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Final Thesis

# **The values of sport through social media**

The common threat between  
Olympic and Paralympic  
athletes

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## Summary

<b><u>ABSTRACT</u></b>	<b>5</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 1 – FROM OLYMPICS TO TODAY</u></b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 VALUES OF SPORT	7
1.2 THE STORY OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES	9
1.3 THE STORY OF PARALYMPIC GAMES	10
1.4 A FOCUS ON THE OLYMPIC EVENTS AND VALUES	12
1.5 A FOCUS ON PARALYMPIC EVENTS AND VALUES	14
1.6 RIGHT TO SPORT, HUMAN RIGHTS, DISCRIMINATION AND INCENTIVES	16
<b><u>CHAPTER 2 – THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SPORT MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION</u></b>	<b>19</b>
2.1 THE SPORT MARKET AND ITS VALUE(S)	19
2.2 SPORT BROADCAST	21
2.3 COMMUNICATION BEYOND SPORT	24
2.4 OLYMPICS AND PARALYMPICS MARKETING CAMPAINGS	26
2.5 THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SPORT COMMUNICATION	27
2.6 ATHLETES AND SOCIAL MEDIA	30
2.7 SPORT COMMUNICATION ON TWITTER	31
<b><u>CHAPTER 3 – ANALYSIS OF THE MODEL</u></b>	<b>34</b>
3.1 INTERVIEWS OF ATHLETES	34
3.2 PRESENTATION OF THE MODELS	35
3.3 RESULTS	36
<b><u>FOR THE SEEDED LDA MODEL WE CHOSE FIVE TOPICS, THE FIRST ONE REPRESENTS STRENGTH AND AS WE CAN SEE IN THE NET THE CONNECTION BETWEEN WORDS IS NOT COMPLETELY HOMOGENEOUS. WE CAN SEE THAT “RESPECT” IS ONE MORE TIME A KEYWORD, BUT THE LINKED WORDS ARE NOT RELATED WITH THE VALUES SEEN BEFORE. THE ONLY MENTION TO THESE WORDS IS IN THE SEQUENCES WHICH ARE NOT RELATED TO THE OTHER WORDS.</u></b>	<b>47</b>
	<b>47</b>
<b><u>THE SECOND TOPIC REPRESENT PASSION AND ALL THE RELATED WORDS. HERE THE PRINCIPAL HUB AS THE PREVIOUS NET IS IN THE WORD “RESPECT” WITH THE</u></b>	

DIFFERENCE THAT “RESPECT” IS LINKED WITH “ATHLETES” AND “COUNTRY” WHICH IS A NEW WORD NEVER MENTIONED. IN THIS NET WE CAN SEE THAT ONE MORE TIME THE WORD “RESPECT” IS THE LINK TO THE OTHER VALUES, FOR EXAMPLE PASSION. ANOTHER INTERESTING THING IS THAT HERE THE WORD “RESPECT” HAS A STRENGTH ASSOCIATION WITH THE WORD SHOW AND THE COUNTRY. RESPECT CAN BE INTERPRETATE AS THE RESPECT OF ATHLETES OF NATIONAL TEAMS REPRESENTING THEIR COUNTRY IN THESE GAMES.

47

FOR THE SECOND TOPIC THE PRINCIPAL HUB IS THE SAME BUT NOW IS LINKED WITH A INTERESTING WORD WHICH IS “COUNTRY”. BUT IT’S NOT THE UNIQUE THINGS. WE CAN SEE THAT RESPECT IS LINKED TO THE WORD “FRIENDSHIP” WHICH IS ONE OF THE CARDINAL POINTS OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES.

50

FOR THE SECOND TOPIC WE FIND THE MOST IMPORTANT HUBS REPRESENTED BY “RESPECT”, “ATHLETES” AND “PASSION”. AND ONE MORE TIME THE WORD “COUNTRY” IS PRESENT. ATHLETES ARE PROUD AND RESPECTFUL REPRESENTING THEIR NATIONAL TEAM AT PARALYMPIC GAMES AND THIS IS ONE OF THE TOPICS MORE DISCUSSED. FANS ARE GRATEFUL AND PROUD IF ATHLETES DEMONSTRATE LOVE TOWARDS THEIR COUNTRY AND THIS IS ONE OF THE BEST THINGS THAT SPORT AND GAMES SHOW TO THE ENTIRE WORLD.

51

51

52

53

CHAPTER 4– CONCLUSIONS

54

BIBLIOGRAPHY

55

SITOGRAPHY

58

## Abstract

In my master's degree final thesis, I decide to underline the importance of the values of sport from the point of view of the Olympic and Paralympic athletes.

Why is this topic so interesting to study? Lot of things are unconsciously everyday related to those values and all its lessons that must be learnt. An example of teaching that's primary both in sport and everyday life is respect.

As said by Billie Jean King<sup>1</sup> *“Sports teaches you character, it teaches you to play by the rules, it teaches you to know what it feels like to win, and lose-it teaches you about life.”*

Frequently, values of sport are forgotten, people only think at the result of the competition (how the results influence their life) and how they appear in front of others. This happens because everyday millions of news reach us through communication channels such as social media, magazines, and newspapers. For this reason, my research is aimed to explore the hidden meaning behind values of sport.

My research question will be the study, through different empirical methods, focused on the view of values of sport using, first, stories and direct experiences of Olympic and Paralympic athletes. I interviewed different athletes, who participated at the last event of Tokyo 2020 (Paralympic and Olympic games) through a series of questions concerning their opinion about the topics related to the value of sports, to reveal which ones are considered the most important or which ones takes more relevance when people talk about individual and team disciplines. At the end, I asked their views about social media and the relevance of this topic related to sport, for example if they know other athletes only because of the web or also in everyday life.

The hypothesis that I want to study in my paper are strictly related to the conception of some keywords in the real life. I would like to show, if possible, how words related to sport values are used in relation to different sport issues and which topics are most discussed. Afterwards, I will highlight how social media can affect the opinions of people? And how the role of social media is moderated by external factors?

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<sup>1</sup> Billie Jean King was born in the United States and was a tennis player. She won the “Battle of the Sexes” against one of the greatest tennis players, Bobby Rings, but she was, at the same time, one of the biggest supporters of Woman's right.

My paper has the purpose to study the values of sport of Olympic and Paralympic athletes through topic modeling methods, in particular I will use a LDA and seeded LDA topic model to analyze tweets obtained from athletes', institution's accounts, together with some interviews.

First, I choose Twitter accounts of different athletes (both Olympics and Paralympics), and institutional accounts of Olympics and Paralympics.

Automated text analysis techniques will be applied not only to Twitter but also textual data from interviews that I did in these months. I interviewed as Olympic athletes; Stefano Tonut, basketball player of Reyer Venezia and Italian National Team (he participated this summer at Olympic games in Tokyo) and Marta Gasparotto, softball player of Bollate Softball 1969 and Italian National team (she also played in Tokyo this summer at Olympic games). As Paralympic athletes, I collected the experiences of, Ahmed Raourahi, wheelchair basketball player from Padova Millenium 1984, he also plays wheelchair rugby and he played for the Italian National Team (Paralympic games of London 2012).

In my research the role played by the social media and in general by communication channels will be very important.

Nowadays social media, like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and so on, have an increasing relevance in people's life, by connecting people and allowing them to discuss and debate about views and values, also with respect to sport.

Social network and internet, acting as opinion amplifiers, can reshape people's perception and behavior and for this reason I think it could be interesting to study this topic.

# CHAPTER 1 – FROM OLYMPICS TO TODAY

## 1.1 VALUES OF SPORT

Sport is an experience that enriches life in different ways. In modern time, people think that sport is mainly an activity that can help us to maintain physical fitness, but it is much more than this. Doing sport gives us three types of benefits: mental, physical, and social benefits.

From the point of view of physical wellness, practicing any type of sports can help a person to lose weight and apparently obtain the perfect physical condition. But the most important function of sport is the mental one. In everyday life people need to fight against stress and fatigue, mentally need to distract themselves from the frenetic routine and the solution is easy: SPORT.

Sport is first a model of values. Sport is a school of life.

But what is the real meaning of “sport values”? Values are strong and very deep convictions that determine actions and influence choices of the persons. Every time someone practices sport, they have the opportunity to learn something, from the technique things to useful behavior of self-improvement.

Values can be transmitted from the sport practice but also from the environment that people attend, as for example school, family, job.

A different point of view is given by the meaning of each letter of the word SPORT.

- S as STRENGTH (as a synonymous of health), as said before, doing sport give people mental and physical benefits. A constant and measured sport activity encourage every person to discover and take care of its own body. A topic strictly correlated to practice healthy sport is the food. If you practice sport you have to have a regular feeding. From a mental point of view, doing sport is a natural cure against stress especially when sport is practiced outdoor in the middle of nature because it stimulates sensory perception like perfumes, colors, and particular lights.
- P as PASSION, passion is a fundamental issue in sport and life. To have a passion give people the desire to reach new goals, to exceed one’s own limits accepting devotion and working hard. Cultivate a passion helps people to be more confident, to be competitive and to improve own selves.
- O as ORIENTATION (self-orientation), sport activity permits to get in touch with yourself. It gives you consciousness of own choices, own capacity, and own limits. The discipline of sport can help you to recognize reactions connected with victory and defeat, to work on yourself.

- R as RESPECT, respect is one of the most important values of the discipline of sport but also in life. First you must learn to respect yourself. Sport build relationships, teach to get in touch with other persons and create groups, to share things like places, particular practices. So, practice a sport teach loyalty and moral fiber, values to which to refer in everyday life and in your own growth.
- T as TOUGHNESS, which in means determination, strength of mind and courage to never give up. Toughness is the motivation which encourage each person to do own best in every kind of situations. Never give up means to prepare yourself to a new challenge.

The above-mentioned values are often the most known. But there are other values, which are not often rarely mentioned that have the same importance.

Which are the values beyond the practice of sport? At this question Stefano Tonut and Marta Gasparotto has given the same answer. In the interviews that I collect this summer, they told me that beyond sport there are effort and sacrifice. Marta said that, in the last period due to the injury she learns the real meaning of resilience and toughness.

Strictly connected with respect, resilience, toughness, competition, dedication, and effort, we can find motivation, collaboration, integration and membership, emotion, self-confidence, discipline, and ethic.

I will underline, in my opinion, which are values that people consider in a second-state status. For example, integration is a value that is very important. Integration means to promote equality, fairness, and equal opportunities. Sport has the capacity to integrate every kind of people in a natural way and without prejudices. Practicing sport is the way to create socialization, principally in a team. Socialization is the direct channel to stimulate the integration of different cultures and different situations.

Another important value which is strictly correlated with the other is: ethic. Ethic concerns mental attitudes and personal behavior.

Sport not always is connected to positive behavior. Sometimes there are some things that negatively influence sport and its value. For example, at the young age an early assumption of high-level sporting responsibilities can conduce to a loss of personality or a mental stress which is dangerous for the growth of the young athletes (Curati C., 2009).

But if we think to the specific values, sport can exalt person who practice it, in sense of the real meaning of strength, for example. In this case, person consider only muscles and strengthens which bring to the negative aspect of it, like violence. Another negative thing is related to the aspect of losses. Losers are not considered as participant and as winner for the spirit of the competition, but

losing is considered a failure, which has a negative influence on the psychological sphere of an athlete or for a future professional athlete (Moro A. C., 2020).

## **1.2 THE STORY OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES**

The Olympic games were born in Greece. For the ancient Greek there wasn't a fixed date for the beginning of the Games, but the beginning was in a such that way that the third day coincided with the second or third moonlight after the Midsummer Eve.

In that edition of Olympic games there weren't symbols or religious ceremonies that present the event (Cantarella E., Miraglia E., 2016). The only function of this event was only as a celebration of God called Zeus. One of the most expected things for the ancient Greek was, who would have the honor to announce competitions and winners. It was not a true competition, but the award for the best trumpeter and the best herald was a very attended prize.

What about the Olympic torch? In Olympia that practice was not usual, in fact the symbol of the Olympic torch was introduced only in the 1928. In Greek's period they only turn on a fire for the entire period of the games. We can say that the most similar experience was a race run by naked men, which carried torch from an altarpiece to another one. These runs were local competition that granted to the winner the privilege to turn on a sacrificial fire (Cantarella E., Miraglia E., 2016).

It's interesting to observe what was the meaning of the word "Marathon" for the Greeks. Marathon was the place where Athenians won the epic battle against the King of Persia. So, for the ancient Greek the only thing connected with Marathon was the memories of THE battle. But what is the correlation between the battle and the recent race? It was simply a tribute to the Athenian Filippide, who at the end of the summer of 490 a.C run 42 km, which was the distance from the place of the battle to Athens, to announce the victory. This is the reason why the race with distance 42 km took the name of Marathon.

Because sport had its roots in ancient Greek Olympia, sport had prophets such as de Coubertin, and sport allowed peoples to meet in peace. In fact, in ancient Greece such as recent years, during the Olympic games a period of peace was proclaimed. In these months of peace countries "forgot" enemies and conflicts. Olympic games were the occasion that remembered to Greeks to celebrate togetherness, to feel part of a precise common entity. The same thing happens today, when athletes, fans, staff, and federation of different countries forgot hostilities to focus on sport and health competition (Cantarella E., Miraglia E., 2016).

Olympic games give the opportunity to take consciousness of belonging in a system where a combination of values inspired by sports can be solution to conflicts and inequalities.

In history books, first event goes back in 776 d.c., but thanks to archeological artefacts, historian says that the Olympic games took place lot of time before (Alessandra Lombardi, 2006).

This competition for ancient Greeks were very important. The victory was the only possible result. In the past for Greeks, victories were demonstrations of one's ability to meet and face challenges, beating others and themselves. At Olympic games as every challenge in their life, ancient Greeks wanted to win.

In 1896, thanks to Pierre de Coubertin, the Olympic games are reborn in Athens, where two thousand five hundred years before they were born for the first time. De Coubertin, which came from Paris, was very interested in education methods, and found the way to introduce his pedagogical model in British college. His pedagogical model was founded on sport as the item that integrated physical and mental education.

The military defeat of the French army in Sedan, against the Prussian army was the event that pushed De Coubertin to think that this failure was related to the softness and laziness of French soldier. For this reason, he thought that sport could be the solution to strengthen new generations.

For De Coubertin, the concept of peace and brotherhood between countries that meet under a unique scope were important. The Olympic idea was expressed in the Olympic flag, which is white with 5 circles of different colors, each representing a continent: blue for Oceania, black for Africa, red for America, yellow for Asia and green for Europe.

### **1.3 THE STORY OF PARALYMPIC GAMES**

Paralympics has a short history respect to the Olympic games. These events are recent because their history dates back from the twentieth century. The name Paralympics was born from the idea that those game would be parallel games of Olympic games. So, the prefix "*para*" is not indicated any kind of disability but only the parallelism with the other major sport event.

Paralympic games were born from a dreamer. The dreamer was a famous neurologist. His name was Ludwig Guttmann<sup>2</sup> and his only scope was to keep alive injured soldiers. Ludwig Guttmann was the first who used sport therapy for people with spinal injuries. He opened the first medical center to assist persons with this disability. In his center he didn't give only medical assistance, but he helped his patient to be more confident and to fight against depression. To do this he had the great idea to encourage that person to practice sport. Thanks to sport his patients took conscious that they can have

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<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Guttmann was a famous neurologist. He was from Germany, and he was Jewish. During the Nazism, he assists as voluntary paraplegic persons and then he left Germany to found refuge with his family in England, where he began a revolution to give opportunity to those people who were left in beds. Later, he will be victim of discrimination due to a temporary invalidity.

fun, they can cultivate relationships and compare themselves with other patients. First real competition focused on person with disability was in 1948 in the courtyard of Guttmann's hospital. This event was composed by a competition of archery with sixteen competitors of both genders. First Paralympic game was so successful that in the 1952, some athletes came from Holland. The most important thought of Ludwig Guttmann was:

*"I hope that Games of Stoke Mandeville will be a real international event. I dream a day when that reputation of women's and men's with disability will be equal to the Olympic athletes".*

Guttmann's approach was innovative in spinal injuries but in the Olympic games of 1904, for the first time in history a Paralympic athlete compete with able-bodied athletes in an international competition. His name was George Eyser, he was a German gymnast, who had lost his leg in a train crash, but after his injury he continued to belong in his club. In the edition of Olympic games of St. Louis, he won six medal and those victories were a precursor symbol for Paralympic games.

In 1956, during the Olympic games of Melbourne, the Paralympic Committee invented a special award called "Fearnley Cup" dedicated to athletes who were distinguished in Olympism<sup>3</sup>.

Paralympic sport took more relevance with the collaboration of Guttmann with an Italian doctor, Antonio Maglio, in fact their same desire was to move this event out of the English borders. In 1957 the Italian surgeon introduced, following the project of Guttmann, sport therapy in Italy. The idea of Antonio Maglio was "treat them as they be normal person. Help them only if they ask for it". In that year Maglio was named chief of surgery of the paraplegic Center Villa Marini in Ostia, place that became in Italy as a reference point in the same way of the medical center Stoke Mandeville of Guttmann. Thanks to the activity of Maglio, in 1974 was founded "Associazione Nazionale per lo sport dei paraplegici italiani (ANSPI)", which regulated and developed for the first-time sport for persons with disabilities.

In 1960 both Olympic and Paralympic games was organized in Rome. This event was remembered because gave great result in terms of numbers. The athletes participating to this edition of Paralympic games was around four hundred from twenty-three different countries. But the effort of Guttmann and the Italian doctor wasn't enough, because only in 1988 Paralympic games was recognize as a discipline and not as a hobby for injured persons.

A significant edition of games was Seoul, in which the flag of International Paralympic Committee was born as a symbol of a real entity. In this edition of Paralympic games, the athletes taking part of

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<sup>3</sup> Olympism is the word which describe all values that regulates the modern Olympic games.

the competition demonstrated their mental strength, great technique, and strong concentration, which was recognized as being better than that of Olympic athletes (Elena Sandre, Silvia Galimberti, 2016). Modern games, thanks to the support of television and other web channels, are better known and followed at a worldwide scale. Paralympic athletes are often depicted as examples of positivity, not only for persons with disability but for all persons of our society.

## **1.4 A FOCUS ON THE OLYMPIC EVENTS AND VALUES**

From the “new” Olympic games of Athens of 1896 from the Olympic games of Tokyo 2020, there were a lot of adjustments due to the changes in the world.

From the first games of the new era, Olympic games were the opportunity to embellish the city. There were urban interventions to build new structures, like hotels or new sport centers, but there were interventions to fix the city up like new.

The opening ceremony was often one of the most exciting moments of the Olympic games and the first ceremony was in the 1896, but in the games of 1900 in Paris and of 1904 in Saint Louis it disappears.

Nowadays if you think about the opening ceremony, you think also to the Olympic torch, which is one of the most famous symbols of the Olympic games. But the torch was not introduced in the “new version” of the games, its first appearance occurred in the games of Antwerp in 1920.

From the point of view of awards, in the reborn games of Athens 1896, medals were attributed only to the first and second classified and it was the only prize in the career of an athlete.

Up to 1992 Olympic games were only for amateur and monetary prize were not allowed<sup>4</sup>. Now the story is very different, athletes who win competition receive big amount of money from sponsor, government, or club where they are associated.

To protect values of sport and maintain sportsmanship in 1920 in the games of Antwerp, it was introduced the pledge of athletes. Later it will be introducing the pledge of referees, Sapporo 1972 and the last one was the pledge of coaches, which was introduced in London in 2012.

These pledges had the only scope of keeping alive values of sport in the games. In recent years in addition to maintain alive sports value, sport federations from all over the world want to fight against episodes of doping.

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<sup>4</sup> In this regard, we can talk about the story of Carlo Airoldi, cross-country runner, who decided to participate to the Olympic games of Athens in 1896. He left from Saronno, and he arrived in Athens by foot, but when he arrived in Athens, he discovered he cannot take part of the competition because he received a monetary prize for the victory of the race Turin-Barcellona. This amount of money rendered him a professional runner.

From the point of view of sport disciplines, the same sports of the Olympic games of Athens 1896 are also in the last Olympic games of Tokyo 2020. The things that in years had changed were the disciplines, the number of competitions and who can participate (for example women are not always allowed).

Who can participate to the Olympic games? Every athlete, who hit the qualification criteria in an approved competition. The Olympic Committee of every country choose and register the designed athletes, who must satisfy criteria including in the Olympic Charter.

In the first modern Olympic games discipline were only ten: athletics, cycling, swimming, gymnastic, fencing and shooting. During the editions of Olympic games were introduced other discipline and now we reach the number of 42 disciplines. In the games of Paris 2024, will be introduce for the first time the discipline of breakdance.

The great innovation is related to the genders. In 1896 there were competitions only for men or only for women (not so much), now we have no more differentiations between men and women.

But in the history, it was not always like that. In the ancient games in 776 d.c no women were admitted, to participated and to assist, the only figures admitted were priestesses. The things didn't change in the modern Olympic games, because De Coubertin want to maintain the tradition so, in the 1896 women are not allowed. However, that year there was a non-official competitor to the marathon, her name was Stamati Revithi (Melpomene), and she was not allowed to the men's marathon, so she run alone the day after. She will never be reminding in the Olympic Women official record.

For the first official women presence we must wait the games of Paris 1900. In that edition, there were six hundred participants and only few ones were women.

Despite first appearance of women, in the Olympic games of Berlin in 1936 for the first-time women were seen as athletes.

Olympic games of 1936 were a precursor in terms of their communication campaign imposed by the Nazi regime. They exalted the physical strength of the German people, to communicate the world that Germany had found again its strength and greatness after the defeats in the first World War (Mandell R. D., Maddaloni S., 1989). In this edition of Olympic games, the athletes participating were 3834 of which 328 are women.

An historical event for the feminine sport is represented by the Olympic games of Atlanta in 1996, in which also Islamic women participated to the competition. For the first time after the Islamic revolution, a women will be taking part of a national team competing in the games. Lida Fariman,

who become the symbol of the revolution for women equality, participates to the discipline of shooting, which is the only one discipline permitted for Islamic women<sup>5</sup> (Monaco M., 2017). Discrimination against women didn't stop all together, in 2012 Qatar, Brunei and Saudi Arabia permitted for the first time to their women athletes to participate to the Olympic games of London. From the point of view of sports values, even nowadays we are not in a complete equality between men and women. In 1985 the "Charter of women's right in sport" underlined the inequalities and gender discriminations in sport, noting the importance of eliminating the cultural barriers, which prevent a full involvement of women in sports, also during the Olympic.

## **1.5 A FOCUS ON PARALYMPIC EVENTS AND VALUES**

When we talk about Paralympic games we must focus on disabilities. As we said before, Guttman was the father of the games using sport as rehabilitation and this led to development of a system of classification based on *impairment*<sup>6</sup>, which takes into consideration the impediment of the athlete doing a specific action.

Person with disability became athletes from the Paralympic games of Rome in 1960.

Inside of the Paralympic movement we can recognize six different categories:

- Amputees,
- Brain-damaged persons,
- Spinal injured persons (paraplegic, tetraplegic, poliomyelitis, persons with spina bifida, and more in general persons in wheelchair),
- People with visual maiming (visually impaired or blind people),
- People with intellectual disability,
- Les autres (from the French word, "the others", every kind of other disability not in the category before).

First classification was based on the medical aspect considering sport as an extension of the rehabilitation. As the years go by, sport for persons with disability was no more considered as a medical rehabilitation process but as a sport and social movement with its own identity.

For this reason, it was necessary to ensure the equality of every kind of competition and consequently the system of classification was discussed, the method to classify is now focused on how the impediment of the athlete impacts on the sports performance (Arrigoni Claudio, 2012).

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<sup>5</sup> Shooting is the only discipline permitted for Islamic women in foreign country because they cannot violate the Hejab (Islamic outfit), which impose women to cover every part of their body including hair, ankles, and wrists.

<sup>6</sup> System of IMPAIRMENT is the base of the modern classification.

First medical examination in this sense was in the Paralympic games of Seoul 1988 and in the 2007 the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) approved two documents which contains eligibility criteria based on the impairment, or rather the impact that disability have on sport.

Now it exists 10 types of impediments eligible for Paralympic sport, which are classify in 3 big groups and resume in the table below:

- a) Physical disabilities: reduction of strength, reduction of range of movement, amputees, differentiation in the length of the extremities, hypertonia (reduced ability of stretching the muscle and abnormal increases of muscle tension), ataxia (missing in movement's coordination), athetosis (non-controlled movements with difficulty to maintain a stable position), nanism.
- b) Visual disabilities.
- c) Intellective disabilities.

With lot of different disciplines and different disabilities, Committee have the necessity to identify with a specific abbreviation composed by a letter which indicates type of sport, first number which indicates the type of disability and the second number which indicates the type of impediment. It is easy to say that every sport needs a specific diversify classification. For visual and intellective disabilities there is a special method of classification.

VISUAL DISABILITY	INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY <sup>7</sup>
B1: Athletes with very low or no visual perception to the lights with both eyes; with perception that does not permit to recognize a hand, from every distance or direction (total blind).	FIRST EVALUATION: diagnosis of the intellectual disability.
B2: Athletes with low visual perception, with capacity to recognize objects or borders, with a visual residual no more than 2 sixtieth or with a visual range no more than 5 degrees (serious visually impaired).	SECOND EVALUTATION: evaluation that the disability has on the practice of a specific discipline.
B3: Athletes with a visual range less than 20 degrees. (Soft visually impaired).	

A category which is also included but has very complex rules, is the category of people with Down syndrome. To participate to international sports activities, they have to preventively be register in the DSISO, Down Syndrome International Swimming Organization.

The disciplines of the Paralympic games are:

- Swimming: for this sport there are three main disciplines, which are freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke, and butterfly.
- Athletics: in athletics there are different disciplines, which are on field or on track.

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<sup>7</sup> For intellectual disabilities it is used the criteria of the "Eligibility" and to ensure equality for all competitors, the distinction is done based on the gravity of disability.

- On wheelchair: some kind of sports are strictly mandatory with wheelchair. For example, tennis, rugby, basketball. Another discipline in which athletes use wheelchair is fencing (which is divided in three class: CLASS A, CLASS B and CLASS C).
- Cyclism: in this discipline athletes are divided depending on the bicycles. Athletes can use hand bikes, normal bikes, trike or tandem.
- Archery: athletes are divided in three categories. People who can use the upper part of the body, people who cannot use upper or lower part of the body and people with visual disability.
- Table tennis: the division for the discipline of tennis table is based on the type of disability.
- Judo: this category is considered in the same way of the Olympic one. Matches are between athletes of same weight.

## **1.6 RIGHT TO SPORT, HUMAN RIGHTS, DISCRIMINATION AND INCENTIVES**

Talking about the values of sport is strictly correlated other important and strong topics related to all spheres of our social life and civil rights. First of all, athletes of both games are protected by rules. In the past, different countries introduced specific laws directly in their constitution, but the most important document related to sports right and Olympic games is the Olympic Charter, which explains how games work, the spirit and ideal of this competition. Thanks to the Olympic Charter was born the International Olympic Commission, which has the role to selected athletes from all the federations.

Olympic games are characterized by the Olympism, which can be considered a real-life philosophy (De Coubertin P., 2000). Olympism is the harmonious exaltation of body's qualities, willingness, and spirit. Sport is associated to education and culture, so the role of Olympism is to create a unique kind of lifestyle based on the joy of effort, education's values of good example and respect of fundamental ethics principles.

Why the Olympism is so important? It's the perfect combination of all aspects of sport. It includes sports as harmonious development of individual to incentive a pacific society and sport as protection of the human dignity of persons.

From the concept of Olympism was born the Olympic Movement which is regulated by the International Olympic Commission and consider all associations, federations and athletes who accept the values enounced in the Olympic Charter. Olympic Movement has the purpose to contribute to education of young people to sport without discrimination and based on the Olympic spirit, which includes, friendship, comprehension, fair-play, and solidarity.

The freedom to practice a sport is considered as one of the most important human rights. All persons must have the possibility to practice sport in order to meet of their physic, physical and socialization needs. The activity of Olympic Movement is symbolized by the five intertwined rings of the Olympic flag which represent the five continents and have a permanent and universal meaning.

From the side of the Paralympic world, the topic of human and sport rights is strictly correlated to the inclusion. To practice sports is one of the ways to preserve rights of persons with disability. Sport is one of the most important forms of inclusion and integration of people who are on the margin of the society.

These kinds of rights are regulated internationally and nationally by documents as the International Charter of Sport and sport education of UNESCO (Paris, 1978), which states that every person be entitled to do sport and the activity must be accessible to everybody, from kids to persons with disability. Another document which includes rules for sport's rights is the ONU Convention on the rights for persons with disability, which encourage Stated to promote the participation to sports for people with disabilities.

The role of sport for every type of person is to include, referring to topic as disability, gender, religion, ethnics, and sexuality.

Person who practices sport learn to accept others, at the young age, hence kids who practice sport are more likely to become man or woman with solid values strictly correlated with the values of sport. Which was the situation in the past? As said before there were differences between genders, for example women couldn't participate to the Olympic games, but in the Paralympic game women were admitted since the first edition of the competition.

But is the present situation any better? The answer is not easy, because now men and women can both participate to the games, but there are other forms of discrimination staying alive, as for example religion or racism. Is the case of Sakura Kokumai, karate athlete of the USA team, who in the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2021, was mugged during training session due of her Asiatic traits. The aggressor accused her to be Chinese and to be the responsible of the COVID pandemic (Livini E., La Repubblica, 2021). Another case of this last Olympic games regard Paola Egonu, volleyball player of Italian National Team, Olympic standard-bearer, who was accused in social media to be standard-bearer only for her skin color and for her sexual identity (Mariani C., Il Giorno, 2021).

In addition, people change their mind regarding the topic of sexuality, in the lasts games is more common to find athletes that declare their sexual identity and preference without being subject to stigma and discriminatory behavior (but not always).

If we consider the case of sexual identity or sexuality, there is the case of Caster Semenya, Olympic champion, and other athletes discriminated. In the Human Rights Watch research, it's said that a test

can determine if a woman is a woman in the sports world. We are talking about tests on woman's bodies to find high level of testosterone. Semenya suffer of a pathology called hyperandrogenism, which produce men hormones, obviously testosterone from the endocrine gland, adrenal gland, and ovaries. If athletes have a level of testosterone in the blood more than 5 nanograms, they have to change discipline, compete with men or leave national and international competitions <sup>8</sup>( Pizzimenti C., Vanity Fair, 2021).

There is nowadays situation in which discrimination still occurs. I will bring for example the case of Nilofar Bayat, captain of the women's basketball Afghanistan National Team. She is Afghan and for her, due to her religion and the situation of her country, life was not easy. She said that in the Taliban regime, women are insignificant, women are not considered in the society and for this reason women cannot study and practice sport. In addition to the fact that she is female, due to a rocket launched at her house, she was constricted on the wheelchair since she was two years old. Now, she fights for civil, and women's rights and she is the captain of the National wheelchair basketball team of Afghanistan. She tried to qualify her team for the Paralympic games of Tokyo, but in every case, they couldn't because of the situation in Afghanistan and the closure of all airports.

Thanks to a Spanish wheelchair basketball team Nilofar and her husband were able to escape from the Taliban regime.

I think that this is a clear example of discrimination, not only for the different culture or religion, but also for gender and disability.

Human and sport right are strictly correlated with the incentives that an athletes can or cannot receive. And this is another topic in which there are differences between Olympic and Paralympics athletes. Every States can decide how much money invest on the athletes who will bring medals. It's easy to say that incentives for Olympic athletes are higher than those for Paralympic ones. From one side there are United States, who decided to give the same amount of money for both categories, but from the other side Italy have a big difference between amounts, Olympics still receive a higher amount than Paralympics. The decision of the USA is amazing not only for the monetary point of view but especially because Olympic athletes and Paralympic athletes are considerate in the same way (Moro E., Cosmopolitan, 2021).

Monetary incentives are not the same in all countries. There are countries which are so generous and give a monetary incentive for every medal they collect in different disciplines, so for example an athlete who win two gold medals in two different disciplines receive two monetary incentives. In

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<sup>8</sup> Human Right Watch report:

[https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media\\_2020/11/lgbt\\_athletes1120\\_timeline\\_graphic\\_WEBSPREADS\\_WITH\\_COVER.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2020/11/lgbt_athletes1120_timeline_graphic_WEBSPREADS_WITH_COVER.pdf)

other countries, winner athletes receive benefits which are not correlated with money, an example is South Korea, where athletes can “switch” the winning medal with the exclusion of military duty. And there is another category of countries in which incentives are directly given to support federations, associations, and athletes (Il Post, August 2021).

For the Paralympic athletes, as said before, the story is completely different. The difference between the amount reserved for Olympic and Paralympic athletes is big and there are different reasons to justify them. The first difference regards the committees, the Olympic one has a higher monetary availability respect to the Paralympic committee. The second difference is strictly related to the first and regards the visibility. Olympic games are considerate on a higher-level respect to the Paralympic ones. The visibility of the Olympic games is higher with the consequence that the revenues are substantially bigger (Il Giornale d’Italia, 2021).

## **CHAPTER 2 – THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SPORT MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION**

### **2.1 THE SPORT MARKET AND ITS VALUE(S)**

Sport is, for somebody a way to keep out from frenetic days, a way to relax, a way to maintain physical health, but for many it has become a work, a way to earn one's living. Sports have increasingly become professionalized through years, and it is now common sense that sport has assumed a global economic dimension.

Growth in the historic period resulted from rapid urbanization, growth in emerging economies and emergence of multiple channels to capture viewership. Factors that negatively affected growth in the historic period were covid-19 pandemic, doping scandals, shortage of sports officials and climate changes. Going forward, emergence of e sports, rising sponsorships, and increase in internet accessible devices will drive the growth. Factors that could hinder the growth of the sports market in the future include threat from home entertainment and increasing regulations on sports.

The global sports market reached a value of nearly \$388.3 billion in 2020, having increased at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 3.4% since 2015. The market declined from \$458.8 billion in 2019 to \$388.3 billion in 2020 at a rate of -15.4%. The decline is mainly due to lockdown and social distancing norms imposed by various countries and economic slowdown across countries owing to the COVID-19 outbreak and the measures to contain it. The market is expected to reach \$599.9 billion by 2025, and \$826.0 billion by 2030.

In the late 1960s, first in the United States and then in Europe countries, it has been increasingly structured according to criteria of profit, through organizations and extending the market logic to activities previously set according to completely different criteria. The underlying phenomenon behind this process is the continuous reduction of working time during the twentieth century and the simultaneous increase in leisure time that in high income societies is dedicated in part increasingly relevant to direct sports practice or passive use – direct or through the television - of sports shows (Caselli G. P., 2009). This new sector of activity has been the subject of increasing monetary investments, so that in a long journey that runs throughout the century, the relationship between sport and other economic activities has become increasingly narrow, to the point of predicting that almost all sporting activity will be in future organize according to market rules, despite the continuous tensions between the symbolic and social aspects that it preserves, and constraints dictated by strict budgetary requirements.

It is known that many of the modern sports were born several centuries ago, but their regulatory formalization took place between the middle and the end of the nineteenth century. Immediately afterwards, the international institutions that still govern the sport activity, but their economic importance grew with the development of the mass media: newspapers, radio, television and now internet (Caselli G. P., 2009)

So, it is possible to have two definitions of sports economy: first, a smaller, delimits the field of investigation to the economic effects of the great professional sport and of big events; the second also includes the indirect effects of sports, such as the purchase of clothing and sports equipment, sports tourism, the purchase of newspapers and sports publications.

In the Anglo-Saxon countries the sport economy is normally conceived in the first sense, the economic analysis of the sports phenomenon is carried out applying traditional tools of neoclassical microeconomics: that is, the tools of the analysis of the supply and demand of an asset are extended to the supply and demand of sport-related products and services. The producer of a sporting good is treated as an undertaking producing a good sold on the market under conditions approaching conditions of perfect competition with the goal of maximizing the profit.

In the European tradition, on the other hand, there is a tendency, especially on the part of the French school (Andreff, Wladimir, and Staudohar P. D., 2000), to apply the traditional instruments much more sparingly and even with a little suspicion of economic theory to sporting activity, considering it necessary to the understanding of its economic significance the use of tools from sociology, demography, and rights.

The economic importance of sport, negligible as a market phenomenon until the end of the 1970s, explodes, until it reaches its current relevance, with the possibility of transmitting live sports events on tv channels (Caselli G. P., 2009).

The sport-television relationship historically began on 17 May 1939, the day in which in the United States were transmitted for the first time a baseball match. Europe follows with a delay of more than ten years: the boom of European national TV in fact dates to the fifties. Subsequently, Eurovision and the world vision (inaugurated on the event of the Tokyo Olympics in 1964) gave the definitive affirmation of this way of communication.

Sport is particularly suitable for television use: if the sport guarantees the maximum of telegenic, the television guarantees the maximum of potential spectacularism.

## **2.2 SPORT BROADCAST**

Television broadcasting has been the most significant factor in the promotion of the Olympic ideals and the growth of the Olympic Games worldwide. The following is a brief overview of key milestones in the history of Olympic television broadcasting.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Documents/International-Olympic-Committee/IOC-Marketing-And-Broadcasting/IOC-Marketing-Fact-File-2021.pdf>

Berlin 1936	The first Olympic Games to be televised, in and around Berlin only, with a total of 138 viewing hours and 162,000 viewers. One of three cameras is capable of live coverage – only when the sun is shining.
London 1948	The first Olympic Games to establish the principle of the broadcast rights fee. The BBC agrees to pay 1,000 guineas (approximately USD 3,000). Concerned about financial hardship to the BBC, the OCOG does not accept payment. More than 500,000 viewers, most residing within a 50-mile radius of London, watch the 64 hours of Olympic programming.
Helsinki 1952	The OCOG conducts broadcast rights negotiations for the first time.
Melbourne 1956	The breakdown of negotiations prevents transmission of the Olympic broadcast to important markets including the US.
Cortina/Ampezzo 1956	The Olympic Winter Games are broadcast live for the first time. During the Opening Ceremony, the final Olympic torchbearer stumbles and falls over the television cable placed on the ice surface of the stadium.
1958	Television rights issues are incorporated into the Olympic Charter with the introduction of Article 49: "the rights shall be sold by the Organising Committee, with the approval of the IOC, and the revenues distributed in accordance with its instructions".
Rome 1960	The Olympic Games are televised live for the first time to 18 European countries, and only hours later in the United States, Canada and Japan.
Tokyo 1964	For the first time, satellite broadcast coverage is used to relay images overseas.
1966	The IOC expands revenue sharing to include NOCs and IFs for the first time.
Mexico City 1968	The Olympic Games are broadcast live in colour for the first time. Slow-motion footage is available live.
Sapporo 1972	Japanese network NHK provides the television feed for broadcasters to choose the coverage they want – the model for today's host broadcast organisation.
Los Angeles 1984	Television and radio rights acquired by 156 nations. More than 2.5 billion people view the Olympic Games.
Albertville 1992/ Barcelona 1992	For the first time in Olympic broadcast history, a multi-tier television structure is operated in several countries. The main national broadcaster sub-licenses coverage of additional events to other cable and satellite broadcasters, expanding the total sports coverage. Surveys of the US, the UK and Spain show an average of seven out of ten people tune in to Albertville, and more than nine out of ten tune in to Barcelona.
Lillehammer 1994	Broadcast and marketing programmes generate more than USD 500 million, breaking almost every major Olympic Winter Games marketing record. More than 120 countries and territories view television coverage of the Games, compared to the 86 countries that broadcast 1992 Albertville. For the first time, the Winter Games are broadcast on the African continent, via M-Net and ART satellites.
Atlanta 1996	The Games are funded entirely via private sources, including broadcast rights. The IOC underwrites the cost of the transmissions to Africa. The broadcast reaches a record 214 countries.

Nagano 1998	Television coverage of the Games is provided to 180 countries and territories, compared to 120 countries for Lillehammer 1994. The Olympic Winter Games are broadcast live in Australia for the first time. Olympic broadcasting firsts include video-on-demand and 3D high-definition.
Sydney 2000	Olympic broadcast reaches 3.7 billion viewers in 220 countries. The IOC introduces Total Viewer Hours (TVH), a new method of measuring the Olympic television audience levels. The Games broadcast generates 36.1 billion Television Viewer Hours.
Salt Lake City 2002	The IOC and broadcast partners work to provide satellite coverage to East Timor. 2.1 billion viewers in 160 countries consume more than 13 billion TVH. For the first time, the host broadcaster covers all Winter events live. For the first time, 100 million viewers in India receive free-to-air coverage.
Athens 2004	More than 300 television channels provide a total of 35,000 hours of dedicated coverage, and 3.9 billion viewers in 220 countries and territories each watched an average of more than 12 hours of coverage. For the first time, the Olympic Games are broadcast live in Azerbaijan. Live coverage is also available on the internet in several territories for the first time.
Turin 2006	The Turin Olympic Broadcast Organisation provided nearly 1,000 hours of live content – the most in Olympic Winter Games history. The Olympic broadcasters also maximised opportunities in new media technology, providing viewers with more access and greater choice through the internet, mobile phones and multiple television channels. Television coverage is offered for the first time in HDTV and coverage is available for the first time on mobile phones.
Beijing 2008	Olympic Broadcasting Services provide a record 5,000 hours of live HD content – the most in Olympic history. Digital media is made available across the world, including via the IOC's own digital channel in 78 countries in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. For more information on the broadcast of Beijing 2008, visit: <a href="http://view.digipage.net/?id=iocbeijing2008">view.digipage.net/?id=iocbeijing2008</a>
Vancouver 2010	Vancouver 2010 was a defining moment in Olympic broadcasting history, with the most extensive coverage ever produced for the Winter Games reaching a record potential audience of 3.8 billion people worldwide and approximately 1.8 billion viewers. For more information on the broadcast of the Vancouver 2010, visit: <a href="http://view.digipage.net/?id=iocvancouver2010">view.digipage.net/?id=iocvancouver2010</a>
London 2012	The Olympic Games London 2012 were a milestone in the history of Olympic broadcasting, with more coverage available on more platforms than ever before. Approximately 100,000 hours of Olympic coverage was broadcast across more than 500 TV channels around the world. For more information on the broadcast of London 2012, visit: <a href="http://view.digipage.net/?id=ioclondon2012">view.digipage.net/?id=ioclondon2012</a>
Sochi 2014	For the first time at any Olympic Games, the amount of digital coverage available exceeded that of traditional broadcasts, with 230 dedicated digital channels, including 155 websites and 75 apps- carrying a total of 60,000 hours of digital broadcast coverage. For more information on the broadcast of Sochi 2014, visit: <a href="http://cloud.digipage.net/go/iocsochi2014/">cloud.digipage.net/go/iocsochi2014/</a>
Rio 2016	Half the world's population watched the Olympic Games Rio 2016, with viewers having access to more Olympic content than ever before. The average TV viewer watched over 20% more coverage of Rio 2016 than London 2012, with 584 TV channels, more than 270 dedicated digital platforms and hundreds of official broadcaster pages on social media. For more information on the broadcast of Rio 2016 visit: <a href="http://touchline.digipage.net/iocmarketing/reportrio2016/">touchline.digipage.net/iocmarketing/reportrio2016/</a>
PyeongChang 2018	More than a quarter of the world's population followed the Olympic Winter Games PyeongChang 2018 across various media platforms. In total, the IOC's global broadcast partners made more coverage available from PyeongChang than any previous Olympic Winter Games, offering a combined 157,812 hours – an increase of 38 per cent from Sochi 2014. The increased digital coverage helped make PyeongChang 2018 the most digitally viewed Olympic Winter Games ever, with 670 million global online users viewing digital broadcast coverage – 120 per cent more than watched Sochi 2014. For information on the broadcast of PyeongChang 2018, visit: <a href="http://iocmarketingreport.touchlines.com/pyeongchang2018">iocmarketingreport.touchlines.com/pyeongchang2018</a>

The 2012 Olympic Games have been hailed as a major success – in terms of sporting achievement, organization, and for the TV coverage. The BBC, as the host country’s national broadcaster, brought new levels of technical, editorial and scheduling innovation to its coverage of the Games. Seeing London 2012 as the biggest live event in its history, the BBC committed to seven years of planning and a yet undisclosed financial investment in technology and programming. As the world’s largest publicly funded broadcaster it was appropriate, they set new creative parameters – enabled by guaranteed funding and a remit to serve the public interest.

Whether future Olympics broadcasters will be able to match this is open to question. A tougher commercial strategy by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) seems likely to ensure more commercial broadcasters, and fewer public broadcasters, secure the rights in future – with a possible impact on the character of coverage (Sambrook R., 2012).

*“The IOC takes all necessary steps in order to ensure the fullest coverage by the different media and the widest possible audience in the world for the Olympic Games.” Art.48 of the Olympic Charter.*

The television broadcast of the Olympic Games is the most significant factor in the communication of the Olympic ideals worldwide. The primary broadcasting objective of the Olympic Movement is to ensure the most television viewers possible have the opportunity to experience the Olympic Games. In pursuit of this objective, coverage of the Olympic Games has been made available in an increasing number of territories and media platforms throughout the world (International Olympic Committee, March 2021).

Paradoxically, every country’s experience of the Games is different as their domestic TV coverage favours home athletes or the sports at which they excel. If you watched the 2012 Games in the USA you will have seen a lot of swimming and track events and, strangely, archery; in the UK there was a lot of cycling, rowing and sailing. In Croatia, water polo was dominant. Yet behind these different biases and narratives sits the common idea of a global festival of sport celebrating excellence, fair play and community, symbolised with the Olympic flame and extravagant opening and closing ceremonies. The challenge for TV broadcasters is to meet the audience’s appetite for news of their own team while continuing to reflect the wider story of the Games. They have to do so within tight rules set by the IOC to protect their own, and sponsors, investment (Sambrook R., 2012).

## 2.3 COMMUNICATION BEYOND SPORT

With each new edition, the Olympics are renewed from a technological and communicative point of view, to surpass previous editions. Better than the previous edition, with special facilities and fantastic structures. At the Olympic games of London in 2012 was introduced a new high-tech system to share competitions all over the world.

In the past, in the first games of 1896 communication was extremely different. News was delivered by messengers on horseback to the fans all around the stadium.

We have to wait for the Olympics of Los Angeles in 1932 for the introduction of radio and tv. Hollywood was nearby and for the first time, the world of cinema met sport.

The first real mediatic event of Olympic games was in 1936, when the *Olimpia Zeitung*, newspaper of the Nazism period was freely distributed to all the population and radio permitted to reach 300 million listeners all over the world. It is also the first edition to be televised and, from a technical and communicative perspective, it was a successful event (Eleni O., 2004).

Television established itself as the sporting medium par excellence after the WW2 and progressively took the place of newspapers and other forms of written communication.

From this moment on things rapidly changed. People could now follow the athletes of their nations, which became increasingly famous and gained more visibility and sponsors. Companies invested on athletes and on their image to benefit from their fame, and to have their products associated to sport-related qualities and values. From that moment, every sport event became a business opportunity and a competition for the host country and city to be perceived as a successful organizer and to attract new tourists and investments.

The winter Olympic games of Sochi in 2014 were the most expensive games but also the ones which registered record high advertisement incomes. These incomes come from marketing partnerships and multinationals which participated as main sponsors (for example Coca cola, Samsung, and Visa) and for this reason Sochi has had the possibility to build an Olympic village which is a theater of the visual communication. Every day, athletes' performances and talks were projected on mega-screens all around the Olympic village, similar contents were distributed to the homes of worldwide audiences through national and international tv broadcasters and the internet.

In the 2018, during the winter games of Pyeongchang, there is a consciousness referring to the communication beyond the Olympic games.

If we think about the era before web and smartphones, we know that Olympic games were available only through television (obviously it was not the same for the Paralympic games which were not transmitted on tv channel). So, it's easy to say that athletes have no influences on the way of communication but now through social media they decided what content sharing with fans or

followed. Games were transmitted on tv channels which gave to the fans a way of following their national teams. With the introduction of social media, it became easy to reach every kind of interaction about sport, in particular Olympic and Paralympic games, and to build a direct link and conversation or interaction with users. Nowadays, Olympic games become a trending topic few months before their beginning. Talking about data, for the Olympic games of Rio de Janeiro of 2016 there were more or less 53 billions of mentions on main social media which were also related also to the difficult situation of Brazil in that period.

On the official website of the Olympic games, we can find this sentence:

*“The Olympic games are one of the most effective international marketing platforms in the world, reaching billions of people in over 200 countries and territories throughout the world”.*

In addition to the mentions, if people want to take part to conversation about the event, it is useful to use hashtags, which are a form of instant marketing.

All these forms of communication are created to gain visibility, but it is also possible that someone don't want to advertise the event, and this is the case of Tokyo 2020. In Japan, there were people that disagreed with the common opinion to celebrate this event in fact the advertising referring to the Olympic games were less than for previous games. On the other side there were companies that decided to act different types of communicative strategies. The framing effect is a cognitive bias where people decide on options based on whether the options are presented with positive or negative. In particular, the negative one was influenced by the frightened of covid contagion, if the frightened was high they will act a certain strategy and vice versa.

On the side of the Paralympic games the situation is completely different. Only at the Paralympic games of London 2012, things have changed. In the event of London there were increasing spaces on media but also higher cost of advertising (Napolitano F., 2016). But how these macroeconomics factors influence the Paralympic associations? A result regard an increasing of professionalism in the association of sport for people with disabilities so the activities for these persons are now not only with the goal of inclusion but also oriented to a competitive activity. Thanks to the communication strategy of the Olympic committee which have centered their message on the exceeding of limits, Paralympic games gained more visibility on social media and in the societal discourse.

The outcome of the growing communicative power assumed by Paralympic athletes on the one hand is configured as a greater awareness and deconstruction of the stigma, on the other side it proposes the creation of a Paralympic mythology.

One of the many ways that you start to adopt communication to change the vantage point: tell the Paralympics how athletes see and live them, and no longer represent them with the eyes of the average viewer, the reporters or the able-bodied people (Spoto A., 2018).

## 2.4 OLYMPICS AND PARALYMPICS MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

Olympic and Paralympic games are events which involve people from all over the world. Involved people are of course, firstly, athletes with their coaches and staff, but these events are strongly followed by lot of fans. Games are an opportunity for each host countries to promote themselves and their strengths through the improvement of services and facilities. For this reason, the competitiveness between host countries become a recurring theme. Events during the games are created thinking about cultural traditions of the territory. According to the opinion of Caroli<sup>10</sup> (1999), the events are a manifestation of the internal product but at the same time they produce an enormous power of communication, and these two functions make them efficient marketing strategy from the point of view of a territorial marketing but not only.

The organization of Olympic or Paralympic games is surely expensive but give to the host country an investment on new generations. Stadium and facilities that were built for the games remain for the becoming athletes. But not only. Cities or places hosting Olympics and Paralympic are renewed and improved and this is also an investment, in the specific moment for tourist and athletes, but later for the population.

From the economic point of view, we can divide the Olympic games of the period after war in different ways, rebuilding with limited incomes, risks with losses, great incomes, and budgets in surplus.

After wars it was very difficult to find money to organize Olympic games specially in countries devastated by war. For this reason, games of London 1948 were the “reborn games”, in which English people did a sacrifice to rebuild the city and to organize the games. In 1948 there was the first television contract with BBC and the event were followed by 500.000 persons in a range of 50 miles from London.

But the revolution was in the 1958, during the Olympic games in Tokyo, was introduced art.49 in the Olympic Charter which says that: “broadcasting rights will be sold directly by the organizers committees of the cities that will have to set up the Games, but always after the approval of the International Olympic Committee, and the incomes will be distributed according to the guideline of the Committee”.

The International Olympic Committee coordinates Olympic marketing programmes with the following objectives: generate revenue to be distributed throughout the entire Olympic Movement – including the OCOGs, the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and their continental associations, the International Federations (IFs) and other recognised international sports organisations – and to

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<sup>10</sup> Professor of LUISS University and coordinator of the community of management of the University.

provide financial support for sport in emerging nations, build on the successful activities developed by each Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (OCOG) and eliminate the need to recreate the marketing structure with each Olympic Games, ensure that the Olympic Games can be experienced by the maximum number of people throughout the world principally via broadcast coverage, protect and promote the equity that is inherent in the Olympic image and ideals, control and limit the commercialisation of the Olympic Games, create and maintain long-term marketing programmes, and finally to enlist the support of Olympic marketing partners in the promotion of the Olympic ideals.

The age of global communication offers unique and challenging marketing possibilities, especially when attempting to reach a diversified global audience. It is imperative that marketing professionals must not overlook the role that local identity practices play in the interpretation of globally standardized marketing messages. One global campaign, in particular, is a prime example of this need – the International Olympic Committee’s “Celebrate Humanity” campaign, which was released prior to the 2000 Summer Olympic Games held in Sydney, Australia (Giardina Michael D., Metz Jennifer L.. 2000)

## **2.5 THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SPORT COMMUNICATION**

Social media and internet in the last fifteen years have completely changed perceptions and habits of people. In recent years, we have seen a remarkable growth of every type of social media, which have influenced the trend of the new generations. From the development of Facebook, we have seen the rising of platforms, which permit individuals to constantly be in contact with each other, to create new interactions and common points with people far away, but the most important innovation reached by social media is being the easiest way to communicate with each other (Palladini, M., 2014/2015). Nowadays, people using internet is no longer satisfied only in surfing online and reading news and interaction of other persons, but people also feel the necessity to give opinions, share images and to comment contents of other users.

Social media have radically changed the way of using internet, not only for individuals but also for firms, associations, federations, and teams. These platforms, now, are an efficient way of marketing and communication for every kind of reality. To stay out of social media, for example for a company, is a kind of auto-exclusion from the world and for companies or association this could be damaging own image.

Network is a powerful resource used by the society to listen, learn, create, find feedbacks and answer to all informative needs of persons using internet and its tools.

Through network and social media, companies, people, and other users can make more efficient marketing campaigns compared to the past. Consumer is not yet a passive viewer but now has the possibility to become an integral part of the initiatives of communication.

These new forms of marketing are from one side advantageous because they are very smart and easy to plan, from the other side they are not so efficient because they are developed to reach a big amount of people and this means that it is not so obvious that the message that wants to be transmitted will arrive with all the same level of interest.

In an interview with the Digital Royalty's Amy Martin, she said that she thinks people tend to get caught up in making social media into something more than it is, but really, it's just a new form of communication. It wasn't necessarily invented or developed to be a marketing channel. What's interesting about social media is that because it is a two-way communication channel, now more than ever consumers, audiences, and fans can interact directly with their favorite brands and celebrities. Social media, by accident more than anything else, is providing this new dialogue that is counterintuitive to the basic tenets of marketing. Fans are beginning to expect their favorite teams and athletes to communicate via these channels.

She contributed to the social media presence of a former famous basketball player, Shaquille O'Neal, and she said that much of their strategy about Shaquille has been focused on tying his endorsements naturally into his online and social-marketing presence. The great thing about Shaquille is that he has such a huge personality and is incapable of faking anything. These are great attributes to have when starting a social-media campaign because entertainment and transparency are so important to followers. When they came up with the *Random Acts of Shaqness* umbrella concept over a year and a half ago, it was his natural way of engaging with his followers that allowed the campaign to really shape and lead the way for a lot of other brands, both individuals and organizations, in terms of how they have gone about their own social-media ventures. They invented a way to bridge the virtual and physical worlds (Ballouli K., Hutchinson M., 2010).

Journalism schools - print communication standbys - are being morphed into new/social/convergent media schools. Legendary programs are changing and much of it has to do with new media influences and opportunities. So, concurrent with the evolving nature of academic entities and student interests/opportunities are changes in research, including a spike in social media sport communication article submissions and publications. Although some studies have been done to quickly build vitas through work without significant rigor or originality, social media in sport has an overall solid research base (e.g., appropriate foundational and exploratory

studies over the past five years based upon established and applicable media theories) upon which scholars can make substantial advancements by taking their work to higher levels and in unique directions. The field has reached a point of saturation in some aspects of social media research (e.g., replicating a quantitative content analysis on another social media platform, performing another thematic examination of the same social media platform but with a different focus) but that just means that it is time to search out innovative ways and different methodologies to advance work and knowledge in this area (Pedersen P. M., 2014).

In the case of sports associations and federations, social media play the role of sharing content and values which permit the involvement of network users. For example, Olympic and Paralympic games are a moment of maximum interaction and opinions between persons. During these events social media are the places in which people collect information about athletes, results, but also create discussion over different kind of topic, becoming sometimes popular for their thought or their interaction.

Discussions that in the past took place in bar or other common spaces, now take place online in the same moment in which people are sitting on the sofa or watching tv (Ceron A., Curini L., and Iacus S. M., 2014).

A winning strategy to involve people online is to plan and create something that is not common or not seen since that moment. Some fantastic examples are the strategy of Nike or Adidas, which through their slogans “Just Do It” and “Impossible is Nothing” are communicating messages referring to selected topic (Nike uses Bebe Vio and other famous women athletes to send message about the power and respect of women as persons and athletes). The most important element of these strategies and which differentiate every marketing campaign from each other is the message which has to be transmitted. As affirmed by the Modern Marketing Manifesto<sup>11</sup> “Content reinforces a brand’s credibility and authenticity in what it stands for believes in and cares about. For modern marketers, content is a vital expression of the Brand” and this means that for companies, social media represents channel through which gain visibility to stand out and be in contact with their fans.

With reference to the Olympic and Paralympic games, Scott Campbell, PhD, Communications and Media Department Chair and Constance F. and Pohns A. C. Professor of Telecommunications, discuss in an interview of Michigan Minds<sup>12</sup>, in July of 2021, about the role of the social media at the Tokyo Olympics. In particular, he said that «social media has the ability to bring people from around the world right to the Olympics». He continued saying that «we are intimately and immediately involved in gossip, rumor, updates and news». This means in other words that «the way that social media

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<sup>11</sup> Published by the Econsultancy and it contain twelve guidelines for an efficient marketing strategy.

<sup>12</sup> <https://publicengagement.umich.edu/the-impact-and-role-of-social-media-at-the-olympics/>

provides a platform for athletes to amplify their voices has a great impact on society». In this episode of Michigan Minds, Campbell also said that «Olympic athletes and professional and amateur athletes can use social media to put themselves on a stage, to represent who they are, to represent their values beyond just their skills. Because they are role models, it also makes them more vulnerable. These are young people and the dynamics on social media are so very hard to keep up with».

Another topic touch by Campbell is with reference to the global pandemic situation. Campbell said that after more than a year of a living through a global pandemic in which individuals connected virtually rather than in person to follow public health and safety guidelines, he believed people will be even more comfortable engaging through social media.

## **2.6 ATHLETES AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

From the evolution of technological items, there was always a relation between media, athletes, and sport. Sport offer contents for media, which promote the performances of athletes. But social media have changed this traditional relation (Filo K., Lock D., Karg A., 2015).

Athletes always check information and news on the social media as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. And this is becoming a habit for all. But is this a good or bad influence for the performances of the athletes?

Social media certainly offer some advantages for athletes, as remaining in contact with family, friends, fans or just to involve their fans in their performances. But there is obviously a commercial advantage for athletes and the researchers of Sport Marketing Quartely, recommend athletes to make strong interaction with fans and share with them information about athlete's life to exploit marketing opportunities. But on the other side, Professor Katie Lebel of Ryerson University examined how athletes had presented themselves on Twitter's profile and she determined it's about an extension of the brand of the athlete, in sense of promoting themselves (Ceron, Andrea, Luigi Curini, and Stefano Maria Iacus, 2014).

But social media has on the other side some disadvantages, in particular in the psychological sphere of the athlete. Lot of studies in the last years, have underline that the media exposure is Achille heel for the sport performances, negatively influencing performances of athletes (Gould D., Dieffenbach K., and Moffett A, 2002).

This negative influence was demonstrated in a study which prove that the use of the social media from Olympic athletes had for the majority of them were surfing on Facebook two hours before sport competition and lot of them use it during their competition. But most important was the fact that sport

anxiety could increase if athletes stayed on Facebook before their performance. The high sport anxiety can also carry on other negative consequences like the fear of failure.

Fighting against the negative influences of social media, some athletes take a sort of “social media diet” or a blackout period from it.

Which impact can have positive or negative feedbacks or comments on Olympics? This is a question which cannot have a unique answer. It’s not possible to know in advance how people can react to comment, and it is not possible to know if it’s reaction could be positive or negative. In general, positive feedback can increase self-confidence and on the other side a negative one can create the opposite emotion.

We can find an example of negative impact on the psychological sphere of an athlete in the last Olympic games of Tokyo 2020. Simone Biles is a gymnastic athlete of the United States of America. She withdraws from the final of gymnastic of Tokyo 2020 due to her mental breakdown. She said that the pressure was so high and that she feels like all world was on her back (Macur J. 24<sup>th</sup> July 2021).

In the world of the Paralympic games the story is quite different. Social media influence athletes like the Olympics ones, positive and negative perceptions, but Paralympic athletes are no social like the Olympics.

For both categories of athletes after games of Tokyo there was an increasing number of research, in particular for Paralympic athletes, who are not known.

## **2.7 SPORT COMMUNICATION ON TWITTER**

Social media, in general, has also been proven to be an effective marketing and communication tool, which sport organizations utilize to market themselves, enhance their brand awareness, and foster brand loyalty. In addition to professional sport organizations, other segments of the sport industry have also benefited from this emergent new technology. These organizations include the Olympics sport government bodies, such as international federations, National Olympic Committees (NOCs), and National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of sports. Unlike professional sports, some Olympic sports can be considered niche sports because they received infrequent fan support and media attention.

Social media, particularly Twitter, with its relatively inexpensive barrier to entry and ease of connectivity with potential fans, is an effective vehicle where niche sports organizations can generate brand awareness and gain the public’s attention (Bo, L., Scott O.KM, Dittmore, S.W. 2018).

There is an excellent opportunity for these Olympic Governing Bodies to attract attention in Olympic years and, particularly, during the Olympic Games.

Twitter is one of the principal social media and has seen in sport a great business opportunity.

Twitter is a virtual common place for sport lovers but not only. In the last years, Twitter improved itself forging partnership (for example during the Covid pandemic, Twitter forge partnership with ministry of countries to give sure information to the users).

The most important upgrades since 2006 was the introduction of videos, photos, and hashtags, which are one of the distinctive elements of this social media.

But which is its goal? Of course, to encourage people to say every kind of opinion. In the last years it introduced lists, event pages, and to customize own feeds. Every media aims to give to the users a unique customizable experience referring on own interests and passions.

Twitter is a social media that says to the users “Look at this” and underline some topic which are “trend” and for this reason during events, like Olympic or Paralympic games but also smaller events like football matches, Twitter’s users can create lists or page events where people can comment, share images and interacting with other persons on a specific event or topic. This social media is very interesting if you are looking for specific topic and you want to know something new about it.

The favorite social media of clubs and federation is surely Twitter, because is one of the easiest ways to involve in real time fans and permit them to follow their favorite athletes or teams virtually. Clubs can re twitted comments and mentions of fans and like this they create a strong sense of community, which convert than in economics benefits for club and sponsor thanks to the visibility gained. But Twitter is also one of the favorite social media of athletes, who shares opinions, though and media with their fans (Pegoraro Ann, 2014).

Things to do if people want to have an efficient profile is to keep the profile always update, use hashtags specific of sport or specific discipline, re twitted mentions and comments of other users or mentioned famous athletes or person who are talking about the topic, and least but not last, to follow, comment and interact with others, which is the basis on an efficient strategy of communication.

During the Olympic Games in Rio2016, the coverage of women’s sport and athletes in the traditional media in Spain represented one in three published news sports stories, o, as female athletes acquire their great- est visibility during the Olympic Games, the image of them that is transmitted has a great potential to change stereotypes (Adá-Lameiras A. and Rodríguez-Castro Y., 2021).

This significant increase in the coverage of women’s sport during the Olympics has been defined as the Olympic Game Effect but, beyond showing genuine interest in female athletes, various arguments have been offered to explain this increase in media coverage of women’s sport, solely and exclusively during the Olympic Games. On one hand, those who say that, as the media are there for male athletes and men’s sport, female athletes simply ‘benefit’ from the media deployment that characterizes these sports mega-events and, on the other hand, there are those who argue that the discourse of nationalism

is above the gender discourse, so, coverage is guaranteed by the medal won, regardless of whether the person who won it is a man or a woman.

During the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, for the first time, NBC collected more information about female athletes than about male athletes.

## CHAPTER 3 – ANALYSIS OF THE MODEL

### 3.1 INTERVIEWS OF ATHLETES

To compute my model, I decided to analyze two types of data: from one side, I collect interviews from Olympic and Paralympic athletes and from the other side I downloaded from Twitter various tweets containing some keywords connected with values of sport. In addition, I will analyze some tweets related to chosen famous athletes, who have a lot of followers or who are “sports influencer”.

I decided to ask the athletes that I interviewed firstly, how they think about the value of sport, in general and then more in detail.

I will start analyzing interviews that I collect:



#### STEFANO TONUT

Basketball player of Reyer Venezia and Italian national team. He is 27 years old, and he plays in the higher championship in Italy. His first appearance with the national team was with the national youth team and he won the gold medal with the U20 national team in 2013. After his first appearances with youth national teams, he played

for the national team this summer in the tournament which gave to the team the pass for the Olympic games.

#### MARTA GASPAROTTO

She is 24 years old, and she plays softball. She is a catcher. She plays for the major series of Italian softball championship with Bollate Softball 1969 and for the Italian National Team. She began playing baseball and then she moved to softball. She won a lot of gold medals with the national team, the last one was the European championship.





## AHMED RAOURAHI

He comes from Morocco and when he was 10 years old, he had an accident (he lost his two legs and part of his right arm). He began playing wheelchair in Morocco when some Spanish talent scout came to recruit players.

He was recruited and his European career began. He came in Italy and immediately fall in love. He

played for the National team, and he participated to the Paralympic games of London 2012. In Italy he played in the major championship, and he won a lot of awards.

### **3.2 PRESENTATION OF THE MODELS**

In my analysis I decided to use topic modelling method, which are the most powerful techniques in text mining for data mining and finding relationships among data and text documents. Topic models cannot understand the meaning and concepts of words in text documents for topic modeling. Instead, they suppose that any part of the text is combined by selecting words from probable baskets of words where each basket corresponds to a topic. There are different methods for topic modelling, but I decided to use the LDA (Latent Dirichlet Allocation) and the Seeded LDA.

LDA is a generative probabilistic model of a corpus. The basic idea is that the documents are represented as random mixtures over latent topics, where topic is characterized by a distribution over words (Blei D.M., Ng A.Y., and Jordan M. I., 2003). This model is one of the most used in topic modelling and represents topics by word probabilities. So, the words with highest probabilities in each topic usually give a good idea of what the topic is can word probabilities from LDA (Jelodar H., Wang Y., Yuan C., Feng X., Jiang X., Li Y., Zhao L., 2018).

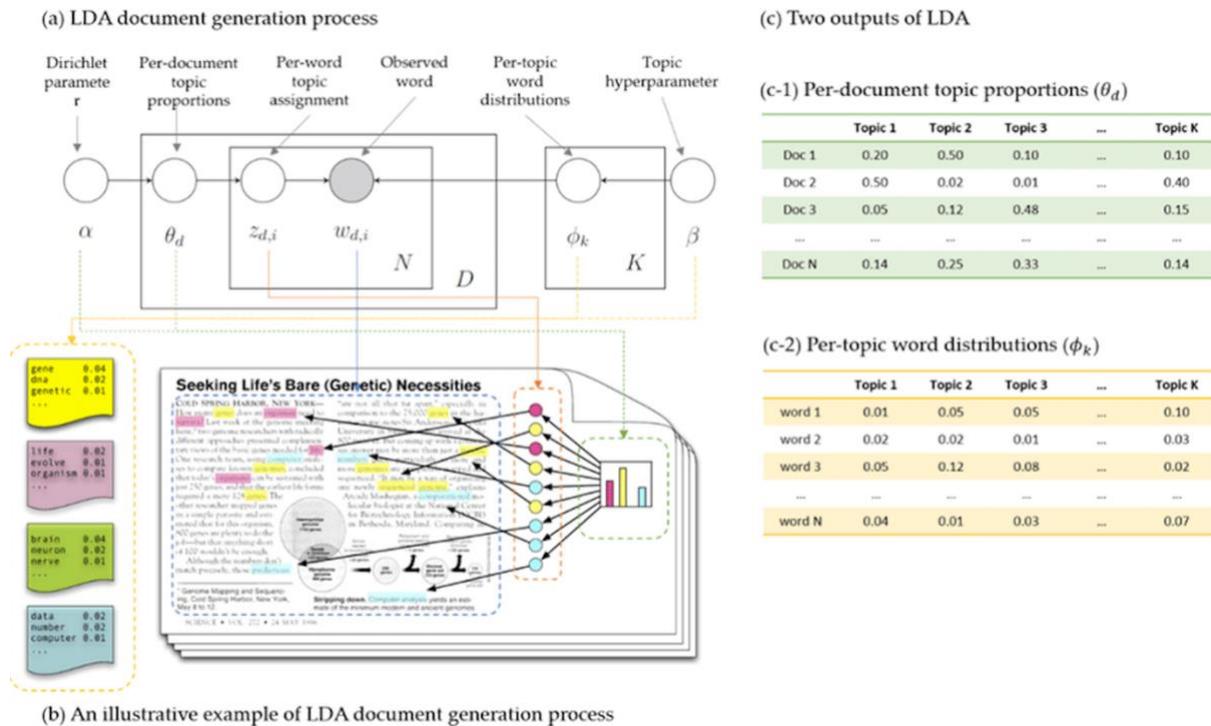
Social networks are a rich source for knowledge discovery and behaviour analysis. For example, Twitter is one of the most popular social networks that its evaluation and analysis can be very effective for analysing user behaviour.

In my analysis, I used first a LDA method on social media analysis (twitter's data) to understand the reactions of online users and I will underline the connection between some chosen keywords.

The second step of my analysis was to use the Seeded LDA. This model allows one to specify seed words that can influence the discovered topics to- ward our desired three categories.

Seeded models are aimed at improving the interpretability of results by using prior lexical knowledge. Lu et al. (2011) developed a technique to weight prior distribution of topics over words to detect

sentences that mention specific issues. In their semi supervised LDA model, pseudo counts are added to user-defined topic seed words before an LDA model is fitted.



The previous figure represents the generation process of LDA document. This model give us a way to easily interpretate result reaching by the model.

### 3.3 RESULTS

I estimated the two models, LDA and Seeded LDA, using R Studio.

For the LDA model, first I collect data from Twitter choosing institutional accounts and set the model. Then I decided to eliminate some words which were extremely influencing results. The words that I eliminated are “olympic”, “Olympics”, “paralympic”, “Paralympics” and “compete”.

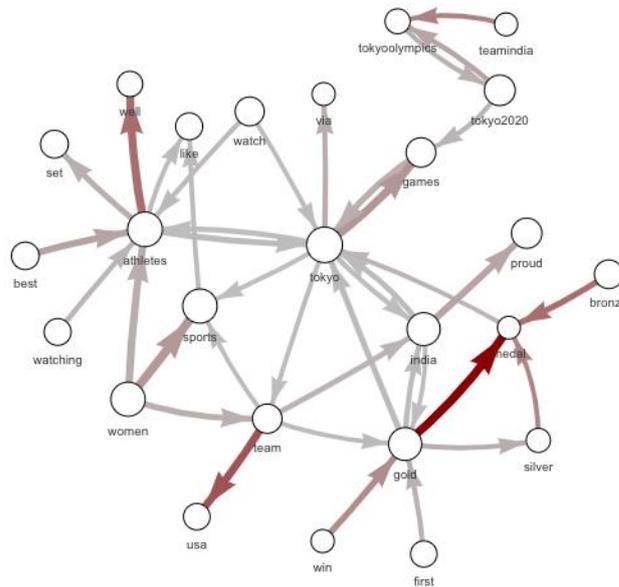
Estimating the model, I reached results below, that I will explain step by step:

In the figure 1 we can see the probability distribution of generating group of topics. We decided to compute a model with ten groups of topics and twenty words to analyse the relation between words in a specific group.

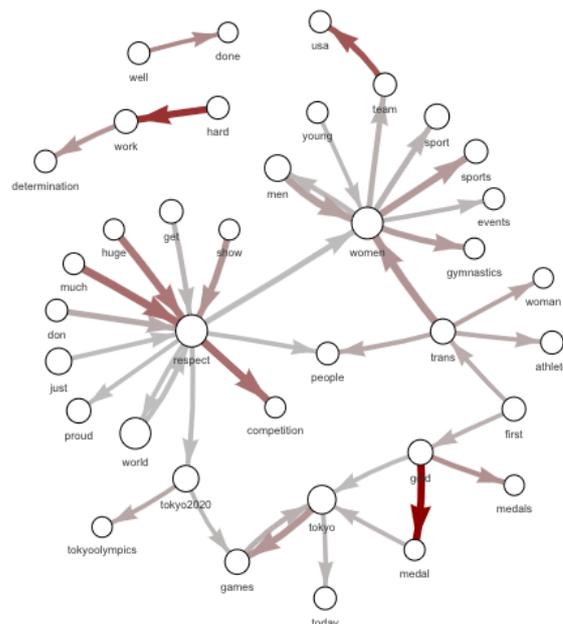
The words that have a higher probability are on the top and we can observe that the word “respect”, which is one of the values of sport mentioning in the previous charters, is on the top of half of the group. This means that in the data collect the word “respect” is extremely used and related to a lot of topics in the social and sport context. An interesting result collect is that the words “women” and “woman” are discussing more than the “man” and “men”, which didn’t compare with a significant probability in these groups.



The second topic underline the high probability and weight of the words “athletes” and “tokyo” which are extremely related with our analysis of sport values. The sequences in this net are strictly related each other. There are no words which are not collected to the others, so also this net is homogeneous and not fragmented.

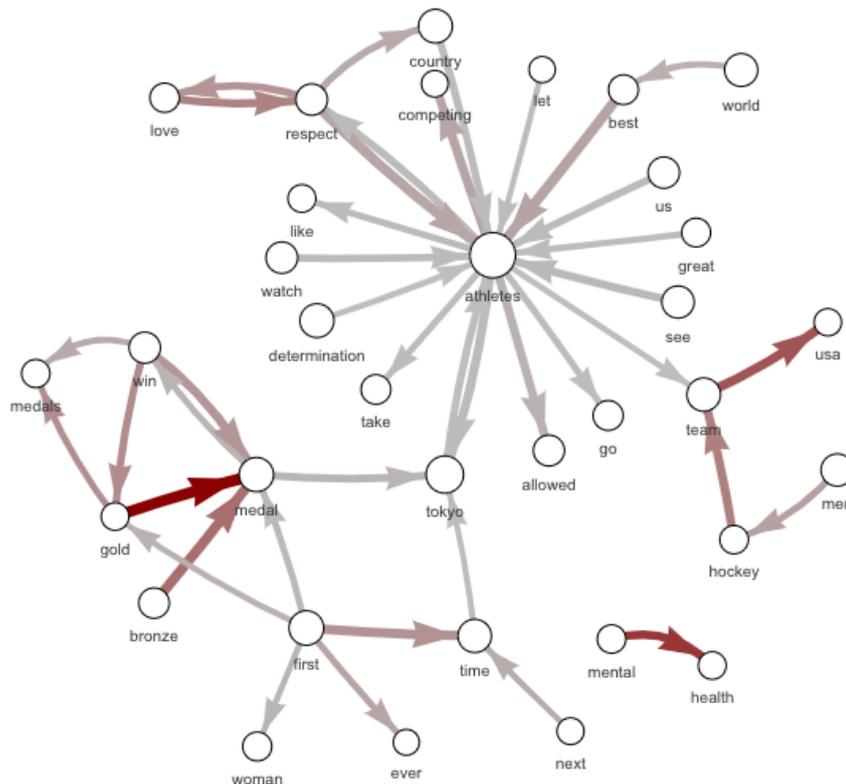


For the third topic the situation is quite different from the previous ones, we have that the most relevant words are “respect” and “woman”. We observe that the other words connected are related to the topic of medals, with reference to the color of them. Is a fragmentary situation in which we have some topic that are not related with the principal hubs but are separated sequences.



In the fourth topic we find a situation similar of the previous one. The connection is not so fragmentary as the third topic, but we have a hub represented by “athletes”, a smaller hub

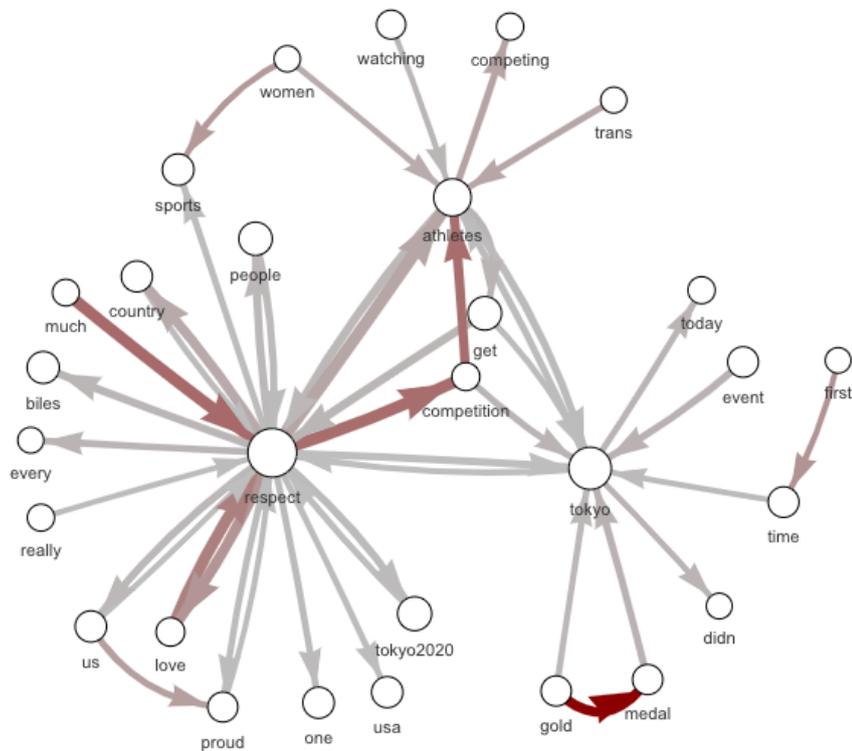
represented by “Tokyo”, which is then connected to the words related to the medals and their color. An important thing to underline is the sequence created by the two words “love” and “respect”, which are then related to the hub “athletes”.



In the last topic we find a situation which is different from the other. The stronger connection is between three keywords: “competition”, “athletes” and “respect”.

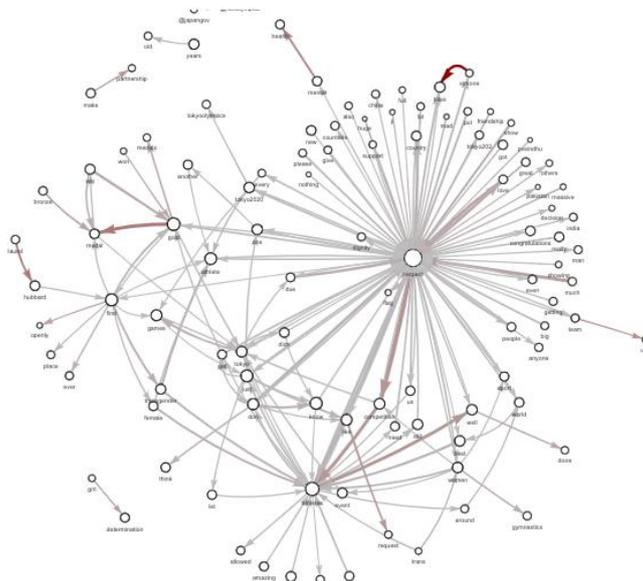
It’s important to say that the word “Tokyo” is frequent because is the place where Olympics and Paralympics games took place.

It is interesting to underline that in every net we find words like “simone”, “biles”, “laurel”, which refers to specific athletes’ scandal or gossip. The case of Simone Biles was one of the most discusses on social media and we can say that this is the prove of how much people have discuss on it and referring to it, but it is a topic which was connected also to the mental health.



The last analysis referring to the LDA model is the comparison of the two nets: between Olympics and Paralympics.

From the side of Olympics, for the first topic have a situation in which the sequences are varied. The bigger hub is represented by “respect”, the same of the Paralympics, but now we underline the connection between “athletes” which are the base of the sports value and “Tokyo”. There are no athletes that only participate and not desire to win a medal or to get a good result, but there is no competition if there is no respect. Respect is related to athletes and competition in a very important way and the net show us that “respect” is very often in the center of the discussion of sports topic. In this net we can see a strong relation between the name of Simone Biles.

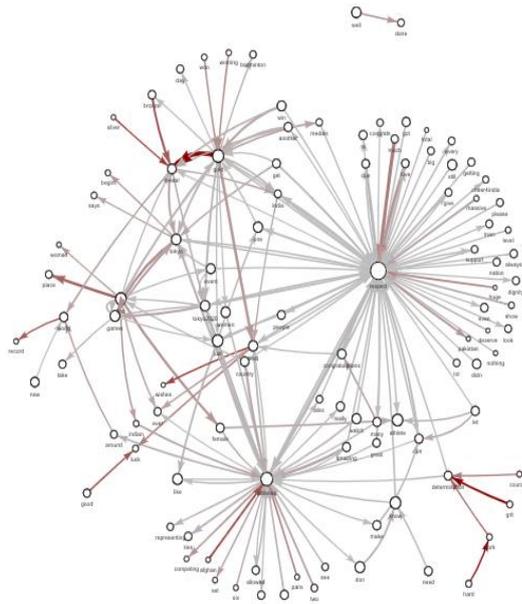




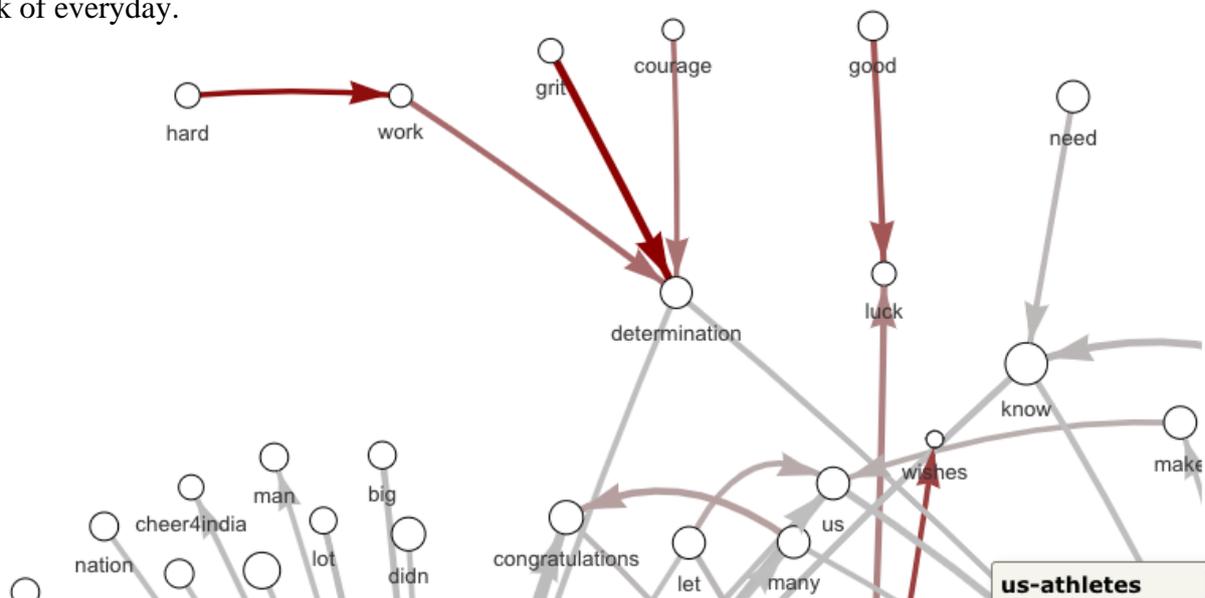


In this other part of the net, it is show that “india” is an important hub connected to frequent keywords and also to medals. This is relevant because India is a small country with not significant number of competitive athletes.

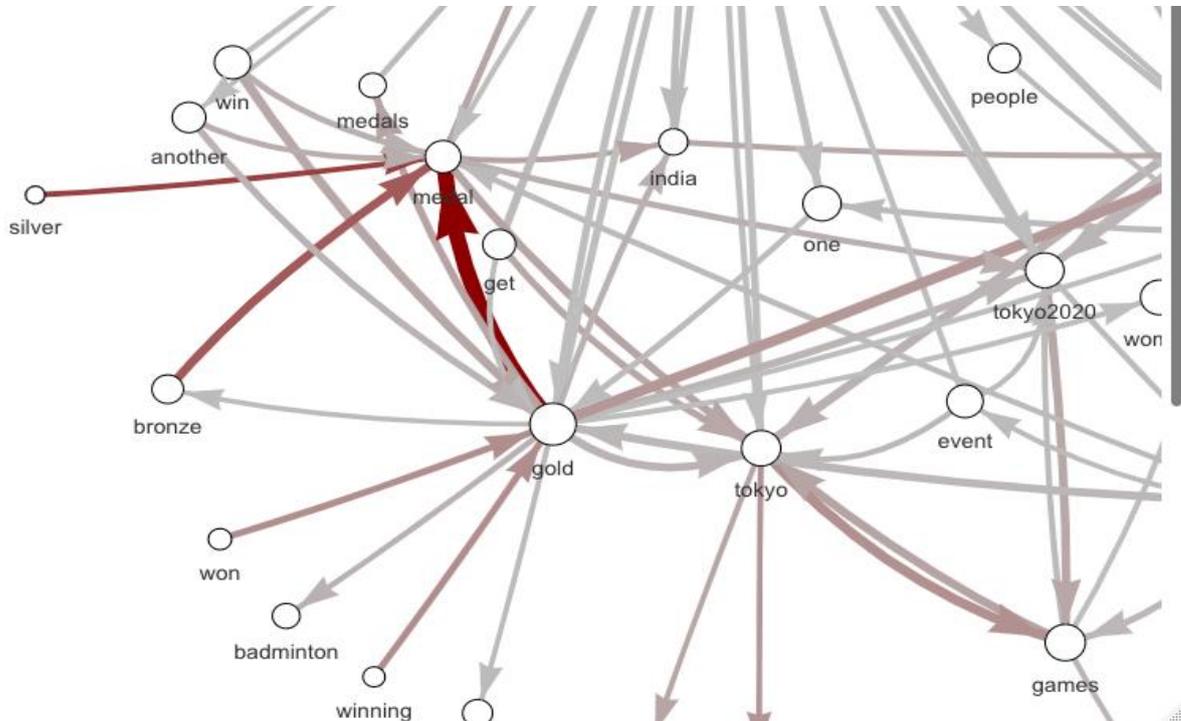
From the side of Paralympics for the first topic, we can show that “athletes” correspond to a hub from which a great number of words start. The net is very varied and is bidirectional. Words are strictly connected to each other.



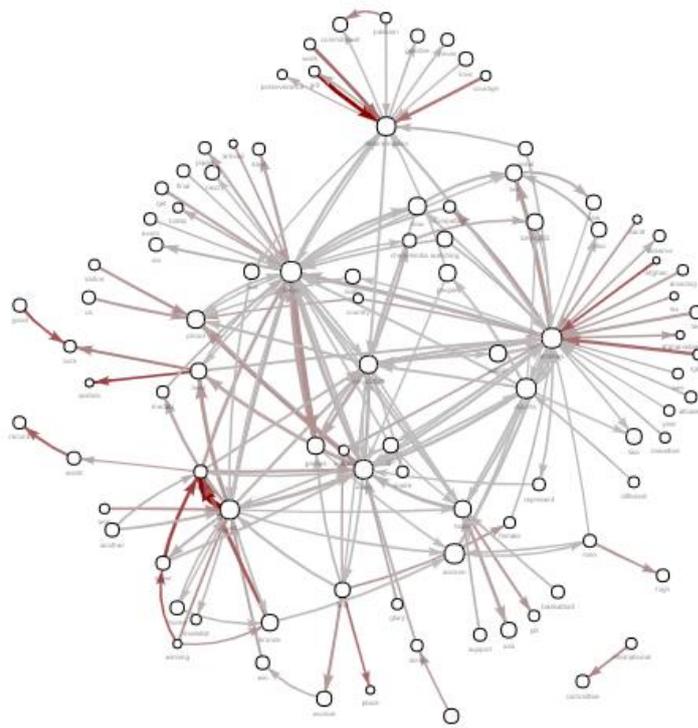
In this net we see the importance of the word “determination”, which is relevant for the sport values and this word is related with “courage” and with “hard” and “work”. This relation is very interesting because it is associated to the sport values but also to the everyday life. With determination and courage and hard work, we can fight against obstacles in life, but courage and determination are also to variable which guide people in the moment of a health problem. A person with disability is pushed by these two variables which give them the power to keep going with hard work of everyday.

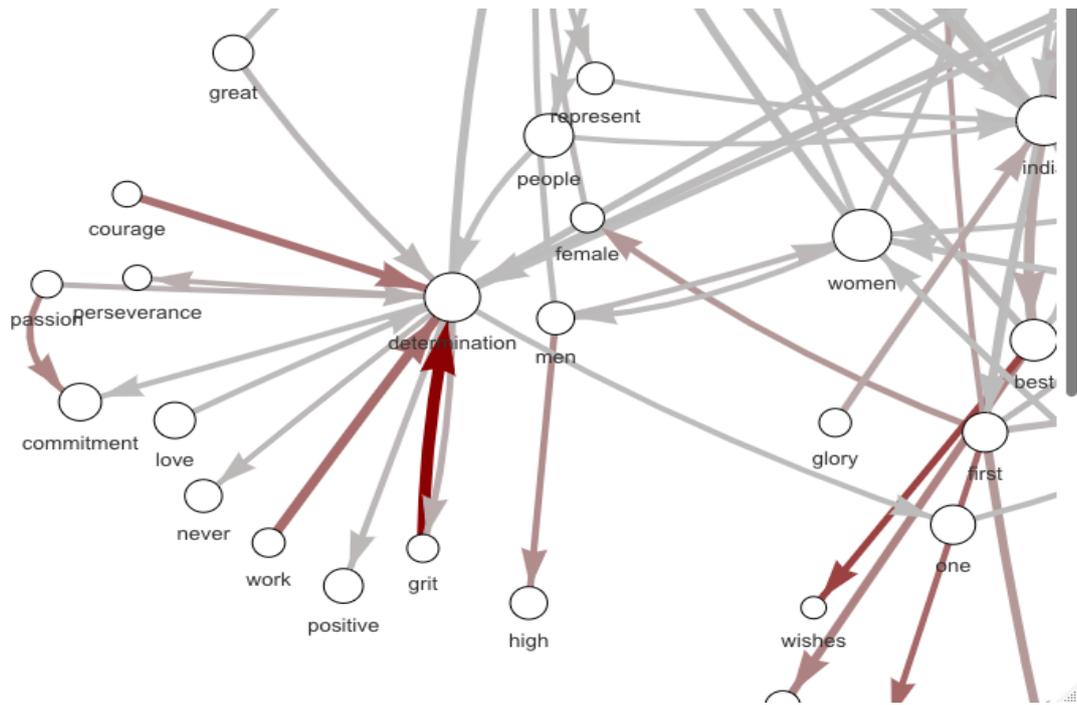


Another aspect I will underline is the presence of words related by medal and its color. This means that users are discussing on the performances of the Paralympic athletes and not only about their stories. This could be a step to break down the barriers of inequality and to follow Paralympics with the same interest of Olympics changing the way to see these athletes.

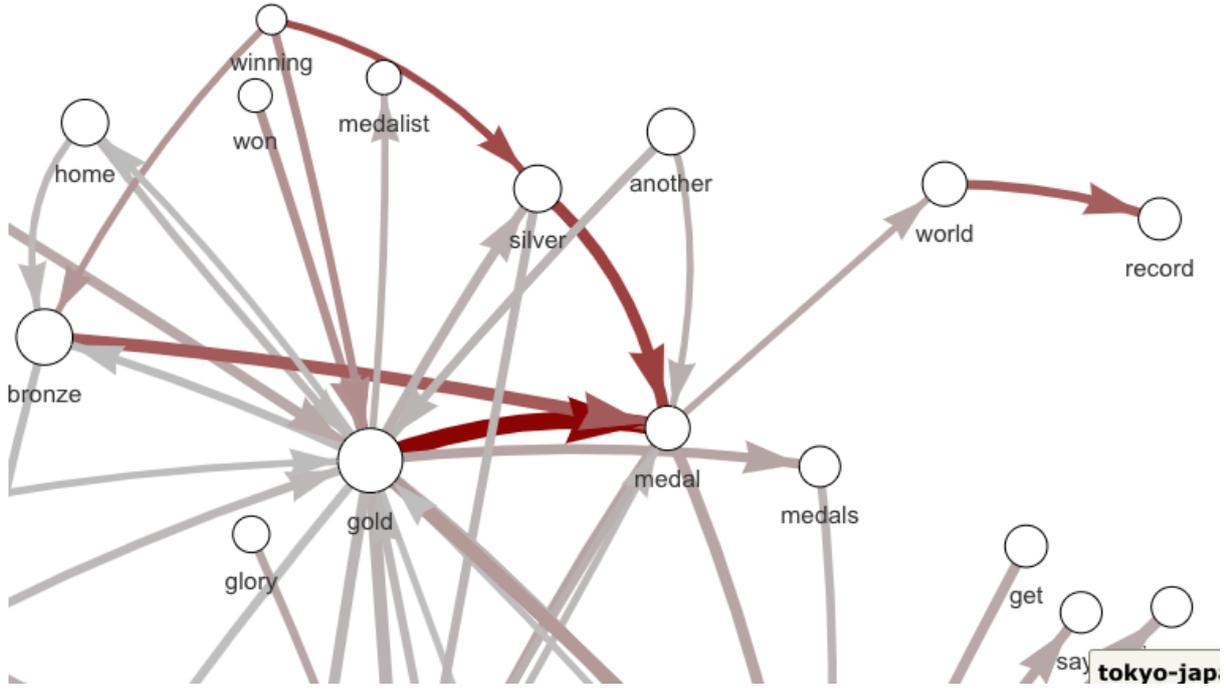


For the Paralympics, for the second topic we find always words “Tokyo”, “Tokyo2020”, “respect”, but now we see two words which are “first”, “gold”, “medal” and “determination”. These words are strictly referring to the performance of athletes, as said before.





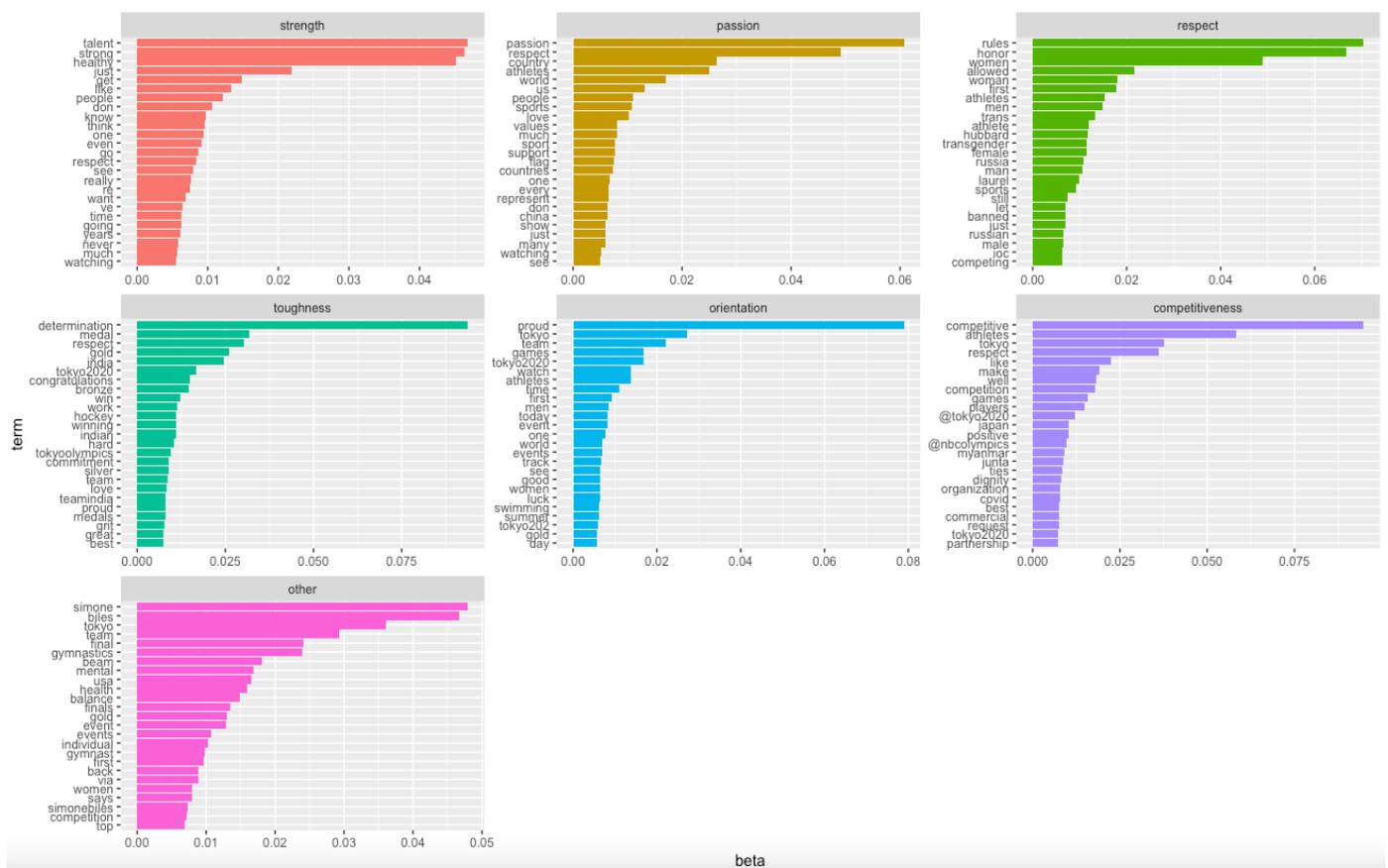
With reference to this hub taken from the second topic of Paralympic analysis, we see how much the word “determination” frequent and how this word is related to the values discussed. The word “determination” is strictly associated to positive emotions. Here we can see the presence of “perseverance” linked to the value of “passion” and the bidirectional link from passion to determination and from passion to commitment.



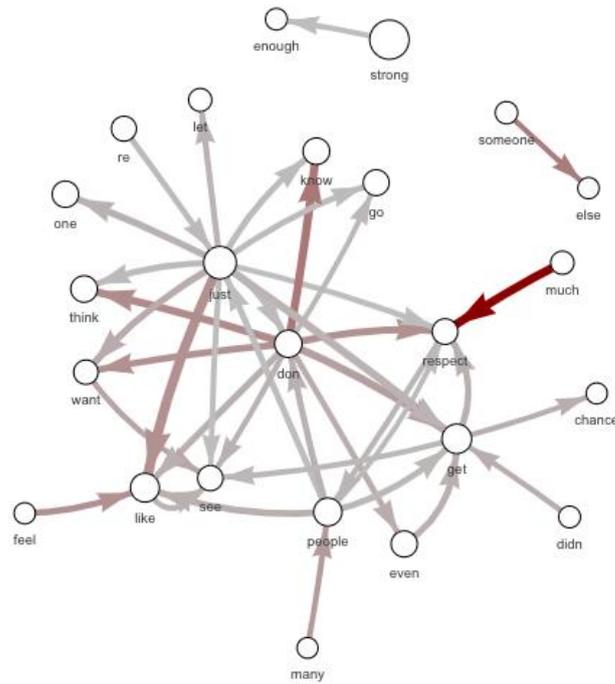
In the previous figure we underline one more time but this time with more relevance the sequence in which the medal and winner are discussed. The medal are associated to the color of them obviously but also to the word “world” and “record”, never mentioned before.

With reference to the Seeded LDA model, we decided to create five groups of topics, which correspond to the five value of sport and their antipodes discussing in the previous chapters: Strength, Passion, Orientation, Respect and Toughness. In these groups we include chosen words related to the words and we estimated the model.

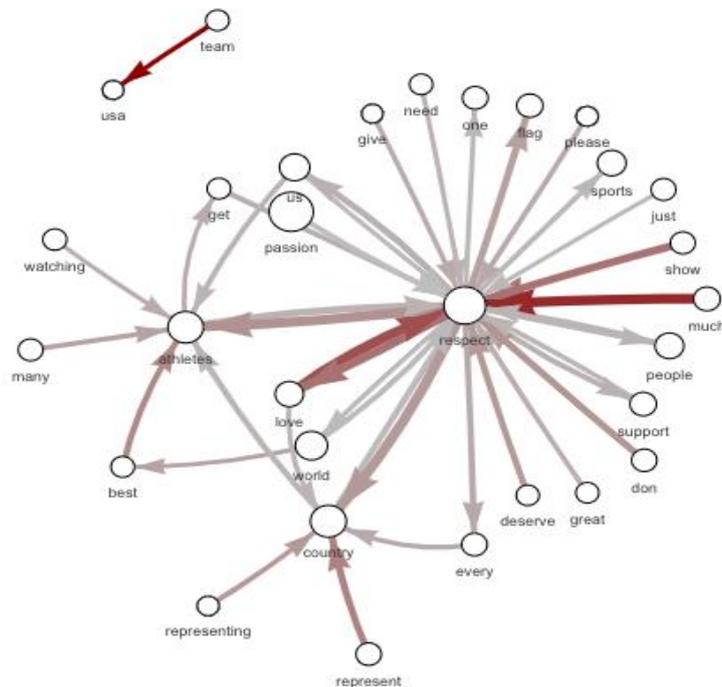
The analysis of plots related to the five topics is resume in the following figure. The words that have a higher probability are the words that we choose before. In the last plot we see “others” which are all words that have a high probability, and which are connected to the chosen topics. Now respect from the plots of the LDA models the distribution is not homogeneous and there is a difference between the words with higher probability and the other.



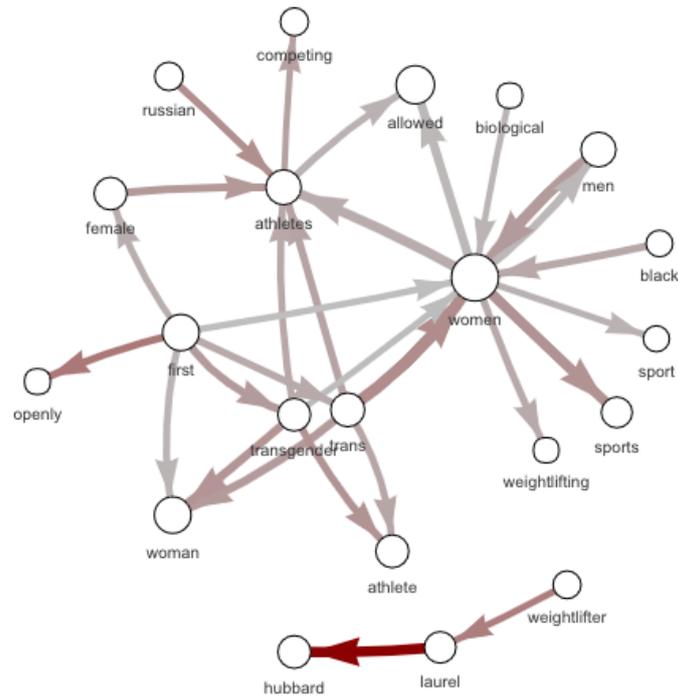
For the Seeded LDA model we chose five topics, the first one represents strength and as we can see in the net the connection between words is not completely homogeneous. We can see that “respect” is one more time a keyword, but the linked words are not related with the values seen before. The only mention to these words is in the sequences which are not related to the other words.



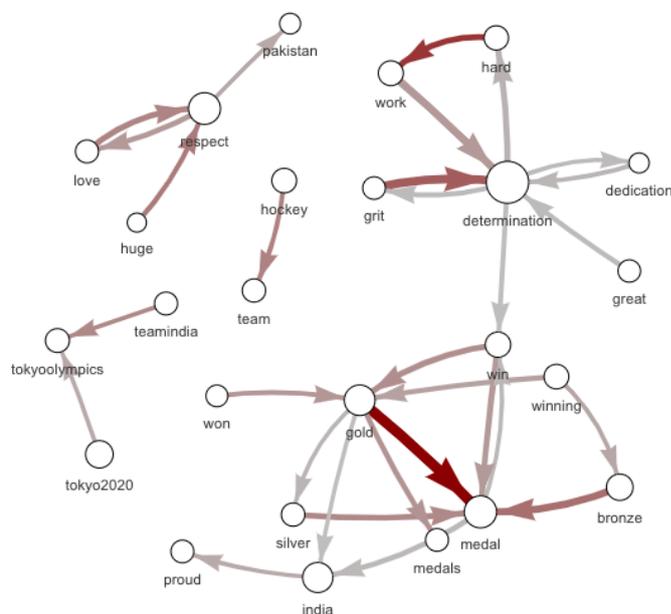
The second topic represent passion and all the related words. Here the principal hub as the previous net is in the word “respect” with the difference that “respect” is linked with “athletes” and “country” which is a new word never mentioned. In this net we can see that one more time the word “respect” is the link to the other values, for example passion. Another interesting thing is that here the word “respect” has a strength association with the word show and the country. Respect can be interpretate as the respect of athletes of national teams representing their country in these games.



Orientation is the third topic. Here we can underline one more time the linked between “women” and their sexual identity and the sports which were considerate in the past only for men. In the net below the linked between men and woman is high and there is also a mention to black, which can represent black people. This is the net which maybe represent more the topic of every kind of discrimination, and this could be a good thing to discuss every topic without discriminate.



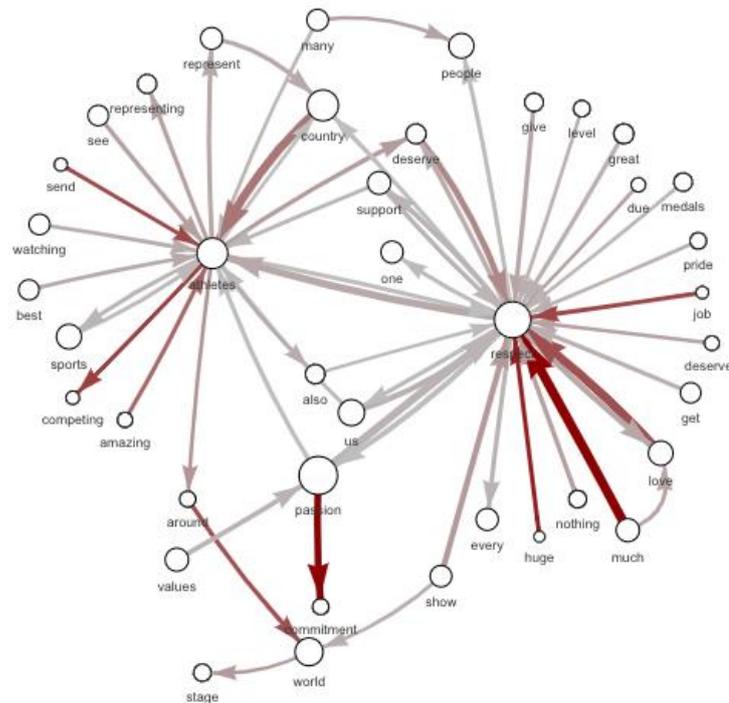
With reference to the fourth net, we are talking about the word respect which is the one that we found more often. The net related to this topic is very fragmentary and the keywords are related to “determination” and “medal”. The words not linked are not determinant to our analysis on the values of sport.



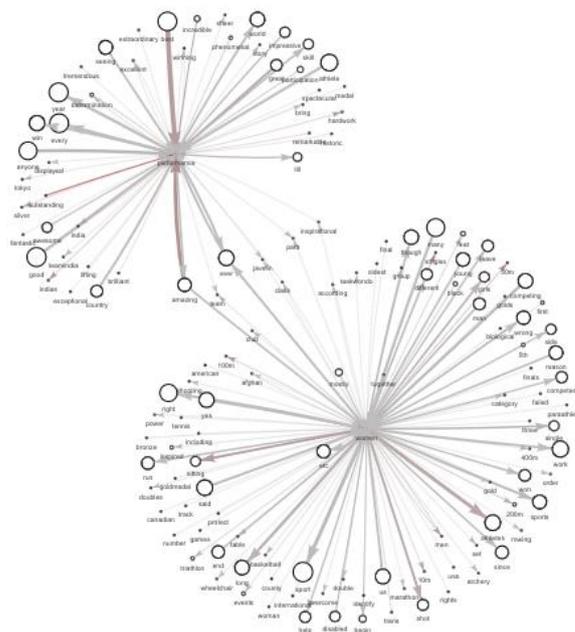




For the second topic we find the most important hubs represented by “respect”, “athletes” and “passion”. And one more time the word “country” is present. Athletes are proud and respectful representing their national team at Paralympic games and this is one of the topics more discussed. Fans are grateful and proud if athletes demonstrate love towards their country and this is one of the best things that sport and games show to the entire world.



In the last part of my analysis, I compute the neighborhood for my two categories: Olympics and Paralympics and two words that I think are extremely linked and discuss. I decided to use “women” and “performance”. The first related to all discrimination fight in the past and the second one for the goal of every athlete.







## **CHAPTER 4– CONCLUSIONS**

Through the topic models I decided to analyze the strength associations among words. The first step was to collect data from Twitter which gave me the possibility to compute the model.

I think that my analysis gives me some interesting way of considerate Olympic and Paralympic games.

The results are interesting also because are strictly related to the topic that I want to analyze, the values of sport. Values of sport take every day more relevance in discussions online and not only. The way in which the word is connecting each other give us a key of lecture which is positive. Some topic that in the past was influencing negatively people now are a point of discussion.

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