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TRANSFORMATIONS OF SPORTS AUDIOVISUAL LENGUAJE DURING COVID-19

TRANSFORMACIONES DEL LENGUAJE AUDIOVISUAL DEPORTIVO DURANTE LA COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The research focuses on the transformations experienced by Ibero-American sports channels during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main objective is to describe the changes applied to the audiovisual language of these media during this period of crisis. **Methodology:** A qualitative approach was employed, using the semi-structured interview technique. The selected sample included journalists and producers affiliated with sports channels. The interview was structured to inquire about specific changes in key elements of the audiovisual language, such as image, sound, and staging. **Results:** Findings reveal that the audiovisual language of sports content underwent significant transformations. Program production adapted to remote modalities, and a hybridization of television technology with others, such as video calls, social media, and mobile phones, was observed. These adaptations allowed for the

continuity of production despite the cancellation of sports events. Some changes implemented during the pandemic are no longer in use, while others persist. Temporary and permanent audiovisual discursive modes generated by these adaptations were identified. **Conclusions:** In conclusion, the research highlights that the crisis triggered by the pandemic led to a reconfiguration of the audiovisual language of sports channels. Remote production and the integration of alternative technologies were crucial in overcoming the challenges imposed by the cancellation of sports events. The coexistence of temporary and permanent changes in audiovisual discursive modes reflects the industry's adaptability to adverse circumstances, outlining a transformed landscape in sports communication in Ibero-America.

Keywords: Audiovisual language, Sports journalism, COVID-19, frame, sound, staging.

RESUMEN

Introducción: La investigación se enfoca en las transformaciones experimentadas por los canales deportivos de Iberoamérica durante la pandemia de la COVID-19. El objetivo principal es describir los cambios aplicados en el lenguaje audiovisual de estos medios durante este periodo de crisis. **Metodología:** Se empleó un enfoque cualitativo, utilizando la técnica de la entrevista semiestructurada. La muestra seleccionada incluyó periodistas y realizadores vinculados a los canales deportivos. La entrevista se estructuró para indagar sobre cambios específicos en elementos clave del lenguaje audiovisual, como la imagen, el sonido y la puesta en escena. **Resultados:** Los hallazgos revelan que el lenguaje audiovisual de los contenidos deportivos experimentó transformaciones significativas. La producción de programas se adaptó a la modalidad remota, y se observó una hibridación de la tecnología televisiva con otras, como videollamadas, redes sociales y teléfonos móviles. Estas adaptaciones permitieron la continuidad de la producción a pesar de la cancelación de eventos deportivos. Algunos cambios implementados durante la pandemia ya no se utilizan, mientras que otros persisten. Se identificaron modos discursivos audiovisuales temporales y permanentes generados por estas adaptaciones. **Conclusiones:** En conclusión, la investigación destaca que la crisis desencadenada por la pandemia generó una reconfiguración en el lenguaje audiovisual de los canales deportivos. La producción remota y la integración de tecnologías alternativas fueron clave para superar los desafíos impuestos por la cancelación de eventos deportivos. La coexistencia de cambios temporales y permanentes en los modos discursivos audiovisuales refleja la capacidad de adaptación de la industria a circunstancias adversas, delineando un panorama transformado en la comunicación deportiva en Iberoamérica.

Palabras clave: Lenguaje audiovisual, periodismo deportivo, COVID-19, encuadre, sonido, puesta en escena.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sports in mass media, or mediated sport, is considered one of the main sources of entertainment in modern societies (Moragas, 1999). Sporting events generate high levels of audience tuning and economic profitability due to the massive attention of

audiences (Marín, 2004; Herrero, 2013; Brachi et al., 2016; Martín et al., 2017). Since the seventies, these broadcasts have been an important part of the television offer, impacting the rise in transmission rights prices, leading broadcasters to invest in this area (Casanova, 2009).

Live broadcasts and sports segments in news programs were the original contents until the emergence of sports programs and later, thematic channels, both national and international (Gutiérrez, 2003; Salvatori, 2013). Thus, sports channels have evolved from a specialized content offering, through subscription, to integration into multiple platforms and screens (Bonaut-Iriarte and Vincent, 2020). In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic drastically affected the media, and to continue producing, different technologies such as cell phones, video calls, and cloud services were applied for reporting (Blas et al., 2020), leading to what has been termed remote journalism (Túñez et al., 2020) or pandemic journalism (Martín et al. 2021). In generalist television journalism, the audiovisual language was modified due to the application of social distancing for coverage (Karbaum, 2021).

1.1. AUDIOVISUAL LANGUAGE AND SPORTS

The formats allow for the production of sports content through different audiovisual discursive structures, classified as: sports broadcasts, sports magazine, sports information, educational spaces, summary programs (Bonaut, 2014). They can also be understood from a procedural division in terms of their production, which would be outdoor and studio programs (Barroso, 2002). For the construction of these contents, audiovisual language is used, which is the set of images and sounds with which stories are created in media such as cinema, television, and the internet (Nicolau, 1982; Jaramillo, 2008; Fernández and Martínez, 2014; Bedoya and León, 2016; Karbaum and Torres, 2020; Karbaum, 2021); this is also known as audiovisual discourse (Caballero, 2019; Chatman, 1990), or codes of the audiovisual text (Tamayo and Chaume, 2016). This language is operationalized through two mental processes: selection and combination (Apareci, 2009; Fernández and Martínez, 2014; Bedoya and León, 2016). In execution, the selection is made through framing, and the combination is consolidated in the montage (Bedoya and León, 2016), being these the most important components of an audiovisual product (García, 2003).

Some studies provide references to its use in sports formats, especially in live broadcasts, where the image is characterized by the distribution of cameras, replays of plays, sound -through comments and ambient audio, which emphasize understanding-, as well as graphics, which provide complementary information (Marín, 2004; Torres et al., 2022). Betti (1998) argues that sport, as content, reaches the viewer already interpreted, and the use of special lenses, sound, music, or narration gives the story a new guise that turns it into a television spectacle. Broadcasts of competitions are interesting due to the suspense because the outcome is unknown, a situation referred to in English as the Thrill of victory (Gutiérrez, 2003; Marín, 2004; Bonaut, 2010). Regarding other formats, more oriented towards information, their impact lies in the images of the actions, interviews with the protagonists, and the comments or voice-overs that appeal to the epic of sports or controversy (Gutiérrez, 2003). This spectacularization of sports would not be possible without the technological advances applied to these events; in fact, many of the audiovisual technical

innovations are first tested in sports competitions (Moragas, 1994; Bonaut, 2010; Roger, 2015).

1.1.1. Components of Audiovisual Language

A fundamental element is framing, which arises from selecting a portion of reality to be recorded with a camera in a specific rectangular or square proportion (Tamayo, 2000). It displays a spatial dimension, which may or may not have movement, and includes sound elements and a narrative point of view (Bedoya and León, 2016). Framing is constructed through a composition process by arranging elements in it, through three ways: arrangement, selection, and design (Fernández and Martínez, 2014). Staging is a process where the director combines a series of languages and elements like lighting, costume, set design, props, and actors' performances, chosen and predisposed for creating the atmosphere and credibility of the audiovisual product (Fernández and Martínez, 2014; Cabañas, 2021; Dragucevic, 2021).

Sound, a complementary element of the image composed of different audios contributing to information generation, emotion, and narrative in audiovisual products (Karbaum and Torres, 2021), also underwent transformations during the pandemic. Marimón (2020) suggested that framing experienced various modifications due to the intensive use of video calls and other non-broadcasting devices, allowing production during the pandemic (Túñez et al., 2020), to the point that many questioned the audiovisual quality of these productions. However, Blas et al. (2020) claimed that narrative, lighting, the number and positioning of cameras, or pandemic-specific scenography would be incorporated as regular production resources. Therefore, this research aims to describe transformations in audiovisual language applied in some of the main Ibero-American sports media.

2. OBJECTIVES

2.1. General Research Objective

Define the hybridizations or transformations applied in the audiovisual language in some of the main Ibero-American sports media (ESPN, Marca, Win Sports, Movistar Deportes, DSports, and Mediapro) during the first years of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020, 2021, and 2022.

2.2. Specific Objectives

Describe modifications of images and sounds in the chosen audiovisual sports media during the mentioned period.

Understand innovations in staging on these platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. These media were selected based on criteria such as audience levels, credibility, and information quality due to their extensive national and international presence.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology applied in this research is basic, cross-sectional, non-experimental, and descriptive, as its intention is to analyze transformations in the audiovisual language of sports programs and broadcasts produced by the media during the COVID-

19 pandemic. To this end, an analytical method was used, examining components of audiovisual discourse classified into subcategories: audiovisual image, sound, and staging. A qualitative approach was utilized, focusing on studying perceptions, opinions, interpretations, and experiences of the sample members (Creswell, 2013; Quecedo and Castaño, 2002). Based on this, the following research questions were determined:

3.1. General Research Question

How were the hybridizations or transformations applied in the audiovisual language in some of the main Ibero-American sports media (ESPN, Marca, Win Sports, Movistar Deportes, DSports, and Mediapro) during the first years of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020, 2021, and 2022?

3.2. Specific Questions

How were images and sounds modified in the selected audiovisual sports media during the mentioned period?

What were the innovations in staging on these platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Empirical data collection was conducted using the semi-structured interview technique. A questionnaire was developed and validated by experts as the instrument. Prior to this, a documentary analysis was conducted, reviewing relevant literature and audiovisual content (Corbetta, 2007). Bibliographic analysis (Del Río and Velázquez, 2005) allowed for the development of the state of the art and theoretical determination of the study category. Selection and analysis of some audiovisual content published by the sample media during 2020, 2021, and 2022 on platforms were also conducted; this analysis enabled a preliminary diagnosis of how images and sounds were transforming in these media, refining the category and subcategories proposed from the theoretical review. Participants were selected for working in the mentioned media during the pandemic, each providing information from their specialty, while sample heterogeneity allowed for data collection from their co-interviewees' functions, enabling triangulation of the collected information. The sample was determined to be purposive, as it allowed for collecting specific data on the research topic (Otzen and Manterola, 2017). Interviews were conducted using the snowball technique (Hernández and Carpio, 2019). The sample consisted of:

1. Julio De Feudis: Producer and post-producer at ESPN, USA, 25 years of professional experience (JD).
2. Ornella Palumbo: Presenter and reporter at ESPN, Peru, 12 years of professional experience (OP).
3. David Gayón: Producer at Win Sports, Colombia, 17 years of professional experience (DG).
4. Valentina Rincón: Host and reporter at Win Sports, Colombia, 7 years of professional experience (VR).

5. Luisa Calderón: Post-producer at Win Sports, Colombia, 16 years of professional experience (LC).
6. Manuel Paz Soldán: Producer at Movistar Deportes, Peru, 18 years of professional experience (MP).
7. David Chávez: Reporter at Movistar Deportes, Peru, 14 years of professional experience (DC).
8. Manuel Arellano: Post-producer at Movistar Deportes, Peru, 25 years of professional experience (MA).
9. José Stuart: Producer at DSports, Peru, 12 years of professional experience (JS).
10. Julio Vílchez: Host and reporter at DSports, Peru, 16 years of professional experience (JV).
11. Roly Mengual: Producer and journalist at Mediapro – Conmebol, Argentina, 18 years of professional experience (RM).
12. Marta García: Producer, director, post-producer, and special correspondent at Marca, Spain, 13 years of professional experience (MG).
13. Alberto Ortega: Audiovisual editor at Marca, Spain, 14 years of professional experience (AO).

All interviews were conducted from October 2022 to February 2023. Questions were designed considering theoretical definitions from authors referenced in tables 1, 2, and 3. Then, transcription and subsequent information processing for coding and organization were conducted (Strauss and Corbin, 2002). Additionally, to obtain more current data, random analyses of programs broadcast by these channels during the Qatar 2022 World Cup were carried out, followed by second interviews or consultations via WhatsApp with sample members who covered the championship. The aim was to compare if audiovisual discursive transformations had persisted or not, to understand to what extent they had integrated into sports audiovisual language.

Table 1.
Image component

Component	Description
Shots	Descriptive, narrative, expressive; shot-counter shot, combined shot, sequence shot, dutch angle shot, resource shot
Angles	Normal, zenithal, aberrant, nadir, high angle, low angle
Movements	Descriptive and dramatic; physical, optical, and editing movements
Framing	Spatial and sound dimensions; forms of gaze: objective, subjective, interpretative; coexistence of framings, generational and grouping framing
Composition	By selection, by arrangement, by design
Media Format	Horizontal, vertical, square, television format, and other media formats

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 2.
Sounds components

Component	Description
Voice or speech	Commentary and dialogue
Music – functions	Substitution for real sounds, reinforcement, accompaniment
Noises	Natural, cultural, and human
Silence – functions	Generate pauses, rhythms in dialogue, support dramatic context
Sound perspective	Close-up, ambient, background

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3.
Staging

Component	Description
Scenography	Natural, artificial, virtual
Light and lighting	Natural and artificial, hard and soft, high and low key
Props	Aesthetic, handheld, scenic
Wardrobe	Physical, psychological, cultural, socioeconomic; makeup: aesthetic, characterization, special effects

Source: Own elaboration.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Video Calls: Composition, Staging, and Coexistence of Frames

Faced with the need to continue reporting, journalists employed various devices for remote journalism (Túñez et al., 2020). Sports journalists adapted: "The first thing we did was to record ourselves with our phones, short news dispatches, as there was also no visual material from the clubs to support a story, then came the era of Zoom interviews," (Palumbo, personal communication, December 19, 2022). Interviewees agree that video calls, used for interviews and panel programs, had a lower aesthetic compared to pre-pandemic standards, but the presence of the subject was paramount.

Shots, angles, and movements compose the image within audiovisual language (Bedoya y León, 2016; Caballero, 2019). During the pandemic's peak, video call recordings or broadcasts typically used medium shots to close-up frontals directed towards the device's camera. The composition was often flawed, with interviewees in backlight or off-center angles (MG – JS - DG). Presenters, being more audiovisual literate, could establish better frames, sometimes with remote direction from camera directors or cameramen (MA).

These framing configurations were prevalent in interviews and solo program hosting. For panel or debate programs, participants appeared in a frontal position but as a mosaic of sub-frames within the overall frame. The lack of a shared physical space on a set led to the loss of shot-reverse-shot, placing the frontal frames of video calls within the interpretative camera configuration as per Casetti and Di Chio (1991), and

the absence of other audiovisual language features like open joint shots and physical camera movements characteristic of television set production.

Figure 1

Al Ángulo program broadcast, composed of a mosaic of sub-frames generated by video calls.



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwO8XXk6-cQ>

Staging encompasses the preparation of all elements within the frame, creating the audiovisual atmosphere (Fernández and Martínez, 2014; Cabañas, 2021; Draguicevic, 2021). With video calls in sports audiovisual production, presenters set up home studios, managing lighting, props, wardrobe, and backdrops (MA – MG – VR - JV). Chroma key techniques were also used to standardize backgrounds in post-production (OP). Additionally, there was a learning uptake from internet streamers and YouTubers, who have been creating setups on platforms like YouTube and Twitch (AO).

Reporters also guided interviewees on framing, leading to a transfer of audiovisual literacy, with interviewees creating their own backdrops and lighting, shifting the visual quality responsibility from cameramen to reporters (MG - DG).

Figure 2

A host organizing their home staging and conducting an interview from there.



Source: <https://acortar.link/R7ceP7> / <https://acortar.link/A5JDWA>

Regarding composition, arrangement composition allows for the control of all elements within the frame. Selection composition involves framing an object of interest without full control, merely recording it, and design composition is applied through the creation of unreal images, such as in animations (Fernández and Martínez, 2014). Despite compositional limitations, there was a progression from selection to arrangement for reporters or presenters improving their staging, and design was used in some cases when animated backgrounds were applied to chroma keys set up for video calls.

However, there were frames that were not the most suitable. When the interviewee was uncooperative, their image was still recorded or broadcast. The priority was having the subject present (DG – JS), reflecting varying levels of audiovisual literacy among interviewees (MP), ranging from none to a willingness to learn. Technical issues included low image resolution, poor audio mixed with ambient sounds, distracting elements like family members crossing the frame, and interviews conducted in unusual places like cars or on the street (AO). This led to an approximation of live dispatches: "So, I had to accept those kinds of bad shots, being interviewed in a car, and all that, right? And there were things you had to accept that remained" (Stuart, personal communication, January 5, 2023).

Social media interviews, especially on Instagram, used by journalists to interact with their subjects and the audience (DC – MG – JV), had to contend with vertical framing—unlike horizontal television framing. Yet, it was possible to integrate sub-frames within and encourage dialogic interaction: "We started doing a lot of Instagram live sessions. Those typical two-person lives, one on top of the other, which became very used during the pandemic" (García, personal communication, January 12, 2023). Another operational option occurred when presenters used the LiveU system, which allows broadcasting the signal from a video camera via broadband, with an extended version for mobile phones. During the lockdown, presenters either framed themselves or had a cameraman assist them (LA).

4.2. Cutaway Shots

Cutaway shots or B-roll are vital visual elements in content creation, allowing events to be shown (Historiadelcine, 2021). Without current B-roll, resources such as YouTube, Twitter, Instagram accounts of athletes were used for information and visual material. These events were mostly recorded with athletes' phones in vertical frame, applying selection composition where recording and following an event is the priority (Fernández and Martínez, 2014). During the initial weeks of lockdown, a recurring theme was what players or clubs were doing to cope with the pandemic; they collaborated by providing self-recorded images sent to editors (LA – MA - OP). Depending on how the event was recorded, it could be classified as either interpretative or objective according to Casetti and Di Chio (1991). Materials generated not only by players but also by citizens and fans served as visual input.

With no current sports events, programs narrating past events were produced. Archives from each channel were crucial, providing B-roll to illustrate narrated events. Football matches from the past became a significant source of B-roll. These supports were archived as broadcast at the time, meaning as the director cut the cameras during that broadcast. The broadcast format of the era also had to be

considered—whether analog or digital—leading to a framing configuration of square (4:3) for the former, and horizontal (16:9) for the latter. Most interviewees stated that the archive was used to produce content such as reports, news pieces, or compilations of B-roll, which were inserted into other programs discussing past topics. In panel programs, this allowed for hosts not to appear constantly, complementing their comments with visual information and avoiding monotony.

Figure 3

The conversation program "Años Atrás", composed of video calls and lower-resolution archival B-roll compared to current standards.



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zrK8vM3rBo>

When sports activities resumed after the initial pandemic restrictions, there were significant limitations. Cameramen couldn't record activities like training sessions, press conferences, or mixed zones, which led to sports institutions creating their own audiovisual compilations. These compilations varied in quality and often showed signs of post-production, such as effects and audio adjustments, indicating a professional level of production. However, a potential bias was introduced as the clubs themselves were the ones recording, showcasing mainly positive aspects and possibly omitting any negative incidents or tensions.

we've lived through a period where everything appeared perfect; every play was wonderful. No goals were missed in training, and no tensions were visible. We lost the gestures, the context, the real situations. This has been negative for the media because it reduces the authenticity of what we report, but it's been positive for the clubs. They seem to prefer controlling the narrative and the information that reaches us (García, personal communication, January 12, 2023).

When sports resumed, camerawork was adapted to the health restrictions of the time. Filming took place at a distance, with masks and other protective items becoming a part of the reporters' and players' outfits. This led to broadcasts from empty stadiums without fans, altering the traditional atmosphere of football matches and limiting the creation of B-roll footage that adds depth to sports storytelling (JV – MA - MG).

4.3. Video calls and Hybridization on Set

Audiovisual productions are categorized based on their filming locales, including both outdoor and in-studio productions (Barroso, 2002). With the onset of lockdowns, studio-based production was significantly curtailed until a limited resumption was

possible. This phase brought an innovative approach in framing, where diverse broadcasting signals were integrated within studio setups. This was achieved by positioning a host within the studio, captured by a television camera, alongside panelists or interviewees connected via video calls, framed by their respective computer or cellphone cameras. Additional innovations included projecting video call participants on monitors, either analog or virtual, within the studio environment (JD - DG - JV).

Another novel technique involved producing these programs using multiple, remotely sourced signals from a mix of domestic and studio cameras. These were switched live, enabling real-time broadcast without the necessity for recording and post-production processing (MA - MP - DG - JD). This approach was groundbreaking, as it allowed cell phone or computer cameras to remotely perform functions typically managed by Electronic Field Production (EFP) cameras in TV studios, resulting in broadcasts that blended various qualities, aesthetics, and camera formats.

Figure 4

Program Al ángulo, broadcast where 3 subframes are hybridized from the set. With another 2 from video call.



Source: <https://youtu.be/z0f1d7x> DOI

4.4. Return of the retransmission

Live sports broadcasting, particularly football matches, is a vital format in audiovisual sports media, as emphasized by Brachi et al. (2016). The interviewees conveyed a strong interest in the resumption of live football broadcasts, and upon COMMEBOL's authorization, they had already initiated a series of actions to enhance the audiovisual experience due to the absence of audiences. This involved diagnosing which elements were needed, leading to the creation of an audio library with tracks and songs from over thirty teams. Visually, it meant generating graphics to fulfill the requirements of competition sponsors. The intent was to offer a realistic feel to the broadcasts, adapting to the new context of playing without live audiences.

All those things were aimed at making the broadcast as realistic as possible. We all knew there were no people in the stands, but framing it in a way that brought some normality was important for making the return as good as possible. (Mengual, personal communication, January 9, 2023)

The process of creating virtual audio for sports broadcasts began two months before the resumption of competitions, around July 2020. This project involved producing two types of sounds: chants and generic sounds. The chants included 5 to 7 support songs from fan groups of each CONMEBOL competition team. The generic sounds encompassed fan reactions for various emotionally intense moments in the games, requiring an assessment of the contextual situations of each stadium and its fanbase.

The creation of virtual audio for sports broadcasts was universal across teams, involving standard sounds like goal cheers, reactions when the ball came close to scoring, fouls, and responses to controversial moments. There were different intensities of goal celebrations, simulating varying crowd sizes. (Megual, personal communication, January 9, 2023)

The sound selection process for the broadcasts began with existing archives, prioritizing high-quality sounds and excluding those with undesirable background noises. Due to a limited number of chants in the archives, additional sounds were sourced from platforms like YouTube, with careful attention to exclude any racist or offensive content. The virtual graphics were specifically designed for advertising sponsors, strategically timed to display during the broadcasts. These graphics were superimposed on empty stands to simulate flags held by fans, with sponsors' logos prominently featured. In Europe, MediaPro took a further step by using virtual graphics to create the illusion of a filled stadium. This period was marked by the notable absence of "color shots," which typically show fan reactions during games, contributing significantly to the emotional and narrative aspects of the broadcast. (RM)

4.5. Current trends in Sports Audiovisual Media

For the framing, the character is now placed in the middle, not in the traditional left or right third. The gaze is frontal towards the camera, not lateral as before, achieving a centered image that can be published vertically on social media, or horizontally without losing visual information on the sides (AO). The pandemic experience and the normalization of videocall interviews led some media to establish mini-studios for recording these calls, complete with background, lighting, and microphones (AO), indicating a specific staging and composition for producing these formats. In other cases, it's a contingency technique, as the preference is to return to the visual quality and personal interaction of in-person interviews (MP – VR - JS). Videocalls continue as an alternative resource, and the frames they generate are now part of the aesthetic of sports channels. For instance, during the 2022 Qatar World Cup, journalists used them for dispatches and debate programs, with each channel using technical resources like LiveU or vMix for mobiles (JV – MP - MG). Media like Marca provided their reporters with these devices for dispatches or content from their World Cup locations (AO - MG). The differentiation lies in combining various sub-frames of different configurations and origins within the final broadcast frame, a technical and discursive change that requires rethinking the evolution of what was known as the coexistence of frames (Karbaum, 2022):

The multi-screen format we now use often had dual screens, but everything was very carefully balanced. Now, you can include four or five screens. In fact,

we produce a lot of content exclusively in vertical format. For example, in Qatar, I had a segment that I was required to record vertically because, post-pandemic, people have gotten used to it and like it. (García, personal communication, January 12, 2023)

Figure 5

World Cup Program on Multi-Screen with 4 Horizontal Vertical Sub-Frames, 1 from Qatar and the Rest. from Commentators' Homes



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phjRUs93buo>

5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

As observed in the preceding pages, audiovisual narrative undergoes transformations due to both exogenous and endogenous factors (Karbaum, 2022), and so does its discourse or language. Thus, this research has demonstrated how the pandemic affected the discursive forms of sports audiovisual content. Non-televised devices had to be adapted for the production of programs and broadcasts in this field. These changes altered the morphology of their image, sound, and staging. While the devices and creation processes that emerged from their use have been incorporated into audiovisual production and legitimized, it does not mean that all modifications have continuous permanence. Some have endured, while others have been temporary. From this perspective, it can be concluded that during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, temporary audiovisual discursive modes and permanent discursive modes were established. This can be considered an additional feature to the audiovisual hybridization phenomenon proposed by Gómez et al. (2010). It also aligns with the formation of a hybrid media system where convergence between the production, distribution, and consumption logics of traditional and digital media was established (Chadwick, 2017). This process of hybridization was already underway before the pandemic but was accelerated by it.

During the early months of the pandemic, the audiovisual image underwent numerous transformations categorized by Marimón (2020). These included the prominence of split-screen displays, the convention of the front-back shot-reverse shot in split-screen, the mosaic of thumbnails, and an increased prevalence of vertical format. All of these changes persisted as long as lockdowns were in effect or were resumed in response to subsequent waves that necessitated a return to remote production. It is worth noting that elements of the audiovisual language characteristic of studio production

(Barroso, 2002), such as physical and optical camera movements (Karbaum and Torres, 2021), wide shots, and ensemble shots, were eliminated. Nevertheless, there is a prevailing opinion among creators that the audiovisual discourse became impoverished during this period.

Before the pandemic, we were already witnessing a convergence of various recording formats - analog and digital, square and horizontal - due to the development of cinema and television, a phenomenon known as the coexistence of frames, which coexist and are grouped in post-production (Karbaum, 2022). However, the pandemic led to the legitimization of the vertical frame. This, in turn, has led to their integration into programs. When vertical frames are broadcast alongside other horizontal subframes in a multiscreen frame, a new evolution of audiovisual discourse occurs. Therefore, it is suggested that when the frame only presents horizontal subframes, it is a homogeneous multiscreen frame. When frames of diverse origins - television, video calls, or mobile phones - and sizes - vertical, horizontal, or square - are used, it can be referred to as a mixed multiscreen frame.

Staging is a process that combines art and technique to create the spaces and atmospheres of content (Fernández and Martínez, 2014; Cabañas, 2021; Draguicevic, 2021). In the context of the pandemic, it was necessary to resort to domestic staging, which evolved from a composition by selection to one by arrangement. In some cases, it even involved composition by design (Fernández and Martínez, 2014), revealing a process of audiovisual literacy facilitated by the transfer of knowledge among journalists and from them to their interviewees. Moreover, these staging approaches could be combined with those performed in television studios to broadcast programs with audiovisual configurations resulting from the blending of different media, a practice that has already been legitimized, even during the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

This research has successfully documented the transformations of audiovisual language in sports media during the pandemic. However, the study has some limitations. Firstly, future research could include other sports media and more participants to expand our understanding of the continued relevance of these audiovisual innovations. Secondly, there is a need to study the roles played by post-production in the consolidation of the studied products. Finally, attention should be given to upcoming research perspectives on this topic, which may be related to media hybridization or the modification of audiovisual discourses influenced by emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence.

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