Reaching Out To the World

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Introduction

T he advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web in the 1990s led to an explosion of change and growth in the media, which in turn has pushed the process of globalisation and made the coverage of sport an interpersonal, intercultural and international public domain. With advances in communication technology information that previously was subject to the time lag involved in the print media or the selectivity of television and radio is now instantly accessible in bewildering amounts through dozens of formats. In the modern media and technology environment it is possible for fans to follow their favourite sports, teams and athletes around the clock every day of the week and the digital media have expanded and enriched the fan experience[1]. In addition to getting updates on the progress of matches or results, they can now use the social media channels to interact and exchange other sorts of information, ideas and opinions. Everyone has the ability to easily participate in a dialogue with stars, pundits and other fans as the analogue era communications model of one source to many receivers has been replaced with a digital era system of many sources and many receivers.

From the point of view of sport governing bodies, teams and other sport organisations, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), this constantly evolving media environment has hugely changed their businesses. Relationships with the athletes, journalists and fans have altered and the social media have become increasingly important tools for marketing events and other products. Moreover, other players in sport such as product suppliers, mass participation running event organisers and individuals with specialist interests have been able to access and make use of the digital media space.

The effect of digital media on sport is already a subject for serious study and a number of books and articles have been produced around the world (see Bibliography on page 77). The aims of this overview are to give a summary of how this environment evolved and present three short, anecdotal case studies, based on a quick survey of easily accessible sources, as a starting point for further discussion and study.

The Co-Development of Digital Media and Sport

The relationship between the media and sport can be characterised as symbiotic. Sport is compelling content - a key area of nationally specific and global popular culture(s) - and thus a pivotal media commodity. In the analogue era, the media industry comprised a set of relatively discrete markets (television, radio, newspapers, magazines) each covering the content created by sport in ways appropriate to their platform[2].

Television was the most powerful format for over fifty years and its popularity led to a vast expansion of audiences and capital injections into sport derived from escalating broadcast rights[3]. It was television sport's success that gave much, though certainly not all, of the impetus for the growth of the digital media. As the number of viewers increased there was the need to better satisfy their demands by providing faster, more efficient transmission underpinned by the better production and distribution and eventually new means for consuming content. With the advent of Internet streaming, starting in 1999, together with high-speed Internet transmission, the media landscape shifted from analogue to digital. The new technical possibilities led to opportunities for increased interaction, which created greater user (fan) engagement and a different, closer, relationship with the content. It also led to a blurring of the specific roles and functions of the media formats and a decline of what could be called the traditional media.

The 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing represented the greatest wide-scale expansion of sport into the online and digital space as a complement to television broadcasting. NBCOlympics.com offered more than 3,500 hours of online coverage[4] and, according to Nielsen Media Research, 51.8 million unique users visited the site, viewing 1.3 billion pages, while watching more than 75 million video streams[5]. In addition, other major websites, mobile video channels, and the user-generated and social media outlets (YouTube, Facebook, and blogs) also covered the Games. Since Beijing, the communication about sport through digital channels has continued to increase, not least because of the introduction of new social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Vine, Tumblr, and Flickr. One recent study has found that more than 60% of sport fans go online to consume sport content[6].

Currently the most important elements of the technology picture driving change in the way we consume sport are:

Cloud Computing - is a generic term for the delivery of Internet services. Traditionally, the storage of the large programs and amounts of data associated with, for example, the website of a media outlet, required a single dedicated server on the other end of your computer, typically connected through a wire or Ethernet cable. With the "Cloud", the working of the programs and data storage takes place across a network of computers operated by a third party and linked to your device through the 3G and 4G networks or wifi. Cloud computing allows companies or individuals to avoid upfront infrastructure costs, get applications up and running faster and focus their resources on projects and content rather than infrastructure. This makes it possible for many new and smaller players to operate in the digital media space, which in turn leads to more innovation.

Mobile Technology – which has allowed access to the Internet, regardless of where you are, on devices such as phones, tablets and portable computers (laptops). You are no longer tied to the television or desk computer in the house if you want to consume sport or access social media.

Social Media - which are websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. When you read or watch news, you naturally want to share it, comment on it and discuss it; it's our human nature. The social media have added a new dimension to content, including sport content, as they have put the fan in the mix through interactivity. We do not just consume content, we are part of creating it.

Interestingly, the adoption of new technology has been happening faster than ever: the telephone took 71 years before it reached 50% of all households in North America, the colour television took 28 years, the personal computer took 19 years, and the mobile phone only took 14 years. The adoption rate for new communications technologies, like broadband Internet, smart phones, or social media platforms seems to accelerate with each new advance[7]. The next wave in the future looks to be wearable technology. For example, Apple has released a watch that gives consumers the ability to access the Internet and shoe companies are adding sensors to footware that

can monitor and publicise data about the players' performance. It is believed that these and other concepts will take about four years to be fully adopted.

Also interesting is the rate of change in the thinking of major sport organisations. For example, just five years ago most of the larger governing bodies and teams were wary of their events appearing on YouTube as it undermined the exclusivity of the content they were selling to broadcasters. Now, most sports have reversed that position and are embracing YouTube, many setting up their own YouTube channels. With these they can show matches after a delay that does not threaten the live television broadcasts. They can also package archive material into special programmes (past season stories, greatest goals, tributes to individuals or teams, etc.) for which there is a market but not one that is big enough to justify time on television. Instead of hurting their main source of income, the big sports are using YouTube as a complement to television broadcasting, broadening fan access to their material and building their brand. For the smaller sports that could never expect regular television coverage, YouTube has become a cost effective way to get their content, and the messages of their sponsors, out to the public.

The impact of the changing media environment on athletics has some special characteristics worth considering. As content for television, athletics has certain weaknesses. The typical televised athletics meeting comprises more or less non-stop action in several parts of a large stadium, which calls for experience on the part of the spectator to follow and is impossible for the television camera to capture in its entirety. Such a meeting is really four, five or more sporting events happening simultaneously. A major event like the IAAF World Championships in Athletics may require between 80 and 100 television cameras for a top quality production, which makes it a very high cost proposition to provide essentially a single image for television broadcast at any moment.

Compare this to American football, where the action occurs in 15-20 second bursts with time for the audience to react, watch a replay and anticipate for the next play. Or with tennis, which has a similar go-stop action and the advantage of the whole field of play fitting into a camera-shot with the players still clearly identifiable. American football games are often broadcast with 15 cameras while the Super Bowl requires a maximum of 30 cameras[8] and approximately 20 cameras are used for the Wimbledon final in tennis[9].

Digital media provide 'communicative abundance' and opportunities for 'narrowcasting' to audiences with specific interests, which are clearly a great opportunity for athletics. Athletics fans can be offered possibilities to focus on the part or parts of the action at an event they want, allowing more than one camera to be providing consumable content at any given moment and thus spreading costs. The sport can also capitalise on its audiences' ability to access other types of content 24 hours per day, seven days per week. Today, they can find live action from any level including young athletes and even Masters; they can access the mass of statistics that are of special importance in athletics compared to other sports; they can participate in forums; they can follow discussions about coaching; they can get advice for their own training, they can enter races and more. This abundance increases the sport's chance to be relevant to a wider cross-section of the population than was possible in the analogue era.

Case Study 1: The Olympic Games

The summer and winter Olympic Games are the world's biggest multi-sport events. The rights holder for both, the IOC, has long been a leader in promoting its events and the Olympic brand through the media available at any given time – from print to radio to television. This promotion has led to the development of what are now two of sport's most valuable media and marketing properties. It is no surprise, therefore, that the IOC and its commercial and media partners, which benefit from any increase in

the value of the Games and the Olympic brand, would be open to exploiting communications opportunities created by changes in the media or that they would be willing to make the necessary investment to develop their presence in the digital media space.

Olympic coverage

The development of the means the media have used to cover the Olympic Games over the last 120 years gives a good picture of the development for all sport. There have, of course, been many changes in the media formats used since the 1896 Games in Athens, where newspapers and magazines were of primary importance. For example, in the editions of the Games that followed, photography and newsreel filming also became important features. The significant advances since then include:

- Radio, with live broadcasts in over 28 languages, was introduced at the 1936 Games in Berlin;
- The 1964 winter Games in Innsbruck were the first to be broadcast live in their entirety on television and the use of satellite made it possible for the summer Games in Tokyo that year to be seen in over 40 countries;
- The Olympic.org website went live at the 1996 Atlanta Games;.
- The Beijing Games in 2008 and the Vancouver Winter Games in 2010 were the first to have full digital coverage around the world allowing viewers to follow live action or replay highlights on their computers;
- The London Games in 2012 saw the creation of the Olympic Athlete's Hub, an application that provided the opportunity for individuals to engage and interact directly with athletes through social media.

The trend in the numbers of Olympic Games viewers and digital media users are impressive: TV Viewers were 3.7 billion in 2000, 3.9 billion in 2004, and 4.3 billion in 2008; Facebook users grew from 100 million in 2008 to 845 million 2012; Twitter users grew from 6.0 million in 2008 to 140 million 2012.

Social media

The obvious goal of the IOC's social media strategy is to engage as many people around the world, regardless of country, language, age demographic, technology device, or media format. Athletes are at the heart of the strategy, which includes Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Foursquare, Tumblr, Flickr, YouTube, Google plus, China's Sina Weibo and Youku, (Video sharing) and Russia's BKOHTAKTE (Vk. com). Examples of how the IOC uses social media include:

- YouTube and Youku to deliver archival footage
- Facebook, Twitter and Sina Weibo to engage in a social networks and exchange of views;
- Flickr to distribute high-resolution images to the media.

Originally offered in English, the IOC now operates in French, Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese, Russian, and Korean, underlining the goal of inclusivity. Expect to see Japanese and Arabic and others soon.

This IOC's free mobile app, Athletes' Hub, acts as a searchable directory of the social media activities of Olympic athletes, for both past and present. Using the app's search function, users can locate athletes by country, team, sport, or current and historical edition of the Games, as well as search through what athletes have updated in real time. It includes Facebook, Instagram and Twitter feeds, for both photos and videos. Fans can also use the app to connect directly with the Olympians, while the athletes themselves can text each other and the IOC directly.

Case Study 2: Football

Because of its unparalleled following, football (soccer) has a digital media presence characterised by both global spread and multiplicity of providers and communities. In addition to the world governing body, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), there are the regional associations, national federations, national leagues, individual teams, media

outlets, independent groups such as fan associations and the players themselves, all filling the space and offering fans more and more opportunities and means to consume and interact.

FIFA

The digital media strategy of FIFA is much the same as the IOC – to utilise digital and social media to reach as many people around the world as possible and thereby strengthen their ties with the game.

In the past, FIFA and UEFA (the powerful European governing body for football) would have seen use of their content by anyone other than the broadcasters who had bought the rights to their matches as a threat. Today, there is no longer the distinction because of the various platforms and apps provide a much wider coverage and practically uncontrollable opportunities. Therefore, the governing bodies are constantly working to develop ways to package their content so that it complements that sold to the broadcasters (providing highlights, special programmes, interviews, etc.) and engages more and more fans.

The broadcasters themselves normally have the right to decide what to do with the content they purchase. Some use it exclusively for television and try to block any dissemination through the Internet to their territory while others make the content available on their own websites, sometimes for free and sometimes for a fee.

In 2014, FIFA launched the Global Stadium, a social and mobile hub for the FIFA World Cup, online via the Internet and changed the way worldwide sporting events were digitally consumed forever. Fans were able to watch matches from the comfort of their homes, work, or on their mobile devices. In other words, people were no longer glued to their radio or TV, or even at a town centre watching on a makeshift outdoor cinema. This initiative allowed fans to engage with friends, players, coaches, journalists and other fans of any of the 64 participating teams. Content included live results, the latest news and pictures, and exclusive interviews. Over a billion people used the Global Stadium across FIFA's platforms The FIFA App, which had been downloaded 33 million times (at the end of 2014), is the biggest sports-event App in history.

On the technical side, the amount of content and connectivity presents a challenge to the current FIFA digital infrastructure, which was set up to handle up to 2.5 million live content streams at any one time across its network, compared to 1.6 million during the 2010 World Cup. This compares to your typical commercial shared web server that can only handle 300 concurrent connections at a time!

Other football channels

The FIFA website isn't the only place to go for information on football. With younger fans it probably is not even the main place they would chose to consume football content. In this multi-tasking world, fans scour the official league or team websites, then hop onto a broadcaster or newspaper's website for other news, scores and commentary of the game. They can supplement these with third party apps, such as the Onefootball app or go directly to their Facebook, Twitter or Vine accounts to connect to their favourite players.

As an example, the BBC in Great Britain has created a large sports website on which football is a main feature. The football part of the site offers comprehensive national and international coverage including fixtures, up to the minute results, league tables, news, opinions, gossip, links to the website of every team in the country and podcasts. A pay service gives the user access to a wide variety of live broadcasts and highlight programmes that can also be accessed through a mobile app. One can see that the investment in design, information gathering and quality of presentation is very high, which presumably reflects the high number of users, and guess that if similar services are not offered already in other football-loving nations they will be soon.

Famous footballers, such as Cristiano Ronaldo or Lionel Messi, as well as not so famous players, seem to use social media constantly. They upload "selfies" (i.e. hand held portraits of themselves from their own camera phone), update their whereabouts, thank their fans, give opinions, air grievances or just post thoughts on the day-to-day life of a footballer. The main aims are to create fan engagement and loyalty and thereby increase the value of the player's personal brand ahead of the next contract negotiations with their team or sponsors. Of course, we don't know if it's really the players themselves sending out the messages or a third party agency that is providing the updates, along with the occasional sponsor message.

One of the top recent international social media stories regarding football players was on Twitter, which is blocked by the government in Iran. That didn't stop three of the country's top players, Hossein Mahini, Sardar Azmoun and Mohammad Reza Khalatbari from getting verified Twitter accounts in other countries, and connecting to their fans, who somehow find ways around the official block.

Finally, we can't talk about football without mentioning betting, from traditional on-site bookies, to online and mobile apps. The global value of bets placed using mobile devices is forecast to reach $62bn (£37bn; 46bn euros) by 2018 - a six-fold increase on the 2013 figure[10]. This has built up the gambling industry for sure but it has also created challenges to the integrity of the sport through the threat of match fixing.

Case Study 3: Athletics

Like football, the digital scene in athletics is characterised by multiplicity. Here the governing bodies, the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) and the national federations are the leaders but there are other important players in the market as well, including independent specialist content websites, top athletes, local clubs and mass participation road races. Unlike football, where a driving force for innovation has been the level of financial return that is possible, digital innovation in athletics often reflects the diverse nature and interests of the many sub-groups within the sport.

The IAAF

The IAAF's digital strategy is based around its website but also integrates Facebook, Twitter and two different YouTube channels . Its main website showcases historical, current, and future events, as well as statistics, athletes' news and non-competition events (i.e., seminars, conferences, etc). It also contains an archive of articles published in the IAAF's printed technical journal New Studies in Athletics. In addition to these fairly standard features, the IAAF has taken advantage of possibilities created by digital media to develop some interesting innovations, including:

Inside Athletics - A video series, available on the IAAF Magazine YouTube channel, is an initiative to promote the sport through candid interviews of top athletes by Olympic medallist turned broadcaster and Coach Ato Boldon. These interviews, conducted behind the scenes of competitions, allow the audience to connect, but not directly engage, with the athletes.

IAAF SPIKES - An online magazine that gives the inside view of world athletics, with its own set of Twitter (spikesmag), Instagram (spikesmag), and Facebook (World Athletic Club) channels. Notably, SPIKES has branched out to China with Sina Weibo, Tencent Weibo, and WeChat in an effort to take the sport to a large but undeveloped market.

WorldRunning.com - A community for amateur road runners in which anyone in the whole world, regardless of age or competitive level, can collaborate and compare performances with other members. The website provides an events calendar, the latest running news, training resources, a global ranking system and charity listings. Facebook and Twitter are also primary channels for distribution of the site's content.

Other governing bodies

Some of the sport's Area and national governing bodies have developed their own interesting innovations. For example, an addition to its more or less standard website with features such as news and statistics on its events, a Twitter account and a YouTube channel of competition videos and athlete interviews, European Athletics has launched two linked websites. The first, running4all.org, offers star ratings of European road races in more than 30 countries, covering such areas as the quality of organisation and services provided to recreational runners. The site also includes a forum through which race participants can share their impressions about the events they run. The second, athleticscommunity.org, targets mainly young people and is intended to promote volunteering and self-designed projects benefitting the sport. Members can receive certificates of recognition from European Athletics and its partner UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) for the hours of volunteer work they register and use these certificates to help them with applications for higher education or jobs.

A leading example of a national federation is British Athletics, which in addition to its well-managed corporate website, has built a resource-packed coaching forum, Ucoach. com, and an innovative athlete ranking system, Power of 10, for young and grassroots athletes. Ucoach.com allows coaches of all levels to develop and get certification by providing videos, podcasts and training documentation. In addition, an event calendar is provided to display the latest conference or seminar. With Power of 10, athletes can check and compare themselves to others in their age group as well as to the qualifying standards required to reach national or international competitions. These features help to increase the relevance and credibility of the national governing body with specific audience groups and thus the overall cohesion of the athletics community in the country.

Independent websites

Athletics has spawned a number of independent specialist content websites catering to those interested in news, results, statistics, and commentary, often with a focus on a particular country or region. Examples include TrackAlerts.com, which contains exclusive news and interviews from Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean, and All-Athletics.com, a database operated out of Hungary that focuses on statistics (performance lists, rankings, etc.) but also includes news, athlete profiles and videos.

The first live streaming of athletics competitions started in the USA in 1999 on Trackmeets.com, founded by Dr. Kamal Jabbour out of Syracuse NY. The site showed the meetings of the Syracuse University team free of charge for a number of years. Today, in addition to the major events streamed by governing bodies and media rights holders, many other events are streamed by commercial websites such as Universal Sports and FloTrack.org in the USA, and Eurosport in Europe.

There are also sites dedicated to coaching, often with an emphasis on a particular event or event group. My own website, SpeedEndurance.com, for example, focuses on the coaching and analysis angle behind every major athletics competition.

One of the big stories about coaching advice on the Internet involves the 2014 Commonwealth Games gold medallist and Kenyan national record holder in the javelin, Julius Yego. Growing up in a country with no tradition or experienced coaches in the event, Yego reports that he learned his technique by watching videos of top throwers posted on YouTube.

The athletes

Along with winning Olympic gold medals and setting world records, the athletes themselves fall into another category of digital media users. A number of top athletes have their own websites (for example see www.mofarah. com) and, as in football, it is not uncommon for athletes to hire a media or public relations

agency to handle their social media activities. The aims are much the same as they are for footballers, to engage fans, build loyalty and increase the personal brand value of the athlete. The Facebook fan page of the sport's biggest star, Usain Bolt, has reached over 16 million people, and he has amassed some 3.75 million followers on Twitter since 2008 (compare with footballer Ronaldo with his 106 million likes on Facebook and 37 million followers on Twitter).

Although normally they have little control over what athletes do in the digital space the IAAF and other governing bodies benefit indirectly because fan loyalty for an athlete means engagement and loyalty for the sport itself. However, social media does have its pitfalls and one is that the athlete's voice is now under scrutiny for everything he or she says publically. In the interest of both the individuals and the sport, some national federations are looking at ways to guide and support athletes in this area.

Athletics clubs

Many local athletics clubs around the world also rely on the Internet and social media channels. In France, for example, close to 100% of clubs have a website and the national federation has an online directory with links to all of them. It is only a matter of time before this situation is replicated in all countries.

Club websites generally include an events calendar, event announcements, team selection policies, the latest news, training resources, a ranking system, and of course, information designed to assist with recruiting new athletes. YouTube is popular for highlighting the performances of club athletes, but others such as Vimeo are also used. Depending on the age of the athletes, expect to see Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as the main media channels to distribute information in the future.

Road races

Mass participation road running is alive and well, and we are seeing a resurgence in popularity since the 1970's. The digital media have played an important role in this renaissance as the media around the sport has moved online and diversified to serve different demographics and interest groups within the running community.

A particularly interesting example is how race organisers have embraced opportunities offered by the digital media. Organisers are in competition with each other as well as other leisure time options people have these days. They need to attract participants and, importantly, they need to ensure that those who participate in this year's event come back again and help convince others to try the event. Websites to promote races, take entries, provide training advice and display results have been among organiser's essential tools for some time and nowadays the social media are becoming increasingly important. Races create Facebook pages and Twitter accounts that allow runners to engage by telling their own stories – in the preparation for the event, sometimes during the race itself and then afterwards. This personalisation and the possibility for runner-to-runner interaction adds a dimension of attraction that is not possible through advertising or the traditional media.

The new digital space also creates opportunities for shoe companies and other product suppliers as well as the charities that are such a big part of the road race scene to communicate more directly with the runners.

Conclusion

Digital media has changed the media landscape in general, for sport and for athletics. The convergence of various media has challenged and modified the old means of communication (i.e., television, newspapers, magazines etc) and the way reporting of events and other activities that take place within the world of sport. For their part, the online content distribution mechanisms (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) have restructured the media sport content and created opportunities for both organisations (federations, professional teams, established media outlets, etc.) and

new players (fans, athletes, local clubs, road races). This "communicative abundance" has created an environment in which everyone has direct access to public space and the ability to influence what happens within it. Importantly, it has created opportunities for the sport of athletics, some of which have been highlighted in this article. It is difficult to predict how athletics will use these in such a rapidly evolving environment but it is safe to say that the technology that will be the big thing in five years time probably has not been invented.

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