**Literature review**

Just like any other consumer-facing industry, the world of professional sports has seen a lot of disruption from the rise of social media. (Force 2016)

Quickly becoming a normal way to communicate, this has transformed the way sports are reported (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010) and consumed (Clavio & Kian, 2010), allowing athletes the freedom to interact directly with their fans and enabling them to become rulers of their own domain (Hambrick et al, 2010). It is argued that the rapid revolution social media has achieved in sport may be unrivaled regarding impact compared with any other industry (Sanderson, 2011)

Sports and Twitter

Twitter has been particularly dominant in the digital-media-sport landscape and has been embraced by the sporting world at amazing speed. We have now reached the point where it is unusual to watch a sports event, attend a live match, or even read a sport-related article without a Twitter reference mentioned. In 2015South America's Copa America soccer championship generated 14 billion impressions. The women's soccer world cup generated 9 billion impressions. Wimbledon generated 8 billion Impressions over two weeks, and the champions league final generated 834 million impressions in one day. (Laird 2015) (Twitter defines an "impression" as how many times a tweet is seen online, both on Twitter and off.)

Research surrounding Twitter use in sport has been conducted from a variety of perspectives. Clavio and Kian (2010) used an internet-based survey to ascertain the demographics, uses, and gratifications of a retired athlete's Twitter followers. Clavio and Walsh (2014) surveyed Division 1 college sports fans and found that social media should not be viewed holistically due to distinct variability between what attracts fans to Facebook and Twitter. Hull (2014) explored how professional golfers participating in the Master's tournament used Twitter during the week of the event. Basing the research on self-presentation theory the author conducted a content analysis of 895 tweets by 39 golfers. Lebel and Danylchuk (2012) compared male and female athletes' tweets relayed by all professional tennis players. Hambrick et al. (2010) used content analysis to place 1,962 tweets by professional athletes into one of six categories: interactivity, diversion, information sharing, content, promotional, and fanship. Pegoraro (2010) investigated athletes' use of Twitter and found that athletes are talking predominantly about their personal lives and responding to fans' queries through Twitter. The results indicate that Twitter is a powerful tool for increasing fan-athlete interaction. Professional cyclist Lance Armstrong once invited his fans to meet him for a ride around Dublin after completing the Tour of Ireland. 1,000 fans showed up hours later (Cromwell, 2009). Serena Williams even asked her Twitter followers for pregnancy advice, “Any tips on how to turn over at night? I'm having trouble from going from my left ....to my right.... to my left side,” She received over 1200 replies.

Female Athletes media coverage

Researchers have found female athletes are considerably underrepresented in terms of the amount of media coverage they receive in comparison with their male counterparts (Kane & Maxwell, 2011). While Cooky (2015), found a decline in the amount of coverage of female athletes from 1989 to 2014. In 2014, only 3.2% of network television coverage focused on women’s sports. The lack of representation of women in media’s coverage of sport contributes to the perception of sport as a male domain. (Birrell, 2000)

The media maintain notions of sport as a male domain through displays of masculinity, strength, and power. On the other hand, when women athletes receive coverage, they are consistently portrayed in ways that emphasize their femininity through caregiver roles and sexuality versus their athletic competence (Cooky et al., 2015). When sports media actually do cover female athletes, they often describe their physical appearances and attire, delve into their personal lives and relationships, trivialise their accomplishments and athleticism, and focusing on perceived psychological weaknesses (Hardin et al, 2007).

Online coverage of women in sport.

A study of gender-related descriptors employed within articles on men’s and women’s basketball produced surprising results, as it contradicted many of the findings previous sport media researchers cited to justify the presence of hegemonic masculinity. The researchers found that there were a significantly higher proportion of descriptors about the positive skill level/accomplishments and psychological/emotional strengths in women’s basketball articles than those on men’s basketball. (Kian et al. 2009). In another study, Cunningham (2003) found university websites provided more coverage of women's tennis than men's tennis. A further analysis of NCAA college websites, Cooper (2008) concluded that coverage of male and female athletes in the same sport was mostly equal.

An exploratory study analysing online media and print media for the 2007 US Open tennis tournament found that online media to be less likely to re-enforce the traditional stereotypes of male and female athletes than newspapers. (Kian and Clavio, 2011)

This suggests that there is a greater opportunity for women to expand their coverage in the online world rather than the traditional mainstream media.

Further examination into how female athletes engage in strategic self-presentation compared to their male counterparts when they control the output themselves (i.e. their own social media account) is necessary.

Self-Presentation Theory

Goffman’s (1959) theory of self-presentation suggests that individuals present themselves in manners in which they wish others to view them. Goffman alludes to life being a “drama,” and the two types of self-presentation depicted by individuals as daily life “performances” are front-stage performances and back-stage performances. In front-stage performances, individuals are especially concerned with the impression they create in the minds of others. On the other hand, in back-stage performances individuals are more candid, often sharing information as if no audience or an audience of familiar people were present (Goffman, 1959).

Research on the self-presentation of athletes suggests that athletes engage in back-stage performances on social-media platforms (Hambrick et al., 2010). Professional cyclists offered insights into the terrain and conditions of the event route, adding a level of personal knowledge for fans that journalists would not have necessarily focused on. (Kassing and Sanderson 2010).

When it comes to front-stage performances, Krane et al. (2010) investigated female college athletes’ self-presentation preferences. They found that female athletes wanted to be portrayed in ways that emphasized their power and strength. Support for the preferences of female athletes to be portrayed as powerful athletes was found in later research by Lebel and Danylchuk (2014).

Krane et al. (2010) found their qualitative study demonstrated how these women were

# She Poses, He Performs: A Visual Content Analysis of Male and Female Professional Athlete Facebook Profile Photos

driven toward masculine behaviours for their sport while at the same time they tried to stay in the feminine role off the field of play. As one athlete in the study said, “If you're an athlete, then you have to transform into entirely someone else when you come off the field.” This corresponds to Goffman's (1959) front-stage/back-stage performances theory.

Goffmans theory is now nearly 60 years old, is it still relevant? Arundale (2010) argues that Goffman’s work, is now outdated and should be modernised to include progress in research and technology, but Miller (2012) says that electronic interaction is a natural addition to what Goffman posited. He says that even though electronic communication is apparently limited in the depth of information it provides compared with face-to-face interaction, there is still enough room for information about the self to be given off in the way people use the medium, in what they say as well as what they don't say.

Oram (2009) says ' Goffman’s approach certainly applies online, because our postings, even our instant messages, are more deliberate acts than our informal behaviours in real life. Although some participants play at being flippant and spontaneous on Facebook walls and microblogs, they must have greater consciousness of their effects on the viewer than most dinner table guests or concert attendees. Our online personas, therefore, conform even more closely to Goffman’s idea of everyday life than our everyday life does. '

Conclusion

While mainstream media still views sport as a male domain, the online world seems to afford a more equal footing for female athletes. Twitter is a powerful tool for increasing fan-athlete interaction (Pegoraro 2010) and allows the athlete themselves to control the output. This research will explore the 'tweets' of top athletes and try to see, are there any differences in the ways in which male and female sportspersons represent themselves online?

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