



## **Social media engagement characteristics of large sports events during COVID-19**

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### **Abstract**

In response to government measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, marathons and race organisers across the world have taken the initiative to either cancel or delay their events. Participants of these races have relied on social media for updates and news about the races. Having a strong presence on social media is crucial for sports event organisations to connect with their stakeholders. Although stakeholders' engagement is a desired outcome, there is limited research on the characteristics of social media posts that drive such engagement. The aim of this paper was to determine which social media post characteristics in marathons led to increased stakeholder engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chi-Squared Automatic Interaction Detection method was used to categorise the posts based on their engagement levels. The analysis was performed on the Facebook posts of three Abbott World Marathon Major sports events, posted between August 12, 2019, and November 30, 2020. The results showed that social media posts of sports events have varying impacts on engagement levels, with six variables found to have a significant impact: month of the year, content that is informational and social, call-to-actions, links, and interactivity. This research is among the first to focus on social media posting strategies and their effects on audience engagement, using the CHAID decision tree methodology. The findings are expected to assist sports event organisers in managing their Facebook platforms more effectively as a channel for stakeholder engagement.

**Keywords:** CHAID decision tree, Facebook, Marathons, metrics, post composition