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Prospectus  

1) Introduction  

I started playing golf at 3 and a half years old, not intentionally and definitely not thinking much of it at the time. My parents and I lived next to a golf course, but they didn’t play golf and they didn’t force me to play golf either. One day, a local coach saw me swinging my little plastic club and asked my parents if he could train me because I had a lot of potential. About 19 years later and a long golfing career with ups and downs, I find myself at Southwestern University in Georgetown, TX., playing for the women’s golf team as a senior. Fate allowed me to be on that golf course that day at the right time to meet my first coach, Francisco Franco, brother to a senior PGA player from Paraguay, Carlos Franco. I am eternally grateful for that.  

Growing up, I had the women on the LPGA (Ladies Professional Golfers Association) to look up to as role models and one of those ladies was also our good family friend Julieta Granada. Back at the time when I started playing golf, social media wasn’t a thing yet, and it was hard to keep up with the LPGA as their tournaments weren’t broadcasted very frequently. Throughout my years, I have grown up watching the LPGA grow not only as an institution and brand, but into a symbol of empowerment for young female golfers like myself. My project on the analysis of the self-branding and marketing of the LPGA’s Instagram is very relevant because of the effort of the LPGA to become as well known as the PGA and it is time for them to get the well-deserved attention, they have been fighting for all these years.
My project is crucial to the scholarly world because there is no real talk about the LPGA or women’s golf in a positive light. There is much work done on other sports where women compete at such as tennis and soccer, but not enough in golf, as women in golf is considered untraditional still after so many years. There is also a lot of scholarly work on sexism and discrimination towards women’s sports, and not a lot, on ways that we can help diminish these issues and fight back against them. I hope that my passion about this topic starts a much-needed conversation on where LPGA stands in our American society, what it represents to people across the globe and how they will continue to impact the future of women’s golf.

Some questions I will attempt to answer in my capstone are: 1) How has the LPGA used “othering” to empower the messages behind their Instagram posts? 2) What brand is the LPGA creating? How is it being interpellated by the audience? 3) Do the “American Identity” and “Western Hegemonic Ideals” appear across their Instagram page? If yes, how so? 4) How is the LPGA making its brand stand out amongst the other female and male professional associations? What are they doing differently? 5) Will the LPGA be able to be considered a traditional sport in our Western society in the future? 6) Has social media been able to help them reach out to more fans across the globe and carry across their message of empowerment?

2) Literature Review

Media sport and transnational commodity (3)

In Transnational Sport: Gender, Media and Global Korea by Rachael Miyung Joo, reviewed by Jin-Kyung Park, Joo coins the term “media sport” as “competitive sports that are structured by commercial mass media and manufactured for mass consumption.” (481). She then goes on to call “media sport” a “transnational metacommodity” as “media sport exercises
power to create spectatorship and thus sponsorship on a massive scale in the era of the new media (ex. Internet) and instant social mobilization of voluminous crowds that it mediates” (p.481). These two terms will be key in my research as the LPGA brand is being modified through the use of social media. The LPGA’s Instagram page has a variation of videos, pictures, tournament promotions, and so on, that both satisfy the sponsors and attract the audience’s attention into interacting with their social media.

The article *The Internet and the future of Sport History*, Holly Thorpe supports her arguments with fellow scholars’ previous observations. Her article’s main argument is talking about how our modern society is heavily impacted by the Internet and the way sports are being shared with the audience help the audience feel more involved in the action (player stats, live tweeting, chat rooms, etc.) J. Patrick Williams and Heith Copes state “expressing subcultural identities online is part of the identity work individuals perform in their everyday lives, yet identity online is not separate from the face-to-face world…rather it complements and supplements it” (130). A struggle most athletes are having online is knowing where to draw the line on how much sports related posts to make and how much of their personal lives they need to share. This will be helpful in analyzing the LPGA’s Instagram page because according to Tina Barnes-Budd, senior director of social media marketing and communication at the LPGA, they are working on “humanizing the brand” to make the audience feel closer to the players and like they are learning about them as athletes, but also as people.

*Defining a Theory of Genre* by Adena Rosmarin is a book chapter that explains the theory of genre. In a summarized version, genre has repetition and resemblance which at times reminds us of something else but has new details that make it unique. This theory aids me in noticing the trends arising in the LPGA’s Instagram that are similar to what other professional
women’s sports are doing as well, as well as point out the differences that are making the LPGA attract people’s attention. In my analysis and conclusion of my paper, I will hypothesize if what they are doing with social media will be enough to memorable amongst our society and will aid them in becoming a more stable entity.

Western hegemonic ideals and American Identity

In Jaime Schultz’s book *Qualifying Times: Points of Change in U.S Women’s Sport*, chapter 5 is titled *From “Women in Sports” to the “New Ideal of Beauty.* In this chapter, she discusses the “beauty myth” (term coined by Naomi Wolf) which are the beauty trends that women should be aspiring two. Back in 1982, female athletes were starting to appear more on magazine covers, which was a step forward in the feminist movement, however other magazines then started posting models on their covers because now “being fit was heterosex.” According to Schultz, “by converting a women’s quest for physical equality into a quest for physical perfection, public culture of the early and mid-1980s effectively diffused the forward momentum of women in sport” (126). In our society now, female athletes are still being judged by their appearance instead of their skill sets because fit is still heterosexy and if you don’t satisfy the “fit, lean athletic” look then you aren’t good enough. The LPGA has players challenging the supposedly “fit” appearance athletes should have and also have a different fashion taste in what is considered “feminine-looking.” The LPGA shows players from different races, countries, sizes, etc., on their Instagram to fight against this “beauty myth” and promote that being unique and different is a good thing. Tina Barnes-Budd mentions how each player on the tour contribute to making the tour a better entity and how the LPGA wants to help each of these players be successful.
Sena Christian challenges in her article *The radical potential of women in sports* the patriarchal society we live in. “Every time a young woman participates in sports or displays her athleticism, she breaks down naturalized gender categories and expectations. The image of women who are not passive, weak, emotional, non-competitive and dependent on men shakes up society’s perceptions and assumptions about men and women. Bodies are signified with meaning, and female bodies that are athletic, strong and muscular disrupt gender binaries and provide a foundation for deconstructing oppressions grounded in biological difference “(27). Though a lengthy quote, this quote shows that female athletes are caught in the definition of what it means to be “athletic” in the patriarchal society we live in. If they look different from what a stereotypical woman should look like according to men, then she is not feminine enough, but if she is too muscular, she is too masculine and threatens the patriarchy. The LPGA celebrates all their players, doesn’t hold them to any standards of what they should look like, since the most important thing should be how they perform. The LPGA’s Instagram is constantly redefining the look of a female golfer and drawing attention to the fact that there is more to these players to simply being a pretty face or even an athlete.

*Textual Portrayals of Female Athletes: Liberation or Nuanced Forms of Patriarchy?* by Victoria Carty analyzes the way that men view women and if the way female athletes are actually fighting against patriarchy or encouraging the patriarchal standards for femininity and stereotypes of beauty. This article will be helpful because it will help me acknowledge how patriarchal norms keep appearing everywhere and keep an eye out to see if those norms appear on the LPGA’s posts on Instagram.

Brad Austin writes a chapter in his book titled “*The Instinctive Urge to Compete*: Challenges to the Anticompetitive Model in Women’s Sports” where he talks about the history of
the patriarchal narrative on how women were perceived to not being able to compete because of their bodies and how women have continued to challenge this false narrative. This will be relevant in my capstone because the LPGA keeps highlighting their players’ abilities and are constantly challenging this false narrative surrounding female athletes.

Padma Prakash writes an article on how female athletes are trying to get control of their bodies’ image in our patriarchal society and how they keep pushing the boundaries. This is very closely knit to the article above and I plan to use this one to give me some history of women in sports struggling to fight of the Western ideals of what athletes’ bodies are supposed to look like.

Othering (5)

Cheering on Women and Girls in Sports: Using Title IX to fight gender role oppression by Harvard Law Review, Title IX and the allocation of resources to women’s and men’s sports by Amy Farmer and Paul Pecorino, and Review: PRESSURE IS A PRIVILEGE: BILLIE JEAN KING, TITLE IX, AND GENDER EQUITY by Susan Ware, reviewed by Amanda L. Paule-Koba, are articles discussing the way Title IX has helped and not helped female athletes.

Harvard Law’s article mentions how social backlash continues to happen to women in sports for invading the domain of the “strong sex in the following manners:“ 1) Women’s sports continue to be minimized and trivialized by unequal media coverage and community support; 2) women are increasingly sexualized; 3) female athletes increasingly portrayed as gaining sport opportunities only at the expense of funding for male athletes” (1629-1630). Harvard Law, just like the LPGA, say how playing a sport can help boost a woman’s and girl’s confidence in their abilities, in their looks and the way they carry themselves in society. The LPGA is fighting to
become a stable entity and have accessible social media outlets to all the way across the globe so young girls know that they can set their minds to whatever they want to, including becoming a professional golfer no matter your background.

Amy Farmer and Paul Pecorino created a model to understand what is truly going on post Title IX at institutions and according to their research, “the model predicts that the total number of resources devoted to sports is unchanged and the increase in resources devoted to women’s sports is matched by a one-for-one decrease in the resources devoted to men’s sports” (142). In simpler terms, institutions need to cutback in men’s sports in order for women to have more sports, but institutions don’t want to do this because men generate revenue and women don’t. This is relevant in project because this will help me analyze and predict the LPGA’s success, as well as comparing it to the PGA, since it is said that the LPGA is living in the shadow of the PGA.

In the reviewed article of Susan Ware’s book, Amanda L. Paule-Koba talks about the way Billie King and second wave of feminism forever changed the world of women’s tennis and how soon after her famous match, in 1972, Title IX was passed. In predicting the future of the LPGA, Billie King’s story will be helpful in seeing if women’s golf needs a big moment in history such as hers to truly challenge the patriarchal society and give the PGA a run for their money.

In Katie Liston’s *Power at Play: Sport, Gender and Commercialisation*, she discusses the potential reasons why women in sports aren’t as appealing to the audience as men in sports. Creedon and Becker (1986) argue that three theoretical constructs can account for stated audience preferences for viewing male sports: people don’t like the unknown, female sports are perceived as inferior, and some sports are viewed as inappropriate for women” (257). This article
will help me construct the counternarrative to the feminist movement in sports and highlight all the ways the LPGA is challenging these three constructs through their social media.

Similarly, in Cheryl Cook’s book “It’s Dude Time!: A Quarter Century of Excluding Women’s Sports in Televised News and Highlight Shows”, the author mentions the reasons why men’s sports are prevailing women’s sports in popularity even post Title IX (uneven change in sports broadcasting, actively building audiences for men, keeping silent on women’s sports, etc.) I will be using this article and complement it with Liston’s article to build my counternarrative.

**Social modeling, imagery, and social environment**

*Interview with Tina Barnes-Budd, Senior Director of Social Media Marketing and Communication, Ladies’ Professional Golf Association* by Wonyu Bae will be one of the most crucial articles in my paper. In this interview, Bae talks to Tina Barnes-Budd, getting insight into the way the LPGA is handling its social media, the way they determine what to post on what day and at what time, how do present sponsors without being overpowering, etc. This article will be used tremendously, and I will be noticing if all things that she is mentioning in her interview are creating the effect that she is hoping for (making the brand approachable to fans) through the posts on Instagram.

W. Douglas Evans’ article on *Social Marketing Campaigns and children’s media use* covers the basics of social marketing on social media and how they use “social modeling, imagery and social environment” to influence to the younger audience. Social modeling affects “the formation of knowledge, attitudes and beliefs” (185); imagery helps “exemplify socially desirable behavior and the attributes of those who engage in a behavior” (185), and social environment is just used to describe the associations kids make between the brand and their immediate social environment
These terms will be helpful in deciphering what image and message the LPGA is putting across to its intended youthful audience.

Relating to this article, Julien Cayla and Eric J. Arnould talk about the Western “imaginary” of marketing, also coined as “social imaginary” by Taylor in 2004. This article will help me notice if the trends across the posts are closely tied with the Western ideals and American identity.

Barrie Gunter’s chapter of *Branding potential of online social media* discusses all the positive attributes to social media and online-branding, as well as pointing out things customers can get frustrated with like overzealous advertising. I will be using this chapter to pinpoint the things the LPGA is doing on its Instagram page in terms of marketing, whether positive or negative, and see if these will affect their brand.

Lastly, Derek Shearer wrote his article *To Play Ball, Not make War: Sports, Diplomacy and Soft power* about how women need to start being acknowledged for their abilities and that men need to give them the space that they deserve in society, not feel threatened by them. This article will tie in closely with my research on “othering” by will hopefully give me some context on why men feel threatened by female athletes, especially in this case female golfers, and how the LPGA is fighting for their players’ rights.

3) Methodology

My methodology for this process has two parts: the social media analysis and the research that I hope backs up my hypothesis on that the LPGA will become considered a traditional sport for women someday.
For the social media analysis, I will primarily focus on the LPGA’s Instagram page. I will be looking at all of their posts since the very beginning of when they started posting in 2012. I want to focus on the way the posts’ filters, content and captions have evolved over time. Since Instagram has changed from only being an app that posts pictures and allows people to comment on them to a more interactive social media outlet (posting videos, stories for 24 hours, highlights, Instagram TV, etc.), I am also intrigued by how much the fans interact nowadays with the account. Thus, I will be looking at the number of likes on posts beginning in 2019 as well as the numbers of comments and if it is a video, how many times was it viewed by the audience. I think focusing more on the posts starting in 2019 will allow me to see how the LPGA’s account is doing in the very beginning of this year, notice if they are carrying out trends from 2018, and also gives me enough posts to analyze and not on overwhelmingly large amount to draw some conclusions for myself. Lastly, I will also be checking out the Facebook and Twitter pages to see if the same trends appear throughout all their social media outlets.

My methodology for my research is based on my main themes: media sport and transnational commodity, Western hegemonic ideals and American Identity, othering, theory of genre, and the three key components of social marketing (social modeling, imagery and social environment). As shown, I have found a lot on women’s history in sports in general, but nothing too specific on golf. I see a lot of scholars mentioning the history of the issues prior to getting into the analysis of the paper, which is what I intend on doing, as well as having an anchor in my introduction to tell my audience what is unique about my project. My project will be different from other scholars work and add into scholarly conversation since it will be solely focusing on golf, while drawing in supporting arguments from the themes mentioned above.
Works Cited


