

The Ladies Professional Golf Association Involvement With Communities Through Corporate Social Responsibility: Modes, Communication And Interaction

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Aim of the research/project

The purpose of this study is to examine how the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) engages with various populations through corporate social responsibility (CSR). The following research questions guided the study. R1: How does the LPGA use philanthropic initiatives to support girls golfing communities? R2: What role does social media play in communicating and interacting with girls golfing communities?

Theoretical background/literature review

CSR in sport has been described as an organization's responsibility "to be ethical and accountable to the needs of their society as well as stakeholders" (Bradish & Cronin, 2009, p. 692). Reasons organizations engage in CSR is to enhance brand identity (Walker & Kent, 2009), serve as role models for youth (Hovemann, Breitbath & Walzel, 2011), development through sport (Levermore, 2010) and to raise awareness regarding social issues (Sheth & Babiak, 2010) among others. A segment of the research on CSR to date has focused on professional teams of major sport leagues in the United States, as well as the leagues themselves, including the MLB, NBA, NHL, PGA and NFL (Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Walker & Kent, 2009). The LPGA has yet to be included in the growing body of research on sports and CSR. Although not regarded as one of the top organizations in U. S. sport in regards to power, money and status, the LPGA has a long history of giving back to communities and empowering girls through the game of golf. Their main charitable contribution is through the LPGA Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the organization, which is the focus of the study. The efforts by the LPGA Foundation are regularly in conjunction with golfers on the LPGA Tour and their individual foundations, as well as a partnership with the United States Golf Association (USGA) to provide Girls Golf programming throughout the country.

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

Content from the LPGA Foundation website, blog, internal documents, annual reports, and social media (Instagram and Twitter) composed the data corpus. In 2013, the hashtag #littlegirlsbigdreams was started by the LPGA Foundation to interact with the golfing community. All Twitter posts (2013–2016) with the hashtag were analyzed, as well as Instagram photos using the hashtag (n = 2,230). All photos from the @girlsgolf Instagram account (n = 487) were analyzed as well. A content analysis of the LPGA Foundation's website, blog, select internal documents and annual reports were analyzed simultaneously. Data analysis from the website, Twitter posts, blog and annual reports began with open coding, followed by axial coding and ended with theme development. The Instagram portion of the data was analyzed using visual content analysis and followed the same theme development method out of the grounded theory tradition. All data were analyzed using Atlas.ti, which promoted the cross analyzation of the data incorporating researcher memos.

Results, discussion and implications

Initial analysis indicates the LPGA Foundation impacts communities by empowering girls through golf, growing the game, role models serving as champions, life skills development and moments becoming movements. Not only does the Girls Golf program provide opportunities to enrich the lives of young girls, many successful golfers are current and former participants, including major championship winners Brittany Lincicome and Morgan Pressel. The blend of community involvement paired with high performance athletes emerging from the program makes it one of the most unique philanthropic endeavors in major sports in the United States. Future research should include empirical interviews with stakeholders (i.e. LPGA Foundation employees, LPGA Tour players, and Girls Golf site directors). Also, comparative analysis with golf tours from different countries (i.e. Ladies European Tour) would provide a unique perspective on how CSR initiatives differ contextually. An area of growth for the LPGA Foundation rests on sustainability education for program participants, as well as continued utilization of social media to promote best practices.

References

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