

Study says Lance Armstrong failed social media, too

October 7 2013

Lance Armstrong used Twitter to employ image-repair strategies in a way that cultivated followers and countered media reports. However, he neglected to enact any image-repair tweets following his admission to using performance-enhancing drugs in a nationally staged interview with Oprah Winfrey, researchers say.

Clemson University communication studies assistant professor Jimmy Sanderson said [traditional media](#) like television and newspapers have been a staple of image repair, but with the rise of social media, athletes now have an additional avenue for it.

They should be prepared with strategies that help them navigate traditional and social media platforms to present consistent messages in multiple settings and contexts, according to the research.

Sanderson and co-authors Marion E. Hambrick and Evan L. Frederick explored how Armstrong utilized image-repair strategies during 2012 and early 2013. This time frame represented a turbulent period in Armstrong's career as he faced a doping investigation by the U.S. government and later admitted to using performance-enhancing drugs in the Winfrey interview.

"Given Armstrong's global recognition, exploring how he managed image repair via traditional media and digital media is an important direction to undertake," said Sanderson. "Understanding how these efforts intersect and diverge yield important insights for image repair,

particularly for athletes."

The researchers analyzed Armstrong's 859 tweets from 2012 to early 2013 and his comments during the Winfrey interview. Their findings were published in journal *Communication & Sport*.

Results indicated that Armstrong utilized the following strategies on Twitter: attacking the accuser, bolstering and stonewalling. However, during the interview with Winfrey, he demonstrated contrition by employing mortification, shifting blame, simple denial, provocation and victimization, along with two newly identified strategies: conforming and retrospective regret.

The results suggest that athletes who display multifaceted image-repair strategies can embolden identification and attachment with followers and introduce competing media narratives surrounding their identities.

"With respect to athletes, when image repair becomes necessary, digital and social media also afford them the capability to introduce alternative narratives and redirect audiences," said Hambrick, of the University of Louisville. "Athletes now have the opportunity to promote their charitable endeavors and diligence during workouts and practices, which may shift the public's attention away from the situation that prompted image repair."

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"Given the immense public outpouring and the ability to navigate between identity positions using Twitter, Armstrong could have maintained both an assertive and remorseful position that likely would

have removed doubt and skepticism among his fans and the public at large," said Frederick, of the University of New Mexico. "Instead, Armstrong minimized the effectiveness of future messages delivered via Twitter, as skeptical followers may view his tweets as little more than propaganda rather than insightful information and commentary."

The researchers note that athletes should be aware that while they have greater control over their messages via [social media](#) platforms, they might at some point have to relinquish the reins as they face difficult conversations in other media.

More information: [com.sagepub.com/content/early/ ...
79513506982.abstract](http://com.sagepub.com/content/early/.../79513506982.abstract)

Provided by Clemson University

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