

Unlocking Virality: Analyzing the Factors Driving Olympic Hot Topics on Weibo During the Paris 2024 Games

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Abstract: This study investigates the factors driving the virality of Olympic-related topics on Weibo, focusing on the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. As one of China's largest social media platforms, Weibo plays a significant role in shaping public discourse and amplifying topics related to global events like the Olympics. By analyzing 242 trending search terms from July 26 to August 11, 2024, this study explores how elements such as keyword choice, emotional appeal, and the presence of news events contribute to a topic's popularity. A binary logistic regression model was employed to examine the effects of these variables on the popularity index, categorizing titles into "high" and "low" popularity. The results indicate that highly emotional headlines, particularly those with extremely positive or negative tones, are more likely to become popular. Additionally, titles associated with major news events significantly increase the likelihood of virality. While keyword relevance is a crucial factor in attracting attention, the length of a headline has a limited impact on its success. The type of content publisher also plays a role, with official media sources often garnering higher credibility and engagement compared to self-media or sports media outlets. The study's findings offer practical insights for content creators, media organizations, and brands aiming to maximize their visibility during large-scale events. The analysis underscores the importance of strategically choosing keywords, leveraging emotional resonance, and integrating newsworthy elements to enhance content distribution and public engagement on digital platforms.

Keywords: Virality, Olympic Hot Topics, Weibo.

1. Introduction

The Olympic Games have long been recognized as one of the most prestigious sporting events globally, captivating audiences with a unique blend of athleticism, culture, and international diplomacy. Over the years, the Olympics have expanded their reach far beyond the sporting world, becoming a platform where global audiences engage not just with the events, but also with the stories, controversies, and narratives surrounding them. As the digital landscape evolves, the way people consume Olympic-related content has dramatically shifted, especially with the rise of social media

platforms such as Weibo. The competition for attention in the online space is as fierce as the events themselves, with countless topics vying for the spotlight.

The Olympics is a globally accessible international sporting event where athletes of all races and colors from all over the world compete in a single event. The Olympic Games include the Summer and Winter Olympics. They are held every four years and today more than 200 countries participate in them.

Weibo, often referred to as the "Chinese Twitter", is one of the largest social media platforms in China [1]. Launched in 2009 by Sina Corporation, it combines elements of microblogging, like Twitter, with features found in social networking platforms like Facebook. Weibo allows users to post short messages, share photos, videos, and links, and engage in discussions through likes, comments, and reposts. What sets Weibo apart is its role as a key platform for real-time information sharing and public discussion in China [2]. It is widely used by individuals, celebrities, businesses, media outlets, and government organizations to share news, promote products, and connect with followers. Due to its broad reach, Weibo often serves as a hotspot for trending topics, viral content, and public discourse, especially around major events like the Olympics. Weibo is basically an important platform for all Chinese people to interact with each other, and it is a very targeted tool for organizations that need to have a social impact.

This study investigates how Olympic-related topics gained traction and became widely discussed on social media during the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. Specifically, it focuses on the dynamics behind viral trends on Weibo, one of China's largest social media platforms, analyzing the factors that contribute to the success of highly discussed topics [3]. Understanding these factors is essential for stakeholders like event organizers, media outlets, athletes, sponsors, and content creators aiming to maximize their online visibility.

This research not only provides insights into how specific keywords, narrative structures, and emotional cues impact a topic's likelihood of trending but also identifies the role of the content creators, from major news outlets to individual self-media accounts. Through the analysis of variables such as topic length, keyword frequency, and sentiment, this study seeks to offer valuable takeaways for enhancing content visibility in the context of large-scale sporting events.

It is important because it examines how Olympic-related topics trend on social media, providing useful insights into the factors that drive online engagement. By focusing on aspects like keyword choice, content type, emotional appeal, and the role of different content creators (e.g., official media, sports media, self-media), the research offers valuable information for those aiming to capture attention during major events like the Olympics.

For media organizations and brands, this understanding can guide better content creation, helping them reach broader audiences and increase interaction. It also sheds light on how public discussions are shaped in real-time through social media, particularly in relation to emotionally charged topics and global events. Additionally, the study offers a practical framework for boosting content visibility, which is vital for anyone involved in digital marketing, sports promotion, or media strategy.

By providing insights into what works and what doesn't in the crowded digital space, the study is a practical resource for maximizing online presence and engagement during large-scale events.

2. Literature Review

With the rapid evolution of media, social media has become pivotal in news dissemination. Olympic Games news topics, as a globally renowned event, reflect content while captivating audiences and shaping public opinion. Studying these topics holds significant theoretical and practical value.

Wang Lu conducted a content analysis of "People's Daily" WeChat official account news during the Tokyo Olympic Games, revealing distinctive features and patterns by compiling headline length, vocabulary, punctuation, and other data [4]. Meanwhile, Xiong Pinliang's team compared linguistic

differences between English and Chinese sports news topics, focusing on vocabulary, grammar, and rhetoric. They found that English topics use abbreviations and short words for space conservation, while Chinese topics emphasize refined vocabulary and emotional nuances [5].

Furthermore, Barnard S and his team delved into the ideological contests underpinning news reports during the Athens Olympic Games, revealing how media outlets employ their unique discourse frameworks and narrative strategies to convey specific values and perspectives [6]. UTAMI R D. performed a comparative analysis of the syntactic characteristics of sports news topics in various English newspapers. Her research showed that sports news topics are typically concise and direct, often utilizing diverse sentence structures to cater to the timeliness and urgency of news reporting [7]. Thongsbat K., through a comparative analysis of the writing styles of World Cup news topics, unveiled the distinct approaches and strategies employed by different media outlets in reporting on major sporting events [8].

In addition to studies focusing on specific sporting events, Huang Hongbo conducted a thorough analysis of the transformations in news headline production techniques and pragmatic functions resulting from the advent of internet technology and social media [9]. He emphasized that the progression of social media has spurred alterations in news headline production methods, with news topics playing a pivotal role in captivating readers and elevating click-through rates. Furthermore, topics have increasingly emphasized the use of numerals and trending themes to bolster formal recognizability and search efficiency. In terms of rhetorical strategies, Suyatminto M. delved deeply into the metaphorical connotations within sports news topics, uncovering the distinctive functions of metaphors in conveying the intensity of competitions, portraying athlete images, and establishing the ambiance of games. He also observed that the selection and utilization of metaphors are intimately tied to news contexts and cultural milieus [10].

Despite the abundance of research literature on the characteristics of sports-related topics, studies focusing on the current Paris Olympic Games remain relatively scarce. Furthermore, research on headline content often fails to adequately address elements such as publisher information and the emotional tendency of topics. To address this gap, the present study endeavors to explore the correlation between various content production elements and dissemination effects. It selects trending topics and their popularity indices on the Weibo platform during the Paris Olympic Games as data sources. The objective of this research is to deepen the understanding of factors influencing the dissemination effects of news topics related to the Paris Olympic Games, thereby offering valuable insights for practices in related fields.

3. Methodology

The data for this study was sourced from over 30 daily trending search titles of various kinds on the Weibo platform. This study screened out imperfect data and news unrelated to the Paris Olympics, resulting in a final selection of 242 valid search terms related to the Paris Olympics from July 26th to August 11th, 2024. The original data included the trending search title, publication date, publisher name, and popularity index. Given data variability, it underwent classification, planning, and transformation.

Using the popularity index as the dependent variable, the study categorized it into "high popularity" and "low popularity" and employed a binary logistic regression model. This model examined the influence of independent variables, including the presence of project, person, country/region names, emotional vocabulary, news events, publisher type, attitude tendency, and title length, on the popularity index, and assessed the importance of each variable.

4. Result

After eliminating factors with collinearity issues and those that were not significant in univariate analysis, only the two independent variables of news events and emotional categories were introduced into the binary logistic regression model.

Through calculations, several conclusions have been drawn from this study. Firstly, within the emotional categories, "extremely positive" and "relatively negative" have statistically significant differences compared to "relatively positive". Specifically, titles with "extremely positive" emotions have 2.75 times the likelihood of becoming high-popularity topics compared to those with "relatively positive" emotions, while titles with "relatively negative" emotions have 3.98 times the likelihood. Secondly, titles that include news events have a 1.81 times higher likelihood of becoming high-popularity topics compared to those that do not. Thirdly, the significance value of the Hosmer-Lemeshow test, calculated to assess the model's validity, indicates that the model is effective. The overall prediction accuracy percentage is 65.1%.

5. Discussions

The first is that headline length has a slight impact on the user's first viewing experience, but the number of words in a headline is not the deciding factor when compared to keywords and emotions. The word count of a title is the same as the word length, so the amount of information and attraction to the user is almost the same. Short title can quickly convey key information, "Sun Yang won the gold" title and "Sun Yang won the Olympic men's 400-meter freestyle gold medal" to bring the effect is almost similar, although the longer title is more specific, more informative, but attracted are concerned about the results of Sun Yang's race audience. Although the longer headline is more specific and informative, it attracts viewers who are concerned about the results of Sun Yang's race. On the contrary, the long title, because of the vague information, caused some users to lose interest in it. Different lengths of titles can be used for different promotional content, especially in combination with the characteristics of the platform. For example, for short videos, a concise headline can be used, while in some in-depth reports and commentaries, a longer headline can be used, which is equivalent to summarizing the information that requires a longer time to browse, and providing a buffer for viewers to browse or not.

One of the main influences on heat is keywords, which determine whether a user will be attracted to a topic and contribute to the heat when quickly browsing a screen. When keywords are associated with trending topics, celebrities, national sentiments, and sports competitions, they quickly catch the viewer's attention. According to our conclusion, suppose there are two hot searches on Weibo, "WANG won the gold medal in table tennis" and "The content of the game is wonderful, and the athletes played superbly". The first hot search clearly expresses the content of the event, the time of the person, and the result of the event, the keywords are clear. Then this one title may attract people who want to get three pieces of information. In contrast, the latter conveys very vague information and loses the content that draws attention to the focus. The heat generated by high-frequency keywords can increase the visibility of the content, and can also help media or brands that need to increase their exposure, as well as create personal IPs. During the Olympics, many sponsors used the words "champion" and "gold medal" as promotional features for their products. During the Olympics, many sponsors will use the words "champion" and "gold medal" as their product promotion feature. However, bringing high heat will also bring potential risks, publishers to increase the number of clicks may use exaggerated keywords, such as "OMG, the Olympic venues broke out a major event!" which can attract attention for a while, but in the long run, can damage the publisher's reputation. In the future, machine learning or computer languages can be used to further analyze which keywords bring positive heat to a given situation and ensure that the keywords are appealing and authentic.

The second major factor is that expressions with emotions in the headlines have a significant impact on the heat. According to our data analysis, headlines with strong emotions, especially positive or extremely negative ones, directly resonate with viewers, this is because emotions are easily incited and users tend to substitute their own emotions on social media, making them emotionally driven. “QUAN performed perfectly and took full points!” Such a headline not only conveys the results of the competition but also inspires pride and joy in the viewer. On the contrary, extremely negative emotions can also generate a lot of attention and discussion, but there is a great potential for negative publicity and effects that can damage the image of the individual and the brand. For example, being attacked, or abused. Publishers should be careful about the level of emotion they use, especially when it comes to negative news, to avoid over-emotional expressions that could lead to unwanted negative consequences.

The involvement of news events is the third factor that affects the heat of hot searches. Due to the timeliness and relevance of news events, it is easy to attract the attention of those who follow them, especially when they are designed to be major news, e.g., “An athlete breaking a record at the Olympics is suspected of doping”. Not only the users but also the people who follow the event itself want to get more information about it, which leads to a rise in popularity. However, relying too much on the timeliness of a news event can lead to a short attention span. For example, if an athlete is suspected of doping, no matter how the event happened when the official conclusion is released, the heat of the event will quickly decrease, and it is difficult to maintain a long discussion. In this case, the publisher can extend the continuity of the conversation by digging into the background of the news event, as well as the subsequent development and impact of the event. Based on the previous example, the implications for the athlete who was suspected for no apparent reason could be followed up.

The last factor is the publisher itself, the type of publisher affects the credibility and authority of the content, and therefore the content is better distributed. When a TV station officially releases the results of a match, users do not need to question whether the source of the information is false. In contrast, the content published by self-published media and sports media is more flexible and may be more acceptable to young people than the former. Headlines such as “President congratulates China's Olympic delegation on another gold medal”, published by official media, are topics that can be discussed by all age groups and genders and are more effective than those published by self-published media. This is because the public is more likely to trust an authoritative organization with a safe and reliable source of information. However, relying on official media may limit the diversity of content, while individuals may find it difficult to generate a wide range of discussions due to a lack of credibility. For example, a person involved in a news event who needs to disseminate information may not be able to achieve the same dissemination effect because he or she does not have sufficient trust and fan base. This can be done through cooperation between official media and self-published media, which retains authority and enhances the diversity of content. This can be done by officially releasing the official news report and the self-media adding more highlights, behind-the-scenes stories, or analytical comments, combining the strengths of both to maximize the dissemination effect.

6. Conclusion

First, the choice of keywords is crucial, and keywords that are concise and directly related to hotspots can quickly attract attention. Second, the uniqueness and timeliness of the content determines the breadth and depth of its dissemination, especially controversial or emotionally resonant content, which is more likely to stimulate discussion and forwarding. The influence of the publisher is also a key factor. A publisher with a large number of fans or a high degree of credibility can greatly enhance the exposure and influence of the content. Finally, whether the content is a news event also significantly affects its heat. Major news events usually have higher attention and dissemination

potential because they fulfill the public's need to be informed and possess a strong sense of timeliness and social concern. Utilizing this finding, selecting concise, powerful, and highly relevant keywords in media releases is the first step in boosting content heat. By using keywords that are current hot topics or of popular interest, people can effectively increase the chances of your content being searched for and distributed. When publishing content, focus on its uniqueness and newsworthiness. Content that is controversial, emotionally resonant, or closely related to current social events is often more likely to spark public discussion and thus increase heat.

Utilizing this conclusion, choosing concise, powerful, and highly relevant keywords in media releases is the first step in boosting content buzz. By using keywords that are current hot topics or of popular interest, you can effectively increase the chances of your content being searched and distributed. When publishing content, focus on its uniqueness and newsworthiness. Content that is controversial, emotionally resonant, or closely related to current social events is often more likely to spark public discussion and thus increase heat.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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