Exploratory analysis of the use of social networks in the context of the digital communication of a sports organization - The case of the Olympic games 2020 communication in Algeria

تحليل استكشافي لاستخدام شبكات التواصل الاجتماعية في سياق الاتصالات الرقمية لمنظمة رياضية – دراسة حالة الاتصال في إطار الألعاب الأولمبية 2020 في الجزائر

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Abstract:

The main objective of this article is the exploratory analysis of the use of social networks in the context of the digital communication of sports organizations. This exploration was carried out through a qualitative research consisting of identifying and analyzing 33 publications posted by the Algerian Olympic Committee (COA) during the Olympic Games 2020 which took place in July and August 2021. This depends on the topics published, the frequency of publication, the types of publications posted and the reactions of Internet users. This analysis allowed us, on the one hand, to provide answers on the nature of the publications posted during this period, as well as on the interactions of Internet users, and on the other hand, to recommend to the COA to increase the frequency of publication and to diversify the content.

Keywords: social networks; digital communication; sports organization.

JEL Classification Codes :M 31.

ملخص:

الهدف الرئيسي من هذا المقال هو التحليل الاستكشافي لاستخدام مواقع التواصل الاجتماعية في سياق الاتصال الرقمي للمنظمات الرياضية. وقد تم هذا الاستكشاف من خلال بحث كيفي يسمح بتحديد وتحليل 33 منشوراً نشرتها اللجنة الأولمبية الجزائرية خلال دورة الألعاب الأولمبية 2020 التي عقدت في يوليو/تموز وأغسطس/آب 2021. ويتوقف ذلك على المواضيع المنشورة، وتيرة النشر، أنواع المنشورات، وردود فعل مستخدمي الإنترنت. وقد أتاح لنا هذا التحليل، من ناحية، أن نقدم إجابات عن طبيعة المنشورات المنشورة خلال هذه الفترة، وكذلك عن تفاعلات مستخدمي الإنترنت، وأن نوصي اللجنة الأولمبية الجزائرية، من ناحية أخرى، بزيادة وتيرة النشر وتنويع المحتوى.

كلمات مفتاحية: مواقع التواصل الاجتماعية.، الاتصال الرقمي.، المنظمة الرياضية.

تصنيفات JEL : M 31

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, social networks occupy more and more place in our personal life, and professional too in the world and in Algeria, as well as the most widely used social network, Facebook alone has 23 million users in January 2021 in Algeria (Saadi, 2021) .

As a result, Facebook is a free and accessible means of ensuring visibility for organizations in general, sports in particular, and facilitating the marketing of sport, which has become a priority for sports organizations. Moreover, the fact of attracting a majority of the public, rather young, the use of social networks as a vehicle for the marketing of sport becomes increasingly important. It should also be noted that for these young people being subscribers to a page publishing sports content makes it possible to use sport as a vehicle of belonging.

One of the main sports organizations with the main objective of promoting sport and Olympic values in Algeria, the Algerian Olympic Committee (COA). This organization was created in 1963, it represents Algeria on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (Historique du COA, s.d.). In its communications policy, this organization uses its Facebook page with more than 30,000 followers and 25,000 fans to communicate and communicate with its target. It is in this sense that the objective of this research corresponds to the exploration and understanding of the communication strategy on the social networks of sports organizations. This, through the analysis of the COA communication during the Olympic Games (OJ) 2020. There are several reasons for choosing this case. First, the importance and impact of the Olympic Games as a global sporting event. Second, the role of the COA in promoting this event in Algeria. And finally, the public's enthusiasm for this event.

In order to achieve this objective, the problem of this research work has been formulated as follows:

To what extent are social networks used by sports organizations?

In order to answer this main question, two sub-questions relating to our research case are being enlisted:

What is the nature of the posts posted on the COA Facebook page during the 2020 Olympics?

What is the observed behavior of Internet users vis-à-vis these publications?

As the methodology used in this article is qualitative and exploratory, we cannot at this stage assume hypotheses (Evrard and others, 2009). This is also linked to the scarcity of studies carried out in this direction. To this end, the results obtained from this research will be used to formulate confirmatory research in the future on the subject of the using of social networks by Algerian sports organizations.

1- conceptual framework

In this part we present a definition of social networks, a presentation of Facebook, digital communication, as well as the professional using of Facebook.

1-1 Social networks

Social networks represent relational networks (Salmandjee & Degranges, 2018) linking

individuals on the basis of friendship, professional relationship, passion… They are defined by Fred Cavazza as *"a set of services to develop conversations and social interactions on the internet or in a mobile situation"* (Adary and others, 2015, p.395). In other words, they can be considered as virtual spaces for sharing ideas, opinions, photos... Several types are listed below in a non-exhaustive list.

Table (1): Typology and examples of social networks

Type of social networks	Example
Information Sharing Site	Facebook
Photo or video sharing site	Instagram, Snapchat Flickr, Picasa, Tiktok
Microblogging[1] site	Twitter
Site of Interest	Pinterest
Video site	Youtube, Dailymotion
Professional Site	Linkedin, Viadeo, Xing
Geolocation site	Foursquare
Music Site	Spotify
Site de bookmarking[2]	Del.icio.us

Source : realized from Salmandjee & Degranges (2018), Réseaux sociaux pour les nuls, First Interactive, Paris.

1-2 Facebook

Facebook is by far the most popular and used social network in the world with the registration of more than 2.6 billion active users per month in 2020 (Le brief, 2020), Created in 2004 by Mark Zukerberg at the University of Harvard (Colantonio, 2011) In order to allow students to exchange information more quickly, this network became accessible to the general public in 2006 (Salmandjee & Degranges, 2018). It is characterized by its social specificity allowing everyone to access and create an account, or even several ones.

Facebook allows communication with the whole world no matter who you are, or where you are. It is in this sense that organizations, whether for profit or not, seize the opportunity of accessibility in order to access their audience, or more precisely, their clientele at any time, and when they decide, almost free of charge.

1-3 Digital communication

Digital communication is digital marketing, which in turn is defined as *"the achievement of marketing-specific objectives through the use of digital technologies"* (Chaffey and others,

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[1]Blog or post content on a theme or organization.
[2] Storage, ranking and sharing of interesting websites and links.

2012, p.10). It is in this sense, that sports organizations should be conquering social networks especially since "*The presence on social media would reduce the costs associated with marketing, by saving among other things media purchases, while increasing the brand's visibility, or even promoting its differentiation*" (Gonzalez-Lafaysse & Lapassouse-Madrid, 2014, p. 92).

Using social networks in its communication becomes almost obvious for any type of organization given the free use of it and the proximity offered with Internet users.

1-4 Professional use of Facebook

The quality of Facebook content is critical to creating a strong link between the organization and its audience. This is made through useful contents, and engaging a conversation, in other terms of contents (Gallic & Marrone, 2020, p. 302):

• Providing information, dreaming, entertaining

• authentic. For example, value your employer brand to humanize your communication and connect with your fans, thanks to transparency and proximity;

• Mention individuals or companies you have worked with.

There are two major families of Facebook posts as shown in Table 2. The first is for classic posts such as text only, text with photo, text with link, and video and photo album. While the second family corresponds to advanced publications, those requiring more efforts on the part of the administrator (Carousel photo, Facebook event and live video).

Table (1): Typology of Facebook posts

Posts' type		Specificities	Strategy
Traditional posts	Text only	Speaking up (ex: yelling)Rarely effective	React to comments
	Text with photo	More engaging Beware of borrowed photos	Associate a text with the photo
	Text with link	Return user to page (link) highlighted	Explain the value of sharing (text)
	Video	Video that automatically launches to users (autoplay)	Choose the first images of the video
	Photo album	Often used in case of an event (several images	Need a description text

		when clicking)	
Advanced posts	Photo carousel	View multiple images by dragging	Highlight a product or collection
	Facebook event	Creation of an event and user invitation Guest users can invite others Very high viral potential	Animate the event by publishing regularly to recall and generate interest
	Live video	Live film in real time	Upstream publication to communicate date, time and subject

Source : Gallic & Marrone (2020), Le grand livre du marketing digital, Dunod, Malakoff.

2- Methodology

The COA's Facebook posts (during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics from July 23, 2021 -opening ceremony- to August 07, 2021) constitute the textual data of our content analysis corpus. This corpus contains 33 publications -shared 657 times, commented 1399 times and liked 11,806 times- that we analyzed without having recourse to data analysis software being these, not homogeneous in terms of language used. As a result, we followed an exploratory qualitative methodology based on a content analysis of these publications and then moved on to quantifying the themes identified and categorizing the behavior of Internet users towards these themes.

3- Results and discussion

In this section we present the results obtained, as well as their discussion according to the literature.

3-1 Results

Following the collection of data from the COA Facebook page during the period covered by the 2020 Olympic Games (23/07 to 07/08/2021), we have produced a corpus containing 33 publications presented in Table 3 and Figure 1.

Table (3): COA's Facebook Posts (from 23/07 to 07/08/2021) and the share of the different attitudes of its subscribers

Thème	Publica-tions	%	Share	%	Like	%	Comment	%
Program	13	40	130	20	2771	23	499	35
Athlete qualification	6	18	235	36	3878	33	431	31

Opening Ceremony	3	9	172	26	1153	10	160	12
Confrontation	5	15	29	4	1759	15	150	10
Various	6	18	91	14	2245	19	159	12
Totals	**33**		**657**		**11806**		**1399**	

Source: Realized from the COA Facebook page

The content analysis allowed us to classify these publications under five (5) themes: the announcement of the program of the following day, the announcement of the qualification of an Algerian athlete, the opening ceremony, and the confrontations and other topics such as the announcement of an athlete's positive test for Covid-19. We notice from Table 3 and Figure 1 that 40% of these publications were dedicated to the announcement of the program for the following day (see Appendix 1). While, only15% of them present the different confrontations of Algerian athletes.

Fig (1): Share of publications topics on the COA Facebook page during the OJ 2020
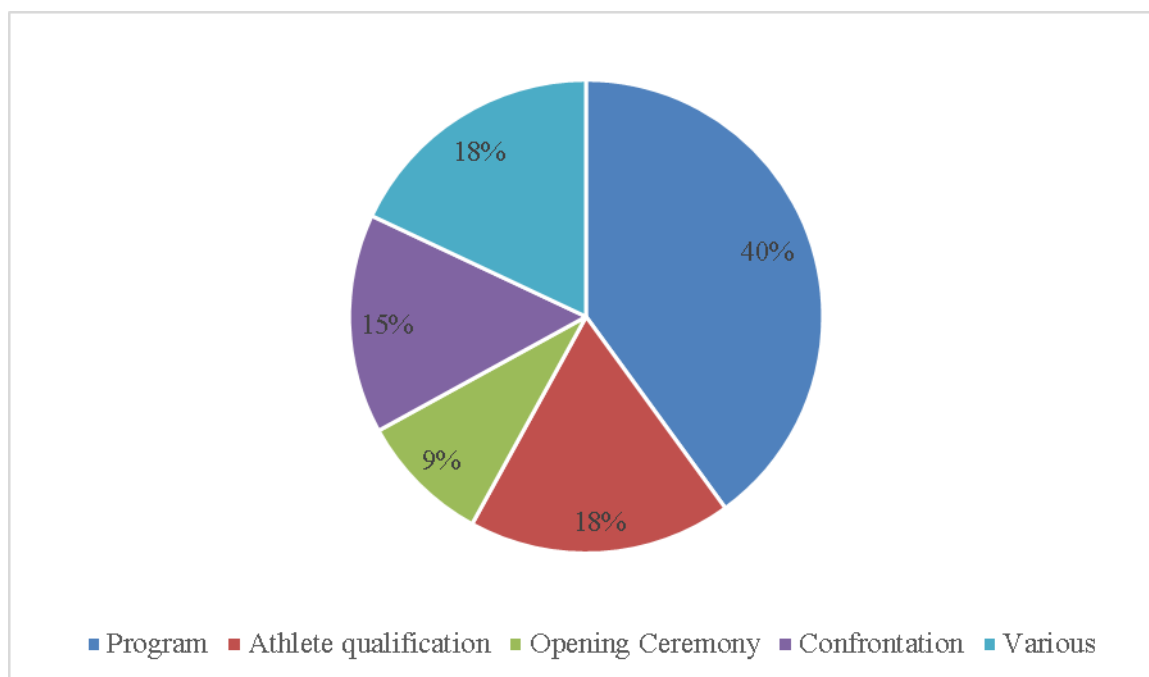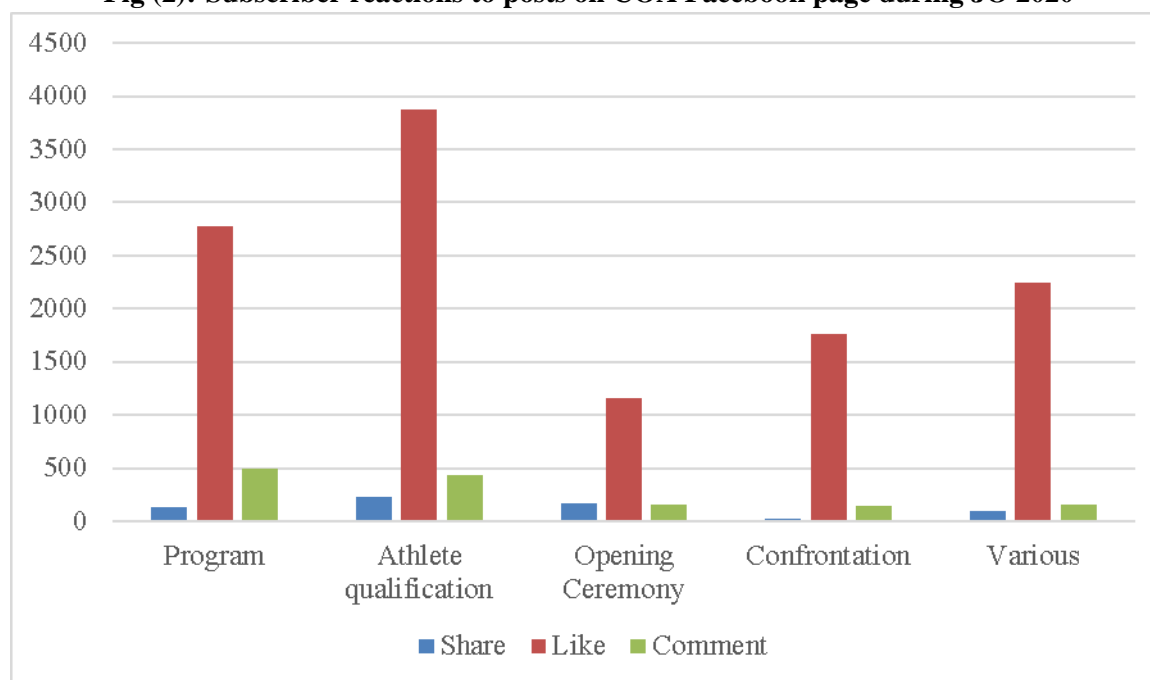

Source: Realized from the COA Facebook page.

Table 3 also shows us the shares of Internet users' attitudes towards these publications shared between comments, reports of appreciation of the publication by the "like" function or "I don't like" and promoting publications through sharing. For this purpose, Figure 2, which represents a summary of subscribers' reactions to COA Facebook posts during the 2020 Olympic Games,

shows that it is the "like" rating that is most used, especially with regard to publications announcing the qualification of athlete (knowing that they are not as numerous as the announcement of the program of the following day).

Fig (2): Subscriber reactions to posts on COA Facebook page during JO 2020

Source: Realized from the COA Facebook page.

With reference to the table on data on COA publications during the OJ 2020 (Appendix 1), these publications have also been classified in Table 4 by type according to the above typology. As a result, 67% of these publications correspond to texts with photos, while only 6% are dedicated to texts with video links.

Table (4): The types of publications used by the COA during the OJ 2020

Publication Type	Nbre	%
Text with photo	22	67
Photo album	9	27
Text with link	2	6
Totals	**33**	**100**

Source: Realized from the COA Facebook page.

3-2 Discussion

At the end of this research work we now move to the discussion of the results obtained according to the formulated problematic in the introduction. It is in this sense that this discussion is organized in such a way as to answer the sub-questions and the main question of the problematic.

3-2-1 Nature of publications published by the COA during the OJ 2020

With regard to the nature of the COA publications during the 2020 Olympic Games, we found it necessary to discuss two aspects: their quality (type, content and page animation), and the frequency of publication. The analysis of these two aspects enabled us to answer the first sub-question of this research, which is devoted to the nature of the publications published on the COA page during the OJ 2020, as follows:

➢ publication quality: following the results obtained, we judge the quality of COA publications during the study period according to:

- **type of publication:** With reference to Table 4, only the so-called classic publications (Gallic & Marrone, 2020) have been used neglecting the use of advanced publications such as photo carousels, events and live. However, the 33 publications recorded during these Olympic Games do not include any video text, which is a pity for the text with video is being a tool to retain the attention of the Internet user using it in an auto-play mode when the latter unrolls their newsfeeds (Gallic & Marrone, 2020). Moreover, it is, in this case, sporting content is indeed more relevant and more impactful to publish a video containing the best moments of the fight of the boxer Younes Nemouchi in the first round, for example, instead of just publishing a photo album;

- **content of publications:** the use of social networks by organizations is considered, today, as a new approach to marketing (Michel and others, 2010). To do this, the content of the publications must be focused on topics that are of interest to subscribers, allowing on the one hand, the distinction of the organization, and on the other hand, the contribution of added value to the Internet user (Gallic & Marrone, 2020). The content of the publications constituting the corpus analyzed in this research work is considered to be little diversified, dealing with only five (05) subjects in 16 days (from 23 July to 07 August 2021) centered at 40% on the announcement of the program of the following day. In reference, Figure 2 caused a lower response from Internet users than for athlete qualification announcements, representing only 18% of the published themes. We believe that it can result many more themes to share with its subscribers during a major event such as the Olympic Games;

- **animation of the page:** creations of events and live performances represent the types of publications allowing the animation of a Facebook page (Gallic & Marrone, 2020). This type of publication is, on the other hand, absent on the COA page during the OJ 2020 period. Thus, decreasing the quality of its animation for this latter.

➢ **frequency of publication:** with the publication of 33 posts in 16 days the COA published an average of 2 posts per day. This frequency remains low compared to the scope of this event, knowing that we can take every opportunity to create engaging

publications such as sharing training sessions, the creation of results foresight posts the day before the confrontations.

3-2-2 Internet user's attitudes with COA publications during JO2020

With regard to the answer to the second question dealing with the behavior of Internet users towards these publications, we have distinguished three types of reaction:

➢ the ratings of the publication by the "like" or "I don't like" estimated at 11,806 for the 33 posts;
➢ the shares of a publication estimated at 657 shares for the 33 posts;
➢ Estimated 1399 comments for all 33 publications.

These figures confirm that it is easier for an internet user to enjoy a publication than to comment or share it (Gallic & Marrone, 2020). These reactions are, on a second thought, much more important when announcing the qualification of an athlete as shown in Figure 2 requiring much more publications around this theme in order to improve the animation of the page.

As for the commitment of Internet users, it can be measured by the calculation of the rate of their daily commitment through the formula below proposed by the agency Social Bakers and quoted by the internet blog Blueboat (2013):

$$\text{Daily commitment} = \text{likes} + \text{shares} + \text{comments (resented on day D)} / \text{Fans (resented on day D)}$$

The calculation of this rate is necessary to distinguish between active fans of a page and passive ones or, besides fake ones[1] (Le blog, 2013). It is, in this sense, that we calculated this rate for the day of July 25, 2021 being the day where there were more posts (4 posts) from the COA and more interactions from Internet users (157 shares, 2 077 likes and 217 comments). The commitment rate for the day of July 25th is 0.97% knowing that the number of fans in this day was 25 050 fans. As this rate is very low and below the 1% threshold, the COA must be able to post publications that generate more interest from its fans in order to ensure a good animation of the page

Conclusion

Although the use of social networks does not seem to be one of the main concerns of Algerian sports organizations, the current environment, as well as the enthusiasm for social networks affecting varied and increasingly young publics, requires reflection around this almost free marketing lever. As a part of this reflection, the objective of this article was to explore and understand the strategy of communication on social networks of sports organizations, in this case, the Facebook page -one of the most widely used social networks in the world – the

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[1] Some organizations do not hesitate to buy fake accounts to increase the number of fans

Algerian Olympic Committee, analyzing the publications posted during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games postponed to 2021 due to the global pandemic linked to Covid-19.

The results obtained as a result of this research work allowed us to have a look at how this page is used by this organization in so far as:

➢ on the one hand, the exploration of the nature of the publications posted by the COA shows a lack of diversity in terms of the types of publications posted, and in terms of diversity of content, thus decreasing the animation of the page;

➢ and, on the other hand, the exploration of the behaviour of Internet users towards these publications reveals a rather weak commitment on their part.

Therefore, we recommend to the COA:

➢ increase the frequency of posting on the Facebook page;

➢ To diversify the content of publications by emphasizing those that generate interest among Internet users;

➢ To use other forms of publications with emphasis on those that allow the improvement of page animation and fan engagement.

Finally, this research on its own, is only a first step in formulating more in-depth issues on the subject, as well as, the assumption of hypotheses allowing comprehensive, descriptive and confirmatory research to be carried out in the future. This work must be complemented by a netnography allowing the analysis of the attitudes of Internet users towards COA publications through the analysis of their comments, and a qualitative study to understand the COA's communication strategy through Facebook.

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ns%20en

Salmandjee, Y., & Degranges, P. D. (2018). <i>Réseaux sociaux pour les nuls.</i> Paris: First Interactive.

Appendix (1): Details of the COA Facebook publications during the OJ 2020

Theme	Type of publication	Publication theme	Date/ time	Nbr/share	Nbr/ like	Nbr/ comments
1*	Text with photo	Algerian Athletes' Day Program	3/08 18 :42	07	181	33
		Program 07/08	06/08 20 :48	1	160	0
		Program 05/08	04/08 18 :03	5	196	34
		Program 03/08	02 08 16 :16	20	297	78
		Program 02/08	01 08 17 :58	6	147	26
		Program 01/08	31 07 16 :12	7	214	37
		Program 31/07	30 07 18 :09	7	171	27
		Program 30/07	29/07 18 :51	7	158	35
		Program 29/07	28/07 18 :58	13	226	79
		Program 28/07	27/07 20 :34	4	129	51
		Program 26/07	25/07 19 :41	5	231	35
		Program 25/07	24/07 19 :32	16	294	29
		Program 24/07	23/07 18 :37	32	367	35
2	Album photo	Qualification Benchebla	24/07 09 :31	46	771	101
	Album photo	Qualification Triki	03/08 12 :07	19	631	60
	Text with photo	Qualification Lahlou	30/07 11 :26	8	493	36
	Album photo	Qualification Younes	26/07 12 :07	23	541	48
	Text with photo	Qualification Houmri	25/07 13 :46	136	1100	144

	Text with photo	Qualification Khelif	30/07 11 :15	3	342	42
3	Album photo	Opening Ceremony	23/07 17 :54	7	155	3
	Album photo	Photos of the Algerian delegation	23/07 14 :19	162	930	157
	Text with photo	Pictures beginning of ceremony	23/07 13 :35	3	68	0
4	Text with photo	Battle Khelif	30/07 12 :47	8	434	72
	Album photo	Battle Khelif photo	30/07 11 :50	3	311	29
	Album photo	Battle Nemouchi	26/07 12 :24	2	268	11
	Text with photo	Anonce of the opponent of mohamed houmri	25/07 15 :39	8	368	24
	Album photo	Battle Homri photo	25/07 14 :56	8	378	14
5	Text with photo	National record for Tourki	05/08 05 :12	26	776	4
	Album photo	Repechage Azara	03/08 13 :57	9	297	27
	Text with photo	Announcement of Bidani's Non-Participation due to Covid-19	3/08 14 :24	17	284	48
	Text with photo	Mouloudia anniversary	07/08 23 :39	38	515	52
	Text with youtube link	Video statement boxer Nemouchi after his qualification	26/07 14 :21	0	97	23
	Text with youtube link	Flissi declaration after the opening ceremony	23/07 17 :08	1	116	6

*Theme 1: Program

Theme 2: Athlete qualification

Theme 3: Opening ceremony

Theme 4: confrontation

Theme 5: Various