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CASE STUDY

A Hole in One (Hundred Forty Characters): A Case Study Examining PGA Tour Golfers' Twitter Use During the Masters

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This case study explored how professional golfers participating in the Masters tournament used Twitter during the week of the event. Basing the research in self-presentation theory, the author conducted a content analysis of 895 tweets by 39 golfers. The results suggest that athletes are using Twitter to give fans both a front-stage and a backstage glimpse into their lives, with engaging with fans (front stage) being the most prominent. By balancing between front stage and backstage, the athletes are able to give fans a more intimate view of their life, while also maintaining a public persona that can please sponsors. Limitations and directions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: athlete, self-presentation, identity, sport events

One of the most historic locations in all of sports vigorously works to ensure that tradition and old-time values remain an important part of the fan experience. During the week of the Masters at the Augusta (Georgia) National Golf Course, patrons are not allowed to carry cell phones, a sandwich costs only $1.50, and the only social networking allowed is having a conversation with the person standing next to you (Mihoces, 2011). Despite this time warp back to a different era during competition, after play, golfers enter the digital era by logging on to Twitter and sending out messages to their followers. Twitter has become the social-media platform of choice for athletes (Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Sanderson & Kassing, 2011) and has had an enormous impact on the sports world (Sanderson, 2011). With athletes at the forefront of this revolution (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010, Pegoraro, 2010), even the Masters is now being reported 140 characters at a time.

Previous research on athletes using Twitter has focused on what athletes tweet about (Hambrick et al., 2010), why fans follow athletes (Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012), and how fans use Twitter to interact with both professional and collegiate athletes (Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010). The purpose of this case study was to ascertain what athletes are tweeting about

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during a time when more attention is focused on their sport. Using content-analytic methods, this case study explores how PGA Tour golfers used Twitter during the week of the Masters and outlines recommendations for how athletes can use it in the future during competitive events. The Masters tournament was chosen as the basis of the study because it is widely recognized as the premiere golf tournament in the world. In addition, because golf is an individual sport, the participants are all on equal footing as far as their goals and roles. A team sport such as football or soccer has many different players competing at a variety of positions and with a mix in regard to amount of playing time. With golf, all players will compete on the same course, on the same days, with the same goal of getting the lowest score to win the tournament. Thus, understanding how golfers use Twitter to self-present during a major event is warranted.

Literature Review

Twitter and Sports

Social-media use is growing at exceptional rates (up 37% in the summer of 2012 compared with the summer of 2011; Knight, 2012) and shows no signs of slowing. Twitter has grown exponentially since its introduction in 2006, already garnering 500 million registered users (Holt, 2013) and climbing toward an estimated 1 billion users within the next 2 years (Dugan, 2012). Through Twitter, users send 140-or-fewer-character messages, or tweets, from either a computer or a mobile device (Palser, 2009). These messages can be read by all other Twitter users if the account is public, or only by those who follow the account if it is private (Johnson, 2009). Social-media sites such as Twitter are changing the world of sports (Sanderson, 2011). Sports fans are more likely to check social media for the latest sports news before going to traditional news sites, and 83% of fans check social media while simultaneously watching a sporting event on television (KT Tape, 2012). For example, during the 2013 Super Bowl, there were 24.1 million tweets about the game and halftime show, not including tweets mentioning advertisements (Ashtari, 2013). With usage numbers like that, it is not surprising that research firms have determined that social media are becoming the primary source of sports information (Werner, 2012).

Twitter has quickly become the network of choice for those involved in sports (Clavio & Kian, 2010; Gregory, 2009; Sanderson & Kassing, 2011). While people from a wide range of professions use the service, professional athletes have gravitated toward it (Gregory, 2009) and have some of the largest numbers of followers of all users (Gaines, 2012). Pegoraro (2010) observed that several athletes have embraced Twitter as a way to create positive exposure, engage fans, and increase visibility. The brief messages enable athletes to give quick updates on many different aspects of their lives.

Twitter has also led to major changes for the journalists who cover sports, as the athletes themselves are now able to give news and insight directly to the fans (Sanderson & Kassing, 2011; Schultz & Sheffer, 2010; Sears, 2011; Sheffer & Schultz, 2010). In many cases, the athletes and the media are now in competition with each other over who can tweet out the latest news first. Athletes have used Twitter to be the first to report about contract information, provide details on their personal lives, and give their own takes on a sporting event in which they have

participated (Sanderson, 2011). If athletes are active on Twitter with this type of information, the fans may choose to follow them instead of the sports-media member so as to get the latest updates directly from "the source."

For some athletes, this opportunity to bypass the media and their gatekeeping practices to speak directly to fans is appealing. Kurt Lewin (1947), widely recognized as the pioneer of gatekeeping theory, stated that a person or group (gatekeeper) decides what information should be passed along to the public and what information should not. Lewin's theory was later corroborated by David Manning White when he discovered that a wire editor at a newspaper had final control over what stories reached his readers and what stories were left out of the newspaper (White, 1950). Athletes can be subject to framing from journalists (Sanderson, 2011), where media members are able to shape public opinion based on how they report on certain events. In some cases, the media will focus on certain aspects of a story to elicit particular emotions or reactions from the audience (Entman, 1993). This practice has made some athletes skeptical about talking to the media, which has made the appeal of Twitter even stronger. Professional football player DeAngelo Hall was quoted as saying, "Your message definitely gets twisted and folded the way the media wants it. If you have something posted on your Twitter . . . it hasn't been doctored up by a writer or any of the media" (Robinson, 2009). Previous research has demonstrated how social media can be used by athletes to combat perceived negative media framing (Sanderson, 2008) and how, by avoiding the gatekeeping, athletes are able to employ Twitter both to increase their standing in the eyes of the fans and to give those fans a sense of closeness that was not available in the past.

The increase in Twitter use among athletes has prompted researchers to investigate how athletes use Twitter to interact with fans, comment on their sport and other sports, and discuss their endorsements (Hambrick et al., 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010; Sanderson, 2011). For many athletes, Twitter is a way to show fans their true personality. This gives the athletes an opportunity to better connect with fans and deliver their own thoughts and feelings away from the media.

Twitter and Self-Presentation

The idea of self-presentation was first addressed by Erving Goffman in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Goffman stated that people created a desirable image that they wanted the world to see. To further explain this theory, the theater was used as an example, as actors negotiate between "front stage" and "backstage" performances. The front stage is where actors are being watched by the audience, so the actor must be on his or her best behavior, act in a certain manner, and perform in a way that will please the crowd. The backstage area is more private and informal, so the actor can be more relaxed and casual in an environment that will not require any type of performance. Goffman stated that people have a desire to create a self-image that balances front stage and backstage. Although valuable in face-to-face interactions, computer-mediated communication and Twitter have created compelling opportunities for people to enhance their self-presentation (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Jacobsen, 2010; Miller, 1995). Sanderson (2008) examined the self-presentation strategies of former Boston Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling on his blog 38pitches.com. Schilling was able to navigate between different positions when self-presenting due to the ability to quickly

navigate between topics and rotate among different self-presentation emphases (e.g., sports-media critic, committed teammate, accountable person). Sanderson argued that digital media are a valuable tool for self-presentation because they give athletes greater control over how they are represented to the public (Sanderson, 2008). With the ability to convey different types of messages to followers, Twitter allows users to form their own public identity in an effort to look more desirable to other people. For athletes, Twitter gives them a chance to create an identity that can appear identifiable and approachable (Sanderson, 2013). Athletes must deal with a vast audience of followers that can include fans, the media, fellow athletes, and possible business opportunities, making the transition between front stage and backstage even more complicated. For athletes on Twitter hoping to build their fan base, they must strike a balance between their own personal interests and giving the audience what they want (Marwick & Boyd, 2010).

Athletes have some of the largest Twitter followings, which can lead to additional problems when cultivating their image via this network. For instance, Tiger Woods has over 3 million people who follow him on Twitter, but those people likely come from all different countries, are different ages, and have different backgrounds. Due to this large variety in the types of followers, athletes have to work with multiple audiences simultaneously. This can be difficult because different types of followers have different expectations about what the athlete should be talking about on social media (Binder, Howes, & Sutcliffe, 2009), which means athletes have to try to entertain and inform diverse audiences. This was less of a problem before the advent of Twitter, because a person could simply change the conversation based on whom they were talking to, but when an athlete is "talking" to millions of people at the same time, the ability to tailor the conversation to individual groups is nearly impossible (Boyd, 2008). This could potentially make the transition between front stage and backstage even more difficult for the athlete, but some have suggested that Twitter provides an outlet where athletes can successfully position their identity based on what is required for the situation or conversation at hand (Sanderson, in press).

Self-presentation has been employed in previous studies examining Twitter use by sports broadcasters (Weathers et al., in press), baseball players (Sanderson, in press), and male and female tennis players (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012). Lebel and Danylchuk (2012) found that both males and females were interested in their own image construction but noted that male athletes acted more as sports fans while female athletes spent more time working to create a positive image. Similarly, Weathers et al. determined that the broadcasters' self-presentation in their study fell along traditional gender lines, with the female sportscaster discussing personal items and the male sportscaster focusing on sports commentary. Sanderson (in press) demonstrated how professional baseball player Logan Morrison was able to use Twitter to portray different identity positions based on varied circumstances. As more athletes begin to use Twitter to reach their fans directly, the days of having to rely on the mass media for the latest updates on sports stars may soon be a thing of the past.

Parasocial Interaction

Avoiding the gatekeeper lets athletes connect directly with fans, and this can enable fans to engage in parasocial interaction with athletes (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009;

Sanderson, 2011). A parasocial relationship is a "seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer" (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215) that is one-sided, or a pseudo friendship (Robinson & Trail, 2005). The fan believes he or she has a friendship with the athlete, while the athlete does not consider the relationship with the fan to be a personal one (Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985; Rubin & McHugh, 1987). When the athletes directly interact with their fans by replying to them on Twitter, this can give the fan the impression of a personal and intimate conversation between him- or herself and the athlete (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009). In return, this can lead to fans sending tweets to the athlete that can provide support and encouragement for both on- and off-the-field issues (Sanderson, 2011). Perhaps the world's most famous golfer, Tiger Woods, said the direct connection he makes with fans is one of the main perks he enjoys with Twitter (Mihoces, 2011). However, some fans use social networks to criticize the athletes (Browning & Sanderson, 2012). Whether it is positive or negative, interaction among athletes is also changing because of Twitter. Previous interactions may have been kept away from public view, but a conversation that takes place on Twitter can generally be seen by all (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Multiple studies have been conducted regarding parasocial interaction between athletes and their fans on Twitter (Frederick et al., 2012; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Sanderson, 2011), and with athletes spending almost 50% of their time on Twitter interacting with fans (Pegoraro, 2010), the likelihood of a direct interaction between a fan and an athlete has grown exponentially. Fans looking to learn more about an athlete or personally engage the athlete may turn to Twitter to get parasocial interaction without the media gatekeeper to interfere.

Due to the increased media coverage of major sporting events, the amount of interest in a particular sport generally increases, and the extra television coverage can lead to new fans for the participating athletes. With the advent of Twitter, the athletes have a way to reach fans directly, with no gatekeeper to filter their message. For golf, the Masters is the most-watched event of the year (Hiestand, 2013), and golfers rarely have the television audience that they do during this major event. As such, the Masters provides a rich opportunity to investigate how athletes present themselves during a major sporting event. The following research question is proposed:

> **RQ1**: What self-presentation strategies are professional golfers using during a major sporting event?

Method

Data Collection

A list of all Masters participants was consulted, which identified 93 golfers. These participants were then cross-checked to determine if they had Twitter accounts. Of those 93 golfers, Twitter accounts were located for 39 of the participants. The mean age of these golfers was 33.89 ($SD = 6.492$), and they represented 12 different countries. Comparatively, the collection of all 93 Masters entrants had a mean age of 35.4 ($SD = 10.074$), and participants hailed from 21 different countries. The United States had the most golfers on Twitter, with 21 athletes (53.8%), followed by England with 5 golfers (12.8%), Northern Ireland with 3 (7.7%), South Africa

with 2 (5.1%), and Argentina, Korea, Belgium, Australia, Spain, Sweden, Italy and Fiji with 1 golfer each (2.6%). This was representative of the entire field, as the United States had the highest number of golfers in the Masters, with 44 (47.3%).

The tweets from each golfer's account were examined starting at 9 a.m. (EST) on the Monday before the Masters began (April 8, 2013) until 9 a.m. (EST) on the day after the tournament concluded (April 15, 2013). The entire week was used as a data source, because the media coverage of the tournament is typically a week long, so fans may be learning about these athletes starting early in the week. The 39 Masters participants with Twitter accounts tweeted 895 times during the recorded time, for an average of 22.95 tweets per golfer ($SD = 24.975$). However, the number of tweets sent varied greatly between golfers; Graeme McDowell tweeted the most, with 88 different messages, while three golfers (Sergio Garcia, Charl Schwartzel, and Vijay Singh) did not send a single tweet during the week of the tournament. Of the 895 tweets, 703 of them were written by the golfer himself (78.5%), while 192 of the tweets were retweets from another source (21.5%).

Data Analysis

Content-analysis methods were used to analyze and then categorize the tweets. This method has been used previously in studies regarding athletes and Twitter (Hambrick et al., 2010; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Pegoraro, 2010) and was appropriate for this research, as well. All golfer tweets from the week of the Masters were coded into categories designed specifically for this study. Categories from previous research (Clavio, 2008; Hambrick et al., 2010; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Pegoraro, 2010) were used as guides, but the final content categories were determined based on the initial examination of the tweets informed by Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory. The constant-comparative method (Glaser, 1965) was used to develop the categories by creating, analyzing, and revisiting the data until new observations failed to alter the existing categories. Two independent coders were trained based on a coding sheet, and they coded 20% of the tweets ($N = 180$) independently of each other. Intercoder reliability using Cohen's kappa (kappa = .94) determined a high level of reliability. Given the high initial agreement, the remaining tweets were coded by the primary researcher. In all, six self-presentation categories were developed, three front stage and three backstage. The front-stage categories included the engager, the promoter, and the informer. The backstage categories included the golf observer, the fan, and the behind-the-scenes reporter.

Front Stage

- *The engager* involved an athlete having direct communication with fans by responding to their questions on Twitter or by inviting an interaction with fans.
- *The promoter* occurred when the golfer would discuss one of his sponsors or endorsement deals.
- *The informer* manifested when the golfer sent a link to a picture, article, or video about himself that had been produced by the mass media. For the purposes of this study, the links and photos in this category had been produced by the mass media and not by the golfer.

Backstage

- *The golf observer* included insight, observations, and fandom of both golf and the Masters tournament itself. This category included general insight about golf, any rooting interests in the outcome of the Masters, and congratulatory messages to other golfers.
- *The fan* occurred when a golfer demonstrated a rooting interest in a sport other than his own. Despite participating in a professional sport themselves, many athletes are fans of other sports, and many go to Twitter to express this fandom.
- *The behind-the-scenes reporter* included instances when a golfer tweeted personal stories or photos that would not normally be reported by the mass media, either because of a lack of interest or a lack of access. This category gave fans a glimpse into the athlete's life that they likely would not be getting if it were not for Twitter's direct access from the athlete to the follower.

Each tweet was only placed into one category, based on the predominant theme of the message. For example, any tweet that was an interaction between a golfer and a fan, no matter what the topic of the conversation, was placed into the engager category with the belief that the interaction by the golfer to the fan is the most important part of the tweet. Therefore, if golfers' tweets were responding to fans' questions about the course, the tweets were coded as engager because it was a fan who started the conversation.

Results and Interpretation

Content of Tweets

Within the content of the tweet, many messages contained links to other Web-site addresses. For clarity, all link addresses have been removed from tweets and replaced with the notation [link]. Otherwise, all tweets have been transcribed verbatim from the data set, including all misspellings and punctuation errors. Table 1 provides an example of each category, along with the frequency of each theme's appearance.

Table 1 Golfer Twitter Use During The Masters

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Front stage		
the engager	396	44.2
the promoter	91	10.2
the informer	79	8.8
Backstage		
the behind-the-scenes reporter	203	22.7
the golf observer	83	9.3
the fan	43	4.8

The research question in this study was to determine what athletes tweet about during a major sporting event. An analysis of the 895 tweets of golfers participating in the study showed that these athletes exhibited both front-stage and backstage personas, consistent with the idea of self-presentation. Golfers tended to demonstrate more front-stage themes when using Twitter, as 63.2% of tweets were front stage, while 36.8% were backstage.

The Engager

The engager category contained 396 tweets from the golfers, the most of any category in this study. This demonstrates that athletes are using Twitter to directly connect with their fans by sending messages responding to the fans' questions and comments. For example, Graeme McDowell tweeted, "Can answer a few questions about the course if anyone has any?" McDowell proceeded to answer 45 questions from fans, including, "any major adjustments to the course? >>subtle change to 14 green. Nothing else." While Luke Donald did not specifically ask for questions from fans, he answered many, including, "what would a 10 handicap shoot at Augusta this week? I would take the over on 100." Amateur T.J. Vogel used Twitter to thank his supporters with the post, "'@lembree888: Good luck to @TJvogel23 at the Masters this weekend!! #gogators' thanks Lauren!"

The Promoter

A golfer's yearly income is based heavily on performance on the course, so the better the tournament finish, the more money the golfer receives. To supplement this volatile income, golfers receive guaranteed income from their endorsements of various businesses. Therefore, it is no surprise that many of the players in this study spent time discussing their sponsors in an effort to keep these companies happy. Promotion of sponsors accounted for 91 tweets (10.2%) of all the tweets sent out during Masters week. Justin Rose's only tweet of the week was to thank his sponsor when he wrote, "Hoping for a flying start this week with my brand new sponsor @British_Airways. I'm pleased to be part of the team!" The majority of golfers did not write the sponsorship-related tweets themselves, as they simply retweeted what had been written from the company account. Over 60% of tweets in the promotion category were retweets (60.4%), the most of any category, as none of the others had more than 45%. Brian Gay retweeted from his clothing sponsor's account each day of the event when they posted a picture of the outfit he would be wearing during the tournament, while Zach Johnson retweeted this from his sponsor Transamerica: "Enter to win weekly prizes to Play like a Pro or Meet a Master: Team Transamerica's @ZachJohnsonPGA! [link]."

The Informer

Linking to news content accounted for 79 tweets (8.8%) of those recorded during Masters week. The golfers used Twitter to direct their followers to articles, photos, and videos that were produced by the mass media. For example, Henrik Stenson used Twitter to link to a news article about himself from his native Sweden: "For those of you who speak Swedish.....[link]." Kevin Streelman retweeted a link from the PGA Tour Web site that discussed the player-of-the month nominees, with

himself as one of the choices. Angel Cabrera was the most prolific of the golfers who posted links to news content, as 52 of his 85 tweets (61.2%) fell into this category.

While there were 200 more tweets in the front-stage categories than in the backstage categories, the golfers were able to demonstrate their ability to switch between the two based on the circumstances of the tweet. This ability to tailor the type of tweet demonstrates one of the strengths of Twitter. The backstage tweets enabled fans to see aspects of the Masters and the golfers that would have previously not been seen.

The Behind-the-Scenes Reporter

Behind-the-scenes stories and photos had the second-highest number of tweets (203 tweets, 22.7%) of all categories, and the highest number of the backstage categories. Athletes used Twitter to relay personal stories, send pictures of themselves or their families, and give fans a glimpse into their lives that the fans would not normally obtain. Many of the tweets in this category were family related, as Stewart Cink wished his son a happy 16th birthday, John Senden sent birthday wishes to his 14-year-old nephew, and Dustin Johnson sent out a picture of himself with his family and girlfriend. Ian Poulter demonstrated that his shopping habits are possibly similar to those of his followers when he tweeted, "Spent the usual amount in the ProShop, it's very addictive I have to tell you. Few shirts, hats, credit card holder, iPhone case, cups etc." Poulter later tweeted a photo of his new credit-card holder along with the tweet, "Just love shopping at Augusta." Meanwhile, defending champion Bubba Watson showed off a new souvenir of his own, tweeting, "Made hole in one on hole 16 today!! The ball & 9 iron. #amazing [link]" with the link taking the reader to a picture of the golf club and golf ball taken by Watson himself. Webb Simpson kept it simple while describing his upcoming weekend after missing the cut when he tweeted, "coffee, kiddos, church, practice."

The Golf Observer

Golf is one of the unique sports in which those participating in the event can comment on the tournament while it is still taking place. When the leaders of the Masters were playing the final holes, many of the golfers had already finished their round and retreated to the clubhouse, hotel, or other locale to watch the conclusion on television. Several golfers took this opportunity to use Twitter to provide insight on the golf course and what the leaders should look for. Throughout the week, 83 tweets (9.3%) were examples of the golfers giving insight about the tournament. As the tournament was winding down and the leaders were heading to a playoff, Jason Dufner tweeted, "Number 10 is a high draw delight today, tee shot and approach," giving fans insight into how the hole was playing from someone who was on it earlier in the day. Dufner was one of many who were "live tweeting" the concluding holes of the tournament, giving an insider's opinion at the greens and what shots needed to be hit. On Saturday morning of the tournament, Tiger Woods was penalized two shots for an improper drop during his Friday round (Harig, 2013), and Hunter Mahan was one of the first to announce the penalty when he tweeted, "I've heard a two shot penalty for Tiger. Interesting." Several golfers then weighed in on the penalty, with Webb Simpson, Ian Poulter, Graeme McDowell, and Mahan all giving their opinion. Tiger Woods himself them took to Twitter to give his side

of the story, sending out five consecutive tweets about the situation. After the final shot, Rickie Fowler was among many golfers to use Twitter to congratulate winner Adam Scott, when he tweeted, "Congrats to Adam! Pumped for him!"

The Fan

The category of being a fan contained the least number of tweets recorded, mirroring the results of previous research (Hambrick et al., 2010). The golfers sent out only 43 tweets (4.8%) that discussed a sport other than their own. The athletes who did demonstrate their fandom of other sports focused on college basketball, as the NCAA men's basketball national championship game took place during the first night that tweets were recorded (April 8). Several of the golfers took to Twitter to give their opinions during the matchup between Louisville and Michigan for the title, including Bo Van Pelt, who wrote, "2 many quick shots by Michigan. Not making UL work on defense." After Louisville won, Jason Dufner tweeted, "Solid game to watch, very entertaining. Congrats to Louisville." After the Masters concluded, Hunter Mahan turned his attention from golf to professional basketball and sent out three consecutive tweets about the NBA's Los Angeles Lakers.

Discussion

This study investigated how golfers were using Twitter during the week a major tournament. With 44.2% of all tweets falling into the engagement category, the results suggest that during the Masters, golfers as a whole seemed to take advantage of the opportunity to directly connect with fans and engage them in one-on-one conversations. This behavior can lead to increased parasocial interaction between a fan and an athlete because the fan has the opportunity to feel a closer bond with the athlete based on this conversation. Athletes answered questions about the golf course and their personal live and had back-and-forth banter with fans on a wide variety of other topics. Ultimately, these interactions on Twitter are increasingly bridging the gap between parasocial interaction and social interaction. By having full conversations with fans, athletes are doing more than simply giving the impression of a relationship; they are having social interaction with fans. This has been labeled a circumsocial interaction, wherein Twitter creates a rotation between social and parasocial interaction based on circumstances. At times, the interaction will remain strictly parasocial, but occasionally it will be something closer to an actual social interaction among peers (Kassing & Sanderson, in press). With these interactions available for all to witness on the athlete's timeline, others can view the questions and answers, as well, and be a part of the conversation. This interactivity gives fans an intimate look at their favorite sports stars.

While the athletes did appear to be taking advantage of the opportunities Twitter allows for a direct connection with fans, they were not using the social network to increase exposure for their sponsors. With only approximately 10% of athlete tweets promoting their sponsors, this would appear to be a wasted opportunity for the athletes. Traditionally, beyond the announcement of the beginning of an agreement, media members do not report on the various sponsorships that an athlete has. With direct access to thousands of followers, these athletes can avoid the gatekeeper and promote their sponsors. Athletes' willingness to mostly retweet these sponsorship

messages also leads to a missed opportunity. Instead of sending the message directly from the company, the athlete could make the endorsement more personal by writing a tweet that praises the product. However, athletes must also consider whether sending a constant stream of advertisements and endorsement messages will turn off the fans who follow them. One study found that female Twitter users did not find celebrity endorsement tweets relevant to their personal needs but did have a moderately positive attitude toward these types of tweets (Cunningham & Bright, 2012). In addition, 68% of people either love, like, or are indifferent to athletes posting endorsement messages or sponsored tweets (GMR Marketing, 2012). That positive feeling could turn negative if the endorsement tweets begin appearing more frequently. Some athletes who have multiple sponsors have been willing to send tweets about nearly all of them (Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011), meaning followers' timelines could be overloaded with pseudo advertisements if an athlete has a large number of endorsers. While constantly tweeting about their sponsors may frustrate some of the athlete's followers, there is likely a balance where athletes can please both fans and those paying them to endorse their product. In addition to deciding how often to tweet about the sponsor, the athlete may ultimately have to get approval for what companies they are tweeting about. Most sports leagues and teams have their own corporate sponsors, and those are not always in harmony with the sponsors of individual players. For example, Justin Rose tweeted his support for British Airways, but the official airline of the PGA Tour is United Airlines (Partners, n.d.). While it appears this conflict is currently not an issue for golfers, it was during the 2012 Summer Olympics when athletes were prevented from using Twitter to advertise non-Olympic sponsors (Belson, 2012).

While it is understandable that one of the appeals of Twitter is the opportunity to avoid the gatekeeping aspects of the mass media, the athletes in this study appear to be ignoring the strengths of the media, as well. A relatively small amount of tweets, only 8.8%, were the golfers linking to news content. While athletes cannot always frame a story how they would like, and the media can publish stories of which athletes may not approve, athletes can still point their followers to stories that they believe are valuable. This enables athletes to expose their followers to positive stories about their personal lives, charity work, or athletic successes. These stories can give much greater detail about athletes than a 140-character tweet can, so athletes would be wise to seek out these stories and provide links to their followers. This gives fans another opportunity to learn more about the athlete, which in turn can increase the athlete's popularity and positive exposure to the public.

Almost a quarter of all tweets fell into the category of behind the scenes, making it the most frequently used category in the backstage concept of self-presentation. This is another instance where athletes are able to give their fans a glimpse into their lives that they would not normally receive. Twitter provides fans with access to athletes that the mass media cannot always achieve for various reasons. The behind-the-scenes tweets also give the athletes an opportunity to frame how they want to appear to the fans. If athletes want to emphasize that they are family focused, they can send many pictures showing them spending time with their families. If athletes want to show how they are dedicated to charity work, they can discuss the recent charitable organizations with which they have assisted. By controlling the message with Twitter, these behind-the-scenes tweets can be beneficial in shaping how the athlete is perceived by the public.

While one of the large appeals of Twitter is that it allows fans to learn more about their favorite players away from the playing field, ultimately it is the athlete's sporting accomplishments that drew in the fans in the first place. Therefore, it is not surprising that golf-related commentary is an aspect of the athletes' Twitter activity. In this study, athletes spent nearly 10% of their tweets discussing the tournament itself. One of the most publicized uses of Twitter during Masters week was when Tiger Woods used Twitter to explain his two-stroke penalty after an illegal drop. Instead of holding a press conference or ignoring the situation completely, Woods sent out five consecutive tweets in which he explained the drop from his perspective, what happened the next morning, how the penalty was assessed, and that he accepted the penalty. By using Twitter, Woods was able to initially avoid the gatekeeper to tell his side of the story directly to the public. It also afforded him the opportunity to not have to answer questions about the incident from the media on the morning of the third round, as he gave a statement on his own to the public instead.

Another effective use of Twitter was during the final holes of the last round when the golfers who had already finished their round were "live tweeting" the event. With more than 80% of fans using social media when watching sporting events (KT Tape, 2012), it is plausible that many of those watching the tournament on television were also using Twitter at the same time. For the golfers to provide extra insight about how the hole played for them earlier in the day can be a valuable resource for fans, because it provides viewers with information that they may not be able to get by simply watching the event on television. If the audience members find the golfers informative, they may be more willing to follow them even after the tournament is over. However, athletes may be hesitant to discuss strategy on Twitter, as their opponents can also see the tweets. When discussing issues relating to their own sport, athletes should strike a balance between giving the fans an insider's view while also not giving away too much information to their opponents.

The golfers in this study spent the least amount of tweets (4.8%) discussing sports other than their own. This could be due to the important nature of the sporting event in which they were participating or that they did not have time to be distracted by other events. Had the NCAA Basketball National Championship not been taking place during the Monday of the Masters, the percentage of golfers discussing their fandom of other sports would likely have been much lower. To help increase parasocial interaction with their followers, these athletes should spend more time discussing other sports that they follow to give their followers another avenue to develop a connection. Hambrick et al. (2010) suggested that athletes tweeting about other sports can also demonstrate that they are not only thinking about their own sport but that they also enjoy watching other sports and athletes, much like the fans do, creating additional avenues for identification and connection.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

An obvious limitation of this article is that only one sport was studied. While golfers participating in the Masters did provide an adequate sample of how Twitter can be used by athletes during their biggest sporting event of the season, future research should examine other sports in that context. Another limitation is that only male athletes were studied in this survey. Future research can examine how female

athletes use Twitter during major sporting events to determine if they use the social network any differently during a major sporting event. Finally, future researchers could examine what exactly the fans are hoping their athletes tweet about during a major sporting event. Fans can be surveyed to determine what makes them want to follow athletes and if they are more or less likely to follow based on the way an athlete is using the social network. Even with these limitations, the research provides an effective glimpse into how the Twitter accounts of professional athletes are affected during a major sporting event.

Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrate that athletes are able to balance between front-stage and backstage themes in the content of their tweets. While some golfers may spend hours crafting tweets to their followers, this attention given to Twitter obviously does not guarantee success on the course. Of the 39 golfers profiled for this study on Twitter during a major sporting event, the champion of the Masters tournament was not one of them. That is because the 2013 Masters winner, Adam Scott, does not have a Twitter account.

Case Questions

- As social media become increasingly popular, is Twitter soon to be an essential tool for athletes when it comes to building up their fan base, or will athletes still be able to become global icons without this direct connection to fans?
- The parasocial aspect of Twitter is one of the major appeals of the social network for sports fans, but should athletes be concerned about giving up too much of their privacy?
- Would the content of athletes' tweets be different if they were part of a team as opposed to participating in a solo sport such as golf?
- Leagues and teams have sponsorship deals, and players often have endorsements of their own. Should teams or leagues be able to regulate what their players endorse on Twitter if those companies are different from ones that support the team or league?
- In this case study, very few athletes used Twitter to discuss their endorsements. Is this a missed opportunity for athletes, or is it wise for them to avoid these types of messages since research has demonstrated that fans do not want to read sponsorship tweets?

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