Guide for young reporters covering international university sports events on social media

Nowadays, not only the audience physically present in sports events is welcome to participate, engage with the competition and competitors and comment. **Globalization came also to sports and social media, television, radio and other media formats bring the audience closer to the sports, even if they are thousands of kilometers away.**

As a (young) reporter in charge of **promoting the engagement of audiences in the social media platforms of international university sports events**, there are different aspects to be taken into consideration, such as: **purpose of the social media, algorithm, language, engagement and timing**. To make good use of all of those, it is imperative to think in strategies beforehand.

First steps when building a social media strategy

In order to make a good social media coverage of international university sports events, consider taking these first steps:

1. Know the event and the sports. You will be communicating the event and, eventually, be managing the social media platforms of the organization. Therefore, you need to be the one knowing more about it. Research the competition, teams, athletes, rules, etc. Familiarize yourself with previous editions, records and storylines. Get to know who is coming to the event, whether is an internationally known athlete or someone with a surprising story. Contact the managers of the participating teams to find out these details.
2. Establish the audiences you want to reach and communicate to. When you know that, study it to answer these questions:
    a. Which social media platforms do they use?
    b. How do they communicate? What is the style of communication?
    c. What are the other social media profiles they follow that we can take as reference?
    d. What are the limitations of the social media platforms I want to use?
3. Choose wisely your platform(s): consider the most used ones, such as Instagram, Facebook, X and TikTok. Depending on the audiences, the selection may vary to more or less platforms.
4. Prepare as much as possible in advance:
    a. Design layouts for posts.

     b. Editorial criteria.
     c. Ideas of content. Planification.

     d. Engagement policy for social media.
     e. Storytelling.
     f. Timing of posts.
     g. Team tasks and responsibilities.
     h. Hold preparatory meetings to discuss all the topics and promote exchange of ideas.
     i. Grant accesses.

Study!

Read about the event and previous editions. Know all about the institutions involved, the organization, the host city, etc. There is no need to know all of it by heart, but it is a good strategy to study in advance and share the knowledge with the team. Perhaps, prepare a document with key information, contacts, universities involved and sports to be practiced. Do not be afraid to use it throughout the event.

Who are you communicating to?

Who are your audiences? What do you know about them: how old are them, what do they like, where do they live, what do they do, how much free time do they have to check social media? These are just a few questions you should answer when you build your **personas**. To adapt the content to your audience, social media managers should not avoid studying their audiences, which can mean losing good opportunities of engagement and wasting time and effort in communication in less effective ways.

Platform(s)

Each platform has its benefits and downsides. Choose wisely which ones let you accomplish your goals best. Study its limitations and understand the meaning of the word "algorithm", so important in nowadays social media strategies. Combining strategies can maximize reach, engagement, and the overall success of the event's digital presence.

Facebook: Facebook allows you to have groups and engage more privately with different people. At the same time, it lets you publish albums of pictures and post longer videos. Facebook is "longer posts friendly", also allows live streaming for press conferences and match highlights.

Instagram: Instagram is ideal for visual storytelling with high-quality photos, stories and reels. Stories allow you to provide real-time updates, BTS content and interactive features.

X: X (Twitter) is made of the instant. It is very effective for real time updates, breaking news and live commentary. Hashtags are very well used in this context, boosting segmentation of content and facilitating conversations.

TikTok: TikTok is all about caption, video and trends. It is ideal for creating and engaging short-form videos. Good for challenges, BTS and helps attract younger audiences and increase event visibility through trends.

YouTube: YouTube is good for long-form videos and live streaming. Playlists can be created to organize content and also can stay as an archive.

LinkedIn: LinkedIn is useful for networking. There, it can be shared in-depth articles about the event's impact, engage with sponsors, industry professionals, bring visibility to student-athletes.

Preparation(s)

The more your team prepare in advance, the less you have to work under pressure and running against time.

Design layout for posts: prepare all the templates that you want to use throughout the event. Make tests of color, lettering, feed, etc. Choose how you want to post results, agenda and warnings.

Editorial criteria: when you are part of a social media team dealing with the same platforms, it is good to be on the same side of the force. Use the same language, answer the same way, use the same tone of voice and work on the same pace.

Ideas of content and planification: promote ideas exchange, create mood/inspiration boards and list what content is good to do and do not forget legal commitments, like sponsors. Create a social media planner (appendix 1).

Engagement policy for social media: establish how you and your team will answer comments and mentions. Do you want to address users by their first name, be impersonal, fun or serious? When you come to this conclusion, be consistent and homogeneous.

Storytelling: which stories do you want to tell and how many of those can be prepared in advance? Think about places, equipment, light, etc.

Timing of posts: when we talk about sports events, it's a lot about good timing. Posting results only makes sense after each competition and reactions in the next hours. Try to stick to those timings and position yourself on the other side: when do you want to know if your university won the table tennis game – when it ends or one day after?

Team tasks and responsibilities: whether is a team of 2 or 10, it is fundamental to know what each one is responsible for. Who is in charge of the design, the Facebook team, the Instagram team, the video editors, etc. Respect the team members and remember you all have the same goal.

Hold preparatory meetings: preparatory meetings to discuss all the topics and promote exchange of ideas is a good way to kick-off the team work. Promote team tasks to develop interaction within the team and break the ice.

Grant accesses: do not forget to grant/get the accesses needed to get the job done. Emphasize the importance of keeping passwords confidential.

Good practices

The role of social media managers in events like this is crucial in bringing the excitement, stories and key moments to a global audience. Knowing each audience will affect the strategy, there are a few strategies known for maximizing reach and engagement, such as:

Use a multi-platform approach
Based on the type of audience you want to reach, choose the social media platforms and be realistic: the number of social media platforms you have must be accompanied by a team that can handle all of that. **Answer the question: Is it better to have many and do a poor communication in all of them due to lack of resources or to implement your strategy and have resources in less?**
Storytelling
Humanize the communication and give faces to your stories. And let's be honest: Sports competitions are full of faces – athletes, volunteers, coaches, fans, staff, other universities representatives. Take advantage of that and know who your good communicators are. For example, invite the different "characters" of the competition tell the story: A day in the life of a voluntary, a day in the life of an athlete, a day in the life of a coach, etc.
Invest in visuals
Social media is everyday less and less about the content itself and more about the visual you deliver. Invest in high-quality images, videos, stickers and infographics.
Live updates & real-time content
Provide live coverage through your social media. Be on the spot and be the first to deliver the news, the results and the reactions. Create the habit in the fans to search for your profiles when they want to know the latest updates. Add value to your content.
Behind-the-Scenes content
Who doesn't love BTS content? Showing exclusive moments like athletes preparations, team spirit, infrastructure preparations, etc. Show what could not be seen while the games were not ON.
Athlete & fan interactions
Conduct short interviews with athletes, coaches and fans. Promote fans engagement by asking them: What would you like to ask Athlete X? What do you want to know about Y?
Trends
Be a fan of other profiles, stay up to date on trends and know which of those can be used in your university sports event. On the other hand, be the one trending! Create challenges, filters, and event-themed trends.

Hashtags
Make a hashtag research based on subject, organization, previous events and trends. Create your own hashtag events.

Types of content

1. **Pre-event content:** Build enthusiasm and expectations, both in the student-athletes coming to compete and in the fans.
   a. Building teasers – where is it going to be held, what it will contain, details, venue tours, etc.
   b. University and student-athletes introductions – get to know the institutions involved in the event and student-athletes competing.
   c. Sports – add knowledge to your audience with information about the different sports involved in the event.
   d. History – do you know which university was the last champion of this sport? Did you know that this competition started in …? Fun facts about the event, the hosting city, etc.
   e. Sponsors – depending on the type of agreement made with the sponsors, it might include a presentation of the sponsors.
2. **Live-event coverage:** Keep the audiences interested in your content.
   a. Score updates.
   b. Best moments.
   c. Game highlights.
3. **Fan engagement:** Bring the fans closer to the athletes. Promote Q&A sessions, reactions and features.
4. **Post-event highlights:** The communication does not end after the last match.
   a. Winner interviews.
   b. Best plays.
   c. Records.
   d. Fans testimonials.
   e. Appreciation post to volunteers, staff, sponsors, etc.
5. **BTS:** Show what could not be seen and the hidden side of the competition.
   a. Daily vlogs.
   b. Bloopers.

Ethical and professional social media management

Regardless the goal your team want to reach, the **Organization values cannot be discarded or disrespected**. By respecting them, you ensure that the social media presence of the event and organization remains credible, professional and engaging. Here are some important values to respect:

Accuracy and credibility:

- Verify all information in trustworthy sources before posting to avoid spreading misinformation.
- Use official sources of information and share the sources. it gives credit, but also responsibility.
- Correct errors transparently.

Respect:

- Promote a positive and inclusive communication.
- Create and maintain safe spaces for exchange of ideas.
- Avoid discriminatory language.
- Be inclusive when communicating about student-athletes, universities, volunteers, staff, organizations and audiences.

Privacy and consent:

- Obtain permissions to post.
- Respect the privacy of athletes, staff, volunteers and attendees. It always good to ask when if you can post when producing content.
- Follow RGPD regulations.

Transparency:

- Disclose partnerships, sponsorships and promotional content.
- Be prepared for crisis and address them professionally.

Possible challenges and suggestion of solutions

There is a number of challenges a social media team can face when covering sports events.

Challenges	Solution
Limited access to internet	Pre-schedule content and use offline tools for editing.
Content approval delays	Plan ahead of time and coordinate with your team who will approve posts.
Negative comments	Follow official moderation policies and avoid engagement with harmful content.

Technical issues	Have backup devices and troubleshoot in advance.
Keeping up with fast-paced events	Assign specific roles and tasks – photography, videography, interviewers, designers, etc.

Suggestion of tools for social media management

There are many tools available online that can help social media managers creating and editing content. These tools provide, often, services of social media management – such as statistics, scheduling, etc.

For video and photography editing, design creations, Canva and the Adobe apps are very good options. For quicker editions of videos, InShot and CapCut cam help making it easier and user-friendly. Meta Analytics gathers scheduling of content on Facebook and Instagram, and also statistics about how your work is performing online.

For team coordination, task distribution and work-flow organization, Trello shows up as a very good alternative, allowing you to share notes about different topics, set timelines, deadlines, add comments to colleagues, assign tasks.

And remember: Less is often more. Most social media networks have the necessary tools for good and effective communication. As long as the content is interesting and rich, the communication will work!

Conclusion

Managing social media in university sports events is not an easy task, but it is certainly exciting. By staying prepared, being creative and engaging effectively with the audiences, you are combining the right ingredients for a successful and impactful digital presence for the event.

Embracing the challenge and counting on the team are good ways to kick off the project of Rhine-Ruhr 2025 FISU World University Games.

Social media planner

Facebook							
Day	Hour	Description	Copy	Image	Notes	Status	Owner
					Hashtags, mentions, links.	To approve, approved, Scheduled, Posted, Canceled.	

Instagram							
Day	Hour	Description	Copy	Image	Notes	Status	Owner

X							
Day	Hour	Description	Copy	Image	Notes	Status	Owner

U-Media: Educational Program for Student Reporters at University Sports Events

LinkedIn							
Day	Hour	Description	Copy	Image	Notes	Status	Owner