



SPORTS TOURISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA STORYTELLING: A MULTIMODAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

In the emotional narrative of sports event tourism, visual communication is key to persuading media consumers. Our aim is to examine the interplay between context (sports tourism) and text (visual and written) to shed light on the storytelling of blogs and online articles regarding sports tourism. Results show that the narrative sequence of the images, supported by text, highlights central values of sports, such as leadership, teamwork, and respect, in which the host city integrates. The emotions reflected in the corpus images point to the construction of a well-defined national identity in tourism social media when applied to sports events.

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1. Introduction

Storytelling is the activity of communicating a message or story with the objective of establishing a connection with a specific audience, showing them the way to a product in a very subtle technique. Stories are crucial when we refer to advertising since when dealing with “selling a product”, advertisers rely primarily on them to attract their audience's attention (Joshi et al., 2023). We know that stories have always existed and have the power to transmit information, emotions and values, making storytelling an intrinsic human characteristic (Mendoza, 2015). This activity originated in a visual way through visual stories, such as cave drawings and hieroglyphics, in which chronicles passed from one generation to another for many centuries. Stories are basic in our lives because they are transformative and reflect evolution.

Some decades ago, we used to read or hear stories; nowadays, media storytelling is part of our world due to the increasing mediatisation that surrounds us. In the 21st century, we need to consider social media storytelling as a powerful tool present in our daily lives. Companies take advantage of this situation since social media can be used as an effective way to get closer and build a profound relationship with their potential customers. The world of sports tourism is no stranger to these circumstances (Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2023). In this sense, social media offer businesses the possibility to share content and have become a fundamental source of information for would-be tourists (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015).

When dealing with sports tourism mega-events, as the one that occupies us in this research, touristic companies resort to social media since, as Douai et al. (2013) state, businesses use them “to reach out to audiences they are unable to reach through their traditional channels” (p. 91), also because today people are more mobile and they usually have all kinds of information “in the palm of their hand”. Moreover, in the digital age, we have to bear in mind social media storytelling, which according to Weber & Grauer (2019) is “widely believed to be an effective strategy in innovation communication” (p. 152). On the other hand, Jia Rizvi (2021), an entrepreneur and documentary filmmaker, highlights that when trying to promote a new product, marketers are basically “storytellers” that create “narratives” for different businesses. In this way, we should consider the influence narratives mean in the storytelling of social media when trying to promote tourism during a mega-sports event. Social media are basically communication systems, but depending on how businesses organise their information, their stories and the narratives within those stories, they will become more or less successful in selling their product, which is why Smith & Weed (2007) highlight that “storytelling relations are a fundamental condition for how narratives generate and come to have meaning for people” (p. 256), and this is a key issue, to be meaningful for tourists.

When advertising sports tourism mega-events, social media are used to inform potential tourists but also, and most importantly, to persuade them with their emotional narratives. In this sense, the role of social media storytelling is crucial since stories evoke specific emotions, which is why Chiappa & Atzeni (2017) emphasise the fact that the role of emotions in a sports event is significant, and that is the reason why advertisers of this kind of events focus on evoking a range of emotions, thus going through an adaptation process in modern times, basically to sell a different experience and in this process we have to take into account multimodality. Indeed, images nurture visual narratives when dealing with sports tourism products, as they foster a much more powerful connection with the audience to the heart of the experience. Van Leeuwen (2014) affirmed that “many forms of contemporary written language cannot be adequately understood unless we look, not just at language, but also at images, layout, typography and color” (p. 281). When analysing the use of social media, we have to refer not only to the language used but also to different images and their representation. According to Miles & Johnson (2020), there are specific images that “generate more engagement from social media audiences” (p. 94). Communication has always been multimodal, but we should consider the fact that “Multimodal representations mediate the sociocultural ways in which these modes are combined in the communication process” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 20). Within social media storytelling, images are the basic aspect we should consider since they have become key in the production of media content and in our image mediated world.

Previous studies in the field of sports tourism are concerned with written media discourse, mainly with text and words analysed using a corpus linguistic approach (Hallet & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010; Jaworska, 2016; Theodoropoulou & Alos, 2020; Yotimart, 2021). Little research is done on the process

of influencing sports tourism media consumers through visual communication. Thus, in our analysis, we focus on the emotive storytelling of sports tourism images, as they are key in providing immersive experiences in this visual narrative domain. In this research, we focus on a case study, the FIFA Women's World Cup (henceforth FIFAWWC), held in Australia and New Zealand in August 2023, which directly points to an increasing growth in the field of sports women, which is a new actor in social media meaning construction that could be of interest to explore within a multimodal approach.

In this paper, our aim is to examine media visual images, signs, and symbols and its interplay between context (sports tourism) and supporting written text. Our ultimate goal is to provide insight into how the emotional narrative of sporting events constructed in tourism media is used. Therefore, this study adopts semiotic and discourse analyses to interpret image and textual multimodal narratives addressed to would-be tourists in a mega-sports event. More specifically, this study addresses this research question: What multimodal elements characterise social media visual narratives when constructing meaning in mega-sports tourism events?

With this study, we intend to shed light on how social media images and their narratives influence the cognitive processes of prospective tourists and, subsequently, their decision-making.

2. Method

A multimodal approach entails comprehending how meaning is built and transmitted right through the visual components and the written text that coexists or complements them. Frequently, visual analyses are used in conjunction with semiotic and discourse analysis, as their mutual support provides a more holistic clarification of the image (Scollon & Levine, 2004). Additionally, to avoid bias, providing context and background knowledge can help researchers more informed interpretations of the data obtained.

Regarding the semiotic analysis, we have analysed how the image transmits meaning and its associated narrative (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). With reference to the discourse analysis, we have investigated how the images communicate meaning and build a narrative connecting with the supporting and surrounding text (Grishakova & Poulaki, 2019), in our case on the FIFAWWC mega-sport event and its location. To add consistency to the findings, the visual investigation of the images was carried out independently by two researchers, and the analyses were subjected to comparison (Patton, 2002). In the end, the findings reported in the present study are the product of the consensus of both researchers.

To carry out the semiotic and discourse analyses of the FIFAWWC visual storytelling, two social media channels have been chosen, namely online press and blogs, as they are the main common channels in which this content is created in sports tourism (Capon, 2017). The online publication chosen, The Telegraph, is a British worldwide known newspaper available to all kinds of tourists. On the other hand, Rezdy is a blog—whose headquarters are in Australia— aimed primarily at companies within the tourism industry; it is an online booking system for tour and activity businesses, considered the world's leading independent SaaS (Software as a Service) booking and distribution platform for tours, activities, and attractions. To understand their meanings and the cultural codes embedded in their narratives, we have analysed all the images depicted on each digital channel, forming a corpus of 13 images from the online publication (7) and the blog (6) regarding this event. Table 1 shows the framework used for the multimodal visual analysis of the images of sports tourism.

Table 1. Framework for a multimodal visual analysis of media images in sports tourism

Analysis	Sub-Analysis	Description
Semiotic analysis	Denotative analysis	Distinguish the literal essence of the image including people, objects, colours, and actions illustrated.
	Connotative analysis	Decipher the symbolic or cultural meanings depicted. This implies considering cultural context and visual conventions, such as shape, colour, tone, texture form, contrast, scale and proportion.
	Mythical analysis	Take into account if the image reinforces identities in sport or tourism, such as national, gender or destination identities.

Analysis	Sub-Analysis	Description
Discourse analysis	Contextual analysis	Comprehend the context of the images including the social, cultural codes and historical context in terms of sport and location.
	Textual analysis	Scrutinise associated text and captions analysing the language used to support the visual narrative of the image.
	Interpersonal analysis	Study the interplay between the provider of the image and the audience. Examine if the images are specially designed to attract a specific demographic or arouse explicit emotions.

Source: Our own elaboration, 2024.

In a first approach to the study, the structure of the narrative was examined in each publication, including its plot, characters, settings, and events (Table 2). This first step is important to understand the context in which the images are depicted. Additionally, sequences of events and relationships between characters have also been analysed as signs of social roles or emotional states.

Table 2. Structure of the narrative studied in the two sports tourism digital genres: online press and blogs

Narrative structure of sports tourism online press and blogs	
Plot	There is a FIFA Women’s World Cup in Australia and New Zealand in 2023 and sports tourism advertisers want to attract potential tourists to make a final decision about their trip and choose their specific offer. Advertisers evoke emotions through images and specific resources (such as mirroring images) to accomplish their mission. The online publication is clearly addressed to touristic businesses and the blog is oriented to prospective sports tourists.
Characters	Advertiser. Audience: tourists, sportswomen, sports fans, tourism companies. Tourist product: mega-sport event (FIFAWWC) and destinations. Australia and New Zealand as destinations.
Setting	Australia and New Zealand, August 2023.
Events	Football competitions, local tastes and experiences.

Source: Our own elaboration, 2024.

3. Analysis

In this study, an analysis of the 13 images and their surrounding text has been carried out; however, only one image in each corpus is fully presented here.

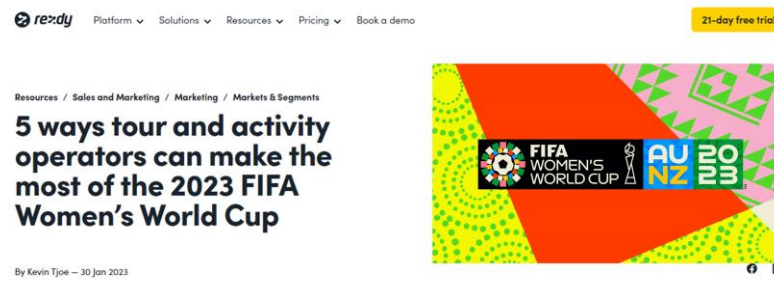
3.1. Blog visual storytelling

Regarding the chosen blog, the advertisers are trying to promote an application, *Rezdy*, that is, AI to improve the sports tourism business¹. It is clearly economic, and business oriented. The target audience refers to companies that offer a product or service to the potential sports tourist. Once we know the background of this App, we can have a closer look at how all the information is presented to tourism and hospitality companies.

The visual narrative in this channel is made up of six images. The first one (figure 1) shows the logo for the FIFAWWC. It is accompanied by a caption that has the same visual weight.

¹ This tourism product is described as “The online booking system for tour and activity businesses” <https://rezdy.com/>

Figure 1. First image from Rezdy blog



Source: Rezdy, January 30th 2023

In this “headline”, both image and text are present; at first glance, their weight is the same because both parts ‘occupy’ the same space. Therefore, we consider that this image is trying to promote, first, the host country and then the sports event. We state that because the most common reading path is from left to right and from top to bottom, hence, we can affirm that the image presents us first with the country and the possibilities tourism businesses can offer and then the event that is going to take place.

As can be appreciated in the sentence presented, it is written in an informative tone and suggests that there are specific strategies that tour operators can implement to make the most of the opportunity that the FIFAWWC represents. The use of number 5 indicates that five specific approaches or tips will be presented (you can “make the most of” this event). This kind of speech is common in articles, blogs, or publications that seek to offer advice or strategies to a specific audience, in this case, tour operators and businesses associated with the tourism and hospitality industry in Australia and New Zealand.

On the right-hand side the logo of the FIFAWWC, a mega-sport event, is shown; this logo is a multifaceted visual representation that combines symbolic and stylistic elements to convey a complete message. The design of this multimodal logo integrates multiple forms of communication, including visual, typographical, and chromatic elements, to create a complete sensory experience.

From a visual point of view, the logo stands out for its stylised representation of the World Cup, with dynamic lines suggesting movement and energy. The silhouette of a woman football player in action is organically integrated into the design —we could assume that—, emphasising the centrality of the players in the event. In this case, the soccer ball is presented as the head of a woman in a sensual or even naïve pose, which could also point to a sexist or chauvinistic subtle element (a trophy).

However, the fusion of visuals symbolises the passion, athletic prowess, and competitiveness inherent in the tournament, which is also reflected in all the colours used: the use of bright and bold colours brings a sense of vibrancy and excitement to the logo, reflecting the intensity and dynamism associated with a mega-sports event. The colour combination can evoke positive emotions and optimism, reinforcing the idea of an exciting and momentous event.

Following Brennan (2023), the soccer ball on the left is surrounded by 32 squares in different colours, symbolising that all the countries taking part in the competition; moreover, they are next to each other, representing the values of indigenous people. It is true that colour can be used as a visual stimulus in a logo, and the FIFAWWC logo makes use of many stimuli to express different nuances, as can be observed as follows.

As a whole, the multimodal analysis of the logo reveals its ability to communicate values such as passion in women's football, sporting excellence, and the celebration of cultural diversity through a visually striking and intentionally crafted design. According to Brennan (2023), the lower part of the logo has been designed by native artists, the one regarding AU and NZ, the two countries, was created by the aboriginal artist Chern’ee Sutton; its design has U-shapes, lines and ovals, which point straight to the traditional tools that women used. The background of 2023 corresponds to aboriginal designs and drawings. Once again, a Māori textile artist called Fiona Collis was inspired by traditional weaving techniques and culture to show different landscapes in New Zealand. The use of all these aspects points to the importance of aboriginal culture, thus highlighting their inheritance as well as their identity, national identity, which is also labelled as “mythical” (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2004). In this case, we can emphasise that the use of colours and all the national and traditional connotations in this logo makes it

extremely unique and attractive. The drawings from aboriginal culture suggest a very strong signal of national identity, since this art dates back between 40,000 and 60,000 years. Artists want to make their culture evident since this aboriginal art has for centuries transmitted stories, which is exactly what they wish to communicate: they want to tell the reader a story about the country, its traditions, and women.

Regarding logos, there is subconscious meaning behind geometric figures. In this case, we could think that, as some experts (Bikacu, 2023) maintain, geometric logos have a unique appeal, which in turn makes them relevant to audiences of all age groups. She continues to emphasise horizontality; since it is horizontal, this logo conveys a sense of community and trust. As we can observe, in this logo the literal meaning of some images and words are presented, but the connotations that want to be conveyed are related to more emotional and/or functional aspects.

For space reasons, we do not offer a detailed analysis of each of the images on this social media channel. However, the general narrative of the six images in this corpus expresses the following: The second image shows a close-up soccer ball resting on many 500€ notes. The ball is standing in the sharpest location of the image, being part of the money out of focus. The third and fourth images present the upper body of sports tourists or football supporters enjoying their experience, expressing high enthusiasm and excitement; they show open mouths, rising arms, and closed fists, with national team T-shirts and different gadgets used for noise making at football matches.

The fifth and sixth images are directly related to how sports tourists literally organise their trip; in the fifth image a smiling man is typing on his computer, probably searching for different aspects regarding his sports trip. As in the second photograph above, there is a blurred area in the image, whereas the tourist is clearly shown as the centre of the information conveyed; finally, the last image presents the App shown in a mobile device with different options available on its screen to choose from. A hand holding the device is clearly depicted, and, in the background, a nice palm tree walk is also seen at sunset. This narrative is directly related to promoting the mentioned App and encouraging sports business clients to acquire it.

Regarding the surrounding text, positive language is reflected in many adjectives and nouns, such as 'coveted travel destination', an 'exponential increase in demand for travel and experiences', 'an incredible comeback of the Australia and New Zealand travel industries', 'this crush of travellers', 'an influx of bookings', 'an exciting season of sports, patriotism, camaraderie and indulgence', 'a record-setting season', 'increased profits', 'a surge of global grand exposure', 'premier payment', 'seamless options'. On the one hand, this kind of vocabulary tries to give the idea of easy access to money on the part of touristic businesses and on the other, it points to national identity. It is correct, as Hallet & Kaplan-Weinger (2010) affirm, that "In this era of globalisation, in which national identities are increasingly constructed through promotion reflecting growth and change as much as tradition and convention, texts, both linguistic and visual, occupy a seminal role" (p. 8).

In summary, the storytelling of the visual elements in this blog shows the promotion of an App to boost sports tourism, and its main strategy is an appeal to national identity as a potential birdcall.

3.2. Online press storytelling

In the first channel, we offered a detailed analysis of an image concerned with national symbols. Considering that this mega-sports event is focused on women, we reckoned that a full analysis of an image representing a woman who is the Australian most iconic football player, could be of interest to shed light on whether both visual narratives differ or coincide.

In the case of The Telegraph, this channel is formed by 7 images and their surrounding texts. The visual data is focused on informing as well as persuading prospective sports tourists who would like to take part in the FIFAWWC experience, that is, the target audience differs from the first channel.

In the first image, two iconic landmarks in Sydney are presented: the Royal Opera House, a multi-venue performing arts centre, and the Sydney Harbour Bridge. We can also appreciate the Sydney Harbour, which is considered one of the most famous and singular buildings in the world and a masterpiece of twentieth century architecture. Moreover, in the distance on the right-hand side, some other high buildings are also shown, which represent the Sydney central business district. The picture was taken from an angle where the ocean, another inherent landmark of the city, can clearly be seen, as well as some purple jacaranda flowers. Image number 2 will be commented in detail in due course.

The description of the images is as follows: In the third and fourth images, the Olympic Cauldron and the Sydney Cricket Ground, two iconic sports landscapes, are also presented. The Olympic Cauldron

(literally 'boiler'), in the very centre of the image, pulverises water that can visually resemble steam coming out of a cauldron. The Cauldron is next to the Olympic Park and in the distance, in the background, we can appreciate Stadium Australia, now known as Accor Stadium, which is the main stadium in the Sydney Olympic Park. In between, some nice and old trees can be observed. The fourth image, once again, corresponds to another sporting landmark in the city, the Sydney Cricket Ground, a sports stadium, which is surrounded by trees and houses, but it is clearly a significant element in the centre of the image. It dates to 1886 and its iconic location, along with the natural and residential surroundings, can be appreciated.

The fifth image shows two aboriginal women surfing on the beach. They are smiling and clearly enjoying themselves, and in the distance some blocks of flats are also shown. The colour of the sea and waves are presented as blurred (due to the very act of surfing) but transparent and clean at the same time.

The last two images are directly associated with enjoying the city as a tourist: the sixth one presents Darling Harbour from a food area perspective. In the foreground we can see a table prepared for two people (two chairs) with a cold bottle of champagne and some food on the table. The view of the high buildings on the other side of the harbour can be appreciated from a glass balcony that lets the viewer enjoy the view. The seventh image shows a shopping area near the Pitt Street Mall. In the centre of the image a happy couple carrying many shopping bags in a pedestrian promenade is shown. In addition, there are other people walking and sitting in cafés, and we can see a building (the shopping mall) on the left and some nice trees on the right.

Most of the images, six out of seven, included in the article highlight the idea of destination branding through traditional city landmarks and through an image of the most iconic woman football player in Australia. All these images have a clear intentionality since narratives in sports tourism play a basic role when transmitting the story, that is, through their use, the newspaper wants to attract sports tourists and take them to live a unique experience.

As mentioned above, one basic protagonist of the story is the image of Kyah Simon, the best Australian football player, as we can read in the caption: "Sydney star: Kyah Simon can't wait for the 2023 Women's World Cup to come to NSW."

Figure 2. Second image from The Telegraph



Source: The Telegraph, July 18th, 2022.

The image shows several significant semiotic elements. The image of the smiling aboriginal footballer could convey a message of inclusion and diversity in sport, showing the importance of representing different cultures in the sporting field. The colours of her shirt, yellow and green, which in fact are green and gold, are the national colours of Australia. They then have symbolic connotations that reflect values or identities related to the country. Gold points to beaches in Australia, to mineral wealth, grain harvests, and Australian wool; also, the national flower is the golden wattle, or genus acacia; on the other hand, green is a colour associated with nature par excellence and in this case, green evokes pastures, forests, and eucalyptus trees within the Australian scenery. Apart from representing several aspects associated with Australia, in the image, Kyah Simon is smiling and waving her hand to all her supporters. According to Kress & van Leeuwen (2001), a multimodal theory of communication focuses on "the semiotic resources" and on "the communicative practices in which these resources are used" (p. 111). Here, we

can observe Kyah Simon facial expression, which points to complete satisfaction, and her hand gesture is important, since she is making her *fandom*² participant of her bliss. This could be considered a kind of interactive “social” meaning of the image. In addition, this fact is related to the mirroring strategy in marketing (Filipovic & Arslanagic-Kalajdzic, 2023), where advertisers show the idea of happiness in this case, so that potential sports tourists can see themselves reflected in that image. This is directly related to the cognitive effects of visual images on potential tourists. If tourists think that they are going to enjoy enthusiasm and happiness, they are much more likely to hire a tourist service. Moreover, journalists and advertisers usually need to adapt their discourse (text and image) to make potential customers think that they are addressing them in an individual and personalised way. In this sense, it is crucial to choose the right strategy since, as Kaplanidou & Vogt (2007) state that “the impact of image on behavioural intentions has been of great importance” (p. 184). In the same vein, Mueller & Rajaram (2023) refer to the fact of how to customise stories for different channels.

On the other hand, her expression shows excitement and captures the moment of empowerment emotion, in addition to also pointing to a sense of belonging to a country, which she is proud of. Furthermore, the footballer is somewhat in the centre of the image with a blurred background, where she is the clear protagonist of the story, trying to transmit enthusiasm and, once again, national identity and power.

When one wants to focus on a specific aspect, an important technique is to avoid overloading, which is why the background is blurred so that the viewer focuses on the woman footballer. In this image the main idea conveyed is passion, she seems to be feeling extremely well, as it is reinforced by the text following the image. We can read words such as ‘exciting’, ‘super-exciting’, ‘beautiful’, ‘incredible’, ‘stunning’, ‘a dream’, ‘hype’, pointing once more to the excellence experience the FIFAWWC and Australia can offer would-be sports tourism. Furthermore, all this vocabulary is looking for triggering positive emotions in potential sports tourists.

Journalists know that evoking emotions is crucial when communicating and trying to grab people's attention, as these emotions can create a deeper connection between the viewer and the destination or sports event. We can observe that the whole story focuses on a desirable city and its cultural context. In image 1, with the Royal Opera House, we are captured by some famous landmarks in Sydney. The combination of the excitement of the mega-sports event and Sydney's iconic symbols as a background reinforces the idea of an exciting and memorable experience that goes beyond the sports event itself (personal interest and experience). The image can convey a sense of adventure, discovery, and enjoyment of both the mega-sport event as well as the unique tourist experience and environment that Sydney can offer. It is true that as Midalia (1999) points out, visual images and photographs, the same as all other representations, “are never innocent or neutral reflections of reality [...] they represent for us; that is, they offer not a mirror of the world, but an interpretation of it” (p. 31).

Image 6 (Darling Harbour) transmits an atmosphere of leisure, relaxation, and enjoyment in a vibrant urban environment. The combination of the panoramic view of the Harbour and the relaxed atmosphere of the restaurant suggests the idea of enjoying special moments with friends (sports friends, supporters and fans) or family sharing experiences and creating unforgettable memories in a unique setting. In this sense, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) believe that images are also a kind of social symbol. In the narrative of image 7 shopping is also presented as a social activity. This image seems to capture the lively and cosmopolitan atmosphere of that commercial area in Sydney. The scene of a couple carrying shopping bags suggests a pleasant experience of exploring the stores and the shop windows enjoying the thriving and welcoming spirit of the shopping area, which points to the fact that sports tourists can also enjoy other kinds of experience, apart from football.

However, since this article is addressed to potential sports tourists, the sportive side also has an evident emotional connection. Two sports landmarks are mentioned and presented: on the one hand, The Olympic Cauldron (image 3) evokes the history and legacy of the Olympic Games held in Sydney in 2000. The pulverised water coming out of the Cauldron echoes boiling water, which points directly to a sports metaphor: a boiling cauldron in intensity or degree of agitation or enthusiasm compared to football supporters' feelings. This image can convey a sense of pride and accomplishment that recalls the sportsmanship and international celebration that took place at the time. In addition, the presence of

² *Fandom* is a blend formed by the words fan and kingdom.

<https://hcahealthcaredtoday.com/2017/09/18/sports-fandom-just-game/>

this monument can be a reminder of the importance of sport and the Olympic spirit in the culture of Sydney and Australia. Furthermore, this magnificent monument reminds locals and visitors that the city can host such large-scale events.

On the other hand, the Sydney Cricket Ground (image 4) surrounded by trees and houses is a significant element in the image. This iconic location, along with the natural and residential surroundings, can convey a sense of rootedness and connection to the local community, at which point the image could evoke a welcoming and familiar atmosphere, underlining the importance of the sporting event in the context of everyday life in the city. Additionally, the presence of nature and housing could suggest a cosy and familiar atmosphere for sports fans who attend the event at that place.

Taking a second look at women and sports, since this is a women's mega-sport event, we can highlight the fact that two of the images are focused on women. In image 5, the vision of two aboriginal women surfing on the beach is powerful in the sense that such a visual representation challenges stereotypes and shows aboriginal women's connection to nature and the ocean, reaffirming their cultural heritage and their relationship with the land and sea. In this sense, surfing can symbolise freedom, courage and harmony with the natural environment, which brings a significant dimension to the representation of these women in the picture.

After the multimodal analysis carried out, we can highlight that, as we have shown, on many occasions, narratives are influenced and somewhat controlled by a highly emotional element. Findings reveal that the narrative sequence of the images, supported by text, features central values of sports, such as leadership (Kyah Simon), teamwork (Cricket Sydney Ground) and respect (Cauldron), among others, values which are also applied to businesses in the tourism industry, and we can also observe that the host city integrates in those values. We should also highlight the obvious idea of fostering a sense of national identity since there are many elements in the narrative that either evoke or clearly display the national values associated with Australia. Moreover, as Hallet & Kaplan-Weinger (2010) underline "As promotion of nationalism has increased, so has the recognition that tourism can be a decisive force in nation building and the identity construction of these nations" (p. 9).

4. Conclusions

This research aims to gain knowledge on how the meaning of storytelling on social media is developed and constructed in multimodal communication, mainly in images, when persuading prospective tourists to attend sports-mega events and host cities. It applies an established framework for visual analysis combining semiotic and discourse analysis to achieve a better understanding of the visual narrative used.

When promoting a mega-sport event in a host city, language seems to be inextricably interlinked to images, as social media are unfailingly concerned with multimodality. Therefore, in this FIFAWWC case study carried out, we analysed images and their surrounding text in two social media channels (blogs and online publications) that tourism marketers employ to attract would-be tourists.

The overall results show that marketers or, more specifically, sports tourism storytellers promote their product, the sports event and the host city, creating emotional narratives to engage their audience. An aspect of this emotional storytelling deals with the sports values with which the city merges, such as leadership, teamwork, and respect, which seem to be an effective strategy to persuade the viewer of the story. Another element is the construction of well-defined national and destination identities that foster a powerful connection creating positive connotations with a young, dynamic, and inclusive nation. However, surprisingly, in the image examined with the iconic female footballer, the main identity revealed is the national one, which takes priority over other identities, thus eclipsing gender identity.

In conclusion, visual storytelling in sports media tourism is about producing a narrative that echoes with viewers, arouses feelings, and persuades with emotion. It is about displaying the unique characteristics of a host city and the sports event making the viewer the central character of the story using a mirroring technique. All images analysed in this study play a crucial role in this process, making the story more appealing. The images in both channels seem to have been carefully selected to create an imagery where viewers mirror themselves in the scene participating in the sports event, while taking delight in the various experiences in the host city, submerging themselves in the destination and sports event. Viewers see the images and they also hear, smell, and feel what is being depicted. Once potential

visitors have noticed themselves reflecting in this craving experience, they are ready to take a final action and decision on their trip.

However, the present study has some limitations, as it is a case study, and the results cannot be generalised. It would be interesting to extend the analysis to other mega sporting event and also to compare the results with a similar male sports event to explore whether there are differences in the narrative in terms of gender visual analysis. Also, it would be of interest to conduct a study over time of female similar events to investigate if there is a chronological narrative evolution.

This study and its narratives could have significance to linguists, journalists, marketers, event organisers, destination managers and other researchers related to sociology and social media fields. We hope that our analysis contributes to developing a deeper understanding of the interactions between the visual language of social media, society, and culture when guiding individual actions and decisions.

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