The Application of the Theory of Social Influence on the Recruitment of Division I Male Basketball Players: Do I Believe What I Read or Listen to Mama?

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Communication - Other (College Sport) 20-minute oral presentation (including questions) Friday, May 31, 2019 3:50 PM
Room: Napoleon A3

Successful Division I intercollegiate coaches must convince the most highly talented student-athletes to attend their institution. To do so, they must understand the type of communications that most influence a recruit's decision. The theory of social influence is comprised of two mechanisms: informational and normative (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Informational influence refers to the communication received from external sources, such as online sources that influence a person's judgment (Guadagno & Cialdini, 2005). Odell, Korgen, Schumacher, and Delucchi (2000) revealed that 85% of young males use online sources to research a university they are interested in attending.

Moreover, a previous study revealed that communication found online provided more realistic information than normative influences during college recruitment (Rozelle & Landis, 2002). Normative social influence relates to conformity with the expectations of primary reference groups such as the immediate family. Research findings have reinforced that the prospective student-athletes considered their mother, father, and head coach as being the most influential in their decision (Croft, 2008; Ulferts, 1992). While student-athlete recruitment has been investigated through different lenses, neither informational nor normative influences have been analyzed. Thus, the purpose of this study was to analyze the impact of the two forms of social influence, informational and normative, may have on Division I intercollegiate male basketball players at a Power 5 conference school during the recruiting process.

A 40-item Likert-scale questionnaire (1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree; 4 = Strongly disagree) was developed and validated by the researchers. Twenty items dealt with normative influences and 20 others addressed informational influences. The normative influences included mother/father, sister/brother, girlfriend/significant other, prior coaches, and communication from university head/assistant basketball coaches (Croft, 2008; Elliott, 1995; Ulferts, 1992). Based on prior studies (Odell et al., 2000; Rozelle & Landis, 2002) informational influences included facts gleaned from credible online communication sources such as traditional news providers (i.e. Sports Illustrated, etc...) or related to the university/athletic department. One hundred and twenty-five out of 156 male basketball players at Power 5 conference schools completed the questionnaire for an 80% response rate.

Means and standard deviations were calculated for each statement as well as for the normative and social influence categories. While the separate rankings will also be presented, the overall rankings of the means and standard deviations revealed that more respondents were influenced by informational rather than normative aspects during their recruitment. Specifically, informational sources such as opportunities to participate in the NCAA tournament, play in a Power 5 conference, or university academic reputation were deemed more important than normative influences exerted by mothers, fathers, or telephone calls from coaches.

Recruiting highly talented student-athletes is the lifeline of a successful intercollegiate athletic program. It is crucial that coaches understand the type of communications that student-athletes perceive as the most influential during the recruiting process. Although the results of this study differ from others, it contributes to the contentions that Division I male basketball players are more influenced by informational communications rather than the normative influences of significant others.