

COUNTRY IMAGE “SPAIN” IN INTERNATIONAL SPORTS EVENTS.

Abstract

This study analyses the impact information published on social media about sports events has on the country brand Spain. Specifically, the study focuses on (1) the use and relevance of diverse social media in different international sports events and (2) the identification of the countries where higher social media content is generated. A total of 1,711,084 posts were retrieved, talking about “Spain” in three international sports events (FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, XLI Marathon Valencia Trinidad Alfonso 2022, and Davis Cup 2022). Results show differences between (1) the use and relevance of social network platforms and events and (2) content-generating countries.

Keywords

Social media analysis; International sport events; Country brand “Spain”

COUNTRY IMAGE “SPAIN” IN INTERNATIONAL SPORTS EVENTS. A SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS.

1. Introduction

Online social networks (OSNs) are critical platforms for participation in public and social life and have substantially impacted contemporary life (Xiang, 2013). The sports industry has not been a stranger to the use of social media. Sports and social media allow people to be connected (Watkins, 2018). The growth and development of new media technologies are performing a relevant role in the skills among athletes and participants and developing a sense of community among supporters and audiences in local and national or global contexts (Thorpe, 2017). In this sense, the emergence of social media has impacted the delivery and consumption of sports (Filo, Lock & Karg, 2015) and changed how sports teams, athletes, supporters, and events interact (Watkins, 2018). Sports supporters can develop feelings of connection to the community (Watkins, 2018) because these fans do not think of the team, athlete, or event and the community as independent identities but rather as intimately linked identities, which can improve civic pride (Heere & James, 2007). And in this scenario, social media can improve the link between sports and the community.

The Greenfly consultancy firm provides us with some figures that show the importance of the use of social networks for the sports market (Greenfly, 2022): “fans of all ages turn to social media platforms to access sports content (51% of fans getting sports content on Facebook, 46% on YouTube, 31% on Instagram, and 25% on Twitter), and some of the most followed accounts on social media are related to sports (Real Madrid has 114 million followers on Instagram, the NBA has 66.3 million followers, and Ronaldo, the most followed person, has 431 million followers). A sport-related topic is trending daily on social media platforms like Twitter. Additionally, 41% of global sports fans stream live sports through digital platforms, and 32% of sports fans — and more specifically, 43% of Gen Z fans — use social media platforms while watching live sports”. Companies know it and invest money in this channel while analysing the amount and content published on these networks.

With this, sports researchers have found an interesting field focusing on sports social media. The literature review of Filo, Lock & Karg (2015), which focuses on the knowledge of sports social media from a service-dominant logic perspective with an emphasis on relationship marketing, identifies three main categories of research in this field: strategic, operational, and user-focussed. Together with this, the recent work of Zeren, Erkan & Acikgoz (2022) found 37 papers in the Scopus database that reveal that (1) studies related to sports marketing and social media focus on sports fans and social media engagement, sports marketing practices of sports providers, and athlete brand identity, (2) most of the studies use a quantitative approach, and (3) sports marketing and social media research mainly focus on Facebook and Twitter.

Considering the above, this study aims to analyse the impact of social media in three international sports events when we think of brand Spain. To achieve this objective, we analysed diverse social media impacts related to Spain on FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, XLI Marathon Valencia Trinidad Alfonso 2022, and Davis Cup 2022, two celebrated in Spain. A total of 1,711,084 posts were retrieved.

Due to the increasing interest of academia (Filo, Lock & Karg, 2015; Zeren, Erkan & Acikgoz, 2022), this study aims to add value to previous studies in the following directions. Firstly, although previous studies have analysed the impact of sports on a country’s image (i.e.,

Grix, 2012; White & Absher, 2013 Kim, Hang & Kim, 2014;), fewer have studied the role of sports social media. Secondly, few studies focus on a single event (i.e., Dubinsky, 2022) or sport (i.e., Aichner, 2019; AlKhalifa & Farello. 2021). Third, although there is considerable research on social media's strategic and operational role, there is less systematic analysis related to the extent to which sports events use social media in general and for different platforms (Aichner, 2019).

2. Sports social media and country image

As stated before, the interest in sports social media has grown recently. Not in vain, sports social media studies focus on how these platforms can help to improve the relationships with fans, players, coaches, organizations, and consumers (Achen, Kaczorowski, Horsmann, & Ketzler, 2020). Most of the studies on sports social media focus on the role that social media plays in club or event engagement. For example, Aichner (2018) investigated four social media platforms from 78 European football clubs to analyse: (1) the degree of social media use, (2) the football fans' engagement with content posted by football clubs, and (3) the differences in user engagement with commercial social media advertisement. In the study of Achen, Kaczorowski, Horsmann & Ketzler (2020) the authors compare Facebook and Twitter to study how professional sports organizations in the US use these platforms and how interaction on these networks differs.

Despite the interest in the study of sports social media, there is still little research analysing the impact of social media on country branding. However, it represents a powerful field of research. Sports companies and organizations recognize that sports supporters watch sports events and expand word-of-mouth to share their beliefs, attitudes, and experiences through social media (Wakefield & Bennett, 2018).

The studies carried out in this field focus mainly on sports events, as these events can significantly impact the country's image. For example, AlKhalifa & Farello (2021) conducted a content analysis based on Instagram to analyse social media as an instrument for sports diplomacy in the Arab world. Also, in the field of football, Dubinsky (2022) studies the role of sports in national branding and public diplomacy during the pandemic, focusing on the analysis of the projected image of the USA through nine-days international online media covering Super Bowl LV 2021, in 13 countries.

But in addition to football, the importance of social media in nation branding can occur with other sports. For example, Schubert & Seyffert (2017) focus their study on table tennis, a sport with less marketing budget and less media coverage. The authors propose that sports social media can help organizations reach further goals, such as maintaining public interest and reinforcing brand awareness (Schubert & Seyffert, 2017). The study of Park, Park, Park & Back (2021) examines the impact of the post content on Facebook pages for the Boston, Chicago, and New York City marathons. The authors conclude that content generated by marketers is more effective than content generated by users.

Therefore, this paper argues that sports social media can impact a country's image. But, when discussing social media, we must consider more than Facebook or Twitter. Social media include other alternatives such as blogs, forums, photo sharing, online news, webs, virtual worlds, and video sharing (Aichner & Jacob, 2015).

In this sense, and considering previous lines, we try to analyse the use and importance of social media in diverse sports events related to the brand Spain. In this sense, we propose the following research questions.

RQ1: What is the use of social media networks in three international sports events when talking about Spain?

RQ2: Are the different social media networks equally relevant when mentioning Spain?

Additionally, because this paper focuses on international sports events related to the brand Spain, it is relevant to know the different uses in diverse countries. We propose a third research question according to previous works (i.e., Van de Belt, Berben, Samsom, Engelen & Schoonhoven, 2012; Archen, 2018).

RQ3: What is the impact of different social networks in different countries when discussing Spain?

3. Methodology

As stated before, the interest in sports social media has grown recently. We can find diverse studies that focus on sports social media and others that try to analyse the impact on or the relation of it to the country's image.

This study followed a two-months (1 November 2022 to 31 December 2022) exploration of posts related to Spain, published on several social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, Reddit, Tiktok, News, Blog, Web, and Forums) of three main sports events: FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, XLI Marathon Valencia Trinidad Alfonso 2022 and Davis Cup 2022. We have selected these three international mega-sports events because, according to Kim, Hang & Kim (2014), these events impact the host country's image from an international marketing perspective.

Data was gathered from the diverse social media with the help of GPI and was first analysed using Atribus. A total of 1,711,084 posts were retrieved (1,694,264 posts from the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, 3,629 posts from XLI Marathon Valencia Trinidad Alfonso 2022, and 13,191 posts from Davis Cup 2022).

Regarding the users' profiles from FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, 43% of the posts come from males, 22% from females, and 35% from organizations. Most of the users are 18-24 years old (36%), followed by users between 25- 34 years old (27%). Most posts are written in English (53%), followed by Japanese and Spanish (17% each).

Related to XLI Marathon Valencia Trinidad Alfonso 2022, 46% of the posts come from males, 26% from females, and 28% from organizations. These users are between 25 and 34 (12%) and between 18 and 24 years old (11%). In this case, almost all posts are in Spanish (83%).

And in the case of Davis Cup 2022, 37% of the posts come from males, 23% from females, and 40% from organizations. Additionally, most users who make the posts are between 18 and 24 years old (27.09%), followed by users between 25 and 34 years old (24.47%). Most posts are in Spanish (48%) and English (46%).

Four stages were followed to answer the three research questions. First, we calculate the posts for each event and social media platform. Later, and following Aichner & Jacob (2015) and

Aichner (2019) proposals, we calculate, second, the social media impact factor (SMIF), and third, we estimate the social media use (SMU) for each social media.

And fourth and finally, we analyse the use of social media in different countries to know which countries have generated more social media content related to the three international events and the use of the word Spain.

4. Results

To answer RQ1, Table 1 offers the posts for each event and social media platform. Data shows that all the social media platforms are present in the three international sports events when discussing Spain. In the three events, Twitter is the platform most used. The second one is Instagram in the case of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, XLI Marathon Valencia Trinidad Alfonso 2022, and online news in Davis Cup 2022.

Table 1

It is important to determine which social network will likely be most relevant for each event (RQ2). In this sense, the next step measures and compares the social media impact on the three international sports events, following the proposal of Aichner & Jacob (2015) and Aichner (2019), as stated before. Table 2 shows the social media impact (SMIF) of all the platforms in the three sports events. In a sense, Twitter is the social media with the higher social impact factor in Total (SMIF_Twitter Total = 0.9) and in two sports events: FIFA and Marathon (SMIF_Twitter FIFA = 0.91; SMIF_Twitter Marathon = 0.40). The second one is Instagram (SMIF_Instagram Total = 0.07; SMIF_Instagram FIFA = 0.07; SMIF_Instagram Marathon = 0.07). The third one is Facebook (SMIF_Facebook Total = 0.01; SMIF_Facebook FIFA = 0.01; SMIF_Facebook Marathon = 0.03). The impact factor of online news must be noticed, especially in Davis Cup 2022 (SMIF_News Davis = 0.58). For this competition, the social media with a higher impact factor are online news, Twitter, and Instagram. In sum, the impact of social media differs depending on the sports event.

Table 2

Additionally, Table 3 presents the social media use (SMU) during the three sports events analysed. To calculate this indicator, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter were chosen as the main social media platforms for this analysis. Although Aichner (2018) states that when the SMU exceeds the optimal value of one, the SMU is equal to one, we can leave the exact value to know more precisely the relevance of each indicator.

Although all the social media analysed were used during the three sports events, certain nuances can be made. In the case of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, Facebook and Instagram are more important than YouTube and Twitter. In the case of Davis Cup 2022, the most relevant social media are, first, Youtube, followed by Twitter and Instagram. And in the case of XLI Marathon Valencia, the most relevant social media are, first, Instagram, followed by Twitter, and, in third place, Facebook and Youtube.

Table 3

Finally, and to answer RQ3, Figure 1 shows the eight countries that generated the most content on social networks, related to the brand “Spain” in three international “sports events”. For the three sports events, the highest traffic is observed in Spain and the US. In the case of

Spain, this may be because Spaniards follow their athletes and teams, and two of the three events were held in Spain (Davis Cup and Marathon). The case of the US can be due to the size of the country.

Additionally, we can observe that only three countries coincide in all three events (Spain, the US, and the United Kingdom). It is important to notice that the highest number of posts come from countries where you might think that Spain is not such a relevant country, such as Nigeria or Peru.

5. Conclusions, implications, and further research

This paper focused on social media impact on three international sports events when related to the country brand Spain. In this sense, the main conclusions of this study can be summarized in two main points. First, results have demonstrated that not all social networks behave similarly; they depend on the sports event analysed. Second, not all countries are equally engaged in a sports event and a country. More specifically, and when talking about Spain, countries worldwide use social networks differently in FIFA World Cup Qatar, Davis Cup 2022 and XLI Marathon Valencia Trinidad Alfonso 2022.

For the business world, this paper reveals that sports events and destination managers must pay attention to their use of social media and the audience's use. They must know each social media's behaviour and where their audience is concentrated.

One of the main limitations is that two international sports events were held in Spain. Future studies can analyse other events celebrated in other countries and their relationship with the brand Spain.

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Table 1. Posts for each sport event and social media platform

Social Media Platform	FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022	Davis Cup 2022	XLI Marathon Valencia Trinidad Alfonso 2022	Total
Twitter	1533781	2508	1456	1537745
Facebook	19081	299	115	19495
Instagram	117597	430	268	118295
Youtube	358	119	30	507
Reddit	149	0	0	149
Tiktok	51	26	26	103

News	15739	7636	1178	24553
Blog	469	175	19	663
Web	7039	1673	302	9014
Forums	925	325	235	1485
TOTAL	1694264	13191	3629	1711084

Table 2. Social Media Impact (SMIF)

















	FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022	Davis Cup 2022	XLI Marathon Valencia Trinidad Alfonso 2022	TOTAL
SMIF_Twitter	0.91	0.19	0.40	0.90
SMIF_Facebook	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.01
SMIF_Instagram	0.07	0.03	0.07	0.07
SMIF_Youtube	0.0002	0.009	0.008	0.0003
SMIF_Reddit	0.0001	0.0000	0.000	0.0001
SMIF_Tiktok	0.0000	0.002	0.007	0.0001
SMIF_News	0.0093	0.58	0.32	0.01
SMIF_Blog	0.0003	0.01	0.005	0.00
SMIF_Web	0.0042	0.13	0.08	0.01
SMIF_Forums	0.0005	0.025	0.06	0.001

Table 3. Social Media Use (SMU)









	FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022	Davis Cup 2022	XLI Marathon Valencia Trinidad Alfonso 2022
SMU_Facebook	0.99	0.99	0.99
SMU_YouTube	0.93	1.04=1	0.99
SMU_Twitter	0.87	1	1
SMU_Instagram	0.99	1	1.03=1

Figure 1. Geolocation of social media in the sports events

FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022	Davis Cup 2022
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	Spain	Negative 17200	Neutral 26400		Spain	Negative 1900	Neutral 687
	The US	28900	6400		The US	2300	85
	Nigeria	29000	5100		Canada	670	50
	India	21500	6000		United Kingdom	349	112
	United Kingdom	16800	2700		Australia	264	3
	Ghana	15000	4400		India	194	25
	Indonesia	8200	9900		Argentina	159	28
	Brazil	3700	9600		Germany	165	15

XLI Marathon Valencia Trinidad Alfonso 2022

		Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total
	Spain	699	184	1200	2083
	The US	162	1	79	242
	Ireland	78	0	32	110
	Peru	36	0	4	40
	France	26	4	7	37
	Mexico	11	1	16	28
	Argentina	15	1	8	24
	United Kingdom	11	0	3	14