



FROM THE TRADITIONAL SPOT TO THE INSTAGRAM REEL: The Evolution of Advertising in Sportswear Brands

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

This study conducted a content analysis of 117 YouTube spots and 117 Instagram Reels with the highest number of views from the sportswear brands Nike, Adidas, Puma, Reebok, and Converse. The data show that reels are shorter in duration, contain less violence, make less use of celebrities, and exhibit greater gender and age diversity. They also feature more animations, as well as higher numbers of views and likes. In terms of engagement, reels demonstrate greater passive engagement (likes/views) but lower mixed engagement ((comments/likes)/views) compared to YouTube. Furthermore, correlations were found between certain variables and the different types of effectiveness proposed. These findings may help such brands improve their audiovisual advertising strategies.

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1. Introduction

Although sportswear was initially used primarily by professional athletes, it has since become popular among consumers who exercise at home, in gyms, and outdoors. The global sportswear market reached a value of USD 412.6 billion in 2023 and is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 5.4% through to 2032 (Global Market Insights, 2024). Key drivers of this growth include rising health awareness, the increasing popularity of outdoor activities, and the growing participation of women in sport (Fortune Business Insights, 2025; Straits Research, 2024). This market represents a highly specialised segment of the textile industry, offering clothing, footwear, and accessories for physically active individuals. Among product categories, footwear holds the largest market share at approximately 47.6%, equivalent to USD 196.4 billion (Global Market Insights, 2024).

The emergence, sustained presence, and continuous growth in the value of sportswear brands represent one of the most prominent developments in the textile industry in recent decades (Jaworek et al., 2021). Nike, with a global presence of over a thousand stores, is not only the leading producer in this sector but also the world's most valuable apparel brand (Statista, 2024a). Adidas, Puma, and Under Armour are among its main competitors, alongside other notable brands such as Converse, Lululemon, and Reebok. Within the athleisure category, Converse stands out as the most influential brand, according to a report by Launchmetrics (2023).

Product innovation, particularly in footwear, alongside strategic marketing and the ability to adapt to evolving consumer lifestyles are key factors contributing to the success of these brands (Jaworek et al., 2021). The sportswear industry invests significantly in advertising and, through collaborations with athletes and celebrities, has not only encouraged consumers to engage in physical activity but has also helped shape fashion trends (Bringé, 2021). For instance, Nike's partnership with basketball legend Michael Jordan in 1984 transformed trainers into a cultural phenomenon, whose influence on fashion endures to this day (Launchmetrics, 2023). Similarly, Adidas played a significant role in popularising the trainer trend through its sponsorship of another sporting icon, footballer Lionel Messi (Caioli, 2016).

The rise of social media has significantly influenced sportswear trends and consumer behaviour. On one hand, it has enabled brands to expand their collaborations with athletes and celebrities across new media channels and formats. On the other, it has given rise to fitness influencers, brand ambassadors, and other voices capable of delivering authentic content that resonates with and engages consumers (Launchmetrics, 2023). In this context, marketers have rapidly transitioned from relying on traditional formats, such as television spots, to leveraging the diverse media options offered by social platforms. Today, not only the sportswear industry but also numerous other sectors utilise these platforms for marketing, advertising, and gathering consumer insights (Choudhury and Mohanty, 2025). However, one of the key challenges in this space is motivating consumers to interact with content in all possible forms (Dong et al., 2024).

Sportswear brands are particularly invested in content creation by high-profile athletes, especially on Instagram, due to the substantial media impact value such content generates. For instance, just two Instagram posts shared by footballer Cristiano Ronaldo on behalf of Nike in the first quarter of 2020 generated a media impact value of USD 4.12 million (Bringé, 2021). Similarly, posts by tennis player Serena Williams, part of a Nike campaign advocating for the inclusion of people of colour and Indigenous communities in sport, produced a media impact value of USD 995,000 (Launchmetrics, 2023). Posts by the football club Real Madrid yielded an impact value of USD 940,000 for Adidas. These examples illustrate how content shared by athletes and sports organisations on social media significantly enhances brand visibility and consumer engagement.

However, Launchmetrics (2023) cautions that the influence of celebrities on consumer engagement, brand perception, and purchasing decisions is declining. This trend underscores the growing importance of direct brand communication and strategic collaborations with micro-influencers and other voices from both traditional and digital media. Additionally, new initiatives aimed at promoting the participation of women in traditionally male-dominated sports are increasingly visible, not only through Instagram content, but also via video advertisements on platforms such as YouTube (Jiménez-Sánchez et al., 2020).

For decades, sportswear brands have incorporated audiovisual advertisements into their marketing strategies due to their effectiveness in building brand awareness and influencing consumer purchasing behaviour (Jiménez-Sánchez et al., 2020; Smith, 2012). Consequently, it is unsurprising that many

companies now prioritise video content on social media platforms, as this format enables concise messaging and effectively captures audience attention by highlighting the most original and novel aspects of a product (Berni et al., 2020). According to a ranking compiled by Semrush (2024), the video hosting platform YouTube is the second most visited website globally, after Google. Currently, approximately 4.9 billion videos have been uploaded to the site, of which 74% are regular-length videos, while the remainder are short-form videos (Broz, 2024). The average duration of videos on YouTube is 11.7 minutes (Hayes, 2024).

Short videos, in particular, have become highly effective tools for product promotion and engaging content (Violot et al., 2024). Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram lead the rankings of social networks by user numbers (Statista, 2024b), all of which support audiovisual content through a variety of features. Contributing to this shift is the vertical video revolution on mobile devices, marked by the growing dominance of vertical formats over traditional horizontal ones, which are increasingly becoming the standard for both video production and consumption (Mulier et al., 2021). In response to this trend, Instagram introduced Reels in August 2020, enabling users and brands to share short vertical videos. Initially limited to 90 seconds (Instagram, 2020), Reels now allow videos up to three minutes in length (Instagram, 2025). Following the success of this format, Facebook and YouTube have also incorporated features for creating and distributing short vertical videos (Violot et al., 2024).

According to data published by DemandSage, more than 200 billion reels are played every day on Instagram and Facebook, twice as many as last year (Kumar, 2025). These reels have an average view rate of 2.54%, 0.8% higher than the usual video format, and also receive a 22% engagement rate. Sports-related reels are among the most popular on Instagram. Indian freestyle footballer Muhammed Riswan's reel, featuring him juggling a ball in front of a waterfall and posted on his account @riswan_freestyle, became the most viewed reel worldwide, amassing over 491 million views and currently exceeding 9 million likes. Short vertical videos are less popular on YouTube than regular videos compared to Instagram, but their popularity is increasing due to the fact that 87.35% of users visit YouTube from their mobile phones (Hayes, 2024).

Two types of users can be identified: passive users, who primarily view and search for content, and active users, who create content, comment on, like, and share videos (Menon and Meghana, 2021). The use of Instagram Reels has increased in recent years, partly because they generate higher levels of user interaction in terms of likes and comments (Liang and Wolfe, 2022; Menon, 2022). However, research by Violot et al. (2024) indicates that while short videos on YouTube attract more views and likes, they receive fewer comments compared to regular-length videos. Thus, the number of views for videos shared on these platforms varies depending on format and duration. For instance, vertical videos elicited greater engagement than horizontal videos among smartphone users in the study by Mulier et al. (2021). Similarly, an analysis of the most viewed advertisements on YouTube in Spain in 2016 found a relationship between video length and views; contrary to expectations, longer videos attained the highest number of views (Segarra-Saavedra and Hidalgo-Marí, 2018).

According to the findings of Jiménez-Sánchez et al. (2020), sportswear brands employ a range of elements in their audiovisual advertisements. One such element is the use of violence, which Nike frequently incorporates; however, this violence is generally limited to acts of vandalism and is not intended to promote aggressive behaviour. Instead, the aim is to evoke humour or drama within the advertisements. Another notable element is the use of animation in commercials. While fully animated advertisements are rare, most tend to be of a mixed type, combining animation with live-action footage.

For these reasons, this research aims to analyse the evolution and differences between traditional advertisements and contemporary formats adapted to the mobile environment, focusing on some of the leading sportswear and footwear brands. The specific objectives are to examine whether the transition from one format to another has involved changes in technical and content-related aspects, such as video length, use of animation, advertising objectives, the sport promoted, presence of violence, use of celebrities versus unknown figures, and the representation of women and individuals of various ages. Finally, these characteristics will be correlated with metrics such as views, likes, comments, and types of user engagement, with the ultimate goal of identifying which elements are associated with greater advertising effectiveness. The findings will offer comprehensive insights into the new audiovisual strategies employed within one of the world's most significant economic sectors, sportswear fashion.

2. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is content analysis, following the guidelines proposed by Krippendorff (2019) and Neuendorf (2017). A total of 234 advertisements were analysed, comprising 117 YouTube spots and 117 Instagram Reels. The sample of YouTube spots and most of their analyses derive from previous research by Jiménez-Sánchez et al. (2020), conducted between May and June 2019, which included 38 productions from Nike, 21 from Adidas, 22 from Reebok, 16 from Puma, and 20 from Converse. These advertisements were selected based on the highest number of views obtained through YouTube searches using keywords combining brand names with terms such as 'ad', 'spot', or 'advertisement' (e.g., Nike ad, Reebok spot, Adidas advertisement). Further details on the selection process and sample are available in Jiménez-Sánchez et al. (2020). Instagram Reels were chosen as a sample of short vertical videos owing to the frequent publication of content by sportswear brands on this platform (Launchmetrics, 2023). YouTube was selected not only due to its popularity but also because it supports traditional video formats with a maximum length of up to 12 hours.

Conversely, an equal number of reels were selected for each brand to match the number of spots. This selection was conducted at the end of 2024 by reviewing each brand's official Instagram page to identify the reels with the highest view counts from the total reels published on their accounts. It is worth noting that while most of the selected spots were uploaded to YouTube between 2012 and 2018, the most viewed reels predominantly date from 2023 and 2024. Furthermore, for these reels, the upload date on Instagram generally coincides with the production date; however, for the spots, this is often not the case. For example, a video may have been uploaded to YouTube in 2015 but produced in the 1980s, such as those featuring basketball player Larry Bird for the Converse brand. This discrepancy is one of the reasons why the sample of spots was not selected from the official YouTube accounts of each company, as these tend to feature only more recent videos and shorts, rather than the historically significant spots originally created for television. Such current content would not be suitable for analysing the evolution from traditional to modern advertising.

In contrast, official Instagram Reels were selected rather than YouTube Shorts and videos, as many of the latter with the highest view counts are not strictly advertisements but rather reports or interviews. Moreover, the most popular Shorts tend to have significantly fewer views compared to the Reels posted on the respective official Instagram accounts. These commercials are therefore more appropriate for comparison with traditional spots, as Instagram has proven to be a more effective broadcasting platform than YouTube in this context, while its Reels are more advertising-oriented than the videos found on official YouTube accounts.

While previous studies on the online advertising of these brands have primarily employed qualitative and discursive analyses (see, for example, Chamorro and Tapia (2015) or García (2016)), this research focuses on technical and concrete aspects that are readily observable and quantifiable. The categories of analysis were largely drawn from the study by Jiménez-Sánchez et al. (2020), with several additional categories included and others modified to enhance the depth of analysis.

The qualitative variables analysed in this study were:

- Format: Spot (YouTube) or Reel (Instagram).
- Brand: Nike, Adidas, Puma, Reebok, or Converse.
- Targeting: This was ultimately categorised into two broad groups: videos aimed at selling trainers or sports shoes, and those focused on promoting other aspects, with brand image being the most commonly emphasised.
- Predominant Sport: Football, basketball, running, and other sports. A 'No sport' category was also incorporated, as many videos did not feature any specific sport, for example, those showing people dancing or famous singers.
- Violence: Classified as either absent or present. Violence was understood to encompass any of its various forms, including physical, psychological, verbal, sexual, patrimonial, or symbolic.
- Type: Real, animation, or mixed.
- Predominant Characters or Protagonists: Classified as famous individuals, non-famous individuals, or a combination of both. A 'No characters' category was also included for videos that did not feature identifiable characters.
- Predominant Gender Represented: Male, Female, Mixed (male and female), or 'No characters'.

- Predominant Age Group Represented: Children, Youth, Adults, Mixed (including all previous categories), or 'No characters'. Individuals appearing to be in their teens to thirties with a distinctly youthful and athletic appearance were classified as Youth.

The quantitative analysis focused on the following variables:

- Number of views.
- Number of likes.
- Number of comments.
- Type of participation: This was categorised into three classes:
 - Passive Participation: Measured by the ratio of likes to views. A value close to one indicates that most viewers liked the video. It is considered passive because it requires only a simple action to express a positive attitude.
 - Active Participation: Measured by the ratio of comments to views. A value close to one suggests that most viewers also commented on the video. This is considered active participation, as commenting reflects greater user engagement than simply liking.
 - Mixed Participation: Measured by the ratio of (comments/likes) to views. The numerator (comments/likes) indicates the degree to which users both liked and commented, with values close to one representing a high correspondence between these actions. Dividing this by views gives an overall measure of combined participation relative to the total number of views, with a maximum value of 0.1 in this case.
- Duration: Seconds of each video. For example, one and a half minutes would be 90 seconds.

Since the sample of spots corresponded to 2019, the quantitative data (views, likes, and comments) were updated to 2024. It is worth noting that, in most cases, there was little significant increase in views over these five years, indicating a rapid initial growth curve followed by a much slower rise in later years. This suggests that these spots were trending at the time of their release, a point to consider in the subsequent discussion of results.

The data were tabulated in an Excel spreadsheet. One researcher completed the entire coding process, while a second researcher independently coded a random 50% of the total sample to calculate inter-rater reliability. This resulted in a Cohen's Kappa of 0.88, indicating a high level of agreement.

Finally, the data were analysed using SPSS (version 23 for Windows). Descriptive statistics (percentages) and inferential analyses were conducted as appropriate, including Chi-square tests, Student's t-tests, correlation analyses (Pearson or Spearman), and one-way ANOVA.

3. Results

The results obtained with regard to the differences between the spots and the reels of both qualitative and quantitative data are shown below.

3.1. Qualitative Analysis

No differences are found between spots and reels with respect to their objective of promoting the brand image or selling shoes ($\chi^2=2.159$; $p=.142$). Similarly, there are no discrepancies in the sports themes ($\chi^2=15.905$; $p=.460$), as both spots and reels continue to be dominated by football, basketball, and other productions where no sport is shown, such as people dancing or famous singers wearing the clothes.

In contrast, there are differences in the use of violence, with reels showing 17% less violence than spots ($\chi^2=15.713$; $p<.000$). There is also a change in the type of characters used, with reels containing fewer celebrities and even more productions in which no characters appear at all ($\chi^2=23.492$; $p<.000$). The reels show a higher proportion of female and mixed characters than the spots ($\chi^2=36.125$; $p<.000$), as well as a lower percentage of content exclusively starring young people ($\chi^2=19.721$; $p<.000$), thus showing more intergender and age variety than the spots analysed.

Finally, reels include 12% more animations than spots ($\chi^2 = 11.549$; $p = .003$). When the categories of real and mixed images are combined and compared with the category of videos made entirely with

animation, the latter are found to focus more on the sale of trainers ($p = .226$; $p = .001$), have a shorter duration ($p = -.247$; $p < .000$), and, notably, are characterised by the absence of characters ($\chi^2 = 151.874$; $p < .000$). This implies that there is no predominant gender or age group represented. As will be discussed below, it is worth noting that over 50% of the animations analysed were produced by Nike, nearly one third by Converse, and 11% by Reebok, whereas neither Adidas nor Puma included animations among their most viewed content.

3.2. Quantitative Analysis

The following table shows the analyses of those quantitative data.

Table 1. Quantitative measurements and differences between spots and reels.

	<i>Spot</i> (average)	<i>Reel</i> (average)	Differences <i>t-Student</i> (<i>p-value</i>)
Views	6,685,851	16,328,213	$t=-4.121$ (.000)
Likes	55,440	352,237	$t=-5.807$ (.000)
Passive Participation	.0068085	.0243584	$t=-6.157$ (.000)
Comments	1,727	3,052	$t=-1.428$ (.155)
Active Participation	0.0004237	0.0002944	$t=1.355$ (.177)
Mixed Participation	0.00000026163	0.00000000735	$t=5.384$ (.000)
Duration	90.9	36.8	$t=7.011$ (.000)

Source: Authors' elaboration, 2024.

As can be observed, reels receive almost three times more views than spots, representing a significantly greater impact, especially considering that most reels have only been online for approximately two years, whereas the spots were uploaded to YouTube several years earlier. Although reels also register a higher number of likes, there are no statistically significant differences in the number of comments. This suggests that Instagram Reels generate higher passive, but not active, user engagement. Furthermore, mixed participation is greater in YouTube spots. As expected, the duration of reels is shorter, due to Instagram's time limit of three minutes. It is worth noting that the original maximum duration was 90 seconds, which was extended to three minutes for imported videos in 2024 (The Social Shepherd, 2024), and as of 2025, this increased limit applies to all Reels (Instagram, 2025). Therefore, it cannot be concluded that this reduction in length reflects a shift in audiovisual strategy by sportswear brands; rather, it may simply be a consequence of the format's inherent limitations.

3.3. Key Factors in Effectiveness

The analyses conducted according to the type of variable (correlations for quantitative variables and ANOVA for qualitative with quantitative variables) indicate that reels contain different elements that may or may not be associated with indicators of effectiveness (views, likes, comments, and types of participation). In this regard, duration is not significantly related to any indicator ($p > .05$), meaning that both short and long videos show similar levels of effectiveness. The same applies to the presence of violence, which is not associated with any of the other indicators. With respect to the objective of the spot (brand image or the sale of shoes), this is only significantly related to active participation (comments/views), where promoting brand image results in a higher level of this type of interaction than promoting the sale of shoes ($p < .05$). The use of animation is associated with lower mixed participation ($p < .05$), i.e., the interaction between comments and likes in relation to the number of views is greater in videos using real images. By contrast, the type of characters, as well as their gender or age, does not show any significant relationship with the indicators ($p > .05$).

Finally, regarding the sample of spots, longer video duration correlates positively with views, likes, comments, passive participation and mixed participation ($p < .05$), although not with active participation ($p = .083$). As with reels, the use of violence is not associated with any of the indicators. In terms of the objective of the advertisement, the promotion of brand image generates more views and higher mixed participation than the sale of trainers ($p < .05$). Meanwhile, the use of animation is not associated with any indicator; however, it is worth noting that there are only two cases of animated spots in this group, so a larger sample would be necessary to confirm this lack of association. Finally, no significant relationships were found between the indicators of effectiveness and the type of characters, gender or age ($p > .05$).

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this research was to analyse the evolution and differences between classic spots and contemporary video advertisements adapted to the mobile environment by sportswear brands. To achieve this objective, a comparison was made between the most viewed classic spots on YouTube and the most viewed Instagram Reels.

Firstly, a qualitative analysis was conducted to determine the differences between these two spot formats in terms of their objectives, the predominant sport depicted, the use of violence, typology, main characters, gender, and age. The results indicate no significant differences between classic spots and reels regarding their objectives; neither format is used exclusively to promote brand image or to sell shoes. Given that classic advertising spots have already been shown to influence brand image building and consumer behaviour (Smith, 2012), it is unsurprising that reels serve similar purposes. Furthermore, some studies have demonstrated that short videos are effective in promoting products and disseminating other brand-related content (Violot et al., 2024).

The five brands most frequently use football and basketball to promote their products. This is unsurprising given that three of the brands, Nike, Converse and Reebok, belong to American companies, where both sports are highly popular. Prominent figures such as Michael Jordan, Larry Bird, and Magic Johnson have served as effective ambassadors for product sales in the United States (Jiménez-Sánchez et al., 2020). Football is also popular in Europe, the region from which Adidas and Puma originate. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the American brands feature well-known footballers such as Cristiano Ronaldo (Nike), while the European brands promote figures like Messi or the Real Madrid club (Adidas) (Caioli, 2016; Launchmetrics, 2023). Nonetheless, there is also a significant number of advertisements in both formats that do not reference sports but instead use celebrities from other fields, such as fashion, popular music, or activities related to physical movement, such as dance.

Conversely, it is observed that reels contain less violence than classic spots, which may be explained by a lower tolerance for violent content among younger users. Although the predominant age group on both platforms is between 25 and 34 years, the proportion of older users is higher on YouTube (Dunn, 2025; Oberlo, 2024). Furthermore, celebrities appear less frequently in reels, reflecting their declining influence on the engagement and behaviour of sportswear consumers (Launchmetrics, 2023). Instead, reels often feature micro-influencers or animations. This type of reel is particularly common in Nike's content, a brand notable for pioneering both the use of athletes in its advertisements and other innovative marketing strategies to engage consumers. Another characteristic of reels is the more frequent inclusion of women and mixed genders. In recent years, brands such as Nike and Adidas have actively campaigned to reduce discrimination and promote the inclusion of diverse groups, especially women, in sport. While these efforts were already evident in classic spots aimed at female audiences, the current findings suggest that reels have become a more effective format for attracting this market segment.

The quantitative analysis begins with a comparison of the duration of the spots. As expected, reels are on average shorter than classic spots, reflecting the 90-second limit for videos created directly on Instagram and the three-minute limit for imported videos. Reels receive more views and exhibit higher user engagement in terms of likes, but not comments. This finding aligns with the results of Violot et al. (2024), whose study showed that YouTube Shorts, a video format comparable to reels, garnered more views and likes but fewer comments than regular videos. Similarly, vertical videos posted on Facebook Shorts demonstrated higher engagement (Mulier et al., 2021). Therefore, irrespective of the platform, short vertical videos tend to attract more views and likes, whereas videos in the classic format promote

more active user participation through comments. The results of the present study indicate that classic spots published on YouTube recorded not only a superior ratio of active participation but also mixed participation, meaning a higher proportion of users both viewed, commented on, and liked the videos.

In the case of the spots, longer videos achieve greater numbers of views, likes, comments, passive participation, and mixed participation, thus confirming the findings of previous studies (Segarra-Saavedra and Hidalgo-Marí, 2018). Other factors contributing to this effectiveness include the focus on promoting brand image rather than directly selling shoes, as well as the use of real images instead of animations. For reels, higher effectiveness is observed in those that promote brand image compared to those centred on the sale of shoes. However, this increased efficiency in reels is not attributable to their duration, as no correlation was found between length and engagement indicators (views, likes, comments, and types of participation).

In conclusion, both classic spots and reels are effective in promoting the brand image of sportswear and footwear; therefore, companies in this sector should continue to utilise both formats to achieve this objective. For greater efficiency in classic spots, it is recommended that brands employ real images, which tend to generate higher engagement than animations. The evolution from the traditional spot to the new vertical short-video format offered by platforms such as Instagram has enabled sportswear brands to attain more views, particularly among certain market segments, such as women. However, this new format does not always foster active or mixed consumer engagement. Furthermore, companies must recognise that the influence of famous athletes and celebrities in conveying brand image and product appeal is diminishing. These figures are increasingly being supplanted by alternative voices, including micro-influencers and specialists across both traditional and digital media (Launchmetrics, 2023). Consequently, brands must carefully select the most appropriate format and spokesperson to meet their marketing objectives.

The results of this research are significant; however, its limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample of classic spots consists of videos published on YouTube in 2019, whereas the sample of Instagram Reels is from 2024. Consequently, it would be necessary to supplement the sample with more recent classic spots to examine whether there have been changes in this format over time. Additionally, future studies should increase the number of spots analysed for both formats, as well as the number of brands included. Regarding short vertical videos, in addition to Instagram Reels, spots from other platforms such as YouTube Shorts and Facebook Shorts could be incorporated. This approach would help establish whether the findings of this study apply to short vertical videos in general, beyond just Instagram Reels.

In summary, this research aims to have broadened the understanding of the use of reels by sportswear brands. It is also considered that the methodology employed may serve as a reference for similar future studies and, finally, that the results may prove valuable for companies seeking to enhance their sales and brand image.

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