Examining the Difference in Engagement between Men's and Women's Instagram Accounts of the Same Sport

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Abstract

Abstract: This research project examines and seeks to explain the differences in social media engagement, that is the likes, comments, shares, and follows on each post, between the Instagram accounts of the men's and women's division one hockey club teams at Liberty University. Despite the differences in success of each team, it is easy to notice a major difference in the amount of engagement of the two. Even though the women's hockey team continues to win multiple national championships and is breaking multiple women's club hockey records, their social media engagement, interaction, and follower growth pales in comparison to that of the men's team, which does not experience the same success on the ice yet largely outperforms the women's team in terms of their Instagram account reach. In an effort to examine and explain these differences in engagement, this research project utilizes user data from the men's and women's division one hockey team accounts from their respective Instagram user Insights data, which displays the reach, engagement, and total follower growth of each Instagram account over a period of the last ninety days. This research hopes to offer a possible solution to the large contrast between the men's and women's Instagram accounts in order to help the women's team gain the recognition they deserve from their accomplishments.

Introduction and Research Question

Introduction: Despite the record-breaking success of the Liberty University Women's Division 1 Club Hockey Team, the reach, engagement, and follower count of their official team Instagram account does not see the same growth and engagement as the Men's Division 1 Hockey Team Instagram account. Engagement in this context is described as the amount of likes, comments, follows, and shares of each post on each Instagram account, respectively. It is important to solve and explain this issue in order to alleviate the discrepancy in visibility and exposure on social media between the men's and women's teams. The main problem this research project attempts to solve is how the issue of low engagement numbers of the Liberty University Women's Division 1 Club Hockey Team can be improved to match or grow relative to the Men's Division 1 Club Hockey Team account.

Research Question: How can the problem of low engagement on the Liberty University Division 1 Women's Hockey team Instagram account be solved?

Methods

Methods: We worked closely with the Liberty Club sports administrative personnel to receive data from both the men's and women's hockey team Instagram accounts, specifically via their Instagram "Insights" information to conduct a quantitative analysis. We used the Instagram Insights data from the previous 90 days in order to research the follower count, account reach, account engagement, and impressions of each account along with the age and gender demographics of the individual accounts that make up the overall data. We lastly used Excel to make visualizations of the data to more easily compare and contrast the data from the men's and women's Instagram accounts.

Study Limitations

Limitations: Given that the data provided from the Instagram "Insights" feature only provides data reaching back to the previous 90 days for account engagement demographics, the data we were able to interpret and provide visualizations for was limited. Although the data we received offered some insights into possible solutions to the research question, this type of data also made creating data illustrations other than simple bar charts for follower, engagement, reach, and profile visits and pie charts for demographic numbers difficult and impractical.

Figure 1. Follower, engagement, profile visits, and account reach counts bar charts for either team

Figure 2. Men's and women's account impression count bar chart

Figure 3. Follower age and gender demographic pie charts for the men's team

Figure 4. Follower age and gender demographic pie charts for women's team

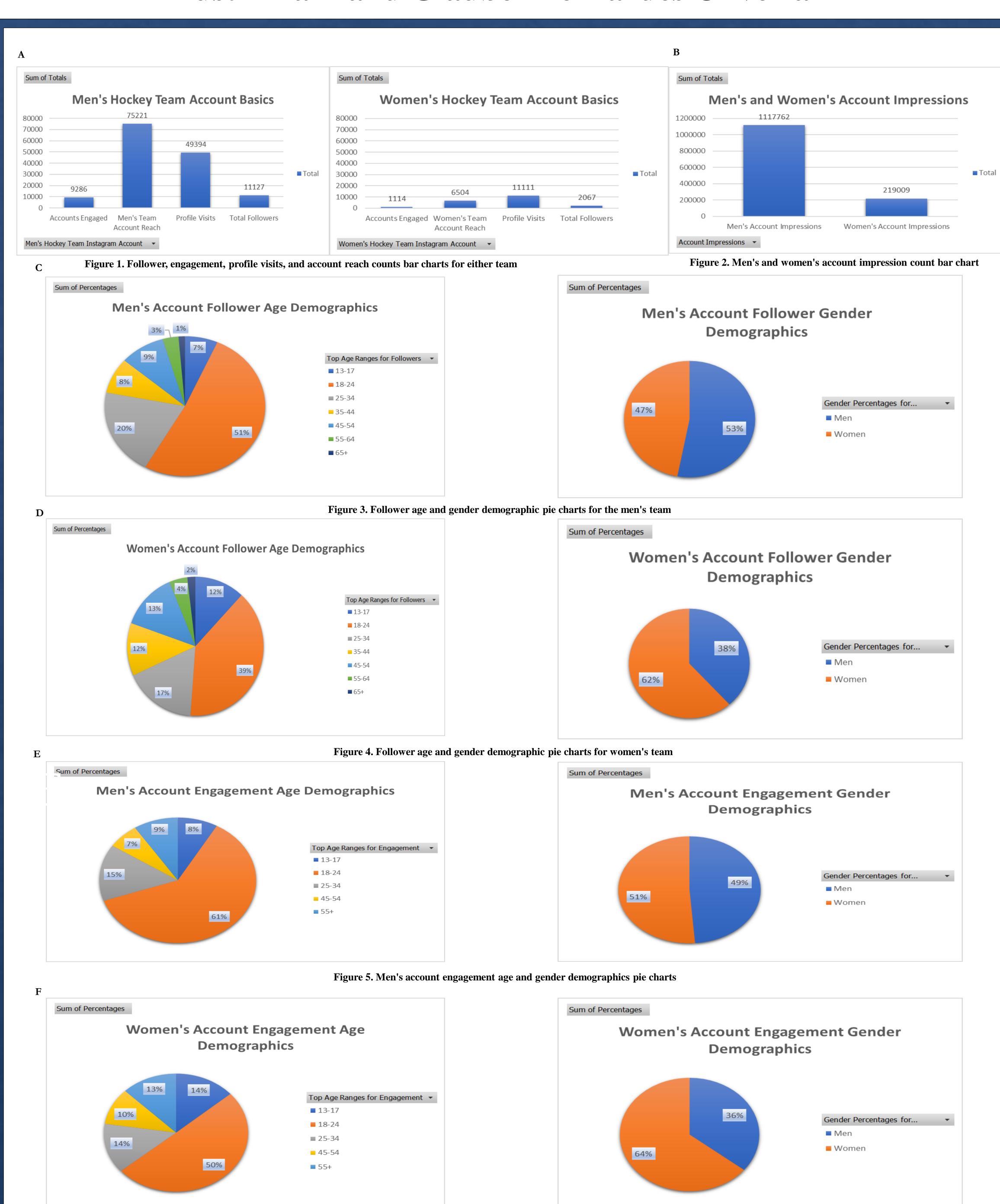Figure 5. Men's account engagement age and gender demographics pie charts

Figure 6. Women's account engagement and gender demographics pie charts

Results and Conclusion

Results: The differences in the data between the men's and women's Instagram accounts is staggering. Figure 1 demonstrates the sheer difference in followers, engagement, and profile visits between the two accounts. The most staggering difference is the men's account receiving over five times the amount of impressions as the women's team (Fig. 2). One interesting difference to note is that unlike the men's team, the women's team account generates more profile visits despite reaching fewer accounts. The men's follower demographics see a majority of college age (18-24) men that follow the account (Fig. 3). The women's account followers are also in the 18-24 age group, but are mostly women (Fig. 4). For engagement, the men's team receives a large majority of interactions from the 18-24 age group, and a near even split between males and females (Fig. 5). The 18-24 age group represents half of the women's team engagement, but females are much more represented than males in their engagement with the account (Fig. 6).

Conclusion: In conclusion, there are major differences in the profile reach, follower count, engagement count, profile visits, and impressions between the Liberty University men's and women's division one club hockey team Instagram accounts. The largest issue to solve would be the difference in account impressions, or the amount of times the content is seen by individual accounts. Increasing their engagement relative to the men's team would give the women's team more visibility and interaction, thus hopefully increasing Instagram engagement, interaction, team visibility, and game attendance. To increase engagement, the women's team may find posts with emotional appeals useful as they are more relatable to audiences and create discourse and conversation (Dolan et al. 2019). The type of content the women's Instagram account posts could also be used to increase their engagement. According to a recent study, content with high "vividness", meaning videos or links, draw the most social media engagement (Annamalai et al. 2021). The main goal of this new content should be posts that elicit emotional or behavioral responses such as encouraging users to engage in conversation and share the content with others (Cao et al. 2021). A possible solution to this would be "incentive" posts. These would include team merchandise giveaways that require entrants to follow the account as well as liking, sharing, and tagging another Instagram user in the comments section. As seen on content of the men's account, this generates exponentially more post and account engagement, along with encouraging potential fans to attend the games.

Future Work

1. Compare the data from these Instagram accounts with other Division 1 club sports programs.
2. Conducting research on specific posts that may draw more account engagement.
3. Set goals for Instagram account growth for the women's team relative to their male counterpart.
4. Investigate the effects of hiring full time employees to manage the women's social media account.
5. Investigate lower division Liberty University club sports teams to see if they experience similar issues with Instagram account engagement.

References

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