

THE FUTURE OF SPORT

NEEDS AND IDEAS OF INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FOR USE BY POLICYMAKERS

Part One

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SKEMA PUBLIKA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction 4**
- I. Why sport? What are the individual motivations for engaging in sport? 6**
 - 1. For mental health first, physical health second 6
 - 2. A personal development tool 7
 - 3. For the social benefits: building relationships and handling adversity 7
 - 4. For the enjoyment and emotions 8
 - 5. As a career? 8
 - 6. There are also reasons for non-participation 9
- II. What do young people think of sport as a social and collective pursuit? 13**
 - 1. Sport for community building: “The extraordinary social power of sport” 13
 - 2. Does sport promote universal values? 14
 - 3. Is sport political? 14
 - 4. Sport for the nation, A vector of national pride? 15
 - 5. Sport and inclusion: women’s sports and parasports 16
 - 6. In public discussion: sport, traditional media, social media 18
 - 7. The attitude toward major sporting events 21
- III. How do young people participate in sport? What hinders or encourages sport participation? 23**
 - 1. The family 23
 - 2. Players in the sport movement 23
 - 3. Self-organisation and unorganised sport participation 24
 - 4. Companies 24
 - 5. School 25
 - 6. Government agencies 28
- Summary: What does the future hold? Common requests and recommendations 32**
 - 1. The future of sport according to young people 32
 - 2. The most common requests and recommendations of young people 33
- Authors 36**
- Methodology appendix 37**

INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS STUDY?

In February 2022, SKEMA Publika published a report entitled *Emergy Youth Early Signs (EYES)*, identifying the opinions and feelings of young people from five different countries on five major political themes: work, new technologies, traditional media and the press, social media, and security.¹ As the list of themes was deliberately kept short, sport was not included. However, its considerable importance had not escaped us. This study is intended to fill that gap.

Sport is indeed omnipresent. Globally, in 2022 half of the top trending Google searches were about sport², and particularly cricket and football matches. Sporting events succeed one another, as do the controversies³. With the Rugby World Cup 2023 and the Paris 2024 Olympic Games just around the corner, sport is a daily feature in the media, in political and economy columns, and in conversations with family and friends. Everyone agrees on the importance of promoting sport for all and on the benefits of sport for young people, particularly in terms of improving health, developing autonomy, improving employability, and teaching values. But what do we know about what the younger generation think of it? After all, they are the ones who are going to be discovering it and participating in it (or not). This is a complex subject, as sport is so multidimensional and multifaceted.

In this context, and in keeping with the general aims of SKEMA Publika, we wished to conduct a comprehensive study focusing on sport, so as to identify, based on the expectations expressed by the young people of a number of countries, the major evolutions which are likely but also necessary over a ten-year period, while taking into account the national and international policies currently in place, then put forward some recommendations for national and international policy-makers.

This is a two-part study:

- **The first part, outlined in this document, presents the results of the quantitative and qualitative surveys of thousands of young people from various countries. A summary and some initial recommendations are provided.**
- The second part, due for publication in late 2023, will present the various public policy models in sport around the world, as well as the existing framework of international rules, to attempt to identify the elements among them that could best fulfil the expectations of international youths and address national and international governance issues; it will also look at the role of sport in our societies, possibly as an accelerator of peace, development and sustainability.

For this first part, we wished to identify the views, expectations and needs of young people with regard to sport. We noted many common interests and concerns. Sport is a multidimensional object that touches education, health, work, entertainment and leisure, and the social sphere among other areas; it is also very much linked to personal development and to enjoyment. The geopolitical, soft power, nationalism and identity aspects of sport did not escape the young people surveyed either.

For this first study, on the attitude of young people toward sport, we joined forces with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which seeks to promote peace through education, culture, science and sport, notably by focusing efforts on youth since they are powerful agents of change.

¹ SKEMA Publika, *EYES Report: Thoughts of International Youths*, 2021: <https://publika.skema.edu/eyes-2021-report/>

² 1) Wordle, 2) **India vs England**, 3) Ukraine, 4) Queen Elizabeth, 5) **Ind vs SA**, 6) **World Cup**, 7) **India vs West Indies**, 8) iPhone 14, 9) Jeffrey Dahmer, 10) **Indian Premier League**: <https://trends.google.com/trends/yis/2022/GLOBAL/>

³ Simon Chadwick, *Qatar's Hosting of the FIFA Men's World Cup: the Issues and Challenges Ahead*, November 2022, SKEMA Publika: <https://publika.skema.edu/qatar-hosting-fifa-men-world-cup-issues-and-challenges-ahead/>

UNESCO's Social and Human Sciences Sector contributes daily to promoting sport and quality physical education as catalysts of development and drivers of social transformation.

Through its sport-based flagship "Fit for Life", UNESCO promotes sport to drive outcomes in health, education, gender equality, youth empowerment, and sustainability. This initiative is also aimed at empowering the younger generations so that they may use the power of sport to combat all forms of discrimination and unify countries and cultures beyond national borders.

OUR METHODOLOGY

The detailed methodology is annexed to this report.

To gather the opinions of young people, we performed a digital scan of the social media platform Twitter. **Approximately 7.6 million tweets were analysed across 7 geographical areas:** 5 countries, corresponding to the five SKEMA Business School campus locations (France, USA, South Africa, Brazil, China), and two zones in Africa (French-speaking Africa and English-speaking Africa). The posts studied were published by more than 670,000 individuals between the ages of 18 and 24. The analysis covers two study periods, each spanning one year: a first phase took place from 24 October 2021 to 24 October 2022, and a second from 16 January 2022 to 16 January 2023.

We also conducted qualitative interviews with 95 students from SKEMA Business School and EFAP (an international school of communication), representing 18 different nationalities. These students engaged in a wide variety of sports: volleyball, running, squash, swimming, tennis, athletics, horse riding, football, futsal, badminton, Basque pelota, cycling, skiing, basketball, dance (modern jazz and hip hop), body building, triathlon, chess, fencing, table tennis, boxing, windsurfing, surfing, wakeboarding, walking, padel tennis, climbing. To avoid a profile bias, 41 of the students were interviewed precisely because they do not do any sport.

The following pages present what was gleaned from the young people's in-person and virtual conversations.

I. WHY SPORT? WHAT ARE THE INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATIONS FOR ENGAGING IN SPORT?

Young people aged 18 to 24 primarily engage in sport for the benefits to their mental health and self-confidence. The most recurring motivations are the educational virtues, the opportunity to make friends, the need to compete against others, and the fun of playing. Very few of the students interviewed had considered becoming career athletes. Several would like to work in the sports industry, but in other occupations, not as athletes. Of the young people surveyed who do not do any kind of sport, half feel a real aversion to it. The other half are hindered by a lack of time and money.

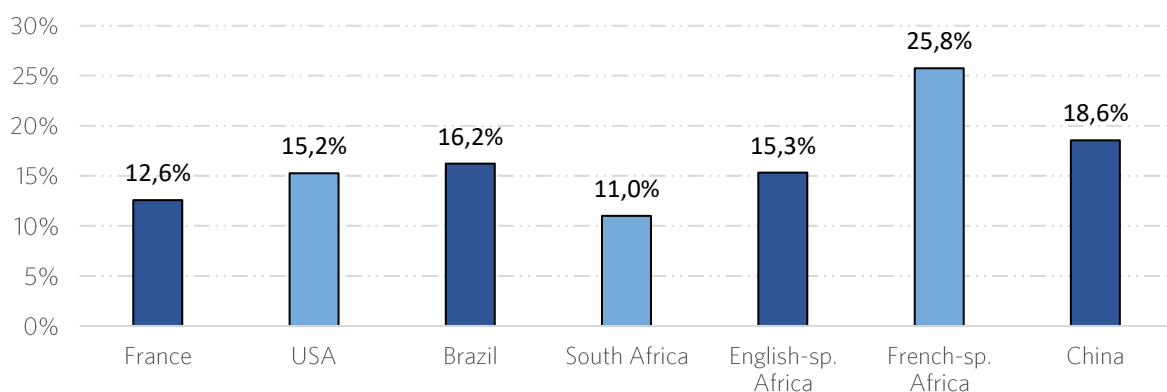
1. FOR MENTAL HEALTH FIRST, PHYSICAL HEALTH SECOND

The mental health theme emerged very clearly as a key point in the Twitter study, particularly in the United States and Brazil. It is mentioned in relation to the benefits of engaging in sport (this also emerged during the student interviews), but also, paradoxically, in relation to the **psychological pressure young high-performance athletes can feel**.

The interviews we conducted with the students of several nationalities revealed that one of the prime motivations for engaging in sport is its **mental health benefits**. The students mentioned this before even talking about physical health. To them, sport is “me time”, time to “break from the routine of work”, “think about nothing”, “let off steam”, “let their mind drift”, “relax”... They see sport as a bubble where they can disconnect, something that is necessary and essential if they are to thrive in the other aspects of their lives (work, studies).

For these sport participants (all levels), sport is an integral part of a routine. One French student shared that he “could not cope mentally without sport”. Another explained that sport had helped her overcome depression. One of the Indian students interviewed shared that sport gives him a sense of freedom.

On Twitter, **the sport and exercise for health theme** represents 547,800 results⁴. Of the total number of tweets relating to this theme over the period, the average proportion of tweets posted by young people (aged 18 to 24)⁵ is **15.3%**. Young people from French-speaking Africa were the most active on this topic with **25.8%** of posts, followed by China (18.6%), Brazil (16.2%), and English-speaking Africa (15.3%). With 11%, South Africa is the country where young people make up the smallest proportion of the results relating to the sport and exercise for health theme.



Proportion of tweets published by 18- to 24-year-olds in the total number of tweets on the “sport and exercise for health” theme, by geographical location, with no age filter. Interpretation note: in French-speaking Africa, 25.8% of the tweets about “sport and exercise for health” were published by 18- to 24-year-olds.

⁴ Keywords: well-being, mind, body, health, confidence, self-esteem, weight, lifestyle, diet, discipline, determination, willpower, learning, mental health, effort, sharing, team spirit, emotion, connecting, fun.

⁵ Initial social listening phase from 24 October 2022 to 24 October 2023.

I. WHY SPORT? WHAT ARE THE INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATIONS FOR ENGAGING IN SPORT?

Approximately 40% of the most engaging tweets from each country or geographical zone mention the positive role of sport. They speak of it in terms of well-being and self-confidence, in other words by mentioning the psychological benefits of engaging in sport in addition to its more common effects on general health. Several of the students interviewed mentioned that sport allowed them to “feel better in their body” and that “keeping fit” is important to them.

On the other hand, the topic of psychological pressure in high-performance sport was particularly prevalent in the United States. One third of the tweets posted and analysed mentioned mental health. In France, the topic appeared in a similar manner on the subject of rugby. The prevalence of this topic seems to crystallise a growing awareness among young people in recent years of the mental health issues high-performance and elite athletes must contend with. The debates surrounding Simone Biles’ withdrawal from competing with the US gymnastics team during the Tokyo Summer Olympics in 2021 spring to mind, as do the American-Japanese tennis player Naomi Osaka’s refusal to take part in a press conference during the French Open in order to protect her mental health, and the suicide of the French rugby player Jordan Michallet in 2022.

Only two students from our panel mentioned **physical appearance as a motivation for exercising**. They mentioned wanting an athletic and desirable body. One tweet by a young Chinese man linked self-confidence to one’s figure. Several French students felt that “staying trim” is a rather common goal in French sports culture, as opposed, in their opinion, to other countries.

2. A PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOL

One Algerian student explained that they saw sport as a tool for personal development. More generally, the students interviewed recognised that sport had allowed them to **develop skills that were complementary to those acquired in school and transferable to the professional world**. Among the most mentioned were: the value of effort, managing failure, the ability to work as a team, adaptability, perseverance, discipline, and leadership.

The sense of **personal accomplishment** and **pushing one’s limits** were two concepts mentioned several times during the interviews with the students, who used the terms “pushing physical limits”, “cult of performance”, “competing with oneself”, and “battle against oneself”. Engaging in sport regularly over several years has enabled many of the students to **improve their self-esteem** through witnessing their own progress. Some of them reported having overcome a lack of self-confidence and certain mental barriers around their own abilities. During the interviews, one student who rides horses explained that his bond with his mare and the need to “understand and control the animal” had helped him to “come out of his shell”. Another, from China, confided that he “was ‘himself’ thanks to sport”. And finally, a student from El Salvador who loves to run said she would never have thought herself capable of what she is achieving now. **Here again, an increase in confidence seems to be one of the most significant benefits of engaging in sport.**

A French chess player spoke about the endurance and the great capacity for concentration he has developed through playing. Although chess is a brain game, here it reflects what sport requires: the ability to focus for prolonged periods and a capacity for anticipatory adaptation. Today, in the era of social media and of digital technology that constantly demands our attention, these abilities seem harder to develop.

3. FOR THE SOCIAL BENEFITS: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND HANDLING ADVERSITY

The group element is an essential part of sporting activities for all the young people interviewed. It was of course mentioned by those who play team sports, but also those in individual sports, who never train, play or fight alone. Team mates and opponents are an integral part of the sporting experience and of the relationships it builds. **The social aspect** of the activity is thus a major motivation for engaging in sport: forging friendships, getting together with friends to play — these undeniably drive young people to participate in sports. The link between sport and friendship was mentioned in several interviews.

The importance of the competitive aspect was mentioned by several other young sport participants. Competing against others enabled them to better evaluate their level and their value, but also to learn to deal with failure and to self-reflect. However, several of the female students we interviewed rejected competition, seeing it as a source of stress and a reason to stop taking part in a sport. Their preference went to recreational sports.

On Twitter, rivalry in sport is almost exclusively seen as positive and healthy by the 18- to 24-year-olds in the countries studied. As an example, several tweets commented on Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal's tearful farewell after the Swiss player's final professional match on 24 September 2022. On this subject, one of the French students we interviewed insisted on the "strong link between adversity and friendship". He spoke of having forged incredible friendships with opponents of all nationalities, all of whom he had met during international competitions. A tweet by a young person living in China illustrates this dialectic perfectly: "Friendship first, competition second' has always been our approach to sport".

In this respect, a former high-performance table tennis player from China compared the Chinese and English sporting cultures. Unlike in China, where players compete against very few strangers, in the United Kingdom it is easy to meet new opponents thanks to the many tournaments organised by clubs. He also feels that in China it is more difficult to "share the enjoyment of the game with other players".

4. FOR THE ENJOYMENT AND EMOTIONS

Most of the students interviewed told us that to them **sport was above all a recreational activity, a passion, a source of enjoyment**. Many consider it a game or a fun activity. Excitement and fun seem to be essential factors in sport participation. One French student described sport as "from an emotional standpoint, perhaps the only domain that can affect absolutely everybody".

On Twitter, many of the most engaging posts from English-speaking Africa contained the word "fun" to describe sport participation. Several of the students interviewed mentioned how difficult it is to maintain a high level of motivation when engaging in individual sports such as running or fitness training. It would thus seem that enjoyment in sport comes from the element of play and the group setting. In this respect, one student distinguished between "working out" — which he saw more as a chore — and "engaging in sport" — which he associated with enjoyment.

Online, it is primarily the emotions felt as a spectator that are described. For example, the word "**emotion**" clearly highlighted the almost religious fervour that football inspires in Brazil. Proportionally speaking, young Brazilians use this term more than the youth of any of the other countries or zones studied. The below tweet is just one of many, but perfectly illustrates this phenomenon:

"I don't know if I really trust people who don't have a football team. Where do you learn things like frustration? Sadness? Rivalry? Where do you release all the anger and hatred that exist in your soul? Weird..."

The French anthropologist Philippe Descola talks about emotion in similar terms: "And the emotion we feel when we see a great play in sport also stems from the possibility [...] of making that play ourselves via the mind, of imagining what we might have done had we been the artist or athlete [...] and in particular of the awareness that there is a chasm between what we could do ourselves and what we are observing"⁶. This is what sparks admiration and is behind the essential role of sports figures in a society.

5. AS A CAREER?

Few of the students we interviewed had seriously considered a career as a professional athlete. Yet, many of them want to work in the sporting world.

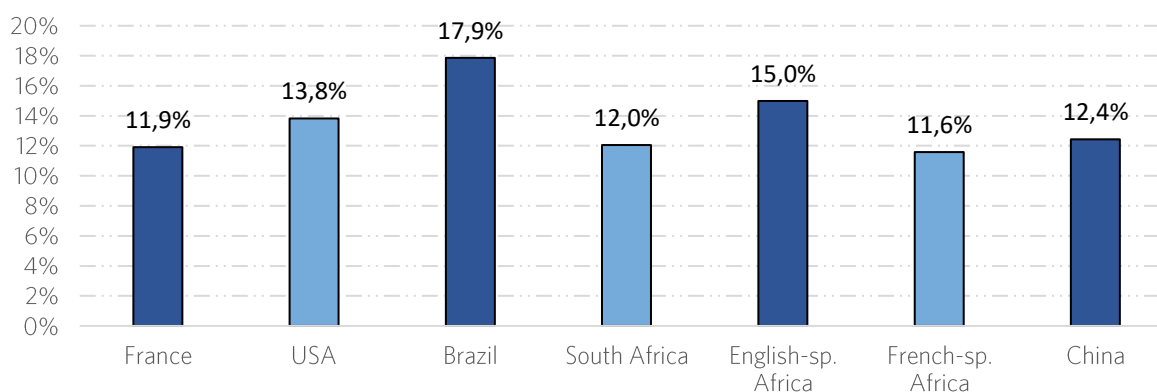
⁶ Philippe Descola, *Le sport est-il un jeu ?*, Homo Lundens, p. 55.

I. WHY SPORT? WHAT ARE THE INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATIONS FOR ENGAGING IN SPORT?

Two French students said they had received offers of sports scholarships from American universities following visits from agents scouting for talent at their clubs (athletics and tennis). They explained that they had turned down these opportunities for the following reasons:

- despite the scholarship offered, it was still cheaper to do their higher studies in France;
- the American collegiate sports system is seen as showing little regard for the health of its athletes: the pace is considered extremely physically demanding, with results and performance being the only criteria for continued funding, as the universities do not invest in their athletes for the long term.

Over the period studied, there were **around 2 million tweets on the topic of professional sport**⁷. It was the most prolific theme by far. Proportionally speaking, it was young Brazilians who tweeted the most on this topic (17.9% for an average of 13.5%). Young people from France and the United States made up the highest proportion of those mentioning the word “career” (11.9% and 9.8% respectively, for an average of 7.3%). **Generally speaking, the tweets on this topic were comments about the latest sports news; there were very few personal statements about the career aspirations of web users.**



Proportion of tweets posted by 18- to 24-year-olds in the total number of tweets (no age filter) on the topic of “professional sport”, by geographical location. Interpretation note: in Brazil, 17.9% of the tweets about “professional sport” were posted by 18- to 24-year-olds.

6. THERE ARE ALSO REASONS FOR NON-PARTICIPATION

While sport participants were rather enthusiastic in responding to our requests for interviews — which stipulated that any student could take part in the study, regardless of their sporting abilities —, it was harder to get non-participants to take an interest. And yet, they are many.

If we leave aside the specific case of young people, according to the WHO 27.5% of adults around the world do not achieve the levels of physical activity recommended for improving and protecting their health. Furthermore, inactivity is more widespread in high-income countries (36.8%) than in low-income countries (16.2%). Of even greater concern is the fact that 81% of children around the world are not achieving the recommended one hour of physical activity per day⁸. According to the 2022 Eurobarometer on sport and physical activity, 45% of the Europeans surveyed reported that they never exercise and 17% that they only do so very rarely⁹. Additionally, according to Eurostat¹⁰, in 2019 **approximately 44% of the European population** engaged in physical activities at least once a week and one third spent at least 150 minutes per week exercising. In France, 44% reported engaging in a physical activity, while the Nordic countries culminate at 70% or more.

⁷ Keywords: future, career, opportunity, federation, professional, sports-study, high performance, club, coach, family.

⁸ World Health Organization, Global Status Report on Physical Activity 2022, October 2022, p. 7.

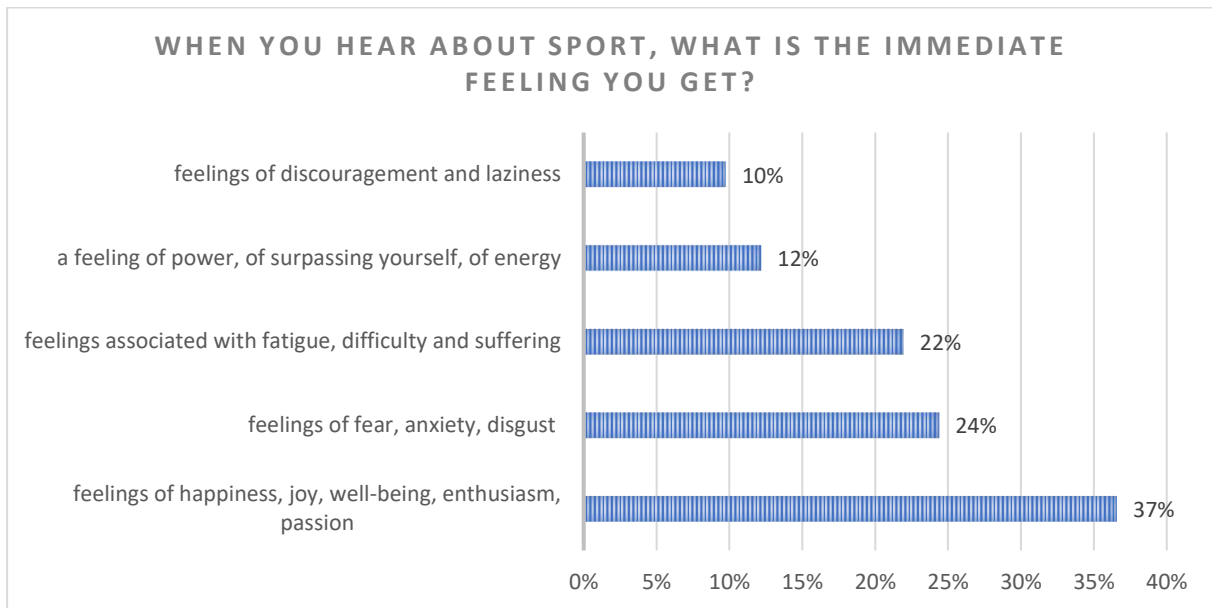
⁹ Special Eurobarometer 525, Sport and Physical Activity, April-May 2022, Kantar, p. 9.

¹⁰ Eurostat, Statistics on Sport Participation, April 2022: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_sport_participation#Leisure_time_physical_activities.

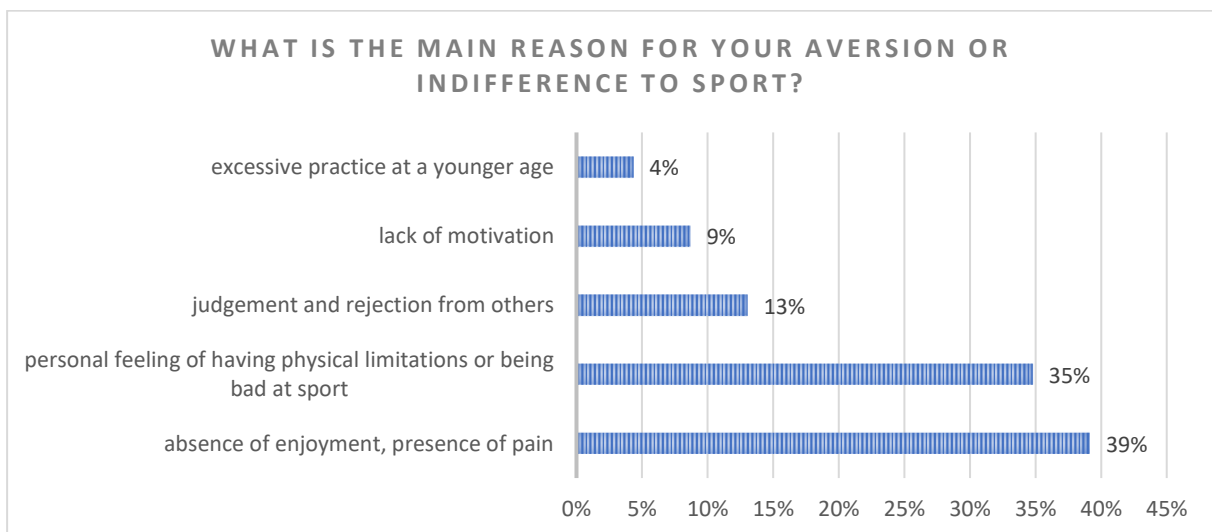
I. WHY SPORT? WHAT ARE THE INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATIONS FOR ENGAGING IN SPORT?

In an attempt to understand the reasons for physical inactivity among the young people in question, we surveyed SKEMA students via an online questionnaire specifically aimed at individuals who do not exercise or engage in any type of sport. 41 individuals answered our survey: 59% of respondents were women; 21% were international students. The respondents came from several countries: France, China, Singapore, Brazil, Lebanon, India, Kuwait, Turkiye, the United States, etc.

The feelings toward sport were shared by the panel of respondents despite the diversity in nationalities. 37% of respondents instinctively associate sport with a positive feeling, with happiness or with joy. They reported that their non-participation in sport was due to practical reasons – mainly a lack of time or money. Nearly a quarter of respondents associate sport with a feeling of fear, anxiety or disgust. Another quarter with the idea of tiredness, difficulty or suffering. Finally, 12% associate sport with a feeling of power and of pushing personal limits, and 10% with discouragement and laziness.

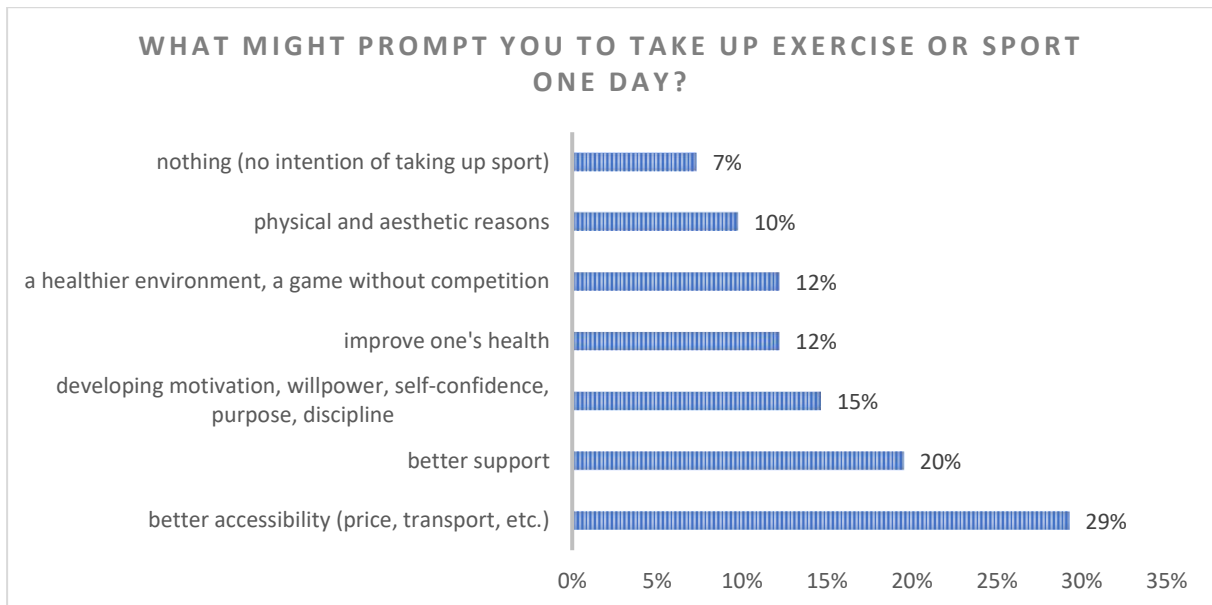


Of the **23 individuals who reported disliking sport or being indifferent to it**, 39% felt that this aversion or indifference was due to an absence of enjoyment and personal gratification. Many of them have not found a discipline they truly enjoy. Many also find that sport is too physically “painful”. 35% think they are physically limited or simply “bad” at sport. Finally, 13% attribute the rejection to a negative social experience where they felt judged or rejected by their teammates or peers.



I. WHY SPORT? WHAT ARE THE INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATIONS FOR ENGAGING IN SPORT?

When asked “**What might prompt you to take up exercise or a sport one day?**”, 29% of respondents requested that sport be made more accessible and felt that cost, transport, and a lack of time were factors hindering their participation. 20% felt that the solution lies in better support, from coaches, friends, the university, etc., while 15% felt that they need to work on their motivation and discipline. 12% stated that they would begin to exercise if their health deteriorated, and 10% would do so to improve their physical appearance. 10% of respondents would like a healthier environment free from competition. Finally, 7% stated that nothing could induce them to take up exercise or a sport.

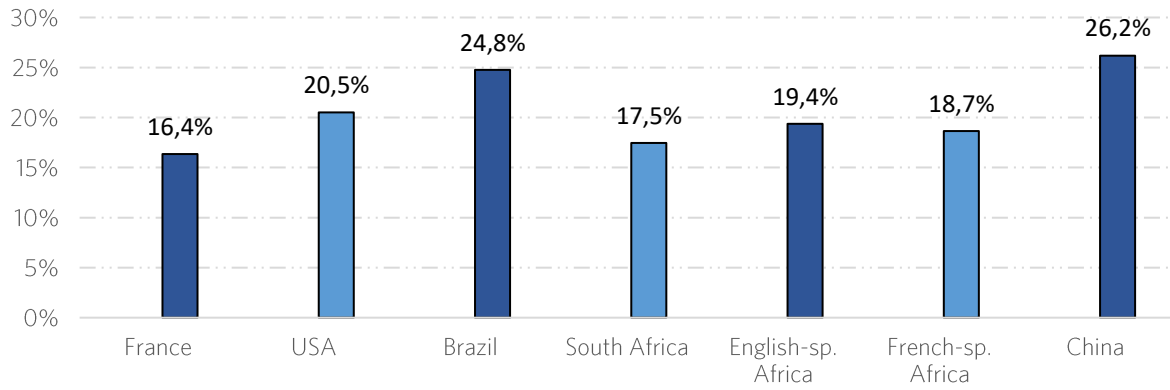


However, it is interesting to note that 64% of respondents are nevertheless spectators of sporting events. They reported watching them with their family and friends, since sportspeople are a source of inspiration. They also see sport as entertainment.

On Twitter, over the period spanning 16 January 2022 to 16 January 2023, we isolated **106,307 tweets expressing a rejection of sport**.¹¹ The highest proportion of young people posting about the subject was in China (26% of tweets with no age filter), followed by Brazil (25%) and the United States (21%). In France, Brazil and the United States, two trends emerge. On the one hand, there is clear criticism directed at the sports industry and at sport as show-business — racism among football fans in France, omnipresence of sport on television and in conversations in the United States, criticism of the football industry in Brazil —. On the other hand, there is a marked hostility toward personal sport participation. Young Twitter users mention the discomfort or even the physical suffering caused by engaging in sport, or an aversion to physical contact. In English-speaking Africa, it is the competence of referees or the omnipresence of sport in the social sphere that attract criticism. In all the geographical areas studied, numerous Twitter users stressed that they disliked sport yet could not resist watching major sporting events.

¹¹ Keywords: I hate, hated, despise, I don't like, never, I don't do; additional social listening phase from 16 January 2022 to 16 January 2023.

I. WHY SPORT? WHAT ARE THE INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATIONS FOR ENGAGING IN SPORT?



Proportion of tweets posted by 18- to 24-year-olds in the total number of tweets (no age filter) on the "aversion to sport" theme, by geographical location. Interpretation note: in China, 26.2% of the tweets expressing an aversion to sport were posted by 18- to 24-year-olds.



II. WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK OF SPORT AS A SOCIAL AND COLLECTIVE PURSUIT?

1. SPORT FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING: “THE EXTRAORDINARY SOCIAL POWER OF SPORT”

Sport is seen as having a very high social potential. Accordingly, several French students described sport as a **tool for social integration, cohesion and mixing**, enabling **interactions between generations** and between people from **different social categories**. According to them, given the diversity encountered in sports clubs, there is no better place for breaking down the walls within society. The pain of effort seemed to be a catalyst for friendships that endured outside of the sporting activity. This social mixing applies to sport participants, but also to spectators. In fact, the French anthropologist Philippe Descola identifies the stadium as a place where people can talk to one another, “to step outside of [their] private sphere and [their] own area of interest to find a common ground.”¹²

One French student also described sport as a “social elevator”, basing his reasoning on the high number of French footballers from Seine-Saint-Denis, the department with the highest rate of poverty in metropolitan France¹³. In 2015, in his book entitled *Sciences Sociales Football Club*, the economist Bastien Drut identified the origins of French Ligue 1 players: 7% of the players during the 1995-1996 season were born in Seine-Saint-Denis, versus 17% in 2013-2014¹⁴. A *Le Parisien* article quoting these figures gives the rise in population density as the reason for this increase. Let us put these figures from the world of professional football back into perspective. In 2021, the French Football Federation boasted more than 1.7 million players, 708,300 of which were aged 16 or over. Yet, the federation had only 2,982 players under contract, i.e. less than 0.4% of the players aged 16 and over.¹⁵ While the social elevator has worked for a small number of the most talented individuals, it is not a social reality. An expert in high-performance football coaching working on the African and European continents shared with us that although this idea of sport as a social elevator is a fallacy, it is a commonly held idea in Africa, particularly among the young people of Senegal. He found the same illusion – because that is what it is – among young people from the suburbs of Paris and Marseille.

Overall, our interviews showed that young people of all nationalities see sport in a positive light, as **an instrument of integration and social emancipation**. Several French students also mentioned it as an emancipation tool for women. Others gave the example of friends for whom sport had helped ease great difficulties they were facing socially and at school, by offering them a space where they could develop their self-confidence and maturity.

However, in reality, the emancipation of women could actually be a Western concept. Indeed, according to our expert on African countries, the concept of emancipation through sport is sometimes poorly understood and parents, for instance, can represent a real cultural barrier. As for bad influences, presenting sport as a way to avoid them is a generalisation we will not make.

The Chinese students interviewed insisted on **how important great sports figures are for society, since people see them as inspirational models**. In China, people particularly enjoy learning about their life stories. The researcher Marcus P. Chu mentioned that champions, who are seen as heroes, frequently had to take part in official propaganda activities¹⁶. The French students mentioned the importance of sportspeople as “role models”, and admiration for great sports figures. They are admired both for their sporting achievements and for the values they promote: humility, sacrifice, striving to be better, hard work, etc. These students also mentioned sports

¹² Philippe Descola, *Le sport est-il un jeu ?*, Homo Lundens, p. 58.

¹³ The poverty rate was 27.9% in 2019. According to a study by INSEE (the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies): <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6436484?sommaire=6036904>.

¹⁴ *Le Parisien*, “VIDEO. Data football club : la banlieue est-elle sous représentée dans le foot français ?”, 2 June 2016. <https://www.leparisien.fr/sports/video-data-football-club-la-banlieue-est-elle-sous-representee-dans-le-foot-francais-02-06-2016-5850727.php>.

¹⁵ FFF, Licence statistics, 2021-2022 season.

¹⁶ Marcus P. Chu, ‘Introduction’, *China’s Quest for Sporting Mega-Events: The Politics of International Bids*, 2020, p. 1.

II. WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK OF SPORT AS A SOCIAL AND COLLECTIVE PURSUIT?

personalities using their influence to promote great causes: anti-racism, the fight against world hunger, etc. On Twitter, the keywords “determination” and “willpower” (used in nearly 11,000 tweets across the 7 geographical areas studied) enabled the identification of many tweets posted by young Americans, Chinese and Africans expressing their admiration for internationally-renowned sportspeople to whom they attribute these qualities. Sports personalities are also seen as vectors of influence, as illustrated by a French tweet about the fact that Kylian Mbappé, “a guy from Bondy” (a town in Seine-Saint-Denis), had refused to join the Real Madrid football team in May 2022; the tweet concluded that “suburbia influences the world”.

2. DOES SPORT PROMOTE UNIVERSAL VALUES?

The students feel that sport promotes universal values: respect, culture of effort, striving to be better, sharing, friendship, excellence, etc. A tweet published by a young person from English-speaking Africa described sport as “a powerful tool for promoting peace and tolerance.” Thus, by bringing people together in clubs, in teams or around a common goal, sport promotes “common social values”. According to several French students, sport transcends cultural and religious differences. It should thus be an integral part of everyone’s education.

During the second phase of social listening, we searched for **tweets relating to Olympism and its values**. Over the year 2022, we identified **30,800 tweets** on this topic¹⁷. The word ‘olympism’ was barely mentioned. It does not seem to be part of the 18 to 24 age group’s lexicon; perhaps it is too specific. The expression “sports values” was more commonly used, in a prescriptive manner in all the geographical areas studied. In France and the United States, certain Twitter users lamented that countries such as Qatar, China or Saudi Arabia, which abuse human rights, are allowed to host major sporting events.

On the question of values, one expert we interviewed clarified an important point: **sport does not in itself promote or instigate values. Societies can, however, choose to use it as an instrument for promoting values and virtues they hold dear.** Sportspeople can then choose whether or not to espouse these. Indeed, the sporting world is frequently the theatre of numerous scandals involving sexual harassment and abuse; violent clashes between spectators (hooliganism in England, for example); racism toward certain players; drug scandals, etc.

One French-Portuguese student mentioned the three Fs, “fado, Fátima, football”, the values of Portugal which Salazar sought to promote under his dictatorship. In doing so, she was referring to the use of **sport as a tool for indoctrinating populations**. This reference also reflects the way nation states use sport as a tool for power and differentiation at the international level.

3. IS SPORT POLITICAL?

In response to the question “How do you see the future of sport?”, one French student mentioned **its growing politicisation**, the increasingly unrestrained use of sport as a tool for international prominence, and the influence geopolitical tensions and rivalries have on the sporting world.

We tracked the word ‘politics’ during the second phase of social listening, from 16 January 2022 to 16 January 2023, and found the word in 240,000 tweets. In all of the geographical areas studied, the tweets could be divided into two groups: a first group of pragmatic Twitter users who observed that sport and politics have been intertwined throughout history, and a second group that expressed a normative view according to which sport should not be political. This tweet by a young man from South Africa (taken from an account that has since been deleted) perfectly illustrates the views of the first group, citing as an example the South African government’s political use of sport during the Apartheid.

People like saying sports and politics shouldn't mix as if the Apartheid **government** didn't deeply infuse politics in **sport**. In SA, to ignore the political/legal component of sports is to perpetuate the negative experiences of players like Makhaya Ntini and Paul Adams. [A12](#)

¹⁷ Keywords and expressions: olympism, values, IOC and international olympic committee.

II. WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK OF SPORT AS A SOCIAL AND COLLECTIVE PURSUIT?

In Brazil, France, the United States and South Africa, the most engaging tweets pointed out politicians or commentators who proclaim that sport is apolitical while using it to achieve their own ends. In Brazil, several tweets commented on the political support expressed by sports personalities, and particularly Neymar, who publicly endorsed Jair Bolsonaro's re-election bid in 2022. In the United States, the expression that appeared the most often in the most popular tweets was "keep politics out of sport". It was used by Twitter users to express a demand, particularly in relation to the impact of anti-abortion laws on female athletes, and was also ascribed to political personalities who claim to support this view yet do not apply it to themselves.

Finally, the debates shift to the geopolitical arena. **These discussions about the geopolitical aspects** of sport¹⁸ make up a little more than 63,000 tweets. In the United States, there are opposing views on whether or not certain nations should be allowed to participate in major sporting events, in light of the international response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, for example. In both French-speaking and English-speaking Africa, several Twitter users pointed out the inconsistency and hypocrisy shown by FIFA or the IOC in choosing which countries to ban or not while preaching about the political neutrality and universalism of sport. Numerous tweets denounced a double standard and questioned why Russia was banned when other countries commit crimes that go unpunished (Israel is mentioned in several tweets). The Chinese tweets identified regretted the diplomatic boycott of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics and the politicisation of the Olympic movement. Similarly, during the interviews conducted with SKEMA students, one Chinese student felt that politics had no place in international sport and that it was unfair to ban athletes on account of the actions of their government (here she was referring more particularly to the case of Russia).

Evidently, young people's posts on Twitter show that they really do see sport as a group of activities in which a state exerts its influence. Numerous French, American and Brazilian tweets mentioned Qatar and Saudi Arabia using sport as a tool for soft power. Here again, an American tweet summarised some young people's annoyance with this double standard: "It's soft power when we like the country but sports washing when we don't."

Several young people from English-speaking Africa want Pan-Africanism in sport to develop the continent's influential power. In French-speaking Africa, the most popular tweets mentioned Morocco's new soft power following the history-making performance of the men's national football team at the World Cup.

In addition, young people of all nationalities interlaced sport and music, mentioning the Nigerian singer Davido's interpretation of the official World Cup 2022 anthem and the performance by the South Korean singer Jungkook (BTS) during the opening ceremony as real levers of influence for each of these two countries.

Finally, several tweets by young French-speaking Africans discussed the impact of geopolitics on sport, and namely the difficulties African athletes face in obtaining visas for the United States, or the difficulties Moroccan athletes encounter when wanting to enter Algeria. One conclusion emerges from these tweets: politics influences sport and sport influences politics.

4. SPORT FOR THE NATION, A VECTOR OF NATIONAL PRIDE?

For one of the groups of students interviewed, the fact that people sing their national anthem together at sporting events while facing flags is **proof of the importance of sport in nation building**. Other examples of this phenomenon were also mobilised. They mentioned comparable semantics when expressing a victory or a defeat ("*France is world champion*"); they also underlined the links between national pride and sport, citing as an example the fact that the king of Saudi Arabia had declared a public holiday to celebrate the national team's victory over Argentina at the football World Cup in 2022. According to the young people interviewed, sport has the power to unify the people, particularly through supporting the national teams.

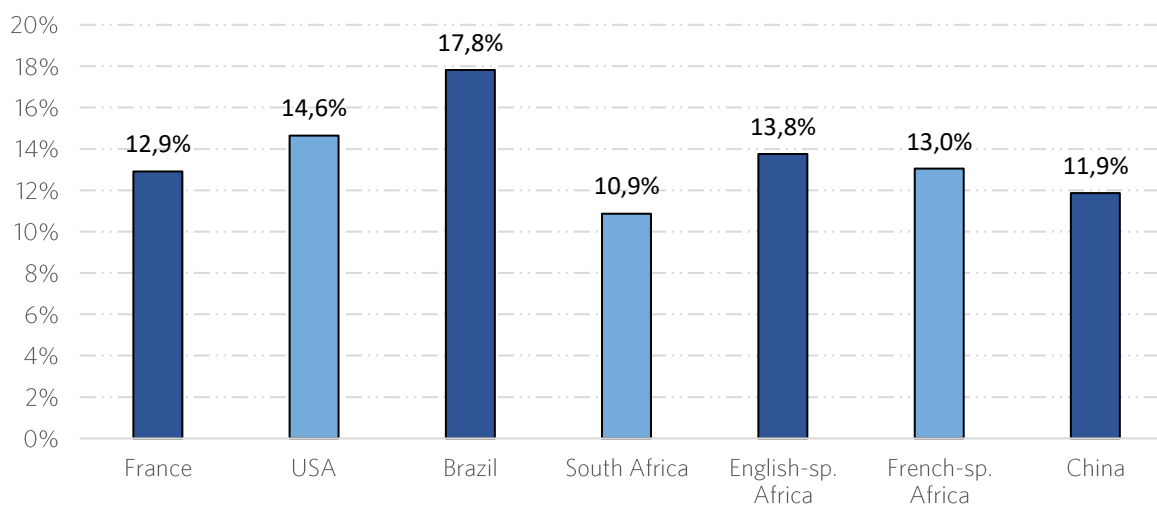
¹⁸ Keywords: international relations, diplomacy, geopolitical, influence, soft power. From 16 January 2022 to 16 January 2023.

II. WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK OF SPORT AS A SOCIAL AND COLLECTIVE PURSUIT?

On Twitter, spontaneous posts **around the idea of nation in sport**¹⁹ represented 778,100 of results, or a little over 3% of all conversations about sport (32 million tweets). The two countries in which young people discussed this topic the most were Brazil (17.8%) and the United States (14.6%).

The relative importance that young Brazilians seem to attach to this aspect of sport could be interpreted as reflecting a need for a strong separate identity on a continent where, according to the French anthropologist Philippe Descola, the cultural differences between countries “are not considerable”.²⁰

The construction of a national identity through sport was also mentioned directly in several tweets by young English-speaking and French-speaking Africans. Among young French-speaking Africans, the expression most frequently associated with the word “nation” was “a great sports/football/rugby nation”.



Proportion of tweets posted by 18- to 24-year-olds in the total number of tweets (no age filter) around the idea of nation in sport, by geographical area. Interpretation note: in Brazil, 17.8% of the tweets about nation and sport were posted by 18- to 24-year-olds.

When we tracked the word ‘pride’, the tweets were not especially about national pride. The most engaging French and Brazilian tweets were mainly about football, often to express admiration for a team or an athlete. In the United States, the word ‘pride’ tended to be associated with university teams, a reflection of the importance of college sports in that country.

We did not specifically study whether sport can be a **marker of cultural identity**.

5. SPORT AND INCLUSION: WOMEN’S SPORTS AND PARASPORTS

During the first phase of social listening on Twitter, **numerous references to women’s sport featured** among the most popular tweets for the different themes. Their context: pride in women’s rugby in France, in women’s boxing in the United States, in female sports journalists in Nigeria; future of women’s football in South Africa and France; numerous references to the Women’s Africa Cup of Nations in English-speaking Africa; reference to identity and to women’s boxing in China; and whether or not there is a lack of media coverage of women’s sports in Brazil, France and the United States. The youth of all the geographical areas studied seemed to discuss the subject.

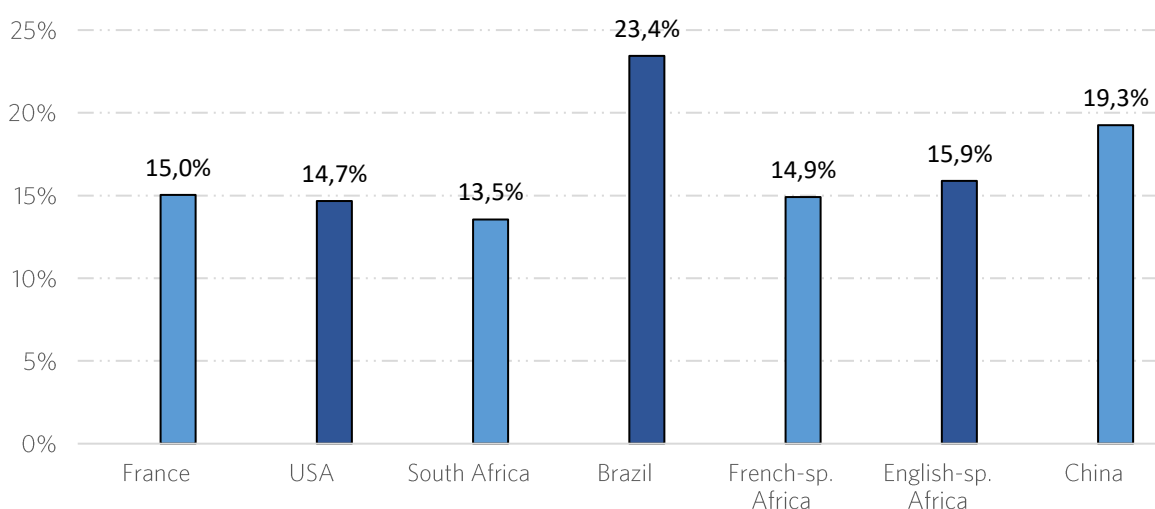
¹⁹ Keywords: nation, proud, pride, unity, identity, patriotism, flag, supporter, competition, rivalry.

²⁰ Philippe Descola, *Le sport est-il un jeu ?*, Homo Lundens, p.49.

II. WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK OF SPORT AS A SOCIAL AND COLLECTIVE PURSUIT?

As a result, during the second phase of the study we specifically tracked this theme by searching for the words woman, female and girl. **1.4 million tweets were identified, making this a major concern of young people.** The young people of Brazil seemed the most invested, with 23% of all tweets coming from young people between the ages of 18 and 24. The most engaging tweets in the seven geographical areas studied claimed to support and encourage the development of women's sport. In South Africa, the discussions centred around the victory of the national team during the Women's Africa Cup of Nations in 2022. In France and in French-speaking Africa, **the most engaging tweets were asking for women-only sporting facilities to be opened.** In China, the tweets may have been fewer in number (3,600), but the Twitter users applauded the achievements of high-performing female athletes. Finally, in France, the most engaging tweet (17.9K likes and nearly 8,000 retweets) mobilised Twitter users against the hijab ban at sporting events, deeming the measure to be discriminatory while forgetting the republican and secular context in which sporting competitions are held.

Several of the French students interviewed mentioned women's sport as an essential area to develop for the future of sport. Several female students mentioned the obstacles young girls can come up against in their adolescent years: gendered social perception of sport, difficulties in coping with puberty and juggling menstruation and sport, a subject that remains taboo.



Proportion of tweets posted by 18- to 24-year-olds in the total number of tweets (no age filter) on the topic of women's sport, by geographical location. Interpretation note: in Brazil, 23.4% of the tweets about women's sport were posted by 18- to 24-year-olds.

The development of women's sport, whether at the competitive level or not, is an essential issue for our societies. The most recent WHO report on physical activity pointed out that "in most countries women are less active than men", and that teenage girls (aged 11 to 17) "are more inactive than boys [...] (85% and 77.6% respectively)"²¹. Women's rejection of competition (mentioned earlier) is cited as one of the many reasons for this regrettable finding²². Our own study reflects this major imbalance. On Twitter, our records show 25.9 million tweets published by 18- to 24-year-olds in our seven geographical areas between 8 December 2021 and 24 October 2022. Men were the authors of 65.8% of these and women a mere 34.2%. In addition to this, in the group of SKEMA students who voluntarily agreed to talk to us about sport, there were 14 men and 5 women²³. The trend is reversed in our survey aimed at non-participants in sport, where almost 59% of respondents were women.

²¹ World Health Organization, *Global Status Report on Physical Activity 2022*, October 2022, p. 8.

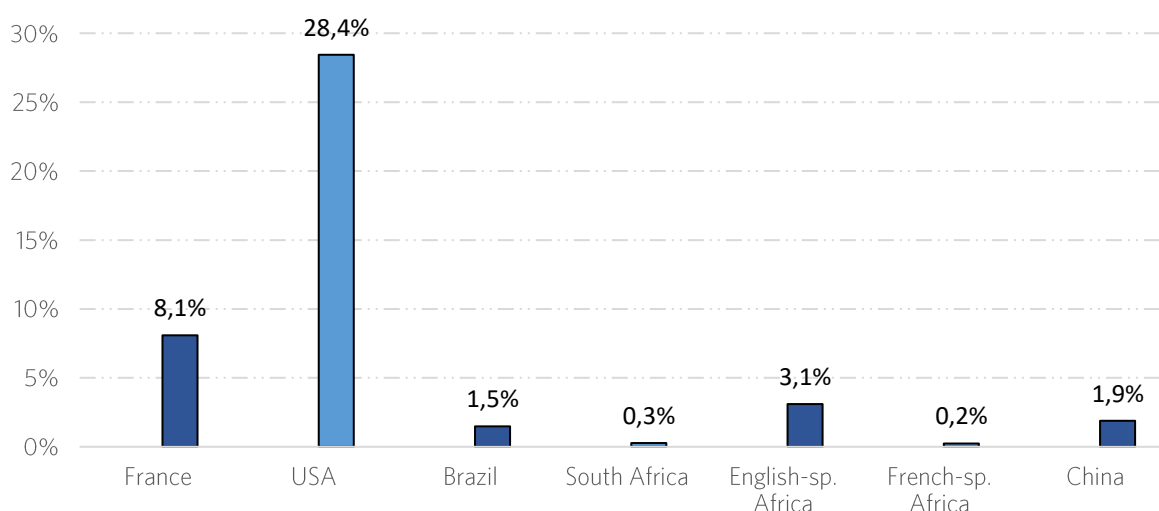
²² Pascale Santi, "*Combattre les stéréotypes de genre, une urgence aussi pour la pratique sportive*", in *Le Monde*, 2 November 2022.

²³ There was greater gender parity in the cohort of students from EFAP, with 15 men and 18 women, but these students were answering the survey as part of their sociology of sport class (their participation was not voluntary).

II. WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK OF SPORT AS A SOCIAL AND COLLECTIVE PURSUIT?

Another underlying theme appeared throughout the study, in the United States this time, namely the controversy surrounding the rights of transgender athletes. Indeed, in recent years — and particularly in 2022 — a number of countries have enacted laws banning transgender students from participating in sports competitions corresponding to their gender identity. Certain American and international federations, such as World Athletics, have taken similar measures.

There were more than 32,000 tweets **discussing parasports** over the period spanning 16 January 2022 to 16 January 2023²⁴. The subject sparked relatively little discussion, and the tweets were distributed very unevenly across the geographical areas studied. The topic garnered the most attention from young people in the United States. 28.4% of tweets on this subject were posted by 18- to 24-year-olds. In the other zones and countries studied, the subject was less popular: a mere 0.2% and 8.1% of tweets were published by young people in the 18 to 24 age group. In the United States, the tweets were predominantly posted by athletes living with disability. In France, the tweets were mainly about upcoming events and competitions.



Proportion of tweets posted by 18- to 24-year-olds in the total number of tweets (no age filter) on the topic of parasports, by geographical location. Interpretation note: in the United States, 28.4% of the tweets about parasports were posted by 18- to 24-year-olds.

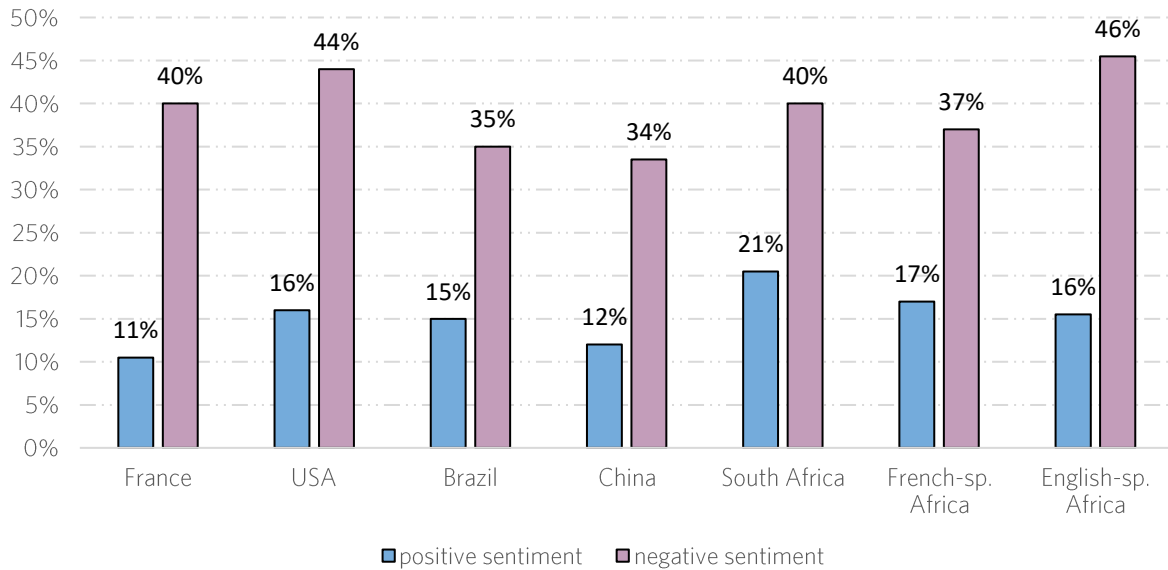
6. IN PUBLIC DISCUSSION: SPORT, TRADITIONAL MEDIA, SOCIAL MEDIA

On Twitter, 18- to 24-year-olds mentioned **traditional media and social media in 802,700 tweets relating to sport**²⁵. The highest proportion of tweets was from young Americans (22.5%). The smallest proportion (13.8%) was from young people in French- and English-speaking Africa. Across all the geographical areas studied, the tweets containing the word 'media' were rather negative.

²⁴ Keywords: disability, disabled, parasports and paralympic.

²⁵ Keywords: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Tiktok, social media, media, communication, communicate, visibility, entertainment, show business.

II. WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK OF SPORT AS A SOCIAL AND COLLECTIVE PURSUIT?



Sentiment analysis of tweets posted by 18- to 24-year-olds and containing the words 'sport' and 'media'.²⁶

The students interviewed felt that **sport was omnipresent in public discussion**, whether through people discussing international competitions or controversies involving famous sportspeople and systematically receiving a great deal of media coverage. On Twitter, 18- to 24-year-olds denounced the **sensationalist practices of certain sports media outlets**, particularly in the United States and Brazil.

Here again, **the topic of women's sport came up**. In France and the United States, almost all of the most engaging tweets about the media mentioned the latter's necessary role in helping women's sport to gain more public recognition.

The words "entertainment" and "show business" proportionally yielded the highest number of results in South Africa. In this country, as in the United States, several tweets regretted **the development of sport as show business**, which they felt weakened the values of sport. And yet at the same time, in both these countries we found many tweets praising entertainment as an integral part of sport. In Brazil, the talk was more passionate: some lamented that football is considered entertainment, while others saw it as "the opiate of the masses". These tweets questioned the very nature of sport. A tweet by a young man from Brazil illustrates this debate perfectly:

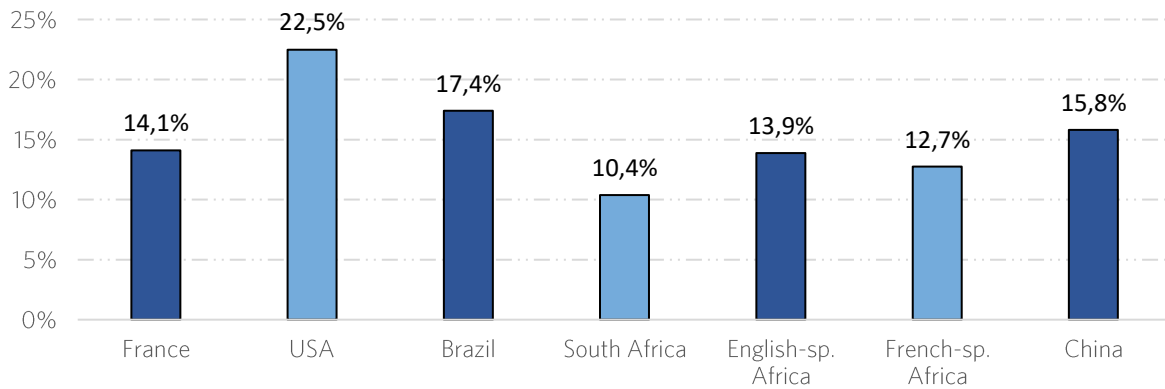
"Football is one of the greatest social phenomena on the planet; there is room for everything within it. It is entertainment, it is work, it is learning, it is professionalism, it is recreation. It is what each person makes of it. Ignorance is thinking that the essence of the most powerful sport in the world is limited to your reality."

An Algerian student and a Greek student both reported that in their respective countries people now see sport more as entertainment than something one engages in.

The French students insisted **on the significant influence media representation has on the popularity of a sport**. They also noted the link between sporting victories and the popularity of the associated sports. The media coverage resulting from a victory leads to a greater knowledge and promotion of the sport in question and this often results in increased numbers of players and members. **It seemed important to them to capitalise further on positive results. Victories are a source of national pride, but also an element that should be leveraged to promote the sport.**

²⁶ For the sake of readability, the graphs for sentiment analysis do not show the percentage of neutral tweets (genuinely neutral tweets or those which the tool was unable to analyse).

II. WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK OF SPORT AS A SOCIAL AND COLLECTIVE PURSUIT?

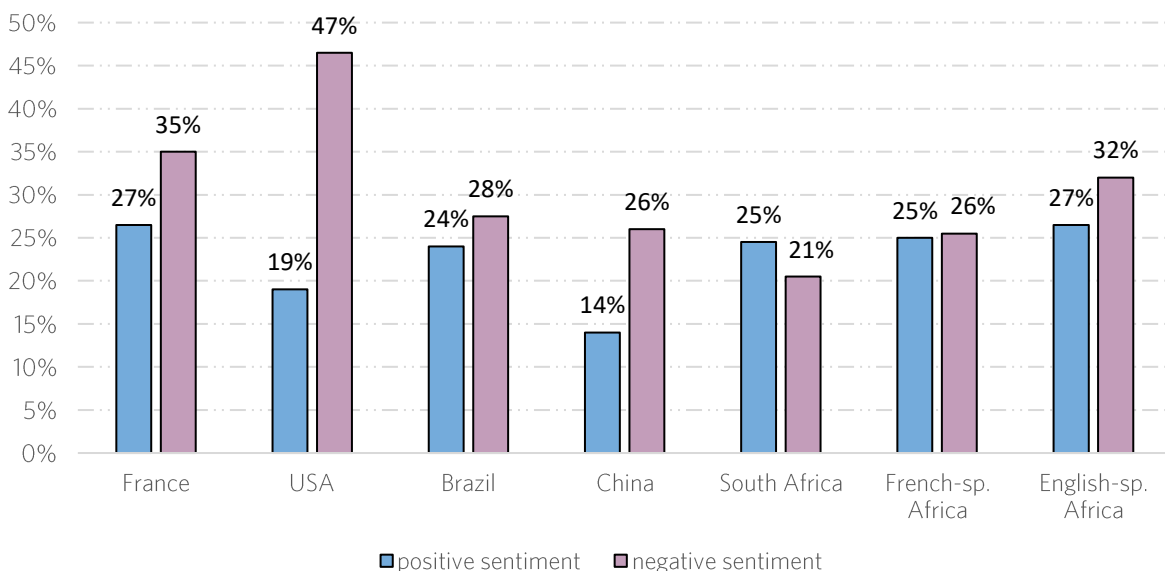


Proportion of tweets posted by 18- to 24-year-olds in the total number of tweets (no age filter) on the topic of sport in traditional media and on social media, by geographical location. Interpretation note: in the United States, 22.49% of the tweets about traditional media/social media and sport were posted by 18- to 24-year-olds.

Our social listening also revealed a **rather widespread criticism of the role of social media** in the discussions of 18- to 24-year-olds. Thousands of tweets shone a light on the harmful role of the platforms, describing them as echo chambers where negativity, excesses and hasty judgements prevail.

In English-speaking Africa, the ten most engaging tweets used the term “football twitter” to refer pejoratively, for the vast majority of them, to the community that discusses this sport on the platform. The expression also appeared in French-speaking Africa and in the United States, where the expression “basketball twitter” was also found.

In fact, in June 2022, in the documentary entitled “[La quinzaine de la haine](#)”, the French sports magazine *L'Équipe* revealed the amount and the content of the hate-filled messages received by “all tennis players, from the most obscure to the best in the world”.



Sentiment analysis of tweets posted by 18- to 24-year-olds and containing the words ‘sport’ and ‘social media’.

The students interviewed **spoke about two very different aspects of social networks**. On the one hand, the latter place sports within the reach of a greater number of people. Anyone with access to YouTube can now engage in a wide variety of sports and physical activities by following a free video. On the other hand, some of these

II. WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK OF SPORT AS A SOCIAL AND COLLECTIVE PURSUIT?

influencers/content creators promote a focus on looks and an unachievable “perfect” body, which can lead young adolescents to develop complexes regarding their physical appearance.

“Cosmetic” sport, which features heavily on the social networks, is one of the seven major conceptions described by Patrick Roult, the co-founder of L’Observatoire des Imaginaires du Sport, which examines current conceptions of sport to understand and measure changes in practices and needs. While the motivations might seem superficial, the approach leads to hundreds of thousands of followers taking up a sport or exercise.

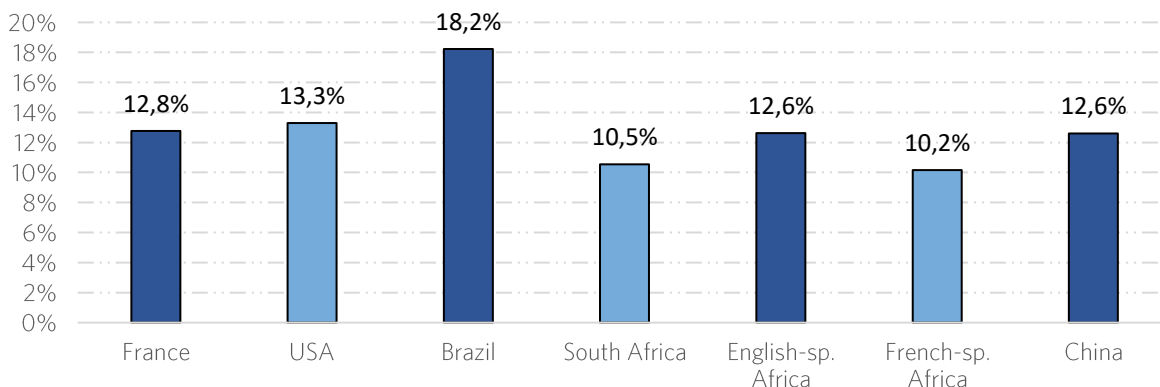
7. THE ATTITUDE TOWARD MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS

On Twitter, **major sporting events were mentioned** in²⁷ 428,300 tweets over the period spanning October 2021 to October 2022. Logically, discussions about these events increased as the events themselves drew nearer (Super Bowl, World Cup).

Unsurprisingly, discussions about the football World Cup were the most common. It was mentioned in nearly 255,000 tweets. **They make up three quarters of the Twitter conversations of French and Brazilian youths.** An analysis of the most engaging tweets shows that while there was a great deal of criticism directed at the World Cup in Qatar among French youths (around one third of tweets containing the term), criticism was much less widespread in the other geographical areas studied, but it was also noted in the United States. No criticism was noted in any of the 25,500 tweets from English-speaking Africa that mentioned the event.

The discussions about the Olympic Games were mainly started by young people in the host countries. Indeed, the Olympic Games were seldom mentioned by young people (2.7% of the theme on average, for all geographical areas except China). China stood out for the high proportion of results mentioning the Olympic Games (43.6% of Chinese tweets about this theme). Similarly, the proportion of young French people that mentioned the Olympic Games was 4.5 points higher than the average (7.5% of the theme). This can be explained by the volume of discussions about the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. The security issues during the Champions League final at the Stade de France in Paris in May 2022 were also a topic that appeared in the most engaging French tweets.

Unsurprisingly, the subject of the Africa Cup of Nations mainly drew attention from young people in French- and English-speaking Africa, and the Super Bowl from young Americans, since it is the biggest sporting event in the United States.



Proportion of tweets posted by 18- to 24-year-olds in the total number of tweets (no age filter) on the topic of major sporting events, by geographical location. Interpretation note: in Brazil, 18.23% of the tweets about major sporting events were posted by 18- to 24-year-olds.

In any case, nearly all the students interviewed follow sporting events. They all watch at least one sport, even those who do not engage in any sport themselves. For many, watching sporting events on television or attending

²⁷ Keywords: Olympic Games, World Cup, tournament, Super Bowl, CAN 2022, CAN 2023, Africa Cup of Nations.

II. WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK OF SPORT AS A SOCIAL AND COLLECTIVE PURSUIT?

them live is a family activity or a good opportunity to get together with friends. Within the different societies, there are notable cultural differences in the importance attached to the events: several French students who had lived in English-speaking countries noted that football culture was much more prevalent in England, Scotland and Ireland than in France.

Among the most cited events were the World Cup, different football leagues, the NBA (basketball), the French Open (tennis), badminton tournaments (very popular in Asia), cricket tournaments (India), Formula 1, and the UFC (MMA).



III. HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN SPORT? WHAT HINDERS OR ENCOURAGES SPORT PARTICIPATION?

This part of the report provides an overview of the different ways in which young people participate in sport, and of the role various actors play in this participation. Family seems to be an essential element and for the young people interviewed it was often the primary source of encouragement and support. They also mentioned clubs, companies or school, then discussed the role of government bodies in the development of amateur/professional sport and recreational/high-performance sport.

1. THE FAMILY

Among the young French and European sport participants interviewed, **family often emerged as the primary source of support and encouragement**. For many of them, engaging in a sporting activity was encouraged or even “imposed” by their parents during childhood. Some had even taken up the same sport as their parents (horse riding, basketball, football, or tennis for example). By providing “financial, material, moral and emotional support” and rides to training and competitions, it is the parents who enabled the young people to find fulfilment in their sport. According to almost all of our students, today in France it is the family that is the driving force behind participation in sport. In fact, the family model seems to also be found everywhere abroad. A few well-known examples stood out in the discussions: Kylian Mbappé, the Williams sisters, Armand Duplantis, and Monica Seles. This same support from family was reported by the Chinese students interviewed.

A former high-performance athlete from Brazil told us that he had taken up tennis at a very young age and that playing had always been a **personal choice**. While he received moral support from his family, he had never felt any pressure to perform from them, something he feels is unusual in his sport. Some of his peers at the time had felt compelled to stop competing because the pressure was too great.

The Salvadorian, Indian, Indonesian and Algerian students we interviewed explained to us that they had taken up sport later in their life and did not receive any particular type of support from their respective families.

2. PLAYERS IN THE SPORT MOVEMENT

Several students mentioned the **devotion of their coaches** and the support received from clubs or federations. **Clubs** appear to be a key element of sport participation in France.

A young Chinese student who had studied in the United Kingdom reported having been struck by how widespread table tennis clubs were over there, since they existed in towns of all sizes even though the sport is less popular in the UK than in China. He explained that in his country there are fewer clubs and the government organises most sporting activities.

According to a young Indonesian student, there are many clubs in his country, but only those for the most popular sports receive the most funding and are the most accessible.

Two French students mentioned the **difficulties in renewing the teams of volunteers** in clubs where the members “have been the same for 20 years”. One of them explained that it was generally easier to get the parents of child members involved than actual adult members. Furthermore, several of the students would like to see the government **help clubs to survive**, since the latter are losing volunteers and also, sometimes, members. **Another student said he would like to see federations and clubs make more efforts to engage people in sport, to “get people out of their homes”**. According to the 2022 Eurobarometer, one in ten Europeans currently engages in voluntary work that supports sporting activities, or plans to do so in the next two months²⁸.

²⁸ European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 525, Sport and Physical Activity*, April-May 2022, p. 63.

III. HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN SPORT? WHAT HINDERS OR ENCOURAGES SPORT PARTICIPATION?

Finally, several young French people expressed dissatisfaction with the **lack of ease and modernity in the sign-up processes of traditional clubs**. They are not digitalised; they are very bureaucratic, with no possibility of quickly identifying the right person to speak to, and membership is compulsory. These young people feel that the way sports clubs are organised is out of step with modern-day habits, and they note that the new players in the market (gyms, etc.) know how to appeal and meet the new demand for immediacy. When describing the sign-up process for padel tennis, one student reported: “You can book online; you don’t need to fill out ten million forms. You book, you pay, and off you go.” Other students also reported difficulties in signing up midway through the year, the lack of availability for certain activities and, in amateur football, the restrictive rules that apply to players who are competing but have changed clubs while the season is in full swing were also seen to be problematic. One student who had briefly lived in Germany emphasised how easy it had been to join a club, even for a short time, and take part in competitions.

An Algerian student explained that there is little diversity in the sports played by the people in his country; football is the most popular by far. The few clubs that offer “niche” sports like climbing or archery receive little funding. He **would like to see a greater variety of sports promoted in his country, and more facilities being built and available**.

An Indian student felt that clubs were well developed in his country, but remarked that sport participation was rather focused on professionalisation.

3. SELF-ORGANISATION AND UNORGANISED SPORT PARTICIPATION

For India and Algeria, the students reported that **self-organised sport – outside of organisations such as clubs – is widespread**, because the clubs do not necessarily fulfil the sporting needs of the population. An Indonesian student confided that most of the time he played sports or exercised with his friends, without being affiliated with any club. Parks, urban equipment and outdoor workout circuits are essential tools to encourage this practice. In the early morning in Asia, in Vietnam or China, it is not uncommon to see groups of (sometimes elderly) people exercising together in these public places. **In Europe, 47% of Europeans who exercise on a regular basis report doing so in parks or outdoors²⁹, while 37% do so in their own home**. A few French students told us that their exercise routine changed according to the season and weather conditions.

In addition to self-organisation for recreational sport, several of the students interviewed revealed to us that they had played professionally without being affiliated with any club. This was the case for a former high-performance tennis player from Brazil, who travelled alone to national and international competitions, without his family or coach (due to a lack of financial means). He told us that he trained with other players, outside of any type of organisation. We heard similar reports from a high-performance French fencer, who told us that he had met many competitors, particularly from Eastern Europe, who had been compelled to take out bank loans to continue to compete at a high level.

Several French students considered getting around day to day as a physical activity: walking instead of taking public transport, taking the stairs whenever possible; this way, there was also a practical aspect to their exercise.

Finally, certain Indian and French students attributed the development of outdoor sport and solo exercise to the movement restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, when group sports and activities in clubs were not allowed.

4. COMPANIES

A French-Salvadorian student who is a keen runner and triathlete insisted on the **pivotal role companies play in her participation in these sports**. Indeed, some companies organise communities of sports enthusiasts with free membership. She is part of a runners’ club run by a major sports company. In addition to this, she is often

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.35.

III. HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN SPORT? WHAT HINDERS OR ENCOURAGES SPORT PARTICIPATION?

sponsored by large companies for her races. This **enables her both to compete and to maintain and expand her professional network**.

A student from India who also runs marathons told us that he had had to drop out of international events several times due to not having found private funding. These days, he keeps to more local races.

One of the obstacles to sport participation that was mentioned very regularly by the young people we interviewed is lack of time. Several of them expressed a desire to see companies tackle this issue and develop sport on their premises.

A short report entitled “*Le sport au service de l’engagement RSE des entreprises*” (Sport supporting the CSR commitments of companies) and published in France in June 2022 by Stephane Audry and William Renaut highlights several initiatives by companies committed to “making sport a driver of social and environmental change”.³⁰ Two recently introduced laws compel French companies to take these issues into account: one, dating from March 2022, stipulates that companies must take into account sport-related issues when setting their business objectives³¹; the other, adopted in August 2021, asks companies which are required to produce extra-financial reporting to disclose within it their efforts relating to sport participation³².

5. SCHOOL...

❖ ... and sport for all

One point that came up often during our interviews was the fact that young people want sport participation to be developed in schools. Sport is present in primary and secondary schools in the home countries of all the young people we interviewed, but unequally, particularly in terms of the time allocated to it (ranging from one hour per week to one hour per day) and the variety of sports available (imposed sports or self-chosen). In China, for example, schools play an important role in sport participation.

The French students felt that the range of sports available as part of EPS (Physical Education and Sport) is too limited. They would like to see “**taster**” **programmes being introduced for various sports from early childhood**. In practice, this would mean dedicating half a day each month, for example, to discovering a new sport, in order to open up the field of possibilities, give rise to vocations in young children, and discover new talents in sports that are more niche and less accessible (golf or horse riding, for example).

One third of the French students interviewed also talked about the need to reform sport in French schools. They would like schools to place more emphasis on sport participation in their education model, as for many children this is the only contact they have with the sporting world. According to the French students interviewed, the solution would be to increase contact with sports outside of the school environment. To them, it is essential to “go out and get young people who would not otherwise make the effort”. **Several of them recommended increasing partnerships between clubs and schools** so that more children could regularly take part in sports. Some initiatives already exist: one student mentioned a partnership between a school in her town and the nearby volleyball club, and another that his club’s fencing master visits different schools to introduce the children to fencing.

These statements by the young French students, who were very critical of schools, call to mind what Evan Fournier said³³ on Twitter about the deficiencies of the school system or of sports policy.

³⁰ Réseau Sport & Engagement, “*Le sport au service de l’engagement RSE des entreprises*”, p. 4.

³¹ Law n° 2022-296 of 2 March 2022 aimed at developing sport participation in France, Article 6, amending Art.-L225-35, paragraph 1 of the French Commercial Code: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article_lc/LEGIARTI000038799405/

³² Law n° 2021-1104 of 22 August 2021 on combating climate change and strengthening resilience to its effects (1), Article 138, amending Article L225-102-1 of the French Commercial Code: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article_lc/LEGIARTI000042339777/

³³ <https://twitter.com/EvanFourmizz/status/1424758619183198210>

III. HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN SPORT? WHAT HINDERS OR ENCOURAGES SPORT PARTICIPATION?

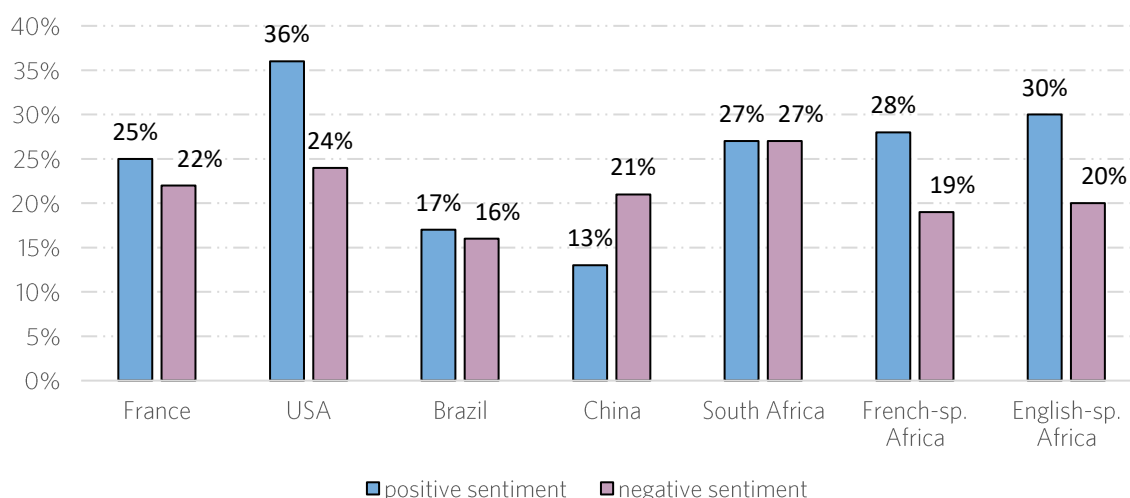


Evan Fournier: *On the contrary Minister @jmblanquer our sporting culture at school is disastrous. If my teammates and I have reached the elite of our sport, it's thanks to the sports associations, clubs and volunteers, but in no way thanks to school.*

Europe 1: *Jean-Michel Blanquer: "We have managed to win gold medals in team sports (...) it says something else: handball, volleyball and basketball are sports that are very popular in schools (...) it shows that the school system is very important".*

The French students who had experienced other education systems reported having timetables that were organised so that pupils could spend their afternoons on recreational activities and particularly on sports. This is the case in Germany, Ireland, Italy, Scotland, the United States and Luxembourg. **These students would like to see sport being given more prominence in the French education system.** A few of the students regretted the absence of competitions between schools, as they foster competition and a sense of belonging. The UNSS (in France, the National Union of School Sport) was of course mentioned, but there are too few competitions during the year and the students feel that insufficient action is taken at the high school level. Of the students who answered our survey but do not engage in sport, several noted support as a factor that helps to re-engage in sport and exercise.

Sentiment analysis of tweets shows rather divided opinions on school and sport. The highest level of satisfaction is among young Americans (36%). On Twitter, young Brazilians speak proportionally more of education in connection with sport. Many of the most engaging tweets criticise the lack of investment in education and sport. Conversely, young Americans tweet less about education.



Analyse de sentiment des tweets publiés par les 18-24 ans traitant de sport et d'éducation.

III. HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN SPORT? WHAT HINDERS OR ENCOURAGES SPORT PARTICIPATION?

Both French and international students often find it difficult to juggle sport and higher studies, particularly in France. The course and work load are too heavy and schedules do not always leave students enough free time to engage in sport. Several French students reported that they had had to pause their sporting activities when they began their higher studies.

However, the Chinese students we surveyed did not identify any particular challenges in juggling sport and studies in their country of birth. To them, this juggling was a normal part of life that they did not question. **Another Chinese student we surveyed identified university as supporting her participation in sport:** through the organisation of events and competitions, the activities organised had enabled her to make friends, particularly thanks to the help of a tutor, her sport mentor. Another student we interviewed felt that higher education establishments should play this role by encouraging non-participants to take up sport.

The French students who had studied for a time in the United States seem to have had easier access to sport over there. They told us that they had been impressed by the sporting facilities placed at the disposal of students, including dozens of indoor and outdoor training areas, swimming pools and more, all of them free to access. They noted that, unlike French establishments, American establishments play an essential role in encouraging and developing sport participation. However, they lamented the fact that, unlike in France where even absolute beginners can join student sport societies, the selection criteria for sporting associations in American universities are very stringent and the level is very high, which prevents the democratisation of sport.

Several groups of French students expressed regret at the fact that there were few or no university teams in France, nor inter-university competitions, like those they had seen in countries such as the United States, Canada, Mexico and Belgium.

Two French reports published in 2023 examine some of these demands: “Le développement de la pratique sportive étudiante” (The development of student participation in sport) published by Inspection générale de l’éducation, du sport et de la recherche (the General Inspectorate for Education, Sport and Research) in January 2023,³⁴ and “Le sport : une ambition pour l’université” (Sport: an ambition for universities), published by France Universités in February 2023³⁵.

❖ ... and high-performance/competitive sport

The former high-performance Chinese athlete we interviewed explained that **school had been a precious source of support**, by funding his training in primary and secondary school. From the age of six he had been in a very strict training programme set up by his primary and secondary schools, requiring him to train for three hours each day, six days a week. He described this time in his life as a real hardship that was necessary to distinguish himself from his competitors. According to him, his attitude toward sport at that time was “obsessive”. At 13, he began attending a specialist sports school where his training programme was even more intensive.

The two high-performance French athletes interviewed currently have a more flexible academic schedule allowing them to juggle their two activities relatively well. They both stated that in the past they had experienced great difficulties in this respect. **The possibilities for providing a flexible schedule in secondary and higher education vary from one establishment to another.**

³⁴ The report identifies several obstacles to student participation in sport, including lack of time, a heavy study load, and a lack of sporting facilities. The recommendations made by the authors are aimed at improving knowledge regarding student participation in sport, making sport more accessible, and improving sporting equipment and facilities: <https://www.education.gouv.fr/le-developpement-de-la-pratique-sportive-etudiante-344356>

³⁵ The report puts forward a list of recommendations for a better integration of high-performance athletes, a better sports offering overall, increased resources for sporting activities as well as their development and promotion, and improved facilities: https://franceuniversites.fr/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/RVB_FRANCE_UNIVERSITES_RAPPORT_SPORT_A4.pdf

III. HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN SPORT? WHAT HINDERS OR ENCOURAGES SPORT PARTICIPATION?

The French-Salvadorian student **bemoaned the lack of recognition of sporting careers in French universities**. At the Canadian university where she had previously studied, she was part of the elite running team and she explained that she had received additional professional opportunities like summer internships as a result of her status as an elite athlete. **To her, it is essential to connect sport and professional life further.**

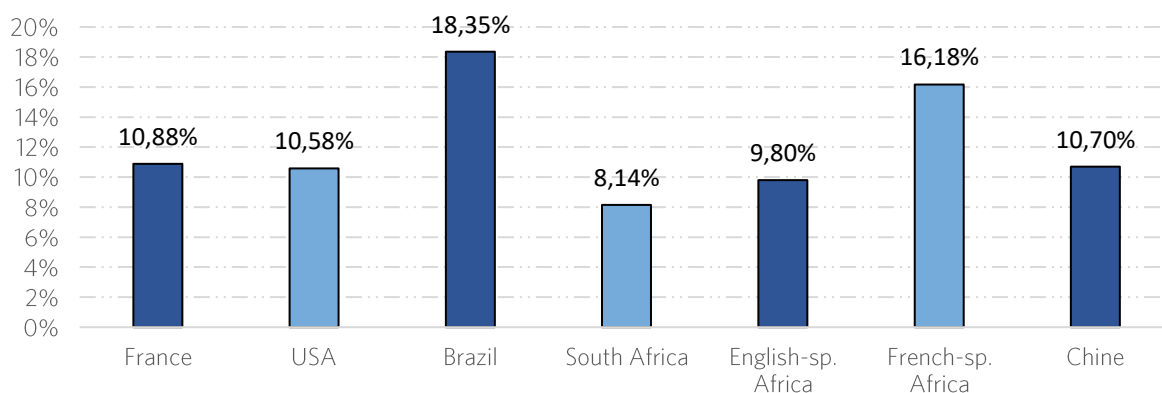
The high-performance Brazilian athlete had a similar experience to those of the French students. In Brazil, his professors reproached him for his absences due to attending sporting events. Putting sport ahead of studies was not tolerated. In the United States, where he was awarded an athletic scholarship to attend an American university, finding a balance was not simple either, because his classes were harder and he was expected to spend four or five hours training each day.

Several young respondents from France lamented that sport-study programmes were not more highly regarded.

On Twitter, some young Americans criticised the fact that colleges place more emphasis on sport than on education. Some young French-speaking Africans felt that the government should invest more in education than in sport. As for young South Africans, many of them emphasised the importance of sport as an educational discipline. Several discussions bemoaned and highlighted the significant differences in infrastructure that exist between “black” and “white” schools.

6. GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Over the first study period, we found **974,900 posts on Twitter mentioning sport and government together**³⁶. On average, the 18 to 24 age group represented 11.1% of the total results identified without applying an age filter. Brazil and French-speaking Africa were the two geographical areas where young people discussed this theme the most, making up 18.4% and 16.2% of the results respectively.



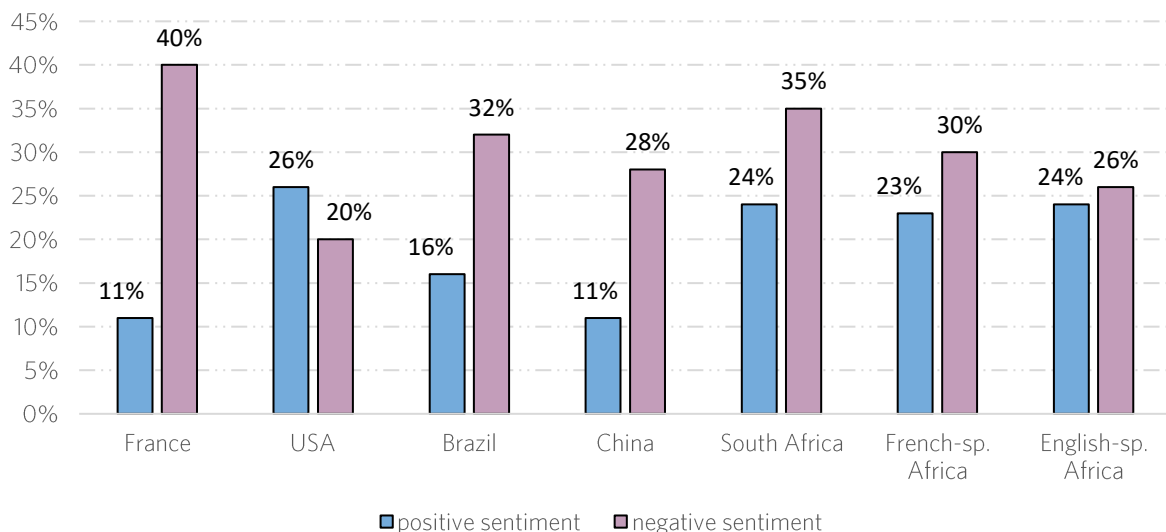
Proportion of tweets posted by 18- to 24-year-olds in the total number of tweets (no age filter) mentioning the government in a sport-related context, by geographical location. Interpretation note: in Brazil, 18.35% of the tweets about government and sport were posted by 18- to 24-year-olds.

This theme is interesting because it highlights what young people spontaneously say about the requests they make and send to government agencies. It also allows us to understand how the government’s intervention or lack of intervention in the field of sport is perceived. Due to certain characteristics inherent to the way Twitter is used, we found only very few tweets expressing recommendations to the government or formulating general suggestions for improving access to sport.

³⁶ Keywords: state, government, politics, funding, infrastructure, equipment, facilities, education, resources, support, subsidies, council, social cohesion, cost, price, expensive, membership, free.

III. HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN SPORT? WHAT HINDERS OR ENCOURAGES SPORT PARTICIPATION?

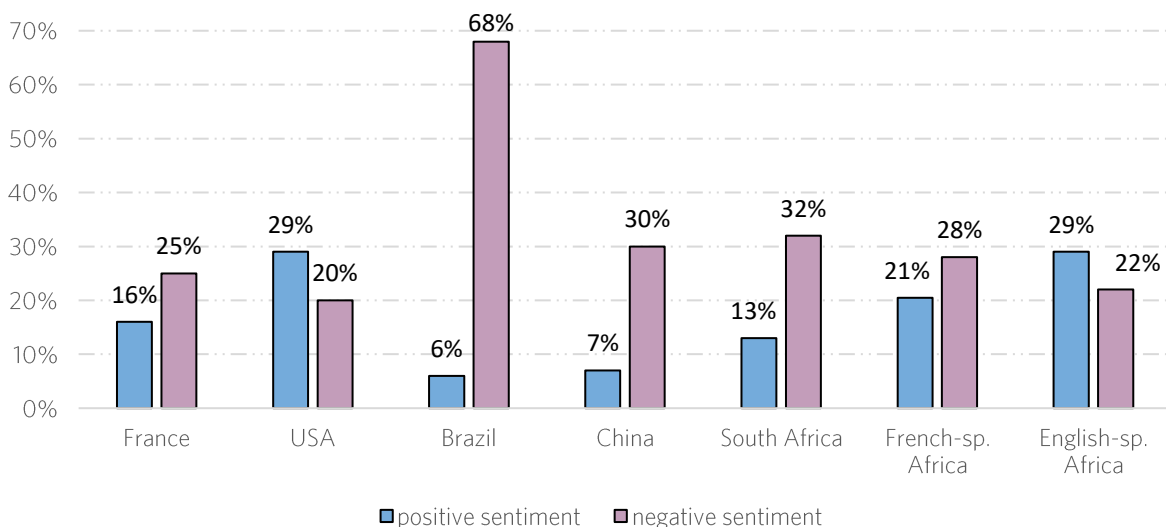
If we look at the sentiment analysis of tweets containing the terms state/government in connection with sport, the negative tweets outnumber the positive ones. This is true for all the geographical areas studied, with the exception of the United States. The most significant negativity seemed to be expressed more frequently in France, China and Brazil.



Sentiment analysis of tweets posted by 18- to 24-year-olds and containing the words 'state/government' and 'sport'.

❖ Sporting facilities

On Twitter, an across-the-board observation can be made regarding how young people feel about their sporting infrastructure: the terms “facilities” and “infrastructure” are **mainly used to complain about a lack of these**. Brazilians and French-speaking Africans make up the highest proportion of young people mentioning these terms in their tweets. With the exception of the United States and English-speaking Africa, all of the geographical areas studied produced a higher number of negative comments. The proportion of negative tweets was highest in Brazil and South Africa: 68% for Brazil and 32% for South Africa. There tended to be a high number of complaints among young French, South African, and English-speaking Africans regarding their sports infrastructure and the resources allocated to sport. The most engaging French tweets highlighted the lack of facilities for amateur and women’s sport. The French students we interviewed **felt that access to sporting facilities was difficult** in France for individuals who were not part of an established organisation (sporting association, club, school, etc.).



Sentiment analysis of tweets containing the words facilities and infrastructure, from 15 January 2022 to 15 January 2023.

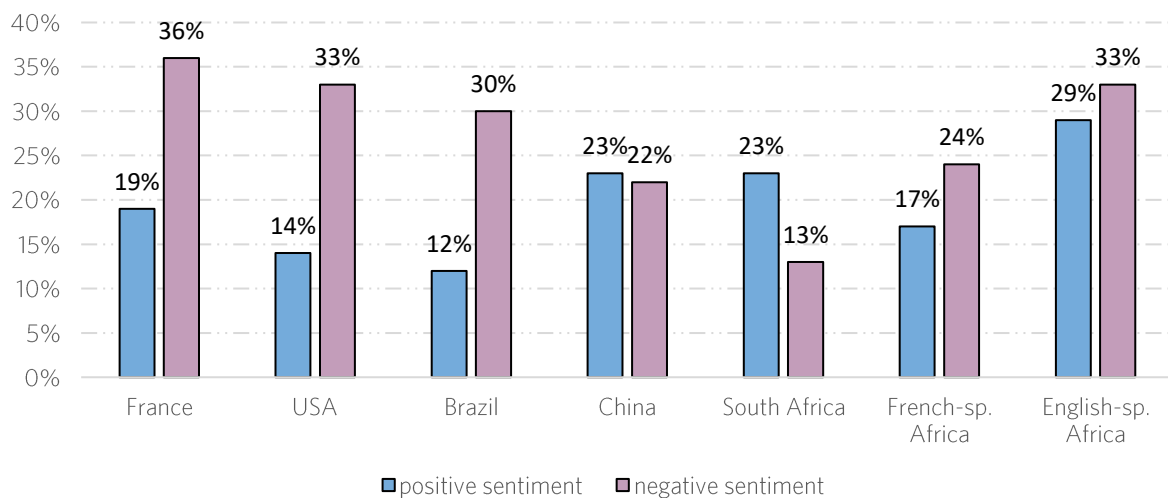
III. HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN SPORT? WHAT HINDERS OR ENCOURAGES SPORT PARTICIPATION?

Some tweets from China celebrated the legacy of the Winter 2022 Olympic Games, which helped to develop participation in snow sports. In the United States, the topic that kept reappearing was the construction of bike paths in urban areas, since these were found to be lacking. One of the priorities of Los Angeles 2028 is an urban redevelopment plan for the Californian city. **Urban planning** is a subject that was broached several times by the groups of students interviewed, as they wish to see cities adapt to pedestrians and cyclists.

According to one Indian student, **small local sport and fitness facilities that encourage people to engage in unorganised sport** increase accessibility to sport, particularly in developing countries. Several of the experts we interviewed made the same observation. One of them gave the example of Africa, where the small facilities are well maintained and not vandalised. These small facilities play an important role in the development of sport – much more than large facilities which are difficult to maintain and, for this reason, are called “white elephants”. One of the experts made the same observation regarding Brazil, where considerable investments had been made ahead of the Rio 2016 Summer Olympics and the FIFA World Cup 2014. Unfortunately, the investments disappeared after these major events; a number of stadiums, such as the Arena da Amazonia in Manaus, are now abandoned because the government does not have the resources to maintain them and no private sector players are willing to buy them. Small facilities thus seem essential, but they need to be inclusive and female-only spaces must be made available to women.

❖ The cost of access to sport

In France, the most engaging tweets mentioned the lack of resources invested in sport and the **difficulties in accessing sport**. **Young French people also mentioned the buying power of both sport participants and sport spectators**. This subject of the “cost” of football as a show-business sport was also found in Brazil, where young Twitter users bemoaned the high price of match tickets. Young French people, on the other hand, bemoaned the high prices of pay-television subscriptions to watch the matches.



Sentiment analysis of tweets containing the words cost/expensive/means.

On Twitter, all of the discussions on these topics were rather negative, except in South Africa.

Many of the students interviewed cited finances as one of the major obstacles to engaging in sport. They were also aware of the differences in accessibility depending on the sport. Some, such as motorsports or boardsports, cost a great deal more than others. In China, winter sports cost a lot of money and few people can afford them. The costs relating to equipment purchases and travel were mentioned specifically. A former high-performance Brazilian athlete explained that the sports clubs in his country are private and overly expensive, which considerably limits people’s access to sport. He added that some local sporting initiatives run by NGOs do exist, but these remain an exception rather than the norm.

III. HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN SPORT? WHAT HINDERS OR ENCOURAGES SPORT PARTICIPATION?

When asked about funding, the students of several nationalities expressed regret at public funds being almost systematically allocated to the most popular sports. The young French respondents lamented the fact that subsidies go to football and rugby clubs, to the detriment of other less popular sports. Similarly, the Indian students interviewed mentioned the revenue disparities between the clubs dedicated to cricket, the country's most popular sport — and the most profitable sporting organisation —, and those of other sports. The Algerian student made a similar observation about the football clubs in his country.

❖ Sport for all vs elite sport, amateur sport vs professional sport : oppositions?

Some of the students interviewed talked about the issues in their respective countries with regard to mass sport and elite sport. For example, the Indonesian, Indian and Chinese students, along with a former Brazilian elite athlete, **bemoaned their countries being so attached to developing high-performance sport as a priority and being less concerned with mass sport.** They would like to see more investment in mass sport. One Indonesian student interpreted it as Indonesia not making sport a priority; instead, the government is focused on improving quality of life. To him, the Indonesian government gets especially involved in high-performance sport because the latter contributes to improving the country's development and visibility. He explained that at the most recent Olympic Games, the country had won five medals, in badminton and weightlifting. International performance and competitions are at the core of the country's policies relating to sport; a real nation branding policy undermined by FIFA's removal of Indonesia as the host of U-20 World Cup. Argentina was chosen as the new host of the event after certain Indonesian political leaders, in support of the Palestinian cause, objected to the participation of Israel's U-20 team, which had qualified for the competition. Indonesia remains determined to host the 2036 Olympic Games, however, as does India, no doubt. According to one Indian student, the country governed by Narendra Modi does not sufficiently subsidise high-performance sports. He felt that this was evident in the country's weak performance at the Tokyo Olympic Games (7 medals won). Another issue dear to the Indian and Indonesian students, and connected to the matter of mass sport, is the difficulty these countries have in recognising and identifying their talent. The Indian and Indonesian students also mentioned corruption as a problem in this area.

The young people interviewed also **talked about the themes of amateur and professional sport.** In India, for example, aside from cricket, few sports have turned professional, as demonstrated by the fact that all the top Indian table-tennis players play for European clubs. Similarly, several French students mentioned how difficult it is for athletes to play professionally in sports other than football, and they **would like to see their own sport turn professional.** For example, in niche sports such as fencing, amateur Italian or American fencers seem to receive sufficient financial support from their government (or their university) to be able to live off this and focus on performing well in their sport. One student who is a keen volleyball player mentioned the need to **increase national championships**, because many teams go off to compete abroad (in Poland, for example) due to the lack of tournaments in France.

❖ Sport during a health crisis

Where France is concerned, the social listening revealed a very large number of tweets expressing **rancour and anger over the government policies adopted at the height of the COVID-19 epidemic.** This type of tweet was among those that drew the most engagement during the study period. Depriving people of sport for public health reasons was deemed unfair by some of the sports enthusiasts online who use Twitter to share their thoughts and opinions.

One high-performance French athlete we interviewed explained that the health crisis had "reshuffled the deck". To him, the COVID period had felt like "an enforced break", **since his amateur status – meaning he is not affiliated with any official national sporting organisation – did not allow him to go out and train.**

In the qualitative interviews, other students of different nationalities spoke of similar policies, in Indonesia and China for example, that prevented them from engaging in outdoor sports. In contrast to this, the Indian student felt that the authorities in his country had handled the situation skilfully: the clubs had stayed open and it was still possible to go out for a run or a cycle, even in the "red zones" (the most affected areas).

SUMMARY: WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD? COMMON REQUESTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE FUTURE OF SPORT ACCORDING TO YOUNG PEOPLE

On Twitter, in the 117,356 tweets mentioning the word “future” in relation to sport, and across the seven geographical areas studied, the only topic that seems to appear again and again is that of women’s sport, which is discussed by young people from France, South Africa, and French-speaking Africa.

In the groups of students we interviewed, several themes appeared: the emergence of new sports, the digitalisation of sport, the obsession with performance, political sport, and the development of sport in companies.

In terms of the emergence of new sports, the students mentioned five-a-side football, rugby sevens, padel tennis and bouldering, among others. According to them, these sports are growing in popularity due to their fun aspects. A resurgence of outdoor sports was also mentioned, perhaps as a reaction to the movement restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many students also mentioned esports, particularly via competitive multiplayer video gaming. This type of gaming is now becoming more and more prominent, particularly with the rise in popularity of Twitch, a streaming platform. Several countries have established national esports strategies or are in the process of doing so. This is the case for France, for example, since 2019 or for Saudi Arabia via its Vision 2030 programme. In 2022, the European Parliament adopted a recommending that the European Union adopt an esports strategy³⁷. In South Korea, the United States or Brazil, the discipline is extremely developed. For the latter, the popularity of gamers rivals that of football players. Yet, a hollow debate remains: do esports fulfil the criteria needed to be classified as a traditional sport and considered an actual physical sport discipline? Finally, given the colossal sums of money involved, another issue emerges: that of the esports sector and industry being promoted by the government in the same way as other sports.

The digitalisation of sport is a trend that young people foresee for the future of sport. They predict that technology will play an increasingly important role in this area. Several pointed out the development of “virtual” sport, in immersion or in the metaverse. As an example, they cited the Zwift platform, which allows users to immerse themselves in virtual worlds via a screen, to cycle through different landscapes on an indoor, stationary bike. The success of the Virtual Regatta sailing simulation game was also mentioned. While these new technological advances had made it possible to engage in physical activity from home during the COVID-19 crisis and while movement was restricted, they do not provide the type of socialisation young people want and they do not offer the same opportunities as shared sporting activities. Some of the students actually expressed some apprehension about these developments. For instance, they mentioned the loss of the “people side” of sport and the benefits of outdoor sport as a shared activity in nature.

Another facet of the growing digitalisation is the use of data to **improve sporting performance**. A young high-performance cyclist we interviewed felt that his sport is one of the most innovative in this regard. Data collection (cyclist’s heart rate, etc.) has existed in this sport since the 1980s and has only begun to appear in football over the past five or six years. These data are analysed by software and used to tweak racing strategies. While the tool is useful and has some benefits, the young cyclist regretted that this analysis is sometimes given a higher priority than “race watching, instinct, feeling or tactical sense”. To him, the human side must remain predominant.

And there is one other trend which was already mentioned but is relevant to tomorrow: several students mentioned the **development of sport in companies** as one of the trends of the future. According to them, incorporating sport into one’s professional life is a key solution to the lack of time.

³⁷ European Parliament resolution of 10 November 2022 on esports and video games (2022/2027(INI)): https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0388_EN.html.

For **some, this quest for performance could lead to more dystopian futures**. As we saw previously, sport is about pushing one's limits. The goal of any high-performance athlete is to keep beating records and thus to strive to push the limits of human performance. Taken to the extreme, this reasoning could lead to reaching and altering the limit separating human from superhuman, and to dabbling with body augmentation, particularly through the use of robotics and performance enhancing drugs. This is one of the seven scenarios put forward by *L'Observatoire des Imaginaires du Sport*³⁸: "cyberpunk" sport and human-machine hybridisation.

It is worth pointing out a weak signal: a small number of students felt that organising international sport around major sporting events held regularly is no longer a viable model given the climate and environmental challenges the world faces. They provided two examples: the next football World Cup [2026], which will be held in three separate countries [Canada, the United States and Mexico], and the 2029 Asian Winter Games in Saudi Arabia, which will be organised without any real consideration for their carbon footprint and their environmental impact.

2. THE MOST COMMON REQUESTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

❖ Most frequently, it is personal benefit that motivates young people to engage in sport

Through our study we identified the below list of the most common "motivators" pushing young people, independent of their origin and culture, to engage in sport, and there seems to be a general consensus on these. In fact, this "consensus" in itself is very interesting.

Health and personal development

Above all, young people seem to be especially interested in sport for its benefits to health and **particularly mental health**. Many of the young people spoke about what sport has afforded them, especially in terms of **self-confidence**.

Enjoyment

A second important aspect of sport is **its fun side**. Most of the students interviewed told us that to them **sport was primarily a recreational activity, a passion, a source of enjoyment and of great motivation**. Many consider it a game and/or a fun activity above all. Excitement and fun seem to be key factors in sport participation.

Social sport and the collective experience

Enjoyment is an integral part of friendships. Sport helps to create lasting friendships and is an agent of socialisation. In this context, the most recurring motivations for sport participation among the students interviewed were its educational virtues, the ability to make friends, the need to compete against others, and the fun of playing.

Competition and skill acquisition

The importance of the competitive aspect was mentioned by several other young sport participants. Competing against others enabled them to better evaluate their level and their value, but also to learn to deal with failure and to self-reflect. More generally, the students interviewed recognised that sport had allowed them to acquire skills that were not only complementary to those acquired in school but also transferable to the professional world.

Remember, finally, that a little less than half of the young people we surveyed do not naturally engage in sport.

³⁸ This observatory combines the expertise of ObSoCo (the French Observatory of Society and Consumption) with that of François Bellanger and Patrick Roullet, the creators of the Rencontres de la Prospective Sportive events: <https://lobsoco.com/les-nouveaux-imaginaires-sportifs/>

❖ The opinions of young people: sport is social and political

The social role of sport

Young people see sport as an important element in our societies. It is a topic of conversation among friends and family, especially when highly publicised major events and competitions are being held. The latter are widely followed, even by young people who do not do any sport. The advent of sport as show business, or in other words sport as a consumer good and as entertainment, is a source of debate: is this a positive phenomenon that encourages participation in sport or rather does it change the very essence of sport?

In any case, sport plays an important role in society and young people in the 18 to 24 age group see it as **a tool for social integration, cohesion and mixing**. According to them, whether as a participant or a spectator, sport makes it possible to become involved in a common pursuit, that of building a community. It is a key factor in identity construction and in instilling **national pride**.

Sport is also conducive to social emancipation. The **development of women's sport** is also a topic that is very dear to young people, as is more generally increasing inclusion in sport.

The political role of sport

Young people make the somewhat fatalistic and unequivocal observation that **sport is a political instrument**, even though tweets on the subject seem normative, epitomised by the plea to “keep politics out of sport”. Yet their appreciation of sport is itself political (demand for greater inclusiveness, universal values that sport should promote, etc.). They consider it a group of activities in which states exert their influence and for which they build strategies in order to use and exploit it. Sport has the power to unify people (nation building), particularly through showing support for the national teams. It can also be **a marker of national and cultural identity**. **It is certainly a geopolitical instrument**.

Values

For many young people, **sport promotes universal values** and one of the roles of sports personalities is to be role models and an inspiration to all and particularly to the younger generation. These expectations place a heavy responsibility on actors in the sport system. One might also wonder **if it is not because these values are already present in the societies in which these young people live that governments are given the responsibility** of imparting and upholding them through sport.

❖ What expectations are there of sport-related public policy?

A first, simple question which is no doubt radical today: **should there be public policies on sport?** Based on the answers to our surveys, one could say that at least three of the topics raised by the young respondents would point to a yes answer: on the one hand, the links between sport, health and education, two subjects that came up constantly; on the other hand, the links between foreign policy and sport used as an instrument of pride (nation building), of visibility, of credibility, and of national expansion (nation branding, soft power). The first two themes fall into the realm of personal development. The last is linked to the country's national development. In fact, this differentiation ties in more or less with that separating sport for the masses and competitive or high-performance sport.

This does raise a question, however: when it comes to health and education, to what extent should public policies be proactive? It is worth remembering that the most proactive states in terms of sport have always been and remain the most authoritarian — looking back through history, the USSR is one example. According to our young people, the role of public policies is to introduce people to sport, in the same way as the other disciplines taught in our education systems. None of the respondents mentioned proactive state intervention from the angle of sport and exercise for health.

There remains one blind spot not addressed in public policies: the importance young people attach to sport as a source of enjoyment and personal development. How can enjoyment and the desire to engage in sport be taken into account in public policy? That is the other question that is raised.

When young people complain that they are unable to do as much sport as they would like, they are always seeking an individual sport the state could encourage but never impose. When asked **“What might prompt you to take up exercise or a sport one day?”**, 29% of respondents requested that sport be made more accessible and felt that cost, transport, and a lack of time were factors hindering their participation. 20% percent felt that the solution lies in better support from coaches, friends, the university, etc.; 15% felt they needed to work on their motivation and discipline; 12% stated that they would take up sport or exercise if their health deteriorated; and 10% would do so to improve their physical appearance. 10% of respondents would like a healthier environment free from competition. Finally, 10% stated that nothing could induce them to take up exercise or a sport.

❖ **What are some concrete solutions to fulfil these expectations?**

We might ask ourselves what initially pushes young people to engage in sport. Among the young French and European sport participants surveyed, **family often emerged as the primary source of support and encouragement**. For many of them, engaging in a sporting activity was encouraged or even “imposed” by their parents during childhood.

During our interviews, the young people who do not receive support from their family, or those requiring extra support, often voiced a desire for sport participation to be developed in schools. Despite the differences in models, for young people the role of schools seems essential. To this is associated the often-mentioned view of sport as an educational discipline. Sport appears to be an essential component in **the education of children** and young people. It should feature more prominently in programmes. Schools should enable the young generation to discover a wide variety of sports. Inter-school and inter-university events should be organised to encourage participation, the history and philosophy of sport should be taught, etc. The government could also reduce the differences that exist between the sport policies of public and private establishments.

In practice, this might look like dedicating a half-day each month to discovering a new sport in order to allow the younger generation to see new possibilities, find vocations and discover new talents, or it might look like a better planning of timetables from primary through to higher education. This would provide some free time for sporting activities and enable those who have taken up a sport to continue with it through high school and their higher studies.

Next, the answer about local facilities is undoubtedly less isolated than it appears. The young people spoke of **the need to develop and improve sporting facilities**. They must be more inclusive and afford everyone easier access to free and — why not — self-organised sport. The development of urban sport is a step in this direction.

The cost of sport is also an important issue. The cost of engaging in sport, but also that of events, emerged as a concern shared by our sample. Finally, the young people of all nationalities bemoaned that public funding is channelled to the most popular sports rather than being invested in developing the others.

We have identified **two broad directions for suitable public policies**: those linked to the social aspect, to health and to education — to be effective, we feel these should incorporate an element of enjoyment. And those linked to political influence through sport. The latter seems to be on the upswing right now in a number of countries. On this point, while they do not embrace the idea of national identity and nationalist sentiment themselves, our young people seem to be aware of the possible influences and the failings of these policies.

Part Two of our study will discuss the different models of sport-related public policy currently in place around the world, as well as the rules of international governance in sport. It will attempt to identify the elements among them that could best fulfil the expectations of today’s younger generation around the world.

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With the contributions of:

- **Jean-Baptiste Guégan**, author and specialist in the geopolitics of sport.
- **Antidox**, a consulting firm recognised for its expertise in communications strategy and specialised in complex online influence issues.

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This report was produced in consultation with a working group composed of:

- Simon Chadwick, Professor of Sport and Geopolitical Economy, SKEMA Business School;
- Xavier Desmaisons, Founder and CEO of Antidox;
- Jean-Baptiste Guégan, author and specialist in the geopolitics of sport;
- Bruno Lartigue, Director of Institutional Relations at GL Events;
- Claude Revel, Director of SKEMA Publika and President of GIE France Sport Expertise;
- Nathalie Sanchez, Head of SKEMA Sport and High-performance Athlete Advisor at SKEMA;
- Olivier Urrutia, member of the SKEMA Publika Strategic Committee;
- Sarah Vallée, Project Manager at SKEMA Publika, rapporteur.

This working group is an advisory group. It helped to establish the working guidelines for this project and participated in the interviews of personalities from the sporting world. They bear no responsibility for the content of this report.

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METHODOLOGY APPENDIX

Our methodology combines quantitative and qualitative research.

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE STUDY: SOCIAL LISTENING ON TWITTER

These aspects are managed by our partner, Antidox, a consulting firm recognised for its expertise in communications strategy and specialised in complex online influence issues. The study consisted in scanning the social media platform Twitter, and more particularly the opinions expressed spontaneously by young people aged 18-24 in seven geographical areas: the five countries in which SKEMA has campuses — namely France, the United States, Brazil, South Africa and China —, along with two larger geographic areas — namely French- and English-speaking Africa — to gather a greater diversity of opinions from this continent. An initial preliminary analysis of the opinions of young people on sport was conducted on Twitter from 24 October 2021 to 24 October 2022. This helped to formulate working hypotheses and narrow down the avenues to explore. A second study phase was then carried out from 16 January 2022 to 16 January 2023. In total, nearly 7.6 million tweets were analysed. These were posted by more than 670,000 young people aged 18 to 24.

For the social media scanning, Antidox used Talkwalker’s Quick Search tool, a recognised AI-powered social listening tool, after drawing up a list of keywords to monitor. The keyword analysis covered a period of one year spanning 24 October 2021 to 24 October 2022 (phase 1), then another year spanning 16 January 2022 to 16 January 2023 (phase 2). The list of keywords was established in French, then translated into Brazilian Portuguese, English and Chinese. We recognise that, in spite of our best efforts, certain biases can appear during the translation process and that the keywords chosen in English, Brazilian Portuguese and Chinese may at times fail to cover the exact same realities as those of the French words.

The boolean query was made up of two parts:

1. a fixed part containing the word “sport”, its most common synonyms and the names of the most popular sports.
2. a part whose keywords were specific to each theme of the study.

The fixed query contained the following words and expressions:

Sport OR “physical activity” OR “activité physique” OR soccer OR rugby OR volleyball OR basketball OR judo OR boxing OR cycling OR cyclisme OR handball OR “table tennis” OR “tennis de table” OR football OR badminton OR équitation OR “horse riding” OR Esporte OR “atividade física” OR “atividade física” OR futebol OR “equitação”

The thematic queries in phase 1 are divided into six major themes. The keywords used are presented in the following table.

Themes	Words in English
Young peoples’ expectations of the government	state, government, politics, funding, infrastructure, equipment, facilities, education, resources, support, subsidies, council, social cohesion, cost, price, expensive, membership, free
Health and well-being	well-being, mind, body, health, confidence, self-esteem, weight, lifestyle, diet, discipline, determination, willpower, learning, mental health, effort, sharing, team spirit, emotion, connecting, fun
Traditional media and social media	Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Tiktok, social media, media, communication, communicate, visibility, entertainment, show business
Nation and patriotism	nation, proud, pride, unity, identity, patriotism, flag, supporter, competition, rivalry
Professional sport	future, career, opportunity, federation, professional, sports-study, high performance, club, coach, family
News and sporting events	Olympic Games, World Cup, tournament, Super Bowl, CAN 2022, CAN 2023, Africa Cup of Nations

The thematic queries in phase 2 covered seven other themes. The keywords used are presented in the following table.

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Words in English</i>
Politics	politics OR political
Geopolitics and influence	“soft power” OR influence OR “diplomacy” OR “international relations” OR geopolitical
Disinterest in and aversion to sport	“I hate” OR hated OR despise OR “I don’t like” OR never OR “I don’t do”
Parasports and disability	handicap OR disabled OR disabilit* OR handicapped OR paralympic
Women’s sport	women OR feminine OR girl*
Olympism	olympism OR values OR “International Olympic Committee” OR “IOC”
Consumption	Consume OR consumption OR purchase

Several factors led Antidox to choose Twitter as the data source. First, the platform has the advantage of offering content that is largely public and visible to all. Users have the option of restricting access to their profile and posts (protected tweets), but in practice very few people use this feature³⁹. Additionally, since the posts are text-based and relatively short (280-character limit), the content is easier to analyse. Second, Twitter appears to be a popular space for expressing and debating ideas. The platform boasts 206 million daily active users around the world⁴⁰. It is widely used in four of the five countries studied (South Africa, Brazil, United States, France), with user numbers ranging from 3.53 million in South Africa to 76.9 million in the United States. Twitter is especially popular with web users in the United States and Brazil, the first and fourth leading countries based on number of users in 2022⁴¹.

	number of Twitter users
<i>United States</i>	76,900,000
<i>Brazil</i>	19,050,000
<i>France</i>	10,000,000
<i>China</i>	3,850,000
<i>South Africa</i>	3,530,000

Source: Statista, January 2022 (United States, Brazil, France), 2020 (South Africa, Senegal).

Users aged 18 to 24 are well represented on Twitter and make up 17.1% of total users⁴². This figure is also representative of the proportion of young people in each of the countries selected. Indeed, young people make up 20.4% of the population of Senegal, 16.8% of the South African population, 16.1% of that of Brazil, 12.9% of the population of the United States, 11.9% of that of France, and 11.5% of that of China⁴³.

We have identified some potential biases in our study. The first is associated with the Twitter platform itself, since its tweet limit of 280 characters can hinder the development and expression of complex and nuanced thought. However, this limitation is offset by the increasingly widespread use of “threads”, a series of related tweets posted by a same user. As these can be read sequentially, they allow users to expand on the ideas and views expressed. In addition, since Twitter is a platform for sharing views and information in real time, the

³⁹ In 2019, 13% of Americans had a private Twitter profile. Source: Pew Research Center: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/02/10-facts-about-americans-and-twitter/>

⁴⁰ Statista data, second quarter 2021.

⁴¹ Statista, January 2022.

⁴² Statista data, April 2021.

⁴³ Percentages of population aged 15-24 by country in The World Factbook, Central Intelligence Agency: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/age-structure/>

content and opinions expressed there remain extremely dependent on current events. We endeavoured to indicate in the body of the report whenever it appeared to us that it was clearly the case.

We can also mention an over-representation of negative points of view inherent to social media posts in general and perhaps at times also imperfectly measured by the tool used (see below). We are aware of this and placing certain formulations in context with the statements made by the SKEMA students we interviewed often enabled us to either balance or confirm these views.

Finally, the information about the age and nationality of Twitter users is self-reported and reliant on user honesty. The Talkwalker tool allows filtering of tweets to isolate those posted by 18- to 24-year-olds. This filter draws on the information provided by the users directly on Twitter and, when possible, on an analysis of their profile pictures.

The second bias lies in the degree of representativeness of Twitter users relative to national populations. On this subject, a study conducted in the United States in 2019 by the Pew Research Center⁴⁴ concluded that Twitter users in the United States are younger and more likely to identify as Democrats than U.S. adults overall. In a 2016 study, a researcher at the Oxford Internet Institute similarly found that, in the United States and in Great Britain, Twitter users “are disproportionately members of elites”. They are younger and wealthier; therefore, they are not representative of the broader population. He concluded that Twitter data are not suitable in contexts such as “forecasting elections or gaining insight into attitudes, sentiments, or activities of large populations”.⁴⁵ Conversely, the results of a study conducted in Brazil in the run-up to the 2014 presidential elections show that Twitter remains a suitable source of information for identifying voting intentions by performing sentiment analysis on tweets. Indeed, the authors of the study showed that performing sentiment analysis on tweets yielded accuracy rates similar to those of traditional opinion polls⁴⁶. **While Twitter is not always representative of a country’s broader population, it is at least representative of the spectrum of arguments.**

A third bias is more specifically linked to the sentiment analysis of tweets performed automatically by the Talkwalker tool. The tool decides whether a tweet is positive, negative or neutral based on the words it contains. These data are to be treated with caution, because the technology of the tool does not yet detect all the subtleties of language; in particular, it is unable to discern irony. However, the more data there are, the more reliable the estimation will be. For the sake of readability, the graphs presented in this report do not show the tweets deemed neutral (genuinely neutral tweets or those which the tool was unable to analyse).

A fourth bias is specific to China, since Twitter is officially blocked over there, which explains why its use remains marginal. The Chinese largely prefer the national social media platforms such as Weibo. The Chinese users of Western social media platforms either reside outside of China or get around the block by using a VPN to simulate an IP address outside of China (geo-spoofing). We can suppose that these web users are more educated and socially privileged. Our analyses took into account this situation which we know leads to a probable over-representation of negative and diverging opinions. In addition, Antidox identified a great deal of digital noise on several of the study themes in China. Given these limiting parameters, the tool does not always reveal any real trends shaping the discourse of young Chinese people online.

⁴⁴ <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2019/04/24/sizing-up-twitter-users/>

⁴⁵ Blank, Grant. (2016). The Digital Divide Among Twitter Users and Its Implications for Social Research. *Social Science Computer Review (SSCR)*, 2017, Volume 35 Issue 6: 679–697. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0894439316671698>.

⁴⁶ Oliveira, Daniel José Silva; Bermejo, Paulo Henrique de Souza & dos Santos, Pâmela Aparecida. (2017). Can social media reveal the preferences of voters? A comparison between sentiment analysis and traditional opinion polls. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, Volume 14, Issue 1:34-35. Routledge 1933-1681. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2016.1214094>.

QUALITATIVE STUDY: INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONALS FROM THE SPORTING COMMUNITY

We conducted a qualitative survey of students of all nationalities, to enrich the results of the digital study. The interviews took place in autumn 2022 and winter 2023. The interviews were conducted with students from SKEMA Business School and from EFAP (international school of communication). **In total, 95 students were interviewed. They included sport participants and non-participants. The group was composed of 47 men, 47 women, and one non-binary person.**

We interviewed 19 SKEMA student athletes of all levels: Ten French (including one French-Portuguese), four Chinese, one Algerian, two Indians, one Indonesia, and one Salvadorian, adding up to a total of fourteen men and five women. These students had volunteered to take part in the consultations, in response to a call put out via the campus and programme heads. The exchanges took place in person, by video conference, or by email.

The following questions were asked (in French or in English):

- Is sport important to you? Why?
- What is sport to you: a game? A show? A health requirement? A career opportunity? An element of personal and/or national competition?
- How do you fit sport into your day-to-day life?
- What has helped you to participate in sport: family, school, government? Explain what type of support you have received (financial, etc.).
- Do you watch sporting events? If so, which ones?
- Can you give us a broad overview of the sport system in your country? Does the state play a key role in it? What about schools, clubs?
- If you have lived in several countries and experienced different sport systems, what differences stood out the most for you? Why? Which system do you think best fits your needs?
- Do you have any recommendations or advice for policy-makers?
- What are the sport trends in your country? Which sports are the most popular with your generation?
- In your opinion, what role does sport play in the society of your country of origin? (individual emancipation and development, common social values, the country's place in the world, etc.)?
- Which sports figures do you admire?

On the EFAP side, 33 MBA Sport Business Communication students were gathered into small groups to debate the same issues. In total, there were 18 women and 15 men (two of them are high-performance athletes, one in fencing and the other in rugby). The breakdown of nationalities was as follows: 30 French, including one French-Moroccan, one French-Greek, and one French-Congolese, as well as two Luxembourgers and one Swiss. The exercise was organised as part of the classes taught by Jean-Baptiste Guegan, author and specialist in the geopolitics of sport and also a member of our working group.

The following two questions were added to those listed previously:

- What do you see as the future of sport?
- In your opinion, what are the obstacles to participating in sport?

We also put together an online questionnaire aimed at SKEMA students who do not do any sport. **41 individuals answered our questionnaire**, including 24 women, 16 men and one non-binary person. 21% of respondents were international students. The countries represented were France, China, Singapore, Brazil, Lebanon, India, Kuwait, Turkiye, and the United States. The questions are listed below:

- When you hear someone talk about sport, what is the feeling you immediately feel? Why?
- What is the main reason for your indifference or aversion to sport?
- Have you always felt this way about sport? Or do you recall a particular event that triggered this aversion?
- We understand that you do not do any sport. But do you watch any? If so, what do you watch and for what reasons?

Finally, we interviewed 4 current or former high-performance athletes (all male) from SKEMA — 2 students and 2 individuals who are part of the school's faculty or administrative staff: a Frenchman, a French-Italian, a Chinese and a Brazilian. The questions were adapted for this more specific group:

- Could you explain your sporting background?
- How do you juggle your studies and your sporting career? What are the challenges you face?
- What has helped you in your sporting career: family, school, state? Explain what type of support you have received (financial, etc.).
- Why did you choose high-performance sport? Do you want to be a professional athlete?
- Do you have any recommendations or advice for policy-makers regarding the HPA (high-performance athlete) training policy, the development of mass sport, etc.?
- What are the sport trends in your country? Which sports are the most popular with your generation?
- In your opinion, what role does sport play in the society of your country of origin? (individual emancipation and development, common social values, the country's place in the world, etc.)?

In parallel to this, on 31 March 2023⁴⁷ we interviewed **a number of national and international personalities** from the sporting world:

- Patrick Roult, Head of the High Performance division at INSEP Paris and Co-founder of the Observatoire des imaginaires du sport.
- Belkhir Belhaddad, a deputy of the National Assembly of France and a member of the Cultural Affairs and Education Committee.
- Pierre Mbas, Director of Diambars France.
- Mariagrazia Squicciarini. Chief of Executive Office, Social and Human Sciences Sector at UNESCO.

They do not bear any responsibility for this report, which reflects the views of its authors only.

CREATION OF A WORKING GROUP

To guide our work, we created a working group composed of high-level personalities from the sporting world. It is composed of the following members:

- Simon Chadwick, Professor of Sport and Geopolitical Economy, SKEMA Business School;
- Xavier Desmaisons, Founder and CEO of Antidox;
- Jean-Baptiste Guégan, author and specialist in the geopolitics of sport;
- Bruno Lartigue, Director of Institutional Relations at GL Events;
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⁴⁷ Other interviews are planned for the second phase of the report

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