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Communication management in professional cycling. The case of the Vuelta a Asturias

La gestión de la Comunicación en el ciclismo profesional. El caso de la Vuelta a Asturias

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Abstract

*This research analyzes the communication management of the Vuelta a Asturias, one of the oldest cycling competitions on the Spanish calendar, included in the UCI Europe Tour 2.1 category. The study describes the information management of both the specialized press and cycling teams and organization. A triangulation of methods was carried out, based on a literature review, to carry out a content analysis of the information published in *El Comercio*, *La Nueva España*, *Marca* and *Ciclismo a Fondo* during the days before and during the 2021 edition. The results of these first two phases were used to conduct interviews with communication professionals in charge of organizing and disseminating the Asturian test. In this way, it has been possible to describe, on the one hand, how the communication management is from the cycling teams themselves and the organization of the event, and on the other, how the coverage of this event is carried out by the journalists in charge of these specialized event. A rapid and progressive application of new technologies by journalists and communication departments, a creative process of information disintermediation by cycling teams, the importance of generating identification processes and sports sponsorship as a key piece of information were detected.*

Keywords

Journalism, sport, communication, cycling, identity, disintermediation, information, media.

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Resumen

Esta investigación analiza la gestión comunicativa de la Vuelta a Asturias, una de las competiciones ciclistas más antiguas del calendario español, incluida en la categoría UCI Europe Tour 2.1. El estudio describe la gestión informativa tanto de la prensa especializada como de equipos ciclistas y organización. Se realizó una triangulación de métodos, partiendo de una revisión bibliográfica, para efectuar a continuación un análisis de contenido de las informaciones publicadas en *El Comercio*, *La Nueva España*, *Marca* y *Ciclismo a Fondo* durante los días previos y el transcurso de la edición de 2021. Los resultados de estas dos primeras fases sirvieron para realizar una serie de entrevistas a profesionales de la comunicación encargados de la organización y difusión de la prueba asturiana. De este modo, se ha podido describir, por un lado, cómo es la gestión de la comunicación desde los propios equipos ciclistas y la organización de la prueba, y por otro, cómo se realiza la cobertura de este evento por parte de los periodistas encargados de estas labores especializadas. Se detectó una aplicación rápida y progresiva de las nuevas tecnologías por parte de periodistas y departamentos de comunicación, un creativo proceso de desintermediación informativa por parte de los equipos ciclistas, la importancia de generar procesos de identificación y el patrocinio deportivo como pieza informativa clave.

Palabras clave

Periodismo, comunicación, ciclismo, identidad, desintermediación, deporte, información, medios.

Introduction

The Vuelta a Asturias is a cycling race of UCI Europe Tour 2.1 category, which occurs in several phases, mainly mountainous. It is one of the oldest cycling events in the Spanish calendar, since its first edition was held in 1925 (Rodríguez, 2015). Despite its antiquity, publications and research on this sporting event are scarce.

The role of communication in the Asturian race was analyzed using different techniques. Not surprisingly, two media have played a key role in the organization of the race in two key stages. It was interesting to investigate how communication strategies and professional routines have evolved thanks to technological innovations, both by the organization of the race, as well as by journalists and the communication departments of the cycling teams. The aim was to find out whether the professionalization and rapid adaptation to

the digital environment, which has been described in the case of the communication departments of soccer clubs (Olabe, 2015; Cano-Tenorio, 2019; Ginesta, 2020; Herrero *et al.*, 2021; Sidorenko *et al.*, 2022), have occurred in this cycling event.

Objectives and research questions

This study analyzes and describes the integral communication process in a high-level cycling tour, integrating both the informative work carried out by the press offices of the sports teams and the organization of the race, as well as the coverage of the race from the media. The following specific research questions were set out to achieve this objective:

- How do the cycling teams manage their communication processes in Vuelta a Asturias?
- What is the media coverage of Vuelta a Asturias?
- What are the differences and similarities of the informative work with a first-class cycling event such as Vuelta a España?

State of the art

First, a literature review was carried out to describe the importance and components of the communication management of sport, the results of research on the media representation of cycling and a historical evolution of Vuelta a Asturias. Given the lack of published studies on this competition, we consulted the original copies of three local newspapers from the period described (El Noroeste, Región and El Comercio).

Communication management in sport

Communication as a tool to achieve the objectives of sports organizations has been defended by various authors (e.g. Mestre 2004; Gambau, 2006; Zapata, 2007; Mayorga, 2019; Pinheiro and Marín, 2019). Thus, Ballesteros (2021) asserts that communication has become “a key factor for the efficient management of sports organizations, leading to the implementation of increasingly professionalized communication processes” (p.171). The communication offices of sports formations have become more professionalized, evol-

ving towards greater independence from the print media (Lobillo, 2018), and creating their own media, allowing them to interact with their target audiences without needing traditional media (Domínguez *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, they have been one of the fastest growing departments, given their work in social networks, internet and institutional event management (Gómez *et al.*, 2008). Corporate communication allows sport entities to create and disseminate their own identity (Brotons, 2005). This communication transmits its values through the conceptual and its identity through the visual, with logos, typography or the association of specific colors with the organization.

In turn, the sports entity serves as a dissemination channel for sponsoring companies, which provide funding in exchange for linking their image to sports values (Breva *et al.*, 2019; Torres and García, 2020). It is estimated that these agreements involve around 360 million euros per year (Infoadex, 2021).

Therefore, external communication should start to create a sports organization's own identity in order to tell a story about that entity to encompass its values, origin, objectives, etc. (BIC, 2011). In this way, there is a subject with proximity and impact, which brings together a wide audience, both individuals and legal entities.

Cycling and sports journalism

Sports journalism has played an important role in the origin and evolution of cycling events, as described by Antonio Alcoba, when stating that L'Equipe and La Gazzetta dello Sport "invented the cycling tours of France and Italy, sponsored by them and converted them into a national and continental event" (1993, p. 64), which in turn multiplied their circulation. From then, the media have organized and sponsored different cycling events, such as the organization of the Tour of Portugal by the newspaper Jornal de Noticias, the creation of the Flèche Wallonne by the Brussels newspaper Sports, the Tour of Flanders by the newspaper Sporwereld, the Tour of Colombia by two journalists of the newspaper El Tiempo or the Tour of Chile by the newspaper Mercurio (De la Cruz, 2002).

The newspaper Informaciones participated in the organization of Vuelta a España from its first edition in 1935 to 1950 when it ceased to be held, until 1955 when the newspaper El Correo Español-El Pueblo Vasco took over the organization for the following 24 years (De la Cruz, 2002).

The economic consequences and tourist promotion of a cycling event on the territory it covers is described in events such as Vuelta a España (Pi-

ñeiro, 2011), Vuelta a Burgos, Vuelta a Andalucía or Vuelta a Extremadura (Blanco and Porro, 2022).

Regarding the informative representation of cycling competitions, Marín (2012) describes how the narrative of Vuelta a España on TVE follows the structure and contents of fictional stories (race, chapters, passion, heroes, etc.) together with a format enriched by online communications. For their part, Jimeno and Rojas (2017) highlight the strategic importance of sports content in the Spanish regional press to create an identity, strengthen ties with consumers and build community. In this sense, Verschelden (2016) says that the external communication of the UCI World Tour international peloton teams seeks to mark and disseminate their own identity.

Historical approach to the Tour of Asturias

Tour of Asturias dates back to 1925, being one of the oldest cycling events in the Spanish calendar (El Noroeste, 1925). From 1926 to 1967, the race was limited to amateur cyclists, so it was not considered an official edition. This consolidation started in 1968, when the newspaper *Región*, with the help of journalist Ricardo Vázquez de Prada, decided to relaunch the race (*Región*, 1968). One of the great promoters of the Tour of Asturias was Julio Álvarez “Mendo”, director of this newspaper, until his death in 2008. Currently, the official name of the race is “Vuelta a Asturias Julio Álvarez “Mendo”. This journalist began narrating the cycling race on the radio and writing articles in the newspaper, at the time that he organized the race since 1957. His definitive professionalization would come in 1971.

Since 2008, his daughter Cristina Álvarez who had participated in the organization of the race since she was very young, directed the race. Since 1967 the race has been held every year except for 2014 due to the economic crisis (*El Comercio*, 2014), as well as in 2020 by the coronavirus pandemic.

In the 90s, Vuelta a Asturias had its momento, when the main cyclists came to the Asturian territory to prepare for the first great stage race of the annual calendar, the Giro d’Italia. During that decade, figures such as Miguel Induráin, Abraham Olano, Tony Rominger, Alex Zülle or Pedro Delgado participated. Since the formation of the UCI Circuits in 2005, the race was part of the Europe Tour, the second category of the international calendar.

The race shortened its duration to three days, and between 2010 and 2021 important teams with some of their best riders competed in the race,

some to prepare for the *Corsa Rosa* and others as an important race in their own calendar.

Materials and methods

The state of the art presented was the first phase of the methods carried out. This literature review included the analysis of the Asturian newspapers, *Región*, *El Noroeste* and *El Comercio* between 1925 and 2020 to describe the origin of the race. As a second step, a content analysis was conducted of general and specialized newspapers that cover *Vuelta a Asturias* at present. The results of these two techniques, carried out as a preliminary to the main study, made it possible to draw up a questionnaire of questions and to choose the interviewees suitable for the objectives set.

Two Asturian newspapers were selected for analyzing the content, *El Comercio* (94,000 readers, EGM 2021) and *La Nueva España* (144,000 readers), the most read Spanish sports newspaper, *Marca* (824,000), and the leading cycling magazine, *Ciclismo a Fondo* (196,000). All the information (n=222) in these publications between 2010 and 2021 was analyzed using an analysis sheet with identification data, formal aspects (appearance on the front page, publication on even or odd pages, graphic and length), elaborating an index of importance of each article (adapted from Igartua, 2006), journalistic genre (Martínez Albertos, 1974), teams mentioned, type and number of mentions, and presence and characteristics of advertising.

Thus, 41 % of the information was published in *La Nueva España*, sponsor newspaper of *Vuelta a Asturias*, while *El Comercio* published 60, *Marca* 45 and *Ciclismo a Fondo* 24. The main genre used was the chronicle, 53 % of the articles, compared to 29 % of interviews, 16 % of previews and just over 2 % of opinion columns. *Ciclismo a Fondo* provided more coverage, with an importance index of 2.38 (SD=1.056), followed by *LNE* (M=2.30, SD=1.087), *El Comercio* (M=2.18, SD=1.127) and, finally, *Marca* (M=1.41, SD=0.858).

These articles were accompanied by 95 advertising pieces, mostly publicity (74 %). *Asturias Paraíso Natural*, *Kike Bike* -sponsor of the race- and the City Council of Oviedo stood out among the advertisers. Up to 63 teams were mentioned, *Movistar Team* (n=137), *Caja Rural-Seguros RGA* (n=116) and *Euskaltel-Euskadi* (n=116) standing out, accounting for 36 % of the total mentions. Later, *Burgos BH* (n=63) and *Andalucía Caja Sur* (n=37).

Design and procedure

An in-depth interview was carried out. A questionnaire was designed based on the literature review and content analysis, and then a series of relevant interviewees were selected. Thus, the selection of the professionals interviewed (see Table 1) was based on two criteria: on the one hand, to be journalists specialized in cycling from the main Asturian and national media with experience in the Tour of Asturias; and on the other hand, to be part of communication members of cycling teams participating in the Asturian race. In addition, members of the organization were interviewed. The main topics addressed were information preparation of the competition and evaluation of the results; adaptation to digital technologies; importance of sports sponsorship; influence of the media in the founding, organization and impact of the Tour; and generation of an identity of its own.

Table 1
Repertoire of interviewees

Professional	Position	Newspaper /Team
Andrés Maese	Writer	El Comercio
José Palacio	Writer	La Nueva España
Nacho Labarga Adán	Writer	Marca
Ainara Hernando Nieva	Writer	Ciclismo a Fondo
Laura Álvarez	Sport Journalist	Eurosport
María Gil Iborra	Responsible of communication	Kern Pharma Team
Jacobo Díaz-Jares Amorós	Director of communication and sponsorship	Movistar Team
Álvaro Lana Arbeo	Responsible of communication	Caja Rural-Seguros RGA Team
Álvaro García Herrero	Responsible of communication	Burgos BH Pro Team
Unai Iraragorri	Responsible of communication and marketing	Euskaltel-Euskadi (men) and Laboral Kutxa Euskadi (women)
Juan Mari Guajardo	<i>Speaker</i>	Vuelta a Asturias
Cristina Álvarez "Mendo"	Executive director	Vuelta a Asturias

Results

The Tour of Asturias and its organization

The organization of the race requires continuous work throughout the year, starting with the recruitment of sponsors, both public and private. “On the one hand, in the public sphere is the government of Asturias and the different councils through which the race takes place, such as L.lena, Oviedo/ Uviéu, Cangas del Narcea, etc.,” according to Cristina Álvarez, executive director of the race. This economic injection from the city councils also determines the route each year.

Private funding “is obtained by being very insistent and passing on different proposals”. The organizer highlights the work of one of the most recent sponsors, Total Energies, which “is making a commitment to the world of sport and cycling and has given us its support”.

After securing the necessary funding, the organization is working to ensure the participation of the best international teams. Direct contact with the teams requires patience and perseverance, “going to sporting events where they can be present and trying to convince them.

To do this, the first thing is to choose “attractive dates since they serve as preparation for a grand tour, such as the Giro d’Italia”, reason for which it is always held weeks before the Italian tour. The director remarks that “the route has a great influence, as it is attractive and tough. They also know that it is one of the safest races according to the UCI.

The communicative promotion of the Tour of Asturias

A small communications department works throughout the year, but “the most difficult occurs two or three months before the race, especially with social networks”. The organization has opted for making important communications through these media, since “now it does not matter if it does not appear in a newspaper, because everything is on the networks,” says Álvarez. The Vuelta a Asturias uses Instagram (3381 followers), Facebook (7500 followers) and Twitter (6046 followers), in addition to its own website to disseminate its communications.

Its executive director stresses that the big communications take the longest, as they wait for official confirmation and reserve the announcement of the stars

who will participate in the race for the day when each year's edition is presented in Oviedo/Uviéu. This is an event that serves as a connection between different people with business and commercial interests in the world of cycling.

With the arrival of Vuelta a España to Asturias, the communication department tries again to be noticed, getting a great diffusion in the press, especially in its official newspaper, *La Nueva España*, but also in national and international media.

The resources, however, are limited and the actions carried out by this department must be "prudent". Its executive director considers that this "is a weakness that must be improved. For the moment, the race has a small coverage on the public sports channel, *Teledporte*, and with the streaming broadcast of the stages thanks to an agreement with *Radio Televisión del Principado de Asturias*".

Álvarez describes that they have "invested a lot in the image, for example, we have changed the logo, which is now very significant". In addition, the Vuelta a Asturias has gone beyond the strictly sporting aspect to open up to society with different events in the center of Oviedo/Uviéu. Among these new events is the Vuelta a Asturias gold badge gala, which aims to recognize cycling figures who transmit positive values. The solidarity races are another example of this openness to society. First, in collaboration with the Spanish Association against Cancer and later with the Galbán Association of families of children with cancer in Asturias, solidarity races have been launched through the streets of the center of the capital.

Media Coverage

The media serve as a channel for disseminating and promoting the race. In this sense, the interviewees highlight the differences between a shorter and more modest competition such as the Vuelta a Asturias and a major sporting event such as the Vuelta a España. Andrés Maese, editor of *El Comercio*, describes how the infrastructure is less than in the big tours, making the work of journalists more difficult.

There are not so many people working to provide information or a service to the journalist. You have to do your best, there is not the immediacy of other races. It is a much smaller race and it is much more difficult to report, especially instantly, because no one is telling you what is happening in the race.

In this sense, Laura Álvarez, cycling narrator at Eurosport, says that there are many communication possibilities that could be developed in Vuelta a Asturias, especially a more careful digital strategy, taking advantage of the full potential of social networks. An example of information that could be provided to the media in advance is the announcement of the participating riders, because “days before the race we still do not know the confirmed teams or the star riders”. The national media, such as the newspaper Marca, elaborate the report of the Asturian race from the editorial office in Madrid, instead of covering it in person as they do in Vuelta a España, in the Volta a Catalunya, the Vuelta a Andalucía or the Gran Premio Miguel Induráin. In this way, when the competition is not too important, information from news agencies, mainly EFE, is used and transcribed, and it is the editor himself who writes the news when there are important events for the development of the race. Then, as complementary information, we resort to the press releases sent by teams such as Movistar Team, in their attempt to obtain greater coverage of their brand in the media.

The local media do inform the race *in situ*, for example, as Maese says, “to see how it goes and who makes up the possible breakaway”, which is complemented by the information provided by the organization. José Palacio, editor of La Nueva España, has also followed the race, first from the bike for Radio Cadena and Radio Nacional de España, with “live connections, telling on live what was happening, stopping in many places to watch the race”.

But there are also national media that cover the race in person, such as Ciclismo a Fondo, whose editor, Ainara Hernando, assures that one-week or three-day races, such as the Vuelta a Asturias, sometimes offer more possibility for communicating than the big tours. Hernando attends both the start and finish of the Asturian event, and has even followed the race from a referee’s car. “I asked the organization for it, and we wrote an article.”

As a product of this type of monitoring and sources used, the media elaborate different informative contents. Thus, Palacio points out that:

It is necessary to tell what is happening and what has happened in the stage, with a summary to make the chronicle, emphasizing the classifications. Occasionally, an important incident or event that had an influence on the development of the stage is also reported.

The coverage is not so exhaustive in a national newspaper, but Labaraga, from Marca newspaper, agrees in reporting in detail when “something

striking, curious or attractive happens”, besides trying, at least, to “do some preview, and maybe some related interview; sometimes we talk to the winner (...) it is about telling the course of the race, percentages of the passes, cyclists who participate, days in which it develops, etc.”. A special case is that of the race host, who looks for the complicity of the public, winking at the places through which the race passes, highlighting the role of the organizers and transmitting information about previous winners.

On the other hand, Ainara Hernando strives to transmit “things that do not appear in the newspapers or social networks” as well as to offer “a little more technical information that goes beyond”, given the more specialized audience of her magazine. In addition, she also uses digital platforms, making videos of short interviews with breakaway riders or stage winners. “You use your cellphone to record them and then post the video on Twitter or Instagram.” Social networks are cited by Eurosport’s narrator, Laura Álvarez, as a source of information to get to know better the cyclists in advance. For that reason, all the teams use Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts, with a much lower use of YouTube, and almost no use of other platforms such as Twitch or TikTok. In addition, this journalist tries to focus her narration on the routes, knowing their details and dangerous areas. Álvarez points out that the fans want to see the big ones, the winners, but also the competitors from the area.

Similarly, Palacio, of La Nueva España, relates the greater interest in telling the stories of the Asturian cyclists, in the case of Vuelta a Asturias, and of the Spaniards in La Vuelta a España. “If there are three Asturians riding Vuelta a Asturias we always have to mention them, because our readers are interested in them,” along with the description of the cyclists, regardless of their region or nationality. In this sense, Maese, from El Comercio, affirms that they look for the “most popular cyclist and the Asturian”, while Hernando says that he thinks on his public, mainly Spanish and Latin American, so when writing “you look especially at Movistar, Kern Pharma, Burgos or Euskaltel”, elevating a bit more Spanish and Asturian sportsmen, since “the race must be a little more local”.

Also Labarga, from Marca newspaper, says that they try to talk about the cyclists of each place, as happened with Vuelta a Asturias when Samuel Sánchez rode for Euskaltel Euskadi, or now, at present, with cyclists such as Daniel Navarro or Pelayo Sánchez Mayo, both from Burgos BH, or Iván García Cortina, from Movistar Team. Labarga believes that “Asturian cyclists are always a good hook to talk about the race”, with the intention of getting

the attention of the amateur reader and making him feel identified with the cyclists of his autonomous community. He also highlights the Asturian scenery as an element that stands out in the information. “Asturias has many great sceneries in Vuelta a España”. Maese, from *El Comercio*, agrees, believing that the race, in addition to the strictly sporting information, serves to publicize Asturias, transmitting its cultural benefits and the towns through which it passes. Labarga and Cristina Álvarez also mention the scenery as the basis of the identity of the Asturian race. Asturias has known summits, such as L’Altu del Acebu, the Naranco or Covandoga. In addition, the interviewees agree that the Asturian race has tried to create its own identity with symbols such as the blue jersey or the jersey of La Nueva España for the leader of the flying goals, and events such as the aforementioned gold badge gala or the traditional music at the inauguration day and the final.

The sponsorship of the race by La Nueva España was also mentioned in the interviews. Thus, Maese considers “as a mistake that the Vuelta a Asturias is sponsored by one of the two newspapers, because the other will not cover it too much, since the main sponsor is its rival”. From La Nueva España, Palacio describes how “La Nueva España would dedicate no less than seven or eight pages in the newspaper in each stage, while others dedicate a page or half a page to it “ which entails “an intense collaboration with the organization of Vuelta a Asturias”. Laura Álvarez emphasizes the need to “have more specialized media”. The speaker Guajardo describes the coverage of the regional media as unbeatable, highlighting the work of La Nueva España as the official newspaper. Finally, Ainara Hernando highlights the press as a dynamizing factor of Vuelta a Asturias, defining the local media as a “very important” source of information in turn for the national media. “It is very important that the national media broadcast the race, because the sponsors enter the races so that their brand is seen in Spain and in the world”.

Communication strategies of cycling teams

The interviewees agree that the main job of the communication offices of the cycling teams is to publicize their brand, which is achieved as a result of planning and carrying out information campaigns, synchronized with the planning and sporting results.

Álvaro Lana, press officer of Caja Rural-Seguros RGA, says that he gets very good coverage from the media. According to the data obtained from Kantar Media, the team obtained 1.7 million impressions in the written press in Asturias, and 2.6 million impacts in the total press. In addition, the Navarre

team received with its participation in the Vuelta a Asturias, at least 22 million impacts in the digital press, from media such as MSN, Sport, AS, Marca and Yahoo News Spain. The participation of this team in the Vuelta a España is the moment with more impact of the year. After the official announcement of its participation, the communication office prepares a press release including the manager's evaluations, which is distributed to the main media and a campaign of interviews, social networks, etc., is launched.

A similar planning is followed in minor races such as the Clásica de San Sebastián or the Volta a Catalunya, but the Asturian race is especially interesting due to the territorial delegation of its main sponsor, Caja Rural de Asturias, deeply rooted in the autonomous community. In addition, the sponsor of its bicycles, MMR, is an Asturian company based in the city of Avilés. Specific actions are carried out, such as the visit of the cyclists to the headquarters of this bicycle brand or to the wind tunnel in Mieres, which is one of the competitions with the greatest media coverage. Its communications manager, Lana, highlights the 2016 edition when its leader, Hugh Carty, won a stage and the general classification, giving the team the moment with more diffusion of the brand throughout the year. Like other teams, it uploads the chronicles and evaluations of coaches and cyclists to its website and social networks, but only uses YouTube for the annual presentation of the team and some specific actions with sponsors.

The Kern Pharma communication team, led by María Gil and Mikel Arilla, believes that the coverage they receive is correct. They believe that it depends on the interests of the media, but that "if you are seen more in races then the attention you receive is greater than if you go unnoticed". The pharmaceutical squad plans all its communications on a bimonthly basis with important dates for the team, such as races or riders' birthdays. Once all the work has been done, a weekly review is carried out, and the next actions to be developed are specified.

The planning is different depending on the conditions of the communication team. Being present at the race allows creating more content, with short videos for social networks or update tweets that generate interaction with followers. In the days before the race, a script is prepared with the contents that are expected to be published during the race, but with pending events that may influence the information.

Álvaro García, head of communications of the Burgos BH ProTeam, assumes that his team is not as mediatic as others, so he considers the results

obtained so far as “the base. If we are satisfied, we have little room for improvement”. Thus, he tries to seek media attention by “accompanying the rider to the finish line, seeking somehow the focus of the television, the interview... Trying to have that exposure and be the voice that explains how the day has been, moving to make your team stand out with a minute of glory”.

The team from Burgos plans its calendar at the beginning of the season, aiming to race the Vuelta a España, given its impact. The communicative preparation is simpler in the spring classics or in the Vuelta a Asturias. Although the basis of the process is the same, with previews, chronicles, testimonials or results, the workload and the concreteness of the content is different, having also in these races a greater chance of winning. Participation in a race like the Vuelta a Asturias is relatively important for the Burgos team. Thus, the communication office faces the competition as “a communicative objective, because we know that we can have certain impact”, García says.

Burgos BH seeks to link the communication strategy with the sporting one. For example, in Asturias, they are fighting for a jersey that is secondary in principle, such as that of the flying goals, but which provides the fact that the sponsor of this garment is the newspaper La Nueva España. In addition, the presence of Asturian riders in their ranks gives them a communicative boost, since the fans want to know what the local cyclists are doing, so they try to give them greater exposure.

Jacobo Díaz, communication director of Movistar Team, believes that his team has been very well represented in traditional media, while developing new strategies in digital media. Movistar Team holds a press conference with its leaders on the day of the presentation of the three grand tours, along with “some very studied requests from some media to do individual interviews.” In addition, they have stopped narrating the races on Twitter and reduced the sending of press releases, while they have boosted audiovisual formats, generating what they call “more friendly content”. As a result, they have 65 thousand followers and almost 13 million views on YouTube. They have created two main series, “#SinCadena” and “Inside”, in which members of the team detail technical and sporting issues, such as nutrition or mechanics, or show the race from the inside, narrating from the vehicles or finish line.

Although this scheme is the same in the classics and smaller tours, the audiovisual narration has not yet been extended to the Asturian race. For the moment, the Vuelta a Asturias continues to work with traditional media and networks to take care of the presence of local riders because of the great at-

traction for the public and the media. This is one of the most important competitions in the calendar of the Telefónica team, since, on the one hand, the fact of having won it in recent years thanks to riders such as Richard Carapaz, Iván Ramiro Sosa, Nairo Quintana or Igor Antón has a communicative impact. On the other hand, as its communications director says “it is at the point of the season when the important things for us are coming, with the Giro d’Italia right after. It is a good pre-show for us to start warming up the atmosphere at a communicative level”. In sporting terms, it serves to prepare for the Giro, which will be attended by some of the Movistar riders who have competed in the Asturian race.

Finally, the communication strategy of Euskaltel Euskadi, the men’s team of the Euskadi Foundation, begin the year, when the competitive calendar is known. In the case of the Asturian race, once the sports director informs who will be the riders who will compete in it, they begin to prepare information about the race, analyzing “routes, the race regulations and I’m preparing the preview and thinking about possible actions in social networks that we can develop depending on the resources we have,” says Iragorri, head of communication of the team. A visibility plan is prepared for sponsors, as well as communication and marketing actions. The presence of the cyclists on their social networks is taken care of, providing training at the first training camp in January, and subsequently reviewing the information they publish, warning, for example, of the appearance of products that do not belong to the team and its sponsors.

On the Foundation’s website, the orange squad’s press releases are uploaded, with detailed chronicles and evaluations of the cyclists and sports directors and shared on their social networks.

Conclusions

As in *Vuelta a Asturias*, relaunched in the 1960s by two journalists from the newspaper *Región*, sports journalism has been involved in the creation, professionalization and sponsorship of national and international cycling events since their beginnings (Alcoba, 1993; De la Cruz, 2002). Later, another local newspaper, *La Nueva España*, would become its official sponsor. This situation provides security to the competition in terms of its informative impact, but there were those who said that it at the same time limited the im-

pact of this event in competing media. Thus, most of the information (41 %) was published by the official newspaper, which also gave it greater formal importance than the more directly competing media. Beyond this fact, there is a consensus that the information repercussion allowed by the media is, nowadays, essential for a sporting competition such as the Tour of Asturias.

The results obtained confirm what was described in the state of the art, about the importance of communication in cycling in particular, and in sport in general. The analysis carried out corroborates the change in the management of communication in sports organizations. Firstly, towards greater professionalization, and secondly, applying and exploiting technological innovations, resulting in an informative autonomy of cycling teams, which use their own media to reach their target audiences directly, with traditional media playing an instrumental role, ratifying the disintermediation process described in Olabe (2015) and Domínguez *et al.* (2012).

The interviewees believe that Vuelta a Asturias is an important and well-established race in the Spanish calendar, but that it needs growth and innovation. The communication managers of the groups consider that the Asturian race is strategic in their calendar because of the preparation and the diffusion of their brand. They plan their information and marketing in collaboration with the sports staff, adapting their narrative to the opportunities they have with the participating team, thus developing many of the functions of sports communication described in previous research (Mediavilla, 2001; Gómez *et al.*, 2008; Ballesteros, 2021).

On the one hand, all the communication teams interviewed use a combination of digital platforms (website, various social networks, YouTube), and Movistar Team or Kern Pharma Team can be cited as examples in the development of their own content in audiovisual format. On the other hand, they use these social media both as a source of information and to disseminate their own information, sometimes in current formats, such as short videos with interviews or pieces from the course.

Unlike what happens in top level races, such as Vuelta a España, journalists in Vuelta a Asturias miss having updated information in real time, and understand that they should move towards a greater development of the digital information strategy, for example, with a greater use of social networks.

The importance of sports sponsorship (Infoadex, 2021; Bрева *et al.*, 2019; Torres and Garcia, 2020) is in the DNA of cycling teams, with commercial firms naming them and providing funding. The interviews have highlighted

the objective of the communication teams to promote their brands through information campaigns, coordinated with the sports planning and seeking to optimize the visibility of the sponsors.

Both journalists and communication managers of the teams describe how the identity of the Asturian race has been created, symbolized visually through jerseys or a new logo, but also through the reference to the culture of the towns it passes by, the link with the cyclists of the land, the organization of social events and, above all, the mountainous scenery of the region, famous in the world of cycling for its use in the queen stages Vuelta a España. All this allows fans to relate and identify with the cyclists, their teams and the race itself, which can be deepened and consolidated in future editions.

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