



# **GERFORD AI SPORT REPORT 2021: TABLE TENNIS & TOKYO OLYMPICS**

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# ABOUT US

**Gerford AI** is an Australian sportstech company, assisting Emerging Olympic Sports globally, with data analytics. Using Computer Vision, we have developed an efficient and focussed way to deliver for Emerging Sports, underpinned by our Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence capabilities. Table Tennis has been our flagship sport along with our growing portfolio of Winter Sports. 2022 sees expansion into deeper insights and analytics for volleyball, beach volleyball and a handful of other Olympic sports.

## A BIG YEAR FULL OF CHANGE

2021 was a big year for sport, with the Tokyo Olympics finally taking place after being rescheduled from 2020 due to Covid-19. Several new sports debuted at the Olympics (baseball/softball, karate, skateboard, sports climbing and surfing), prompting a younger, more digitally savvy audience to engage with the Olympics primarily through social media and newly introduced digital products such as live streaming and fan engagement features on the Olympics app.

Working with several Table Tennis teams in 2021, we have seen first-hand the growth of Table Tennis - an emerging Olympic sport that has been steadily growing in popularity and innovating through changes in the game, technological updates, and thriving global player participation.

Due to COVID-19 risks, fans were unable to attend most Table Tennis events and were restricted from attending the Tokyo Olympics - however, global sports fans were passionately engaged in discussion and debate online, with the Tokyo Olympics creating a massive spike in “talkativity” on social media.

**This report outlines the most global talking points and trending topics for Table Tennis and the Tokyo Olympics for 2021.**





# TRENDING TOPICS IN TABLE TENNIS

## SIZE OF THE PLAYING AREA

Generating over 250 million views on Chinese social media site Weibo, the size reduction of the playing area in table tennis during the Olympics caused a massive stir amongst fans and coaches. First raised by the Chinese team, who reported that the reduction from the usual playing area from 'seven by 14 metres', compared to 'six by 11 metres' during the Olympics, was endangering 'athletes' running and safety', as expressed by Chinese Table Tennis Association president Liu Guoliang. The German team also vocalised their concerns, which were quickly echoed by table tennis fans the world over.

Fans generated the hashtag "Liu Guoliang uses his foot length to measure the Olympic venue", which had the highest topic engagement, with 250 million engagements on the social media site Weibo.



# GROWING SUPPORT FOR TALENT FROM AFRICA

With Quadri Aruna (NGR) finishing #14 in 2021 and Omar Assar (EGY) being only the second African male ever to reach the Olympic quarter-finals singles, fan noise and support continued to grow by large waves in Africa.

The top 10 African male players reached the top 150 global Table Tennis rankings in 2021. Additionally, emerging star Dina Meshref from Egypt has shown a strong presence in the women's draws in the past year and solidifies her position in the top 40 of the ITTF Rankings coming into 2022.

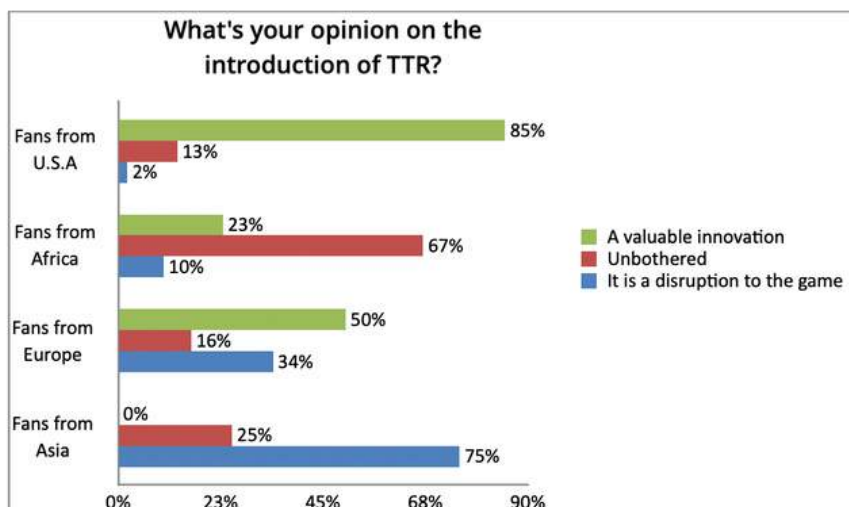
These players are increasing the popularity of table tennis in Africa, and conversations amongst fans on social media are hopeful to see a Top 10 African player challenge the Chinese player dominance of the sport.



## TECH CHANGES IN TABLE TENNIS

Like in many sports, Table Tennis fans expressed complaints and frustrations about umpire decisions during tournaments.

However, the recent approval of a Table Tennis Review System (TTR) by the ITTF was met with considerable fan support, who feel the TTR will provide greater transparency during matches, helping minimise umpire errors and assisting them with making difficult decisions around illegal ball tosses on serves.







# TOKYO OLYMPICS 2020

Despite the fact that the Tokyo 2020 Olympics were held without fan attendance due to the risk posed by Covid-19, Tokyo 2020 had some of the highest fan engagement on social media channels out of any recent Games.

## MORE THAN 1 BILLION FANS WERE REACHED

Tokyo 2020 had the highest engagement of all Olympics held in previous years, reaching a global broadcast audience of more than three billion people.

The official coverage on Olympic broadcast partners' digital platforms alone generated 28 billion video views in total, which represents a total increase of 139 per cent compared to the Rio 2016 Games.

This makes the Tokyo Games the most streamed and watched Olympic Games ever on digital platforms.



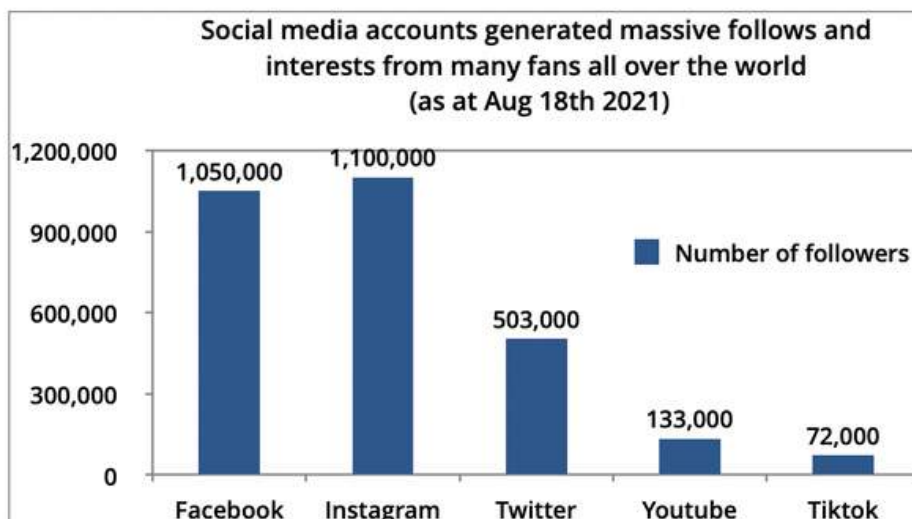
## #TOKYO2020 SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS GENERATED MASSIVE INTEREST

The Tokyo Olympics had official Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube accounts and its first-ever official Olympics TikTok channel.

At the end of the Olympics, the total number of engagements across all of the social channels was 6.1 billion, including shares, likes, comments, and video views.

The official Tokyo Olympics social media accounts also generated massive traffic from fans all over the world. As at the 1st of August 2021, social media posts by @olympics on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Weibo had generated about 3.7 billion engagements. During this same period, all of the social media accounts of the Olympics gathered a combined total of about 75 million followers.

The most significant digital supports and social engagements came from Australia, India, Japan (the host country), Korea, and the United States.



# DIGITAL INNOVATIONS PROPELLED FAN ENGAGEMENT

Due to the restrictions placed on fans' attendance for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, several digital innovations were introduced to enable fans to easily view games live through their phones or laptops.

These innovations went a long way in increasing the rate at which fans engaged during the Olympics. During the first few days of the Olympic Games, the Olympic digital platforms experienced record-breaking web traffic, double the total number of daily digital users during Rio 2016.

Looking at data from the 1st of August 2021, which was very early into the Olympic Games, the Tokyo 2020 app (Android and iOS) registered 100 million unique users.

During the first week of the Olympics, the 'Cheer' Button, which was embedded on several broadcasters' digital platforms to allow fans to virtually clap or cheer during events, recorded 150 million 'cheers' that had been sent from fans all over the world.

By the end of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, the Tokyo 2020 app (Android and iOS) had generated a total of 196 million unique users with online traffic three times that of the Rio 2016 Olympics.







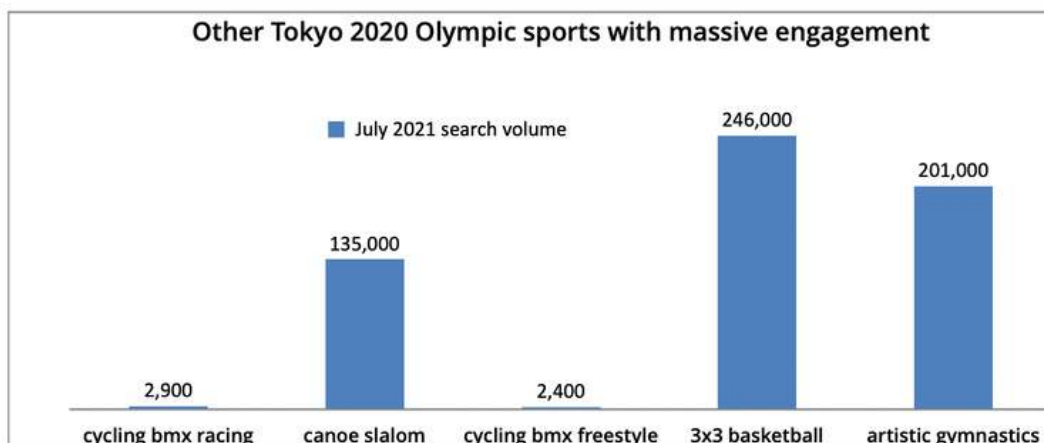
## SKATEBOARDING WAS A POPULAR NEW SPORT AT THE OLYMPICS

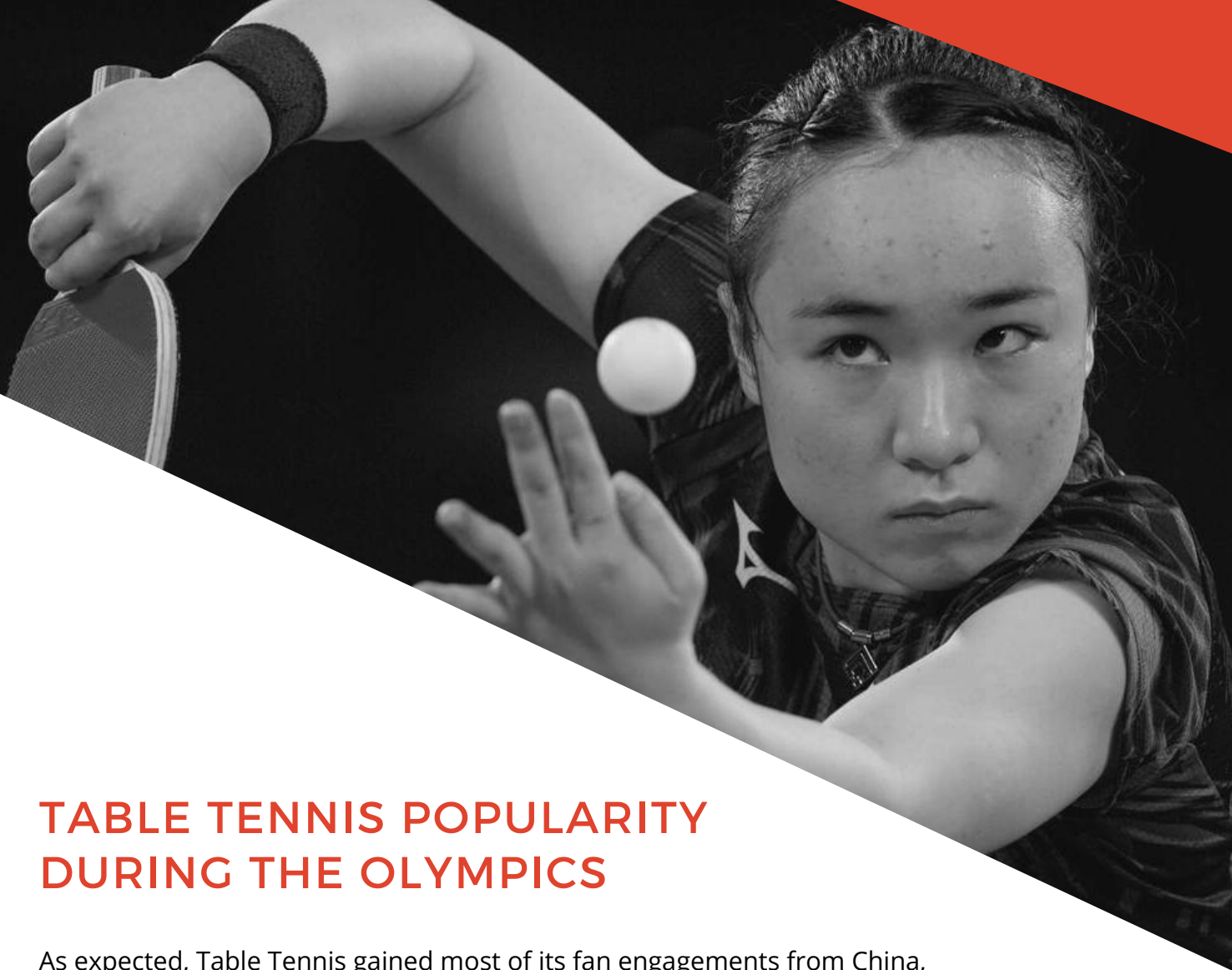
Skateboarding was one of the sports that debuted at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and did not fail to impress the fans. Skateboarding was one sport that saw the biggest interest spike from fans, generating 700,000 web and app users in just two days across all age groups.

Excitingly, and no doubt, music to the ears of the IOC, is the fact that most of the engagements generated from skateboarding during the Olympics came specifically from fans in the younger age groups.

One of the most engaged tweets from Tokyo 2020 was about Rayssa Leal, the 13-year-old Brazilian skateboarding silver medallist, which attracted 460,000 likes.

Other sports that also saw a spike in fan interest at the Tokyo Olympics were a mix of newly added sports such as BMX Racing and Cycling, Canoe Slalom, BMX freestyle, 3x3 Basketball, and Artistic Gymnastics.



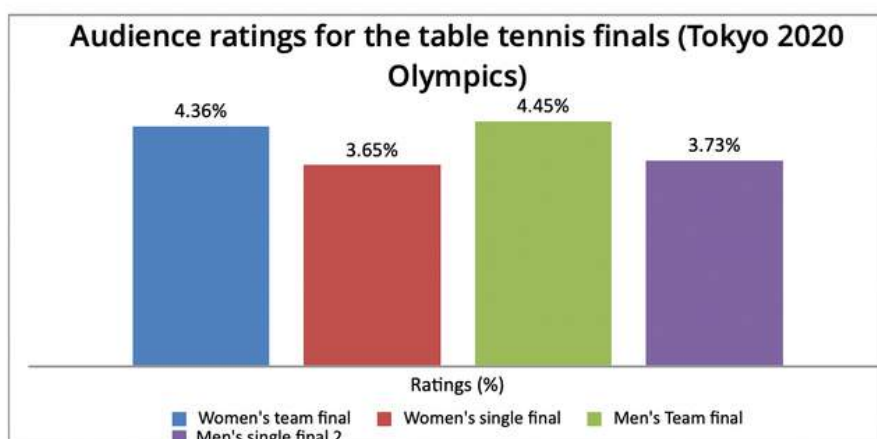


## TABLE TENNIS POPULARITY DURING THE OLYMPICS

As expected, Table Tennis gained most of its fan engagements from China, which dominate the sport and have a dedicated and passionate fan base, and Japan, the Olympics host country.

Table Tennis generated about 350 million unique viewers who tuned in to watch CCTV-5's (the main sports channel in China) coverage of all table tennis events from the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium.

There was massive fan engagement on social media, with the Men's Team final registering 19 million hashtag clicks and post impressions amounting to about 47.57 million.





# THE TECH DRIVERS OF THE GLOBAL SPORTS MARKET

## THE IMPACT OF TECH INNOVATION

2021 witnessed tangible and material growth in sportstech (technology used in sports). In 2021, the global sportstech market was valued at US\$17.9B, and according to GlobeNewswire, is expected to reach US\$40.2B by 2026. This trend strongly continues due to some of the following reasons;

- **Athletes, teams and leagues:** Sports such as (but not limited to) football (soccer), tennis, golf, NFL, NBA, cricket and F1, have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic resulting with huge losses in attendance revenues, sponsorships, TV and gambling dollars. They have now 'supercharged' a recovery by all competing for fan engagement through content, commerce and technology. Some of the growing 2021 trends which will continue into the future.
- **Interactive brand presence:** eSports has seen massive global growth and the 'sticky' nature of gaming has lured numerous sporting brands, leagues and athletes into the space.



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- **Data analytics:** The formula is simple, the more a team/athlete/brand wins, the more the fans will follow (and transact). And with this century-long formula, many teams believe if you can't measure it, you can't manage it. Therefore, the analytics space has become an integral resource to inform rosters, strategy, talent ID/recruitment, wellbeing and performance personnel. Additionally, sports data has morphed into a communicable commodity which enhances areas such as broadcast and gambling.
  - **Gambling:** According to Zion Market Research, the global sports betting market generated US\$131.1B in 2020 and is expected to reach revenues of US\$179.1B by 2026. Many sports are generating significant revenues in this space and with the growing number of U.S. gambling licences being approved, the revenues will continue to increase. Additionally, many brands are finding this as an additional avenue for fan engagement.
  - **NFT's/Blockchain/Cryptocurrencies:** It's early days in this area but 2021 increased the frenzy around this space. Many sports brands, clubs and leagues have already commenced the process of commercializing NFT's and a growing portion have developed their own crypto coins.
  - **Democratization of fitness technology:** With more people spending enormous blocks of time at home and social distancing, there has been a flooding of wearables, smartphone apps, machines, gadgets and apparel enter the living room and garages. The competition in this market has become fierce and the quality of the products has become significant quality with interactive capabilities.
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## LOOKING BEYOND TO 2022

In 2022, data and analytics for elite sports will continue grow, but the health and fitness categories will continue to shine as more people work from home and place higher emphasis on wellness and wellbeing.

Gerford AI is investing heavily in Emerging Sports, as fan numbers continue to grow and the athletes are always looking for that 2% edge to win more and improve their rankings.

Performance analytics will come in many forms but a key emphasis will be around time and ROI. So the technologies which enable efficient and accurate data to tell the story and inform the High Performance teams, Media & Broadcasters, Sportsbooks and of course the fans, will be in a great position for Paris 2024.

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