An Investigation of the Role of Communication Privacy Management Theory in the Development of NCAA Division I Social Media Policies

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The increasing social media use by student-athletes creates risks for multiple intercollegiate athletic stakeholders. Consequently, many athletic departments turn to social media policies to reduce this risk. With increasing student-athlete use of social media, there is a need to analyze National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I athletic department social media policies to determine how policies are developed in regulating student-athlete communication (Snyder, 2014; Browning & Sanderson, 2012). Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory serves as the framework for this study. CPM theory assists in understanding communication and privacy boundaries between and among individuals. Previous research suggests little information about the role of CPM theory in identifying how social media policies are implemented (Sanderson, Browning, & Schmittel, 2015). Athletic departments are adding social media policies to student-athlete handbooks to control the following: (a) implementation of privacy rules (Sanderson et al., 2015); (b) creating shared communication boundaries between athletic departments and student-athletes (Sanderson et al., 2015); and (c) the development of privacy boundaries as being co-owned and mutually managed through boundary coordination between student-athletes and athletic administrators (Snyder, 2014). By managing communication restrictions through a social media policy, athletic departments are essentially utilizing the components associated with CPM theory to establish specific types of communication guidelines for its student-athletes (Snyder, 2014; Sanderson, 2011). Failing to understand the rationale of implementing social media policies could negatively impact athletic departments and student-athletes. Student-athletes need to know and understand how athletic administrators develop student-athlete communication privilege policies (Sanderson et al., 2015). Varied evidence of the restrictions in social media policies and lack of understanding about the role of communication in establishing privacy boundaries, can cause misunderstanding and negatively impact decision making of athletic administrators.

This quantitative correlation study examined the relationship between social media policy implementation and student-athlete social media usage; and whether the size of the NCAA Division I institution moderates the relationship between social media policy implementation and student-athlete privacy rights. Using responses from NCAA Division I compliance directors in the southeastern United States, this study measured the extent to which the dependent variable, social media policy implementation, is related to the independent variables: privacy rights, boundary turbulence, monitoring, and social media banning of NCAA Division I student-athletes' social media accounts (Snyder, 2014; Waters & Ackerman, 2011). The size of the NCAA Division I institution served as the moderating variable of the study. The population of the study was 118 NCAA Division I compliance directors in the southeastern United States (U.S.) A random sampling of 59 served as the target sample of the study based on a G*Power proportions exact test with a proportion p1 = 0.5 and proportion p2 = 0.9, significance of α = 0.05, and 95% power. Instrumentation of the research study included a one-time web-based survey generated through Survey Monkey. The primary instrument used in the survey included a modified version of the Perception of Social Media Policy Items (PSMPI) (Snyder, 2014). A total of 24 items were utilized within the PSMPI instrument that will include both closed-ended and dichotomous questions (Snyder, 2014). Reworking of four questions on the PSMPI did not affect the original validity and reliability (Snyder, 2014). The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2016) served as the tool to categorize the size of the NCAA Division I institutions. Assessment using the Carnegie Categories at four-year institutions scale: (a) very small <1,000; (b) small = 1,000-2,999; (c) Medium = 3,000-9,999; and (d) Large ≥ 10,000+ (Carnegie Classification, 2016). Research questions were analyzed using SPSS 22 to examine the interval data from the study using descriptive statistics from each section of the survey instrument and the use of Fisher's exact tests to explore the relationship between two variables to determine if the difference of means is statistically significant. To examine the moderator as a variable, an interaction effect using a logistic regression analysis was applied to investigate if the interaction is significant between a combination of factors and help explain the variation in the response variable (Cohen et al., 2003). The results indicate moderate support for the
The results of the study expand the theoretical understanding of the components supporting communication privacy management theory as related to communicative choices and boundaries of NCAA Division I athletic departments and student-athletes. Analysis of the data collected for the research study provided appropriate evidence to conclude there is a relationship between NCAA Division I social media policy implementation, and privacy rights, boundary turbulence, social media account monitoring, and social media banning of student-athletes. These results assisted in the lack of understanding of the role of CPM theory in developing social media policies. Research question one focused on the relationship between NCAA Division I social media policy implementation and privacy rights of student-athletes. This finding aligns with component three of CPM theory, which proposes that the way people control their own private information is through the use of privacy rules. Research question two focused on the relationship between NCAA Division I social media policy implementation and boundary turbulence of student-athletes. Component five of CPM theory proposes that when shared boundaries are present, information and communication is managed through the use of boundary coordination. Research questions three and four illustrate that monitoring and banning of social media use by NCAA Division I student-athletes exists. For example, 28.8% of NCAA Division I athletic department compliance directors initiated 24/7 monitoring by athletics department personnel and 23.3% have 24/7 monitoring by outside personnel. This provides clarification that component four of CPM theory, shared privacy boundaries between individuals are co-owned and mutually managed by the athletic department administrators.

Through conducting a research study such as this, NCAA athletic department administrators will be able to develop improved social media policies, conduct social media training, and consider the effect banning and monitoring of social media has on student-athletes. Results of the study suggest the need for future research: a survey of NCAA Division I compliance directors in other geographical locations across the United States, comparing student-athlete social media policy with the institutional social media policy; investigation of social media policy changes by comparing and contrasting all NCAA Division I social media policies; and a study on how large Division I schools differ from smaller Division I schools in terms of social media restrictions of student-athletes.