The Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 were out of the ordinary: postponed a year; closed to spectators. At the same time, the pandemic had accelerated digitalisation across every aspect of our lives.

This context provided immense challenges for all sports organisations but also brought with it opportunities for us when it came to achieving our mission ‘improving the world through sports’ by connecting people all over the world, engaging new audiences and especially younger audiences. In absence of spectators on the ground, it was also vital that the athletes felt the support of their loved ones and hundreds of millions of fans at home.

We achieved incredible results in 2021, with more people than ever digitally connected to the Olympic Games. In addition to 28 billion views on Olympic broadcaster partners’ digital platforms, part of this success was also due to the Olympic web and app platforms for Tokyo 2020. They attracted more than 196 million unique users, drawing more than three times the amount of online traffic for the Olympic Games Rio 2016, while the IOC’s social media handles generated 6.1 billion engagements – including video views, shares, comments and likes.

So how did we do it?

Achieving digital transformation
The framework for our achievements was in place even before the outbreak of COVID-19. Identifying the ever-growing digitalisation of society, our digital strategy laid out key components that would help grow engagement with the Games, especially among digital-first young people. When the pandemic hit, our ambition for digitalisation became not only desired but essential. Innovating in the digital and social media spaces became more vital than ever.

Key elements in the lead up to the Tokyo 2020 Games were the launch of Olympics.com, a new Olympic Virtual Series and our Stronger Together campaign. At Games-time, digital activities connected athletes and people around the world like never before.
A single people-centric online platform

One of the biggest challenges we faced when it came to audience engagement was that there was no single digital Olympic platform for people to go to. So, we built Olympics.com and its sister app – merging the websites and apps of the IOC and Games organising committees for the first time. We also integrated the Olympic Channel – our sports video section featuring everything from live events to award-winning films across a range of Games-related topics.

Launched in 2021, the new platform provides a comprehensive source for information, news and original content, enabling improved, streamlined digital engagement both during and between the Olympic Games. Everyone in the Olympic Movement – fans, athletes, sports federations and partners alike – can now access the digital content they’re most interested in based on data insights. Over the course of Tokyo 2020, 196 million users have visited the platform. This success was mirrored across social channels, including crafting our first digital collaboration with leading youth platform TikTok. A bespoke hashtag challenge #OlympicSpirit, has been viewed 6.7 billion times.

The Olympic Virtual Series

There’s been huge growth in the gaming industry and virtual sport, bringing people together around their passions.

We identified the opportunity to promote the Olympic Movement, Olympic values, sports participation and grow direct relationships with young people by moving into this area for the first time. Partnering with five International Sports Federations and games publishers, we produced the Olympic Virtual Series: Olympic-licensed mass participation events bringing together virtual sport, esports and gaming enthusiasts around the world.

Held in May-June 2021, the series featured Baseball, Cycling, Rowing, Sailing and Motorsport events, each differing in format and concept in order to maximise online participation and prioritise inclusivity. We welcomed nearly 250,000 players competing from home or at training facilities, with people around the world following events on our digital channels.

It was a promising start in the virtual sports environment, and we’re excited to develop it further in the run up to Paris 2024.
**Stronger Together**

With 100 days to go to the rescheduled Tokyo 2020 Games, we launched our main Stronger Together campaign, focused on connecting audiences through human, emotion-led content. Athletes including Naomi Osaka, shared their powerful personal stories in our Olympic Voices film. We ran a bespoke TikTok challenge and harnessed influencer power including Tony Hawk and Sky Brown – generating record levels of engagement and directly targeting the youth audience.

**A newly digital Games**

During the Games, we knew people would want to find ways to support the athletes and feel part of the action – even if they couldn’t physically be in the same place. Equally, we wanted the athletes to know they were being supported.

Working with Olympic Broadcasting Services, we encouraged fans to upload cheer videos and send virtual claps to the athletes they were following, which were then relayed on giant screens in the venues. Participants were able to pick any country they wanted to support, regardless of their location. In total 255 million cheers were sent from across the globe – a remarkable expression of the feeling of solidarity we were hoping to inspire.

Dedicated digital stations ensured that immediately after competing athletes could connect to friends and families thousands of miles away. The power of these moments will have been clear to anyone watching the emotional scenes – and it was especially moving that the 200th athlete moment was for the host country, Wrestling gold medallist Yui Susaki.

**What’s next?**

This was a pivotal year for our digital strategy. Reacting to the world around us, we accelerated the journey to fulfil our mission. We’ll be building on our successes at the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022 and beyond, continuing to look forward and innovate in the exciting, constantly evolving digital space.

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**FACTS AND STATS**

- **196 million** unique users on Olympic Web & App
- **255 million** virtual cheers sent from fans to Tokyo 2020 athletes
- **6.1 billion** engagements on Olympic social media handles
- **250,000 players** in the first Olympic Virtual Series
- **28 billion** views on Olympic Broadcast Partners' digital platforms