

2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

Method

Participants for this study were acquired through purposive sampling. A link to an Internet-based survey was posted on the Twitter feeds and Facebook pages of the two athletes chosen for this study. The survey link was also posted on Twitter by prominent sport media members within the athlete's geographic area. The sample (N = 336) consisted of followers of one predominately parasocial (n = 123) and one predominately social athlete (n = 213). These athletes were chosen based upon the results of an interaction-specific content analysis of athlete tweets conducted prior to this study (i.e., Author (in press)).

Results

For RQ1, a significant difference was found between the two follower sets for PSI ($t(324) = 7.05, p < .05$). The mean for the social athlete was significantly higher ($M = 48.24, SD = 7.85$), in comparison to the mean for the parasocial athlete ($M = 41.89, SD = 7.85$).

With regard to RQ2, significant differences were found between the two conditions for affinity ($t(228.29) = -3.13, p < .007$), perceived realism ($t(331) = 2.86, p < .007$), uncertainty reduction ($t(286) = 3.53, p < .007$), social attraction ($t(173.05) = 4.36, p < .007$), and attitude homophily ($t(261) = 5.67, p < .007$). The means of the social athlete were significantly higher for perceived realism ($M = 15.96, SD = 3.18$), uncertainty reduction ($M = 14.09, SD = 5.05$), social attraction ($M = 16.06, SD = 2.59$), and attitude homophily ($M = 12.98, SD = 3.46$) in comparison to the means of the parasocial athlete for perceived realism ($M = 14.91, SD = 3.28$), uncertainty reduction ($M = 11.96, SD = 4.87$), social attraction ($M = 14.36, SD = 3.44$), and attitude homophily ($M = 10.42, SD = 3.69$). The mean for affinity was significantly higher for the parasocial athlete ($M = 12.98, SD = 5.27$) in comparison to the social athlete ($M = 11.19, SD = 4.58$). No significant mean differences were found for instrumental media use between the social athlete ($M = 17.83, SD = 3.85$) and the parasocial athlete ($M = 17.65, SD = 4.07$).

In order to answer RQ3, two exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were conducted. The factors for the social athlete included consumption (18.72%), admiration (12.35%), promotion (11.37%), and community (10.98%). All factors had eigenvalues over 2. For the parasocial athlete, the EFA revealed four factors including newsgroup (16.87%), modeling (11.82%), engaged interest (11.13%), and media use (10.34%). All factors had eigenvalues over 2.

Discussion

The development of PSI was significantly higher among followers of the social athlete. This finding is logical considering that attributes of PSI are similar to those of social interaction (Giles, 2002) and that individuals often behave in ways that closely resemble actual social relationships when they are involved in PSI (Gleich, 1997; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010). Additionally, data analysis revealed a sense of heightened interpersonal closeness based on the interaction style of the athlete. Specifically, interpersonal constructs were heightened among followers of the social athlete, while followers of the parasocial athlete relied more heavily on media based constructs in their interaction patterns. In conclusion, this study answered the call placed by Pegoraro (2010) in which the author proposed that the next step in sport-specific Twitter research is to query fans that follow professional athletes. Furthermore, this study demonstrated that PSI and its associated constructs could be tested quantitatively within the realm of sport and social media.