



THE IMPACT OF MAJOR EVENTS ON FRANCE'S IMAGE

JANUARY
2026

When Global Visibility No Longer Guarantees Influence

Claude **REVEL**, Frédérique **VIDAL**, Sean **SCULL**

with contributions from Grégoire **KRAOUL-RIERA** & Marin-Marie **LE BRIS**

In collaboration with Matthieu **LEVRAY**, Julien **KMEID** & Léo **CASALI**
from the **Antidox** consultancy

SKEMA PUBLIKA

SKEMA Publika is the international think tank of SKEMA Business School, Publika analyses major social, economic, technological and geopolitical changes to inform public and private decision-making. Based on the school's work and scientifically validated external contributions, the think tank fuels public debate and issues recommendations for national and international decision-makers.

SKEMA Publika takes an interdisciplinary and international approach, drawing on SKEMA's global network of campuses and a community of experts from academia and the professional world. This international dimension is not just a network, but a way of thinking. Publika combines local dynamics with global transformations to offer a decentralised, multipolar perspective on major contemporary issues.

The opinions expressed in this text are solely those of the authors.

© All rights reserved, SKEMA Business School, 2025

Cover: © Stade de France® - Macary, Zublena et Regembal, Costantini – Architectes, ADAGP - Paris 2015 –
Photographe : F. Aguilhon ; © Shutterstock ; © A.S.O./Charly Lopez ; © VivaTech

SKEMA Publika

SKEMA Business School, Campus Grand Paris
5 Quai Marcel Dassault – CS 90067
92156 Suresnes Cedex, France

Tel.: +33.1.71.13.39.32
E-mail: publika@skema.edu
Website: www.publika.skema.edu

WORLDS IN TRANSITION

Observe global interdependencies and cross-cutting changes.

The “Worlds in Transition” collection examines the interdependencies between actors, territories and development models, at the crossroads of the local and the global. This specifically “glocal” approach links local dynamics and global issues, in line with SKEMA’s international presence. The publications in this collection combine transitions (geopolitical, economic, digital, social, etc.) and international comparisons.

READING COMMITTEE

Grégoire Kraoul-Riera is a student in the Master’s in International Governance and Diplomacy programme at Sciences Po Paris. A graduate of SKEMA Business School’s Grande École programme and holder of a Master’s in Business Law with a specialisation in European Law and New Economies from Université du Littoral – Côte d’Opale, he focused his research dissertation on the regulation of digital industries in the European Union, exploring the intersection between law, industrial economics and international governance. Upon completion of his master’s degree at Sciences Po, he intends to join an international organisation to contribute to multilateral dialogue and the development of global governance for new technologies.

AUTHORS

Claude Revel is a specialist in international strategic intelligence and influence, and one of the pioneers of these fields in France. After beginning her career in public administration and spending many years in the private sector, where she also founded her own company, she served as interministerial delegate for economic intelligence to the French Prime Minister from May 2013 to June 2015, before becoming *Conseillère Maître en service extraordinaire* at the *Cour des comptes* (the French Court of Auditors) until November 2019. She has now re-established her own firm, Information & Stratégies, through which she undertakes various professional and advisory assignments. From 2021 to 2025, she was responsible for developing SKEMA Business School's think tank. She taught for many years at various institutions. She is also an essayist and public speaker. She has published numerous articles and books, including *La France, un pays sous influences ?* (2012) and *Intérêt général et marché : la nouvelle donne* (as editor and contributing author, 2017). Originally from Nice and having spent part of her childhood in Africa, she is a graduate of École nationale d'administration (ENA), Institut d'études politiques de Paris (Sciences Po), and University of Paris II, where she studied business law. Claude Revel has been an Officer of the Légion d'honneur since 2014.

Frédérique Vidal, Director of Development at SKEMA Publika and Director of Strategy and Scientific Impact at SKEMA Business School. A full professor of Biology, she was president of the University of Nice Sophia Antipolis from 2012 to 2017, and subsequently served as minister of higher education, research and innovation in the Philippe and Castex governments from 2017 to 2022. She served as special advisor to the President of EFMD and is currently also the Permanent Representative of the Principality of Monaco to the United Nations Environment Programme and the Whaling Commission.

Sean Scull, Think Tank Project Manager, is a doctoral candidate in Information and Communication Science at Université Paul Valéry – Montpellier III. He holds a degree in Political Science with a specialisation in International Relations from the University of Gothenburg, and a Master's degree in International Politics with a focus on Anglophone politics from the University of Toulon. Sean has lived and worked in Sweden and the United States of America. He is the author of *Le Populisme : Symptôme d'une crise de la démocratie – Comment le néolibéralisme a triomphé en France et en Suède* [Populism: the symptom of a crisis in democracy – How neoliberalism has triumphed in France and Sweden], published by Éditions L'Harmattan (2024).

Marin-Marie Le Bris, is a former think tank project manager, a graduate of Sciences Po and HEC Paris, and holds a master's degree in philosophy from Université Panthéon-Sorbonne. Marin-Marie Le Bris joined SKEMA Publika in September 2023, having previously served as programme leader at Philonomist (Philo Éditions).

This report was produced with the participation of **Antidox**, a consultancy specialising in communication strategy and complex online influence issues.

Xavier Desmaison is president and co-founder of the Antidox group (Antidox, ComCorp, Anseres, Choiseul Advisory). He sits on the executive committee of Groupe ADIT and serves

as vice-president of the public-affairs firm ESL Rivington. He is also vice-president of Institut Choiseul, a lecturer at Sciences Po, and an editor.

Matthieu Levray holds a degree in International Relations and an MBA in Strategy and Economic Intelligence from École de guerre économique. At the French Embassy in Beijing, China, where he served as an industries and cleantech development officer, he developed analytical and advisory expertise in a highly competitive international environment while supporting French exporting companies. Matthieu joined Antidox in 2024, as a senior consultant within the Intelligence and Analysis Division.

Julien Kmeid holds degrees in International Relations and Economic Intelligence. He has specialised in strategic intelligence, developing expertise in market analysis and influence strategy across a range of sectors. In 2024, Julien joined Antidox's Intelligence Division, where he focuses on developments in mobility, industry and energy.

Léo Casali is a graduate of Institut d'études politiques de Strasbourg. He worked in project management and institutional coordination during the 2024 Olympic Games, serving as deputy security manager. At Antidox, he completed an internship as a consultant within the Intelligence Division. Léo now works as a parliamentary assistant at the French National Assembly.

SUMMARY

Focusing on seven major cultural, sporting and technological events held in France between 2022 and 2024, this report measures how such events help to shape France's international image. The analysis uses a mixed methodology combining the extraction and classification of conversations on X-Twitter, in both French and English, with a qualitative review of the most engaging content. It does not aim to measure global opinion as a whole, but rather to identify key trends in perceptions of the French national narrative.

The findings show that one-off, high-profile events (such as the 2023 Rugby World Cup and the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games) generate strong emotional engagement that is more pronounced abroad than within France, but remain vulnerable to symbolic controversies that can reshape overall interpretation. Prestigious cultural events such as the Cannes Film Festival and Paris Fashion Week undoubtedly sustain France's aura, yet they also reveal attempts by other nations to appropriate it, thereby partially shifting the centre of gravity of these events. By contrast, recurring sports competitions such as Roland-Garros and the Tour de France contribute to the continuity of the French narrative, conveying a positive and widely appreciated image rooted in tradition and the regions. Finally, the VivaTech fair demonstrates genuine, non-partisan technological influence, though its national anchoring remains limited. The event is primarily functioning as a global hub for innovation rather than a showcase for the French model.

The actor-based analysis highlights a polyphony of messaging. Institutions and political leaders see their communication around major events reframed through the lens of domestic politics, which weakens the unifying effect of these events by associating them with unrelated controversies. The organisers of major events produce professional, coherent and inclusive communications, yet these can be challenged by global dynamics over which they have little control. Online influencers and communities, meanwhile, play a decisive role in shaping and amplifying messages. They can redirect attention, subvert established codes or reinforce the intended message, illustrating a form of soft power that is now shared and negotiated.

Three main findings emerge from the report. Major events continue to sustain an image of excellence, creativity, elegance and organisational mastery, yet this image is now being reshaped within a fragmented, multipolar and highly reactive narrative space. The success of an event depends less on controlling the narrative than on maintaining coherence, anticipating, and ensuring high-quality engagement with non-state actors. Influence-based diplomacy must be conceived as a continuous, measurable and interactive process linking culture, sport, the innovation economy and the digital environment.

Based on these findings, the report recommends the following:

- Strengthen interministerial coordination and prioritisation by geography and sector;
- Tailor narratives to specific linguistic spheres and audiences;
- Move from top-down institutional communication to co-creation mechanisms involving influencers, the media and brands, framed by contractual agreements and subject to evaluation;

- Anticipate controversies through multidisciplinary preparation and multilingual monitoring teams able to respond in real time;
- Invest in digital presence through dedicated professional teams, formats adapted to new online storytelling practices, and precise tracking of the impact of communication around major events.

This study therefore calls for a careful orchestration of French soft power, aimed at consolidating stable markers, improving the narrative framing of high-profile events, actively engaging in the co-production of narratives with transnational actors, and establishing a measurable process of continuous improvement. In a media environment governed by the viral circulation of images and emotions, influence can no longer be decreed; it must be designed, measured and defended. Under these conditions, France can remain not only a benchmark but also an audible and credible voice in the global competition of imaginaries.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary	i
Introduction	1
Methodology	3
A. Objective and Scope of the Report	3
B. Approach and Analysis Protocol	3
1. Data Collection and Processing	4
2. Sentiment Analysis	4
3. Comparative Analysis	4
C. Interpretive Analysis and Actor Categories	5
D. Limitations and Scope of the Study	5
I. Major Events: Mirrors and Shapers of France's Image	7
A. One-Off Events: Between National Pride and Symbolic Controversy	7
1. The 2023 Rugby World Cup: Between Popular Fervour and Unintended Politicisation	7
2. The Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games: Reflecting Contemporary Tensions	8
3. A Fragmented French Image	8
B. Prestigious Cultural Events: Reflecting a Contested Prestige	8
1. The Cannes Film Festival: A Showcase for French Cinema and a Stage for Symbolic Rivalries	9
2. Paris Fashion Week: A Soft Power Fragmented Between French Influence and Korean Appropriation	9
3. A Shared Prestige, Between Influence and Effacement	10
C. Recurring Sporting Events: Shared Fervour, Stable Prestige	10
1. Roland-Garros: Competitive Elegance and the French Sporting Tradition	11
2. The Tour de France: A Popular Showcase of France's Regions	11
3. Everyday Diplomacy: Stability, Emotion, and Narrative Continuity	11
D. VivaTech: Global Visibility, Diminished Identity	12
1. The "Start-Up Nation" on Display	12
2. An International Stage for Technology	12
3. A Technological Soft Power Without Distinct Identity	12
II. Plural narratives: major events through the lens of different actors	14
A. Institutions and Political Leaders: Between State Communication and Polemical Appropriation	14
B. Organisers and Organisations: Striving for a Controlled and Unifying Narrative	15
C. Influencers and Online Communities: Between Reappropriation, Engagement and Transnational Soft Power	16
III. Towards a new strategy for French soft power	19
A. Redefining French Soft Power in the Digital Age	19

B. Anticipating and Framing the Public Perception of Major Events.....	20
C. Cooperating with Influencers and Adapting Influence Diplomacy to the Digital Sphere	20
Recommendations	23
Conclusion	25

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, France has demonstrated its attractiveness and expertise in hosting large-scale international events. Between 2015 and 2025, it has welcomed major diplomatic summits (COP21, the G7 in Biarritz, the Summit for a New Global Financing Pact, the United Nations Ocean Conference, etc.) and mega sporting events (UEFA Euro 2016, the 2023 Rugby World Cup, the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games), while continuing to host and promote its long-established cultural showcases (the Cannes Film Festival, Paris Fashion Week) and creating new business-oriented events (the VivaTech fair, the Choose France summit, the Made in France trade show, etc.).

In a world where images circulate at unprecedented speed, these events are not only cultural or economic showcases but also instruments of influence, platforms for projecting the national identity, and levers of soft power. The concept of soft power, coined by American political scientist Joseph Nye in *Bound to Lead* (1990), refers to a state's capacity for persuasion, measured through the attractiveness of its model. According to Nye, hard power represents the traditional, coercive side of power. Soft power relies on intangible resources such as cultural prestige, international communication, and scientific and technological influence. However, the presence of certain elements of a state's soft power does not imply political alignment on the part of another. For example, the presence of American cultural symbols in China (fast food, jeans, etc.) in no way signals adherence to the American model. In a media environment that is both saturated and competitive, influence is now built within the global digital sphere, shaped by narratives that converge, are contested, and circulate rapidly.

The concept of influence in international relations, meanwhile, refers to a form of non-coercive power based on persuasion and trust. Robert Dahl offers a widely cited definition in *Modern Political Analysis*: "A has influence over B to the extent that A can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do¹." Thus, if both parties are already in agreement, no influence can be said to exist. This is why the surrounding context must be taken into account when analysing influence. Dahl also distinguishes between "potential" influence, which draws on resources such as money, expertise or prestige, and "actual" influence, which reflects the concrete use of those resources. Possessing resources therefore does not guarantee real influence. In *L'Acteur et le système*², Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg develop this analysis by introducing the notion of monopoly as a key resource of power. They identify expertise and control of information as strategic elements that can also be applied to the field of influence. According to Crozier and Friedberg, holding a monopoly means having control over something that others do not. This confers power. It can take the form of exclusive possession of a skill, information, or strategic resource. Meanwhile, in *On the Concept of Influence*³, Talcott Parsons emphasises the intentional nature of influence, yet this is debatable: an actor may also refrain from acting out of fear of possible retaliation from another. According to Parsons, "influence is recognised by the regularity of its effects",

¹ DAHL (R.), *Modern Political Analysis*, Engelwood Cliffs, 1963.

² CROZIER (M.) and FRIEDBERG (E.), *L'acteur et le système*, Seuil, 1977.

³ PARSONS (T.), "On the Concept of Influence", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XXVII, No 1, 1963.

which allows him to distinguish it from power, defining it as a “general capacity to persuade” built on trust. By contrast, power relies on sanctions or coercion, which he sees as “the weapon of the rulers”, while influence is “the weapon of the governed”. Today, this interpretation appears limiting. In *Lexique de science politique*, edited by Olivier Nay, this limitation is addressed. Nay emphasises the role of individuals and interest groups that use their economic and social capital to disseminate ideas.⁴ This approach widens the scope of influence beyond the actions of governments alone, to encompass a plurality of actors, from political and economic spheres to cultural and intellectual ones.

In this respect, major events are strategic levers of France’s international influence. They are characterised by their international reach, their media appeal, and both their economic and symbolic impact. As Donald Getz notes, they bring tangible benefits (economic and tourism-related) as well as intangible ones (social cohesion, national image, and pride).⁵ These events are key moments when a country’s image takes shape, is discussed and reshaped. In France, which boasts longstanding symbolic capital, such events can contribute to promoting the country and consolidating a coherent national image within the shared global imagination. However, they also expose the country to criticism, political controversy, and a range of debates amplified by social media. **It is therefore essential to assess the impact of major events on France’s image in order to determine whether they enable the country to project its influence internationally.**

To that end, the report is based on a sentiment analysis conducted on X-Twitter, focusing on seven major events held in France between 2022 and 2024. By cross-referencing conversations in the Francophone and Anglophone spheres, it identifies recurring patterns in perception according to the type of event (one-off, prestigious cultural, recurring sporting, or technological) and the actors participating in the discussion (institutions, organisers, influencers, and online communities). The study has two aims: to shed light on the dynamics of reception that shape the French narrative online, and to propose actionable levers for a diplomacy of influence adapted to the digital age.

⁴ NAY (O.) (dir.), “Influence”, *Lexique de science politique*, Dalloz, 5th ed., 2025, 664 p., pp. 301-302.

⁵ GETZ (D.), *Event Studies: Theory, research and policy for planned events*, Routledge, 2007.

METHODOLOGY

A. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THE REPORT

With reference to specific major cultural, sporting and technological events held in France between 2022 and 2024, this report aims to measure how such events help to shape the country's image within the Francophone and Anglophone digital spheres.

In a context of intense international media exposure and the rapid circulation of images and representations, major events serve as a key instrument of national soft power, by enabling a country to tell its story to the world through collective, emotionally charged experiences spanning sport, culture and technology.

The report has two main objectives:

1. To evaluate international perceptions of these events through the tone of the reactions they generate, based on a sentiment analysis conducted on the social network X-Twitter;
2. To analyse how these perceptions contribute to the construction or reconfiguration of French soft power in the digital age.

Seven emblematic events were selected for their symbolic significance and sectoral diversity:

- The Rugby World Cup 2023,
- The Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games,
- The Cannes Film Festival,
- The Paris Women's Spring–Summer Fashion Week,
- Roland-Garros,
- The Tour de France and
- The VivaTech fair (VivaTech).

These events illustrate the variety of dimensions of France's international influence, spanning sport, culture, luxury and innovation. This analysis was made possible through collaboration with the consultancy Antidox, which examined online conversations generated by these major events on X-Twitter between 2022 and 2024, in both the Francophone and Anglophone spheres. The platform X-Twitter was chosen because it brings together a large volume of opinions, often linked to current events, within a concise and unified format.

B. APPROACH AND ANALYSIS PROTOCOL

The study is based on a sentiment analysis combined with a qualitative review of the discussions surrounding each event. This combined approach makes it possible to assess both overall emotional trends and the symbolic meanings attributed to France in online conversations.

1. Data Collection and Processing

Data were collected through keyword and hashtag searches specific to each event, distinguishing between posts written in French and those in English.

Each event was observed over the 2022–2024 period, covering:

- The 4 months preceding the event;
- The month of the event; and
- The 3 months following it.

Posts (tweets, retweets and replies) were aggregated and analysed using natural language processing tools designed to classify content according to its emotional tone.

2. Sentiment Analysis

Messages were categorised into seven “emotional” groups:

- Soft power and influence
- Admiration
- Pride
- Joy
- Interest
- Anger and Aversion
- Surprise

These categories reflect the main reactions elicited by the events and serve as indicators of perception. This analytical framework thus makes it possible to measure the emotional tone (positive, negative or neutral) associated with each event and to infer its impact on France's image. A predominance of positive emotions (pride, admiration, joy) indicates a strengthening of France's image, while a strong presence of negative emotions (anger, rejection, irony) suggests a weakening of its international influence.

3. Comparative Analysis

To highlight the dynamics specific to each type of event, the report takes a comparative approach, grouping them as follows:

- One-off events: the 2023 Rugby World Cup and the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games;
- Prestigious cultural events: the Cannes Film Festival and Paris Fashion Week;
- Recurring sporting events: Roland-Garros and the Tour de France;
- Technological event: VivaTech, analysed separately.

This classification makes it possible to observe where perceptions converge and diverge according to (i) the nature of the event, (ii) its frequency (one-off or recurring), and (iii) its symbolic anchoring (sporting, cultural or technological).

The analysis also compares linguistic and cultural differences in reception between the Francophone and Anglophone spheres, in order to assess the genuinely international reach of the messages these major events seek to promote.

This typology of events forms the analytical basis of the first part of the report, which examines in detail the various forms of influence and visibility these events afford France.

C. INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS AND ACTOR CATEGORIES

The quantitative results of the sentiment analysis were supplemented by a qualitative review of the most engaging posts (tweets most shared or commented upon) in order to understand who is speaking, how, and in what register.

Three categories of actors were identified:

- Institutions and political leaders,
- Event organisations and committees,
- Digital influencers and online communities.

This dual, quantitative and qualitative, analysis made it possible to identify (i) the dominant narratives produced around each event, (ii) the gaps between official communication and public reception, and (iii) the ways in which other actors appropriate and reshape the national narrative. It provides an overarching view of French soft power online that can be measured and interpreted.

This typology forms the basis of the second part of the report, which examines how each of these actors contributes to constructing, disseminating or contesting the national narrative.

D. LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study relies exclusively on data from X-Twitter, a platform where opinions are often polarised and where certain generations, languages or regions are under-represented. The results should therefore be interpreted as indicative of perception trends rather than as a comprehensive measure of global opinion. Similarly, sentiment analysis has inherent limitations linked to natural language processing: irony, sarcasm or parody may sometimes be misinterpreted. In addition, some reactions, whether positive or negative, may stem from external factors unrelated to the events observed or to France.

Nevertheless, the size of the dataset, the richness of the observed interactions and their linguistic distribution provide **a representative and unprecedented insight into the dynamics of how France's image is perceived in the global digital sphere in relation to major French events**. This report thus sheds light on how these events contribute to the

contemporary production of French prestige, revealing both the strength and the vulnerabilities of national soft power in the global digital sphere.

I. MAJOR EVENTS: MIRRORS AND SHAPERS OF FRANCE'S IMAGE

By analysing posts and reactions on X-Twitter regarding major cultural, sporting and technological events held in France, it is possible to assess how the country's image is constructed within the digital sphere. Drawing on sentiment analysis tools and a comparison between the Francophone and Anglophone linguistic spheres, this first section distinguishes several categories of events according to their nature and symbolic significance: one-off events with strong international visibility (the 2023 Rugby World Cup, the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games), prestigious cultural and luxury events (the Cannes Film Festival, Paris Fashion Week), recurring sporting events (Roland-Garros, the Tour de France), and the VivaTech trade fair, a showcase of French technological expertise. Examining these four groups sheds light on the different ways in which France is perceived, represented and talked about during these moments of global visibility.

A. ONE-OFF EVENTS: BETWEEN NATIONAL PRIDE AND SYMBOLIC CONTROVERSY

The 2023 Rugby World Cup and the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games were two key events for France's international visibility. Their significance extended well beyond the sporting sphere: they crystallised the tension between the national narrative, the assertion of soft power, and social or political reactions. The debates they generated on X-Twitter illustrate how challenging it is to control the digital narrative of a major event at a time when the audience reception is fragmented.

1. The 2023 Rugby World Cup: Between Popular Fervour and Unintended Politicisation

In the Francophone sphere, the Rugby World Cup was experienced with mixed feelings. Official posts and online reactions oscillated between sporting pride and political criticism. While the atmosphere in the stadiums and the performance of the French team generated a strong sense of unity, [posts and appearances by President Emmanuel Macron](#) attracted a large share of the negative comments. Users turned the event into a backdrop for political criticism, diverting attention from the opening ceremony [to criticise domestic policy](#), [question aspects of national identity](#) or [express satisfaction at the booing directed at the head of state](#). These diversions effectively disrupted the narrative of cohesion promoted by the institutions and organisers.

In contrast, the Anglophone sphere offered a narrative more focused on sport and emotion. A significant proportion of posts celebrated the [beauty of rugby](#) and the camaraderie among nations, particularly through images showing solidarity between Tongan and South African players. The most frequently recurring words — “proud”, “inspiring”, “magic”, “fairy” and “dream” — belong to the lexicon of prestige and collective pride. Much of this commentary came from South Africa, [celebrating their team's victory](#) while also touching on [national issues](#) such as political corruption. The overall tone in the Anglophone sphere shows that

outside of France the World Cup fully fulfilled its role as a positive showcase for sport and, indirectly, for French organisational expertise.

2. The Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games: Reflecting Contemporary Tensions

The Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games crystallised even more contrasting perceptions. In the Francophone sphere, the event generated a mix of pride and scepticism. Posts praising the performances of the French team and the logistical success of the Games ([image of a more beautiful, cleaner and safer Paris](#)) coexisted with criticism regarding cost, particularly that of making the [Seine suitable for swimming](#), and criticism of the country's political management, in a context of early legislative elections. While national mobilisation was genuine, the opening ceremony sparked heated debate over a staging considered provocative or out of touch. France thus appeared both united by sport and divided over the image it projected of itself as a nation.

In the Anglophone sphere, reactions were initially dominated by the controversy surrounding the opening ceremony, accused of desecrating religious symbols. Other criticisms focused on Israel's participation, while [debate over the gender of an Algerian boxer](#) reflected the symbolic tensions revealed by the opening ceremony, in which the Games openly championed inclusive values. These criticisms generated high levels of engagement, underscoring the multidimensional impact of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, which transcend sport to become global arenas reflecting social, cultural and political dynamics. Conversely, international political and media figures such as [Narendra Modi](#), [Barack Obama](#) or [Elon Musk](#) took the opportunity to celebrate their nations' victories or praise the quality of the organisation.

3. A Fragmented French Image

These two events reflect a dual movement. In the Francophone sphere, major sporting events unite audiences around sporting achievements but continue to reflect internal divisions over the nature of the national narrative. In the Anglophone sphere, they remain above all a source of admiration for sport and a showcase for French organisational capability. However, while the Rugby World Cup inspired a largely apolitical enthusiasm abroad, the Olympic and Paralympic Games, through their opening ceremony, became invested with political and moral significance.

These differences in reception highlight a cultural and political gap between the Francophone and Anglophone spheres in their responses to major events. They reveal the limits of a diplomacy of influence based on collective emotion in a world where a national image is constructed at the intersection of multiple narratives, at the crossroads of identity, social and political issues. Both reflecting internal tensions while enhancing global visibility, these events highlight France's **increasing difficulty in asserting a unified narrative within the global digital sphere**. This underscores the need to design narrative strategies capable of anticipating differentiated receptions of the national image, and thus of reinforcing, rather than undermining, soft power.

B. PRESTIGIOUS CULTURAL EVENTS: REFLECTING A CONTESTED PRESTIGE

The Cannes Film Festival and Paris Fashion Week are two of France's foremost showcases of the country's prestige, combining cultural excellence, aesthetics and craftsmanship. These events embody a reputation built on luxury, creativity and tradition, yet their reception on X-Twitter shows that this prestige is increasingly contested. In a globalised digital environment, France's image, while still strongly associated with elegance and refinement, now faces growing competition from other powers.

1. The Cannes Film Festival: A Showcase for French Cinema and a Stage for Symbolic Rivalries

A pillar of French cultural soft power, the Cannes Film Festival remains a central marker of the country's international image. Yet online discussions surrounding the 2024 edition, and the previous ones, illustrate a growing tension between its cultural mission and global societal debates. Conversations on X-Twitter were strongly influenced by the geopolitical context, particularly the conflict in the Middle East, which resurfaced in public and symbolic acts of solidarity, such as [actress Cate Blanchett's dress in the colours of Palestine](#). At the same time, the #MeToo movement returned to prominence through the circulation of a ["blacklist"](#) naming film industry personalities accused of sexual violence, attracting attention well beyond the world of cinema, with some 30,000 tweets on the subject during the period.

In the Francophone sphere, the emphasis was more on highlighting international talent, particularly Iranian actress [Golshifteh Farahani](#), who expressed her love for France. Numerous posts also celebrated the vitality and impact of French cinema and its funding model, which also drew criticism. In English-language tweets, the festival was primarily seen as a global showcase of glamour, with France serving as a promotional backdrop for the films, luxury brands and celebrities present on *La Croisette*. Comments focused more on films, outfits and personalities than on the political or institutional dimension of the event, even though some referred to the French film system.

These differing interpretations reveal the dual function of the Cannes Film Festival: on the one hand, it is a space for artistic celebration and the promotion of French excellence; on the other, a platform for global causes and foreign influence strategies. Saudi Arabia, for example, is increasingly using the festival to project its cultural soft power by financing films presented there. This symbolic competition shows how **French prestige, once dominant in this field, has now become a shared arena where multiple national narratives intersect.**

2. Paris Fashion Week: A Soft Power Fragmented Between French Influence and Korean Appropriation

Paris Fashion Week embodies another pillar of French soft power, bringing together luxury, fashion and creativity. Organised by the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode, the French Federation of Haute Couture and Fashion, it brings together the leading fashion houses each year and generates millions of online interactions. However, an analysis of X-Twitter discussions shows a shift in the balance of influence.

Since 2022, online discussions have increasingly focused on South Korea and the presence of its [K-pop](#) stars. Korean influencers and international fans generate enormous levels of engagement, often eclipsing the French narrative. The participation of artists such as Jisoo

(Blackpink) or J-Hope (BTS), in partnership with French luxury fashion houses such as Céline, Hermès and Louis Vuitton, has transformed Fashion Week into a global stage where France lends its visibility to other cultural powers.

In the Francophone sphere, tweets expressed a form of indirect national pride. Franco-Korean collaborations were perceived as a sign of recognition of French excellence. Yet criticisms also emerged around themes such as [greenwashing](#), the disconnect between the world of luxury and everyday realities, and the [commercial exploitation of cultural heritage](#). In the Anglophone sphere, discussions focused more on celebrities and [brands](#) than on France itself, which was relegated to the role of prestigious host rather than key player.

These dynamic highlights a paradox of soft power in the digital age. By welcoming other cultures, **France maintains its position as a symbolic epicentre but partially loses control of the narrative**. Attention and virality shift towards international figures using the French stage to advance their own influence.

3. A Shared Prestige, Between Influence and Effacement

The Cannes Film Festival and Paris Fashion Week project a coherent image of French know-how, rooted in elegance, creativity and artistic freedom. Yet their online reception reveals a phenomenon of fragmentation, already observed for the “one-off” events. **Though once vehicles for a unified narrative of national prestige, these major gatherings have become plural spaces where narratives intersect and compete.**

In the Francophone sphere, debates focus on moral, economic or identity-related issues linked to cinema and fashion. In the Anglophone sphere, France remains a prestigious setting, but increasingly a neutralised one, eclipsed by transnational actors. This shift signals a transformation in the tools of soft power. France retains the aura of prestige, but its image is increasingly diffused within a global ecosystem where attention has become the main currency of influence.

These prestigious cultural events thus serve as reflections of a contested prestige: they both attest to French influence and highlight the challenges of visibility and narrative control in a world where soft power is no longer possessed, but shared. This shift illustrates the transition from a unilateral soft power to a multipolar circulation of influence, where the French stage serves both to project France's influence and to amplify that of others.

C. RECURRING SPORTING EVENTS: SHARED FERVOUR, STABLE PRESTIGE

Unlike one-off or prestigious cultural events, recurring sporting competitions rest on long-term continuity and cross-generational popularity, which firmly anchor France's image in the global collective imagination. Roland-Garros and the Tour de France exemplify a soft power of continuity, grounded in regularity, accessibility and the shared celebration of sporting heritage. **These competitions embody a stable form of influence that is less spectacular but more enduring, capable of keeping France at the centre of international attention without major controversy.**

1. Roland-Garros: Competitive Elegance and the French Sporting Tradition

A symbol of sporting excellence and refinement, Roland-Garros projects the image of an elegant, skilled and passionate France. On X-Twitter, Francophone reactions mainly celebrated the performances of [French players](#) and the atmosphere of the tournament, combining fervour and national pride. This tone, often tinged with good-natured chauvinism, reflects a sense of collective pride surrounding an event seen as emblematic of French, and especially Parisian, prestige. The few criticisms expressed focused on its [“Paris-centred”](#) character, perceived by some as detached from the grassroots spirit of sport in general.

In the Anglophone sphere, tweets revealed a different but equally positive perspective. Discussions focused on the tournament itself, [technical mastery and performance](#), notably through the achievements of female athletes such as [Iga Swiatek](#) or [Jasmine Paolini](#). This approach reinforces Roland-Garros's status as a leading event in world tennis, renowned for the rigour of its organisation and the beauty of its setting. Sentiment analysis shows that most tweets were positive and admiring, highlighting the tournament's elegance and the passion of its audience, confirming the strength of France's image of sporting excellence.

2. The Tour de France: A Popular Showcase of France's Regions

The Tour de France is another cornerstone of France's international image, though it works in a different way. It relies less on elitism, and more on proximity and continuity. Each summer, the event travels across the country, connecting villages, mountains and cities, and offering the world a showcase of France's natural and architectural heritage. On X-Twitter, reactions were marked by a consistently positive tone, combining admiration for the riders, attachment to tradition, and fascination with the landscapes along the route. Contemporary champions, such as Tadej Pogačar, Remco Evenepoel and Jonas Vingegaard, embody a competition followed around the world, yet its staging remains profoundly French.

In the Francophone sphere, the Tour was described as a [unifying moment](#) imbued with [nostalgia](#) and conviviality, while Anglophone posts praised the [performances](#), the [beauty of the stages](#) and the quality of the media coverage. Few criticisms emerged, apart from occasional remarks on [environmental](#) or doping issues, but these were marginal given the overall volume of interactions. **The Tour thus functions as an instrument of soft power that promotes France not only as a sporting nation, but also as a destination with cultural, geographical and tourism appeal.**

3. Everyday Diplomacy: Stability, Emotion, and Narrative Continuity

Roland-Garros and the Tour de France share an essential characteristic: their ability to generate a collective emotion that is repeated, stable and predictable. **These events embody a form of everyday diplomacy built on audience loyalty, enduring rituals and organisational mastery.** Unlike the one-off or prestigious cultural events, they do not seek to surprise or provoke, but to reassure and unite. The strength of their influence lies precisely in this consistency, reminding the world that France remains a country of sport, excellence and shared passions.

In a fragmented digital landscape, these competitions serve as symbolic markers of continuity. They project a coherent, apolitical and broadly consensual image of a France capable of combining tradition and modernity. This “quiet” soft power does not rely on creating new narratives, but on remaining true to a well-established collective imagination, that of a nation which celebrates sport as both a way of life and a source of national unity. It shows that **France's strength of influence lies not only in the exceptional or in performance, but also in the continuity of a collective narrative renewed with each edition.**

D. VIVATECH: GLOBAL VISIBILITY, DIMINISHED IDENTITY

VivaTech stands apart from the other major events examined. Neither a sporting competition nor a cultural showcase, it embodies France's ambition to establish itself within the global innovation and technology economy. Created at the initiative of Publicis Groupe and the newspaper *Les Échos*, and supported by the State and leading players in the French tech ecosystem (known as the French Tech), the fair has become a key platform for dialogue between businesses, researchers and decision-makers. Each year, VivaTech generates a substantial volume of interactions on X-Twitter, yet their content reveals a tension between national self-assertion and the borderless discourse of technology.

1. The “Start-Up Nation” on Display

In the Francophone sphere, VivaTech remains closely associated with the political rhetoric of the “Start-up Nation”. The tweets from [political leaders](#) and institutional partners highlight the success of the French ecosystem, with references to national initiatives such as the [AI plan](#), the digital transition, start-up financing, and technological sovereignty. The most frequent keywords (French Tech, innovation, AI, future, Paris) reflect an intention to demonstrate that France stands among the major technological nations. The tone is generally positive and professional, yet this highly institutional communication is sometimes perceived more as a state-driven self-promotion exercise than as a spontaneous celebration of innovation.

2. An International Stage for Technology

In the Anglophone sphere, the narrative shifts scale. VivaTech is viewed primarily as a global hub for innovation. Specialist media accounts (*TechCrunch*, *Forbes*, *StartupBlink*) and partner companies praise the discoveries unveiled, the “inspiring” talks and the quality of the organisation, but make little mention of France itself. The tweets tend to focus on global themes ([artificial intelligence](#), climate, [entrepreneurship](#)) rather than on the host country. **The event thus becomes a global space for the circulation of ideas and technologies, where the nationality of participants matters less than their capacity to innovate.** It could just as easily have taken place in Las Vegas, a place known for organising the annual CES convention.

3. A Technological Soft Power Without Distinct Identity

This shift from the national to the global illustrates the paradoxes of soft power in the technological domain. While VivaTech enhances France's visibility as a hub of expertise and innovation, it simultaneously dilutes its national identity. France appears more as a facilitator of a globalised ecosystem than as the standard-bearer of a distinct model. Online sentiment is largely positive, but seldom linked to a specific idea of “French innovation”. The

event thus fulfils its goal of visibility while revealing the limits of an influence that dissolves into the wider dynamics of the sector.

Ultimately, VivaTech illustrates the transformation of French prestige in the digital age: that of a country capable of creating attractive platforms and bringing together global players, but whose visibility now takes shape within a shared arena where influence is no longer imposed but negotiated.



The analysis of these major events held in France highlights the diversity of forms through which national influence now manifests itself. One-off events, such as the Rugby World Cup and the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, reveal both the symbolic power of collective emotion and the fragility of a national narrative exposed to political divisions. Prestigious cultural events, exemplified by the Cannes Film Festival and Paris Fashion Week, reflect a prestige that remains vibrant but is now shared with other centres of influence within a globalised cultural arena. Recurring sports competitions, such as Roland-Garros and the Tour de France, embody a quieter and more enduring form of influence, rooted in collective memory and a long-standing sporting heritage. Finally, VivaTech illustrates the contemporary transformation of soft power, expressed less through national identity than through the ability to unite a global network of economic and technological actors.

Across these different models, France's image appears at once enduring and transformed. Enduring, because it continues to be associated with excellence, creativity, elegance and organisational mastery. Transformed, because it now takes shape within a fragmented discursive space, where meaning is negotiated among audiences, communities and competing powers. These events thus act both as reflections of French society and as engines of its international projection, yet their fragmented reception underscores the growing difficulty of asserting a unified narrative in the age of social media.

This complexity does not indicate a weakening of French soft power, but rather its redefinition. The goal is no longer to dominate the global narrative, but to exist within it as a hub of attraction and dialogue. It is precisely this plural circulation of narratives and representations that the next section will examine, by analysing the respective roles of institutions, organisations and communities of influence in shaping the narratives of contemporary France.

II. PLURAL NARRATIVES: MAJOR EVENTS THROUGH THE LENS OF DIFFERENT ACTORS

The examination of these major cultural, sporting and technological events has shown that, while France's image remains anchored in its traditional attributes (excellence, prestige and creativity), it is now being reshaped within a globalised and fragmented discursive space. This second part builds on that observation, shifting the focus from event types to the actors who shape and disseminate these narratives. On X-Twitter, the construction of France's image rests on a diversity of voices (public institutions, organisers, professional and civil organisations, influencers and online communities) whose logics, aims and audiences diverge significantly. Major events thus emerge as shared storytelling spaces where official communication, image strategies and viral dynamics converge and compete. By understanding this polyphony of narratives, it is possible to assess how French soft power is exercised, negotiated and, at times, diluted within the global digital sphere.

A. INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL LEADERS: BETWEEN STATE COMMUNICATION AND POLEMICAL APPROPRIATION

Institutions and political leaders seek to make major events showcases of national influence and collective cohesion. However, on social media, their posts were frequently twisted and reinterpreted through the lens of domestic politics. It is interesting to note that there were fewer political reactions in the Anglophone sphere than on the Francophone side.

During the 2023 Rugby World Cup, President Emmanuel Macron's tweets attracted mostly negative reactions, often focused more on his person than on the event itself. Users seized on the tournament as an opportunity to criticise national policy and even to [express satisfaction at the booing](#) directed at the head of state during the opening ceremony. Similarly, during the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, [the President's announcement that France had secured the 2030 Winter Games](#) triggered a barrage of comments on the outcome of the early legislative elections, the country's budgetary problems, and climate-related issues, thus turning a message of national pride into a partisan debate. Some non-institutional political actors (journalists and associations) also focused their attention on issues peripheral to the events themselves. During the 2024 Tour de France, the newspaper [Libération](#) criticised public broadcaster commentator Franck Ferrand for paying tribute to Pierre Poujade (a far-right figure) during one of the stages. In the same vein, the animal rights association [L214](#) criticised one of the Tour's sponsors, featured in the publicity caravan, for its treatment of animals.

In the cultural sphere, Paris Fashion Week and the Cannes Film Festival reflected a similar tension. Official or ministerial posts intended to promote French know-how and cultural excellence were often met with hostile reactions accusing political elites of being "out of touch" when attending such events, with little reference to the events themselves. Posts by [Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo](#) and [French Minister of Culture Rachida Dati](#) celebrating these

occasions prompted comments criticising their policies and questioning what the events themselves, and the collections shown, symbolised.

Finally, VivaTech stood out as one of the few events largely untouched by politics, which fits squarely with its ambition to serve as a professional gathering devoted to new technologies and their applications. While a few criticisms of the societal model or the values promoted by participants were voiced by political figures, these remained rare, mostly coming from the left or far left, and tended to appear in traditional media rather than on X-Twitter. Political statements on X-Twitter came almost exclusively from the centre and right and were strongly positive, emphasising technological innovation and the role of French Tech in advancing France's technological sovereignty. In all cases, the comments beneath such posts focused more on the politicians themselves or their party than on the event. VivaTech thus appeared unique among the major events, in managing to remain neutral in a context of strong political polarisation.

In short, institutional communication on X-Twitter struggles to separate the country's image from that of its political leaders. Major events intended to unite instead become spaces for partisan reinterpretation. This phenomenon reduces the symbolic effectiveness of French soft power in the digital sphere, but clearly reflects the logic of virality that is characteristic of social media and amplifies the personalisation, polarisation and confrontation of political communication.

B. ORGANISERS AND ORGANISATIONS: STRIVING FOR A CONTROLLED AND UNIFYING NARRATIVE

The organisers of major events (sports federations, organising committees, broadcasters, associations and partner institutions) tend to adopt a relatively homogeneous communication strategy. Their aim is to maintain a positive narrative centred on performance, creativity and emotion, with a view to promoting their sector. On X-Twitter, their communications thus help to project a controlled and unifying image, though its impact varies considerably depending on the type of event and the audience's reception.

In the sporting arena, the communications of these organisations stand out for their unanimously positive tone and their focus on the sport itself. During the 2023 Rugby World Cup, the official [Rugby World Cup](#) account congratulated South African player Mbongeni Mbonambi on his performance, prompting universally admiring reactions focused purely on the sport. The [French football team's account](#) likewise generated highly positive engagement by posting a photo of players who had come to support Les Bleus, with no diversion into unrelated subjects. A similar approach can be seen in posts from the International Olympic Committee and Paris 2024, highlighting key Olympic moments. For instance, they [commemorated the 1992 Barcelona Games](#) and the iconic moment when the Olympic cauldron was lit by an arrow, and celebrated a [Filipino athlete](#) who won two gold medals. Some posts, such as that featuring [South Korean singer Jin \(BTS\)](#) participating in the Olympic torch relay, were widely shared by his national fanbase and international followers. Reactions to these posts were largely positive, focused on celebration and spectacle.

Recurring tournaments take a similar approach. Roland-Garros continuously posts results, archival material and tributes, as well as TV ratings to underscore public enthusiasm, while

broadcasters ([France TV Sport](#), [Prime Video Sport France](#) or [TNT Sports](#)) share the most striking moments. Commercial collaborations with luxury brands and technological innovations aim to attract a younger, more connected audience. Likewise, the Tour de France and its partners showcase the event's heritage and collective emotion through [stage victories](#), [tributes to champions](#) and [historical commemorations](#). These often bilingual and visually striking posts exemplify professional, apolitical communication driven by a passion for sport.

Communications from cultural event organisers follow a similar pattern, though their greater global exposure intensifies competition between narratives. The Cannes Film Festival promotes its status as an international cultural platform, as reflected in [Cannes being named World's Best Festival and Event Destination](#) by the World Travel Awards. As for the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode, it presents Paris Fashion Week as a celebration of French craftsmanship and creativity. This strategy is broadly effective on the symbolic front, both domestically and internationally, enabling France to assert its cultural leadership and distinctive aesthetic. However, within the digital sphere, the French narrative faces partial competition from other dynamics. Highly active Korean fan communities, for instance, have come to dominate online discussion during Paris Fashion Week, where K-pop and South Korean influencers impose their own codes and narratives. Similarly, the growing presence of countries such as Saudi Arabia, which is increasingly financing films presented at Cannes, illustrates how French prestige has evolved into a platform for the expression of global soft power.

Finally, VivaTech demonstrates the ability of the event's French organisers and partners to combine national communication with international reach. The [trade fair's official account](#) and those of its partners (Publicis Groupe, *Les Échos*) highlight the entrepreneurial energy and vitality of start-ups, while also putting the accent on international exchanges. They seek to construct a dynamic, unifying and open narrative, underscoring France's contribution to a global ecosystem. However, this universalist approach sometimes tends to dilute the specifically French dimension of the message, in favour of a much broader discourse on innovation and collaboration.

Overall, the organisations surrounding these major events manage to maintain consistent and effective communication that increases the visibility of the events and promotes their positive values, such as excellence, emotion, creativity and innovation. Nevertheless, their narrative remains fragmented and dependent on global dynamics over which they have limited control. The strength of French soft power thus lies less in message dominance than in its ability to coexist, and even interact, with other national or community narratives in a digital space where visibility must be both won and shared.

C. INFLUENCERS AND ONLINE COMMUNITIES: BETWEEN REAPPROPRIATION, ENGAGEMENT AND TRANSNATIONAL SOFT POWER

Influencers, content creators and online communities play a central role in disseminating and reshaping the narratives surrounding major cultural, sporting and technological events. On X-Twitter, they appropriate these events to project their own slant, whether humorous, activist, identity-based or community-oriented. Their capacity to drive engagement often

exceeds that of institutional actors, yet their contribution to France's image remains mixed, oscillating between amplifying national influence and blurring the original message.

During the major sporting events in our corpus, several high-profile influencers and accounts stood out for their critical or ironic tone. The political account *Prince*, for example, [applauded the global broadcast of boos](#) directed at Emmanuel Macron during the opening ceremony of the 2023 Rugby World Cup, framing it as a symbol of political resistance. Similarly, during the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, certain online figures diverted official celebratory messages to highlight national controversies, including the event's cost given France's strained public finances, the political situation following the dissolution of parliament, and environmental issues. These viral messages shifted the debate, transforming a narrative of national unity into a forum for dissent. Conversely, other influencers, particularly from abroad, celebrated the sporting achievements or cultural symbols associated with the Games, helping to spread a positive and emotionally charged image of France through the lens of spectacle.

In the cultural and glamour events analysed in this study, international communities often dominate the conversation. During Paris Fashion Week, Korean fans in particular played a defining role in the virality of content. The presence of artists such as Jisoo (Blackpink) and [Korean influencers](#) generated such massive attention that it overshadowed the French narrative of these events. This transnational appropriation reflects the growing strength of a community-based soft power in which France serves as a stage or platform for foreign narratives. At the Cannes Film Festival, online engagement similarly centred on the increasing presence of Saudi Arabia, accused by certain human rights organisations of using the festival to burnish its international image. These phenomena show that, far from being mere intermediaries, influencers and online communities actively redefine the very meaning of such events, by integrating them into their own strategies of visibility and cultural identity.

For recurring sporting events, specialised influencers tend to take a more passionate or nostalgic approach. Accounts such as [Univers Tennis](#) or [Le Gruppetto](#) share memorable moments, pay tribute to iconic figures in French sport, and celebrate collective emotion. Their engagement strengthens loyalty within the fan community and helps to preserve the country's sporting memory. However, this engagement often remains confined to a circle of insiders: it is intense, but limited to an already committed audience, with little impact on France's image internationally.

Finally, VivaTech reflects a more professional dynamic. The trade fair enlisted both technology-focused influencers such as Sixtine Moullé-Berteaux, Margot Daugieras and Jules Stimpfling, and news-oriented creators such as *Hugo Décrypte*, who covered the event and even ran booths (Gaspard G.). This partnership strategy helps to broaden the audience and lends weight to the narrative of "French-style innovation". The physical and digital presence of actors such as *Forbes France*, *StartupBlink*, and researcher-ambassadors from [CNRS](#) (the French National Centre for Scientific Research) demonstrates a remarkable coherence between public and private stakeholders, multiplying the channels and approaches for influence building. This collaboration between influencers and institutions increases the legitimacy of the French ecosystem, but does not prevent the conversation

from remaining global in scope. Indeed, the themes covered (artificial intelligence, the environment, entrepreneurship) extend far beyond the national framework. The interactions are structured more around technological fascination than around France's influence per se.



Our analysis reveals that influencers and online communities create a parallel narrative sphere that continuously reshapes institutional messages. They amplify the visibility of major events while altering their interpretive framework. France thus appears at times as a catalyst for debate, and at others as an open platform for the soft power of other nations. Their influence reveals new mechanisms in the circulation of prestige, where attention takes precedence over control of the narrative. While this dynamic may undermine the consistency of the national message, it also demonstrates the adaptability of French soft power in the digital age: a form of soft power that is shared, dialogue-based and decentralised.

Ultimately, beyond the differences specific to each category of actors, the analysis of posts and reactions on X-Twitter reveals the coexistence of multiple narratives surrounding major French events. These narratives vary not only according to the category of actor but also across the cultural and linguistic spheres in which they circulate.

In the Francophone sphere, institutional and organisational posts are often interpreted through the lens of domestic political debates. The unifying narrative centred on national cohesion and French excellence is thus diverted or overshadowed by national controversies. Conversely, in the Anglophone sphere, discussions focus more on sporting performances, cultural symbols and the spectacle itself, reflecting a more neutral and admiring reception. These differences underline the extent to which perceptions of French soft power remain dependent on the political and cultural contexts of each discursive space. Major cultural events stand out in this respect, illustrating the complexity of an increasingly globalised soft power. French prestige remains genuine, but it is increasingly diluted within a global symbolic space where nations coexist and compete through the same events.

These observations highlight a structural limitation in analysing soft power through social media. **Domestic debates, community logics and foreign influence strategies “interfere” with the dissemination of France’s message, making it difficult to control the overall narrative. The effectiveness of French soft power no longer lies in dominating the narrative, but in its ability to remain a visible, identifiable and credible centre within a fragmented discursive ecosystem.**

The multiplicity of narratives surrounding major events therefore points to the need for an international communication strategy capable of reconciling national cohesion with adaptation to global dynamics. Based on the findings of this study, concrete levers must now be identified to strengthen the effectiveness of French soft power in the digital age.

III. TOWARDS A NEW STRATEGY FOR FRENCH SOFT POWER

The transformation of the global media landscape, the emergence of new cultural hubs and the growing influence of online communities all call for a profound redefinition of French soft power. The era when influence relied solely on the strength of cultural attraction is now long past, and **France must conceive its international standing as a strategic, measurable and interactive process**. French policymakers appear aware of this shift. As Anne-Marie Descôtes, Secretary-General of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE), noted, “we are facing a war [...] of narratives, images and perceptions that is unfolding across an immense and fragmented theatre”⁶. Indeed, besides the challenges already identified, France is, after Ukraine, the second most targeted country in Europe for attempts at information manipulation and destabilisation.⁷ The time has therefore come to redefine French soft power in order to regain greater control of the national narrative and to rethink the instruments of influence diplomacy for the digital age.

A. REDEFINING FRENCH SOFT POWER IN THE DIGITAL AGE

France has historically relied on its international standing — a blend of cultural prestige⁸, political universalism⁹ and diplomatic elegance¹⁰ — to assert its influence on the world stage. Today, this model must evolve: visibility alone is no longer enough; the goal is to demonstrate tangible impact grounded in credibility, coherence and the capacity to inspire.

A new soft power strategy first requires a rebalancing between global reach and targeted actions. Rather than pursuing universal visibility, France should concentrate its efforts on priority regions, sectors and communities of interest connected to economic cooperation, university attractiveness, scientific diplomacy, cultural industries and the digital transition. Influence must be built around clearly defined goals and measurable indicators, such as the number of international students accepted, the scale of economic presence, cultural partnerships, or shifts in perception abroad.

Moreover, the effectiveness of soft power depends on stronger coordination between actors. French influence relies on a dense ecosystem of businesses, universities, media, NGOs, local authorities and cultural institutions whose actions often remain fragmented. Under the guidance of the MEAE and the diplomatic network, coordinated governance

⁶ LARCHER (L.), “Guerre informationnelle : comment le Quai d’Orsay lance sa contre-offensive face aux attaques russes”, *La Croix*, 11 Sept. 2025, <https://www.la-croix.com/international/guerre-informationnelle-comment-le-quai-d-orsay-lance-sa-contre-offensive-face-aux-attaques-russes-20250911>.

⁷ ARPAGIAN (N.), “La France assume ses offensives en ligne contre la désinformation”, *Franceinfo*, Nouveau Monde, 20 Sept. 2025, <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinfo/podcasts/nouveau-monde/la-france-assume-ses-offensives-en-ligne-contre-la-desinformation-4881972>.

⁸ LEMNY (S.) (ed.), “D’une politique de rayonnement français à l’étranger”, in *Alphonse Dupront : De la Roumanie*, Presses de l’Inalco, 2023, p. 111, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pressesinalco.47223>.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-121.

could strengthen coherence across initiatives and avoid the dispersion of resources. Building alignment between public and private actors, between the state and civil society, is an essential condition for contemporary soft power.

Finally, the digital dimension must become a central pillar of this strategy. The strategic use of data, global trend monitoring and social media now make it possible to measure message reach in real time, adjust influence campaigns and mobilise target audiences. In this context, France should fully mobilise digital diplomacy by producing content adapted to evolving information dynamics through multilingual campaigns supported by varied creators and media outlets. Such an approach would fall within a broader framework of economic intelligence encompassing monitoring, information protection and influence, a theme explored in detail in [a 2023 report](#) by SKEMA Publika.

This repositioning remains consistent with France's tradition of intellectual and political independence. In Gaullist thought, influence is not measured by accumulated power, but by the ability to stand apart and chart a distinctive course. In a multipolar world, this distinctiveness should now be expressed through creativity and carefully crafted messages and narratives that enhance the appeal of the French model and culture.

B. ANTICIPATING AND FRAMING THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF MAJOR EVENTS

While major events serve as key showcases of a nation's image, their global exposure also makes them particularly vulnerable to controversy and misappropriation. The controversies surrounding certain opening ceremonies have shown just how easily symbolic staging can polarise opinion, both in France and abroad.

To limit these risks, organisers and partner institutions should, from the design stage onwards, adopt a multidisciplinary approach combining sociological, historical and communication perspectives in order to anticipate public reactions. An opening ceremony, a visual or a campaign can be interpreted differently depending on cultural contexts; only an informed, intercultural approach can prevent symbolic misunderstandings.

Beyond foresight, there needs to be a rapid-response mechanism in place — a system for managing the narrative in the event of controversy. Real-time monitoring of reactions on social media, coupled with a swift and context-sensitive communication strategy, would help to prevent a controversy from redefining the event. This proactive approach requires close coordination between communication teams, media partners and key amplifiers, in order to keep the message consistent.

In a digital environment where attention shifts rapidly, narrative control has become a condition for credibility. A delayed or fragmented response can turn a symbol of unity into a source of division. Conversely, a communication strategy that is anticipatory, clear and inclusive can not only protect the national image but also reinforce trust between institutions, organisers and the public.

C. COOPERATING WITH INFLUENCERS AND ADAPTING INFLUENCE DIPLOMACY TO THE DIGITAL SPHERE

The rise of influencers and diverse online communities has profoundly altered the channels through which credibility and messages circulate. Influencers are no longer just intermediaries; they shape representations by setting narrative priorities and steering international perceptions. Their role in how major French events are received illustrates a shift towards decentralised and participatory influence diplomacy.

In this context, France must design **an engagement strategy based on co-creation rather than simple communication**. This involves identifying content creators, journalists and influencers whose values and themes align with the image the country seeks to project, and involving them early in event promotion campaigns. Such partnerships can broaden the reach of these events while preserving narrative consistency.

Mobilising foreign influencers, particularly in Asian, African and American spheres, would also help to expand audiences while fostering a shared model of soft power in which France serves as a platform for dialogue and innovation. This model is already visible at VivaTech, where the participation of international players enhances the fair's credibility, even as it dilutes its specifically French character.

Developing effective influence diplomacy in the digital age therefore depends on strengthening the training and professional skills of public and institutional communicators. The new formats for expression (short-form video, immersive storytelling and editorial partnerships) should be fully integrated into diplomatic strategies. The state, cultural institutions and major-event organisers would all benefit from investing further in understanding the codes of digital platforms, so as to turn these visibility-promoting spaces into drivers of attractiveness rather than sources of risk.

Ultimately, redefining French soft power requires a new alignment between cultural influence, digital diplomacy and control of the national narrative. The shift from a universalist model of international projection to a strategic, measurable and interactive process calls for strengthening (or, where necessary, establishing) coordination between public and private actors, integrating new dynamics of online influence, and recognising digital diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy in its own right, already utilised by many states today.

In response to the intensification of foreign disinformation campaigns, government ministries have gradually begun this transformation. In late 2022, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE) created, within its Press and Communications Directorate, a new Sub-Directorate for Monitoring and Strategy.¹¹ In August 2025, the ministry launched a new X account, [French Response](#), which, according to Anne-Marie Descôtes, is tasked with “restoring facts and correcting perceptions by proactively advancing France’s positions.”¹² Minister Jean-Noël Barrot has stated that the aim is to develop “a clear narrative, strong

¹¹ Ministerial Order of 9 August 2022 amending the Order of 28 December 2012 on the organisation of the central administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NOR: EAEA2221108A, Article 4, 2°.

¹² LARCHER (L.), *op. cit.*

interministerial alignment, and an operational public-private ecosystem.”¹³ This approach aligns closely with our own recommendations, though it currently remains limited to countering foreign interference and should ideally be extended to the broader national narrative.

Nonetheless, these developments mark a real shift in awareness. In a world driven by the viral circulation of images and emotions, influence can no longer be decreed; it must be won and defended. For French soft power to remain credible, it must draw both on the strength of its cultural narratives and on the capacity of its institutions to navigate and master the digital environment. The future of French soft power therefore lies in an integrated approach, in which culture, technology and public communication converge to make France not only a nation of prestige but also a clear and respected voice in the global competition of imaginaries.

¹³ TRUJILLO (E.), “Le virage offensif de Jean-Noël Barrot pour contrer la désinformation russe”, *La Lettre*, 5 Sept. 2025, https://www.lalettre.fr/fr/politique_executif/2025/09/05/le-virage-offensif-de-jean-noel-barrot-pour-contrer-la-desinformation-russe,110518204-evg.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the analysis of perception dynamics and influence mechanisms at work during major cultural, sporting and technological events held in France, several priorities emerge to strengthen the coherence, effectiveness and reach of French soft power in the digital age. These recommendations are structured around eight strategic pillars.

1. **Governance and prioritisation:** strengthen interministerial coordination and ensure coherence between public, private and regional actors.

For events in which the state is directly involved, communication and impact should be organised under a unified steering framework bringing together the relevant ministries (Foreign Affairs, Culture, Sports, Economy, etc.), and including local authorities and cultural stakeholders. This governance should identify priority areas and sectors by targeting regions and communities of interest with strong potential for attractiveness.

2. **Narrative architecture:** adapt the national narrative to the linguistic, cultural and symbolic characteristics of different audiences.

This means producing differentiated messaging for the Francophone and Anglophone spheres, while maintaining consistency overall. “Globalised” events, such as Paris Fashion Week, the Cannes Film Festival and VivaTech, should include explicit markers of French expertise, whether through language, the creativity of Francophone participants or their capacity for innovation. Recurring events, such as Roland-Garros and the Tour de France, should be consolidated as pillars of continuity in the French narrative, embodying constancy and tradition.

3. **Collaborative communication:** shift from a top-down approach to co-creation of content.

Involving influencers, creators, journalists, brands and associations in communication campaigns helps to amplify message reach while preserving narrative consistency. These partnerships should include editorial guidelines, shared objectives, and an evaluation of the campaigns’ reputational impact.

4. **Anticipatory management of controversies:** as they are the symbolic core of major events, opening ceremonies and campaigns should be tested in advance using multidisciplinary analyses.

A rapid-response communication system should be ready to address controversies swiftly, as they arise. This system would include pre-approved messages, designated spokespersons, and coordination with partner organisations. The aim is to prevent symbolic crises from redefining the very meaning of major events.

5. **Real-time monitoring and response:** have multilingual monitoring units in place on social media for every major event, capable of detecting and analysing trends, rumours and hostile campaigns.

These event-specific crisis units should be equipped with monitoring tools and dashboards tracking how the event is received by the public, enabling real-time narrative management.

6. **Enhanced digital presence:** make digital communication a core pillar of influence policy.

Establishing dedicated and coordinated teams to produce multilingual content suited to new communication formats (short-form video, live streaming, data visualisation, immersive storytelling) makes it possible to steer the narrative while aligning it with contemporary audience habits. With this approach, public communicators should be trained in platform-specific codes and viral communication techniques, to turn social media into spaces of influence rather than sources of risk.

7. **Influence measurement:** establish indicators to evaluate the performance of soft power instruments.

Such a policy would make it possible to assess the effectiveness, and therefore the comprehension, of the French narrative, as well as the reactions it generates domestically and internationally. It would also allow continuous tracking of French soft power dynamics and adjustment of future priority actions.

Possible indicators include:

- The proportion of positive emotions associated with major events;
- The proportion of French voices in international conversations;
- The visibility of French markers in Anglophone discourse;
- The evolution of attractiveness indicators.

8. **Continuous improvement loop:** establish a systematic feedback process following each major event.

Comparing the institutional narrative with audience reception makes it possible to identify lessons learned for future editions and upcoming major events. These post-event analyses (this report is an initial attempt) should feed into an annual communication calendar, ensuring the consistency and continuity of messaging and securing an effective French soft power strategy.

CONCLUSION

Focusing on seven major cultural, sporting and technological events held in France between 2022 and 2024 and drawing on sentiment analysis conducted on X-Twitter, this report measures how such events help to shape France's image in the global digital sphere. The analysis confirms the high exposure these events offer, while also revealing an increasing fragmentation of perceptions depending on the type of event, the linguistic sphere, and the category of actors participating in the conversation.

Four main findings emerge. First, one-off events with exceptionally high visibility foster emotional engagement, particularly in the Anglophone sphere, but remain vulnerable to symbolic political and cultural controversies which can reshape how the entire event is interpreted and reduce its effectiveness as an instrument of national soft power. Second, cultural events extend France's aura, but within a competitive arena where other centres of influence impose their own narratives, often to the detriment of French soft power. Third, recurring sporting events play a stabilising role, by conveying a positive and consensual image of France rooted in constancy, heritage and ritual. VivaTech stands apart from the other categories of events, illustrating genuine, non-partisan technological influence, albeit with weaker national anchoring.

The actor-based analysis reveals a polyphony that can be complementary. Political communication tends to be reinterpreted through the prism of domestic divisions; organisers produce professional, unifying and apolitical narratives that are, however, partially challenged by global dynamics; and influencers and online communities amplify visibility while reshaping interpretive frameworks. These dynamics indicate that soft power is now shared and negotiated. Within this ecosystem, France retains its prestige but must actively shape its narrative to prevent distortion by those who relay it.

These findings point to the need for a new French soft power strategy, designed as a strategic, measurable and interactive process. This means prioritising key geographic areas and target communities, strengthening coordination between public and private actors, anticipating controversy through multidisciplinary preparation and rapid-response mechanisms, and fully mobilising digital diplomacy via its formats, metrics and partnerships with content creators. The recommendations outlined translate these directions into operational levers, ranging from governance to impact measurement.

Finally, this study highlights the need for methodological humility and analytical continuity. Drawing exclusively from X-Twitter, it sheds light on robust yet non-exhaustive trends in global opinion. Further research is needed (extension across platforms, longitudinal monitoring, segmentation by audience and region, analysis of influence networks) to refine the dashboards for tracking France's international projection. In a world governed by the viral circulation of images and narratives, influence can no longer be decreed; it must be orchestrated. The French state must now engage in this careful, coherent and adaptive orchestration if it is to remain not only a benchmark but, above all, an audible and credible voice in the global competition of imaginaries. This study paves the way for comparative

research on the influence strategies adopted by other powers in hosting major international events.

skema
THINK TANK

PUBLIKA

SKEMA Publika

SKEMA Business School, Campus Grand Paris
5 Quai Marcel Dassault – CS 90067
92156 Suresnes Cedex, France

Tel.: +33.1.71.13.39.32

Email: publika@skema.edu

Website: www.publika.skema.edu