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Instagram Engagement: Comparing Sportswear Companies to Running Brands

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Running Head: Instagram Engagement

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Abstract

Achieving an engaged social media presence is a crucial task for sports organizations in today's expanding digital realm. "Instagram Engagement: Comparing Mainstream Sports Brands to Running Brands" explores the evolution of the sports-media relationship and specifically analyzes the engagement rates and types of content posted throughout five sportswear and running organizations' Instagram accounts. 393 posts were analyzed and classified into three categories: metacommunicative, conceptual, and narrative (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Romney & Johnson, 2018). Overall, sportswear companies posted the most narrative images while running brands shared the greatest number of conceptual images. Significant difference was discovered between the number of comments received on metacommunicative and conceptual posts compared to narrative pictures. No significant difference was apparent between the likes received throughout the three post categories. This study provides a detailed report regarding the social media presence of the ten running-related entities to understand the relationship between the content posted and the number of likes and comments accumulated on each post.

Keywords: sportswear, running, metacommunicative, conceptual, narrative, social media

Instagram Engagement: Comparing Sportswear Companies to Running Brands

Cultivating an active and engaged online presence is an imperative undertaking for any organization in today's expanding digital realm. New emerging technologies allow a variety of organizations to disseminate information regarding their practices in a clear and time-effective manner. The advent of social media has provided a series of accessible communication channels that organizations can utilize to connect with their key constituents in an immediate fashion (Abeza et al., 2013). In addition to the everchanging media landscape, the growing realm of sports constitutes a significant portion of today's cultural environment. Sports and media play a compelling role in providing entertainment to worldwide audiences, and understanding the relationship between these society-defining elements can provide insights into the sports-media relationship. Exploring this interconnection with media and sports is essential in comprehending the manner in which sports brands utilize social media to promote their organizations.

This inquiry specifically inspects sportwear organizations and running brands to illuminate the social media presence of these distinct entities. For this study, "sportswear organizations" are defined as entities that produce a running product line among a variety of different products, and the running-specific Instagram accounts of the "sportswear organizations" were analyzed within this research. "Running brands" are described as entities that only develop running-related products. The sportswear organizations' running accounts examined for this inquiry are Nike Running, Adidas Running, Under Armour Running, Puma Running, and New Balance Running. The running brands inspected for the study include Brooks Running, Saucony, HOKA, On Running, and Altra Running. These accounts were selected because they represent the five-highest followed entities within their respective categories. Distinct similarities and discrepancies throughout the online presences of five running and five

sportwear companies' Instagram accounts were inspected to analyze the extent to which these defined accounts utilize the online platform to interact with their audiences. Examining these accounts provides an overview of how different running and sports brands engage with their target groups. The twofold goal of this research centers on identifying common themes within the Instagram posts and determining the level of engagement received by the running brands and the mainstream sports brands' running accounts.

Literature Review

Cultivating an engaged social media presence is a crucial task for sports organizations in today's expanding digital realm. The evolution of the sports-media relationship has been expedited by the advent of social media, and these platforms have revolutionized the online landscape through creating an interactive and dynamic environment (Duncan, 2020). Determining the most effective social media engagement tactics is an essential task for any sports organization as social media continues to possess a substantial impact on digital communication. Researchers identify a variety of strategies that organizations can employ throughout their social media accounts to enhance their online connection with key stakeholders. To further understand the inquiry regarding the connection between sports and media, the following terms are defined: social media and engagement. In addition, the history of the sports-media relationship is illustrated below, and this phenomenon illustrates the everchanging connection between the sports and digital realms. In addition, the significance of using social media within the sports industry is investigated as multiple researchers assert the importance of effectively utilizing social media throughout sports organizations. The below research provides an in-depth analysis of the use of social media across a variety of running brands and sportwear organizations. As Instagram and the digital media realm continue to expand, it is crucial to

examine the social media strategies utilized by the highest-followed sportswear organizations to understand the importance of receiving high levels of engagement within this social media platform.

Social Media

Freberg (2013) defines social media as the center of dialogue, strategic communication, and information dissemination throughout online environments. Social media platforms offer a substantial variety of communication channels to organizations, and these avenues of conversation include social networking sites, blogs, podcasts, collaborative websites, intranets, and photo sharing networks (Freberg, 2013). Social media platforms serve one of the following purposes: "identify, conversation, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups" (Freberg, 2013, p. 847). In addition, Freberg (2013) furthers this definition through stating that social media sites are "open and accessible, dynamic, modifiable, and decentralized…media that provide means for real two-way or group conversations" (p. 847). This proves that social media is designed for immediate access where individuals possess the opportunity to interact with the entity posting throughout the online platform. To expand on this definition, Dessart (2017) asserts that social media are "vast ecosystems with intricate networks of relationships and a multiplicity of social nets and levels of interaction" (p. 377). In addition, Coles (2015) declares that social media is a platform for conversation that can be utilized for "brand awareness, which can be a personal or a business brand: and networking, or building relationships online" (p. 4). Social media sites supply a multitude of communication channels where organizations have the opportunity to sincerely connect with their targeted audiences. For purposes of this study, social media is defined as an online presence upheld by the sportwear companies and running brands to effectively and openly communicate with their target audiences.

Engagement

In addition to social media, the term "engagement" is defined to provide a clear foundation for this research inquiry. Perreault and Mosconi (2018) identify distinct metrics that can be utilized to determine levels of social media engagement. For instance, these scholars declare that likes, dislikes, shares, visits, views, clicks, tags, hovers, check-ins, pins, embedding, endorsements, uploads, and downloads can assist in illuminating the level of engagement an organization is achieving with its target audiences (Perreault & Mosconi, 2018). This will showcase the consumers' motivation to utilize the organization's product or service and will increase their receptivity to the brand (Perreault & Mosconi, 2018). In addition, this article provides precise definitions of engagement to further understand how the previous metrics evaluate levels of connection with an organization's social media audience. Perreault and Mosconi (2018) defined engagement as either participation, interaction, conversation, and eWOM. The latter term refers to "any positive or negative statements about a product or company made by potential, current, or former customers" (Perreault & Mosconi, 2018, p. 3570). To further this definition, Smith and Gallicano (2015) state that engagement is an informative and personal experience that could potentially be spontaneous or intentional. This phenomenon contains cognitive and emotional captivation within the social media realm and is fueled by information consumption, social connection, and internet engrossment (Smith & Gallicano, 2015). These definitions can assist in analyzing a running organization's social media posts for specific engagement metrics, and this information can be utilized to determine if the organization was able to successfully communicate with its consumers. Furthermore, Dessart (2017) augments these definitions through affirming that social media engagement refers to the framework of relationships with consumer and brand-related constructs. The outcome of this

organization-consumer interaction is a psychologically-based eagerness to purchase a specific

product or utilize a particular service (Dessart, 2017). These terms provide a groundwork for the

research questions and are utilized throughout the remainder of this study. For this inquiry,

engagement is defined as the number of likes and comments received on a post.

History of the Sports-Media Relationship

The everchanging landscape of the sports-media relationship illustrates the deep

connection between online platforms and sports organizations. Duncan (2020) provides an in-

depth analysis of the evolution of this connection and asserts the importance of the digital and

social media world in transforming the sports media industry. The digital world has immensely

influenced the sports industry and has created a range of unparalleled opportunities to connect

with mass audiences (Duncan, 2020). Before the advent of social media, the relationship between

sports organizations and consumers was characterized as passive and impersonal. This mode of

interaction consisted of one-way communication through traditional media outlets where the

audience lacked the ability to voice their sentiments regarding the information received through

the media (Duncan, 2020). From traditional media outlets to new digital platforms, the media-

sports relationship has considerably transformed throughout the years. The growth and expansion

of the sports-media relationship can be accredited to the development of digital platforms and

social media, but the notion of communicating sport-like events has existed since the creation of

sports (Duncan, 2020). The beginning of sports media coverage illustrates the elongated and

deep connection that has existed between sports and media.

Media and Sports in Today's Society

While traditional media outlets, such as print, radio, and television, dominated the media

landscape and provided sports-related information to a variety of consumers, today's evolving

digital world is "far more dynamic, broad and varied" (Duncan, 2020, p. 22). The introduction of

social media exponentially increased the popularity of sports. The new digital platforms create an

interactive and dynamic environment for consumers to voice their opinions and personally

connect with sports organizations (Duncan, 2020). Rather than traditional media outlets that

provided domestic coverage, social media allows individuals to connect on a global scale where

fans can interact with sports companies around the globe. In addition to the development of

social media, technological advancements have expedited the number of ways consumers can

utilize technology to connect with sports organizations in a digital realm. Electronics, such as

smart devices, tablets, laptops, and television sets, provide a variety of avenues for customers to

consume different forms of content. This monumental shift in sports coverage provides

immediate information to consumers through an online platform (Duncan, 2020).

Social Media

Social media provides an easy communication source to disseminate unfiltered messages

to precisely defined target audiences, and sports teams must actively use social media to cultivate

favorable relationships with these essential markets (Wallace et al., 2011). The expansion of

social media platforms has completely shifted the consumer-organization relationship. These

platforms allow sports fans to thoroughly engage in conversations and debates about their

favorite sports, and these online sites allow for greater interaction levels within the sports

community (Duncan, 2020). These outlets provide an opportunity for organizations to

disseminate specifically tailored content to their audiences, and in return, the sports community

can discuss their interests regarding sports throughout the digital environment. In addition, social

media platforms serve as viewing sites for sports games and matches, and this proves that

traditional media outlets, such as the television, are not the only communication channels for

consuming sports (Duncan, 2020). Historically, social media content "relating to live sports or

analysis acted as an accompaniment to television broadcasts of sport" (Duncan, 2020, 55). In

today's society, consumers tend to rely on social media for sports coverage and updates due to

the easy access and immediacy of the digital platforms. Accessibility is essential throughout the

growing digital age as online users value quick access and timely updates regarding the sports

industry (Duncan, 2020).

Technological Advancements

As digital media continues to expand, technology is additionally evolving and provides

consumers with a variety of outlets to consume sports-related information. For instance, the

development of smartphones, tablets, and computers allows sports fans to stream live sport,

receive prompt updates concerning sports competitions, and engage with their favorite sports

organizations (Duncan, 2020). In addition, digital technology has shifted consumption rates as

fans are increasingly utilizing "second and third screens to access digital content during games"

(Duncan, 2020, p. 56). A report composed by Nielsen estimated that nearly 45 percent of

Americans utilize a second screen when consuming sports-related content, and of that

percentage, 63 percent use social media platforms for additional content. The increase in the

number of technological platforms has provided consumers with a variety of options to consume

sports media, and this has overall increased the level of sports consumption throughout the

United States (Duncan, 2020). This proves that there is a deep connection rooted between sports

and media.

Digital Organizations

Digital organizations serve as the main competitors for traditional media outlets, and

these platforms provide unique and unparalleled niche products for sports audiences (Duncan,

2020). These exclusive avenues of communication include "news sites, opinion blogs, YouTube channels, podcasts…and streaming services" (Duncan, 2020). Digital platforms offer users immense accessibility when attempting to locate information regarding the sports realm, and this availability of sports content specifically appeals to individuals who are retrieving information regarding sports that are not broadly covered by the mainstream media. Furthermore, digital media, such as blogs and podcasts, allow for the creation of niche content that individually highlights niche sports. The content created throughout these platforms provides today's consumers with a wider variety of choices to retrieve news regarding the sports industry.

Sporting Organizations

In today's evolving digital realm, the sports organizations themselves have become media outlets. Different sports teams, clubs, and organizations disseminate content that highlights distinct aspects of a variety of sports, and these sporting entities can precisely connect with fans via social media (Duncan, 2020). Digital and social media have provided sports companies with a variety of platforms to guarantee that their hired advertisers can reach the organizations' intended audiences. This opportunity authorizes sports organizations to raise awareness of their brand, engage with followers, and publicize information regarding a multitude of sports (Duncan, 2020). Sports brands have constructed their media profile and have expanded the content they produce, and the sports market does not solely rely on traditional media outlets to provide sports-related content.

Sports Brands' Social Media Strategies

Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) argue that the advent of social media has transformed the way in which organizations can communicate with their consumers. Social media has "fundamentally altered consumer behavior and the sport industry as sports organizations, teams, leagues, and

athletes have access to consumers on two-way channels, as opposed to the more traditional one-way media and advertising platforms (Pegoraro et al., 2021, p. 3). With the everchanging relationship between sports and the media, establishing a strong online presence is at the forefront of every sports organization. In today's expanding digital realm, sports organizations heavily utilize social media to promote their brand and connect with their intended audiences. To accomplish this goal of increased connection and interaction with fans, sports entities uphold an active social media presence. Social media channels serve as "online classrooms" and "community hubs" of sport, and these online platforms represent immense opportunities for organizations to actively communicate with their target audiences (Duncan, 2020). Sports organizations utilize social media to disperse different types of posts to their audiences, disseminate consistent information in an immediate manner, establish positive and authentic relationships with their fanbase, convert viewers to participants, and specifically connect with the Generation Z population.

Different Types of Social Media Posts

Over the years, social media has expanded into a space for interpersonal interaction, and the images shared throughout these digital realms have become important elements in increasing viewer engagement (Romney & Johnson, 2018). Social media platforms are progressively more notable communication outlets for organizations to disseminate content to their followers, and the notion of storytelling has grown to possess increasing significance. Society is dominated by visual images as "visual-based communication has only grown more prevalent" (Romney & Johnson, 2018, p. 95). Multiple online platforms, including Instagram, have increased the pervasiveness of digital narration through the sharing of consistent images. This strong visual imagery is essential in the domain of sports because sports are visual in nature (Romney &

Johnson, 2018). Various scholars identify three types of Instagram posts that sports organizations

can utilize to promote their brand: metacommunicative, narrative, and conceptual (Kress & van

Leeuwen, 2006; Romney & Johnson, 2018).

Metacommunicative. Metacommunicative posts refer to content that is highly edited and

manipulated in the post-production phase (Romney & Johnson, 2018). These posts contain

primary messages along with secondary information that accompanies the principal photograph.

Metacommunicative posts include textual elements that are layered over photography and serve

as a secondary communication channel to the original image (Romney & Johnson, 2018). For

instance, a sports account could share an action shot of a person playing their respective sport

breaking a record, and accompanying text can be included to inform the audience of the record-

breaking moment. In this example, the photograph of the athlete serves as the primary message,

and the overlaid text acts as the secondary element of the social media post. Metacommunicative

posts provide this additional information the viewer and allow for the social media audience to

understand the photograph in a greater extent (Romney & Johnson, 2018). Furthermore,

Instagram allows for and "emphasizes such metacommunicative forms of visual storytelling"

(Romney & Johnson, 2018). Users possess the opportunity to share images with their network of

followers and can edit their photos in a multitude of ways before publishing the photograph on

the social media site. Sharing these images can promote and encourage an account's audience to

engage with the image by either liking or commenting on the post. Instagram serves as a crucial

space to share metacommunicative content throughout the social media landscape (Romney &

Johnson, 2018).

Narrative. Another form of Instagram content is referred to as narrative posts. Narration

is a fundamental form of human communication and can be traced to the beginning of humanity

(Romney & Johnson, 2018). Cognitive theorist Polkinghorne (1988) declares that narrative and storytelling are "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful" (p. 13). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) provide an examination regarding the process of identifying an image's narrative qualities. These scholars assert that narrative images are visual in nature, and a 'transaction' must occur between two or more subjects within the photograph (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). This interaction between two elements in the photo "denotes change, transformation, or the unfolding of actions and events" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 56). Action must be present within the image to be classified within this post category. In addition, the transaction can occur between either human or nonhuman subjects within the photo. The primary subjects in the image are referred to as "actors" while the secondary elements in the photo are known as the "goals," and the transaction that occurs between the primary and secondary subjects is linked by unseen lines known as vectors (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). This invisible line that connects the two subjects signifies an interaction between multiple elements in the photograph and suggests that a narrative is constructed throughout the image.

Romney and Johnson (2018) utilize a photograph provided by Fox Sports to further illustrate this narrative theory. This image features two baseball players after winning a game. The one teammate is pouring a Gatorade jug onto his teammate in this celebratory picture. In this instance, according to the findings of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the two baseball players are the actors, the transaction is the action of pouring the Gatorade onto the athlete, and the vector is the eye-contact made between the two athletes. This process can be utilized to assist in identifying narrative posts throughout sports organizations' Instagram accounts.

Conceptual. On the contrary to narrative images, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) conclude that conceptual images showcase static characteristics and do not illustrate action

within an image. Conceptual posts represent participants "in terms of their more generalized and

more or less stable and timeless essence, in terms of class, or structure, or meaning" (Kress &

van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 79). This suggests that conceptual imagery contains a sense of

permanence and does not denote change or action. These photos represent still symbolism as the

subjects within the image possess idle qualities (Romney & Johnson, 2018). In addition, a

transaction is absent from these images, and this represents the principal distinction between

narrative and conceptual photographs (Romney & Johnson, 2018). When action is unapparent

and no interaction exists between different elements of the photo, the image can be classified as

conceptual in nature. This information provides a consistent foundation for allocating social

media posts into distinct categories, and these divisions can be utilized to categorize Instagram

content.

Immediate Dissemination of Content

In addition to the immediacy of social media, sports organizations maintain an online

presence to provide a constant flow of content to their consumers. Kim Phillips (2017) highlights

the importance of understanding the purpose of utilizing social media, specifically Instagram, to

promote a sports organization's offerings and daily activities. She specifically describes the

imperative significance of focusing on one topic throughout an Instagram page, and this niche

focus will allow organizations to connect with a target audience that possesses a high level of

interest for the brand (Phillips, 2017). This is a beneficial element to decipher when analyzing

the different running organizations. In addition, Phillips (2017) expresses the importance of

using Instagram features, such as stories and Instagram Live, to connect with key audiences.

These features allow organizations to communicate directly with their consumers via social

media. Sports organizations can also focus on cultivating entertaining content that highlights

relevant information and showcases eye-catching designs to capture the attention of its viewers.

This will assist in driving traffic to the organization's social media accounts as well as maintain a

beneficial relationship with consumers (Pegoraro et al., 2021). To further this sentiment, Romney

et al. (2018) identifies that establishing a "narrative" throughout social media content is an

important undertaking for sports organizations. The definition of "narrative" derives from the

work of Kress and van Leeuwen, and these scholars define "narrative" as an image that connects

consumers through visual cues. This connection between the participants and the post is a vital

component in receiving a larger level of social media engagement (Romney et al., 2018).

Producing consistent and appealing sports-related content will assist these organizations in

gaining a greater following and improving their online presence.

Another important element of social media is the immediate nature of disseminating

content to followers. Gail Martin (2017) asserts that understanding the everchanging digital

realm is essential for the success of an organization because social media offers unparalleled

opportunities to connect with target audiences. The immediacy of social media platforms has

altered the mode in which individuals receive information, and using these digital programs will

allow companies to authentically connect with their fundamental consumers in a timely manner

(Martin, 2017). Furthermore, Schoja (2016) continually highlights the importance of cultivating

timely content to disperse to consumers. She asserts that social media serves as an opportunity to

circulate prompt information to sports fans (Schoja, 2016). Utilizing social media to disseminate

immediate content is a crucial endeavor for any sports organization.

Engagement and Authentic Relationships with Target Audiences

The abundance of social media platforms that are readily available allow users to obtain

greater access to sports organizations, and it is vital that the sports entities consistently interact

with their target audiences via these platforms (Duncan, 2020). Icha and Agwu (2015) describe

the importance of using social media to conduct marketing processes and increase engagement

with key constituents. These experts assert that providing timely information to sports fans and

actively interacting with these individuals throughout social media posts are two essential

components in increasing follower engagement rates. In addition, Ashley and Tuten (2015)

suggest that organizations should implement an integrated approach within their social media

accounts to allow for greater consumer interaction. This technique allows constituents to

participate in social media campaigns (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Furthermore, companies can also

characterize their social media presence by focusing on business-to-consumer dialogue, and this

allows the organization to directly communicate with their target audiences via social media.

This phenomenon refers to personally connecting with followers through responding to

comments and providing a myriad of content to the consumers (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). L'Etang

(2013) furthers this notion of audience engagement and asserts that organizations must partake in

two-way symmetrical communication, consisting of open dialogue and equal exchange between

the organization and its audience.

Brandi Watkins (2014) additionally describes the communicative capabilities of social

media as she describes the relationship between digital media and the sports industry. Sports

organizations can interact with their target publics and fans through various platforms, and this

can lead to an array of positive benefits including the strengthening of a brand relationship as

well as increased levels of fan engagement (Watkins, 2014). In addition, the article illustrates the

notion of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and its connection to social media. This

term refers to the "development of relationships with consumers through strategic messages and

dialogue" (Watkins, 2014, p. 30). Using social media to connect with constituents will allow for

an organization to reach a large audience in a personalized fashion, and building this consumer-brand relationship is vital to the creation of an ongoing transparent connection between the two parties. Furthermore, Watkins (2014) highlights the importance of using open communication via social media to transparently connect with key constituents and grow an organization's social media following.

To calculate this level of interaction with followers, Marie-Catherine Perreault and Elaine Mosconi (2018) identify a series of distinct metrics that can be utilized to track social media engagement. For instance, likes, dislikes, shares, visits, views, clicks, tags, hovers, check-ins, pins, embedding, endorsements, uploads, and downloads can illuminate the level of engagement an organization is achieving with their target audiences. This will showcase the consumers' motivation to utilize the organization's product or service and will increase their receptivity to the brand (Perreault & Mosconi, 2018). Sports organizations can utilize these features to determine their level of audience engagement, and actively updating their social media pages is crucial in achieving a substantial degree of interaction with their fanbases.

Converting Viewers to Participants

Achieving a high level of engagement can assist an organization in cultivating a loyal and consistent fanbase. Evans (2011) declares that achieving a high level of engagement creates a robust, two-way collaborative interaction with consumers and allows the organization to convert consumers from viewers to participants (Evans, 2011). When consumers are viewers, they merely examine the organization without engaging or interacting with the social media page. However, consumers can evolve into participants and actively interact with the organization and its offerings (Evans, 2011). The engagement process is imperative in converting consumers from viewers to participants, and this will allow the organization to develop interactive and

meaningful relationships with stakeholders. Furthermore, Frick (2014) echoes these sentiments

and asserts that consistency, honesty, and trustworthiness are all essential components in

achieving the viewer to participant conversion.

Appealing to Generation Z

Sam Duncan (2020) illuminates the notion of appealing to Generation Z on social media

as he describes the online behavior of these potential consumers. He asserts that this generation

is the largest group to utilize digital media platforms, and targeting this specific audience in an

effective manner can assist in increasing social media following and engagement. Duncan (2020)

declares that Generation Z prefers "moments flashpoints and highlights just as much as the

games these moments took place in" (p. 115). Posting content that captures these moments is

essential in engaging with this target audience. Duncan raises an interesting theme of targeting

the audiences that consume social media to the greatest extent, and this action will assist a sports

organization in increasing their following. Utilizing social media to appeal to this specific target

group is vital for all sports entities, and dedicating significant measures in upholding an active

social media presence is crucial in expanding consumer engagement rates.

Research Questions

Utilizing Kress and van Leeuwen's theory of narrative, the current inquiry examines

Instagram posts from five sportwear organizations' Instagram accounts and five running brands'

Instagram accounts to understand the frequency of narrative, metacommunicative, and

conceptual posts throughout these social media accounts. This study examines if a connection

exists between the type of content posts and the engagement rates, in terms of likes and

comments, that are received on these posts. Through liking or commenting on an image, viewers

showcase their affiliation and interest in the Instagram content. These statistics will be compared

between the sportswear organizations and running brands to comprehend if one type of brand receives a greater level of engagement than the other category of organization. This study offers an in-depth analysis of the different types of content that comprise the Instagram accounts of the ten-analyzed companies to witness a potential interrelationship between content and engagement.

Based on previous scholarly research regarding narrative storytelling and metacommunication, the following questions provide a framework and direction for the research project. These questions assist in determining the engagement rates of the defined running brands and sportwear organizations and illuminate the apparent themes that exist throughout each social media account. The currently study proposes the following six research questions:

RQ1: Does Nike Running, Adidas Running, UA Running, Puma Running, New Balance Running, Brooks Running, Saucony, HOKA, On Running, or Altra Running share more metacommunicative, narrative, or conceptual images?

RQ2: Do images with metacommunicative, narrative, or conceptual qualities generate more likes than the other two categories?

RQ3: Do images with metacommunicative, narrative, or conceptual qualities generate more comments than the other two categories?

RQ4: Which type of brand (sportswear or running) shares more metacommunicative, narrative, or conceptual images on their Instagram pages?

RQ5: Do sportswear companies or running brands accumulate more likes on their Instagram posts?

RQ6: Do sportswear companies or running brands accumulate more comments on their Instagram posts?

Methodology

To answer the above research inquiries, 393 total Instagram posts across the ten-analyzed accounts were collected and examined for post content and engagement metrics. The data-gathering and analysis process consisted of a three-step approach, including the completion of constructed-week analyses, coding the posts into one of three categories, and conducting one-way ANOVA tests for statistical purposes. These methods were utilized to effectively assemble different data entries, categorize the Instagram posts, and numerically analyze these statistics.
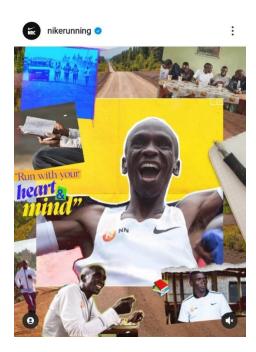
Constructed-Week Analyses

To gather data for this inquiry, constructed-week analyses (Hester & Dougall, 2007) were employed to ensure an accurate and representative sample was achieved. Constructed-week analyses are a type of stratified random sampling in which the completed sample represents each day of the week (Hester & Dougall, 2007). This method was utilized because "the cyclic nature of media content can render simple random sampling inefficient compared to other types of sampling (Hester & Dougall, 2007, p. 812). The constructed-week analyses (Hester & Dougall, 2007) consisted of investigating Instagram posts from different days of the week and distinct weeks of each month to ensure that a representative sample was achieved. This process began by examining the first week of each month. Instagram posts from the Monday of the first week in January, the Tuesday of the first week in February were investigated, the Wednesday of the first week in March, and so on, were analyzed. This pattern was followed throughout the four weeks of each month for a total of 393 posts. Twelve constructed-week analyses were conducted for the sportswear companies' Instagram accounts, and five constructed-week analyses were completed for the running brands' Instagram pages. The number of constructed-week analyses for each brand category were determined to ensure that a similar number of posts were inspected for each

classification. When gathering this data, the type of content and the number of likes and

comments were collected for each post. In terms of comments, any comment, including replies

from the organization who posted the Instagram content, were considered as comments for this

inquiry.

Coding

Once the data was gathered, the 393 Instagram posts were individually categorized into

three distinct sections based on the post's content: metacommunicative, narrative, and conceptual

(Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Romney & Johnson, 2020). This qualitative analysis followed the

guidelines of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and Romney and Johnson (2020) to ensure that

posts were accurately classified for further analysis purposes.

The below image (Figure 1) represents an example of a metacommunicative post from

@nikerunning's Instagram page.

Figure 1. Metacommunicative Image. Image Courtesy of @nikerunning Instagram page.

This image features a collage of professional runner Eliud Kipchoge. This Instagram post contains a variety of characteristics that classifies the post as a metacommunicative image. For this inquiry, images categorized as metacommunicative must be heavily manipulated, edited, or contain textual elements that overlay the images within the social media post (Romney & Johnson, 2020). The above content illustrates a collage of the professional runner through superimposing a myriad of photos to create an eye-catching composition. These edits were made in the post-production phase and therefore represent a metacommunicative image. In addition, the Instagram post features a textual overlay that assists in classifying the picture as obtaining metacommunicative characteristics: "Run with your heart & mind" (@nikerunning). This similar coding strategy was utilized to allocate the Instagram posts into their respective sections.

Furthermore, the next image (Figure 2) depicts a narrative Instagram post. This photograph features a runner breaking through the finish line at Nike Cross Nationals (@nikerunning). According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), narrative images must incorporate an actor, a goal, and a transaction within the picture. In this photograph, the runner serves as the actor and is the focal point of the image. In addition, the "goals" refer to the secondary elements in the image that supplement the main actors. For this specific instance, the finish line would be the "goal" in this action photo because the tape provides context to and reinforces the setting of the image. The third characteristic of narrative images centers on the transaction between two human or non-human subjects in the photo. In @nikerunning's photo, an interaction occurs between the runner and finish line as the athlete tears the tape material and signifies the conclusion of the race. This image represents an optimal example of the scholarly work regarding the components of a narrative image (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006).

Figure 2. Narrative Image. Image courtesy of @nikerunning Instagram page.

Another image posted on @nikerunning's Instagram page illustrates an exemplary model

of a conceptual image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). For a photograph to be considered

conceptual, no action can be denoted throughout the image, and a still presence must exist within

the picture. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) assert that these photographs contain timeless

qualities and represent stable and motionless imagery, and this coding method was utilized to

categorize posts for this research inquiry. In Figure 3 below, a photo of a shoe from

@nikerunning's Instagram page is displayed. The photo contains a blue and green shoe with a

slightly green background. Action is not illustrated in this image, and the shoe does not suggest

any sense of movement. Therefore, this photograph is classified as conceptual. For this research

study, any photo of a shoe, another non-human material, or an individual that did not denote

action, was classified as conceptual.

Figure 3. Conceptual Image. Image courtesy of @nikerunning Instagram page.

Statistical Tests

Following the completion of the coding process, one-way ANOVA and post hoc tests were conducted to determine if significant difference existed between the type of content posted and the engagement rates received throughout each post. These tests were utilized to discover the potential relationships between content and engagement, type of brand and engagement, and the number of metacommunicative, narrative, and conceptual posts throughout the Instagram accounts of the sportswear companies and running brands. These statistical tests will identify the potential relationships that exist between these different variables.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

Results for each research question are compiled below. Data collection consisted of a sample of 393 Instagram posts, including 44 posts from Adidas Running, 38 from Altra Running, 29 from Brooks Running, 28 from Hoka, 30 from New Balance Running, 44 from Nike Running,

48 from On Running, 47 from Puma Running, 43 from Saucony, and 42 from Under Armour

Running. 207 Instagram posts from sportswear organizations and 186 posts from running brands

were analyzed for this investigation.

      To answer the first research question regarding the frequency of conceptual,

metacommunicative, and narrative posts shared throughout the ten-analyzed Instagram accounts,

a frequency test on SPSS was utilized to calculate the total number of each post category for

every account inspected. Figure 4 below illustrates that 131 conceptual posts, 144

metacommunicative posts, and 118 narrative posts were shared between the ten-analyzed

Instagram accounts. In addition, On Running shared the most conceptual posts at 22, Adidas

Running posted the greatest number of metacommunicative content at 31, and Under Armour

Running distributed the highest count of narrative posts at 31. On the contrary, Under Armour

Running posted the least number of conceptual images at 3, Hoka shared the smallest count of

metacommunicative photographs, and Brooks Running obtained the lowest frequency of sharing

narrative imagery at 2 posts.

Brand	Conceptual	Metacommunicative	Narrative	Total
Adidas Running	4	31	9	44
Altra Running	16	9	13	38
Brooks Running	12	15	2	29
Hoka	15	2	11	28
New Balance Running	16	9	5	30
Nike Running	14	21	9	44
On Running	22	19	7	48
Puma Running	18	6	23	47
Saucony	11	24	8	43
UA Running	3	8	31	42
Total	131	144	118	393

Figure 4. Number of Conceptual, Metacommunicative, and Narrative Posts across each brand.

In terms of the second research inquiry, which questions the potential relationship between the type of content posted and the number of likes received on each post, one-way ANOVA and post hoc tests were conducted to inspect this probable connection. Figure 5 showcases the average mean for the number of likes that were received on each metacommunicative, narrative, and conceptual post across the ten-inspected brands. Conceptual posts achieved the greatest number of average likes at 7442.73, and narrative posts accumulated the lowest number of average likes at 5377.2. Metacommunicative posts accrued the middle mean of 5712.85 likes. Figure 5 additionally showcases the dispersion of likes within each type of content through the standard deviation tab. Narrative posts possess the greatest standard deviation of 10441.96, and metacommunicative posts boast the lowest standard deviation of about 7850.821. Conceptual posts achieved a standard deviation of 10186. Furthermore, Figure 6 delineates the post hoc tests that were conducted to determine if significant difference exists between the type of content and the number of likes received on the post. To achieve significant difference, the value must be less than 0.05. The one-way ANOVA revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference in the mean of likes between the likes received on metacommunicative, narrative, and conceptual posts ($p = 0.956$) ($p = 0.287$) ($p = 0.2$).

One-Way ANOVA: Types of Content vs. Likes			
Types of Content	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Metacommunicative	144	5712.85	7850.821
Narrative	118	5377.2	10441.96
Conceptual	131	7442.73	10186.052
Total	393	6188.89	9499.659

Figure 5. One-Way ANOVA Test Results with Mean of Likes.

Significant Difference Between Types of Content (Likes)		
Type of Content		**Sig.**
Metacommunicative	Narrative	0.956
Metacommunicative	Conceptual	0.287
Narrative	Conceptual	0.2

Figure 6. Post Hoc Test showcasing Significant Difference for Likes.

The third research question centered on the relationship between the type of content posted and the number of comments received on each post. Figure 7 denotes the mean number of comments received on each post across all ten brands. Metacommunicative posts received the highest number of comments at 97.98, and narrative posts accumulated the lowest average comment count at 42.23. Conceptual content aggregated an average of nearly 90 comments per post. In addition to the mean of comments, Figure 7 showcases the spread of comments received on the different types of content through the standard deviation statistic. Metacommunicative posts collected the highest standard deviation of about 150.193, and narrative posts amassed the lowest dispersion of comments at 57.853. Conceptual posts accumulated a standard deviation of 127.749. Figure 8 also assists in answering the third research question and provides information regarding the post hoc test conducted to test for significant difference between the two variables. The one-way ANOVA test showcased that there was statistically significant difference between the comments on metacommunicative posts and narrative posts ($F_{(144, 118)} = [2.596]$, $p = <0.001$). In addition, statistically significant difference exists between the comments received on conceptual and narrative imagery ($F_{(131, 118)} = [2.208]$, $p = 0.006$). No significant difference was discovered among the comments on metacommunicative and conceptual posts ($p = 0.838$).

One-Way ANOVA: Types of Content vs. Comments			
Types of Content	**N**	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
Metacommunicative	144	97.98	150.193
Narrative	118	42.23	57.853
Conceptual	131	89.68	127.749
Total	393	78.47	123.359

Figure 7. One-Way ANOVA Test Results with Mean of Comments.

Significant Difference Between Types of Content (Comments)		
Type of Content		**Sig.**
Metacommunicative	Narrative	<.001
Metacommunicative	Conceptual	0.838
Narrative	Conceptual	0.006

Figure 8. Post Hoc Test showcasing Significant Difference for Comments.

In addition, the fourth research question compared the type of content shared among the five sportswear companies and the five running brands investigated for this research study. To analyze this question and further understand the type of content that the two categories post, a frequency test was completed on SPSS. The results showcase that sportswear companies post the most narrative imagery and the lowest count of conceptual pictures. Metacommunicative posts slightly trailed narrative posts, and there was a total of 75 metacommunicative images shared by sportswear companies. On the other hand, running brands posted the greatest number of conceptual content and shared narrative posts in a less frequent manner. There was a total of 76 conceptual posts, 69 metacommunicative images, and 41 narrative pictures.

Type of Brand	Conceptual	Metacommunicative	Narrative	Total
Sportswear Companies	55	75	77	207
Running Brands	76	69	41	186

Figure 9. Types of Content compared to the Types of Organization Categories.

To answer the fifth research inquiry, which questions if sportswear companies or running brands accumulate more likes on their Instagram posts, one-way ANOVA and post hoc tests

were conducted to compare the like count for each type of brand. The one-way ANOVA assessment determined the average number of likes received on the sportswear companies' Instagram accounts as well as the running brands' Instagram content (Figure 10). The average mean for sportwear companies is 8285.03, and the average like-count for running brands is 3855.68. In addition, the standard deviation for the analyzed sportwear companies is 12175.422 while the inspected running brands' standard deviation is 3969.992. To further determine the relationship between the type of brand and comments, a post hoc test was conducted and signifies if significant difference is apparent between the two entities (Figure 11). It was determined that significant difference exists between the number of likes received on sportswear companies' Instagram posts and the running brands' social media content. The one-way ANOVA test illustrated that there was statistically significant difference between the likes received on the sportswear companies' Instagram posts and the running brands' online images $(F_{(207, 186)} = [3.067], p = <0.001)$.

One-Way ANOVA: Types of Brand vs. Likes			
Type of Brand	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sportswear Companies	207	8285.03	12175.422
Running Brands	186	3855.68	3969.992
Total	393	6188.69	9499.659

Figure 10. One-Way ANOVA test comparing likes with types of brands.

Significant Difference Between Types of Brand (Likes)		
Type of Brand		Sig.
Sportswear Companies	Running Brands	<.001

Figure 11. Post Hoc Test to determine relationship between types of brands and likes.

The final research question compares the volume of comments received on Instagram posts shared my sportwear companies and running brands. Figure 12 delineates the average

number of comments received on posts from the two categories of brands. Sportwear companies accumulated over an average of 81.22 comments per post while the running brands aggregated 75.41 comments on the analyzed Instagram content. To supplement the mean of comments, the standard deviation was calculated for both sportwear companies and running brands. The standard deviation for sportwear companies totals to 114.713, and this same statistic for running brands is 132.566. Furthermore, in order to be considered significantly different, the post hoc test must be less than 0.05. Figure 13 illustrates that no significant difference exists between the number of comments received on the sportwear companies' images and running brands' content. The one-way ANOVA test showcased that there was no statistically significant difference between the comments received on the sportswear companies' posts and the running brands' Instagram images ($p = 0.642$).

One-Way ANOVA: Types of Brand vs. Comments			
Types of Brand	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sportswear	207	81.22	114.713
Running	186	75.41	132.566
Total	393	78.47	123.359

Figure 12. One-Way ANOVA test comparing comments with types of brands.

Significant Difference Between Types of Brand (Comments)		
Type of Brand		Sig.
Sportswear	Running	0.642

Figure 13. Post Hoc Test to determine relationship between types of brands and comments.

Discussion

The results of this study articulate a variety of distinct themes that the analyzed sports organizations can utilize to improve their online social media presence. These entities can apply these results to their current social media standing and effectively plan their content to reach a

greater audience. The results indicate the frequency of the content that each brand presently posts

and identifies the engagement rates, in terms of likes and comments, that the images receive.

Metacommunicative posts were shared the most frequently followed by conceptual and narrative

posts. In addition, metacommunicative and conceptual posts received a significantly different

number of comments than narrative posts, and there was no significant difference between the

average number of likes received throughout the three categories of posts. The ten-inspected

brands can make use of this data to alter their social media presence in the future.

Types of Content

In terms of the content posted throughout the analyzed Instagram pages, sportwear

organizations posted 55 conceptual images, 75 metacommunicative pictures, and 77 narrative

posts. On the other hand, the five running brands shared a total of 76 conceptual posts, 69

metacommunicative images, and 41 narrative photographs. The sportswear organizations posted

a substantially higher number of narrative posts than the running brands while the running brands

disseminated a considerably greater count of conceptual images. This ratio could exist because

the sportswear companies sell a wider variety of products, and posting a greater level of still

images could assist in promoting their clothing and shoe items. The running brands could have

posted more conceptual imagery to highlight the specific running shoes that they sell.

Throughout this study, it was discovered that a significant number of conceptual posts were

images of running shoes, and this could have impacted the number of conceptual images that

were shared by the running brands. In addition, when analyzing the ten organizations from an

individual view, there is some disparity that exists between the number of each type of content

posted on the companies' Instagram accounts. For instance, even though the sports organizations

posted the highest number of narrative images, Adidas Running only shared nine of those posts.

In this category, Under Armour Running posted 31 of the 77 total narrative posts (Figure 4).

Furthermore, out of the 69 shared metacommunicative images throughout the running brands'

Instagram accounts, Hoka only shared two examples of metacommunicative imagery (Figure 4).

Other outliers include Adidas Running and Under Armour Running sharing four and three

conceptual images respectively and Brooks Running distributing two narrative images (Figure

4). This showcases that each brand possesses their own social media strategy when disseminating

content. In addition, due to the constructed-week analysis method utilized to gather results, a

different number of posts were analyzed for each brand. These unique numbers could impact the

number of conceptual, metacommunicative, and narrative imagery that were shared throughout

each account. Overall, the identified sportswear organizations and running brands consistently

disseminated each category of content to their Instagram pages.

Rates of Engagement

In addition to classifying the dispersed content into conceptual, metacommunicative, and

narrative imagery, engagement rates were discovered for these three categories of content type.

One-Way ANOVA and post hoc tests were administered to test for significant difference

between the number of likes and comments between conceptual, metacommunicative, and

narrative pictures. No significant difference was found in terms of the likes received on each

category of content. However, significant difference was found for the number of comments

received between metacommunicative and narrative posts as well as narrative and conceptual

posts. The number of comments could be significantly different for metacommunicative posts

because these designs included videos and highly-edited imagery, and this could have prompted

more questions in the comments. The greater count of inquiries could lead to a larger discussion

in the comments section and hence allow for more comments to be received on the post. In

addition, conceptual images could have received more comments than narrative images because many conceptual pictures highlighted a product for sale, and this could result in a greater number of questions regarding the purchase of the product. This would additionally contribute to a more in-depth discussion in the comments section of conceptual posts.

Likes

The post hoc test showcased that no significant difference was discovered between the likes accumulated among the conceptual, metacommunicative, and narrative images analyzed for this research study. This indicates that a small disparity exists in the number of average likes received for the three content categories. Conceptual imagery received the greatest number of average likes at 7442, and metacommunicative and narrative pictures followed with 5712 and 5377 likes respectively (Figure 5). In addition, metacommunicative posts achieved the smallest standard deviation in terms of likes, and this asserts that these posts possessed the narrowest range of likes throughout all posts. On the contrary, narrative images accumulated the largest standard deviation, and this suggests that these posts received the greatest discrepancy in likes throughout each inspected image. This proposes that metacommunicative images receive a more consistent number of likes while narrative pictures could collect a wide variety of likes. This element will allow the inspected organizations to further understand the number of likes that are received on the different types of content they post.

Comments

In terms of comments received on the posts, significant difference was detected between metacommunicative and narrative posts as well as conceptual and narrative images (Figure 8). This exhibits that metacommunicative and conceptual posts received an extensively greater number of comments than narrative posts. This statement is supported by the data discovered in

Figure 7, and this table showcases that metacommunicative and conceptual posts received nearly

98 and 99 average likes respectively compared to the approximately 42 comments received on

each narrative post. The data asserts that conceptual and metacommunicative posts achieve a

higher engagement rate, in terms of comments, compared to narrative imagery.

Changes to the Brands' Social Media Pages

The five sportwear organizations and five running brands can utilize this data to enhance

their social media content dissemination. These statistics can assist in improving the engagement

rates of these accounts to ensure that the organizations and brands are reaching the largest

audience possible.

The sportswear companies, including Adidas Running, New Balance Running, Nike

Running, Puma Running, and Under Armour Running, maintained a greater number of average

likes that the researched running brands. The sportswear organizations averaged about 8285 likes

per post, and significant difference was discovered between the likes accumulated on the

sportswear organizations' Instagram accounts and the running brands' online presence. To

increase the number of likes for sportswear organizations, these entities could structure their

content to post more conceptual images. This specific type of content achieved the greatest mean

for number of likes, and this could assist these organizations in reaching a greater audience. In

addition, in terms of increasing the number of comments per post, sportswear companies can

post more metacommunicative and conceptual images because significant difference was found

between these two types of content and narrative imagery. These alterations will optimistically

benefit the social media presence of these organizations.

The researched running brands, including Altra Running, Brooks Running, Hoka, On

Running, and Saucony, possessed a lower average number of likes on their posts compared to the

sportswear companies' shared images. Significant difference was found for the likes received

between the two categories, and running brands acquired an average of about 3855 likes on their

Instagram content. To heighten the number of likes received on their Instagram posts, these

running brands can post a greater number of conceptual images as this category received the

greatest number of likes per post. In addition, the running brands received slightly less comments

than the sportswear organizations, and Altra Running, Brooks Running, Hoka, On Running, and

Saucony can disseminate more metacommunicative and conceptual images to increase the

number of comments on their Instagram content. Posting a greater number of these types of

content can hopefully increase the engagement rates throughout the running brands' social media

presence.

Limitations and Future Research

As this research study was conducted, some limitations can be identified that potentially

impacted the results of this inquiry as well as some areas of future research to continue to

explore this field. For example, the number of followers for each account were not considered

for this research, and this factor could have impacted the number of likes and comments received

on each post. In addition, ten accounts and 393 posts were analyzed, and this number could

expand to achieve a greater sample. Another limitation of the project centers on the number of

responses to comments in each post. For this research, the responses from the owners of the

social media accounts to the commenters were considered as comments. This was included in

this calculation because responses are considered engagement, but this could have escalated the

number of total comments on each account. These limitations could impact the results and

therefore alter the statistical tests utilized to compare engagement rates with the different types of

content.

If this project were to be extended in the future, a ratio can be made between the number

of likes and comments with the total number of followers for each account. This will provide a

more accurate representation of the number of followers that are actively engaging with the

Instagram content. In addition, the actual content of each image could be analyzed. For instance,

the individuals within each photo could be classified as a collegiate athlete, professional runner,

brand ambassador, and more. This analysis could allow for further insight into the variety of

content that is posted on the ten-analyzed accounts. Furthermore, the number of photographs

compared to the number of videos posted to each account can be inspected. In terms of

engagement for the videos, the view count could also be considered to obtain a more in-depth

understanding of the engagement received on each unique piece of content. To further

comprehend the opinions of Instagram users, a survey could be administered and request

feedback for posts. This will allow the social media accounts' owners to discern the viewpoints

of their consumers. Another potential area of study could include extending the project to a

worldwide level. For example, @nikelondon, @niketokyo, and @niketoronto could be compared

and analyzed for specific distinctions and similarities in content. These different avenues could

provide further context into the realm of social media engagement.

Conclusion

Actively planning consistent social media content is an imperative undertaking for any

organization. This research analyzed five sportswear organizations' running Instagram accounts

and five running-specific brands to comprehend the social media strategies of these two entities.

The type of content and the engagement rates, in terms of likes and comments, were categorized

and calculated for 393 total posts across the ten Instagram accounts. The coding methods from

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and Romney and Johnson (2018) were utilized to classify each

post as conceptual, metacommunicative, or narrative. Sportwear companies posted the most

narrative imagery and the least number of conceptual posts while the running brands

disseminated the most conceptual pictures and the lowest count of narrative images.

Furthermore, statistical tests, including one-way ANOVA and post hoc assessments, were

conducted to determine if a relationship exists between the type of content posted and the

engagement received on each post. It was discovered that significant difference existed between

the number of comments received on metacommunicative posts and narrative photographs as

well as conceptual images and narrative content metacommunicative and conceptual posts. This

illustrates that metacommunicative and conceptual imagery yielded greater engagement rates in

terms of comments. In addition, no significant difference was discovered between the number of

likes received throughout each content type. However, conceptual posts achieved the highest

average like count on each post. This sentiment asserts the importance of posting more

conceptual imagery to receive more engagement throughout the accounts' online presence. The

conducted research will hopefully benefit the sportswear companies and running brands in

proactively planning their social media content to extend their audience reach to the greatest

extent.

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