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Fake News and Football. The Qatar World Cup as a Showcase for Disinformation

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Disinformation has increased with the advent of new communication channels and is considered one of the most critical global risks according to the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2024. In sports journalism, particularly in football, the proliferation of fake news about transfers, match-fixing and rumours has spread significantly, generating mistrust.

This study analyses disinformation in the Qatar 2022 World Cup through a content analysis based on the classification of information clutter (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

Denials from verifying agencies such as Newtral, Maldita and Efe Verifica were examined using SPSS for data analysis. The results reveal hoaxes related to the war in Ukraine, respect for human rights in Qatar, and prominent figures such as Messi, Ronaldo and World Cup winners Argentina.

The findings confirm a growing link between disinformation and hate

La desinformación ha aumentado debido a los nuevos canales de comunicación y es considerada de los riesgos globales más graves según el Global Risks Report 2024 del Foro Económico Mundial. En el periodismo deportivo, particularmente en el fútbol, la proliferación de noticias falsas sobre fichajes, amaños y rumores genera desconfianza.

Este estudio analiza la desinformación en el Mundial de Fútbol Catar 2022, con un análisis de contenido basado en la clasificación del desorden de la información (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

Se examinaron los desmentidos de agencias verificadoras como Newtral, Maldita y Efe Verifica, utilizando SPSS para el análisis de los datos. Los resultados revelan bulos relacionados con la guerra en Ucrania, el respeto a los derechos humanos en Catar y figuras como Messi, Ronaldo y Argentina, ganadora del Mundial.

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speech, as warned by Blanco-Castilla et al. *(2022), and underline the need to sanction those spreading disinformation that fosters hatred and polarisation.*

The spread of fake news is a major risk that requires regulatory measures and media literacy programmes to reduce the negative impact on society and sport. Additionally, it is essential to enforce collaboration from platforms such as Twitter, where anonymity enables impunity, to identify perpetrators and protect democracy and citizen security.

Keywords: *information disorders, sports communication, football, verification, hate speech.*

Los resultados confirman una creciente relación entre desinformación y discursos de odio, como alertan Blanco-Castilla et al. *(2022), y subrayan la necesidad de sancionar a los autores de la desinformación que fomenten odio y polarización.*

La propagación de noticias falsas constituye un riesgo importante que demanda medidas normativas y programas de alfabetización mediática, a fin de reducir el impacto negativo en la sociedad y el deporte. Resulta esencial forzar la colaboración de plataformas como Twitter, donde el anonimato otorga impunidad, para identificar responsables y proteger la democracia y la seguridad ciudadana.

Palabras clave: *desórdenes informativos, comunicación deportiva, fútbol, verificación, discurso de odio.*

The Football World Cup is the world's premier international sporting tournament, which brings together the world's leading national football teams. The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (known by its acronym FIFA), as the governing body of football federations worldwide, is the organiser of this sporting event considered the most important in the world after the Olympic Games, which also take place every four years and whose last edition took place in Paris between 26 July and 11 August 2024. Each time, the World Cup is organised in a different host country. Its twentieth edition, which is the one that concerns us in this investigation, took place in Qatar, with two unprecedented particularities: for the first time in the history of the competition it was held in a country of the Arab world and, the tournament, which is normally held in summer, had to be postponed to autumn to avoid the high summer temperatures in Qatar, finally being held from 20 November to 18 December 2022.

However, since its selection in 2010, Qatar's designation as host of the World Cup has been marked by controversy. For years, accusations of corruption and bribery of FIFA members; concerns about the host country's failure to respect fundamental human rights and the absence of basic freedoms; poor working conditions for migrant workers; problems arising from the country's extreme

climate; its lack of a football tradition; and the alleged influence of some political figures in deciding the choice of the venue were some of the issues that were a recurrent source of media debate, but also a source of controversy among the international community, until the World Cup was held (Romero, 2022).

The celebration of these major sporting events focuses the attention of millions of people around the world, generating a massive flow of content both in the media and on social networks. In its annual report for the same year as the World Cup (2022), FIFA described the World Cup as a "formidable" sporting success that "delivered unparalleled financial results". At the same time, the report noted that football fans considered it to have been the best World Cup in history.

According to the FIFA report FIFA (2022), this World Cup achieved an audience of close to 5 billion people who interacted with the World Cup and followed the matches through digital platforms and channels. The report relies on a study by the consultancy Nielsen to estimate 93.6 million posts across all social platforms, with a cumulative reach of 262 billion posts and 5.95 billion interactions. According to Statista (2022), this is the highest audience figures for a World Cup in the last two decades, surpassing with 1.4 billion viewers the results achieved in the previous edition held in Russia.

The competition thus became the first major international sporting event open to the public in the aftermath of the pandemic. FIFA put the number of spectators who watched the matches live at over 3.4 million, with an average stadium attendance of 96.3 % of the stadiums' capacity, which included Qatari women who were exceptionally allowed access to the matches. All this in a context where misinformation had already demonstrated its fatal consequences as a major international social problem.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Disinformation and the role of verification agencies

Disinformation is a phenomenon that affects the journalistic world in general and the media is often accused of being more superficial and sensationalist and increasingly prone to take journalistic shortcuts in news gathering (Aelst *et al.*, 2017). Sports journalism is one of the journalistic specialties where distrust has grown the most. Özel and Alkan (2023) argue that sports journalism is particularly vulnerable to ethical breaches, although it often strives to maintain strict adherence to professional standards.

The rise of digital journalism has intensified the problem of fake news in sports reporting. Fake sports news represents a complex phenomenon with profound social, political and economic implications that erode trust in the mainstream media (Muqing, 2023), provoking attitudes that compromise individual rights, but also security and social stability.

Of all sports, football is the one that concentrates the most news, as it attracts large crowds of fans all over the world. Therefore, as the most watched and

followed sport in the world, it is also the one that generates the largest number of fake news stories.

Rojas-Torrijos (2012) suggests that sports journalism often experiences a 'futbolisation', characterised by an overwhelming amount of football-related information. This phenomenon makes it difficult to distinguish between meaningful news and mere noise, especially during the biannual transfer periods in major European leagues (Rojas Torrijos and Simoes, 2021).

Spurs, fake transfers, rumours about athletes, match-fixing, etc., are the most common hoaxes in this sporting discipline. In this sense, the mixture of facts and rumours in the news coverage of football transfers is widespread (Rojas-Torrijos and Simoes Mello, 2023) and this can be extrapolated to other aspects of the so-called "beautiful game" or "king of sports".

In turn, misinformation in football news is, as Nielsen and Graves (2017, p. 1) state, "a problem generated by a combination of media that airs it, sources that contribute to it, and platforms that help it spread". The relentless pursuit of interactions and clicks leads to the multiplication of unverified news and hoaxes that attempt to provoke conjecture and the viralisation of such misleading content with varying degrees of intentionality.

Footballers have become media stars and are considered, by a large part of the fans, an object of curiosity and devotion, which means that these audiences closely follow their movements through the news and, above all, through social networks. In the age of misinformation, these players are also involved in hoaxes that go viral in a variety of ways and which cause their personal brand to be damaged at some point. The use of these techniques to exploit fame or discredit personalities or institutions is not new. Its origin dates back to antiquity with numerous examples in classical Rome. However, this practice has evolved to the present day, thanks to the communicative possibilities that technological advances have favoured. In the same way that Gutenberg's printing press favoured the dissemination of information, the advent of mass media such as radio and television increased the dissemination of satirical news that was interpreted as true, being transmitted publicly through word-of-mouth (Posetti and Matthews, 2018, pp. 1-2).

Far from decreasing, these practices have increased dramatically due to the new communication channels and their dissemination possibilities (Jerónimo Sánchez-Beato, 2022). In the 21st century, social networks have made it possible to disseminate information among peers, which favours credibility and trust in the communication received among the communities existing on these platforms, fostered by the echoes generated by the algorithms themselves. Technology once again stands as an amplifier of the reach and impact of fake news, globalising and collapsing the system, at a speed that offers little chance of being contrasted, let alone disproved. This only polarises opinion and reinforces confirmation bias, choosing to share information that reinforces their point of view, leading many users to believe they have the right to choose or create their own reality of the facts (Posetti and Matthews, 2018, pp. 1-2). Social media have boosted the transmission of falsehoods and rumours, increasing information clutter, as Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) point out.

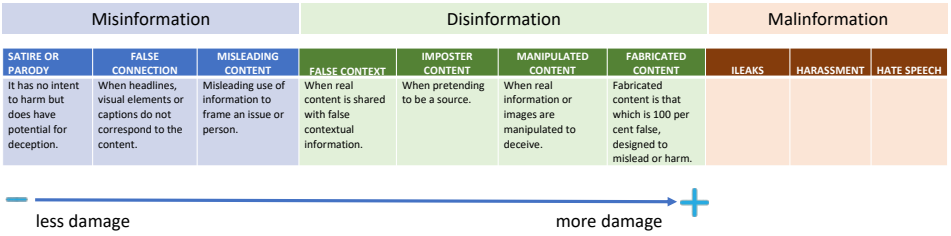
This phenomenon has been identified as the most serious global risk for the last few years, according to the latest edition of the Global Risks Report 2024, conducted by the World Economic Forum. Fake news emerges with the aim of breaking or reinforcing belief frameworks (Rodríguez Fernández, 2019). To advise on policies and practices aimed at countering disinformation, the European Commission created a high-level group of experts, known as "the HLEG", which in its final report (2018) deliberately avoids using the term "fake news" to put the focus on the problem of disinformation. They propose a multidimensional approach that must be tackled and contained from the collective, as it goes far beyond:

> Capture the complex problem of disinformation, which involves content that is not actually or completely "fake" but fabricated information blended with facts, and practices that go well beyond anything resembling "news" to include some forms of automated accounts used for astroturfing,networks of fake followers, fabricated or manipulated videos, targeted advertising, organized trolling, visual memes, and much more (European Commission, 2018, p. 10).

However, they warn that disinformation does not reflect those forms of deliberate, but not misleading, distortion of facts, such as satire or parody. Nor should the term be linked to the creation and dissemination of illegal content, defamation, hate speech or incitement to violence, which are punishable under European or intentional law.

Information disorders are the main communicative concern of the 21st century (Cea and Palomo, 2021). In this sense, Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan (2017) established three levels of misinformation (misinformation: erroneous or false information, although the sender believes it to be true; disinformation: false information from the conscious sender; and malinformation: malicious information that, based on reality, is used to do harm), with seven categories to identify information disorder while incorporating the intentionality of doing harm (Figure 1). Ireton and Ponsetti (2020, p. 45) echoes this classification and underlines that malicious reporting "goes against the standards and ethics of journalism".

Figure 1. Misinformation, disinformation and malinformation



Source: Own elaboration based on Wardle and Derakhshan (2017).

Faced with this, news verification or *fact checking* agencies have demonstrated their relevance when it comes to dismantling hoaxes and fighting against

information, although given the speed at which disinformation spreads, their action may be insufficient and needs to be complemented with other techniques such as *framing* and with the help of technology (Tuñón and Sánchez, 2022). Their task is simple: to detect and disprove hoaxes in order to offer the audience truthful explanations and answers to combat the falsehoods that circulate in the public sphere (Coddington *et al*., 2014).

This points to a new journalistic genre that, in addition to verifying, must reconstruct reality based on false news, which it must deconstruct and transform, using the same weapons of dissemination: social networks and citizen counter-power. Verification journalism is established as a professional adaptation to the current context, which gives journalistic work a new democratic role, in defence of citizens' freedom of information, "by evolving proactively in line with the challenges posed by the digital and mobile revolution and the new habits of information consumption" (Rodríguez Pérez, 2020, p. 248).

Rojas (2020) assures that the international standard for this type of agency is established by the International Fact Checking Network (IFCN) through a code of principles to which agencies wishing to be part of this network of verifiers must adhere. Currently, in Spain, there are three news verification agencies that are members of the IFCN: Newtral, EFE Verifica and Maldita.es.

The sports press has always occupied a preferential position in the consumption of information by the Spanish population, with four sports newspapers in the Top 10 of the Spanish press, well above the readership of the general press. In this sense, *Diario Marca* was the most widely read newspaper in Spain in 2023, with an average daily readership of 978,000. To these readers must be added the same number of readers accumulated by *Diario As* (402,000), *Mundo Deportivo* (261,000) and *Sports* (200,000), according to data provided by Statista (Orús, 2024). However, these data show a decreasing trend in the consumption of sports media over the last decade, in parallel to a growth in the consumption of this content on social platforms.

Due to its own characteristics of information consumption and media landscape, the Spanish context is particularly vulnerable to misinformation due to a combination of media and sociological factors. In the media sphere, extreme polarisation, the loss of the traditional media's information monopoly and the predominance of opinion over analysis stand out. Sociologically, there are low reading rates, low scientific literacy and limited knowledge of English, as well as a growing distrust of the media as a source of information, which creates fertile terrain for the dissemination of unverified information on various aspects of society (Rodríguez-Martínez *et al*., 2021). In the Spanish context, audiences tend to be selectively exposed to ideologically aligned media, which can contribute to the creation of echo chambers and filter bubbles, factors that facilitate the spread of misinformation such as Valera-Ordaz (2023).

Hate speech and football

The United Nations (UN) defines hate speech on its website as a form of communication or behaviour that "attacks or uses derogatory or discriminatory

language in reference to a person or group on the basis of who they are; in other words, on the basis of their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other forms of identity (UN, n.d.). This expression is used to designate unlawful, or at least immoral, actions of the most diverse nature (Díaz Soto, 2015).

Hate speech is not new either (Krippendorff, 2010; Blanco *et al*. 2022), as there have always been ways of propagating rejection of what is different (Salaverría *et al*. 2020). It materialises in violent, offensive or discriminatory forms of expression, which through images, cartoons or illustrations, memes, chants, gestures and symbols, are shared mainly through the Internet, although it can occur in any social encounter (UN, n.d.). What is new is the fact that social networks have made it possible to amplify their echo, multiplying their propagation and impact with the help of algorithms, at a speed that makes it impossible to verify the veracity of the information. These messages often inflame emotions online, confirming preconceived prejudices about a given issue and turning it into a trend, especially when the discourse transcends the traditional media (Martín *et al*., 2022).

Football grounds are becoming the scene of hate speech, where isolated events take on media dimensions. The themes present in hate speech are not limited to strictly sporting matters. Football is often intertwined with various ideological issues, such as politics, sex, power, discrimination (racial, religious, nationalist, sexual), as well as with certain ethical and moral evaluations (Gándara, 1997).

The profile of the "hater" is mostly male and coincides with sports fans, more specifically, football fans (Blanco *et al*. 2022). They operate under the impunity conferred by anonymity on social platforms and by the feeling of unreality provided by the digital environment, where it is difficult to find the initial authors of these messages (Reagle, 2015; Martín *et al*., 2022).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of this research is to analyse the phenomenon of disinformation (verifying agencies, tone used, protagonists, resources...) in the World Cup in Qatar, organised by FIFA and which took place from 20 November to 18 December 2022 in five cities in this Middle Eastern country.

The specific objectives to be pursued are:

- SO1. Find out how agencies identify the different hoaxes about the World Cup in Qatar.
- SO2. To know which are the platforms for the dissemination of hoaxes and their relationship with the identification tags of the Agencies.
- SO3. Analyse the origin of the hoax in relation to the classification of disinformation disorder.

A content analysis with a mixed approach was carried out on all the denials of the three most important verification agencies in Spain: *Newtral, Maldita and Efe*

Verifica. The selection of the verifications was made taking into account the time frame between November and December 2022 and discarding all those that had nothing to do with the sporting event that is the subject of this research.

An analysis template was used for the study (Table 1) based on the methodology validated by Almansa-Martínez *et al*. (2022) and on Wardle and Derakhshan's (2017) classification of misinformation and disinformation and malinformation.

Table 1. Coding table

Headline and URL	
Verification agency	Newtral; Maldita; Efe Verifica
Tags issued by the verification agency	*Post-Codification*
Date	
Thematic (suggested tags)	*Post-Codification*
Origin of the hoax	Anonymous; not anonymous
Protagonists	
Dissemination platform	Social networks in general; Twitter; Facebook; TikTok; Instagram; WhatsApp; Web/Media
Tone	Positive; Negative; Neutral
Information disorder (misinformation/ disinformation)	Satire or parody; false connection; misleading content; false context; impostor content; manipulated content; fabricated content; fabricated content
Language	Text; Image/capture; Audio; Video; Meme
Intention (malinformation)	Hate speech; Leaks; Harassment; Harassment
Impact	Discredit (of a country, towards a person or group; to rival fans)

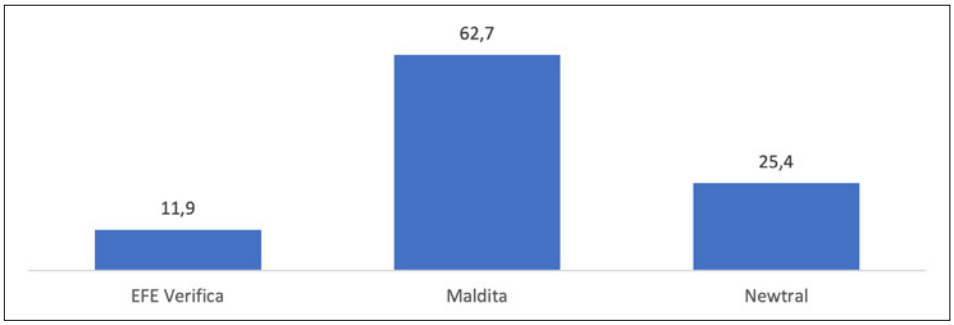
Source: Own elaboration.

The SPSS v. 28.0 statistical software was used to process the data.

RESULTS

Agencies have verified a total of 59 news items or hoaxes in the period analysed during the World Cup in Qatar, with Maldita being the agency with the highest number of verifications carried out (61.7 %) (Figure 2).

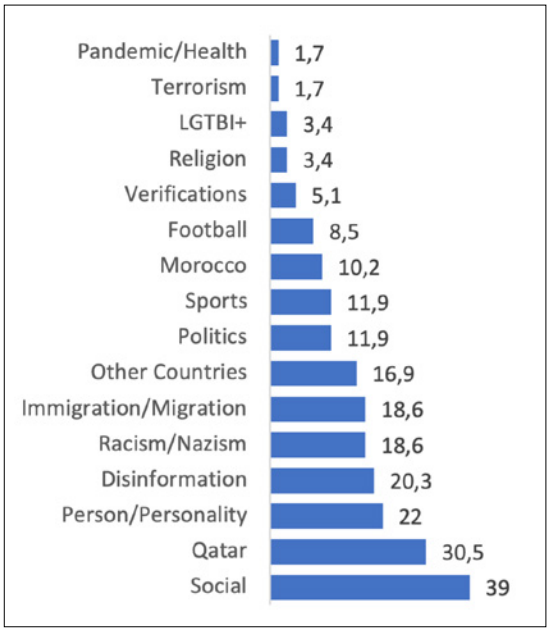
Figure 2. Distribution of hoaxes verified by agencies (%)



Source: Own elaboration.

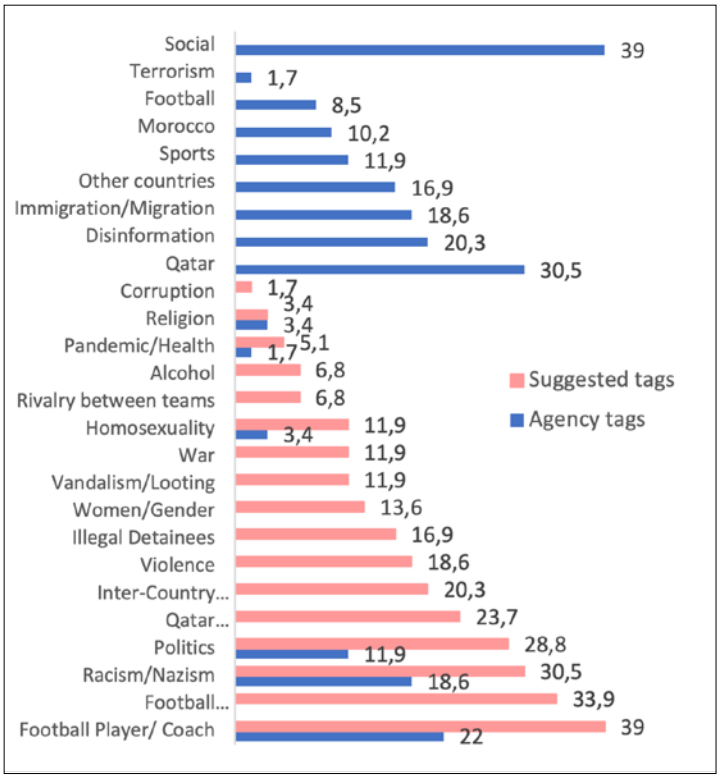
The analysis shows that the agencies categorise their verifications with various tags including Social, Qatar, Person/Character, Disinformation, Racism/Nazism, Immigration/Migration, Other countries (Figure 3). However, an analysis of the content of the hoaxes reveals a distinct categorisation in which the most common identifying words are Footballer, Fan/Fan, Racism/Nazism, Politics, Qatar Bans/Restrictions, Cross-Country Affiliations/Phobias.

Figure 3. Agency tags (%)



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 4. Suggested tags vs. agency tags (%)



Source: Own elaboration.

With respect to the classification made during the research, a gap is detected between the tags of the verifying agencies and those suggested by the researchers (Figure 4). The Pandemic/Health tag appears in 1.7 % compared to the 5.1 % identified by the research team. Homosexuality/LGBTI appears in 3.4 % while it has been identified in 11.9 % of hoaxes. The Politics tag, which appears in 11.9 %, is found in 28.8 %. Racism/Nazism with 18.6 % is found in 30.5 % of the hoaxes; and Person/Personality as an agency tag in 22 % of the hoaxes, and Footballer/Selectionist in 39 % of the hoaxes.

In order to find out if there is a relationship between the Qatar category and the other categories of the tags, an analysis is carried out (Table 2) which indicates that the related categories are: Football, Disinformation, Racism, Migration, Morocco, Other countries, Social and Person/Character. In particular, the statistically significant and high relationship (V = .763) between Qatar and Disinformation with a Chi-Square value of 34.312 and a significance level of p = .000, as well as the inversely proportional and moderately high relationship (V = -.530) between Qatar and Social with a Chi-Square value of 16.549 and a significance level of p = .000, so that the

hypothesis of independence between them is rejected, are noteworthy due to the robustness of the analysis.

Table 2. Ratio *Tags*Qatar*

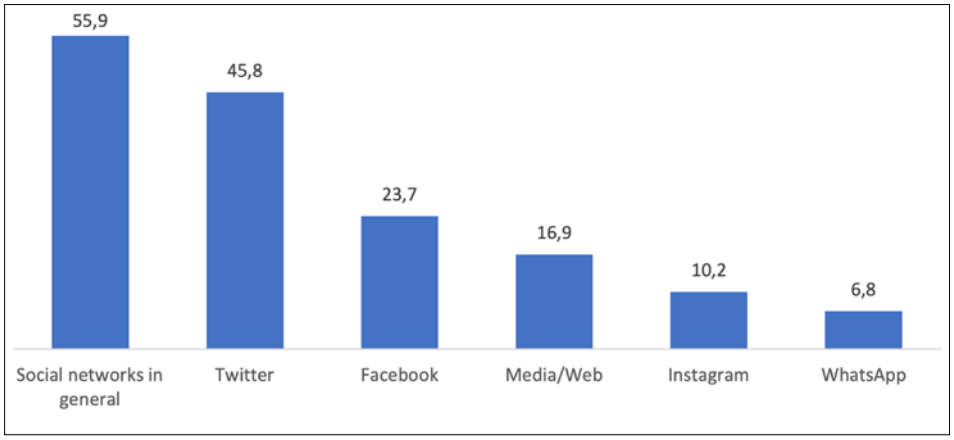
	Chi-square test			Symmetrical measurement	
Tags	Value	gl	Asymptotic sig. (2-sided)	V for Cramer	Approx. Sig.
Football	12,443	1	,000	,459	,000
Disinformation	34,312[1]	1	,000	,763	,000
Racism/Nazism	5,936	1	,015	-,317	,015
Immigration/Migration	5,936	1	,015	-,317	,015
Morocco	8,791	1	,003	,386	,003
Other countries	4,940	1	,026	,289	,026
Social	16,549[2]	1	,000	-,530	,000
Character/Person	7,320	1	,007	,352	,006

[1]1 boxes (25.0 %) have expected a count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.66.
[2]0 boxes (0.0 %) have expected a count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.02.

Source: Own elaboration.

Hoaxes are spread by different digital platforms. The analysis shows that social networks are the channels used to spread hoaxes and, specifically, Twitter (45.8 %) and Facebook (23.7 %) are the most widely used, with Instagram and WhatsApp at the bottom of the list (Figure 5).

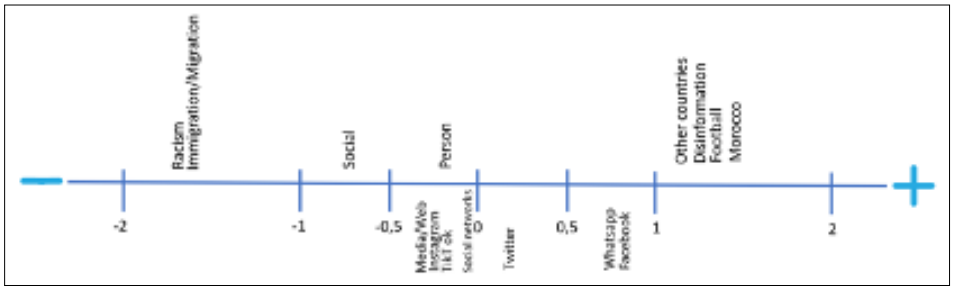
Figure 5. Platforms of dissemination of hoaxes (%)



Source: Own elaboration.

A Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) was also carried out to determine the association between the categories of the tag variable and the categories of the platform for the dissemination of the hoax, since it allows the information to be explained in a reduced number of factors with the least loss of information. The resulting two-dimensional model (Figure 6) indicates that the correlation between the tags of dimension 1 is almost 70 % (Cronbach's alpha = .699). Furthermore, the discriminant measures indicate that Racism and Immigration/ Migration explain 62.4 % of this dimension, and that they are very close to each other, but very far from the specific platforms of dissemination. The analysis also shows that hoaxes tagged Persona are spread via Media/Web, Instagram, Tik Tok, WhatsApp and Facebook are platforms close to hoaxes tagged Morocco, Football, Other countries or Disinformation.

Figure 6. Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) ***Tags*Dissemination platforms***



Source: Own elaboration.

Almost 51 % of the news items have an unknown origin, compared to 49 % where the source of the hoax is known. With regard to the protagonist of the verified news items (Table 3), fans or supporters predominate, followed by countries, the World Football Organisation, sportsmen and sportswomen with first and last names and football teams.

Table 3. Protagonist of hoaxes (%)

Protagonist	Frequency	Percentage
Supporters/Fans	29	49,2
Countries	20	33,9
World Football Organisation	18	30,5
Athletes	18	30,5
Selections	16	27,1
Government	14	23,7
Media/Journalists	10	16,9
Politicians	91	15,3

Protagonist	Frequency	Percentage
Woman	6	10,2
LGTBI+ Collective	4	6,8
Security Agents	3	5,1
Referee	1	1,7

Source: Own elaboration.

78 % of hoaxes are characterised by a negative tone. Only 1.7 % of hoaxes are considered positive. The rest use a neutral tone.

Among the resources used to disseminate hoaxes, text (66.1 %) and image (62.7 %) achieve the greatest presence. This was followed by video (44.1 %) and, with a substantial difference, audio (5.1 %). Memes, on the other hand, are absent in the analysis.

With regard to misinformation, false context and manipulated content dominate the typology found, followed by misleading content (Table 4).

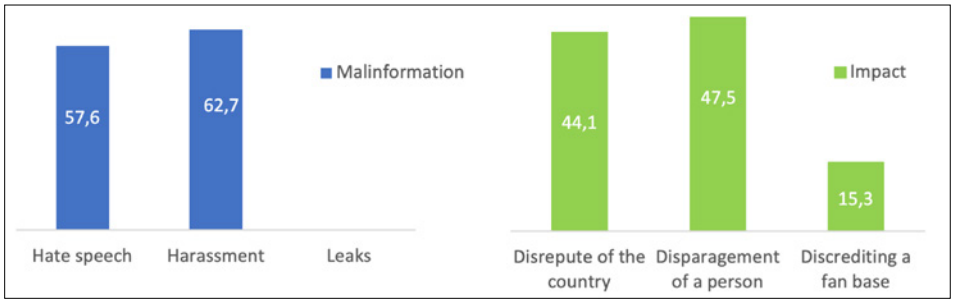
Table 4. Information clutter found (%)

Information disorder	Presence (%)	Type of disorder	Presence (%)
Satire or parody	5,1	Misinformation	27,1
False connection	8,5		
Misleading content	13,6		
False context	37,3	Disinformation	72,9
Imposter content	0		
Manipulated content	30,5		
Manufactured content	5,1		

Source: Own elaboration.

In terms of the intention of the hoax (Figure 7), harassment (62.7 %) and hate speech (57.6 %) predominate in a context in which discrediting a person is the most present consequence (47.5 %), followed by discrediting the country (44.1 %).

Figure 7. Malinformation and its impact (%)



Source: Own elaboration.

After cross-tabulation (Table 5), which highlights the difference between the frequency found and the expected count, the statistical analysis shows a statistically significant (Chi-square = 6.286; p = .012) although moderate (Cramer's V = .326) relationship between the origin of the hoax and the discrediting of the country as a result of the hoax. In other words, the discrediting of the country is conditioned by the anonymity of the false news that is spread, and well-known people do not tend to spread hoaxes that discredit the country.

Table 5. Cross tabulation *Source hoax*Consequence*

Origin of the hoax YES		**Country discredit as a consequence**		**Total**
		NO		
Anonymous person	Frequency	18	12	30
	Expected count	13,2	16,8	30
	% within the origin of the hoax	60 %	40 %	100,0 %
Non-anonymous person	Frequency	8	21	29
	Expected count	8,8	20,2	29
	% within the origin of the hoax	17,2 %	82,8 %	100,0 %
Total	Frequency	26	33	59
	Expected count	26	33	59
	% within the origin of the hoax	44,1 %	55,9 %	100,0 %

Source: Own elaboration.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The first World Cup organised in an Arab country —Qatar— was the subject of hoaxes and disinformation and attracted international attention not only because of the sporting interest involved but also because of the regime and laws of the country in which it was held, which violated human rights. While some of the accusations were true, others (which are the ones that concern us in this investigation) were unfounded falsehoods. False and manipulated content is the most common type of disinformation found regarding the Qatar World Cup, followed by misleading content due to decontextualisation. It is interesting to note that, as Dijck (2009) pointed out, information produced by journalists coexists with information that can be created by any user. However, in this regard, it should be noted that the content produced or disseminated by media professionals had no intention of misinforming.

The analysis has provided an answer to Specific Objective 1, which was to find out how agencies identify the different hoaxes about the World Cup in Qatar. Fact-checking agencies classify hoaxes using labels. However, the study has shown that these labels are insufficient to describe the full scope of disinformation.

The most frequent themes of the hoaxes analysed in the Qatar World Cup are related to racism and immigration, and the intentionality of these hoaxes is to harass and generate hate speech, with an impact on the discrediting of different politicians, footballers and other people related to the game or the fans themselves. But there is also the discrediting of different countries participating in the event, although the host country stands out for its customs, traditions and laws that violate human rights. Qatar has been at the centre of many of the hoaxes, mainly by anonymous people.

The results allow us to conclude that almost half of the hoaxes come from known sources, so that the authorities should take measures to identify and punish those responsible for them. Especially given the worrying consequences of their discourse since, as stated by Aelst *et al*. (2017), they encourage the intentional misinformation of citizens according to partisan interests towards a single way of thinking that fosters hate speech, polarisation and social fragmentation, which increases tension and puts any democracy at risk. These sanctions should be exemplary in order to have a deterrent effect both for haters and for platforms that do not cooperate with the legal framework of countries when the legal limits of freedom of expression are exceeded.

Furthermore, the data confirm Specific Objective 2, which was to know which platforms are used for the dissemination of hoaxes and their relationship with the identification tags of the agencies. In this regard, the agencies help identify the platforms through which disinformation goes viral. Specifically, hoaxes spread more quickly through social media, particularly on X (Twitter).

It is clear that social networks continue to be the main channels for the dissemination of hoaxes, also during the World Cup in Qatar, using mainly text, images and videos and a mostly negative tone. In this sense, the platforms have a co-responsibility in its dissemination and, therefore, they should collaborate with agility and diligence to unmask the anonymous hater that threatens citizen

security and the country's discredit. The data obtained focus on Twitter as the platform where disinformation circulates with the greatest impunity.

It contrasts, according to the findings obtained, and in response to specific objective 3 in terms of analysing the origin of hoaxes in relation to the classification of disinformation disorder, that hoaxes related to racism and xenophobia towards a country, specifically Morocco, and its cultural conditioning factors in the Spanish context are mostly anonymous when they are disseminated via the social networks that provide the greatest intimacy and personal trust, such as WhatsApp and Facebook. Platforms such as TikTok or Instagram favour the dissemination of hoaxes that affect the sphere of 'celebrity' and the world of fans.

In this context, the need for rigour in the information transmitted, as well as the verification of sources, must become fundamental tools for both journalists and communication directors of the different sports institutions, in order to avoid the propagation of hoaxes and rumours and to be able to provide truthful information to their audiences. Disinformation is a global, complex problem that requires a multidimensional response (Fernández-Torres and Cea, 2023). However, the results obtained in the research suggest that, if verification agencies were to develop the tagged concepts more broadly, the hate speech implicit in disinformation would become more clearly visible, which would help to identify the latent social problems in the hoaxes circulating around these sporting events and even to unmask the intentionality behind them.

In line with this, Sánchez-Duarte and Magallón-Rosa (2023) point out that in political stories passion prevails over reason, which favours the dissemination of false information. This fact could also be extraplated to the sports field, especially soccer, where passion and emotionality are inherent characteristics.

Therefore, the main objective of this research has been to analyse the phenomenon of disinformation, as well as the work carried out by the verification agencies, the tone used, the protagonists, resources, etc. in relation to the hoaxes circulating in Spain during the Qatar World Cup.

While disinformation affects the world of journalism in a huge way, the field of sports journalism has seen a growing mistrust both in the media that cover sport and in the communications departments of sports institutions, which see the proliferation of fake news as a constant threat to the profession and to the rigour that all entities should have towards their audiences. The incessant search for interactions and "clicks" leads to the multiplication of unverified news and hoaxes that try to provoke conjecture and the viralisation of such misleading content.

Hate speech is often the precursor to hate crimes that polarise society, encouraging discrimination and violence, contrary to international law. It constitutes, per se, a serious violation of human rights and is at odds with sporting values, representing a serious threat to the integrity of sport and the maintenance of its fundamental pillars, such as respect and diversity. It is therefore crucial that sports organisations, athletes, fans, as well as international organisations commit themselves to eradicating it, including the implementation of sanctions against anyone who uses it. Football moves the masses and is a sport where fans

and emotion are the most important factors. And emotion also promotes the construction and dissemination of disinformation, either with the intention of causing harm, or for the reaffirmation as a supporter of a particular team or for any other reason. Thus, once again, the messages show the growing connection between disinformation and hate speech and hate crimes, as demonstrated by Blanco-Castilla *et al*. (2022).

Media literacy needs to be much stronger than it is at present to counter the threat posed by misinformation and the problems it creates not only at the individual but also at the global level.

Future lines of research should address the magnitude of disinformation at different sporting events, as well as the categories of disinformation that proliferate the most, in order to find out whether this phenomenon depends on the sport in question, the host country or other factors. It would also be possible to compare the results obtained with those of other sports competitions. Studies that will help in the fight against the challenges posed by disinformation and for the prevalence of truth.

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