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Professional Athlete Self-Presentation on Twitter

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Graduate Program in Kinesiology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE SELF-PRESENTATION ON TWITTER

(Thesis format: Integrated Article)

by

Katie Lebel

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the digital self-presentation of professional athletes. Central to this purpose was the application of Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory to the social media landscape in order to further our understanding of online athlete behavior through a theoretical lens.

Study 1 established how professional athletes are presenting themselves on Twitter through the identification of ten focused self-presentation strategies and explored differences in athlete strategy based upon gender. Content analyses compared male and female athlete tweets relayed by all professional tennis players with a verified Twitter account. The analysis suggested that while athlete image construction was largely similar between genders, male athletes spent more time in the role of *sport fan* while female athletes spent more time in the role of *brand manager*.

Study 2 built upon the framework for athlete self-presentation established in Study 1 by asking sport consumers to identify their level of interest in each self-presentation strategy. A self-administered online survey was created to measure audience interest and sent to a snowball sample of golf consumers ($N = 377$). The most salient strategy reported was the *sport insider*. The study suggested that fans may not be as interested in the personal details of an athlete's life outside of sport as previously suggested. A disconnect between the self-presentation strategies being employed by athletes on Twitter and the strategies sport consumers reported being most interested in was also identified.

Study 3 investigated how professional athletes present themselves in their Twitter profile picture and included an interpretation of this photographic self-presentation by a Generation Y audience ($N = 141$). Participants assessed a sample of profile photos of the most followed male

and female athletes on Twitter by providing their first impressions of each athlete's image and then evaluating photo favorability and effectiveness. This research provided evidence to suggest that individuals invest meaning in the social cues provided in athlete profile pictures. Athletes who highlighted a sport context were consistently ranked most favorably and effectively and were associated with positive word associations. The findings underscore the importance of a strategic alignment between social media profile content, profile photos, and the brand established by athletes.

Keywords: self-presentation, Twitter, professional athletes, image management strategy

Co-Authorship

The information presented in this dissertation is my original work; however, I would like to acknowledge the important contributions of my advisor, Dr. Karen Danylchuk. Her insight and guidance helped shape this dissertation and strengthen the final product.

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Introduction

The revolutionary impact of social media has redefined our communications infrastructure. In an era of rapid change, social media has radically affected the way information is now shared between individuals and industries across the globe. Social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter have become the news source of choice for millions of consumers. In contrast to traditional media outlets, these communication platforms grant users the power to direct the focus of national news media, and often provide inspiration for global conversation. Twitter users in New York City, for example, learned of a 2011 earthquake some thirty seconds before they were able to feel its effects (Mason, 2012). The events surrounding Egypt's landmark presidential election and the Iranian Revolution were brought to life around the world through the extensive coverage provided by Twitter users. Global awareness of both events was largely credited to the mass circulation of first-hand reports and stories on Twitter. Strategists, supporters, and protestors alike, all rallied support for their respective causes using Twitter as a base of operations (Mason, 2012).

The 2012 United States Presidential election became the most-tweeted moment in history this past November when Twitter conversation surrounding the occasion surmounted the 31 million mark (Reuters, 2012). President Barack Obama broke the record for the most re-tweeted (or repeated) message in history with his “Four more years” message, published just before taking the stage to affirm his election victory. The simple message was re-tweeted more than 810,000 times by people from more than 200 countries (Twitter, 2012).

The common question plaguing those on the outside of the Twitterverse looking in is “why do I need to know what a person ate for dinner?” It is true—Twitter can make a bad first impression (Johnson, 2009). Superficially, it undoubtedly appears a largely narcissistic act of

navel gazing and there are a multitude of irrelevant details published. On the other hand, Twitter can provide an unexpected, even surprising depth. Critics have long lamented a perceived demise in national conversation. The media has been blamed for molding public thought; the public blamed for not challenging popular thought. Twitter is in many ways able to provide a remedy for these social ills—it seems to be reengaging society and inspiring them to join back in on societal conversation. Whether or not Twitter is used by the masses is now somewhat of an irrelevant point. To say it is on the popular radar might even be an understatement. It has been injected into our global dialogue and there are 500 million “tweeps” creating and spreading their own news and opinions across the globe (Twitter, 2012). Twitter has fundamentally changed the communications playing field.

In the midst of this power shift, the swift integration of sport and social media have become so intertwined in collective successes that it is argued no other industry has been as deeply affected by social media as sport (Sanderson, 2011). While a majority of Twitter’s records involve sport, the 2012 Olympic Games in London were honoured as the most tweeted about event in history, garnering over 150 million tweets during the course of its 16-day duration (Twitter, 2012). Usain Bolt’s gold medal performance in the 200 meter final generated more than 80,000 tweets per minute, while the Spice Girls performance during the closing of The Games topped 115,000 tweets per minute (Reuters, 2012).

Sport marketers have acknowledged the popularity of Twitter through their mass adoption of it. It has become almost unusual to tune into a sporting program, attend a live sporting event, or read a piece of sport journalism without being bombarded with a Twitter handle, a sport related hashtag, or a reference to the latest Twitter conversation. Specific to sport consumption practices, the Perform sports media group suggested that 26% of sports fans are

now using social media to follow leagues, teams and players (Laird, 2012). A study conducted by KT Tape suggested that as many as 83% of sports fans check sports social media sites while watching sport on television while a further 63% of fans reported browsing sport social media sites while in attendance at live sporting events (KT Tape, 2012).

The innovations of social media have also altered the way athletes are expected to conduct themselves. Presentations of self that were once highly formal productions, filtered by marketing professionals, journalists, and public relations specialists, are now expected to be authentic and insightful accounts representative of an athlete's personality and character. More than half of the professional athletes in the world have taken to Twitter and invested their brands in social media channels (Wertheim, 2011). This has been a very powerful opportunity, particularly for those athletes in underserved sport markets that were previously invisible to the traditional media (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012). The National Hockey League's Paul Bissonnette is an example of an athlete who has been exceedingly successful in the context of social media self-marketing. As a fourth line player who receives very little ice time, Bissonnette has become a Twitter superstar, boasting nearly half a million followers as of April 2013. Based upon his popular Twitter messaging, Bissonnette has earned sponsorship deals with Nike, as well as a clothing line with Sauce Hockey. The current most-followed athlete on Twitter, Cristiano Ronaldo, can connect with more than 17 million people (Twitter, 2012). This astonishing influence has captured the imagination of many marketing minds as companies incorporate social media into their promotional strategies and vie to capitalize on the far spanning reach of well-followed athletes (Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012).

With great power, however, comes great responsibility. The highly public Twitter stage has devastated the brands of a number of athletes whose comments were misinterpreted or

deemed inappropriate, ill-informed, or poorly timed by their audience. An example of this can be illustrated by the off-colour joke posted to the Twitter account of Greek triple jumper, Voula Papachristou. After earning the honour to represent her country at the 2012 London Games, Papachristou published a tweet that was deemed racist in nature and was promptly expelled from the Olympic team as a result, just days before competition was to begin. How different her life might have been had she avoided the negative ramifications of a single misguided decision on Twitter—how different her life might have been had she realized her Olympic dream just four years earlier! This incident exemplifies the profound consequences possible for athletes who are active on Twitter. While this is an extreme case in terms of penalty, the circumstances of innocence and naivety behind the post are not unique or uncommon. This example simply illustrates the critical importance of conducting social media research to better inform social media strategy.

Given the substantial impact of social media on sport, scholars have responded through the analysis and documentation of various social media trends. Specific to athlete Twitter use, research has suggested that Twitter effectively fosters the fan-athlete relationship through immediacy, intimacy, and interactivity (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010). Scholars have also considered the characteristics of an athlete's Twitter followers (Clavio & Kian, 2010; Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012), the influence of Twitter on sport media production and consumption (Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012), Twitter information flow (Clavio, Burch, & Frederick, 2012; Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Hambrick, 2012), the use of hashtags in sport (Blaszka, Burch, Frederick, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Smith & Smith, 2012), and the challenges of social media policy development

(Sanderson, 2011b) in the transition of social networks into viable revenue generators (Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011).

As a burgeoning area of study, the opportunities for research are expansive. This dissertation explored the evolving role of professional athlete self-presentation in sport. As touched upon earlier, one of the key drivers of social media's success has been the novelty of extending athletes the control to shape their own public image (Pegoraro, 2010). This stands in unique contrast to traditional practices of athlete self-presentation which have been reliant upon the interpretations of sport media and public relations professionals. At its core, the social media platform might best be considered as a tool for self-presentation (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012). As such, the purpose of this dissertation was to investigate the digital self-presentation of professional athletes.

Erving Goffman introduced his seminal theory of self-presentation in the highly influential *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Within this work, Goffman's central thesis proposed that individuals create preferred versions of themselves for public consumption. Goffman suggested that people strategically manage the impressions they give off to others relative to context, tactically emphasizing some characteristics while de-emphasizing others in an effort to achieve relational goals. Goffman likened the process of conveying various versions of the self to a performance and analogized his theory through dramaturgical references rooted in the differentiation between an actor's on and off-stage performances. Goffman reasoned that on-stage, an actor delivers a carefully scripted, formal performance. Backstage, however, when the actor is out of the spotlight, Goffman rationalized actors are likely to conduct themselves in a relaxed manner that reveals elements closer to their true personality. It is in the differentiation between front and backstage performances that Goffman bases his theoretical framework; the

designation of a *front stage performance* signifies individual self-presentation that is considered more formal in nature, whereas use of the term *backstage performance* is used to capture self-presentation that is less measured and more familiar.

Performance exists as a critical component in any public figure's identity (Marshall, 2010). Specific to professional athletes, their presentations of self have traditionally been limited to front stage performances; they enact their role as a competitor on the field of play and occasionally present themselves to the public through formalized interviews or sponsorship endeavors. While audiences have always been fascinated by the behind-the-scenes lives of elite athletes, it was not until the revolution of social media that backstage performances became an emphasized element of athlete presentation. Social media thus represents a tipping point in athlete self-presentation strategy. Society has placed a premium on the presentation of insider perspectives and the everyday details of athletes' lives; social media has enabled athletes the technology to share these behind-the-scenes minutiae. This transition has shifted the long-standing tradition of front stage athlete performances in sport, to an expectation of backstage performances.

It is this newfound emphasis on the backstage performance of athletes that inspired this dissertation. The use of self-presentation theory allows us to better understand this phenomenon from a sport marketing standpoint and contribute insight to the larger body of sport communications literature. Specifically, this dissertation was designed to provide the following contributions: (1) identify the self-presentation strategies being used by professional athletes using the notions of front and backstage performances, (2) provide interpretation relative to the perceived effectiveness of athlete self-presentation strategies, and (3) demonstrate the effective use of self-presentation theory in the digital landscape. It should be noted that although self-

presentation has been widely used in an array of fields, Goffman's pivotal theory has historically been limited to face-to-face interactions. The application of this framework to the social media landscape, therefore, provides an opportunity to extend our understanding of self-presentational constructs to a new setting in addition to allowing us to view online athlete behavior through a theoretical lens.

In order to achieve the goals of this dissertation, three studies were conducted. The term "professional athlete" is used throughout the three studies. It should be noted that while the definition of "professional athlete" has evolved over time to include varied meanings, for the purposes of this work, it is used to describe those athletes who have been declared "professional" by the website *athletes-tweeting.com*. This website verifies the Twitter accounts of active professional athletes in order to ensure the authenticity of their account. This site was used as an organizational tool for data collection in order to avoid the inaccurate analysis of false athlete accounts.

The first study of this dissertation sought to establish how professional athletes are presenting themselves on Twitter through the differentiation of front and backstage athlete performances and the identification of focused self-presentation strategies. A secondary purpose of this study was to determine potential differences in self-presentation strategies based upon athlete gender. This research adds three important elements to the literature: (1) it expands digital branding concepts to include the image management strategies employed by athletes; (2) it distinguishes between the use of front and backstage performances by athletes; and (3) it establishes a stream of gendered social media research in sport.

While prior research has initiated the study of athlete use of social media (e.g., Hambrick et al., 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010) and investigated the characteristics of

a retired athlete's Twitter followers (Clavio & Kian, 2010), a gap was identified pertaining to the interpretive understanding of audience interest in professional athlete Twitter content. Study 2 was designed to address this shortcoming. By examining audience interest in the self-presentation strategies established in Study 1 and distinguishing the perceived importance of self-presentation to an athlete's digital image, Study 2 adds to the literature by providing the perspective of sport consumers relative to the digital self-presentation of professional athletes.

Equipped with an enhanced understanding of professional athlete-produced Twitter commentary as a result of Studies 1 and 2, Study 3 diverged from the textual analyses of Twitter content in order to explore the photographic self-presentation tactics of professional athletes. This research again addressed a notable gap in the literature as profile photos had yet to be considered in a sport context. This study thus initiated research in this important area and also added to the development of online impression management strategies, thus extending our understanding of digital self-presentation theory.

The final section of this dissertation provides a summary of the main research findings and overall contributions this dissertation makes to the literature. As this dissertation is presented in an integrated article format, each study provides a specified purpose and review of extant literature. Collectively, the studies are united by the common thread of self-presentation and the shared purpose of informing professional athlete social media communication.

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Study 1

How Tweet It Is: A Gendered Analysis of Professional Tennis Players'

Self-Presentation on Twitter¹

The advent of social media technologies has had a profound impact on the world of sport (Sanderson, 2011). Rapidly becoming standard infrastructure, this innovation has transformed the way sports are both reported (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010; Sheffer & Schultz, 2010) and consumed (Clavio & Kian, 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010), while recasting athletes as the rulers of their own domain—free to interact on a much more direct level with their audience (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010; Sanderson, 2008; Sanderson, 2010). Scholars argue that the swift revolution social media has achieved in sport may be unrivalled in terms of impact when compared to any other industry (Sanderson, 2011).

Within the digital mediasport landscape, the micro-blogging site Twitter has been particularly influential. This communication phenomenon has been embraced by the sporting world at an extraordinary pace. We have now reached the point where it is *unusual* to tune into a sport broadcast, attend a live event, or even read a sport related article without some sort of Twitter reference mentioned. Traditional news media are reporting stories based on Twitter sources with increasing regularity (Burt, 2010). Twitter has shattered our traditional views of fan-athlete interaction and redefined how athletes practise their roles as celebrities. The appeal of Twitter for fans exists in the perception of direct access (Hambrick et al., 2010). For athletes, it is the opportunity to build voices and audiences (Pegoraro, 2010). There is power in the direct communication that Twitter affords—it allows athletes to exert more control over their identity

¹ A version of this study was selected for the Social Media Special Edition of the *International Journal of Sport Communication* and published as Lebel, K. & Danylchuk, K. (2012). How Tweet It Is: A Gendered Analysis of Professional Tennis Players' Self-Presentation on Twitter. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 5, 461 – 480. This study was also awarded the Graduate Scholar Award at the 2012 Sport & Society Conference, Cambridge, UK.

and public presentation. The website *tweeting-athletes.com* reflects this thought, reporting over 5,000 verified professional athlete accounts on Twitter as of March, 2012. This figure is up nearly 60% from data collected in March, 2011 and represents roughly half of all professional athletes worldwide (Wertheim, 2011). Twitter is evolving into a strategic marketing tool; it is enabling athletes to cultivate their own brands through diverse engagement with a broad audience. In so doing, it is opening up some very powerful doors for celebrity athletes—most notably in the form of brand awareness and sponsorship opportunity (Wertheim, 2011). One of the most fascinating aspects of this form of digital communication exists in the prospects it offers to athletes that were previously invisible in traditional media markets. Some of Twitter's most popular sports stars are relatively unknown for their sporting prowess, instead celebrated for their witty insight and accessibility (e.g., Chintapalli, 2010).

There have been a variety of studies that have begun to analyze data patterns and trends on Twitter. Specific to sport, Hambrick et al. (2010) found professional athlete tweets tend to be direct and address topics beyond sport. Kassing and Sanderson (2010) described how Twitter is able to enhance the immediacy between athletes and their fans. Pegoraro (2010) declared Twitter a powerful tool for increasing fan-athlete interaction while finding that athletes predominantly chat about their personal lives. The purpose of this study was to delve into the largely unexplored terrain of athlete gender on Twitter. Specifically, this exploratory study investigated the function of gender in the self-presentation strategies professional athletes use to navigate Twitter. As such, this study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What self-presentation strategies are professional athletes using to present their brand on Twitter?

RQ2: How does athlete self-presentation vary relative to gender?

Literature Review

The following is a review of literature related to media coverage of women's sport, social media in sport, self-presentation, and the celebrity performance.

Media Coverage of Women in Sport

The deeply entrenched hegemonic values present in sport have long been a topic of dispute. Investigation of the traditional media's treatment of female athletes is resounding with data that suggests a disproportionate quantity and biased quality of coverage (Duncan, 2006). This finding has been so prevalent it is argued that sport, more than any other social institution, perpetuates male superiority and female inferiority (Bernstein, 2002; Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988). Despite the notable achievements female athletes have accomplished, women in sport seem to be continually undercut by the mainstream media's narrow focus on male sport and the social prestige that is associated with male athletics. Messner and Cooky's (2010) longitudinal study of televised sport news and highlights shows indicated that news coverage of female sport is actually declining at an alarming rate. Network-affiliated news coverage (KNBC, KCBS, KABC) slashed women's sport content from nine percent of all sport coverage in 1999, to a dismal two percent in 2009. ESPN's *SportsCenter* similarly cut back its already bleak coverage from a mere two percent of airtime in 2004, to just one percent in 2009 (Messner & Cooky, 2010). As the splash of digital media makes tsunami-like waves in the worlds of sport marketing and communications, we wonder: Do traditional treatments of gender persist in new media outlets?

Online coverage of women in sport. Internet-based sport media studies are an emerging field of research. Specific to the online coverage of women in sport, Clavio (2008) noted a male dominance of online sport content. Clavio and Eagleman (2011) studied the portrayal of females in popular sports blogs. Their content analysis concluded that males receive significantly more

photographic exposure in sports blogs than do females, with female representation far more apt to be sexually suggestive in nature. Kian and Clavio (2011) found that online journalism was less likely to trivialize female athletic accomplishment and skill than traditional media sources. Similarly, Kian, Mondello and Vincent (2009) found the use of stereotypical descriptors that belittle the accomplishments of female athletes, or focus on their personal lives, were much less prevalent online when compared to traditional media streams.

In the study of varsity athletics, Sargas, Cunningham, Wigley, and Ashley (2000) found university internet sites posted more detailed coverage of men's baseball than women's softball. This finding stands in contrast, however, to a study conducted by Cunningham (2003) that found university websites actually provided more coverage of women's tennis than men's tennis. In a further analysis of NCAA college websites, Cooper (2008) concluded that coverage of male and female athletes in the same sport was mostly equitable. When considering the online coverage of women's sport in a more global sense, Leonard (2009) speculated that traditional media has in effect "interfaced" with new media (p. 4). This is in line with a growing number of scholars who believe that the traditional male dominance so engrained in our sport culture is being reflected in digital mediasport (Dart, 2009; Mean, 2010; Mean 2011; Oates, 2009; Reichart Smith, 2011).

A gendered look at social media. While the online coverage of women's sport has found mixed results, gender has been left largely unexamined within the social media context. Reichart Smith (2011) conducted a gender analysis of the Twitter feeds of four major Division 1A sport conferences in the United States. Despite the relative freedom that the Twitter format allows, this study found female athletes received less than 25% of the combined coverage from their respective sport conferences. Using the theory of hegemonic masculinity to help explain the

results, this research hypothesized that sport coverage may actually be taking a step backward with respect to gender equity and concluded that Twitter is reinforcing male dominance in sport.

The Twitter resource *tweeting-athletes.com* further illustrates gender inequity noting extreme discrepancy in the volume of followers male and female athletes have been able to attract. At the time of data collection, no female athletes were ranked in the top ten most followed athletes. In a recent ode to Twitter, *Sports Illustrated* acknowledged the site's influence on the sport landscape by releasing its “Twitter 100”—a collection of the sport mavens deemed the most intriguing producers of content. Only 11 females made the list (Wertheim, 2011). This gender imbalance mirrors the findings of ESPN network’s 1999 ranking of the 100 greatest athletes of the 20th century. This historic list featured only eight female athletes among the 89 male athletes and three horses that rounded out the top sporting figures of our time (Billings, 2000).

The unique format of Twitter offers athletes the opportunity to level the playing field in the battle for gender equality. The absence of a female presence among the most popular Twitter athletes, however, raises questions regarding content production. Do athletes present themselves to their audiences in a manner that differs so dramatically it warrants such discrepancy in influence, or is male hegemony so entrenched in sport that the Twitter platform is merely another way to perpetuate female inequality in sport?

Twitter as a Social Media Tool

Twitter is recognized as a social networking and micro-blogging service. It encourages users to answer the simple question, “What’s happening?” in brief, 140-character posts that are referred to as “tweets.” The “tweets” are chronicled in a constantly updated newsfeed that includes everything from breaking news stories, to what a person ate for dinner. Twitter has thrived as an outlet for information sharing. While it includes a directed friendship model in

which users are able to “follow” Twitter accounts in their newsfeed, there is no technical or social expectation of “follower” reciprocity (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Tweets may be posted and accessed from a variety of media outlets that allows for convenient use. Users have the ability to post photos and links, offer a newsworthy story, or interact with fellow “tweeps” via any web-connected device. At its core, Twitter has evolved into a dialogical tool—highlighting up-to-the-minute trends and emergent themes. In contrast to the static profiles of other social networking sites, Twitter is much more focused on facilitating conversation, making its appearance much more textual as opposed to visual, and its overall function more communicative than social (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Twitter has enjoyed rapid growth and popularity since its inception in 2006. Arbitron and Edison Research reported in May, 2011 that 92% of the U.S. population is aware of Twitter (Webster, 2011). To put the swiftness of this awareness in perspective, the same company’s 2008 report found only 5% of U.S. consumers were mindful of the communication medium; a mere 1% of the population reported having actually used the service. Currently, The Pew Internet & American Life Project’s 2012 statistics suggest that 15% of American adults identify as active Twitter users (Smith & Brenner, 2012). Among this population, 8% access Twitter on a daily basis—this figure has doubled since May 2011 and quadrupled since findings compiled in late 2010 (Smith & Brenner, 2012). Data released in October 2011, by Twitter CEO, Dick Costolo, touted more than 100 million active Twitter users worldwide. Of this number, 50% reportedly check in with the site on a daily basis and collectively produce an astonishing 250 million tweets per day (Parr, 2011). eMarketer projected U.S. advertising revenues on Twitter would reach upwards of \$225 million by the year 2012 (eMarketer.com, 2011). Perhaps the most telling statistic of all exists in the 44% of all Americans over the age of 12 that reported

seeing tweets in other media (radio, TV, newspaper or other websites) “almost every day” (Webster, 2012). A total of 80% of the overall population reported seeing tweets in other media at some point (Webster, 2012). These findings illustrate Twitter’s expansive use as a broadcast medium in today’s society.

Self-Presentation

Self-presentation theory is embedded in the idea that people tend to have a preferred manner in which they aspire to present themselves to the world (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Typically, this translates into accentuating positive characteristics in an effort to engender favourable impressions among peers. This practice is referred to as self-presentation. Self-presentation was pioneered by Erving Goffman in his highly influential work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Goffman’s underlying thesis was that people navigate between “front stage” and “backstage” performances in their daily social interactions, much as actors intermingle between their audiences and the stagehands or crew. The backstage term suggests that conversations behind the curtain are more likely to reflect a candid, personal flare compared to front stage performances, which are more apt to be calculated and professional presentations of self. According to Goffman, individuals work to maintain preferred self-images in a never-ending negotiation of complex identity performance. Various ‘impression management’ strategies are used as people adjust to varying contexts and perceptions of audience judgment (Goffman, 1959).

Online self-presentation. The investigation of virtual self-presentation has centered largely on personal web pages and blogs to date. Papacharissi (2002a) concluded that web authors “stage online performances through which the individual’s personality, or aspects of it, are revealed” (p. 654). In research that considered the personal utility of webpages, Papacharissi

(2002b) found that authors maintained their sites to fulfill information and entertainment needs. This same study found that authors who viewed their webpage as a tool for self-presentation were more likely to share personal information, while authors who used the page as a professional extension of self tended to avoid the posting of personal information. In research that examined the authors of A-List blogs, Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) found that men were more likely to maintain filter blogs (information related to events external to the author), while women were more inclined to run diary blogs (commentary on one's own life). Mehdizadeh (2010) noted that the qualities of narcissism and low self-esteem were related to greater online activity and linked to self-promotional content production.

In reference to the flourishing online celebrity culture, Marshall (2010) posited that the presentation of self online is not entirely interpersonal in nature, nor entirely mediated or representational. He labeled it “a hybrid among the personal, interpersonal and the mediated” (p. 35). With relation to Goffman, Marshall declared we are, “witnessing the staging of the self as both character and performance in online settings” (p. 40). He likened the props and accoutrements of the stage to the profiles, images, and messages of social media accounts. As such, Twitter (and social networking mediums of the like) becomes a means to construct a “character for a kind of ritual of the performance of the self” (p. 40).

The Celebrity Performance

The term ‘micro-celebrity’ has been coined to describe the prevailing style of online behavior linked to an increase in the popularity of ‘self-branding’ and strategic self-presentation (Hearn, 2008; Lair, Sullivan, & Cheney, 2005). Micro-celebrity can be distinguished as “a mindset or set of practices in which the audience is viewed as a fan base; popularity is maintained through ongoing fan management; and self-presentation is carefully constructed to be

consumed by others" (Marwick & Boyd, 2011, p. 141). Twitter has popularized the practice of micro-celebrity. In this arena, the creation of compelling content can be leveraged to superstardom. Many athletes have been quick to incorporate this technology into their marketing arsenals (Sanderson, 2011). Athletes who have not yet hopped on the social media bandwagon are in many cases being encouraged to do so in the name of their brand and its development (Wertheim, 2011).

While Twitter has received considerable attention for the many challenges it presents to sport communication (see Sanderson, 2011), the opportunity for positive brand building exists as a decided strength. In following an athlete on Twitter, fans are able to "gain intimate perspectives that would be unlikely to appear in the mainstream media" (Sanderson, 2011, p. 70). This unprecedented access to athletes is part of the allure that has spurred the popularity of Twitter among sports fans. In an effort to better understand the motivation behind professional athlete Twitter use, an initial inquiry of social media stakeholders was conducted by the researchers on site at the 2011 U.S. Open Tennis Championships.

Interviews were conducted with various communications staff representing the United States Tennis Association (USTA), the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP), and the Women's Tennis Association (WTA). These stakeholders reiterated a similar theme: social media is revolutionizing the communications industry. The fact that digital media has become an integral component in all marketing extensions was repeatedly emphasized by all communications professionals, though Twitter existed as a particularly hot topic. According to the WTA's Senior Manager of Social Media, the key to establishing a presence on Twitter lies in providing authentic, 'behind the scenes' insight (A. Chu, personal communication, September 15, 2011). When paired with tactical promotion, digital footprint success can build both

audiences and sponsorship opportunity. The management of social media accounts thus becomes a performance of sorts. The consensus among tennis' communications professionals was that it is largely irrelevant as to whether the actual athlete provides status updates or a trusted member of their team (A. Chu, personal communication, September 15, 2011).

At the end of the day, content is the ultimate social media currency. A Senior Communications Coordinator for the USTA noted that Twitter is about selling a brand. In his opinion, it is in the athlete's best interest to give fans the impression of candid, uncensored access into their lives (M. Zanca, personal communication, September 10, 2011). Social media outlets have become so influential according to these professionals that it is to the detriment of an athlete not to put their best foot forward, in whatever form this may be, as they embrace/construct their celebrity status. Reflecting on how this new level of accessibility contrasts to the tightly guarded images traditionally protected by public relations professionals, the WTA communications staff noted that while Twitter may have initially reflected typical mass media reports, they are encouraging their athletes to find their own voices.

Method

Consistent with Goffman's front and backstage theatrical analogies, Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005) likened the research design to the stages a property owner might embark on when building a new structure—the conceptualization of the phenomenon under review comparable to the property owner's vision of what a structure might look like; the research design similar to an architect's construction of a blueprint; and the data collection and analysis much like a contractor executing a building plan. Using this framework, the vision of our research was to shed light on the function of gender specific to the online platform Twitter and the self-presentation strategies of professional athletes. Due to the burgeoning nature of this brand of knowledge, this study was

envisioned as largely exploratory, with the goal of setting a foundation on which future research into this area might expand.

Research Context

The blueprint for this research included a content analysis of all professional tennis player tweets from the time period surrounding the 2011 U.S. Open Tennis Championships. Among professional sports, tennis exists as the only setting in which females register among the most followed athletes on Twitter according to the resource *tweeting-athletes.com*. Within the sport itself, three females cracked the top ten most followed players. We believed this made the sport of tennis well suited to act as the springboard with which to begin gendered social media research through a micro-celebrity lens.

As one of tennis' grandest stages, the U.S. Open Championships were selected as a highly covered sporting event that attracts the attention of a significant audience. Statistics rank the U.S. Open as the top ranked annually attended international sporting event in the world; it attracted 1,710 credentialed media in 2010, broadcast coverage of the event to 180 nations, and boasted 12,400,000 unique visitors to USOpen.org (USTA, 2011). The period of study thus included coverage of the entire two-week tournament as well as the addition of two days on either end of the event in an attempt to capture the full Open experience. The requirement of an extra day of competition due to rain delays elongated the period of study by a day, pushing the actual period of study to include posts from August 27th to September 14th. The 19-day analysis was based on publicly available Twitter data.

Participants

All professional tennis players with a verified Twitter account, as confirmed by the website *tweeting-athletes.com* and Twitter, were included in the sample ($N = 84$). Profile details

and messages from the sample were downloaded for both quantitative and qualitative content analyses. Of the 84 verified professional tennis player Twitter accounts, 38 were female and 46 were male. As only English-speaking accounts were included in the design, the final sample included 34 female athletes and 35 male athletes who contributed a total of 2,783 tweets for analysis.

The mean age of the sample was 25.5 and 27.4 ($SD = 3.9, 4.4$) for females and males, respectively. Female players hailed from a range of 12 countries. The United Kingdom led the way with representation from eight athletes; followed by Russia with seven athletes; the U.S. with five athletes; Germany with four athletes; Slovakia and Belgium each with two athletes; and Denmark, India, Canada, Belarus, Israel and Australia with only one athlete. On the men's side, 15 countries were represented. Twelve athletes represented the U.S.; the U.K. had six; India and Serbia each had three athletes; and Canada, Spain, Japan, Croatia, Finland, Denmark, Slovenia, Bosnia, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands were each represented by a single athlete. The mean world ranking among female athletes was 90.6 ($SD = 94$), ranging from the world number one, Caroline Wozniacki, to Anna Fitzpatrick, ranked 384th. Among the male athletes, the mean world ranking of the sample was 140.9 ($SD = 197$), with representation from the top ranked player Novak Djokovic to Vince Spadea, ranked 834th. Of the top 20 female players in the world, seven had Twitter accounts at the time of this study, while 12 of the top 20 ranked males were active on Twitter.

Research Method

In the spirit of Goffman's dramaturgical analogies and the online adaptation of the presentation of self theory, a coding protocol was developed specifically for this study. Frames were developed to explain athlete Twitter activity based on Goffman's definition:

Given their understanding of what it is that is going on, individuals fit their actions to this understanding and ordinarily find that the ongoing world supports this fitting. These organizational premises—sustained both in the mind and the activity—I call the frame of the activity (Goffman, 1974, p. 247).

In our development of frames for athlete Twitter activity, all athlete tweets were first critically analyzed and reviewed for emergent themes. The researchers then translated the themes into the development of broader self-presentational frames. This process entailed extensive discussion between the study's researchers to ensure all themes were appropriately captured. An expert in the field of research methods was consulted to provide feedback and ensure frame relevancy. A total of ten self-presentation frames were constructed—six backstage frames and four front stage frames (see Table 1). The backstage frames included: the conversationalist, the sport insider, the behind-the-scenes-reporter, the super fan, the informer, and the analyst. The front stage frames included: the fan aficionado, the publicist, the superintendent, and the brand manager. Each frame was operationalized through the creation of a coding sheet that was reviewed by an expert in the field to ensure readability, frame relevancy, and face validity. Content analysis was then utilized to categorize each tweet into one of the ten frames in the systematic and replicable fashion inherent of the method.

Procedure

Two independent coders, knowledgeable with the sport of tennis and Twitter, analyzed a random sample of ten percent of the total number of tweets for each gender, representing 20% of the total number of tweets ($n=2,783$). Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005) recommended an overlap of data from between 10-20%, placing our procedure within acceptable means. Intercoder reliability was .92, calculated using Cohen's *kappa* (Cohen, 1960).

Table 1.**Description of Self-Presentation Strategy Frames**

<i>Backstage Performances</i>	
the conversationalist	Interaction with fellow athletes, celebs, family, personal friends
the sport insider	Personal behind-the-scenes tennis info: travel, practices, matches, general insight into tennis
the behind-the-scenes reporter	Candid reports of the person behind the persona: site-seeing, favourite movies, extra-curricular activities
the super fan	Discussion of non-tennis athletes, other sports
the informer	General information sharing, web apps, content, links, current events
the analyst	General statement of opinion, complaints, life musings
<i>Front Stage Performances</i>	
the publicist	Promotion, publicity regarding sponsorship, upcoming matches, autograph sessions ect.
the superintendent	Presence maintenance i.e. "good morning tweeps"
the fan aficionado	Fan interaction
the brand manager	Formal acknowledgments associated with positive image, i.e. 9/11 recognition

Given the short format of tweets and the high initial agreement, the remaining tweets were coded by the primary researcher. Each tweet was assigned to a single frame using Microsoft Excel as an organizational tool. Tweets containing content consistent with more than one frame were placed into the frame that was considered to exemplify the most dominant theme of the message. For example, athletes often introduced their first tweet of the day with a short salutation, followed by a more lengthy thought. In these cases, the bulk of the content was coded into the appropriate frame as opposed to the tweet being placed in a frame addressing the salutation. As the majority of the tweets were concise and fit into a distinct frame, instances of more than one frame being present were rare.

In addition to athlete posts, descriptive data was gathered regarding each athlete's world ranking, Twitter impact score, age, and country of origin. Profile information was collected

making note of when the athlete joined Twitter, the number of followers each athlete had at the time of data collection, and the number of Twitter accounts each athlete followed. Notations were further made when athletes identified their location, provided a self-description, or included a link to a personal website in their Twitter profile.

Upon completion of data collection, all materials were examined using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, frequencies, and cross-tabulations were run to interpret and report results.

Discoveries

The primary focus of this research was to determine how male and female professional tennis players elect to present themselves to their audience via Twitter. The findings reflect the descriptive statistics of each gender's Twitter presence as well as how presentational strategy variables correlate with gender.

Twitter Activity

Following a person on Twitter might also be described as subscribing to that person's account. As a follower/subscriber, one is privy to the messages sent out by each individual one follows in a personal Twitter timeline. Anyone with interest is able to follow professional athletes on Twitter. At present, there is no reliable method to discern the demographic characteristics of followers. At the time of analysis, the mean number of individuals following the sample of female athletes on Twitter was 122,043 ($SD = 409,521$). One extreme case was detected in Serena Williams, among the most followed athletes in any sport on Twitter. Ms. Williams had an accumulation of 2,285,105 followers at the time of study and was thus identified as an outlier that skewed the collective data (Barnett & Lewis, 1984). With the outlier removed from calculations, the average number of female followers decreased to 56,496 ($SD =$

149,345). By contrast, this sample of male athletes had a mean of 90,439 followers ($SD = 201,953$), with no influential cases detected.

The athletes in the sample employed their Twitter accounts not only to be followed, but also to follow other Twitter accounts. The mean number of Twitter accounts followed by female athletes was 60.2 ($SD = 45.4$), and they posted a mean of 39.4 tweets/athlete ($SD = 29.7$) during the time period under review. By contrast, male athletes followed a mean of 117.9 accounts ($SD = 222.3$). An outlier was again detected in Travis Parrott who followed 1,324 accounts. With this outlier removed, the mean became 82.4 followed accounts ($SD = 74.3$). Male athletes posted a mean 41.3 tweets/athlete ($SD = 40.5$) during the time of study.

It is recognized that the number of followers a person accumulates is not necessarily indicative of the influence or reach of a Twitter account (Leonhardt, 2011). The analytical tool Twitalyzer was therefore used to calculate each athlete's impact score. As opposed to measuring influence based solely on the number of followers a Twitter user is able to collect, an impact score takes into account factors such as the number of times a Twitter name is mentioned by others and the frequency with which a person is actually communicating (Leonhardt, 2011). The mean impact score of female athletes was 8.9 ($SD = 15.1$) with the highest impact calculated for Serena Williams at a score of 69. The mean impact score for male athletes was 13.6 ($SD = 17.7$) with the highest impact achieved by Rafael Nadal at a score of 68.1.

Athlete Self-Presentation

While the interface of the Twitter website only states "What's happening?" it also provides users the opportunity to post a self-description, identify his or her location, and provide a link to a personal homepage. In this sample, female athletes chose to self-describe 65% of the time, while male athletes did so 83% of the time. Female athletes identified their location 74%

of the time, compared to 69% of male athletes. Among the female athletes, 76% provided a link to a personal homepage, only slightly higher than the 74% of their male counterparts. It is also notable to report that female athletes included a personal photograph in 8% of their posts compared to 9% of males. Female athletes included links to content in 13% of their posts in contrast to males who made this a practice in just 2% of their posts.

The self-presentation frames that were developed for this study (see Table 1) included a concentration of all athletes in the ‘backstage performance’ with 76% of all female tweets classified as such and 77% of all male tweets. The frequency counts and percentages of self-presentational strategies employed on Twitter by male and female athletes in this sample are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2.

Self-Presentation Strategies Among Male and Female Professional Tennis Players

Self-Presentation Strategy	Male Athletes		Female Athletes		<i>t</i>
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
<i>Backstage Performances</i>					
the conversationalist	401	27.8	421	31.4	-0.25
the sport insider	356	24.6	285	21.3	1.02
the behind-the-scenes reporter	157	10.8	232	17.3	-1.53
the super fan	146	10.1	28	2.1	2.35 *
the informer	30	2.0	33	2.5	-0.31
the analyst	19	1.3	28	2.1	-0.8
<i>Front Stage Performances</i>					
the publicist	46	3.2	88	6.6	-1.79
the superintendent	6	0.4	18	1.3	-1.48
the fan aficionado	265	18.3	159	11.9	0.67
the brand manager	12	0.8	38	2.8	-2.79 *
n/a	4	0.03	11	0.8	

* $p < .05$

Backstage performances. The *conversationalist* frame consisted of 31.4% of all female tweets and 27.8% of all male tweets. Athletes conversed with friends and family frequently, but were also quite chatty with fellow players, speaking to one another about travel, tournament conditions, and match results. An example of this was exemplified by Sania Mirza-Malik congratulating Lisa Raymond on her victory, “@lisaraymond73 congratulations;))) nail biter...”. Mardy Fish teased fellow player John Isner asking him, “Do you ever tweet without name dropping?”.

Within the *sport insider* frame, athletes provided an assortment of behind-the-scenes tennis information to their audience. Andrea Petkovic let her fans know she was watching the tournament, commenting, “Did anybody just see the James Blake return on match point? What the HELL?” Milos Raonic notified his fans that he was “Heading to the courts. Doing a training session this morning on court and the gym before I fly off to Israel tonight”.

The *behind-the-scenes reporter* frame provided audiences with access to non-tennis related details of the athlete’s life. Laura Robson, for example, informed fans she was “Watching the Great British Bake Off with my mum. Pie week! Jason and Rob are my faves”. Novak Djokovic provided a personal photo link with this tweet, “Some photos from Mamma mia show the other day with @RafaelNadal” as he let fans know he both socialized with fellow tennis star, Rafael Nadal, and was a fan of Broadway.

The *super fan* frame was used by athletes to discuss athlete fandom of non-tennis related sport. For this time period, chatter revolved largely around the Premier League, the beginning of the NFL season, and college football. Sabine Lisicki let her fans know, “My favorite player is Drew Brees, so I’m going with the Saints! ☺ But I still remember how great Packers played in the Super Bowl...” Colin Fleming captured the essence of this category with his tweet, “Wow.

Glad I got to see that. What a display from Man United, relentless attacking and enthusiasm. It's going to be a good season..."

The *informer* frame was developed to encapsulate the sharing of general information. This often included the provision of links. Vera Zvonareva for example, shared the breakdown of her follower's demographics, tweeting "My followers live in the U.S. (21.1%), the U.K. (13.7%) & Argentina (7.5%) [top 3]. Find yours at <http://twocation.com/>". Somdev Devvarman shared this link with his followers, "[http://www.happyplace.com/3941/the-most-entertaining-obnoxiousOr-completely-insane-notes-written-to-neighbors](http://www.happyplace.com/3941/the-most-entertaining-obnoxious-or-completely-insane-notes-written-to-neighbors) - hilarious!"

Finally, the *analyst* frame categorized general statements or opinions provided by athletes. Svetlana Kuznetsova commented on a looming hurricane upon her arrival in New York noting, "I'm not sure how big the hurricane will be but I'm sure that the shops sold tons of food!" Rajeev Ram used this self-presentation strategy to share his opinion of a sport commentator, tweeting "Pam Shriver is interviewing Will Ferrell and somehow finding a way to make him sound dull and not funny..(amazing but true)".

Front stage performances. The *fan aficionado* was the most prevalent frame for front stage performances with 11.9% of all female tweets being coded as such and 18.3% of all male athletes. This frame captured interaction between athletes and their fans. Venus Williams, for example, collectively thanked her fans with the tweet, "Thank you 4 sharing all your sjogrens & auto immune stories w/me. Feels good to know I'm not alone! Feel better to you and your loved ones!" This was in response to an outpouring of support received after withdrawing from the Open due to illness. Andy Roddick similarly interacted with his fans saying, "Thanks to all of you tweepies for all the great bday wishes!!! Much appreciated!"

The *publicist* frame featured promotional self-presentation strategies. John Isner used this to plug an interactive Twitter date with his fans. Tweeting, “I’m answering all ur #USO11 questions tmrw from 3:30-4:30pm. Tweet me ur Q’s (hosted by @AmericanExpress)”, this athlete was able to include a promotion for his American Express sponsor in his short message as well as promote an activity. Bob Bryan similarly used this strategy in his tweet, “Mike and I will be signing autographs at the @esurance booth at 11:30am. Hope to see some of you out there. @usopen #fb”.

The *superintendent* frame was designed to capture athlete’s presence maintenance with their followers. Svetlana Kuznetsova exemplified this strategy, tweeting, “Hey guys! How are you guys doing?” Henri Kontinen checked in with his followers asking, “Whats up homies?” The fact that this frame exists as the least used self-presentational strategy is somewhat misleading. Upon analysis, it was found this strategy was often used as a lead-in to another more prevalent strategy. As tweets were only categorized into one frame as per the research design, this category may have been affected by a lack of representation.

Rounding out the front stage performances, the *brand manager* frame was developed to categorize the tweeting of formal acknowledgements. The period of study happened to include the 10th Anniversary of the horrific September 11th attacks, as well as the tragic Lokomotiv Yaroslavl plane crash that claimed the lives of a number of Russian hockey players. Many athletes used the brand manager frame as a way to recognize these events on Twitter. Yaroslava Shvedova paid her tribute noting, “Can’t believe what happened to the hockey team from Yaroslavl city. So sad and shocked. Praying with condolences to their families”. Ken Skupski used this strategy when he tweeted, “9/11 - 10 years ago! It’s amazing how time has passed. Remembering all those who lost their lives!”

A t-test indicated that the total number of tweets posted did not significantly differ across gender ($p > .05$). A series of t-tests were also conducted to examine gender differences in each of the ten front and backstage self-presentation strategies employed by athletes on Twitter. There were no significant differences as a function of gender for the conversationalist, the sport insider, the behind-the-scenes reporter, the informer, and the analyst ($p > .05$). Within front stage performance frames, there were no significant differences as a function of gender for the publicist, the superintendent, and the fan aficionado ($p > .05$). A significant difference did emerge as a function of gender within the super fan frame ($t = 2.3, p < 0.002$), with males employing a greater attention to sports outside of tennis in their self-presentation than females. The brand manager frame was also found to have a significant difference as a function of gender ($t = -2.8, p < 0.005$), such that female athletes employed a greater amount of brand management in their self-presentation than did their male counterparts. The corresponding effect sizes, calculated by Cohen's d at 0.56 and 0.68 respectively, are both considered medium sized effects by statistical conventions (Cohen, 1992).

Discussion

This study sought to explore the self-presentation strategies used by professional tennis players in the Twitter terrain and ascertain differences that might exist between genders. Ten self-presentation frames were developed to help explain athlete behavior on Twitter, with an average of 77% of all tweets distinguished as backstage performances. This population of athletes posted messages at a very similar frequency and in fundamentally the same manner. Significant gender variance was found in terms of the number of followers athletes were able to attract, as well as the influence athletes have established as content producers—male athletes enjoying substantial advantages in both cases. These findings suggest that despite the relative

gender equity within the sport of tennis and the opportunities inherent of Twitter as an uncensored broadcast medium, hegemonic values appear to persist.

One of the goals of this study was to determine the self-presentation strategies professional athletes use to present their brand on Twitter. In examining athlete communication strategies, this work built upon the research of Hambrick et al. (2010) and Pegoraro (2010). Similar to the current study's finding that athletes tended towards backstage performances, Hambrick et al. coded 62% of the athlete tweets in their study as either interactive communication or diversion, concluding that Twitter gives sport fans unprecedented access to the personal and social lives of professional athletes. Pegoraro (2010) also coded 26% of the athlete tweets in her study as relative to an athlete's personal life. Through the exploration of athlete tweets as a form of self-presentation, this study was able to expand on athlete use of Twitter as a self-marketing tool.

The ideas of athlete branding and the use of Twitter as a self-marketing tool were highlighted in this research's initial inquiries to tennis communication professionals and have also been underscored in recent literature (e.g., Sanderson, 2011; Sanderson and Kassing, 2011). As Twitter has escalated in popularity, some controversy has leaked into the conversation regarding the genuineness of professional athlete accounts. If content is posted by someone other than the athlete whose name the account bears, is the authenticity of the information compromised? When Twitter content is viewed through a self-presentation lens as in this study, the answer to this popular question would appear to be irrelevant. From a self-presentation stand-point, Twitter exists as an extension of the athlete's brand. It is but another avenue for athletes to market their name. What makes the case of Twitter unique from traditional athlete

branding is the fact that the athlete, not a media professional, has complete control over how their story is told, and by extension, how their brand is framed.

As Twitter grows as a legitimate sports media source, the management of an athlete's brand through this unrestricted medium will surely become increasingly important as a means to promote both the athlete, and their perspectives (Sanderson & Kassing, 2011). The key point here is that regardless of who actually posts material on a Twitter account, it behooves professional athletes to ensure that they are represented in a positive light, and ultimately, the onus of this presentation falls on the shoulders of the athlete. In a competitive market, professional athletes may be best served by having someone with communications experience on their team in order to avoid some of the highly publicized miscues that have plagued a number of athletes on Twitter (e.g. Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Sanderson, 2009; Sanderson, 2011). In evaluating social media authorship, we must ask ourselves why Twitter should be held to a different standard. Athletes are trained to compete in a sport. While Twitter has opened up the ability for athletes to have a voice in the media, is it reasonable to expect them to be proficient in public relations?

This particular study emphasized the growing trend of brand promotion on Twitter. It is noteworthy, however, to recognize that promotion is not a new concept with respect to Twitter. Other researchers have recognized its potential and even encouraged its use among athletes (e.g., Hambrick et al., 2010; Pegoraro, 2010). As the potential for financial gains progress, however, increasing numbers of athletes may seek professional advice as they navigate emerging business opportunities. Increased sponsorship prospects for athletes may further spur the evolution of social media into a corporate focused endeavor, compelling athletes to seek increased council regarding their online presence.

The breakdown of Twitter self-presentation strategies in this research provides a context to view other content production tactics in addition to promotion. It is hoped that the framework developed as a result of this research might re-direct the focus of social media blunders and pitfalls in sport to a more brand-centric conversation. In reviewing the ten strategies presented, athletes have the capacity to develop a clearer understanding of where their energy might be best spent. As social media continues to evolve from a pastime to a strategic self-marketing endeavor, it is believed strategies such as these will become of increasing value.

The second goal of this research was to evaluate athlete self-presentation relative to athlete gender. While this sample made use of similar self-marketing strategies, male athletes were found to spend a significantly increased portion of their time performing the role of sport fan compared to their female counterparts. Conversely, female athletes put significantly more effort into their roles as brand managers. A tendency toward sport fandom may seem a natural transition for male athletes. Early socialization grooms men to converse about sports from a very young age in our society (Greendorfer, 1993). Alternatively, females are often encouraged to be thoughtful in their upbringing which may explain their tendency to recognize events on Twitter as brand managers (Greendorfer, 1993). Further investigation into this finding is required, though the current information could be instructive for female athletes looking to build their followings. Recent statistics suggest that 83% of sports fans will check sports social media sites while watching sport on TV, while 63% will browse sports social media sites in attendance at live sporting events (KTTape, 2012). Sports fans are hungry for sport information in any form they can get it. Developing sport conversational strategies may very well be to the benefit of female athletes.

Outside of these two significant frames, the fact that male and female professional tennis players are posting messages to Twitter in such a similar fashion problematizes the decided difference in the number of followers and relative influence each gender has established. It seems suspicious to link a tendency toward sport fandom with the thousands of additional fans the male athletes have gathered and their domination of influence as ranked by the sport media at large (e.g. Wertheim, 2011). One explanation offered to support this finding might be the current strength of men's tennis. There are a number of very strong players breaking records and establishing brands through high caliber play. Women's tennis has been criticized of late for its lack of pizazz; the absence of a dominant star has been cited as a reason for a lessened excitement value in women's tennis (Osmak, 2011). It is possible that similar to traditional media outlets, superstardom and intense rivalry play a role in garnering Twitter audiences; the exceptional competitiveness currently thrilling fans of men's tennis on the court may also be imparting an added boost of support to men's tennis as a whole on Twitter. Perhaps traditional media attention is a form of Twitter currency for athletes.

In terms of the ways in which men and women are using the internet, a comScore survey concluded that women in fact make up the digital mainstream (Abraham, Morn, & Vollman, 2010). The June 2010 study highlighted the unique qualities of Twitter in relation to gender, noting that as a communication mechanism, it lends itself to females while as an innovative technological platform, it appeals to a traditionally male demographic (Abraham et al., 2010). In line with this finding, the sample of male athletes in this study, were faster as a whole to join Twitter, with women catching on to the platform more recently. Adoption rates of technology may help to explain the unequal audience distribution as well. Interestingly, Twitter's reach has

been found to be marginally higher among women than men in general; however, use was found to vary among gender by context (Abraham et al., 2010).

In dealing with celebrity athletes, literature from the study of role models in sport might also be relevant to our results. Building upon the large database of research which suggests our sport heroes have a propensity to be male, Biskup and Pfister (1999) surveyed a sample of male and female students. Asking each participant to identify their favourite role model, the study indicated a majority of boys named male sporting heroes among their most admired. In contrast, girls reported a fondness for the stars of the movie and music industries. This too might contribute to the disproportionate audiences of male and female athletes. Perhaps our early socialization grooms us to revere male athletes, making us subconsciously more inclined to follow male athletes on Twitter.

Another possible explanation exists in the actual language being used by male and female athletes. A growing body of literature has identified gender differences in computer mediated communication. For example, women have been found to be more polite, supportive, emotionally expressive, and less verbose than men (Herring, 2003; 2004). In contrast, a tendency has been documented for men to be more insulting, challenging, and sarcastic while also more likely to use profanity in their digital messaging (Herring, 2003; 2004). While these qualities were not within the realm of this study, it is recommended that future research consider the possibility of these variables with regard to the identity performance of athletes.

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not recognize the potential impact of the profound roots of male hegemony in sport. While Twitter presents itself as an exciting opportunity to shed the unfair light in which female athletes are often cast, the mass media continues to exercise considerable influence on the construction of societal expectations and gender. Deeply ingrained

traditions that feature sport as a male rite continue to be reflected in society by our socializing agencies (Greendorfer, 1993; McCallister, Blinde, & Phillips, 2003). Fischer and Gainer (1994) offered an insightful assessment of the perpetuation of male superiority and female inferiority in sport noting:

Consumption of sports is deeply associated with defining what is masculine and concurrently, what is not feminine. It has been noted that participating in and watching sports lead to a range of masculinities, and each of them relies for its definition on being distinct from femininity (p. 101).

Numerous researchers have documented an under representation of the female population in sport (Duncan, 2006; Duncan & Messner, 2005; Hallmark & Armstrong, 1999; Huffman, Tuggle, & Rosengard, 2004; Messner, 1992; Tuggle, 1997; Tuggle & Owen, 1999). Scholars have estimated that televised sports coverage, for example, devotes a mere 5% of their total presentation to women's sports (Tuggle, 1997). Lopiano (2000) highlighted the fact that it was not until 1992 that the total coverage of women's sport surpassed that of dogs and horses. Many scholars argue that it is largely the traditional media's skewed coverage of sport that impacts society's attitudes toward female athletes (Billings, 2004; Billings & Angelini, 2007; Billings & Eastman, 2003). Jeffres, Neundorf, and Atkin (2003) highlighted the ability of the media to "cultivate images and perceptions of what is popular and attractive" (p. 173). McCombs and Shaw argued that mass media messages "don't tell people what to think, but what to think about" (1972, p. 177). Lebel and Danylchuk (2009) pursued an investigation of the perceptions of a Generation Y sport audience with regard to their established beliefs of women's sport. The sample linked female athletes with inaccessibility and perceived women's sport as inferior to

men's sport in terms of both athletic skill and general atmosphere. These perceptions were reported to reflect the participants' interaction with women's sport in the traditional media.

Social media represents a significant development in our ability to both consume and interact with women's sport. As this study alludes, Twitter has fundamentally changed the communications playing field. Female athletes now have the ability to tell their own stories via online platforms and the long-standing challenge of accessibility to women's sport has the potential to be significantly improved through social media. The opportunities to develop women's sport awareness and promotion are also decidedly vast under the social media umbrella. It could hold the power to help us diverge from our hegemonic tendencies; however, athletes and their fans must also be ready to let them go.

Implications

As we continue to tackle the challenges inherent in this new technological innovation and as Twitter progresses through the technology adoption lifecycle, we will undoubtedly see its continued growth. Adoption rates will level out as early adopters become seasoned veterans and a majority audience becomes more familiar with the 'Twitterverse'. Sponsorship opportunities and promotional activities are certain to become more intimately intertwined within Twitter's communication applications. This study serves as a baseline to monitor this progress and highlights the possibilities of a new and unique space. There is opportunity to significantly expand scholarship by not only chronicling the growing influence of new media, but in this case, re-imagine women's sport. These results are merely the tip of the iceberg. The promotional culture to which we have all become accustomed is undergoing great change: new media is customizable. The public not only has a much greater role in shaping conversation—we can filter the content that we consume based on our interests and ideals. The stereotypical notions of

gender and sexuality that have shaped the portrayal of female athletes for so long need no longer be idly ingested. There is opportunity to encourage a new voice, free of the mechanics used to undermine female athletic ability and success.

Athletes are already beginning to bypass traditional media sources to break leading news stories. This acts as strong evidence of the power collapse occurring in a once omnipotent institution. This also stands as an example of the influence the online platform holds to affect social change; if society no longer requires the traditional media as an intermediary, it does not seem unreasonable to detour around the cliché's of hyper-femininity, maternity and heterosexuality that have plagued female athletes as well. As researchers, it will be our continued responsibility to keep gender at the forefront of social media observations. With new technology comes new opportunity. If we can use our history of gender relations in traditional sport media to inform content production of athletes and sport enthusiasts in the future, we have an opportunity to re-shape the direction of women's sport. Perhaps with a collective education, gender equality has a chance to prevail within this new medium. Female athletes could be rightly known for their athletic prowess and the content of their character as opposed to a hyper-feminine image.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study was limited by the fact that each tweet was coded into only one frame. While this was a research decision that was deemed appropriate for the majority of data in this review, other coding techniques might be exercised to gauge the impact of this decision. As athletes become more adept at posting their thoughts in 140-characters or less, tweets may become increasingly complex, warranting more complex coding procedures.

This exploratory study was an initial attempt to investigate the function of gender in professional athlete self-presentation on Twitter. As a burgeoning field of study, there exist many opportunities to pursue and further develop this topic. For example, this study was limited to the Twitter content posted by professional tennis players during the time period of the 2011 U.S. Open Championships. While tennis exists as a valid starting point, future research might wish to examine other sport comparisons and perhaps look at the differences that may exist between team and individual sports. An investigation might also look at potential differences in the content posted by female athletes participating in “socially acceptable” sports, or explore content posted during a training timeframe as opposed to content posted during competition. Building upon the contribution of the self-presentation strategies developed in this research, Study 2 will investigate how sport consumers interpret athlete self-presentation on Twitter and inquire as to their level of interest in each of the ten strategies.

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Study 2

An Audience Interpretation of Professional Athlete Self-Presentation on Twitter²

The technological innovation of social media has become deeply entrenched in the world of sport. As reported by the Perform sports media group, more than 26% of sport fans now use social media to follow leagues, teams and players (Laird, 2012). A study conducted by KT Tape suggested that as many as 83% of sports fans check sports social media sites while watching sport on television, while a further 63% of fans reported browsing sport social media sites while in attendance at live sporting events (KT Tape, 2012). The revolutionary communication tool has completely transformed traditional sport consumption practices (Hambrick, 2012) and become a central instrument in the brand management strategies employed by sport professionals around the world (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012).

Within the social media landscape, the micro-blogging site Twitter is widely recognized as the sport industry's social network of choice (Sanderson & Kassing, 2011). With many of Twitter's most momentous occasions tied to sport, athletes may even deserve credit for spurring the broader popularity of Twitter (Browning & Sanderson, 2012). As of November 2012, there were 7,135 verified professional athlete Twitter accounts according to the website *tweeting-athletes.com*. This figure is up 55% from statistics gathered in November 2011. Well-followed Twitter athletes have come to enjoy unprecedented power and influence through the Twitter medium. For example, the current social media monarch among athletes, Cristiano Ronaldo, can now connect with over 17 million followers. While perhaps initially a novelty, even a toy, there is little doubt that the upsurge in Twitter use across all major sport constituents and

² A version of this study has been submitted for publication to the *International Journal of Sport Communication*. This study was also named a finalist in the North American Society for Sport Management's 2013 Student Paper Competition.

stakeholders has seen the communications tool strategically evolve into an impactful marketing maneuver.

Twitter's overwhelming success in sport is largely linked to the novel opportunity it offers athletes to interact directly with their fans (Pegoraro, 2010). It is like the ultimate peek behind the curtain—Twitter removes the filtered communication traditionally associated with professional athlete interaction and allows athletes to present themselves as they wish to be perceived—as opposed to how a sport journalist elects to portray them. Fundamentally, this sets social media up as a tool for athlete self-presentation. Self-presentation can be defined as a process by which people convey to others the type of person they are or the kinds of characteristics they possess (Leary, Tchividjian, & Kraxberger, 1994). In its original interpretation, Goffman (1959) theorized that individuals compose preferred versions of themselves for public consumption, strategically emphasizing some characteristics while de-emphasizing others.

Lebel and Danylchuk (2012) applied Goffman's self-presentation framework to assess professional athlete-produced Twitter commentary; however, research has yet to examine audience interest in the self-presentation strategies employed by professional athletes. In a competitive marketplace, this exists as an important and practical research extension—to build a loyal audience, one must listen to one's audience. As a new approach to mass media communication, exploring the interpretation of social media messaging is an equally important endeavor. This research sought to address both of these challenges by exploring how sport consumers interpret athlete self-presentation on Twitter, and further, how a sport audience distinguishes the perceived importance of self-presentation on an athlete's image. By benchmarking audience preferences, we establish a compass with which to direct the

development of best practices and uniquely add an interpretive element to the larger body of sport communication literature. Further, the application of a self-presentation framework to the digital landscape provides an opportunity to advance self-presentation theories and extend their traditional face-to-face utility. As such, this research is guided by the following questions:

RQ1: What athlete self-presentation Twitter strategies are sport consumers most interested in?

RQ2: What self-presentation strategies are perceived as most important to an athlete's digital image?

In addition to gauging sport consumer interest in the self-presentation strategies employed by professional athletes on Twitter, the variables of gender and age were considered in order to establish differences among sport consumers and compare the demographics of our sport audience to the broader demographics available for Twitter consumers. The Pew Internet Project's social networking report from November 2012 suggested that 63% of all males and 75% of all females use social networking sites with more than half of all female Internet users reporting daily social media consumption (Brenner, 2012). Social media consumption has also increased dramatically across all age demographics since reporting began in 2005—92% of those aged 18-29 report active social media consumption, followed by 73% of those aged 30-49, 57% of those aged 50-64, and 38% of those aged 65 and older, according to data gleaned in August 2012 (Brenner, 2012). While young adults continue to exist as the heaviest social media users, it is interesting to note that their actual rate of growth pales in comparison to the upsurge in social media use by older adults (Madden, 2010). From April 2009 to May 2011, social media use among Internet users over the age of 65 was found to be especially enthusiastic, growing 150% (Zickuhr & Madden, 2012). One in five Internet users between the ages of 50-64 reported daily

social media use (Madden, 2010). Further, unlike younger demographics, females and older adults have been found to exhibit increased loyalty (Schultz & Sheffer, 2011), which may make these sport consumers valuable commodities moving forward. In light of these findings, two additional research questions were developed:

RQ3: How does interest in professional athlete self-presentation vary relative to gender?

RQ4: How does interest in professional athlete self-presentation vary relative to age?

Literature Review

The following is a review of self-presentation theory and the current literature related to sport and social media.

Self-Presentation

In the highly influential *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (1959) suggested that individuals compose preferred versions of themselves for public consumption. Goffman analogized his theory through the dramaturgical reference to an actor's management of on and off-stage performances. On-stage, an actor is charged with the task of performing a carefully scripted, formal performance. Contrastingly, when the actor is backstage, among friends and out of the spotlight, he/she is likely to conduct him/herself in a more relaxed and less formal manner. Goffman suggested that it is in the backstage where real, behind-the-scenes living is experienced and personality is revealed (Papacharissi, 2002). It is in the differentiation between front and backstage performances that Goffman bases his theoretical framework; the designation of a *front stage performance* signifies individual self-presentation that is considered more formal in nature, while use of the term *backstage performance* is used to capture self-presentation that is less measured and more familiar.

Performance exists as a critical component in any public figure's identity (Marshall, 2010). Traditionally, the primary performance of professional athletes has revolved around their role as a sport competitor and extended into extra-textual dimensions such as interviews and advertising/sponsorship endorsements (Marshall, 2010). These traditional outlets for self-presentation have all tended toward relatively formal performances, or what Goffman would refer to as *front stage performances*. Through the burgeoning tool of social media, athletes have been introduced to a new and increasingly intimate performance dimension centered on their everyday lives and the provision of insider perspectives. Goffman would consider this type of self-presentation a *backstage performance*. Marshall (2010) argued that in the staging of our digital world, the props and accoutrements of Goffman's original theory are translated into the profiles, images and messages now produced in online environments. Marshall further contended that Twitter is but "a construction of character for a kind of ritual of the performance of the self", while labeling social-networking practitioners "highly conscious of a potential audience" and social media engagement "a careful preening and production of the self" (p. 40).

The Impact of Twitter on Sport

"Twitter and sports fit together because sports are live, immediate, suspenseful, and fun—these are qualities Twitter mirrors and enhances in real-time." ~ Twitter (2012)

The rise of athlete-created content in sport through social media outlets such as Twitter represents a shift for sport consumers—after years of consuming sport filtered through marketing and public relations professionals, sport consumers are now not only a part of sport conversation, they are also largely responsible for shaping the direction of sport discussion. While the impact of this new relationship is still unfolding and yet to be fully understood, the following sections

provide an overview of the research that exists to date relative to the impact of Twitter on athletes and their audiences.

Athlete Twitter use. Three studies should be recognized for their efforts in establishing Twitter as a subject area in sport. Pegeraro (2010) pioneered this branch of research in an investigation of professional athlete presence on Twitter. A content analysis of the top five most-followed athlete twitter accounts was conducted across a selection of nine different sports. Data were collected over a seven-day period. The resulting analysis exposed six types of content categories: relating to personal life (29%), relating to business life (27%), relating to their sport (4%), relating to another sport/athlete (16%), responding to fans (46%), and pop culture/landmark references (9%). Similarly, Hambrick et al. (2010) conducted a content analysis to categorize a random sample of the 20 most recent tweets of 101 professional athletes from a variety of sports. Six content classifications were again developed through this research: interactivity (34%), diversion (28%), information sharing (15%), content (13%), promotion (5%), and fanship (5%). Finally, Kassing and Sanderson (2010) examined the Twitter content produced by English-speaking cyclists competing in the 2009 Tour of Italy. This analysis highlighted the utility of Twitter for athletes through its identification of three prominent themes that saw athletes providing commentary and opinions, fostering interactivity, and providing insider perspectives for fans.

In a more recent work, Lebel and Danylchuk (2012) explored athlete image construction by taking a brand-centric approach to the analysis of athlete Twitter commentary. By way of Goffman's pivotal theory of self-presentation (1959), the authors contended that Twitter exists as an extension of the professional athlete's brand with 77% of all athlete tweets classified as "backstage performances", a term depicting less formal audience interaction. While producing

similar findings to the original work conducted on professional athlete Twitter use, the use of a self-presentation framework emphasized the capacity of Twitter to build, frame, and promote athlete brands. Browning and Sanderson (2012) further contributed to the understanding of athlete Twitter use by focusing on a population of student-athletes. Results revealed that Twitter was enlisted by this demographic for three primary purposes: keeping in contact, communicating with followers, and accessing information.

Twitter information flow. Twitter is used by the sport industry to share information about athletes, teams, and leagues (Hambrick, 2012). As such, it has a growing reputation in sport as the home for breaking news (Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012). This is coupled with a growing sentiment among social media consumers that views Twitter as an increasingly credible news source, often times referred to over traditional media professionals (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). These factors among others have made the study of Twitter information flow an intriguing research agenda. Yang and Leskovec (2010) introduced the concept of social media information decay, suggesting that news stories lose their attraction within a mere ten hours of their release to a social media network. Specific to sport, Hambrick (2012) tracked the flow of information facilitated by the organizers of a local bike race compared to the information flow of a national bike race via Twitter. Three key findings were reported: race organizers attracted followers by sharing upcoming event information and promotions; most Twitter followers were attracted to the event's Twitter page within the first few days of its creation; and gaining influential followers with large social networks helped spread event information more efficiently. Echoing Yang and Leskovec's finding, Hambrick suggested there is a limited window of opportunity inherent of Twitter. He advised capturing the attention of Twitter users quickly with consistent messaging and balanced content, while attracting popular followers whenever possible

to assist in the spread of communications. Amy Martin of Digital Royalty likened social media information flow to the hosting of a cocktail party—the goal to entertain and engage, swiftly (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010).

Why followers follow. In the analysis of a retired female athlete's Twitter followers, Clavio and Kian (2010) learned that fans were attracted to the athlete's Twitter feed largely based on perceptions of the athlete as an expert in their sport. The athlete's writing style was also recognized as a salient factor in attracting Twitter followers. Witkemper, Lim and Waldburger (2012) likewise contributed to our understanding of the motivations and constraints of Twitter users in research that found consumers envision Twitter as an information source, a form of entertainment, and a way to enhance the fan experience.

Clavio, Burch, and Frederick (2012) employed a systems theory framework to examine user characteristics of a Big Ten football team's social network on Twitter. Their research found that media representatives were an active group of Twitter participants and hypothesized that the media may serve as agenda setters in sport networks on Twitter. Frederick et al. (2012) proposed a heightened interpersonal closeness among Twitter followers depending on the interaction style of an athlete. In their analysis of the followers of both a social and parasocial athlete, they found the development of parasocial interaction (PSI) was significantly higher among the followers of the social athlete and demonstrated that common PSI correlations can be applied to the followers of professional athletes who use Twitter.

As the social dimension of Twitter has tended to reward athletes who are able to provide the right mix of entertainment value, genuineness, and engagement (Zimmerman, 2012), performance indicators to date have largely judged Twitter success based upon metrics of follower volume. This study looks to build upon the scholarly contributions outlined above by

offering an alternate measure of success: audience interest. By developing a better understanding of audience interest in the self-presentation strategies employed by athletes, we hope to inform marketing initiatives and establish best practices relative to athlete content production and digital self-presentation strategy.

Method

Research Context

The micro-blogging tool Twitter served as the platform for this study. As previously noted, the social media network has come to enjoy particular influence in sport and is widely recognized as the industry's social network of choice (Sanderson & Kassing, 2011). Beyond this, a research decision was made to focus this research around the sport of golf due to its diverse demographic of both gender and age representation. Golfers exist as one of the most sought after target audiences on the Internet due to the diversity that they offer (GolfADS Global, 2010). Additionally, the sport of golf has received significant social media buy-in from many of its top players; as of December 2012, there were 220 professional golfers with verified Twitter accounts according to the website *tweeting-athletes.com*. The most followed players all boasted well over a million followers.

Survey Design

Lebel and Danylchuk (2012) explored the digital self-presentation of professional athletes through the lens of Goffman's original framework and theatrical analogies. This work resulted in the creation of six backstage athlete content strategies—the conversationalist, the sport insider, the behind-the scenes reporter, the super fan, the informer, and the analyst, as well as four front stage athlete content strategies—the publicist, the fan aficionado, the superintendent, and the brand manager (see Table 1 for a description of each category). With the purpose of the current study to investigate audience interest in the digital self-presentation of professional athletes, these ten

Table 1.**Description of Athlete Self-Presentation Strategies**

Type	Definition	Example
Backstage Performances		
the conversationalist	Interaction with fellow athletes, celebs, friends & family.	"@JustinRose, I saw you shank it on 14 today. Welcome to the club, mate."
the sport insider	Insider sport information.	"All packed and ready to go to Augusta National in the morning. Very excited as per normal like a little school kid. It just has that buzz."
the behind-the-scenes reporter	Behind-the-scenes information about an athlete's life.	"So excited for my kids to wake up. Seeing them off to school, then going to the new house as furniture starts to go in. 2 weeks to install."
the super fan	Discussion of an athlete's personal sport interests.	"Come on Arsenal! A win would be so huge. So glad my mum is sitting in my seats today. Enjoy the game mumsy. Bring them luck!"
the informer	Sharing of information that an athlete believes is important or interesting.	"There's a great new golf app by @mastercard that you guys can download on iTunes. Instructional & fun. You will love it."
the analyst	Sharing of athlete opinions or life musings.	"Can Johnny Miller actually say anything positive? Er no."
Front Stage Performances		
the publicist	Sharing of athlete promotional information.	"Just done my column in the @huffingtonpost. Check it out at the link http://tinyurl.com/c3sd2b5 . Enjoy."
the superintendent	Checking in with followers via short athlete updates.	"Good morning tweeps! How is everyone today?"
the fan aficionado	Athlete engagement in fan interaction.	"Friends it's been a lot of fun on twitter today! I look forward to answering more of your questions tomorrow. To answer Ross' question about the last time I flew coach, it was today."
the brand manager	Athlete provision of formal acknowledgements.	"Happy Mother's Day to all that celebrate today. I hope you have a really nice day!"

athlete self-presentation strategies were utilized to guide the development of audience interest scales. Participants were provided with a definition and golf specific example of each self-presentation strategy and then asked to rate their level of interest in each of the items. Interest was measured using a five-point Likert scale which ranged from a rank of one that signified no interest in the content, to a rank of five which was indicative of very high interest. In order to elicit further insight into audience content preferences, additional examples of athlete self-presentation were included as corresponding sub-categories for each of the ten strategies. The sub-categories were developed based upon the self-presentation strategy definitions provided in Lebel and Danylchuk (2012). For example, within the *superfan* strategy, participants were also asked to rate their level of interest in learning about an athlete's favorite sport personalities and teams, sport knowledge, and opinions about sport. Each sub-category was also assessed using a five-point Likert scale measuring interest.

Upon the evaluation of each of the ten self-presentation strategies and their corresponding sub-categories, participants were asked to provide a rating of how important they believed each strategy might be with regard to its potential impact on an athlete's public image. They were also asked to rate the importance of humor and multimedia in athlete tweets, and to provide any advice to professional athletes that they might have relative to their Twitter self-presentation. Rounding out the survey, participants were asked to comment on their awareness of Twitter in a brief section that asked participants how often they came across Twitter references in various media outlets. Finally, demographic information pertaining to gender, age, education and employment was collected. The 49-item survey was published online via the survey-software site SurveyMonkey.com and required approximately ten minutes to complete (see Appendix D).

Procedure

The survey instrument was reviewed by a panel of four experts with varied experience in the fields of sport psychology, sport management, and sport philosophy. Their feedback was incorporated before testing the survey in a pilot study ($N = 20$) that included representation from a sport consumer group diverse in both age and gender. Minor revisions were made with regard to item wording and layout before the survey instrument was submitted and subsequently approved for distribution by the University Research Ethics Board (see Appendix B).

The survey link was sent out via email to a convenience sample of golfers, golf courses, and golf governing bodies across both Canada and the U.S. The link was also posted on various golf-related Facebook and Twitter pages. A short message accompanied all emails and social media posts which encouraged snowball sampling by asking participants to forward the link along to anyone they believed might also be willing to participate in the research. The study was live for two a two-month time period and yielded a total of 407 responses of which 377 surveys were deemed usable.

Data Analysis

All data were cleaned and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Software Package (SPSS). Gender and age were included as control variables. Age was treated as a categorical variable and was reflective of the demographic breakdown documented in existing Twitter research. Descriptive statistics and frequencies were used to interpret and report the results. T-tests were run to explore the function of gender on each of the strategies and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) tests were conducted to ascertain whether there were significant differences in means based on participant age. Reliability tests were conducted to ensure that the data were normally distributed. Chronbach alpha scores for the entire

collection of athlete self-presentation strategies ranged from 0.89 to 0.95, illustrating strong scale reliability.

Results

The primary focus of this research was to determine audience interest in the self-presentation strategies used by professional golfers on Twitter. The findings reflect descriptive statistics relative to the audience that was surveyed, as well as how the audience's interest in each self-presentation strategy varied relative to gender and age variables.

Audience Demographics

The gender breakdown of our audience included a demographic that was 58% male and 42% female. The greatest response was garnered by those aged 25-34 (40%). Table 2 depicts a detailed account of participant age, education, and employment. Significant differences emerged for both age and gender variables and will be discussed in detail. There were no significant differences for either the education or employment variables.

Twitter Awareness

When asked to comment on Twitter awareness, 96% of the population reported in the affirmative. In a follow-up question, 44% reported having seen the social media tool referred to on TV; 51% reported having seen it mentioned in news articles or magazines; 50% reported having seen it mentioned online; 44% reported having heard it referenced on the radio; 47% reported having heard friends discuss it; 38% reported having seen it used for advertising purposes; and 23% reported having their own Twitter account. Slightly more than 40% of all respondents reported being aware of Twitter through all of the above mentioned media outlets.

When asked specifically about seeing the @ sign or # hashtag symbol associated with Twitter use, 31 % of the population reported having seen one or both mentioned on TV; 28% reported having seen it used in advertising; 30% reported having seen it in news articles/magazines;

Table 2.

Audience Demographics

Gender	n	%
Male	218	58
Female	159	42
Age	n	%
18-24	68	18
25-34	151	40
35-44	37	10
45-54	30	8
55-64	56	15
65 +	35	9
Education	n	%
High School Diploma	51	14
College Degree	78	21
University Degree	143	38
Master's Degree	60	16
Doctoral Degree	20	5
Professional Degree (e.g., MD, JD)	11	3
Employment	n	%
Education	39	10
Management	51	14
Professional	98	26
Sales	15	4
Student	52	14
Technical	21	6
Other	86	23

32% reported having seen the Twitter symbols in their online media consumption; 19% reported hearing Twitter referred to on the radio; and 20% reported having heard their friends talk about Twitter. A combined 58% of those surveyed reported noticing Twitter references in all of the above mentioned media outlets with only 6% reporting that they had not seen Twitter references

used in the media. Participants were also asked to comment on the frequency with which they saw Twitter references in sport media. Response to this question found 42% of respondents came across Twitter references on a daily basis. A further 28% reported seeing or hearing about Twitter regularly, but not daily. There were no significant differences between media consumption habits and interest in Twitter content.

Interpretation of Athlete Self-Presentation Strategies on Twitter

Participants were asked to rank their level of interest on a one to five scale for ten athlete self-presentation strategies and their corresponding sub-categories (see Table 3). Of the ten athlete self-presentation strategies, the *sport insider* received the highest overall rating from participants ($M = 2.8$, $SD = 2.8$) while the superintendent strategy was ranked the lowest ($M = 2.0$, $SD = 1.0$). The overall mean for backstage performance strategies ($M = 2.6$) was higher than the overall mean for front stage performance strategies ($M = 2.3$), though not statistically significant. The audience reported higher interest in the combined means of the subcategories for the *sport insider*, *behind-the-scenes-reporter*, *super fan*, *informer*, and *fan aficionado* self-presentation strategies compared to their reported interest in each of these overall self-presentation strategies.

Audience Interest in Athlete Self-Presentation Strategies by Gender

T-tests were used to determine significant differences in audience interest relative to gender (see Table 3). Due to the large number of tests, Bonferroni adjustments were used (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) to mitigate the risk of Type I errors and ensure the integrity of the results. Male participants reported significantly greater interest in the *sport insider* sub-categories of athlete reflection on their sport performance ($t = 3.8$, $p = <.000$), discussion of sport equipment ($t = 3.3$, $p = <.001$), tournament preparation ($t = 3.7$, $p = <.000$), and technical

expertise ($t = 4.4, p = <.000$) than their female counterparts. Similarly, male participants reported greater interest in the *super fan* sub-category of athlete sport opinions ($t = 3.3, p = <.001$), the overall *analyst strategy* ($t = 3.3, p = < .05$), as well as its sport opinion analyst sub-category ($t = 4.2, p = < .000$). Male and female participants reported combined means of 2.6 and 2.5 respectively for interest in backstage athlete performances; both genders indicated a mean interest of 2.3 for front stage athlete performances. Neither of these findings was statistically significant.

Audience Interest in Athlete Self-Presentation Strategies by Age

MANOVA were used to determine if there were significant differences in audience interest relative to age (see Table 4). Bonferroni type adjustments were again used in follow-up ANOVAs (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) to moderate the risk of Type I errors and ensure the reliability of the results. Significant age variance was calculated for all ten self-presentation strategies ($p = < .000$): conversationalist ($\lambda = 0.74, F = 3.7$); sport insider ($\lambda = 0.67, F = 4.3$); behind-the-scenes reporter ($\lambda = 0.78, F = 4.2$); super fan ($\lambda = 0.74, F = 4.8$); informer ($\lambda = 0.78, F = 2.6$); analyst ($\lambda = 0.83, F = 2.9$); publicist ($\lambda = 0.77, F = 3.2$); superintendent ($\lambda = 0.86, F = 3.2$); fan aficionado ($\lambda = 0.76, F = 4.4$); and brand manager ($F = 10.4$).

Conversationalist. Participants aged 18-24 ($M = 3.2, SD = 0.9$) reported significantly higher interest in athlete conversation compared to those aged 55-64 ($M = 2.1, SD = 0.9$), and those 65 and older ($M = 2.1, SD = 0.9$). Participants aged 25-34 ($M = 2.8, SD = 1.1$) also reported significantly greater interest in this strategy than did those aged 55-64. Within the sub-categories, significant differences emerged for communication with athletes ($F = 13.1$), celebrities ($F = 13.8$), friends ($F = 8.3$), and family ($F = 4.5$).

Sport insider. Specific variance was identified for 18-24 year olds ($M = 3.5, SD = 1.0$) when compared to the interest of those aged 45-54 ($M = 2.4, SD = 1.2$), 55-64 ($M = 2.2, SD = 1.0$), and 65 and older ($M = 1.9, SD = 0.8$). Those 25-34 ($M = 3.2, SD = 1.2$) varied with those aged 55-64 and 65 and over. The 35-44 age group ($M = 2.9, SD = 1.2$) also displayed significantly more interest than those aged 65 and older. Within the subcategories, significant differences emerged for interest in the discussion of athlete performance ($F = 10.9$), fitness ($F = 12.6$), equipment ($F = 6.2$), tournament preparation ($F = 9.4$), and sport expertise ($F = 3.7$).

Behind-the-scenes reporter. Those aged 18-24 ($M = 3.0, SD = 1.1$) and 25-34 ($M = 2.7, SD = 1.2$) rated this type of content significantly more interesting than those aged 55-64 ($M = 1.8, SD = 1.0$), and those 65 and older ($M = 1.7, SD = 0.9$). Within the sub-categories, significant differences emerged for interest in the discussion of an athlete's daily routine ($F = 12.2$), personal life ($F = 11.5$), and personal interests ($F = 12.5$).

Super fan. Those aged 18-24 ($M = 3.2, SD = 1.1$) found this type of content significantly more interesting than those aged 45-54 ($M = 2.2, SD = 1.1$), 55-64 ($M = 1.2, SD = 0.9$), and 65 and older ($M = 1.6, SD = 0.7$). Within the sub-categories, significant differences emerged specific to interest in the discussion of an athlete's personal sport interests ($F = 13.8$).

Informer. Participants aged 18-24 ($M = 2.8, SD = 1.0$) and 25-34 ($M = 2.5, SD = 1.1$) found this content more interesting than those aged 55-64 ($M = 1.7, SD = 0.9$) and those 65 and older ($M = 1.7, SD = 0.7$). Those aged 35-44 ($M = 2.6, SD = 1.1$) also reported increased interest when compared to those aged 65 and older. Within the sub-categories, significant differences emerged for interest in athlete conversation relative to promotions ($F = 3.2$), websites ($F = 4.4$), interesting articles ($F = 4.2$), current events ($F = 5.3$), and the provision of multimedia ($F = 9.0$).

Table 3.
Audience Interest in Self-Presentation Strategy by Gender

Strategy		Overall		Male		Female	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
conversationalist	overall	2.6	1.1	2.6	1.1	2.6	1.1
	athletes	2.8	1.3	2.9	1.3	2.6	1.2
	celebs	2.4	1.2	2.4	1.2	2.4	1.2
	friends	2.4	1.2	2.4	1.2	2.4	1.2
	family	2.3	1.2	2.3	1.2	2.4	1.2
sport insider	overall	2.8	1.2	3.0	1.2	2.7	1.2
	performance	3.0	1.2	3.2*	1.2	2.7	1.2
	fitness	3.0	1.2	3.1	1.2	2.9	1.2
	equipment	2.9	1.2	3.1**	1.2	2.7	1.1
	tournament	2.9	1.2	3.1*	1.2	2.6	1.2
	expertise	3.1	1.2	3.3*	1.2	2.8	1.2
behind-the scenes reporter	overall	2.4	1.2	2.4	1.2	2.4	1.2
	routine	2.4	1.2	2.5	1.2	2.3	1.1
	personal	2.4	1.2	2.3	1.2	2.5	1.1
	interests	2.6	1.1	2.6	1.1	2.6	1.2
super fan	overall	2.5	1.2	2.5	1.2	2.4	1.2
	sport interest	2.5	1.2	2.6	1.2	2.3	1.2
	sport info	2.7	1.2	2.8	1.2	2.4	1.2
	sport opinion	2.7	1.2	2.8*	1.2	2.4	1.7
informer	overall	2.3	1.1	2.4	1.1	2.3	1.1
	promotions	2.4	1.1	2.3	1.1	2.4	1.1
	websites	2.5	1.1	2.5	1.1	2.5	1.0
	articles	2.6	1.1	2.6	1.1	2.6	1.1
	current events	2.6	1.1	2.6	1.2	2.6	1.1
	multimedia	2.7	1.2	2.7	1.2	2.6	1.1
analyst	overall	2.7	1.1	2.8	1.1	2.4	1.1
	sport	2.8	1.2	3.0*	1.2	2.5	1.1
	life	2.5	1.1	2.5	1.1	2.4	1.1
	world issues	2.4	1.1	2.4	1.1	2.4	1.1
publicist	overall	2.3	1.1	2.4	1.1	2.2	1.1
	schedules	2.5	1.1	2.7	1.1	2.3	1.1
	sponsorship	2.1	1.0	2.2	1.1	1.9	1.0
	updates	2.2	1.1	2.3	1.1	2.0	1.1
	contests	2.3	1.1	2.3	1.1	2.2	1.1
superintendent	overall	2.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.0	1.1
	frequency	2.8	0.7	2.8	0.7	2.9	0.8
fan aficionado	overall	2.4	1.1	2.5	1.1	2.3	1.2
	questions	2.7	1.2	2.8	1.2	2.6	1.2
	advice	2.5	1.2	2.5	1.2	2.4	1.2
	special offers	2.5	1.2	2.4	1.2	2.5	1.2
brand manager	overall	2.4	1.2	2.4	1.1	2.5	1.2

Note. * Denotes males reported significantly greater interest than females, $p = < .000$; ** denotes $p = < .001$

Table 4.
Audience Interest in Self-Presentation Strategy by Age

Strategy	18-24	SD	25-34	SD	35-44	SD	45-54	SD	55-64	SD	65+	SD
conversationalist	3.2 ^{5,6}	0.9	2.8 ⁵	1.1	2.7	1.0	2.4	1.1	2.1	0.9	2.1	0.9
athletes	3.4 ^{5,6}	1.1	3.1	1.2	2.8	1.2	2.5	1.1	2.0	1.0	1.8	1.0
celebs	3.2 ^{5,6}	1.2	2.7 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.3	0.9	2.2	1.1	1.7	0.8	1.7	0.9
friends	3.1 ^{5,6}	1.2	2.5	1.2	2.2	1.0	2.3	1.2	1.8	1.0	1.8	0.9
family	2.8 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.4	1.2	2.2	1.1	2.3	1.3	2.0	1.1	1.9	1.0
sport insider	3.5 ^{4*,5,6}	1.0	3.2 ^{5,6}	1.2	2.9 ^{6*}	1.2	2.4	1.2	2.2	1.0	1.9	0.8
performance	3.5 ^{5,6}	1.1	3.3 ^{5,6}	1.2	3.1	1.2	2.8	1.1	2.2	1.0	2.1	0.9
fitness	3.7 ^{5,6}	1.1	3.3 ^{5,6}	1.2	3.1	1.1	2.9	1.1	2.3	0.9	2.3	1.0
equipment	3.5 ^{5,6}	1.1	3.0	1.2	2.9	1.1	2.9	1.1	2.6	1.0	2.2	1.0
tournament prep	3.5 ^{5,6}	1.1	3.1 ^{5,6}	1.2	3.0	1.2	2.9	1.1	2.2	1.0	2.2	1.0
expertise	3.5	1.1	3.2	1.2	3.1	1.2	3.0	1.2	2.9	1.2	2.7	1.0
behind-the-scenes	3.0 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.7 ^{5,6}	1.2	2.5	1.2	2.1	1.1	1.8	1.0	1.7	0.9
routine	3.1 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.6 ^{5,6}	1.2	2.4	1.2	2.3	1.1	1.7	0.8	1.7	0.8
personal	3.2 ^{4*,5,6}	1.2	2.6 ⁵	1.1	2.3	1.1	2.2	1.1	1.8	1.0	1.8	1.0
interests	3.4 ^{3,4,5,6}	1.1	2.8 ^{5,6*}	1.0	2.4	1.2	2.3	1.0	2.0	1.0	1.9	0.9
super fan	3.2 ^{4,5,6}	1.1	2.7	1.1	2.7	1.2	2.2	1.1	1.2	0.9	1.6	0.7
sport interest	3.2 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.6 ^{5,6}	1.2	2.6 ^{5*}	1.1	2.4	1.0	1.7	0.9	1.8	0.8
sport knowledge	3.2 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.9 ^{5,6}	1.2	2.8	1.2	2.6	1.1	2.0	1.0	1.9	1.0
sport opinion	3.4 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.8 ⁵	1.1	2.8	1.1	2.5	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.1	1.1
informer	2.8 ^{5,6}	1.0	2.5 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.6 ^{6*}	1.1	2.4	1.2	1.7	0.9	1.6	0.7
promotions	2.7 ⁶	1.1	2.5	1.1	2.4	1.1	2.3	0.9	2.1	1.1	1.9	0.9
websites	2.9	1.1	2.7	1.1	2.5	1.0	2.4	1.1	2.3	1.0	1.9	1.0
articles	3.0	1.0	2.7	1.2	2.7	1.0	2.5	1.1	2.2	1.0	2.1	1.1
current events	3.1 ⁶	1.0	2.7	1.1	2.8	1.1	2.5	1.1	2.3	1.1	2.0	1.0
multimedia	3.3 ^{5,6}	1.3	2.9 ^{5,6}	1.2	2.7	1.3	2.5	1.0	2.1	1.0	2.0	0.9
analyst	3.1 ^{5,6}	1.0	2.9 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.8	1.2	2.6	1.1	2.2	1.1	2.1	1.1
sport	3.3 ^{5,6}	1.1	3.0 ^{5,6}	1.2	2.9	1.2	2.6	0.9	2.2	1.0	2.1	1.1
life	2.9 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.6	1.1	2.7	1.2	2.2	0.9	2.0	1.0	1.8	0.9
world issues	2.9 ^{5,6}	1.0	2.5	1.1	2.4	1.3	2.2	1.0	2.0	1.0	1.8	0.8
publicist	2.8 ^{5,6}	1.0	2.6 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.4	1.1	2.2	0.9	1.7	0.9	1.6	0.7
schedules	2.9 ^{5,6}	1.2	2.6	1.1	2.5	1.1	2.4	0.8	2.2	1.0	1.9	1.0
sponsorship	2.7 ^{5,6}	1.0	2.2	1.1	2.2	1.1	2.0	0.9	1.7	0.8	1.5	0.8
updates	2.7 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.4 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.4	1.1	1.9	0.9	1.7	0.9	1.5	0.7
contests	2.8 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.4	1.1	2.5	1.1	2.1	0.9	1.7	0.9	1.5	0.8
superintendent	2.6 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.1	1.1	2.1	1.0	1.8	0.8	1.5	0.8	1.5	0.8
frequency	2.6	0.7	2.7	0.8	2.8	0.7	3.0	0.7	3	0.6	3.0	0.7
fan aficionado	3.1 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.7 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.4	1.0	2.1	0.9	1.7	1.0	1.6	0.9
questions	3.5 ^{5,6}	1.1	3.0 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.7	1.1	2.6	1.1	2.0	1.1	2.0	1.0
advice	3.1 ^{5,6}	1.2	2.7 ^{5,6}	1.1	2.3	1.0	2.2	0.9	1.8	1.0	1.8	0.9
special offers	3.2 ^{5,6}	1.0	2.6 ^{6*}	1.1	2.4	1.2	2.3	1.1	2.0	1.1	1.7	1.0
brand manager	3.3 ^{5,6}	1.0	3.3	1.1	3.2	1.2	2.7	1.3	2.4	1.1	2.2	1.0

Note. Superscript indicates significant differences between age, $p = < .000$; * $p = < .001$; 3 = 35-44; 4 = 45-54; 5 = 55-64; 6 = 65+

Analyst. Participants aged 18-24 ($M = 3.1, SD = 1.0$) and 25-34 ($M = 2.9, SD = 1.1$) reported significantly more interest in this category compared to those aged 55-64 ($M = 2.2, SD = 1.1$) and those aged 65 and older ($M = 2.1, SD = 1.1$). Within the sub-categories, significant differences emerged for interest in the discussion of an athlete's opinions about sport ($F = 8.8$), interest in an athlete's life musings ($F = 7.6$), and interest in an athlete's opinions on world issues ($F = 5.4$).

Publicist. This type of information was rated significantly higher by those aged 18-24 ($M = 2.8, SD = 1.0$) and 25-34 ($M = 2.6, SD = 1.1$), when compared to those aged 55-64 ($M = 1.7, SD = 0.9$) and those 65 and older ($M = 1.6, SD = 0.7$). Significant differences emerged for interest in the discussion of athlete schedules ($F = 4.5$), sponsorship ($F = 7.4$), promotion of blog/website updates ($F = 9.5$), and fan contests ($F = 9.3$).

Superintendent. Participants aged 18-24 ($M = 2.6, SD = 1.1$) had significantly greater interest in this content than did the 55-64 ($M = 1.5, SD = 0.8$) and 65 and older ($M = 1.5, SD = 0.7$) age groups. Unlike the other self-presentation strategies which have to this point included follow-up sub-categories, this survey item asked participants to comment on how often they believed athletes should check in with their fans ($F = 8.6$). There were no significant differences relative to age; a majority of participants believed athletes on Twitter should check in with followers at least once a week (53%).

Fan aficionado. Audience interest in fan acknowledgement was significantly higher for those aged 18-24 ($M = 3.1, SD = 1.1$) and 25-34 ($M = 2.7, SD = 1.1$) compared to those 55-64 ($M = 1.7, SD = 1.0$) and 65 and over ($M = 1.6, SD = 0.9$). Significant differences also emerged with respect to interest in seeing athletes respond to fan questions ($F = 14.4$), interest in athletes

asking fans for advice ($F = 13.5$), and interest in seeing athletes provide fans with special offers ($F = 10.1$).

Brand manager. A one-way ANOVA test found significant age based differences with the 18-24 ($M = 3.2$, $SD = 1.1$) age demographic indicating greater interest in seeing athletes provide formal acknowledgments to their audience than those aged 55-64 ($M = 1.8$, $SD = 1.0$), and 65 and older ($M = 1.8$, $SD = 1.0$).

Audience Brand Interpretation

Participants were asked to comment on how important they perceived each of the ten self-presentation strategies to be relative to an athlete's overall brand or public image (see Table 5). The *super fan* and *fan aficionado* self-presentation strategies were rated as the most important categories to an athlete's brand, both with overall means of 3.0 ($SD = 1.0$ and 1.2, respectively). Athlete interaction followed closely with an overall mean of 2.9 ($SD = 1.1$). Male participants were found to find the sport insider strategy significantly more important to athlete brand than females. Participants aged 18-24 and 25-34 believed each of the ten categories to be more significant to an athlete's brand than those aged 55-64 and those 65 and older. Those aged 35-44 reported higher brand importance than those over age 55 for the sport insider, behind-the-scenes information, and super fan categories. Significant variance was also highlighted for the 18-24 and 25-34 age demographics which ranked the importance of both the fan update and fan interaction categories significantly higher than those aged 35-44 and 45-54.

Audience Advice for Athlete Self-Presentation

To conclude the survey, the audience was asked to rate the importance of humor and multimedia in athlete tweets and then given the opportunity to offer any advice they might have relative to athlete content they believe would be particularly effective on Twitter. The

incorporation of humor received a mean importance of 3.1 ($SD = 1.2$). The incorporation of personal pictures or videos in an athlete's Twitter feed received a mean importance of 2.9 ($SD = 1.2$).

Audience advice to athletes was critically analyzed and reviewed for emergent themes. Three themes were constructed as a result: personality, respect, and quality. Many fans urged athletes to produce authentic content that revealed aspects of their personality, believing this made them more interesting and relatable. Respect was a second theme, with participants recommending that athletes be courteous with their online presence at all times. Many comments suggested athletes avoid commenting on religion and politics; some even suggested they keep their personal lives personal. Participants emphasized that athletes should stay positive and avoid controversy by "cramming your foot in your mouth in an attempt to seem cool or edgy". A number of comments in this section also highlighted the fact that athletes have a responsibility to present themselves as role models on the Twitter medium. The last theme involved a recommendation that athletes provide quality content over a high quantity of content. This theme placed a premium upon uniqueness, innovation, and humor. Participants encouraged athletes to be relevant, honest, and humble with one participant going so far as to say, "Sometimes the less a professional athlete says, the better".

Table 5.**Importance of Self-Presentation Strategies on Athlete Brand**

Strategy	Gender		Age						Overall	
	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+		
conversationalist										
	<i>M</i>	2.9	2.9	3.3 ^{5,6}	3.2 ^{5,6}	2.8	2.8	2.4	2.1	2.9
	<i>SD</i>	1.04	1.2	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.0	0.9	1.1
sport insider										
	<i>M</i>	2.9*	2.7	3.2 ^{5,6}	3.1 ^{5,6}	3.3	2.6	2.1	2.0	2.8
	<i>SD</i>	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.0	0.8	0.9	1.1
behind-the-scenes										
	<i>M</i>	2.6	2.6	3.3 ^{5,6}	2.9 ^{5,6}	2.7 ^{5,6}	2.3	1.8	1.8	2.6
	<i>SD</i>	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.0	0.9	1.2
super fan										
	<i>M</i>	3.0	2.8	3.2 ^{5,6}	3.2 ^{5,6}	3.2 ^{5,6}	2.9	2.4	2.3	3.0
	<i>SD</i>	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0
informer										
	<i>M</i>	2.6	2.6	3.0 ^{5,6}	2.8 ^{5,6}	2.7	2.3	2.1	2.1	2.6
	<i>SD</i>	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.1
analyst										
	<i>M</i>	2.2	2.2	2.6 ^{5,6}	2.4 ^{5,6}	2.2	2.0	1.8	1.7	2.2
	<i>SD</i>	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.0	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.0
publicist										
	<i>M</i>	2.3	2.2	2.8 ^{5,6}	2.4 ^{5,6}	2.3	2.1	1.8	1.6	2.3
	<i>SD</i>	1.1	0.9	1.2	1.0	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.7	1.0
superintendent										
	<i>M</i>	2.7	2.6	3.2 ^{3,4,5,6}	3.0 ^{3,4,5,6}	2.6	2.4	2.0	2.0	2.7
	<i>SD</i>	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.0	0.8	0.8	1.0	1.1
fan aficionado										
	<i>M</i>	3.0	2.9	3.5 ^{3,4,5,6}	3.5 ^{3,4,5,6}	2.8	2.6	2.2	2.1	3.0
	<i>SD</i>	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.2
brand manager										
	<i>M</i>	2.6	2.6	2.9 ^{5,6}	2.8 ^{5,6}	2.7	2.4	2.2	2.2	2.6
	<i>SD</i>	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.1

Note. * Denotes males reported strategy significantly more important to athlete brand than females.

Note. Superscript indicates significant differences between age groups, $p < .000$; 3 = 35-44; 4 = 45-54; 5 = 55-64; 6 = 65+.

Discussion

This research sought to explore audience interest in the self-presentation strategies of professional athletes on Twitter and ascertain possible differences in preference based on gender and age. By way of Goffman's (1959) conceptualization of front and backstage performances and Lebel and Danylchuk's (2012) framework for athlete self-presentation strategies, this research indicated that sport consumers are largely ambivalent to the Twitter practices employed by professional athletes. While 96% of the audience surveyed reported being aware of Twitter and a further 42% noted they come across Twitter references in the sport media on a daily basis, overall interest in the ten self-presentation strategies under investigation was relatively low. The most salient athlete strategy reported was that of the *sport insider* with participants reporting particular interest in the discussion of athlete performance, athlete fitness, and an athlete's sport expertise. Greater audience interest was highlighted in the less formal backstage performance strategies of athletes ($M = 2.6$) when compared to more formal front stage athlete performances ($M = 2.3$). Significant gender variance was identified for only the *sport insider* strategy, with males reporting greater interest than females. Significant age variance was found in all ten self-presentation strategies with 18-34 year olds reporting consistently greater interest in all content than those aged 55 and older.

This research serves to inform professional athletes in the production of their Twitter content and support the application of a self-presentation framework in the digital landscape. While this audience reported relatively low interest in the self-presentation strategies under investigation, a clear preference was identified for the discussion of sport. Strong opinions were expressed relative to how participants believed athletes should be presenting themselves online. This feedback offers evidence to suggest that individuals do invest meaning in the impression

management techniques digitally employed by athletes and provides support for self-presentation as an effective way for scholars to understand online behavior through a theoretical lens.

As Twitter has risen in popularity, athletes have been enabled to paint a far more detailed picture of their life and have been tasked with expressing their personality for public consumption. This has provided sport consumers with increased information with which to shape their perceptions of athletes—an opportunity that might be likened to a doubled-edged sword for athletes evolving their self-presentation habits from what was once a primarily front stage performance to what is now a more focused backstage performance. Twitter has created successful public identities for many athletes and established individual brand awareness that will outlive athletic careers and provide ranging financial potential. Twitter has also become a very public stage for missteps, however, and exists as an ever-looming threat for athletes. Twitter gaffes and blunders by athletes are painfully compounded by the current popularity of social media, its fast-paced nature, and the media scrutiny to which public figures are subjected. Given the findings of this research, it would appear to behoove athletes negotiating the delicate Twitter balancing act to carefully consider the publication of backstage performances that include personal opinions and details of their life. If audiences are indeed most interested in learning about insider details of an athlete's sport, professional athletes may be better served to dedicate their backstage time on Twitter to what they know best—sport!

Specific to the identification of best practices on Twitter, this data promotes athlete reflection on sport performance, discussion of fitness routines, the provision of information regarding sport equipment developments, behind-the-scenes tournament information and expert sport advice by way of tips and practice drills. Audience interest was also comparatively high with regard to athlete interaction with fellow athletes, the provision of general sport information,

sport opinion, and sport analysis with the incorporation of both humor and multimedia also noted as important components of athlete tweets. These results are in line with the findings of Clavio and Kian (2010) who suggested audiences follow athletes on Twitter primarily as sports fans and are most interested in athlete sport expertise. The work of Witkemper, Lim, and Waldburger (2012) also found audiences access Twitter as a way to enhance their sport fan experience.

Specific to the potential impact of Twitter self-presentation strategies on an athlete's public image, the *superfan* and *fan aficionado* strategies were perceived to be of greatest importance by this audience, followed closely by the *conversationalist* and *sport insider* strategies. The *analyst* and *publicist* strategies were deemed least important to the development of an athlete's image. While previous research has promoted social media as a tool to broadcast views on a variety of subjects (Sanderson, 2011), these findings again support the recommendation that athletes focus their Twitter commentary on sport-related topics.

Prior research documenting athlete use of Twitter is mixed when it comes to how much time athletes currently spend producing sport-related Twitter discussion. In line with the golf context of this research, Pegoraro (2010) noted professional golfers tweeted about golf only 3.5% of the time and referenced other sports or athletes just 16% of the time. Content pertaining to personal life (29%) and fan interaction (46%) were found to account for the majority of professional golfer tweets according to Pegoraro. Lebel and Danylchuk (2012) found athletes were most active within the conversationalist strategy spending 30% of their time engaging in this type of dialogue; athletes spent just 23% of their time performing within the sport insider strategy and a mere 6% of their time within the super fan strategy. While it is recognized that the digital practices of athletes are constantly evolving, these studies suggest that athletes may not be spending as much time participating in the sport-related self-presentation that was advocated for

in this study and highlights a possible disconnect between athletes and their fans that should be addressed going forward.

This research further informs our understanding of athlete digital self-presentation strategies based upon gender and age demographics. Male participants reported greater interest than their female counterparts, while younger participants were consistently more interested in all content than older participants. These findings are important to take into account as gender and age have been identified as strong predictors of sport-related social media use (Schultz & Sheffer, 2011). The audience preferences indicated by both female participants and older adults should not be discounted though. Social media is recognized as an empowering outlet for audiences previously underserved by traditional media (Schultz & Sheffer, 2011). Professional athletes should therefore be considerate of a very diverse audience in the publication of all Twitter content.

Overall, this study offers evidence of broad Twitter awareness among a varied demographic of sport consumers though it suggests that sport fans may not be as interested in the personal details of their favorite athletes' lives as previously suggested. The apparent disconnect between how athletes are electing to present themselves on Twitter and what their audiences report being interested in is one of the more critical findings. Relatively low overall interest in athlete self-presentation coupled with audience advice that implored athletes to be respectful, responsible, and recall their function as role models suggest that the initial fascination with the personal lives of professional athletes may be waning. Perhaps sport audiences prefer to elevate their sport heroes to the esteemed pedestals that traditional media once created and public relations professionals were able to maintain. It could be that the raw Twitter dialogue that has humanized athletes and tarnished the names of so many diminishes our ability as fans to create

lasting sport idols that society can celebrate. Conceivably, the all-access pass Twitter initially championed prevents athletes from living up to our expectations. Ultimately, this research teaches us that athletes may not need to divulge the personal details of their lives in order to be relevant—sport consumers profess to be most interested in sport-related information. It logically follows that athletes who are able to satisfy this consumer preference will enjoy loyal Twitter followings and grow their brands based on the knowledge and skills that brought them their initial success.

Implications

Social media has forced great change on the presentational culture of professional athletes. Images that were once tightly controlled by public relations professionals are now largely shaped by athletes themselves and expected to include far more diverse and personal dimensions of self. This makes it all the more important to develop an understanding of what drives online sport consumption and what content best attracts the interest of sport consumers. This type of knowledge will assist athletes in appropriately tailoring of their self-presentation strategies to develop positive fan engagement and establish brand equity. In a similar manner, audience research of this nature can inform the development of social media strategy by highlighting potential brand benefits and best practices while potentially avoiding damaging missteps. As the social media platform becomes increasingly saturated and competition mounts, success on the exceedingly public Twitter stage will require more calculated performances by athletes. This research contributes to the digital construction and refinement of professional athlete self-presentation by confirming the value of authentic backstage performances among a sport audience and offers quantitative support for a greater interest in sport-specific Twitter content.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Limitations to this study are recognized. Survey instruments are dependent upon the capacity of participants to provide accurate responses. Generalizability of these results is also limited to the audience that elected to partake in this research. This survey was targeted towards a golf-minded demographic. The findings might vary if different sports were investigated or if different Twitter examples had been used to clarify the self-presentation strategies. Future research should address these concerns by investigating both the self-presentation tactics of a more diverse collection of athletes as well as the self-presentation interests of various audiences. This might include the exploration of potential differences between team sports and individual sports, as well as possible differences in college and professional sport. As Twitter becomes a part of mainstream sport consumption, assorted audience views and interpretations will be crucial to sport communications professionals, sport marketers, and athletes of all levels. In an effort to further develop our understanding of athlete digital self-presentation, the following study will address the photographic self-representation of professional athletes.

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Study 3

Facing Off On Twitter: A Generation Y Interpretation of Professional Athlete Profile Pictures

The innovations of social media are revolutionizing the sport media landscape. Defined largely by an ability to provide instantaneous news updates and connect athletes directly to their fans, social media has transformed the sport consumption experience (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenahlgh, & Greenwell, 2011; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010). According to a survey conducted by the Perform sports media group, 26% of sports fans are now using social media to follow leagues, teams and players (Laird, 2012). A study conducted by KT Tape suggested that as many as 83% of sports fans check sports social media sites while watching sport on television; a further 63% of fans browse sport social media sites while in attendance at live sporting events (KT Tape, 2012). Professional athletes closely match the voracious social media appetite displayed by sport consumers. As the sport industry's widely recognized social network of choice, Twitter boasted 7,360 verified professional athlete accounts as of February, 2013 according to the website *tweeting-athletes.com*. This figure is up over 50% from data collected in February, 2012. The most followed athletes are enjoying unprecedented influence through their Twitter presence with the unfiltered communication tool allowing them to connect to millions of followers in 140 characters or less.

One of the key drivers of social media's success has been the novelty of extending athletes the control to shape their own public image (Pegoraro, 2010). This stands as a unique divergence from the practices of traditional sport media coverage which have traditionally relied on the press releases prepared by public relations professionals. At its core, the social media platform exists as a tool for self-presentation (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012). It is a chance for sport

³ A version of this study has been submitted for publication to *Journal of Sports Media*.

personalities to present themselves as they wish to be perceived, extend their brands beyond the borders of traditional media, and grow their social capital. The purpose of this study was to delve into this largely unexplored terrain of digital self-presentation in sport. While research has dealt with the self-presentation of professional athletes by way of textual analysis (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012), this study investigates the self-presentation of professional athlete profile pictures.

Profile pictures are a common element of most online social networking sites and have been recognized as one of the most important attributes of social networking (Zhao & Jiang, 2011). They are typically provided a place of prominence in online profiles and serve as a frame of reference across a diverse range of online consumers. Specific to Twitter, the profile image is a featured characteristic of each user's profile and accompanies all posts that are broadcast through the Twitter server. Intuitively, it stands to reason that the profile picture, therefore, functions as an initial point of assessment for consumers. Several scholars have substantiated the power of visual material to provide information relative to a profile owner's identity (e.g., Mikkola, Oinas, & Kumpulainen, 2008; Siback, 2009). We contend that the profile picture an athlete elects to represent themselves with furthers our understanding of who they are and thus contributes to their overall public perception. The application of a self-presentation framework to the study of profile pictures therefore allows us to develop online impression management strategies while extending our understanding of digital self-presentation theory.

Self-presentation can be defined as a process by which people convey to others the type of person they are or the kinds of characteristics they possess (Leary, Tchividjian, & Kraxberger, 1994). Goffman's seminal theory of self-presentation (1959) implied that individuals manage impressions of themselves through identity cues that are given off both

intentionally and unintentionally in an effort to achieve relational goals. Goffman suggested that individuals attempt to manage the impressions they give off, strategically emphasizing some characteristics while de-emphasizing others. He theorized that through the interpretation of these identity cues, individuals are provided the information necessary to make determinations about one another. Lindgaard, Fernandes, Dudek and Brown (2006) advised that online visual appeal can be assessed within as little as 50 milliseconds. In an online landscape that is constantly competing for consumer attention, consumer retention stands as a critical factor for success; subsequently, we argue initial profile photo assessment holds vital importance to the successful marketing of professional athletes.

While it might be assumed that professional athletes attempt to engender a positive self-image through their digital self-presentation, very little is known about the fashion in which they attempt to accomplish this task and less still is known regarding how the digital self-presentation of athletes is perceived by sport consumers. This exploratory study, therefore, investigates how photographic self-presentation is interpreted by a Generation Y audience of sport consumers. Generation Y is understood to include those born between the years 1977-1994 (Bradish, Lathrop, & Sedgwick, 2001). It is a generation that has grown up in a culture obsessed with sport and a generation that has been provided with more opportunity to participate in sport than any before them (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2009). In addition to being the most active Twitter audience (Smith, 2011), 67% of Generation Y internet users also report posting photos they have taken to a website, notably empowering this demographic with savvy relative to online photo interpretation (Rainie, Brenner, & Purcell, 2012).

In benchmarking both current digital self-presentation practices and Generation Y audience preferences, we establish insight as to how profile construction might affect the

perceptions that are formed of professional athletes and contribute an interpretive component to the digital self-presentation literature in sport. As such, this research is guided by the following questions:

RQ1: How does an audience of Generation Y sport consumers perceive the impressions projected by professional athletes in their Twitter profile pictures?

RQ2: What photographic impressions are deemed most/least favorable relative to athlete profile pictures?

RQ3: What photographic impressions are deemed most/least effective relative to athlete brand?

Literature Review

The following is a review of literature related to the self-presentation including its digital and photographic applications.

Self-Presentation

“All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players: They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts.” ~ Shakespeare, As you Like It, 2/7

One of the central tenets of Goffman’s influential *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) suggests that individuals compose preferred versions of themselves for public consumption. He likened this process to the way an actor might manage their on and off stage personas. On stage, the actor manages what the audience sees through their performance of a specific scene. Behind the curtain, among friends, the actor is able to take respite from his formal presentation. Goffman suggest that it is in the backstage where real, behind-the-scenes living is experienced and personality is revealed (Papacharissi, 2002). This analogy became the basis for his front and backstage theoretical framework in which front stage performances are

essentially linked to self-presentation which is considered more formal in nature and backstage performances are used to capture self-presentation that is less measured and more intimate.

Digital Self-Presentation

Online social networking has exposed an entirely new method of self-presentation (Mehdizadeh, 2010). The online environment provides individuals with a controlled setting where they have complete authority over the construction of an ideal identity (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Relative to the structure of social networking profiles, self-presentation can be translated to include the posting of information and photos that one believes to be reflective of a desired online image (Mehdizadeh, 2010). While Goffman's original thesis conceptualized self-presentation in real-time, scholars from a variety of disciplines have demonstrated the continued relevance of the underlying thread of Goffman's theory in the modern online context: people invest meaning in the social cues they are provided with, both implicitly and explicitly (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Hogan (2010) admitted that while online self-presentation is more of an exhibition than a real-time performance, as Goffman originally imagined, online performances live on indefinitely as artifacts and should be considered a contemporary form of self-presentation. Hogan suggested that the impression management techniques used to create online identities are judged in a manner similar to live performances; online self-presentation is simply subject to much larger crowds. As such, traditional self-presentation tactics designed to impress others (i.e., the selection of clothing, hairstyles, accessories, logos) are interpreted in the virtual world as they might be in a live, contextual setting that embraces a defined audience (Schau & Gilly, 2003). This reasoning led Hogan (2010) to argue that exhibition is not only a sound form of self-presentation, but indeed a useful tool for scholars attempting to understand online behavior through a theoretical lens.

Tufekci (2008) stressed that self-presentation is in essence, a minimum requirement for social media participation. A study conducted by Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2009) confirmed that participants view self-presentation as one of the most interesting things about Facebook. The research established that 63% of Facebook users consider posting photos to be a way to express who they are to other users. Zhao and Jiang (2011) found evidence of cultural sensitivities relative to social media self-presentation; Chinese users were more likely to customize profile images than Americans. Specific to sport, Lebel and Danylchuk (2012) explored gender differences in the self-presentation strategies of professional athletes on Twitter. Athlete image construction was found to be textually similar between genders, though male athletes spent significantly more time presenting themselves as sport enthusiasts and female athletes were found to spend more time than their male counterparts presenting discourse that supported their brand.

Photographic Digital Self-Presentation

Profile pictures serve an important role in the digital presentation of self due to the wealth of information visual materials can inspire (Sibak, 2009). The pervasive strength of visual images have been found more powerful than the written word due to the fact that they can catch the eyes of even the most casual consumers and allow them to create impressions (Bishop, 2003; Cuneen & Spencer, 2003). While social media is a largely content based medium, the profile picture accompanies all posts which positions it as the literal face of an individual's online brand. Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs (2006) reasoned that profile photos serve as a means of support for the textual descriptions found in online profiles while also giving an overview of a person's self-concept and physical characteristics. Based upon research conducted on an online dating website, the same authors suggested that people are very conscious of the photos they elect to

post to their digital profiles. Specific to social networking, Strano (2008) reported that Facebook users consider their perceived attractiveness in a photo the most important factor in their decision to display an image. In an online survey of Finnish social networking users, Mikkola et al. (2008) found that participants tended to express qualities in their profile photos that were important to them (e.g., significant others, hobbies, pets). Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin (2008) and Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe (2007) also offered evidence in support of the importance of grounding Facebook identities in offline relationships. A study of 11-18 year old students in Estonia offered further evidence suggestive that the selection of a profile image is a highly conscious act that is strategic in nature (Sibak, 2009). Participants in this study offered clear expectations in their evaluation of profile photos, delineating certain elements deemed necessary to achieve social networking popularity. Female participants in the research were particularly articulate expressing noted value in profile photos that were built on self-belief and inclusive of normative values associated with the traditional female gender role.

Method

Research Context

The micro-blogging tool Twitter was the focus of this study. Twitter has come to enjoy particular influence as a social networking outlet and is widely recognized as the sport industry's social network of choice (Sanderson & Kassing, 2011). More than half of the professional athletes in the world are reported to have verified Twitter accounts (Wertheim, 2011). The digital platform of Twitter has been heralded for its potential to create athlete brand awareness and sponsorship opportunity (Wertheim, 2011) while also allowing direct communication with fans (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Hambrick et al., 2010; Pegoraro, 2010). As such, the profile

pictures of the most followed Twitter athletes were selected to be assessed by a Generation Y audience.

Profile Picture Selection

In order to evaluate the photographic self-presentation strategies of professional athletes, the Twitter profile photos of the top 20 most followed male and female professional athletes were collected in March, 2012. The resulting collection of 40 photos was provided to a panel of four experts specializing in the fields of sport management and sport philosophy. The panel reviewed each athlete's photo, taking into account factors such as setting, relation to sport, and whether or not the athlete was actively engaged or passive (note that all 20 female photos were distinguished as passive images). Upon review, the panel established what was believed to be a diverse compilation of 10 female and 10 male profile photos (see Appendix E). These photos were compiled into a PowerPoint presentation for audience interpretation.

Female professional athlete photographic self-presentation. Among the 10 female professional athlete profile photos selected, all photos were considered passive (i.e., posing or not engaged in movement), eight featured a non-sport setting, and four included no sporting reference whatsoever. Six of the 10 athletes opted to present a headshot, while two athletes presented an image including their head and torso, and two athletes selected profile images that included their full-body. Six female athletes presented a photo of themselves that was considered to be either a glamorized or sexualized version of themselves. Seven of the 10 photos were considered front stage or formal performances, while the images provided by Michelle Wie, Kim Clijsters, and Venus Williams were deemed backstage or informal performances.

Male professional athlete photographic self-presentation. Among the 10 male professional athlete profile photos selected, seven were distinguished as passive images and three

were considered active (i.e., athlete was actively engaged in an activity, not posed). Six athletes included themselves in a sport-related setting, one athlete included sport context in a non-sport setting, and the remaining three photos included no sport reference aside from the presence of the athlete himself. Three male athletes presented a headshot of themselves for their photo, while three more provided an image including their head and torso, and four athletes included full body shots. Half of the ten male athletes provided what was considered to be a glamorized photo. Seven of the 10 male photos illustrate front stage performances, while the images of Dwyane Wade, Floyd Mayweather, and LeBron James were considered backstage performances.

Survey Instrument

A written survey composed of open-ended questions was constructed in order to elicit audience interpretation of the athlete profile photos (see Appendix F). The survey consisted of three parts. The first part elicited impressions of the profile photos, while the second part elicited information concerning the favorability and effectiveness of the photo toward the brand of the athlete in question. A final section requested information about the participants' most favored athletes overall.

The survey instrument and its accompanying photo presentation were reviewed by a panel of four experts prior to the start of the study. Suggestions relative to item wording and photo organization/sizing were incorporated into the study design before conducting a pilot study with sport management graduate students ($N = 12$). Minor revisions were again incorporated into the survey design and photo layout at which point all materials were submitted to the University Research Ethics Board for review and subsequent approval (see Appendix A).

Participants

Perspectives of a Generation Y audience of sport minded participants were sought. This audience was deemed suitable as research indicates that the most active Twitter audience falls within the Generation Y age frame (Smith, 2011). Further, audience interpretation studies in sport have found that a “targeted, invested audience” tends to be best suited to studies of this nature (Bruce, 1998, p. 379). It was assumed that Kinesiology students enjoy a heightened interest in the sporting realm and are equipped with a familiarity of professional athletes making them ideal candidates to interpret athlete self-presentation. The resulting sample represented the interpretations of 65 males and 76 females with a mean age of 22.1 years.

Procedure

Participant recruitment involved making initial contact with Kinesiology course instructors at a large Canadian University and asking for permission to present the study to their students. Instructors who agreed to participate in the research invited the researchers into their courses and allotted the final 20 minutes of their class to the research.

Participants were asked to complete the survey while viewing the photo presentation on a computer screen. Participants were first asked to evaluate each of the female profile photos. Viewing the images one at a time, the survey probed participants to provide the first words that came to their mind upon viewing the photo, name the athlete if they were able, and then identify the sport in which the athlete is active. This was followed by a collage that pictured all ten of the female athletes. Participants were asked to identify their favorite and least favorite image from the collection and substantiate their decisions. An ensuing question asked participants to select the images they believed were the most and least effective in terms of the athletes’ brand and again explain their decision. Upon evaluating all female profile pictures, the same process was

repeated for the collection of male photos—participants viewed each male athlete's individual photo, and then made selections based on photo favorability and effectiveness.

To conclude the survey, participants were shown the entire collection of both female and male photos. They were then asked to identify their favorite and least favorite image from this larger collection and make note of the images they believed were the most and least effective in terms of athlete brand. A final question provided space for participants to substantiate the reasoning behind each of these selections. A total of 150 surveys were administered of which 141 were deemed usable.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of data collection, all survey data was input into Excel for organizational purposes. Descriptive statistics and frequencies were run to interpret and report survey results using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Open-ended survey feedback was quantitatively analyzed through the documentation of word frequencies.

Results

The focus of this research was to determine how a Generation Y audience of sport enthusiasts interprets the impressions projected by professional athlete Twitter profile pictures. The findings are therefore presented to reflect the audience interpretation of the self-presentational strategies of the athlete profile photos under investigation.

Female Athlete Photo Recognition

Table 1 depicts a description of each female athlete's photo, frequencies of athlete and sport recognition, frequencies of favorability and effectiveness, and the most common words associated with each athlete's image. Tennis player Venus Williams was the most recognized athlete among the audience with 56% of all participants correctly identifying her based on her

photo. Serena Williams was correctly identified by 40% of the audience, followed by golfer Michelle Wie (38%), Indy driver Danica Patrick (37%), and gymnast Shawn Johnson (30%) (see Table 1 for full listing). More than half of the female athletes had recognition rates of 30% or less based on their profile image. Specific to sport, team U.S.A. star Angela Ruggiero was correctly identified as a hockey player by 94% of the audience, followed by tennis players Venus Williams (77%) and Serena Williams (55%). The remaining athletes were correctly linked to their sport 51% of the time or less.

In terms of the first impressions that came to participants' minds when viewing each female athlete's image, a wide assortment of responses was offered. Participants that correctly identified the athlete were often inspired to associate words connected to the athlete's established brand. For example, Michelle Wie and Dancia Patrick both motivated responses linked to their respective sponsorship deals with Kia and GoDaddy.com. Both women are featured in popular commercial advertisements with these sponsors. Participants appeared to recall this commercial interaction with the athlete upon being exposed to the athlete's photo. While few participants were able to correctly identify Angela Ruggiero, the fact that she displayed herself in her team U.S.A. jersey with Olympic medals around her neck seemed to give her significant credibility as an athlete. Not only were participants able to explicitly associate her with her sport of hockey, impressions of athleticism and success were common words linked with her image. Likewise, the athletic images displayed by Shawn Johnson and Alex Morgan were associated with themes of strength, power, and fitness.

Table 1.**Description of Female Professional Athlete Profile Pictures**

Athlete Name	Photo Description	Athlete Name Correctly Identified		Athlete Sport Correctly Identified		Frequency of Favorability		Frequency of Effectiveness		Common Words Associated with Image
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Venus Williams	Passive shot of head & torso, features pet, sport setting.	79	56	109	77	8	6	3	2	dog, cute, caring, relaxed, real
Serena Williams	Passive headshot featuring sexuality, non-sport setting.	57	40	78	55	1	0.7	0	0	hair, frizz, afro, posed, "is she wearing clothes?"
Michelle Wie	Passive headshot, athletic look, non-sport setting.	54	38	72	51	7	5	5	4	Stanford, golf, sporty, Kia, happy
Danica Patrick	Passive, glamorized headshot featuring sexuality, non-sport setting.	52	37	56	40	13	9	5	4	GoDaddy, pretty, model, attractive, stylish
Shawn Johnson	Passive shot of head & torso featuring sexualized, athletic look, non-sport setting.	42	30	63	45	44	31	50	35	strong, fit, happy, muscular, sporty
Kim Clijsters	Passive headshot posing with husband and daughter, non-sport setting.	26	18	26	18	8	6	5	4	family, happy, cute, real, down to earth
Caroline Wozniacki	Passive, glamorized headshot, non-sport setting.	12	9	48	34	10	7	4	3	watch, model, advertisement, pretty, cheezy
Alex Morgan	Passive, full body shot featuring sexualized, athletic look, sport setting.	11	8	28	20	35	25	23	16	athletic, toned, powerful, strong, fit
Angela Ruggiero	Passive, full body shot featuring hockey jersey and Olympic medals, non-sport setting.	5	4	132	94	14	10	46	33	hockey, champion, Olympics, confident, success
Jennie Finch	Passive, glamorized headshot, non-sport setting.	5	4	4	3	0	0	0	0	fake, posed, "trying too hard", bad hair, split ends

Athletes that elected to post a profile image that featured a glamorized headshot were met with significantly more criticism than those that tended toward sportier images. This was especially true for athletes that were not well recognized. Participants often reproached the lack of a sporting context, criticizing females for not providing any context to their brand as an athlete. Participants were also more likely to harshly judge these athletes for “posing”. Participants were especially critical of the photo displayed by softball player Jennie Finch with references against her “split ends” and “bad roots”, in addition to a number of insults that accused her of “trying too hard”.

Audience Assessment of Female Athlete Profile Pictures

Former Olympic gymnast Shawn Johnson’s athletic looking pose in uniform was selected by 31% of participants as their favorite female photo. Rising U.S. soccer star Alex Morgan earned 25% of the vote for a pose featuring her athletic build in a sport locker room. Angela Ruggiero, who presented herself in her team U.S.A jersey adorned with her Olympic medals, was selected by 11% of the audience as their favorite female image. In all three cases, participants reported liking the fact that these athletes were all clearly recognizable as athletes. In terms of the audience’s least favorite female photos, Jennie Finch’s glamorized pose and tennis star Kim Clijsters’ casual photo with her family were each selected by 26% of the audience. Serena Williams posed headshot followed closely behind, selected by 23% of participants as their least favorite photo. While Finch was criticized for being “fake” and having “bad hair”, 95% of all comments made with regard to Clijsters included the word “family”. A similar majority of the comments in reference to Serena Williams’ photo were centered on her hair. In general, participants professed distaste for the fact that these individuals were not capitalizing on the athletic success that had earned these elite athletes their fame.

Relative to the impact of each athlete's profile photo on their overall image or brand, Shawn Johnson's profile picture was selected by 38% of the participants as the most effective of the group. Angela Ruggiero's photo was selected by 32% of the audience and Alex Morgan was declared most effective by 16%. Johnson was praised by participants for "effectively showing who she is". Participants believed she did a good job of emphasizing her fitness, sport and personality in her photo. Ruggiero was heralded for showing participants her sport, team and success; while Morgan's photo was appreciated by participants who highlighted the power, focus and strength they perceived in her image. Kim Clijsters (33%), Serena Williams (28%), and Jennie Finch (23%) were again selected by participants as the least effective profile photos among female athletes. Participants criticized Clijsters for not putting more of a focus on herself as an athlete. They suggested her photographic brand would be more effective if built around her tennis success, allowing better recognition. Williams' photo was criticized for similar reasons. Participants did not believe it was a becoming photo of her and thought she would have been better to play to her tennis strengths for the purposes of brand consistency and brand recognition. Participants were again very critical in their feedback of Finch's photo. She was once more accused of "looking fake", not showing her personality, and having no connection to sport.

Male Athlete Photo Recognition

Table 2 depicts a description of each male athlete's photo, frequencies of name and sport recognition, frequencies of favorability and effectiveness, and the most common words associated with each image. Basketball legend Shaquille O'Neil was the most recognized athlete among the audience with 79% of all participants correctly identifying him based on his photo. Soccer player Cristiano Ronaldo was correctly identified by 74% of participants followed by cyclist Lance Armstrong (65%), soccer player Wayne Rooney (57%), and basketball player

LeBron James (55%) (see Table 2 for full listing). The remaining male athletes were recognized at a rate of 50% or less base upon their self-selected profile images. With regard to the athletes' sport, 96% of the audience correctly recognized Cristiano Ronaldo as a soccer player. Basketball player Dwyane Wade (94%), boxer Floyd Mayweather (92%), and basketball player Lamar Odom (90%) all achieved equally high rates of sport recognition. With the exception of soccer player Kaka (32%), male athletes were correctly associated with the appropriate sport a minimum 65% of the time.

Similarly to female athletes, the first impressions that came to the minds of participants when viewing male athlete profile pictures were diverse. As in the cases of Michelle Wie and Danica Patrick, Lance Armstrong's image was often linked with words related to his widely publicized role as both a cancer survivor and Livestrong founder. (It should be noted that this research was conducted before Armstrong's doping scandal was officially exposed). Likewise, participants that recognized LeBron James' image often brought up strong words of judgment related to his highly publicized and controversial trade from the Cleveland Cavaliers to the Miami Heat.

Athletes who portrayed themselves in active poses were met with far more positive terminology than athletes who presented themselves in posed, passive images. Action shots and sport related settings were consistently associated with themes related to passion, focus and sport success, while non-sport settings were more apt to be associated with connotations of arrogance. Unlike the female athletes, however, male athletes that elected to post a glamorized, non-sport related photo received far less criticism and were more likely to be linked to themes of sophistication, style, and class. The exception to this was the little recognized soccer player,

Table 2.**Description of Male Professional Athlete Profile Photos**

Athlete Name	Photo Description	Athlete Name Correctly Identified		Athlete Sport Correctly Identified		Frequency of Favorability		Frequency of Effectiveness		Common Words Associated with Image
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Shaquille O'Neil	Passive shot of head & torso featuring sunglasses and tattoo in a glamorized pose, non-sport setting	111	79	116	82	13	9	5	4	gangster, playa, tough, posed, arrogant
Cristiano Ronaldo	Active shot of head & torso featuring the celebration of a goal, in sport uniform and sport setting.	102	74	136	96	26	18	48	34	passionate, celebration, success, excitement, winner
Lance Armstrong	Passive headshot, glamorized black and white candid, non-sport setting.	92	65	92	65	17	12	13	9	happy, Livestrong, rugged, confident, inspirational
Wayne Rooney	Passive shot of head & torso, glamorized pose, non-sport setting.	81	57	95	67	5	4	2	1	sophisticated, stylish, confident, serious, tough
LeBron James	Passive headshot posing with 2 children, non-sport setting.	77	55	97	69	3	2	4	3	family, kids, unprofessional, cute, "trying too hard to restore image"
Dwyane Wade	Passive full body shot featuring glamorized pose with a basketball, non-sport setting.	70	50	132	94	17	12	11	8	stylish, luxury, extravagant, arrogant, distant/sad
Floyd Mayweather	Passive full body shot featuring athletic dress in a sport-setting.	55	39	130	92	22	16	30	21	relaxed, tired, contemplation, athletic, focused
Tony Hawk	Active full body shot featuring Hawk as a child on his skateboard, sport setting.	51	36	111	79	29	21	21	15	fun, exciting, thrilling, crazy, little kid
Kaka	Passive headshot, glamorized pose, non-sport setting.	36	26	45	32	1	0.7	0	0	creepy, posed, corny, awkward, loser
Lamar Odom	Active full body, black & white shot featuring a basketball, sport uniform & sport setting.	8	6	127	90	8	6	7	5	old school, player, action shot, focused, basketball

Kaka, whose headshot was harshly judged by a majority of participants for giving off impressions of being “creepy” and “awkward”.

Audience Assessment of Male Athlete Profile Pictures

In terms of audience preference, Tony Hawk’s presentation of himself skateboarding as a child was selected by 21% of participants as their favorite photo among the collection of male athletes provided. Cristiano Ronaldo, who depicted himself in his uniform celebrating on the field, was second with 18% of the votes, and Floyd Mayweather, who was pictured taking a break from practice in a boxing ring, was selected as a favorite photo by 16% of participants. Kaka’s glamorized headshot led the way in reference to the audience’s least favorite male photo (48%). LeBron James’ image was selected by 12% of participants, followed by Shaq’s image, which was selected by 11% of participants. Justification for these athletes’ low favorability was in line with the words originally associated with their profile pictures including criticism that Kaka was “creepy” and “corny”, LeBron James was too focused on family as opposed to his basketball success, while Shaq was criticized for perceived arrogance.

Cristiano Ronaldo was selected by a 35% majority of participants for being the most effective male photo relative to overall athlete brand. Floyd Mayweather was selected by 21% of participants, followed by Tony Hawk who was selected by 15% of participants. Ronaldo was celebrated for the fact that he clearly articulated his team, sport, and passion. The fact that he posted an action shot was also very well received and frequently noted by participants. Floyd Mayweather was applauded for placing himself in his sport setting and providing participants with what they perceived as “a glimpse into his world”.

Kaka was selected by 55% of all participants as having the least effective profile photo relative to his overall brand as an athlete. LeBron James was selected by 16% of participants,

followed by Shaq who was selected by 10% of participants. In the case of Kaka, participants were critical of the fact that they did not seem to learn anything about him in his photo. They believed that it was an unflattering and awkward image and suggested that revealing aspects of his personality or sport would be beneficial in improving his photographic brand. LeBron was criticized for the quality and lack of professionalism in his photo. Participants also seemed to believe he should be including aspects of his basketball success as a part of his photographic brand. Shaq was accused by participants of being pompous and “trying too hard to be cool” in his photo. Some went so far as to call him a poor role model in light of the “gangster” impressions they believed he was endorsing through his image.

Audience Assessment of Entire Collection of Athlete Profile Pictures

Amongst the entire collection of 20 athlete photos, Shawn Johnson was selected by 18% of the participants as their favorite overall photo. Alex Morgan was selected by 17% of participants and Tony Hawk and Cristiano Ronaldo were both selected by 10% of participants (see Table 3). With respect to the audience’s least favorite athlete photos, Kaka was selected by 24% of participants, followed by Kim Clijsters, Jennie Finch, and Serena Williams who were each selected by 13% of participants.

Angela Ruggiero was selected by 18% of participants as the most effective profile photo overall in terms of athlete brand. This was followed by Ronaldo (17%), and Shawn Johnson (16%). The common thread between these photos was the ability to tell these athletes were athletes, according to participants. A perceived passion for sport was also consistently recognized in participant assessment of these athletes. Finally, Kaka was selected by 29% of participants as the overall least effective athlete photo, followed by Kim Clijsters (19%), and

Serena Williams (16%). These athletes were again criticized for not providing a sport context within their photographic presentation of self.

Discussion

This research investigated how professional athletes present their self-image in their Twitter profile pictures and explored how digital athlete self-presentation is interpreted by a Generation Y audience. Based on Goffman's theoretical framework of self-presentation, this research provides evidence to suggest that individuals invest meaning in the social cues provided in athlete profile pictures. Clear trends were established relative to the impressions profile pictures inspired as well as the calculation of the perceived effectiveness of the profile pictures. Athletes that highlighted themselves in a sport setting or with some reference to a sport context were consistently ranked more effectively than those who did not. The photographic linkage to sport seemed to enhance both athlete recognition and credibility while motivating more positive word associations among participants. Preferences were further expressed for profile photos that provided some insight into the athlete's personality and remained in line with their established brand as an athlete.

Specific to the actual self-presentation tactics employed by the collection of professional athletes in this sample, strong tendencies were exhibited toward more formal, front stage performances. A distinct preference was also displayed for passive self-representations, with 85% of those examined selecting a photo that did not portray active engagement. Female athletes demonstrated a tendency to present glamorized photos of themselves, taken in non-sport settings. Male athletes elected to present a glamorized image of themselves in just half of the cases examined, with a 70% majority portraying themselves in either a sport setting or with a sport context. Audience feedback of the collection of athlete photos seemed to call for a balance

Table 3.

Overall Audience Preferences for Entire Photo Collection

between the front and backstage performances. Preference was expressed for a sense of photographic professionalism that also revealed insider details relative to the athlete's personality.

While some profile photos received high praise from this audience, others were at times ruthlessly criticized. The least recognized female and male athletes were among the most condemned. Softball player Jennie Finch, for example, presented a glamorized image of herself in a non-sport setting. She was associated with particularly harsh comments that were largely personal in nature and consistently rated as one of the least favorite and least effective photos in comparison to other athletes. The same was true of famed soccer player, Kaka. At the time of data collection, he stood as the most followed professional athlete on Twitter, boasting over 14 million followers. His glamorized headshot was frequently associated with comments attacking his personal character with participants labeling him "creepy" and a "loser". These examples stand in stark contrast to the sporty action shot provided by Cristiano Ronaldo and the image highlighting the athletic success of Olympic hockey champion Angela Ruggiero. These two athletes were not only recognized by the audience as the most effective athlete photos in the collection, they were associated with consistently strong and positive connotations. Through the lens of self-presentation theory, this research establishes that profile pictures have the ability to give off a wide variety of both implicit and explicit cues that can be used by consumers to further develop impressions of athletes, whether they are prepared for this judgment or not. In light of this, it logically extends that professional athletes with a social media presence should be cognizant of what their profile picture might say about them. In the management of an online identity, the literal face of a digital brand could wield important influence in shaping overall perceptions of an athlete.

As social media platforms continue to take hold as a form of direct communication, this research demonstrates that the equity building value of photographic self-presentation possesses significant opportunity for athletes to unveil elements of their personality. It also establishes photo sharing as a self-presentation strategy that should not be overlooked. While this research provided a number of findings with regard to the social cues that can be interpreted in athlete profile photos, some of the more interesting discoveries were the sponsorship connections participants associated with athlete photos (e.g., Michelle Wie/Kia, Danica Patrick/GoDaddy, Lance Armstrong/Livestrong). This demonstrates the sophistication that is involved in photo evaluation. Recent research from the Pew Research Center supports the growing popularity of photos in social networks, explicitly highlighting them as a form of online social currency (Rainie, Brenner, & Purcell, 2012). Among the Pew study's most significant findings, it found 46% of internet users post original photos and videos online that they have created themselves. A further 41% of online adults reported curating photos and videos they came across in their daily online travels and posting them on online image-sharing sites. As previously mentioned, within the Generation Y demographic, the numbers are even higher; 67% of internet users reported posting photos that they had taken themselves to a website, while 63% of the same demographic reported posting photos or videos that they found online and sharing them on social networking sites. These findings speak to the familiarity and experience Generation Y audiences have with online photo sharing and may explain the strong opinions parlayed by participants in their judgment of athlete photos as well as their insightful links to athlete sponsors. It is possible that the personal experience participants have with social media consumption and photographic presentation served to heighten their expectations of athlete photos and inform their assessments of our athlete profile photos.

Relative to previous sport literature, authors Pegoraro and Jinnah (2012) noted in specific reference to Twitter, that it is the most effective media outlet for fostering the direct fan-sport relationship given its propensity for immediacy, intimacy, and interactivity. They also pointed out the fact that while sport participation and performance may help create awareness of an athlete's potential as a brand, it is the equity athletes create off the field that establish them as valuable commercial brands. As Horne (2006) offered, celebrity athletes become known not for what they do, but rather who they are, and what they are like. According to this research, the activities of an athlete both on and off the field of play can be taken into account during photographic assessment. While the photo itself offered participants explicit social cues with which to form impressions, this research illustrated how a participant's previous knowledge of an athlete was also associated with the athlete in the form of various implicit social cues.

Photographic self-representation is arguably one of the most intimate ways in which an athlete can share their life with fans. A photo can literally give fans a glimpse into the life of a professional athlete, providing them with the insider information that sports fans covet. It may be the truest behind-the-scenes look a fan can experience. While previous social media research has focused on the dialogic actions of professional athletes on Twitter (Hambrick et al., 2010; Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Pegoraro, 2010) and begun to research the motivations and constraints of Twitter followers (Clavio & Kian, 2010; Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Smith & Smith, 2012; Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012) this research highlights the ability of a profile photo to speak to sport consumers, thus moving the sport-related social media research forward as a burgeoning body of knowledge.

Implications

While this study was focused on profile pictures as a form of self-presentation, the influence of the social media phenomenon should also be recognized for its effects on the marketing tactics of sport entities (Emmons, 2012; Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012). In the new social media era, even the savviest professional athletes find themselves subject to a far more acutely focused public microscope. As professional athletes learn to navigate this fresh responsibility, they are often confronted by audiences that are as critical as they are appreciative of this novel mode of communication. Athletes that have provided fans with coveted, behind-the-scenes looks into their lives via written and photographic presentations have been publicly heralded with intense scrutiny, much the same as some of the athletes in this study were criticized. Unlike traditional media, social media lacks a safety net. Once a message has been sent or a photo has been posted, it cannot be taken back. This leaves athletes without a margin for error and has led athlete social media use to become an increasingly sensitive matter in the wake of numerous miscues. It is in this wisdom that the major implication of this research reminds athletes and their managers/organizations of the impact that a photo can brandish. Social media has become a very fast-paced world in which an ill-thought comment can tarnish an athlete's image. An ill-thought photo, however, can be interpreted by the public with far less explanation and by its graphic nature, often create far more lasting impressions that have the potential to follow individuals around for the rest of their lives as online artifacts. This study underscores the fact that we are what we post and encourages athletes and public relations professionals to take a moment to consider all possible interpretations of their online publications before they upload them for the world to see.

A second, more practical translation of knowledge that comes from this research encourages professional athletes to consider their profile pictures akin to the foundation of their social media presence. Online communication for athletes may include a variety of goals; this study illustrates the importance of ensuring a proper fit between profile content, profile photos, and the brand established as an athlete, such that the three elements are strategically aligned to represent an athlete's desired image. While an arduous task and perhaps a rigorous balancing act, this study confirms that when presentations of self successfully complement one another, an athlete is apt to be rewarded with far more positive perceptions associated with their name. The utility of the concept of front and backstage performances further provides a tool to keep this alignment in check while negotiating the professionalism of being a celebrity athlete and the personalization inherent of social media practices. In a competitive marketplace, thoughtful digital self-presentation can be a useful guide for overall brand management while setting the footing for diverse sponsorship opportunities and other extracurricular activities.

Limitations and Future Considerations

This study was limited by the fact that it was an examination of Twitter profile photos at one point in time. The most-followed athletes on Twitter are constantly evolving and some athletes update their profile images on a frequent basis. Had images been collected at a different time, the results may have been different. This study was also limited to the perceptions and views of our specific Generation Y sample and their Kinesiology background. While other age demographics may have provided different interpretations, as might individuals with a diminutive sport background, we believed our sample provided a strong starting point with which to initially address this area of research. We acknowledge the fact that our audience selection criteria affect the generalizability of our results. As individuals with sport backgrounds

and a probable awareness of depictions of gender in sport by way of their education, this sample may have been a more informed and therefore more critical audience of our profile photo collection. They may also have been more familiar with the athletes and have pre-determined opinions of them, both positive and negative. While the participants' previous experience with the athletes in our study may have impacted their perceptions, it is important to note that as sport minded consumers, the opinions garnered by our sample are also reflective of the audience most likely to consume this brand of social media content.

This exploratory study stands as the first investigation of professional athlete profile pictures. As such, there are boundless opportunities for future research. Content analysis of a larger collection of athlete photos is one potential avenue of exploration. Comparing a more diverse selection of pictures would allow for greater generalizability of the results. A gender focused study that examines specific tendencies of athletes is also warranted; current male and female self-presentation practices could then be compared to the significant body of research available on the photographic treatment of athletes by traditional media outlets. Finally, in an effort to move digital concepts of self-presentation forward, future studies involving audience interpretations of athlete image construction are recommended. This should include creative methodology that investigates the time it takes for online impressions to be created as well as research that probes into the mechanisms at play as consumers interpret digital impressions in a new technological era.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this research serves to support the power of photographic imagery in our ever-expanding digital culture. This research not only lends credence to the classic saying that “a picture is worth a thousand words”, but hopefully motivates an updated version of the phrase

to include the fact that a profile photo might have similar worth. It is of the utmost importance that athletes select their photographic self-presentation with care, realizing that it could be every bit as significant as the content that accompanies it.

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Summary

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the digital self-presentation of professional athletes and extend the application of Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation to the social media landscape in order to further our understanding of online athlete behavior through a theoretical lens. Specifically, this dissertation was designed to provide the following contributions: (1) identify the self-presentation strategies being used by professional athletes, (2) provide interpretation relative to the perceived effectiveness of athlete self-presentation strategies, and (3) demonstrate the effective use of self-presentation theory in the digital landscape. Three studies built upon these proposed contributions separately. The outcomes of this research add to the larger body of sport communication literature through the documentation of the current social media practices being implemented by professional athletes. This research also offers practical insight for sport practitioners by way of the development of social media best practices and self-presentation strategy specific to professional athletes.

The purpose of Study 1 was to investigate the self-presentation strategies that professional athletes are engaging in on the social media site Twitter and ascertain possible differences that might exist between genders. This study built upon the original contributions informing athlete social media use by providing a more brand-centric approach and incorporating image management strategies tied to self-presentation theory. Ten self-presentation frames were subsequently developed to categorize professional athlete Twitter behavior and expand on Twitter's potential as a self-marketing tool. The athletes analyzed were found to spend the greatest amount of their time presenting themselves as conversationalists (30%), a term used to qualify interaction with fellow Twitter users. It was also established that a majority of professional athlete Twitter content could be classified as a backstage performance. The

dominance of this type of self-presentation illustrates how drastically athlete self-presentation has evolved and helps to put the swiftness with which athletes have embraced social media technology into some perspective.

Specific to gender, content production was found to be largely similar in terms of both frequency and construction though the mean number of followers attracted was significantly skewed in favour of male athletes, as was the average impact score that measures overall Twitter influence. This finding suggests that hegemonic values appear to persist in the digital media context, despite the opportunities inherent of Twitter as an uncensored broadcast medium. Gender variance within the self-presentation strategies was further identified within the *super fan* frame, with men spending significantly more time than women discussing sport related ideas. Alternatively, female athletes were found spend a significantly greater amount of time presenting as *brand managers* than their male counterparts.

The purpose of Study 2 was to explore audience interest in the self-presentation strategies of professional athletes on Twitter and distinguish the perceived importance of digital self-presentation on athlete image. This study extended the framework developed in Study 1 by providing an interpretive element to digital athlete self-presentation. Our audience reported broad Twitter awareness with 96% of those surveyed reporting being aware of Twitter, 58% reporting they notice Twitter references in offline media, and 42% of the audience reporting daily interactions with Twitter references. The *sport insider* self-presentation strategy received the greatest interest ratings among the audience and collectively, backstage performances edged out the overall audience interest when compared to front stage performances, albeit by a narrow margin.

The key finding of this research suggested that sport consumers may not be as interested in the personal details of an athlete's life outside of sport as previously believed. Evidence also suggested a disconnect may exist between the self-presentation strategies being employed by professional athletes and the strategies in which our audience reported the most interest. While discussion of sport was found to be the most salient self-presentation strategy among our audience, previous literature has suggested that athletes actually spend a comparatively small amount of time discussing sport on Twitter (Pegoraro, 2010). These are critical findings for athletes, sport practitioners, and more broadly, social media advisors. The low audience interest reported for the personal details of an athlete's life outside of sport in particular represent a significant divergence from the popular press' social media mindset which has encouraged behind-the-scenes insight into the personal lives of celebrities. In an increasingly competitive digital marketplace, this finding could re-shape the approach social media users take to address their audiences and the manner in which they tailor their social media strategies.

Study 3 sought to examine the photographic self-presentation tendencies of professional athletes and explored how this form of digital athlete self-presentation is interpreted by a Generation Y audience. This study is particularly notable due to the fact that it provides complex evidence to suggest that our audience invested meaning in the social cues provided in athlete profile pictures. Athletes that highlighted themselves in a sport setting or with reference to a sport context were consistently ranked more effectively than those that did not. The incorporation of a photographic linkage to sport also enhanced both athlete recognition and credibility while motivating far more positive word associations among participants. The most effectively ranked athlete photos were found to provide insight into an athlete's personality while remaining consistent with the athlete's established brand.

These findings again hold important implications for both athletes and social media advisors in terms of profile photo selection. The diversity of word associations linked to the images under investigation illustrate the importance of selecting a photo that is in strategic alignment with the goals of the overall athlete brand. It also strengthens the application of self-presentation theory in the digital landscape as we show its utility in online impression management and thus extend its use beyond face-to-face interactions.

Collectively, the research findings presented in this dissertation provide insight that can help inform the development of strategic social media practices for athletes while also expanding our understanding of the applications of self-presentation, thus enabling us to extend both the knowledge and theory relative to the impact of social media on sport. Moving forward, there are a number of research endeavors that this work might motivate. For example, while this research illustrated an athlete preference for backstage performances, the interpretive elements of the dissertation highlight the moral scrutiny that athletes now find themselves subject to as a result of this less formal interaction with their audience. Future research might address these changes more closely and explore the expectations we have for professional athletes more carefully. As the financial opportunities of social media continue to be developed, issues of ethics and athlete responsibility will become increasingly important. Athlete contract negotiations are already evolving to include specific social media language and guidelines. The use of the front and backstage self-presentation framework might be a useful tool to help guide the development of this area of study; at the very least, this research points out a need for philosophical evaluation.

This research further underscores the essential need for athlete social media education. Traditional public relations training for athletes have been specific to the front stage performance. The findings of this dissertation point to a need for the re-tooling of established

media preparedness programs to include a focus on backstage performances. Social media is a new skill set. Detailed educational programs for athletes should reflect this transition and prepare them appropriately for this fresh responsibility. While this research emphasizes the opportunities that might exist for gender equity in sport and accentuates the power that digital self-presentation can have in the development of audience brand perception, this work is only the tip of the iceberg. There are multiple extensions of digital brand power that might also be investigated. Instructing athletes on presentation skills that strengthen their social impact is an important area of study that will only grow in its significance.

In viewing social media through a self-presentation lens and extension of athlete brand, its value as a self-marketing tool can be more clearly articulated. This dissertation elucidates that the paired exploration of athlete digital self-presentation with audience interpretation to evaluate the perceptions given off as a result of self-presentation combine to allow the strategic development of social media practices. The dissemination of this knowledge to sport marketers and sport communications professionals can assist in the development of athlete social media presentation. These findings also function more broadly as an impetus to encourage the evaluation of social media self-presentation in a variety of other fields both within the sport realm and beyond.

APPENDIX A

The University of Western Ontario Certificates of Approval for Research Involving
Human Subjects



Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Research Ethics

Principal Investigator: Dr. Karen Danylchuk
File Number: 102821
Review Level: Full Board
Approved Local Adult Participants: 500
Approved Local Minor Participants: 0
Protocol Title: Professional Athlete Self-Presentation on Twitter – An Audience Interpretation
Department & Institution: Health Sciences\Kinesiology, Western University
Sponsor:
Ethics Approval Date: August 23, 2012 **Expiry Date:** February 28, 2013

Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Sub-Study Letter of Information & Consent		
Letter of Information & Consent		

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

Grace Kelly (grace.kelly@uwo.ca)	Janice Sutherland (jsutherland@uwo.ca)
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Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Karen Danylchuk

Review Number: 18884S

Review Level: Full Board

Approved Local Adult Participants: 120

Approved Local Minor Participants: 0

Protocol Title: The Effect of Digital Self-Representation on Celebrity Athlete Image

Department & Institution: Health Sciences\Kinesiology, University of Western Ontario

Sponsor:

Ethics Approval Date: March 13, 2012

Expiry Date: August 31, 2012

Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Western University Protocol		
Letter of Information		

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The UWO NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

Grace Kelly grace.kelly@uwo.ca	Janice Sutherland jsutherland@uwo.ca
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The University of Western Ontario

Office of Research Ethics

Support Services Building Room 5150 • London, Ontario • CANADA - N6G 1G9
PH: 519-661-3036 • F: 519-850-2466 • ethics@uwo.ca • www.uwo.ca/research/ethics

APPENDIX B

Letter of Information (Study 2)

Examining audience perception of professional athlete self-presentation on Twitter

Dear Participant,

Twitter has become a very popular way for professional athletes to communicate with fans and share their opinions online. This survey seeks to investigate the effectiveness of the content professional athletes post on Twitter from the perspective of their fans. You are being invited to participate in this study so that we may gain a better understanding of the types of Twitter content that you as a golf enthusiast believe to be most interesting and also most important to a professional athlete's image.

If you agree to participate, involvement in this study will entail completing an online questionnaire consisting of 48 questions that will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire will include four sections: sport consumption habits, awareness of the social media tool Twitter, interpretation of professional athlete Twitter content, and demographic information. There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. Similarly, it is not expected that you will experience any direct benefits by participating in this study. The information you provide in this study may, however, benefit sport communication literature by providing insight into the self-presentation of professional athletes.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. Data collected in this study will be stored on a disc in a locked filing cabinet in a secured room, and will be deleted two years after the results of this study are published. Data provided by the participants will remain anonymous, and will be kept confidential. As the data is anonymous, after you have completed and exited the survey, you will be unable to withdraw from the study, as we will have no way of identifying the information that you provided. However, if you wish to leave a question blank, or terminate your involvement in the study while you are completing it, you may do so without any penalty. Completion of this online survey indicates your consent to participate in this study.

If you have any questions about the ethical conduct of this study or your rights as a research subject, you may contact: The Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario, 519-661-3036, ethics@uwo.ca. If you would like to receive a copy of the overall results of this study, please reply to the email address provided at the end of the survey.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Katie Lebel
PhD Candidate
School of Kinesiology
Western University

Karen Danylchuk, EdD
Associate Professor
School of Kinesiology
Western University

APPENDIX C

Letter of Information (Study 3)



Professional Athlete Self-Representation Survey

Dear Student,

I am a PhD candidate in the School of Kinesiology at Western University. You are invited to participate in a research project investigating the perceptions of professional athlete self-representation on Twitter. Through your participation in a brief written survey, we hope to gain a better understanding of how the self-presentation of professional athletes impacts their brand.

To qualify for participation in this study, you must be between the ages of 18 and 35. Participation will involve viewing a collection of 20 professional athlete Twitter profile pictures. Participants will view the publicly accessible photos on a computer screen and complete a 10-item written survey. You will be asked to provide the first words that come to mind when you see each athlete photo and then name the athlete and his/her sport if you are able. You will also be asked to comment on how effective you believe the photos are relative to the athlete's brand. The total time commitment will be approximately 15 minutes.

Your participation is voluntary. There are no known risks or benefits to participating in this study. You will not be compensated for your participation in this study. If you decide to participate, you may refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your academic status. You will not be asked to provide your name and your professor will not know who completed or did not complete the study. The completion of the written survey is evidence of your consent. If you would like to receive a copy of the overall results of this study, please put your name and address on a blank piece of paper (separate from the questionnaire) and return it to me.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have prior to your participation or at any time during the study. If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, Western University, 519.661.3036 or email at: ethics@uwo.ca.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Katie Lebel
PhD Candidate
School of Kinesiology
Western University

Karen Danylchuk, EdD
Associate Professor
School of Kinesiology
Western University

APPENDIX D

Professional Athlete Self-Presentation on Twitter Survey (Study 2)

media consumption

The following questions relate to your general sport consumption habits. Please rate how often you consume each type of sport media.

1. Do you watch live sport on TV?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
<input type="radio"/>				

2. Do you read sport-related magazines?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
<input type="radio"/>				

3. Do you read the sports section of newspapers?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
<input type="radio"/>				

4. Do you listen to sport on the radio?

<input type="radio"/> Never	<input type="radio"/> Seldom	<input type="radio"/> Sometimes	<input type="radio"/> Frequently	<input type="radio"/> Always
-----------------------------	------------------------------	---------------------------------	----------------------------------	------------------------------

5. Do you visit sport-related websites?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
<input type="radio"/>				

6. Do you follow sport teams or athletes via social media outlets?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
<input type="radio"/>				

twitter awareness**7. Are you aware of the social media tool Twitter?**

- Yes
- No

8. If yes, how are you aware of Twitter? Check all that apply. If no, proceed to question 9.

- I've seen it used on TV.
- I've seen it mentioned in news articles/magazines.
- I've seen it mentioned online.
- I've heard it mentioned on the radio.
- I've heard my friends talking about it.
- I've seen it used in advertisements.
- I have a Twitter account.
- All of the above.

9. Have you ever come across the @ name or # symbol in the media?

- I've seen it mentioned on TV.
- I've seen it in advertising.
- I've seen it mentioned in news articles/magazines.
- I've seen it mentioned online.
- I've heard it mentioned on the radio.
- I've heard my friends talking about it.
- All of the above.
- I have not seen these symbols used in the media.

10. If you are aware of Twitter feeds, commonly called tweets, or have come across the @ or # symbol, how often do you see or hear about them through sport media outlets such as TV, newspapers, radio, or websites other than Twitter?

- Almost every day
- Regularly, but not daily
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- I've never heard of Twitter

Interaction

The following questions include examples of messages posted on Twitter by a popular professional golfer. The messages are arranged in 10 different categories according to content and you will be asked to rate your level of interest in each category. If you do not use Twitter, please answer the questions in terms of your overall interest in the type of content described.

11. Please rate your level of interest in seeing professional athletes interact on Twitter with fellow athletes, celebrities, personal friends, or family.

Here are some examples of athlete interaction:

"Congratulations Bubba Watson, very impressive win today. Enjoy slipping that jacket on!"

"Justin Rose, I saw you shank it on 14 today. Welcome to the club, mate."

"Great seeing you yesterday @bob&sally. We should get together again soon!"

My level of interest in this type of content is:

no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
<input type="radio"/>				

12. Please rate your level of interest in seeing professional athletes interact on Twitter with the following people:

	no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
fellow athletes	<input type="radio"/>				
celebrities	<input type="radio"/>				
personal friends	<input type="radio"/>				
family	<input type="radio"/>				

sport insider

13. Please rate your level of interest in seeing professional athletes provide insider sport information on Twitter.

Here are some examples of an athlete sharing insider sport information:

"Got off to a flyer, -4 thru 6 holes. Then someone chucked an anchor overboard. Gutted. Felt I had a low round in me."

"Here's a little sneak peak at the new Puma golf shoes. Wow I love them!"

"All packed and ready to go to Augusta National in the morning. Very excited as per normal like a little school kid. It just has that buzz."

"I will show you all how to do a re-grip. It's very easy, you can all do it. Just ordering my whole workshop now, re-shafting equipment etc."

My level of interest in this type of content is:

no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
<input type="radio"/>				

14. Please rate your level of interest in the following sport insider information:

	no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
reflection on athletic performance	<input type="radio"/>				
personal fitness/training regimens	<input type="radio"/>				
sport equipment/apparel developments	<input type="radio"/>				
tournament preparation	<input type="radio"/>				
technical expertise (e.g., swing tips, drills)	<input type="radio"/>				

behind-the-scenes information

15. Please rate your level of interest in seeing professional athletes share behind-the-scenes information about their lives on Twitter.

Here are some examples of an athlete sharing behind-the-scenes information:

"So excited for my kids to wake up. Seeing them off to school, then going to the new house as furniture starts to go in. 2 weeks to install."

"My courtesy car driver is Chinese & trying to sing along to English music & I'm peeing myself laughing. It's XFACTOR gone badly."

"My hands are bleeding. Packed all the IJP deliveries, finished painting the new house, tweeted, fed the kids, hit 2000 balls. Phew."

My level of interest in this type of content is:

no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
<input type="radio"/>				

16. Please rate your level of interest in the following behind-the-scenes information:

	no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
athlete's daily routine	<input type="radio"/>				
athlete's personal life	<input type="radio"/>				
athlete's interests	<input type="radio"/>				

super fan

17. Please rate your level of interest in seeing professional athletes share their personal sport interests on Twitter.

Here are some examples of a professional golfer sharing their sport interests:

"Come on Arsenal! A win would be so huge. I'm so glad my mum is sitting in my seats today. Enjoy the game mummysy. Bring them luck."

"In the box watching the Magic vs. Heat. Come on Magic! Beat the Heat!"

My level of interest in this type of content is:

no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
<input type="radio"/>				

18. Please rate your level of interest in learning about an athlete's:

	no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
favourite athletes/teams	<input type="radio"/>				
sport knowledge	<input type="radio"/>				
opinions about sport	<input type="radio"/>				

Information sharing

19. Please rate your level of interest in seeing professional athletes share information on Twitter that they believe is important or interesting.

Here are some examples of an athlete sharing information:

"Great day filming with @mastercard for a new app that you guys can download on iTunes soon. Instructional & fun. You will love it."

"Love Golf, Love Looking Good. Go to <http://www.ijpdesign> and use code LUVIJPI\$ at checkout for a 14% discount."

"I'm hosting a charity event at Lake Nona March 2nd benefiting Nemours Children's Hospital. For more information follow @ipcc."

My level of interest in this type of content is:

no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
<input type="radio"/>				

20. Please rate your level of interest in the following types of shared information:

	no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
special promotions/coupons	<input type="radio"/>				
links to interesting websites	<input type="radio"/>				
links to online articles/stories	<input type="radio"/>				
current event information	<input type="radio"/>				
multimedia (i.e., video clips, photos)	<input type="radio"/>				

life musings

21. Please rate your level of interest in seeing professional athletes share their opinions or life musings on Twitter.

Here are some examples of an athlete sharing their opinions:

"Not sure that was a fair interview with Ernie Els after his round. The reporter's question was short and stuck in like a dagger. Not cool."

"Can Johnny Miller actually say anything positive, er no."

My level of interest in this type of content is:

no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
<input type="radio"/>				

22. Please rate your level of interest in the following types of opinions:

	no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
sport opinions	<input type="radio"/>				
life opinions	<input type="radio"/>				
world issues	<input type="radio"/>				

promotions & sponsorship

23. Please rate your level of interest in seeing professional athletes share promotional information on Twitter.

Here are some examples of an athlete promoting:

"Teeing off at 11:53 with Z Johnson and P Cantlay. Time to relax and get some sleep before a busy day..."

"Just done my column in the @huffingtonpost. Check it out at the link
<http://tinyurl.com/c3sd2b5>. Enjoy."

"The new limited edition Masters putter covers are now online. Don't miss out.
<http://www.ljpdesign.com>."

My level of interest in this type of content is:

no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
<input type="radio"/>				

24. Please rate your level of interest in the following types of promotions:

	no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
tournament schedules	<input type="radio"/>				
sponsorship activity	<input type="radio"/>				
blog/website updates	<input type="radio"/>				
fan contests	<input type="radio"/>				

fan updates

25. Please rate your level of interest in seeing professional athletes check in with their followers through quick updates on Twitter.

Here is an example of an athlete checking in with their followers:

"Morning tweeps! How is everyone today?"

My level of interest in this type of content is:

no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
<input type="radio"/>				

26. How often do you think an athlete should check in with their fans?

- a few times a day
- at least once a day
- at least once a week
- at least once a month

fan interaction

27. Please rate your level of interest in seeing professional athletes engage in fan interaction on Twitter.

Here are some examples of fan interaction:

"Friends it's been a lot of fun on twitter today! I look forward to answering more of your questions tomorrow. To answer Ross' question about the last time I flew coach, it was today."

"Just for you all - text IJP to 84444 for a chance to get inside the ropes at my round at @2012BayHill!"

"Does anyone have good stain removal tips? I spilled on my favourite golf shirt."

My level of interest in this type of content is:

no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
<input type="radio"/>				

28. Please rate your level of interest in the following types of fan interaction:

	no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
answering fan questions	<input type="radio"/>				
asking fans for advice	<input type="radio"/>				
special offers for fans	<input type="radio"/>				

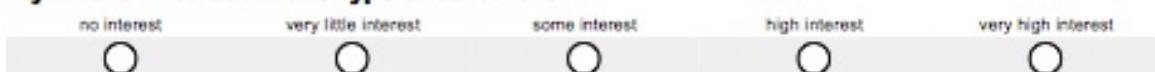
formal acknowledgments

29. Please rate your level of interest in seeing professional athletes provide formal acknowledgements on Twitter.

Here is an example of a formal acknowledgement:

"Happy Mother's day to all that celebrate today. I hope you have a really nice day."

My level of interest in this type of content is:



athlete brand interpretation

The information athletes post on Twitter is a reflection of their overall image as a professional athlete. The content can shape our perceptions of athletes by giving us a better idea of who they are. How important do you feel each of the following categories are with regard to their potential impact on an athlete's public image?

30. Interaction with fellow athletes, celebrities, family, or personal friends.

not important	somewhat important	important	very important	highly important
<input type="radio"/>				

31. Insider information specific to your favourite athlete's sport.

not important	somewhat important	important	very important	highly important
<input type="radio"/>				

32. Behind-the-scenes information about an athlete's life.

not important	somewhat important	important	very important	highly important
<input type="radio"/>				

33. Discussion of sport.

not important	somewhat important	important	very important	highly important
<input type="radio"/>				

34. General information sharing of things an athlete believes are important or interesting.

not important	somewhat important	important	very important	highly important
<input type="radio"/>				

35. General opinions and life musings.

not important	somewhat important	important	very important	highly important
<input type="radio"/>				

36. First-hand information about athlete promotional activities.

not important	somewhat important	important	very important	highly important
<input type="radio"/>				

37. Regular updates of any sort that keep you involved as a fan.

not important	somewhat important	important	very important	highly important
<input type="radio"/>				

38. Personal interaction with fans.

not important	somewhat important	important	very important	highly important
<input type="radio"/>				

39. Formal acknowledgments.

not important	somewhat important	important	very important	highly important
<input type="radio"/>				

preferences**40. How might you rank the importance of humour in athlete tweets?**

not important	somewhat important	important	very important	highly important
<input type="radio"/>				

41. Please rate your level of interest in the incorporation of personal pictures/videos on an athlete's Twitter feed.

no interest	very little interest	some interest	high interest	very high interest
<input type="radio"/>				

42. Do you have any advice for professional athletes on content you think might be particularly effective on Twitter?

demographic information**43. Gender:**

- Male
- Female

44. Age:

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-65
- 65+

45. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High School
- College
- University Degree
- Masters Degree
- Doctoral Degree
- Professional Degree (e.g., MD, JD)

46. What is your present employment?

- Education
- Management
- Professional
- Sales
- Student
- Technical
- Other

golf experience**47. How often do you play golf?**

- 2+ times a week
- Once a week
- Once a month
- Once each season
- I don't play golf, but I love to watch it.

48. What is your golf handicap?

- 0-9
- 10-19
- 20-29
- 30+
- I don't have a handicap

49. Are you a member at a golf course?

- I'm a member at a private or semi-private golf course
- I'm a member at a public golf course
- I am not a member at a golf course

Thank-you for participation in this survey! If you wish to receive a copy of the results please email klebel@uwo.ca

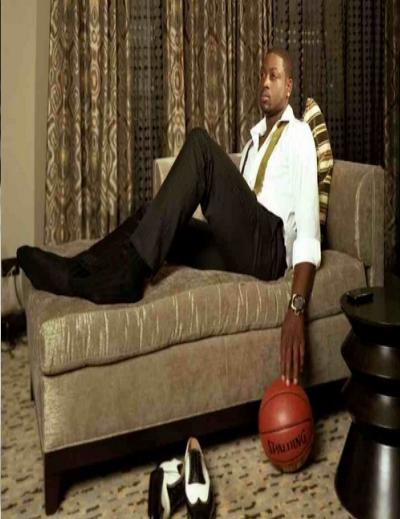
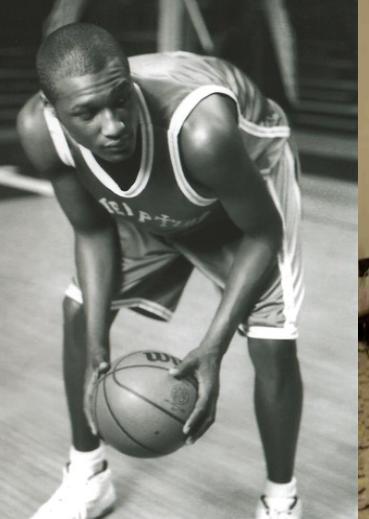
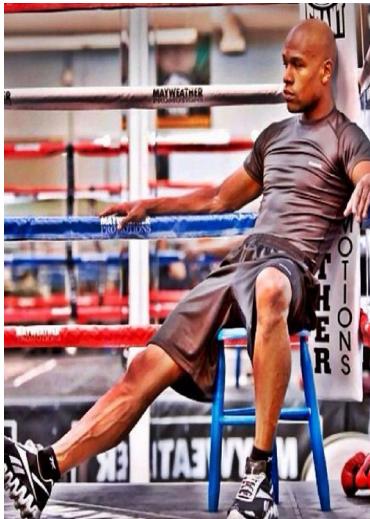
APPENDIX E
Professional Athlete Profile Photos

Female Athlete Profile Pictures





Male Athlete Profile Pictures





APPENDIX F

Professional Athlete Self-Representation Survey (Study 3)

Professional Athlete Self-Representation Survey

Gender: Male/Female Age: _____

1. Name your favourite athlete.

2. Name an athlete you believe is a good role model in sport.

3. You will be provided a collection of images of female athletes. Please provide the first words that come to mind when you see the athlete photo and then name the athlete and their sport if you are able.

a. First words that come to mind:_____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

b. First words that come to mind:_____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

c. First words that come to mind:_____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

d. First words that come to mind:_____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

e. First words that come to mind: _____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

f. First words that come to mind: _____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

g. First words that come to mind: _____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

h. First words that come to mind: _____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

i. First words that come to mind: _____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

j. First words that come to mind: _____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

4. Please identify:
- Your favourite photo: _____
 - Your LEAST favourite photo: _____
5. Please identify the photo you feel is:
- MOST effective relative to building the athlete's brand: _____
 - LEAST effective relative to building the athlete's brand: _____
6. You will be provided a collection of images of male athletes. Please provide the first words that come to mind when you see the athlete photo and then name the athlete and their sport if you are able.
- First words that come to mind: _____
Athlete Name: _____
Sport: _____
 - First words that come to mind: _____
Athlete Name: _____
Sport: _____
 - First words that come to mind: _____
Athlete Name: _____
Sport: _____
 - First words that come to mind: _____
Athlete Name: _____
Sport: _____

e. First words that come to mind: _____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

f. First words that come to mind: _____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

g. First words that come to mind: _____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

h. First words that come to mind: _____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

i. First words that come to mind: _____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

j. First words that come to mind: _____

Athlete Name: _____

Sport: _____

7. Please identify:

a. Your favourite photo: _____

b. Your favourite photo: _____

8. Please identify the photo you feel is:
 - a. MOST effective relative to building the athlete's brand: _____
 - b. LEAST effective relative to building the athlete's brand: _____
9. Given an assortment of the entire collection of photos, please identify:
 - a. Your favourite photo:_____
 - b. Your least favourite photo:_____
10. Given an assortment of the entire collection of photos, please identify the image you feel is:
 - a. MOST effective relative to building the athlete's brand: _____
 - b. LEAST effective relative to building the athlete's brand: _____

Curriculum Vitae

Curriculum Vitae

KATIE LEBEL

Education:

- 2013 Ph.D. Candidate (Sport Management)
 Western University, London, Ontario, Canada
 Dissertation title: *Professional Athlete Self-Presentation on Twitter*
 Supervisor: Dr. Karen Danylchuk
- 2008 M.A. (Kinesiology)
 Western University, London, Ontario, Canada
 Supervisor: Dr. Karen Danylchuk
- 2006 B.A. Psychology, Cum Laude
 St. John's University, New York
-

Research Focus:

My research is focused in the area of mediasport, with a particular interest in image management and how professional athletes are utilizing social media platforms.

Refereed Publications:

1. **Lebel, K., & Danylchuk, K.** (2012). How Tweet It Is: A Gendered Analysis of Professional Tennis Players' Self-Presentation on Twitter. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 5(4).
2. **Lebel, K.** (2012). Facing off in the Sport Management Classroom: Using Facebook as an Educational Tool. *Teaching Innovation Projects*, 2(2).
3. Aughey, T., Danylchuk, K., & **Lebel, K.** (2011). The Impact of the Economic Recession on Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) Programs. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 4(1), 147-157.
4. **Lebel, K., & Danylchuk, K.** (2009). Generation Y's Perceptions of Women's Sport in the Media. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 2, 146-163.

Manuscripts Under Review:

1. **Lebel, K.**, & Danylchuk, K. Facing off on Twitter: An Audience Interpretation of Professional Athlete Profile Pictures. Submitted to *Journal of Sports Media*.
 2. **Lebel, K.**, & Danylchuk, K. An Audience Interpretation of Professional Athlete Self-Presentation on Twitter. Submitted to *International Journal of Sport Communication*.
 3. Stegink, J., Danylchuk, K., & **Lebel, K.** Doping Scandals in Professional Cycling: Impact on Primary Team Sponsors' Stock Returns. Submitted to *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*.
-

Refereed Conference Presentations:

1. **Lebel, K.** & Danylchuk, K. (2013, May). An Audience Interpretation of Professional Athlete Self-Presentation on Twitter. Paper accepted to the 28th annual conference of the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), Austin, TX.
2. **Lebel, K.**, Harman, A., Fletcher, C. (2013, May). Innovation in the Sport Management Classroom: Student Interpretation of YouTube as a Learning Tool. Paper accepted to the 28th annual conference of the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), Austin, TX.
3. **Lebel, K.** & Danylchuk, K. (2012, September). Facing Off on Twitter: A Generation Y Interpretation of Professional Athlete Profile Pictures. Paper accepted to the 20th annual conference of the European Association for Sport Management (EASM), Aalborg, Denmark.
4. Danylchuk, K., **Lebel, K.**, Pitts, B., Thoma, J. (2012, September). Teaching International Sport Management: Current Status, Challenges, and Best Practices. Workshop accepted to the 20th annual conference of the European Association for Sport Management (EASM), Aalborg, Denmark.
5. **Lebel, K.** & Danylchuk, K. (2012, July). A Gendered Analysis of Professional Athletes' Self-Presentation on Twitter. Paper accepted to the 3rd International Conference on Sport and Society, Cambridge, U.K.
6. **Lebel, K.**, & Danylchuk, K. (2012, May). How Tweet It Is: A Gendered Analysis of Professional Tennis Players' Self-Presentation on Twitter. Paper accepted to the 27th annual conference of the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), Seattle, WA.

7. Harman, A. & **Lebel, K.** (2012, May). Would the Real Grounded Theory Please Stand Up? Paper accepted to the 27th annual conference of the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), Seattle, WA.
 8. Kossert, A. & **Lebel, K.** (2012, April). Tweetment in 140 Characters or Less? A Content Analysis of Cystic Fibrosis Social Networks on Twitter. Paper presented at the 33rd annual meeting of the Society of Behavioral Medicine, New Orleans, LA.
 9. **Lebel, K.**, & Danylchuk, K. (2009, May). Generation Y's Perceptions of Women's Sport in the Media. Paper presented at the 24th annual conference of the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), Columbia, SC.
-

Research Symposia:

1. **Lebel, K.** & Danylchuk, K. (2013, March). An Analysis of Professional Athletes' Self-Presentation on Twitter. Paper accepted to the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Day, Western University, London, Ontario, Canada.
 2. **Lebel, K.**, Harman, A., Danylchuk, K. (2013, March). Innovation in the Sport Management Classroom: Student Interpretation of Social Media as a Learning Tool. Paper accepted to the Technology in Education Symposium, London, Ontario, Canada.
 3. **Lebel, K.** & Harman, A. (2012, January). Leveraging your digital footprint in the classroom. Paper presented at the 6th Annual University of Western Ontario Teaching Conference, London, ON.
 4. **Lebel, K.** (2011, April). How Tweet It Is? A Gendered Analysis of Twitter Use Among Professional Tennis Players. Paper presented at the 8th Annual Brock University Colloquium for Sport Management Research, St. Catherines, ON.
 5. **Lebel, K.** (2007, March). If It Is Built, They Will Come: A Case Study Analysis of the Potential Pittsburgh Penguins Franchise Relocation. Paper presented at the 7th Annual Brock University Colloquium for Sport Management Research, St. Catherines, ON.
-

Professional Experience:

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2013 | Co-Reviewer, <i>Sport Management Review</i> , one manuscript |
| 2013 | Co-Reviewer, <i>European Sport Management Quarterly</i> , one manuscript |
| 2013 | Co-Reviewer, <i>International Journal of Sport Communication</i> , one manuscript |

2012	Co-Reviewer, <i>European Sport Management Quarterly</i> , one manuscript
2012	Co-Reviewer, <i>Sport Marketing Quarterly</i> , one manuscript
2011	Co-Reviewer, <i>Sport Management Review</i> , one manuscript
2011	Co-Reviewer, <i>Sport Marketing Quarterly</i> , one manuscript
2011	Co-Reviewer, <i>Journal of Intercollegiate Sport</i> , one manuscript
2010-2011	North American Society for Sport Management UWO Conference Organizing Committee
2010-2013	North American Society for Sport Management Conference Committee, Student Representative
2010-2013	Western Graduate Review, Editorial Board

Teaching Related Experience:

International Sport Management, Kin 4489a, Western University

- Course Coordinator & Instructor, 2012
- Teaching Assistant, 2010-2011

Sport Marketing, Kin 3399b, Western University

- Teaching Assistant, 2007-2013

Sport Management, Kin 2298a, Western University

- Teaching Assistant, 2006-2008

Guest Lectures:

2013	Guest Lecture, Leadership in Sport, Graduate Leadership Seminar, Western University
2013	Guest Lecture, Image Management in Sport via Digital Platforms, Sport Marketing Course, Western University
2012	Guest Lecture, The Impact of Social Media on Sport, Introductory Sport Management Course, University of Waterloo
2012	Guest Lecture, Social Media & Sport Management, Sport Communications Course, University of Windsor

Teaching Development:

- 2012 Western Certificate in University Teaching & Learning, Teaching Support Centre, Western University
- 2012 Advanced University Teaching Certificate, Teaching Support Centre, Western University
- 2012 Developing a Teaching Portfolio, Western Certificate in University Teaching and Learning (WCUTL) – Teaching Support Centre, Western University
- 2012 Integrating Technology into the Classroom, Western Certificate in University Teaching and Learning (WCUTL) – Teaching Support Centre, Western University
- 2012 Developing a Course Syllabus, Western Certificate in University Teaching and Learning (WCUTL) – Teaching Support Centre, Western University
- 2012 Dealing with Difficult Teaching Situations, Western Certificate in University Teaching and Learning (WCUTL) – Teaching Support Centre, Western University
- 2012 Creating an Inclusive Classroom, Western Certificate in University Teaching and Learning (WCUTL) – Teaching Support Centre, Western University
- 2012 Getting Feedback on Your Teaching, Western Certificate in University Teaching and Learning (WCUTL) – Teaching Support Centre, Western University
- 2012 Effecting affect: Methods for facilitating affective knowledge in the classroom, Western Certificate in University Teaching and Learning (WCUTL) – Teaching Support Centre, Western University
- 2012 Teaching Mentor Program, Western Certificate in University Teaching and Learning (WCUTL) – Teaching Support Centre, Western University
- 2011 Strategies for Marking Essays, Western Certificate in University Teaching and Learning (WCUTL) – Teaching Support Centre, Western University
- 2011 Teaching Critical Thinking, WCUTL – Teaching Support Centre, Western University
- 2011 Flipping Problem Solving on its Head: New Problem Sets to Enhance Learning and Motivation, WCUTL – Teaching Support Centre, Western University
- 2011 Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement, WCUTL – Teaching Support Centre, Western University

2011	Master Teaching in Media and Information Technology, WCUTL – Teaching Support Centre, Western University
2011	Master Teaching in Political Science, WCUTL – Teaching Support Centre, Western University
2010	Study Abroad Experience in Cuba - Investigated Cuban Sport Delivery System, Western University

Membership in Academic and Professional Societies:

2007-	North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM)
2012 -	International Sport & Society Member

Awards & Accomplishments

2013	Packianathan Chelladurai Award, Value \$600, Awarded to outstanding sport management graduate student in the School of Kinesiology, Western University
2013	Finalist for the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) Student Paper Competition, Value \$425
2013	Western Kinesiology Graduate Student Conference Travel Award, Value \$658
2013	Western Faculty of Health Sciences Conference Travel Award, Value \$500
2013	Western Graduate Thesis Research Award, Value \$810
2012	Sport & Society Graduate Scholar Award, Value \$300, Awarded to outstanding graduate student by the Sport & Society Conference Committee
2012	Packianathan Chelladurai Award, Value \$600, Awarded to outstanding sport management graduate student in the School of Kinesiology, Western University
2012	Western Kinesiology Graduate Student Conference Travel Award, Value \$760
2012	Western Faculty of Health Sciences Conference Travel Award, Value \$500
2012	Western TANB Study Abroad Award, Value \$400, Awarded for research conducted at the 2011 U.S. Open Tennis Championships
2012	Western Faculty of Health Sciences Study Abroad Award, Value \$100

2011	Western Graduate Thesis Research Award, Value \$600
2010	Earle F. Zeigler Award, Value \$1,000, Awarded to outstanding sport management student in the School of Kinesiology, Western University
2010	Western Faculty of Health Sciences Study Abroad Award, Value \$136
2010	Bronze W Award, Awarded for outstanding athletic achievement, Western University
2009	Western Graduate Research Scholarship, Value \$50,791 (over four years)
2009	Western Faculty of Health Sciences Graduate Scholarship, Value \$11,218 (over four years)
2006-2010	Captain & MVP of the Western University Women's Golf Team
2006-2010	Academic All-Canadian Honouree
2006	Dr. Michael Pisano Memorial Award, Awarded for outstanding academic achievement
2002-2006	Academic All-American Honouree
2002-2006	Big East Academic All-Star
2002-2012	Deans Honour List
2002-2006	Roger Bacon Scientific Honour Society
2002-2006	National Collegiate Athlete Honour Society
2002-2006	National Honours Society

Related Service

2013	Skate Canada, World Figure Skating Championships, London, Ontario, Volunteer
2012	Canadian Paralympic Committee, London to London, Volunteer
2006-	Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of Canada, Volunteer
2005-2006	Garden of Dreams Foundation, Madison Square Garden, Volunteer

- 2004-2006 Teach to Fight ALS Golf Fundraiser, Volunteer
- 2002-2006 St. Nicholas' Homeless Shelter and Soup Kitchen, Volunteer
- 2002-2006 First Tee Golf Program, Volunteer
- 1997- Canadian Diabetes Association, Volunteer
- 1996- Canadian Cancer Society, Volunteer
-

Related Work Experience:

- 2007 – 2009 St. Clair Parkway Junior Golf Academy Director
- 2006 Nike Golf, Marketing Internship
- 2005-2006 New York Rangers, Marketing Internship
-