

A Level Playing Field?

How a Governing Body Promotes Its Men's and Women's National Teams through Social Media

Steph Doehler,
The Open University (UK)

 @StephDoehler_OU



Introduction

- Focused on the European Championships 2020 (men's) and European Championships 2022 (women's)
- Media coverage of women's football has been consistently poor (Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2017), particularly when compared to the men's game (O'Neill and Mulready, 2015; Petty and Pope, 2019).
- The FA's 2020-24 vision is to “unite the game, inspire the nation”, by delivering “football for all” (The Football Association, 2021, p.12).



England captain, Leah Williamson
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England men's team
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Literature considerations

- Lack of coverage into women's sport (LaVoi and Calhoun, 2014; Magrath, 2020; Smallwood, Brown and Billings, 2014)
- Coverage depicts women differently to men (Biscomb and Matheson, 2017; Cooky, Messner and Musto, 2015; Toffoletti, 2016)
- In football = patronising coverage (Crouse, 2013) - women's football is inferior to men's (Pfister, 2015)
- Social media is a possible equaliser for women's sport (Geurin-Eagleman and Burch, 2016; Lebel and Danylchuk, 2012; Smith and Sanderson, 2015).

Research questions

RQ1: to what extent did the FA promote the women's national team during the 2022 European Championship through their @Lionesses Twitter account?

RQ2: to what extent did the FA promote the women's national team during the 2022 European Championship through their @England Twitter account?

RQ3: how do the findings of RQ1 and RQ2 compare to the FA's promotion of the men's national team during the 2020 European Championship through their @England Twitter account?

Methodology

Quantitative content analysis of Twitter accounts:
@England and @Lionesses

Codebook created with working definitions for each variable

All tweets gathered throughout duration of each tournament

Coding recorded: source, format of tweet, type of coverage, image/video type

Findings and discussion

Tweets during women's tournament

- @Lionesses – 1,472 across 40 days
- @England total – 301 tweets
- @England focused on Lionesses – 210 tweets (69.8%)
- Majority related to squad information/engagement and information on specific matches
- 71% of @Lionesses tweets included multimedia
- 92% of @England tweets focused on women's team included multimedia
- Internal media prominent throughout

Tweets during men's tournament:

- @England – 1,452 times across 44 days
- Majority related to squad information/engagement and information on specific matches
- 84% of tweets included multimedia – sporting context, match information

Findings and discussion

- The FA promoted the women's squad more frequently than the men's team during their competitions - tentatively suggesting a cultural change for women's football
- Photos and videos were commonplace during both tournaments
- Images of the men's team in sporting context were more commonly shared
- 'Context of sport' videos were more prominent throughout the men's tournament
- More advertising/sponsorship tweets during men's tournament
- Less quotes/statements during women's tournament
- Women players were not sexualised but pictures displaying emotion more prevalent

Conclusion

- Positive shift and some reason for optimism, but we must tread lightly
- Implications for the FA's social media strategy moving forward
- The Lionesses were promoted as equals in terms of quantitative coverage via their dedicated account
- Governing bodies' usage of social media is explored and would benefit from further investigation

Interested in more?

Published in *International Review for
the Sociology of Sport*

steph.doehler@open.ac.uk

 [@StephDoehler_OU](https://twitter.com/StephDoehler_OU)



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