

# Sports information on social networks leaves out women, disabled and minority disciplines

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Researchers from the University of Seville and Pompeu Fabra University argue that sports information on social media is dominated by men and football. This leaves out women's sports, sports featuring

athletes with disabilities and minority disciplines, thus repeating the reality of the traditional media. That is the main conclusion of a study analyzing more than 7,000 tweets published by the profiles of four public media in four European countries.

The study analyzed the posts by the Twitter profiles providing sports news of the public broadcasters of Spain (RTVE), France (France TV), Ireland (RTÉ) and Italy (RAI). Between 30% and 58% of the tweets by these media related to football. However, differences were observed between them, mainly depending on the successes of national athletes, the tradition of certain sports in those countries and, a decisive factor in television, whether the media outlet in question held the broadcasting rights of the competitions being reported.

Thus, basketball, motorcycling, handball and indoor football received greater prominence from RTVE. Each of them accounted for between 8.6% and 10.1% of all tweets. Rugby stood out (21%) on France TV, followed by skiing, tennis and [motor sports](#), with the Dakar rally taking center stage. Irish broadcaster RTÉ regularly reported on local sports such as Gaelic football (12.5%), hurling (7.45%) and horse racing (5.2%). And on Italy's RAI, where football took the highest share of tweets published (58.3%), other major and traditional sports in the country's sporting culture, such as cycling, were very present. The study also underscores that athletics, one of the sports with the longest tradition and the backbone of the Olympic Games, was barely visible on Twitter, with a share ranging between 1.48% and 2.84% in the media analyzed.

France TV offered more diverse coverage, as its publications covered a total of 36 sporting disciplines. It was followed by RTVE and RTÉ with 35 and RAI with 28. However, two thirds of these other sports had only an anecdotal or casual presence, with less than 15 tweets per sport.

"It is striking that these are corporations with a clear public service duty that, in theory, should make more of an effort to accommodate a greater plurality of voices, sources and topics," says José Luis Rojas, professor in the Department of Journalism II at the University of Seville and author of the study along with Xavier Ramon, professor at the Pompeu Fabra University.

The pattern is repeated with regard to diversity in terms of gender or disability. Female athletes were underrepresented in all the profiles analyzed, accounting for an average of only 9.4% of the total number of tweets published by the four public broadcasters, compared to 84.5% whose protagonist was male and around 6% with mixed protagonists. Hardly any differences were observed between the countries in this respect. France TV gave most presence to women athletes, accounting for 13.2% of its tweets.

This information imbalance was even more evident when it came to athletes with disabilities. Only 43 of the 7,426 tweets in the study referred to athletes with disabilities. "This is very striking considering that the Paralympic Games were held in the year covered by the study," says Professor Rojas.

These data show that Twitter reproduces the sports media coverage model that existed before social media and, as such, contributes to reinforcing, rather than alleviating, information gaps in the media's agenda. The push that these media give to distribute content, their visibility, their impact to reach global audiences and also their interaction, are not being used by the media to offer greater diversity in their coverage.

On the contrary, researchers argue that the media use [social media](#), in this case Twitter, to multiply the visibility of their content and to reinforce the promotion of their coverage and their media brand. Many

of their tweets focus on raising the visibility of their broadcasts and the work of their employees, through self-promotion of programs, and by offering highlights of their coverage, especially events for which they have the broadcast rights. These publications do not always respond purely to criteria of newsworthiness. Instead, the main intention is to have an impact and achieve audience interaction, to reach as many people as possible. For this reason, the study's authors argue that, in their approach to sports coverage, these public media hardly differ from private [media](#) companies.

**More information:** José Luis Rojas-Torrijos et al, Exploring Agenda Diversity in European Public Service Media Sports Desks: A Comparative Study of Underrepresented Disciplines, Sportswomen and Disabled Athletes' Coverage on Twitter, *Journalism Studies* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2020.1809497](https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1809497)

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