

Face-ism in Sport Communication: Examining Professional Athletes' Twitter Profile Photographs

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Abstract

Athletes who engage in social media have an opportunity to present their respective images in numerous ways. One strategy is through the use of profile photographs, an option that is provided by various social networking sites. Social media profile photographs are important in an online self-presentation context, and, as such, users attempt to construct positive self-images through such source publicity opportunities. This study analyzed the face-ism phenomenon of the Twitter profile photographs of professional athletes from the WNBA, NBA, LPGA Tour, PGA Tour, WTA, and ATP. The results revealed no differences in the facial prominence displayed between female and male athletes across the three sports. Furthermore, those athletes who attracted more followers and had more influential Twitter accounts depicted themselves with greater facial prominence. The results also revealed that greater facial prominence tended to be identified in Twitter profile photos that were taken from sport-related locations, shown in action style shots, and presented with a fewer number of brand logos.

Introduction

Social media has established a significant and pervasive impact online with its seemingly ubiquitous presence, myriad formats (e.g., discussion forums, social networks, media sharing, reviews, social gaming, blogs, microblogs), and billions of users (Zhang & Mao, 2016). Interaction is a key reason for using social media (e.g., Stavros et al., 2014). In addition to interaction, building and maintaining relationships are key motivations that influence users' social media consumption.

Label and Danylchuk (2012) argued that Twitter enables athletes to maintain greater control over how their identity is portrayed in public. With this power, many athletes as unique human brands (Carlson & Donovan, 2013; Walsh & Williams, 2017) and companies put effort into using Twitter as a strategic marketing tool. Thomson (2006) noted that "technological alternatives for direct interaction show potential not only because they expand the human brand's reach and exposure" (p. 116). Most social networking sites provide users with the ability to add a photograph of themselves on their profiles, and these photographs perform a special function in the context of online self-presentation (Hum et al., 2011). However, only a few studies (e.g., Coche, 2014; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016) have focused on how athletes present

themselves to fans visually, even though previous research shows the importance of photographs on social networking sites (Siibak, 2010). According to Siibak, social media profile photographs are “an overview of a person’s self-concept and physical characteristics” (p. 406).

One of the motives for using social networking sites is presentation of self and status-seeking, which suggests a need and want to present oneself and to gain recognition and build a reputation from among other users (Jung, Youn, & McClung, 2007). The concept of user-generated content in social media is fundamental to the self-presentation strategy that facilitates users’ ability to manage their public image (Browning & Sanderson, 2012). For instance, the results of an analysis of the self-selected profile photographs of the users of online dating sites showed that the users selected profile photographs as a self-presentational strategy to enhance their desired images.

Previous studies have focused on the visual aspects (e.g., profile photographs) of social media features (e.g., Coche, 2014; Hum et al., 2011; Kapidzic & Herring, 2011, 2015; Zhao, Grasmuch, & Martin, 2008). Zhao et al. argued that within social media platforms, visual features (e.g., photos) are one of the self-presentational tools used to create users’ online identity. Many studies have attempted to find out usage of social media profile images and its key characteristics. For example, Hum et al. focused on Facebook users of both male and female college students to examine contents in the users’ profile photographs. There was a total of six variables analyzed including: the number of photos in users’ profile, photograph albums, candidness, the level of physical activity, appropriateness, and number of subjects. The study did not find any gender differences in the six categories.

Moreover, Kapidzic and Herring (2011) employed a content analysis to examine profile photographs uploaded in teen chat sites. The results showed that most users (89.5%) had a profile photograph. The female and male users presented themselves differently in the profile photographs. The female users portrayed themselves with a closer distance while the male users represented themselves further away from the camera. Also, the female users wore suggestive outfits in the profile photographs. Another content analysis study by Kapidzic and Herring (2015) analyzed profile photographs on a teenage chat site to determine if there was the gender (i.e., male and female) and racial (i.e., white and black) differences in the characteristics of the profile photographs. The study found that the most of users (92.3%) selected profile photographs. The findings were similar to the previous investigations in that it was found that the male users selected photographs taken further away from the camera, while their female counterparts took their profile photographs closer to camera. Based on the findings of studies such as these, the use of a different facial prominence is a unique feature in the utilization of social media profile images.

A limited number of previous studies have focused on social media profile photographs in a sports context. For example, in their analysis of the online presentation (i.e., Twitter profile photos) of female athletes, Shreffler, Hancock, and Schmidt (2016) found that photos most often fit the athletic competence theme (depictions of the female athletes in some type of sport

portrayal). Thus, according to Shreffler and colleagues, it could be argued that when the athletes could choose how they are portrayed they chose to present or identify themselves with athletics. In another study, Coche (2014) analyzed the Twitter profiles of professional tennis players and golfers. In only examining two sports, Coche noted that “more research needs to be conducted by including athletes from other sports in order to generalize the findings” (p. 116). In order to enhance the possibility of a positive and effective communication outcome, one of the aspects that athletes and companies consider is facial prominence (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2005). In order to determine if facial prominence is a key aspect of social media profile images within the sport industry, the current study applied face-ism as a conceptual framework.

Face-ism

Previous studies have found that men are more likely to represent in media with a greater facial prominence than their female counterparts (Archer et al., 1983; Zuckerman, 1986; Zuckerman & Kieffer, 1994). Differences in facial prominence lead to differences in viewers' impressions of the people portrayed. People evaluated individuals as more intelligent, dominant, ambitious, and assertive and gave an overall positive general evaluation (e.g., warmth, sensitivity) when the individuals were depicted in greater facial prominence in a photograph (e.g., Archer et al., 1983; Cooley & Smith, 2013; Levesque & Lowe, 1999; Schwarz & Kurz, 1989; Zuckerman, 1986). This phenomenon is known as face-ism (Archer et al., 1983).

Print media (e.g., newspapers, magazine; Matthews, 2007; Zuckerman & Kieffer, 1994) and electronic media (e.g., websites; King, 2002; Konrath & Schwarz, 2007; Prieler, 2016; Szillis & Stahlberg, 2007) were two popular areas that previous studies have focused on. Konrath and Schwarz analyzed the profile photographs of four countries' political representatives. The photographs were obtained from each government's official website. The results showed that male political representatives were displayed with a higher facial prominence than female political representatives. In addition, King used the photographs from Fortune 500 companies' websites to examine the face-ism phenomenon, and the results indicated that the male businesspersons were depicted with a greater facial prominence than female businesspersons on the websites. Many prior studies (e.g., Cooley & Smith, 2013; Reichart & Cooley, 2008; Smith & Cooley, 2012) have examined print and electronic media outlets, but little is known regarding face-ism in a social-media context. Reichart and Cooley investigated Facebook profile photographs, and the scholars found that male users' Facebook profile photographs were shown with a greater facial prominence than female users' profile photographs. The subsequent sections discuss face-ism in terms of viewer's evaluation, gender, race, and occupation.

A number of scholars (e.g., Archer et al., 1983; Levesque & Lowe, 1999; Zuckerman, 1986) have revealed that this facial prominence influences viewers' evaluations of the images. An experimental study conducted by Archer et al. found that gender differences affected interpersonal perceptions. Individuals presented with a greater facial prominence were rated to be more intelligent, assertive, and ambitious when compared to similar individuals who were shown with a smaller facial prominence. In addition, other scholars found consistent results in

terms of ambitiousness and intelligence (Schwarz & Kurz, 1989), ambitiousness and dominance (Zuckerman, 1986), and a warmer and positive general evaluation (Levesque & Lowe, 1999). Scholars have concluded that the facial prominence is an indicator of personal traits (e.g., dominance, power, assertive; Archer et al., 1983; Zuckerman, 1986). Levesque and Lowe also mentioned about the importance of facial prominence as “a determinant of interpersonal perception” (p. 258). Also, Konrath and colleagues stated that, “high facial prominence is important to consider because it can lead to evaluations of competence versus warmth and likability” (p. 485).

In different media outlets, males are represented with a greater facial prominence than their female counterparts in various media representations. (e.g., Archer et al., 1983; Copeland, 1989; Konrath, Au, & Ramsey, 2012; Konrath & Schwarz, 2007; Prieler, 2016; Szillis & Stahlberg, 2007; Zuckerman, 1986; Zuckerman & Kieffer, 1994). Archer et al. analyzed different forms of media outlets, including American periodicals (e.g., *Fortune*, *Money*, *Ms.*, *Newsweek*, *People*, *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Time*), artwork from different centuries (i.e., 15th–20th centuries), 13 publications from 11 countries (e.g., *Illustrated London News* from England, *Paris Match* from France, *The Weekly Review* from Kenya, *Far Eastern Economic Review* from Hong Kong, *Ercilla* from Chile, *Der Spiegel* from Germany, *Link* from India, *L'expresso* from Italy, *La Revista Inter-American Vision* from Mexico, *Cambio 16* from Spain), and amateur drawings in their study. The scholars discovered that photographs and drawings highlighted men's faces rather than women's faces. It was suggested that the differing facial prominences show and emphasize the stereotype that women are considered more important by society for their general attractiveness and figure (body-oriented characteristics), and men are considered more important for their personality and intellect (face-oriented characteristics).

Moreover, Copeland (1989) examined primetime television commercials (e.g., on NBC, ABC, CBS, Fox) and revealed the gender difference in facial prominence in these outlets. Dodd et al. (1989) examined *Newsweek* and *Time* magazine photographs from five decades (i.e., 1938–1983), and the results revealed that females' faces were not presented in the same way as their male counterparts. Moreover, Melkote and Melkote (2012) examined *Newsweek* magazine and found a gender difference in facial prominence.

The previous studies have focused on particular groups of people (e.g., professors, politicians, college students) to examine the face-ism phenomenon. Szillis and Stahlberg (2007) targeted professors and politicians in Germany. The scholars obtained the profile photographs from official websites and found that male professors and politicians were portrayed with a significantly higher facial prominence than female professors and politicians. Similarly, Konrath and Schwarz (2007) looked at American, Canadian, Australian, and Norwegian political representatives' profile photographs on their official websites. The researchers found that the male political representatives had a higher facial prominence than the female political representatives. Konrath et al. (2012) also examined political representatives. The scholars analyzed 6,610 profile photographs of all of the major political representatives of 25 countries

across six continents. The scholars found that male political representatives were presented with a higher facial prominence, whereas female political representatives portrayed more of their bodies.

Matthews (2007) attempted to reveal the relationship between occupational status and the face-ism phenomenon. The scholar retrieved photographs from six popular American magazines (i.e., *Fortune*, *Money*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, *People*, and *Sports Illustrated*). The results showed that people who were portrayed as working in intellectually-themed jobs (e.g., businesspeople, educators, executives, politicians, scientists) had a higher facial prominence than people who were portrayed as working in physically-themed jobs (e.g., actors, entertainers, models, sports stars). Furthermore, Kapidzic and Martins (2015) investigated photographs of college students. The scholars found that there was a significant gender difference in the photographs of college students. Female students displayed relatively more of their bodies; however, male students emphasized their faces more.

A number of previous studies (e.g., Cooley & Smith, 2013; Smith & Cooley, 2012) have focused on face-ism in a social-media context. These scholars have uncovered that male Facebook users' profile photographs were displayed with a greater facial prominence than the female users' profile photographs. Along with the gender difference in face-ism literature, a number of scholars have examined other groups of people in various media channels.

The online version of Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory was applied to analyze professional athletes' online self-presentation strategies. To apply the concept of face-ism to the sports context, the current study viewed the facial prominence as a self-presentational tactic and examined face-ism phenomenon in the professional athletes' Twitter profile photographs. This research is the first to apply the face-ism concept in professional athletes' social media profile photographs. Sauder and Blaszkia (2018) said that, "Embedded within the context of all of this interesting, diverse, complex work is the reoccurring notion that Twitter allows athletes to portray themselves in a particular light that they can largely control" (p. 5). Therefore, it would be beneficial to understand the professional athletes' self-presentation approaches by examining their Twitter profile photographs.

The current study used an exploratory content analytic method to investigate face-ism as an online self-presentation strategy (i.e., Twitter circular profile photographs of professional athletes) in women's and men's golf, tennis, and basketball. There were three research questions that guided this research:

RQ1: Are there differences in the facial prominence displayed by female and male professional athletes across the three professional sports (i.e., basketball, tennis, and golf)?

RQ2: Are there differences in the facial prominence based on their social media activity levels (i.e., active and inactive)?

RQ3: Are there differences in the facial prominence presented by the self-presentation strategies (e.g., athlete headshot, wearing sponsor apparel, posing in a casual outfit, presenting brand logos)?

Method

To investigate the professional athletes' online self-presentation tactics and the face-ism phenomenon in sport media, a content analysis was employed to analyze the content. Krippendorff (2013) defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p. 24). The professions (i.e., basketball, tennis, and golf) were selected in order to compare the same level of competition in the same gender-neutral sports (e.g., Koivula, 1995, 2001) in the U.S. Therefore, this study focused on both female and male professionals who participated in the following sports leagues: For basketball the leagues were the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) and National Basketball Association (NBA); tennis included the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) Tour and Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) World Tour; golf included the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) Tour and Professional Golf Association (PGA) Tour. The content analytic methodology has been frequently employed in sport communication for studies involving traditional sport media (e.g., Eagleman, 2013) and new sport media (e.g., Weathers et al., 2014), and online self-presentation methods (e.g., Coche, 2014; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016).

The current study first involved an identification of 1,393 Twitter accounts from 141 WNBA, 452 NBA, 200 WTA, 200 ATP, 200 LPGA, and 200 PGA professional athletes. Because only authenticated Twitter accounts with the official check mark (i.e., verified Twitter accounts) were utilized in this study, 871 of the accounts originally identified were determined to be verified Twitter accounts. Of the 871 verified accounts analyzed in the final sample, 215 (24.68%) were from female professional athletes and 656 (75.32%) were from male professional athletes. The 215 verified accounts for females consisted of WTA ($n=106$), WNBA ($n=61$), and LPGA ($n=58$) professional athletes. The 656 verified accounts for males consisted of NBA ($n=399$), PGA ($n=133$), and ATP ($n=124$) professional athletes.

The coding protocol prevented any confusion and allowed the two trained coders to generate a proper data set. Fifteen guidelines were created to assist the coders, and a codebook was constructed to analyze the profile photographs of the professional athletes in the sample ($N=871$). Intercoder reliability testing of 20.67% (180) of the sample revealed acceptable agreement levels of 83% or higher and that all variables coded by the two coders had alpha values between .74 and .98, all of which were above the .70 cutoff (Lombard et al., 2002) that is used for acceptable alpha values in intercoder reliability testing.

A coding sheet was compiled to organize coders' evaluations and involved the coding of gender (female and male professional athletes included in the study), sport (three gender-neutral sports [Koivula, 2001, 2001] consisting of golf, tennis, and basketball), and social media activity

(determining active and inactive social media groups based on the athletes' activity levels in terms of their social influence [i.e., Klout score] as well as their number of tweets, accounts followed, followers, and likes). Klout score collects the online traffic of social media users' accounts by using a formula to evaluate their social influence and then assigning a score within the range of 1 to 100 (Baan & Dor, 2017). The score indicates how users are influential in the social media realm. In addition to gender, sport, and social media activeness, the self-presentation strategies used by the professional athletes were coded based on the athletes' profile photo as it related to photo style (e.g., dynamic activeness, business, posed, casual), athlete outfit (e.g., uniform, professional, casual), photo location (e.g., facility, casual, portrait), and presence of brand exposure (e.g., brands, logos).

In order to examine the three research questions, facial prominence (i.e., Face-ism Index) of each final sample was measured. The coders used monitors which were set with a 1920×1080 resolution. Archer and colleague (1983) clearly stated how to calculate the Face-ism Index. It requires two measures (i.e., length of face and length of body) from each photograph. The size of the face is measured from the highest point of the head to the lowest point of the chin. The size of the body is measured from the highest point of the head to the lowest part of the body. With these two measures, a Face-ism Index is calculated to divide face length by body length. For every photograph in the codebook, both values were measured in millimeters (mm) using a standard ruler. The maximum Face-ism Index value would be 1.00, which means that photographs include only the face, and the minimum value would be 0.00, which indicates that photographs do not contain any images of the face. The Face-ism Index was utilized as a dependent variable in the current study.

The SPSS version 24 was used to perform a series of t-tests, and ANOVAs. In addition, the interaction effects between the two genders and the three sports on the dependent variable of facial prominence were evaluated. Post hoc tests were also employed to obtain detailed information on the means that differed significantly from each other.

Results

In examining face-ism as an online self-presentation strategy, this study utilized the Face-ism Index to analyze the facial prominence displayed in the Twitter profile photographs of professional athletes. Facial prominence was measured in a total of 762 profile photographs from 871 verified accounts. The photographs included 205 (26.90%) female professional athletes (i.e., 57 WNBA players, 94 WTA Tour players, and 54 LPGA Tour golfers) and 557 (73.10%) male professional athletes (i.e., 328 NBA players, 119 ATP Tour players, and 110 PGA Tour golfers).

The first research question that guided the facial prominence aspect of the study involved two parts. The first part asked about the differences in the facial prominence (i.e., the Face-ism Index) displayed by female and male professional athletes. Regarding the analysis between female and male professional athletes, the ANOVA results showed that the main effect of

gender was not significant, $F(1, 756) = .49, p > .05$. The Face-ism Index for the female professional athletes was determined to be .39 (WNBA), .42 (WTA), and .41 (LPGA) while the index was .39 (NBA), .40 (ATP), and .39 (PGA) for the male professional athletes. The second part of the first research question sought to determine the differences in the facial prominence displayed by the athletes across the professional sports examined (i.e., basketball, tennis, and golf). The ANOVA revealed the main effect of type of sport was not significant, $F(2, 756) = .60, p > .05$. Finally, the interaction effect between gender and type of sport also was found to not be significant $F(2, 756) = .22, p > .05$. In other words, the facial prominence in female and male professional athletes' profile photographs was not statistically different, and the facial prominence in profile photographs across the three sports was also not statistically different (see Table 1).

Table 1: ANOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics for Face-ism Index by Gender and Type of Sports

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	
Female				
WNBA	.39	.21		57
WTA	.42	.20		94
LPGA	.41	.24		54
Male				
NBA	.39	.22		328
ATP	.40	.22		119
LPGA	.39	.21		110
Sources	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Gender	.02	1	.02	.49
Type of Sports	.06	2	.03	.60
Gender*Type of Sports	.02	2	.01	.22
Error	35.31	756	.05	

Note. $R^2 = .003$, adj. $R^2 = .004$. *M* = Mean. *SD* = Standard Deviation. *SS* = Sum of Squares. *MS* = Mean Square

In this examination of face-ism, the second research question asked about the self-presentation strategies of the athletes based on their social media activity levels. In terms of their social media activity levels, this was determined by analyzing the professional athletes who fit into one of two groups (i.e., the top 25th and bottom 25th percentiles). The two groups were determined according to five Twitter activity variables (i.e., number of tweets, number of accounts followed, number of followers, number of likes, and Klout score). The active group was classified the users who tweeted more than 5,974, followed more than 494 users, had more than 131,610 users, liked more than, 1009 tweets, and recorded 78 or higher Klout score. On the other hand, the inactive group was categorized the users who had 835 tweets or less, followed less than

144 users, attracted fewer than 11,460 followers, liked fewer than 57 tweets, and rated 53 Klout score or less.

To examine the groups' facial prominence, independent sample t-tests were performed. The results indicated a statistically significant difference in facial prominence between the active group, who had more than 131,610 Twitter followers ($M = .45$, $SD = .24$); and the inactive group, who had less than 11,460 Twitter followers ($M = .36$, $SD = .19$); $t(371) = -4.03$, $p < .001$. Moreover, there was a statistically significant difference in facial prominence between the group with Klout scores higher than 78 ($M = .42$, $SD = .02$) and the group with Klout scores lower than 53 ($M = .37$, $SD = .19$); $t(381) = -2.78$, $p < .01$. The professional athletes with more followers and higher Klout scores tended to be presented with more facial prominence in their Twitter profile photographs than those with fewer followers and lower Klout scores (see Table 2).

Table 2: Independent Group T-Test for Face-ism Index between Active and Inactive Accounts

Activeness Categories	Active		Inactive		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Number of Tweets	.10	.21	.39	.21	-.61	375.56
Number of Following	.40	.23	.14	.21	.31	376.36
Number of Followers	.45	.24	.36	.19	-4.03***	371
Number of Likes	.39	.23	.41	.21	1.17	368.68
Klout Score	.42	.22	.37	.19	-2.78**	381

Note. ** = $p \leq .01$, *** = $p \leq .001$. *M* = Mean. *SD* = Standard Deviation. The active group represents the top 25 percentile of each Twitter social media activeness categories while the inactive group represents the bottom 25 percentile of each Twitter social media activeness categories.

In terms of the athletes' self-presentation strategies (RQ3), the study analyzed the Twitter profile photos of the professional athletes based on four items (i.e., style of the profile photo, location of the shot, outfit of the athlete, and brand exposure).

The facial prominence of the professional athletes' Twitter profile photographs was compared across photograph styles (e.g., action, business, posed, causal). The ANOVA results indicated a statistically significant difference in facial prominence across the different profile photo styles [$F(4,757) = 81.82$, $p < .001$]. Scheffe post hoc comparisons revealed that the average Face-ism

Index in business-style photographs ($M = .68$, $SD = .22$) was significantly higher than that in casual-style photographs ($M = .49$, $SD = .23$), posed-style photographs ($M = .37$, $SD = .18$), and action-style photographs ($M = .29$, $SD = .12$). The post hoc comparisons also found that casual-style photographs had statistically higher facial prominence than posed-style and action-style photographs. In addition, the posed-style photographs' facial prominence was higher than that of the action-style photographs (see Table 3).

Table 3: ANOVA Test of Face-ism Index among the Style of the Photographs, Outfit in the Photographs, and Location in the Photographs

	Style of Photographs					<i>F</i>
	Action	Business	Posed	Casual	Other	
Face-ism Index	.29	.68	.37	.49	.70	81.82***
	(.12)	(.22)	(.18)	(.23)	(.25)	
	Outfit in Photographs				<i>F</i>	
	Uniform	Professional	Casual	Other		
Face-ism Index	.35	.34	.46	.75	82.12***	
	(.18)	(.17)	(.23)	(.21)		
	Location in Photographs				<i>F</i>	
	Facility	Portrait	Casual	Other		
Face-ism Index	.32	.42	.41	.56	36.69***	
	(.16)	(.23)	(.22)	(.24)		

Note. *** = $p \leq .001$. Standard deviations appear in parentheses below means. Means with differing subscripts within rows are significantly different at the $p < .05$ based on Scheffe post hoc comparisons.

Regarding comparing facial prominence in the Twitter profile photographs across the different photograph locations (e.g., facility [gym, arena, etc.], portrait [studio, etc.], casual [park, beach, etc.]). A one-way ANOVA was conducted and revealed a statistically significant difference in the facial prominence of the professional athletes' Twitter profile photographs across the different

photograph locations [$F(3,758) = 36.69, p < .001$]. Scheffe post hoc comparisons indicated that the average face-ism indices for photographs with portrait backdrops ($M = .42, SD = .23$) and photographs taken at casual locations ($M = .41, SD = .22$) were significantly higher than those of photographs taken at sports facilities ($M = .32, SD = .16$) (see Table 3).

In examining the facial prominence of the professional athletes' Twitter profile photos across the different outfits (e.g., uniform/jersey, professional attire, casual attire), a one-way ANOVA showed a statistically significant difference in facial prominence across the photo outfits [$F(3,758) = 82.12, p < .001$]. Scheffe post hoc comparisons were conducted to determine the mean differences according to the nominal variables, which included uniform, professional, casual, and other. The results indicated that the average Face-ism Index for casual-outfit photographs ($M = .46, SD = .21$) was higher than that of photographs depicting the user in uniform ($M = .35, SD = .18$) and in professional attire ($M = .34, SD = .17$) (see Table 3).

Lastly, Brand exposure was used as another independent variable to examine differences in facial prominence between those who presented a brand logo or logos in their Twitter profile photos and those who did not have any recognizable brands in this profile photos. An independent sample *t*-test was performed and the results indicated a statistically significant difference in facial prominence between the professional athletes who showed brand logo(s) in their Twitter profile photographs ($M = .35, SD = .18$) and those who did not ($M = .49, SD = .25$); $t(760) = -8.38, p < 0.001$. Professional athletes who did not display brand logo(s) in their Twitter profile photographs were depicted with more facial prominence than those who did (see Table 4).

Table 4: Independent Group T-Test for Face-ism Index between Twitter Social Media Activeness and Gender

	Brand Exposure				<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>
	Yes		No			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Face-ism Index	.35	.18	.49	.25	-8.38***	760

Note. *** = $p \leq .001$. *M* = Mean. *SD* = Standard Deviation.

Discussion

In order to investigating face-sim as an online self-presentation strategy, the present study investigated the professional athletes' Twitter profile photographs which are a crucial feature in social networking sites. Face-ism, which serves as a conceptual framework in this study, refers

to the facial differences between men and women in visual presentations, and men especially are likely to be presented with a greater facial prominence than their female counterparts (Archer et al., 1983). Among the 871 verified Twitter accounts, the current study found that a total of 762 profile photographs (87.49%) included the users' faces. The remaining 105 photographs included other people's faces, animals, objects (e.g., car, bag, ring), or personal brand logos. The current study analyzed face-ism from a number of perspectives (i.e., gender, occupational status, social media influence, and self-presentation strategy).

First, the study sought to compare face-ism between the genders. Therefore, the current study focused on both female (i.e., WNBA, WTA, and LPGA) and male (i.e., NBA, ATP, and PGA) professional athletes in order to compare the facial prominence in their Twitter profile photographs. Unlike the previous studies (e.g., Archer et al., 1983; Cooley & Smith, 2013; Copeland, 1989; Konrath, Au, & Ramsey, 2012; Konrath & Schwarz, 2007; Levesque & Lowe, 1999; Matthew, 2007; Szillis & Stahlberg, 2007; Zuckerman, 1986; Zuckerman & Kieffer, 1994), the findings indicated that both female and male professional athletes used similar ratios of facial prominence in their Twitter profile photographs. Archer et al. stated that, "there is a pronounced tendency to represent men with their faces and women with their bodies" (p. 727). By highlighting these characteristics, male professional athletes also presented more of their bodies in a manner similar to their female their Twitter profile photographs. Moreover, Konrath and Schwarz proposed that more recently, the younger generation of men have begun to refuse traditional masculine portrayals. Siibak (2010) stated that, "the new media environment does encourage the expression of alternative masculinities and eliminate the need for purely stereotypical masculine self-presentations" (p. 419).

Additionally, the current study examined professional athletes in three different sports (i.e., basketball, tennis, and golf). Only a few studies to date have focused on varied occupational status associated with varying levels of face-ism, and the populations under study include: students, faculty, businesspeople, politicians, scientists, sports figures, models, actresses and actors. Professional athletes of three sports under study showed relatively similar facial size in their Twitter profile photographs. Dodd et al. (1989) and Matthew (2007) examined sports figures as part of a sports and entertainment group. Their results for the group were marginally different; however, the sports and entertainment people were depicted as having the lowest facial prominence when compared to other groups (e.g., public officials, professionals, executives/businesspeople, politicians, scientists/educators). The present study also revealed results similar to those found in Matthew's study. Archer et al. (1983) concluded that there is a strong association between an individual's depiction in the media and the characteristics that the individual presentations in real life. Matthew concluded that, "individuals in physically focused occupations are valued for qualities related to physicality such as attractiveness or physical strength" (p. 523). In other words, the athletes in this group are more likely to show their bodies because it is the only real way for them to emphasize their physical strength. According to Arai et al. (2014), body fitness is one of the important factors that makes a strong athlete brand image.

This exploratory study examined facial prominence based on the professional athletes' social media influence. The current study discovered that the professional athletes who had more followers and higher Klout scores were more likely to be portrayed as having greater facial prominence in their Twitter profile photographs than the professional athletes who had fewer followers and smaller Klout scores. Differences in facial prominence elicits different reactions from viewers. For instance, research has shown that viewers evaluate individuals in visual images as more competent, assertive, intelligent, dominant, ambitious, and positive when the individuals are shown with a higher face-ism index ratio (Archer et al., 1983; Levesque & Lowe, 1999; Schwarz & Kurz, 1989; Zuckerman, 1986). The professional athletes who attracted a large number of followers and had greater Klout scores may take advantage of using higher facial prominence in their Twitter profile photographs. Regardless of its cause-and-effect relationship, these findings indicate that there is a strong connection between facial prominence and social media influence.

Lastly, based on the different self-presentation tactics professional athletes used in their Twitter profile photographs, the current study examined facial prominence as it was depicted in the photographs. The current exploratory study found that the Twitter profile photographs that were taken at sports-related locations were likely to depict lower facial prominence. Because the photographs focused on the professional athletes' bodies, the distance between the camera and the athlete would be greater. Moreover, it was found that in the Twitter profile photographs that did not feature brand logo(s), the professional athletes' faces were more likely to be the focus. As the face takes up a larger area within the photograph, the space available to depict other things in the photograph decreases. The style of shots was found to be a factor associated with facial prominence. For example, this study found that business-style shots, such as passport photographs and LinkedIn profile photographs, highlight faces more effectively. The findings are consistent with the previous studies conducted by Dodd et al. (1989) and Matthew (2007), as these studies found that higher facial prominence was more present in intellectual occupations. The professional athletes who chose business-style shots may have wanted to present themselves via professional and intellectual images (Huang & Park, 2013). In addition, professional athletes who wore casual attire (e.g., t-shirts, tank-tops, button down shirts, jeans) tended to be presented with great facial prominence in their Twitter profile photographs. Because the photographs were portrayed on social media, a number of professional athletes who wore casual clothing in the photographs took selfies. Arai et al. (2014) indicated these characteristics as physical attractiveness and symbolism (e.g., name, logo, team color, fashion), which are dimensions that are a significant part of an athlete brand image.

Implications

This empirical study examined the online visual self-presentation of both female and male professional basketball players, tennis players, and golfers, utilizing online visual self-presentation characteristics as depicted in their Twitter profile photographs. There were key findings in this study for both online self-presentation literature and face-ism literature.

In terms of face-ism, the key findings included that there was no gender difference in the facial prominence of professional athletes' Twitter profile photographs. However, the results indicated that professional athletes who had more followers and higher Klout scores tended to be presented via a higher facial prominence than professional athletes who had fewer followers and lower Klout scores. Moreover, the Twitter profile photographs taken in sports-related settings and that included fewer brand logos featured less facial prominence. The results also showed that the Twitter profile photographs that were comprised of business-style shots wherein the athletes were portrayed in casual attire were likely to feature a higher facial prominence.

With regard to the face-ism literature, the findings of this study added new insights to the areas of gender (i.e., female and male), online platforms (i.e., Twitter), social status (i.e., professional athletes), social influence (i.e., Klout score), and self-presentation strategy (i.e., location, style of shots, outfits). Unlike prior research that has reviewed more traditional media outlets (e.g., newspapers, magazines), this research did not find the face-ism phenomenon present between male and female professional athletes' Twitter profile photographs. However, the leagues, teams, and players should work with Twitter to verify female athletes' accounts. This will help to address the gender gap present among social networking sites. In addition, by doing this, those who work in the media would be better able to use the athletes' Twitter accounts as journalistic resources to generate mainstream media contents (Bruns & Highfield, 2012; Newman, Dutton, & Blank, 2012).

Moreover, in terms of marcoms, the social media profile photographs serve as effective tools to enrich companies' marketing objectives (e.g., increase brand awareness, associate brand image with leagues and athletes). Carlson and Donovan (2013) noted that "firms may benefit by employing tactics that facilitate athlete identification" (p. 204). Especially, using a higher Face-ism Index in Twitter profile photographs is beneficial in the golf industry, as it increases the visibility of brand logos that exist around the golfers' faces (Jang et al., 2015). This media exposure is one of the main reasons why companies spend huge amounts of money. Not only does it increase of media exposure, but it could also generate positive evaluation from viewers. Furthermore, the global population of golf fans is always connected with golfers, which makes it easier for companies to reach audiences. Therefore, companies should pay attention to these constructive marcoms strategies to maximize their endorsement contracts with professional golfers. In addition to the golf industry, the NBA is another league that should consider facial prominence in their social media profile photographs. Because of the NBA's recent jersey sponsorship deal, it is suggested that NBA players use higher face-ism photographs in order to show the logos on each side of their shoulders more clearly.

Regardless of facial prominence in profile photographs, individual athlete endorsement and league official sponsorship deals were effective in terms of generating media exposure by affixing their brand to professional athletes, human brands (Thomson, 2006). For example, when basketball players held balls in their Twitter profile photographs, a Spalding logo was often visible. Spalding produces the official game ball for both the WNBA and NBA. There were

a few players who were holding another brand of basketball (e.g., Nike) in the professional basketball players' Twitter profile photographs. Furthermore, the professional basketball players who were endorsed by Nike had the same types of profile photographs. 'BRING YOUR GAME' appeared as a slogan in the profile photographs. These are the most effective ways to use profile photographs as marcoms tools.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Study

In applying Goffman's self-presentation theory to the current study, an assumption was made that the professional athletes investigated here held ownership (and maintained/controlled) their Twitter accounts and thus selected or approved their profile photo. Thus, because of this assumption, one of the study's limitations is in the reliance on the authenticated Twitter accounts of the professional athletes. While only verified accounts were used, it can only be assumed that the accounts were owned, controlled, and maintained by the subjects analyzed in this study. Another limitation has to do with generalization of the findings in sports contexts. The findings here revealed face-ism in professional athletes' Twitter profile photographs, face-ism in different self-presentation approaches, and face-ism with regard to social media influence. This study only examined three sports (i.e., basketball, tennis, and golf) and thus it is suggested that future research investigate other professional sports (e.g., soccer, softball, baseball). Lastly, even though the current research examined both female and male professional athletes, both coders who analyzed the final samples were male graduate students. Coche (2014) suggests that both female and male coders analyze samples to improve reliability. Thus, future content analysis studies should include both female and male coders to enhance overall reliability.

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