



Audiovisual Post-production During COVID-19: Perceptions of Ibero-American Sports Journalists

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Abstract. In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic created an environment of fear, uncertainty and confinement. Given the suspension of coverage and sporting events, diverse and contingency audiovisual content had to be generated. For this reason, the objective of this research is to describe the functions that post-production fulfilled in sports audiovisual media to continue keeping their programming on the air. The applied methodology was qualitative. To achieve the research objective, semi-structured interviews were carried out with journalists and filmmakers from some of the most important media in Latin America. The results in which the integrating role that post-production played to consolidate videos of diverse origin such as video calls, archive material or video game recordings are evident. Based on what was found, it is concluded that post-production played a homogenizing and hybridizing role of a variety of audiovisual elements, giving them coherence, narrative, and their own aesthetics that are already assigned to the audiovisual production of this period that humanity lived through.

Keywords: post-production · sports journalism · COVID-19

1 Introduction

The mass media and sports have a relationship of mutual need. For a few decades, sports have been important content for television because they generate a lot of income for the television stations that broadcast them, thanks to the large audience they attract [1]. But all this changed abruptly when the confinements for COVID-19 were decreed. At that time, the population turned to the traditional media for information, with television acquiring a major role [2]. However, other audiovisual fields were affected -such as live broadcasts and sports channel programs-, since they could no longer continue broadcasting championships and had to transfer part of their production to teleworking [3]. It is estimated that, during the year 2020, around 250 high-level international competitions

were canceled [4]. When this arose, sports networks had to produce and offer alternative programming to replace the many hours of programming that stopped broadcasting tournaments and competitions [5]. Within this restructuring, post-production was one of the audiovisual fields that transformed the most. For this reason, the objective of this research work is to describe the functions of post-production in some of the main Ibero-American sports media in the context of COVID-19.

As mentioned in the introduction to this work, post-production was one of the processes affected by the pandemic. In many television stations, protocols were adapted to work blended or remotely, in addition, new ways of editing images and sounds had to be innovated [6]. When talking about post-production, we are specifically referring to the stage after coverage or filming, where audiovisual products are given a final form through a series of processes, with the interrelation of images and sounds [7, 8]. Within this stage the edition is carried out, at this stage the different registered materials are cut and ordered to build and structure the story; For their part, editors apply journalistic criteria to organize information [9]. In order to consolidate the audiovisual product, it is necessary that, in the edition, the shots be given the appropriate duration and rhythm so that the viewer understands them [10]. Subsequently, the post-production of image and sound is carried out, in which the original recording conditions of both materials are improved [11]. With this, post-production grants visual and sound legibility, it also allows compliance with current ethical and legal regulations by protecting the identity of witnesses or sources through the application of effects such as blurring and voice distortions; Lastly, it is used to create images in case these were not obtained in the coverage [12]. Additionally, thanks to the advancement of digital post-production, non-fiction stories, especially in the documentary, have evolved presenting four audiovisual modalities: Hypermontage, pictorialism, Animation, Collage [13].

2 Methodology

This is a basic and descriptive investigation, with the objective of describing the innovations that were applied in post-production in some of the most important audiovisual sports media in Latin America during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this work, the qualitative approach was applied, since it is intended to know the social reality from the point of view of its protagonists. Subjectivity and intersubjectivity are proposed as legitimate objects of scientific knowledge [14]. For the execution of the study, the analytical method was used, in order to determine how the audiovisual post-production functions were executed in sports channels and in each of its constitutive stages (editing, image post-production, sound post-production).

General question

What functions did audiovisual post-production fulfill in some of the main Ibero-American sports media (ESPN, Marca, Win Sports, Movistar Deportes, DSports and Mediapro) in the first years of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020, 2021 and 2022?

Specific questions

How did the audiovisual edition develop in the chosen audiovisual sports media during the aforementioned period?

What innovations were applied in image and sound post-production on these platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic?

To collect empirical information, the semi-structured interview technique was applied. The questions were descriptive and structural [15]. These questions were established in a script validated by experts. To answer the research questions, it was determined to work a sample in a chain or by networks. The interviewees were also selected for their specific positions, which made it possible to gather information about the production chain in these sports' audiovisual media. The sample consisted of:

- Julio De Feudis: producer and post-producer for ESPN, United States, with 25 years of professional experience (JD).
- Ornella Palumbo: presenter and reporter for ESPN, Peru, with 12 years of professional experience (OP).
- David Gayón: producer of Win Sports, Colombia, with 17 years of professional experience (DG).
- Valentina Rincón: host and reporter for Win Sports Colombia, with 7 years of professional experience (VR).
- Luisa Calderón: post-producer for Win Sports, Colombia, with 16 years of professional experience (LA).
- Manuel Paz Soldán: producer of Movistar Deportes, Peru, with 18 years of professional experience (MP).
- David Chávez: reporter for Movistar Deportes, Peru, with 14 years of professional experience (DC).
- Manuel Arellano: post-producer for Movistar Deportes, Peru, with 25 years of professional experience (MA).
- José Stuart: producer of DSports, Peru, with 12 years of professional experience (JS).
- Julio Vílchez: driver and reporter for DSports, Peru, with 16 years of professional experience (JV).
- Roly Mengual: producer and journalist for Mediapro – Conmebol, Argentina, with 18 years of professional experience (RM).
- Marta García: producer, director, post-producer and special envoy for Marca, Spain, with 13 years of professional experience (MG).
- Alberto Ortega: audiovisual editor for Marca, Spain, with 14 years of professional experience (AO).

The interviews were conducted during the months of October 2022 to February 2023, online, using the Zoom application. Subsequently, the interviews were transcribed to carry out the coding and organization of the data, which answered the research questions [16], and which are expressed in the results.

3 Results

3.1 Treatment of Support Records

Given the impossibility of face-to-face coverage, it was necessary to resort to and generate the support shots of the time in various ways different from the pre-pandemic, for this purpose the archives, the athletes' social networks, the materials sent by the

clubs were used, or to the self-recording of supports by the interviewees themselves. By having a diversity of supports from different sources, the final broadcast format will be determined, therefore the different images and their proportions were adapted to that transmission format. Therefore, the supports were homogenized by applying scale modifications, image cropping and placing backgrounds so that the sides of the frame with black stripes would not be seen: the latter was applied above all in the images that tested social networks, whose publication configuration is vertical.

Another type of images that were used, as support shots, were those that were rescued from the archives and video libraries of the channels. These resources were used for programs or content that touched on issues from the past and that were a recurring theme during the most intense period of confinement: “We use archives in the sense of that old reports or things that had been done were perhaps recovered in the past, to update a bit and pulling that to have a hanger so that it would make sense, and bring up a topic again and generate a discussion with players” (MG).

3.2 eSports on Television: Post-producing Hybrid Formats

For some decades now, audiovisual formats have been hybridizing and television has not been an exception to this phenomenon that mixes narratives from different generic sources [17–19]. For example, soccer championships were organized and broadcast in video games, these were played mostly by soccer players, sports journalists, and media personalities (DG - OA - LA - MP - MA). The realization of these hybrid programs meant recording different signals, 2 of these corresponded to the recording of each of the participants playing the game from their homes, normally in vertical format because they did it from their cell phones connected by Zoom. Another signal was that of the same game played on the FIFA PlayStation, with a horizontal proportion, to which we had to add the narration of the channel’s announcer and the comments of the journalists, as if it were a face-to-face football match broadcast on television.

On other channels, FIFA matches were sent to the editor for him to record on his computer, and from there he edited and post-produced (PM) them. All these audiovisual supplies were combined in the edition to provide them with coherence, order and structure. Being diverse signals, the elements had to be distributed within the frame, for this the editors placed the players on one side of the frame and the game, in a larger proportion, on the other side; however, in some situations one of these frames could occupy the entire screen, rescaled and located, thus, by the editor, before some action of interest such as a goal, an injury, a controversial play. The above happens identically in the transmissions of real matches, with which it was not only used to emphasize moments, but also served as a resource to cover image and sound imperfections that could have been generated in the Zoom signals, since these could present damage. in the recording when the internet was unstable. In addition, image post-production complements had to be applied, generating borders for the player boxes, banners with their credits, graphics with the scoreboard, team lineups, television channel logos, a background containing all the subframes, among others. elements (MP – DG – LA - MA), as shown in Figs. 1 and 2.



Fig. 1. FIFA football game frame that hybridizes various audiovisual signals. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zM5EGHup1Bw&t=792s>

3.3 The Reissue of Past Matches

Sports broadcasts are one of the contents that generate the most tuning in the audience and on which the entire grid of programs of a sports channel is generated [1, 20]. However, the cancellation of sporting events due to the pandemic created gaps in the content offer of these media and, in addition, they were left without the information supply to produce newscasts, debate programs, panels, among others. Given this, a solution was to appeal to the archive and broadcast matches that had been played in the past but were chosen according to their level of significance. Despite being preserved in the archives of the studied media, they had to be modified in post-production, because on some channels these matches are recorded in the video libraries only with ambient sound. Thus, it was necessary to put together new locutions and interventions by the commentators to insert them in the post-production, in others the locution was changed because those narrators no longer belonged to the television channel (DG - LA): “At that time there was no television channel to do them like we do right now, which is transmitting well, at that time the file is in the camera recorded and that’s it” (DG).

The post-production also served to unite the games of the past rescued from the archives and mix them with the interventions of their protagonists today, who were interviewed by Zoom. Frames were created for these interventions by the characters to make the framing more orderly and aesthetic, this implied a combination of an out-of-date television signal, plus another video call, which were composed in post-production, adapting them to be broadcast through the format, codec and parameters with which sports audiovisual media broadcast their signals, which are normally from Full HD, to other higher qualities:

3.4 The Post-production of Interviews and Debates in Video Calls

Video calls were a technical resource used intensively during confinement to continue producing content remotely [6, 21]. In audiovisual sports media, continuous use was also



Fig. 2. Stock footage integrated in post-production into a higher quality frame. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zrK8vM3rBo>

made of them, but specific processing was required in post-production. For the treatment of video calls, it was necessary to focus on image post-production processes, such as cutting interviews, creating backgrounds, placing credits and adapting video size scales (MA). For configuration reasons, Zoom sometimes recorded the interviews with the interviewer and interviewee appearing simultaneously in the frame, each one appearing in a subframe. In this way, the editors applied the journalistic criteria of selection and personal relevance, giving prominence to the interviewee, making him prevail. Therefore, the interviewer was cut from the source shot and the interviewee's frame was rescaled, enlarging it and placing it in the center on a background that identified the program or channel. Another option was to place it on one side of the frame accompanied by another subframe, where supporting shots referring to the topic, they were dealing with were shown: "We left the character talking about his goal and the goal was shown next to it, those were the resources that were most they used and we tried to talk about things that we had on file to be able to use those images" (L.A.). Finally, the technique of leaving your audio and then setting up support shots that occupied the entire frame was also applied (MA).

The interviews or participations of conductors in debate programs that were made by video calls were reframed for various reasons, one of them was so as not to force their low quality of origin by enlarging them too much; This technique was also used to compose them aesthetically within the frame and, furthermore, to organize them in such a way that the visual information could be understood, locating the participants in a certain place in the frame (LA – MA – MG). One of the problems that some of these interviews or participations presented was that the participants did not compose their frames well, presenting decentered shots, with high angles or low angles. So, the post-producers tried to correct these visual deficiencies: "If there is a social gathering and the background that the character puts on you is that, and no matter how much you tell him to change, it does not give you a decent shot, you cannot do anything, then you You tried to recompose it in editing, but even so, there are times when it could not be removed and it was what it was" (MG).

4 Discussion and Conclusions

Similar to what various authors have proposed [7, 8, 22], during the pandemic, post-production continued to be the process by which visual and sound pieces are assembled. of the contents that make up a program or audiovisual product; but, in this period, as in

television journalism, it was necessary to innovate to continue editing news content [6], with which it is concluded that in the post-production of sports programs there were also differential characteristics and functions compared to other times. prior to the pandemic.

In the edition, the contents are delimited, located and ordered so that they have structural and narrative coherence [9, 23], in the analyzed stage this function was also fulfilled, but they were applied to audiovisual materials that were not of broadcasting quality, with which the media normally operate, since they came from recordings such as video calls, files from the past, social networks of athletes or video game recordings. The integration of these elements to the sports audiovisual narrative meant the creation of a differentiated treatment in the edition, where these materials had to be integrated with others of higher quality, after the structuring and general ordering of each product. Thus, the post-producers integrated all this diversity of recordings in what is already known as a grouping frame [12], which is understood as the conglomerate of a whole diversity of records with different proportions - square, vertical or horizontal- and qualities – digital or analog. The differential of this stage is that there was a greater presence of non-television recordings - video games, video calls or social networks - that had to be integrated through what would be a new editing function, the homogenization of frames.

As Edgar-Hunt [11] and Sifuentes [24] suggest, both image and sound post-production have among their functions to improve the original recording conditions. In this pandemic stage, this process of audiovisual invigoration was applied with intensity. Since it was not possible to produce content with the channels' cameras, from the studios, the coverage or the live broadcasts, resources that had lower image quality or defects in the sound recording, very frequent in video calls, were used, which meant a new stage of what was known as the audiovisual legibility function. Thanks to this legibility, the quality of recordings made with cell phones, security cameras or others was improved, adapting them to the broadcast format of the television station [12]. And the same thing happened with sports audiovisual production in a pandemic, because video calls, archive images, material from social networks or video game recordings had to be cut, arranged and complemented with graphic backgrounds in order to compose the frames. And the above also meant the application of the audiovisual enrichment function, which is applied when there is not an abundance of recordings and post-production is used to generate them through mixing processes.

In relation to the trends raised by Vidal [13], there was an evolution in the pandemic due to the recordings made in confinement and remotely. For this reason, hypermontage was applied by compiling various sub-frames in a general frame; These subframes came from recordings made by Zoom for the conversation and debate programs, where the mosaic of participants was recorded and, later, these were cut out individually to be rearranged in the final frame, placing integrating graphic backgrounds on them. The animations were present in graphics, backgrounds and wedges to add dynamism and aesthetics to the products. Pictorialism was applied to colorize the different recordings, improving their visual quality. Likewise, the collage occurred naturally, by integrating the diversity of resources already mentioned. All of the above allows us to conclude that post-production made it possible to integrate and harmonize a wide range of audiovisual resources to build decodable content for the viewer, in turn the hybridization of this

diversity of materials was consolidated, which had never before been integrated as it happened in the pandemic.

This research work, although it had the collaboration of the interviewees, was not exempt from difficulties, one of which was the final confirmation of the sample of participants, because their own working hours are intense and the interviews had to be arranged with a lot of planning. In addition, it is worth studying how post-production is being used in fields of sports audiovisual production that no longer correspond to the mass media, but rather to sports clubs, which increasingly integrate specific audiovisual practices into their institutions, such as sports video analysis and creation of their own audiovisual broadcast channels, where post-production fulfills functions that have not yet been studied.

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