
THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE ATHLETE BRAND PERSONALITY

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Synopsis:

Abstract:

INTRODUCTION/LITERATURE REVIEW

Changing communication patterns, specifically the use of Twitter, has provided athletes with a unique promotion and branding platform (Clavio & Kian, 2010). Through social media, athletes have the ability to market themselves and connect with fans in unique ways. With the increased usage of social media by athletes it is important to understand the impact of their social media use. Previous sport social media research has examined topics such as the content of athlete tweets (e.g., Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011) and why consumers follow athletes on Twitter (e.g., Clavio & Kian, 2010). To date, only one known study has evaluated athletes as having brand personality (Carlson & Donovan, 2013), which is the set of human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997).

PURPOSE

Given their importance, this study examined both constructs of social media and brand personality (BP). Specifically, this was the first known attempt to explore the BP items athletes portray on Twitter, and the differences between what is being tweeted by athletes and consumer perception of those tweets. To address this, this study examined the following research questions:

RQ1: Do the most salient BP items reflected from the content analysis of the athlete's tweets match the Twitter followers' perception of those characteristics?

RQ2: Are athlete Twitter BPs viewed differently between high, moderate, and low levels of identified fans with each athlete?

RQ3: Are the athlete Twitter BPs rated differently among high, moderate, and low levels of the athlete's followers Twitter usage for each athlete in the study?

METHOD

In order to address the research questions this study utilized three professional athletes (Curtis Granderson, Eric Decker, and Jayson Heyward) and 22 Twitter BP items from previous research which could be applied to athletes (Blaszka, Walsh, Clavio, & Williams, 2015). Utilizing these 22 items, a content analysis was performed on the 200 most recent tweets of three chosen athletes in order to understand each athlete's salient Twitter BP items.

Following the content analysis, a survey was conducted to see which BP items consumers were noting on Twitter. The survey was distributed to Twitter followers of each of the athletes by team bloggers who tweeted a request to take the survey. To measure BP characteristics, a 7-point Likert scale was used to measure the "fit" of the 22 BP characteristics with the three athletes used in the study. Also, the survey asked questions designed to measure levels of Twitter consumption, athlete identification, and team identification.

To measure RQ1, descriptive statistics were utilized to compare the differences in the salient BP items uncovered in the content analysis when compared to survey respondents ratings of the 22 BP items. For RQ2 a MANOVA assessed potential differences in the athletes BP ratings among high, moderate, and low levels of athlete and team identification. RQ3 was also analyzed using a MANOVA to determine if athlete BPs were rated differently among the varying levels of the respondents Twitter usage.

RESULTS

The survey allowed for the examination of RQ1, and which BP items were rated highly by the respondents and how that compared to the content analysis results. For Granderson, the BP items that overlapped were leader, appreciative, and supportive. Decker's follower's responses for the most salient BP characteristics overlap existed with family-man, supportive, trendy, and exciting, while no items overlapped for Heyward.

To answer RQ2, a MANOVA determined that there were significant differences between low, moderate, and high levels of both athlete and team identification for two of the three athletes. There were not consistent significant differences between the athletes and the identification levels.

While examining RQ3, a MANOVA also determined that there were some significant differences between low moderate and high levels of Twitter usage amongst consumers for Jason Heyward. Four BP variables had significant differences. However, there was no consistency between the characteristics and the Twitter consumption levels.

DISCUSSION

This is the first known attempt to explore athlete's Twitter BP characteristics from both an athlete and consumer perspective. . The development of these BP characteristics on Twitter could be an important avenue for athletes and their audience. If athletes can develop their personal BP characteristics, the consumer could be more familiar with who the athlete is. Consequently, consumers could be less interested in the team because they have a strong affiliation to the athlete and not just the team. While creating a marketing strategy around a specific player can be beneficial, it is critical to consider the alternative by marketing the team as well (Carlson & Donovan, 2013).

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