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The influence of social media on sports personalities' social image

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether social media influences athletes in building a positive social image. The prevalence of social media use in modern society has led to increased imagery viewing, impacting female body image satisfaction levels and subsequent eating disordered behavior. Social media imagery was examined to determine its impact on body image constructs and to discover approaches that lower the likelihood of eating-disordered behavior. The research gathered personal perspectives and experiences regarding body image through phenomenological one-on-one interviews with 41 active male and female participants between the ages of 18 and 30. Results indicated that active females believe social media imagery affects body image in both positive and negative ways, depending on the types of imagery viewed. "Thinspirational" photos elicited feelings of empathy and sadness, while "fitspirational" images evoked feelings of motivation and empowerment. Heightened levels of body image satisfaction were found after viewing "fitspirational" images, and social comparison tactics were utilized, aligning with the theoretical framework of the study. Findings demonstrate that psychological factors are affected when users interact within a sphere of optimized ideals. Data suggests the need for future examinations of motives related to social comparison and their effect on body image constructs, interventions such as warning labels and advisory messages, and educational models centered on social media advantages and disadvantages.

Keywords: Social media, athlete image, body image satisfaction, positive social image

Introduction

In today's interconnected world, the media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception and influencing social norms. Whether through traditional outlets like newspapers, television, and radio, or through modern digital platforms such as social media, blogs, and online news sites, the media has the power to significantly impact how individuals and groups are viewed by society. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of social media in shaping the positive social image of athletes.

Media as a shaper of public perception

The media acts as a powerful tool in constructing and disseminating images of individuals. By highlighting certain aspects of a person's life, such as their achievements, values, and contributions to society, the media can craft a narrative that promotes a positive image. For instance, when a public figure engages in philanthropic activities, the media's coverage can enhance their reputation and portray them as compassionate and community-oriented (Perloff, 2014)^[6].

Mechanisms of positive image building

1. **Highlighting Accomplishments:** Media coverage of awards, achievements, and milestones can boost an individual's image. Success stories in career, sports, academics, or other fields are often celebrated and shared widely, creating a positive public perception (Archer & Prentice, 2013)^[2].
2. **Promoting Positive Traits:** Media can emphasize desirable qualities such as kindness, integrity, and leadership. Interviews, profiles, and personal stories that showcase these traits help build a favorable image (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014)^[7].

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3. **Social Media Influence:** Platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn allow individuals to control their narratives. By sharing positive content, engaging with followers, and demonstrating expertise or goodwill, people can cultivate a positive online presence (Perloff, 2014) [6].
4. **Crisis Management:** Effective media strategies during crises can also help maintain or rebuild a positive image. By addressing issues transparently and showing a commitment to rectifying mistakes, individuals can preserve their reputation (Archer & Prentice, 2013) [2].

Impact on society and Individuals

The influence of media on social image is not limited to celebrities and public figures. Ordinary individuals can also benefit from positive media exposure. Community leaders, activists, and entrepreneurs can gain recognition and support through media coverage, which can amplify their impact and encourage further positive actions. Moreover, the portrayal of positive role models in the media can inspire and motivate others to emulate their behavior, contributing to the overall betterment of society. Consistent media highlights of stories of perseverance, generosity, and innovation can foster a culture that values and aspires to these qualities (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014) [7].

Methodology

For the present study, 41 students were selected from different colleges and universities in Jammu and Kashmir, who have represented their respective institutes and colleges at national and state-level competitions in different sports. Data was collected from these students using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to gather perceptions regarding social media's impact on building a positive social image. Five response options were provided: Strongly agree, agree, partially agree, disagree, and strongly disagree, with a five-point scale used for results. Initially, the questionnaire was distributed to over 50 student-athletes, with 41 completed questionnaires returned. Descriptive statistics, including mean calculations, were used to analyse the data.

Results

The data analysis revealed that out of the 41 subjects, 18 strongly agreed, 8 agreed, 8 partially agreed, 6 disagreed, and 1 strongly disagreed with the research problem, which aimed to determine whether social media influences athletes in building a positive social image. The responses were quantified using a five-point Likert scale, and the mean score was calculated to be 3.88, indicating a general agreement among participants that social media can influence athletes to build a positive social image.

The results are summarized in Table 1 below

Table 1: Responses to the influence of social media on positive social image

Response	Frequency (F)	Score (X)	Fx
Highly Agreed	18	5	90
Agreed	8	4	32
Partially Agreed	8	3	24
Disagreed	6	2	12
Highly Disagreed	1	1	1

$$\text{Mean} = \frac{\sum Fx}{N} = \frac{159}{41} = 3.88$$

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the majority of athletes

believe that social media plays a significant role in shaping their public image positively. The high number of participants who strongly agreed or agreed suggests that social media provides a platform for athletes to showcase their achievements, share personal stories, and engage with a broad audience. This visibility can enhance their public image and reinforce their status as role models.

The mixed responses indicate that while many athletes see the benefits of social media, there are also concerns about its impact. Participants who disagreed or strongly disagreed may feel that social media can sometimes lead to negative exposure, increased scrutiny, or pressure to maintain an idealized image. This highlights the complexity of social media's influence and suggests a need for balanced and mindful usage.

These results align with previous research indicating that social media can have both positive and negative effects on body image and self-perception (Perloff, 2014; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014) [6, 7]. The positive aspects include increased motivation and empowerment from "fitspirational" images, while the negative aspects involve feelings of inadequacy and comparison triggered by "Thinspirational" images.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that social media is a powerful tool for athletes to build and maintain a positive social image. By leveraging platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, athletes can highlight their accomplishments, promote positive traits, and manage their public persona effectively. However, the mixed responses also underscore the need for strategies to mitigate potential negative impacts.

Recommendations

1. **Educational Programs:** Implement educational programs that teach athletes how to effectively use social media to build a positive image. These programs should include best practices for content creation, engagement with followers, and managing online presence.
2. **Social Media Guidelines:** Develop guidelines for athletes on responsible social media use, emphasizing the importance of authenticity, positive engagement, and mental health. These guidelines can help athletes navigate the pressures of maintaining an idealized image online.
3. **Mental Health Support:** Provide mental health support to athletes to help them cope with the pressures of social media and maintain a healthy self-image. This support can include counselling, workshops, and resources for managing stress and online scrutiny.
4. **Research Expansion:** Conduct further studies to understand the long-term impact of social media on athletes' mental health and public image. Future research should explore different demographics, sports, and the role of emerging social media platforms.
5. **Interventions:** Introduce interventions such as warning labels and advisory messages to alert users about the potential negative impact of social media imagery. These interventions can help users engage with social media more mindfully and reduce the likelihood of negative self-comparison.
6. **Promotional Campaigns:** Encourage social media platforms to run promotional campaigns that highlight the positive aspects of athlete engagement, such as community involvement, personal achievements, and inspirational stories. These campaigns can help create a

more supportive and positive online environment.

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