An Olympic Mosaic

Multidisciplinary Research and Dissemination of Olympic Studies
CEO-UAB: 20 Years

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Definition of new media

All means of communication transmission based on the Internet Protocol are referred to as new media, irrespective of the device used to access content and services: PCs, smartphones or Internet-enabled television sets. These new media allow users to choose specific live or recorded on-demand content, and they also give viewers the chance to share information, to give their opinions and to receive additional information that traditional media cannot provide (such as data about an event and competition results). New media are social in nature; they allow users to share information, to give their opinions, to make recommendations, to submit reviews, to change messages and to create new messages. Furthermore, communication can often be customised to suit each user's tastes and preferences. In this new, more social environment, recommendations made by friends also acquire considerable importance. This potential for sharing among users can make communication more personal: it is usually someone close to other users who acts as the bridge for showing and disseminating content. This is where the social networking concept comes into play. While it is a reality as old as humankind itself, the Internet has been responsible for taking it to a whole new level through phenomena like Facebook and Twitter.

In this chapter, we shall give a historical overview of the relationship between the Internet and the Olympic Movement since the advent of the Web, analysing the role of various actors connected with the Olympic Movement, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Olympic sponsors and television broadcasters, while examining the role of Internet natives — those born into the Internet era in the mid-1990s.

We understand the Internet as a medium and as an environment consisting of various actors who play a lead role in sorting, managing and administering multimedia content available on the Web. Therefore, in addition to the Olympic Movement and its stakeholders, television broadcasters and TOP sponsors, we shall focus on search engines (taking Google as the main example in this instance, together with some of the group's companies, such as YouTube) and social networking sites (particularly Facebook and Twitter, since they have achieved outstanding success on this new Social Web).

In this article, we shall also give an overview of the main contributions made by CEO-UAB researchers to the field of the Internet and new media, endeavouring to define some concepts and specific trends in relation to the ways in which the Olympic Movement and its stakeholders communicate through these new media.

The origins of the Internet and the Olympic Movement

The greatest milestone for the popularisation of the Internet and the incorporation of it into the range of media at the Olympic Movement's disposal was the creation of the World Wide Web in 1993. The implementation of this easy-to-use, browser-based Internet access system that links content via hyperlinks, together with its appealing design and multimedia capabilities, represented a very significant change for the Olympic Movement. The second major change, which has enormous potential thanks to the first, was that of connecting users via social networks and their capacity to disseminate content. However, before analysing these new possibilities, we shall first give a brief historical overview of the Internet's integration into the Olympic Movement.

The Olympic Games are a prime event for putting communication technologies into practice, as we recalled in the chapter on television. At the Squaw Valley Games in 1960 and the Tokyo Games in 1964, IBM computers were used for the first time to manage results. In the latter of these two Games, communication satellites were also used for the first time (Moragas 1992).

Although videotext technology was used at Barcelona'92, the first Games of the World Wide Web era were the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. In December of that year, internauts were very few and far between (only 36 million, just 0.9% of the world's population, according to *Internet World Stats*), meaning that it was very much a minority medium. At that time, the Internet was a medium for accessing data in a ubiquitous way (from anywhere with a connection) and for viewing photos, but it was not a medium for broadcasting moving images. The Web developed very quickly but, in 1995, just one year before the Atlanta Games, there were only 16 million Internet users worldwide. It was precisely at that moment when the IOC created its first website.

According to IBM data, the official website of the Atlanta Games (http://www.atlanta.olympic.org) had 11 million visits a day and a total of 185 million visits over the 16 days of the Games (Moragas 1999), meaning that these very first internauts, these early adopters, were really keen to take full advantage of the new communication technology. At the 1998 Nagano Olympic Winter Games, the website management problems experienced at Atlanta had been solved and, alongside IBM, Lotus was the company in charge of managing a website that received 634 million visits. In 1998, while every International Federation had a website, only 70% of National Olympic Committees had a Web presence (Moragas 1999).

Moragas (1999) reminded us that software such as RealPlayer – enabling video to be played on the Internet – did not exist before 1997, and it was not possible to speak of the Web as an audiovisual communication medium until late 1998. At that time, however, slow connections (DSL was not widespread) did not allow video over the Internet to become consolidated; in 1998 it was experimental and image quality was poor for the large majority of the viewing public. However, the website of the Nagano Games held in February 1998, which was created by IBM, already offered a few videos, as did the website created by the NBC television network for those Games. Despite these early audiovisual broadcasting experiments, the 'world memory' concept, described by Moragas (1999) as a place where every item of documentation generated could be accessed from anywhere, was the most common one at that time.

Even though video broadcasting over the Internet was possible at the following Olympic Games, Sydney 2000, the critical mass of viewers with broadband connections was still low. Consequently, it was not until Athens 2004 that the first six hours of television were broadcast over the Internet. However, the first major continuous audiovisual broadcast of a Games over the Internet took place at the 2006 Torino Paralympic Games through the creation of paralympicsport.tv. The channel broadcast over 100 hours of live coverage of the four Paralympic winter sports (Alpine skiing, ice sledge hockey, cross-country skiing and wheelchair curling). There was free access to these images, as well as the chance to see historical footage of the Paralympic Winter Games, from Örnsköldsvik 1976 (Sweden) to Salt Lake City 2002, held just before Torino (Puig 2008, 274-5).

Beijing 2008 were the first Games at which the Internet as a broadcasting medium and as a video library was consolidated by television broadcasters holding Internet broadcast rights. The NBC, for example, offered 2,200 hours of video over the Internet during the 2008 Games (Sandomir 2008). From that moment onwards, the Internet, or rather the Internet Protocol

(IP), which can be used on a variety of devices such as smartphones, notebooks, tablets and television sets, not only became an alternative means of accessing moving images of Olympic endeavours, but also a media library.

The IOC has had a website since late 1995 (CEO-UAB launched its website several months before that). The Atlanta Olympic Games occasioned the first major revamp of the IOC website in "a style that was more documentary than visual, though the contents were interesting from the point of view of information about the institution and the Olympic Movement" (Moragas 1999, 24).

In the early years, the hypertext design prevailed but, very gradually, still images and then audiovisuals were incorporated. Just before the Olympic Congress held in Copenhagen in October 2009, the IOC revamped its website once again; the new version was the complete opposite of the old one. While the version of the website introduced before the Beijing Games predominantly contained bright colours and, of course, provided access to audiovisual content, the new version of the website launched a few days before the Olympic Congress in October 2009 had a much more visual approach to its design. Its presentation is totally audiovisual, with a predominance of video and images, while a search tool leads to the many thousands of text documents hosted on the website. The 2010 website is much more socially oriented, allowing content to be shared via social media.

The Web and Olympic sponsors

In his doctoral thesis *Internet i els patrocinadors olímpics* (*The Internet and Olympic Sponsors*), José Maria Puig Lobato (2008) focuses on companies that form part of The Olympic Partner (TOP) programme (four-yearly) that the IOC introduced in 1985 in order to centralise and rationalise sponsorship of every Olympic Games. In his thesis, he performed a comparative analysis of the websites of the 14 Olympic sponsors for the Sydney 2000 and Athens 2004 Olympic Summer Games, and the Salt Lake City 2002 and Torino 2006 Olympic Winter Games.

Over the period analysed, Olympic sponsors used the Internet in the Games period to differing degrees. According to Puig, Coca-Cola, Kodak, McDonalds and VISA took full advantage of their sponsorship contracts on their websites and added value to their brands through the multimedia and interactive communication potential that the Internet offers. However, other sponsors such as Manulife, US Postal and Xerox only added their logos to the websites of the various Olympic Games as a way of linking to their own websites, without exploring that potential (Puig 2008, 271).

Also worthy of mention are the so-called 'in-kind services' that TOP sponsors offer the IOC; these services are usual when sponsors are technology companies. Out of the four Games analysed, this kind of synergy was only identified in the case of Salt Lake City. According to Puig, this was done by fusing together the websites of NBC (the holder of television broadcast rights for the U.S.), MSN (part of Microsoft) and the IOC. In the rest of the Olympic Games, in-kind services were not shown on the official page of the event (Puig 2008, 272).

Puig concludes that Olympic sponsors did not take full advantage of the potential of the Internet for promoting their brands while the Games under analysis were being held. Instead, they continued to place a great deal of importance on traditional media in their dissemination strategies. And they did so despite the fact that the global communication capabilities of the Internet make it an ideal medium for major brands such as these, all of which have aspirations of reaching out to global markets. According to Puig, the reason for this is that the Internet was not a mature medium at the time of the study.

Towards an Internet ecology: the actors

The Internet is now a mass medium thanks to the advent of the Web, which facilitates access in a simpler, more user-friendly environment, and it could be described as an ecosystem in which various principal actors relate to each other. Multimedia

content (text, photos and moving images) is sorted and hierarchically structured via search engines that partially construct the Net for the user. In an ecosystem like the Internet, with a vast amount of content just a click away (even though users may know little about its existence), search engines like Google, the world's number one provider of this type of service, take on a fundamental role. Google also leads the way in what we would call 'social audiovisual content', represented by its company YouTube, which also plays a lead role in this collaborative multimedia environment.

The other major component of this ecosystem is the social aspect, with social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, and other sites pre-dating them such as Flickr (for photos) and the already mentioned YouTube (for videos). Social networking sites shift the age-old need for humans to relate to each other for manifold purposes – one of which is the survival of the species – to the realm of the Internet. Social networks were incorporated as one of many other components into the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games. Unlike before, the Social Web concept means that users are now the lead players: they are the ones who, by sharing and modifying content, leaving comments and uploading photos and videos (Jenkins 2006, Jenkins et al. 2009) breathe life into this new social networking environment.

Google, Olympic too!

For the Beijing 2008 and the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games, Google and other services belonging to the company, like YouTube for example, were very significant actors because of their ability both to create imaginaries and to become a portal to the content of this huge sporting event. Google and other search tools, like YouTube for audiovisuals, guide the user through this maze of content and services which would otherwise be inaccessible. The results that Google and other search engines provide always appear in order of relevance from among the hundreds of thousands of content items. Since users usually only follows the links to the first few results, generally the first five, the universe of information as prioritised by the search engines consequently constructs the Internet for users.

Google, as the market's number one search engine, is perfectly assimilated into our culture today (Battelle 2005). Google 'knows' everything our civilisation is thinking about. It also gathers and processes the results of the thousands of millions of searches that transit through its servers each and every day, thus allowing it to know exactly what the Internet public is interested in. While the Olympic Games were being held, every day it offered a new collection of thematic logos (Google Doodles) focusing on the most representative sport in the Games' calendar. Google therefore 'positions' us in a virtual context when we access its search tools, thereby connecting its corporate image and popular culture through a sort of new 'Pop Art'.

Google is able to offer a full range of services from its various divisions: information about the Olympic Games on Google News, videos on YouTube, spatial position and location on Google Maps and so on, yet it is neither a news nor an audiovisual content producer. Google and its sister companies help us find and access information, in the widest of senses, that others produce (news, websites, wikis, blogs, comments, videos, photos, etc.).

For its part, Google Inc.'s audiovisual service YouTube is a web application fed by videos that users create, record from the television or capture from the Internet. It is a collaborative communication tool that came about with the advent of 'Web 2.0', and is capable of offering Olympic Games' content that users record from their local television channels. Given the value of this content for television broadcasters and in an attempt to protect their main source of revenue, the IOC acted diligently: several weeks before the Beijing Olympic Games, it created a television channel with YouTube for 77 countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, where the Olympic Games' Internet rights had not been sold. The Google service was only accessible from those regions of the world and, consequently, only YouTube users in those geographical areas could access images of the Olympics Games. YouTube's Olympic channel was fed by content from the Olympic Games' institutional signal, because neither YouTube nor Google are content producers, but rather portals to it or, in this instance, simply disseminators of it.

This strategy of collaborating with Google turned out to be a suitable way of protecting television broadcast rights holders, as journalist Brian Stelter from *The New York Times* pointed out, "As dancers and acrobats whisked across the National Stadium in Beijing, anonymous users uploaded more than 100 video clips of the ceremony to YouTube, but the site, owned by Google, swiftly removed as many as it could. Similarly, some live video streams on Justin.tv, a popular source for international video, were also removed. According to International Olympic Committee guidelines, the television networks with the local rights to the Games are the only legal sources of video in each country" (Stelter 2008).

Audiovisual consumption of the Olympic Games on the Internet

As mentioned in the introduction, the Sydney Olympic Games were the first to take advantage of synergies between television and the Internet. At those Games, American network NBC used the Internet as a tool to complement its audiovisual services, offering results or photos, but still not moving images (Moragas 2003, 11). For their part, the Athens Olympic Games offered the first Internet video experience while the Beijing Olympic Games allowed the Internet's potential as a medium for broadcasting television images to be unleashed.

Citizens in the United States use the Internet more and more often to watch television. In the last two years, the number of people watching television on the Internet has doubled. According to Michael Saxon, vice-president of TNS, "Fundamentally, consumers expect content to be available when they want it, and on the screen of their choice – TV, PC, or mobile." The top two destinations for online broadcasts were the TV channels' home pages, accessed by 65% of viewers, and Google Inc.'s (GOOG) YouTube, accessed by 41% of viewers. Other sites used for TV and video viewing included Apple Inc.'s (AAPL) iTunes, NBC Universal and News Corp.'s (NWS) Hulu, file sharing sites, social networking sites, and Limewire (CNN Money 2008).

The Beijing Olympics were the first Games for which TVE broadcast audiovisual content over the Internet in a generalised manner. The TVE website received more than 10 million visits and users viewed more than 50 million pages and 11 million videos. Besides viewing images and finding information, the potential to interact with athletes via online interviews added new value to the Spanish public television broadcaster's website.

Furthermore, as alluded to earlier, NBC clearly followed the 'logic' of exploiting audiovisual windows. The NBC network itself offered images in the first window and then, twelve hours later, these images were made available to users on its website. The aim of this strategy of putting the Internet in second place was both very clear and, in the light of the revenue results, a very good choice: its total revenue from advertising was over $1 billion, of which only $5.75 million came from Internet advertising (Stelter 2008).

The Internet has made the way the Olympic Games are consumed more flexible. Traffic on the NBCOlympics.com website peaked at midday, coinciding with lunchtime in the United States, and on Monday mornings when workers went back to work after the weekend (Stelter 2008). Yahoo! — another of the Internet's native companies — did not spend anything on buying Olympic Games' broadcast rights, yet it clearly benefitted from the capacities of the link, taking advantage of the traffic its services are capable of generating. As a result, from its blog on the Olympic Games, Yahoo! offered links to two websites where videos of Usain Bolt winning the 200-metre sprint just a few hours after it had been broadcast by NBC were available. This fact highlights two issues that need to be taken into account. First, an event with such power to attract an audience as the Olympic Games is, in itself, able to make the consumption of all types of media soar. Second, despite the IOC's and right-holding networks' efforts to prevent other non-right-holding media from broadcasting images of the Olympic Games, one thing is very clear: the Internet is an open network that is hard to control.

Authors like Sheila Seles (2010) identified new traits among users that view audiovisual content over the Internet. The author speaks of 'social viewing'. In this instance, users value the existence of supplementary online content that is different from

content broadcast on television for the purposes of sharing it with their friends on social networks; this allows new users to be attracted to online audiovisual broadcasts. Seles (2010) points out that a specific online audience is gaining ground, and that if this audience does not find any content available on the official website, it will search for it on other websites that are not controlled by the main broadcaster. In the case of Olympic Games' broadcasts, here we come up against a dilemma: to what extent are commercial television broadcasters prepared to offer the same content on the Internet and on television at the same time, for fear that if they did, television (a proven source of advertising revenue) might be eaten up by their own Internet services (a marginal source of revenue for broadcasters)?

Television, Internet and data broadcast rights

Internet broadcast rights are the little brother of television broadcast rights. According to Payne (2006), in 2000, a decision was taken not to sell Internet broadcast rights separately because the Internet did not have the capacity to generate enough income to become an alternative source of revenue. Nor is it seen in the short term as a source of revenue separate from television for the IOC. Unlike what people might have thought in the early years of the Web in the mid-1990s, the time when the Internet was seen as a globalising medium, audiovisual broadcasts over the Internet are also guided by two fundamental premises: exclusivity and territorial limits (IOC 2009) of their transmission, controlled by a geolocation system, meaning that users can only access official content for the Games via the Internet from the country of broadcast.

The agreement between Google Inc. (YouTube), the Spanish company Telefónica Terra and the IOC to broadcast images of the 2008 Olympic Summer Games over the Internet created a new public service model led by the private sector, which allowed some users in developing countries to access images of the Olympic Games. For the IOC, this agreement had the advantage of ensuring that YouTube would do more to prevent television images recorded by users from being broadcast. However, controlling YouTube, the Internet's largest audiovisual content website, is not the way to control the unauthorised broadcasting of videos on an open network like the Internet. To do that, other formulas will need to be found so as not to jeopardise the business of broadcasters who pay huge sums of money to acquire images while, at the same time, specifically creating free – and worthwhile – content for dissemination via social networking sites (Fernández Peña et al. 2010).

In addition to their highlighted potential, new media offer a new opportunity for certain Olympic sports: a combination of audiovisual images and data, received on portable devices such as smartphones, tablets, iPods or games consoles. The combination of graphics, audiovisual images and data about matters connected with the event (times, records, speeds) will undoubtedly enhance the television viewers' or stadium spectators' experience and open up new business channels for broadcasters.

Social networking and the Olympic Games: The public's involvement

The Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games inaugurated the use of social networking sites by various actors of the Olympic Family: the IOC, the Vancouver Organising Committee for the Olympic Games, athletes, television broadcasters and sponsors. There were two main social networking sites used by these actors: Facebook and Twitter.

Created in January 2010, the IOC's Facebook page managed to get 1.5 million fans and generated 200 million participatory events from its public in the form of comments, photo sharing and likes (referring to a particular item of content). Of its fans, around 60% were under 24 years old, which demonstrates the potential of social networking sites to reach young people, though the fact that nearly half of them were in very mixed aged ranges should not be overlooked. More modest figures were reached on Twitter, where the IOC had around 12,000 followers.

In the case of Facebook, the IOC's official page, which was launched several weeks before the Games, saw fan numbers soar to the mentioned 1.5 million by the end of the Vancouver Games. The IOC's presence on Facebook through a page called 'The Olympic Games' was fairly active, with an average of four posts a day over the duration of the Winter Games. The degree of public participation in each IOC post to its The Olympic Games page varied depending on the topic and the time a comment was published. In any event, the rates of participation were low, less than 1% among those expressing a like for a comment or an opinion, and less than 0.05% of all registered fans.

Facebook and Twitter were used by the Vancouver Organising Committee for the Olympic Games as two of many other components of its information supply ship, which was none other than its website. The Vancouver Organising Committee used the two social networking sites as tools for forwarding information disseminated on its website (Silverman 2010, 3).

Graeme Menzies, director of online communications, publications and editorial services of the Vancouver Organising Committee for the Olympic Games explained that the Organising Committee's @2010tweets service on Twitter was used like a telegram service to provide information about ticket sales, sporting event schedules and means of transport rather than engaging users in discussions (Silverman 2010, 2).

Despite rapid growth, a social networking strategy is built day by day; there are many unknowns about how to manage tools on social networking sites such as these, which have an enormous capacity to disseminate information. Quantitatively speaking, the number of messages on Twitter was high on the days in the middle of the Games. In the Organising Committee's case, they exceeded 50 a day and most of them were one-way messages; in other words, there was hardly any interaction with the public or conversations with fans according to CEO-UAB's own monitoring of the situation. However, worthy of note is the fact that Twitter is also able to generate conversations, and many aspects still need to be explored in this respect. In addition, for athletes followed live, Twitter has enormous potential to be used as a contextualising tool, adding contextual information on what is happening at an event. An example of this is Formula 1's @Formula1 (http://twitter.com/Formula1TV).

Over the Games, the Facebook participation record was 21,000 replies to a question posed by the Organising Committee about who would win the ice hockey final, which demonstrates the potential of these social media to generate significant levels of engagement.

According to CEO-UAB's monitoring of social networking in the Vancouver Olympic Games period, sponsors made a hesitant use of social networking sites. For example, they used Facebook for self-promotion and published very few posts. Of these, however, Omega stood out for its use of Facebook because it published an average of 1.6 posts referring to the Games while they were on. In its posts, besides comments encouraging the public to get involved, Omega also included exclusive videos of some Olympic events for its social network.

Regarding Twitter, Olympic sponsors showed themselves to be much more active, putting out calls to get involved by – among many other participation ploys – asking users to predict results. Even so, these Games, in which social networking sites were used for the very first time, only provided a hint at the possibilities that virtual social networks might offer in the future. For upcoming events, these will need to be improved and enhanced with new applications and new ways of bringing communication closer to users.

New, more socially-oriented media

New media form part of a mediatic continuum consisting of traditional media and these more participatory social media. Because, as an open network, the Internet constructs this convergence between old and new media. The success of social networks depends on their ability to create discussions and conversations, and to encourage the sharing of multimedia content.

Users are more open to messages that they receive from their peers and their friends, in which they intervene and of which they consider themselves to be an active part. That is one of the advantages of social networks. Besides sport in general and the Olympic Games in particular, they are an element that favours participation, driven by the enthusiasm inherent to the Olympic event. When users get involved through social media, every user becomes an advocate for the Olympic Family and someone who spreads certain values and ideals to other members of his or her social network.

However, this new participation model requires a change of mindset: users can contribute things to such organisations, but those organisations need to become more transparent to ensure that internauts feel that they are part of a creative process, a process in which they are one of the links in the chain. The Olympic Movement will need to leave certain valuable items of content open, albeit without jeopardising relationships with broadcast rights holders.

Faced with the diverse nature of social networking initiatives implemented by many different actors (IOC, National Olympic Committees, sponsors and television broadcasters), greater coordination leading to the centralisation of these initiatives on a single platform might make social networking activities more powerful for the common good of the Olympic Family as a whole.

Social networks are integral elements of an online strategy, in which a website is the vital component. Using them merely as elements for retransmitting items that have already been published on an official website is tantamount to squandering their potential to mobilise the public and to disseminate the Olympic Family's values, ideals and content. The big advantage of social networks lies in their capacity to generate conversations between users and to encourage participation, as mentioned earlier. Twitter has huge potential, not only to generate conversations, but also to provide live contextual information about sporting events for spectators physically present at them, or for viewers watching them via electronic media. For its part, Facebook allows users to have fuller, richer conversations and to share all kinds of content, graphics and audiovisuals that have either been created or modified by those users. Therefore, they should not merely become elements for retransmitting what websites and traditional media such as television already offer. Rather, they should become independent channels with exclusive content, such as those mentioned earlier. Both Twitter and Facebook are communication tools that fall outside the strict control of page owners, and page owners must use them in a way that places trust in their followers and fans by adopting a closer, more sincere attitude. This will allow page owners to use any criticism, which may potentially be levelled against them in these means of free expression, to the benefit of the Olympic Family. By doing so, their fans will become more loyal and get more involved in the cause.

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