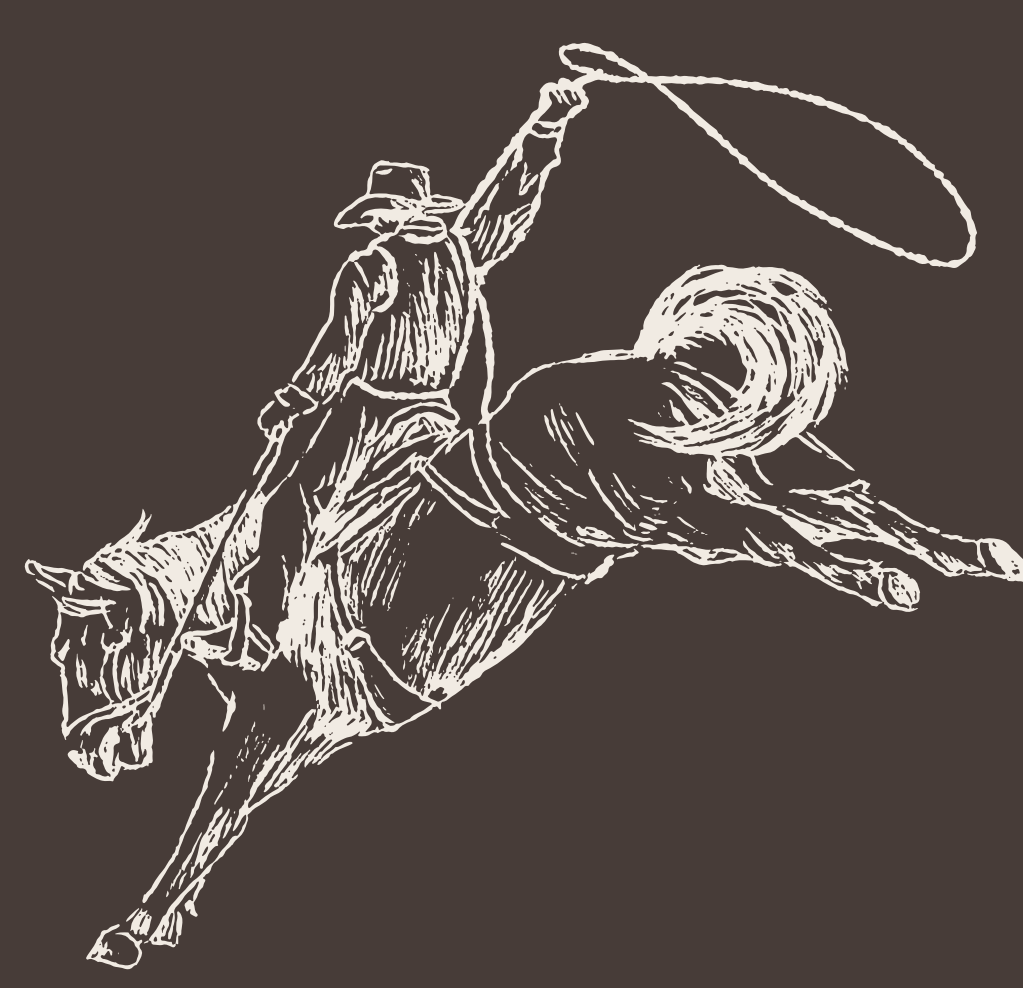


RIDING HIGH: SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES OF COLLEGE RODEO TEAMS

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INTRODUCTION

Rodeo is considered a non-traditional sport, deeply rooted in cultural meaning and Western heritage, reflecting sport, lifestyle, and work (Pearson & Haney, 1999; Rhea & Martin, 2010; Myers & Laurent, 2012; Thatcher, 2022). Collegiate rodeo has been central to sustaining this legacy and cultural importance (Mahoney, 2004). Despite this, research on rodeo in sports media is limited, particularly regarding athlete portrayals. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate how college rodeo teams utilize Instagram to convey their story as both a sport and a cultural phenomenon.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on media framing theory from a sociological perspective (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, 1989; Gitlin, 1980). Framing emphasizes certain aspects of messages to create meaning, often through symbols, visuals, or narratives. These frames shape how audiences perceive and interpret media portrayals.

METHODOLOGY



Content analysis of Instagram posts (N = 238) from top 10 NIRA women's teams with active accounts (Oct. 1, 2022–May 31, 2023)



20% sample (n = 48) coded by 2 researchers, finding acceptable intercoder reliability (Gwet's AC).



Coded for emphasis or absence of **product-related** (team success, star athletes) and **non-product-related** (branding, culture, sponsors, events) frames

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

BRANDING (74%)



CULTURE (35%)



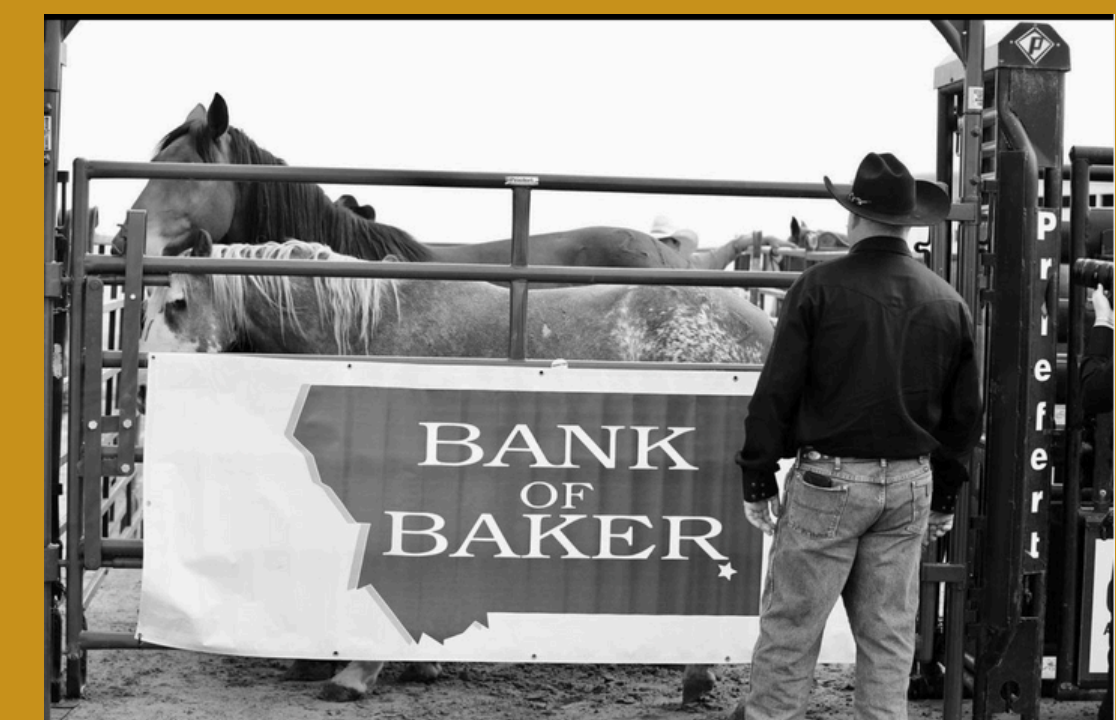
TEAM SUCCESS (23%)



STAR ATHLETES (23%)



SPONSORS (23%)



EVENTS (16%)



CONCLUSIONS

Collegiate rodeo teams primarily frame their Instagram coverage through branding and culture, aligning with patterns found in traditional sports while also reflecting broader Western media narratives (Patton, 2012). This framing mirrors professional rodeo by emphasizing branding, culture, team success, star athletes, sponsors, and events. Culture, in particular, distinguishes rodeo as a niche sport, reinforcing its unique identity within Western tradition.

IMPLICATIONS



Collegiate rodeo teams frame social media to emphasize both Western culture and program identity.



Unique structures (e.g., Cal Poly's team within the College of Agriculture) may shape branding differently from traditional athletics.



Insights can guide rodeo teams and related communities in strengthening social media strategies.



Findings highlight rodeo's cultural value within collegiate, professional, and agricultural contexts.

REFERENCES

