

# OBRA DIGITAL

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Sports communication, closely linked to sports journalism, has proven relevant in contemporary society. Sports around the world are a source of leisure, distraction, and entertainment for millions of people. This assertion is backed by decades of history, but it has become even more evident following the return of sporting events to the screen after the COVID-19 pandemic subsided in the mid-2020s. In this context, communication from the different actors involved in sporting events becomes indispensable.

Sports communication becomes an information tool for the public and a resource for attracting new followers of a sport, a team, or an athlete. Likewise, the communication management that athletes give to their networks has also proven essential to bring them closer

to their fans and even to manage and obtain sponsorships that boost their careers.

In this sense, this issue of *Obra Digital* aims to put the spotlight on this field of communication, which has gained prevalence at a global level in recent years. This edition seeks to understand better the communication dynamics that revolve around sporting events and actors in a liquid, immediate world that demands constant entertainment.

To this end, sports communication and journalism will be observed from different perspectives, such as economic, technological, content creation and engagement with the public, and gender perspective, among others. The multidisciplinary voices from different areas of knowledge and various actors within the world of sports will give us a clearer picture of

how sports communication is in contemporary times, especially in America and Europe.

In sports communication, it is also essential to understand that a media confluence combines elements of traditional communication with aspects of digital communication. This issue attempts to reflect that reality, as the research presented here spans a spectrum from media such as television to cutting-edge social networks such as TikTok.

In addition, it is essential to mention that the magazine has managed to compile a collection that studies different sports with very different fan and spectator bases. In that sense, the studies concentrate on extremely popular sports, such as football, and show how communication develops in sports further away from the media spotlight, such as fencing. This allows readers to learn about and compare the reality of sports communication in disciplines with large audiences, constant media presence, and disciplines that require more significant efforts to reach their followers.

In addition to reviewing sports-related subjects, this issue will address topics related to current communication matters. In this sense, gender issues are examined in the world of translators and interpreters in the article *Communication Mediated by Conference Interpreters: age and gender stereotypes* by Lucila Christen. In addition, a study analyzing how print media in Spain are moving to a social network such as TikTok is presented in the article *TikTok activity in the print media in Spain* by Galindo-Rubio, Fuentes-Nevado, and Suárez-Carballo. Finally, the topic of fake news and its propagation will be addressed in the article *Fake News: propagation and communities, how are they related?* by Pereira, Mendes, da Silva, Bez and Czrnhak.

*“En garde!”* fencing judges would say before a duel begins. This French cry indicates to the fencers that the fight is about to start; it is an invitation to get ready. *“En garde!”* we say to our readers. Get ready to read academic papers that will bring you closer to the field, the piste, and the sports center. The game is about to start.





# OBRA DIGITAL

Universitat de Vic - Universitat Central de Catalunya  
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## MONOGRAPH SECTION

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**Contemporary social processes and  
communication**

# Sports communication, beyond sports journalism

***Comunicación deportiva, más allá del periodismo deportivo***

## INTRODUCTION

### Gema Lobillo Mora

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This monograph is dedicated to sports communication from a global point of view, where aspects as diverse as journalism, sponsorship, the media, social networks, broadcasts, etc., are dealt with. That is why the concept of sports communication encompasses much more.

This issue reflects the need to disseminate research in sports communication, which is necessary in the times we live in, where leisure and, specifically, sports are part of our daily lives and where they are an essential part of our lives.

There is a need for academic research and publications in this field, as it has often not been given the importance it deserves due to its economic and social potential, which is much more potent than any other field. Sport has excellent social and economic power; the academy cannot turn its back on this vital power.

To some extent, the articles included in this monograph cover this need to give visibility to studies in this field. Firstly, in the paper on *Sponsorship as a conditioning factor in the development of the careers of Spanish elite sportsmen and women*, an attempt is made to detect

how the scope of sponsorship affects the success of sportsmen and women. Through the study of the variables of gender, discipline, or country where the profession is exercised, Óscar Gutiérrez-Aragón, Joan-Francesc Fontdevila-Gascón, and Alba Gracia-Conde of the University of Girona structure a qualitative research, through personal interviews and focus groups with Spanish elite athletes, to conclude that success is conditioned by discipline, gender, country or previous successes.

Secondly, authors Roxane Coche and Benjamin J. Lynn from the University of Florida and Matthew J. Haught from the University of South Carolina examine, in the article *Divide and Conquer? A Model for Live OTT Sports Streaming* explores the model of multi-level streaming sports broadcasting through new sports fans, traditional fans, and hardcore sports fans. Thus, a quantitative survey of adults in the United States shows that sports fans could increase if broadcasters implement this streaming model.

Thirdly, this time in English, *Fencing on Instagram: Examining self-presentation as branding*

*strategies of professional fencers*, authors Admilson Veloso da Silva and Tao Yiming, both from Corvinus University in Budapest, study the branding strategy of professional fencers through their public presentations, which they disseminate through social networks, specifically through Instagram. These authors examine the accounts of the top ten fencers, according to the International Fencing Federation (FIE), to explore the opportunities for professional fencers to develop self-presentation and communication strategies on the digital platform. In short, the main result shows that the active use of Instagram by fencers improves their self-presentation and positively influences the image of fencing as a sport.

Fourthly, Francisco Javier Zamora Saborit (International University of Valencia), Guillermo Sanahuja Peris (Jaime I University), and Sandra Arias Montesinos (University of Alicante) present a study on the *Evolution of the use of TikTok in Spanish football. Comparative study 2021-2023*. These authors compare the different profiles of the social network TikTok as a communication channel of FC Barcelona, Real Madrid, Atlético de Madrid, Sevilla CF, and Valencia CF for two years, complemented by four in-depth interviews with sports professionals. After comparing both methodologies, it is concluded that there is a 135% increase in the number of publications and that the stylistic resource of humor and entertainment is the main content used.

The monograph dedicates the fifth article to the research on *The role of women in the production of journalistic pieces: analysis of Mundo Deportivo and Marca during Qatar 2022*, authored by Nahuel Ivan Faedo from the University of Vic. This paper analyzes female sports journalists' role in producing journalistic pieces published in the Spanish sports press during the FIFA World Cup-Qatar 2022. The author carries out a quantitative content analysis of informa-

tion published between 20 November and 18 December 2022, which coincides with the celebration of this sporting event. Among the most noteworthy results, it shows a low presence of female journalists in producing articles and fewer women designated to work with information on Qatar 2022.

To conclude the research, Caroline Patatt from the University of Beira Interior in Portugal analyzes the SporTV channel, which is the audience leader among those specializing in sports during the COVID-19 crisis. Through the case study, based on content analysis and interviews, this author presents the results that journalistic convergence was fundamental for developing television sports journalism in Brazil during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The monograph concludes with a review of the publication *Multinational entertainment companies. Football, Diplomacy, Identity, and Technology*, published by the UOC and written by Professor Xavier Ginesta Portet. In the review, *The evolution of the football business as a multinational entertainment company*, written by the coordinator of this monograph, Gema Lobillo Mora, she gives an overview of the different chapters, complete of theoretical foundations and years of research. She presents an essential text for students who want to specialize in sports communication.

This introduction aims to present the exciting studies compiled on sports communication. Still, readers are encouraged to delve into every one of the texts that will fill them with knowledge and generate a desire to approach this field from an academic point of view beyond the traditional informative and journalistic one.

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# Sponsorship as a determining factor in the development of the careers of Spanish elite athletes. Inequalities by gender and type of sport.

***El patrocinio como factor condicionante en el desarrollo de las carreras de los deportistas de élite españoles. Desigualdades por género y tipo de deporte***

1

ARTICLE



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## Abstract

The importance of sponsorship has increased a lot in recent years, being essential in the recognition of elite athletes. The main objective of this study is to determine the scope that sponsorship has on the athlete's success, analyzing the differences based on gender, discipline or country where the profession is practiced. Qualitative methodologies have been used (personal interviews and focus groups with elite Spanish athletes). It is concluded that obtaining a sponsor is not the same easy for all athletes, depending largely on the chosen discipline, gender, the country in which the activity takes place and previous sporting successes.

## KEYWORDS

Patrocinio; marketing; deporte; perspectiva de género; redes sociales

## Resumen

La importancia del patrocinio se ha incrementado mucho en los últimos años, resultando esencial en el reconocimiento de los deportistas de élite. El objetivo de este estudio es determinar el alcance que sobre el éxito del deportista tiene el patrocinio, precisando las diferencias en función de género, disciplina o país donde se ejerce la profesión. Se han empleado metodologías de tipo cualitativo (entrevistas personales y focus group a deportistas españoles de élite). Se concluye que obtener un patrocinador no resulta igual de sencillo para todos los deportistas, pues influye la disciplina, el género, el país o los éxitos precedentes.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Patrocinio; marketing; deporte; perspectiva de género; redes sociales

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sponsorship has become one of the fundamental sources of financing for the best athletes in each discipline to face the competitions in which they participate. In this context, numerous sports contracts are signed in which athletes are provided with the necessary equipment to compete at the best level and sometimes financial aid is offered so that they can

continue their sports training. In any case, there is a great inequality of sponsorship among the various disciplines; likewise, the gender of the athlete influences the amount of support received from the major brands.

If we are aware of the great impact generated by sponsorship contracts in today's sport, the main objective of this research is to try to analyze the influence of a sports sponsorship contract on the development of an elite athlete's

career. This work focuses mainly on how this financing is influenced by the discipline practiced and the country where the practice takes place. It also aims to analyze the gender differences that can currently be detected and the interests of major brands in their decision to invest in a person. To this end, we will provide the vision on the sponsorship of different representatives of the country's sports scene and what it has meant throughout their sporting career in their dealings with brands.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. IMPORTANCE OF SPORTS SPONSORSHIP IN THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF COMPANIES**

In today's society, sport has a great sociocultural relevance, so big brands seek to be present in the most important sporting events in the world, which represent extraordinary opportunities for companies and other institutions to showcase their brands and products, or promote their image through an intense and positive association between advertiser and sport, in terms of value and experience (Ginesta-Portet and De-San-Eugenio, 2014; Keshkar *et al.*, 2019; Aragonés-Jericó *et al.*, 2020). In this sense, sports sponsorship, understood as agreements between companies and professional athletes or sporting events, is increasingly present in the strategic communication decisions of companies, since the actions carried out in this field usually offer a proven profitability at the level of notoriety, consumer acceptance, capital-image positioning and sales, as their products more easily achieve greater international recognition (Lobillo-Mora *et al.*, 2016; Bрева-Franch *et al.*, 2019; Koronios *et al.*,

2020; Lázaro-Marcé *et al.*, 2021; Koronios *et al.*, 2022).

Sports marketing has evolved significantly in recent decades, due to the widespread use of the Internet. This has created a context in which, in a simpler way than before, sports fans can show a high degree of involvement in different disciplines and competitions. On the other hand, companies manage to be constantly informed about the tastes of their customers and analyze the motivations and concerns about the people, teams or tournaments that audiences follow (Beech and Chadwick, 2007; Fondevila-Gascón, 2012; Da-Silva and Las-Casas, 2017). A scenario has thus been shaped in which sport, media, communication and marketing have been integrated so that, thanks to the use of new digital technologies, it is possible to generate more efficient sponsorship strategies, both for sports organizations and associated brands (De-Moragas-Spà, 2020; Garza-Segovia and Kennett, 2022; Cornwell, 2023). In this new framework, corporate investments in this type of sponsorship tend to have good returns, especially if the association achieved with what is sponsored provides a positive brand image. Thus, consumers increase their degree of satisfaction with the brands and products acquired due to sponsorship, also allowing an easier purchase decision, while professional athletes or sponsored sports entities capture one of the revenues that usually has a large weight in their accounts (Yousaf *et al.*, 2018; Lee and Jin, 2019; Kunkel and Biscaia, 2020).

### **2.2. DETERMINANT FACTORS IN SPORTS SPONSORSHIP AND ELECTION OF ATHLETES**

The most relevant factors for driving sports sponsorship policies among companies are customer loyalty, employee motivation, reputation and image improvement, effective com-

bination with the use of social networks, innovation, the emergence of a good opportunity, positive consumer response, corporate social responsibility and brand revaluation (Miragaia *et al.*, 2017; Kim *et al.*, 2019; Navarro-Picado, 2019; Contreras-Espinosa, 2021). Once sponsorship is implemented, companies try to recover or monetize their investment, through fan involvement and brand recognition and positive image associations generated in the long term (Smith *et al.*, 2008; Kwon and Shin, 2019; Gutiérrez-Aragón *et al.* 2021). In any case, measuring the return value of an investment in a sports sponsorship is an extremely complex task, as this return depends, to a large extent, on the positioning and prior knowledge of the brand in the market and the sustainability over time of the investments, which favor the recognition and association of the brands to specific projects, athletes or sports entities (Brewer and Pedersen, 2010; Walraven *et al.*, 2014; Abril *et al.*, 2018).

On the other hand, regarding sponsorship of individual athletes, although not all sports enjoy the same sponsorship conditions and there is an increasing effort to combat possible inequalities, the most common form of contract negotiation is carried out through agencies specializing in this field. These agencies reach reach cession agreements of certain rights of the athlete in exchange for certain services, material or, in the best cases, periodic sums of money more or less large, depending on the gender or media impact of the athlete, the discipline or the country in which he or she exercises his or her activity (Buser *et al.*, 2020; Manzenreiter, 2021; O'Connor, 2021). Sponsorship contracts signed under these parameters, in the absence of a global regulation relating to sport and its sponsors, are different in each country, depending on their respective regulations, so that situations that are legal in a given country may

not be legal in another, due to issues relating to salary or income ceilings of the teams (García and Meier, 2016; Akhmetshina *et al.*, 2017). Thus, for example, while university sport enjoys extensive funding and a large public following in Anglo-Saxon countries, these competitions in Spain bear a heavy burden of indifference from the public; this results in university sports being relegated in many cases, and their infrastructure and investment are precarious (Blanco-García and Burillo, 2018; Brunton and St Quinton, 2021). Apart from the relevant legal considerations regarding the country in which the investment will take place and the different sociocultural rules that operate there, these contracts have to take into consideration both the needs of the sponsored athlete, the events and disciplines in which he or she participates, and the communication objectives of the sponsoring company. In this way, it is avoided that low social acceptance of the sponsoring company causes the loss of the investment (Mikhailitchenko *et al.*, 2012; Montes *et al.*, 2014; Keshkar *et al.*, 2019).

The companies' selection of professional athletes to be sponsored will depend on their results and their sports image, or on the media presence of their discipline; but it will also depend on the values represented for society and their moral exposition to the community, besides the potential brand visibility in function of the products that they want to promote. (Crespo-Celda, 2020; Torres-Romay y García-Mirón, 2020). Other valuable aspects in the same sense are the phenomenon of shared experience, international relevance, and the volume of participants in the events. Thus, some variables are relegated, in many cases, like spectators' preferences and even athletes' needs (Rutter *et al.*, 2019; Wakefield *et al.*, 2020). In this field, big multinationals usually bet for sponsorship contracts with big athletes with worldwide



recognized prestige (such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Leo Messi, Rafael Nadal, Lewis Hamilton o LeBron James), able to associate the brand and the company's products with their own personal brand, mainly through their use in social networks, where they have millions of followers. (Zhou *et al.*, 2020). Another successful strategy, mainly on extreme athletes, has been to become official sponsors of those disciplines, organizing competitions and challenges, providing all the material needed by athletes (e.g., Red Bull). This is a way to reinforce, through the use in social media directed to a wide community of fans, their brand image, that ends up being directly related more with risk, as concept, than with the product itself that is promoted (Kunz *et al.*, 2016; Næss y Tickell, 2019).

### **2.3. SPORTS SPONSORSHIP AND GENDER INEQUALITY**

One of the relevant issues in the sponsorship of professional athletes lies in the fact that, despite the cultural and social evolution of recent decades, gender inequalities in terms of investment are still very significant in some countries. Although it is also true that there is an increasing number of them trying to issue regulations in this field that lead to the requirement of similar conditions, both in terms of gender and the discipline exercised (Lafrance-Horning, 2018; Moawad, 2019; Norman *et al.*, 2021; Yenilmez, 2021). In this sense, although it is also a phenomenon that affects male athletes to a lesser extent, there are many female athletes who are harmed by the reduced social scope of their disciplines, both in the purely financial aspect and in their own psychological state, especially if the sports results are not present and there is a loss of sponsorship (Keshkar *et al.*, 2019; Sait and Bogopa, 2021). In any case, although women's sport has traditionally been underrepresented in the media, in recent years

there has been a notable increase in its visibility that heralds the advent, in many countries, of a new era in terms of media coverage. This coverage will have to favour increased investment in sponsorship in the future, both for athletes and competitions (Darvin and Sagas, 2017; Petty and Pope, 2019; Billings and Gentile, 2021).

Even so, while greatly appreciating this positive evolution, it should not be forgotten that, like so many other socioeconomic fields, sport has unfortunately also been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to contractual repercussions and reductions in salaries and sponsorship for many professional and semi-professional sports women. A commercial prioritization of male athletes is revealed again that favours economic precariousness of females (Bowes *et al.*, 2020; Clarkson *et al.*, 2020; Parry *et al.*, 2021). However, once it is possible to recover normality in the health area, the social background that was previously being established is encouraging, as there seems to be a great involvement of both public and private organizations, either through scholarships for the training of athletes or the promotion of professional sponsorship, as an expression of the social character of the brand. This will serve to favour and support gender equality in sport (Fernández-Morillo, 2019; Martínez-Abajo *et al.*, 2020; Sanahuja-Peris *et al.*, 2021).

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

In order to achieve the research objectives and to carry out an in-depth study of the current situation of sponsorship of Spanish elite professional athletes and its relative weight or importance in their careers, a combination of methodologies has been chosen; it is understood that, in this way, the research can achieve a greater knowledge of the subject under study (Webb *et al.* 1966; Bericat, 1998; Gutiérrez-

rez-Aragón et al., 2022). For this purpose, two qualitative techniques were used: semi-structured interviews with top athletes from different sports disciplines, and a focus group with a group of athletes who were considered relevant to the objectives of the research. The interviews were conducted between January and April 2021 and the focus group was carried out in June of the same year.

Specifically, nineteen interviews were conducted with athletes (eight men and eleven women) from different sports disciplines practiced in Spain. They were chosen for their sporting career and success and for their different experiences in terms of sports sponsorship. Depending on the personal situation of the interviewee and the specific sport he or she practiced, the interviews could vary in structure and format; the conversation was allowed to flow naturally, in order to collect reliable qualitative data. In any case, in order to shape the line of argument required by the research guidelines, each of the interviewees was asked the same eight open-ended questions, among other questions, so that they could express their feelings and opinions on the issues raised. It was considered appropriate to obtain as broad a view as possible of the current context of sponsorship, so not all the sports chosen have a high media and social visibility in the country. It was precisely because of their lesser relevance, in this sense, that they were chosen. Thus, it was

possible to analyze the real impact of sponsorship in each case (Table 1).

Since, in general, women's sports in Spain have had less social consideration, the athletes were chosen for their relevance in their sport. All of the selected cases have stood out in their disciplines in recent years; most of them have gone through high performance centres and, in many cases, have been called up to the national team on repeated occasions. Three of the athletes were chosen for the interview because they were training in the United States, which would serve as a point of comparison in terms of sponsorship with a pioneering country in this field. The interviews provided a large amount of information of interest, so, in order to analyze the information in depth, systematize the data obtained and organize the results, they are divided into three large blocks. In the first of these, a comparison is made between genders, based on the most common responses between the two. In the second block, an in-depth analysis is made of the responses offered by women grouped according to four variables of interest: the world of motorsports, the Spanish national team, their stay in the United States and minority sports. Finally, the same was done with the men's responses, grouping them into four sections: major disciplines, retired athletes, Spanish national team and minority sports.

**Table 1***Interviewed athletes and sports*

<b>Athlete</b>	<b>Sport</b>	<b>Relevance for the research</b>
Marta García	Car racing	Women in an eminently masculine sport
Emma Reyes	Rhythmic gymnastics	Minority sport. Spanish national team
Marina Bassols	Tennis	Gender gap with respect to male tennis
Laura Ester Ramos	Water polo	World champion (Spanish national team)
Agustina Talasimov	Basketball	Works in the U.S.
Anna Grima	Volleyball	Minority sport
Júlia Gutiérrez	Volleyball	Part of his career in the U.S.
Ester Ribera	Beach volleyball	Has competed in the world circuit
Melanie Serrano	Football	Gender gap in men's football
Laia Muñoz	Football	Works in the USA
Berta Abellán	Trials	Women in a predominantly male sport
Rubén Gracia "Cani"	Football	Professional career in elite teams
Pau Martínez	Football	Athlete at the beginning of her career
Miki Juanola	Football	Athlete at the beginning of her career
Jaime Fernández	Basketball	Athlete at the beginning of her career
Ignacio Alabart	Roller hockey	Minority sport
Cristian Portelli	Surfing	Minority sport
Guillermo Fayed	Alpine skiing	He competes with the French national ski team
Àngel Mullera	Athletics	European medallist (Spanish national team)

*Source: own elaboration*

It was considered appropriate to complement the study with a focus group of five athletes from different disciplines, which would allow, on the one hand, to resolve certain doubts that were not resolved in the interview phase, and, on the other hand, to reveal other significant factors on the subject of the research that could be of interest to the study. All participants have a long experience in their field of sport and with current sponsors and were chosen for certain characteristics that were relevant to the

study (table 2). As a starting point, they were presented with a questionnaire similar to the interview questionnaire, in order to generate a discussion among them and to get their opinion on the questions raised in the study.

**Table 2***Composition of the Focus group*

Athlete and sport	Motivación para su participación
Agustina Talasimov (Basketball)	Extensive experience with sponsorship in the USA (her institution informs about changes every season).
Berta Abellán (Trials)	Breaks gender stereotypes in the sport (the number of female pilots is quite small).
Miki Juanola (Football)	He is the youngest home-grown athlete to participate in the study. His place of training is key in terms of his sponsorship.
Cristian Portelli (Surfing)	Extensive experience in sponsorship from an early age, despite being part of a very minority discipline in Spain.
Guillermo Fayed (Alpine skiing)	By competing for the French national team, he can bring a different vision to the table.

*Fuente: elaboración propia*

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

In order to detect differences in sponsorship models between disciplines and genders and to be able to contrast them with each other, five football players (trained in some of the best quarries in Spain), two basketball players and three volleyball players with a wide national background were interviewed, as well as high-level representatives of sports with a lesser social following such as rhythmic gymnastics, trial, motor racing, surfing, tennis, alpine skiing, athletics, water polo and hockey. The interviews conducted with the sportsmen and sportswomen, within the flexibility allowed by the semi-structured modality, made it possible to gather reliable information on the subject analyzed, obtained from conversations carried

out within the naturalness allowed by a process of this type. In this sense, when designing the research, it was considered appropriate to maintain a minimum set of questions of major relevance to the study, which were asked to all the people interviewed. Six of the results obtained from these questions have been processed, categorized and tabulated according to gender, in order to achieve a quantitative treatment that facilitates a better interpretation of the results (table 3).

Thus, a first approximation of the data obtained in the interviews shows that 87.50% of the men interviewed, whether active or not, had sponsorship contracts during the study, in contrast to 63.64% of the women. In the case of the male athletes, the only one who did not have a valid contract was the athlete Àngel Mullera, who received support from his own local council; therefore, when he stopped competing, his contract was terminated. The also retired Guillermo Fayed (third in the world in downhill alpine skiing) and Rubén Gracia “Cani” (who played for several Spanish football teams) still have a contract with the brands that offer them clothing and equipment, even though they are no longer active. Young footballers Miki and Pau enjoy individual sponsorship contracts with Puma and Adidas, respectively; these contracts, in addition to funding, provide them with all the necessary competition material and other clothing throughout the season. As for women, those who are still competing today and are at the top of their sport have contracts with brands that help them to continue their sporting commitments by providing them with equipment. In contrast to men, sportswomen who are no longer competing or whose performance has deteriorated have automatically had their contracts terminated.

The male sportsmen interviewed whose discipline is a mass sport (football and basketball)

**Table 3***Summary of questionnaire interviews on sponsorship*

		MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL
Do you currently have a sponsorship contract?	YES	87,50%	63,64%	73,68%
	NO	12,50%	36,36%	26,32%
Were you at the top of your sport when you started your sponsorship contract?	YES	50,00%	72,73%	63,16%
	NO	50,00%	27,27%	36,84%
Is sponsorship a key factor in your career?	YES	50,00%	100,00%	78,95%
	NO	50,00%	-	21,05%
Do you think that the conditions of sponsorship are similar regardless of the gender of the athlete?	YES	37,50%	45,45%	42,11%
	NO	62,50%	54,55%	57,89%
Do you think there are differences in sponsorship conditions between disciplines?	YES	100,00%	72,73%	84,21%
	NO	-	27,27%	15,79%
Do you think that there are differences in the conditions of sponsorship in the United States compared to Spain? (*)	YES	-	100,00%	100,00%
	NO	-	0,00%	0,00%

(\*) This question was only asked to sports women pursuing their professional careers in the United States.

Source: own elaboration

state that their contracts with sports brands started when they were still in the lower categories of their club. The situation is very different for the other four athletes from minority disciplines, as it was much more complicated to get a sponsor, as they had to win national titles. On the other hand, all the women interviewed who are currently practicing their profession in Spain admit that they had to be the best in their disciplines and win several titles in order for a sponsor to be interested in them. The case of the Spanish sports women currently competing in the United States is different, as they enjoy a sponsorship contract just for the fact of being part of their university team and competing at a good level.

Overall, 78.75% of the sportsmen and women interviewed believe that sports sponsorship is vital for their development and training. However, while only half of the men considered this requirement to be essential, all the women agreed that, at present, without a sponsoring brand, they would not be able to continue their professional careers in their disciplines. The four men who signed sponsorship contracts when they were in lower categories (majority sports) do not attach too much importance to this type of sponsorship, as they see it as an extra in their career and could develop their career without it. However, since they have this economic boost and since this incentive is good, they take advantage of it. The four men who belong to minority sports disciplines argue that, for them, sports sponsorship is very important, as the equipment they use on a daily basis is very expensive. They also point out that reaching the elite requires a lot of effort and sacrifice, so getting sponsors increases their motivation to keep fighting for more titles and not lose them.

The results of the study found that 57.89% of the respondents felt that sponsorship conditions are not equal depending on the gender of the athlete. The three sportswomen belonging to American universities point out that in this type of sport, a woman and a man receive the same conditions for sports sponsorship within their institution, as there are regulatory norms that oblige both to receive the same budget and the same facilities. Ester Ribera (beach volleyball) and Marina Bassols (tennis), despite competing in Spain, point out that in their disciplines there is not too much difference in sponsorship in terms of gender. However, for the five members of more minority sports, the sponsorship situation is quite complex, partly due to the fact that the visibility and influence of women's sport in these disciplines is practically non-existent. Thus, although sponsorship has increased in recent years, they feel that it is still far from what is offered to men, and their conditions are much more demanding. Among the men interviewed, Rubén Gracia "*Caní*" was the only one who acknowledged that women receive worse sponsorship conditions. Athletes from minority disciplines perceived that, in their sports, women are on an equal footing with men, arguing that they enjoy similar visibility, as the championships are held at the same venue and on the same day for both, so the impact should be the same. When taking into consideration the great contrast of perspectives on the visualization of this issue by the different interviewees, it is especially relevant to see how this situation is perceived by the youngest athletes: Miki, Pau and Jaime (football and basketball). Although they have had sponsors since their youth career, they claim to be totally unaware of the differences between genders in sports sponsorship contracts. Ignacio Alabart (roller hockey) also shared this opinion.

On the other hand, 84.21% of the interviewed sportsmen and sportswomen appreciate the existence of different sponsorship conditions between the various disciplines. In general, it is evident that there is a great deal of inequality in sponsorship between mainstream and minority sports, as many disciplines receive a tiny amount of money and material compared to what is received in mass sports such as football. The footballers interviewed are aware of the advantages of their sport in this respect, although they warn that the main cause is that much more money is involved and much more profit is generated. The three sportswomen who compete in the United States explain that there is more equality between the different disciplines there, even though not all sports have the same sponsorship budget. This is because the law does not allow individual sponsorships, so the best brands sponsor the whole institution so that the best athletes in each discipline promote their products. Finally, many of the participants in the study note that the widespread use of social media as a communication tool may be a major driver of sponsorship contracts in less socially embedded sports. This encourages a levelling of sponsorship conditions between disciplines.

## 4.2. FOCUS GROUP

The second phase of the research consisted of a focus group of five athletes from different disciplines, with the aim of providing feedback on the information obtained in the interviews and conducting a debate based on the arguments and opinions that emerged (table 4). The main objective of using this qualitative analysis tool was to obtain information on the generic particularities of individual sports sponsorship in Spain. The responses, statements or revelations that appeared most frequently in the focus group confirmed, among other things, the

**Table 4***Summary table Focus group. Most frequent response*

Most frequent response		Other high frequency responses
What does your contract mainly consist of?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive appropriate sports clothing for competition each season.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in brand events</li> </ul>
What obligations or conditions does your sponsorship contract entail?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the material received in social networks and competitions and do not use material from competitors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occasionally it may be possible to negotiate with another brand for a particular material.</li> <li>• Failure to comply automatically voids the contract.</li> </ul>
How often do you receive material?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In general, athletes are provided with equipment whenever they need it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The brand supplies the material and sends it out whenever there are new items.</li> <li>• In the official shop, you could always get what you wanted (competition clothing on a monthly basis).</li> </ul>
Do you think it is important for your career to be sponsored?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no doubt about it. It is essential</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Majority disciplines: it is an extra in the career and contributes to the image.</li> <li>• Minority disciplines: without sponsorship it is not possible to survive as an athlete.</li> </ul>
Are there substantial differences in sponsorship between the United States and Spain?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a huge difference. In the United States there is much more investment in sport (it is more professionalized).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University sport is considered professional</li> <li>• Just by being part of a university team you get sponsorship.</li> </ul>
Are there significant gender differences in sponsorship?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In most cases, women do not enjoy the same opportunities as men.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are differences depending on the discipline and the country.</li> <li>• It is more equal in minority sports</li> </ul>

*Source: Own elaboration*

need for sponsorship for athletes, the importance of receiving sports clothing and equipment in order to compete in certain disciplines, the existence of significant inequalities in sponsorship based on gender, and the differences between the United States and Spain in sponsorship at the university level.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The main objective of this article was to find out and analyze the influence that a sports sponsorship contract has on the career of an elite athlete, as well as to discern the existence of possible differences or inequalities depending on the athlete's gender, the discipline he/she practices and the country where he/she practices his/her profession. For this purpose,



a methodological triangulation has been practiced, carrying out two different types of qualitative analysis. This was done in order to achieve a more complete vision of the subject matter of the research (Webb *et al.*, 1966; Bericat, 1998; Gutiérrez-Aragón *et al.*, 2022).

The results of this study show that, currently, thanks to technological advances, the evolution of companies' marketing strategies and the widespread use of social networks as a means of communication, brands can make their products known globally, which is why there is great interest in sponsoring professional players and sporting events. This is a practice that usually offers a proven return in terms of notoriety, influence on fans, image and sales (Miragaia *et al.*, 2017; Breva-Franch *et al.*, 2019; Kim *et al.*, 2019; Navarro-Picado, 2019; Koronios *et al.*, 2020; Zhou *et al.*, 2020; Contreras-Espinosa, 2021). For companies, it is particularly important, in this sense, to carry out a study of various factors related to the athlete or event to be sponsored that may end up influencing their choice. Thus, depending on the different regulations and socio-cultural aspects that may affect public acceptance in each country, it will be possible to choose those sponsorship investments that can achieve the expected return (Mikhailitchenko *et al.*, 2012; Montes *et al.*, 2014; Keshkar *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, it is becoming increasingly common for a company to sponsor or organize events, providing the necessary materials to the athletes. This helps to reinforce the brand image, so that it relates to the competition itself and not to the products it offers (Kunz *et al.*, 2016; Næss and Tickell, 2019).

There are many types of individual sport sponsorship contracts, although in most cases they involve an agreement to cede the ath-

lete's rights in exchange for services, materials or money, which will be of greater or lesser amount or importance depending on gender, discipline or country (Garcia and Meier, 2016; Akhmetshina *et al.*, 2017; Buser *et al.*, 2020; Manzenreiter, 2021; O'Connor, 2021). A large body of previous academic work, as well as the results obtained in this research, point to the fact that gender inequalities in sponsorship are generally contrastable. It is estimated that, more often than not, women do not enjoy the same opportunities or facilities in finding a company to sponsor them, nor the same conditions as their male counterparts when sponsorship is finally achieved (Lafrance-Horning, 2018; Moawad, 2019; Norman *et al.*, 2021; Yenilmez, 2021).

Another factor that undoubtedly causes inequality in the formats and amounts of sponsorship is the discipline practiced by each athlete, as companies are not as willing to invest in sponsorship in mass sports as they are in those that are minorities in terms of their following. This is because the financial return on the investment made, in terms of communication, will largely depend on the media presence of the discipline (Rutter *et al.*, 2019; Torres-Romay and García-Mirón, 2020; Wakefield *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, although there are many factors that influence the performance of athletes, one of the most relevant is the pressure to achieve sporting titles and not lose their sponsorships, since, without these, in minority sports, it is very difficult to continue with a professional career (Keshkar *et al.*, 2019; Sait and Bogopa, 2021).



## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Obtaining sponsorship is not equally easy for all athletes, as this is influenced by a number of variables. For example, all the female athletes in the study who were no longer in the elite of their sport lost the sponsorship of the brands that sponsored them; the brands stopped providing them with equipment, even though the athletes continued to compete. On the other hand, the men who were no longer active continued to keep their contracts in force. Also, among the athletes participating in the study, those involved in mass sports had received sports sponsorship before reaching the elite, while those in disciplines with a lesser social following found it much more difficult. In most of the cases, they had to contribute with sporting achievements first, before receiving funding. Moreover, all of the women interviewed noted that, in their sports training, it is essential to receive financial support, whether from private entities or public subsidies. The three Spanish sportswomen who belong to university teams in the United States recognised that sport there is much more professionalized and that there is greater regulatory control of sports contracts, in order to guarantee greater equality in terms of sponsorship among the members of the teams that participate in competitions, both by gender and between disciplines.

In short, athlete sponsorship as a marketing and communication technique and an element of potential commercial persuasion has been gradually gaining presence in different disciplines over the last few decades, through outstanding sportsmen and women. For many

of them, sponsorship is an essential source of funding for the development of their professional careers; without this type of support, in many cases, they would have to give up sport. However, inequalities are quite marked in terms of access to relevant contracts, so obtaining sponsorship with sufficient guarantees will depend on the sporting discipline, gender, the country in which the activity is being carried out and the sporting successes that have been achieved beforehand.

In carrying out this study, limitations have been encountered which, logically, derive from the willingness to collaborate in the research on the part of the sportsmen and women who were proposed, some of whom declined to participate. On the other hand, the fact that one of the researchers is a professional sportsperson also meant that many interviews could be carried out in conditions of cordiality and complicity, which made it possible to obtain data that might not otherwise have been possible. Thus, the study has tried to contribute to clarifying, to a certain extent, many of the unknowns raised by the subject analyzed, although, logically, at the same time, it has also generated new questions that open up future lines of research and work. These lines of research could be of interest to both sport and communication professionals and academic researchers. Among these lines of study are the analysis of the salary and socio-labour gap between the men's and women's sections of top-level clubs (mainly football and basketball), and between mass and minority sports.

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# Divide and Conquer? A Model for Live OTT Sports Streaming

*¿Divide y vencerás? Un modelo para la retransmisión deportiva OTT en directo.*

# 2

ARTICLE



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## Abstract

The current study examined if multi-tiered offerings of a sports broadcast (three levels aimed at new sports fans, traditional sports fans, and hardcore sports fans) would increase a viewer's intention to watch sports. Results reveal one's level of sports fandom may increase if broadcasters implemented a feasible multi-tiered model of streaming sports based on three fandom levels, and viewers, even hardcore fans, like the idea of an introductory broadcast that explains in more detail the sport they are watching—perhaps because it could help them fulfill their willingness to consume more sports through fantasy and betting.

## KEYWORDS

Sports; broadcasting; digital media; fandom; television

## Resumen

El presente estudio examinó si un modelo de retransmisión deportiva en *streaming* de va-

rios niveles (tres niveles dirigidos a los nuevos aficionados al deporte, a los aficionados tradicionales y a los aficionados incondicionales) aumentaría la intención del espectador de ver deportes a través de una encuesta cuantitativa de adultos en Estados Unidos. Los resultados revelan que el nivel de afición a los deportes podría aumentar si los organismos de radiodifusión aplicaran este modelo de retransmisión, y que, a los espectadores, incluso a los aficionados fanáticos, les gusta la idea de una retransmisión introductoria que explique con más detalle el deporte que están viendo, tal vez porque podría ayudarles a satisfacer su deseo de consumir más deportes a través de la fantasía y las apuestas.

## PALABRAS CLAVE:

Deportes, Radiodifusión, Medios digitales, *Fandom*, Televisión.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

"If we can get 68,000 to watch an MLS game in person, why can't we get 300K to watch at home?" asked the voice of the Major Soccer

League's Los Angeles Football Club and television anchor, Maximiliano Bretos (2022). Research is scarce on this issue, but we know the knowledge required to comprehend a sports broadcast is likely acquired by watching or at-



tending sporting events and/or speaking with others about sports (Giulianotti, 2015). One does not simply turn on the television and suddenly understand a sports broadcast. Yet, broadcasters assume a viewer can fully process the information presented, including the rules of the sport, the language used to describe the sport, and the graphics presented on the screen. Uninitiated viewers may not be capable of mentally processing these various elements, which could lower their motivation for watching sports. That matters to traditional sports broadcasters because it raises questions about the sustainability of their business models. If they cannot effectively initiate new viewers, their audience could drastically decline as older viewers stop watching. In fact, viewers' average age for most sports has steadily increased since the turn of the century (Notte, 2017).

With the rise of esports, which are broadcast differently, the fragmentation of audiences generally, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Buehler, 2020; Hutchins & Boyle, 2017; Lynn et al., 2021; Steinkuehler, 2019; Takahashi, 2019), traditional sports broadcasters face mounting pressure to sustain the viewership levels that they once enjoyed (Buehler, 2020; Reimer, 2021). Academically, this pressure matters because the pathway from uninitiated viewer to full sports fan has not been adequately tested, a gap the current study seeks to address. Further, recent technological changes allow for new ways of testing theoretical models of fandom and sports viewership, which could benefit the rise of under-covered sports, including women's sports (Coche, 2016; Cooky et al., 2021) and para-sports (Watson, 2020).

This study explores an idea that could help define a new theoretical model to rejuvenate

sports fans, and help sports broadcasters turn a new leaf: what if sports broadcasters packaged their product differently based on fandom? A newer audience member would watch a feed containing more explanation so they have a chance to learn the game, a casual viewer/fan would watch a feed similar to the traditional feed, and a "hardcore fan" would watch a feed with more facts, more jargon, more insider knowledge, etc. As a traditional medium of mass communication, television does not make this model possible as everyone must watch the same content. However, it would be easy to implement digitally, and at fairly minimal cost. In fact, offering different teams of commentators has already been done (e.g., Fingas, 2018). This study uses this concept to test whether people may be interested in a multi-stream model based on people's level of fandom for live sporting events.

## **2. CONTEXT: THE FUTURE OF SPORTS BROADCASTING**

Online companies have recently bought broadcasting rights for big sporting events. Some recent examples include Amazon picking up the partial rights of the WNBA in the U.S. (Porter, 2021), the bulk of the Ligue 1 rights in France, some UEFA Champions League matches in Germany and Italy, or, notably in the full broadcast rights of the powerful NFL for Thursday Night Football in the U.S. (Kayali et al., 2021). The online giant has become a central power broker in the global sports broadcasting political economy (Kunz, 2020).

In parallel, sports organizations (notably teams and leagues) have been increasing their dig-

ital content offers to keep their fans engaged all year long (Laharie, 2017), with international soccer governing body FIFA the latest to launch its streaming service (Forristal, 2022). These digital-only companies or departments provide engaging content (Kim & Kim, 2020; Wymer et al., 2021), competing with television networks for audience attention. To fight back, television networks have offered digital content online for a few years, but online specialists may be better placed to take advantage of all digital has to offer. For instance, though NBC has offered additional Olympic coverage online for over a decade, the network still tailors its online content for its traditional television broadcast (Sipocz & Coche, 2019). Online companies are not restricted by any such “traditional broadcast”; they can offer something new at a time when online streaming has become “an important source of new business opportunities” (Feng et al., 2020, p. 2).

With technology innovation more rapid than ever (Winarski, 2019), media professionals and media scholars have worked to understand and harness the power new technologies have on their industry, and better serve their fragmented audience. In American sports, a good example from the early 2010s is the creation of the NFL RedZone channel. On this commercial-free channel, the football league dissects every touchdown made in every game and provides various game statistics to viewers who pay for the service. It is “constant action,” channel host Scott Hanson says (cited in Farmer, 2019), and it caters to those with short attention span (Farmer, 2019) all while providing a “football nirvana” to die-hard fans, fantasy players, and gamblers (Brown, 2012). With streaming advances over

the past decade, a full channel is no longer needed to reach (potential) fans. Hence, the present study examines if multi-tiered offerings of a sports broadcast (three levels aimed at new sports fans, traditional sports fans, and hardcore sports fans) would increase a viewer’s intention to watch sports.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sports broadcasters have historically benefited from the “feeling of presence” (Cummins, 2009, p. 376) one gets watching a game live. In a nutshell, people who watch live sports may have the sentiment of being at the stadium or arena and can also feel less lonely (Cummins, 2009; Kim & Kim, 2020). That is why, Cummins (2009) argues, “content producers and hardware manufacturers are eager to develop viewing experiences that facilitate this sense of ‘being there’ in a mediated environment as a means of attracting viewers and advertising dollars” (p. 376). However, the current study’s authors posit, this may come at the expense of the understanding of the sport itself, which is paramount to becoming a fan.

#### 3.1. BECOMING A SPORTS FAN

The concept of sports fandom is not universal (Gantz & Lewis, 2021). In a seminal study, Gantz and Wenner (1995) used a binary variable, fans vs. non-fans to identify sports consumers’ motivations to watch sports. They clarified non-fans still consume sports, but not as much as fans do and with less interest. This dichotomy was used in many studies and expanded in others. For instance, Hull and Lewis (2014) introduced

a third type of fan, “the connected fan” (p. 18), who emerged thanks to the creation of the internet, which encourages interaction. Meanwhile, Giulianotti (2015) used two basic oppositions to create a quadrant to study football clubs’ fans. He contends fans can be divided into four types: (1) supporters, who “have inextricable biographical and emotional ties to the club’s ground” (p. 258) almost as if it were part of their family; (2) fans, who strongly identify with a club but tend to “have a more market-centered relationship to [it] as reflected in the centrality of consuming club products” (p. 251); (3) followers, who stay updated on a club’s results and events, but do not identify as strongly with it—or only for temporary competitions; and (4) flâneurs, who may occasionally watch a club but have “no capacity to secure personal alignment” with it (p. 259).

Since his influential 1995 study with Wenner, Gantz has also continued studying sports fandom. He recently argued fandom is a continuous spectrum and one’s level of fandom can fluctuate throughout their life (e.g., Gantz & Lewis, 2021), but the question of what motivates people to become sports fans remains. What gratifications do people get from consuming sports? The most influential work on the topic is Wann’s (1995) Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS), which is based on eight main constructs: aesthetic, economics, entertainment, escape, eustress, family, group affiliation, and self-esteem. The scale has been tested, used, and/or adapted by many scholars, including for studies based on newer technology, such as the internet, social media, and esports (e.g., Coche, 2014; Cushen et al., 2019). Knowing what motivates people to watch and/or follow

sports is a crucial element for sports managers and sports broadcasters as their goal is to grow their audience and keep them loyal (Fortunato, 2008), i.e. have them go from flâneur to follower to fan or supporter on Giulianotti’s quadrant. It is poignant information for scholars and industry professionals alike as a call for more diversity in the media presents an interesting opportunity for under-covered sports, including women’s sports and para-sports, to grow their audiences.

We know sports broadcasts stimulate audiences’ emotions (e.g., Tamir & Lehman-Wilzig, 2022). However, understanding the sports experience is “more complex than positive or negative emotion” (Rogers, 2018, p. 380). Indeed, sports entertain people, not only through enjoyable experiences but also “meaningful” ones:

There are plenty of fans who seem annoyed, irritated, or frustrated with their teams. This might leave some wondering why would these fans watch the game if it is so unpleasant. The answer is that watching the games is not fun but it is meaningful. Those fans are deriving value from the sporting event that does not represent pleasure but represents a connection to others. (Rogers, 2018, p. 379)

Of Wann’s eight motivations to watch sports, broadcasters have a constant and direct influence on only one (entertainment). Indeed, though the quality of production can influence aesthetics, the primary definition of aesthetics according to Wann (1995) revolves around the

beauty of the sport itself. Group affiliation (interacting with friends and/or fellow fans), family (e.g. spending time with family), and economics (betting on sports) are personal concepts and decisions. Self-esteem (feeling good when one's team wins), eustress (a positive form of stress a fan experiences during a game), and escape (watching sports to forget about whatever challenge may be happening in one's life) are individuals' feelings, and though sports broadcasters could influence them in some cases, it is unlikely all audience members' feelings will be impacted at once. Entertainment, though, is directly affected by one's production of sports because technology, when used right, can help people enjoy a sporting event more (Rogers et al., 2017). For example, in the context of a live sporting event, informative commentary and graphics can increase an audience member's knowledge about the game and/or sport at hand, and thus their feelings of independence and competence to understand what they are watching (Rogers, 2018). According to the uses and gratifications theory (U&G), in this scenario, an audience member feels gratification thanks to the effective use of technology.

### 3.2. USES AND GRATIFICATIONS

While sports scholars have tried to identify people's motivations for consuming sports, mass communication scholars have attempted to uncover what motivates someone to consume and/or use media, often through U&G, which suggests media audiences are active in gratifying their own needs and wishes (Katz et al., 1974; Sundar & Limperos, 2013; Tang et al., 2021). As Katz et al. (1974) explained, U&G examines "(1) the social and psychological or-

igins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences" (p. 20). In other words, audiences use media to fulfill specific desires/needs. Rubin (1983) identified five reasons explaining adults' use of television: to pass time, for information, for entertainment, for companionship, and to escape.

The fast-changing 21st-century media landscape has created a renewal of U&G scholarship (Lewis et al., 2017), in which audiences are now "users" thanks to newer, interactive platforms (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p. 505), and scholars have been more concerned with better identifying what people do with media (Lin et al., 2018; Spinda & Puckette, 2018; Tang et al., 2021). Lewis et al. (2017) seem to have been the first to examine sports streaming users' motivations. They interviewed 38 self-identified users of services mostly from U.S. major leagues, such as NFL Game Rewind, NBA League Pass, MLB.TV, and NHL Game Center. Their study focused around people who are already established sports fans who pay for specific online streaming services, but streaming sports is not reserved exclusively for those who pay for such niche subscriptions. Hence the question at the heart of this study: can streaming be used to gratify people's various needs when watching sports?

We know enjoyment is the primary gratification when watching TV or using the internet (Lewis et al., 2017; Logan, 2011) and that to enjoy "sports media, an audience member must first have some degree of understanding of the sport" (Rogers, 2018, p. 380). In other words,

the audience of a sports broadcast cannot have their needs gratified, if they do not know the fundamentals of the sport on the screen. In fact, during the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, Australian scholar Dr. Adele Pavlidis summed it up well in a tweet:

I love how the olympics is so inclusive in that the commentators don't always assume watchers know much about the sport so they are commentating and explaining as they go. For me, as someone with lots of interests besides watching sport this makes the experience more exciting

Even though Pavlidis' research focuses on sports, she is not an expert in every sport, so Olympic commentators are instrumental in her understanding of sports she does not know well. Thanks to this different style of commentating, she is a more satisfied customer. It follows she is more likely to be a returning customer and perhaps become a loyal consumer, i.e. a fan (Fortunato, 2018). That understanding a sport is needed to enjoy watching it is logical, yet this crucial detail tends to get overlooked, as people overestimate their capacity to understand even the most popular sports (Lynn et al., 2021).

### **3.3. STREAMING LIVE SPORTING EVENTS**

Despite the substantial increase in the production of sports content, "live televised sports remain at the core of sports broadcasting across the globe" (Tamir & Lehman-Wilzig, 2022, p. 3). In fact, 94 of the top 100 telecasts in the U.S. in 2022 were live sports (Karp, 2023). In France, seven of the top 10 were (Grosskopf, 2022),

and in Spain, only football appears in the top 5 of the most watched telecasts in 2022 (Palco23, 2023). These telecasts were also available over the top (OTT) as OTT infrastructures have become "a major spectating channel for sports fans" (Feng et al., 2020, p. 1), disrupting the sports media industry (Bowman, n.d.).

Moreover, the element of liveness has been a significant concept in media studies, particularly television studies for almost a century (Ilan, 2021). In today's media environment, digital outlets offer live news coverage, including in sports (Ilan, 2021). Social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, were the first to go after live streaming of sporting events in the mid-2010s, but they have since "cooled their interest in becoming sports broadcasters" (Joseph, 2019). However, they still offer OTT sports content. Facebook seemingly opted to focus on a pay-per-view model instead of competing directly with traditional sportscasters (Young, 2021). In essence, as an anonymous sports executive told Joseph (2019), Facebook wants "the content around the main event on their platform, not the event itself." The famed social network's change of strategy has not stopped Amazon or Apple from getting involved with the streaming of live sporting events worldwide (e.g., Kayali et al., 2021; Porter, 2021). Netflix also recently expressed interest in streaming live sports, though reversed course after the company lost subscribers and market value in early 2022 (Gentrup, 2022).

In parallel, sports organizations (leagues, teams, federations, etc.) started creating OTT content, essentially cutting out the middleman to reach their fans (Feng et al., 2020; Wymer et al., 2021). An early exploratory study about audiences' experience with live streaming of

sports suggests the new medium provides “a completely different spectating environment for sports fans” (Feng et al., 2020, p. 14). Thus, those who live stream sports should take advantage of the current times to implement new models, especially because people, including those in the sports broadcast industry, don’t like change (Coche & Lynn, 2020). This attitude is why the present study proposes OTT producers pursue a new model for live sporting events by offering different packages for different target audiences.

### 3.4. SUMMARY AND PURPOSE

People need to understand a sport to have the potential to grow from flâneur to supporter. This study proposes to offer audiences three streaming alternatives based on fandom level. The video stream targeted toward flâneurs would include more explanations to give viewers a chance to understand the game better. In essence, it would be a beginner’s guide in the form of a live competition. On the other end of the spectrum, the stream targeted toward fans or spectators (both of whom know more about their team and the sport) would use more jargon and provide in-depth analysis, skipping basic explanations; akin to an experts’ playbook. Finally, a third stream, similar to current traditional broadcasts, would serve as a bridge between the other two. Such a model would give OTT producers a chance to meet their audience where they are at, thus creating a matching framework beneficial for all. Hence, this research tests whether offering multiple live sports streams with different packaging styles (e.g., commentary, graphics, etc.) changes people’s intention to watch a sporting event.

Companies involved in the live streaming of sports must adapt the traditional (television) product to the online platform to provide the best experience to their viewers, and perhaps even expand their audience, especially as viewers increasingly cancel cable subscriptions to turn to online options (Haught, 2022). The model proposed in the study also offers an interesting opportunity for under-covered sports, including women’s sports and para-sports, as they attempt to grow their audiences.

## 4. METHOD

An online, self-administered questionnaire was created using Qualtrics and distributed to adults based in the United States (U.S.) using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), which can provide a moderately representative sample of the U.S. population (Loepp & Kelly, 2020). Though results cannot be generalized, “MTurk is an efficient, reliable, cost-effective tool” (Mortensen & Hughes, 2018, p. 537) that allows researchers to improve sample quality over the traditional college student pools (Loepp & Kelly, 2020). The survey was pretested with 10 MTurkers before being launched. Each participant received \$1.50 for completing the survey.

### 4.1. PARTICIPANTS

A total of 429 U.S.-based MTurkers clicked on the survey, but 114 of them failed one of the basic attention check questions. Of the 315 remaining participants, all completed the survey, but a visual check revealed two who seemed to have “flatlined” their responses to finish quickly, so 313 responses were included. Though sample size calculations (Zhou & Sloan, 2011) using



the U.S. population as the survey's population reveal 385 respondents are required to meet a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, 313 participants allows us to make conclusions with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 5.6%. As such, this sample still provides an interesting foundation as an exploratory case study for people's potential interest in multi-tiered sports streaming.

#### 4.1.1. DEMOGRAPHICS

Participants came from 40 of the 50 American states. Their age ranged from 18 to 71 ( $M=35.27$ ,  $SD=9.41$ ), and the majority was male ( $n=186$ , 59%; female  $n=122$ , 39%; non-binary  $n=1$ ; prefer not to say  $n=4$ , 1%). The sample was overall more educated than the U.S. population with 62% of participants with a bachelor's degree ( $n=194$ ) and another 21% with a graduate degree ( $n=66$ ). Yet, 47% of participants ( $n=148$ ) lived in households making \$59,999 or less every year, thus under the U.S. median household income of \$68,703 (Semega et al., 2020). Another 19% ( $n=60$ ) were in households earning between \$60,000 and \$74,999, and about a third ( $n=105$ , 34%) lived in households earning \$75,000 or more annually. Based on the median, the participants' annual household income is somewhat representative of the U.S. population. Finally, most participants considered themselves Caucasian or white ( $n=240$ , 76%). An additional 15% identified as Black or African-American ( $n=46$ ), 4% as Hispanic or Latine ( $n=11$ ), 3% as Asian or Pacific Islander ( $n=8$ ), and 2% as Native American or Alaskan Native ( $n=6$ ). The last two participants identified as multiracial or preferred not to disclose their race. Thus, compared to the U.S. Census, Caucasians were overrepresented at the expense of the Latine and Asian populations.

#### 4.1.2. SPORTS HABITS

Though the survey was open to any U.S. adult, most participants reported watching live sports throughout the year. Indeed, only five (2%) reported never watching live sports, while 46 (15%) said they watched live sports one to ten times a year, 64 (20%) once or twice a month, 79 (25%) once a week, 75 (24%) two to three times a week, and 44 (14%) more than three times a week. Of the 308 participants who watch live sports (regardless of frequency), about half ( $n=157$ , 51%) prefer to do so on television while 42% ( $n=130$ ) prefer to stream them online, and 7% ( $n=21$ ) have no preference. No sex-based differences existed in these habits.

Unsurprisingly, the sample was also skewed based on sports fandom: on a scale of 1 ("I am not a sport, not a sports fan") to 7 ("I am a fan of at least one sport"), respondents averaged 5.84 with no sex-based difference (male  $M=5.90$ ,  $SD=1.14$ , female  $M=5.78$ ,  $SD=1.15$ ). Asked about 10 sports (the five most popular sports in the country along with five less popular Olympic team sports), participants were more likely to be fans of football, basketball, baseball, soccer, and ice hockey (in that order) than volleyball, team handball, field hockey, curling, and rugby (in that order). No sex-based differences existed in participants' likelihood to be a fan of a given sport.

#### 4.2. MEASURES

After screening questions, the survey included three sections. First, participants answered questions about their sports consumption habits, their fandom of ten sports (listed in the paragraph above), and statements about their

motivations to watch live sports, adapted from Wann's SFMS, on a seven-point Likert scale.

The second section started with a description of the proposed changes to traditional sports broadcasting (tailoring the product to people based on their level of fandom) before respondents rated four statements on a seven-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree): (1) If a company starts offering different streams based on knowledge/fandom level, I will start watching sports I do not know well; (2) A company offering different streams based on fandom level would enhance my experience watching sports; (3) If a company starts offering different streams based on fandom level, I will watch my favorite sports more often than I currently do; and (4) If a company starts offering different streams based on fandom level, I am more likely to become a fan of a sport I merely follow from a distance. Then, for each of the ten team sports, respondents selected one of three options they would rather watch: (1) An introductory broadcast in which the announcers carefully explain the rules of the sport as I watch the gameplay; (2) A traditional broadcast like what I'm used to seeing with announcers who focus mostly on the gameplay and sometimes explain the rules; or (3) An in-depth broadcast in which the announcers discuss in extreme detail the strategies the players/teams use. The announcers do not explain the basic rules of the sport unless it is relevant to the gameplay.

Finally, section 3 focused on demographics. All three sections included quantitative questions with variables mostly at the nominal or ordinal levels, which allows for investigation into the specific idea of tailoring live sports to the audience based on their level of fandom.

## 5. RESULTS

The present study sought to determine if packaging live sports differently based on people's various levels of fandom would change their intention to watch a sporting event. To answer this central research question, the present study used a combination of factor analysis, ANOVA, and regression.

To begin, nine measures of motivations for watching sports were classified into two factors. Measures were rated on a seven-point scale. Using a Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization, a factor rotation converged in three iterations (Table 1). The first factor had an eigenvalue of 3.95 and explained 43.91% of the variance. It contained motivations of escape ( $M=5.12$ ,  $SD=1.44$ ), finance ( $M=4.62$ ,  $SD=2.03$ ), beauty ( $M=5.49$ ,  $SD=1.26$ ), friends ( $M=4.99$ ,  $SD=1.63$ ), self-esteem ( $M=4.72$ ,  $SD=1.92$ ), and family ( $M=5.25$ ,  $SD=1.64$ ); as this factor represented components of sports media consumption associated with one's identity, the factor was named Identity ( $M=.72$ ,  $SD=.18$ ,  $\alpha=.85$ ). The second factor had an eigenvalue of 1.55 and explained 17.23% of the variance. It contained three measures of Getting pumped ( $M=5.54$ ,  $SD=1.33$ ), having a good time ( $M=5.76$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ), and entertainment ( $M=5.83$ ,  $SD=1.11$ ); as this factor represented components of sport media consumption associated with entertainment, the factor was named Enjoyment ( $M=.82$ ,  $SD=.14$ ,  $\alpha=.70$ ). Both factors were used as motivators for consumption.



**Table 1***Factor analysis of motivations for watching sports*

	1	2
FACTOR 1: Identity		
Escape	<b>.61</b>	.36
Finance	<b>.85</b>	-.01
Beauty	<b>.46</b>	.44
Friends	<b>.77</b>	.17
Self-Esteem	<b>.90</b>	.03
Family	<b>.70</b>	.32
FACTOR 2: Enjoyment		
Get Pumped	.28	.72
Good Time	.07	<b>.80</b>
Entertainment	.04	<b>.78</b>

*Note.*  $N = 313$ . The extraction method was principal axis factoring with a Varimax with Kaiser Normalization rotation in three iterations. Factor loadings are in bold.

Respondents were asked if, when watching one of the 10 sports identified for consumption, they would prefer an introductory broadcast, a traditional broadcast, or an in-depth broadcast. These preferences were analyzed for relationships to the motivators of Identity and Enjoyment using a series of ANOVA tests. Across the 10 sports, significant preferences were found in four. Identity-driven fans of soccer [ $F(2, 310)=5.09, p=0.007$ ], basketball [ $F(2, 310)=16.75, p<0.001$ ], football [ $F(2, 310)=12.81, p<0.001$ ], and baseball [ $F(2, 310)=8.08, p<0.001$ ] significantly preferred the more detailed, introductory broadcast. Meanwhile, Enjoyment-driven fans of volleyball significantly preferred the traditional broadcast style [ $F(2, 310)=3.15, p=0.044$ ].

Finally, a regression analysis measured the desire to stream sports more often. Four measures on a seven-point scale asked about watching sports. The items were 1. If a company starts offering different streams based on knowledge/fandom level, I will start watching sports I do not know well ( $M=4.91, SD=1.56$ ); 2. A company offering different streams based on fandom level would enhance my experience watching sports ( $M=5.24, SD=1.43$ ); 3. If a company starts offering different streams based on fandom level, I will watch my favorite sports more often than I currently do ( $M=5.18, SD=1.55$ ); and 4. If a company starts offering different streams based on fandom level, I am more likely to become a fan of a sport I merely follow from a distance ( $M=5.12, SD=1.58$ ). These items were summated into a measure of watching more sports ( $M=.71, SD=.19, \alpha=.87$ ).

The regression analysis (Table 2) indicated three predictors explained 61% of the variance of the desire to watch more sports with differentiated broadcasts ( $R^2=.61, F(1, 307)=159.80, p<.001$ ). Specifically, Enjoyment ( $\beta=.08, p=.035$ ), Identity ( $\beta=.48, p<.001$ ), and the intensity of one's sports fandom ( $\beta=.27, p<.001$ ) were the significant predictors. Ultimately, this finding indicates people who derive sources of their identity from sports are most likely to consume more sports with the enhanced broadcasts, with people who watch sports for enjoyment, and people who just watch a lot of sports, also consuming more.

**Table 2***Beta weights for regression analysis*

Variables	B	SE B	b	t	p
Enjoyment	.113	.053	.083	2.12	.035
Identity	.487	.069	.475	7.04	<.001
Sports Fandom	.199	.050	.265	3.98	<.001

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study is limited in a few ways. The use of MTurk as a sampling tool provides a viable, but sometimes slightly skewed, perception of the general population. Also, sports fans self-identified their viewing habits, but self-perceptions are often underreported. Furthermore, the study did not differentiate between consumption of men's or women's sports, which could be a fruitful avenue for future research as the audience for women's sports is growing and changing. Finally, all participants were adults based in the U.S., so similar exploratory research in other markets would be beneficial. Yet, as online companies and sports organizations increasingly broadcast live sports, this study contributes to the industry and academia by exploring viewer preferences for live sports within the framework of U&G. As an explanatory analysis conducted within the American market, it explores a new way to broadcast sports to improve audiences' experience. A multi-tiered streaming system embraces the power of digital streaming more fully while keeping costs lower than what a fully customized audience experience would require.

Hence, this study still provides valuable insight for both scholars and industry professionals. Leading sports communication scholars recently encouraged researchers to conduct more practical research (ICA, 2020), and this study responds to this call. Specifically, Toni Bruce said in that panel that an obstacle to sports communication research is "our failure to engage directly with those who actually produce the content that we often spend most of our time critiquing" (ICA, 2020). This study directly addresses a major concern of practitioners by providing a potential solution to recurring problems scholars have pointed out for decades, like the aging of the sports audience (Wakefield & Bennett, 2018), or the media's lack of coverage of women's sports (e.g., Coche, 2022; Cooky et al., 2021) and para-sports (Watson, 2020). It also contributes to Ilan's (2021) call for more research into the significance of live television at a time when live sports need a new model to deliver more value to consumers (Hall, 2021).

### 6.1. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study offers empirical evidence that one's level of sports fandom may increase if broadcasters implemented a feasible multi-tiered model of streaming sports based on three fandom levels. This is in line with Rogers' (2018) finding that having a basic understanding of a sport is crucial to enjoying it in the media. In other words, the current research shows more spectators' needs can be gratified if a viable pathway from uninitiated viewer to full sports fan were to exist. This also means that a mul-

ti-tiered streaming model may be a viable solution to resolving some of the “persistent inequities” that exist in sports media (e.g., women’s sports and para-sports are rarely covered), an industry that tends to “actively builds audiences [only] for certain men’s sports” (Cooky et al., 2021, p. 351). Indeed, an introductory broadcast would allow audience members to get to know a sport and its athletes, which would make it more likely for them to become fans.

Furthermore, all types of fans preferred the introductory broadcast style providing more detail about the rules of the sport watched, which was initially thought to be for flâneurs, as defined by Giulianotti (2015). Notably, fans of four of the top five U.S. sports (football, basketball, baseball, and soccer) indicated preferring an introductory broadcast with more basic information about leagues, players, and rules. Although this might seem counterintuitive, the authors deduce three possible explanations: (1) the introductory broadcast is a way to better inform fans about the intricacies of individual players, which can be a manifestation of the rise in fantasy sports and sports betting (Kupfer & Anderson, 2021), (2) one’s capacity to comprehend a sports broadcast may be overestimated, confirming Lynn et al.’s (2021) conclusion, and/or (3) audiences may want to connect with others through sports (Kim & Kim, 2020; Tamir & Lehman-Wilzig, 2022): introductory broadcasts would make communal viewing an accessible social activity, inclusive of flâneurs, followers, fans and supporters alike.

Though all types of fans were attracted to a more introductory broadcast, this study’s results also indicate sports consumers have a high willingness to consume more sports television content. They saw the differentiated broadcasts as an added bonus. Though this model relies on one-way communication during the broadcast, it still gives the audience more control over their media consumption as they must make a conscious choice among three options. Hence, audience members are more active and, according to previous U&G research, more likely to feel gratified (Lewis et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2018; Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

## 6.2. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Sports and media professionals can use these results to create a more educative process to attract more fans as they attempt to rejuvenate their aging audiences (Notte, 2017). Indeed, including pedagogical tools within sports broadcasts would give audiences a chance at better understanding what they are watching, which will allow for more enjoyment (Cummins, 2009; Rogers, 2018), hence higher gratification (Katz et al., 1974; Lewis et al., 2017; Logan, 2011; Rubin, 1984; Tang et al., 2021). Advancing, cost-effective technologies in on-screen graphics might be one solution that could be turned on and off, like closed captioning. Providing such elements would make the broadcast more accessible and thus, following Rogers (2018),

more likely to be enjoyed. For instance, football viewers, unlike in-stadium spectators, can often see added graphics that help them understand why a referee called an offside.

Moreover, this study's results imply sports audiences continue to want more content. Because mainstream sports remain a major factor for televised sporting events (Lynn et al., 2021) and as OTT television and sports streaming continue to grow (e.g., Wymer et al., 2021), broadcasters and sports professionals should leverage the multimedia nature of live streaming. Studying the Queensland Maroons' live streaming on Facebook, Wymer et al. (2021) concluded the Australian rugby team did not capitalize on the service's capabilities to "engage through sharing, socializing, codeveloping, and learning" (p. 88). The current study suggests broadcasters have been committing a similar mistake by treating the live streaming of sport as an additional screen or channel rather than an entirely new platform with its own opportunities. In non-live streaming content, Netflix has been testing ways to make shows and movies more interactive with "branching technology" (Nee, 2021, p. 1489) that allows viewers to choose their own adventure. However, the process is "expensive [...] difficult and challenging" (p. 1489) as it requires writers to write more stories, and crews to shoot more scenes, both

of which take time and financial resources. In contrast, the proposed model for live sports does not require any more time, and the additional financial resources required are limited to a few crew members (mainly commentators, graphics, audio) as many positions would be used for all three streams (e.g., camera operators, replay, sideline reporter, etc.). Moreover, a few tweaks and explainers could bring fans closer to the game by giving them richer knowledge about the gaming experience happening on their second screens, via fantasy or betting, which have a "reciprocal relationship" with the media industry, particularly television (Kupfer & Anderson, 2021). A multi-tiered streaming model could thus deeply affect these two growing industries (Kupfer & Anderson, 2021). Future research should explore how a multi-tiered model works in practice.

Ultimately, the time is now for the expansion of sports viewing options. The addition of tiered broadcasts would allow for more voices to be heard in the game, and provide education to novice sports fans and seasoned fans alike. Parents and grandparents could share in watching elementary broadcasts with their children and grandchildren, furthering family traditions of sports watching while all learn more about the game.

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# OBRA DIGITAL

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# Fencing on Instagram: Examining self-presentation as branding strategies of professional fencers

***Esgrima en Instagram: examinando la autopresentación como estrategia de marca de los esgrimistas profesionales***

3

ARTICLE



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## Abstract

Instagram has impacted how athletes present themselves and communicate with their audiences without the need for mass media mediators, such as journalists. Hence, this study explores the opportunities for professional fencers to develop self-presentation and communication strategies on the platform. The methodological approach is based on netnography and content analysis, evaluating the top 10 fencers accounts (FIE). The findings point out how these athletes build their brand by increasing fan engagement and interaction through sharing training videos, competition photos, and personal stories, while also collaborating with sponsors and brands to open up business opportunities and revenue streams. Therefore, fencers' active use of Instagram enhances their self-presentation and positively influences the image of fencing as a sport.

## KEYWORDS

Sport communication, social media studies, Instagram, athletes branding, fencing

## Resumen

Instagram ha impactado la forma en que los atletas se presentan y se comunican con sus

audiencias sin la necesidad de mediadores de medios masivos, como los periodistas. Por lo tanto, este estudio explora las oportunidades para que los esgrimistas profesionales desarrollen estrategias de autopresentación y comunicación en la plataforma. El enfoque metodológico se basa en la netnografía y el análisis de contenido, evaluando las cuentas de los 10 mejores tiradores (FIE). Los hallazgos señalan cómo estos atletas construyen su marca al aumentar el compromiso y la interacción de los fanáticos al compartir videos de entrenamiento, fotos de competencias e historias personales, al mismo tiempo que colaboran con patrocinadores y marcas para abrir oportunidades comerciales y fuentes de ingresos. Por lo tanto, el uso activo de Instagram por parte de los esgrimistas mejora su autopresentación e influye positivamente en la imagen de la esgrima como deporte

## PALABRAS CLAVE:

Comunicación deportiva, estudios de redes sociales, Instagram, atletas branding, esgrima.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The accessibility of athlete-related information has significantly increased through news websites since the 1990s, with contemporary sport communication providing an overview of their training and competitions. However, much of this content is 'media-processed,' capturing fleeting moments rather than presenting a comprehensive view of athletes' lives (Ma, 2021). More recently, the advent of social media platforms enabled athletes to express their thoughts and experiences in a more authentic and relatable manner (Kutzer, 2016).

Instagram, in particular, offers them a unique visual-centered way that bypasses traditional media and provides the public with a broader perspective. Hence, this study has the objective of exploring the opportunities brought by the platform to professional fencers in developing self-presentation as sport communication strategies, with a focus on personal branding.

The study's relevance lies in its contribution to the field of sport communication and social media studies, besides its novelty in analyzing online branding strategies among a specific group of sportspeople. Despite the extensive

study of sport communication, fencing remains a less explored subject within this domain, possessing unique characteristics that distinguish it from other sports. For instance, fencers compete with their faces covered, temporarily concealing aspects of their identity despite their names being printed on their outfits, thus partly limiting what the audience can see from the person. Additionally, Instagram has become one of the most popular visual social media globally, accounting for more than two billion active users in 2023 (Kemp, 2023), and its use has been investigated in other sports (Lobillo Mora and Aja Gil, 2020), but there is still a lack of scientific knowledge about its application for branding in fencing.

Furthermore, professional athletes hold a unique position as social and cultural influencers, utilizing social media platforms to voice their opinions and impact not only specific topics or events but the broader society as well (Kutzer, 2016). Instances of sportspeople making public political statements or expressing opinions on social media have generated extensive discussion and garnered attention from diverse sectors of society. Moreover, young sports fans and students often observe professional athletes on social media, seeking to learn from and emulate their healthy lifestyles, training methods, and competitive attitudes.

To investigate this phenomenon, the authors adopt a methodological approach based on netnography (Kozinets, 2010) and content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018), focusing on evaluating the top 10 fencers' accounts from the International Fencing Federation (FIE). Moreover, the study addresses two primary research questions: (RQ1) What are the sport communication trends regarding professional fencers' self-presentation on Instagram? (RQ2) How does the Instagram content of professional fencers affect the perception of fencing as a

sport? By examining how fencers portray themselves on this platform, the study seeks to identify the strategies and techniques employed to create a compelling personal brand that resonates with their followers, while also shaping the perception of fencing as a whole.

The findings reveal that professional fencers encounter some opportunities offered by social media to interact with their audiences, share sport-related and behind-the-scenes footage, and promote their brand values. In this sense, the platform enables them to increase fan engagement and interaction by sharing training videos, photos of their competitions, and personal stories that offer a glimpse of their daily lives to the public. Furthermore, collaborations with sponsors and brands open up additional business prospects and revenue streams. Therefore, Instagram enables these athletes to showcase their competitive spirit and their skill level to a larger audience, thereby attracting more individuals to participate in and follow the sport. In the next section, we present an overview of the literature regarding contemporary sport communication, and social media, and explain relevant characteristics of fencing to the study.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.1. SPORT COMMUNICATION AS A DIVERSE PRACTICE**

Sport communication studies have traditionally focused on analyzing media coverage of sports events, games, and athletes' lives (Bernstein and Blain, 2002; Abeza *et al.*, 2014; Hambrick, 2017). However, since the emergence of the Internet, particularly social media like Instagram, professional athletes, and other sportspeople have been able to reach and engage a far big-

ger audience than previously (Kutzer, 2016). Bernstein and Blain (2002) noted that “sport and the media have become associated to such an extent that it is often difficult to discuss sport in modern society without acknowledging its relationship with media” (p. 3).

Since 1980, sport communication research and practice has experienced significant growth, with this professional activity being recognized as one of the four functions of sport management (Hambrick, 2017). Scholars have studied the role of communication within the realm of sports, which is evident through the emergence of new textbooks, journals, associations, and conferences dedicated to sport communication, facilitating the dissemination of ideas and fostering advancements in the field (Abeza *et al.*, 2014).

According to Pedersen *et al.* (2007) and Billings (2016), sport communication is a dynamic process through which individuals engage in the sharing of symbols and create meaning within the context of sports. It encompasses a diverse set of activities, including observing and analyzing meaning-making processes, managing and directing communication, and exploring the impact of sports on individuals and society. This results in an interplay of roles, since there are at least three areas in which sport communication exists in the sports industry. Namely:

First, sport communication is communication in sports;

Second, sport communication is communication in a sport setting;

Third, sport communication is communication through sport.

Furthermore, people participating in sport communication may serve as both senders and receivers of messages, as these two spectrums are not always separated. For example, within

media organizations, senders could consist of sports editors, producers, journalists, broadcasters, and other personnel involved in content production, while the receivers are their audience (e.g. listeners, viewers, readers, etc.), customers, advertisers, and any individual or group responsible for interpreting sports-related information (Pedersen *et al.*, 2007). However, sports fans expressing discontent with their team's performance also act as senders whose message could affect these relationships (e.g. influence changes in the team management).

As outlined above, the sport communication process involves multiple components such as sports institutions, media, spectators, and other entities associated with the sports environment. Furthermore, Pedersen *et al.* (2007) argue that sport communication can be intentional or unintentional, complex, cyclical, irreversible, transactional, irreducible, dynamic, multidimensional, and encompasses both verbal and non-verbal aspects. In this context, Wenner (2017) suggests that communication plays a relevant role in shaping the social power and cultural significance of sports. In the following section, we explain how sport communications intersects with social media.

## **2.2. SPORT COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA BRANDING**

Social media is defined as “a set of Internet-based applications that are built on Web 2.0 ideas and technologies and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, pp. 59-58). As a functional definition, it refers to the interaction between people and also to the creation, sharing, exchange, and commenting of content in virtual communities and networks (Toivonen, 2007). Among the most popular social media platforms nowadays, Instagram accounts for

over two billion users in 2023 (Kemp, 2023), impacting how we communicate, share, and consume content online (Veloso, 2021). Since its launch in October 2010, Instagram has seen rapid growth in the number of users and uploads (Hu et al, 2014), providing users with an instant way to share moments of their lives with friends through a series of (filtered) images and videos (Veloso, 2018), thus having a strong visual focus (Serafinelli and Villi, 2017).

Not surprisingly, social media have become popular tools for sport communication (Hutchins, 2011; Sanderson, 2011) and differ from traditional media in at least two ways: They are not resource-limited by time (broadcasting) or print space (newspapers). Hence, these platforms, more specifically Instagram, offer an abundance of content and play an important role in the delivery of multimedia messages to sports audiences (Romney and Johnson, 2020a), while enabling interpersonal and mass communication spaces that can increase audience engagement (Romney and Johnson, 2020b). Espinosa (2021) indicates that the emergence of social networks has given rise to a distinct form of communication, characterized by rapid conversations and effortless transmission of information (p. 11).

For Meraz (2009), social media are “architected by design to readily support participation, peer-to-peer conversation, collaboration, and community” (p. 682). Since sports are by nature a highly visual exercise, with images of athletes capturing excitement, effort, and emotion (Romney and Johnson, 2020a), the integration of visual platforms such as Instagram into sport communication seems a strategic choice. Professional athletes from all fields already take advantage of these online opportunities. This is especially important for those who do not receive daily mainstream media coverage to generate publicity, as social media provides a

promotional vehicle to raise awareness and build their personal brand (Eagleman, 2013; Parmentier & Fischer, 2012).

A study of MotoGP pilot Jorge Lorenzo on Instagram, conducted by Lobillo Mora and Aja Gil (2020), has pointed out nine main topics being covered in the user’s content during the season 2018, but with a prevalence of posts related to competition (25%) and training (25%). The pilot’s personal life (11%), endorsement and sponsorship (11%), and other miscellaneous topics (10%) appeared in the sequence. Less prevalent themes included declarations (7%), recognition of other public figures (6%), lesions (3%), and season summary (2%). The authors also show that 73% of the posts covered discussions related to the pilot’s career and activities that may influence it (p. 111). Finally, the research on Lorenzo’s Instagram reveals that he primarily used single images for quick consumption, focusing on his professional identity as a pilot, while adding English in short, simple descriptions.

Benavides *et al.* (2021) surveyed 2,410 people in Santiago de Chile to evaluate the social perceptions of the Chilean National soccer team as a brand. The authors point out that the national team holds a strong brand image and is highly regarded by the majority of Chileans. Despite differences among socioeconomic groups and age ranges, the overall evaluation of the team and the emotions it evokes are positive, contrasting with the perception of the country itself. Older generations may have a more pessimistic outlook based on past experiences, while younger individuals tend to be more optimistic due to recent victories. Moreover, the national team is seen as a unifying force in Chilean society, promoting good coexistence and serving as role models.

Previous studies (Poletti, 2011) have also demonstrated that the process of sharing narratives on social media platforms contributes to ‘intimacy’ and ‘community bonds’ between the communicator and the audience (p. 76). Moreover, researchers have examined how Instagram can be used to engage fans for sporting, business as well and social purposes (Kim and Hull, 2017); as a self-presentation tool by Olympic athletes in specific (Geurin-Eagleman and Burch, 2016), or by professional athletes more in general (Smith and Sanderson, 2015). The public’s perception of an athlete is relevant to their career as it can also influence the athlete’s endorsements and contract negotiations.

Historically, their self-presentation was constrained by the influence of mass media, relying heavily on how sports journalists portrayed them. However, athletes now have more control over the dissemination of information and can showcase aspects of their identity that they consider most important, enabling a more personalized and authentic representation. In this scenario, the term “athlete brand” is defined by Arai et al (2013) as “a public persona which has already established their own symbolic meaning within their name, face, or other elements in the market” (p. 391).

To better understand the key components of athlete brands, Arai et al., (2013) developed a conceptual Model of Athlete Brand Image (MABI), which outlines how athlete brands are a cumulative result of how they are perceived in both frontstage and backstage settings. The MABI specifically posits that consumer percep-

tions of athlete brands are influenced by perceptions related to:

- Athletic Performance
- Attractive Appearance
- Marketable Lifestyle

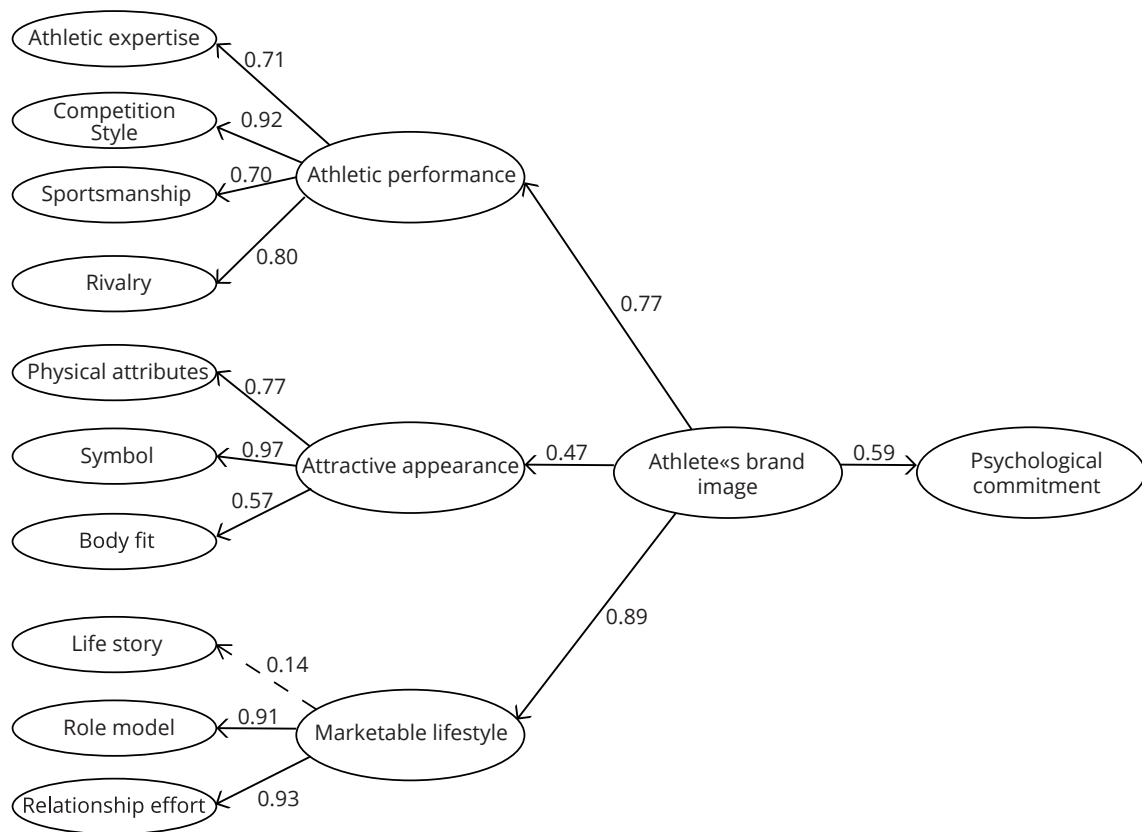
“Athletic performance” refers to an athlete’s on-field characteristics and athletic expertise, which play a relevant role in building their brand image and differentiating them from other athletes. “Attractive appearance” involves showcasing an athlete’s physical attributes, such as hairstyles, tattoos, body attributes, and muscle forms. Finally, “Marketable lifestyle” encompasses an athlete’s off-field interactions with fans and activities outside of sports, their life story, allowing them to connect with their audience and share aspects of their personal lives.

Consumers’ perception of an athlete’s brand is influenced by the information surrounding the sportsperson, including their own brand management and self-presentation strategies (Walsh and Williams, 2017). The process requires them to emphasize their uniqueness during the promotion, and it can be achieved through their on-the-field performance and off-the-field activities (Lobpries *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, effective branding strategies can provide athletes with added value, extended job markets, and increased income through endorsement (Arruda and Dixson, 2007; Mogaji *et al.*, 2020; Na *et al.*, 2020).



**Figure 1**

*MABI by Arai et al.*



*Note: Conceptual Model of Athlete Brand Image (MABI) by Arai et al. (Source: Arai et al., 2013, p. 397).*

## 2.3. FENCING: SPECIAL FEATURES

Fencing is one of the oldest sports, having that has evolved with the development of new metal forging techniques, military training, and the influence of different cultures (Porzio and Mele, 2002). Throughout history, fencing has even been considered an art form (Labat, 1696); in 1604, it was officially introduced as a discipline (Agrippa, 1604), and in 1896, it became part of the Olympic Games held in Athens. Although it is not particularly dangerous, there is only a thin line between a fatal injury and a simple knife wound. For this reason, fencers are required to wear a standard fencing uniform, masks, gloves, and socks while competing, and

must wear them throughout the competition (except during the prescribed breaks between matches).

Fencing is a martial sport characterized by skillful movements and non-contact between athletes and international fencing competitions can last several hours, but the actual match time comprises only a small portion, ranging from 17 to 48 minutes (Roi and Bianchedi, 2008). Because it is a physically demanding activity, factors such as age, gender, level of training, and tactical strategies employed against opponents influence the performance of fencers. Moreover, the physical demands of fencing are closely intertwined with perceptual and psychological aspects, which evolve continuously throughout

a match based on the opponent's behavior. The fencer must anticipate and deceive the opponent while maintaining mental and physical readiness to avoid lapses in concentration and fatigue (Roi and Bianchedi, 2008).

Furthermore, wearing a mask for safety also means that the fencer cannot show their face while competing, which makes the fencer appear more mysterious to the spectators and also adds to the tension and spectacle of the competition, which is one of the special features of the fencer. Although their identity and emotions cannot be shown through facial expressions, fencers can still show their strength and even identity (e.g. signature moves) through their skills and movements during a match.

Beyond the competition venues and training settings, fencers can now demonstrate more of their personalities on social media platforms, such as Instagram. This represents a unique new aspect for fencers, as they unmask themselves and can showcase other characteristics of their private life, building on sport communication in a personalized way, which has not been vastly researched in communication science yet. In the following section, we explain the methodological approach used to collect data and analyze this phenomenon.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research relied on a multimodal methodological approach based on netnography (Kozinets, 2010) and qualitative content analysis (Allen and Reser, 1990) for the data collection and analysis, thus offering an exploratory qualitative perspective that does not aim for generalization. We collected Instagram data (visuals only) from the top 10 men's and women's fencing (Epee) athletes worldwide for the 2021/2022 season, which was the latest consolidated ranking. The sample consisted of all their visual posts (photos and videos) published until April 30th, 2023 (N = 6.400) and the evaluation took place in the first four months of the year.

Netnography is a method inspired by traditional ethnography (Kozinets, 2010) that uses digital data from the internet, such as web pages, forums, social media, etc., to study consumer behavior and social interactions. During the study, data was collected and analyzed from the fencers' Instagram accounts, including their interactions with other users, content posted, number of followers, etc. This provided insight into the athletes' self-presentation and interaction patterns. Additionally, Instagram was chosen due to its popularity, accounting for more than two billion active users (Kemp, 2023), and to the opportunity it offers fencers to share

multimedia content directly with their audiences in an easy way (mostly consumed mostly on mobile phones), bypassing editorial constraints that they could face in traditional media outlets.

Moreover, we applied a qualitative content analysis (Allen and Reser, 1990) to better understand the brand image, attitudes, opinions, and marketing strategies of fencers, including images and videos. This process was achieved by manually analyzing the content posted on the platform and then categorizing and coding it according to the different post types.

As one of the most widely used analytical tools today, content analysis has been used fruitfully in a variety of research applications (Allen and Reser, 1990), and can be applied for quantitative or qualitative purposes. In this study, we developed a qualitative content analysis, which is defined as a research approach that involves the subjective analysis of data by systematically categorizing and identifying themes or patterns through a coding process (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1278).

Through the initial survey of the 20 athletes (top 10 males and top 10 females), five out of 20 fencers set their accounts to private and, as their Instagram accounts are not highly visible, the content was not included in the analysis. The final list (Table 1) consists of 15 fencers (Epee) who meet the following criteria: 1) Are ranked in the top 10 in the world for the 2021-2022 season; 2) had an open/public Instagram account throughout the research period. Moreover, an additional in-depth analysis is provided with examples of the two athletes' accounts with the highest number of followers.

**Table 1**

*Fencers selected for the research*

Name	Gender	Code	Instagram Account
CANNONE Romain	Male	H1	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/romaincannone/">www.instagram.com/romaincannone/</a>
BOREL Yannick	Male	H2	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/yannickborelofficel/">www.instagram.com/yannickborelofficel/</a>
LIMARDO GASCON Ruben	Male	H3	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/rubenlimardo/">www.instagram.com/rubenlimardo/</a>
REIZLIN Igor	Male	Private	Omitted
KANO Koki	Male	H5	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/kanokoki3568/">www.instagram.com/kanokoki3568/</a>
KOCH Mate Tamas	Male	Private	Omitted
BARDENET Alexandre	Male	Private	Omitted
KURBANOV Ruslan	Male	H8	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/kurbanov_ruslan_13/">www.instagram.com/kurbanov_ruslan_13/</a>
MINOBE Kazuyasu	Male	H9	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/minobe_kazuyasu/">www.instagram.com/minobe_kazuyasu/</a>
VISMARA Federico	Male	H10	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/federicovismara/">www.instagram.com/federicovismara/</a>
CHOI Injeong	Female	Private	Omitted

SONG Sera	Female	M2	<a href="http://www.instagram.com/sera.song/">www.instagram.com/sera.song/</a>
KUN Anna	Female	Private	Omitted
CANDASSAMY Marie-Florence	Female	M4	<a href="http://www.instagram.com/candassamymarieflorence/">www.instagram.com/candassamymarieflorence/</a>
FIAMINGO Rossella	Female	M5	<a href="http://www.instagram.com/rossellina91/">www.instagram.com/rossellina91/</a>
KONG Man Wai Vivian	Female	M6	<a href="http://www.instagram.com/vmwkong/">www.instagram.com/vmwkong/</a>
DIFFERT Nelli	Female	M7	<a href="http://www.instagram.com/nellidiffert/">www.instagram.com/nellidiffert/</a>
SANTUCCIO Alberta	Female	M8	<a href="http://www.instagram.com/albertasantuccio/">www.instagram.com/albertasantuccio/</a>
NDOLO Alexandra	Female	M9	<a href="http://www.instagram.com/alexandrandolo/">www.instagram.com/alexandrandolo/</a>
LEHIS Katrina	Female	M10	<a href="http://www.instagram.com/katrinalehis/">www.instagram.com/katrinalehis/</a>

*Note: List of fencing athletes selected for the research*

When analyzing the data, in addition to evaluating each athlete's account individually, we classified their publications according to four variables, based on previous analysis conducted through the netnography. For this purpose, we coded each image (see Table 2) based on the activities they depicted, namely: Training and competition (T/C), daily life (DL), charity or volunteer campaign (C/VC), and athlete branding or endorsement ads (A/E). It is important to note that this approach aimed for an initial exploration of their self-presentation strategies from a qualitative perspective, which we combine with examples from the athletes' content. In the next section, we present the main results of our research.

**Table 2**

*Coded content for each Instagram post per athlete*

Ath-letes	T/C	DL	C/VC	A/E	Total posts
H1	52	43	2	16	113
H2	201	105	5	31	342
H3	348	563	40	55	1006
H4	Privado	Privado	Privado	Privado	0
H5	21	13	2	7	43
H6	Privado	Privado	Privado	Privado	0
H7	Privado	Privado	Privado	Privado	0
H8	18	53		1	72
H9	87	80	16	73	256
H10	34	30	1	1	66
M1	Privado	Privado	Privado	Privado	0
M2	30	51	1	2	84
M3	Privado	Privado	Privado	Privado	0
M4	58	59	3	9	129
M5	368	1499	35	231	2133
M6	53	157	57	27	294
M7	82	133	5	11	231
M8	126	460	0	5	591
M9	162	617	18	19	816
M10	127	78	4	15	224

*Note: Classification of fencers' posts per category in the content analysis*

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 4.1. OVERVIEW OF TOP FENCERS ACTIVITY ON INSTAGRAM

This section is weighted towards the following findings: Firstly, the data collection presentation and interpretation of the netnography data from the Instagram accounts of the top 10 male and female fencing (Epee) athletes worldwide for the 2021/2022 season. Secondly, we provide a brief content analysis to reflect on the activities covered by their images. Finally, we evaluate these categories more in-depth and provide examples of the two most popular athletes on Instagram, based on the total number of followers.

Table 3 shows the number of followers and the number of publications from each of the top 10 male and female fencers (Epee) in the world for the 2021-2022 season. As can be observed in the data, the athletes have a very diverse activity on the platform, with two females ranking as the most popular (F5 and F6) with more than 200,000 followers by the time of this analysis. Among the males, the most followed one (M3) had 75,000 people in their audience.

Furthermore, when comparing their number of posts, some of those with a larger follower base tended to share more often, which was the case for F5 (2.133 posts) and M3 (1.006 posts). However, other least popular accounts (e.g. F8 and F9) also maintained a frequent posting activity (591 and 816 posts, respectively), while the second most followed male (M1) had a significantly lower number of images (113) when compared to the others. It is important to note that many factors can impact the amount of content shared on their accounts, such as when the profile was created and their intentions to publish daily activities. In addition, female athletes communicated more regularly on the platform than their male counterparts.

**Table 3**

*Top 10 fencers' activity on Instagram*

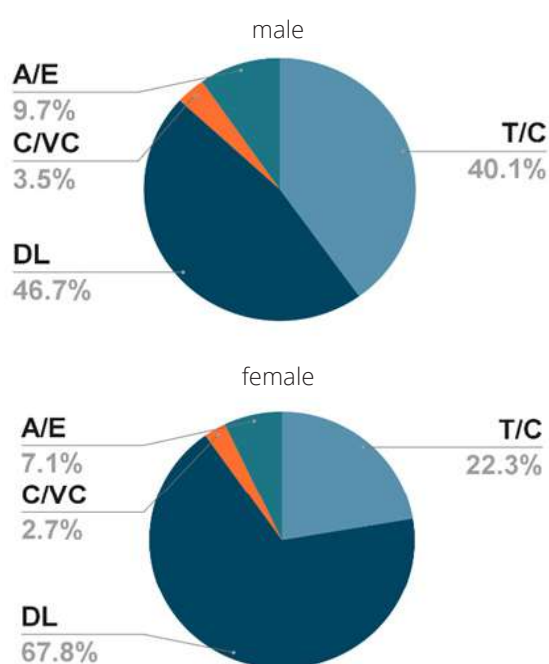
Athlete	Followers	Posts	Athlete	Followers	Posts
H1	19.000	113	F1	Private	Private
H2	17.000	342	F2	7.079	84
H3	75.000	1006	F3	Private	Private
H4	Private	Private	F4	1.490	129
H5	3.026	43	F5	300.000	2133
H6	Private	Private	F6	207.000	294
H7	Private	Private	F7	945	231
H8	991	72	F8	8.651	591
H9	7.661	256	F9	8.581	816
H10	1.605	66	F10	9.071	224

*Note: Fencers followers and posting activity on Instagram*

Through the survey and analysis, we noticed that there is a positive correlation between the number of posts and the number of followers of professional fencers, suggesting that their self-presentation strategies on Instagram can attract more followers and potentially increase their personal brand value and influence. This also reflects the effectiveness of professional fencers' use of Instagram as a sport communication channel, which is likely to help increase the attention and awareness of fencing.

**Figure 2**

*Types of posts on Instagram by gender*



*Note: Types of posts on Instagram by the top 10 male (left) and female (right) fencers*

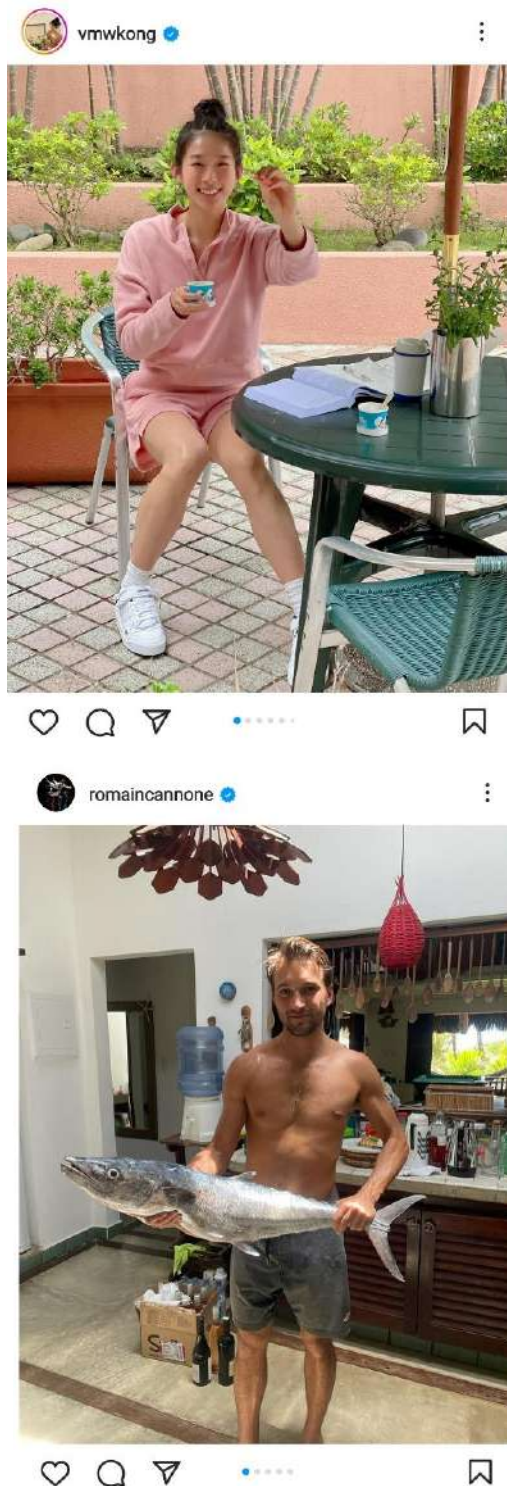
To further assess these strategies, we evaluated the activities that these athletes covered in their Instagram content. As can be seen from Figure 2, the most frequent category was daily life (DL), which refers to visual information that depicts their experiences beyond sports settings and could be related to two dimensions of the MABI (Arai et al., 2013), namely "Attractive appearance" and "Marketable lifestyle". The representation of activities varies between genders, with females sharing more of their quotidian (67.8%) than males (46.7%) in the analyzed sample.

Hence, the platform acts as a place where athletes use their accounts to share their private lives, depicting routine events, such as travel, food, beverages, recreational activities, etc. An example is shown in Figure 3, with fencers F6 photographed while enjoying ice cream in a garden and M1 in a home setting with casual clothing while holding a big fish. Compared to professional competition content, daily life posts are more relaxed, fun, and easy to interpret and, therefore more palatable for the general audiences.



**Figure 3**

*Fencers' daily life content*



*Note: Fencers F6 (left) and M1 (right) representing their daily life on Instagram. Source: Instagram/Screenshot*

Training and competition events (T/C) only appear in second place, but do not reach nearly the same proportion of daily life content, pointing out a less prevalent use of the “Athletic performance” dimension from the MABI (Arai et al., 2013) among these athletes. Additionally, male athletes seem to be almost twice as likely to represent their sport-related activities on Instagram (40.1%) than females (22.3%). This comparison demonstrates a variation in the modes of self-presentation adopted by professional fencers according to their genders. However, as indicated previously, female athletes were more popular and posted more regularly, which could explain this variation.

What fencers post about training and competitions can have a positive impact on the general public perception of fencing as a sport and result in increased exposure for athletes. A closer look at what they share related to this type of content shows moments of celebration after victories, medal awards on the podium, and practice with their masters. Moreover, by depicting their professional activities, fencers can increase their career visibility in the fencing world while reinforcing their technical skills and experience. Additionally, it can inspire more people to take up fencing, thus expanding the base and influence of the sport.

**Figure 4**

*Fencers professional life content*



*Note: Fencers M3 (left) and F5 (right) showing their professional activity Source: Instagram/Screenshot*

The two other categories, volunteerism and brand endorsements (Figure 2), are relatively low on the list of posts by the athletes evaluated, but they can still have a positive impact on the performance of fencing as a sport, although in some cases (e.g. paid advertising) they fall outside the 'athletic performance' dimension of the MABI (Arai et al., 2013). By participating in these activities, professional fencers can spread the message of fencing to a wider audience and increase the visibility of fencing to the public. Some examples of what they portray when they post about themselves include educational work in schools related to fencing (for volunteering) and promoting specific products, such as dietary foods, to their audiences (endorsements and advertisements).

Endorsement activities, especially those that include paid partnerships with companies, can provide more financial support and resources to promote the marketability and commercialization of fencing. Furthermore, by participating in voluntary work professional fencers can create a positive image and reinforce a sense of social responsibility and mission, which consequently helps to enhance the social image of fencing. However, these two activities are not necessarily an exclusive practice from fencers, as other athletes have historically dedicated themselves to both engaging in social work also using their personal brand to sell products.



## 4.2. MOST POPULAR FENCERS' CONTENT AND ACTIVITY

After analyzing the content of the top fencers, we focused on the two most popular fencers on Instagram, F5 and F6, to better understand their sharing practices and interaction with followers. For the frequency of interaction, we calculated the average interactions (average number of likes + average number of comments on all posts) of the two fencers with the highest number of followers on the platform (Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Average interaction*

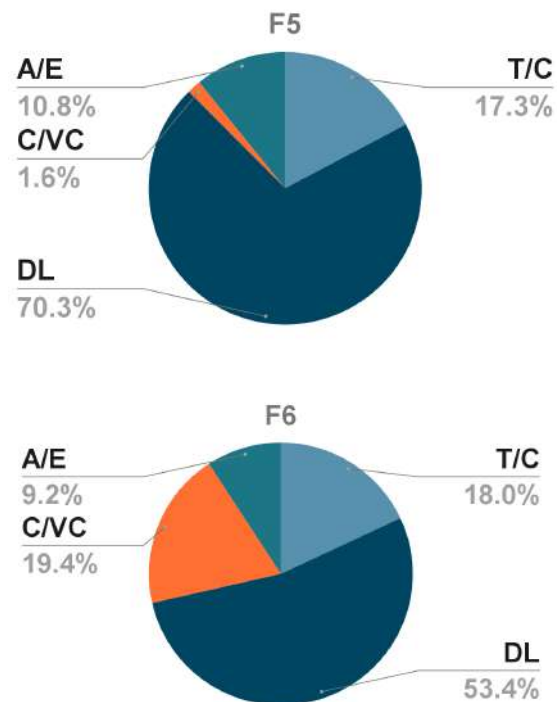
Athlete	Followers	AVG LIKES	AVG COMMENTS	AVG INTERACTIONS
F5	300000	8946.31	58.81	9005.12
F6	207000	8439.06	68.94	8508

*Note: Most popular fencers' average interaction on Instagram*

A closer look at the content shows that different types of posts receive different levels of interaction on average. For example, when comparing Training & Competition (T/C), Daily Life (DL), Charity & Volunteering (C/V), and Athlete Branding & Endorsement (A/E), we noted that T/C and DL were the most popular types of posts. Hence, visual content depicting their professionalism and everyday life obtained more attention from followers. For example, humorous content, and photos with other celebrities or athletes attracted more likes, thus increasing the average number of interactions on their posts.

**Figura 5**

*Tipo de publicación por esgrimistas*



By looking at the data on professional fencers' F5 and F6 post types (Figure 5), we found that they post mainly about their daily lives (70.3% and 53.4%, respectively), with training and competition appearing in second place for F5 (17.3%) and third place for F6 (18%). They share their daily life outside the training ground, fami-

ly gatherings, travel, healthy lifestyle during rest and recovery, interactions with coaches and teammates, etc. This content allows followers to gain a better understanding of the athletes' lives and build a closer connection with them.

**Figura 6**

*Actividad voluntaria y benéfica de la esgrimista M6*



*Note: Fencer F6 volunteer and charity activity content on Instagram*

A clear distinction between the two most popular professional fencers on Instagram refers to F6's volunteer and charity activity (Figure 5), which reached second place (19.4%), even more than their training events. A large proportion of these volunteer and charity posts are about participating in or organizing fencing competitions for children and young people, or attending fencing courses in public schools (see Figure 6), which to an extent connects with their professional practice.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The fact that visual social media, such as Instagram, have become a relevant tool for athletes branding demonstrates the relevance of contemporary sport communication, which is still an evolving area of research. Centered on photo and video sharing, Instagram provides a global platform for sportspeople to connect with others, share their training and competition events, and also depict their private lives. This allows athletes to be more actively involved in their public speaking and self-presentation (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Sanderson, 2008), influencing the development of the communication process.

Professional fencers use Instagram to interact with fans and viewers, share moments and behind-the-scenes footage of events, and promote their brand values, simultaneously incorporating into their online communication multiple dimensions of the MABI concept (Arai *et al.*, 2013). This is important for sport communication and promotion, as it allows athletes to engage more directly with their audiences.

This paper examines how professional fencers use Instagram to communicate about sports and finds that their active use of social media has multiple nuances and possible implications. In response to our RQ1 *“What are the sport communication trends regarding professional fencers’ self-presentation on Instagram?”*, the study shows some directions in the athletes’ self-representation. For example, the number of posts and followers seem to be slightly correlated, suggesting that these users adopt the platform to actively showcase their fencing skills and personalities in order to attract more viewers. The findings also suggest that fencers’ content focuses more on the dimensions of ‘attractive appearance’ and ‘marketable lifestyle’ than directly on ‘athletic performance’, although this was also part of their self-presentation strategies. Hence, they look for ways to showcase their life beyond the piste, giving a face and a story to the competitor behind the fencing equipment, which contrasts with the practice observed by Lobillo Mora and Aja Gil’s (2020) in their discovery of pilot Jorge Lorenzo’s Instagram content.

In regards to our second research question, *“How does the Instagram content of professional fencers affect the perception of fencing as a sport?”* The exploratory qualitative research shows that professional fencers’ online content may result in a positive impact on the image of fencing as a sport. By posting photos and videos of their practices and competitions, they promote their skills and competitive stand-

ing, attracting the attention of Instagram users. Moreover, this practice increases the general public’s knowledge of the sport, making its characteristics more palatable through diverse visual elements (photos, videos, etc.). In addition, by sharing content about their behind-the-scenes footage, and social involvement in charity work, brand endorsements favor the reach of fencing-related messages to new audiences that may be interested in these topics and, as a result, learn about the sport.

Finally, this research has identified trends, challenges, and opportunities in sport communication for the self-presentation of professional fencers on Instagram. They raise the profile and performance of fencing as a sport through diverse content and interaction with their audience. The presence of athletes on the platform is an important contribution to the sport communication market on a general level and to the modality in particular. By actively engaging and posting engaging content, they are able to attract more followers and viewers to themselves, increasing the visibility of the individual and the sport.

## **6. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

This study aims to explore the contribution of professional fencers’ self-presentation on Instagram as a sport communication strategy, with a focus on personal branding. Hence, it is important to note that it only covers content on one platform and, therefore, does not provide representative data of fencers’ performance on all social media. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of an athlete’s self-presentation and impact on social media, future research could allow for cross-platform comparisons. Moreover, we conducted qualitative exploratory research based on visuals only, and other researchers could further evaluate the topic from

a quantitative perspective or on text-centered platforms.

Since the number of current studies on fencers' online self-presentation remains low and no established theoretical framework has been established, this paper provides a tentative approach that offers support for research in this

area. Therefore, future analysis and exploration could be undertaken by other researchers to reveal the wider impact and strategies adopted by fencers on social media, thereby enhancing the understanding of their online branding.

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# OBRA DIGITAL

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# Evolution of the use of TikTok in Spanish football. Comparative study 2021-2023

***Evolución del uso de TikTok en el fútbol español. Estudio comparativo 2021-2023***

4

ARTICLE



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## Abstract

This paper studies in a comparative and longitudinal way the use of TikTok as a communication channel of FC Barcelona, Real Madrid, Atlético de Madrid, Sevilla CF and Valencia CF, with the aim of categorising and understanding their messages. The methodological design consists of a content analysis of the five profiles during March 2021 and March 2023, analysing a total of 312 videos. The findings are contrasted with four in-depth interviews with sports professionals. The results show a 135% increase in the number of publications, as well as the stylistic use of humour and entertainment as the main content.

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## KEYWORDS

*TikTok*, football, sports communication, social media.

## Resumen

Este trabajo estudia de forma comparativa y longitudinal el uso de TikTok como canal de comunicación del FC Barcelona, Real Madrid, Atlético de Madrid, Sevilla CF y Valencia CF, con el objetivo de categorizar y comprender sus mensajes. El diseño metodológico consiste en un análisis de contenido de los cinco perfiles durante marzo de 2021 y marzo de 2023, donde se analizan un total de 312 vídeos. Los hallazgos se contrastan con cuatro entrevistas en profundidad a profesionales del deporte. Los resultados muestran el incremento de un 135% en el número de publicaciones, así como el recurso estilístico del humor y el entretenimiento como contenido principal.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

*TikTok*, fútbol, comunicación deportiva, redes sociales.

# 1. INTRODUCTION AND STATE OF THE ART

## 1.1. INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the 20th century, we have witnessed the transformation of large global sports organizations into truly multinational entertainment companies (Andrews & Jackson, 2004). The irruption of digital technology and Web 1.0 triggered a reconsideration of the communicative function of sports clubs. Thus, they went from informative relations, such as promoting their activity and supporting the demand for news, to the first version of content-producing entities.

The next evolutionary leap came with the expansion of social networks during the first decade of this century. With Facebook and Twitter at the forefront, the opening of new channels brought about transformations in the entire communication process: the typology of the message, the diversity of audiences, the evolution of tone, and the obligatory bidirectionality, understood as the conversation between fan and club. Moreover, content generation transcended the classic system of own media to a transmedia digital ecosystem within each sports organization (Kuzma et al., 2014).

In the case of the big European football clubs, this transmedia ecosystem, which incorporated instantaneous and public metrics, represented a new playing field to compete for an audience whose limit was set in the last village with a network connection. Thus, the Big Five clubs expanded the staffs of their digital communication areas (Sanahuja, 2012) to offer the best

content. They were subject to an effervescent panorama of new tools (Borges, 2019), apps, and, fundamentally, modes of entertainment consumption by the fans.

In this context, the social network TikTok burst onto the scene as the latest success story of an interactive and relational application on the social web (Fernandez-Peña et al., 2014). It became a complementary network to the already consolidated ones such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram; moreover, it had the singularity of being created outside Silicon Valley. In 2016, the Chinese company ByteDance launched a mobile application of short music clips and trivial content called Douyin. In 2017, after becoming popular in Asia, it jumped to other continents, merging with Musica.ly.

Since its international debut, TikTok's growth has been exponential. ByteDance revealed that by July 2020, it had over 689 million active users worldwide (Sherman, 2020; Curry, 2022). This figure increased to 1 billion by September 2021 (Bursztynsky, 2021; Curry, 2022; TikTok, 2021). The latest public data states that TikTok had 1.092 billion users aged 18 and over in April 2023 (Datareportal, 2023). This nuance is essential, as TikTok allows users aged 13 to register.

However, one figure that confirms TikTok's penetration is the percentage of active users, defined as those who access the platform on a daily basis. According to SensorTower (2023), TikTok has 29% of active users; this puts it in second place behind Instagram, which had 39% of active users in the second quarter of 2022. However, users spent more time on By-

teDance's app than on Mark Zuckerberg's app: 95 minutes compared to Instagram's 51 minutes.

In Spain, TikTok is the fastest-growing social media platform. According to IAB (2023), its suggested awareness has increased from 75% to 78%, and its usage has risen from 30% to 36% this year.

## 1.2. STATE OF THE ART

Football's importance and social impact lead to a confluence of media, political, economic, and cultural interests, as Meneses and Ávalos (2013) stated. Consequently, football clubs maintain a continuous presence in the communication ecosystem, which implies a permanent and active management of the communication and public image of the club.

The communication management of football clubs has been extensively studied (Fernández *et al.*, 2019; Olabe, 2009; Sanahuja, 2012). According to Castillo *et al.* (2015), there are various actors involved in such communication: the club itself (Ginesta, 2010), the players, the media (Olabe, 2011), the fans themselves, and the political institutions, when there is an association between national identity and sport, as in the case of national football teams (González, 2014; Ginesta and San Eugenio, 2013; Xifra, 2008).

Regarding the communication issued by the football club, Sotelo (2012) refers to the presence of *La Liga* teams on social networks. He states that it is one of the most active in Europe, in terms of followers, ahead of the British Premier League. However, the author concluded

that there was a glaring lack of online strategy, overshadowed by the fanaticism in Spain for football. Cano (2017) points to the prolific publication of club content on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which goes beyond the sporting aspect.

Lobillo and Muñoz (2016), in their study on the presence of Barcelona FC and Real Madrid on Twitter in Arabic, point out that, at that time, no personalized, stable, and long-lasting strategic planning was in sight.

This line of thought is supported by Segarra-Saavedra and Hidalgo-Marí (2020) in their analysis of Spanish footballers on Instagram, stating that "there is no professionalized planned management" and that this digital presence on Instagram is "improvised." (p.51)

Concerning TikTok, Sidorenko-Bautista *et al.* (2022) analyze the use of this social network by Spanish First Division football clubs. There, it is also revealed that the clubs do not have a specific strategy for this network, as they recycle clips published on other platforms.

For their part, Cano and Galiano (2022), in their study of the Egyptian club Ah-Ahly Sporting Club's TikTok communication, carried out a content analysis that concluded that publications related to the club's players, post-match reports and training sessions were the most used in their publications.

Based on this introductory tour and the conceptual framework drawing, the purpose revolves around this question: How has the content on TikTok issued by the five major Spanish football clubs with the most significant number

of followers evolved between 2021 and 2023? The answer to this question will contribute to the debate on corporate communication trends of sports organizations within the digital ecosystem and social networks.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the evolution of the use of TikTok in Spanish professional football between 2021 and 2023.
2. To observe the periodicity of the publications.
3. To examine the type of content used on TikTok by the clubs analyzed.
4. To analyze the tone and style of the publications made on TikTok by professional football clubs about their identity and positioning.
5. To assess the importance of this social network in football clubs as a tool for engagement and loyalty among the public.

### 2.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

To achieve the objectives, a methodological combination has been used with a first phase based on a content analysis with a longitudinal approach and a second phase in which the results obtained are contrasted with four in-depth interviews. These interviews were

**Table 1**  
*Methodology outline.*

Stages of the study			
Docu- mentary study	Content analysis	In-depth in- terviews	Conclusions
Review of research on sport, social me- dia, and TikTok	Sample selection	Design of semistruc- tured ques- tionnaires	Comparison of the find- ings of the phases
	Determi- nation of the analy- sis table	Selection and contact of interview- ees	Review of objectives and hypoth- eses
	Fieldwork	Conducting interviews	Compar- ison with previous research

*Source: Own elaboration*

conducted with four professionals in the field of sports communication.

### 2.3. CONTENT ANALYSIS

The content analysis is based on previous studies on the use of content published on TikTok and Instagram (Sidorenko-Bautista *et al.*, 2022; Cano & Galiano, 2022; Su *et al.*, 2020b; and Geurin, 2017) and combines the extraction of quantitative and qualitative findings. The research approach is exploratory, given that this is an emerging object of study, with little academic literature on TikTok and where it is hoped to lay the foundations for future studies. Likewise, the number of profiles analyzed (five) is similar to that of the research by Su *et al.*

(2020b) and with a sport-communicative context that coincides with that of Sidorenko-Bautista *et al.* (2022).

The content analyzed corresponds to the posts made on the profile feeds of the five clubs selected as a sample during two study periods. Thus, this study has a longitudinal approach (Arnau & Ono, 2008). The chosen dates were 1-30 March 2021 and 1-30 March 2023. This range corresponds to March, where sporting activity is constant. In this period, clubs play *La Liga* matches on weekends and European competitions during the week. It is, therefore, one of the months with the most regular sporting activity.

Data collection took place in the weeks following the publication of the messages in each of the two years. The analysis variables in a recent domain, such as the social network TikTok, are described and justified in more detail in sections 2.3.2. and 2.3.3.

2.3.1. DELIMITATION OF THE SAMPLE

The five Spanish professional La Liga Santander clubs with the most followers have been selected. In descending order of the number of followers on TikTok, these are:

2.3.2. STUDY OF THE CATEGORISATION OF CONTENT

Given the recent interest in studying TikTok, content categorization is based on previous research by several authors who have addressed content categorization on this platform. The most recent categorization, and the one that most influences this study, is the one proposed by Sidorenko-Bautista *et al.* (2022).

In the analysis, the research has focused on quantitative aspects such as the virality indices defined by Congosto (2015) and engagement, described by Rojas and Redondo (2013).

To quantify these indices, the following metrics have been measured: the total number of “Likes” on a video, the total number of comments, the total number of times it was shared, and the number of views. These metrics are public and are considered the most common engagement and reach metrics in social networks, according to Mejía Llano (2017) and González Fernández-Villavicencio *et al.* (2013).

The level of engagement of each video analyzed has been obtained by using the following formula:

(Total Likes + Total Comments + Total Shares) x 100 / Number of Views

To calculate the global engagement index, the total metrics of the content broadcasted were added up, following the methodology proposed by Núñez (2017).

Table 2

Teams and followers on TikTok.

Team	Position	Start in TikTok	Followers in March 2021	Followers in March 2023
Real Madrid CF	1º	August 2019	5,000,000	30,000,000
FC Barcelona	2º	July 2019	8,300,000	27,800,000
Atlético de Madrid	3º	August 2019	2,200,000	7,800,000
Sevilla FC	4º	April 2020	355,000	3,200,000
Valencia FC	5º	August 2019	150,000	2,600,000

Source: Own elaboration

### 2.3.3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED CATEGORISATION

Based on the comparative analysis of the preceding analysis tables and on the proposal of original analysis criteria to achieve the objectives of the research, the following analysis variables are proposed for the sample:

#### • A) Subject matter

1. Sport: includes training, competitions and matches.
2. Community: The protagonists are the fans.
3. Social causes: social causes to which the organizations are committed (equality, sustainability, etc.).
4. Merchandising: They include products related to the club and aim to sell.
5. Sponsorship: advertising a brand or product related, or not, to the club.
6. Entertainment created by the club.
7. Entertainment created by sources outside the club and replicated by the club on its account.
8. Challenges by the club: The club creates challenges for its fandom and TikTok users to participate in and create more interaction.

#### • B) Tone, text, and sound

##### 1. Tone

1. Humorous: when the purpose of the publications is to make people laugh.

2. Energetic: a dynamic tone to show sports publications, training, championships, or matches.

3. Emotional: appeals to the feelings of users and fans through memories and good or bad moments of clubs, sportsmen, and sportswomen.

##### 2. Text

All sports organizations contain a description in every post they make. Most often, they also use hashtags in their descriptions to try to reach more users.

Organizations publish their videos in different languages, depending on the publication or organization, but generally use English. In addition, they post videos that contain text in the video itself. The texts share common elements across all organizations, such as emoticons, informal tones, and hashtags.

##### 3. Sound

In the posts of sports organizations, there are many types of sound.

##### 1. Ambient sound

##### 2. Instrumental music

##### 3. Music with lyrics

##### 4. Narration of the clip

##### 5. Interviews and press conferences

#### • c) Interaction

**Table 3***Type of TikTok content.*

Subject	Tone	Sound	Interaction
Sports	Humoristic	Ambient sound	Reproductions/views
Community	Energetic	Instrumental music	Likes
Social causes	Emotional	Music with lyrics	Comments
Merchandizing	Text	Narration of clip	Shared
Sponsorship	Languages	Interviews and press conferences	
Entertainment (internal)	Hashtags		
Entertainment (external)	Emoticons		
Challenges			

*Source: Own elaboration*

The impact and engagement of club publications are analyzed and measured through views, likes, comments, shares, and downloads of the video.

- **d) Frequency of publication**

The frequency with which sports clubs publish content on TikTok is analyzed.

## 2.3. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Once the results of the quantitative phase have been obtained, they are subjected to confrontation with qualitative fieldwork (Álvarez-Gayou, 2003).

This technique was chosen because qualitative interviews are flexible and dynamic; moreover, they allow the findings of the previous phase to be discussed and contextualized (Taylor & Bogdan, 2008). For the present research, a semi-structured interview system was developed, where the questions discuss the results obtained from the quantitative part, as well as issues affecting the work of the different profiles associated with athlete communication. Between three and five open questions are asked. The interviews took place between 10 April and 23 May 2023.

Name and Surname	Job Title/Profession
Guillem Graell	Director of D2F Partners and Chief Marketing Officer of FC Barcelona between 2017 and 2021.
Marcos García	General Manager - GoSharing-Dreams
Puri Vicente	Director of Argot Comunicación, an agency specializing in Social Networks.
Laura Palanques	Account Manager Twelfthundred

*Source: Own elaboration*

To conduct the interviews, we have selected four professional profiles with direct or indirect involvement in sports communication management.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1 FC BARCELONA

*FC Barcelona* experienced a notable growth in followers and number of posts between 2021 and 2023. Content has diversified, with a decrease in sporting focus and an increase in entertainment content. Content related to sports



**Table 5**

*Comparison of the primary data obtained from FC Barcelona.*

Metrics	Year 2021	Year 2023
Followers	8.3 million	27.8 million
Publications	30	88
Media publication	0.96	2.8
Content		
- Sports	50%	38%
- Entertainment	37%	13%
Style		
- Epic and dynamic tone	63%	31%
- Humorous tone	23.00%	52%
- English speaking	100%	65%
- Instrumental music	36.70%	34%
- Ambient sound	6%	21%
Engagement*		
- Views	20 million	3.6 million

*\*Publication with more engagement*

*Source: Own elaboration.*

sponsorship, as well as content of a social nature, increases.

In terms of style, the epic/dynamic tone declined, while the humorous tone became the main one. The text was mainly in English in 2021, but in 2023, descriptions in Catalan and, to a lesser extent, in Spanish were included.

### 3.2 REAL MADRID

*Real Madrid* shows an exponential growth (+300%) in followers compared to 2021. Topics have been shifting towards entertainment and humor, characteristic of the TikTok social network. This implies a greater adaptation of communications.

Stylistically, 2023 used descriptions in English and Spanish with short, informal, and modern

**Table 6**

*Comparison of the main data obtained from Real Madrid.*

Metrics	2021	2023
Followers	5 million	30 million
Publications	26	40
Media publication	0.84	1.2
Content		
- Sports	84%	32.50%
- Entertainment	0% social external and internal	50% social, external, and internal
Style		
- Epic and dynamic tone	84%	42.50%
- Humorous tone	15.40%	47.50%
- English speaking	100%	60%
- Instrumental music	53.80%	25%
- Ambient sound	23.50%	35%
Engagement*		
- Views	6 millio	3.5 million

*\*Publication with more engagement*

*Source: Own elaboration.*

texts. There was also a change in the music used, with an increase in the use of instrumental music (55%).

Regarding engagement, the most successful post in 2021 generated almost 6 million views and more than 450,000 likes, while in 2023, the top video garnered 3.5 million views and 64,000 "likes".

### 3.3 ATLÉTICO DE MADRID

Like its predecessors, Atlético de Madrid has a significant increase in followers and publications. Regarding the typology of its publications, a large part of its content continues to be sport-

**Table 7**

*Comparison of the main data obtained from Atlético de Madrid.*

Metrics	Year 2021	Year 2023
Followers	2.2 millions	7.8 millions
Publications	13	48
Media publication	0.43	1.5
Content		
Sports	76.9%	60%
Entertainment	15.4%	27%
Style		
Epic and dynamic tone	61.5%	50%
Humorous tone	30.8%	41%
English speaking	76%	45%
Modern music	53.8%	33%
Ambient sound	30.8%	47%
Engagement*		
Views	3 millions	9 millions

*\*Publication with more engagement*

*Source: Own elaboration.*

ing, with an epic/dynamic tone. However, there is an increase in humorous content.

The football club is going for realism. In 2023, ambient sound predominates, compared to modern music in 2021. Regarding engagement, there is a substantial increase in views between the most viewed publications in 2021 and 2023. However, in 2021, there were more than 370,000 "likes," while in 2023, there were 60,000 "likes".

### 3.4 SEVILLA FC

The club has significantly increased its community of followers and its average daily publication from 2021 to 2023. In 2023, there will be

an increase in sports content and a reduction in humor content compared to 2021.

The predominant tone in 2021 was epic/dynamic in 85.7%, but in 2023, it decreased to

**Table 8**

*Comparison of the main data obtained for Sevilla FC.*

Metrics	Year 2021	Year 2023
Followers	355,000	3,2 million
Publications	7	20
Media publication	0.22	0.6
Content		
Sports	42.90%	85%
Entertainment	26%	15%
Style		
Epic and dynamic tone	85.70%	70%
Humorous tone	10%	20%
English speaking	60%	95%
Modern music	57.10%	50%
Ambient sound	15%	45%
Engagement*		
Views	280,000	37,000

*\*Publication with more engagement*

*Source: Own elaboration.*

70%, giving way to a humorous tone in 20% of the occasions. In terms of language, in 2021, English was used more in descriptions, while in 2023, Spanish was predominant.

Regarding music, in 2021, modern music with lyrics was the most used (57.1%), but in 2023 ambient sound stood out with 45%.

In terms of engagement, in 2021, the most successful post had more than 280,000 views and more than 35,000 likes, while in 2023, the most successful post had more than 37,000 views, 71,000 likes and 833 comments.

### 3.5 VALENCIA CF

Percentage-wise, the most significant increase in followers between 2021 and 2023 is for *Valencia CF*, which goes from 150,000 to 2.6 million in two years. The predominant content in 2021 and 2023 is entertainment, with sports

Table 9

Comparison of the main data obtained from Valencia CF.

Metrics	Year 2021	Year 2023
Followers	150,000	2.6 million
Publications	16	23
Media publication	0.57	0.7
Content		
Sports	46%	21%
Entertainment	50%	47%
Style		
Epic and dynamic tone	31.3%	50%
Humorous tone	62.5%	47%
English speaking	0.32%	0.13%
Modern music	43%	26%
Sonido ambiente	37%	60.8%
Engagement*		
Views	185,000	95,000

\*Publication with more engagement

Source: Own elaboration.

content dropping considerably between these years.

In terms of language, the content is mainly in Spanish in both years. The use of English in publications is minimal, only 12.5% in 2021 and 0.23% in 2023. In terms of music, there is an increase in the use of ambient sound, which represents 60.8% in 2023, while modern and instrumental music decreases to 26%.

Regarding engagement, the most successful post in 2023 got over 95,000 views, 83,200

Table 10

Comparison of number of publications and average number of publications during March 2021 and 2023.

Club	Year 2021	Year 2023	Average publication rate (per day) 2021	Average publication rate (per day) 2023
FC Barcelona	30	88	0.96	2.8
Real Madrid	26	40	0.84	1.2
Atlético de Madrid	13	48	0.43	1.5
Valencia CF	16	23	0.57	0.7
Sevilla CF	7	20	0.22	0.6

Source: Own elaboration.

likes, and 1,045 comments. In comparison, the most successful post in 2021 has more than 185,000 views and less than 5,000 likes.

### 3.6 COMPARISON OF TIKTOK USE IN FOOTBALL CLUBS

Table 11

Most used content types per year and club.

Club	Year 2021	Year 2023
FC Barcelona	50% sports	37.5% sports
	37% entertainment	13% entertainment
Real Madrid	84% sports	32.5% sports
	0% social external and internal	50% social external and internal
Atlético de Madrid	76.9% sports	60% sports
	15.4% entertainment	27% entertainment
Valencia CF	46% sports	21% sports
	50% entertainment	47% entertainment
Sevilla CF	42.9% sports	85% sports
	26% entertainment	15% entertainment

Source: Own elaboration

Having analyzed each football club's TikTok postings individually, a more general comparison between the different clubs is necessary.

As noted in Table 1, all five clubs experienced significant growth in the number of followers on TikTok between 2021 and 2023. These results reflect the ongoing popularity of football on the platform and the close competition between big clubs such as Barcelona and Madrid.

Table 12

Most used style types per year and club.

Club	Year 2021	Year 2023
FC Barcelona	63% epic and dynamic tone	31% epic and dynamic tone
	23% tone of humor	52% tone of humor
	36.7% instrumental music	34% instrumental music
	100% English language	65% English language
Real Madrid	84% epic and dynamic tone	42.5% epic and dynamic tone
	15.4% tone of humor	47.5% tone of humor
	53.8% modern music	25% modern music
	100% English language	60% English language

Atlético de Madrid	61.5% epic and dynamic tone	50% epic and dynamic tone
	30.8% tone of humor	41% tone of humor
	53.8% modern music	33% modern music
	76% English language	45% English language
Valencia CF	31.3% epic and dynamic tone	50% epic and dynamic tone
	62.5% tone of humor	47% tone of humor
	43% modern music	26% modern music
	25% English language	1% English language
Sevilla CF	85.7% epic and dynamic tone	70% epic and dynamic tone
	10% tone of humor	20% tone of humor
	57.1% modern music	50% modern music
	60% English language	95% English language

Source: Own elaboration.

All five clubs have increased their activity on TikTok, posting more content and more frequently between 2021 and 2023. FC Barcelona leads in the total number of posts, as well as the average number of posts per day.

#### 3.6.1. TYPE OF CONTENT BROADCASTED

Sports content is predominant in both periods. This indicates that sports-related content is a priority for clubs when posting content on this social network. However, there is a decrease in the percentage of sports content and a trend towards more diversification, including more entertainment-related content. This may be a strategy to attract a wider audience and keep fans interested in the platform.

The use of the tone of humor has increased sig-

**Table 13**

*Publications with the most engagement per year and club.*

Club	Year 2021	Year 2023
FC Barcelona	20 million	3.6 million
Real Madrid	6 million	3.5 million
Atlético de Madrid	3 million	9 million
Valencia CF	185,000	95,000
Sevilla CF	280,000	37,000

*Source: Own elaboration.*

nificantly in the majority of clubs in 2023. This suggests that clubs use this resource to connect with and engage their audience.

Regarding speech, most clubs have reduced the percentage of English content in 2023. This could indicate an intention to reach out to a more diverse and multilingual audience on TikTok initially but then move closer to home.

There is a general trend towards a more humorous tone and a reduction in the use of instrumental music in favor of various musical styles. These changes reflect an adaptation of the clubs to the preferences and dynamics of the TikTok platform.

### 3.6.3. ENGAGEMENT

Regarding engagement, it can be concluded that some featured posts generated a high level of interaction from followers, with many views, likes, and comments. These posts tend to be related to relevant events, participation of prominent players or collaborations with other content creators, and content that is very focused on Generation Z.

The table shows the publication with the most engagement for each club. The difference between the two periods lies in two main axes;

the first is the explosion of TikTok in that period, which benefits the content more, and the second has to do with the context in which society was moving, caused by the pandemic.

## 3.7 CONTRAST STAGE

The results obtained in the quantitative stage are contrasted and contextualized with four in-depth interviews with professionals in the field of sport or specialized in TikTok. The convergent and divergent points, as well as the most relevant findings, are outlined below.

### 3.7.1 FACTORS INFLUENCING THE GROWTH OF CLUB FOLLOWERS

Each club has its characteristics, from its fan base to its level of media interest. These aspects, along with sporting performance, can impact, either positively or negatively, on the number of fans they attract.

Graell highlights how risk appetite can vary between clubs. He takes Real Madrid as an example, as it tends to avoid risks, especially in new media (Graell, personal communication, 15 April 2023).

However, Puri Vicente provides another perspective by identifying three key factors that have driven the accelerated growth in followers: the increase in TikTok users, the increase in the number of posts, and the proliferation of TikTok content on other platforms, such as Reels (P. Vicente, personal communication, 18 April 2023).

### 3.7.2 CHALLENGES IN GENERATING SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

Generating content on TikTok is not without its challenges. García stresses that the main challenge lies in balancing viral content with the club's branding (García, personal communication, 22 April 2023).

Added to this are other challenges mentioned by Vicente, such as the need for originality, the constant creation of content, and the importance of having an internal team dedicated to TikTok.

Palanques, on the other hand, insists on the importance of adapting content to the platform. He criticizes clubs such as Valencia and Sevilla because, in his opinion, they repeat content from other networks and do not achieve the desired engagement (L. Palanques, personal communication, 30 April 2023).

### **3.7.3 IMPORTANCE OF ENTERTAINMENT CONTENT IN CLUB STRATEGY**

Entertainment content has played a central role in the clubs' strategy on TikTok. Graell argues that aspects such as the rivalry and history of the clubs offer them the opportunity to generate content that truly resonates with their fans (Graell, personal communication, 15 April 2023).

García complements this point by emphasizing that, while anyone can create entertaining content, clubs must offer something unique and distinctive (García, personal communication, 22 April 2023). Palanques closes this point by reiterating that TikTok is essentially an entertainment platform and that users are looking for content that entertains them rather than direct promotions.

### **3.7.4 STRATEGIES AND FORMULAS TO GENERATE ENGAGEMENT**

Engagement is a vital metric in any social network. Although, as Palanques points out, there is no magic formula to guarantee it, it is crucial to use the metrics that TikTok provides to tune in to what the audience wants (L. Palanques, personal communication, April 30, 2023).

Vicente provides a more detailed view, stressing the importance of keeping up to date with trends, observing other creators, and adapting their strategies to the needs of a sports club (P. Vicente, personal communication, 18 April 2023).

## **4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **4.1 DISCUSSION**

Through the study, it was found that sports and entertainment content, with an epic and dynamic approach and following the codes imposed by TikTok, are the ones that generate the greatest attraction in the football clubs studied. This finding aligns with the thesis of Su *et al.* (2020b), which highlights the unique, casual, and authentic nature of TikTok compared to other social platforms.

TikTok synthesizes three growing trends in social media: one, the visual-televisual medium, which has always enjoyed great popularity; two, an algorithm that is structured to offer a better user experience according to tastes; and three, a platform designed for smartphone cameras (Guinaudeau *et al.*, 2022).

This attraction can be attributed to the fact that TikTok offers a more genuine and authentic means of interacting with fans compared to more traditional platforms that are often saturated with promotional and less personalized content. In this context, football clubs have a unique opportunity to present themselves from a different, more human, and closer perspective to their fans, which can strengthen their relationship and connection with them.

The decision by major football clubs to establish a presence on TikTok, as suggested by Sidorenko-Bautista et al. (2022), not only validates the growing importance of this platform but also reflects a strategic shift in how these institutions wish to project themselves in the digital world. The significant 135% growth in posts from 2021 to 2023 supports this claim. This signals a determined commitment by clubs to adapt and evolve in line with the changing preferences of their audience.

The clubs have been able to adapt to the network and the audience, modifying their communication strategy and their content towards sport and entertainment, dynamic and agile, allowing them to get closer to the new generations. A review of the content published reaffirms that they use TikTok's native formats and collaborations, with its codes in terms of graphics and sound, and produced specifically for this social network. This allows us to assess the communication management of the clubs on TikTok, as well as to establish similarities and differences with previous studies on other social platforms (Segarra-Saavedra & Hidalgo-Marí, 2020; Lobillo & Muñoz, 2016), where communication on Instagram or Twitter is described as improvised.

The contribution of Garcia *et al.* (2022) provides further context regarding the nature of TikTok posts. By focusing on day-to-day content, clubs

not only offer a behind-the-scenes look at club operations and the daily lives of their players and staff but also demonstrate a willingness to move away from traditional communication and marketing approaches. This strategic decision can be seen as an attempt by the clubs to humanize their brand and make it more relatable and more appealing to a younger, digitally native fan base.

While football clubs have always been highly visible and influential in popular culture, their adaptation and success in TikTok suggests recognizing the need to evolve in line with contemporary media and changing fan expectations.

## 4.2 CONCLUSIONS

The evolution of the use of TikTok in Spanish professional football between 2021 and 2023 has been remarkable. All the indicators analyzed point to the quantitative and qualitative leaps made by the clubs under study. Both the accumulated followers and the volume of publications (from 92 in total in 2021 to 219 in 2023), as well as the adaptation of the audiovisual pieces to the demands and trends of the social network, reveal the allocation of resources of these clubs in the production of content for TikTok. In other words, the management of this social network has been professionalized; it has gone from a management in which the profiles existed to test the channel and be present to a management that can be considered strategic and sophisticated just two years later.

In terms of the type of content used, entertainment has become a determining factor in the clubs' strategy on TikTok. Fans prefer en-

tainment content, heavily based on humor and sporting content, rather than promotional content. Clubs have leveraged their history and rivalry to generate targeted content that resonates with their supporters and football fans but have accepted the unwritten rules of the platform. This ability to offer content that is different from other media is what has attracted fans and kept them engaged on the platform.

Regarding the tone and style of the publications, it is worth noting that originality, fun, and spontaneity are crucial elements to stand out on TikTok. Clubs have managed to adapt their communication style to the preferences of this entertainment platform. Some clubs, such as Real Madrid, Barcelona, and Atlético, have adapted successfully, as the comparison shows, while others, such as Sevilla and Valencia, are building the most relevant narrative in this context.

Finally, assessing the importance of this social network for football clubs as a tool for engagement and loyalty among the public, it can be concluded that TikTok allows them to connect with their audience from a different perspective than that previously used in other media available to the club. Today, clubs face new challenges, such as creating viral content that, in addition to achieving visibility, transmits the club's identity. This is one of the focuses on which clubs are working and which, in the coming years, will be a great competition off the pitch, with TikTok as a backdrop.

Considering the exploratory nature of the research and the limited sample, this study provides an exciting starting point for future research that could further investigate the evolution of these challenges.



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# OBRA DIGITAL

Universitat de Vic - Universitat Central de Catalunya  
Universidad del Azuay

# The role of women in the production of journalistic pieces: analysis of *Mundo Deportivo* and *Marca* during Qatar 2022

***El papel de las mujeres en la producción de piezas periodísticas: análisis de Mundo Deportivo y Marca durante Qatar 2022***

5

ARTICLE



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## Abstract

Historically, both in Spain and internationally, the role of female journalists in the media has been characterized by being scarce and stereotyped. This poor representation has been called on numerous occasions as a “symbolic annihilation” (Gerbner and Gross, 1976; Tuchman, 2000). The invisibility of women has been carried out mainly in the field of sports journalism, which has been configured as a difficult space for women to access and develop professionally (Ramon et al., 2020; Sainz de Baranda, 2013).

The article aims to analyse the role played by women sports journalists in the production of journalistic pieces published in the Spanish sports press during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. The research was based on a quantitative content analysis that studied the information published between November 20 and December 18, 2022, the period in which the sporting event was held. The results indicate, among other things, a poor presence of female journalists in the production of articles, a low number of women designated to work with information about Qatar 2022 and a limited presence of female journalists both in the creation of opinion articles and also in the authorship of

the information that appears on the front pages of the newspapers.

**Keywords:** Sports journalism, women journalists, *Marca*, *Mundo Deportivo*, *FIFA*, *Qatar*.

## Resumen

Históricamente, tanto en el ámbito español como en el internacional, el rol de las periodistas en los medios de comunicación se ha caracterizado por ser ínfimo y estereotipado. Esta escasa representación se ha denominado, en numerosas oportunidades, como una “aniquilación simbólica” (Gerbner y Gross, 1976; Tuchman, 2000). La invisibilización de las mujeres se ha llevado a cabo principalmente en el campo del periodismo deportivo, el cual se ha configurado como un espacio difícil para que las mujeres accedan y se desarrollen profesionalmente (Ramon *et al.*, 2020; Sainz de Baranda, 2013).

El siguiente artículo tiene como objetivo analizar el papel que cumplieron las periodistas

deportivas en la producción de piezas periodísticas publicadas en la prensa deportiva española durante la Copa Mundial de la FIFA Qatar 2022. La investigación se basó en un análisis de contenido cuantitativo que estudió las informaciones publicadas entre el 20 de noviembre y el 18 de diciembre de 2022, período en el que se disputó dicho evento. Los resultados indican, entre otras cosas, una pobre presencia de las periodistas en la producción de artículos, una escasa cantidad de mujeres designadas a trabajar con informaciones sobre Qatar 2022 y una presencia limitada de mujeres periodistas, tanto en la creación de artículos de opinión como también en la autoría de las informaciones que aparecen en las portadas de los periódicos.

**Palabras claves:** Periodismo deportivo, mujeres periodistas, *Marca*, *Mundo Deportivo*, *FIFA*, *Qatar*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sports journalism has historically been characterized as a section with several ethical dysfunctions: low diversity of the sports agenda, gender inequalities, and informative sexism (Franks & O'Neill, 2016; Ramon *et al.*, 2020). In the specific case of women, although it is true that, over time, there has been progress regarding their work, it continues to be a male-dominated site (Bernstein & Kian, 2013; Faedo *et al.*, 2022).

In Spain, despite the arrival of new technologies and communication platforms, the sports press has a fundamental role within the journalistic industry. It continues to have a large number of followers today (Faedo *et al.*, 2022). Within this sports press, and sports journalism in general, the sport that completely dominates the panorama is soccer, which causes other ac-

tivities to end up being displaced from the media agenda (Rojas-Torrijos, 2012).

The latest major soccer-related sporting event has been the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Precisely, this tournament has been characterized by a large number of controversies in terms of human rights. It has come to be called The World Cup of Shame (Amnesty International, 2016). It has been criticized on numerous occasions for, among other things, homophobic attitudes and the absence of fundamental rights of migrant workers and women (Arrung, 2022). Therefore, what was the role of women journalists in the Spanish sports press at the time of the event? The general objective of this research is to analyze the role played by female sports journalists in the production of journalistic pieces published in the Spanish sports press during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN THE SPORTS MEDIA?

Since its origins, journalistic information has been configured as a men-dominated site (Beasley, 2020). The case of sports journalism is no exception: gender inequalities and informative sexism are characteristics that have always been present (Franks & O'Neill, 2016). Hardin and Shain (2006) point out that women are outsiders about their gender but insiders regarding compliance with journalistic norms and values. This poor representation of women journalists has been referred to, on numerous occasions, as “symbolic annihilation”, which explains that, by ignoring and/or portraying women in stereotypical roles, the media do nothing more than symbolically annihilate them (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Tuchman, 2000).

Since sports is a male-dominated space, this has a direct impact on the field of journalism: men “own” sports journalism because they “own” sports (Everbach, 2018; Hardin & Shain, 2006). Therefore, the presence of women in this journalistic specialization is scarce, as explained by different research. Generally speaking, as Schoch (2022) observes, studies expose invisibilization, gender discrimination, the difficulties they face regarding the reconciliation between work and family, the unbreakable glass ceiling, and the need for female reporters to constantly struggle to obtain recognition and keep their jobs (Hardin & Shain, 2006; Organista *et al.*, 2019).

Franks and O'Neill (2016) studied six national newspapers in the United Kingdom (UK) and found that only 2.3% of the stories were created by women. In Schoch's (2020) analysis, only

9% of the articles analyzed were written exclusively by women. The Women's Media Center (2021), which studies gender representation in print, digital, and wire news, reported that in 2021, women produced 15% of sports news in newspapers, 24% in online media, and 8% of news in wire services.

Regarding the performance of roles at the top of management, women have few possibilities of obtaining a position due to a “glass ceiling.” As explained by Sarrió *et al.* (2002), this ceiling functions as a barrier supported by gender stereotypes that assume that the traits of an ideal manager are those prototypical of masculinity and that, therefore, do not allow women to access positions in media management.

On the other hand, it often happens that women work with “soft” news while men work with “hard” news. As explained by Schoch (2020), Tuchman (1972), and Van Zoonen (1998), the former are those with little news prestige, and the latter are those with a high level of journalistic and public interest. Consequently, women report more frequently on, for example, women's sports, which are considered not very prestigious and of less appeal to the audience (Boczek *et al.*, 2022; Organista *et al.*, 2019).

### 2.2 THE CASE OF SPANISH SPORTS JOURNALISM

In Spain, talking about women in journalism necessarily implies talking about unequal opportunities (Ufarte, 2012). Numerous studies show women's scarce and stereotyped presence in the Spanish sports media.

Through a study on hate speech on Spanish women sports journalists on Twitter, Blanco *et al.* (2019) collected dire figures: 89.6% of the journalists participating in the study have experienced violence in the course of their work, and half of them have suffered it continuously. Hate

speech not only affects them emotionally but also damages their personal and professional reputation. In addition, they harm them in their work and safety, as they ultimately restrict their freedom of expression (Blanco *et al.*, 2019).

According to Ramon *et al.* (2020), who, through interviews, inquired about the opinion of various experts in sports journalism on gender discrimination, women incorporated into the sports journalism profession are a minority. These authors point out that the journalists interviewed are aware that they are perceived as anecdotal elements, that their physical appearance is an essential factor in the eyes of men, and that “their interest in sports journalism is interpreted more from stereotypes (maybe ‘because they like some sportsperson’) rather than really as a professional option” (p. 1190). In addition, it is necessary to de-masculinize the newsrooms, which involves breaking the glass ceiling and getting more women into decision-making positions (Ramon *et al.*, 2020).

Sainz de Baranda (2013), in a longitudinal investigation of the sports press, points out that women represent only 9.1% of the total number of female news bylines. On the other hand, despite an increase of women as reporters (mainly as editors) over the years, we cannot observe an increase in positions of responsibility such as the direction or sub-direction of a newspaper. In the same way, Ortega and San Miguel (2016) and Salido Fernández (2021) pronounce themselves. Men prevail in all Spanish sports television journalism roles: anchor, reporter, and voice-over (Ortega & San Miguel, 2016). In addition, women who enter a profession as masculine as sports journalism do so

with rigorous limitations and requirements (Salido Fernández, 2021).

Concerning decision-making positions, Caro *et al.* (2004), some years ago, and Román-San-Miguel *et al.* (2021), more recently, showed that the number of women in management positions in the Spanish sports media is scarce. Few women are in positions of responsibility and, when they do exist, they do not even occupy 50% of the management team (Román-San-Miguel *et al.*, 2021). The authors explain that there is not a single woman in a management position who holds the position of director, and the highest level to which a woman reaches is deputy director. Consequently, since they do not have roles at the top and, in general terms, their presence is not numerous in the newsrooms, rather than feminization within the press, there is a “pseudo-feminization”; that is, an appearance of change rather than a fundamental transformation (Soriano *et al.*, 2005).

On the other hand, Faedo *et al.* (2022), in an investigation on the work of women in *Marca* and *Mundo Deportivo*, explain that the informative production of women in the Spanish sports press shows resistance in the newsrooms that reproduce a journalistic culture that does not allow their incorporation in the production of content. In addition, they report that there has been a regression in the number of women who sign reports. It is more feasible for a woman to write an article in 2010 than in 2018. In addition, they tend to work with informative articles but not with opinion articles.

Along the same lines, an analysis by Alonso-Alende *et al.* (2019) shows that, out of 3,304 opinion pieces studied during a month in 25



newspapers, only 21% were written by women. Although male authorship dominates in all categories, this difference is more pronounced in sports content: while women participate in 10% of these, men do so in the remaining 90%.

Furthermore, it is wise to point out that Spanish sports newspapers remain highly popular despite the press losing ground to new technologies (Faedo *et al.*, 2022). To briefly exemplify this situation, we can point out that *Marca* and *Mundo Deportivo* were newspapers with a large number of readers during the first quarter of 2023. While *Marca* was the most-read newspaper in Spain in the first quarter of 2023 (976,000 readers per day), *Mundo Deportivo* ranked in the top 10 of those with the highest readership in the whole country (232,000 readers per day) (*Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación*, 2023).

After reviewing some of the most relevant studies on the employment situation of women in both international and Spanish sports journalism, this research takes a theoretical stance based on three main ideas that complement each other: the theory of the “pseudo-feminization” (Soriano *et al.* 2005) of sports journalism, the idea that women are outsiders (Hardin & Shain, 2006; Ramon *et al.*, 2020) due to their gender, and the “symbolic annihilation” (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Tuchman, 2000) that they suffer in the media.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research technique applied for this study is quantitative content analysis, which describes, in an objective, systematic, and quantitative way, the manifest content of the communication (Berelson, 1952). We analyzed the journalistic pieces published (only where authorship was identified) between 20 November and 18 December 2022 in the print versions of the oldest sports newspapers published in Spain: *Mundo Deportivo* and *Marca* (founded in 1906 and 1938, respectively). The period above was studied because that is when the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 occurred.

The journalistic pieces in which authorship could be identified accounted for 67.4% of the published (see Table 1). Those signed by women were studied, except on specific occasions when the production of men was also analyzed, to make some comparisons. The following variables were analyzed for each of the journalistic pieces: a) Date, b) Author's name, c) Author's sex, d) Journalistic genre (informative/interpretative/opinion)<sup>1</sup>, e) Sports discipline, f) Sex of the sports competition, and g) Cover page<sup>2</sup>. All of them were coded and worked with Microsoft Excel tables and filters.

In addition, it was identified that 1) the hierarchical positions and 2) the journalistic team in charge of working with information on Qatar 2022 from each of the newspapers. These data were obtained directly from the pages of the newspapers.

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1 Informative (news and briefs), interpretative (chronicles, reports, interviews), opinion (analysis, columns, reviews, editorials, and comic strips).

2 The variable “front page” refers to whether or not the piece of journalism analyzed appears on the newspaper's front page.

**Table 1***Study sample*

	<i>Mundo Deportivo + Marca</i>	<i>Mundo Deportivo</i>	<i>Marca</i>
Total number of articles	5.057	2.523	2.534
With an element of authorship	67,4% (3.409)	52,6% (1.324)	82,2% (2.085)
No element of authorship	32,6% (1.652)	47,8% (1.199)	17,9% (453)

*Source: own elaboration.***Table 2***Authorship of articles*

	<i>Mundo Deportivo + Marca</i>	<i>Mundo Deportivo</i>	<i>Marca</i>
Men	81,8% (2.786)	73% (966)	87,3% (1.820)
Women	13% (445)	23,6% (312)	6,4% (133)
Not detectable	5,5% (178)	13,5% (46)	6,3% (132)

*Source: own elaboration.*

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 JOURNALISTS CONSPICUOUS BY THEIR ABSENCE

The first results indicate a notable absence of women in the authorship of articles. Whether individually in each newspaper or in general, men clearly dominate (see Table 2). While in *Mundo Deportivo*, women participated in 23.6% of the creation of articles, in *Marca*, they participated in an even lower percentage, 6.4%. Therefore, as Faedo *et al.* (2022) and Franks and O'Neill (2016) explain, female journalists have low participation in producing information. The percentages obtained show that women continue to be the outsiders that Hardin and Shain (2006) mentioned: their presence in news and sports journalism is limited.

From another perspective, another critical element to highlight is the roles played by female journalists during the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar. During the competition, both newspapers had a team in charge of reporting on the World Cup on all the days studied. In both cases, the situation is worrying. In the case of *Mundo Deportivo*, the newspaper presented its team under the title "*El once del Mundial*", and out of eleven people, only one woman appeared: Cristina Cubero, deputy editor. The situation of *Marca* is similar: they reported a team of ten people under the name "*Despliegue Marca Qatar*", and Marta Pérez was the only woman.

On the other hand, when trying to identify the journalistic genres in which women worked, the research comes up against the findings of Alonso-Allende *et al.* (2019) and Faedo *et al.* (2022): women journalists have limited participation in opinion articles (see Table 3). Their presence is distributed between informative and interpretative pieces, but their presence is not significant in producing opinion pieces. The case of *Marca* is the most critical: the participation of women in this type of article only represents 6%.

**Table 3***Journalistic genres of the articles written by women.*

Journalistic Genres	<i>Mundo Deportivo + Marca</i>	<i>Mundo Deportivo</i>	<i>Marca</i>
Informative	40,7% (181)	36,9% (115)	49,7% (66)
Interpretative	41,3% (184)	42% (131)	39,8% (53)
Opinion	18% (80)	21,1% (66)	10,5% (14)

*Source: own elaboration.*

## 4.2 SPORTING COMPETITIONS: IN WHICH ONES DO THEY HAVE THE MOST IMPACT?

On the other hand, when examining the sports competitions in which the female journalists mostly worked, it can be seen that football dominated by far in both newspapers: 72.8% (227) in *Mundo Deportivo* and 70.7% in *Marca* (94) (see Table 4), which makes total sense; during the period analyzed, a football event took place. This dominance of football may also be due to the “footballisation” (Rojas-Torrijos, 2012) that sports journalism suffers from: football reigns over all sports and leaves the rest in the background. As football is the basis of the journalistic business, sports journalism has almost become football journalism (Rojas-Torrijos, 2012).

**Table 4***Sporting disciplines of articles written by women.*

Sport	<i>Mundo Deportivo + Marca</i>	Sport	<i>Mundo Deportivo</i>	Sport	<i>Marca</i>
Football	72,1% (321)	Football	72,8% (227)	Football	70,7% (94)
Athletics	6,7% (30)	Athletics	4,9% (15)	Athletics	11,3% (15)
Swimming	2,9% (13)	Swimming	3,8% (12)	Basketball	3% (4)
Other sports	18,2% (81)	Other sports	18,6% (58)	Other sports	15% (20)

*Source: own elaboration.*

Beyond the sporting disciplines, the sex of the sporting competitions the women worked with was identified. The majority did so with competitions practiced by men. Therefore, in this case, what is described by authors such as Boczek *et al.* (2023) and Organista *et al.* (2019), who explain that women tend to work with sports played by women, is not fulfilled.

In addition, the data in Table 5 shows a large majority of information about men, both in *Mundo Deportivo* and *Marca* (see Table 5). Although a men’s World Cup was indeed held during the period analyzed, the supremacy of information about men was overwhelming. Therefore, as Ortega and San Miguel (2016) explain, the media make women athletes invisible, which contributes to a systematic absence of women’s sports, in contrast to an over-supply of men’s sports.

**Table 5***Sex of sports competitions in articles written by women*

	<i>Mundo Deportivo + Marca</i>	<i>Mundo Deportivo</i>	<i>Marca</i>
Men	82% (365)	83,3% (260)	79% (105)
Women	9,5% (42)	8,7% (27)	11,2% (15)
Mixt	8,5% (38)	8% (25)	9,8% (13)

*Source: own elaboration.*

### 4.3 MANAGEMENT AND COVER: INVISIBILISATION AT ITS BEST

On the other hand, the positions within the hierarchical structure of the newspapers were identified according to what they reported during the period studied. In the case of *Mundo Deportivo*, out of fifteen people mentioned as responsible for different areas of the newspaper, only one is a woman, and it is precisely the same one who is part of the team in charge of covering Qatar 2022: Cristina Cubero (deputy editor). The situation at *Marca* is just as serious: out of 17 people identified as responsible for different areas, only one was a woman: Yolanda Santander (editor-in-chief). Therefore, as mentioned by Caro *et al.* (2004) and Román-San-Miguel *et al.* (2021), women do not seem to have presence within the hierarchical structures of the media.

Finally, all the information on the front pages during the studied period was analyzed. The front page is the place where the most impor-

tant articles of the newspaper are reflected, as it seeks to provoke the attention of the eventual reader (Alonso-Allende *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, it is positioned as a central element for newspapers. The study of this variable aimed to identify how many front-page stories were produced by women.

The results showed that the participation of women is negligible and that men monopolize most of them. In the case of *Mundo Deportivo*, women only participate in 14.2%. In *Marca*, this percentage is even lower; they only take part in creating 3.9% of the information on the front pages. If we look at the total of all the data published on the front pages of the two newspapers, we can see that women participate in 8.1%, while men participate in 91.3% of the cases (see Table 5).

**Table 6***Authorship of all articles appearing on the covers*

	<i>Mundo Deportivo + Marca</i>	<i>Mundo Deportivo</i>	<i>Marca</i>
Total	309	127	182
Men	91,3% (282)	85,9% (109)	95,1% (173)
Women	8,1% (25)	14,2% (18)	3,9% (7)
No element of authorship	0,9% (3)	0,8% (1)	1,1% (2)

*Source: own elaboration.*

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis shows a poor presence of women journalists in producing journalistic pieces in the Spanish sports press. Although women in both newspapers are relegated in all the variables analyzed, it should be noted that the situation is worse in *Marca* than in *Mundo Deportivo*. In the Madrid newspaper, women are less present in the authorship of the information, producing opinion articles, and creating the articles published on the front pages. Therefore, this research corroborates what Soriano *et al.* (2005) explained almost 20 years ago: there is a “pseudo-feminization” in the Spanish sports press that implies that women’s participation in journalism is more an appearance than a reality. As Hardin and Shain (2006) and Ramon *et al.* mentioned, women continue to be outsiders.

With such a low level of representation and such evident marginalization, it is necessary to think that barriers may hinder their participation and representation in Spanish sports newspapers. This limited participation is directly linked to the “symbolic annihilation” proposed by Gerbner and Gross (1976) and Tuchman (2000). The news agenda needs diverse voices to ensure women’s and men’s equal representation in newspapers.

On the other hand, beyond the number of women involved in producing information, the low number of women in the teams assigned to cover the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar is also worrying. This poor representation in such a sporting event only demonstrates the lack of confidence in women’s journalistic work. It helps to perpetuate a gap between men and women that seems to have no end in sight.

Along the same lines, the fact that only one woman is reflected in each newspaper man-

agement team confirms what Román-San-Miguel *et al.* (2021) explained: the positions of responsibility and management in the media are monopolized by men. A glass ceiling still imposes difficulties and obstacles that do not allow women to progress regarding newsroom leadership. Women journalists need more opportunities to climb the ladder in sports media.

Additionally, women have almost zero participation on the front pages, which is significantly alarming. As Alonso-Allende *et al.* (2019) explain, the front page is the showcase that brings the reader the most important articles of the newspaper. Therefore, is the information produced by women journalists not relevant enough to be on the front page of newspapers? Both men’s and women’s voices need to be equally represented on such a central element of the newspaper.

In short, it is essential that, from its place, the sports press collaborates to combat inequalities between men and women. As Salido Fernández (2021) explains, “It is essential that the sports media industries implement actions aimed at eradicating this inequality because only by encouraging greater participation of women in all stages of the news production chain” (p. 43). They must help to build a more caring and egalitarian society, which they can do by: a) promoting the participation of women in this journalistic format to close the gender gap; b) appointing them more equitably in the production of information; c) giving them more access to leadership positions.

Although the results do not allow to confirm the absence of women in Spanish sports journalism in general, they do show some really worrying data regarding the sports press in particular. The situation of women in journalism is a phenomenon worthy of study from different perspectives. This work can serve as a

starting point for future analyses. For example, it would be interesting to transfer this study to the digital field and new technologies: will their participation be just as scarce there? On the other hand, the analysis could be extended to other Spanish sports newspapers or even to radio and television: Would Qatar 2022 have had extensive participation of women journalists, or would the situation have been as unequal as in the press?

Beyond quantitative studies, looking at the phenomenon from a more qualitative perspective

would be interesting. For example, it would be interesting to analyze, beyond the numbers, how women experience these inequalities, if they suffer any discrimination, and if they believe that journalistic pieces are produced considering the gender perspective, among other questions.

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# Convergence as a tool against the impact of COVID-19 on journalism: a case study of the Brazilian channel SporTV

***La Convergencia como herramienta frente a los impactos de la COVID-19 en el periodismo: un estudio de caso del canal brasileño SporTV***

6

ARTICLE



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## Abstract

This study presents how convergence in technological, professional, content and business dimensions (Salaverría, 2003, 2010) was crucial in overcoming the difficulties imposed by COVID-19 on the productive routines of Brazilian sports journalism, based on an analysis of the SporTV channel. As a leader in audience ratings among sports channels, SporTV was the first in the country to adapt a program fully for remote broadcasting from participants' homes during the pandemic. The case study, based on content analysis and interviews, was the research techniques used.

## KEYWORDS

Convergence, COVID-19, Sports Journalism, SporTV, Brazilian Television.

## Resumen

Este trabajo presenta cómo la convergencia en las dimensiones tecnológica, profesional, de contenidos y empresarial (Salaverría, 2003, 2010), fue fundamental para superar las dificultades impuestas por la COVID-19 en las rutinas productivas del periodismo deportivo brasileño. Se basa en un análisis del canal SporTV, que es líder de audiencia entre los especializados en deportes y fue el primero en el país en mostrar un programa adaptado comple-

tamente para ser transmitido desde las casas de los participantes durante la pandemia. La técnica de investigación utilizada fue el estudio de caso, basado en el análisis de contenido y la entrevista.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Convergencia, COVID-19, Periodismo Deportivo, SporTV, Televisión Brasileña.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, sports journalism has established itself as a pioneer in terms of digital innovations, as it has experienced updated narratives in this sense, as well as new tools, changes in the configuration of workplaces, in the type of production, and the use of content (Boyle, 2017; Ferrucci & Perreault, 2022; Morrison, 2014; Patatt, 2023; Perreault & Nölleke, 2022). Much of what is observed in newsrooms in this specialty in different parts of the world today presents characteristics of what Salavería (2003, 2010) defines as convergence, especially in the technological, professional, content, and business dimensions.

Taking this reality into account, this paper aims to verify which aspects of the dimensions mentioned above of convergence were present in Brazilian television sports journalism during the COVID-19 pandemic and how these elements collaborated to overcome the crisis in the sector. The interruption of major sports competitions around the world has had a significant impact on the development of activities, especially in television, and has required the adaptation of working methods and productive routines (Bradshaw, 2020; Patatt, 2021; Perreault & Nölleke, 2022).

Specifically, it sought to test hypotheses related to the importance of developing journalists' technological knowledge, especially concerning the operation of audio and video devices. We also investigated the effects of reducing the number of professionals working in the newsrooms, either in person or organized in a net-

work through the Internet, and how integrated work would have supplied different communication channels within the same journalistic group.

To achieve the objectives, the case study was used as a research technique (Gil, 2008; Yin, 2005), which is focused on content analysis - applied to thirty editions of the *Redação* SporTV program - and interviews.

It is important to note that sports journalism on Brazilian television has been developing since the 1950s, in the early days of national television, and was gaining relevance at the same time as the popularity of football increased. This reality led the country's broadcasters to invest considerably in this segment.

The Brazilian channels have been pioneers in many aspects worldwide. Even before the decade of 1980, they already used exclusive software, private satellites, and equipment capable of taping underwater, for example, and slow-motion cameras while transmitting significant events. In 1982, the Brazilian broadcaster Rede Globo was the only broadcaster in the world to have at least one reporter in each of the 14 football World Cup host cities (Memoria Globo, 2021). Currently, the SporTV channel alone, the subject of this study, took nearly 200 journalists to cover the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

SporTV is one of three channels with daily news production and a focus on various sports, along with ESPN and BandSports, all available by subscription only. Sports debates feature prominently on all three channels. Even

the newscasts and e-magazines have at least one commentator in the studio to engage in dialogue and discussion with the other participants in the program. These are inherent characteristics of the format (Fechine, 2001).

The analysis in this paper focuses on SporTV because it is the national audience leader in its segment, both currently and in the run-up to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic (Vaquer, 2020), and because it was a pioneer in the country for having a program wholly adapted to be broadcast from participants' homes during the pandemic. We are referring to the program *Redação SporTV*, which has been on the calendar for almost two decades; it temporarily changed its name to *Redação Home Office*.

These characteristics mean that Brazil is considered a fertile field for analyzing evolutionary issues related to this journalistic specialization, such as the case of convergence.

## 2. THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON JOURNALISM AND SPORTS JOURNALISM.

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered how journalism is done worldwide, regardless of segment, specialty, or function. The number of studies on the subject is multiplying as these modifications become more evident, as well as the perpetuation of some measures taken at the most critical moments of the disease's spread, apparently emergent, but which have been maintained.

It is not the aim to discuss positive or negative aspects here but to contextualize a quite complex reality. Despite the immense difficulties in the production processes, there is hard work to combat misinformation and face many other challenges from an operational perspective (Mair, 2020; Patatt, 2021, 2023; Patatt & Rocha,

2020; Perreault & Nölleke, 2022). Moreover, during the pandemic, there have also been increases in news consumption in major markets, such as in the United States, where 92% of adults frequently access news on the topic, in a kind of re-approximation of the public to traditional media

[...] an increase of 32 percentage points compared to the period before the health emergency. The most significant increase in news consumption and positive evaluation of media coverage of the pandemic was observed among users previously unrelated to the news, such as young people, people with less education, and occasional consumers of information. (Casero-Ripollés, 2020, p.9)

Specifically, in sports journalism, the vulnerability to which this specific area was subjected also led to a review of activities. For example, the criteria for which sports were worthy of being televised were redefined: faced with the impossibility of broadcasting high-performance competitions due to canceled events around the world, lack of training, and other difficulties, ESPN in the United States even broadcast a stone-throwing tournament, and one of the most popular sports channels in the Netherlands was successful with the so-called Marbula One, a kind of marbles race (Perreault & Nölleke, 2022).

In Brazil and Germany, broadcasts of historic matches of national teams increased (Patatt, 2021; Schallhorn & Kunert, 2020). In the case of Germany, the specialized channel Sky even tried to emulate full days of *Bundesliga* matches as if there had been no coronavirus, including the "traditional pre- and post-match reports and a fictitious scoreboard" (Schallhorn & Kunert, 2020, p. 517). Also, in Brazil, the sport-

ing agenda was more linked to social, political, economic, and cultural issues (Patatt, 2021; Longo, 2020).

While these alternatives may be questionable, it is undeniable that creativity is essential to overcome professional difficulties (Mosby, 2020). The need to inform and the challenges in obtaining new images, especially on television, meant that audio and video quality took a back seat. Less conventionally, material from social media, football clubs, etc., was used. This broadened the relationship with sources (Patatt, 2023).

Götz and Costa (2021) point out that the action in multiplatform format gained more space in Brazilian radio stations. This is in line with Olsen, Pickard, and Westlund (2020), who argue that the economic effects of this unique period in human history were decisive in accelerating changes in production, distribution, consumption, and business models of news in general, not only in sports.

In this line, García-Avilés (2021) describes the adaptation to remote work from communication enterprises in Spain, especially concerning the structure of newsrooms.

Journalists quickly adopted remote work, new communication protocols were created, and practices were adapted [...] The consolidation of remote work has brought unprecedented organizational changes to newsrooms, accelerating digital transformation. These changes can become permanent in most news organizations: (pp. 1256-1257).

Especially in this one, but also in the other works mentioned, it is possible to note the details and applications related to the ideas of convergence, which will be discussed in more detail below.

### 3. CONVERGENCE IN JOURNALISM

Salaverría, García Avilés and Masip (2010) establish a concept of journalism convergence based on the idea that a generalized implementation of digital technologies in communication affects the practice of journalism on a day-to-day basis in different forms “[...] by fostering an integration of previously disparate tools, spaces, working methods, and languages so that journalists produce content that is distributed across multiple platforms, using the languages of each one”(p. 59).

Convergence can be addressed more specifically in different dimensions, such as technological, professional, content, and business (Salaverría, 2003, 2010) - all related to this research - but all interconnected.

The internal subdivisions and hierarchies in the profession, established since the 20th century, have changed, especially in the last two decades. In 2012, the research entitled Professional Profile of the Brazilian Journalist pointed out 288 descriptions of new roles and 177 new activities related to journalistic practice, including digital media and strategy coordinator, digital content analyst, blog writer, and social mobilization analyst.

New characters, known as techno-actors, have emerged in newsrooms (Canavilhas *et al.*, 2015). They are professionals with extensive technological mastery who work in the same medium as journalists but are not journalists, although they have the power to produce news. Examples of occupations that fit this idea of techno-actors include designers and programmers.

In short, reporters and editors who used to have control over the newsroom now need to establish negotiation mechanisms with professionals trained in other areas and operate according to different logic to carry out their primary mission. Journalists, designers, and programmers think and act differently, but when they work together in the same newsroom, they have a common purpose: to produce information. (Canavilhas *et al.*, 2016, p. 4)

These are examples of how technological convergence goes beyond journalists' use and domain of new tools and devices. It interferes with the ecosystems of editorials, how journalism is done, and how the news reaches the public. In other words, it has an impact from a professional, content, and business perspective.

Talking about convergence in journalism, in many media companies, implies optimizing space, time, and human resources. There are more tasks to be carried out in the same period and most of the time with fewer people, but in different functions, as well as large teams sharing adapted spaces. Various media belonging to the same business group, which used to work in separate sectors, floors, or buildings, now often coexist in integrated newsrooms.

According to Salaverría (2010), the first significant international example of newsroom fusion took place in 2000 by the American group Media General in Tampa, Florida, where the Tampa Tribune journal, the Bay Online (TBO.com) local portal, and WFLA-TV television station gathered in one place.

Santos *et al.* (2014) synthesize some definitions from different authors for network convergence models:

The first is full integration, in which the infrastructure for multiplatform production is concentrated in a single newsroom, controlled by a central news and workflow management system [...] The second model is a collaboration between newsrooms, in which journalists work in different sections and newsrooms but are connected through their multimedia coordinators or certain collaborative routines along the news flow [...]. Finally, there is the model of coordination of isolated media. In this case, there is no organization of integration in the workflow. There is only a voluntary collaboration of each journalist in the news production process. (Santos *et al.*, 2019, p. 107)

Deuze and Witschge (2017) point out that "The newsroom is not necessarily a solid or coherent entity in today's post-industrial journalism" (p.166). It is possible, and in some cases considered a trend, to work outside of it, at a distance, and in total synchronicity with the more profound ideals of convergence.

Canavilhas (2012) states that “you can only speak about convergence when the final product is content with unique characteristics” (p. 9). The researcher refers to content convergence: it is not enough to distribute information material on different platforms. If so, it could be considered simply as a remediation:

By remediation, we mean the process of renewal of old content carried out by new media [...] There is an essential difference between the two concepts: while convergence necessarily implies a new language that integrates old content, remediation can be an accumulation of content from different origins distributed on the same platform. In this sense, convergence is always remediation, but not all remediation can be considered convergence, as convergence implies integration and not a mere accumulation of content. (Canavilhas, 2012, pp. 9-10)

On the other hand, it is possible to consider the harnessing of interactivity through the internet (through digital social networks, email, etc.) as a genuine form of convergence, as it manages to use information originating in one medium and transform it in a way that encompasses characteristics of another (e.g., radio or television), generating something completely new.

It would not be impossible, but it seems more challenging to consolidate the idea of concentrating efforts in favor of a singular objective and still have professionals working separately in no longer existing sectors. On the other hand, while representing an important step, such physical issues do not guarantee effective convergence.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

To achieve the goal of investigating the contribution of convergence in overcoming the impacts of COVID-19 in Brazilian sports journalism, the SportTV channel, belonging to the *Globo* Communication Group, has been established as the object of investigation. It has existed since 1994 when it replaced Top Sports, the first specialized sports program offered by a Brazilian pay-TV broadcaster, *Globosat*, also part of the *Globo* Group. Top Sports was on the air from 1991 to 1994<sup>1</sup>.

Before the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, SporTV was the leader in the audience among all channels available by subscription in the country and, at some points, was also among the top five Brazilian television channels, including the generalist free-to-air channels, i.e., non-paid, with varied content and available for free access by the population. This popularity is maintained in 2023 (Carvalho, 2023).

In addition to this projection in national sports journalism, the fact that the station was the first in the country during that pandemic state to have a program fully adapted to be made and broadcast directly from the home of the pre-

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<sup>1</sup> Available: <http://canaiglobosat.globo.com/>. Access January 14, 2021.

senter and the participants was a crucial factor in defining SporTV as an object of analysis.

The outstanding program is called *Redação SporTV* and has been broadcast since 2004. It is inspired by *Meet the Press* from American television, also to debate the coverage by the press. Thus, it gathers journalists and has the audience's participation through digital social networks.

Traditionally, it is broadcast from Monday to Friday, from 10:00 to 12:30 Brasilia time. It features at least two commentators and reporters who mainly participate live. It is defined as a round table but combines elements of a television news program.

The COVID-19 pandemic meant that, from 30 March to 22 June 2020, *Redação SporTV* was presented directly from participants' homes, leading to a temporary change of name: *Redação Home Office*.

Patatt (2021) conducted research focused on the overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Brazilian sports journalism, in which he presents a general analysis of the modification above in *Redação SporTV*. It is essential to mention, for a better understanding of some important structural aspects of the program, that, in addition to the change in the program's name, adjustments were made to the introduction and visual characteristics in line with the video-conference proposal. A software called Cloudcast, operated via the Internet, was used for the realization of the program, which required a reduction in the number of participants. The time on the programming grid and the duration were modified at various times. Initially, it

was presented only from 13:00 to 14:00, also from Monday to Friday, then the time was gradually increased as sporting activities resumed around the world. It became the only attraction broadcast live daily on SporTV.

To conduct a sequential study to that of Patatt (2021) but with different objectives, hypotheses, and research techniques, the same period of analysis as the authors are used: thirty editions of *Redação SporTV* were recorded at two different intervals; first, from 30 March to 18 June 2020 (when the program was in home office format and there were no national or international football competitions with the participation of Brazilians), and from 29 September to 20 November 2020.

The second interval begins precisely three months after the program returned to its usual format, in near-normal sporting conditions, with the presenter back in the studio and only the guests and some reporters working from home.

The programs were recorded in two ways, using the *Apowersoft* tool, which captures the computer screen. First, the videos were obtained directly from the *Redação SporTV* website<sup>2</sup>. The compilation was then made available on the Globoplay website<sup>3</sup>, by subscription, with the program available live. The recording dates were determined by lottery, except the premiere of *Redação Home Office*, which was the starting point. The "probability sampling of composite weeks" was used (Fonseca Junior, 2006, p. 293).

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<sup>2</sup> During the entire period of *Redação Home Office*, the program was available free of charge to the public after the live broadcast, both in video and audio format, through the Vocês da Imprensa podcast.

<sup>3</sup> Available: <https://globoplay.globo.com/>. Access May 26 2023.



The methodology used is a case study based on content analysis and interviews.

More specifically, the situation of *Redação SporTV*, with all the specificities mentioned above, served as a basis for investigating a phenomenon - that of convergence - within its context of reality, as indicated by Yin (2005) in discussing the case study. This offers the possibility of an exploratory study capable of providing hints of a broader reality and providing data for further research. It considers the possibility of “[...] exploring real-life situations whose boundaries are not clearly defined”(Gil, 2008, p.58).

The starting point is the content analysis of the thirty recorded programs, using a coding form that, in addition to fundamental data about the broadcast, such as date, work-from-home or not format, and several participants, aims to collect specific information about audio and video standardization, indications of participants’ use of their equipment, variations in journalistic formats, usage of content produced by other Globo group media, presence of interactivity and relationship with digital social networks. All recorded editions were viewed, and the data was collected and analyzed manually.

Although the case study is not a rigidly scripted method, it follows the steps of case unit delimitation: data collection, data selection, analysis, interpretation, and report writing.

From that, the next step was to conduct interviews through the Internet<sup>4</sup> with three professionals related to *Redação SporTV*: the presenter, a commentator, and the head sports editor of *Grupo Globo*. By following what Batista, Matos and Nascimento (2017) define, it was possible to “[...] understand the subjectivity of the

individual through their testimonies, since it is about how that person observes, experiences and analyses their historical time, their moment, their social environment, etc. (p.27).

The interview with *Redação SporTV* presenter Marcelo Barreto and *Redação SporTV* participating journalist Sérgio Xavier Filho can be considered semi-structured interviews (Gil, 2008), as they developed more spontaneously. Key questions were considered, which unfolded into others as doubts arose and needed to be resolved.

On the other hand, the interview with the Globo group’s sports editor, Gustavo Maria, was conducted in a structured manner (Gil, 2008), predetermining to a greater extent the answers that were to be obtained with closed-ended questions.

## 5. RESULTS

The following hypotheses were tested:

- 1) The use of devices with audio and video recording capacity belonging to the journalists participating in the program and not to the television station, nor for the exclusive purpose of journalistic productions, associated with the technological knowledge of these communication professionals, were crucial elements for the development of *Redação Home Office*.

In 100% of the programs analyzed, it was verified that the use of devices with audio and video recording capacity belonged to the journalists participating in the program, not the tel-

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4 Justified by the fact that the interviewer and interviewees were in different countries.



evision station, nor for the exclusive purpose of journalistic productions.

This assertion is possible by associating three situations: firstly, the lack of standardization of sound and image in the participation of the guests can be noted; furthermore, in Patatt's work (2021), the presenter of the program Marcelo Barreto had already confirmed that, out of all of them, only he had received a laptop computer from the station to use in the production of the program; and in an interview for this paper, *Redação* SporTV journalist and commentator Sérgio Xavier Filho revealed details of what the process was like from a participant's perspective, especially during *Redação* Home Office, which corresponds to the first recorded interval between March and June 2020.

Xavier Filho (2023) recalls that the Cloudcast program, used for the production of *Redação* Home Office, did not work on his mobile phone or tablet. He, therefore, had to improvise:

[...] I had to take a computer that was lying around here and adapt it,

connect cables, etc. So, I struggled, struggled until I understood (about Cloudcast), and all with our stuff, headphones, all ours, we did not have any 'Globo' structure. Why? Because it was an emergency. So, looking back now, we cannot forget that people could not have physical contact at that time, right? A technician could not come and install something [...] And so I managed. I asked my daughter for help [...], And for that, I had to do things like not use WiFi. That was the recommendation that we connect a cable directly to the network. And where is that cable, which is something we never use? So, we were already suffering in that technological part. (S. Xavier Filho, personal statement, 29 May 2023).

This practice continued even with the presenter's return to the studio, as seen in the second analysis interval, between 29 September and 20 November 2020, when commentators continued participating from home.

**Figure 1**

*An example of a situation where the presenter has already returned to the studio, but the commentators are still at home and participate via their own devices.*



*Note: Redação SporTV, October 14, 2020.*

Despite the increased demands and requirements, the company did not provide additional training for journalists, limiting itself only to the team that operated the Cloudcast software from a technical point of view. Presenter Marcelo Barreto states this in an interview for this paper:

That was the most important thing: having the program (software), knowing that it worked and developing people within the company who were capable of using it, solving any eventual problems [...] Then a technical team specialized in managing the Cloudcast was formed, and that is when *Redação* got the green light to go on air. (M. Barreto, personal statement, 29 December 2020)

The analysis of this situation reveals contradictory aspects of convergence. Journalists had to use technological resources related to the Internet but adapted for television in an attempt more of emergency substitution than technological convergence. Something that only evolved subsequently.

At a certain point, when television thought the pandemic was going to last longer, they distributed a kit to the principal people broadcasting from their homes, principal in terms of frequency and not in terms of importance. So, they went to each of these people's houses; I was one of them, with a tripod, a light - a single light, the one that looks like a halo, big - headphones, and a microphone. This significantly improved the quality of everyone's transmission. (S. Xavier Filho, personal statement, 29 May 2023)

Despite this, the process can be considered successful, as SporTV managed to stay on the air and continues to achieve high levels of viewership. It is important to note that this process also led to changes that continued into the post-pandemic period:

The need to have a studio in my home led me, of course, to acquire skills that I did not have. I improved a lot, a lot [...] and I think, for other people, who were more dependent on third parties - my colleagues - maybe the evolution, the need, has brought about an even bigger transformation. (S. Xavier Filho, personal statement, 29 May 2023)

2) There was a reduction in the number of professionals involved in the production, recording, and broadcasting processes during the pandemic. A demand previously met by more people was met by fewer, with signs of convergence, especially from a technological and professional point of view.

This hypothesis arises as a consequence of the previous one and is confirmed. There was a reduction in the number of people involved in journalistic processes at the SporTV channel during the pandemic, with professionals taking on multiple roles. This demonstrates aspects of the technological convergence mentioned above, as well as professional convergence: “The pandemic accelerated a process that was already underway, of simplification and cost reduction [...] we became everything, cameras, lighting, and much more”(S. Xavier Filho, personal statement, 29 de mayo de 2023).

As mentioned above, this reality did not mean improving quality or maintenance. Still, it was a sufficient resource to guarantee the continuity of activities on the SporTV channel in an entirely atypical moment.

The most significant difficulties were really when there were technical problems, either with the platform or persistent problems with those participating in the program, including myself, who sometimes had connection problems when working from home. In most cases, we were able to disguise it, but on some occasions, the commentators had to assume and say that I would be back at any moment. (M. Barreto, personal statement, 29 December 2020)

From the perspective of professional convergence, it is also relevant to highlight an aspect Barreto (2020) pointed out that indirectly refers to the proof of this hypothesis: sports journalists also had to work in other areas unrelated to sports. The presenter reveals that many SporTV

professionals were assigned to other Globo Group stations to work in general news production. At the same time, the topics covered by *Redação SporTV* also transcended sports issues. Patatt (2021) detailed that the program addressed subjects such as politics and public health, sometimes even more than the sport itself, in several editions. In an interview for this work, Marcelo Barreto corroborates this:

In terms of dealing with issues related to the pandemic, this is in line with what I often say, that the sports journalist must be prepared to be a journalist at some point, not just a sports journalist. And this was an interesting challenge we faced during the *Redação Home Office* period. It required us to be more informed about an area that is not necessarily our area of expertise, and I think, above all, it demanded a lot of responsibility in talking about the return or not of football and other sports. We were dealing with a broader topic, which was a topic of interest to society (M. Barreto, personal statement, 29 December 2020).

Despite all these factors, Xavier Filho (2023) assures that he did not feel overwhelmed but that not all professionals had the same capacity to adapt. According to him, some found it more challenging to cope with the accumulation of tasks, especially those used to a television structure with well-defined roles. Although the quality of productions has been reduced, as detailed in Patatt (2021), the journalist does not consider this a problem:

When you analyze broadcasting and content reception, you realize that those who receive the content are also in a difficult situation; they are also in an emergency, they know that their life has less quality because of the limitations of not being able to go outside, due to the confinement itself. (S. Xavier Filho, personal statement, 29 May 2023).

The journalist also states that those with professional experience marked by versatility, with passages through different media and who are “intimate with radio, audio, video, writing” (S. Xavier Filho, personal statement, 29 May 2023) have made a difference.

This statement fully aligns with technological, professional, and business convergence ideas. The latter is especially evident in the confirmation of the third hypothesis of this work.

2) The integrated newsroom, where professionals from different media of the same group worked in the same place, was decisive in overcoming some difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the ability to operate in a remote newsroom system in the online context.

According to *Grupo Globo's* sports editor Gustavo Maria, who took over the position in 2018, before the pandemic, there was already a structure linking different media outlets of the Brazilian media conglomerate:

“[...] an integrated structure that works for SporTV, TV Globo, and GE.globo. Our newsroom in Rio has approxi-

mately 400 professionals [...] SporTV's main newsroom is in Rio de Janeiro, where the channel's studios are located. And, consequently, where the presenters, editors-in-chief, and most of the narrators and commentators are located. But there is also a large newsroom in São Paulo and newsrooms in Belo Horizonte, Recife, and Brasília.” (G. Maria, personal statement, February 11, 2022).

That said, it is possible to consider that the above structure influenced the journalistic output during the pandemic. The analysis carried out in this paper found that, except for the first two programs recorded during the first interval that did not even have an image for illustration, in the rest (representing 90% of the total), at least one media outlet of the Globo Communications Group, which shares the same newsroom as SporTV in an integrated manner, was mentioned. Its content was used during the *Redação Home Office* period.

According to Maria (2022), acting convergently was essential to meet these needs, not only for the program mentioned above but also for the information channels of the entire conglomerate:

Integrated work develops more complete professionals with a multi-platform vision, more prepared for the present and the future. Being together was very important during the pandemic. The integration of the structures allowed us to have a broader vision of the team and a more efficient distribution of our workforce. And,

amid so many absences, we always managed to deliver relevant content to our consumers, whether on digital, cable or broadcast TV. (G. Maria, personal statement, February 11, 2022)

The fact that newsrooms had been integrated since before the pandemic was also considered by Maria (2022) to be fundamental during the *Redação* Home Office period. According to Barreto (2020), this occurred when most people, including editors-in-chief and executives, worked from home, with few exceptions for operationally indispensable professionals:

The pandemic made us discover the possibility of working from home [...] then we developed a hybrid model. The functions that need to be in the newsroom, in the editing rooms, in the studios, and on the street work in person. Those who can work from home have a staggered schedule. They go to the newsroom once a week. Since then, the newsroom has never been at 40 percent of its capacity. (G. Maria, personal statement, February 11, 2022)

In other words, the situation of remote working as part of the convergence process related to the restructuring of newsrooms also stands out, and as seen here, not only in the case of *Redação* SporTV or the SporTV channel but in the entire unified newsroom of Globo Communications Group, which is significant.

However, it cannot be affirmed that the integrated work has been entirely practical, according to Xavier (2023):

Because of cultural differences, we never managed to have a seamless integration where you could produce something for one side and quickly understand that you needed to send it to the other. That does not happen organically. You always need some supervisor or boss to come along and say: "Hey, why don't you put this in GE? So, it is a partial integration, which I think has not quite worked yet. It has a bit of a mirage that works perfectly, but I think it does not work because it was not born that way. (S. Xavier Filho, personal statement, 29 May 2023)

Once again, the need for communication professionals to adapt to different roles, networking - remote or face-to-face - and the re-adjustment of formats are highlighted as characteristics of convergence in journalism.

4) The difficulty of producing new content with the audiovisual characteristics of television due to factors such as the lack of training and sporting competitions and the need for social distancing accelerated the convergence of content.

This hypothesis can be considered only partially true.

There is a convergence of content insofar as interactivity was present in both intervals analyzed: comments sent by viewers via Twitter, using the hashtag #RedaçãoSporTV, were used both

during the period of remote work and the return to the studio.

On the other hand, the finding follows what Patatt (2021) presented regarding the use of journalistic productions from other media. More of a content remediation than a true convergence was observed. The first two episodes of *Redação Home Office* did not feature the use of any television journalism format. The similarity was instead a conversation transmitted on the internet.

**Figure 2**

*An example of how the first Redação Home Office was presented.*



*Note: Redação Home Office, March 30, 2020.*

All the other programs in both intervals had images to illustrate some interventions, but during *Redação Home Office*, the final product had no unique features. The material was redistributed on a different platform. For example, the front page of a newspaper was shown, read, and commented on without necessarily adding particular attributes of television.

**Figure 3**

*Example of content remediation*



*Note: Redação Home Office, June 05, 2020.*

According to Sérgio Xavier Filho, there was a great closeness of social networks, not only in the *Redação SporTV* program or in the *Redação Home Office*, but in the SporTV channel in general, mainly when it resorted to rebroadcasting old football matches to keep the programming on the air.

Empezamos a hablar de cosas antiguas, como la final de la Copa del Mundo de 1970 [...] eso es algo propio de los aficionados de YouTube, que van y buscan contenido antiguo y lo disfrutan, luego van y buscan otro... Creo que, de alguna manera, debido a las limitaciones, también nos convertimos un poco en eso. Nos convertimos en un gran YouTube en ese sentido, transmitiendo contenido que no es necesariamente contemporáneo. (S. Xavier Filho, comunicación personal, 29 de mayo de 2023)

The journalist also highlights other media characteristics that were not previously part of the *Redação SporTV* program.

[...] it is a resource that we did not really use, the text, the quotes in the middle of the screen, starting to use more images from the social networks themselves and even a 'tiktokisation'<sup>5</sup> of our journalism. It left some marks, but something stayed for now; I think we continue with these new possibilities, which are used much more frequently than before the pandemic. I do not think it is necessarily a bad thing. (S. Xavier Filho, personal statement, 29 May 2023)

<sup>5</sup> Refiriéndose a red social TikTok.

It is possible to use social networks as an example of content remediation; the showing of a clip of *Grupo Globo* collaborators made from a trend on the digital social network TikTok, which was shown in its entirety at the program's opening and without any alteration whatsoever. These changes are evident, for example, from the screen format: it was recorded entirely vertically, as was the content of TikTok, which is not in line with standard television practice.

**Figure 4**

*Content for TikTok reproduced in full in Redação Home Office*



*Note: Redação Home Office, April 28, 2020.*

It is possible to say that remediation was a way of meeting a need that, at the time, could not be envisaged in any other way.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The convergence presented by the Brazilian channel SporTV was not thoroughly thought out and structured but was carried out in an emergent way. Even so, it was efficient, as it allowed, in general terms, the integration of tools, workspaces, and languages for the benefit of live sports programming.

Even at a time without training or competitions, when there was no possibility of developing themes due to the need for social distancing imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Redação SporTV* program managed to fulfill its role of informing its audience.

The multimedia skills of the professionals, together with the general vision of journalism not only from the sports perspective, were fundamental aspects in realizing the journalistic activities in the SporTV channel.

In terms of integrated newsroom, it can be considered, according to the different points of view presented in the interviews, that there would be a greater ease of work if there were a complete integration with a multiplatform infrastructure controlled by a central news system and a single management of the news flow. It is not enough to have connections that occur through the intervention of multimedia coordinators or certain collaborative routines.



The fact that *Redação SporTV* has the characteristics of a content aggregator, also acting based on information published in other media, facilitated the work during the pandemic. However, it is considered that it would have been possible to serve in a more convergent way, not only replicating this information but with unique characteristics of each product and in an indeed televised language.

That said, and considering the prominence of the sample for the reasons already mentioned. However, it is a case study; it is possible to affirm that journalistic convergence was fundamental to developing television sports journalism in Brazil during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is in line with what has been found in other countries, according to the literature, especially about the use of content, the structure of newsrooms, the usage of television formats from other media, the need for journalists to

be “multidisciplinary” - not only from a technological perspective but also in terms of the necessity to address issues more broadly - as well as new forms of news distribution and work on multiple platforms.

Although there are several studies on the subject in Brazilian media companies, the specific focus on the pandemic with all its controversial situations shows how convergence made a difference in a time of such crisis. After all, it is more difficult to imagine and implement new communication models under pressure.

An acceleration of the convergence process has been observed, and the questions to be asked now concern the future implications of these emergency measures and parallel situations in other media companies to obtain more definitive comparisons.



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# OBRA DIGITAL

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## MISCELLANEOUS SECTION

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# Communication mediated by conference interpreters: age and sex stereotypes

*Estereotipos relativos a la edad y el sexo aplicados a la comunicación mediada por intérpretes de conferencias*

7

ARTICLE



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## Abstract

Previous studies have concluded that the combination of interpreters' sex and age may affect the perception of their simultaneous interpretation. In this study, 156 subjects completed a questionnaire assessing various non-verbal factors of the simultaneous interpretations produced by four male and four female interpreters of different age groups in a recording studio. The recordings were controlled to

achieve a homogeneous rendition of verbal factors to favor the rating of non-verbal factors. The results show that interpreters' sex- and age-related characteristics, as discerned by the listener, may bias the perceived interpreter's performance.

## KEYWORDS

Sex and age, stereotypes, ageism, simultaneous interpretation.

## Resumen

Estudios previos concluyen que la combinación del sexo y la edad de los y las intérpretes puede condicionar la percepción de la interpretación simultánea. En este estudio, 156 participantes contestaron un cuestionario para evaluar diversos factores no verbales de las interpretaciones realizadas por ocho intérpretes, cuatro hombres y cuatro mujeres, grabadas en un estudio. Las grabaciones se controlaron para lograr una producción homogénea de los fac-

tores verbales que no interfiriera en la evaluación de los factores no verbales. Los resultados muestran que las características relacionadas con el sexo y la edad de los y las intérpretes pueden sesgar la percepción de la interpretación simultánea por parte de la audiencia.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Sexo y edad, estereotipos, edadismo, interpretación simultánea.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This research builds upon a previous Baseline Research (Christen, 2020), which investigated the impact of interpreter sex on the perception of simultaneous interpreting (SI). However, the previous research faced challenges with a small sample size (Gile, 2018), so the authors made the methodological improvements outlined in the methodology section of this publication. This study aims to replicate the Baseline Research and either support or refute its findings. The present study will consider the age and sex of the interpreters, as suggested in the conclusions of the previous research. For this research, sex will be used dichotomously (Bhargava et al., 2021) without including social genders. The study included interpreters with no borderline voices, i.e., no male voices in the female frequency range (135 Hz to 635 Hz) and no female voices in the male frequency range (75 Hz to 480 Hz). This study is not intended to discriminate based on age, sex, ethnicity, or any other factor, nor to promote stereotypes that might lead to such exclusions. When referring to interpreters or participants, men and

women are included unless the sex of the specific group under study is specified for clarity. Where the context of the text so requires, a distinction between sexes may be made.

### 1. 1 INTERPRETATION STUDIES

Simultaneous interpreting is essential for multilingual communication at congresses and events. With the help of technological tools, the interpreter's oral production is delivered synchronously with the original speech, delayed by the time it takes the professional to process it, creating a sense of simultaneity for the listener.

There is a lack of common ground in SI studies when investigating the sex (Defrancq et al., 2021) and the age of interpreters. Most recent studies have focused on investigating the impact of sex differences in interpreters on the one hand and the age or experience of interpreters on the other.

Regarding the sex of the interpreter, several topics have been addressed, such as the role of sex and linguistic politeness in police interviews (Nakane, 2008) or sex differences in facial

threat and the use of mitigating factors (hedgers) in the treatment of politeness in SI in the European Parliament (Magnifico, 2017). Some studies have focused on the influence of the sex of the interpreter on the interpreting lag (Ear-Voice-Span), showing that the length of the lag varies significantly between interpreters (Collard & Defrancq, 2017, 2019). A study that also deals with the sex of the interpreters concludes that connectors vary according to interpreting norms and the sex of the interpreter (Magnifico & Defrancq, 2020). Finally, according to Bartłomiejczyk (2020), female interpreters mitigate serious and deliberate rudeness to a greater extent than male interpreters.

There is less research on the age or experience of the interpreter. Liu (2008) concludes that the main differences between novice and experienced interpreters lie in the strategies the latter use in comprehension, translation, and production and in their ability to switch between these processes.

Along the same line, Tiseliu (2013) analyses the process and product of interpreting in interpreters with different levels of experience and concludes that interpreters with long professional experience show significant differences in their interpreting skills compared to those with little or no interpreting experience. According to the results of her study, the former find fewer differences in speech processing and have more problem-solving strategies. Subsequently, Liu et al. (2020) interviewed interpreters aged 70 and over who are members of AIIC (Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence).

Most respondents acknowledge that they have faced some challenges in the later stages of their careers, which they attribute to changes in the working environment. Chmiel (2021) examines the latency of word interpretation and points out that it improves during interpreter training but does not increase with professional experience. Moser-Mercer (2022) suggests that SI experience should be analyzed not only in terms of behavioral and brain changes but also in terms of the needs of the profession.

Regarding the inclusion of age and sex, Collados Aís (2007), from a different approach, examines users' perceptions of the quality of interpreting according to the sex and age of the user. Few studies include the age and sex of the interpreters in their approach. Angelelli (2004) includes age, sex, level of education, and income when studying the role of the interpreter in community, legal, and medical settings to establish the relationship between these variables and the self-perceived visibility of interpreters.

According to the results of this study, there were no significant differences between the groups investigated. Regarding age, the older participants perceived themselves as less visible than the younger ones. García Becerra, who studied the effect of first impressions on the perception of the quality of SI, points out that "[...] subjects recognized that their expectations could vary according to certain conditions or characteristics of the interpreter, such as age, sex or vocal aspects" (2012, p. 566).

In a later study analyzing the effect of order and first impressions on the perception of SI, García

Becerra (2015) points out that in-depth studies related to first impressions as a function of the interpreter's sex and age are needed. In the evaluations carried out by the interviewees, negative traits had a negative influence on the interpreters' perception of their performance. Conversely, positive traits improved the interpreters' evaluations more than those of their female colleagues. Drawing on theories from the sociology of professions, Gentile (2016) investigates the self-perceived professional status of conference and public service interpreters. Her questionnaires (one for each type of interpreting) include, among others, demographic elements, including sex and age variables. It concludes that the increasing feminization of the profession, rapid technological change, and a complex labor market, along with other factors, have influenced interpreters' perceptions of the profession.

## 1.2 EXTERNAL DISCIPLINES

To make sense of the world, humans need to categorize their perceptions and group them into objects and events of a similar nature, identify shared characteristics, and reduce the time needed to process redundant information (Cuddy & Fiske, 2004). Just as we group objects and events, we group people based on perceived similarities. In our eagerness to assign objects, events, and people to meaningful classes about which we have established beliefs and expectations lies the root of stereotypes (Cuddy & Fiske, 2004). These variables are autonomous in their motivations and arise from the activation of patterns learned in each person's life cycle. Humans can decode the information contained

in verbal messages on several levels (Nass & Brave, 2005). Fundamental frequency (FO) and formant frequencies, which are the most important vocal features for identifying the sex and age of an individual, can be extracted from speech signals and encoded almost immediately in brain areas specialized in the perception of male or female voices. (Abdulsatar et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). As a result, listeners easily develop stereotypical responses to the sex and age of speakers based on the listeners cultural norms (Pisanski & Feinberg, 2015). Age and sex stereotypes automatically interact to influence the processing of speech perception (Strand, 2000).

It is widely known that age stereotypes precede age discrimination. Voss et al. (2018) point out that a reference to age does not equate to age discrimination (ageism). Age categorization becomes ageist only when described as a character based on stereotypes. To evoke an ageist stereotype, several elements of judgment must interact and, almost always unconsciously, the factor with the most substantial impact is the voice of the older adult (Hummert et al., 1999). The content and activation of sex stereotypes reflect a bias that favors men over women (Casper & Rothermund, 2012; Kornadt et al., 2013; Krekula et al., 2018).

Given the above, the following questions arise: Can the sex, and age of the interpreter bias the perception of SI? Could this bias be due to cultural norms and stereotypes of listeners derived from the physiological characteristics they unconsciously perceive in the speaker?



## 2. METHODOLOGY

In this quantitative quasi-experimental study, a closed-ended questionnaire was applied to corroborate the findings of the Baseline Research without modifying its methodology in terms of the age and sex of the interpreters, the questionnaire, the interpreted performances, the recording environment, and the recruitment of participants. Improvements included an increased number of interpreters and respondents, a differentiated control of the recording groups, the evaluation of the linguistic criteria of the recorded performances, and a new statistical design to ensure the randomization of the recordings according to the sex and age of the interpreters.

### 2.1 INTERPRETERS

Given that users show a certain tendency to evaluate an SI with a non-native accent negatively (Cheung, 2020), native Spanish-speaking interpreters were chosen based on their place of birth and their academic background in Mexico City. The study included two groups. Each group consisted of two novice and two experienced interpreters, one male and one female per age group (see Table 1).

The first group (G1) participated in the Baseline Research, while the second group (G2) was recruited for this study. The four experienced interpreters of both sexes, aged 60 and over, are graduates with at least 25 years of continuous practice in IS. The four novice interpreters, male and female, aged 26-34, are graduates with at most ten years of continuous practice in SI. All eight interpreted their renderings from English into Spanish.

**Table 1**

*Age of interpreters at the time of the study and years of experience*

Group	Code	Age on date of recording	Years of uninterrupted practice
1	G1EF	68	
1	G1EM	69	48
1	G1NF	26	1
1	G1NM	27	2
2	G2EF	69	42
2	G2EM	60	33
2	G2NF	27	6
2	G2NM	34	9

*Note. G = group; M = female; H = male; E = experienced; N = novice.*

### 2.2 PRESENTATIONS

Four videos in English were chosen from among the speeches that the global TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) community disseminates through the Internet (see Table 2). These talks, approximately 15 minutes long, were selected to reduce the number of interferences that could negatively affect the primary sources of cognitive loads in the interpretation (Riccardi, 2022). Special attention was paid to the speaker's accent, intonation, and pronunciation (Pöchhacker, 2016), the excessive speed of the original speech (García et al., 2020), the complexity or density of the source speech, and the use of technical jargon or syntactically complex sentences (Gile, 2002).

## 2.3 SEQUENCE DESIGN

To provide greater methodological rigor, to make the results robust, and to ensure complete randomness in the order of the recording segments by avoiding repetition of the ages and sexes of the interpreters and the sex of the speakers in the sequences, two researchers from the Centro de Investigación en Matemáticas (CIMAT), in León, Guanajuato, Mexico, designed four thirty-minute sequences. Each sequence included the interpretation of two talks, one per group (G1 and G2), with eight segments of approximately three and a half minutes, one segment per interpreter. Subsequently, the order of the groups was alternated to obtain a total of 64 segment positions in eight sequences (see Table 3).

**Table 2**

*Audiovisual material used in the experiment*

Pre-sentation Name	Link	Name of speaker	Short name
"The gentle power of highly sensitive people"	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pi-4JOIMSWjo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pi-4JOIMSWjo</a>	Elena Herdieck-erhoff	Sensitive
"After watching this, your brain will not be the same again."	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-NHBMF-CzznE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-NHBMF-CzznE</a>	Lara Boyd	Brain
"What you didn't know about coffee."	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaQNyOE-f4YY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaQNyOE-f4YY</a>	Asher Yaron	Coffee
"How to become a millionaire in three years."	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jvBaRf9L-HDs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jvBaRf9L-HDs</a>	Dany Ally	Millionaire

## 2.4 RECORDING PROCESS

A specialist with a master's degree in engineering and a recording engineer designed the recording process and implemented it in both groups. Using the 4K Downloader software (Open Media, LLC, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia), the four presentations were downloaded from the YouTube platform in the original 1280 x 720 format, with H.264 compression, in MP4. The audio and video source files were imported into a ProTools HD Ultimate™ session. Interpreters viewed the video on a screen and listened to the audio through their headphones. The performances were recorded in 48 kHz, 16-bit digital audio in WAV format through a DAKING Mic Pre-500 preamplifier with no analog compression and using SSL Alphalink audio interfaces.

The recordings had a target of approximately 28 LUFS and maximum peaks of -6 dB, which depended on the individual interpreter. All audios had a low-frequency cutoff at 80 Hz. The multiband normalization, compression, and limiting processes were performed with very subtle parameters to preserve the dynamics of the voices.

Adobe *Premiere* Pro™ was used to generate the final files. The MP4 source files and the WAV file with the voices of the interpreters were imported into a new *Premiere* session. In each video, the mastered audio was integrated with the original audio. In this integration, the original English audio was kept in the left channel, and the recorded Spanish audio was assigned to the right channel. To ensure synchrony, a time-code was used on both channels.

**Table 3***Outline of the eight recording sequences designed for the study*

No.	Pres-entation	Speak-er	Segment				Segment				Speak-er	Pres-entation
			1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4		
			Group 1				Group 2					
1	Sensitive	FS	G1EF	G1NM	G1NF	G1EM	G2NF	G2EM	G2NM	G2EF	MS	Coffee
2	Millionaire	MS	G1NM	G1NF	G1EM	G1EF	G2NM	G2EF	G2NF	G2EM	FS	Brain
3	Coffee	MS	G1EM	G1NF	G1NM	G1NF	G2EM	G2NF	G2EF	G2NM	FS	Sensitive
4	Brain	FS	G1NF	G1EM	G1EF	G1NM	G2EF	G2NM	G2EM	G2NF	MS	Millionaire
			Group 2				Group 1					
5	Coffee	MS	G2NF	G2EM	G2NM	G2EF	G1EF	G1NM	G1NF	G1EM	FS	Sensitive
6	Brain	FS	G2NM	G2EF	G2NF	G2EM	G1NM	G1NF	G1EM	G1EF	MS	Millionaire
7	Sensitive	FS	G2EM	G2NF	G2EF	G2NM	G2EM	G1EF	G1NM	G1NF	MS	Coffee
8	Millionaire	MS	G2EF	G2NM	G2EM	G2NF	G1NF	G2EM	G1EF	G1NM	FS	Brain

*Note. FS = female speaker; MS = male speaker; M = male; F = female; E = experienced; N = novice.**Source: Andrés Christen PH.D., Sebastián Quintanilla, M. Sc.*

The G1 participants received the transcripts and glossaries of two talks (Millionaire and Coffee) one day in advance. Before starting the recording session, the interpreters reviewed the other two talks (Brain and Sensitive) for a few minutes. All group members recorded their four performances in their entirety in one day, at staggered times. The 16 segments used for this group's sequences were extracted from the recordings according to the position assigned to each interpreter in the designed sequence. Participants in G2 received the four transcripts of the talks and their glossaries two days in advance. Each interpreter was given a specific recording day. This group recorded only the segments that had been assigned to each interpreter during the design of the sequences.

This differential treatment of the G2 group in terms of preparation, time, and recording method was designed to enable G2 participants to produce performances with better control of the verbal features in their oral production than G1 participants. The aim was to assess whether respondents could discriminate such differences despite the randomized design of the sequences. If so, this design would provide a higher level of validity in assessing of the parameters under analysis.

To ensure that the interpretations of all participating interpreters, regardless of sex or experience, were perceived to be of a comparable linguistic and terminological level, the eight interpreters were provided with transcripts of

the four speeches during the recordings. They were reassured that the study aimed to obtain interpretations with the best possible linguistic characteristics, reflecting a complete and faithful translation of the original speech. They were also offered the opportunity to re-record their interpretations if they were not satisfied with the first recording.

## 2.5 QUESTIONNAIRE

The 5-point questionnaire used in the study was based on previous instruments on prosodic features and work attitudes tested for their relationship with perceived SI quality (Collados Aís *et al.*, 2007). It included five prosodic criteria: voice (Iglesias Fernández, 2007), intonation (Collados Aís, 2019), fluency (Rennert, 2020), diction (Blasco Mayor & García Becerra, 2007), and rhythm, the latter given its demonstrated importance in SI anticipation (Palová & Kiktová, 2019). It also included two work attitudes (credibility and professionalism) and one linguistic parameter (cohesion) (Collados Aís *et al.*, 2007). Although Collados Aís *et al.* (2007) studied cohesion, in the focus group conducted to verify the validity of this study, it was determined that the term coherence should be used instead due to cultural issues in the environment where the questionnaire would be applied. For this reason, as shown in Figure 1, coherence was the criterion to be assessed in the questionnaire. Finally, overall perceived quality was included to measure the user's satisfaction with the interpretation.

The same questionnaire was used for the Baseline Research and this study. Its validity and reliability were tested in a focus group mentioned above in which four men and four women from four age groups, one man and one woman per age group, were interviewed after viewing one of the recorded talks given by the two groups of interpreters. The validity of the questionnaire

was confirmed by the ability of the focus group participants to distinguish the perceived age and sex characteristics of the interpreters and to rate the interpretations. Once the questionnaire was designed (see Figure 1), the template was repeated eight times on individual sheets, one for each segment, to complete the measurement tool.

## 2.6 PROCEEDINGS

The minimum number of subjects (100) recommended to obtain meaningful results in quantitative studies (Dörnyei, 2007) was taken as a basis. One hundred and fifty-six native Spanish-speaking subjects, 79 male and 77 female, divided into five age groups, were recruited using a snowball sampling method and answered the questionnaire to rate the sequences recorded by the eight interpreters (see Table 4). The participants were aged 20 years or older, lived in the metropolitan area of Mexico City, and had at least one previous contact with professional SI services given their lack of knowledge of English, the language generally used in seminars and conferences in Mexico City. In total, 27 had a high school diploma, 45 were university students, 68 had a bachelor's degree, and 16 had completed postgraduate studies.

**Table 4**

*Experimental sample by age range and sex*

Sex	Age group				
	20 to 30	31 to 40	41 to 50	51 to 64	65 to 75
Female	10	23	18	18	8
Male	18	13	17	19	12
Total	28(17,9 %)	36(23,0%)	35(22,4%)	37(23,7%)	20(12,8%)

*Note. n=156.*

**Figure 1**

*Outline of the questionnaire designed for the study*

Question	Rating scale				
1. Please rate the quality of the interpretation	<i>Very bad</i>				<i>Very good</i>
	1	2	3	4	5
2. Please rate the coherence in the transmission of the interpretation	<i>Very bad</i>				<i>Very good</i>
	1	2	3	4	5
3. Please rate the fluency of the interpretation	<i>Not fluency</i>				<i>Full fluency</i>
	1	2	3	4	5
4. Please rate the diction of the interpreter	<i>Not clear</i>				<i>Absolutely clear</i>
	1	2	3	4	5
5. Please rate the intonation of the interpreter	<i>Very monotonous</i>				<i>Not at all monotonous</i>
	1	2	3	4	5
6. Please rate the rhythm maintained by the interpreter	<i>Not regular at all</i>				<i>Very regular</i>
	1	2	3	4	5
7. Please rate the voice of the interpreter	<i>Not pleasant at all</i>				<i>Very pleasant</i>
	1	2	3	4	5
8. Please rate the credibility of the interpreter	<i>Not credible</i>				<i>Very credible</i>
	1	2	3	4	5
9. Please rate the professionalism of the interpreter	<i>Not professional</i>				<i>Very professional</i>
	1	2	3	4	5

The study was conducted in 41 sessions from 7 November to 12 December 2020. Each participant sat at an individual table and received disposable headphones, the eight-page questionnaire, and a pencil. The room was arranged to emulate a conference setting. Audio recordings of the TED talks in English were played through loudspeakers while participants simultaneously listened to the voices of the Spanish interpreters in their headphones.

Before the exercise, the facilitators explained to the participants the operationalized definitions of the parameters of the questionnaire and the written and oral instructions for completing the questionnaire. The facilitators played the video segments of the selected sequence one by one on a screen at the front of the room, stopping

the projection at the end of each segment. A response time of 90 seconds for each segment was given to ensure spontaneous reactions from participants to the voices of the interpreters (García Becerra, 2012; Larrea Estefanía, 2014). In each session, facilitators presented one of the eight sequences, reaching a total of 20-23 respondents per sequence. Participants did not have access to the interpreters' photographs or CVs, so their assessments were based solely on their impressions of the interpreters' voices (Horváth, 2017). The president and vice-president of the Colegio Mexicano de Intérpretes de Conferencias, A.C. 2020-2021, attended some sessions to verify full compliance with the designed method.

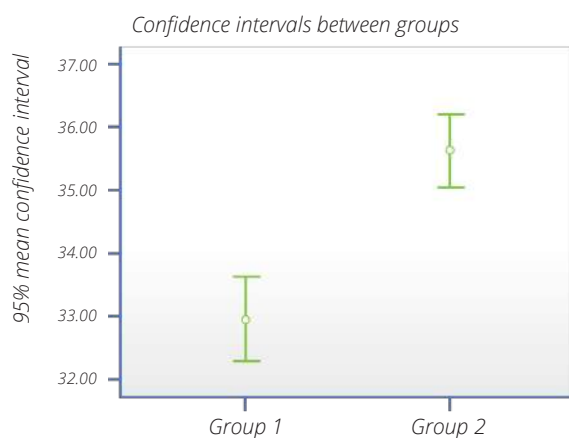
**Table 5***Between-group ANOVA test*

Independent sample test										
		Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means						
		F	Equal	t	df	Sig. (bi-lateral)	Mean difference	95 % confidence interval of the difference		
								Standard error difference	Lower	Upper
Average	Equal variances assumed	18.202	.000	5.938	1246	.000	-.29380	.04948	.39087	-.19673
	Equal variances not assumed			5.938	1219.291	.000	-.29380	.04948	.39088	-.19673

*Note. F = ratio of the two variances; df = degrees of freedom*

### 3. RESULTS

The first objective was to determine whether respondents perceived a significant difference in the rating of interpretations between G1 and G2. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was performed to determine the mean difference between the groups (-0.2938). The result was significant, greater than 1%, in favor of G2, with a p-value of 0.000 (see Figure 2 and Table 5).

**Figure 2**

This result shows that respondents gave higher ratings to the G2 renditions than to the G1 renditions, even though the precise segmentation of the randomized sequential design could have confounded this overall perception. The results show that the longer preparation time given to the G2 interpreters to study the talks and the more favorable conditions for their recordings led to better control of the substantive features of their performances. In summary, as expected, the G2 interpreters working under more favorable conditions outperformed the G1 interpreters, confirming the robustness of the sequential design.

Tukey tests were used to compare the group means pairwise for each of the nine parameters. The null hypothesis was that the means were equal between groups. The results were significant at the 5% confidence level for the sample size ( $n = 156$ ).

A large number of tests were conducted in this study, which could lead to Type I error inflation.

When and how to correct for multiple tests remains a hotly debated topic (Streiner, 2015). In this study, a non-confirmatory, albeit exploratory, post-hoc analysis was performed whose significance level rarely needs to be corrected, as observed in multiple regression analysis with categorical variables mathematically equivalent to ANOVA (Streiner, 2015).

The following pairs were analyzed:

- (1) Experienced female vs. experienced male (EF vs. EM).
- (2) Experienced female vs. novice female (EF vs. NM).
- (3) Experienced female vs. novice male (EF vs. NM)
- (4) Experienced male vs. novice female (EM vs. NF)
- (5) Experienced male vs. novice male (EM vs. NM)
- (6) Novice male vs. novice female (NM vs. NF)

When assessing perceived quality, the difference between ME means with the other three groups (EM, EF, and NF) were -0.349, -0.369, and -0.577, respectively, significant in favor of all three groups, with a confidence level of at least 5% in all cases. The difference between the means of EM and NF was -0.019, with a standard error of 0.077, the average between the two being approximately the same, so the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. The difference between the means of EM and NM was -0.228, with a confidence level of at least 5%. The comparison between the NM and NF groups gave an average of -.208 with a confidence level of 5%.

When examining coherence, significant differences were found between the means of EF and EM, with a difference of -0.218 and a con-

fidence level of at least 5%. Additionally, there were differences found between EF and NF, as well as between EF and NM, with differences of -0.333 and -0.462, respectively, and a confidence level of at least 5% in both comparisons. However, when comparing EM and NF, no significant difference was found, with a mean difference of -0.115 and a confidence interval that included zero. On the other hand, the mean difference between EM and NM was -0.244 in favor of the NM group, with a confidence level of at least 5%. Finally, when comparing NM and NF, no significant difference was found.

For fluency, the difference between the EF and EM means was -0.250, in favor of the EM group, significant at 5%. The difference between the EF and NF groups was -0.196, significant only at 10% and in favor of the NF group. The mean difference between EF and NM was -0.506, in favor of the NM group, with a confidence level of at least 5%. The comparison between the EM and NF groups was not significant. The mean difference between NM and EM was 0.256 in favor of the former, significant at 5%; between the NM and NF groups, the difference was 0.311 points in favor of the former, with a confidence level of at least 5%.

When assessing the diction of the interpreters, the difference between the EF and EM means was -0.151, in favor of the EM group; this value was not significant. The mean differences between EF and NF and between EF and NM were -0.330 and -0.484, respectively. These differences were significant in both comparisons, at least 5 %. The mean difference between EM and NF showed no significant difference between these groups. In the case of EM and NM, the main difference was -0.333 in favor of the NM group, at a confidence level of at least 5%. The comparison between NM and NF showed no significant difference.



The mean differences in intonation between EF and the other three groups (EM, NF, and NM) were significant, reaching -0.375, -0.417, and -0.394, respectively, in favor of the latter three, with a confidence level of at least 5% in all pairwise comparisons. The comparison between EM and NF showed no significant differences, suggesting a tie between the two groups. When comparing EM and NM and NF and NM, the results were not significant, and the two groups were tied. Therefore, the hypothesis that their intonation scores were equal cannot be ruled out.

Regarding the rhythm of the interpretations, the EM, NF, and NM groups were 0.333, 0.304, and 0.625 points higher than the mean of the EF group, with a significant difference of at least 5% in all three comparisons. The comparison between EM and NF showed no significant differences, so the hypothesis that these two groups have the same results cannot be ruled out. In the comparison between EM and NM, a significant difference of 0.292 points was found with a confidence level of at least 5% in favor of the NM group. When comparing the NM and NF groups, a significant difference of -0.321 was found, with a confidence level of 5%, in favor of the HN group.

For the interpreters' voice rating, the EM, NF, and NM groups scored on average 0.500, 0.705, and 0.702 points higher than the EF group, respectively, with a significant difference of at least 5% in all three cases. For the first time, when comparing the EM and NF groups,

the NF group scored 0.205 points higher than the EM group, but only at the 10% confidence level. The comparison between EM and NM showed a significant difference of 0.202 points in favor of the beginners, which is a difference of 10%. The last comparison category between the NM and NF groups showed no significant difference. Therefore, the hypothesis that the interpreters' voices of the NF and NM groups were perceived as equally pleasant cannot be rejected.

The eighth parameter in this analysis was perceived interpreter credibility. The means of the EM, NF, and NM groups were 0.269, 0.359, and 0.455 points higher than those of the EF group, respectively, at a confidence level of at least 5% in all comparisons. The last three comparisons of credibility indices were for the EM and NF, EM and NM, and NM vs. NF comparisons, where no significant differences were found. Therefore, the hypothesis that the means of these three groups were equal cannot be ruled out.

Regarding professionalism, there was a noticeable difference of 5% or more between EF and EM, NF, and NM. The mean scores of these three groups were higher than EF by 0.317, 0.359, and 0.474 points. As in the case of credibility, there were no significant differences between EM and NF, EM and NM, or NM and NF. Therefore, we cannot reject the hypothesis that the means of these three groups are equal. For more detailed results of the Tukey's test, please refer to Table 6.



Table 6

Mean difference, standard error, significance, and two-way ANOVA of the study variables.

Independent variable	Difference in means	Std. error	95% confidence interval		Independent variable	Difference in means	Std. error	95% confidence interval		Independent variable	Difference in means	Std. error	95% confidence interval		Sig.	95% confidence interval
			Lower	Upper				Lower	Upper				Lower	Upper		
1. Rate the quality of the interpretation																
Experienced female	EM	-.349*	.077	.000	-.55	-.15	.077	.000	-.55	-.15	EM	-.218*	.077	.000	-.55	-.15
	NF	-.369*	.077	.000	-.57	-.17	.077	.000	-.57	-.17	NF	-.333*	.077	.000	-.57	-.17
	NM	-.577*	.077	.000	-.77	-.38	.077	.000	-.77	-.38	NM	-.462*	.077	.000	-.77	-.38
Experienced male	EM	.349*	.077	.000	.15	.55	.078	.027	-.42	-.02	EM	.218*	.078	.027	-.42	-.02
	NF	-.019	.077	.994	-.22	.18	.078	.000	-.53	-.13	NF	-.115	.078	.000	-.53	-.13
	NM	-.228*	.077	.016	-.42	-.03	.078	.000	-.66	-.26	NM	-.244*	.078	.000	-.66	-.26
Novice female	EM	.369*	.077	.000	.17	.57	.078	.000	.17	.42	EM	.369*	.078	.000	.17	.42
	EM	.019	.077	.994	-.18	.22	.078	.448	-.08	.32	EM	.115	.078	.448	-.08	.32
	NM	.208*	.077	.034	-.41	-.01	.078	.352	-.33	.07	NM	-.128	.078	.352	-.33	.07
Novice male	EM	.577*	.077	.000	.38	.77	.078	.000	.26	.66	EM	.462*	.078	.000	.26	.66
	EM	.228*	.077	.016	.03	.42	.082	.010	.04	.44	EM	.244*	.082	.010	.04	.44
	NF	.208*	.077	.034	.01	.41	.078	.352	-.07	.33	NF	.128	.078	.352	-.07	.33
2. Rate the coherence in the transmission of the interpretation																
Experienced female	EM										EM					
	NF										NF					
	NM										NM					
Experienced male	EM										EM					
	NF										NF					
	NM										NM					
Novice female	EM										EM					
	EM										EM					
	NM										NM					
Novice male	EM										EM					
	EM										EM					
	NF										NF					
3. Rate the fluency of the interpretation																
Experienced female	EM										EM					
	NF										NF					
	NM										NM					
Experienced male	EM										EM					
	NF										NF					
	NM										NM					
Novice female	EM										EM					
	EM										EM					
	NM										NM					
Novice male	EM										EM					
	EM										EM					
	NF										NF					

4. Rate the diction of the interpreter										5. Rate the intonation of the interpreter					6. Rate the rhythm maintained by the interpreter				
Experi- enced female	EM	-.151	.080	.231	-.36	-.05	EM	-.375*	.085	.000	-.59	-.16	EM	-.333*	.087	.001	-.56	-.11	
	NF	-.330*	.080	.000	-.53	-.13	NF	-.417*	.085	.000	-.63	-.20	NF	.087	.003	-.53	-.08		
	NM	-.484*	.080	.000	-.69	-.28	NM	-.394*	.085	.000	-.61	-.18	NM	.087	.000	-.85	-.40		
Experi- enced male	EM	.151	.080	.231	-.05	.36	EM	.375*	.085	.000	.16	.59	EM	.333*	.087	.001	.11	.56	
	NF	-.179	.080	.109	-.38	.03	NF	-.042	.085	.961	-.26	.18	NF	.087	.987	-.19	.25		
	NM	-.333*	.080	.000	-.54	-.13	NM	-.019	.085	.996	-.24	.20	NM	.087	.004	-.51	-.07		
Novice female	EM	.330*	.080	.000	.13	.53	EM	.417*	.085	.000	.20	.63	EM	.304*	.087	.003	.08	.53	
	EM	.179	.080	.109	-.03	.38	EM	.042	.085	.961	-.18	.26	EM	.087	.987	-.25	.19		
	NM	-.154	.080	.215	-.36	-.05	NM	.022	.085	.994	-.20	.24	NM	.087	.001	-.54	-.10		
Novice male	EM	.484*	.080	.000	.28	.69	EM	.394*	.085	.000	.18	.61	EM	.625*	.087	.000	.40	.85	
	EM	.333*	.080	.000	.13	.54	EM	.019	.085	.996	-.20	.24	EM	.087	.004	.07	.51		
	NF	.154	.080	.215	-.05	.36	NF	-.022	.085	.994	-.24	.20	NF	.087	.001	.10	.54		

7. Rate the voice of the interpreter										8. Rate the credibility of the interpreter										9. Rate the professionalism of the interpreter									
Ex- peri- enced fe- male	EM	-.500*	.083	.083	.000	-.71	-.29	EM	-.269*	.084	.007	-.49	-.05	EM	-.317*	.080	.000												
	NF	-.705*	.083	.083	.000	-.92	-.49	NF	-.359*	.084	.000	-.57	-.14	NF	-.359*	.080	.000	-.57	-.15										
	NM	-.702*	.083	.083	.000	-.91	-.49	NM	-.455*	.084	.000	-.67	-.24	NM	-.474*	.080	.000	-.68	-.27										
Ex- peri- enced male	EM	.500*	.083	.083	.000	.29	.71	EM	.269*	.084	.007	.05	.49	EM	.317*	.080	.000												
	NF	-.205	.083	.083	.064	-.42	.01	NF	-.090	.084	.708	-.31	.13	NF	-.042	.080	.955	-.25	.17										
	NM	-.202	.083	.083	.070	-.41	.01	NM	-.186	.084	.120	-.40	.03	NM	-.157	.080	.207	-.36	.05										
Nov- ice fe- male	EM	.705*	.083	.083	.000	.49	.92	EM	.359*	.084	.000	.14	.57	EM	.359*	.080	.000												
	EM	.205	.083	.083	.064	-.01	.42	EM	.090	.084	.708	-.13	.31	EM	.042	.080	.955	-.17	.25										
	NM	.003	.083	.083	1.000	-.21	.22	NM	-.096	.084	.661	-.31	.12	NM	-.115	.080	.479	-.32	.09										
Nov- ice male	EM	.702*	.083	.083	.000	.49	.91	EM	.455*	.084	.000	.24	.67	EM	.474*	.080	.000												
	EM	.202	.083	.083	.070	-.01	.41	EM	.186	.084	.120	-.03	.40	EM	.157	.080	.207	-.05	.36										
	NF	-.003	.083	.083	1.000	-.22	.21	NF	.096	.084	.661	-.12	.31	NF	.115	.080	.479	-.09	.32										

Note: Sig. = significance: n = 156.  
 \* The mean difference was significant, with a confidence level of 0.05 %.

## 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The age and sex of the interpreters were clearly distinguished in the study variables, as shown in the explanation of the results above, from which the following conclusions can be drawn:

1) Novice males consistently ranked first in the nine categories, and experienced females ranked last. Significant differences were found between the EF group and the other groups. The EM, NF, and NM groups were always favored. These results corroborate the Baseline Research. This marked differentiation can be explained by the fact that anatomical variations related to the age and sex of the speaker produce significant changes in the fundamental frequency (F0) and formant frequencies (Baus et al., 2019; Sundberg, 2019). These two acoustic features, which are the most important for identifying the sex and age of an individual, are recorded in less than 140 ms from the onset of the utterance (Schweinberger et al., 2008). The sex of the speaker is readily recognized and encoded in brain areas specialized in the perception of male or female voices before the way words are articulated or the linguistic and grammatical components of the speaker are recognized (Greenberg & Christiansen, 2019). Voice characteristics influence how listeners perceive the speaker and respond to the information they convey. This process can influence the perception of an SI's verbal and nonverbal characteristics, which was unfavorable for the mature women in this study.

2) The male novice interpreters outperformed all their peers in three categories: quality, rhythm, and fluency. None of the participants in the other three groups significantly outperformed their peers. The perception of performance quality is related to several parameters (Iglesias Fernández, 2010), such as the interpreter's voice, fluency, and rhythm (Kiktová et al., 2019) of the rendition, where in this study, novice males scored the highest. This result corroborates the findings of the Baseline Research, where novice interpreters outperformed their peers in terms of quality, rhythm, professionalism, credibility, and voice. A higher rating for several parameters in the same age group can be interpreted as a preference of the listeners for this group.

3) No experienced interpreters, male or female, obtained significantly higher means than the novice interpreters.

4) Novice female interpreters were comparable to experienced male interpreters in all parameters except voice. Lower voices, generally male, score higher due to their ability to evoke greater credibility and persuasiveness, especially when conveying descriptive and informative messages (Larrea Estefanía, 2014), as in the case of the SI conducted in this study. These results show that there can be interactions between voice and sexual stereotypes (Strand, 2000). As mentioned above, most people integrate social stereotypes into their perception of speech, which elicits automatic, almost instinctive attitudes and judgments toward speakers (Strand, 2000).

5) Experienced male interpreters were comparable to female and male novices in intonation, professionalism, and credibility, yet all three groups outperformed experienced female interpreters. This perception of more excellent professionalism of male experienced interpreters than female experienced interpreters may be due to the content and activation of sexual stereotypes (Casper & Rothermund, 2012). When investigating age-related changes, Kornadt *et al.* (2013) showed that in most domains of experience, these changes were more favorable for women than men (family, friends, religion, leisure, personality, and health). However, in the work and finance domains, a reverse effect was identified that favored men over women. This double standard may also be due to stigmatizing attitudes towards women (Barret & Naiman-Sessions, 2016; Krekula *et al.*, 2018), highlighting the dominance of patriarchal norms combined with a more pronounced concern about age in older women.

6) When the mean scores were disaggregated by group, the same results were found, with beginners systematically ranked first and experienced interpreters ranked last in all parameters. The means of G2 were systematically higher than those of G1 (the disaggregated analysis is not included here as it is beyond the scope of this publication).

The results of this research corroborate the conclusions of the Baseline Research. The following empirical conclusions can be drawn from the findings with statistically significant differences in scores according to the age and sex of the interpreter: 1) male interpreters tend

to score higher than their female counterparts of the same age; 2) novice interpreters tend to score higher than experienced interpreters, regardless of sex; and 3) comparisons between age groups are less favorable for experienced interpreters.

Native speakers of a given language acquire a specific awareness of how phonological categories are uttered, depending not only on the different communities that use it but also on the sex of the utterer (Madrid Servín & Marín Rodríguez, 2001). Thus, it cannot be ruled out that the peculiarities or culture of the country where the study was conducted may encourage sexist or ageist stereotypes, especially towards mature women. Further research is therefore needed beyond the country where the study was conducted to determine whether such ageist stereotypes are prevalent elsewhere.

Experience, an indisputable resource for all professional interpreters (Moser-Mercer, 2022), is undoubtedly relevant to their performance. However, the findings suggest that when two interpreters sharing the same booth, have the same level of preparedness and similar knowledge of the interpreted topic, it is likely that, if there are any presbyphonic elements in the voice of either of them, differences in the perception of their interpretations will be found. The statements expressed here can be applied when listeners only have the interpreter's voice as a reference rather than other professional skills that could be perceived as an added value to the service.

The empirical results of this study do not allow us to determine whether the sex or age of the interpreters, by themselves, are determining factors in the perception of SI, i.e., whether one has more weight than the other or whether they are due to a reciprocal effect depending on the age group. However, these data suggest that before the verbal elements of SI are perceived, the interaction between the perceived sex and age of the interpreter unconsciously biases the listener's evaluation of the interpretation. This bias may be due to the listener's cultural norms and stereotypes based on the vocal characteristics of the interpreter.

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The author declares that she has no potential conflict of interest concerning the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

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# The activity in Tiktok of the print media in Spain

*La actividad en Tiktok de los medios impresos en España*

8

ARTICLE



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## Abstract:

The social media platform TikTok presents itself as a predominantly entertainment-focused communication format, not only for younger generations but also for an increasingly captivated audience enticed by recommendation algorithms. In this context, traditional media outlets are formulating their strategies to establish a presence on TikTok, fully aware that the future audiences to be engaged are now on this platform.

This research aims to primarily examine the activity of the major print media outlets in Spain. The objective is to analyze whether the use of TikTok by print media outlets in Spain is significant or not, whether there is a strategic professionalization of their editorial activity, and finally, whether this activity is tailored to the peculiarities of the platform or if it simply involves recycling content from their main medium. To achieve this, the posts published on the social network by the leading national newspapers—El País, El Mundo, ABC, La Vanguardia, and La Razón—will be reviewed in a specific chronological sequence, establishing a comparative analysis of the main interaction milestones provided by the platform.

The main conclusions establish that there is a greater attempt than expected in the activity that print media outlets engage in on TikTok. However, despite this, the activity is not highly professionalized or well-thought-out, as there is no clear pattern of publication, continuity, or specific production. Instead, TikTok serves more as a container where already produced content is poured into.

**Keywords:** TikTok, Technology, Journalism, Social Networks, Information

## Resumen:

La red social TikTok se presenta como un formato de comunicación preponderantemente de entretenimiento no solo para las generaciones más jóvenes, sino para un público cada vez más seducido por los algoritmos de recomendación. En este contexto, los medios de información tradicionales plantean sus estrategias de desembarco en TikTok, conscientes de que en ella están ahora las audiencias futuras a las que poder fidelizar.

Esta investigación tiene como principal objetivo revisar la actividad de los principales medios impresos de España. Se pretende analizar si el uso de TikTok de los medios impresos en España es o no significativo, si existe una profesio-

nalización estratégica de la actividad editorial de estos medios y, finalmente, si esta actividad se realiza *ad hoc*, en función de las peculiaridades de la plataforma o si la dinámica es el reciclado de contenido del medio principal. Para ello, se revisarán los posts publicados en la red social por las principales cabeceras nacionales: El País, El Mundo, ABC, La Vanguardia y La Razón, en una secuencia temporal concreta que establece un análisis comparativo entre los principales hitos de interacción que proporciona dicha red social.

Las principales conclusiones establecen cómo existe un intento mayor de lo esperado en la actividad que los medios impresos plantean en TikTok. Sin embargo, a pesar de ello, es una actividad poco profesionalizada y reflexionada, ya que no existe una pauta clara de publicación, continuidad o producción específica, sino más bien un contenedor más en el que volcar contenido ya producido.

**Palabras clave:** TikTok, Tecnología, Periodismo, Redes Sociales, Información

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Far from being a static phenomenon, the development and evolution of social networks are increasingly taking up more and more space in society's communication ecosystem.

Facebook remains one of the most widely used social networks overall, but its influence on journalism is waning as it shifts its focus away from news. It also faces new challenges from established networks such as YouTube and youth-focused networks such as TikTok. The Chinese-owned social network reaches 44% of 18-24-year-olds in different markets and 20% in news (Newman et al., 2023, p.10)

From time to time, new proposals emerge that substantially modify the perception, and with it the study, of what communication networks mean for this field of study:

Social networks have transformed the communication scenario, forcing new media to adapt to their logic (van Dijck

& Poell, 2013) and reformulating the journalistic model (Bell & Owen, 2017) [...] Moreover, media have adapted to the ephemeral dynamics of Instagram (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2019), experimented with Snapchat to gain new audiences with their news (Lee, 2019), developed strategies on private instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp (Boczek & Koeppers, 2020) and are observing how platforms such as Twitch are renewing ways of consuming streaming content (Bingham, 2020). (Negreira, Vázquez & López, 2022, p.1)

Along the same lines, and despite the lack of academic literature on the subject, there are authors such as Vázquez, Negreira and López (2022), who mention texts such as Lewis et al. (2014) or Xia et al. (2020) to reinforce the increasingly relevant link between the media and the audience, in order to build a reciprocal relationship. This concept is crucial to understanding why traditional media seek to communicate with their audiences through social networks in

what Hill and Bradshaw (2018) call *Social First or Social Only*.

In this constant growth and change of the rules of the game of social networks, most actors strive to integrate profiles into their communication strategies to ensure their presence on social networks (Ekström and Westlund, 2019). However, there is often no clear vision of what, how, when, and why to publish content, despite ambitious attempts. Moreover, it is common to repeat the habit, whose lack of effectiveness has already been demonstrated on several occasions (Galindo, 2012), of reusing content from other media to fill the feeds of these social networks without a defined purpose.

In the same way that each social network can be generally associated with an age group, there is a generational shift in the communicative intention and formal proposal of each social network. Not only because of their technical approach but also because of the purpose for which they are published and consumed.

Their social network logic modifies the processes of media production, distribution, and use (Klinger and Svensson, 2015) so that the media employ the news values and narrative techniques that work best on each platform (Strömbäck, 2008; Welbers and Opgenhaffen, 2019). (Vázquez, Negreira, & López, 2022, p.1719)

Thus, the survival of a pre-existing communicative culture can be observed: the older generations, related to Facebook, use this network in a largely descriptive way, with long texts and a profusion of images. The intention is the permanence of the content. If a new user comes

to another user's profile, they can see what they posted some time ago: trips, celebrations, achievements. They compose something like a life album that needs to be available because the intention is to offer a determined and cumulative overall image of the user (Marcelino, 2015)

On the other hand, social networks that could be considered second generation, such as Snapchat, Instagram (in its Stories aspect), TikTok or, more recently, BeReal, are committed to a communicative ecosystem that is the complete opposite of the previous one. Far from seeking the permanence of content, they seek the ephemeral, the transitory. As such, they do not seem to require too much organization, either in terms of form or content. The excessive, the spontaneous, and the amusing (Lozano, Mira and Gil, 2023). The here and now takes precedence, with no other intention than disposable consumption.

According to the Global Overview Report (Kemp, 2023), 41% of surfers on TikTok are between the ages of 16 and 25, which is why this social network has attracted the interest of many companies who see the platform as a unique opportunity to reach young audiences, particularly those belonging to Generation Z. A generation is defined as "an age group that has shared a unique set of formative experiences that distinguishes it from those that preceded it" (Chirinos, 2009, p. 137). Generation Z is specifically defined as "those individuals born in the digital age who are lifelong users of technology with a sophisticated skill set" (Prensky, 2001 p. 19).



As with social networks, there is a significant difference between the generations in the consumption of general mass media: press, radio, television, and digital media. If the more mature age groups indicate a high consumption of traditional media, inherited from habits before the emergence of the Internet or social networks, it is also significant that younger people are abandoning these media in favor of social networks and streaming platforms for music and video on demand.

Younger groups everywhere show a weaker attachment to news brands' websites and apps, preferring to access news through alternative routes such as social networks, search engines, or mobile aggregators (Newman *et al.*, 2023).

These premises are the starting point of this research, which aims to observe how the Spanish media use the social network TikTok as part of their communication or information strategy. To this end, a comparative analysis of the content published on the TikTok profiles of the main Spanish print media since its creation will be carried out. It will assess the quantity, frequency, format, and content of this activity.

## 2. MEDIA AND TIKTOK

News media and news professionals are facing a scenario of uncertainty generated by social media and new consumer habits. "Across markets, only about a fifth of respondents (22%) say they prefer to start their news journey with a website or app" (Newman *et al.*, 2023, p. 11).

Over the last few years, they have had to adapt to platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat or

WhatsApp, and now it is time to do the same with TikTok, which "has burst onto the international market with its logic and language" (Negreira-Rey *et al.*, 2022, p. 146). These have made it one of the most popular networks in the world.

The use of images as the primary mode of communication on this platform is not a coincidence. Advancements in technology have led to improved internet connectivity and better camera capabilities, which have contributed to a rise in the creation and consumption of images and videos. So much so that, according to Pellicer (2020, n.p.), "conventional television is taking a back seat and new consumers are switching to this new television, which are channels such as TikTok or Instagram".

TikTok has become an alternative business model for the news media. However, as Clavijo (2021) points out, the characteristics of the medium force journalists to develop a completely different type of content than they have produced on other social networks. Newman *et al.* (2021) point out that the media are faced with the challenge of capturing the attention of TikTok users, who use the platform mainly for entertainment, where personalities have a greater weight and interest than traditional news. This contrasts with other networks, such as Twitter.

When it comes to news, audiences report paying more attention to celebrities, influencers and social media personalities than to journalists on networks such as TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat. This is in stark contrast to Facebook and Twitter, where media



and journalists remain central to the conversation (Newman *et al.*, 2023, p. 10).)

The rise of the platform among young audiences has attracted the attention of the press, which “seeks its place in this emerging platform”(Sidorenko and Herranz, 2020, n.p.). Its content is being adapted by renewing its language. Furthermore, Negreira-Rey *et al.* (2022) point out that the media have realized that TikTok is not a watertight information space and that audiences can be transferred from it to other platforms to expand journalistic content, opening up even more avenues for development. Thus, given the wide range of offerings, the audience and influence that can be generated by any one medium are diluted. For this reason, Brems *et al.* (2017) emphasize that one of the main goals of media is to produce a personal brand to achieve greater visibility and attract new audiences (Newman *et al.*, 2023, p. 10).

## 2.1. MEDIA PRESENCE IN TIKTOK IN SPAIN

In 2022, for the first time and according to the Association for Media Research (AIMC), television is no longer the medium with the highest consumption. It has shifted to the Internet: 84.3% of the population consumes the Internet, compared to 83.3% for television (Vara *et al.* 2023). This figure confirms the trend of the last few years, which foreshadowed this fact. Social networks are one step behind, but they have already surpassed radio and the traditional press. This is also the case for news, even though:

Trust in the news has declined, across all markets by 2 percentage points in the past year, reversing gains made at

the height of the coronavirus pandemic in many countries. On average, four in ten people in our total sample (40%) say they trust the news most of the time (Newman *et al.*, 2023, p. 11).

In the specific case of Spain, “trust in the news remains at its lowest level since 2015” (Negredo *et al.*, 2021, p. 102).

With a loss of trust most evident in the political polarization expressed in social media posts, the media hope to see TikTok as a new way to engage audiences and gain greater impact. Here:

They embrace the more participatory, enjoyable and personalized options offered through platforms, often looking beyond legacy platforms to new entrants (many of whom generate few references to news and do not prioritize news) (Newman *et al.*, 2023, p. 11).

In fact, most of the media that have made the leap to TikTok in search of a new audience have gained a remarkable number of followers. This social network enjoys great media appeal because, as Sabin-Darget (2022) points out, Spain had 8.8 million monthly active users on TikTok in 2021.

## 3. RESEARCH

This article presents the results of research carried out in the first half of 2022, consisting of a comparative analysis of the content available on the social network TikTok by the main Spanish media. Due to the spatial limitation of this publication and the interest in the results, this article includes the data related to the activity on TikTok of the main generalist print media,

leaving the rest of the media spectrum for subsequent publications.

### 3.1. RESEARCH GOALS

- To describe the communicative activity in the field of information in the social network TikTok of the main Spanish print media.
- To evaluate the interaction of the public with the publications of the main Spanish print media on TikTok.
- To analyze the production strategies of specific content for TikTok according to the technical characteristics of this channel.

### 3.2. HYPOTHESIS

The purpose of the research is to verify the following hypotheses:

H1: The professional use of TikTok accounts by the main Spanish print media is still insignificant and hardly professionalized.

H2: The professional use of TikTok accounts by the main Spanish print media does not adopt publication dynamics driven by the parameters of traditional media editorial activity such as periodicity, thematic organization, or content coherence.

H3: The activity of the TikTok accounts of Spanish print media is not perceived as a strategy that can be defined as developed from the peculiarities of the social network, but rather as a reuse and/or adaptation of already produced material.

### 3.3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study is based on a comparative analysis of the activity carried out

on the TikTok social network by the most traditional Spanish generalist press media. These are: *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia*, *ABC* and *La Razón*.

For this analysis, a quantitative methodology will be utilized to compare various media platforms. The focus will be on the number of followers, frequency of content publication, and engagement metrics such as views, likes, comments, shares, and saves. A sample of ten Tiktoks was randomly selected for this research. The data collected will be used to create a comparative analysis of each media platform using the same list of variables.

This study's sampling period was from June 1 to June 25, 2022. During this time, it was confirmed that all the Spanish generalist press outlets had active profiles on TikTok and consistently posted content. The ten Tiktoks from each media outlet included in the analysis were randomly selected using a simple random sampling tool provided by the WinEpi website.

The formal appearance of the selected tiktoks can be seen in the images in Annex I and can be viewed in the media profiles:

*EL PAÍS*: <https://www.tiktok.com/@elpais>

*EL MUNDO*: <https://www.tiktok.com/@elmundo.es?lang=es>

*LA VANGUARDIA*: <https://www.tiktok.com/@lavanguardia?lang=es>

*ABC*: <https://www.tiktok.com/@abc.es?lang=es>

*LA RAZÓN*: <https://www.tiktok.com/@larazon.es?lang=es>

### 3.4. RESULTS

To present the results, three analyses have been established: the frequency of publication, the productive typology, and the interactions of the users of the profile.

#### 3.4.1 FREQUENCY OF PUBLICATION

*El País* is the Spanish generalist newspaper with the most daily readers, according to the first wave of EGM 2022. However, it is no longer the most relevant medium in TikTok. *El Mundo* has taken the lead by publishing the most content in the first half of the year, with a total of 255 posts. *La Razón* comes in second with 124 posts, followed by *El País* with 73, *La Vanguardia* with 63, and ABC with 48. In any case, these data must be treated with particular caution, since *La Vanguardia* started its activity in February 2022, *La Razón* in mid-April and ABC only started publishing on 6 June of the same year. Based on Table 1, ABC had the third-highest number of publications in June, despite joining TikTok that same month.

The newspaper *El País*, launched on TikTok on 11 November 2021, has a community of 25,100 followers. In terms of volume and frequency of publication, it can be seen that they do not have a strict criterion of frequency or volume of publications per month. As for the number of videos published, between January and June 2022, *El País* published an average of 11 videos per month. This number gradually increased until reaching a peak in June: 18 videos. During this period, they regularly published tiktoks. Two videos were the maximum amount of content uploaded in one day, and there were never more than five days between one publication and another.

*El Mundo*, which opened its profile on TikTok on 14 May 2021, had 311,000 followers by June 2022. The number of posts per month made by *El Mundo* between January and June 2022 was 255. The volume of publications is regular and can be considered high. So much so that they publish at least one tiktok every day, and even three videos a day on certain occasions. Such a large number of publications, as well as having been the first general press to have created a TikTok account, make *El Mundo* the Spanish written media with the most followers on the Chinese social network, with more than

**Table 1**

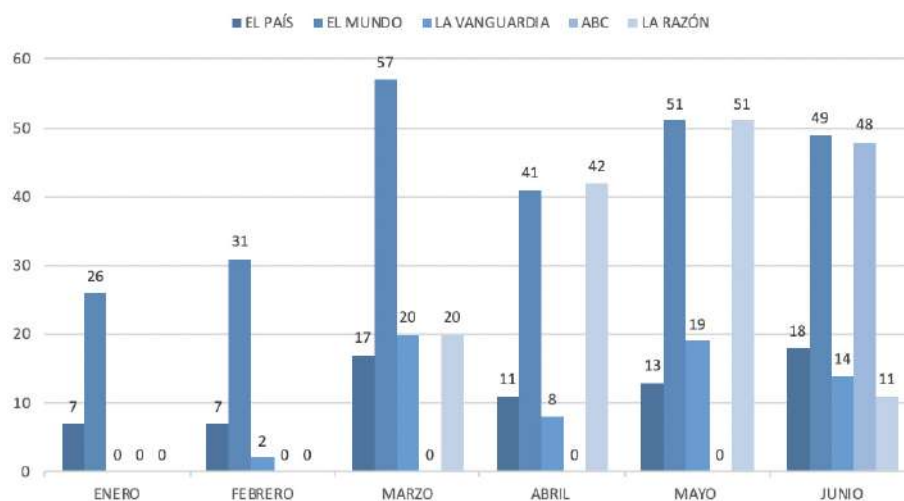
*Frequency of Publication*

Frequency of Publication							
	Ene-ro	Febre-ro	Mar-zo	Abril	Mayo	Ju-nio	To-tal
El país	7	7	17	11	13	18	73
El mun-do	26	31	57	41	51	49	255
La van-guardia	NO	2	20	8	19	14	63
ABC	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	48	48
La razón	NO	NO	20	42	51	11	124

*Note: Own preparation*

**Figure 1**

*Frequency of Publication*



*Note: Own preparation*

280,000 users in comparison to the second, *El País*.

*La Vanguardia* has 15,300 followers on TikTok and made the leap to this social network on 25 February 2022, which is why there is no data available for publications in January and only two in February. During the period it has been on the platforms, 63 tiktoks have been published. If we select only the full months that the newspaper has been present on the Asian social network, we obtain an average of fifteen per month. In terms of frequency, *La Vanguardia* does not create content daily; indeed, on many days of the month there is no new content, but they do ensure a minimum of four publications per week. It should also be noted that the maximum number of publications in a single day was two and the maximum time elapsed between one video and another was four days.

The newspaper that took the longest to get on TikTok is ABC. It did so on 6 June 2022, and in less than a month it gained 2,721 followers and published 48 videos, a very significant number that is only surpassed by *El Mundo*, which has

the most followers and has been on the platform the longest. There is not enough data to determine the average number of monthly publications, but we can use the figures from June to assess the frequency and amount of content ABC published on TikTok. On 13 June, six videos were posted, the most ever in a single day. On the other hand, the longest period without a post was six days.

*La Razón* began its presence on TikTok on 17 March 2022 and by June of the same year, it already had 2859 followers. Since it started its journey on the social network in mid-March, the analysis of periodicity and the average number of monthly publications is less extensive than in some other cases, as there are only two full months (April and May) in which *La Razón's* activity on TikTok was observed. In terms of periodicity, *La Razón* published eleven tiktoks in June, with a maximum of two uploaded on a single day. The longest period between publications was three days.

### 3.4.2. TYPE OF PUBLICATION ACCORDING TO PRODUCTION ORIGIN

Now, we need to examine whether the content of the articles was produced by taking advantage of the first natural production of the medium, the article in the printed press. The aim is to analyze whether an entry in TikTok is produced based on this journalistic piece. On the other hand, there is the possibility that an ad hoc piece has been produced, considering the peculiarities of the medium.

To differentiate between these entries and compose this table, ad hoc entries are considered to be those in which, either explicitly or with the introduction of a presenter both on- or off-air, new content is generated that cannot be consumed in another medium, such as print or digital derivative. Recycled content, on the other hand, is content that comes from a piece that has already been published in one of the editorial manifestations of the medium.

**Table 2**

*Type of Content according to its productive origin*

Tipo de contenido en función de su origen productivo			
	Reciclados	AD-HOC	Nº de los Tiktoks AD-HOC
El país	8	2	2 y 7
El mundo	7	3	1, 5 y 8
La vanguardia	7	3	1, 5 y 10
ABC	5	5	1,2,6,9 y 10
La razón	6	4	5,6,7 y 9

*Note: Own preparation*

### 3.4.3. INTERACTIONS

The following sections present the results of the principal forms of interaction with the platform: views, likes, saves, shares, and comments. The complete table with all the data on these usage actions can be found in Annex II.

In a first evaluation, Table 3 shows that the newspaper *El Mundo* is in first place in terms of the number of views, likes, and times its videos have been saved. The second most viewed newspaper is ABC, which is also the medium with the most comments and the most times a video has been shared, but it comes fifth in terms of times a video has been saved and liked. In terms of views, *La Vanguardia* is in third place. It is followed by *El País* and lastly by *La Razón*.

**Table 3**

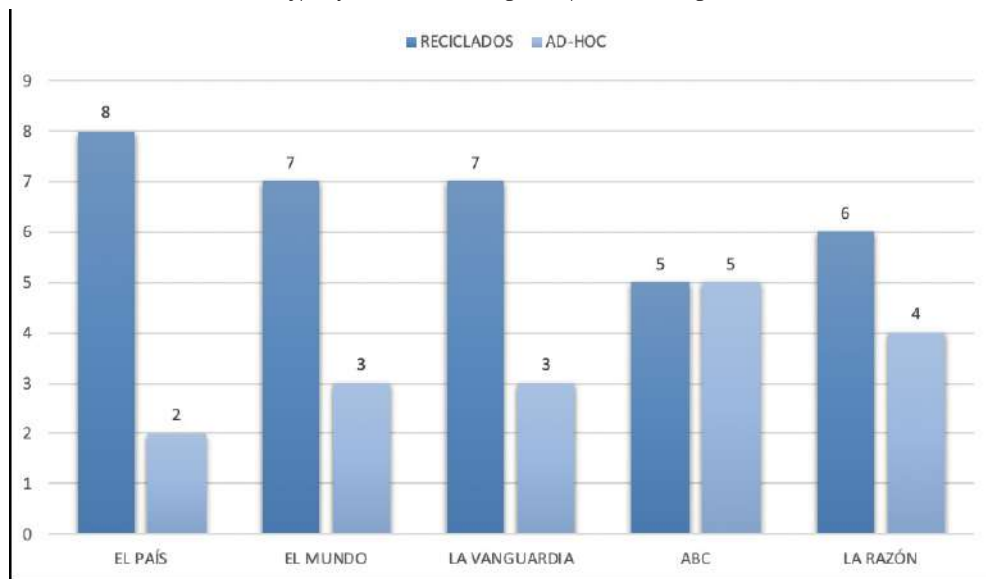
*Summary of interactions*

Frecuencia de Publicación					
	Visualizaciones/1000	Me gusta /100	Comentarios	Guardado /10	Compartido /10
El país	1.114	388	2.158	193	134
El mundo	1.831	1.184	2.119	423	213
La vanguardia	1.134	760	1.377	255	218
ABC	1.170	299	2.488	135	413
La razón	90	22	5	8,5	14,8

*Note: Own preparation*

**Figure 2**

*Type of Content according to its productive origin*



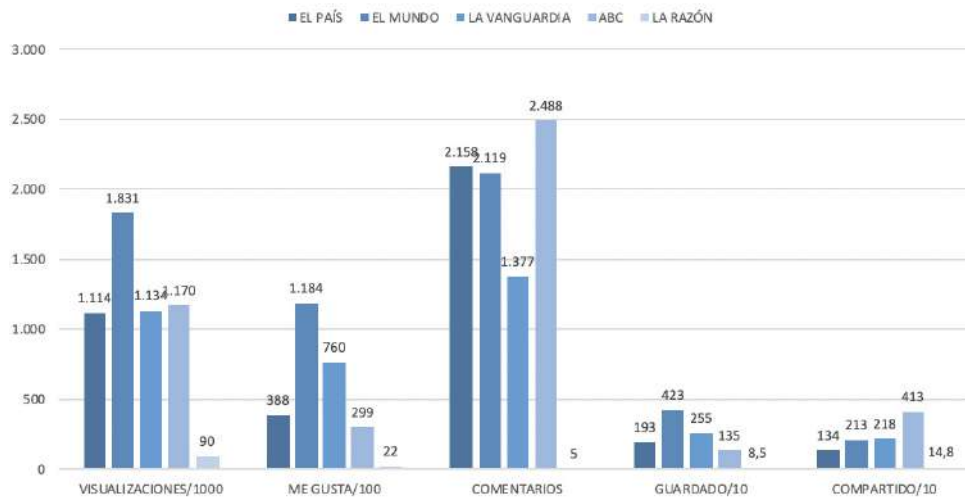
*Note: Own preparation*

In terms of the number of likes, *La Vanguardia* is in second place, followed by *El País*, *ABC*, and *La Razón*. From highest to lowest number of comments, after *ABC* in first place, *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia*, and lastly *La Razón*, with only five comments in a total of ten publications.

Furthermore, *La Razón* once again stands out for the low number of times its tiktoks are saved and shared. It is, without a doubt, the newspaper with the worst data in the analysis carried out, without exception in any of the metrics observed.

**Figure 3**

*Summary of interactions*



*Note: Own preparation*

The ranking of the number of times a publication has been saved is completed by *La Vanguardia* in second place, *El País* in third place, and ABC in fourth place, with *El Mundo* in second place and *La Razón* in fourth place.

To conclude the analysis of this table, we can once again observe the huge difference between *La Razón* and the rest of its competitors. The next worst is *El País*, with almost 1,200 more shares of its content. ABC, *La Vanguardia*, *El Mundo*, and *El País* are the best in this order.

### 3.4.3.1. NUMBER OF VIEWS

The first interaction is the most important. It is the number of times the video was played both in the “for you” section and in the “following” section. This interaction is the one most valued by most of the media themselves, as it comes closest to the usual audience figures of print editions such as the OJD or EGM.

**Figure 4**

*Number of views*



*Note: Own preparation*

The data in this category indicates that the media outlet with the most followers on TikTok is *El Mundo* newspaper, which has been on the platform the longest.

It is striking that the ABC newspaper, which had been active on the platform for less than a month at the time of this research, has already managed to position some of its videos at very high insertion levels in users' profiles; specifically, the number of views of the records analyzed reached 1,170,411. This is more than newspapers such as *El País* or *La Vanguardia*, which have a longer history on the platform. Moreover, this account does not feature a specific video, as in other newspapers, but rather a much more proportionate viewing than other newspapers.

Similarly, there is a wide dispersion of results (see Annex II for details), even among the newspapers themselves, with significant cases such as *El País*, whose maximum number of views is close to one million users, as it is about statements made by the President of the Government, Pedro Sánchez, and the minimum, which barely reaches 800 views and shows an unremarkable event in the United States. The same variations are repeated in all the media, where very high and inconsequential values are reached with the same frequency, except in the aforementioned case of ABC, which has a more homogeneous behavior.

### 3.4.3.2. NUMBER OF LIKES

The second category to be evaluated has to do with the approval of the content by the user, who reacts to the content by clicking on the icon available for this action on the screen.

It is an action that is highly valued by the media, as it shows 'the line to follow'. In a context as unstructured and unruly as TikTok, getting the content creation right is a very relevant source

**Figura 5**

Número de "Me gusta"



Note: Own preparation

of information when it comes to producing new posts.

The newspaper with the best results in this category is undoubtedly *El Mundo*, with 118,448 Likes for the ten articles analyzed, a very high average not only in terms of attention but also in terms of acceptance, well ahead of the rest of its competitors. Only *La Vanguardia* had more than fifty thousand likes.

Once again, it is striking that the ABC newspaper, with less than a month's presence on TikTok at the time of this analysis, has already achieved such relevant results in this category. Looking at the best-positioned tiktok of this newspaper, political topics again appear as the content of this newspaper. In this case, the tiktok with the most likes on ABC, 9387, corresponds to a video of a citizen insulting the president of the government.

### 3.4.3.3. NUMBER OF COMMENTS

A second, more engaged level of interaction has to do with the ability to get users not only to view or approve content but also to add to it, thereby extending the reach of the platform. If a user leaves a comment, they can be considered an attentive subject in the sense that they



are spending some time with the publication and are therefore of interest to the medium's business strategies.

**Figure 6**

*Number of comments*



*Note: Own preparation*

On this occasion, there are three media outlets that, proportionally, manage to exceed two thousand comments on the selected sample of TikTok entries. Two of these media, *El País* and *El Mundo*, consolidate this stable trajectory in the social network; the other, *ABC*, is positioned as a benchmark in this category; in fact, it is the one that receives the most comments and, therefore, generates the most social conversation.

Only two entries have more than a thousand comments. The first one is the *El País* entry, which has almost a million views and contains statements made by Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez. This entry has 2,035 comments. The second entry is from *El Mundo*, and it has 1,088 comments. This particular entry belongs to a special section of the newspaper that provides English advice and asks viewers a question, explaining why it has so many comments.

On the other hand, in the newspaper *La Razón*, only tiktok nº 3, nº 5, and nº 9 receive comments. This interaction causes the remaining selected entries to become orphaned.

### 3.4.3.4. NUMBER OF TIMES SAVED

To assess the quality and interest of a post or entry not only in TikTok but in any social network, it is considered a good indicator that the subject saves it in the spaces provided for this purpose in the interface of the social network itself, either to consume it at another time when it may have better reception conditions, or because they consider it useful for the near future, or because they want to save it as content to show to their social circle.

**Figure 7**

*Number of times saved*



*Note: Own preparation*

The circumstances of the previous categories are repeated, with *El Mundo* as the leader in this section, doubling the intensity of this interaction with its main competitor, *El País*. *La Razón*, which uses this platform the least, achieves insignificant results due to low activity.

Two entries achieve very high results. Specifically, video no. 7 from *La Vanguardia*, in which a famous singer, Manu Carrasco, surprises a teenage girl suffering from cancer at a concert. This video has garnered 2014 interactions. Another video with a lot of users who decided to save it is an impressive action scene between a primate in captivity and a visitor to the facilities. This video posted by *El Mundo* has been saved 1761 times.

### 3.4.3.5. NUMBER OF TIMES SHARED

One interaction that is highly desired by both the media and users is the viral spread of content. When an individual's message is shared voluntarily and spontaneously by others, it indicates that the content has something unique that has resonated with people. These dynamics should be considered when producing future posts.

**Figure 8**

*Number of times shared*



*Note: Own preparation*

In this sub-dimension, the ABC newspaper stands out above all others, and despite its short life on the web, it has been able to attract a very active number of followers, who accept, comment on, and share the media's content proposals.

One content, shared 1,981 times, stands out above all others, which once again alludes to political issues and once again involves the President of the Government, Pedro Sánchez, in its argument. It is a video of a pensioner who accuses him of neglecting the *Sierra de la Culebra* region of *Zamora* following the fires of 2022.

Finally, it should be noted that interesting content has the potential to go viral and be shared. On the other hand, if the content lacks interest, the response to it will be very limited or non-ex-

istent. This is the case for almost half of the 50 items analyzed, 23 to be precise, which received fewer than ten comments from users. Thirteen items received zero comments, indicating that there is content that is not relevant to the social network and lacks engagement.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

In terms of the analysis of the three hypotheses formulated at the beginning of the study, the data obtained are as follows.

On the one hand, in response to the first hypothesis (H1), regarding the initial idea that the use of TikTok by the main print media in Spain is insignificant, their activity is not as scarce as it might seem, as a result of the initial lack of knowledge that was assumed to exist about these networks, due to the widespread idea that only the younger public uses TikTok.

Although it might seem narrower, data such as the number of views in which all media (except for *La Razón*) exceed one million views altogether, only counting the ten entries analyzed, suggest a similar activity to that of reference media such as USA Today, *La Nación* or Dallas Morning News, all of them similar proposals of printed newspapers that adapt their content to TikTok.

However, the number of views on this social network should be put into perspective, since just appearing in a browsing session, regardless of whether it was maintained long enough to be received, counts as one more interaction. Moreover, these figures are insignificant compared to most of the massive ad hoc journalistic media accounts such as Ac2allity, which often exceeds one million views for each of its posts.

After examining the data, the second hypothesis (H2) appears to have more validity. This is

because there isn't any clear evidence to suggest that there is a strategic editorial agenda at play. Instead, it appears that most media outlets are experimenting with different approaches to see what works, without any predetermined logic. With the exception of serialized content like *La Razón's* "Reasonable Questions," the content of TikToks from other newspapers appears to be random, arbitrary, and lacking in context. There is no macro-discourse with a clear preceding and following, both visually and formally. These dynamics are largely extended from the successful accounts on this social network.

Finally, the third hypothesis (H3), which complements the second, is confirmed in the sense that the production of tiktoks is poorly adapted to the formal and technological premises of the network. Most of the entries analyzed are constructed by collecting content already published on nearby dates in any of the newspaper's media, whether in print or digital format.

In this sense, as with other emerging media and formats, the idea of recycling content and doubling its profitability is a very common dynamic. The cross-media strategy (Erdal, 2009) usually ends up reducing the communicative effectiveness of the project in a unique and complete way.

In short, even though there is more activity on TikTok by the main Spanish print media than expected a priori, this activity is not relevant in terms of communicative effectiveness. It suggests that the medium has not been independently analyzed in depth, but is seen as just another container in which to dump content that has already been produced. This means that these publications are not connected and therefore do not provide a permanent dis-

course with the user, which is one of the most valued assets of this channel.

Similarly, there is a possible idea of getting involved in this network with objectives other than the main objective of the medium, which is information. The type of content that is posted, which sometimes violates delicate boundaries such as clickbait, could indicate that the intention is to achieve high audience figures to substantiate advertising sales arguments.

Finally, on the basis of the research and conclusions, two lines of debate can be identified:

a) Should all media outlets be present on all social media?

It is a fairly widespread idea that it is appropriate to be present on as many social networks as possible in order to be known by all kinds of audiences, especially the younger ones. The concept is to keep individuals informed about current events, even if they may not currently have a need for the information. The hope is that in a few years, when the need arises, the name of the newspaper will be on the top of their mind and they will be more likely to engage with the medium.

In the opinion of the researchers in this study, although this perception is interesting as a behaviorist scheme, the media should bear in mind that the trend of technological evolution, as it is complying with the dictates of Moore's Law, has entered into an exponential process that will not facilitate these dynamics, but rather the opposite. Being in all the networks today is a possible process, but if it is desired as part of consolidated projects and seeking communicative efficiency in each of them, it will generate an effort proportional to the technological advance.

b) In connection with this, should the medium re-use content already produced, or should it produce ad-hoc content for a social network such as TikTok?

Logic seems to go hand in hand with customized production. The logic of TikTok, from its recommendation algorithm to its “non-standards” of design, composition, editing, etc.,

make this medium a cosmos as eclectic as it is entertaining in which, after analyzing numerous accounts, it is perceived that unwritten rules such as capturing interest in the first three seconds (Sidorenko, 2022) or constancy in format, language, tone (McArená, 2022) are essential to the success of these messages.

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# Fake News: propagation and communities, how are they related?

***Fake News: propagação y comunidades, ¿Cuál es su relación?***

9

ARTICLE



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## Abstract:

The present study investigates the growing role of fake news in digital communities and the potential impact resulting from its rapid spread. To achieve this, netnographic methodology was utilized along with lurking observation, the latter to preserve the integrity of participants. Data collection focused on two politically similar groups with open access on WhatsApp, whose data provided a deep understanding of fake news and its influence on decision-making, as well as possible reasons for its easy and rapid spread through the internet.

**Keywords:** fake news, digital communities, impact, netnographic methodology, lurking observation, social communication.

## Resumen:

El presente estudio investiga el creciente papel de las *fake news* en las comunidades digitales y el posible impacto resultado de su rápida propagación. Para ello, se usó la metodología netnográfica, junto con la observación *lurking*. Esta última se usó para preservar la integridad de los participantes. La recopilación de datos se enfocó en dos grupos políticos de ideologías similares con libre acceso en WhatsApp. Dichos datos permitieron una comprensión más detallada sobre la influencia de las *fake news* en la toma de decisiones, además de las posibles razones de su fácil y rápida propagación por internet.

**Palabras clave:** *fake news*, comunidades digitales, impacto, metodología netnográfica, observación *lurking*, comunicación social.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2017, the term fake news was the most searched word in browsers. This creates a new insight into their remarkable growth; they are up to 70% faster to disseminate than real news (Vosoughi *et al.*, 2018).

Brazil is one of the countries where such fake news is highly accepted and widespread. It is estimated that 9 out of 10 people have already received at least one fake news story through a social network and that more than half of these users have contributed to its dissemination.

In 2018, Brazil was going through a period of presidential elections. In this year, according to reports presented by the cybercrime laboratory PSafe (2018), there was a significant increase in the dissemination of fake news. Social networks (mainly Facebook and WhatsApp) were the main tools used to achieve the reach observed in this type of news.

To understand the spread of fake news by users and the role of social capital in the exchange of information, the social network WhatsApp was chosen as the main source for collecting data.

### 1.1. POST-TRUTH ERA: CURRENT AFFAIRS AND CONCEPTS

Post-truth and fake news stem from the fluid communication conditions in the globalized world and how these conditions have disrupted the concepts of what is true and what is a lie (Waisbord, 2018). Borges Junior (2019) defines post-truth as a clash between a) objective and variable facts and b) individual emotions in the form of beliefs.

According to Nietzsche (1873), the truth never mattered; people in earlier centuries feared the act of lying and internalized it in the form

of shame or kept it a secret. Nowadays, on the contrary, lies have gained a very important role in society, since they are mainly used to influence others through factors such as persuasion of an idea. Some justification is sought to transform them into something true (Keyes, 2004). This is a behavior that, according to Nietzsche (1873), would amount to dissimulation, a characteristic very representative of the post-truth era (Keyes, 2004).

Within the existentialist current, authors such as Nietzsche (1873) and Kierkegaard (1968) conceptualize truth as a construction of the human intellect, indispensable for shaping a sense of morality and ethics in society, which can be represented almost entirely through communication. Nevertheless, some individuals prefer to escape from any feature that represents truth to live their reality.

The formation of different identities, each with its unique perspective on the world, can divide society and lead to the creation of simulated groups (Deleuze, 2006). These groups can be very accurate representations of reality, even though they exist in a fictional context. This process of exclusion from the world around them can give the impression that their reality is the only true one (Baudrillard, 1991).

Post-truth as an abstract concept is proportional to a simulacrum that arguably has always existed. This is based on the ideas of Keyes (2004) and Nietzsche (1873). They suggest that the manipulation of information and creation of imaginary scenarios are not new developments, but rather have been around for some time. This idea is further strengthened by advancements in technology and communication, which have enabled individuals to engage with the online community.

## 1.2. FAKE NEWS

In more recent literature, fake news has been the subject of constant discussion and is commonly associated with post-truth (Waisbord, 2018; Borges Junior, 2019) and with political and partisan processes (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Pennycook & Rand, 2018; Tandoc *et al.*, 2018). However, authors such as Zhou and Zafarani (2020) reject that the phenomenon of fake news poses a threat to democratic society.

Fake news is information manipulated to be shared on social networks (Pennycook & Rand, 2018). They have a structure mainly focused on attracting the attention of individuals, which generates, almost always in an accidental way, a diffusion of the same (Netto & Peruyera, 2018).

According to these authors, fake news is seen as a current expression to name old practices of manufacturing news without verifying reality. They have an obvious objective: to deceive the reader (Netto & Peruyera, 2018). This purpose can be seen in the credibility, visibility, and veracity that media communication can give to content (Bakir & McStay, 2018).

Fake news generated directly by journalists or related media is only one of the theories. The other possible source of fake news is related to user-generated content (UGC) in the form of user-related theories. In these spaces, users post, share, like, and comment on their like-minded ideas (Zhou & Zafarani, 2020).

Scholars believe that the term fake news is currently being misused and has been reduced almost entirely to aggressions and defamations towards other people. As a result, it has become a much more serious problem (Netto & Peruyera, 2018).

In this regard, Genesini (2018) believes that: just as fake news has always existed, so have

interactions and changes between individuals defending their beliefs and interests. This could change the fact that nowadays the influence of online platforms has radically changed the dissemination and creation of information that, for very different reasons and almost always without explanation, goes viral and increases its audience from one moment to the next in an exorbitant way.

The literature on fake news has revealed concerns about the dissemination methods of fake news. Fake news has content that is usually more eye-catching and easier to understand than authentic news. It manages to stimulate certain senses in the reader (hearing, sight and even touch) to achieve its goal, which is to deceive the reader (Alves, 2018; Genesini, 2018; Netto & Peruyera, 2018).

Contrary to some literature findings, Pennycook and Rand (2018) argue that believing disinformation or lies is not linked to political bias, but rather to a lack of critical thinking. The authors argue that the internet has overtaken this and agree that, although fake news has been around for a long time, its spreading has become more alarming and rapid due to mass access to the internet.

Within the realm of internet disinformation, fake news is just one category, alongside rumors and clickbait (the use of sensationalist messages to attract attention), and social spam (unwanted promotional content) (Bondielli & Marcelloni, 2019).

Wardle (2017) lists the possible categories of fake news as follows: a) mockery or parody; b) misleading content; c) fraudulent content; d) fabricated content; e) false connection; f) false background; g) manipulated content. This can be seen depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Categorical display of the types of fake news*



Note: Image created by the authors based on Fake News. It's complicated, by Wardle, 2017.

Within fake news, credibility is considered one of the most important characteristics (Quirós, 2017). This can be acquired through factors such as the speed of information sharing. This element can be both essential for the construction of an identity and the acquisition of values in simulacra and a determinant for truth to be of much lesser importance. Thus, truth becomes less relevant (Alves, 2018).

Following this line, Bondielli and Marcelloni (2019) offer a classification of other types of disinformation on the internet, including mocking and humorous content, manipulated content, or rumors, as represented by Wardle (2017). To these, we can add those depicted in Figure 2 as other extensions of disinformation.

**Figure 2**

*Categories of disinformation on the web.*

*A. Bondielli, & F. Marcelloni (2019), Information Sciences [Ciencias de la información] 497(38-55).*



Note: Authors' translation. Adapted from A survey on fake news and rumor detection techniques (p. 41), by A. Bondielli and F. Marcelloni, 2019, Information Sciences, 497.

Another phenomenon is deepfakes, which are highly realistic audiovisual material that manipulates the image of a figure to make them appear to be saying something they have not said. However, it poses some risks regarding altered speeches of public figures, which can potentially interfere with elections and the security of users (Westerlund, 2019).

Fake news has found itself in the post-truth era with a landscape of segregation, where what is different is ignored and belittled (Deleuze, 2006). With very diverse origins (Alves, 2018), fake news can be liked or disliked by the public; due to the wide range of interactions they can generate, they usually make this process fast and uncontrolled (Genesini, 2018). This allows algorithms to better understand people's preferences and facilitates the development of digital simulations and connections between users through algorithms.

Westerlund (2019) argues that the most widely adopted avenues in the literature to combat the spread of fake news are state regulation, private governance, and voluntary action. However, it is important to note that given the scale

and prevalence of fake news, it is unlikely that the phenomenon can be eliminated, although it is likely to be drastically reduced (Bakir & McStay, 2018). One of the main reasons for this problem is that fake news is usually the product of virtual communities (Zhou & Zafarani, 2020); therefore, these are communities made up of individuals whose behaviors that generate fake news cannot be fully controlled.

### 1.3. ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Before the popularization of technology that enabled new forms of social relations, a community was understood as an association of people with high social interactions based on common interests and values acquired from everyday conceived relationships. However, they depended on the same territorial location and consisted of small groups.

With the advent of communication and information technology, this term may have had some variations, specifically in the characteristics that delimit communities to a particular

place. This has, as a consequence, the beginnings of deterritorialization (Thompson, 2001).

Virtual communities are online (digital) spaces where interpersonal exchanges and relationships take place. Thus, an environment for the generation of social value in the form of capital emerges (Faucher, 2018).

For Agostini and Mechant (2019), such communities are seen as a grouping of individuals or companies that promote social relations with a common interest. Within this space, interactions are conducted through a common language and a set of agreed protocols.

As Rodrigues (2023) notes, the absence of barriers to entry to the Internet opened the door to creating inclusive connections. According to Putnam (2000), this occurred in several ways: a) bridging (weaker but more diverse connections and ties, in the form of dissemination of information and data); or b) bonding (exclusive, with stronger and more intimate ties, more homogeneous in terms of group opinions due to the high degree of shared experiences and identities). The system operates on the logic that weaker ties allow for more diverse relationships with other individuals (Mishra, 2020).

Samuel (2018) points to the social network WhatsApp as a tool that revolves around these connections. These connections are good for sharing interests, keeping in touch with others, and engaging in discussions and debates.

Peck (1987) describes eight categories for the design and development of communities and the involvement of their members: (i) inclusion, compromise and agreement; (ii) realism (a plurality of views); (iii) deliberation (decisions are made unanimously and collectively); (iv) a safe place (trust); (v) a social deconstruction laboratory (a socially supportive environment prone to exploring new forms of behavior); (vi) a group

capable of 'fighting back' (support in conflict resolution); (vii) a group of leaders (all are leaders in decision making); (viii) a spirit (a sense of belonging to a community or group).

The metamorphosis of space and place brought about by the advent of technology has led to a debate about the true meaning of space on the internet. Tools such as WhatsApp can bring communities together and give the concept of space a completely different meaning (Samuel, 2018).

McLuhan (1964) suggests a link between this process of deterritorialization and the emergence of alternative means of transport and communication. According to the author, this technological development has made it possible for people to communicate with greater ease and almost everywhere. The original meaning of community is thus restored.

All these changes are thought to be responsible for the emergence of the new term virtual communities. Rheingold (1993) refers to them as social aggregations created by a specific group of people who manage to form personal relationships in cyberspace. This is because they hold public discussions with human sentiments at a given time.

To complement this idea, Baudrillard (1991) asserted that the emergence of new technologies, virtual communities, and cyberspace would result in the disappearance of a sense of reality or participation in society.

On the contrary, Lemos (2002) refers to this type of community as groups that form around shared interests, regardless of borders or specific territorial limits. Following this line, Agostini and Mechant (2019) affirm that virtual communities begin in an a priori way, from an imaginary process in which individuals project them-



selves in an immaterial way as a grouping of individuals.

There are also great thinkers, such as Primo (2000), Wellman and Gulia (2000), who defend the idea that cyberspace and the emergence of the Internet have been able to create environments where society can develop in different ways, creating richer connections than communities limited to one place.

These communities, stemming from technological advances, specifically in the fields of information and communication, made it possible to create new formats for the content found on these networks.

All this progress ended up shaping the creation of its content, converging with traditional formats (Jenkins, 2008). The content created and shared (interactions) with and towards users represents a form of influence on decision-making and the perception of trust (Terra, 2010).

The generation of content by users (UGC, photos, videos and audio) is a key factor in the propagation of fake news, according to the theory of user-generated fake news (Zhou and Zafarani, 2020). In virtual communities, members play an active role as co-creators within the structures of WEB 2.0 (Maffie, 2020).

Although virtual communities do not have a physical space and do not depend on such strong ties, they still have some characteristics of unity. This makes it possible to classify them into three broad groups (Recuero, 2009).

Emerging communities are based on mutual social relations (Primo, 2000). They have an axis made up of users who are more closely connected through strong ties (intimacy, trust, and/or emotion), and in their periphery, they have "nodes" that are either not developed and routed to the axis or are disconnected from it.

On the other hand, association or affiliation communities are characterized by relatively low levels of interaction. Their most significant characteristic has to do with reactive social interactions (Primo, 2000), formed by clusters internally linked by common interests. They are held together by their group affiliations, without the need for actual interactions (Recuero, 2012).

Hybrid communities have characteristics of the two communities mentioned above, the only difference being that within them there is an 'actor' and around them, emerging communities are formed, which may also be linked to different communities with some common interest. This makes the nodes interconnected in order to achieve an exchange of information between each of them (Recuero, 2012).

## **1.4. SOCIAL CAPITAL**

The relationships between individuals that are present in the clusters of communities are part of a very specific type of capital: social capital. Faucher (2018) considers social capital as an asset resulting from social relationships and the maintenance of their connections from the following perspectives: a) as a product of online exchanges, which may or may not be linked to a specific network community; or b) in the case of a network owner or leader, the work of users can be used as data and then converted into profit.

Interaction between members of a network or a group is related to performance. To perform is to show someone something you know or think you know, which causes an influence on them due to a combination of action, socialization, and/or observational behaviors (Schechner, 2003).

Based on the idea of virtual communities introduced by Agostini and Mechant (2019), research on social capital suggests that it has a

positive impact on network performance. This is mainly due to the exchange of knowledge and experiences, as outlined by Swan et al. (2020). How the forms and resources of social capital are used depends largely on the composition and characteristics of the members of a network or community (Mishra, 2020).

Although social capital outcomes are often related to economic outcomes, there are still interesting parallels with non-explicitly economic outcomes. For example, trust is an attribute closely linked to social capital (Rodrigues, 2023). Results indicate that, in an interconnected network, cooperation and trust are related to group performance (Salume, Guimarães & Rantisi, 2019). This can also be used for community relations.

Through the social capital that comes from the interactions between users, the relationship of trust, a network value, occurs (Terra, 2010). This is related to the viral content that arises, according to O'Connor (2008), from blind belief, appreciation, and trust.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The process for conducting this research began with a literature review of scientific articles published in journals. An attempt was made to select the most recent and relevant works on the topics studied (Thomas, 2021). In the case of this study, bibliographic materials on fake news and social capital were consulted.

To collect and analyze the data, the netnographic method was used, which is based on lurking observation (passive observation); that is, the researcher participates as a covert spectator in an online community to observe practices, interactions, and conversations. This facilitates entry into and engagement with the social group under study (O'Leary, 2021).

Netnography, for this context, corresponds to a traditional ethnographic extension, where researchers enter a digital and online community, going through the stages of immersion in that group, collection, reflection of observation, and communication of qualitative findings and phenomena (Kozinets, 2019).

To apply these methodologies, creating a person to facilitate access to the groups neutrally was necessary. He was given the name Ricardo (one of the most registered names in the 70s and 80s) dos Santos (one of the most common surnames in Brazil), and his profile picture was taken from a freely accessible image bank. A telephone chip was acquired exclusively for this investigation.

As proposed in the netnographic methodology, pseudonyms were used for each of the members of the communities. This was done to protect the privacy and integrity of each of the people involved (Maddox, 2021).

After integrating our fictitious person, managed by one of the authors, into the selected WhatsApp groups, data collection was initiated directly from the source to describe the social interactions generated by the different content generated by users associated with these groups.

## 3. RESULTS

There were some difficulties in finding and obtaining groups from which to extract the data needed for this research, particularly left-leaning groups. Nevertheless, it is strongly argued that working with groups with relatively similar ideologies and characteristics was one of the factors that led to a better understanding of the spread of fake news and its behavior within different groups and simulacra.



As this is a netnographic research, it is worth noting that many of the situations that are presented below may have occurred during the period of observation of the communities but tend to be explained separately as they contain different characteristics but are relevant to the specific themes of the present study. The images, originally in Portuguese, have been translated into Spanish.

### 3.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMUNITIES

The groups used for the research are available on internet sites and are searched by people with political interests, with the aim of increasing this type of knowledge. Thus, the characteristics mentioned by Lemos (2002), Rheingold (1993) and Agostini and Mechant (2019) to be called virtual communities are fulfilled.

In Figure 3, in the “IP - Closed Group” on 24 September 2019, a video was shared with apparently false information about a YouTuber named Felipe Neto. This was an attempt to justify a discussion that had previously been raised in the group. However, it made other members feel uncomfortable and sparked a debate that generated opinions that did not agree on the veracity of the matter.

**Figure 3**

*Conflict in IP - Closed Group*

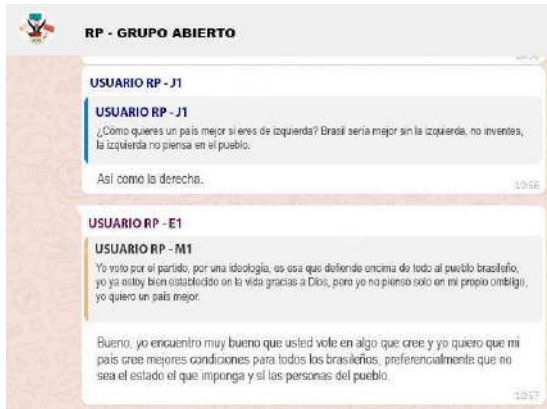


*Note: Screenshot from WhatsApp, translation by the authors.*

Figure 4 shows a discussion in “RP - Open Group”. In contrast with the “IP - Closed Group”, conflicts are largely influenced by the intensity of the ties among the participants. These ties can either be homogeneous and strong or weak and diverse (Mishra, 2020). In this case, the participants are more experienced users in the group, resulting in less rude discussions and generating less dissatisfaction among the other participants.

**Figure 4**

*Conflict in RP - Open Group*



*Note: Screenshot from WhatsApp, translation by the authors.*

Based on the mentioned factors, there are differences that can be discussed among these groups.

**IP - Closed Group:** Despite the similar ideals managed in it, the community formed seems to have fragile ties and is mainly used as a source of political information. Frequent aggressive debates among its users characterize this group, and no attempt is made to support each other; therefore, according to the parameters established by Recuero (2009), this group would be classified as a community of association or affiliation.

**RP - Open Group:** With a better sense of what a community is, strong bonds can be found within this group. This is due to the diversity of ideals and opinions shared within it, and it is precisely this diversity of thought that makes it less complicated to neutralize unfounded debates and enforce or encourage compliance with the rules imposed within the community. Thanks to the values developed within this group and according to the parameters established by Recuero (2009), the community formed within this group could be classified as an emergent community.

## 3.2. SIMULATIONS

On 30 August 2019, a news item with unreliable information was shared on IP – Closed Group, which allegedly showed comedian Gustavo Mendes offending his audience with rude words and attitudes, after being criticized for making fun of the then-President Jair Bolsonaro. This generated comments from other community members and violated the principles established within the community, as seen in Figure 5 below.

**Figure 5**

*Conflict in IP – Closed Group*



*Note: Screenshot from WhatsApp, translation by the authors.*

The situation presented above can be identified as one of the many examples of simulation that took place within the IP-Closed Group, in which, following Nietzsche's (1873) line of thought, members set aside their shared values to concentrate on defending an opinion that they believe to be indisputably true. In doing so, they ignore any other idea that contradicts their own. The term *bolsominion*, used in a derogatory way by user IP - A1, refers to the voters and supporters of the then President of the Republic, Jair Bolsonaro.

Similar situations occurred in RP - Open Group. For example, Figure 6 shows a discussion triggered by a member's comment that poor people cannot support right-wing ideologies.

**Figure 6**

*Conflict in RP - Open Group.*



Note: Screenshot from WhatsApp, translation by the authors.

In the given scenario, certain members utilize their cultural backgrounds to spark discussions, not only to influence others but also for amusement and to generate debate around their arguments (Schechner, 2003). This results in other members aligning themselves with those individuals. However, this also highlights the presence of distinct simulations that comprise the community (Deleuze, 2006; Baudrillard, 1991). The word *petralhada* is used in a derogatory manner to describe members or supporters of the Brazilian *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT).

IP - Closed Group is seen as a community with simulacra that are not constrained by general resources and are much more effective at dismantling fake news. This means that fake news has little or no impact on discussions, so it is not possible to influence the users belonging to the group (Schechner, 2003). The environment has proven to be a fertile one for the promotion of beliefs without much consideration or fuss about critical thinking (Pennycook & Rand, 2018).

Within the IP-Closed Group, a higher recurrence of fake news could be identified. Following the ideas of Wardle (2017) and Bondielli and Marcelloni (2019), these would belong to the group of misleading content with false context. These contents aim to ratify an ideological position in the community and generate debates that may favor the performance of users (Schechner, 2003) through easy connection processes (Genesini, 2018; Baudrillard, 1991).

This is why the interest placed by users is based on incorrect or unsubstantiated argumentation as a tool to obtain a particular type of reaffirmation or performance (Deleuze, 2006; Schechner, 2003). This makes the verification of news almost non-existent.

### 3.3. USERS WITH MORE POWER FOR DISSEMINATION

In the two groups in which the research was applied, it was possible to identify users who spread fake news. These users acted as active members who were exclusively dedicated to frequently sharing this type of content with unreliable sources (Terra, 2010). This was their only form of interaction with the other members of the groups (Jenkins, 2008).

In RP - Open Group, there was no evidence of inappropriate or disrespectful discussions due to fake information being shared. Usually, users tend to deny this type of fake news shared by the aforementioned users, as they send links or information with reliable sources (Terra, 2010). For all these reasons, despite the existence of users who spread fake news, it is not possible to guarantee that they have sufficient social capital to maintain them for a long time (Recuero, 2009).

In the IP - Closed Group, as opposed to the RP - Open Group, these users dedicated to the dissemination of fake news usually have a much higher social capital (Recuero, 2009) due to the propagation force existing in this group. On most occasions, the sharing of this news results in the emergence of conversations that generally involve those responsible for sharing this information. This all depends on the type of relevance or interest that the shared content has generated (Terra, 2010; Genesini, 2018; Genesini, 2018).

For its part, shared digital content is used by both communities as a tool for incorporation (Peck, 1987), defense (Baudrillard, 1991; Deleuze, 2006), and as a factor in the construction of individual values (Schechner, 2003; Ter-

ra, 2010). In this way, the RP - Open Group's efforts to counter false information shared in the group can be effective in achieving this goal.

In addition to the aforementioned actions, it is also possible to observe the forwarding of messages or information from other groups or private conversations to achieve something from this situation (Terra, 2010), as seen in Figure 7.

**Figure 7**

*UCG - Forwarding of images*



*Note: Screenshot from WhatsApp, translation by the authors.*

In general, the content that is most sent, shared, and commented on varies between photos, audio, and videos, among others. The easier it is to understand this content, the greater its relevance to the ideals of the communities (Netto & Peruyera, 2018; Alves, 2018), and the greater the possibility of starting a conversation around it. This type of fake news-oriented UGC is an example of the theory that points to users as generators and/or propagators of fake news, as Zhou and Zafarani (2020).

It is necessary to emphasize that it is not the shared content that is most important within the groups but the content that is generated thanks to the interactions between the users belonging to the groups (Terra, 2010).

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

It was possible to observe how this desire to be seen by other people is one of the main reasons why spreading fake news is so effective. This is mainly due to the social capital that fake news can provide to people, making the user an “influential” and trustworthy community member. This confirms part of the original hypothesis and fully addresses the problem presented.

As a result of these issues, the results obtained in this study are inconsistent with one of the ideas initially proposed in the thesis that aimed at analyzing conflicting ideals. For this reason, it is believed that if such a perspective were to be applied, the understanding of people’s interactions with fake news and how social capital functions within groups would have a clearer and broader vision than the one obtained.

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# OBRA DIGITAL

Universitat de Vic - Universitat Central de Catalunya  
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## REVIEW

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# The evolution of the football business into a multinational entertainment company

*La evolución del negocio del fútbol como multinacional del entretenimiento*

10

REVIEW



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## Data from the book under review:

Ginesta Portet, Xavier (2022). The entertainment multinationals. Football, Diplomacy, Identity and Technology. Editorial UOC.

## 1. IDENTIFICATION

The work of Xavier Ginesta Portet, professor at the Faculty of Business and Communication of the University of Vic-Central University of Catalonia (UVic-UCC), analytically presents a conceptual framework of the reality and evolution

of the football business as an entertainment multinational. This is done through four major themes: Sociology, Diplomacy, Identity, and Technology, distributed in two parts and seven chapters.

This work is essential for students interested in sport's sociological, economic, communicative, diplomatic, and/or technological aspects.

Ginesta Portet is a consolidated researcher specializing in sports communication since he defended his doctoral thesis at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) in 2009, entitled: "

ICTs and sports. Analysis of the Spanish First Division of football (2006-2008)". This thesis was supervised by the professor and great expert in the field, Miguel de Moragas Spà.

This book, published by the UOC publishing house, is the result of the remarkable trajectory of the teacher who has been able to delve into fields where sport, specifically football, has developed its professionalization. He is the author of many articles and book chapters, which have led him to complete this work.

He is a lecturer in various subjects, including Sports Marketing, and a collaborating researcher at the Centre for Olympic Studies at the UAB, a Sport Management Advisory Board member at Widener University (Philadelphia, USA) from 2016 to 2020. He is a member of the Communication & Sport Journal editorial board.

## 2. SUMMARY

This book analyzes aspects of sport from different points of view, delving into the business side of football. It is divided into two parts; the first part carries out a diachronic analysis of the globalization of sport, while the second part delves into the concept of football in the liquid society, an idea used by the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2005).

In the first part, the author explores the dimensions of globalization in sports, specifically in football, from a sociological point of view. In this way, he turns this work into an essential manual for understanding the evolution of society, using authors such as Maguire (1999),

Elias (1989), Ritzer (2002), Wallerstein (1974), Donnelly (1996), Wagner (1990), among others.

In his analysis of globalization, he traces the economic origins of the global world, citing the works of Robertson (1992) and Dunning (1992) while also examining the classical sociology of Durkheim (1961), Weber (1978), and Simmel (1978, 1986) for precedents.

The final section explores the global media and sports complex in depth. The analysis focuses on the interactions between various actors in the sporting world, highlighting the benefits and drawbacks of such synergies. This section adds significant coherence to the longitudinal research.

In the second part of this work, Ginesta Portet reviews the globalization process with the theories that support it scientifically and explains the world of sports as a very complex network with compelling commercial and economic interests.

By way of example, an English football club, Manchester United, is studied as a pioneer of attractive business policies that have influenced those of the rest of the world's clubs. Comparisons are also made between the policies of Real Madrid CF and FC Barcelona, as they have served as a model for the Spanish football multinationals.

This second part identifies the phenomena of sports diplomacy and sports place branding, allowing us to delve into the link between politics and football and the evolution of city brands, respectively.

As an example of a country branding strategy, the Qatar 2022 World Cup and China's experience of state involvement in football are discussed:

What is new is the ability of private clubs to blur their corporate values to embrace foreign geostrategic interests: a marriage of convenience between the commercial interests of clubs and the political interests of states is proposed. (Ginesta, 2021, p. 147)

During this systematic analysis, an exemplary explanation is given of models such as that of FC Barcelona, of how local identity can be blurred in global environments, or Girona and other clubs, faced with the purchase of foreign investors, without losing the peculiarity of the local.

Finally, eSports is discussed as a consolidated sport worthy of study by specialists in sports communication due to its growing production and consumption, especially by young people.

### 3. EVALUATION

It is, without a doubt, an essential manual for all undergraduate and postgraduate students in the faculties of Communication, Commerce, Marketing, Geography, Sociology, and Humanities interested in the business and communication world of the king of sports.

A work, like a manual written in a very clear and organized way, leads us mentally to have a broader notion of everything that concerns the business of football.

The author highlights how football has become one of the most influential industries of the 21st century by providing various trends. These trends include the transformation of football clubs into entertainment multinationals, the use of football as a "para-diplomatic" agent, the struggle for the legitimacy of football brands, and the necessary relationship between technology and football in this industry.

It is a must-read for academics studying the field and those who wish to discover the business practices of football, which can be of practical application to many businesses in other areas.

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