

International Federations 2025



SPORT ON SOCIAL

Redtorch

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Future Outlook: Long-Term Digital Strategies for IFs



Karishma Riar
Head of Research
& Insights

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

2025 is set to be a defining year for International Federations (IFs) in the digital space. The competition for fan engagement has intensified. Fan behavior and digital platforms are evolving, making it crucial for brands to remain visible, engaging, and competitive. The primary challenge now is to sustain engagement and expand audiences beyond the Olympic spotlight.

That's why we're excited to unveil the SportOnSocial International Federations 2025 report, which goes beyond rankings to provide in-depth, narrative-driven insights into the strategies shaping success on social media. This year, for the first time, we have introduced a dedicated separate ranking of IFs on Chinese platforms, offering a clear view of engagement trends in one of the world's most dynamic digital ecosystems.

Additionally, we are launching a brand-new **interactive dashboard**, giving IFs an opportunity to explore rankings, track year-on-year performance, and compare their standing across platforms as well as against other IFs. With interactive filters and a dedicated section for Chinese platform rankings, International Federations can gain deeper insights into their SportOnSocial performance over the past 9 years.

What's next?

2025 is the year for IFs to move beyond Olympic-driven spikes and build lasting engagement. This report provides the insights needed to win fan attention, drive digital growth, and stay competitive in a crowded sports ecosystem.

A huge thank you to our contributors






Best Wishes,

Methodology

SportOnSocial International Federations 2025 ranks 43 Summer and Winter Olympic International Federations (IFs) by their social media performance in 2024.

To determine the rankings, analysts from the Redtorch Research & Performance Lab used a combination of third-party tools, desk research and propriety technology to analyse 319.9k social media posts across 348 primary, discipline-specific and World Championship pages actively managed by IFs.

The platforms below (and their subsequent metrics) were analysed:

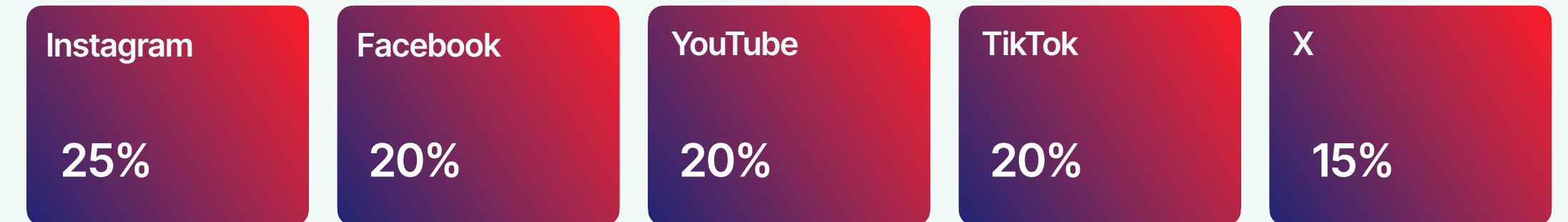
-  **Platform:** Facebook
Metrics: total followers, follower growth, growth rate, engagement rate*, total engagements, engagements per post
-  **Platform:** Instagram
Metrics: total followers, follower growth, growth rate, engagement rate*, total engagements, engagements per post
-  **Platform:** X
Metrics: total followers, follower growth, growth rate, engagement rate*, total engagements, engagements per post
-  **Platform:** YouTube
Metrics: total subscribers, subscriber growth, growth rate, engagement rate*, total engagements, engagements per post, total video views, video views per video
-  **Platform:** TikTok
Metrics: total followers, follower growth, growth rate, engagement rate**, total engagements, engagements per post, total video views, video views per video

*engagement rate = number of post engagements divided by number of fans (Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube)

**TikTok engagement rate = engagements divided by video views

Platform weighting

Multiple SportOnSocial surveys conducted over the past 9 years have resulted in platforms being weighted as follows:



In addition to the Western platforms, Chinese platforms were analysed to create a separate ranking table for IFs with an active presence:

- Weibo:** Total followers, posts, total engagements, engagements per post
- Douyin:** Total followers, posts, total engagements, engagements per post
- WeChat:** Posts, total engagements, engagements per post

Notes: Data correct as of Wednesday 5 February 2024

- Analysis of open-source data meant it was not possible to determine whether metrics were organic or paid
- Instagram Stories metrics have not been included as data not available
- An IF performance index score (out of 100) has been included in the overall rankings to highlight the gaps between positions and offer a clearer understanding of differences in rank
- Content theme analysis performed on top posts on Facebook/Instagram/ X using Redtorch AI Engine
- All IF names are taken from the Olympic charter as of January 30 2025
- The SportOnSocial League Table benchmarks IF social media performance only. It is not ranking, making comment, or presenting analysis into the popularity of any specific sport.

Redtorch cannot guarantee the accuracy of analysis of SportOnSocial International Federations 2025 and disclaims all warranties - either express or implied - including warranties for merchantability and fitness for any particular purpose

SportOnSocial League Table 2025

Ranking	International Federations	Change	Score
1	World Athletics	+1	94.1
2	World Aquatics (AQUA)	+3	89.5
3	International Cricket Council (ICC)	+8	89.5
4	Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)	+2	89.2
5	Fédération Internationale de Basketball (FIBA)	-2	88.5
6	World Rugby	-2	87.4
7	Volleyball World (FIVB)	-6	86.0
8	Badminton World Federation (BWF)	+2	83.4
9	Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI)	-1	78.5
10	United World Wrestling (UWW)	-3	77.0
11	World Archery (WA)	+4	76.4
12	Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)	+5	75.9
13	Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG)	-1	72.0
14	World Table Tennis (WTT)	-5	72.0
15	Fédération Internationale de Ski et de Snowboard (FIS)	-1	71.4
16	International Judo Federation (IJF)	+5	70.7
17	International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF)	-1	61.3
18	International Skating Union (ISU)	-5	61.2
19	International Tennis Federation (ITF)	+1	59.1
20	International Biathlon Union (IBU)	-1	56.7
21	World Taekwondo (WT)	-3	49.3
22	World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC)	+2	49.3

Ranking	International Federations	Change	Score
23	International Canoe Federation (ICF)	+12	46.3
24	World DanceSport Federation (WDSF)	+5	44.1
25	International Hockey Federation (FIH)	+1	43.1
26	World Rowing	+4	40.7
27	International Handball Federation (IHF)	-4	40.3
28	International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC)	-6	37.4
29	International Surfing Association (ISA)	-4	37.0
30	World Triathlon	+7	35.6
31	World Skate	+9	31.9
32	International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF)	+9	30.2
33	World Curling	0	29.1
34	World Squash	-2	27.4
35	World Lacrosse	-4	26.3
36	Fédération Internationale d'Escrime (FIE)	0	25.8
37	World Sailing (WS)	+2	19.5
38	International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation (IBSF)	-4	19.0
39	International Luge Federation (FIL)	-1	16.6
40	International Weightlifting Federation (IWF)	-12	11.7
41	World Pentathlon (UIPM)	+1	11.2
42	International Federation of American Football (IFAF)	New entry	10.0
43	International Ski Mountaineering Federation (ISMF)	New entry	8.6

The headlines



ranks #1 overall after topping Instagram & Facebook

World Athletics performed strongly across all platforms, reaching #1 on Instagram and Facebook for the first time. A steady rise on Instagram since Tokyo – climbing from 5th to 1st place – was a key factor in securing the overall top spot.



moves +34 places in TikTok rankings

Badminton World Federation (BWF) made TikTok a priority platform – they ranked #2, despite IFs collectively seeing a -39% YoY drop in engagements.



tops Chinese platform rankings

World Table Tennis (WTT) ranked #1 overall, leading on all 3 platforms: Weibo, Douyin, WeChat – where they amassed a combined 43m engagements.



climbs highest

International Canoe Federation (ICF) climbed 12 places in the overall rankings, driven by a 1st-place finish on YouTube (+33-place jump). Strong gains on Facebook (+6) and Instagram (+6) played a key role, along with progress on TikTok (+5) and X (+1).



sees largest engagement increase vs Tokyo

Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG) generated 5.2x more engagements this year vs Tokyo 2020 across Facebook, Instagram and X – the highest increase of any IF and well above the 2.4x IF average.



rises on YouTube amid Summer Olympics year

YouTube performance stood out as Winter IFs rose in the rankings by an average +4 places. Fédération Internationale de Ski et de Snowboard (FIS) (+10) and International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) (+8) saw the largest increases. Overall, Winter IFs saw an average drop of nearly -2 places on Facebook, Instagram, X and TikTok.

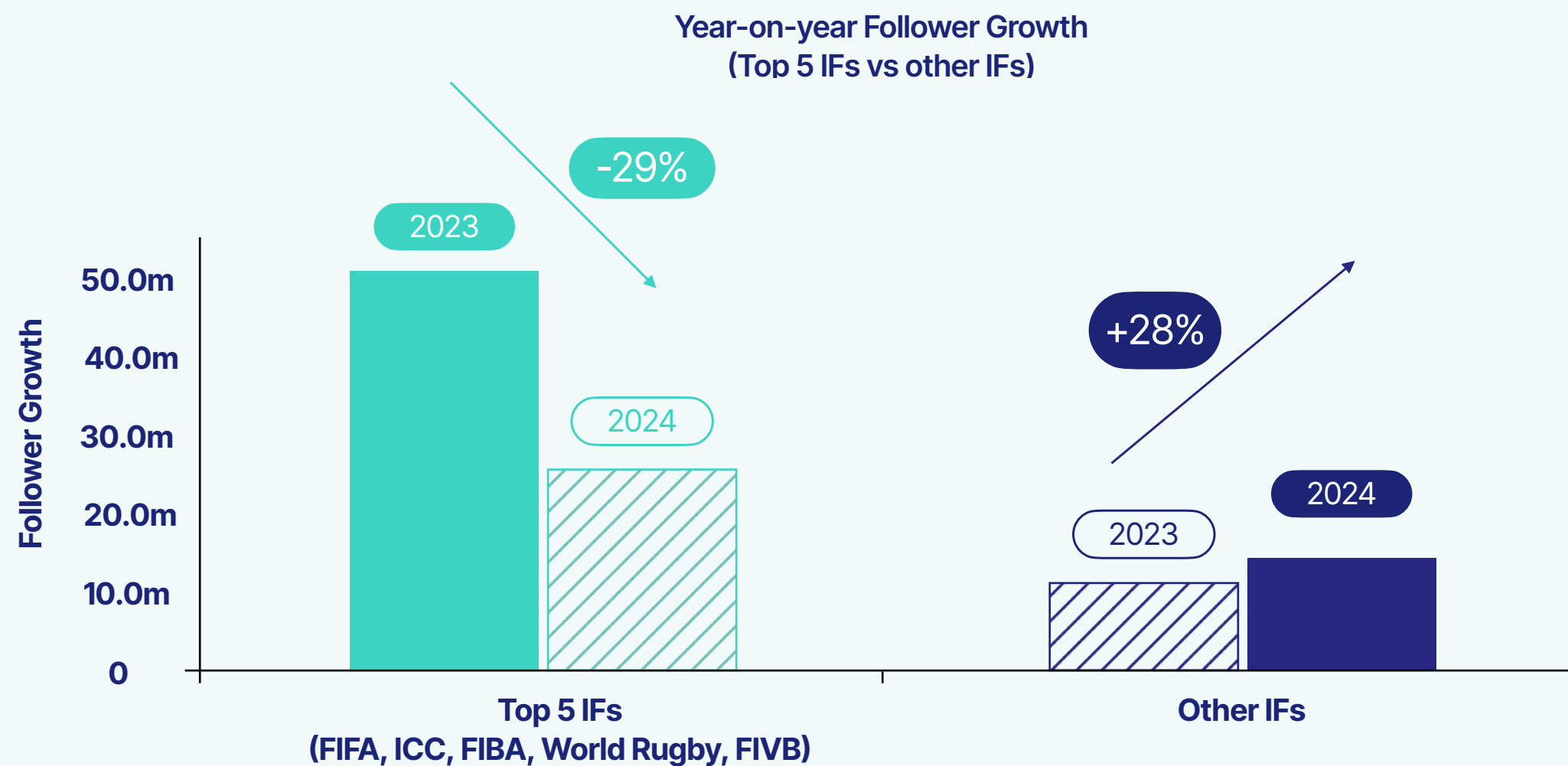
2024 Sees Shift: Two-thirds of IFs drive 11% audience growth

Paris 2024 spurred a major engagement shift, reshaping platform performance across International Federations.

Growth

Audiences of International Federations (IFs) grew by 11% in 2024, marking the slowest rate since Tokyo 2020 (heavily impacted by Covid-19). Overall follower growth declined to 50.6m (-19%) from 62.6m, primarily due to a -29% drop among a small set of historically high-performing IFs – FIFA, ICC, FIBA, World Rugby and FIVB. However, these major sports bodies still collectively achieved significant growth (26m), underscoring their ongoing potential by continuously demonstrating how to expand in non-Olympic years by resourcing large-scale events and leveraging their sport's global recognition.

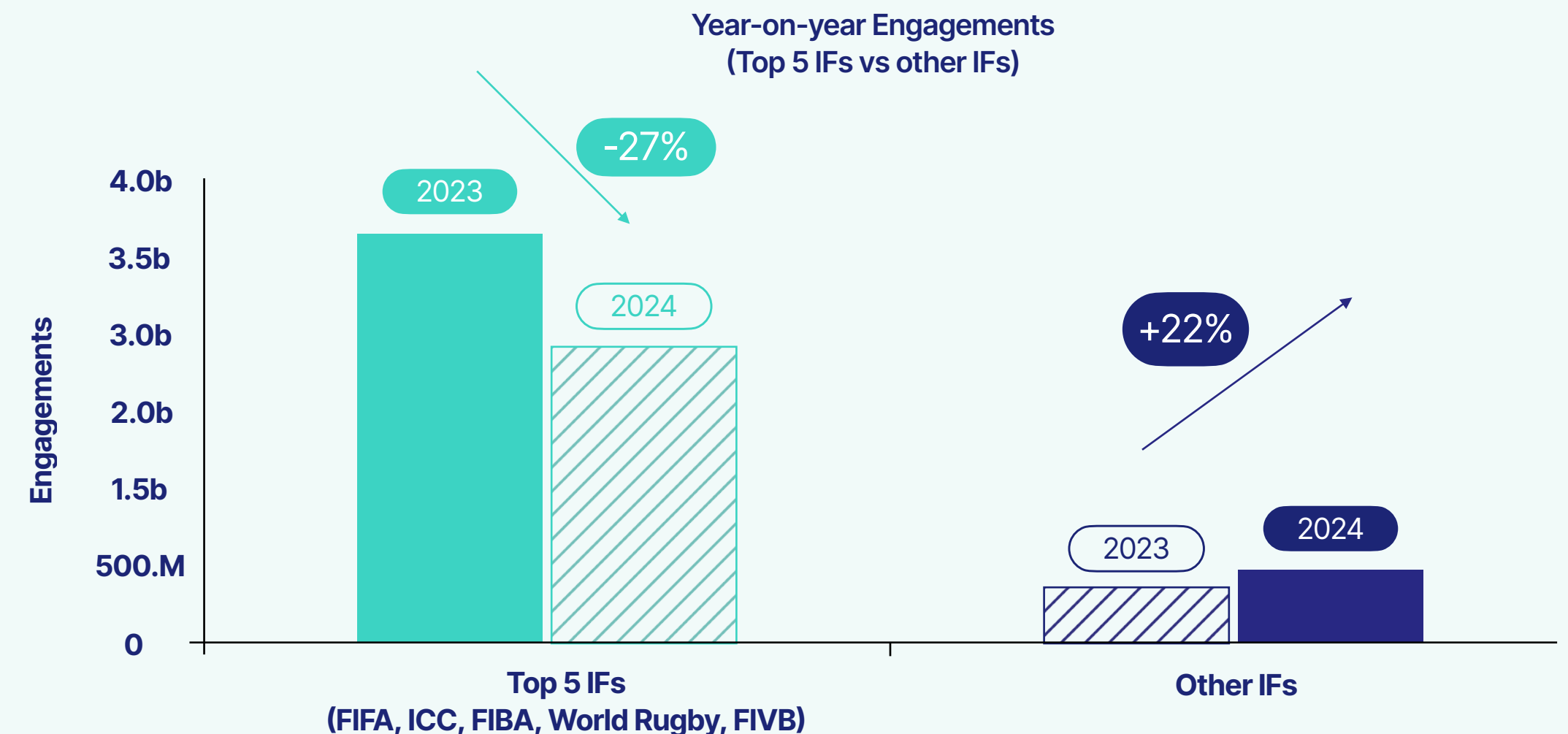
Meanwhile, other IFs generally recorded robust gains, totalling +28% growth. Paris 2024 in particular emerged as an opportunity for this broader group, underlining how the Olympic cycle reshapes visibility, fuels new audience attention, and redistributes overall share across the IF domain. This dynamic elevates not only sports and federations that are typically less recognised outside of the Olympic Games context but also encourages a more equitable distribution of media attention and fan engagement, cultivating growth opportunities that extend well beyond the Olympic period.



Engagement

Engagement also experienced its first YoY decline since Tokyo 2020. This drop was primarily driven by the largest 5 IFs, known for generating high engagement around their own marquee events (e.g., World Championships, qualifying tournaments) – where IOC video restrictions do not apply so highlights and best moments can be shared to gain highest engagement.

For the other IFs, the impact of Paris 2024 was undeniable as it boosted average engagements by 22% vs 2023. More than half of these IFs reached their highest-ever engagement in 2024, demonstrating the power of the Games in catalysing digital traction. Going forward, sustaining this heightened visibility will be critical as federations plan their content, sponsorships, and audience-retention strategies into the post-Olympic cycle.



Platform Breakdown



Facebook: Top 20 IFs

Ranking	International Federations	Change
1	World Athletics	+1
2	World Aquatics (AQUA)	-1
3	Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG)	+3
3	World Rugby	+4
5	Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)	+4
6	World Archery (WA)	-2
7	Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)	+9
8	Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI)	+2
9	International Cricket Council (ICC)	-6
10	Fédération Internationale de Basketball (FIBA)	-2
11	International Hockey Federation (FIH)	+11
12	International Skating Union (ISU)	0
13	Volleyball World (FIVB)	-8
14	Badminton World Federation (BWF)	-3
15	International Biathlon Union (IBU)	+9
16	United World Wrestling (UWW)	-2
17	Fédération Internationale de Ski et de Snowboard (FIS)	-2
18	International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF)	-1
19	World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC)	-1
20	World Table Tennis (WTT)	-7

Winter sport IF among highest climbers on Facebook

IBU climbed 9 places in Facebook rankings to secure a top 20 position, largely attributed to its World Championship event in 2024. This standout performance distinguishes IBU from most other Winter IFs, particularly in a year when the spotlight on Paris 2024 significantly boosted the profiles of other IFs like FIH (+11) and FEI (+9).

Facebook still provides a great opportunity for IFs to reach a global audience in smaller markets

Facebook saw a +8% growth rate, the 2nd-slowest of the platforms (behind X), largely because it is already so huge that it leaves less room for IFs to expand, especially in major markets. However, in smaller markets, Facebook often remains the primary platform used and so provides the best opportunity for IFs to reach a global audience.

Top 5 IFs see a YoY decrease in engagement, while other IFs see an increase

The difference between IFs with the largest followings and other IFs was most pronounced on Facebook. The top 5 saw a -51% YoY decrease in engagements; the other two-thirds saw a +15% increase. This contrast highlights the impact Paris 2024 had on engagements for most IFs, especially those representing the more niche sports. Facebook could serve as a primary point of discovery for these IFs, potentially driven by greater representation in global markets.

IFs start to replace long-form videos with short-form Reels

IFs are shifting towards short-form content, increasing their use of Reels by +11% YoY; traditional video usage decreased by -23%. Although traditional videos still comprise two-thirds of Facebook video content – and some IFs seem to generate more engagement on long-form content – Reels are gaining traction. This shift has resulted from a new Meta algorithm that has changed the 'video views' metric to align Reels and traditional videos with one singular metric, 'Plays'.

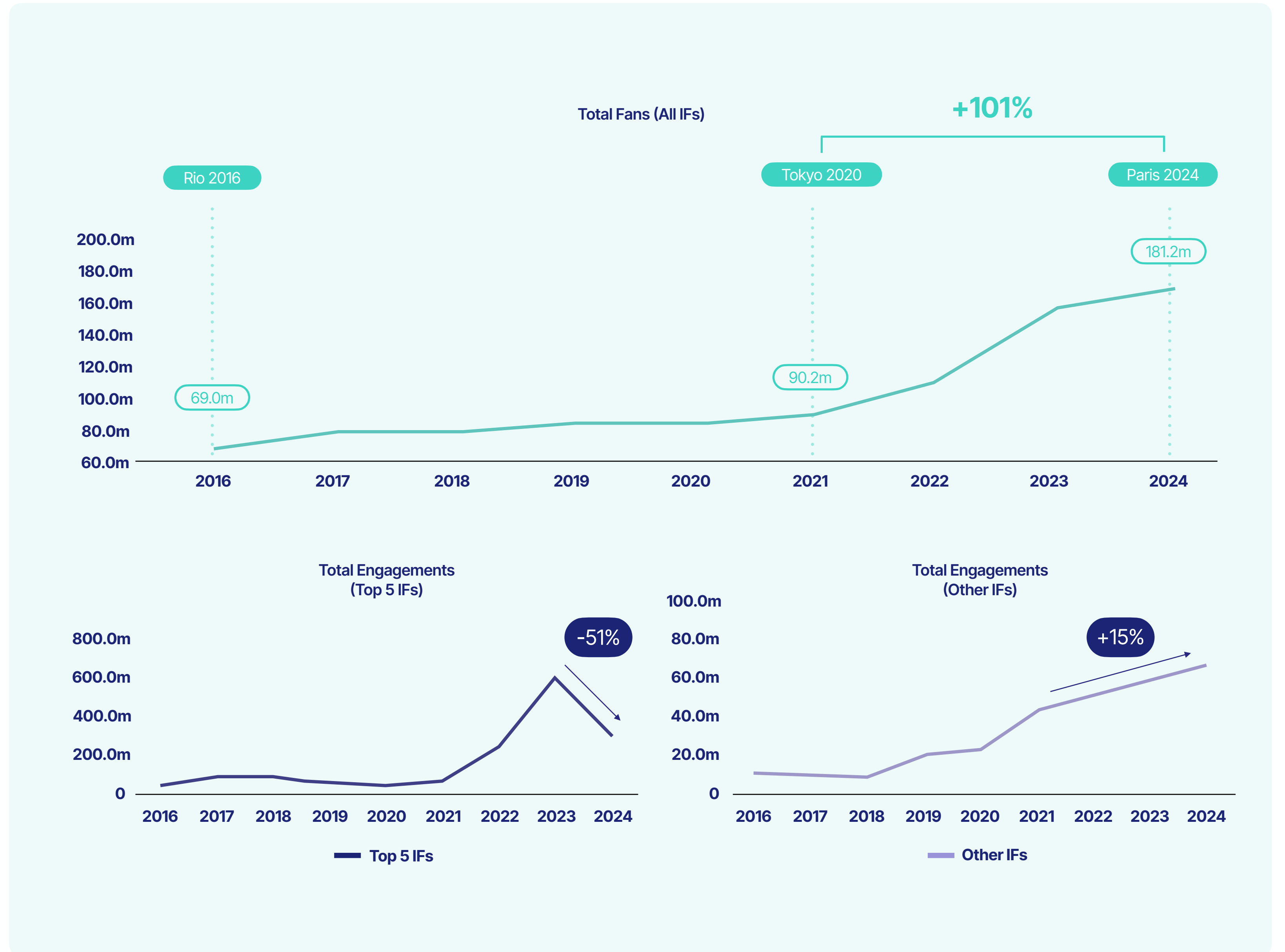
Facebook's 15.2m growth highlights expanding influence in global sports

Facebook remains the largest platform by total fanbase, reaching 181.2m fans and accounting for 38% of the total audience. Despite shifting digital consumption habits, the platform recorded a net gain of 15.2 million new followers YoY, the highest absolute growth across all platforms.

This increase in following highlights Facebook's continued ability to attract new global audiences, especially in regions where alternative platforms face restrictions or lower general usage. In many markets, Facebook is still the primary (and sometimes only) social media platform used.

Given Facebook's wide reach and user base, the platform offers distinct opportunities for IFs. A clear disparity exists in Facebook performance between the Top 5 IFs and other IFs. The latter have steadily increased their engagements YoY, using Facebook to connect with a global audience – particularly during events like Paris 2024. In contrast, the top 5 IFs tend to see significant spikes driven by their major events outside of the Olympics.

Consequently, while the Olympics provides other IFs with their greatest opportunity to access a global audience, the Top 5 IFs are able to achieve high engagement with dedicated events outside of Olympic years.





Nishant Mehta, FIH
Social Media Manager

How the International Hockey Federation built a global community

Overview

The International Hockey Federation (FIH) excelled on Facebook, climbing +11 places to rank 11th – the highest rise on any FIH platform. With 64% of its social media audience on Facebook, the platform remains central to FIH's social media strategy.

Their approach to Facebook places an emphasis on community building to ensure their diverse international fan base remains engaged across different regions and languages.

“Our goal is bringing hockey fans together and fostering a community.”

Community growth tactics

Nishant Mehta highlighted three tactics used to grow the hockey community

1. **Targeting regions that speak 3 focus languages** – English, Spanish and Hindi
2. **Creating dedicated Facebook group** – localised fan spaces in Hindi and Spanish
3. **Retaining fans post-Paris** – continuing successful strategies that engaged new fans during Paris 2024

Tailoring content to a global community

Analytics play a crucial role in identifying FIH's most engaged fans. Insights reveal that English, Spanish and Hindi-speaking regions should be a key focus. While India drives high engagement, FIH works to balance global and regional coverage, showcasing a variety of teams that usually reflects on-ground performance.

Tournaments like the FIH Hockey5s World Cup and FIH Hockey Nations Cup gave emerging nations the chance to gain visibility. Adding diversity to their coverage broadened FIH's community reach.

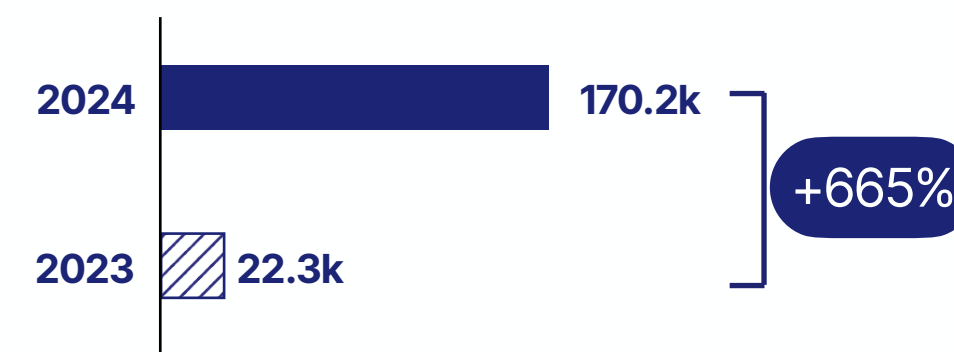
Growing the hockey community post-Paris 2024

FIH saw a surge in new fans during Paris 2024. Their challenge was how to convert these fans into longterm, engaged members of their hockey community.

FIH continued the successful strategies used during the Olympics to achieve this objective, including a stronger focus on match video content and curating content series that showcased various aspects of the sport.

By sticking with what they knew worked, FIH successfully integrated these new fans into the wider hockey community, developing structured content to keep them engaged year-round.

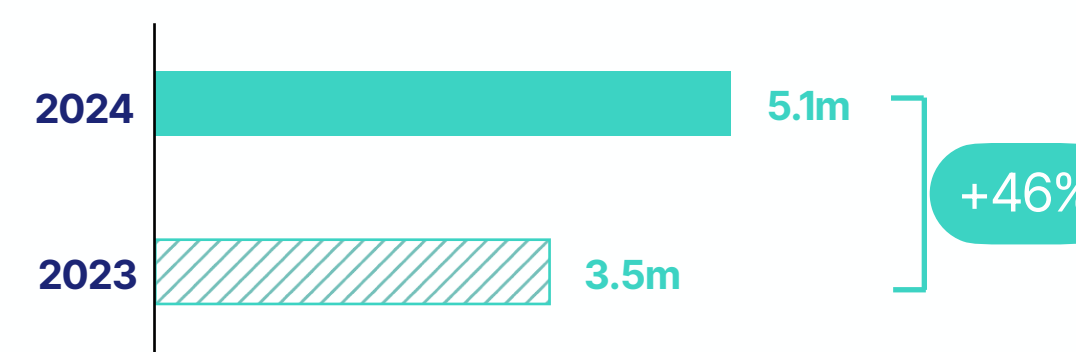
Growth



Facebook as a community hub for hockey fans

FIH has transformed their Facebook pages into a central hub for hockey fans by creating localised fan spaces through dedicated Hindi and Spanish Facebook groups. These groups align with FIH's goal of bringing hockey fans together and fostering a community where they can engage in discussions in their preferred languages. To ensure consistent engagement, FIH employ two freelancers who dedicated to managing the groups.

Engagements



Connecting with a global fan base

FIH has strategically balanced short-form content, e.g. Reels and long-form videos, on Facebook to appeal to diverse fan segments. Reels are popular among Gen Z, so FIH tends to use short videos on Instagram, and prioritise long-form videos on Facebook which they've seen drive higher engagement. With TikTok's ban in India – a large market for FIH - Facebook and Instagram have become even more critical for reaching global fans. FIH can therefore fill the gap left by TikTok and effectively target fans across multiple platforms.

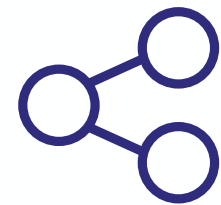
Challenges & opportunities

Challenge: Declining organic reach

Facebook is the world's largest social media platform. Nevertheless, it has been facing an incremental decline in organic reach, a trend dating back to 2012, with a reach of only 1.37% in 2024. The question is: How can a platform with 3.07b users worldwide experience such a drop in organic visibility? The explanation is two-fold:

Facebook's algorithms have increasingly prioritised user experience over brand visibility. This means that personal updates/content from individual users are favoured in newsfeed over brand posts. Such an approach aligns with the primary reason people use Facebook—to connect with friends/family – thus ensuring that the platform remains engaging/relevant to its users.

IFs experienced the lowest YoY growth across all Facebook pages in 2024. Consequently, paid advertising space on the platform has become increasingly competitive especially since it is essential for achieving meaningful success on the platform. By investing in paid media, brands can ensure their content appears in the newsfeeds of targeted audiences, thereby overcoming the limitations of organic reach.



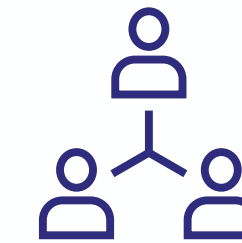
Creating shareable content

- With social connections driving social media engagement, IFs can harness Facebook's algorithm by creating content that resonates emotionally and encourages sharing. Rather than competing for attention, IFs can craft narrative-driven content that sparks emotion, provides value, and naturally motivates audiences to share—helping to amplify organic reach.
- By embracing a mix of content formats, IFs can leverage Facebook's prioritisation of Reels, which have emerged as a dominant feature in 2024. Short-form videos in Reels capture attention quickly, drive engagement, and offer a versatile format that can be repurposed across multiple platforms. With a strategic approach to storytelling and format variety, IFs can maximise visibility, deepen audience connections, and extend their reach beyond traditional organic limitations.



Paid media optimisation

- Paid media has become a crucial tool for IFs to maintain visibility. Rather than battling the platform's algorithm—which tends to prioritise content from groups and individual users—IFs can use paid advertising to bypass these and directly reach their ideal audience.
- Targeting users based on specific interests, demographics and behaviours, IFs can ensure their content is seen by both existing fans and new potential followers, expanding their reach beyond the limits of organic exposure.
- By leveraging precise audience targeting, strategic ad placements and optimised creative formats, IFs can maximise engagement, drive fan growth and maintain their strong presence on the platform. In a landscape where organic visibility is no longer guaranteed, paid media provides a direct, effective way to cut through the noise and place IF posts at the forefront of fans' feeds.



Building communities

- IFs can go beyond audience growth to build lasting fan loyalty by fostering deeper connections and creating spaces where fans feel valued. As seen with FIH's success, interactive tools like Facebook Groups centred on shared interests—such as sports or events—serve as hubs where like-minded fans can connect, share ideas, and engage in meaningful discussions. This not only increases the time spent on the platform but also amplifies content visibility through organic engagement.
- Direct communication also plays a key role in cultivating a strong community. Engaging with audiences through comments, responding to discussions, and hosting Q&A sessions around events fosters a sense of belonging and encourages deeper interaction. Additionally, incorporating user-generated content (UGC) by inviting fans to share their photos, videos, and stories further strengthens community bonds, reinforcing loyalty and increasing overall engagement.

Instagram: Top 20 IFs

Ranking	International Federations	Change
1	World Athletics	+1
2	World Aquatics (AQUA)	+3
2	Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG)	+8
4	United World Wrestling (UWW)	0
5	Fédération Internationale de Basketball (FIBA)	-4
6	World Rugby	-1
6	Badminton World Federation (BWF)	0
8	Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)	0
9	International Cricket Council (ICC)	0
10	Volleyball World (FIVB)	-7
11	World Archery (WA)	+9
12	Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI)	-1
13	Fédération Internationale de Ski et de Snowboard (FIS)	-1
14	World Table Tennis (WTT)	0
15	Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)	+13
16	World Taekwondo (WT)	0
17	International Biathlon Union (IBU)	-4
18	International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF)	+2
19	International Tennis Federation (ITF)	-1
20	World Rowing	+4

6 of the top 20 federations' rankings remained unchanged

United World Wrestling, Badminton World Federation, FIFA, ICC, WTT and WT all showcased remarkable stability on Instagram by maintaining their positions. In contrast, Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique's impressive 8-place climb into the top 10 reflects the varied impact of strategic shifts and operational effectiveness across different sports federations on a whole.

Instagram led engagement in 2024 as IFs see 2.8x more engagement compared to Tokyo 2020

Instagram accounted for 76% of IF engagement in 2024, matching its peak share during 2021 (Tokyo 2020). A significant majority (34 out of 37) of IFs saw increased engagement compared to Tokyo 2020, with the average IF generating 2.8x more engagement than in 2021. This highlights Instagram's influence during events, with smaller, continued engagement spikes expected during 2025 events.

IFs placed athletes at the heart of Instagram strategy

IFs effectively placed athletes at the centre of their posts to drive mass engagement during Paris 2024. By introducing athletes before events and continuing their stories throughout and post-event, IFs connected with both avid and casual fans. Using carousels for stronger storytelling kept fans invested in the athletes' personal journeys and ultimately drove higher engagement during key moments.

'Event Reflection' posts generated more engagements than 'Event Hype'

'Event Reflection' content generated higher average engagements per post while IFs posted more 'Event Hype' content leading up to events. With fan interest peaking after events, IFs were unable to fully capitalise on this engagement window. Moving into 2025, IFs should allocate more resource to post-event reflection content, such as emotional recaps or following athlete stories after events to maximise engagement during this critical period.

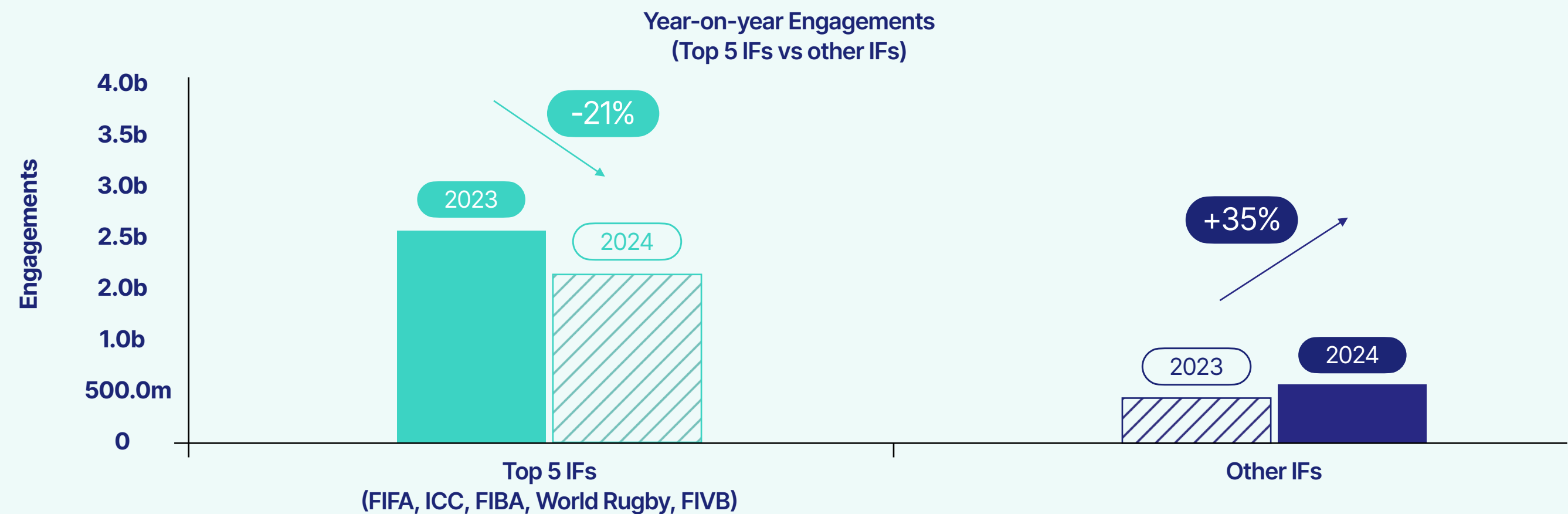
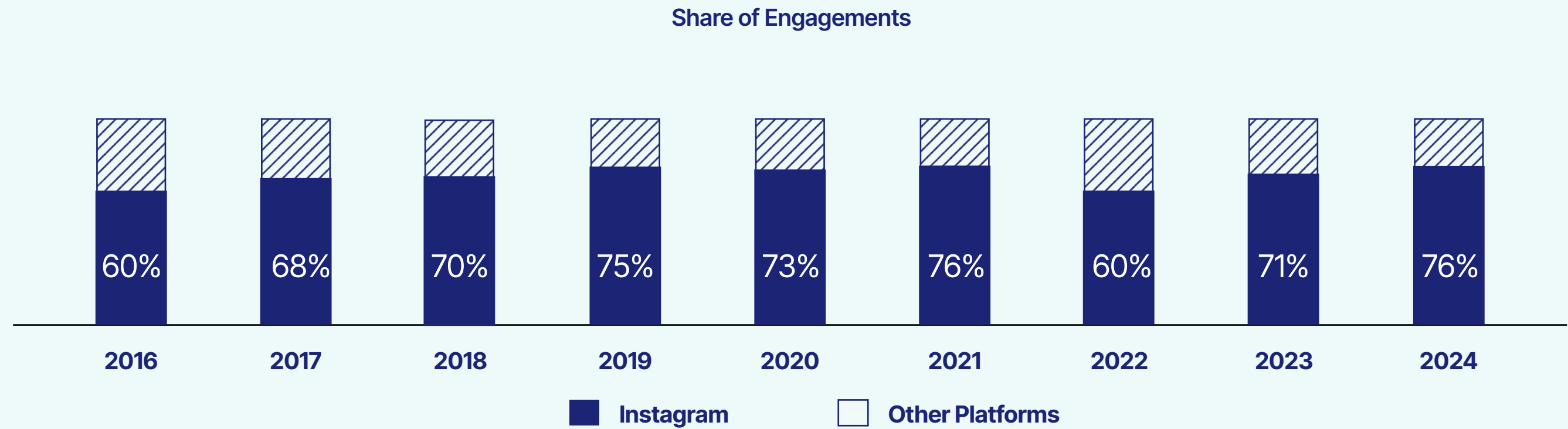
Instagram firmly holds highest share of engagements

Instagram has consistently held the highest share of engagement among platforms from 2016 to 2024, reinforcing its role as the primary platform for IFs to generate engagement.

Instagram's share of engagements have peaked during the last two Olympic years, capturing 76% of engagements during the years of Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024. This trend indicates how Instagram's ability to capitalise on major sporting events makes it the primary platform for event engagement and visual storytelling.

While engagement decreased by -15% YoY, this drop was primarily driven by the largest IFs by audience size, who saw a -21% decrease. In contrast, Other IFs experienced a significant boost during Paris 2024, with engagement increasing by +35%.

This surge from Other IFs demonstrates the Olympics' significant role in boosting visibility for these federations, particularly among causal fans who might not otherwise engage with their sports.



Instagram: Content theme trends

Balancing pre- and post- event storytelling

IFs posted Event Hype content the most (34%), driving the majority of engagements. A diverse mix—memes, humour, and viral-style storytelling, especially during Paris 2024—proved highly effective. These entertaining, shareable formats amplify excitement and anticipation, making event coverage more dynamic and fan-driven.

While pre-event buzz is strong, post-event storytelling remains underutilised, accounting for just 19% of posts despite driving 131k average engagements per post. Emotional recaps, behind-the-scenes moments, and athlete reactions can extend engagement beyond the event.

Behind-the-scenes hooks fans

With the highest engagement rate at 427k per post but only comprising 6% of total posts, there is a clear opportunity to produce more of this content type. Fans are showing a strong preference for authenticity and intimate glimpses into the lives of athletes. By offering exclusive, unscripted glimpses into an athlete's world, IFs can strengthen fan loyalty and differentiate themselves from standard game-day coverage.





Laura Arcoleo, World Athletics
Head of Digital Media

How World Athletics used cultural storytelling to win at Paris 2024

Overview

World Athletics reached #1 Instagram ranking on SportOnSocial, following a steady rise since Tokyo – climbing from 5th to 1st place.

Recognising the sport's global reach and the significance of the Olympic stage, World Athletics adopted cultural storytelling, city-inspired themes, and innovative content formats to engage audiences. By integrating Parisian culture, athlete-focused narratives, and trend-driven content, they established themselves as a leading force among Olympic sports on Instagram.

Key tactics

Laura Arcoleo identified four key tactics that drove World Athletics' success

1. **Creating a unique and powerful brand identity** – making digital content stand out in a crowded space
2. **Capitalising on the city of Paris** – making content more relevant to casual fans attracted during the Games
3. **Placing powerful athletes at the centre of storytelling** – using the collaboration tool on Instagram
4. **Introducing winners of Content Creators programme** – providing fans with the most informative, inspiring and entertaining content

"We knew all eyes around the world would be on athletics and we had to be prepared to offer the most comprehensive experience for our fans."

Using culture & jumping on trends

Embracing Paris & cultural relevance

World Athletics fully integrated the spirit of Paris into its content strategy, drawing from the city's rich art, culture, food, and language to engage a broader Olympic audience. This cultural connection helped make athletics more accessible to casual fans during the Games, with examples such as 'Hang it the Louvre' which generated 12% more engagement than the post average.

Preparation & planning

By establishing a well-structured and robust long-term content plan early in the season, World Athletics created space for creativity, allowing them to capitalise on trends and even create new ones. Their in-depth knowledge and detailed planning ensured they were in the right place at the right time to jump on trends and report on the most important stories and results, being the first to release key information.

Storytelling through archival footage

World Athletics pride themselves on their history, legends and archive. As their fanbase grows with each generation of emerging athletes, the archive provides a rich source of content that connects each generation of fans to discover and re-discover the stories of Athletics stars.

"We know what fans of athletics want; we are fans ourselves. By preparing detailed plans well in advance, we can create the most compelling and engaging content for our audience."

Tailoring content for different audiences

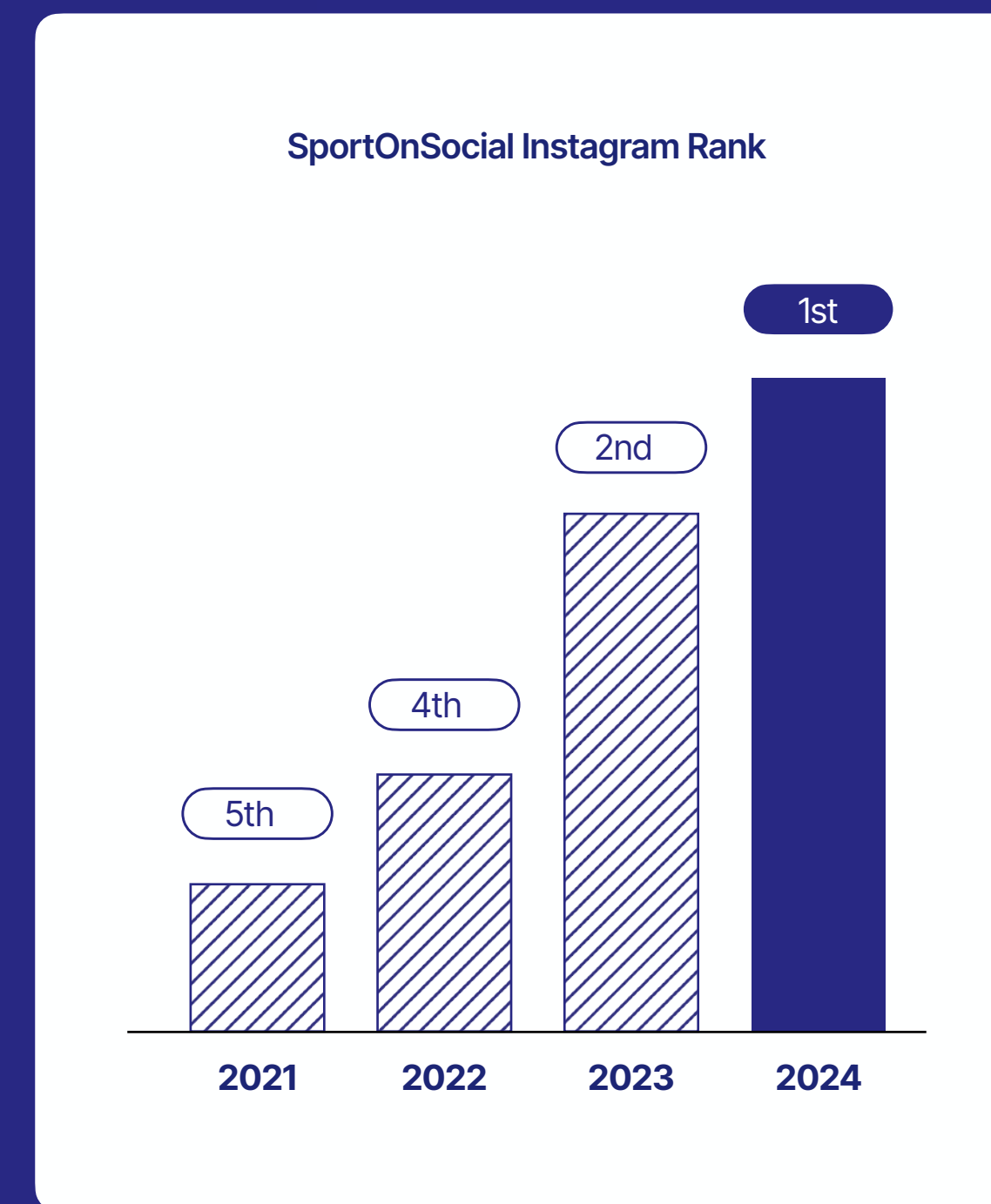
World Athletics excelled in tailoring content for diverse audiences by preparing specifically for unique moments, such as the first-ever medals won by countries like Pakistan, Saint Lucia, Dominica, and Botswana during Paris 2024. Anticipating these historic achievements, the digital team created tailored content that would resonate with local audiences while maintaining a global appeal.

By being ready for all possible outcomes and releasing information swiftly, World Athletics ensured its content transcended audiences, while also enabling the athletes' personalities and achievements to transcend in a way that connected with fans internationally.

Building hype with SPRINT documentary

The Netflix documentary SPRINT was released just before Paris 2024, offering a unique look into the world of elite sprinters. World Athletics collaborated with Netflix by sharing promotional materials, while also creating exclusive digital assets to leverage this moment to boost the sport's visibility and attract new fans in the lead up to Paris 2024.

World Athletics were pleased to see athletes' popularity grow as the show broke into Netflix's top 10 most viewed shows in its first week.



Spotlight: How female athletes drove engagements in 2024

The rise of female athletes has transcended the sporting landscape and redefined how audiences engage with sports content. Women's sports have not only gained prominence in mainstream media but have also thrived on digital platforms like Instagram, where authentic, relatable content help female athletes connect with their audiences on another level.

One notable example is WNBA rookie Caitlin Clark whose popularity skyrocketed after joining Indiana Fever. Her performance and engaging online presence led to an 80% increase in Instagram followers within just one month of the WNBA draft, ultimately accruing 4.9 million engagements and reaching 3.0 million followers during her first season. This meteoric rise in social media visibility translated into tangible commercial benefits, including increased broadcast value – accounting for 45% of WNBA broadcast value in the 2024 season – merchandise sales of her jersey at the collegiate and national level, sponsorship impact and brand collaborations— initiating lucrative deals never seen before in the history of women's sport, such as Nike alone generating over \$30 million in social media value from WNBA partnerships.

The Paris 2024 Olympics further accentuated this shift as female Olympians generated 53% of total engagements across Instagram and TikTok. High profile Gymnastics athletes such as Simone Biles and Rebecca Andrade on average experienced 143% increase in followers following the Games, while Rugby athlete Ilona Maher accumulated the most engagements of any athlete during the Olympics, sustaining engagement through 2024. Their medal-winning performances coupled with resonating behind-the-scenes and relatable personal narratives exemplified their power in reshaping the digital sports landscape, driving new commercial opportunities for their personal brand.



Takeaways

Authentic content enhances connections

Female athletes are gaining more attention by blending their sports achievements with genuine personal stories, which offer relatable insights into their daily lives. This authenticity boosts engagement on Instagram.

Cultivate genuine athlete-fan interactions

- Encourage athletes to share authentic, behind-the-scenes content of their daily lives and training routines.
- Prompt fans to respond with their own experiences or questions, creating a two-way dialogue.
- Develop guidelines for athletes to share personal milestones and daily routines that emphasise authenticity.
- Integrate the most engaging fan-created content alongside athlete posts to create a more comprehensive narrative.

Advocates for social change

Female athletes promote not just their sporting abilities but also champion equality and inclusivity on Instagram, sparking conversations that extend beyond sports.

- Promote athlete-led initiatives: Collaborate to highlight their advocacy, underscoring the organisation's commitment to social progress.
- Spotlight impactful actions: Feature their charitable and community efforts, linking sports to social awareness.

X: Top 20 IFs

Ranking	International Federations	Change
1	Fédération Internationale de Basketball (FIBA)	+1
2	World Athletics	+1
3	Volleyball World (FIVB)	-2
4	International Cricket Council (ICC)	0
5	World Aquatics (AQUA)	+3
6	Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG)	+3
7	International Tennis Federation (ITF)	+10
8	World Table Tennis (WTT)	+10
9	International Judo Federation (IJF)	+4
10	Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI)	-5
11	World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC)	+1
12	International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF)	-3
13	Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)	-2
14	Badminton World Federation (BWF)	-8
15	World Rugby	-8
16	World Archery (WA)	-2
17	Fédération Internationale de Ski et de Snowboard (FIS)	-7
18	Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)	+14
19	International Skating Union (ISU)	-4
20	International Surfing Association (ISA)	+2

Stability & surges in X rankings among the top IFs

While some IFs, e.g. ICC and WBSC, maintained steady positions, showing consistency in their digital strategies, others surged in the rankings. FEI, for example, rose +14 places, underscoring its successful engagement strategies during key equestrian events.

Slowest growth of any platform

IFs amassed 4.1m new fans on X/Twitter, the lowest of any platform – contributing to the slowest growth rate of +6%. Facebook ranked 2nd with +8%, although this platform already has the largest audience size. As X/Twitter becomes a lower priority for IFs and fans alike, it is no surprise that growth is slowing, with overall usage down even during event times.

Most International Federations see a decline in engagement vs Tokyo 2020

Of the 37 IFs featured in both the 2025 and 2022 editions of SportOnSocial, more saw a decrease in engagement than an increase (21 vs 16) – the only platform with this trend. X was also the only platform with a drop in post volume (-11%), suggesting it has become even less of a priority platform for IF communications during Olympic years.

Post volume decrease as IFs opt for other platforms

The number of posts from IFs has been declining steadily, with a -11% decrease since 2021. This trend contrasts with other platforms, which have seen an increase in post volume, suggesting a shift in priority platforms for IFs. Despite X still leading in total post volume due to its nature of live event posts, the gap with Facebook is narrowing and may be overtaken during 2025.

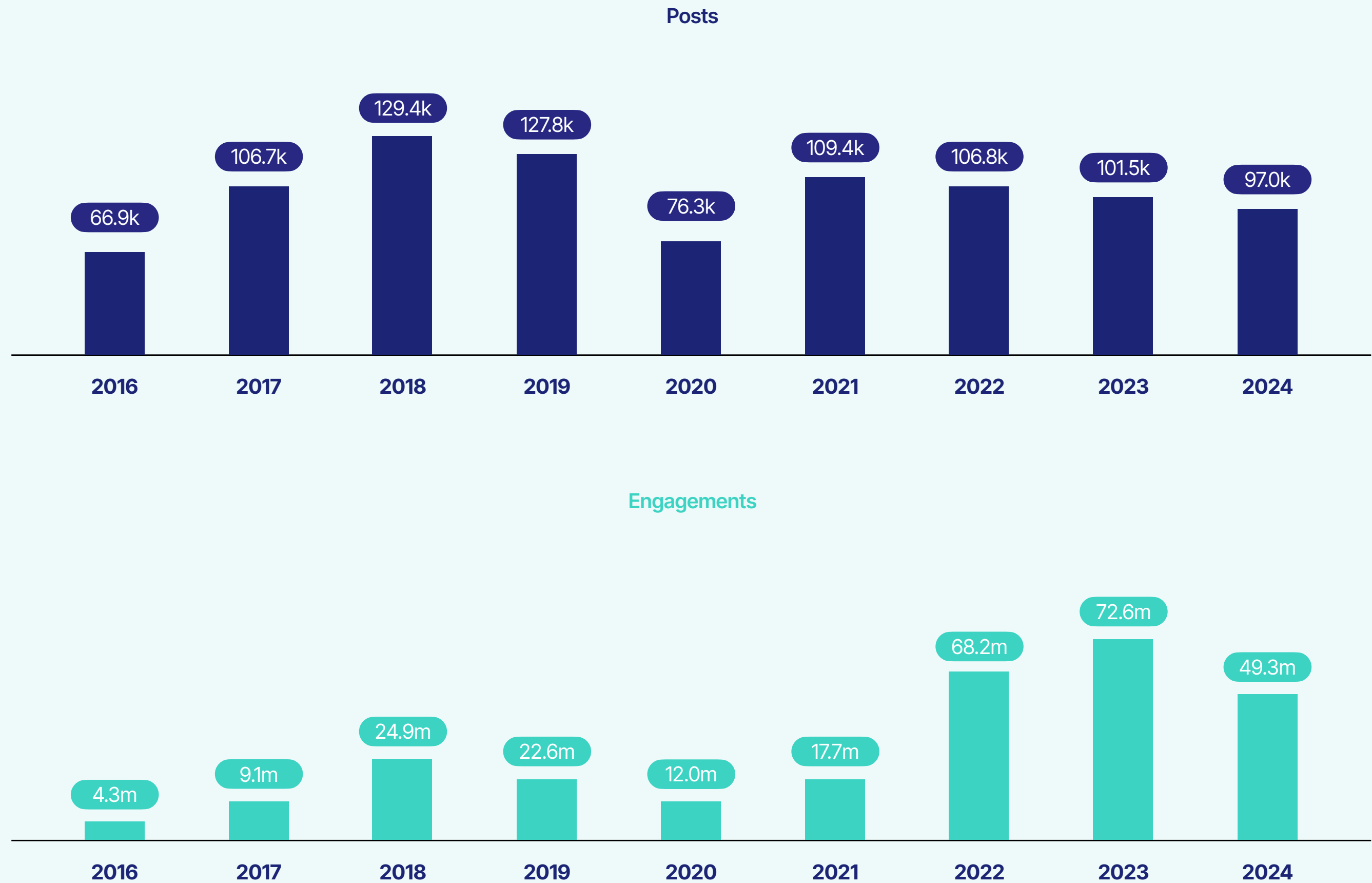
X's declining role in IF engagements

X was the only platform to see a decline in post volume, dropping 11% in 2024 vs. 2021 (Tokyo Olympics). Only 2020, heavily impacted by COVID-19, recorded fewer posts in the past nine years of SportOnSocial data.

Despite its reputation as a hub for real-time discussions and event-driven engagement, X appears to be losing relevance as a key communication tool for IFs. The declining post volume signals a lower prioritisation of the platform, even during Olympic years when global sports conversations are at their peak. While X remains valuable for live updates, breaking news, and fan interaction, its reduced usage indicates that IFs are favouring platforms with stronger organic reach, better content performance, and more engaging multimedia formats.

X was also the only platform where engagement declined for more IFs than it increased: 21 saw a drop, while only 16 experienced growth (2024 vs. 2021).

While total engagement on X in 2024 was 2.8x higher than in 2021, its YoY engagement fell -32%, outpacing the -11% decline in post volume. This disparity indicates that reduced engagement is not just a result of fewer posts but a broader trend of declining user interaction. Even as IFs post less, audiences are engaging even less, reinforcing the notion that X is facing increased competition from other platforms that offer more compelling ways to connect with fans.



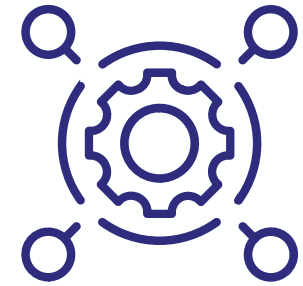
Challenges & opportunities

Challenge: Platform instability & technical failures

- Real-time coverage of major events (e.g. World Cup qualifiers, continental championships) was disrupted when X's live-tweet feature experienced downtime.
- **Impact:** Risk of missed sponsorship deliverables, delayed official updates, and potential loss of fan trust if alternative channels are not clearly established.

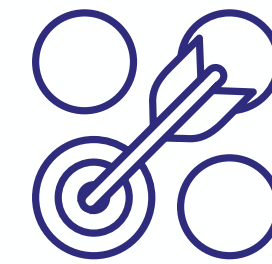
Challenge: Declining user base and reach

- Markets like the U.S., UK, and EU witnessed double-digit declines in daily or monthly active users. A projected 7 million U.S. users lost between 2022–2025.
- **Impact:** Reduced organic reach undermines social media ROI. Federations increasingly need multi-platform strategies to maintain audience engagement and sponsor value.



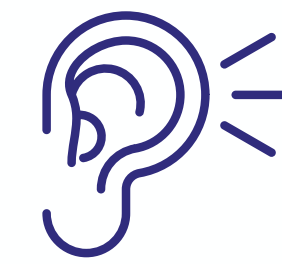
Diversify your channel mix

- With the evolving social media landscape, relying solely on X for real-time engagement presents a risk—especially during high-stakes moments like a cup final. To ensure consistent reach and fan interaction, IFs can adopt a multi-platform approach, leveraging Instagram Stories and TikTok for quick, engaging updates that capture attention in the moment.
- Short-form, snappy content on these platforms offers an opportunity to enhance visibility and engagement beyond X's algorithmic unpredictability. Instagram Stories provide an interactive space for polls, Q&As, and live reactions, while TikTok thrives on dynamic, trend-driven clips that can rapidly amplify event excitement.



Lean into niche communities

- While overall usage on X is declining, certain sports communities—such as cricket, athletics, and esports—remain highly active. Focusing on these dedicated groups allows IFs to maintain engagement even as broader consumer interest shifts.
- Engagement thrives when content aligns with what niche audiences care about most. IFs can share in-depth match stats, tactical breakdowns, and historical comparisons to spark discussion among loyal fan base.
- Creating interactive threads, hosting Q&A sessions, and responding to fan insights can drive meaningful conversations. This two-way engagement strengthens loyalty and keeps these communities invested in the platform.



Keep an ear to the ground

- X's algorithm evolves rapidly, often with little warning. Regularly monitoring analytics helps detect shifts that could impact impressions and engagement, allowing IFs to stay ahead of changes.
- A sudden drop in reach or interactions may indicate an algorithmic shift rather than a content issue. Adapting posting frequency, format, or engagement tactics quickly can help mitigate performance declines.
- Analysing trends over time can reveal which content types are most resilient to algorithm shifts. IFs can use this data to fine-tune their approach, ensuring continued engagement despite platform unpredictability.

YouTube: Top 20 IFs

Ranking	International Federations	Change
1	International Canoe Federation (ICF)	+33
2	International Cricket Council (ICC)	+7
3	Volleyball World (FIVB)	-2
4	Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)	+1
5	World Athletics	-3
6	World Rugby	-3
7	Fédération Internationale de Basketball (FIBA)	-4
8	World Table Tennis (WTT)	0
9	World Archery (WA)	+4
10	Fédération Internationale de Ski et de Snowboard (FIS)	+10
11	World Aquatics (AQUA)	-1
12	International Judo Federation (IJF)	0
13	Badminton World Federation (BWF)	-7
13	Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)	-2
13	United World Wrestling (UWW)	-6
16	International Surfing Association (ISA)	+4
17	International Tennis Federation (ITF)	+4
18	Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI)	-1
19	International Skating Union (ISU)	-4
20	International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC)	-6

Shorts drive discoverability, long-form content keeps fans invested

YouTube Shorts have proven to be a powerful tool for driving engagement, accounting for 83% of interactions despite making up only 26% of posts. IFs strategically utilised Shorts to attract new viewers, leveraging their high engagement rates and discoverability. Meanwhile, long-form content plays a crucial role in retaining existing fans, ensuring a balanced approach to growth.

YouTube Shorts transform engagement from Tokyo 2020 to Paris 2024

Shorts were rolled out globally in July 2021 but it wasn't until 2022 that IFs fully embraced them. The engagement on Shorts became a key differentiator in YouTube's performance between Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024, with IFs generating 9x more engagements in 2024 compared to 2021. The majority of IFs saw significant increases in engagement, highlighting the platform's strength during major events.

YouTube shows more visibility for IFs compared to other platforms

YouTube stands out as a strong platform for IFs – it was the only platform to see a YoY increase in engagements (+92%) and had the highest increase in YoY growth (+40%). This was largely driven by Shorts, which have strong reach and visibility for IFs. Unlike TikTok, where engagement during Paris 2024 was more competitive and driven by athletes and fan-generated content, YouTube provides IFs with a more favorable environment for IFs to connect with and expand their audience.

YouTube Memberships: a new tool for IF revenue and keeping fans invested

Currently, only two IFs have implemented YouTube Channel Membership options, a monetisation feature allowing them to offer paid subscriptions. This strategy not only provides exclusive content to keep fans engaged long-term but also unlocks a new revenue stream for IFs.

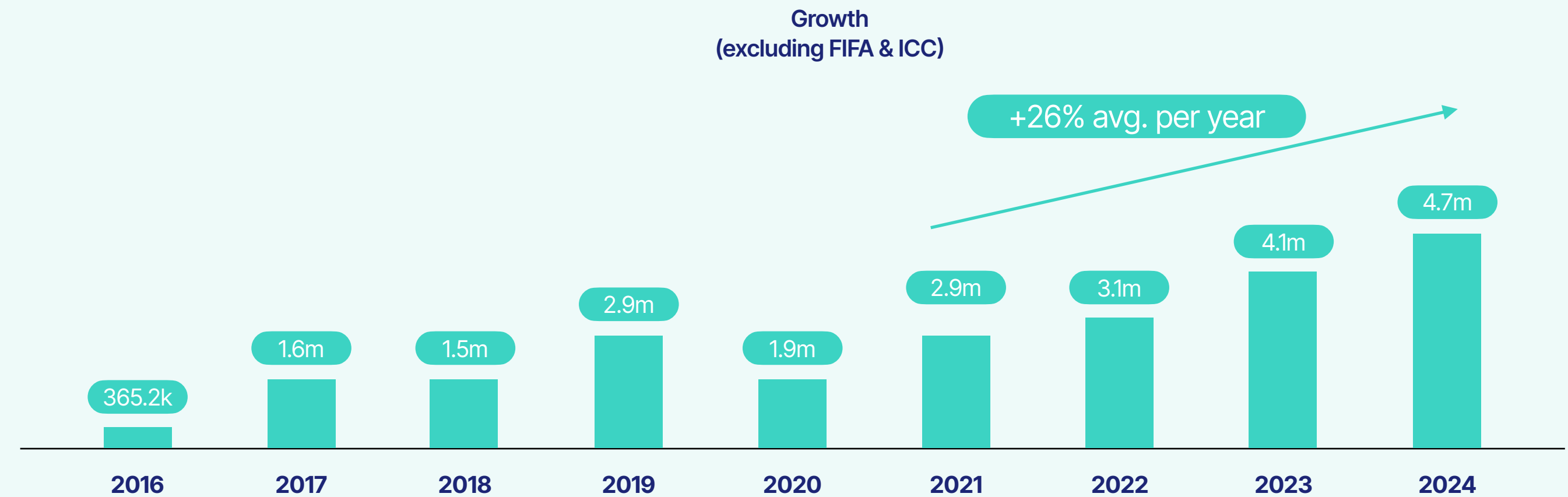
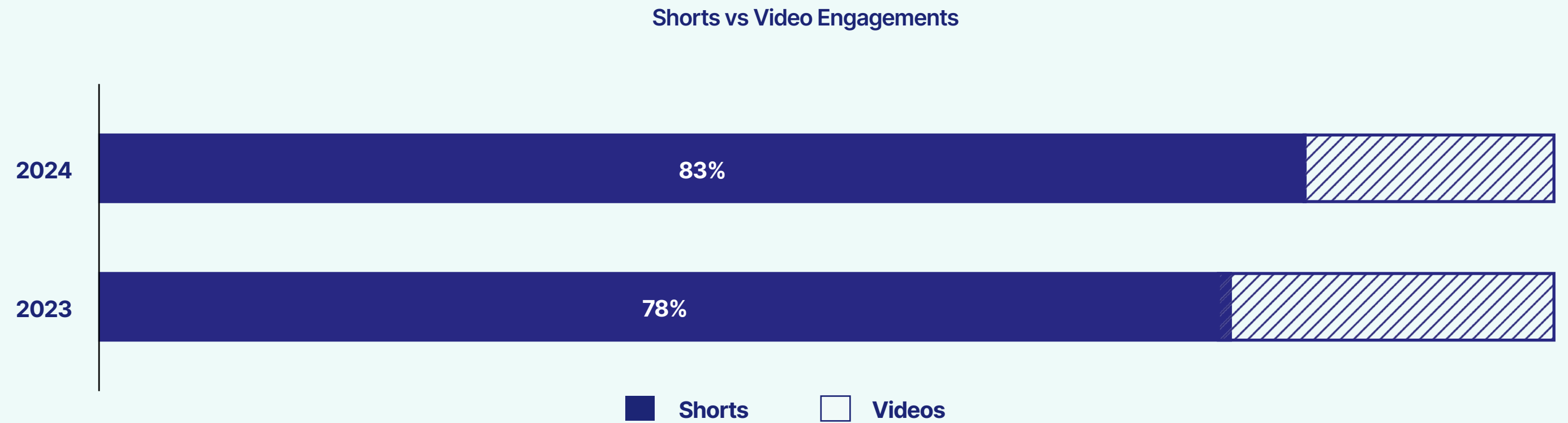
The sustainable impact of YouTube Shorts

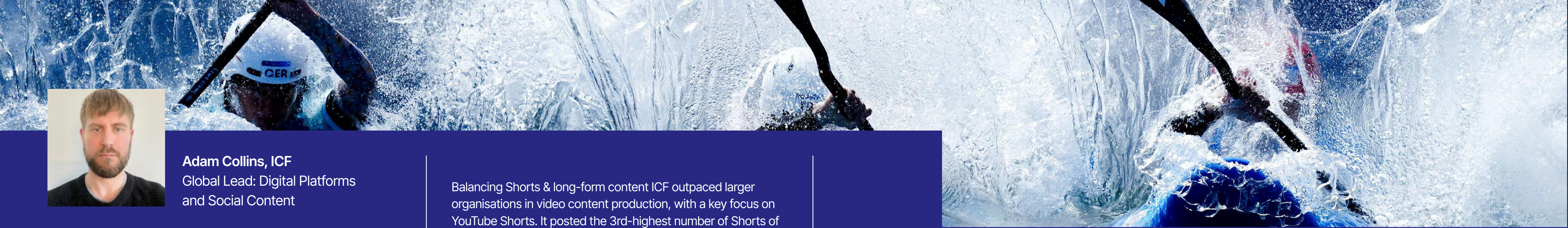
YouTube was the only platform to see an overall YOY increase in engagements – driven by the popularity of YouTube Shorts. Despite a -24% decrease in the number of Shorts posted, share of total engagements rose from 78% to 83% – showcasing a pivotal change in the way fans engage with videos on the platform.

Growth on YouTube was fuelled by the dedicated Shorts feed, which actively promoted short-form content. Additionally, user familiarity with vertical video formats – thanks to platforms like Instagram Reels/TikTok – contributed to high engagement rates.

YouTube Shorts have been a major driver of IF fan growth (+40% increase in fans in 2024 vs 2023) since their introduction in July 2021. The long lifespan of Shorts means they generate engagement weeks or even months after posting, making them a powerful tool for discoverability.

With its wide reach, Shorts act as a gateway for new fans, helping IFs attract broader audiences through short-form content. This leverages the discoverability of Shorts to introduce viewers to IF channels and guide them toward longer, more in-depth videos. IFS can effectively engage new fans while creating sustained audience retention by balancing the immediacy of Shorts with the depth of long-form content.





Adam Collins, ICF
Global Lead: Digital Platforms and Social Content

How the International Canoe Federation grew YouTube subscribers by +432% in 2024

Overview

The International Canoe Federation (ICF) made YouTube its number one priority in 2024, transforming its channel, Planet Canoe, into a dominant force in sports media.

Climbing 33 places to top spot among IFs on YouTube, ICF grew its subscriber base by an impressive +432% (62k to 333k) through a high-volume, strategic content approach.

"No other platform currently offers the same level of organic reach and discoverability."

Key shifts driving growth

According to Adam Collins, three major changes fuelled ICF success.

- A huge push on Shorts:** maximising reach and engagement through bite-sized, high-frequency content.
- Targeting key markets:** using data to adapt content schedules for maximum impact in the USA and India.
- Placing powerful athletes at the centre of storytelling** – using the collaboration tool on Instagram
- YouTube Memberships & live coverage:** unlocking a new revenue stream and creating a more engaged community.

Balancing Shorts & long-form content ICF outpaced larger organisations in video content production, with a key focus on YouTube Shorts. It posted the 3rd-highest number of Shorts of any IF while maintaining the exact average IF balance in 2024 (26% Shorts, 74% traditional videos). ICF identified that each content format served a different purpose and used AI-driven insights to define common high-performing themes.

Shorts

Purpose: reaching new audiences/increasing engagement as Shorts shown to non-subscribers more frequently.

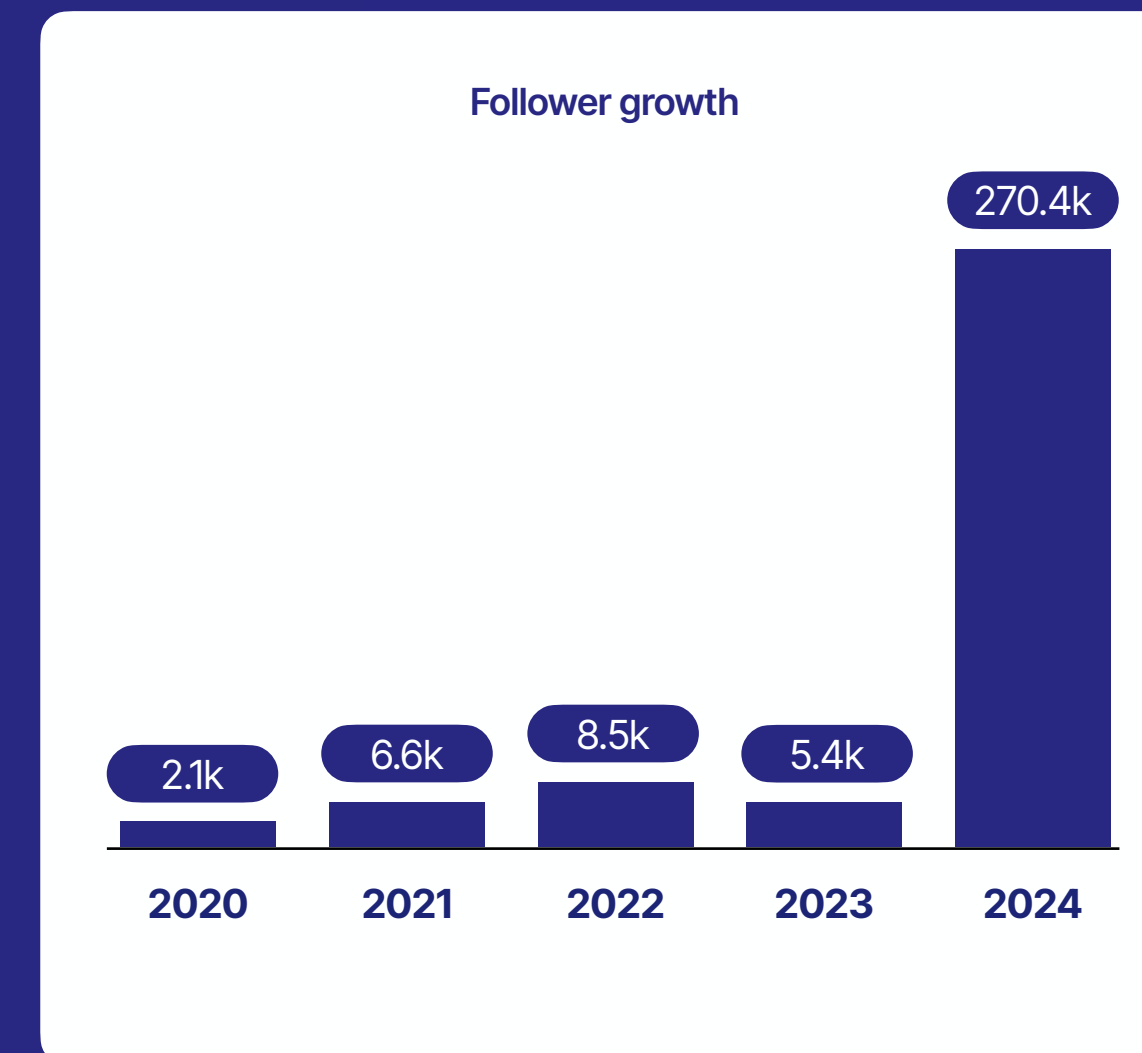
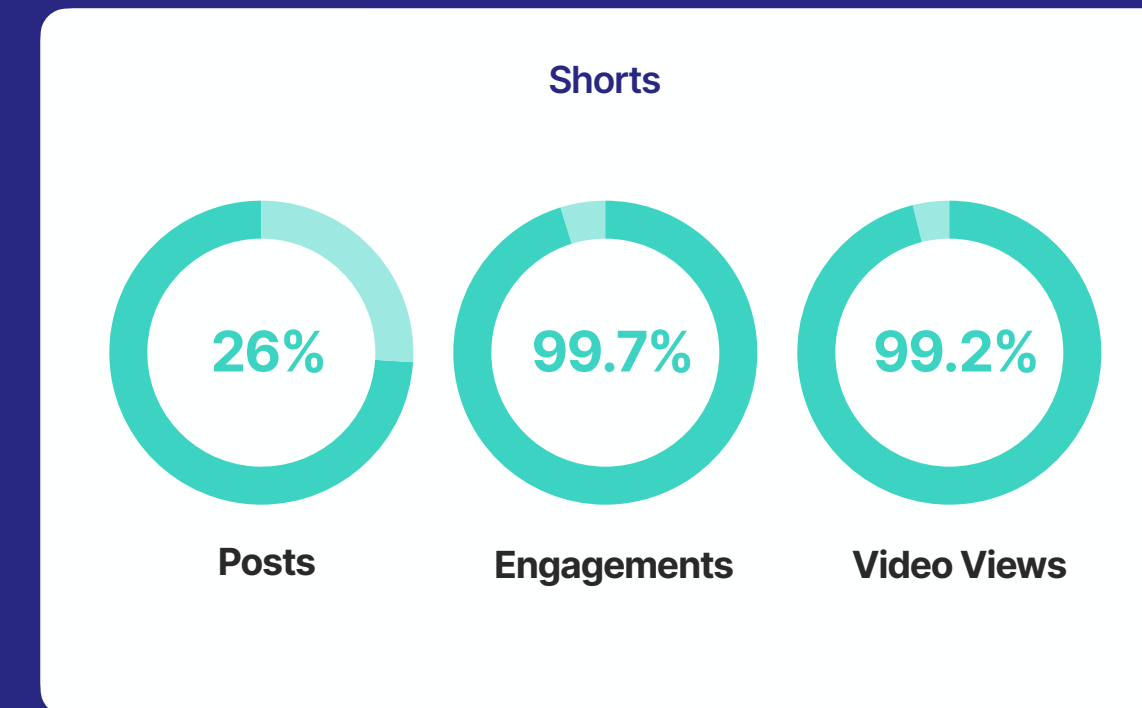
Themes: nature, humour, workout-themed content – designed to engage people who may not be familiar with paddling.

"By using Shorts to drive discovery and long-form content to keep viewers invested, we've created a strong, sustainable audience base."

Long-form videos

Purpose: converting casual viewers into dedicated fans, ideal for providing deeper insights/covering event highlights.

Themes: race results, event highlights, in-depth analysis – catering to more engaged fans.



Strategic & data-driven approach

The success of ICF was fuelled by a sharp focus on key markets and real-time content adaptation. By identifying USA and India as major growth areas, ICF adjusted their posting schedule to align with peak viewing times in these countries. In addition, tools like Grabyo allowed the IF to repurpose live content quickly, add branding, and drive traffic to paid streams – helping scale their reach while maintaining high engagement.

YouTube Channel Memberships: unlocking new revenue & engagement

Another key ICF shift was the integration of YouTube Channel Memberships to make live coverage more interactive/valuable by offering exclusive content/strengthening their community.

This has unlocked a new revenue stream that feeds directly back into further content production. ICF sees a major opportunity for expanding the Channel Memberships offerings/investing more in interactive content. By creating educational advice, behind-the-scenes exclusives, live Q&As, and premium content for members, ICF can build heartfelt connections with its audience and strengthen long-term engagement.

TikTok: Top 20 IFs

Ranking	International Federations	Change
1	Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)	+3
2	International Cricket Council (ICC)	+37
2	Badminton World Federation (BWF)	+34
4	United World Wrestling (UWW)	-1
5	World Rugby	-4
6	Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI)	0
7	World Aquatics (AQUA)	-1
8	Fédération Internationale de Basketball (FIBA)	-3
9	World Athletics	0
10	Volleyball World (FIVB)	-8
11	Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)	-1
12	Fédération Internationale de Ski et de Snowboard (FIS)	+8
13	World Curling	+10
14	World Table Tennis (WTT)	-3
14	World Archery (WA)	+12
16	International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF)	-1
17	World Taekwondo (WT)	-8
18	International Skating Union (ISU)	-1
19	International Judo Federation (IJF)	-3
20	International Handball Federation (IHF)	-2

Highest growth rate of all platforms, poised to surpass X

IFs collectively increased their TikTok following by +23% - and the platform now lies only 4.8m followers behind X. IFs saw more growth on TikTok in 2023 than 2024 – indicating there could be more opportunity to grow on video platforms outside of Olympic years by leveraging competitions without video footage restrictions.

+244% increase in Photo Carousels, as IFs make use of alternative post-types

Compared to 2023, the volume of regular videos remained consistent - increasing by +3%. Many IFs incorporated carousels into their strategy, often repurposing carousel content initially created for Instagram.

'TikTok Olympics' driven by athletes and fan-generated content where IFs struggled to engage fans

The number of IF TikTok posts increased by +7% YOY, however engagements dropped by -39%. With both Top 5 and Other IFs experiencing significant YOY engagement drops, fan-generated content and athletes such as Ilona Maher were the real drivers of significant engagement during the Games.

The Discovery Hub for younger fans in 2025

TikTok is increasingly used by younger fans as a search engine for discovering event highlights, athlete updates, and trending content. As Gen Z turns to TikTok for information, IFs can leverage this trend by creating searchable content with relevant hashtags and keywords. This approach will enhance visibility during major events in 2025, allowing IFs to effectively reach and engage with their audience – in particular, younger fans – on the platform.

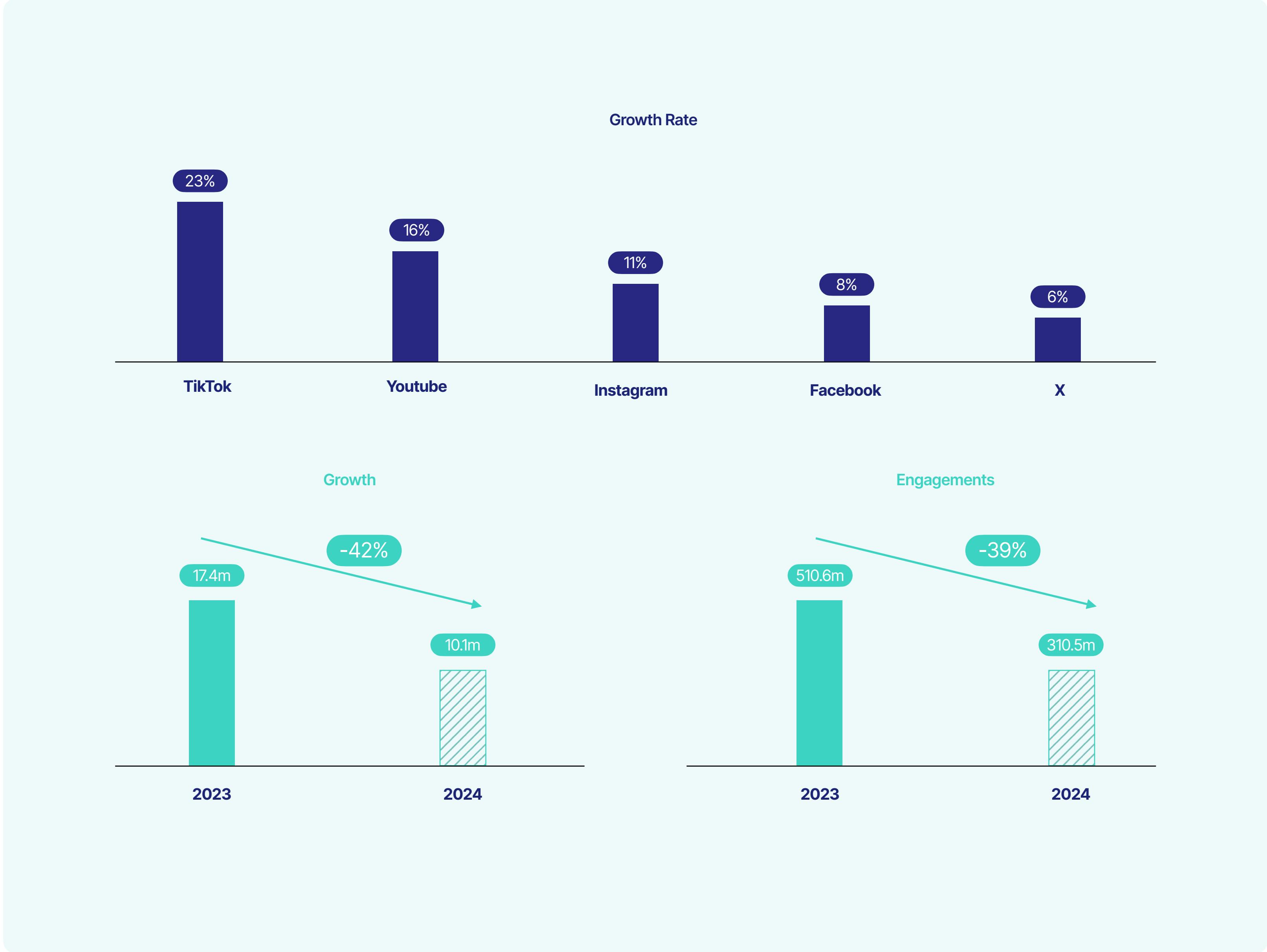
TikTok's 2024 Paradox: growth & engagement challenges

TikTok demonstrated the highest growth rate of all platforms (+23% increase in followers vs 2023), significantly outpacing its competitors. Despite being a relatively new platform (launched in 2016), TikTok currently ranks 5th in total IF audience size but is on track to surpass X and potentially YouTube in the near future. Its rapid expansion highlights its dominance in short-form video content and its ability to attract new users at an impressive rate.

However, 2024 proved to be an anomaly for TikTok's overall performance. While its audience base expanded, overall follower growth declined by -42% and engagement dropped by -39%, suggesting widespread difficulties with video content. Notably, TikTok was the only platform where the Top 5 IFs (-42%) and other IFs (-27%) experienced YoY decreases in engagement.

Paris 2024 has often been referred to as the "TikTok Olympics" due to the immense popularity and resonance of athlete and fan-generated content on the platform. By contrast, IFs struggled to achieve the same level of engagement due to limitations on their video footage and content creation.

This highlights a critical learning for IFs: while TikTok remains a key growth driver, effectively leveraging its platform requires adapting to user behaviours, prioritising original content, and embracing storytelling formats that resonate beyond official footage.





Benjamin Stoll, FIS
Digital & Innovation Director

How the Fédération Internationale de Ski et de Snowboard grew their TikTok ahead of Milano Cortina 2026

Overview

The Fédération Internationale de Ski et de Snowboard (FIS) competed with summer sports in 2024 and managed to grow their TikTok, rising +8 places in the rankings to finish 12th on TikTok.

FIS built on the Olympic hype left by summer sports during Paris 2024 and saw significant growth on TikTok with the delivery of their World Championships, which has continued into 2025.

“TikTok offers a unique platform to reach the next generation and develop new audiences.”

Strategy focus areas

Benjamin Stoll outlines three strategic areas that have driven FIS’ success ahead of Milano Cortina 2026.

1. **Discipline-specific channels:** 8 new channels with discipline-specific content creators
2. **Athlete-centric strategy:** focusing on their stories, dreams and characters
3. **Collaborative partnerships:** working with TikTok and an agency to get insights and support production

TikTok’s role in FIS’ digital strategy

TikTok has quickly become FIS’ second-biggest platform in terms of reach, and they are pleased to see such positive results, alongside the qualitative feedback received from users, athletes, national ski associations, and commercial partners.

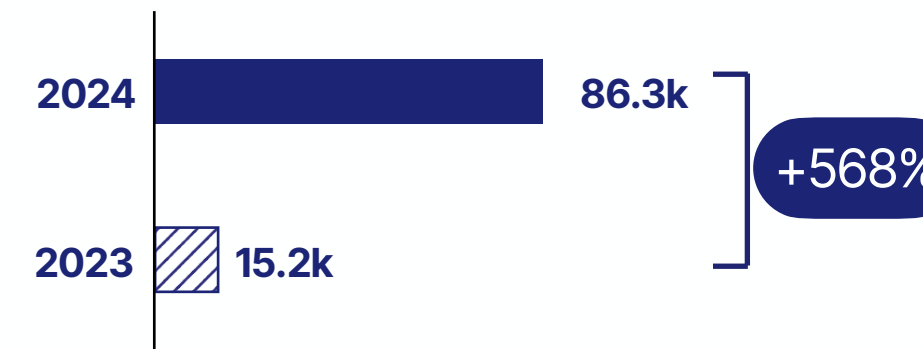
FIS see TikTok as a unique platform to reach the next generation and develop new audiences, which is an important part of their strategy. With the content team now giving TikTok a larger focus, FIS has embraced a variety of content, including a component of education/edutainment aimed at global audiences, particularly casual fans who are not deeply familiar with the different sports and athletes.

Athlete-centric storytelling

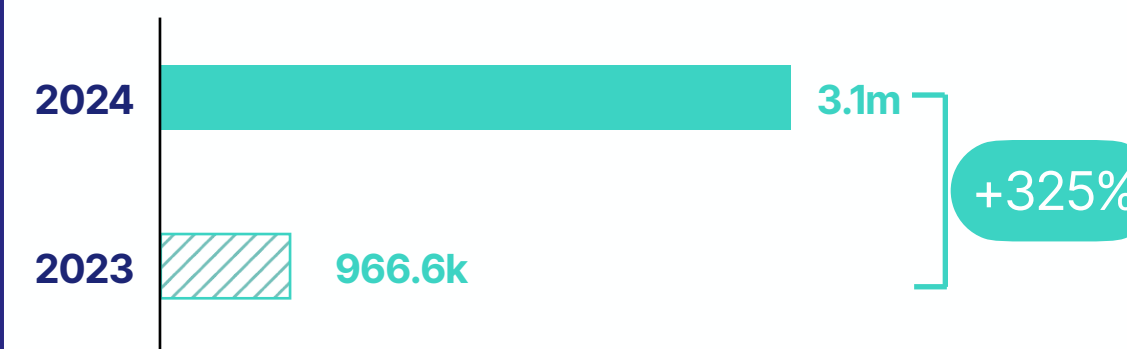
FIS have recognised that fans connect most with individual athletes, with their surveys showing that 71% of fans follow a sport because of specific athletes. To capitalise on this, FIS focused on storytelling around athletes’ journeys, motivations, and personalities.

A key initiative was the FIS Content Exchange Platform, which provided World Cup competition footage for athletes to use on their own social media channels, including TikTok. This approach amplified their reach while allowing athletes to narrate their own stories in creative ways.

Growth



Engagements



Collaborative partnerships

FIS has enhanced its TikTok strategy through key partnerships. The launch of discipline-specific channels, each with dedicated content creators, allows FIS to empower and trust these creators, giving them the space to experiment and innovate.

In addition, working with an agency and TikTok itself provides valuable insights and support for content production. This collaboration drives continuous data-driven optimisation, production of highlights, and the ongoing evolution of their content strategy.

Preparing for Milano Cortina 2026

With the 2026 Winter Olympics on the horizon, FIS are careful to take the correct strategic steps to position themselves on TikTok and other platforms. They are currently working on their game plan for Milano Cortina, knowing that they intend to put a huge focus on athletes, their stories and motivations.

In the lead up Milano Cortina, FIS will enhance and optimise their content strategies for other competitions, such as the FIS World Cups and Junior World Championships where they are seeing a lot of interest and traction on digital platforms.

Chinese Platforms

Chinese platforms: Top 20 IFs

Ranking	International Federations
1	World Table Tennis (WTT)
2	Fédération Internationale de Basketball (FIBA)
3	Badminton World Federation (BWF)
4	Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)
5	World Athletics
6	World Aquatics (AQUA)
7	International Skating Union (ISU)
8	Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)
9	Fédération Internationale de Ski et de Snowboard (FIS)
10	International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF)
11	International Tennis Federation (ITF)
12	Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI)
13	International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC)
14	International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation (IBSF)
15	World Pentathlon (UIPM)
16	World Curling
17	Fédération Internationale d'Esgrime (FIE)
18	World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC)
19	World Archery
20	World DanceSport Federation (WDSF)

WTT leads the way

Table tennis is deeply embedded in Chinese sports culture, and World Table Tennis (WTT) generates 6x more engagements than FIBA, demonstrating the impact of culturally relevant sports.

Winter IFs on the rise

Winter sports are experiencing rapid growth in China, with 86% of winter IFs at least have one page in Chinese social media platforms, compared to 60% of summer IFs. The Beijing Winter Olympics played a crucial role in boosting engagement, driving conversations, and increasing participation. ISU, FIS, and IIHF saw major ranking improvements compare to global rank, with ISU standing out as the only IF present on all five major Chinese platforms.

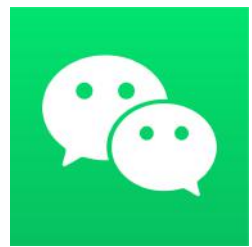
Weibo leads digital engagement

Weibo remains the centre of real-time sports conversations in China, attracting young-to-middle-aged users who engage with trending topics, news, and multimedia debates. With 27 IFs managing 32 pages, it leads all platforms in number of followers, posts and engagement.

Localised content fuels engagement in China

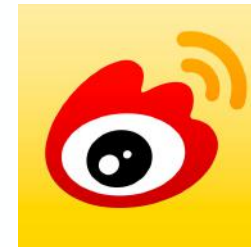
Digital engagement in China is maximised through localised content that resonates with cultural nuances and trends rather than mimicking Western methods. Exclusive live streaming and event-driven content keep audiences engaged all year, while crossover content like viral sports moments demonstrates the universal appeal of dynamic visuals, effectively bridging language barriers.

Chinese platform breakdown: Top 10 IFs



WeChat

Ranking	International Federations
1	World Table Tennis (WTT)
2	Fédération Internationale de Basketball (FIBA)
3	World Athletics
4	Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)
5	Badminton World Federation (BWF)
6	Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)
7	International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF)
8	World Aquatics (AQUA)
9	World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC)
10	International Skating Union (ISU)



Weibo

Ranking	International Federations
1	World Table Tennis (WTT)
2	Badminton World Federation (BWF)
3	Fédération Internationale de Basketball (FIBA)
4	Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)
5	World Aquatics (AQUA)
6	International Skating Union (ISU)
7	World Athletics
8	Fédération Internationale de Ski et de Snowboard (FIS)
9	International Tennis Federation (ITF)
10	International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF)



Douyin

Ranking	International Federations
1	World Table Tennis (WTT)
2	Fédération Internationale de Basketball (FIBA)
3	Badminton World Federation (BWF)
4	World Athletics
5	Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)
6	World Aquatics (AQUA)
7	Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)
8	International Skating Union (ISU)
9	International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC)
10	Fédération Internationale de Ski et de Snowboard (FIS)

Challenges & opportunities

Challenge: Navigating regulations and content restrictions

- Strict government regulations limit what can be shared on Chinese social media, requiring compliance with censorship policies and avoidance of sensitive topics. Balancing engagement with regulatory restrictions poses a challenge for effective storytelling.

Challenge: Platform fragmentation and multi-platform strategies

- China's digital ecosystem is highly segmented, with platforms serving distinct purposes—WeChat for direct engagement, Weibo for public discourse, Douyin for short-form video, and Xiaohongshu for influencer-driven content. Navigating this complexity requires a tailored, multi-platform approach.

Challenge: Long-term sustainability amid rapid change and competition

- China's digital landscape changes rapidly, with frequent algorithm updates, shifting user behaviours, and emerging trends. Intense competition from domestic and global brands makes differentiation essential. Sustaining long-term growth requires consistent engagement, trend awareness, and localised storytelling tailored to platform-specific formats.



Partnership potential

- Strict content regulations make it essential to collaborate with trusted local entities. Partnering with Chinese brands, media companies, and influencers ensures content aligns with local guidelines while resonating with audiences. These partnerships provide credibility and offer a direct channel to engage fans within a compliant framework.
- Different platforms offer unique sponsorship opportunities tailored to their audience behaviours. Weibo is ideal for brand-led discussions, Douyin for high-engagement video campaigns, and Xiaohongshu for influencer-driven brand storytelling. Aligning sponsorships with platform strengths maximises exposure and engagement while ensuring content remains relevant and culturally appropriate.



Expanding fanbases

- China's fragmented social media landscape means audiences consume content differently on each platform. WeChat is best for direct fan engagement and exclusive content, Weibo fosters public discussions and trending topics, while Douyin thrives on short, highly shareable videos. Understanding and adapting to these nuances ensures IFs maximise reach across multiple audience segments.
- Real-time interactions deepen fan connections. Hosting Q&As, live streaming events, and sharing behind-the-scenes content boost engagement across WeChat Groups, Weibo Super Topics, and Douyin Challenges.
- User-generated content (UGC) strengthens community bonds, with platforms like Xiaohongshu amplifying peer-driven storytelling. Combining live engagement with fan-driven content fosters loyalty and long-term growth.



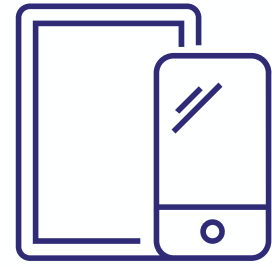
Leveraging E-commerce culture

- WeChat's Mini-Programs provide a versatile platform for IFs to create integrated experiences beyond traditional communication. From ticket sales and gamified campaigns to social commerce and exclusive content, these tools drive deeper engagement while unlocking new monetisation opportunities. Leveraging Mini-Programs ensures a seamless, interactive entry into China's digital ecosystem, enhancing both market presence and revenue potential.
- By leveraging a mix of platform tools, IFs can diversify revenue opportunities. Limited-edition merchandise drops on Xiaohongshu, real-time product showcases on Douyin live streams, and exclusive membership communities on WeChat offer multiple ways to monetise engagement. Combining commerce with interactive fan experiences enhances brand loyalty and long-term financial sustainability.

Creative Playbook: Shaping Success in 2025



What's driving engagement in 2025?



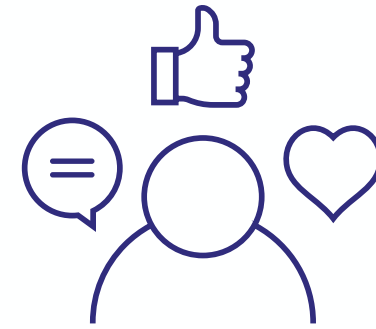
Multi-screen consumption

Fans aren't just watching sport, they're engaging across multiple screens simultaneously – whether it's watching a live event on TV while scrolling through social media for instant reactions or participating in real-time polls during a stream.

This isn't a new trend, but it's surely one that's here to stay! Multi-screen consumption doesn't simply boost engagement – it deepens it. By offering interactive touchpoints across devices, IFs can capture attention for longer, gather real-time fan insights and strengthen their digital ecosystem.

How do you tap into this audience that is using their phones while watching live sport? Create content that is relevant in the moment through your digital channels – be it social media, an app or a website. This might include live voting or in-game polls that highlight key moments, offer fans an extra layer to the live experience with data/athlete biometrics not shown on broadcast, or drive live fan discussions through hashtags, Reddit threads or Instagram Live.

Multi-screen consumption isn't about fan engagement alone – it's a revenue opportunity for IFs. It opens the door for sponsorship activations with exclusive content, paywalled experiences for premium content, and data-driven insights from live fan interactions to offer sponsors real-time value.



Micro influencers

Micro-influencers are predicted to be a significant trend in 2025 due to their dedicated and engaged followings.

Unlike traditional influencers, micro-influencers are perceived by their audiences as genuine enthusiasts rather than paid spokespeople.

Many brands are choosing to collaborate with multiple micro-influencers instead of one high-profile influencer, offering a cost-effective/authentic approach to content amplification.

What does this mean for IFs? First, your athletes are your influencers. Though big name stars are sure to drive reach online, collaborating with athletes who have smaller digital followings and quality, authentic content can help drive engagements while boosting their profiles at the same time. A great tactic for those on a smaller budget.

IFs don't need to stick to influencers from within their sport, either. 2025 is the year to think outside the box and work with influencers who share the same values/interests as your target audience.

Don't merely follow audience trends – embed yourselves within their culture!



The rise of static posts

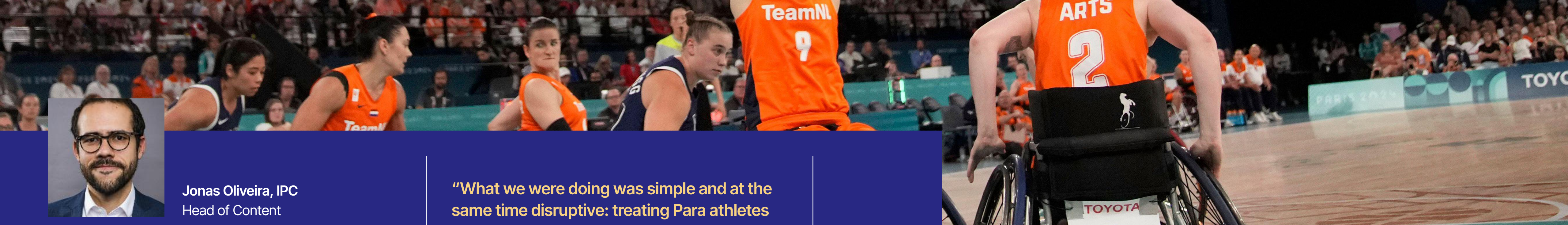
There has been a significant shift toward video-first content among sports global rightsholders since the formidable rise of TikTok. However, as platforms battle for attention, there is opportunity to stand out among competitors and create a varied content mix through static posts.

TikTok's Photo Mode grew exponentially in popularity in 2024, gaining 2.9x more comments, 1.9x more likes and 2.6x more shares on average than videos across the platform as a whole.

While short-form content remains the go-to for accounts, there is no reason that statics can't compete and provide variety to your content. Take a look at some of the incredible static images that came out of Paris 2024 and went viral, e.g. the photo of surfer Gabriel Medina.

Evidence for this can be found in the rise in Instagram's share of total IF engagements during Paris 2024 (71% to 76%) while TikTok saw a decrease in Games-time (19% to 9%).

With Instagram reportedly testing a Reels-only app, we may see a greater shift back to static imagery on the platform in 2025.



Jonas Oliveira, IPC
Head of Content

Purpose-Driven Entertainment: How International Paralympic Committee grew their TikTok audience to 4.5m

Overview

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) launched its TikTok channel in 2020 and quickly identified an opportunity to creatively leverage extensive Paralympic footage. Led by a Paralympian with firsthand insight into both the platform and athlete experience, the IPC adopted a bold strategy combining humor with educational content. This unique, authentic approach resonated profoundly, turning TikTok into IPC's fastest-growing platform, becoming their first social channel to surpass 1 million followers during Paris 2024.

Key to TikTok success

According to Jonas Oliveira, three major approaches fuelled their content to resonate with audiences.

- 1. Authentic approach to growing and connecting with audiences:** taking bold creative risks and adopt an unexpected tone of voice resulted in a TikTok audience of 4.7m
- 2. Platform fluency:** Leveraging trending sounds and popular memes on the platform enabled content to be relatable, particularly with younger audiences
- 3. Trust in their team:** Empowering their team—particularly a Paralympian with firsthand experience—ensured authenticity and deep community connection, resulting in sustained engagement and loyalty.

“What we were doing was simple and at the same time disruptive: treating Para athletes like any athlete and not being afraid of using humour just because they have a disability.”

Balancing content themes: meme/entertainment vs educational

Their core goal with their social media strategy was to raise awareness about Paralympic Sport. The channel garnered over 1 billion views and 166 million engagements during the Paris 2024 Paralympics, significantly outperforming other IPC social platforms. This balanced strategy combined viral, entertainment-driven content with educational moments that informed audiences about Paralympic sports, creating lasting awareness.

- Integrating education using explanations of Paralympic sport to increase awareness – result xx
- Key information about athletes were described in the captions or comments
- High-Frequency Posting: Multiple daily updates covering key moments, from competition highlights to athlete reactions – result xx
- Viral Edits: Leveraged TikTok sounds and meme trends, expanding reach beyond sports fans – result = “Air Piano” triathlon clip (35M+ views).

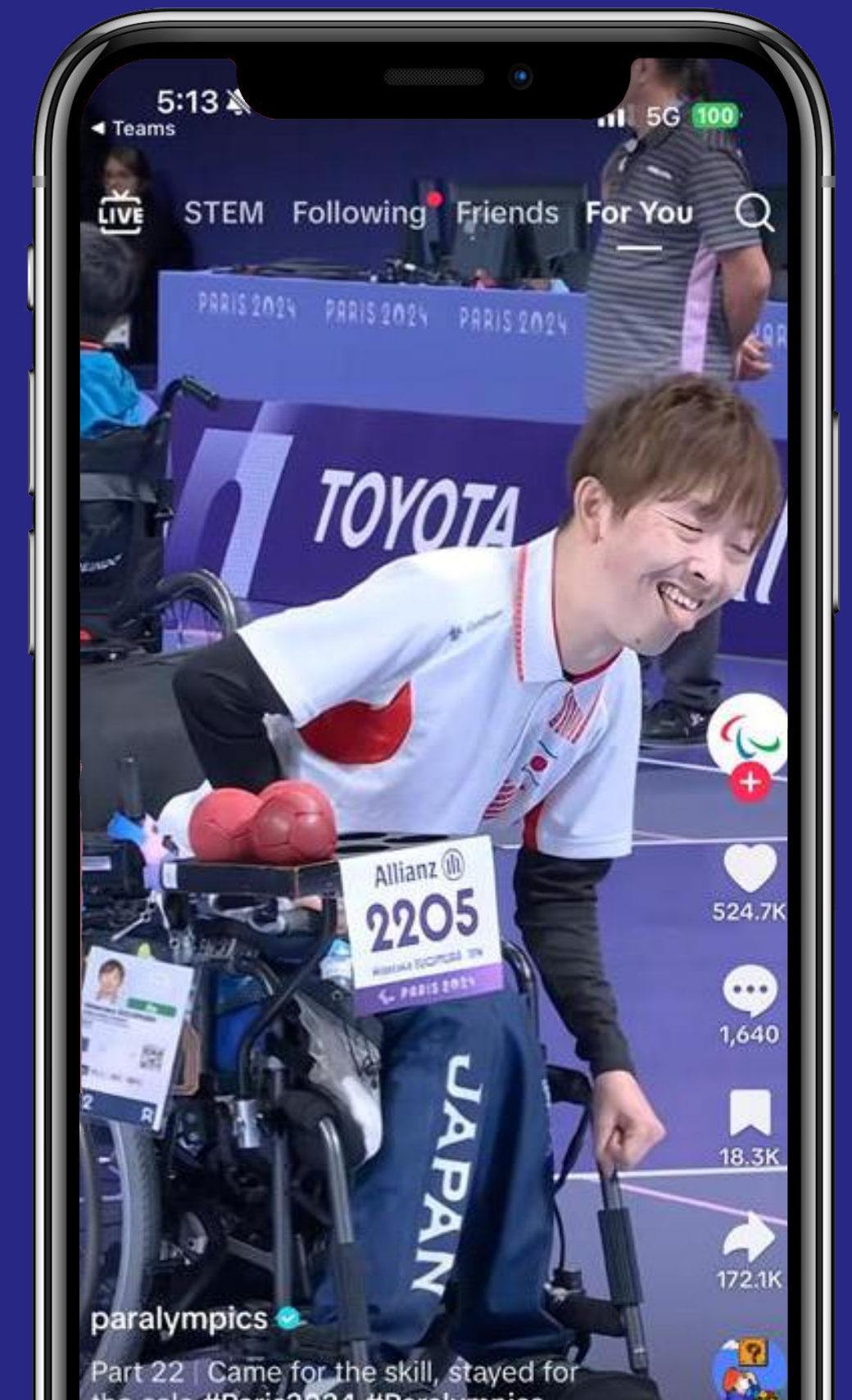
Managing expectations and navigating controversy
The IPC's bold TikTok strategy was well-received by athletes, member organisations, and stakeholders, as reflected in impressive performance metrics and increased visibility for Paralympic sports. Nevertheless, their humorous and unconventional approach did attract controversy, prompting varied reactions—especially among those less familiar with disability-related conversations. Despite this, IPC effectively leveraged controversy as an opportunity to encourage essential dialogue about disability representation, furthering their core mission and deepening public understanding of Paralympic sport.

Long-term impact

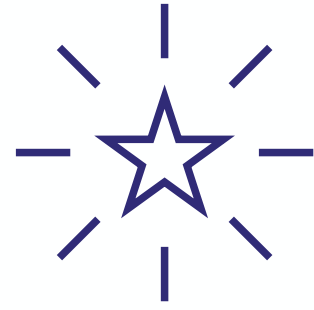
IPC's strategic use of TikTok has transformed it into their most engaged social media channel, significantly boosting public awareness of the Paralympic Movement. Critical lessons from their success include:

- Humor and relatability drive engagement but must always remain respectful and authentic.
- Quick adaptation to trends greatly amplifies reach.
- Athlete-centric content cultivates long-term audience loyalty and sustained interest beyond immediate events.
- Ongoing, post-event engagement maintains momentum and reinforces the Paralympic legacy beyond competition.

The IPC's clear purpose and creative confidence on TikTok have not only achieved impressive growth but also positioned Paralympic athletes as powerful, relatable role models, creating lasting social impact.



What's driving digital interest in women's sport?



Star Athletes

Athletes have become central figures in driving interest and engagement within women's sport.

Their outstanding performances, personal stories and active engagement on social media platforms have significantly increased visibility and drawn larger audiences, both locally and internationally. Caitlin Clark's social media following surged by +154% following the WNBA draft. This correlated with the league's significant rise in searches and highlighted once again how individual athletes can amplify interest in their sport/contribute to its overall growth.

Sky Sports found that nearly 70% of people viewed professional athletes as the most influential sporting role models for young women, underscoring the crucial role female athletes (e.g. footballers) play in shaping the next generation of sports fans/participants.

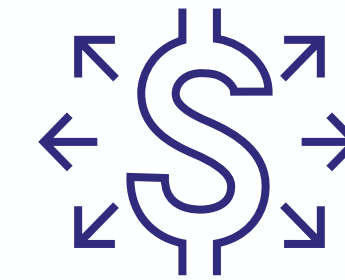


Accessibility

Enhanced media coverage and a shift towards digital platforms have broadened the reach of women's sport and made events accessible to a global audience.

Increased digital presence has enabled fans to interact more closely with their favourite sports, driving consistent engagement throughout the year. Barclays Women's Super League (WSL), for example, garnered 15.9m interactions across its Instagram/TikTok channels; viewing figures for WSL games streamed online more than tripled this season following the league's switch to YouTube as its streaming platform.

Similarly, the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) closed its monumental 2024 season with a record-breaking 2.5m viewers for its championship weekend, highlighting the growing digital engagement/fan loyalty across the leagues.



Investment

There has been a notable increase in commercial interest and investment in women's sport, driven by the growing recognition of their market potential.

Revenue generated by women's elite sport surpassed US\$1b for the first time in 2024, with total revenues estimates reaching US\$1.2b. The largest markets were North America: US\$670m (52%), and Europe: US\$181m (14%). The two highest-value sports were football, projected to generate US\$555m (43%) and basketball US\$354m (28%).

Sponsorships and partnerships played a significant role in elevating the profile of women's leagues/events, thus contributing to their overall growth and sustainability. WNBA, for example, delivered a record US\$136m in media value for sponsors during the 2024 regular season.



Stéphane Schwander, FEI
Head of Content & Channel
Management

FEI's Blueprint for Monetisation Success in 2024

Overview

Fédération Équestre Internationale (FEI) accelerated their digital monetisation strategy after Tokyo 2020 by introducing branded content, activations and advertising across their digital channels – the first governing body to offer this level of exclusivity. By so doing, FEI enhanced their online presence and maximised both partner visibility and commercial potential.

"This transformation has allowed us to create a dynamic commercial ecosystem that maximises partner visibility while delivering engaging content to our audience."

Key tactics

Stéphane outlines how the success of FEI's digital strategy hinged on following targeted initiatives:

1. **Data-driven activation:** FEI leverages a mix of quantitative and qualitative metrics – engagement rates, sentiment analysis, audience growth, and conversion rates – to accurately assess the success of its digital activations. They also provide partners with detailed demographic data to optimise digital sponsorships and refine consumer activations.
2. **Diverse digital assets:** FEI prioritises high-performing social media campaigns and direct-to-consumer content, focusing on video and interactive formats that showcase the personal stories and lifestyles of horses. This strategy leverages the growing fan interest in the horses themselves, opening new digital monetization channels.

Innovative monetisation & audience engagement

FEI's success was driven by several innovative strategies that effectively leveraged digital and social media platforms.

- **Branded content & partnerships:** FEI delivered branded content that resonated authentically with their audience by collaborating with lifestyle content creators. This ensures that engagement aligned with the interests of the equestrian community.
- **Integration of commercial efforts:** FEI seamlessly integrated monetisation into their content – maintaining fan trust by avoiding overt commercialisation and prioritising content quality that reflects their values.

Balancing commercial success with authentic storytelling

FEI dedicated balanced monetisation with the preservation and enhancement of the fan experience through the following approaches:

- **Authentic storytelling:** FEI made sure that all their monetisation efforts were organically integrated into storytelling without compromising content quality.
- **Strategic brand alignment:** FEI meticulously selected their sponsorships to align with core values so that every commercial activity upheld the sport's integrity and resonated well with audiences.

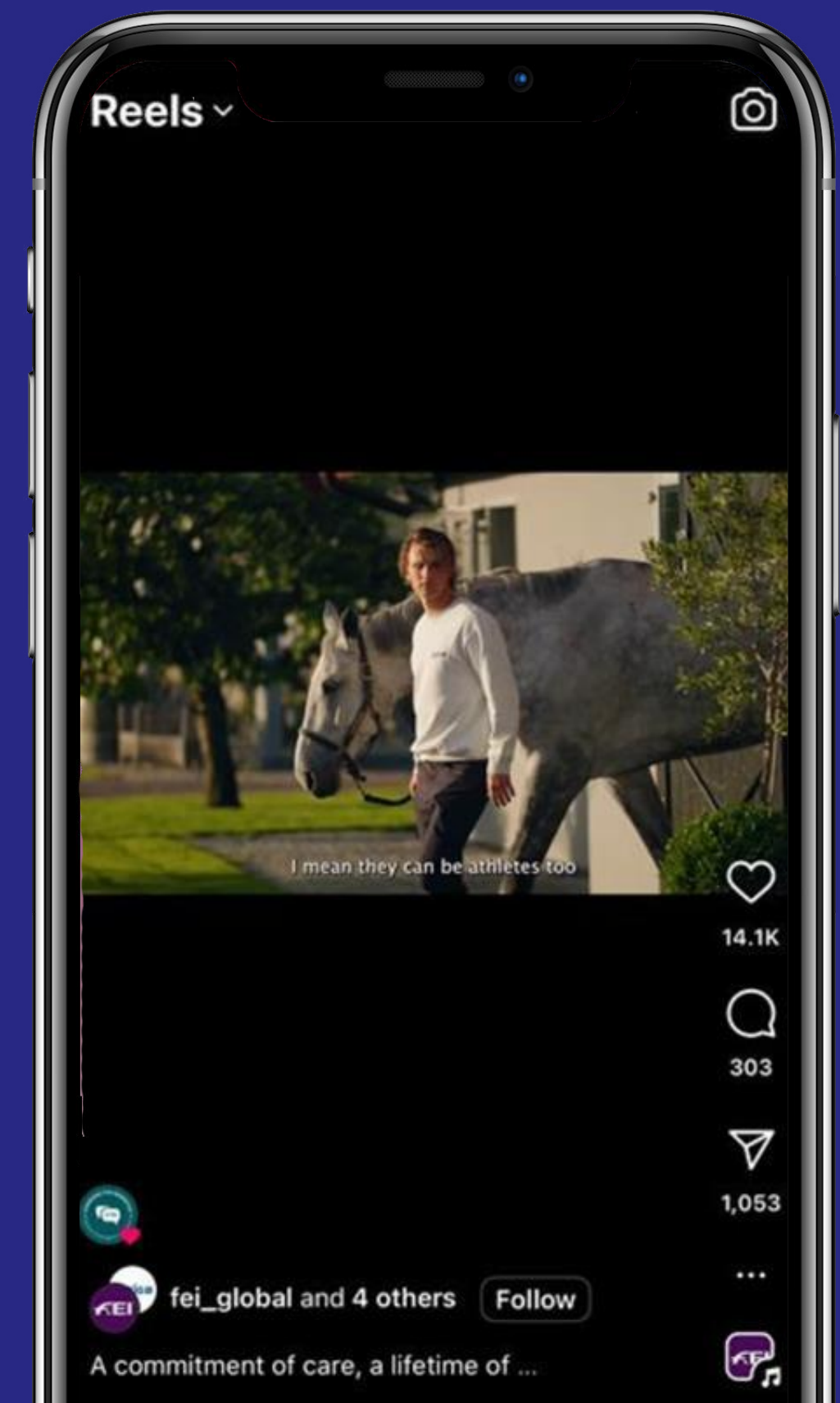
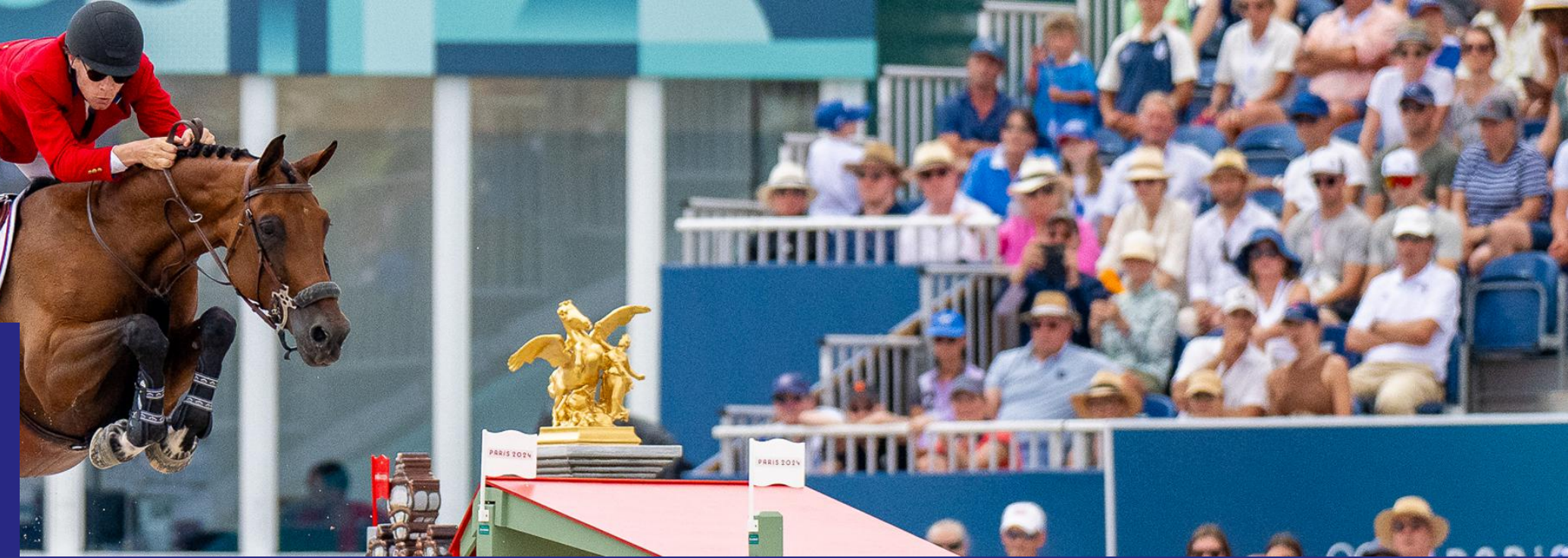
"FEI is equestrian for everyone – not just for premium audiences."

Looking ahead – pioneering future strategies

As FEI looks to the future, they plan to further enhance digital monetisation through the following innovative strategies:

- **AI-driven personalisation:** FEI plans to implement AI-driven personalisation to significantly scale content creation and deliver customised experiences to various audience segments.
- **Exploration of Web3 technologies:** to anticipate shifts in digital engagement, FEI is exploring token-based models and blockchain technology that will create new opportunities for fan engagement and monetisation.
- **Expansion into fictional content:** recognising the broad interest in equestrian lifestyles, FEI is developing creative storytelling projects that extend beyond traditional sports content to reach a wider audience.

In 2024, FEI set a new standard for digital innovation in sports governance by its strategic use of digital platforms – leading to enhanced fan engagement and significantly increased revenue. FEI, in adopting this proactive and forward-thinking strategy, have positioned themselves as a leader in the ever-evolving landscape of sports monetisation.



Future Outlook: Long-Term Digital Strategies for IFs

Milano Cortina 2026 & beyond: how IFs can win the digital game

Introduction

The Olympics plays a crucial role for most IFs in promoting their sport and engaging their fans. Paris 2024 drove significant digital growth for many IFs (+95% overall) and increased engagement (+75%) vs 2023.

Despite this, the Olympics had less impact for the five largest IFs which saw declines in engagement (-32%) and growth (-39%) vs 2023, a year when their flagship events delivered stronger results without Olympic competition.

This highlights an important shift: while the Olympics boosts the visibility of most IFs, it is not the ultimate arena for them all. As minds start to focus on Milano Cortina 2026 and LA28, IFs need to refine their strategies to sustain impact beyond the Games.

Content distribution & strategy

Observation

Paris 2024 offered athletes greater freedom to share content, giving fans exclusive behind-the-scenes access to the Games and deepening their connection to the event. And yet IFs still faced content restrictions which limited their ability to use competition footage. This posed additional challenges in sustaining engagement during the Games and prolonging momentum afterwards.

Evidence for this can be found in the drop in TikTok engagement during Paris 2024: its share of total engagements fell from 19% to 9% despite a +244% increase in carousel posts. In contrast, Instagram's share grew from 71% to 76%, highlighting its strength as a platform where federations can drive engagement through consistent imagery, unlike TikTok, which relies more on video content.

Some IFs overcame this by leveraging archive content, thus contributing to strong video performance aligned with IOC benchmarks.

Takeaway

IFs should develop a digital strategy that spans the entire Olympic cycle. A robust visual and editorial identity, combined with evergreen content will help retain engagement outside event-driven spikes. The objective is to embed the sport into fans' daily digital habits to ensure it remains relevant.

Audience development & engagement

Observation

IFs face a trade-off between strengthening engagement with existing fans and attracting new ones. Recent data shows audience growth is slowing, with total follower growth across IFs at its lowest since 2021.

Larger IFs have been hit hardest, with a -49% decline in growth rate vs 2023. This suggests that IFs will struggle to attract new fans unless they adopt a fresh approach.

Takeaway

A successful strategy needs to balance community building with expansion. IFs have got to use social storytelling to turn casual followers into dedicated fans by focusing on authenticity and cultural relevance. Rather than merely broadcasting results, the most effective IFs position themselves as lifestyle brands that resonate with fans throughout the year.

Year	% Increase
2021	+15%
2022	+28%
2023	+25%
2024	+12%

Milano Cortina 2026 & beyond: how IFs can win the digital game

Female-led storytelling

Observation

Despite the rapid rise of women's sport, female athletes continue to be underrepresented in digital content. During Paris 2024, 57% of social posts featured male athletes vs 43% for female athletes (despite content that featured the latter driving 53% of total engagements). This underscores both the demand for female-led storytelling and a missed opportunity for IFs to establish the next generation of female stars.

Takeaway

IFs must proactively invest in personality-driven content and strong visual branding to elevate female athletes. Those who take an active role – advocates, leaders, promotional platforms – will be best positioned to capitalise on the growing momentum of women's sport and build a stronger, more engaged fan base.

Tech, brand & creative evolution

Observation

AI is transforming content creation and fan engagement by enabling IFs to personalise experiences, increase efficiency and scale their output. AI-driven tools can generate real-time highlights, automate translations and create hyper personalised content. Nevertheless, an over-reliance on AI risks diminishing brand authenticity if the content lacks genuine emotional depth.

Takeaway

AI-powered tools – e.g. automated highlights, chatbots, personalised content recommendations – can enhance engagement, but striking the right balance between automation and human-driven storytelling is key to maintaining trust and emotional connection with fans.

Explore your IF rankings further

[Click here](#) to access the SportOnSocial International Federations Digital Dashboard



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