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**2**

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Equipo Editorial  **3**

**3**

EDITORIAL

E

pp. 6-7

**Why research sports communication?**

**¿Por qué investigar sobre comunicación deportiva?**

###### Julia Catalina Serrano Cordero

**Mar Binimelis-Adell**

MONOGRAPH SECTION

INTRODUCTION

P

pp. 10-12

1

pp. 13-30

###### Sports communication, beyond sports journalism

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

###### Gema Lobillo Mora

**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 ca- rreras de los deportistas de élite españoles. Desigualdades por géne- ro y tipo de deporte

2

pp. 31-50

Óscar Gutiérrez-Aragón Joan-Francesc Fondevila-Gascón

**Alba Gracia-Conde**

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

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

###### 3 branding strategies of professional fencers

**Roxane Coche Benjamin J. Lynn Matthew J. Haught**

pp. 51-71

###### Fencing on Instagram: Examining self-presentation as

**Esgrima en Instagram: examinando la autopresentación como estra- tegia de marca de los esgrimistas profesionales**

###### Admilson Veloso da Silva

**Tao Yiming**

4

pp. 73-91

###### 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**

###### Francisco Javier Zamora Saborit Guillermo Sanahuja Peris Sandra Arias Montesinos

**4** Índice

5

pp. 93-104

###### 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 periodís- ticas: análisis de Mundo Deportivo y Marca durante Qatar 2022

I

6

pp. 105-123

###### Nahuel Ivan Faedo

**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 CO- VID-19 en el periodismo: un estudio de caso del canal brasileño Spor- TV**

ÍNDICE

###### Caroline Patatt

MISCELANEOUS SECTION

7

pp. 125-146

8

pp. 147-165

###### Communication mediated by conference interpreters: age

**and sex stereotypes**

**Estereotipos relativos a la edad y el sexo aplicados a la comunica- ción mediada por intérpretes de conferencias**

###### Lucila Christen y Gracia

**The activity in Tiktok of the print media in Spain**

La actividad en Tiktok de los medios impresos en España

**Fernando Galindo-Rubio Ángel Fuentes-Nevado Fernando Suárez-Carballo**

9

pp. 167-183

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

**related?**

**Fake News: propagación y comunidades, ¿cuál es su relación?**

###### Cristiano Max Pereira Thiago Godolphim Mendes Eva Caroline da Silva Ev

**Eva Fabbiana Bez Galarza**

RESEÑA **Thomás Czrnhak**

10

pp. 184-188

###### The evolution of the football business into a multinational entertainment company

**La evolución del negocio del fútbol como multinacional del entrete- nimiento**

###### Gema Lobillo Mora

Índice  **5**

### E Why research sports communication?

***¿Por qué investigar sobre comunicación deportiva?***

EDITORIAL

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

Sports communication becomes an informa- tion tool for the public and a resource for at- tracting new followers of a sport, a team, or an athlete. Likewise, the communication man- agement 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 communica- tion, which has gained prevalence at a global level in recent years. This edition seeks to un- derstand better the communication dynamics that revolve around sporting events and actors in a liquid, immediate world that demands con- stant entertainment.

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

**6** Julia Catalina Serrano Cordero, Mar Binimelis-Adell

**6**

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 net- works such as TikTok.

In addition, it is essential to mention that the magazine has managed to compile a collec- tion that studies different sports with very dif- ferent fan and spectator bases. In that sense, the studies concentrate on extremely popular sports, such as football, and show how commu- nication develops in sports further away from the media spotlight, such as fencing. This allows readers to learn about and compare the reali- ty 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 transla- tors and interpreters in the article *Communi- cation 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 activi- ty 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: propaga- tion 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 pis- te, and the sports center. The game is about to start.

Why research sports communication?  **7**

**7**

Universitat de Vic - Universitat Central de Catalunya

Universidad del Azuay

# MONOGRAPH SECTION

**Contemporary social processes and**

# communication

## I 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 com- munication 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 re- search in sports communication, which is nec- essary 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 pub- lications in this field, as it has often not been given the importance it deserves due to its eco- nomic and social potential, which is much more potent than any other field. Sport has excellent social and economic power; the academy can- not 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 de- velopment of the careers of Spanish elite sports- men and women,* an attempt is made to detect

how the scope of sponsorship affects the suc- cess 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 Fon- devila-Gascón, and Alba Gracia-Conde of the University of Girona structure a qualitative re- search, through personal interviews and focus groups with Spanish elite athletes, to conclude that success is conditioned by discipline, gen- der, country or previous successes.

Secondly, authors Roxane Coche and Benja- min 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 Insta- gram: Examining self-presentation as branding*

**10** Gema Lobillo Mora

**10**

*strategies of professional fencers,* authors Ad- milson 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, specifical- ly 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 com- munication 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 (Inter- national University of Valencia), Guillermo San- ahuja Peris (Jaime I University), and Sandra Ari- as 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 produc- tion of journalistic pieces: analysis of Mundo De- portivo and Marca during Qatar 2022,* authored by Nahuel Ivan Faedo from the University of Vic. This paper analyzes female sports journal- ists’ role in producing journalistic pieces pub- lished 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 cele- bration 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 informa- tion on Qatar 2022.

To conclude the research, Caroline Patatt from the University of Beira Interior in Portugal ana- lyzes the SporTV channel, which is the audience leader among those specializing in sports dur- ing 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 compa- nies. Football, Diplomacy, Identity, and Technolo- gy,* published by the UOC and written by Pro- fessor Xavier Ginesta Portet. In the review, *The evolution of the football business as a multination- al entertainment company,* written by the coor- dinator 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 com- munication.

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 knowl- edge and generate a desire to approach this field from an academic point of view beyond the traditional informative and journalistic one.

Comunicación deportiva, más allá del periodismo deportivo

**11**

## 11

Universitat de Vic - Universitat Central de Catalunya

Universidad del Azuay

**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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## 13

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###### Abstract

The importance of sponsorship has increased a lot in recent years, being essential in the rec- ognition of elite athletes. The main objective of this study is to determine the scope that spon- sorship 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

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Sponsorship has become one of the funda- mental sources of financing for the best ath- letes in each discipline to face the competitions in which they participate. In this context, nu- merous sports contracts are signed in which athletes are provided with the necessary equip- ment to compete at the best level and some- times financial aid is offered so that they can

###### Resumen

La importancia del patrocinio se ha incremen- tado mucho en los últimos años, resultando esencial en el reconocimiento de los deportis- tas de élite. El objetivo de este estudio es deter- minar el alcance que sobre el éxito del deportis- ta tiene el patrocinio, precisando las diferencias en función de género, disciplina o país donde se ejerce la profesión. Se han empleado meto- dologías de tipo cualitativo (entrevistas perso- nales y focus group a deportistas españoles de élite). Se concluye que obtener un patrocina- dor 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

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 re- ceived 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 ana- lyze the influence of a sports sponsorship con- tract on the development of an elite athlete’s

career. This work focuses mainly on how this financing is influenced by the discipline prac- ticed and the country where the practice takes place. It also aims to analyze the gender differ- ences 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 rep- resentatives of the country’s sports scene and what it has meant throughout their sporting ca- reer in their dealings with brands.

#### THEORETICAL

**FRAMEWORK**

#### IMPORTANCE OF SPORTS SPONSORSHIP IN THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF COMPANIES

In today’s society, sport has a great sociocultur- al relevance, so big brands seek to be present in the most important sporting events in the world, which represent extraordinary oppor- tunities 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 (Gines- ta-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 profes- sional athletes or sporting events, is increas- ingly present in the strategic communication decisions of companies, since the actions car- ried out in this field usually offer a proven prof- itability at the level of notoriety, consumer ac- ceptance, capital-image positioning and sales, as their products more easily achieve greater international recognition (Lobillo-Mora *et al.*, 2016; Breva-Franch et al., 2019; Koronios *et al*.,

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

Sports marketing has evolved significantly in re- cent 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 disci- plines 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 peo- ple, teams or tournaments that audiences fol- low (Beech and Chadwick, 2007; Fondevila-Gas- cón, 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 gen- erate 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, es- pecially if the association achieved with what is sponsored provides a positive brand image. Thus, consumers increase their degree of satis- faction 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).

#### 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, repu- tation and image improvement, effective com-

bination with the use of social networks, inno- vation, 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 spon- sorship is implemented, companies try to re- cover 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 recog- nition 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 inequal- ities, the most common form of contract nego- tiation is carried out through agencies special- izing in this field. These agencies reach reach cession agreements of certain rights of the ath- lete 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, de- pending 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 (Gar- cia 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 in- frastructure 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 spon- soring company. In this way, it is avoided that low social acceptance of the sponsoring com- pany causes the loss of the investment (Mikhail- itchenko *et al.,* 2012; Montes et al., 2014; Kesh- kar *et al.,* 2019).

The companies’ selection of professional ath- letes to be sponsored will depend on their re- sults and their sports image, or on the media presence of their discipline; but it will also de- pend on the values represented for society and their moral exposition to the community, be- sides the potential brand visibility in function of the products that they want to promote. (Cre- spo-Celda, 2020; Torres-Romay y García-Mirón, 2020). Other valuable aspects in the same sense are the phenomenon of shared experi- ence, international relevance, and the volume of participants in the events. Thus, some var- iables are relegated, in many cases, like spec- tators’ preferences and even athletes´ needs (Rutter *et al.,* 2019; Wakefield *et al.,* 2020). In this field, big multinationals usually bet for sponsor- ship contracts with big athletes with worldwide

recognized prestige (such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Leo Messi, Rafael Nadal, Lewis Hamilton o LeB- ron James), able to associate the brand and the company’s products with their own personal brand, mainly through their use in social net- works, where they have millions of followers. (Zhou *et al.,* 2020). Another successful strategy, mainly on extreme athletes, has been to be- come official sponsors of those disciplines, or- ganizing competitions and challenges, provid- ing 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).

#### SPORTS SPONSORSHIP

**AND GENDER INEQUALITY**

One of the relevant issues in the sponsorship of professional athletes lies in the fact that, de- spite the cultural and social evolution of recent decades, gender inequalities in terms of invest- ment are still very significant in some countries. Although it is also true that there is an increas- ing number of them trying to issue regula- tions 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; Ye- nilmez, 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 cov- erage will have to favour increased investment in sponsorship in the future, both for athletes and competitions (Darvin and Sagas, 2017; Pet- ty and Pope, 2019; Billings and Gentile, 2021).

Even so, while greatly appreciating this posi- tive 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 contrac- tual 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 fe- males (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 so- cial background that was previously being es- tablished 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).

#### METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the research objectives and to carry out an in-depth study of the cur- rent 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 under- stood that, in this way, the research can achieve a greater knowledge of the subject under study (Webb et al. 1966; Bericat, 1998; Gutiér-

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

Specifically, nineteen interviews were conduct- ed with athletes (eight men and eleven women) from different sports disciplines practiced in Spain. They were chosen for their sporting ca- reer and success and for their different experi- ences in terms of sports sponsorship. Depend- ing 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 natural- ly, in order to collect reliable qualitative data. In any case, in order to shape the line of argu- ment required by the research guidelines, each of the interviewees was asked the same eight open-ended questions, among other ques- tions, so that they could express their feelings and opinions on the issues raised. It was con- sidered appropriate to obtain as broad a view as possible of the current context of sponsor- ship, 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 sponsor- ship 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 nation- al 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 di- vided 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 minor- ity sports. Finally, the same was done with the men’s responses, grouping them into four sec- tions: major disciplines, retired athletes, Span- ish national team and minority sports.

**Table 1**

*Interviewed athletes and sports*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Athlete** | **Sport** | **Relevance for the research** |
| 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 signifi- cant 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 opin- ion on the questions raised in the study.

**Table 2**

*Composition of the Focus group*

**Athlete and sport**

**Motivación para su participación**

Extensive experience with

out within the naturalness allowed by a pro- cess 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 ob-

Agustina Talasimov

(Basketball)

Berta Abellán (Tri- als)

Miki Juanola (Foot- ball)

Cristian Portelli

(Surfing)

Guillermo Fayed (Alpine skiing)

sponsorship in the USA (her

institution informs about changes every season).

Breaks gender stereotypes in the sport (the number of fe- male pilots is quite small).

He is the youngest home- grown athlete to participate in the study. His place of training is key in terms of his spon- sorship.

Extensive experience in spon- sorship from an early age, despite being part of a very minority discipline in Spain.

By competing for the French national team, he can bring a different vision to the table.

tained from these questions have been pro- cessed, categorized and tabulated according to gender, in order to achieve a quantitative treat- ment 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 spon- sorship 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 coun-

*Fuente: elaboración propia*

#### RESULTS

* 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 na- tional background were interviewed, as well as high-level representatives of sports with a less- er social following such as rhythmic gymnas- tics, 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

cil; therefore, when he stopped competing, his contract was terminated. The also retired Guillermo Fayed (third in the world in down- hill 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 con- tracts, 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 per- formance has deteriorated have automatically had their contracts terminated.

The male sportsmen interviewed whose disci- pline is a mass sport (football and basketball)

**Table 3**

*Summary of questionnaire interviews on sponsorship*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **MEN** | | | **WOMEN** | **TOTAL** |
| Do you cur- rently 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 sponsor- ship 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 dis- ciplines? | YES | 100,00% | 72,73% | 84,21% |
| NO | - | 27,27% | 15,79% |
| Do you think that there are differences  in the condi- tions of spon- sorship 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 Sates.*

*Source: own elaboration*

state that their contracts with sports brands started when they were still in the lower cat- egories of their club. The situation is very dif- ferent 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. How- ever, 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 im- portant, 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 condi- tions 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 dis- ciplines 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 practi- cally 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 *“Cani”* was the only one who acknowledged that women receive worse sponsorship conditions. Ath- letes from minority disciplines perceived that, in their sports, women are on an equal footing with men, arguing that they enjoy similar visibil- ity, as the championships are held at the same venue and on the same day for both, so the im- pact should be the same. When taking into con- sideration the great contrast of perspectives on the visualization of this issue by the differ- ent interviewees, it is especially relevant to see how this situation is perceived by the young- est 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 mi- nority sports, as many disciplines receive a tiny amount of money and material compared to what is received in mass sports such as foot- ball. 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 be- cause the law does not allow individual spon- sorships, so the best brands sponsor the whole institution so that the best athletes in each dis- cipline promote their products. Finally, many of the participants in the study note that the wide- spread use of social media as a communication tool may be a major driver of sponsorship con- tracts in less socially embedded sports. This en- courages a levelling of sponsorship conditions between disciplines.

#### 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 argu- ments 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 revela- tions that appeared most frequently in the fo- cus group confirmed, among other things, the

**Table 4**

*Summary table Focus group. Most frequent response*

**Other high frequency responses**

**Most frequent response**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| What does your contract mainly consist of? | * Receive appropriate sports clothing for competition each season. | * Participate in brand events |
| What obligations or conditions does your sponsorship contract entail? | * Promote the material received in social networks and competitions and do not   use material from competitors. | * Occasionally it may be possible to nego- tiate with another brand for a particular   material.   * Failure to comply automatically voids the contract. |
| How often do you receive ma- terial? | * In general, athletes are provided with equipment whenever they need it. | * The brand supplies the material and sends it out whenever there are new   items.   * In the official shop, you could always get   what you wanted (competition clothing on a monthly basis). |
| Do you think it is important for your career to be sponsored? | * There is no doubt about it. It is essen- tial | * Majority disciplines: it is an extra in the career and contributes to the image. * Minority disciplines: without sponsorship it is not possible to survive as an athlete. |
| Are there substantial differences in sponsorship between the United States and Spain? | * There is a huge difference. In the   United States there is much more investment in sport (it is more profes- sionalized). | * University sport is considered profes- sional * Just by being part of a university team you get sponsorship. |
| Are there significant gender dif- ferences in sponsorship? | * In most cases, women do not enjoy the same opportunities as men. | * There are differences depending on the   discipline and the country.   * + It is more equal in minority sports |

*Source: Own elaboration*

need for sponsorship for athletes, the impor- tance of receiving sports clothing and equip- ment in order to compete in certain disciplines, the existence of significant inequalities in spon- sorship based on gender, and the differences between the United States and Spain in spon- sorship at the university level.

#### DISCUSSION

The main objective of this article was to find out and analyze the influence that a sports spon- sorship contract has on the career of an elite athlete, as well as to discern the existence of possible differences or inequalities depend- ing 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 prac- ticed, carrying out two different types of qualita- tive 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; Koroni- os *et al.,* 2020; Zhou *et al.,* 2020; Contreras-Es- pinosa, 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 re- turn (Mikhailitchenko *et al.*, 2012; Montes et al., 2014; Keshkar *et al.,* 2019). On the other hand, it is becoming increasingly common for a com- pany 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 spon- sorship 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 sponsor- ship 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 con- ditions as their male counterparts when spon- sorship is finally achieved (Lafrance-Horning, 2018; Moawad, 2019; Norman *et al.,* 2021; Ye-

nilmez, 2021).

Another factor that undoubtedly causes ine- quality in the formats and amounts of spon- sorship is the discipline practiced by each ath- lete, 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 fol- lowing. This is because the financial return on the investment made, in terms of communica- tion, will largely depend on the media presence of the discipline (Rutter *et al.,* 2019; Torres-Ro- may 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 pres- sure to achieve sporting titles and not lose their sponsorships, since, without these, in minority sports, it is very difficult to continue with a pro- fessional career (Keshkar *et al.,* 2019; Sait and Bogopa, 2021).

#### 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 pro- viding them with equipment, even though the athletes continued to compete. On the other hand, the men who were no longer active con- tinued 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 fol- lowing 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 re- ceive 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 ele- ment 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 profes- sional 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 ob- taining 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 par- ticipate. On the other hand, the fact that one of the researchers is a professional sportsperson also meant that many interviews could be car- ried out in conditions of cordiality and complic- ity, 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 ques- tions that open up future lines of research and work. These lines of research could be of in- terest to both sport and communication pro- fessionals and academic researchers. Among these lines of study are the analysis of the sal- ary and socio-labour gap between the men’s and women’s sections of top-level clubs (main- ly 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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## 31

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###### Abstract

The current study examined if multi-tiered of- ferings 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 broad- casters 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-

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

rios niveles (tres niveles dirigidos a los nuevos aficionados al deporte, a los aficionados tra- dicionales 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 radio- difusión aplicaran este modelo de retransmi- sión, 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 fanta- sía y las apuestas.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Deportes, Radiodifusión, Medios digitales, *Fan- dom,* Televisión.

League’s Los Angeles Football Club and tele- vision anchor, Maximiliano Bretos (2022). Re- search 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 watch- ing 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 old- er viewers stop watching. In fact, viewers’ aver- age 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 gen- erally, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Buehler, 2020; Hutchins & Boyle, 2017; Lynn et al., 2021;

Steinkuehler, 2019; Takahashi, 2019), tradition- al sports broadcasters face mounting pressure to sustain the viewership levels that they once enjoyed (Buehler, 2020; Reimer, 2021). Aca- demically, 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, re- cent 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 pa- ra-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 pack- aged their product differently based on fan- dom? A newer audience member would watch a feed containing more explanation so they have a chance to learn the game, a casual view- er/fan would watch a feed similar to the tradi- tional feed, and a “hardcore fan” would watch a feed with more facts, more jargon, more insid- er 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 commenta- tors 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.

#### CONTEXT: THE FUTURE OF SPORTS BROADCASTING

Online companies have recently bought broad- casting rights for big sporting events. Some re- cent 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 broad- cast 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 polit- ical 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 bet- ter placed to take advantage of all digital has to offer. For instance, though NBC has offered ad- ditional Olympic coverage online for over a dec- ade, 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 fragment- ed audience. In American sports, a good exam- ple 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 (Farm- er, 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 offer- ings 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.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Sports broadcasters have historically benefit- ted 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, Cum- mins (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.

#### 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’ moti- vations 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. Mean- while, Giulianotti (2015) used two basic oppo- sitions to create a quadrant to study football clubs’ fans. He contends fans can be divided into four types: (1) supporters, who “have in- extricable biographical and emotional ties to the club’s ground” (p. 258) almost as if it were part of their family; (2) fans, who strongly iden- tify with a club but tend to “have a more mar- ket-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 compe- titions; 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 fan- dom. He recently argued fandom is a contin- uous spectrum and one’s level of fandom can fluctuate throughout their life (e.g., Gantz & Lewis, 2021), but the question of what moti- vates people to become sports fans remains. What gratifications do people get from con- suming sports? The most influential work on the topic is Wann’s (1995) Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS), which is based on eight main con- structs: 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 follow- er to fan or supporter on Giulianotti’s quad- rant. 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, includ- ing women’s sports and para-sports, to grow their audiences.

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

There are plenty of fans who seem an- noyed, irritated, or frustrated with their teams. This might leave some wonder- ing 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 in- fluence 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 (in- teracting 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 broad- casters 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.

#### 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 con- sume 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) expecta- tions 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, audienc- es use media to fulfill specific desires/needs. Rubin (1983) identified five reasons explaining adults’ use of television: to pass time, for infor- mation, for entertainment, for companionship, and to escape.

The fast-changing 21st-century media land- scape has created a renewal of U&G scholar- ship (Lewis et al., 2017), in which audiences are now “users” thanks to newer, interactive plat- forms (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p. 505), and scholars have been more concerned with bet- ter 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’ mo- tivations. They interviewed 38 self-identified us- ers 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 estab- lished 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 (Lew- is 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, Aus- tralian 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 experi- ence 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 commen- tating, she is a more satisfied customer. It fol- lows she is more likely to be a returning cus- tomer 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 under- stand even the most popular sports (Lynn et al., 2021).

#### STREAMING LIVE SPORTING EVENTS

Despite the substantial increase in the produc- tion of sports content, “live televised sports re- main 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 (Pal- co23, 2023). These telecasts were also availa- ble 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, particular- ly 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 inter- est 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 ad- vantage 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 produc- ers pursue a new model for live sporting events by offering different packages for different tar- get audiences.

#### 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 lev- el. The video stream targeted toward flâneurs would include more explanations to give view- ers 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 to- ward 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 cur- rent 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.) chang- es 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 view- ers increasingly cancel cable subscriptions to turn to online options (Haught, 2022). The model proposed in the study also offers an in- teresting opportunity for under-covered sports, including women’s sports and para-sports, as they attempt to grow their audiences.

#### 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 partici- pant received $1.50 for completing the survey.

#### 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 re- maining 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 sam- ple 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 er- ror, 313 participants allows us to make conclu- sions with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 5.6%. As such, this sample still pro- vides an interesting foundation as an explora- tory case study for people’s potential interest in multi-tiered sports streaming.

#### DEMOGRAPHICS

Participants came from 40 of the 50 Amer- ican 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. popu- lation with 62% of participants with a bachelor’s degree (*n*=194) and another 21% with a grad- uate 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 consid- ered 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, Cau- casians were overrepresented at the expense of the Latine and Asian populations.

#### 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 vol- leyball, 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.

#### MEASURES

After screening questions, the survey includ- ed 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 respond- ents 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;

1. 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 cur- rently 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 mere- ly 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 announc- ers carefully explain the rules of the sport as I watch the gameplay; (2) A traditional broad- cast like what I’m used to seeing with announc- ers 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 audi- ence based on their level of fandom.

#### RESULTS

The present study sought to determine if pack- aging 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 fac- tors. Measures were rated on a seven-point scale. Using a Varimax rotation with Kaiser nor- malization, a factor rotation converged in three iterations (Table 1). The first factor had an ei- genvalue 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 repre- sented components of sports media consump- tion associated with one’s identity, the factor was named Identity (*M*=.72, *SD*=.18, α=.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 me- dia consumption associated with entertain- ment, the factor was named Enjoyment (M=.82, SD=.14, α=.70). Both factors were used as moti- vators for consumption.

**Table 1**

*Factor analysis of motivations for watching sports*

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

*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 consump- tion, they would prefer an introductory broad- cast, 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 soc- cer [*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, intro- ductory broadcast. Meanwhile, Enjoyment-driv- en fans of volleyball significantly preferred the traditional broadcast style [*F*(2, 310)=3.15, *p*=0.044].

Finally, a regression analysis measured the de- sire to stream sports more often. Four meas- ures on a seven-point scale asked about watch- ing 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 of- fering different streams based on fandom level would enhance my experience watching sports (*M*=5.24, *SD*=1.43); 3. If a company starts offer- ing 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 com- pany 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 summat- ed into a measure of watching more sports (*M*=.71, *SD*=.19, α=.87).

The regression analysis (Table 2) indicated three predictors explained 61% of the variance of the desire to watch more sports with differ- entiated broadcasts (R2=.61, *F*(1, 307)=159.80, *p*<.001). Specifically, Enjoyment (β=.08, p=.035), Identity (β=.48, *p*<.001), and the intensity of one’s sports fandom (β=.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 |

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study is limited in a few ways. The use of MTurk as a sampling tool provides a via- ble, but sometimes slightly skewed, perception of the general population. Also, sports fans self-identified their viewing habits, but self-per- ceptions are often underreported. Further- more, the study did not differentiate between consumption of men’s or women’s sports, which could be a fruitful avenue for future re- search as the audience for women’s sports is growing and changing. Finally, all participants were adults based in the U.S., so similar explor- atory research in other markets would be ben- eficial. Yet, as online companies and sports or- ganizations increasingly broadcast live sports, this study contributes to the industry and aca- demia by exploring viewer preferences for live sports within the framework of U&G. As an ex- planatory analysis conducted within the Ameri- can 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 custom- ized audience experience would require.

Hence, this study still provides valuable insight for both scholars and industry professionals. Leading sports communication scholars re- cently 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 pro- duce the content that we often spend most of our time critiquing” (ICA, 2020). This study directly addresses a major concern of practi- tioners by providing a potential solution to re- curring 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 (Wat- son, 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).

#### THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study offers empirical evidence that one’s level of sports fandom may increase if broad- casters implemented a feasible multi-tiered model of streaming sports based on three fan- dom 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 solu- tion to resolving some of the “persistent ineq- uities” that exist in sports media (e.g., women’s sports and para-sports are rarely covered), an industry that tends to “actively builds audienc- es [only] for certain men’s sports” (Cooky et al., 2021, p. 351). Indeed, an introductory broad- cast 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 in- troductory broadcast style providing more de- tail about the rules of the sport watched, which was initially thought to be for flâneurs, as de- fined by Giulianotti (2015). Notably, fans of four of the top five U.S. sports (football, basketball, baseball, and soccer) indicated preferring an in- troductory broadcast with more basic informa- tion about leagues, players, and rules. Although this might seem counterintuitive, the authors deduce three possible explanations: (1) the in- troductory broadcast is a way to better inform fans about the intricacies of individual players, which can be a manifestation of the rise in fan- tasy sports and sports betting (Kupfer & Ander- son, 2021), (2) one’s capacity to comprehend a sports broadcast may be overestimated, con- firming Lynn et al.’s (2021) conclusion, and/or

1. audiences may want to connect with others through sports (Kim & Kim, 2020; Tamir & Le- hman-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 re- sults also indicate sports consumers have a high willingness to consume more sports tel- evision content. They saw the differentiated broadcasts as an added bonus. Though this model relies on one-way communication dur- ing 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).

#### 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, in- cluding pedagogical tools within sports broad- casts 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; Ru- bin, 1984; Tang et al., 2021). Advancing, cost-ef- fective 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 audi- ences 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 contin- ue to grow (e.g., Wymer et al., 2021), broadcast- ers and sports professionals should leverage the multimedia nature of live streaming. Study- ing 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 shar- ing, 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 ad- ditional screen or channel rather than an en- tirely 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 sto- ries, 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 addi- tional 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 oper- ators, replay, sideline reporter, etc.). Moreover, a few tweaks and explainers could bring fans closer to the game by giving them richer knowl- edge about the gaming experience happening on their second screens, via fantasy or betting, which have a “reciprocal relationship” with the media industry, particularly television (Kup- fer & Anderson, 2021). A multi-tiered stream- ing model could thus deeply affect these two growing industries (Kupfer & Anderson, 2021). Future research should explore how a mul- ti-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. Par- ents 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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Universitat de Vic - Universitat Central de Catalunya

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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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## 51

###### Abstract

Instagram has impacted how athletes present themselves and communicate with their audi- ences without the need for mass media me- diators, such as journalists. Hence, this study explores the opportunities for professional fencers to develop self-presentation and com- munication strategies on the platform. The methodological approach is based on netnog- raphy 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 collab- orating with sponsors and brands to open up business opportunities and revenue streams. Therefore, fencers’ active use of Instagram en- hances their self-presentation and positively in- fluences the image of fencing as a sport.

KEYWORDS

Sport communication, social media studies, In- stagram, athletes branding, fencing

###### Resumen

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

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The accessibility of athlete-related informa- tion has significantly increased through news websites since the 1990s, with contemporary sport communication providing an overview of their training and competitions. Howev- er, much of this content is ‘media-processed,’ capturing fleeting moments rather than pre- senting 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 au- thentic and relatable manner (Kutzer, 2016).

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 desa- rrollen estrategias de autopresentación y co- municación en la plataforma. El enfoque meto- dológico 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 au- mentar el compromiso y la interacción de los fanáticos al compartir videos de entrenamien- to, fotos de competencias e historias persona- les, al mismo tiempo que colaboran con patro- cinadores y marcas para abrir oportunidades comerciales y fuentes de ingresos. Por lo tanto, el uso activo de Instagram por parte de los es- grimistas mejora su autopresentación e influye positivamente en la imagen de la esgrima como deporte

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Comunicación deportiva, estudios de redes so- ciales, Instagram, atletas branding, esgrima.

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 develop- ing 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, pos- sessing unique characteristics that distinguish it from other sports. For instance, fencers com- pete with their faces covered, temporarily con- cealing aspects of their identity despite their names being printed on their outfits, thus part- ly 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 influenc- ers, 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 pub- lic political statements or expressing opinions on social media have generated extensive dis- cussion and garnered attention from diverse sectors of society. Moreover, young sports fans and students often observe professional ath- letes on social media, seeking to learn from and emulate their healthy lifestyles, training meth- ods, 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 eval- uating the top 10 fencers’ accounts from the International Fencing Federation (FIE). Moreo- ver, the study addresses two primary research questions: (RQ1) What are the sport commu- nication 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 them- selves on this platform, the study seeks to iden- tify the strategies and techniques employed to create a compelling personal brand that res- onates 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 en- gagement and interaction by sharing training videos, photos of their competitions, and per- sonal stories that offer a glimpse of their daily lives to the public. Furthermore, collaborations with sponsors and brands open up addition- al business prospects and revenue streams. Therefore, Instagram enables these athletes to showcase their competitive spirit and their skill level to a larger audience, thereby attract- ing more individuals to participate in and follow the sport. In the next section, we present an overview of the literature regarding contem- porary sport communication, and social media, and explain relevant characteristics of fencing to the study.

#### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

* 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 In- ternet, 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 manage- ment (Hambrick, 2017). Scholars have studied the role of communication within the realm of sports, which is evident through the emer- gence of new textbooks, journals, associations, and conferences dedicated to sport commu- nication, 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 pro- cess 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 analyz- ing meaning-making processes, managing and directing communication, and exploring the im- pact of sports on individuals and society. This results in an interplay of roles, since there are at least three areas in which sport communica- tion exists in the sports industry. Namely:

First, sport communication is communication

in sports;

Second, sport communication is communica-

tion 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, broad- casters, and other personnel involved in con- tent production, while the receivers are their audience (e.g. listeners, viewers, readers, etc.), customers, advertisers, and any individual or group responsible for interpreting sports-relat- ed information (Pedersen *et al.,* 2007). Howev- er, 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 envi- ronment. Furthermore, Pedersen *et al.* (2007) argue that sport communication can be in- tentional or unintentional, complex, cyclical, irreversible, transactional, irreducible, dynam- ic, 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 follow- ing section, we explain how sport communica- tions intersects with social media.

#### SPORT COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA BRANDING

Social media is defined as “a set of Inter- net-based applications that are built on Web

2.0 ideas and technologies and allow the crea- tion 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, shar- ing, 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 up- loads (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 (broad- casting) 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 interperson- al 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, char- acterized by rapid conversations and effortless transmission of information (p. 11).

For Meraz (2009), social media are ‘‘architect- ed by design to readily support participation, peer-to-peer conversation, collaboration, and community’’ (p. 682). Since sports are by na- ture a highly visual exercise, with images of ath- letes capturing excitement, effort, and emotion (Romney and Johnson, 2020a), the integration of visual platforms such as Instagram into sport communication seems a strategic choice. Pro- fessional 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 Ins- tagram, 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 pi- lot’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 dis- cussions related to the pilot’s career and activ- ities that may influence it (p. 111). Finally, the research on Lorenzo’s Instagram reveals that he primarily used single images for quick con- sumption, 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 per- ceptions 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, con- trasting with the perception of the country it- self. Older generations may have a more pessi- mistic 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 so- ciety, promoting good coexistence and serving as role models.

Previous studies (Poletti, 2011) have also demonstrated that the process of sharing nar- ratives on social media platforms contributes to ‘intimacy’ and ‘community bonds’ between the communicator and the audience (p. 76). Moreover, researchers have examined how In- stagram can be used to engage fans for sport- ing, 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 ath- lete’s endorsements and contract negotiations.

Historically, their self-presentation was con- strained by the influence of mass media, rely- ing heavily on how sports journalists portrayed them. However, athletes now have more con- trol over the dissemination of information and can showcase aspects of their identity that they consider most important, enabling a more per- sonalized 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 mean- ing 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 per- ceptions related to:

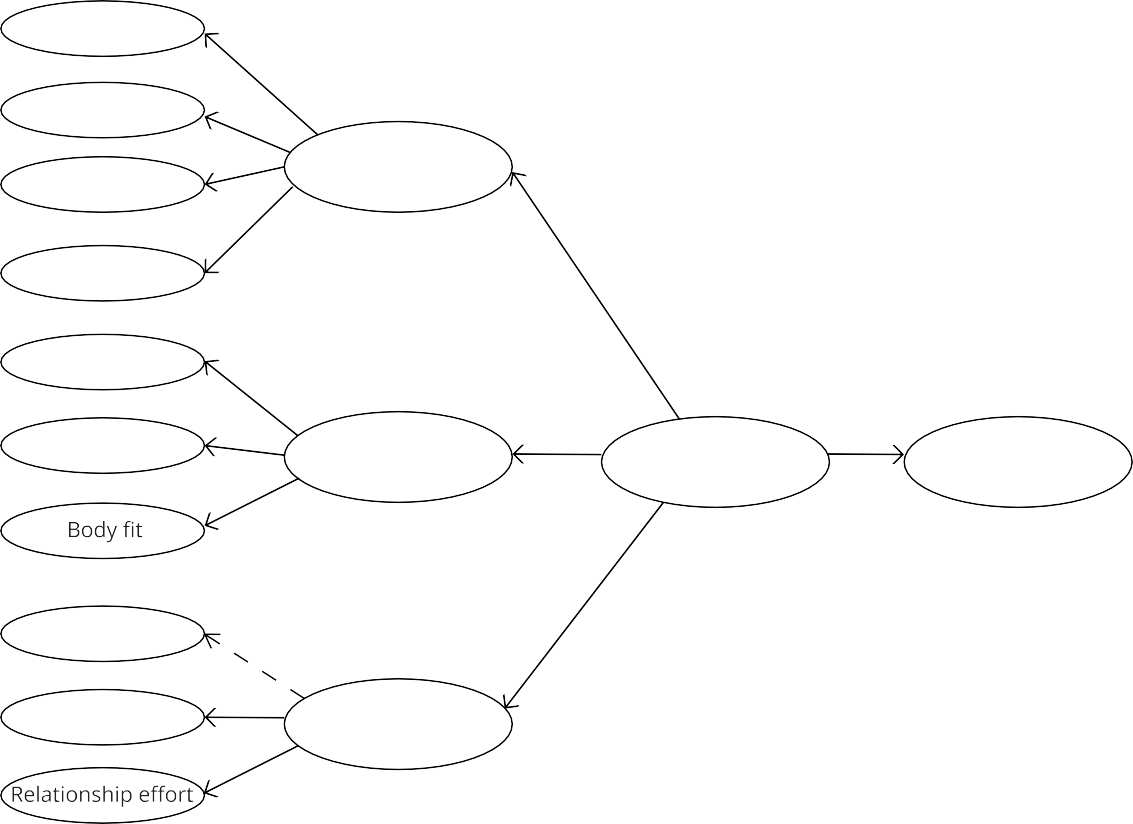
* Athletic Performance
* Attractive Appearance
* Marketable Lifestyle

“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” en- compasses 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 re- quires 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). There- fore, effective branding strategies can provide athletes with added value, extended job mar- kets, and increased income through endorse- ment (Arruda and Dixson, 2007; Mogaji *et al.,* 2020; Na *et al.,* 2020).

**Figure 1**

*MABI by Arai et al.*



Athletic expertise

0.71

Competition Style

0.92

Sportsmanship 0.70 Athletic performance

0.80

Rivalry

0.77

Physical attributes 0.77

Symbol

0.97 Attractive appearance

0.57

0.47

Athlete«s brand image

0.59

Psychological commitment

0.89

Life story

0.14

Role model

0.91

Marketable lifestyle

0.93

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

#### FENCING: SPECIAL

**FEATURES**

Fencing is one of the oldest sports, having that has evolved with the development of new met- al 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 sim- ple 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 skill- ful movements and non-contact between ath- letes 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). Be- cause it is a physically demanding activity, fac- tors such as age, gender, level of training, and tactical strategies employed against opponents influence the performance of fencers. Moreo- ver, 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 op- ponent 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 ap- pear 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 emo- tions cannot be shown through facial expres- sions, 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 them- selves and can showcase other characteristics of their private life, building on sport commu- nication in a personalized way, which has not been vastly researched in communication sci- ence yet. In the following section, we explain the methodological approach used to collect data and analyze this phenomenon.

#### METHODOLOGY

The research relied on a multimodal method- ological approach based on netnography (Koz- inets, 2010) and qualitative content analysis (Al- len and Reser, 1990) for the data collection and analysis, thus offering an exploratory qualitative perspective that does not aim for generaliza- tion. 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 tradition- al ethnography (Kozinets, 2010) that uses digi- tal 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 interac- tion patterns. Additionally, Instagram was cho- sen 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 audienc- es 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 un- derstand 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 quantita- tive 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 vis- ible, the content was not included in the anal- ysis. The final list (Table 1) consists of 15 fenc- ers (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 In- stagram account throughout the research pe- riod. 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 | [www.instagram.com/romaincannone/](http://www.instagram.com/romaincannone/) |
| BOREL Yannick | Male | H2 | [www.instagram.com/yannickborelofficiel/](http://www.instagram.com/yannickborelofficiel/) |
| LIMARDO GASCON Ruben | Male | H3 | [www.instagram.com/rubenlimardo/](http://www.instagram.com/rubenlimardo/) |
| REIZLIN Igor | Male | Private | Omitted |
| KANO Koki | Male | H5 | [www.instagram.com/kanokoki3568/](http://www.instagram.com/kanokoki3568/) |
| KOCH Mate Tamas | Male | Private | Omitted |
| BARDENET Alexandre | Male | Private | Omitted |
| KURBANOV Ruslan | Male | H8 | [www.instagram.com/kurbanov\_ruslan\_13/](http://www.instagram.com/kurbanov_ruslan_13/) |
| MINOBE Kazuyasu | Male | H9 | [www.instagram.com/minobe\_kazuyasu/](http://www.instagram.com/minobe_kazuyasu/) |
| VISMARA Federico | Male | H10 | [www.instagram.com/federicovismara/](http://www.instagram.com/federicovismara/) |
| CHOI Injeong | Female | Private | Omitted |

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

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

When analyzing the data, in addition to eval- uating each athlete’s account individually, we classified their publications according to four variables, based on previous analysis conduct- ed 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 brand- ing 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 com- bine 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*

#### DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

* 1. **OVERVIEW OF TOP**

#### FENCERS ACTIVITY

**ON INSTAGRAM**

This section is weighted towards the following findings: Firstly, the data collection presenta- tion and interpretation of the netnography data from the Instagram accounts of the top 10 male and female fencing (Epee) athletes world- wide 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 ath- letes 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 activi- ty 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, respective- ly), while the second most followed male (M1) had a significantly lower number of images

(113) when compared to the others. It is impor- tant 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*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ath- lete** | **Follow- ers** | **Posts** | **Athlete** | **Follow- ers** | **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 |

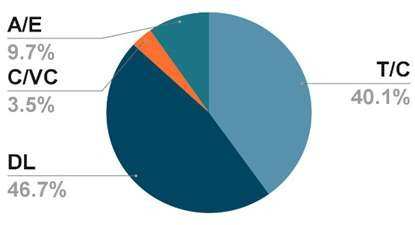
*Note: Fencers followers and posting activity on Instagram*

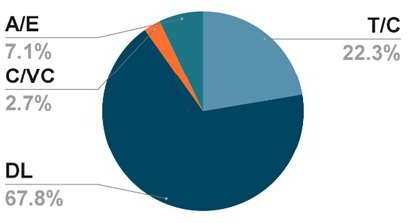
Through the survey and analysis, we noticed that there is a positive correlation between the number of posts and the number of followers of professional fencers, suggesting that their self-presentation strategies on Instagram can attract more followers and potentially increase their personal brand value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

**Figure 2**

*Types of posts on Instagram by gender*

male



female

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

To further assess these strategies, we evaluat- ed the activities that these athletes covered in their Instagram content. As can be seen from Figure 2, the most frequent category was daily life (DC), which refers to visual information that depicts their experiences beyond sports set- tings and could be related to two dimensions of the MABI (Arai et al., 2013), namely “Attrac- tive appearance” and “Marketable lifestyle”. The representation of activities varies between gen- ders, with females sharing more of their quotid- ian (67.8%) than males (46.7%) in the analyzed sample.

Hence, the platform acts as a place where ath- letes 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 inter- pret and, therefore more palatable for the gen- eral 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 ap- pear in second place, but do not reach nearly the same proportion of daily life content, point- ing out a less prevalent use of the “Athletic per- formance” dimension from the MABI (Arai et al., 2013) among these athletes. Additionally, male athletes seem to be almost twice as like- ly 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 profes- sional fencers according to their genders. How- ever, as indicated previously, female athletes were more popular and posted more regularly, which could explain this variation.

What fencers post about training and compe- titions can have a positive impact on the gen- eral 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 evaluat- ed, 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 au- dience and increase the visibility of fencing to the public. Some examples of what they por- tray when they post about themselves include educational work in schools related to fencing (for volunteering) and promoting specific prod- ucts, 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 commercial- ization of fencing. Furthermore, by participat- ing in voluntary work professional fencers can create a positive image and reinforce a sense of social responsibility and mission, which con- sequently 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.

#### 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 fol- lowers. For the frequency of interaction, we cal- culated the average interactions (average num- ber of likes + average number of comments on all posts) of the two fencers with the highest number of followers on the platform (Table 4).

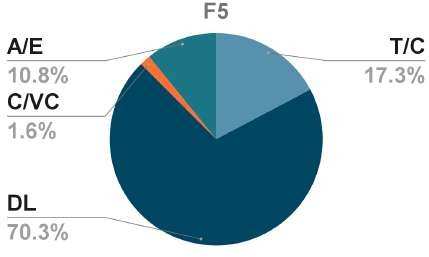
**Table 4**

*Average interaction*

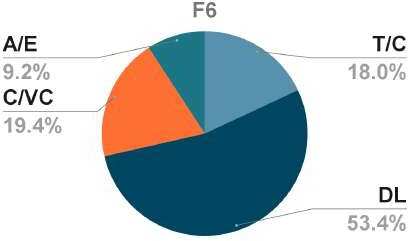
A closer look at the content shows that dif- ferent types of posts receive different levels of interaction on average. For example, when comparing Training & Competition (T/C), Daily Life (DL), Charity & Volunteering (C/VC) and Ath- lete Branding & Endorsement (A/E), we noted that T/C and DL were the 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 ce- lebrities or athletes attracted more likes, thus increasing the average number of interactions on their posts.

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

**Figura 5**

*Tipo de publicación por esgrimistas*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ath- lete** | **Followers** | **AVG**  **LIKES** | **AVG COM- MENTS** | **AVG INTER-**  **ACTIONS** |
| F5 | 300000 | 8946.31 | 58.81 | 9005.12 |
| F6 | 207000 | 8439.06 | 68.94 | 8508 |



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 pop- ular 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 pro- portion 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.

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The fact that visual social media, such as Ins- tagram, have become a relevant tool for ath- letes 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 competi- tion 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 communi- cation process.

Professional fencers use Instagram to inter- act 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 commu- nication 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 com- munication trends regarding professional fenc- ers’ self-presentation on Instagram?”,* the study shows some directions in the athletes’ self-rep- resentation. 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 per- sonalities in order to attract more viewers. The findings also suggest that fencers’ content fo- cuses more on the dimensions of ‘attractive ap- pearance’ and ‘marketable lifestyle’ than direct- ly 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 discov- ery of pilot Jorge Lorenzo’s Instagram content.

In regards to our second research question, “How does the Instagram content of profes- sional fencers affect the perception of fencing as a sport?” The exploratory qualitative re- search 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 gener- al public’s knowledge of the sport, making its characteristics more palatable through diverse visual elements (photos, videos, etc.). In addi- tion, by sharing content about their behind-the- scenes footage, and social involvement in char- ity 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, chal- lenges, and opportunities in sport communi- cation for the self-presentation of profession- al fencers on Instagram. They raise the profile and performance of fencing as a sport through diverse content and interaction with their au- dience. The presence of athletes on the plat- form is an important contribution to the sport communication market on a general level and to the modality in particular. By actively engag- ing and posting engaging content, they are able to attract more followers and viewers to them- selves, increasing the visibility of the individual and the sport.

#### LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study aims to explore the contribution of professional fencers’ self-presentation on Ins- tagram as a sport communication strategy, with a focus on personal branding. Hence, it is im- portant 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 explorato- ry research based on visuals only, and other re- searchers could further evaluate the topic from

a quantitative perspective or on text-centered platforms.

Since the number of current studies on fenc- ers’ online self-presentation remains low and no established theoretical framework has been established, this paper provides a tentative ap- proach 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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## 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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## 73

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###### Abstract

This paper studies in a comparative and longitu- dinal 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 profession- als. 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.

The results show a 135% increase in the num- ber of publications, the stylistic use of humour and entertainment as the main content.

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 perfi- les 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 entreteni- miento como contenido principal.

PALABRAS CLAVE

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

1. **INTRODUCTION AND**

**STATE OF THE ART**

#### INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the 20th century, we have witnessed the transformation of large global sports organizations into truly multinational entertainment companies (Andrews & Jack- son, 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 con- tent-producing entities.

The next evolutionary leap came with the ex- pansion of social networks during the first dec- ade 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 evo- lution of tone, and the obligatory bidirection- ality, 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 communi- cation 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 be- came 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 Val- ley. 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 us- ers 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 Tik- Tok 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 min- utes.

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.

#### STATE OF THE ART

Football’s importance and social impact lead to a confluence of media, political, economic, and cultural interests, as Meneses and Áva- los (2013) stated. Consequently, football clubs maintain a continuous presence in the commu- nication 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). Ac- cording to Castillo *et al*. (2015), there are vari- ous actors involved in such communication: the club itself (Ginesta, 2010), the players, the me- dia (Olabe, 2011), the fans themselves, and the political institutions, when there is an associa- tion 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 pres- ence 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 Pre- mier 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 pub- lication of club content on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which goes beyond the sport- ing 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 Segar- ra-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 spe- cific 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 publica- tions 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 con- ceptual framework drawing, the purpose re- volves around this question: How has the con- tent 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.

#### METHODOLOGY

* 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 Tik- Tok by the clubs analyzed.
4. To analyze the tone and style of the publica- tions made on TikTok by professional football clubs about their identity and positioning.
5. To assess the importance of this social net- work in football clubs as a tool for engagement and loyalty among the public.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

To achieve the objectives, a methodological combination has been used with a first phase based on a content analysis with a longitu- dinal 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.

#### CONTENT ANALYSIS

The content analysis is based on previous stud- ies 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 stud- ies. Likewise, the number of profiles analyzed (five) is similar to that of the research by Su *et al*.

(2020b) and with a sport-communicative con- text that coincides with that of Sidorenko-Bau- tista *et al.* (2022).

The content analyzed corresponds to the posts made on the profile feeds of the five clubs se- lected 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 com- petitions during the week. It is, therefore, one of the months with the most regular sporting activity.

Data collection took place in the weeks follow- ing 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 sec- tions 2.3.2. and 2.3.3.

**Table 2**

*Teams and followers on TikTok.*

#### DELIMITATION OF THE SAMPLE

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

#### STUDY OF THE CATEGORISATION OF CONTENT

Given the recent interest in studying TikTok, content categorization is based on previous re- search 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 met- rics have been measured: the total number of “Likes” on a video, the total number of com- ments, 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 net- works, according to Mejía Llano (2017) and González Fernández-Villavicencio *et al.* (2013).

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Team** | **Posi- tion** | **Start in**  **Tik- Tok** | **Followers in March 2021** | **Followers in March 2023** |
| Real Madrid CF | 1º | August 2019 | 5,000,000 | 30,000,000 |
| FC Bar- celona | 2º | July 2019 | 8,300,000 | 27,800,000 |
| Atlético de Ma- drid | 3º | August 2019 | 2,200,000 | 7,800,000 |
| Sevilla FC | 4º | April 2020 | 355,000 | 3,200,000 |
| Valen- cia FC | 5º | August 2019 | 150,000 | 2,600,000 |

The level of engagement of each video analyz- ed has been obtained by using the following formula:

*Source: Own elaboration*

(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).

#### 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 objec- tives of the research, the following analysis var- iables 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 or- ganizations are committed (equality, sustaina- bility, etc.).
4. Merchandising: They include products relat- ed 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 ac- count.
8. Challenges by the club: The club creates chal- lenges for its fandom and TikTok users to par- ticipate in and create more interaction.

* B) Tone, text, and sound

1. Tone

1. Humorous: when the purpose of the publica- tions 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 sportswom- en.
4. 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 ad- dition, they post videos that contain text in the video itself. The texts share common elements across all organizations, such as emoticons, in- formal tones, and hashtags.

1. 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.*

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 devel- oped, where the questions discuss the results obtained from the quantitative part, as well as issues affecting the work of the different pro- files associated with**Tab**a**l**t**e**h**4**lete communication.

Betwe*At*e*h*n*lete*t*s*h*a*r*n*e*d*e*pr*a*o*n*fe*d*ssio*fi*n*v*a*e*ls in*o*t*p*er*e*vi*n*ewe*q*d*u*i*e*n* s*d*t*e*i*p*o*t*n*h.*s are

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Subject** | **Tone** | **Sound** | **Interac- tion** |
| Sports | Humor- istic | Ambient sound | Reproduc- tions/views |
| Community | Energetic | Instrumen- tal music | Likes |
| Social caus- es | Emo- tional | Music with lyrics | Comments |
| Merchan- dizing | Text | Narration of clip | Shared |
| Sponsorship | Languag- es | Interviews and press conferenc- es |  |
| Entertain- ment (in- tern) | Hashtags |  |  |
| Entertain- ment (exter- nal) | Emoti- cons |  |  |
| Challenges |  |  |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **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 Comuni- cación, an agency specializing in Social Networks. |
| Laura Palanques | Account Manager Twelfhun- dred |

The impact

*Source: Own elaboration*

and engagement of

club publi-

*Source: Own elaboration*

asked. The interviews took place between 10 April and 23 May 2023.

cations 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 confron- tation with qualitative fieldwork (Álvarez-Gayou, 2003).

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

#### RESULTS

##### FC BARCELONA

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

**Table 5**

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

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Metrics Year 2021 Year 2023** | | |
| Followers | 8.3 millon | 27.8 millon |
| 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 millon | 3.6 millon |

*\*Publication with more engagement Source: Own elaboration.*

sponsorship, as well as content of a social na- ture, increases.

In terms of style, the epic/dynamic tone de- clined, 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.

##### REAL MADRID

*Real Madrid* shows an exponential growth (+300%) in followers compared to 2021. Top- ics 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 millon | 30 millon |
| Publications | 26 | 40 |
| Media publication | 0.84 | 1.2 |
| Content |  |  |
| - Sports | 84% | 32.50% |
| - Entertainment | 0% social exter- nal 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 millo | 3.5 millon |

*\*Publication with more engagement Source: Own elaboration.*

texts. There was also a change in the music used, with an increase in the use of instrumen- tal 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”.

##### ATLÉTICO DE MADRID

Like its predecessors, Atlético de Madrid has a significant increase in followers and publica- tions. 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 millons | 7.8 millons |
| 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 millons | 9 millons |

*\*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 engage- ment, 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”.

##### SEVILLA FC

The club has significantly increased its commu- nity of followers and its average daily publica- tion 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/dy- namic 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 millon |
| 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 suc- cessful 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.

##### VALENCIA CF

Percentage-wise, the most significant increase in followers between 2021 and 2023 is for *Va- lencia CF*, which goes from 150,000 to 2.6 mil- lion 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 millon |
| 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 publica- tion rate (per day) 2021** | **Average publication rate (per day) 2023** |
| FC Barce- lona | 30 | 88 | 0.96 | 2.8 |
| Real Ma-  drid | 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.

#### COMPARISON OF TIKTOK USE IN FOOTBALL CLUBS

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Atlético de Madrid | 61.5% epic and dy- namic tone | 50% epic and dy- namic tone |
| 30.8% tone of humor | 41% tone of humor |
| 53.8% modern music | 33% modern music |
| 76% English language | 45% English lan- guage |
| Valencia CF | 31.3% epic and dy-  namic tone | 50% epic and dy-  namic 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 dy- namic tone | 70% epic and dy- namic tone |
| 10% tone of humor | 20% tone of humor |
| 57.1% modern music | 50% modern music |
| 60% English language | 95% English lan- guage |

**Table 11**

*Most used content types per year and club.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Club** | **Year 2021** | **Year 2023** |
| FC Barce- lona | 50% sports | 37.5% sports |
| 37% entertainment | 13% entertainment |
| Real Ma- drid | 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 compar- ison 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 re- sults reflect the ongoing popularity of football on the platform and the close competition be- tween 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 dynam- ic tone | 31% epic and dy- namic tone |
| 23% tone of humor | 52% tone of humor |
| 36.7% instrumental music | 34% instrumental music |
| 100% English lan-  guage | 65% English lan-  guage |
| Real Madrid | 84% epic and dynam- ic tone | 42.5% epic and dy- namic tone |
| 15.4% tone of humor | 47.5% tone of humor |
| 53.8% modern music | 25% modern music |
| 100% English lan- guage | 60% English lan- guage |

*Source: Own elaboration.*

All five clubs have increased their activity on Tik- Tok, posting more content and more frequently between 2021 and 2023. FC Barcelona leads in the total number of posts, as well as the aver- age 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 millon | 3.6 millon |
| Real Madrid | 6 millon | 3.5 millon |
| Atlético de Madrid | 3 millon | 9 millon |
| 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 con- nect 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 Tik- Tok initially but then move closer to home.

There is a general trend towards a more hu- morous tone and a reduction in the use of in- strumental 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 fo- cused on Generation Z.

The table shows the publication with the most engagement for each club. The difference be- tween 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 sec- ond has to do with the context in which society was moving, caused by the pandemic.

#### 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 conver- gent and divergent points, as well as the most relevant findings, are outlined below.

#### FACTORS INFLUENCING

**THE GROWTH OF**

#### CLUB FOLLOWERS

Each club has its characteristics, from its fan base to its level of media interest. These as- pects, 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 ex- ample, as it tends to avoid risks, especially in new media (Graell, personal communication, 15 April 2023).

However, Puri Vicente provides another per- spective by identifying three key factors that have driven the accelerated growth in follow- ers: 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).

#### CHALLENGES IN GENERATING SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

Generating content on TikTok is not without its challenges. García stresses that the main chal- lenge lies in balancing viral content with the club’s branding (García, personal communica- tion, 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 impor- tance of having an internal team dedicated to TikTok.

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

#### IMPORTANCE OF ENTERTAINMENT CONTENT IN CLUB STRATEGY

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

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

#### STRATEGIES AND FORMULAS TO GENERATE ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is a vital metric in any social net- work. 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, stress- ing 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).

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

* 1. **DISCUSSION**

Through the study, it was found that sports and entertainment content, with an epic and dynamic approach and following the codes im- posed 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 so- cial 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 sat- urated 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 per- spective 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 Sidoren- ko-Bautista et al. (2022), not only validates the growing importance of this platform but also re- flects 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 de- termined 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 net- work and the audience, modifying their com- munication strategy and their content towards sport and entertainment, dynamic and agile, allowing them to get closer to the new gener- ations. A review of the content published re- affirms 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 oth- er social platforms (Segarra-Saavedra & Hidal- go-Marí, 2020; Lobillo & Muñoz, 2016), where communication on Instagram or Twitter is de- scribed 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 deci- sion can be seen as an attempt by the clubs to humanize their brand and make it more relat- able 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 rec- ognizing the need to evolve in line with contem- porary media and changing fan expectations.

* 1. **CONCLUSIONS**

The evolution of the use of TikTok in Spanish professional football between 2021 and 2023 has been remarkable. All the indicators ana- lyzed 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 audiovis- ual pieces to the demands and trends of the so- cial 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, enter- tainment has become a determining factor in the clubs’ strategy on TikTok. Fans prefer en-

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

Regarding the tone and style of the publica- tions, 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 Valen- cia, are building the most relevant narrative in this context.

Finally, assessing the importance of this social network for football clubs as a tool for engage- ment and loyalty among the public, it can be concluded that TikTok allows them to connect with their audience from a different perspec- tive 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 com- ing 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 evo- lution of these challenges.

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## 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 ste- reotyped. This poor representation has been called on numerous occasions as a “symbolic annihilation” (Gerbner and Gross, 1976; Tuch- man, 2000). The invisibility of women has been carried out mainly in the field of sports journal- ism, which has been configured as a difficult space for women to access and develop pro- fessionally (Ramon et al., 2020; Sainz de Baran- da, 2013).

**93**

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 quantita- tive content analysis that studied the infor- mation 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 in- formation about Qatar 2022 and a limited pres- ence of female journalists both in the creation of opinion articles and also in the authorship of

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## 93

the information that appears on the front pag- es of the newspapers.

**Keywords:** Sports journalism, women jour- nalists, *Marca, Mundo Deportivo, FIFA, Qatar.*

###### Resumen

Históricamente, tanto en el ámbito español como en el internacional, el rol de las periodis- tas en los medios de comunicación se ha ca- racterizado por ser ínfimo y estereotipado. Esta escasa representación se ha denominado, en numerosas oportunidades, como una “aniqui- lación simbólica” (Gerbner y Gross, 1976; Tuch- man, 2000). La invisibilización de las mujeres se ha llevado a cabo principalmente en el campo del periodismo deportivo, el cual se ha configu- rado como un espacio difícil para que las muje- res accedan y se desarrollen profesionalmente (Ramon *et al.,* 2020; Sainz de Baranda, 2013).

El siguiente artículo tiene como objetivo ana- lizar el papel que cumplieron las periodistas

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Sports journalism has historically been charac- terized as a section with several ethical dysfunc- tions: low diversity of the sports agenda, gender inequalities, and informative sexism (Franks & O’Neill, 2016; Ramon *et al.,* 2020). In the specif- ic 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 technolo- gies and communication platforms, the sports press has a fundamental role within the jour- nalistic 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-

deportivas en la producción de piezas periodís- ticas publicadas en la prensa deportiva espa- ñola durante la Copa Mundial de la FIFA Qatar 2022. La investigación se basó en un análisis de contenido cuantitativo que estudió las informa- ciones publicadas entre el 20 de noviembre y el 18 de diciembre de 2022, período en el que se disputó dicho evento. Los resultados indi- can, 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 periodis- tas, tanto en la creación de artículos de opinión como también en la autoría de las informacio- nes que aparecen en las portadas de los pe- riódicos.

**Palabras claves:** Periodismo deportivo, mu- jeres periodistas, *Marca, Mundo Deportivo,* FIFA, Qatar.

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

The latest major soccer-related sporting event has been the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Pre- cisely, 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 oc- casions for, among other things, homopho- bic 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 journalis- tic pieces published in the Spanish sports press during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

#### THEORETICAL

**FRAMEWORK**

#### 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 in- formative 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 ex- plains that, by ignoring and/or portraying wom- en in stereotypical roles, the media do nothing more than symbolically annihilate them (Gerb- ner & 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 ex- plained by different research. Generally speak- ing, as Schoch (2022) observes, studies expose invisibilization, gender discrimination, the dif- ficulties 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; Organis- ta *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 creat- ed by women. In Schoch’s (2020) analysis, only

9% of the articles analyzed were written exclu- sively 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 ste- reotypes that assume that the traits of an ideal manager are those prototypical of masculinity and that, therefore, do not allow women to ac- cess positions in media management.

On the other hand, it often happens that wom- en 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 journal- istic and public interest. Consequently, wom- en 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).

#### THE CASE OF SPANISH SPORTS JOURNALISM

In Spain, talking about women in journalism necessarily implies talking about unequal op- portunities (Ufarte, 2012). Numerous studies show women’s scarce and stereotyped pres- ence 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 expe- rienced 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 var- ious experts in sports journalism on gender discrimination, women incorporated into the sports journalism profession are a minority. These authors point out that the journalists in- terviewed are aware that they are perceived as anecdotal elements, that their physical appear- ance 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 de- cision-making positions (Ramon *et al.,* 2020).

Sainz de Baranda (2013), in a longitudinal in- vestigation of the sports press, points out that women represent only 9.1% of the total num- ber 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 responsibil- ity such as the direction or sub-direction of a newspaper. In the same way, Ortega and San Miguel (2016) and Salido Fernández (2021) pro- nounce themselves. Men prevail in all Spanish sports television journalism roles: anchor, re- porter, and voice-over (Ortega & San Miguel, 2016). In addition, women who enter a profes- sion as masculine as sports journalism do so

with rigorous limitations and requirements (Sa- lido 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 posi- tions 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 funda- mental 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 informa- tive 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 wom- an to write an article in 2010 than in 2018. In addition, they tend to work with informative ar- ticles but not with opinion articles.

Along the same lines, an analysis by Alonso-Al- lende *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 cat- egories, 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 Span- ish sports newspapers remain highly popular despite the press losing ground to new tech- nologies (Faedo *et al.,* 2022). To briefly exem- plify this situation, we can point out that *Marca* and *Mundo Deportivo* were newspapers with a large number of readers during the first quar- ter 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 read- ers per day) (*Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación,* 2023).

After reviewing some of the most relevant stud- ies on the employment situation of women in both international and Spanish sports journal- ism, this research takes a theoretical stance based on three main ideas that complement each other: the theory of the “pseudo-feminiza- tion” (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” (Gerb- ner & Gross, 1976; Tuchman, 2000) that they suffer in the media.

#### 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 communica- tion (Berelson, 1952). We analyzed the journal- istic 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 wom- en were studied, except on specific occasions when the production of men was also analyzed, to make some comparisons. The following vari- ables were analyzed for each of the journalistic pieces: a) Date, b) Author’s name, c) Author’s sex, d) Journalistic genre (informative/interpre- tative/opinion)1, e) Sports discipline, f) Sex of the sports competition, and g) Cover page2. All of them were coded and worked with Microsoft Excel tables and filters.

In addition, it was identified that 1) the hierar- chical 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.

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*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Mundo Deportivo***  ***+ Marca*** | | ***Mundo Deportivo*** | ***Marca*** |
| Total number of articles | 5.057 | 2.523 | 2.534 |
| With an element of author- ship | 67,4%  (3.409) | 52,6%  (1.324) | 82,2%  (2.085) |
| No ele- ment of author- ship | 32,6%  (1.652) | 47,8%  (1.199) | 17,9%  (453) |

*Source: own elaboration.*

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

* 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 par- ticipated 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 con- tinue to be the outsiders that Hardin and Shain (2006) mentioned: their presence in news and sports journalism is limited.

**Table 2**

*Authorship of articles*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Mundo Deportivo***  ***+ Marca*** | | ***Mundo Depor- tivo*** | ***Marca*** |
| Men | 81,8%  (2.786) | 73%  (966) | 87,3%  (1.820) |
| Women | 13%  (445) | 23,6%  (312) | 6,4%  (133) |
| Not de- | 5,5% | 13,5% | 6,3% |
| tectable | (178) | (46) | (132) |

*Source: own elaboration.*

From another perspective, another critical ele- ment to highlight is the roles played by female journalists during the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qa- tar. 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 De- portivo,* 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 Qa- tar”,* 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 Alon- so-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 interpre- tative pieces, but their presence is not signifi- cant 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.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Journalis- tic Genres** | ***Mundo Deportivo***  ***+ Marca*** | ***Mundo Depor- tivo*** | ***Mar- ca*** |
| Informative | 40,7%  (181) | 36,9%  (115) | 49,7%  (66) |
| Interpreta- | 41,3% | 42% | 39,8% |
| tive | (184) | (131) | (53) |
| Opinion | 18% | 21,1% | 10,5% |
|  | (80) | (66) | (14) |

*Source: own elaboration.*

#### 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: foot- ball reigns over all sports and leaves the rest in the background. As football is the basis of the journalistic business, sports journalism has al- most become football journalism (Rojas-Torrji- os, 2012).

**Table 4**

*Sporting disciplines of articles written by women.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Sport** | ***Mundo Depor- tivo + Marca*** | **Sport** | ***Mundo Depor- tivo*** | **Sport** | *Marca* |
| Foot- | 72,1% | Foot- | 72,8% | Foot- | 70,7% |
| ball | (321) | ball | (227) | ball | (94) |
| Ath- letics | 6,7%  (30) | Ath- letics | 4,9%  (15) | Ath- letics | 11,3%  (15) |
| Swim- ming | 2,9%  (13) | Swim- ming | 3,8%  (12) | Bas- ket- ball | 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 compe- titions 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). Al- though 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 invis- ible, which contributes to a systematic absence of women’s sports, in contrast to an over-sup- ply of men’s sports.

Nahuel Ivan Faedo

**99**

**99**

**Table 5**

*Sex of sports competitions in articles written by women*

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

*Source: own elaboration.*

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

On the other hand, the positions within the hi- erarchical structure of the newspapers were identified according to what they reported dur- ing the period studied. In the case of *Mundo Deportivo*, out of fifteen people mentioned as responsible for different areas of the newspa- per, 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: Yolan- da 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 struc- tures 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 eventu- al reader (Alonso-Allende *et al.*, 2019). Conse- quently, 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 news- papers, we can see that women participate in 8.1%, while men participate in 91.3% of the cas- es (see Table 5).

**Table 6**

*Authorship of all articles appearing on the covers*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Mundo Deportivo***  ***+ Marca*** | | ***Mundo Deportivo*** | ***Marca*** |
| 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 ele- ment of author- ship | 0,9%  (3) | 0,8%  (1) | 1,1%  (2) |

*Source: own elaboration.*

#### 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 vari- ables analyzed, it should be noted that the sit- uation is worse in *Marca* than in *Mundo Depor- tivo.* In the Madrid newspaper, women are less present in the authorship of the information, producing opinion articles, and creating the ar- ticles 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 real- ity. As Hardin and Shain (2006) and Ramon et al.) mentioned, women continue to be outsid- ers.

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 Gerb- ner 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 op- portunities to climb the ladder in sports media.

Additionally, women have almost zero partici- pation 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 news- paper. 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 inequal- ities 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 jour- nalism in general, they do show some really worrying data regarding the sports press in particular. The situation of women in journal- ism is a phenomenon worthy of study from dif- ferent 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 journal- ists, or would the situation have been as une- qual as in the press?

Beyond quantitative studies, looking at the phe- nomenon 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 be- lieve that journalistic pieces are produced con- sidering the gender perspective, among other questions.

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## Caroline Patatt

**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***

ARTICLE

***periodismo: un estudio de caso del canal brasileño SporTV***

6

**Convergence as a tool against the**

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###### Abstract

This study presents how convergence in tech- nological, professional, content and business dimensions (Salaverría, 2003, 2010) was crucial in overcoming the difficulties imposed by CO- VID-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 con- tent 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 dificul- tades impuestas por la COVID-19 en las rutinas productivas del periodismo deportivo brasi- leño. Se basa en un análisis del canal SporTV, que es líder de audiencia entre los especiali- zados en deportes y fue el primero en el país en mostrar un programa adaptado comple-

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## 105

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.

#### INTRODUCTION

Over the years, sports journalism has estab- lished 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; Mor- rison, 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 Salaver- ría (2003, 2010) defines as convergence, espe- cially in the technological, professional, content, and business dimensions.

Taking this reality into account, this paper aims to verify which aspects of the dimensions men- tioned 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 sec- tor. The interruption of major sports competi- tions around the world has had a significant im- pact 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 relat- ed 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 news- rooms, either in person or organized in a net-

PALABRAS CLAVE

Convergencia, COVID-19, Periodismo Deporti- vo, SporTV, Televisión Brasileña.

work through the Internet, and how integrated work would have supplied different commu- nication 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 televi- sion, 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 ca- pable of taping underwater, for example, and slow-motion cameras while transmitting signif- icant 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 (Memo- ria Globo, 2021). Currently, the SporTV channel alone, the subject of this study, took nearly 200 journalists to cover the 2018 World Cup in Rus- sia.

SporTV is one of three channels with daily news production and a focus on various sports, along with ESPN and BandSports, all availa- ble by subscription only. Sports debates fea- ture 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 partic- ipants in the program. These are inherent char- acteristics 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 hav- ing a program wholly adapted to be broadcast from participants’ homes during the pandem- ic. 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 con- sidered a fertile field for analyzing evolutionary issues related to this journalistic specialization, such as the case of convergence.

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

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered how jour- nalism is done worldwide, regardless of seg- ment, 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 com- plex reality. Despite the immense difficulties in the production processes, there is hard work to combat misinformation and face many oth- er 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 mar- kets, 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 sig- nificant increase in news consumption and positive evaluation of media cov- erage of the pandemic was observed among users previously unrelated to the news, such as young people, peo- ple with less education, and occasional consumers of information. (Casero-Ri- pollés, 2020, p.9)

Specifically, in sports journalism, the vulnera- bility 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 difficul- ties, ESPN in the United States even broadcast a stone-throwing tournament, and one of the most popular sports channels in the Nether- lands was successful with the so-called Mar- bula 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 questiona- ble, 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 televi- sion, 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 Ols- en, 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, consump- tion, and business models of new in general, not only in sports.

In this line, García-Avilés (2021) describes the adaptation to remote work from communica- tion 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 unprec- edented organizational changes to newsrooms, accelerating digital trans- formation. These changes can become permanent in most news organiza- tions: (pp. 1256-1257).

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

#### CONVERGENCE IN JOURNALISM

Salaverría, García Avilés and Masip (2010) es- tablish a concept of journalism convergence based on the idea that a generalized imple- mentation of digital technologies in commu- nication 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 languag- es so that journalists produce content that is distributed across multiple platforms, using the languages of each one”(p. 59).

Convergence can be addressed more specifi- cally in different dimensions, such as techno- logical, professional, content, and business (Salaverría, 2003, 2010) - all related to this re- search - but all interconnected.

The internal subdivisions and hierarchies in the profession, established since the 20th century, have changed, especially in the last two dec- ades. In 2012, the research entitled Profession- al Profile of the Brazilian Journalist pointed out 288 descriptions of new roles and 177 new ac- tivities related to journalistic practice, including digital media and strategy coordinator, digital content analyst, blog writer, and social mobili- zation analyst.

New characters, known as techno-actors, have emerged in newsrooms (Canavilhas *et al.,* 2015). They are professionals with extensive techno- logical mastery who work in the same medium as journalists but are not journalists, although they have the power to produce news. Exam- ples of occupations that fit this idea of tech- no-actors include designers and programmers.

In short, reporters and editors who used to have control over the news- room now need to establish negotia- tion 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 con- vergence goes beyond journalists’ use and do- main 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 profes- sional, 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 pe- riod and most of the time with fewer people, but in different functions, as well as large teams sharing adapted spaces. Various media belong- ing 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 significa- tive international example of newsroom fusion took place in 2000 by the American group Me- dia General in Tampa, Florida, where the Tampa Tribune journal, the Bay Online (TBO.com) local portal, and WFLA-TV televisión station gathered in one place.

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

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

Deuze and Witschge (2017) point out that “The newsroom is not necessarily a solid or coher- ent entity in today’s post-industrial journalism” (p.166). It is possible, and in some cases con- sidered a trend, to work outside of it, at a dis- tance, and in total synchronicity with the more profound ideals of convergence.

Canavilhas (2012) states that “you can only speak about convergence when the final prod- uct is content with unique characteristics” (p. 9). The researcher refers to content convergence: it is not enough to distribute information ma- terial 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 accu- mulation of content from different ori- gins 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 char- acteristics 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 concen- trating efforts in favor of a singular objective and still have professionals working separate- ly in no longer existing sectors. On the other hand, while representing an important step, such physical issues do not guarantee effective convergence.

#### METHODOLOGY

To achieve the goal of investigating the con- tribution of convergence in overcoming the impacts of COVID-19 in Brazilian sports jour- nalism, the SportTV channel, belonging to the *Globo* Communication Group, has been estab- lished as the object of investigation. It has ex- isted 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 19941.

Before the pandemic caused by the SARS- CoV-2 virus, SporTV was the leader in the au- dience among all channels available by sub- scription 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-

1 Available: [http://canaisglobosat.globo.com/.](http://canaisglobosat.globo.com/) Access Jan- uary 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 fea- tures at least two commentators and reporters who mainly participate live. It is defined as a round table but combines elements of a televi- sion 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 pandem- ic on Brazilian sports journalism, in which he presents a general analysis of the modification above in *Redação* SporTV. It is essential to men- tion, for a better understanding of some impor- tant 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 Cloud- cast, 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 dura-

was presented only from 13:00 to 14:00, also from Monday to Friday, then the time was grad- ually 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, hypothe- ses, and research techniques, the same period of analysis as the authors are used: thirty edi- tions of *Redação* SporTV were recorded at two different intervals; first, from 30 March to 18 June 2020 (when the program was in home of- fice format and there were no national or inter- national football competitions with the partici- pation of Brazilians), and from 29 September to 20 November 2020.

The second interval begins precisely three months after the program returned to its usu- al 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 *Apowesoft* tool, which captures the computer screen. First, the videos were ob- tained directly from the *Redação* SporTV web- site2. The compilation was then made available on the Globoplay website3, 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).

tion were modified at various times. Initially, it

* 1. During the entire period of *Redação* Home Office, the

program was available free of charge to the public

after the live broadcast, both in vide o and audio format, through the Vocês da Imprensa podcast.

* 1. 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 possi- bility of an exploratory study capable of provid- ing hints of a broader reality and providing data for further research. It considers the possibil- ity 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 par- ticipants’ use of their equipment, variations in journalistic formats, usage of content produced by other Globo group media, presence of inter- activity and relationship with digital social net- works. 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 delim- itation: data collection, data selection, analysis, interpretation, and report writing.

From that, the next step was to conduct inter- views through the Internet4 with three profes- sionals related to *Redação* SporTV: the present- er, a commentator, and the head sports editor of *Grupo Globo.* By following what Batista, Ma- tos and Nascimento (2017) define, it was pos- sible to “[...] understand the subjectivity of the

* 1. Justified by the fact that the interviewer and interview- ees were in different countries.

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

The interview with *Redação* SporTV presenter Marcelo Barreto and *Redação* SporTV partici- pating journalist Sérgio Xavier Filho can be con- sidered 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 Glo- bo 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.

#### RESULTS

The following hypotheses were tested:

* 1. The use of devices with audio and video recording capacity belonging to the journalists participating in the pro- gram and not to the television station, nor for the exclusive purpose of jour- nalistic 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 ver- ified that the use of devices with audio and video recording capacity belonged to the jour- nalists participating in the program, not the tel-

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 pro- duction of the program; and in an interview for this paper, *Redação* SporTV journalist and com- mentator 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, head- phones, 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 man- aged. I asked my daughter for help [...], And for that, I had to do things like not use WiFi. That was the recommenda- tion 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 tech- nological part. (S. Xavier Filho, personal statement, 29 May 2023).

This practice continued even with the present- er’s return to the studio, as seen in the second analysis interval, between 29 September and 20 November 2020, when commentators con- tinued 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 require- ments, the company did not provide addition- al training for journalists, limiting itself only to the team that operated the Cloudcast soft- ware 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), know- ing that it worked and developing peo- ple within the company who were ca- pable 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. Bar- reto, personal statement, 29 Decem- ber 2020)

The analysis of this situation reveals contradic- tory aspects of convergence. Journalists had to use technological resources related to the In- ternet but adapted for television in an attempt more of emergency substitution than tech- nological 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 impor- tance. 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 - head- phones, and a microphone. This signif- icantly improved the quality of every- one’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 view- ership. 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)

* 1. There was a reduction in the num- ber of professionals involved in the production, recording, and broadcast- ing processes during the pandemic. A demand previously met by more people was met by fewer, with signs of convergence, especially from a techno- logical 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, per- sonal 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 entire- ly atypical moment.

The most significant difficulties were really when there were technical prob- lems, either with the platform or persis- tent problems with those participating in the program, including myself, who sometimes had connection problems when working from home. In most cas- es, 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, per- sonal statement, 29 December 2020)

From the perspective of professional conver- gence, it is also relevant to highlight an aspect Barreto (2020) pointed out that indirectly refers to the proof of this hypothesis: sports journal- ists 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 pro- duction. At the same time, the topics covered by *Redação* SporTV also transcended sports is- sues. Patatt (2021) detailed that the program addressed subjects such as politics and public health, sometimes even more than the sport it- self, in several editions. In an interview for this work, Marcelo Barreto corroborates this:

In terms of dealing with issues relat- ed to the pandemic, this is in line with what I often say, that the sports jour- nalist must be prepared to be a jour- nalist 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 exper- tise, 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 broad- er topic, which was a topic of interest to society (M. Barreto, personal state- ment, 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 capac- ity to adapt. According to him, some found it more challenging to cope with the accumula- tion of tasks, especially those used to a televi- sion 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 limita- tions of not being able to go outside, due to the confinement itself. (S. Xavi- er Filho, personal statement, 29 May 2023).

The journalist also states that those with pro- fessional 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 confirma- tion 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 op- erate in a remote newsroom system in the online context.

According to *Grupo Globo’s* sports editor Gus- tavo 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 locat- ed. And, consequently, where the pre- senters, editors-in-chief, and most of the narrators and commentators are located. But there is also a large news- room in São Paulo and newsrooms in Belo Horizonte, Recife, and Brasilia.” (G. Maria, personal statement, Febru- ary 11, 2022).

That said, it is possible to consider that the above structure influenced the journalistic out- put 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 Commu- nications Group, which shares the same news- room 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 conglomer- ate:

Integrated work develops more com- plete professionals with a multi-plat- form vision, more prepared for the present and the future. Being together was very important during the pan- demic. The integration of the struc- tures 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, per- sonal statement, February 11, 2022)

The fact that newsrooms had been integrated since before the pandemic was also consid- ered by Maria (2022) to be fundamental during the *Redação* Home Office period. According to Barreto (2020), this occurred when most peo- ple, including editors-in-chief and executives, worked from home, with few exceptions for op- erationally 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 per- son. 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. Ma- ria, personal statement, February 11, 2022)

In other words, the situation of remote work- ing 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 Commu- nications Group, which is significant.

However, it cannot be affirmed that the inte- grated work has been entirely practical, accord- ing 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 su- pervisor 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, net- working - remote or face-to-face - and the re- adjustment of formats are highlighted as char- acteristics of convergence in journalism.

4) The difficulty of producing new con- tent with the audiovisual characteris- tics of television due to factors such as the lack of training and sporting com- petitions and the need for social dis- tancing accelerated the convergence of content.

This hypothesis can be considered only partial- ly true.

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

during the period of remote work and the re- turn 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 con- vergence was observed. The first two episodes of *Redação* Home Office did not feature the use of any television journalism format. The similar- ity 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 im- ages to illustrate some interventions, but dur- ing *Redação* Home Office, the final product had no unique features. The material was redistrib- uted 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 gen- eral, mainly when it resorted to rebroadcasting old football matches to keep the programming on the air.

Empezamos a hablar de cosas an- tiguas, como la final de la Copa del Mundo de 1970 [...] eso es algo pro- pio 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 converti- mos 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 char- acteristics 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’*5* of our journalism. It left some marks, but something stayed for now; I think we continue with these new possibil- ities, which are used much more fre- quently than before the pandemic. I do not think it is necessarily a bad thing. (S. Xavier Filho, personal statement, 29 May 2023)

* 1. Refiriéndose a red social TikTok.

It is possible to use social networks as an ex- ample 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 whatso- ever. These changes are evident, for example, from the screen format: it was recorded entire- ly 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.

#### 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 al- lowed, 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 distanc- ing 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, to- gether with the general vision of journalism not only from the sports perspective, were funda- mental aspects in realizing the journalistic ac- tivities 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 infra- structure 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 coordi- nators or certain collaborative routines.

The fact that *Redação* SporTV has the charac- teristics of a content aggregator, also acting based on information published in other me- dia, 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 af- firm that journalistic convergence was funda- mental to developing television sports journal- ism in Brazil during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is in line with what has been found in oth- er countries, according to the literature, espe- cially 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 techno- logical perspective but also in terms of the ne- cessity 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 sub- ject in Brazilian media companies, the specific focus on the pandemic with all its controver- sial 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 situa- tions in other media companies to obtain more definitive comparisons.

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12

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Universitat de Vic - Universitat Central de Catalunya

Universidad del Azuay

# MISCELLANEOUS SECTION

### Lucila Christen y Gracia

**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***

ARTICLE

7

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###### Abstract

Previous studies have concluded that the com- bination of interpreters’ sex and age may affect the perception of their simultaneous interpre- tation. In this study, 156 subjects completed a questionnaire assessing various non-verbal factors of the simultaneous interpretations produced by four male and four female inter- preters of different age groups in a record- ing 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, simultane- ous interpretation.

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**125**

###### 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 di- versos factores no verbales de las interpreta- ciones 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-

* + 1. **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

This research builds upon a previous Baseline Research (Christen, 2020), which investigated the impact of interpreter sex on the percep- tion of simultaneous interpreting (SI). However, the previous research faced challenges with a small sample size (Gile, 2018), so the authors made the methodological improvements out- lined in the methodology section of this pub- lication. This study aims to replicate the Base- line 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 re- ferring to interpreters or participants, men and

tores verbales que no interfiriera en la evalua- ción 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 interpreta- ción simultánea por parte de la audiencia.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Sexo y edad, estereotipos, edadismo, inter- pretación simultánea.

women are included unless the sex of the spe- cific group under study is specified for clarity. Where the context of the text so requires, a dis- tinction between sexes may be made.

#### 1 INTERPRETATION STUDIES

Simultaneous interpreting is essential for mul- tilingual communication at congresses and events. With the help of technological tools, the interpreter’s oral production is delivered syn- chronously 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 stud- ies when investigating the sex (Defrancq et al., 2021) and the age of interpreters. Most recent studies have focused on investigating the im- pact of sex differences in interpreters on the one hand and the age or experience of inter- preters 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 inter- views (Nakane, 2008) or sex differences in facial

threat and the use of mitigating factors (hedg- es) 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 interpret- ers (Collard & Defrancq, 2017, 2019). A study that also deals with the sex of the interpreters concludes that connectors vary according to in- terpreting 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 experi- enced interpreters lie in the strategies the lat- ter use in comprehension, translation, and pro- duction and in their ability to switch between these processes.

Along the same line, Tiselius (2013) analyses the process and product of interpreting in in- terpreters with different levels of experience and concludes that interpreters with long pro- fessional experience show significant differ- ences in their interpreting skills compared to those with little or no interpreting experience. According to the results of her study, the for- mer find fewer differences in speech process- ing and have more problem-solving strategies. Subsequently, Liu et al. (2020) interviewed in- terpreters aged 70 and over who are members of AIIC (Association Internationale des Inter- prètes 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) ex- amines the latency of word interpretation and points out that it improves during interpreter training but does not increase with profession- al 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 interpret- ers in their approach. Angelelli (2004) includes age, sex, level of education, and income when studying the role of the interpreter in commu- nity, 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 visi- ble 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 stud- ies 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 inter- preters’ evaluations more than those of their fe- male colleagues. Drawing on theories from the sociology of professions, Gentile (2016) inves- tigates the self-perceived professional status of conference and public service interpreters. Her questionnaires (one for each type of inter- preting) 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 fac- tors, 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, iden- tify shared characteristics, and reduce the time needed to process redundant information (Cud- dy & 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 expecta- tions 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 im- portant vocal features for identifying the sex and age of an individual, can be extracted from speech signals and encoded almost immedi- ately in brain areas specialized in the percep- tion 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 be- comes ageist only when described as a charac- ter 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 de- rived from the physiological characteristics they unconsciously perceive in the speaker?

#### METHODOLOGY

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

#### INTERPRETERS

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

The first group (G1) participated in the Base- line 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 continu- ous 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 uninter- rupted 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.*

#### PRESENTATIONS

Four videos in English were chosen from among the speeches that the global TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) community dissem- inates through the Internet (see Table 2). These talks, approximately 15 minutes long, were se- lected to reduce the number of interferences that could negatively affect the primary sourc- es of cognitive loads in the interpretation (Ric- cardi, 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 com- plexity or density of the source speech, and the use of technical jargon or syntactically complex sentences (Gile, 2002).

#### SEQUENCE DESIGN

To provide greater methodological rigor, to make the results robust, and to ensure com- plete randomness in the order of the record- ing 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 Matemáti- cas (CIMAT), in León, Guanajuato, Mexico, de- signed four thirty-minute sequences. Each se- quence 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 or- der of the groups was alternated to obtain a to- tal of 64 segment positions in eight sequences (see Table 3).

**Table 2**

*Audiovisual material used in the experiment*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Pres- entation Name** | **Link** | **Name of speaker** | **Short name** |
| “The gentle power  of highly sensitive people” | https:// www.you- tube.com/ watch?v=pi- 4JOIMSWjo | Elena Herdieck-  erhoff | Sensitive |
| “After watching this, your brain will not be the same again.” | https:// www.you- tube.com/ watch?v=L- NHBMF-  CzznE | Lara Boyd | Brain |
| “What you didn’t know  about cof- fee.” | https:// www.you- tube.com/ watch?v JaQNyOE- f4YY | Asher Yaron | Coffee |
| “How to become a millonaire in three years.” | https:// www.you- tube.com/ watch?v=- jvBaRf9L- HDs | Dany Ally | Millionaire |

#### RECORDING PROCESS

A specialist with a master’s degree in engineer- ing and a recording engineer designed the re- cording 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 per- formances were recorded in 48 kHz, 16-bit dig- ital audio in WAV format through a DAKING Mic Pre-500 preamplifier with no analog compres- sion 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 au- dios 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* ProTM was used to generate the final files. The MP4 source files and the WAV file with the voices of the interpreters were im- ported into a new *Premiere* session. In each vid- eo, 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**  **1 2 3 4** | **Segment**  **1 2 3 4** | **Speak- er** | **Pres- entation** |
|  |  |  | 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 Cof- fee) one day in advance. Before starting the re- cording 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 in- terpreter 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 pa- rameters under analysis.

To ensure that the interpretations of all partic- ipating interpreters, regardless of sex or expe- rience, 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 faith- ful 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.

#### QUESTIONNAIRE

The 5-point questionnaire used in the study was based on previous instruments on prosod- ic features and work attitudes tested for their relationship with perceived SI quality (Collados Aís *et al.,* 2007). It included five prosodic crite- ria: 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 (cred- ibility and professionalism) and one linguistic parameter (cohesion) (Collados Aís *et al.,* 2007). Although Collados Aís *et al.* (2007) studied co- hesion, in the focus group conducted to veri- fy the validity of this study, it was determined that the term coherence should be used in- stead 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 ques- tionnaire. Finally, overall perceived quality was included to measure the user’s satisfaction with the interpretation.

The same questionnaire was used for the Base- line Research and this study. Its validity and re- liability 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 question- naire was designed (see Figure 1), the template was repeated eight times on individual sheets, one for each segment, to complete the meas- urement tool.

#### PROCEEDINGS

The minimum number of subjects (100) recom- mended to obtain meaningful results in quan- titative studies (Dörnyei, 2007) was taken as a basis. One hundred and fifty-six native Span- ish-speaking subjects, 79 male and 77 female, divided into five age groups, were recruited us- ing a snowball sampling method and answered the questionnaire to rate the sequences re- corded 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 pro- fessional SI services given their lack of knowl- edge 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**

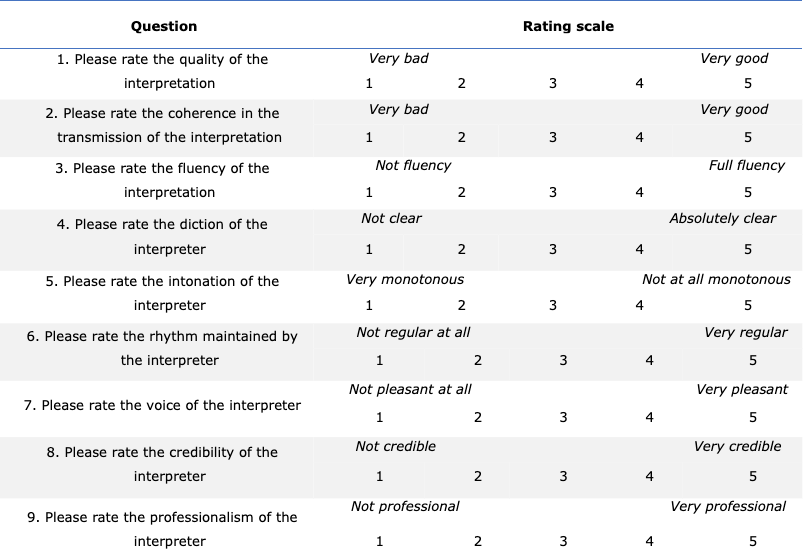
*Experimental sample by age range and sex*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Sex** |  |  | **Age group** | | |
|  | 20 to 30 | 31 to 40 | 41 to 50 | 51 to 64 | 65 to 75 |
| Fe- male | 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*



The study was conducted in 41 sessions from 7 November to 12 December 2020. Each partici- pant sat at an individual table and received dis- posable headphones, the eight-page question- naire, 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 interpret- ers 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 interpret- ers (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’ pho- tographs or CVs, so their assessments were based solely on their impressions of the inter- preters’ 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 compli- ance 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- late ral) | Mean differ- ence | 95 % confidence interval of the dif- ference | |  |
| Standard error dif- ference | Lower | Upper |
| Average | Equal vari- ances assumed | 18.202 | 000 | 5.938 | 1246 | .000 | -.29380 | .04948 | .39087 | -.19673 |
| Equal vari- ances not as- sumed |  |  | 5.938 | 1219.291 | .000 | -.29380 | .04948 | .39088 | -.19673 |

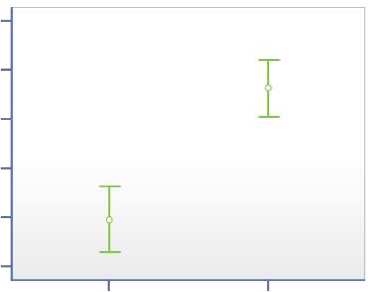
#### RESULTS

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

This result shows that respondents gave high- er ratings to the G2 renditions than to the G1

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 differ- ence 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**

*Confidence intervals between groups*

*37.00*

*95% mean confidence interval*

*36.00*

*35.00*

*34.00*

*33.00*

*32.00*

renditions, even though the precise segmenta- tion 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 re- cordings 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 parame- ters. 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

*Group 1*

*Group 2*

study, which could lead to Type I error inflation.

When and how to correct for multiple tests re- mains a hotly debated topic (Streiner, 2015). In this study, a non-confirmatory, albeit explora- tory, 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 differ- ence 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 dif- ference 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 confi- dence level of 5%.

When examining coherence, significant differ- ences 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 confi- dence level of at least 5% in both comparisons. However, when comparing EM and NF, no sig- nificant difference was found, with a mean dif- ference 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 con-

fidence 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 val- ue was not significant. The mean differences between EF and NF and between EF and NM were -0.330 and -0.484, respectively. These dif- ferences were significant in both comparisons, at least 5 %. The mean difference between EM and NF showed no significant difference be- tween 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 pair- wise 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 re- sults 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 fa- vor 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 per- ceived 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 no- ticeable 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 cred- ibility, there were no significant differences be- tween 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.*

**137**

Lucila Christen y Gracia

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Inde-**  **Independent Difference Std. 95% con- pend- Differ- Std. 95% con- Inde- Differ- Std. 95% con-**  **variable in means er- Sig. fidence ent ence er- Sig. fidence pend- ence er- Sig. fidence**  **ror interval vari- in ror interval ent var- in ror interval**  **able means iable means** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | | |  |  |  | Conf. limit | |  |  |  |  | Conf. limit | | |  |  |  |  | Conf. limit | |
|  | | |  |  |  | Low- er | Upper |  |  |  |  | Low- er | Up- per | |  |  |  |  | Low- er | Up- per |
| 1. Rate the quality of the interpretation | | | | | | | | 2. Rate the coherence in the transmission of the inter- pretation | | | | | | | 3. Rate the fluency of the interpretation | | | | | |
| Ex- | EM | -.349\* | | .077 | .000 | -.55 | -.15 | EM | -.218\* | .077 | .000 | -.55 | -.15 | | EM | -.250\* | .082 | .013 | -.46 | -.04 |
| peri- |
| NF | -.369\* | | .077 | .000 | -.57 | -.17 | NF | -.333\* | .077 | .000 | -.57 | -.17 | | NF | -.196 | .082 | .081 | -.41 | .02 |
| enced |
| NM | -.577\* | | .077 | .000 | -.77 | -.38 | NM | -.462\* | .077 | .000 | -.77 | -.38 | | NM | -.506\* | .082 | .000 | -.72 | -.30 |
| female |
| Ex- | EM | .349\* | | .077 | .000 | .15 | .55 | EM | .218\* | .078 | .027 | -.42 | -.02 | | EM | .250\* | .082 | .013 | .04 | .46 |
| peri- |
| NF | -.019 | | .077 | .994 | -.22 | .18 | NF | -.115 | .078 | .000 | -.53 | -.13 | | NF | .054 | .082 | .910 | -.16 | -27 |
| enced |
| NM | -.228\* | | .077 | .016 | -.42 | -.03 | NM | -.244\* | .078 | .000 | -.66 | -.26 | | NM | -.256\* | .082 | .010 | -.47 | -.05 |
| male |
| Novice female | EM | .369\* | | .077 | .000 | .17 | .57 | EM | .369\* | .078 | .000 | .17 | .42 | | EM | .196 | .082 | .081 | -.02 | .41 |
| EM | .019 | | .077 | .994 | -.18 | .22 | EM | .115 | .078 | .448 | -.08 | .32 | | EM | -.054 | .082 | .910 | -.27 | .16 |
| NM | .208\* | | .077 | .034 | -.41 | -.01 | NM | -.128 | .078 | .352 | -.33 | .07 | | NM | -.311\* | .082 | .001 | -.52 | -.10 |
| Novice male | EM | .577\* | | .077 | .000 | .38 | .77 | EM | .462\* | .078 | .000 | .26 | .66 | | EM | .506\* | .082 | .000 | .30 | .72 |
| EM | .228\* | | .077 | .016 | .03 | .42 | EM | .244\* | .082 | .010 | .04 | .44 | | EM | .256\* | .082 | .010 | .05 | .47 |
| NF | .208\* | | .077 | .034 | .01 | .41 | NF | .128 | .078 | .352 | -.07 | | .33 | NF | .311\* | .082 | .001 | .10 | .52 |

**138**

Communication mediated by conference interpreters: age and sex stereotypes

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 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 | | -.304\* | .087 | | .003 | -.53 | -.08 | |  |
|  | NM | | -.484\* | | .080 | | .000 | | -.69 | | -.28 | | NM | | -.394\* | | .085 | | | .000 | | | -.61 | | | -.18 | | NM | | -.625\* | .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 | | .029 | .087 | | .987 | -.19 | .25 | |  |
|  | NM | | -.333\* | | .080 | | .000 | | -.54 | | -.13 | | NM | | -.019 | | .085 | | | .996 | | | -.24 | | | .20 | | NM | | -.292\* | .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 | | -.029 | .087 | | .987 | -.25 | .19 | |  |
|  | NM | | -.154 | .080 | | | .215 | | -.36 | | -.05 | | NM | | .022 | | | .085 | | | .994 | | | -.20 | | | .24 | NM | | -.321 | .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 | | .292\* | .087 | | .004 | .07 | | .51 |  |
|  | NF | | .154 | .080 | | | .215 | | -.05 | | .36 | | NF | | -.022 | | | .085 | | | .994 | | | -.24 | | | .20 | NF | | .321\* | .087 | | .001 | .10 | | .54 |  |

**139**

Lucila Christen y Gracia

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 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 | | .000 | | -.71 | | -.29 | EM | | -.269\* | | .084 | | .007 | | -.49 | | -.05 | EM | -.317\* | | .080 | .000 | | -.52 | | -.11 |
|  | NF | | -.705\* | .083 | | .000 | | -.92 | | -.49 | NF | | -.359\* | | .084 | | .000 | | -.57 | | -.14 | NF | -.359\* | | .080 | .000 | | -.57 | | -.15 |  |
|  | NM | | -.702\* | .083 | | .000 | | -.91 | | -.49 | NM | | -.455\* | | .084 | | .000 | | -.67 | | -.24 | NM | -.474\* | | .080 | .000 | | -.68 | | -.27 |  |
| Ex- peri- enced male |  | EM | | .500\* | .083 | | .000 | | .29 | | .71 | EM | | .269\* | | .084 | | .007 | | .05 | | .49 | EM | .317\* | | .080 | .000 | | .11 | | .52 |
|  | NF | | -.205 | .083 | | .064 | | -.42 | | .01 | NF | | -.090 | | .084 | | .708 | | -.31 | | .13 | NF | -.042 | | .080 | .955 | | -.25 | | .17 |  |
|  | NM | | -.202 | .083 | | .070 | | -.41 | | .01 | NM | | -.186 | | .084 | | .120 | | -.40 | | .03 | NM | -.157 | | .080 | .207 | | -.36 | | .05 |  |
| Nov- ice fe- male |  | EM | | .705\* | .083 | | .000 | | .49 | | .92 | EM | | .359\* | | .084 | | .000 | | .14 | | .57 | EM | .359\* | | .080 | .000 | | .15 | | .57 |
|  | EM | | .205 | .083 | | .064 | | -.01 | | .42 | EM | | .090 | | .084 | | .708 | | -.13 | | .31 | EM | .042 | | .080 | .955 | | -.17 | | .25 |  |
|  | NM | | .003 | .083 | | 1.000 | | -.21 | | .22 | NM | | -.096 | | .084 | | .661 | | -.31 | | .12 | NM | -.115 | | .080 | .479 | | -.32 | | .09 |  |
| Nov- ice male |  | EM | | .702\* | .083 | | .000 | | .49 | | .91 | EM | | .455\* | | .084 | | .000 | | .24 | | .67 | EM | .474\* | | .080 | .000 | | .27 | | .68 |
|  | EM | | .202 | .083 | | .070 | | -.01 | | .41 | EM | | .186 | | .084 | | .120 | | -.03 | | .40 | EM | .157 | | .080 | .207 | | -.05 | | .36 |  |
|  | NF | | -.003 | .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 %.

#### 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 fa- vored. 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 pro- duce significant changes in the fundamental frequency (F0) and formant frequencies (Baus et al., 2019; Sundberg, 2019). These two acous- tic 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 infor- mation 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 outper- formed their peers. The perception of perfor- mance quality is related to several parameters (Iglesias Fernández, 2010), such as the inter- preter’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 Re- search, where novice interpreters outper- formed 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 parame- ters except voice. Lower voices, generally male, score higher due to their ability to evoke greater credibility and persuasiveness, especially when conveying descriptive and informative messag- es (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 men- tioned above, most people integrate social ste- reotypes into their perception of speech, which elicits automatic, almost instinctive attitudes and judgments toward speakers (Strand, 2000).
5. Experienced male interpreters were compa- rable to female and male novices in intonation, professionalism, and credibility, yet all three groups outperformed experienced female in- terpreters. This perception of more excellent professionalism of male experienced inter- preters 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 do- mains of experience, these changes were more favorable for women than men (family, friends, religion, leisure, personality, and health). How- ever, in the work and finance domains, a re- verse 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 patriar- chal 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 expe- rienced interpreters ranked last in all parame- ters. The means of G2 were systematically high- er 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 fol- lowing 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, re- gardless 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 cate- gories 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 pro- fessional 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 knowl- edge of the interpreted topic, it is likely that, if there are any presbyphonic elements in the voice of either of them, differences in the per- ception 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 per- ceived, the interaction between the perceived sex and age of the interpreter unconsciously biases the listener’s evaluation of the interpre- tation. This bias may be due to the listener’s cultural norms and stereotypes based on the vocal characteristics of the interpreter.

###### Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that she has no potential conflict of interest concerning the research, au- thorship, 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

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## 147

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###### Abstract:

The social media platform TikTok presents it- self as a predominantly entertainment-focused communication format, not only for younger generations but also for an increasingly capti- vated audience enticed by recommendation algorithms. In this context, traditional media outlets are formulating their strategies to es- tablish 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 ac- tivity 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 signif- icant or not, whether there is a strategic pro- fessionalization of their editorial activity, and finally, whether this activity is tailo red to the pe- culiarities 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 chrono- logical sequence, establishing a comparative analysis of the main interaction milestones pro- vided 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 for- mato de comunicación preponderantemente de entretenimiento no solo para las generacio- nes más jóvenes, sino para un público cada vez más seducido por los algoritmos de recomen- dación. En este contexto, los medios de infor- mación 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 Espa- ña 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 peculiarida- des de la plataforma o si la dinámica es el re- ciclado 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 Ra- zón, en una secuencia temporal concreta que establece un análisis comparativo entre los principales hitos de interacción que proporcio- na dicha red social.

* 1. **INTRODUCTION**

Far from being a static phenomenon, the de- velopment 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 wan- ing as it shifts its focus away from news. It also faces new challenges from es- tablished networks such as YouTube and youth-focused networks such as TikTok. The Chinese-owned social net- work 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

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 ac- tividad 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 con- tenido ya producido.

**Palabras clave:** TikTok, Tecnología, Periodis- mo, Redes Sociales, Información

& 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), exper- imented 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 ob- serving 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 in- creasingly relevant link between the media and the audience, in order to build a reciprocal rela- tionship. This concept is crucial to understand- ing 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 communi- cation 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 communica- tive intention and formal proposal of each so- cial network. Not only because of their techni- cal approach but also because of the purpose for which they are published and consumed.

Their social network logic modifies the processes of media production, distri- bution, 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 Op- genhaffen, 2019). (Vázquez, Negreira, & López, 2022, p.1719)

Thus, the survival of a pre-existing communica- tive culture can be observed: the older genera- tions, related to Facebook, use this network in a largely descriptive way, with long texts and a profusion of images. The intention is the per- manence 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 cu- mulative 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), Tik- Tok or, more recently, BeReal, are committed to a communicative ecosystem that is the com- plete 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, ei- ther 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 dis- posable 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 spe- cifically 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 con- sumption of general mass media: press, radio, television, and digital media. If the more mature age groups indicate a high consumption of tra- ditional 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 net- works and streaming platforms for music and video on demand.

Younger groups everywhere show a weaker at- tachment 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 Span- ish media use the social network TikTok as part of their communication or information strate- gy. 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, fre- quency, format, and content of this activity.

#### MEDIA AND TIKTOK

News media and news professionals are facing a scenario of uncertainty generated by social media and new consumer habits. “Across mar- kets, 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 inter- national 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 coin- cidence. 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 im- ages 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 chan- nels 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 me- dium force journalists to develop a completely different type of content than they have pro- duced on other social networks. Newman et al. (2021) point out that the media are faced with the challenge of capturing the attention of Tik- Tok users, who use the platform mainly for en- tertainment, 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 ce- lebrities, 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 audi- ences has attracted the attention of the press, which “seeks its place in this emerging plat- form”(Sidorenko and Herranz, 2020, n.p.). Its content is being adapted by renewing its lan- guage. Furthermore, Negreira-Rey *et al.* (2022) point out that the media have realized that Tik- Tok 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 develop- ment. Thus, given the wide range of offerings, the audience and influence that can be gener- ated 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).

#### MEDIA PRESENCE

**IN TIKTOK IN SPAIN**

In 2022, for the first time and according to the Association for Media Research (AIMC), televi- sion is no longer the medium with the highest consumption. It has shifted to the Internet: 84.3% of the population consumes the Inter- net, 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 tradi- tional 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 pandem- ic 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 look- ing beyond legacy platforms to new entrants (many of whom generate few references to news and do not prior- itize 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 be- cause, as Sabin-Darget (2022) points out, Spain had 8.8 million monthly active users on TikTok in 2021.

#### RESEARCH

This article presents the results of research car- ried out in the first half of 2022, consisting of a comparative analysis of the content available on the social network TikTok by the main Span- ish 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 sub- sequent publications.

#### 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 me- dia on TikTok.
    - To analyze the production strategies of specif- ic content for TikTok according to the technical characteristics of this channel.

#### 3. 2.HYPOTHESIS

The purpose of the research is to verify the fol- lowing hypotheses:

H1: The professional use of TikTok accounts by the main Spanish print media is still insignifi- cant 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 Span- ish print media is not perceived as a strategy that can be defined as developed from the pe- culiarities of the social network, but rather as a reuse and/or adaptation of already produced material.

#### 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 tra- ditional 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 plat- forms. The focus will be on the number of fol- lowers, frequency of content publication, and engagement metrics such as views, likes, com- ments, shares, and saves. A sample of ten Tik- toks was randomly selected for this research. The data collected will be used to create a com- parative 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 con- firmed that all the Spanish generalist press outlets had active profiles on TikTok and con- sistently posted content. The ten Tiktoks from each media outlet included in the analysis were randomly selected using a simple random sam- pling 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](https://www.tiktok.com/%40elpais)

*EL MUNDO*: [https://www.tiktok.com/@elmun-](https://www.tiktok.com/%40elmun-) do.es?lang=es

*LA VANGUARDIA*: [https://www.tiktok.com/@](https://www.tiktok.com/%40) lavanguardia?lang=es

*ABC:* [https://www.tiktok.com/@abc.es?lang=es](mailto:www.tiktok.com/@abc.es)

*LA RAZÓN*: [https://www.tiktok.com/@larazon.](https://www.tiktok.com/%40larazon) es?lang=es

#### 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.

#### FRECUENCY 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 con- tent 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 Feb- ruary 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. Dur- ing this period, they regularly published tiktoks. Two videos were the maximum amount of con- tent 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**

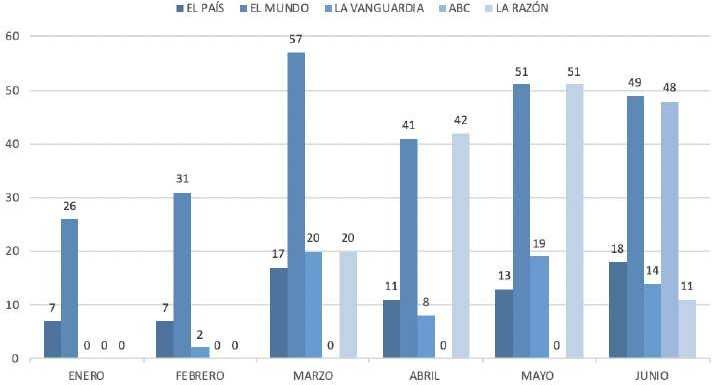
*Frecuency of Publication*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Frecuency 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**

*Frecuency 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 pub- lished. If we select only the full months that the newspaper has been present on the Asian so- cial 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 publica- tions 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 plat- form 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 sin- gle 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* ac- tivity on TikTok was observed. In terms of pe- riodicity, *La Razón* published eleven tiktoks in June, with a maximum of two uploaded on a single day. The longest period between publi- cations was three days.

#### TYPE OF PUBLICATION ACCORDING TO PRODUCTION ORIGIN

Now, we need to examine whether the content of the articles was produced by taking advan- tage of the first natural production of the me- dium, the article in the printed press. The aim is to analyze whether an entry in TikTok is pro- duced 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 consid- ered 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 oth- er 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 van- guardia | 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*

#### 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 vid- eos 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.*

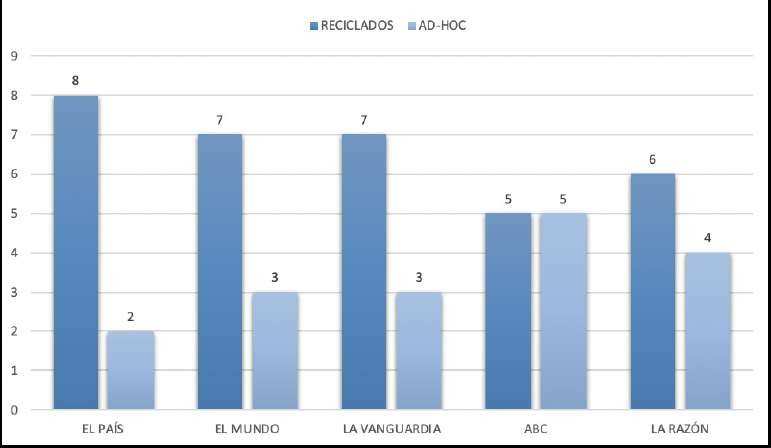
**Table 3**

*Summary of interactions*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Frecuencia de Publicación** | | | | | |
|  | Visualiza- ciones/1000 | Me gusta  /100 | Co- men- tarios | Guar- dado  /10 | Com- par- tido  /10 |
| El país | 1.114 | 388 | 2.158 | 193 | 134 |
| El mun- do | 1.831 | 1.184 | 2.119 | 423 | 213 |
| La van- guardia | 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 Vanguardi*a is in second place, followed by *El País,* ABC, and *La Razón*. From highest to lowest number of com- ments, 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 newspa- per with the worst data in the analysis carried out, without exception in any of the metrics ob- served.

**Figure 3**

*Summary of interactions*



*Note: Own preparation*

The ranking of the number of times a publica- tion has been saved is completed by *La Van- guardia* in second place, *El País* in third place, and ABC in fourth place, with *El Mundo* in sec- ond place and *La Razón* in fourth place.

To conclude the analysis of this table, we can once again observe the huge difference be- tween *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.

###### 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 me- dia 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 al- ready 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 spe- cific 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 news- papers 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 Gov- ernment, 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.

#### 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 cat- egory 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 news- paper, with less than a month’s presence on TikTok at the time of this analysis, has already achieved such relevant results in this catego- ry. 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, corre- sponds to a video of a citizen insulting the pres- ident of the government.

#### 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 consid- ered 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 out- lets 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 posi- tioned as a benchmark in this category; in fact, it is the one that receives the most comments and, therefore, generates the most social con- versation.

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 com- ments. 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 com- ments.

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.

#### NUMBER OF TIMES SAVED

To assess the quality and interest of a post or entry not only in TikTok but in any social net- work, 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 con- tent 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 interac- tion with its main competitor, *El País. La Razón,* which uses this platform the least, achieves in- significant results due to low activity.

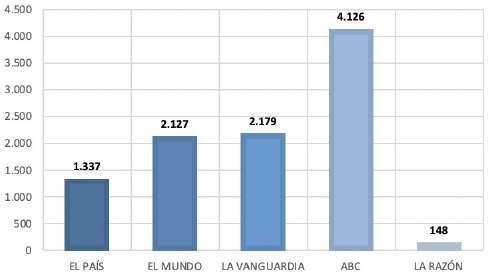
Two entries achieve very high results. Specifi- cally, video no. 7 from *La Vanguardia,* in which a famous singer, Manu Carrasco, surprises a teenage girl suffering from cancer at a concert. This video has garnered 2014 interactions. An- other video with a lot of users who decided to save it is an impressive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

#### NUMBER OF TIMES SHARED

One interaction that is highly desired by both the media and users is the viral spread of con- tent. When an individual’s message is shared voluntarily and spontaneously by others, it in- dicates that the content has something unique that has resonated with people. These dynam- ics should be considered when producing fu- ture 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 con- tent 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.

#### 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 hy- pothesis (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 altogeth- er, only counting the ten entries analyzed, sug- gest 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, regard- less of whether it was maintained long enough to be received, counts as one more interaction. Moreover, these figures are insignificant com- pared to most of the massive ad hoc journal- istic media accounts such as Ac2allity, which often exceeds one million views for each of its posts.

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

because there isn’t any clear evidence to sug- gest that there is a strategic editorial agenda at play. Instead, it appears that most media out- lets are experimenting with different approach- es to see what works, without any predeter- mined 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 net- work.

Finally, the third hypothesis (H3), which com- plements the second, is confirmed in the sense that the production of tiktoks is poorly adapt- ed to the formal and technological premises of the network. Most of the entries analyzed are constructed by collecting content already pub- lished on nearby dates in any of the newspa- per’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 dy- namic. 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 inde- pendently 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 in- volved in this network with objectives other than the main objective of the medium, which is information. The type of content that is post- ed, which sometimes violates delicate bound- aries 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 con-

clusions, two lines of debate can be identified:

1. Should all media outlets be present on all so-

cial media?

It is a fairly widespread idea that it is appropri- ate 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 en- gage 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 rath- er the opposite. Being in all the networks today is a possible process, but if it is desired as part of consolidated projects and seeking commu- nicative efficiency in each of them, it will gener- ate an effort proportional to the technological advance.

1. 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 custom- ized production. The logic of TikTok, from its recommendation algorithm to its “non-stan- dards” 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 sec- onds (Sidorenko, 2022) or constancy in format, language, tone (McArena, 2022) are essential to the success of these messages.

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## Fake News: propagation and

**communities, how are they related?**

##### Fake News: propagación y comunidades, ¿Cuál es su relación?

9

ARTICLE



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## 167

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###### Abstract:

The present study investigates the growing role of fake news in digital communities and the po- tential 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 sim- ilar 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 rap- id 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 deta- llada 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 digi-

tales, impacto, metodología netnográfica, ob-

servación *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 laborato- ry PSafe (2018), there was a significant increase in the dissemination of fake news. Social net- works (mainly Facebook and WhatsApp) were the main tools used to achieve the reach ob- served 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.

#### 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 disrupt- ed 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 influ- ence others through factors such as persuasion of an idea. Some justification is sought to trans- form them into something true (Keyes, 2004). This is a behavior that, according to Nietzsche (1873), would amount to dissimulation, a char- acteristic 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 hu- man intellect, indispensable for shaping a sense of morality and ethics in society, which can be represented almost entirely through communi- cation. 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 pro- cess 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 propor- tional 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 develop- ments, but rather have been around for some time. This idea is further strengthened by ad- vancements in technology and communication, which have enabled individuals to engage with the online community.

#### FAKE NEWS

In more recent literature, fake news has been the subject of constant discussion and is com- monly 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 Zafara- ni (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 ve- racity 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, us- ers post, share, like, and comment on their like-minded ideas (Zhou & Zafarani, 2020).

Scholars believe that the term fake news is cur- rently being misused and has been reduced almost entirely to aggressions and defama- tions 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 con- cerns 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 de- ceive the reader (Alves, 2018; Genesini, 2018; Netto & Peruyera, 2018).

Contrary to some literature findings, Penny- cook 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 ru- mors 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*



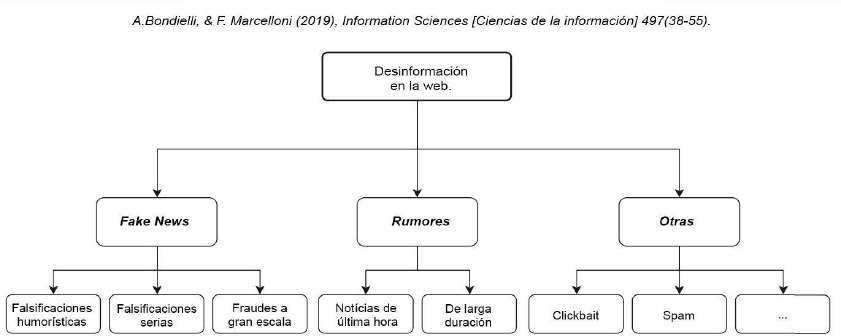
Within fake news, credibility is considered one of the most important characteristics (Quirós, 2017). This can be acquired through factors such as the speed of information sharing. This element can be both essential for the construc- tion of an identity and the acquisition of values in simulacra and a determinant for truth to be of much lesser importance. Thus, truth be- comes less relevant (Alves, 2018).

Following this line, Bondielli and Marcelloni (2019) offer a classification of other types of dis- information 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.

Note: Image created by the authors based on Fake News. It’s complicated, by Wardle, 2017.

**Figure 2**

*Categories of disinformation on the web.*



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 manip- ulates the image of a figure to make them ap- pear to be saying something they have not said. However, it poses some risks regarding altered speeches of public figures, which can potential- ly 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 pref- erences and facilitates the development of digi- tal simulations and connections between users through algorithms.

Westerlund (2019) argues that the most wide- ly adopted avenues in the literature to combat the spread of fake news are state regulation, private governance, and voluntary action. How- ever, 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 & Mc- Stay, 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.

#### ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Before the popularization of technology that enabled new forms of social relations, a com- munity 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 infor- mation technology, this term may have had some variations, specifically in the character- istics that delimit communities to a particular

place. This has, as a consequence, the begin- nings of deterritorialization (Thompson, 2001).

Virtual communities are online (digital) spaces where interpersonal exchanges and relation- ships 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 commu- nities are seen as a grouping of individuals or companies that promote social relations with a common interest. Within this space, interac- tions are conducted through a common lan- guage and a set of agreed protocols.

As Rodrigues (2023) notes, the absence of bar- riers to entry to the Internet opened the door to creating inclusive connections. According to Putnam (2000), this occurred in several ways:

* + 1. bridging (weaker but more diverse connec- tions 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 rela- tionships 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 plu- rality of views); (iii) deliberation (decisions are made unanimously and collectively); (iv) a safe place (trust); (v) a social deconstruction labora- tory (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 lead- ers 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 emer- gence of alternative means of transport and communication. According to the author, this technological development has made it pos- sible for people to communicate with great- er ease and almost everywhere. The original meaning of community is thus restored.

All these changes are thought to be responsi- ble 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 person- al relationships in cyberspace. This is because they hold public discussions with human senti- ments at a given time.

To complement this idea, Baudrillard (1991) asserted that the emergence of new technol- ogies, 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 spe- cific territorial limits. Following this line, Agostini and Mechant (2019) affirm that virtual commu- nities begin in an a priori way, from an imagi- nary 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 environ- ments where society can develop in different ways, creating richer connections than commu- nities limited to one place.

These communities, stemming from technolog- ical advances, specifically in the fields of infor- mation and communication, made it possible to create new formats for the content found on these networks.

All this progress ended up shaping the crea- tion 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 deci- sion-making and the perception of trust (Terra, 2010).

The generation of content by users (UGC, pho- tos, videos and audio) is a key factor in the prop- agation 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 con- nected through strong ties (intimacy, trust, and/ or emotion), and in their periphery, they have “nodes” that are either not developed and rout- ed 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 char- acteristic has to do with reactive social interac- tions (Primo, 2000), formed by clusters inter- nally 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 com- munities 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).

#### 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, socializa- tion, and/or observational behaviors (Schech- ner, 2003).

Based on the idea of virtual communities in- troduced by Agostini and Mechant (2019), re- search 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 compo- sition and characteristics of the members of a network or community (Mishra, 2020).

Although social capital outcomes are often re- lated to economic outcomes, there are still in- teresting parallels with non-explicitly economic outcomes. For example, trust is an attribute closely linked to social capital (Rodrigues, 2023). Results indicate that, in an interconnect- ed network, cooperation and trust are related to group performance (Salume, Guimarães & Rantisi, 2019). This can also be used for com- munity 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.

#### METHODOLOGY

The process for conducting this research be- gan 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 netno- graphic 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 re- searchers 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 phe- nomena (Kozinets, 2019).

To apply these methodologies, creating a per- son 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 methodol- ogy, 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, man- aged 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 con- tent generated by users associated with these groups.

#### RESULTS

There were some difficulties in finding and ob- taining groups from which to extract the data needed for this research, particularly left-lean- ing 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 pre- sented 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 imag- es, originally in Portuguese, have been translat- ed into Spanish.

#### 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 increas- ing this type of knowledge. Thus, the character- istics 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 ap- parently false information about a YouTuber named Felipe Neto. This was an attempt to jus- tify 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*

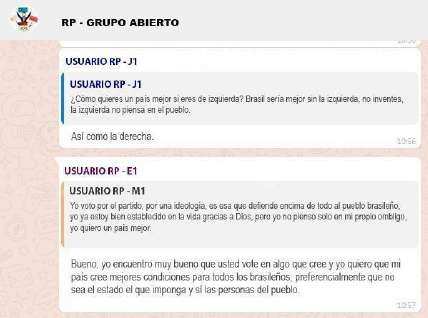


*Note: Screenshot from WhatsApp, translation by the authors.*

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 dif- ferences 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 de- bates among its users characterize this group, and no attempt is made to support each other; therefore, according to the parameters estab- lished by Recuero (2009), this group would be classified as a community of association or af- filiation.

**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 de- bates and enforce or encourage compliance with the rules imposed within the communi- ty. Thanks to the values developed within this group and according to the parameters es- tablished by Recuero (2009), the community formed within this group could be classified as an emergent community.

#### SIMULATIONS

On 30 August 2019, a news item with unreli- able information was shared on IP – Closed Group, which allegedly showed comedian Gus- tavo Mendes offending his audience with rude words and attitudes, after being criticized for making fun of the then-President Jair Bolsona- ro. This generated comments from other com- munity 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 identi- fied as one of the many examples of simula- tion that took place within the IP-Closed Group, in which, following Nietzsche’s (1873) line of thought, members set aside their shared val- ues to concentrate on defending an opinion that they believe to be indisputably true. In do- ing so, they ignore any other idea that contra- dicts 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 trig- gered by a member’s comment that poor peo- ple 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 discus- sions, not only to influence others but also for amusement and to generate debate around their arguments (Schechner, 2003). This re- sults 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 Tra- balhadores* (PT).

IP - Closed Group is seen as a community with simulacra that are not constrained by general resources and are much more effective at dis- mantling 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 promo- tion 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 Mar- celloni (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 (Schech- ner, 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 reaffirma- tion or performance (Deleuze, 2006; Schech- ner, 2003). This makes the verification of news almost non-existent.

#### 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 ac- tive 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 mem- bers 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 (Recue- ro, 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).

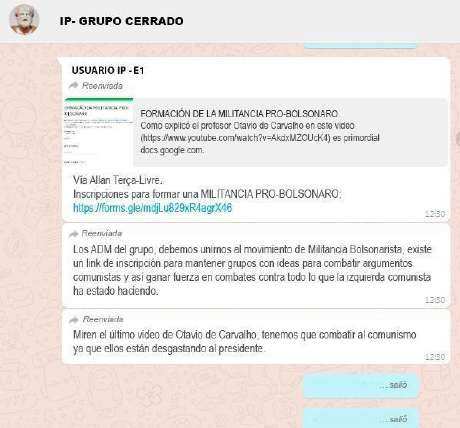
For its part, shared digital content is used by both communities as a tool for incorpora- tion (Peck, 1987), defense (Baudrillard, 1991; Deleuze, 2006), and as a factor in the construc- tion of individual values (Schechner, 2003; Ter-

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 mes- sages or information from other groups or pri- vate 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, au- dio, and videos, among others. The easier it is to understand this content, the greater its rel- evance 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).

#### CONCLUSIONS

It was possible to observe how this desire to be seen by other people is one of the main rea- sons 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 hy- pothesis and fully addresses the problem pre- sented.

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 inter- actions 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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# REVIEW



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ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5315-3057 RECEIVED: 2023-07-17 / ACCEPTED: 2023-07-19

Data from the book under review:

Ginesta Portet, Xavier (2022). The entertain- ment multinationals. Football, Diplomacy, Iden- tity 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 Cat- alonia (UVic-UCC), analytically presents a con- ceptual framework of the reality and evolution

of the football business as an entertainment multinational. This is done through four ma- jor 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 spe- cializing in sports communication since he de- fended his doctoral thesis at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) in 2009, entitled: “

**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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## 185

ICTs and sports. Analysis of the Spanish First Di- vision 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 de- veloped 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 research- er 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 Commu- nication & Sport Journal editorial board.

#### SUMMARY

This book analyzes aspects of sport from dif- ferent 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 di- mensions of globalization in sports, specifical- ly in football, from a sociological point of view. In this way, he turns this work into an essen- tial 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 the- ories that support it scientifically and explains the world of sports as a very complex network with compelling commercial and economic in- terests.

By way of example, an English football club, Manchester United, is studied as a pioneer of attractive business policies that have influ- enced those of the rest of the world’s clubs. Comparisons are also made between the pol- icies 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, al- lowing 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 expe- rience of state involvement in football are dis- cussed:

What is new is the ability of private clubs to blur their corporate values to em- brace 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 exempla- ry 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.

#### 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 Humani- ties interested in the business and communica- tion 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 tech- nology and football in this industry.

It is a must-read for academics studying the field and those who wish to discover the busi- ness practices of football, which can be of prac- tical application to many businesses in other areas.

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**187**

## 187

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