

ONLINE PERSONAL BRANDING FROM PROFESSIONAL DUTCH SPORTS ATHLETES VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

In the last few years turbulent changes in the Personal branding of professional sports athletes become the norm. Online Personal branding (OPB), the art of attracting and retaining more actively opportunities online to shape public perception, of professional athletes has become a big part of their branding. The inadequacy of Dutch athletes to build and maintain such a brand within the field of Social Media can be seen as a missed opportunity. By providing an overview of the developments in the external environment and identifying the areas of influence in the creation of an Online Personal brand, research has been able to address the key question of this research: 'Is it possible for Dutch Professional athletes to create an Online Personal brand via Social Media?'

Research methods, objectives and timeliness

This project involves methods used in practice-based research and serves to support the creation of a new model. The five genres of authenticity as identified by Pine and Gilmore (2007) have been applied in order to answer the key research question. In addition the level of image has been analyzed. Both the genres of authenticity and image level has been found after the completion of an Online Brand Assessment. The athlete and a minimum of 25 of his/ her fans have participated in this assessment. The results relating to the level of authenticity and the image have led to a communication plan, referred to as storytelling in the literature. The protracted developments have been placed in arrays with four quadrants. Other methods that were used in order to answer the hypotheses have been a combination of literature based research (Scholte 2009, Tapcott 2009, Cheney 2005), desk-based research, interviews and a case study by Digital Royalty.

Conceptual framework

The main question in this research contains an important assumption; Dutch professional athletes have both online as well as offline brand value. Under offline brand value the following factors can be classified: the performance on the field, athletes behavior towards fans, media and colleagues.

With online brand value we mean the behavior of the athlete on the internet. The level of online success of several professional athletes outside the Netherlands supports the fact that building an Online Personal brand is worth doing. It also provides input in order to answer the

question why Dutch professional athletes would want to build an OPB. Professional athletes who make use of online personal branding via Social Media get the opportunity to influence how they are perceived, build their own fan base and have the opportunity to interact with their fans.

Future directions

Based on the findings from the related questions, the case study by Digital Royalty and the researcher's insights, a general tendency has been discovered and thus helping to formulate the answer to the key question 'Is it possible for Dutch Professional Sports athletes to create an Online Personal brand with Social Media?' It is possible for Dutch professional athletes to create an Online Personal brand via Social Media. There are a number of conditions that should be taken into account. First of all this research shows that the use of storytelling is the key in the process of the creation of brand value. Secondly it is advisable to determine the level of authenticity based on those established by Pine & Gilmore (2007). An image analysis developed by Tom Scholte (2008) has been used in this research. The integration of the acts mentioned above will lead to a structured approximation and will result in the creation of a structured Online Personal brand of the athletes in this research.

Besides this qualitative result, the professional athletes who participated in this research developed a significantly higher reach and more publicity, both online and offline.

Over the last years Social Media sites such as Youtube, Twitter and Facebook have become new sources for Personal Brand management in the field of professional sport management. At the start of this research there were no professional athletes in the Netherlands who had developed an online brand in a structured way. Another trend in the Netherlands revolves around sponsoring budgets that are under pressure and adding value in sponsorship deals by the athletes has become of increased interest. Furthermore both commercialization and internationalization within the field of professional sports has created a growth in the distance between fans and athletes. Social Media sites offer the opportunity to reduce this distance and permits communication directly with fans.

References:

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