Does the Social Media have An (Negative) Effect on Student-Athletes’ Performance?

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Social media has changed our culture drastically and is continuing to cultivate where it has affected many people including athletes (Amedie, 2015). Social Media has been consuming the sports world for so many years now (Amedie, 2015). It is now common to see athletes express themselves by posting status updates, links, photos, and opinions (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohl, 2011). While social media allows us to better connect with others, it has been linked to number of undesirable consequences such as depression (Kelenchick et al., 2013; Moreno et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2012), low self-esteem (Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008), and feeling isolated and disconnected (McGillivray, 2015). There is no exception in the field of sports. Especially, student-athletes are using social media to get connected with fans, friends, and others. Due to the negative consequences, some universities have their own social media policies to regulate social media usage among student-athletes (Sanderson, 2011). However, how social media plays a role in student-athletes’ psychological factors such as self-confidence, self-efficacy, perceived well-being and performance has not been examined yet. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe psychological processes associated with social media usage among student-athletes.

Literature Review and Research Questions
As the purpose of this study is to understand how social media affects student-athletes’ perceptions and how that connects to their performance, we draw from the Social comparison theory. According to Wood (1996), individuals tend to search for the information about other persons’ standings and opinions for the purpose of self-assessment, judging the correctness of one’s opinions, beliefs, and capabilities and as a result, their emotions and arousals are negatively/positively influenced (Suls & Wheeler, 2000). Considering the impacts of how social comparison and how it can be a threat to many, it can also be a huge threat to athletes. The article “The Mental Health of Elite Athletes” helps portray the relationship between social media and student-athletes’ psychological well-being or process (Rice, et al., 2016). Elite athletes face a unique array of ‘workplace’ stressors, including the pressures of increased public scrutiny through mainstream and social media, limited support networks due to relocation, group dynamics in team sports and the potential for injuries to end careers prematurely (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, & Spink, 2008). The ways by which athletes appraise and cope with those stressors can be a powerful determinant of the impact the stressors have on both their mental health and their sporting success (Lazarus, 2000). Given that, it is crucial to examine how social media affects student-athletes’ self-confidence, motivation, and perceived well-being.

Research Question 1: How do student-athlete compare themselves and others using social media and how the process affects their psychological factors (self-confidence, motivation, and perceived well-being)?

Along with the social comparison theory, one word that describes the occurrence of an event or situation that is happening currently is referred to the phenomenon. The phenomenon is an accurate definition that describes what social media is representing. Many people post what is currently happening for others to see. For student-athletes, this is a prime example of how they represent themselves. Since they are already in the spotlight and are encouraged to be leaders and to be successful, they honor that by posting certain things on social media to try to uphold their image. The athlete can use this knowledge to their advantage by displaying an image that is untruthful or plays to the expectations of others (Sloan, 2013). Social media will moderate the relationship between student-athletes’ and their performance because using social media influences student-athletes’ anxiety levels. The relationship between Internet addiction and self-esteem has been investigated in several studies. These studies have revealed that personality traits, self-esteem, and psychiatric disorders are associated with Internet addiction (Griffiths, 2000).

Research Question 2: How do athletes perceive social media?

Broadhurst (1957) and many other sport psychologists explained the relationship between performance and arousal...
using the inverted U hypothesis. The hypothesis showed, once the arousal had increased so would the performance, but if the arousal increased too much where it became overbearing and became a distraction to the athlete, the performance would decrease. The inverted-U relationship illustrates that as somatic anxiety increases from low to moderate levels, there is an associated improvement in performance. Performance level decreases, however, once intensity levels either exceed or fall below this moderate range (Davidson & Schwartz, 1976). As literature suggests that using social media influences student-athletes’ arousal level dramatically, it is also plausible that social media usage will eventually affect student-athletes’ perceived performance.

Research Question 3: Using Social Media before/after games affect student-athletes’ perceived performance?

Method
As the purpose of this study is to understand psychological process related to social media among student-athletes. We will use the purposeful sampling approach as suggested by Morse (1991). We will purposefully select 20 student-athletes who are actively using social media on/off fields and before/after games. The participants will be asked to share their experience, thoughts, and perceived performance. Then, participants will be asked to recommend other student-athletes who are spending a lot of time on the social media. In this way, we will be able to include potential participants who are endorsed by their peers or teammates. In order to locate the themes for this study, open coding will be used. Authors will use research questions as guides to come up with general themes, which will be broken up into more concrete concepts. If themes are similar and cannot be used alone, we will combine in a process known as axial coding which relates initial themes to one another (Corbin & Strauss, 2008)

Results
We are currently collecting the data and will guarantee that we present the results and implications at the 2018 NASSM conference.

Contributions
This study makes several important contributions. First of all, most of the sport marketing research focusing on the positive aspects of using social media. However, we are going to highlight some negative aspects of social media and how it influences student-athletes’ overall performance and psychological factors. Moreover, most of the research studying the effect of social media used quantitative research approach, but in this study, we are using qualitative research approach to better understand the perceived effects of social media among student-athletes. Finally, since we will highlight the effects of social media on student-athletes, this study contributes to not only sport marketing literature, but also intercollegiate athletic literature.