Show and Tell? How Sport Manufacturers Are Re-Defining their Self-Presentation on Digital Platforms

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Social media technologies have undergone explosive growth in the sport industry. The move towards more dynamic conversations between brands and their audiences has spurred creative content creation and innovative engagement strategies designed to enhance consumer relationships. While research has been quick to capture the effects of this phenomenon on athletes and various sport organizations (e.g., Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Pegoraro, 2010), little work has documented the digital presentation of other key stakeholders in sport. The purpose of this study is to examine the self-presentation strategies being used by sport manufacturers to carve out their digital presence. Specifically, this research explores the self-presentation strategies of golf manufacturers on the digital platforms of Twitter and Instagram.

Self-presentation in sport to date has primarily been used to document habits on singular social platforms. Twitter in particular has served as the backdrop for a bulk of the research that has been conducted with regard to social media in sport. This research looks to extend the literature by comparing the digital presentation of two different social platforms. While Twitter has long been viewed as the social tool of choice in the sport industry, the visual storytelling capabilities inherent of Instagram have increased its popularity as a digital branding tool. In 2015, more than half of all Instagram users reported using the platform to follow their favourite brands (Mander, 2015). As such, this work uses the theoretical lens of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) to explore the tactics being utilized by golf manufacturers on both Twitter and Instagram. The work then provides a comparative analysis to illustrate variances in the self-presentation strategies being used on each respective platform.

Seven golf manufacturers were selected for study—Titleist, TaylorMade, Callaway, Cobra, Cleveland, Ping, and Nike Golf. This sample captured all golf manufacturers with a social media presence at the time of data collection. All posts on the Twitter and Instagram feeds of the seven manufacturers were collected between April 2015 and September 2015, providing a snapshot of activity over the course of a traditional golf season. Each post was then reviewed for emergent themes using content analyses and the process of constant comparison. Frames are being developed to help explain broader self-presentation behaviors on each platform and how this might impact audience engagement.

Initial findings indicate the use of similar self-presentation techniques among golf manufacturers on both Twitter and Instagram. Tendencies toward product promotion and athlete sponsorship have been identified across the sample. Content strategies, however, have been found to be platform specific. For example, Twitter tends to rely on textual presentation, while Instagram is noticeably more visual; a finding that seems to impact the audience engagement each outlet procures. This outcome poses interesting implications with regard to cross-platform digital branding strategies and as well as the broader application of relationship marketing across social platforms.

References