Past research on social impact of events relies heavily on residents’ perceptions, not necessarily reflecting lived experiences. Moreover, social media (SM) usage as a medium for social connection has been largely neglected in social impact research. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to develop a valid framework to measure social impact based on experiences (SIE) including SM usage. The Toronto Raptors’ winning streak (TRWS) during the 2019 NBA finals offered a unique context for this study, particularly given the strong nationwide promotional campaign #WeTheNorth.

Researchers have started to examine user generated content on SM platforms during events, finding that spectators use a second screen while watching sports to express their emotional responses to the event (e.g., Jones et al., 2012; Yu & Wang, 2015). In addition to traditional social spaces (e.g., public viewing areas, bars), SM offer new avenues for social connections which are not yet well understood and warrant further exploration (Smith, Pegoraro, & Cruikshank, 2019).

The hashtag #WeTheNorth galvanized Canadians behind the country’s one NBA team (Campbell, 2014), creating a nation of support for the Raptors. This campaign became a pillar of the team’s identity providing a consistent source of engagement for the community of fans and non-fans (Naraine, Pegoraro & Wear, 2019) that rippled through the whole country during the TRWS (Brady, 2018), creating a strong sense of community and pride among Canadians.

The level of involvement with a sport as well as demographic variables may affect SIE from events. Generally speaking, the more involved with the sport, the higher the levels of social impacts (Oja et al., 2018). Demographically, ethnic background is of particular interest, as some ethnic groups show higher affiliation with basketball, and the changing demographics of the Canadian population may affect the popularity of, and excitement around basketball (Snelgrove & Selvaratnam, 2019). Thus, the research questions are: (1) To what extent did the TRWS generate SIE? (2) How did SM usage, involvement with basketball, and demographic characteristics affect SIE of the TRWS?

The questionnaire consists of five sections: (1) SIE in general terms (e.g., community spirit, psychic income, social cohesion), (2) SM usage (e.g., level of usage, platforms used, engagement with #WeTheNorth, interaction with other fans across the country), (3) SIE through SM usage (adapted from section 1), (4) involvement in basketball, and (5) demographic variables.

Panel data will be collected in February 2020 from representative samples of four different regions in Canada: (1) the greater Toronto area (GTA) as the “hub” of the Toronto Raptors; (2) Ontario, as the province to most directly associated with the team; (3) Vancouver, location of a previous NBA team; and (4) a region of low media coverage. The time frame, eight months after the event is deliberately chosen, so respondents can reflect on their experiences and gauge whether any of the SIE were sustained over time. The results provide evidence if SIE are prevalent in the context of TRWS, and to what extend SM usage, level of involvement and demographic characteristics affect these SIE.