

Passive or pro-active Sports journalism? The coverage of *FIFAGate* in the sports press in Mexico and Spain¹

¿Periodismo deportivo pasivo o proactivo? La cobertura del *FIFAGate* en la prensa deportiva de México y España

Jornalismo esportivo proativo ou passivo? A cobertura do *FIFAGate* na imprensa de México e Espanha

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses formats, reporting techniques and the use of sources to measure proactive journalism in the coverage of the corruption scandal known as *FIFAGate* in four major newspapers: *Reforma* and *Récord* from Mexico, and *El País* and *Marca* from Spain. The study examines the actors, angles and football confederations that received the most media coverage, the indicators of 'proactivity' per media type (specialist vs. reference) and per country (Mexico vs. Spain), and the variable with the highest impact in proactivity. It concludes that investigative journalism was overall scarce, although *El País* scored the highest standards of proactivity in the coverage.

Keywords: sports journalism, investigative journalism, quality journalism, content analysis, *FIFAGate*.

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza formatos, técnicas de reportaje y uso de fuentes para medir "proactividad" en la cobertura del escándalo conocido como FIFAGate en cuatro diarios: Reforma y Récord, de México, y El País y Marca, de España. Se examina qué actores, ángulos y confederaciones de fútbol recibieron mayor cobertura; los indicadores de proactividad por tipo de diario (especialista o de referencia) y por país (México y España), y se determina cuál de estas dos variables propicia la presencia de proactividad. Se concluye que hubo escasa investigación, aunque El País presenta los mayores índices de proactividad en su cobertura.

Palabras clave: periodismo deportivo, periodismo de investigación, periodismo de calidad, análisis de contenido, *FIFAGate*.

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa formatos, técnicas de comunicação e uso de fontes para medir a "proatividade" na cobertura do escândalo conhecido como *FIFAGate* em quatro jornais: *Reforma* e *Record*, do México, e *El País* e *Marca*, da Espanha. O trabalho analisa quais atores, ângulos e confederações de futebol receberam maior cobertura, indicadores de proatividade de acordo com o tipo de jornal (especializado ou de referência) e país (México e Espanha) e determina qual dessas duas variáveis leva à presença de proatividade. Conclui-se que havia pouca investigação jornalística, embora o *El País* tenha apresentado as maiores taxas de proatividade em sua cobertura.

Palavras-chave: jornalismo esportivo, jornalismo investigativo, jornalismo de qualidade, análise de conteúdo, *FIFAGate*.

How to cite:

Márquez-Ramírez, M. y Rojas, J. L. (2017). ¿Periodismo deportivo pasivo o proactivo? La cobertura del *FIFAGate* en la prensa deportiva de México y España. *Cuadernos.info*, (40), 173-188. <https://doi.org/10.7764/cdi.40.1009>

INTRODUCTION

Sports journalism is often assigned the mission of entertaining and reporting on various sports events that are attractive to eager audiences for such content. It is a highly profitable activity that, according to academic literature, has been placed between the margins of *infotainment* and journalism (Rowe, 2007; Sugden & Tomlinson, 2007). As a result, the professional canons and values of sports journalism are less clear and consensual than those of other fields of specialty, such as political journalism, for example, which is expected—as part of its democratic functions—to constantly question and monitor the actors in power, particularly in the commission of crimes and acts of corruption. Sports journalists either fail to assume such standards as part of their functions or are “poorly prepared” to conduct the more difficult tasks associated with the “fourth power”, such as investigation (Rowe, 2016, p. 11; also see Boyle, 2006; Rowe, 2005). Thus, the sports press is rarely called upon to exercise traditional journalistic standards (Surface, 1972, in Salwen & Garrison, 1998, p.88).

Consequently, the arising question is, how did sports journalism react to having one of the largest corporate corruption cases in history, such as the so-called *FIFAGate*? In the interests of transparency, justice and accountability, did sports journalism in Mexico and Spain investigate the actors in power and actively followed the local tentacles of a scandal of global dimensions? To answer these questions, this article compares the news coverage of the soccer corruption scandals known as *FIFAGate* in two Spanish newspapers and two Mexican newspapers. Mexico and Spain have been selected for four main reasons: 1) the importance and leadership of both countries in their respective football confederations, their highly profitable markets, the competitiveness of their soccer leagues and the leadership of their national teams in the regional tournaments; 2) the context of corruption allegations involving both executives of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) and the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF), to which the Mexican Federation belongs (FMF), as well as of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), from which the Royal Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) is part; 3)

the possible involvement in acts of corruption by executives of the federations of both countries; and 4) the resources and access that were only available for the research team in those two countries.

To conduct our research, we performed a content analysis to measure the use of reporting techniques and sourcing patterns; and, on the other hand, we considered the presence or absence of twelve indicators of what we will call *proactive journalism*. This involves the intention and initiative on the part of the journalist to investigate, through document analysis and research, ongoing stories that require context and in-depth reporting, as opposed to *reactive journalism*, which merely gives an account of what has happened (Lamble, 2011, p. 21). We selected the sports sections from reference newspapers as well as specialized sports papers, commonly of tabloid format. For Spain, the chosen newspaper were *El País* and *Marca*, while for Mexico *Reforma* and *Récord*. We analyzed a sample of thematic articles (N=467) published between May 1 and October 31, 2015, during the first phase of the *FIFAGate*.

In accordance to the aggregated academic literature on quality journalism (Gómez Mompert, 2013; Pellegrini & Mujica, 2006; Pellegrini, Puente, Porath, Mujica & Grassau, 2011; Programa Prensa y Democracia [PRENDE], 2007; De la Torre & Téramo, 2015), there are twelve indicators that we propose to measure proactive journalism, namely: 1) *document sources* are used and quoted; 2) *expert sources or opinion leaders* are used and quoted; 3) there is provision of *hard data and evidence*; 4) the news piece is the result of *investigative journalism*; 5) there is *context and historical information*; 6) the journalist provides *interpretation or explanation*; 7) *external research* is widely reported; 8) there is *balance in the use of sources*; 9) the genre of the article is *reportage*; 10) the extension of the item is *long or medium*; 11) the item has an *identified author*; 12) there is data gathering *and research*.

The aim of our study is to determine whether there was an active investigation into the corruption scandals that occurred and whether there was a follow-up or not on any complicity or acts of corruption at the local level in Mexico or Spain, given that their national football executives were singled out for their possible involvement. In particular, we aimed to corroborate whether in the selected reference newspapers—*El País*

and *Reforma*—with a greater tradition of investigative journalism, there are better reporting and sourcing techniques than in purely sports papers that could be considered more specialists and with an interest on the subject from a sensationalist and infotainment perspective. We also aim to determine if there are substantial differences between sports journalism in both Mexico and Spain that could reveal differences or similarities between their journalistic cultures.

THE SCANDAL OF CORRUPTION IN THE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES OF ASSOCIATED FOOTBALL

FIFAGate is considered the biggest scandal in football history (Bayle, 2015). It was made public in May 2015, when the United States Department of Justice ordered the arrest of seven FIFA officials at a hotel in Zurich, Switzerland. Since then, more than thirty people with relevant positions within the governing body of world football and its confederations, most notably CONCACAF and the South American Football Confederation (Conmebol) have been accused, to which most of those involved were affiliated (The New York Times, 2015). The charges presented were for fraud, bribery and money laundering in connection with the allocation of television rights, marketing and sponsorship of tournaments organized by FIFA, and awarding of championship venues. Bribes amounted to \$150 million and occurred since 1990, according to the investigation.

In June 2015, the scale of the scandal forced Joseph Blatter to quit as FIFA president after seventeen years in office, few days after he was re-elected. In September, the Swiss court announced the opening of a criminal proceeding against Blatter on suspicion of unfair administration, breach of trust and, in particular, a suspicious payment of €1.8 million to Michel Platini, then president of UEFA. Both would be suspended for eight years of any football-related activity.

In the midst of this conjuncture of corruption allegations there has been, hitherto, no Mexican or Spanish executives charged. This is despite the fact that in June 2015 some news reports, particularly digital media, published the rumor that Mexican football executives Justino Compeán and Decio de María could be under investigation by the FBI (Monforte, 2015). The issue was never clarified but the first of them presented his

resignation as the top leader of the Mexican Football Federation (FMF) in those days, claiming “personal reasons”, and was replaced by the second, who had previously occupied other management positions (Peña, 2015). Such movements were viewed with suspicion by a number of sports commentators, without conducting any follow-ups of the media on FMF corruption cases. And while the executives have defended themselves against possible accusations by arguing that the assignment of television rights is negotiated directly with the television channels and not through intermediaries (ESPN, 2016), the rumors involve the possible match-fixing of Mexico vs. Trinidad and Tobago in the qualifiers of the Mexican national soccer team to the 2006 World Cup in Germany.

Meanwhile, the president of the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF), José María Villar, held the presidency of the UEFA Executive Committee on an interim basis following the suspension of Platini, and his name has been mentioned directly or indirectly by international media. On the one hand, *The Daily Mail* published that the candidacy of the World Cup Qatar 2022 invested more than 200 million euros in gaining the favor of Spain through Villar to obtain the sponsorship of Qatar Airways for the F.C. Barcelona (Harris, 2015); on the other hand, the former president of Conmebol, Eugenio Figueredo, points to the son of the president of RFEF, Gorka Villar, as the main figure in an extortion to the Uruguayan clubs that denounced the sale of the audiovisual rights of the Libertadores World Cup.

In any case, as Bayle (2015) points out, with large sums of money at its disposal, FIFA has been able to distribute more than one billion dollars between 2011 and 2014 to the national federations for various projects, allocations that are very unclear, but which, we believe, could have been the starting point for possible journalistic investigations at the local level. The erratic and opaque governance of FIFA, its internal structures, and the football confederations have been a recurrent theme over the years (Pielke, 2013; Tomlinson, 2014). While there have been high profile journalistic investigations that account for the entanglement of local, national, regional, and global complicities (Blake & Calvert, 2015; Jennings, 2011, 2014, 2015), these do not seem to be encouraging more local in-depth reporting in Mexico and Spain, two countries with highly profitable markets in their respective confederations.

INVESTIGATION AND QUALITY IN SPORTS JOURNALISM

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of research literature on sports journalism. On the one hand, there are collective works that combine academic voices and focus their attention on the various forms in which sport is currently communicated regarding its political, social, cultural and educational implications (Billings, Butterworth & Turman, 2014; Pedersen, 2013). On the other hand, studies that focus on aspects that define this area of specialization, such as themes, journalistic genres or style and language, stand out (Alcoba, 2005; Andrews, 2013; Boyle, 2006; Gisondi, 2011; Marrero-Rivera, 2011; Rojas Torrijos, 2011; Steen, 2015). The growing importance of sporting events and their impact in a context of growing cultural and economic globalization have also been recognized in various studies (Tomlinson & Young, 2006, p.3), but they have also led to reflections on the consequences that spectacularization can have in the quality of this kind of journalism. Sports information is usually subject to entertainment, therefore engaging in elements from the entertainment industry outside of journalism and drifting towards a gradual trivialization of content and a loss of quality (Rojas, 2016).

The concern for quality standards in sports journalism has also led to greater professional awareness, which has been reflected in the publication of style manuals (*Mundo Deportivo* in 1995 and *Marca* in 2012); and, at the academic level, in doctoral theses on reporting techniques, sources and professional ethics.

Among the latter, we find Gómez Bueno's (2013), who argues that in the Spanish digital sports press there is no clear delimitation between information and opinion, while warning about the usual use of rumors and "low accuracy", linked to the scarce number of sources used. Calvo (2016), for his part, points out that this type of journalism tends towards entertainment, contains a considerable number of sensationalist elements, applies an inappropriate news hierarchy by undervaluing the importance of certain sports and events, and suffers from dysfunctions typical of a low quality press.

In Mexico, literature on the cultures and practices of sports journalism has been rather scarce. The most recent studies indicate that the Mexican sports press rarely resorts to in depth articles on their coverage

of special events, and that less than 5% are based on investigation (González Macías, 2015); at the same time, they point to improvisation and journalistic routines tending to passivity and to the coverage of scheduled events, resulting in low content diversity (Colin Vaughan, 2013). These would be conditions that affect and limit quality sports journalism, and particularly investigative journalism in the sports field. In any case, the sports press in general tends to be passive by only covering already planned events and not topics emerging from their own investigation. It usually focuses on match results, and tends to publish news unsourced stories, as shown in a study conducted in the United States (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005).

On the other hand, the issue of corruption, as Numerato (2009) asserts, "remains at the margins of research into the relationship between the media and sports" (p.262). In some cases, sports scandals have also called for a more watchdog role by journalists in other regions. As Reinardy and Wanta (2009, p. 6) point out, sports journalists, at least in their country, the United States, have long ceased to act as cheerleaders of the local teams they usually cover, since the emergence of scandals associated with sports and related to corruption, doping or violence, has forced the media to increase their daily scrutiny of clubs, federations and other sports bodies.

However, this does not seem to be the rule regarding the coverage of governing bodies of associated football. Not only does the economic structure of football allow corruption to be naturalized, since certain football team owners are also entertainment tycoons (Giulianotti, 1999), but this issue features very marginally in sports coverage in general (Schultz-Jorgensen, 2005). Regarding *FIFAGate*, Rowe (2016) observes that the scandal reached a high level of media coverage worldwide, but few journalists showed a deep knowledge of the internal structure of FIFA, which explains why the press tended to narrate the scandal from the almost "comical" figure of its leader, Joseph Blatter, which would somehow explain some of the results to be presented in this paper. As the author explains, this coverage was entertaining at times, but only served to "highlight the substantial failure of most of the news media, and especially of sports journalism, to deal seriously with the institutional politics of sports" (Rowe, 2016, p.1).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

This study aims to examine whether the news media in question managed to investigate the local tentacles of a global scandal, or whether, as we argue, they covered the issue only in a rather passive and uncritical way. Specifically, we analyze whether the twelve indicators of proactive journalism, which evaluate reporting techniques, use of sources and characteristics of information, were present in the newspapers that comprise the sample of this investigation. We also seek to know if it is possible, based on these results, to characterize a journalistic sports culture at a national level, where one would expect the newspapers of the same country to be similar, or if the affinity in proactivity would rather be connected to the orientation –serious vs tabloid– of the newspaper, beyond the country in question.

For these purposes, the research questions are:

- P1. Which actors or institutions involved in *FIFA-Gate* were given greater coverage in the four selected newspapers?
- P2. How did the presence of proactive journalism vary across the four selected newspapers, both overall and for each indicator of proactivity during *FIFAGate* coverage?
- P3. Which dimension best explains the differences in the presence of proactive journalism: the type of media (serious vs. tabloid) or the country (Mexico vs. Spain) in question?

The hypothesis that we have raised are the following:

- H1. The newspapers focused on the FIFA scandal and the succession process of Joseph Blatter, rather than on the follow-up of the investigations in their confederations and federations.
- H2. The reference newspapers *El País* and *Reforma* will tend to be more proactive in their coverage of the *FIFAGate*, while the specialists *Marca* and *Récord* will be more passive.
- H3. The level of proactivity in the coverage of *FIFAGate* is more associated to the orientation and type of newspaper (tabloids vs. reference) than to that of the country in question.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, we selected two newspapers from each country that were market leaders in their segment, and then both were subjected to the research technique known as content analysis, understood as the analysis of the *manifest* and *latent* messages of a body of texts (Krippendorff, 2013). Through content analysis, the architecture, structure, basic components and operation of the media messages can be reconstructed (Igartua & Humanes, 2004).

SELECTION OF THE SAMPLE

For the Mexican case, we selected *Reforma* as the best representative of a reference, quality newspaper. It was founded in 1993 and, according to experts, not only it revolutionized Mexican journalism for its innovative business model that grew independent of the political power, its design and content and professional standards and ethics of its newsroom, but it also fueled investigative journalism as a core practice (Hughes, 2009; Lawson, 2002). *Récord* is a Sports tabloid that came to light in 2002 and modernized sports journalism in its design, layout, format, color, and even the print paper, being one of the first in hiring young university graduates. It is considered to have the largest readerships in Mexico.

In Spain, *El País*, founded in 1976, showed the way of a new way of doing printed journalism, betting on a model of quality and Europeanist newspaper, which based its signs of identity on an innovative layout and the elaboration of the first so-called book of style of the Spanish press (Seoane & Sueiro, 2004). Since its launch, it has been considered a great reference newspaper both inside and outside Spain; specifically, its sports section created a literary style of sports chronicles that later would be imitated by other media. *Marca* is the most widely read sports newspaper in Spain and has been characterized in recent years by a renewed style of visual and textual content.

UNIT OF ANALYSIS

Our units of analysis (items) were the news articles published in the printed editions of the four newspapers in question between May 1 and October 31, 2015, and found through keywords searches (in Spanish) like *soccer*, *corruption*, *scandal* or *FIFAGate*. In order not to bias the results by retrieving FIFA-only entries, all the searches were repeated using in combination with

acronyms and names of confederations and national federations. The journalistic articles were searched in digitized format in the databases of a private media monitoring company in the case of Mexico (Eficiencia Informativa), and in the digital archive of both Spanish outlets. The final corpus of articles consisted of $N=467$, after a debugging process to identify duplicates or items marginally related to the topic. Columns and opinion articles, cartoons, or caption-only pictures that were not accompanied by a text were discarded from the sample. Although the FIFA scandal episode lasted until January 2016, when the then General Secretary, Jérôme Valcke, was dismissed, it was during the summer and autumn of 2015 when the main events developed and produced a greater number of articles on the subject. The distribution of the sample is as follows: the newspaper *Récord* comprised 29.8% of the sample, with 139 articles; *Reforma*, 33.8% of the sample, with 158 articles; *Marca*, 20.1% of the sample, with 158 articles; and *El País*, 16.3% of the sample, with 76 articles.

The team consisted of two lead researchers and four research assistants, who were trained in the use of a coding instrument, which had an explanatory manual for each variable and an abbreviated coding template. The Krippendorff index of intercoding reliability was $\alpha.721$ for the first pair of coders and $\alpha.743$ for the second pair. The data were analyzed using the SPSS statistical analysis package.

MEASURING INSTRUMENT

The instrument was designed through a coding manual that measured 65 variables or indicators regarding item identification data, format aspects, coverage, use of sources and reporting practices. Although all the items of the instrument were designed to measure certain dimensions of the news coverage of *FIFAGate*, for this paper we only focus on twelve variables related to “proactive” journalism. Each of them measured the presence or absence of an indicator on a dichotomous scale (1=Yes it is present, 0=No, non-present). To determine which and how many proactivity indicators were used, several rounds of reliability and internal consistency tests between variables were conducted, finding the highest index in 12 of 16 possible variables (Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha=.699$), a value high enough for exploratory studies like this (Huh, Delorme & Reid, 2006). The indicators that resulted from proactive

journalism were: 1) There is use of document sources, 2) There is use of expert sources, 3) There is hard data and evidence, 4) There is investigative journalism, 5) There is context information, 6) There is interpretation or explanations, 7) There is a balanced use of sources, 9) The journalistic genre is a reportage, 10) The extension of the item is medium/long, 11) There is an identified author or combination of author and news agency, 12) There is data gathering or research. In a second step, in order to run tests of variance analysis (ANOVA), we proceeded to convert the twelve individual variables of dichotomous (categorical) nature into a single variable (index) of interval type to quantify the “proactivity index”, and obtain a scale of 1 (lower level of proactivity) to 12 (higher level of proactivity). An Excel spreadsheet matrix was designed and used for each coder, and the results were then aggregated and analyzed in the SPSS statistical processing package.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

To answer the research questions about how the use of sources and reporting practices varied between the four selected newspapers, and what dimensions—type of media or country— better explain the variance, we made a first descriptive approach to some format and content indicators that allowed us to notice differences and nuances in the coverage of the four newspapers. In the first part, we will present the results on how the different newspapers hierarchized the information in question, and the actors and institutions that were given greater exposure. Then, we will proceed to show the percentage of articles with presence of proactive journalism (through 12 separate indicators) in each newspaper. Finally, we will compare the average, coefficients of significance and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine which of the variables—country or type of media— had greater power to explain the variance between results.

HIERARCHY, THEMES AND EMPHASIS

To answer the first research question we have the following results. In general, FIFA, with more than 70% of the sample, was the institution that gathered more coverage in the four newspapers. Comparatively, UEFA (6%) and Concacaf (3.9%) obtained a much lower interest as the central focus of the articles. Regarding FMF,

this was only the focus of 2.4% of the sample, while the RFEF was of 2.1%. That is, the national federations of both countries were neither an actor nor an object of scrutiny in the analyzed newspapers, which preferred to turn their attention to other federations instead of what might be happening in their own country. There are slight variations per newspaper: for the case of Concacaf, on average, *Reforma*, *Récord* and *Marca* had it as the main focus only in 4.3% of their articles, while *El País* only in 1.3% of their articles. On the other hand, UEFA was the main focus of 7.9% in stories from *El País* and 11.7% from *Marca*. In the Mexican newspapers UEFA was present, on average, only in 3.7% of the article as the main actor of the story. It is also worth mentioning that, of the four newspapers, *El País* has had up to 10% fewer FIFA-focused stories (63.2%), even though it was the institution that was most highlighted.

As for specific actors in whom the information was focused, Joseph Blatter garnered 32.5% of the articles in the sample; Jack Warner, of Concacaf, 5.6%; and Michel Platini, of UEFA, 9.9%. It should be noted that the “serious” newspapers targeted less the former Swiss leader than their tabloid counterparts, with *Marca* being the newspaper with more articles focused on this character (42.6%).

In addition, it should be noted that although the main theme of each article revolved around FIFA, with the exception of the RFEF, the rest of the institutions were cited significantly less. For example, in total, 45.2% of the entire sample included quotes or

references from a FIFA source –officials, newsletters, etc., 15.8% of UEFA, 7.5% of Concacaf and only 1.7% of the analyzed items have any source from the Mexican Football Federation, which implies that it was not a subject of interest. As for the sources of the Royal Spanish Football Federation, 5.4% of the items included some source of that institution.

In figure 1 we can see that the issue that captured the attention of the four newspapers and the highest number of articles was definitely the succession process and the resignations processes in the different football organizations, with 28.9% of the total sample, followed by the judicial processes of those implied in the case (19.3%) bribery and the purchase of votes for World Cup venues (17.6%), and, finally, corruption, tax evasion and money laundering (12.2%), an issue that could have triggered more follow-up by the newspapers, given the preponderance of Spain and Mexico in their respective confederations.

However, there is variation on the follow-up of a particular topic among the different newspapers. We see that *Marca* is the least interested in the issue of corruption and tax evasion (with 4.3%), while *El País* focused almost five more times than the others on these topics (19.7%). In Mexico, the serious newspaper *Reforma* (14.6%) also focused more than its tabloid counterpart *Récord* (10.8%) on the issue of corruption. But if one compares, by contrast, by type of media, *Reforma* was less interested in the matter than *El País*, and *Récord* more than *Marca*.

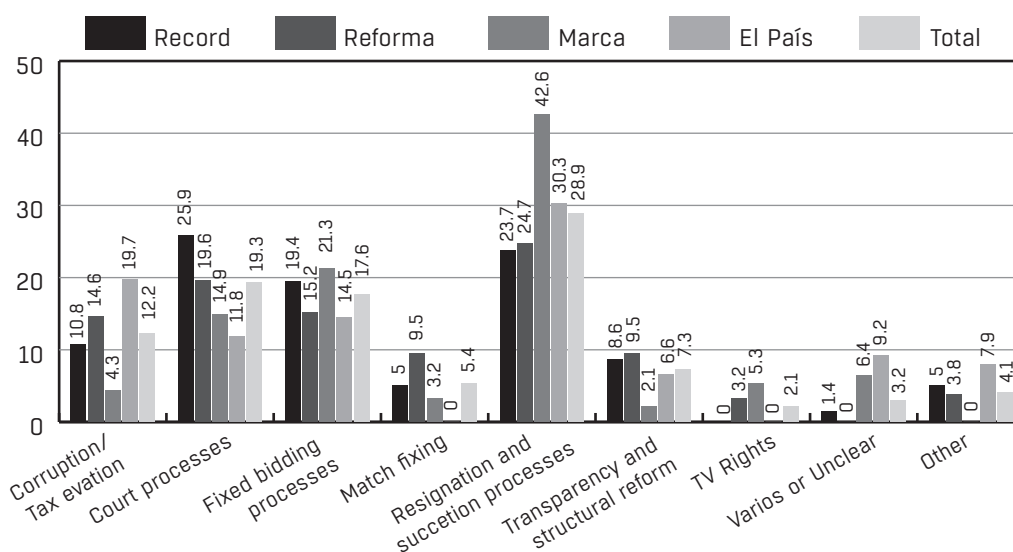


Figure 1 Prevailing topics in FIGGate coverage (% of news items)

Source: Own elaboration.

Other issues were also relevant in varying degrees. For the succession proceedings, the Spanish papers were the ones that covered it the most (*Marca*, 42.6%, *El País*, 30.3%), while Mexican newspapers became more interested in judicial and criminal proceedings (*Récord*, 25.9%). Mexican newspapers, especially *Reforma* (9.5%), were also more interested than their Spanish counterparts in two issues: transparency and structural reform of football institutions, and match fixings (also 9.5% for *Reforma*). On the other hand, the tabloid newspapers in both countries were five or six percentage points higher than their reference counterparts in covering the issue of bribes and fixed bidding processes for Worldcup hosts.

The only issue where the differences and similarities are not between country or media is in TV broadcasting rights, because neither *Récord* (tabloid) nor *El País* (serious) published a single article emphasizing that particular aspect, while *Marca* was the one that did it the most, with 5.3% of its stories, and in the case of *Reforma*, it was 3.2%. It should be noted that television rights should be an important issue in Mexico due to the high TV concentration prevailing in the country, with two consortiums, Televisa and TV Azteca, hoarding the open TV market and the national team broadcasting rights. The undue influence that television broadcasters have on the Mexican Football League and the National Team during the international championship broadcasts has been a subject of growing criticism and so this issue should have prompted Mexican journalists to investigate possible improper acts during the last World Cups², but clearly failed to do so. As we see, our first hypothesis has been proved: newspapers in general tended to focus on the mere figure of Joseph Blatter and his succession process, rather than on the possibilities of local corruption and the root of the problem.

USE OF SOURCES AND REPORTING PRACTICES: PROACTIVE JOURNALISM

The second part of our study comparatively seeks the indicators of good journalism –or proactivity– in the Spanish and Mexican sports press during the coverage of *FIFAGate*. In addition to the use of varied sources and active reporting techniques, we assume that a greater and more varied use of sources would also reflect investigative journalism and a deep follow-up on scandals. Contextual inquiry, data collection and research, and reporting methods –unlike newsletters or press releases– imply that the media is actively engaged in finding news leads.

Sourcing pattern by newspaper

A first key finding is that the average number of quoted sources per story did not reach even two of them. Although the total sample average is $M=1.51$ ($SD=1.13$), there was a significant variation between newspapers, with tabloid newspapers being the ones that least used sources on average, but also the Mexican newspapers with respect to their counterpart. *Récord* had an average of $M=1.20$ ($SD=.69$) sources per article with respect to *Marca*, with $M=1.43$ ($SD=1.31$); while *Reforma* obtained an average of $M=1.68$ ($SD=1.1$) sources per story and *El País* obtained the highest with an average of $M=1.86$ ($SD=1.13$) sources per story. This first result may indicate, for the Mexican case, a tendency to prefer the fragmentation of the information in several separate articles published in the same page than the compilation and contrasting of sources in a single, more extensive article. This is supported by the fact that Mexican newspapers have the highest number of items in the sample, while *El País* has the least (their articles are usually longer). We can infer from this finding that Mexican newspapers privilege more the number of articles with a single source than the writing of few well documented and elaborated articles.

Proactive journalism per newspaper and indicator

Compared to the other newspapers, *El País* was the most proactive newspaper out of the four of them. It was the first whose articles presented Explanation or interpretation of the facts (34.2%), Context (82.9%), Long or medium extension (43.4%), Identified author (85%), Source balance (43.4%), Data gathering and research (21.1%), Reportages (25%), and finally, the variable that interests us the most: Investigative journalism (11.8%).

For its part, the Spanish tabloid *Marca* scored the highest of all in only one indicator among the newspapers analyzed, Use of experts (19.1%), which is one of the indicators with the lowest presence in all newspapers (only 7% of articles); it was also the lowest newspaper in Use of evidence and hard data (25.5%), Use of context (17%) and External investigation (6.4%).

As for the Mexican press, *Reforma* stands out in the Use of documents as sources (32.9%), and Show of evidence and hard data (63.9%); however, it was the lowest of all having stories with an Identified author (36.7%). Finally, the Mexican tabloid *Récord* did not peak in any indicator and was the lowest in several more: Use of documents as sources (4.3%), Use of expert sources (2.2%), Explanation of the journalist (12.9%),

Long and semi-long articles (18.7%), Balance of sources (15.8%), data gathering and research (2.9%); lastly, its reportages only reached 1.4% of its publications in the matter, and it did not have any article as a by-product of investigative journalism. Comparatively, the reference newspapers *El País* and *Reforma* were more proactive than their tabloid counterparts, but with large differences: the spanish were better off than the Mexicans, thus partially confirming the second hypothesis.

The sports press: indicators of proactivity

If we consider the overall sample, the highest indicators generally, are, in this order, Context (present in 64% of the sample), Author identification (59.5%), Use of evidence and hard data (57.9%) and Publication of extensive articles (31.3%). The lowest presence in the overall news sample of *FIFAGate* were the following indicators: Use of expert sources (7.1%), Reportages (6.2%) and Investigative journalism, with only 3.6% of the total. However, a key finding for the study is that, out of the articles that were the by-product of self-investigation, more than half were about FIFA and Joseph Blatter and none had as their main focus the FMF or RFEF. In fact, no Mexican official was cited in any investigative

article, and only four articles cited a Spanish official. That is to say, there was no investigation into the possible corruption cases of Mexican and Spanish officials, but instead about FIFA in general. These findings may indicate that even in the scant percentage of investigative journalism found, the initiative may not have been the journalist's but the in-depth coverage made by news agencies and the judicial investigation itself, even if the 17 articles rated as "investigative journalism" in the entire sample were by-lined by a journalist.

THE EXPLANATORY VARIABLE: COUNTRY OR TYPE OF MEDIA

In order to answer our third research question and to know which factor –type of media or country–best explains the results obtained for each indicator of proactivity, we performed the chi-square (χ^2) significance test that is applicable to categorical variables, where our dependent variables were each of the twelve indicators of proactivity, and the two independent variables were the type of media (reference vs. tabloid) and the country in question (Mexico vs. Spain). Subsequently, through the calculation of the Cramer's V contingency coefficient, we measured the effect size

	Tabloid % of items (N=233)	Reference % of items (N=234)	Chi Square χ^2	Significance	Effect Size Cramer's V
Use of document sources	10.3	24.4	16.095	.000***	.186
Use of expert sources	9	5.1	2.6	.101	.076
Evidence and hard data	27.9	62	54.75	.000***	.342
Context	38.6	67.1	37.972	.000***	.285
Investigative journalism	2.6	4.7	1.504	.22	.057
External investigation	11.6	19.7	5.765	.16	.111
Explanation/ Interpretation	15	31.2	17.182	.000***	.192
Reportages	2.6	9.8	10.548	.001***	.150
Long stories	24.9	37.6	8.782	.003**	.137
Identified author	65.2	53.8	6.287	.012	.116
Source balance	18	27.4	5.78	.016	.111
Data gathering-Research	6	10.7	3.334	.68	.084

Table 1: Relationship between the type of media and proactivity indicators

Result is significant at * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Source: Own elaboration.

of the significance, that is, the percentage of variance that explains the independent variable (type of media or country) regarding the proactivity indicator. That is, we aimed to verify whether the presence of indicators varies due to the impact of the independent variable (significant relation) or if they vary due to chance.

Table 1 shows the following results for the indicators that are best explained by the type of media. The first two groups of columns show the percentage of articles that met each indicator with respect to the type of media (reference vs. tabloid). The following column presents the Chi-square results, and the last two, which are the most important ones to answer our question, show the significance of the relationship between variables and the size of the effect (using the Cramer's V coefficient).

The results show that there is a significant relationship between the type of media and six indicators of proactivity, especially in five of them: use of document source, provision of evidence, context, explanation and the genre of reportages. By Cramer's V index we see that the relationship between proactivity and type of media as well as significant is relatively strong for two indicators: evidence and hard data as well as Context.

That is, the type of media does influence these indicators, since it explains 34% and 28% of the variance in these indicators, respectively. As we saw in previous sections, the reference newspapers tend to have better results in these areas. Likewise, the media type of the newspaper in question explains 19% of the variance in the presence of Explanation and interpretation in the stories, and 15% of the use of reportages.

Therefore, the findings reveal that the type of media—in this case, the reference Sports sections, as we saw in previous sections—determines the depth of information about *FIFAGate*, rather than the journalistic culture of the country in question. On the contrary, purely sports newspapers confirm their status of tabloid newspapers covering the topics more superficially, even though technically they are specialized papers.

Notwithstanding the above, there are other indicators that are more associated with the journalistic culture of each country than with the type of media, as shown in table 2.

When we compare by the country variable, the results show that the rest of the proactivity indicators are much better explained by the national journalistic

	México % of items (N=297)	Spain % of items (N=170)	Chi Square χ^2	Significance	Effect Size Cramer's V
Use of document sources	19.5	13.5	2.714	.099**	.076
Use of expert sources	4	12.4	11.376	.001***	.156
Evidence and hard data	47.8	40	2.666	.103	.076
Context	56.6	46.5	4.422	.035**	.097
Investigative journalism	.7	8.8	20.473	.000***	.209
External investigation	13.8	18.8	2.065	.151	.066
Explanation/ Interpretation	19.5	29.4	5.940	.015	.113
Reportages	2	13.5	24.589	.000***	.229
Long stories	27.3	38.2	6.046	.014*	.114
Identified author	43.4	87.6	87.722	.000***	.433
Source balance	17.8	31.2	10.951	.001***	.153
Data gathering-Research	4.4	15.3	16.835	.000***	.190

Table 2: Relationship between the country and proactivity indicators

Result is significant at: * $p < .5$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .005$

Source: Own elaboration.

culture than by the type of media, since the relationship between variables is significant. We find that the indicators such as Use of experts, investigative journalism, Reportage, by-lining the articles and data gathering and researching and the balance of sources hold a significant relation regarding the country in question. That is, for these indicators, the country determines the differences in the performance of proactivity. Considering the sport journalistic culture of each country with respect to previous sections, we can conclude that Spanish journalism does better things in these areas than their Mexican counterparts. In particular, the results indicate that the largest effect size found so far for any variable is in the stories with a by-line. That is, 43% of the variation between authored and un-authored stories about *FIFAGate* is explained by the country from which the newspaper originates: Spanish sports journalists do sign their articles, while Mexicans do not tend to do so. The country from which the newspaper comes is strongly linked with two indicators: with investigative journalism, explaining 20% of the variance, and the publication of reportages, with 22% of the variance, indicating that there is a sports press (the Spanish) that differs substantively from its (Mexican) counterpart in doing in-depth journalism. Our third hypothesis, therefore, is not verified at the level of proactivity by specific indicator. The orientation of the newspaper does explain some features of proactivity, but the country explains others much better.

VARIANCE OF THE AGGREGATE OVERALL PROACTIVITY INDEX BY COUNTRY AND TYPE OF MEDIA

So far we have seen the results of proactivity regarding each of its specific indicators; in this regard, the results show that the country in question has greater power to explain some indicators, while the type of media has other explanatory powers. But which of the two variables has the greatest definitive weight for proactive journalism in general? To answer this question associated with our third research question, we created an aggregated scale (from 1 to 12) using all the indicators to be able to extract the average of aggregated proactivity and the standard deviation, and later we performed a test of analysis of variance (ANOVA) to measure the significance and size of the effect, since the index became an interval type of variable.

Table 3 shows the overall results of the aggregated proactivity index in the *FIFAGate* coverage by newspaper, country, type of media and total. The analyzed sample has, in general, a low index ($M=2.93$) of aggregated proactivity. That is, on average, each news item analyzed has less than three of the twelve indicators. The results indicate that *El País* is the most proactive newspaper overall, with an average index of $M=4.63$ and a standard deviation that suggests that it had articles that fulfilled proactivity with up to seven out of twelve indicators, and some with none. This result is far superior to that obtained in the whole sample,

Country	Media	Proactivity index average (Scale from 1 to 12)	Standard deviation
MEXICO	<i>Récord</i>	2.07	1.82
	<i>Reforma</i>	3.01	2.15
	Total Mexico	2.57	2.06
SPAIN	<i>Marca</i>	2.68	2.09
	<i>El País</i>	4.63	2.39
	Total Spain	3.55	2.43
Totals	Total tabloids	2.32	1.95
	Total reference	3.53	2.36
	Overall	2.93	2.25

Table 3: Proactivity index in the sports press of Mexico and Spain

Source: Own elaboration.

which illustrates that sports journalism in that newspaper stands out from the others and may indicate that it has developed a unique journalistic culture. In contrast, *Reforma* had an average index of $M=3.01$, just a few decimals above the Spanish tabloid *Marca*, which brought out $M=2.68$. Definitely, as seen at the individual indicator level, Mexican *Récord* scored the lowest level of aggregated proactivity out of the four, averaging only $M=2.07$, that is, only two points of twelve in proactivity per item. In conclusion, the Spanish sports press generally had more proactivity than Mexico's by almost a point of difference, and the reference newspapers have more than a point of proactivity with respect to the specialized tabloids.

Then, in comparative terms, already with the aggregated indicators, a question remains: Which one did it better in general in covering *FIFAGate*: The Spanish sports press or the serious press? The variance test (ANOVA) suggests that both are highly and equally significant ($p = .000$ for country variable vs. $p = .000$ for variable type of media), but the partial eta squares (η^2), which measures the size and power of the effect, suggests that the type of media is slightly more important than the country to explain the proactivity results. The type of media explains almost 10% of the variance ($F=50.81$, $\eta^2=.099$) in proactivity with respect to the country, which explains only 6% of the variance ($F=30.47$, $\eta^2 = .062$). With this, our third hypothesis is confirmed at the level of aggregated proactivity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results presented in this paper lead us, first of all, to give a complete answer to the research questions posed by the study; and, secondly, to verify the formulated hypotheses. Thus, regarding the first question ("How important was *FIFAGate* and which actors or institutions were given greater coverage?"), the analysis shows that this global scandal caught the attention of the four media studied, although in this coverage there are notable differences between the Spanish and Mexican press. With respect to the players and institutions to which the media gave more prevalence, FIFA is clearly ahead of regional confederations and national federations; while Joseph Blatter was single-handedly the main actor of the event, confirming the first of our hypotheses. Comparatively, the national federations did not generate any kind of investigative interest, which

means that the global inquiry and criminal case did not elicit the active searching of news leads at the national level. Equally, the issue that attracted the most media attention in all the four newspapers was the succession process and resignations of top-ranked executives in the different football organizations, ahead of court proceedings or cases of corruption, which clearly constituted a lost opportunity to do investigative journalism in the sports press of Mexico and Spain. As for the comparative measurement of indicators of quality journalism, in no case the average number of sources per item was even of two, which can denote an insufficient work of investigation and follow-up of news. The 'serious' newspapers of both countries have an average of sources superior to the one of the 'tabloids', and the average of the Spanish press surpasses that of Mexico in this aspect. Mexican newspapers prioritize the quantity of stories on the subject, although they only have one source, while *El País* opts for fewer pieces, but more documented and with a deeper treatment.

Our second hypothesis was that general (or serious) reference newspapers would tend to be more proactive in their coverage of the *FIFAGate* than those purely of sports content (or tabloid). The data obtained confirm that *El País* ranks as the most proactive daily in almost all analyzed indicators (articles with explanation or interpretation of the facts, Context, Extensive articles, identified by-lined articles, Balance of sources, Stories based on data collection and own research and reportages). The specialized newspapers tend to be more passive in the items analyzed and the Mexican newspapers rarely scored high on any indicator.

In addition, writing for the section of a serious daily or for a specialized sports tabloid will significantly determine performance in five variables—Use of documents, Use of evidence and hard data, Context, Interpretation and extensive stories—, which have to do with the format of the newspapers and the space and time that they allocate to a topic. On the other hand, writing for a newspaper in Mexico or in Spain is fundamental to use or not six key variables of depth, such as author's signature in the articles, Publication of reportages, Investigative journalism—key variable for the study—, Use of data gathering and research, and Use of experts. Only the presence of an indicator—External investigation—has nothing to do with the type of media or country. Even if each variable explains almost the same number of indicators, if we consider them

in aggregate form, the type of media has more weight than the country to explain the proactivity or lack of it, which means that, for *FIFAGate* coverage, proactive journalism varied more between media types (especially in Spain, where *El País* almost doubled the average proactivity of *Marca*, while in Mexico *Reforma* exceeded by less than a point in average to *Récord*), that between countries, where Spanish journalism is just under a point more proactive than the Mexican. This may be due to the great school of journalism that has driven *El País* as a reference sports section in Spain (and Latin America) since Mexican sports journalism may be reflecting the inertia of passivity that creeps into generalist journalism (Márquez Ramírez, 2012). Although a newspaper such as *Reforma* has been a great reference of investigative journalism in Mexico, the results reveal that this school has not extended to the sports section, at least not for this case with huge investigative potential. On the other hand, journalism supposedly specialized in sports is not showing any signs of wanting to engage in investigative journalism,

but to deal with the issues with superficiality and in a passive or reactive way: reacting to the subject rather than actively doing first hand reporting. In this regard, it is worth noting the limitations that sports journalists find increasingly lack of access to the sporting bodies as sources of information (Bourgeois, 1995), and have to work with a scarcity of human and economic resources in newsrooms.

One implication of our study is that sports journalism would not necessarily corroborate the results of comparative studies on political journalism, which indicate that reporting style tends to vary more between countries than between media types within the same country (Van Dale, De Vreese & Albaek, 2012), suggesting that the type of media and school of each newspaper can be a fundamental variable for the configuration of journalistic sports cultures. However, to explore this finding on a larger scale, we suggest that future studies include more extensive samples of sports journalism and compare it with other types of journalism, and include more media outlets and more countries in the comparison.

FOOTNOTES

1. The authors are grateful for the funding provided by the Research Department of the Universidad Iberoamericana of Mexico City, for this study, as well as research assistants Cedric Gall, Víctor Hugo Ángeles, Juan Carlos Colín and José Luis Lemini. We also thank Dr. Rob Johns of the University of Essex for his invaluable advice, and the anonymous reviewers of the article for their helpful suggestions.

2. A report from Mexican newspaper *El Economista* notes that four out of every ten dollars that enter the Mexican Football Federation are on television (broadcasting rights), since only Televisa has 63.5% of the television rights of the total of football clubs. The newspaper quotes an ex-leader, Alberto de la Torre, saying: "Why do we have a federation that makes the decisions if in the end we do what the broadcasters want?" (Herrera & Hernández, 2013).

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