



# Golf & Social Media: Diversity

Insights, Analysis & Solutions



Social listening data provided by Ipsos



# Introduction

Golf continues to experience unprecedented demand, but it is yet to persuade the public it is a game for all.

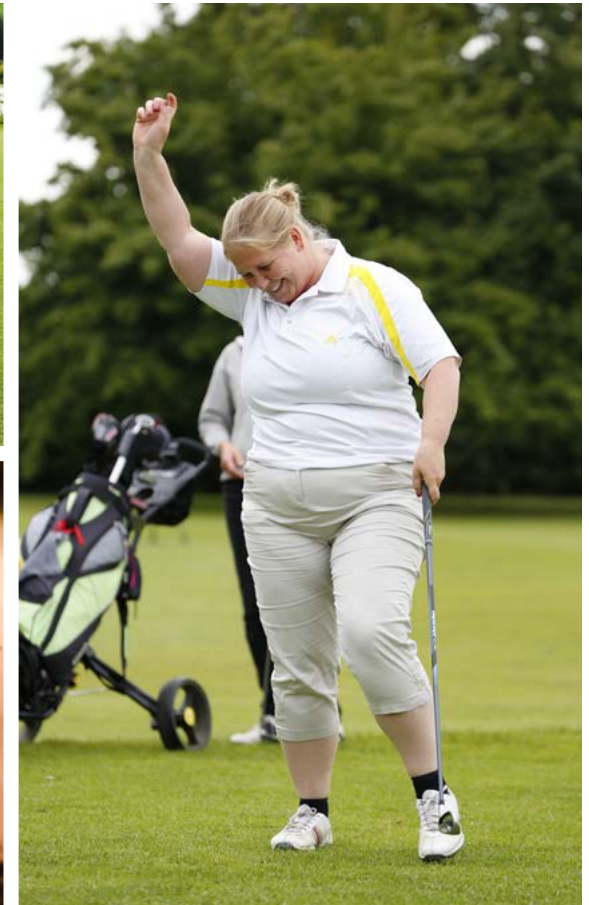
That's one of the key findings of Syngenta and Ipsos' landmark study '**Golf & Social Media: The Great Divide**,' which explored 16.1 million social media posts, shares, comments, articles and blogs over three years\* to analyze what people were saying about golf online.

This summary report hones in on what is being said about golf and diversity online, focusing on four key topics and highlighting case studies and solutions golf businesses can implement to enhance diversity.

- **Ethnicity**
- **Sexuality**
- **Religion**
- **Disability**

*(For Gender Diversity please see the separate, dedicated report).*

*\*United States & UK, July 2019 – August 2022*





# Expert Analysis

"The fact is that golf is still highly associated with wealthy white men. Although we saw little discrimination online, the lack of representation in the game doesn't make minorities feel welcome.

"Remarkably, 2% of all mentions in our sample related to Donald Trump and Republicans playing golf. This association does not help dispel the notion that it is a sport for older white males, disconnected with the rest of society.

"Golf recognizes that it has an image problem, but its efforts to change are clearly not getting to the right audience. There is a disconnect.

"It's a vicious circle: people from minorities do not feel welcome so don't play. Outsiders look in and see few minorities playing, and so it continues."

**Claire Martin**

**Ipsos Social Intelligence Researcher**



# Ethnicity

Golfers of color are underrepresented at every level, from the professional game to grassroots where, since the pandemic, only 5% of new players in the UK are non-white.\*

Similarly, in the United States, African American golfers make up just 5% of the country's 25 million players, yet contribute \$4 billion to the total market value.

It is no wonder that golf struggles with reputation issues on social media.

There is huge opportunity to change this and successfully welcome a wide audience. In a recent podcast interview with Syngenta, Jim Beatty, Executive Editor of African American Golf Digest, said the number of African American golfers could be doubled or tripled, significantly adding to the value of golf and the bottom lines of golf clubs and courses.



Why is diversity necessary? ”



Golf is a mostly lily-white sport that has struggled for decades, to its continuing detriment, to attract women and people of color – just as Trump, a creature of the game, has denigrated those very same people. ”



By hole 15 he's calling himself, his ball, his driver, his putter the N-word. No one is even engaging him, and I finally told him – look, it's an off day but you can't behave like that, we're all trying to enjoy ourselves and honestly its becoming impossible. ”



I love that golf is virtually immune from progressive cancel culture because the fan base that drives the revenue is a bunch of middle-aged white dudes that don't give a shite. ”



There are no rules or laws preventing black folks from golf. We don't have to seek out poc just to make ppl like you feel less guilty. If they want to play they'll play on their own volition. ”

\*Source: Post Covid Opportunity, R&A (2021)



# Sexuality

Despite few instances of outright discrimination, it is clear from the research that many people from the LBGTQ+ community do not feel actively welcomed to golf.

The rise of LIV Golf, the professional tour backed by Saudi Arabia, where homosexuality is banned, compounds this perspective, as did the widely reported use of a homophobic slur by PGA Tour player Justin Thomas during a tournament.

LBGTQ+ people often take to social media – particularly forums – to ask others for advice on topics such as addressing their identity on the golf course and how transitioning from one gender to another will affect their game.



As a LGBT player I haven't ever had an issue and you are correct it rarely comes up. Only had a few awkward encounters.  
*Forum*



I have been golfing for 30 years and it has honestly progressed relatively little over time. I have many LGBT friends that are afraid to go out due to the unwelcoming environment. It has gotten much better but the game still has a long way to go.  
*Forum*



The casual use of anti-gay language in sports – usually without homophobic intent – is a major reason why many athletes and coaches who are #LBGT+ don't feel they would be made welcome if they came out.



# Religion

In most cases, religion does not appear to be a barrier to golf, and there is a consensus online that it is not a topic to be brought up on the course.

There is an active online community of Christian men talking about golf, and some professional players, such as Scottie Scheffler, talk openly about their faith and how it impacts their game.

In recent years some groups have emerged for specific religions, such as the Jewish Golf Initiative and the Muslim Golf Association, and although the reaction on social media has been mostly positive, some argue that creating specific groups is not improving wider inclusivity.



**My home course has a reduced membership rate for clergy. There's quite a few of them. You won't see them on the weekends, but they get a few rounds in during the week.**

*Forum*



**"I fail to see how/why religion comes into play on the golf course. Also I wonder why other faiths are not invited to share how their faiths and golf intermingle."**

*Forum thread about Christianity in golf*



**The Muslim Golf Association has launched Britain's first-ever Muslim women's golf taster tour. The initiative allows Muslim women to take up the sport within an environment that is in keeping with their faith.**





# Disability

In the past five years, disability golf has risen sharply. There is now a world ranking points system, modifications to the rules of golf that accommodate adaptive play and the G4D Tour, comprising competitive events run in tandem with the DP World Tour and EDGA.

Physical and mental disabilities are rarely mentioned online, though.

When a disabled golfer posts about golf, they often highlight the hurdles they have had to overcome in order to play – such as specific equipment or needing more time than regular players.

Some golf clubs advertise on social media if they have specific programs for disabled people or those with a chronic illness, and mentions relating to events for disabled golfers, such as the Special Olympics or G4D Open are overwhelmingly positive.



My swing is certainly unconventional, from where I aim to how my weight moves and how I deliver the club head. I've found a way that works for me and it's taken a while, with different prosthetics and different clubs. Now at 57 years old I finally feel I'm getting somewhere. ”



They are one of the very few occasions I mix with other Parkinson's sufferers. The (Golf in Society) sessions have introduced me to new friends and provided a comforting, inclusive environment at a potentially quite lonely time. ”



This stuff never gets old. Special Olympics golfer Amy Bockerstette warmed our hearts with this incredible par on the 16th hole at TPC Scottsdale. ”





# Solutions

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Diversity in all its forms – in both your staff and membership – adds perspective.

Changes can be made at a very local level; it doesn't have to be a nationwide governing body initiative.

A golf club or organisation can take some simple steps towards greater diversity, such as using data to better understand demographics or speaking to its people to find out how diversity, equity and inclusion could enhance their experience.

By creating an environment and experience where minority groups feel welcome and valued - and this is reflected in your club imagery and communications – this will help other diverse groups understand that this is a place where they could belong.

## Brandon Bell

Syngenta North America,  
People and Organizational  
Development Lead

Golf will continue to have a negative image as long as the general public believe its advocates are defending a small group of privileged people.

There is a need for a much stronger sense of accessibility and inclusivity, and for greater visibility of the diversity among golfers. This can be done through giving more visibility to minorities across all stakeholders, supporting initiatives and insisting on clear statements in cases of bad conduct.

Minorities don't always feel excluded, but they don't feel included, either. There is a huge opportunity to change this.

## Claire Martin

Ipsos, Social Intelligence Researcher

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# Case Studies

Around the world, people and organizations are striving to improve diversity in golf:

## Ethnicity

### Black Girls Golf

Black Girls Golf was founded in 2013 by Tiffany Mack Fitzgerald, who noticed how many opportunities were available to her golf-playing male colleagues in her corporate organization. She found learning the game difficult and intimidating, and felt invisible.

Resolving to change that, she invited some friends to play at a course in Atlanta, Georgia, and 26 women turned up. Now there are more than 4,000 members in the US and beyond, who benefit from golf clinics and meet-ups, all-women golf trips, online education covering rules and etiquette, and introductions to coaches.



## Sexuality

### German Rainbow Golfers

'More golf, more fun, more community' is the motto of this network of LBGTQ+ golfers in Germany. They organize regular rounds, tournaments and trips in Germany and internationally, and in September 2023 played the 18th edition of the annual German Rainbow Open.



## Religion

### Muslim Golf Association

Since 2021, the Muslim Golf Association in partnership with love. golf, the empowering group coaching experience backed by Syngenta, has introduced more than 1,000 women to golf.

The partnership has showcased how to address the latent demand for golf in new customer segments and communities by creating safe, encouraging environments with no judgements or dress codes and the emphasis firmly on learning while having fun.



## Disability

### EGDA

EGDA (formerly the European Disabled Golf Association), is a non-profit volunteer organization promoting and delivering opportunities for people with disabilities to play golf. Its membership comprises 36 national federations, and it provides advice on golf for disabled players to governing bodies including The R&A and the DP World Tour.

Focusing on growing the game, EGDA has designed and implemented coach education programs for delivery in rehabilitation centers, hospitals and golf clubs.





# Market Insights

Golf & Social Media: The Great Divide is free to download from [www.syngentagolf.com](http://www.syngentagolf.com)

Look out for our series of snapshot reports:



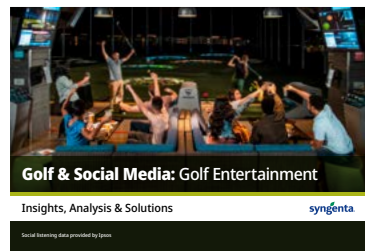
> Sustainability



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