

Video refereeing and football. Narratives regarding the power of technology at the service of major sport events

Videoarbitraje y fútbol. Narrativas en el poder de la tecnología al servicio del espectáculo



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Abstract:

Nowadays, top professional sports use audio-visual tools to speed up referee decision-making, thereby modifying the regulatory development of various sporting domains (Benítez, 2019). Despite its popularity, football was one of the last sports to implement video replay as part of the regulations of its main competitive events. This article analyses the use of Video Assistant Referee (VAR) in football, with a particular focus on Spain. The study also examines how VAR modifies the narrative of live broadcasts. To carry out the research, the authors have selected certain VAR situations from the 2023-24 LaLiga football season, which are available on the YouTube channels of LaLiga, DAZN, and Movistar. Based on the recordings chosen, it is possible to evaluate the way in which television reflects VAR situations in terms of form, aesthetics, and narration.

Keywords:

Audio-visual production; video assistant referee (VAR); narrative; football; technology.

Resumen:

Los deportes más profesionalizados utilizan herramientas audiovisuales para agilizar decisiones arbitrales, modificando el desarrollo reglamentario de diferentes disciplinas (Benítez, 2019). A pesar de su popularidad, el fútbol ha sido de los últimos deportes en adoptar la revisión de vídeo al reglamento de sus principales competiciones. Este artículo analiza la aplicación del videoarbitraje en el fútbol (VAR) considerando el caso español. De igual forma, el trabajo busca examinar cómo el VAR modifica el relato narrativo de las retransmisiones en directo. Para su elaboración se han seleccionado situaciones del VAR correspondientes a LaLiga 2023-24 (públicos en el canal YouTube LaLiga, DAZN y Movistar). A partir de los registros seleccionados se podrá valorar la manera formal, estética y narrativa en la que la televisión refleja el momento del VAR.

Palabras clave:

Realización audiovisual; videoarbitraje (VAR); narrativa; fútbol; tecnología.

1. Introduction

The technological development of audio-visual production has historically led to many changes in sports. When sport became a business, the rules were transformed, as it was forced to adapt to the requirements of television (Whannel, 1992). The live broadcast of major sporting events includes the most typical features of televised sport, as these programmes are transmitted in real time. Moreover, they break the routine, take place in remote locations, and require meticulous planning (Dayan and Katz, 1995). Such events include the Olympic Games and the Football World Cup, which attract record audiences, largely due to their grandiose nature, the ability to attract large crowds, and their international impact (Roche, 2000). The commercialisation of broadcasting rights for sports competitions has allowed audio-visual operators to invest in sophisticated resources to improve the viewer's experience, such as developing interactive options using second screens (Kroon, 2017; Marín-Montín, 2020; Elishar-Malka, et al., 2021). The advent of video streaming platforms for the broadcast of sporting events, along with business agreements between television operators, has increased the number of subscriptions for the main competitions and raised the quality of coverage, thereby arousing more interest among the audience (Owens, 2021; Moya-López et al., 2024).

The technical resources devoted to sports broadcasting have not only grown, but they have continuously incorporated innovation into audio-visual production as well (Roger Monzó, 2015). One such novelty is offering the audience various simultaneous content signals through multi-screen viewing (Hutchins et al., 2019), which was introduced into the television coverage of motorsports such as Formula One Racing, and later extended to other sports like football. This resource is incorporated into the broadcast narrative, thereby increasing the entertaining nature and excitement of televised sports (Wyver, 20 22). Thus, by

using a screen divided into multiple squares, fans can follow an event from different angles, along with statistics and graphic animation, which generally require a subscription when offered as an interactive tool (Marín-Montín, 2021).

A key ingredient in the audio-visual production of sports is the replay, which involves “inserting parts of the deferred story into different independent blocks” (Benítez, 2013: 357), which is used to clarify actions that have gone unnoticed during the live broadcast. In football, replay is a common resource of television broadcasts, which is used to settle disputes such as being offside, as well as other rules violations such as the use of hands and other types of fouls. The replay is used during interruptions in the game, at which point the sequence of shots regarding the questionable play is immediately available for review in order to understand exactly what has happened (Perry et al., 2019). Furthermore, technological advances have provided other options for sports production, such as super slow-motion cameras, which enable high-quality images to be captured thanks to a recording system of 75 or more frames per second (Owens, 2021). This resource makes it possible to record the most impressive moves and include them as bonus content in the broadcast of important matches. An additional resource used in football coverage is the 3D replay system. This technology was brought in from major US sports federations such as the NFL and NBA, and it was implemented in the Spanish football league during the 2016/17 season. It is based on the computer processing of a system of 38 ultra-high-definition cameras, which offers 360° volumetric replays from any angle and position (Torres-Martín et al., 2022).

On the other hand, graphics are another important feature of audio-visual sport production, which are used to provide as much information as possible in order to complement the images captured by the cameras, along with the voices of the sports commentators. Moreover, there is a difference between text and illustration graphics, which can either be stationary or moving (Owens, 2021). In the case of football, the most common graphic feature in a broadcast or summary of a match is the sign in the top left-hand corner, which shows the score and time (Marín-Montín, 2021). Sometimes additional information is provided depending on the type of action that has taken place, whether a foul, substitution, offside, or other occurrence. Likewise, graphics also provide initial line-ups and sport statistics, which is highly valued by sports fans (Cummins et al., 2016). As in most key football competitions, the graphics for Spain’s La Liga are developed by an external company, which is sub-contracted to provide this service to television operators.

In addition to the aforementioned visual aspects, televised sports includes sound components that are mainly comprised of narration, commentary, and ambient sound. Thus, the narrator leads the description of what is happening in the event, sometimes accompanied by commentators who complement the story, and whose number varies depending on the type of coverage in question. In this regard, it is common for one of the speakers to be on the ground in order to offer a closer account of the action, and to conduct interviews as well. On the other hand, ambient sound refers to sound that is directly linked to the sporting event, such as that of kicking the ball, or the occasional shout of a coach (Marín-Montín, 2021), as well as to the audience in the stands, whose reactions and chants contribute significantly to the authenticity, immediacy, and liveliness of the soundscape (Graakjær, 2020). Based on the features mentioned above, the audio-visual production of a football match integrates image and sound composed of repetition, graphic elements, and commentaries, which try to provide the spectator with a coherent analysis, evaluation and assessment of the action taking place, since the fans are not physically present at the event (Barnfield, 2013). As such, it must be pointed out that sports broadcasts on television have become a complete

communicative process, either involving the journalistic process (constructing the event), or reception (reconstructing the same act) (Blanco, 2012).

2. Video assistant refereeing in the world of sport

Major sports competitions have benefited from advances in television production tools by incorporating them into refereeing methods, which has even changed the development of rules in different sporting environments (Benítez, 2013). Thus, the rules of some mega-events in sports allow the official judge of the competition to use video technology and computer tools to make decisions regarding certain plays in the game, thereby avoiding mistakes at crucial moments that can have an undue impact on the results (Petersen-Wagner & Lee Ludvigsen, 2023). For this reason, these major competitions have a system of regulated technical assistance for referee decisions, which varies according to the sport as follows: American football has *Replay Official*; Rugby uses *Television Match Official*, or TMO; Basketball has *Instant Replay*, and so on.

The premier American football league is the NFL, which is the longest-standing user of instant replay for supporting referees' decisions. Moreover, this technology has been a regular part of the game since 1999. According to Oates (2014), the use of instant replay by the NFL is not only for enforcing the rules of a complex sport, but is also a key component of television entertainment. Instant replay has become part of the spectacle for both viewers and live fans, who can even watch replays on big screens in the sports stadiums where the games are played. However, in recent years doubts have been raised about its use, such as whether the technology can adequately correct erroneous decisions without becoming a hindrance (Chen & Davidson, 2022), due to images being fragmented, the search for multiple angles for repetition, and other cumbersome actions as a result of innovation.

As for rugby, TMO technology has been used since 2001 in certain competitions overseen by the international federation known as World Rugby. Its implementation is an attempt to reduce the number of incorrect referee decisions made during a match, yet at the same time its use has given the sport more media coverage as well (Frandsen, 2020). Along the same lines, rugby fans are calling for more information during the TMO decision-making process in the stadium, requesting that the sound of the referees' discussions and subsequent decision using the video assistant should be broadcast over the stadium's sound system throughout the review process. Of course, this depends on the images and camera angles provided by the television signal broadcasting the match (Stoney & Fletcher, 2021).

On the other hand, basketball uses instant replay as a support tool for referees, which was implemented in the NBA in the 2002-2003 season. Moreover, it is now an integral part of the narrative framework of this sport, as fans in their homes, local bars, and live sports venues anxiously await the referee's decision after viewing the replays (Tingle, 2020). In addition to instant replay, basketball has incorporated the *challenge* system for coaches during the games, which allows them to request instant replays to verify certain key moves, provided that a series of requirements are met, although the final verdict on the play still resides with the referee (López, 2019).

Along with video replays, many sports now use computer tools to enhance referee decision-making which, when combined with video cameras, can generate virtual 3D simulations of the action. One sport that stands out in this regard is tennis, which has been using the Hawk-Eye system for live television coverage of the main tournaments since 2006, the main objective

of which is to accurately follow the trajectory of the ball to see if it falls inside or outside the line. The technology ended up being incorporated into the official regulations of the professional tennis circuit as a verification system (Bal & Dureja, 2012; Lingenti, 2024). This technology has made it possible to reduce controversies in the decision-making of line judges. Moreover, it is a valuable part of refereeing and a benefit to television viewers as well (Collins & Evans, 2008). The success of the Hawk-Eye has led to its use in other sports such as cricket, volleyball, and football, in order to accurately follow the trajectory of the ball at decisive moments, thereby reducing referee errors.

Despite its popularity, football (soccer) was one of the last sports to incorporate technological tools into its major competitions to support referee reviews. The first technology officially implemented by the FIFA was during the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. The tool is known as Goal-Line Technology (GLT), and it immediately informs the referee when a goal has been scored, or in other words, when the ball has completely crossed the goal line into the goal (Simon, 2020). By using a set of cameras surrounding the field, the GLT does not aim to replace the referee, but to help them in critical situations to make the right decision (Spagnolo et al., 2015). In addition to the FIFA World Cup, this goal technology is also being used by the UEFA, as well as national competitions such as the Premier League, Bundesliga, and Italy's Serie A. In spite of the foregoing, there are critical voices as well. Many fans believe that such technology distorts the atmosphere of football by reducing the debate surrounding crucial decisions about controversial goals (Winand & Fergusson, 2016).

On the other hand, the system of video assisted refereeing (VAR) was officially approved and authorised by FIFA in March 2018 after being tested in 2017 at the Confederations Cup. The introduction of VAR technology is intended to assist referees in making decisions at controversial and crucial moments of a game, although in many cases it is also used to resolve general disputes related to a match (Petersen-Wagner & Lee Ludvigsen, 2023). Furthermore, the regulations state that VAR cannot make decisions, and is only used to support the decisions of the head referee (FIFA, 2018).

Major football championships have incorporated VAR into their regulations, although its use has stirred debate, with counterarguments stating that it sometimes disrupts the rhythm and negatively affects the natural flow of the game (Bao & Han, 2023). While this may be true, the fact is that behind the refereeing decisions in today's professional football there is a lucrative, worldwide industry where many interests are at stake, ranging from players' salaries to club revenues, and from shareholder profits to gambling proceeds (Nuhurat, 2023). Nevertheless, there is an element of emotional attachment and fan enthusiasm in football, where VAR is still not seen as a technological aid to a fairer game, but rather an artefact with the power to produce unforeseen consequences (Petersen-Wagner & Lee Ludvigsen, 2023; Schwab, Steverding, & Rein, 2023). Furthermore, the implementation of video refereeing in football has led to a discrepancy between fans watching the game from the stadium, who rely mainly on the first impression and perceive less transparency regarding VAR decisions, and the spectators watching from home, who receive quantitatively more information with many slow-motion replays, in addition to the commentaries from the TV channel itself (Mártins, Westmattmann, & Schewe, 2023).

Moreover, with regard to VAR, we should also mention the tool known as Semi-Automated Offside Technology (SAOT), an instrument used to support both video assistant and on-field referees to make accurate offside decisions more quickly (FIFA, 2023). SAOT made its debut in the 2022 European Super Cup Final, and since then its use has spread not only to FIFA matches, but gradually to other top leagues as well. Thanks to 3D animation, the so-called semi-automatic offside technology avoids

adding to the confusion in explanations between broadcasters (Viswanathan et. al, 2023) by improving communication with both spectators at home and fans in the stadium who can visualise very clearly when there is an offside foul (Moñino, 2022).

In short, the broadcast of football matches on television has been incorporating all of this revolutionary technology into the sports narrative, which has led to referee reviews through VAR and the variety of tools associated with it. This situation has turned refereeing into a new element for enhancing audience interest, an example of which is showing a replay sequence to clarify controversial decisions, or displaying aspects of the game that have gone unnoticed live (Owens, 2021; Benítez, 2020).

Authors such as Umberto Eco (1986) have reflected on how the presence of television cameras has modified various events, whether related to politics, ceremonies, or spectacular encounters such as football matches. In this sense, the inclusion of an entire meta-narrative in sport through video refereeing undoubtedly enhances the suspense involved (Prósper, 2019) by making it a setting in which new narrative structures can be incorporated. In an increasingly globalised environment, large business conglomerates tend to rely on content that will ensure a mass audience. As such, the advent of new narrative structures through the interpretation of the refereeing meta-narrative will only increase the content, number of screens, and readings of the same action, thereby leading to more debate and discussion on television. Given its high degree of audience loyalty, televised football matches are a driving force for the sale of products by the main media conglomerates who are eager to establish links with major football brands, especially through the purchase of broadcasting rights (Ginesta, 2021).

3. Methodology and corpus

This research takes an initial approach of an exploratory nature to the issue, focusing on the various platforms that hold the broadcasting rights of the so-called *Liga de Fútbol Profesional* [professional football league], or La Liga. These platforms include the official website of the football league, as well as Movistar Plus and DAZN. This study has one overall objective, and two secondary objectives derived from the initial one. Firstly, the authors intend to carry out a comparative analysis of the summaries available on each platform after the conclusion of the matches. The main objective of this study is to examine the plays that have undergone referee review during matches, and how each platform addresses this issue in the overall context of each summary. To this end, an analysis protocol will be used in order to consider both visual and sound elements, whether diegetic or extradiegetic. Regarding the secondary objectives, the aim is to verify whether each media outlet uses video referee analysis in diverse ways, either by generating their own content on the subject or by simply incorporating it as another feature of the game's narrative. Likewise, a related aim is to establish an initial categorisation of the different uses of video refereeing within the final narrative of the matches, if possible.

For this research, the decision was made to carry out an analysis of the summaries of the matches of the *Liga de Fútbol Profesional Española* [Spanish professional football league], in which Real Madrid and FC Barcelona take part, in the period from 1 January to 30 April of 2024.

The study began in January 2024, which is the month when VAR audios are made public in Spain, provided that a referee has reviewed them on a monitor. This time period covers a total of 13 league matchdays, which include a direct clash between the two teams mentioned on the 32nd day. Thus, among the three platforms mentioned above, a total of 27 matches were analysed, along with a total of 81 match summaries of the twenty-seven games.

Table 1. Corpus table

Matchday	Match 1	Match 2
Matchday 20	FC Barcelona - Osasuna	Getafe - Real Madrid
Matchday 21	Real Betis Balompié - FC Barcelona	Real Madrid - Almería
Matchday 22	FC Barcelona - Villarreal	Las Palmas - Real Madrid
Matchday 23	Alavés - FC Barcelona	Real Madrid - Atlético
Matchday 24	FC Barcelona Granada	Real Madrid - Girona
Matchday 25	Celta - FC Barcelona	Rayo Vallecano - Real Madrid
Matchday 26	FC Barcelona - Getafe	Real Madrid - Sevilla FC
Matchday 27	Athletic Bilbao - FC Barcelona	Valencia - Real Madrid
Matchday 28	FC Barcelona - Mallorca	Real Madrid - Celta de Vigo
Matchday 29	Atlético de Madrid - FC Barcelona	Osasuna - Real Madrid
Matchday 30	FC Barcelona - Las Palmas	Real Madrid - Athletic
Matchday 31	Cádiz - FC Barcelona	Mallorca - Real Madrid
Matchday 32	Real Madrid - FC Barcelona	Real Madrid - FC Barcelona
Matchday 33	FC Barcelona - Valencia	Real Sociedad - Real Madrid

Source: prepared by the authors

To carry out the analysis, a worksheet was used that includes the key features of the audio-visual production such as the types of shots, repetition of the replays, use of slow-motion cameras, and the number of shots included in the final editing. Regarding sound, both diegetic (e.g. ambient sound or fans) and extradiegetic (e.g. commentators' narration) were analysed. The template of the worksheet used in the analysis can be seen below.

Table 2. Analysis worksheet

Match analysed		
Platform		
VAR action. Match minute.		
	Audio-visual production	Type of shot
		Repetition
		Slow motion
		Other effects
		One or more of a single shot
	Sound features	Diegetic sound
		Narrator or narrators
	Textual features	Titles. Typography
		Overprints.
	Other notes	

Source: prepared by the authors

4. Results

Some of the main findings of the analysis of the 27 matches, along with 81 summaries, are outlined below. Again, they were all taken from the three selected platforms. It is important to note that for this study, only plays in which VAR was directly involved in one of the three platforms have been analysed. Of the 27 matches examined, 11 do not include any video refereeing in the summaries of the three platforms. This is a significant, because plays are sometimes included on one platform, yet not on others, which will be explained in more detail later.

Given the context, it is striking to see how certain summaries from Movistar and DAZN intentionally omit key plays in some of the matches. Consequently, viewers who only watch these highlights might receive only a partial view of the match, and possibly one that is incorrect. Furthermore, these omissions cannot be justified by the short duration of the reports. Although

they rarely exceed three minutes, there is time enough to avoid omissions. An example can be seen on Matchday 22, during the game between FC Barcelona and Villarreal. In this case, the summary of La Liga includes both the VAR lines and the disallowed Villarreal goal, as shown in Image 1.

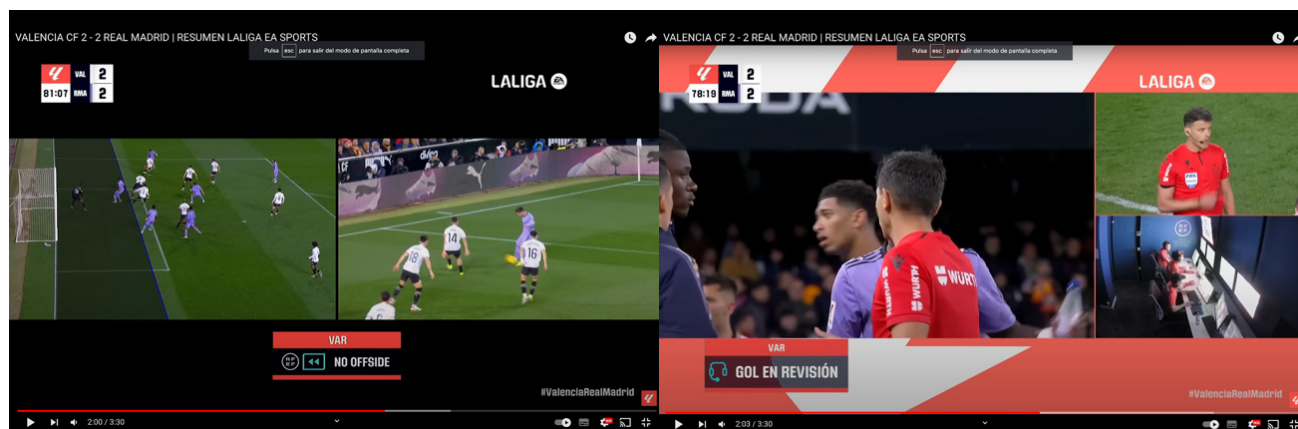
Image 1. Summary of La Liga's EA [elite academy]. Matchday 22. FC Barcelona-Villarreal



Source: YouTube, 2024A

The same play is narrated differently by the Movistar platform, which does not include the offside lines in the goal, although it does include a replay and a brief, narrated commentary about the goal that was disallowed due to an offside foul, yet there was no mention of VAR in this case. This stands in contrast to the coverage on DAZN, which does not even include the disallowed goal in its summary. As a result, there are no goal lines, nor remarks from the commentators on this platform. This same situation occurs with Raphinha's disallowed goal on Matchday 30 in the game between FC Barcelona and Las Palmas, which appears in full in the summary of La Liga, only briefly on Movistar, and is omitted on DAZN. On Matchday 27, during the game between Valencia and Real Madrid, neither DAZN's nor Movistar's coverage offered audio or visual explanations related to the disallowed goal scored by Vinicius. However, the official La Liga summary includes a sequence of images that shed light on the reasons behind this referee's decision. Firstly, there is a double-screen montage showing an infographic with the offside line superimposed, together with a shot of the exact moment of the pass. Next, the goal review process is displayed, after which the situation returns to full screen mode and the referee is seen awarding the goal.

Image 2 and Image 3. Summary of La Liga's EA. Matchday 27. Valencia - Real Madrid



Source: YouTube, 2024B

A comparable situation occurs on Matchday 25 in the game between Celta and FC Barcelona, where La Liga once again provides the most complete summary. Despite the lack of audio support in the form of commentaries, the summary does not overlook crucial plays during the match. Most notably, a penalty kick by Lewandowski was blocked by the goalkeeper when he stepped forward, prompting the referee to order a review of the spot-kick using VAR. In this case, the Movistar summary skips the first penalty kick, and the situation can only be understood through a brief clarification by the commentators, although there is no reference to VAR. On the other hand, although the DAZN summary shows both penalty kicks, the situation is not clearly explained. By contrast, La Liga's summary includes the chronology of the decisions and adequately summarises the situation.

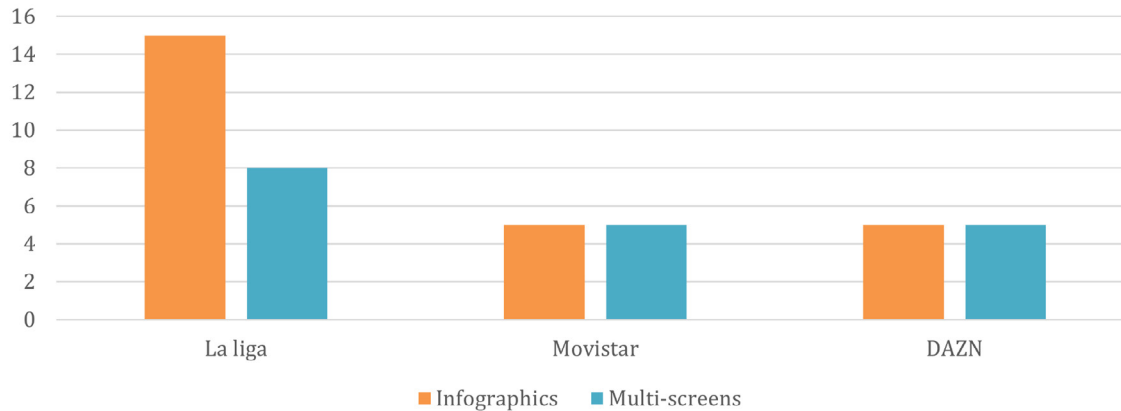
Regarding specific comments referring to VAR, which are likely to be present in the full live coverage of the matches, a few examples were found in the summaries analysed, with the visual component being most prevalent. In any case, two clear examples were found: The first is Movistar's summary of the Real Madrid-Sevilla match, which includes the following comment by the narrator: "Referee Díaz de Mera had conceded the goal, but then the VAR alerted him of the foul". The second example involves the summary of the FC Barcelona-Mallorca match on DAZN, in which the following commentary is heard in connection with the images of the VAR activity: "Now, it appears that referee Iglesias Villanueva is turning to look at the monitor in order to determine what... (short pause)... It's a penalty!"

Regarding infographics, this resource is commonly used in the highlights of La Liga whenever VAR is employed. Infographics not only illustrate offside lines, but they also complement the decisions made by the referee based on the recommendations of his colleagues in the VAR room.

In 15 of the 16 matches where VAR is used, the summary published by La Liga incorporates specific infographics on the screen detailing the exact origin of the images, as well as the possible judgement being assessed, along with the final decision. This undoubtedly helps the viewer to clearly understand what is happening in real time. By contrast, the use of infographics by

DAZN or Movistar is much lower and only occurs on six occasions in similar situations. It should be noted that the omission of infographics is sometimes compensated by the commentators' audible remarks, which help the viewer follow and assimilate the action. However, this is not possible in the official summaries provided by La Liga, as there is no audio other than the ambient sound of the stadium.

Graph 1. The presence of infographics and multi-screens when using VAR



Source: prepared by the authors

A comparable situation occurs regarding the presence of multi-screens in actions where the VAR monitor is being reviewed on the playing field. Of the 15 activities that use infographics, only eight incorporate multi-screens in La Liga's productions, while all the VAR actions of the other two operators use multi-screens to visually reinforce the review. To quote Pasolini (2020), "The power of zoom and slow motion in sports broadcasting is the work of the devil (p. 95)". This refers to a common strategy found among DAZN and Movistar, which contrasts with the official set-up published by La Liga. Moreover, this issue connects directly with one of the themes outlined in the theoretical framework. In other words, the development of narrative structures or dramatic sequences use the VAR review in order to incorporate features that toy with the dramatic strain placed on the viewer. This is something that is found in most of the VAR reviews of Movistar and DAZN.

A case in point can be found on Matchday 33 in the game between Real Sociedad-Real Madrid. In the DAZN summary (although Movistar's approach is very similar), a review is included of the disallowed goal made by San Sebastián player Take Kubo, whose previous background was in Madrid, which adds a new level of drama to the action. The chronology starts with the player scoring the goal. The celebration of the goal is included in the summary, which is unusual for disallowed goals in other summaries. Next, the possible foul is replayed twice, once in a close-up and once in a wide angle shot. The infographic shows that the goal is under review. Next, we see the referee walking toward the monitor (Image 2), which is the beginning of the dramatic effect. Then, there is a pause, when the referee is seen in front of the screen (Image 3), in multiscreen format. For

a few seconds, the reviewing activity can be seen, yet the spectator still does not know the final decision. Finally, the referee is seen returning to the field of play when he disallows the goal. The reaction of the San Sebastián players after the decision is also added. The scene is dramatic, involving three acts. It even incorporates a prologue that lasts a total of twenty seconds, which is a micro-narrative within the summary that undoubtedly shapes the spectator's expectations and imbues them with suspense. According to the researcher Blanco, "This is a dramatic action that is pure theatre, with the added bonus of providing suspense, along with the enticement of maintaining the viewer's attention by not letting them know the result until the end of the test (2009:66)".

Image 2 and Image 3. DAZN. Matchday 33. Real Sociedad - Real Madrid



Source: YouTube, 2024C

5. Discussion

By analysing the summaries of 27 matches, the findings reveal significant discrepancies in the depiction and coverage of VAR decisions among the three platforms examined, which are La Liga, Movistar, and DAZN. The lack of standardisation in the inclusion of VAR decisions in summaries can have a significant impact on the viewer's perception of the way matches develop, which is a highlight of this study.

One of the key findings is the intentional exclusion of certain key actions of the match in the Movistar and DAZN highlights. Moreover, this type of approach is a problem, as it might limit the viewer's understanding of the match, and could lead to a partial or erroneous perception of the game. This is especially evident in the match between FC Barcelona and Villarreal (Matchday 22), where the summary of La Liga includes both the VAR lines and the disallowed Villarreal goal, while Movistar does not show the offside lines, and DAZN omits the play altogether.

This discrepancy in including the VAR decisions is not an isolated event and is repeated on multiple matchdays and games. For example, on Matchday 30, in the game between FC Barcelona and Las Palmas, the summary of La Liga offers full coverage of Raphinha's disallowed goal, while Movistar presents it briefly, and DAZN omits it altogether. This pattern is also observed on Matchday 25 during the game between Celta and FC Barcelona, where again the summary of La Liga provides the most comprehensive coverage of a decisive VAR-related event.

The use of infographics and multi-screens in VAR reviews also varies considerably among the platforms. La Liga differentiates itself through its consistent use of these visual aids, which provide the viewer with a clear and accurate understanding of referee decisions. By contrast, both Movistar and DAZN use infographics more sporadically and rely more heavily on narrator commentaries to explain VAR decisions.

This highlights the fact that Movistar and DAZN tend to create a narrative structure that adds an element of dramatic tension to VAR decisions, something that is less prevalent in La Liga's summaries. A case in point related to this practice is the review of Take Kubo's goal, which was disallowed in the match between Real Sociedad and Real Madrid (Matchday 33). In this case, the sequence is presented as a micro-narrative that toys with the viewer's expectations by repeating the possible foul, displaying the referee's walk to the monitor, and showing his final decision.

In summary, the way in which the various platforms present VAR decisions in their summaries not only affects the viewer's understanding of the match in question, but also has wider implications for the perception of fairness and transparency in football. The inconsistent coverage of these essential actions underscores the need for more standardisation and consistency in the media's portrayal of refereeing decisions.

6. Conclusions

Given the exploratory nature of this research, the conclusions drawn from the results can be a starting point for future study. It is important to point out that the findings presented in this paper not only provide an initial understanding of the phenomena explored, but also highlight some areas that require deeper and more detailed analysis.

This research has identified several issues that merit particular attention in subsequent research. Firstly, the importance of using infographics in perceiving and understanding the decisions of referees in sports summaries has been noted, suggesting the need to further explore how different formats and presentation styles might influence the viewer's experience. Furthermore, by comparing different media such as DAZN and Movistar in terms of their use of infographics, the road is paved for comparative studies that specifically examine variations in content presentation and its impact on the audience.

In terms of sound, there is a notable lack of commentaries related to the use of VAR. This observation highlights the prevalence of the visual component in the match summaries. However, it is worth undertaking future research to focus on the role of audio narration as a key feature in creating suspense in these highlights. This type of research might shed light on how narration and sound contribute to the spectator's experience, thereby complementing the visual information provided by VAR, and possibly enhancing the understanding and enjoyment of sporting events. Exploring these narrative dynamics could offer valuable insight into sports broadcasting techniques and their impact on audience perception. The narrative sequence observed in the

goal disallowed to Take Kubo in the Real Sociedad-Real Madrid match exemplifies the dramatic structure that can be used as a theoretical framework for future research on the narratology of live broadcasts, which can also be extrapolated to live broadcasts themselves. This specific case clearly shows how the inclusion of narrative and visual elements can manipulate and permeate spectator expectations, suggesting that the analysis of micro-narratives in sporting contexts can be a productive line of future research.

In summary, the findings of this study not only establish a solid starting point for future studies, but they also highlight key areas that merit further investigation. The continuation and expansion of this line of research can significantly contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of visual communication in sports media, and its impact on the spectator's perception.

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8. Specific contributions of each author

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Conception and design of the work	Sergio Cobo Durán and Joaquín Marín-Montín
Methodology	Sergio Cobo Durán and Joaquín Marín-Montín
Data collection and analysis	Sergio Cobo Durán and Joaquín Marín-Montín
Discussion and conclusions	Sergio Cobo Durán and Joaquín Marín-Montín
Drafting, formatting, version review and approval	Sergio Cobo Durán and Joaquín Marín-Montín

9. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest contained in this article.

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