A Case Study of Self-representation on Twitter: A Gender Analysis of How Student-athletes Portray Themselves

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Abstract

Throughout sports coverage, mass media has been blamed for masculine hegemony, which often includes a lack of exposure regarding female sports and over emphasizing "femininity." The emergence of social media provides athletes the opportunities to portray themselves, increase their brand equity, and directly interact with other sport media consumers. Informed by self-presentation theory, this case study is an attempt to investigate whether gender difference exists between female and male student-athletes in term of the way they portray themselves on Twitter. The profiles, background pictures, bibliographies and the content of tweets from 100 NCAA Division I student-athletes' Twitter accounts were selected to study. The results indicated that there were significant gender differences with regard to different types of profiles pictures used and types of information included in their biographies. The results also revealed that male student-athletes were more likely to demonstrate their athletic features on Twitter whereas female student-athletes were more likely to present themselves as "feminine."

Introduction

Studies have shown that sport media has dedicated more attention, and offered greater emphasis and exposure to male athletes and male sports as opposed to their female counterparts (Bruce, Hovden & Markula, 2010; Duncan & Messner, 2000; Bernstin & Kian, 2013). The domination of male sports throughout media coverage may be due to the popularity of a hegemonic masculine cultural and organizational structure in the majority of sport organizations and franchises (Bernstein & Kian, 2013). Also, within the hierarchy of sports media outlets, generating enormous revenues and drawing attention results in the increasing media exposures of male athletes and sports (Bernstein & Kian, 2013).

Due to the way female athletes and sports are portrayed, mass media has been accused of reinforcing masculine hegemony throughout sports coverage (Hardin, Lynn, Walsdorf, & Hardin, 2002). Framing is a tool that the mass media uses to influence audiences interpretations by selecting certain news items (Kuypers & Cooper, 2005; Tian & Stewart, 2005; Sanderson, 2013). The "femininity" of female athletes, which has been emphasized in media coverage, contradicts the attributes of sport which have always been associated with physical strength, speed and muscle - the characteristics of masculinity (O'Reilly & Cahn, 2007). Moreover, media coverage of women's sport has been framed within stereotypes that manifest non-sport-related aspects of female athletes, such as their personal lives, and appearance, rather than athletic skills (Clavio & Eagleman, 2010).

However, the advent of the internet, especially social media, provides a platform where athletes can not only bypass traditional media to directly communicate with their fans and supporters, but also provides the user the platform in which to frame themselves (Coche, 2014). Sanderson (2011) believes social media assists athletes competing in less-known sports, by increasing awareness and sport exposure.

The social media obsession has led scholars to study the motivation of athletes to embrace social media, especially Twitter. Compared to other social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter was favored by researchers (Coche, 2014). Also, due to the public nature of Twitter, Farhi (2009) considers a journalistic resource. McNary and Hardin (2013) found that athletes were motivated to engage on Twitter to interact with fans, promote sponsors and increase their personal brands. In addition, the gender difference regarding how athletes use Twitter has been investigated by a variety of researchers. Lebel and Danylchuk (2012) claimed that there was no obvious difference between male and female tennis players' self-presentation on Twitter. However, Coche (2014) indicated that professional female golfers and tennis players framed themselves as feminine women on their social media platforms, while male professional golfers and tennis players portrayed themselves as athletes. Previous literature on gender and social media has primarily focused on professional athletes, and there is a gap in the literature regarding those who participate in intercollegiate sports.

Indeed, the approach of student-athletes harnessing social media could be different from professional athletes due to the fact that they have a dual role as both college students and athletes. Also, compared to professional athletes, student-athletes have been facing much tighter regulation in terms of using social media. For example, in order to manage potential risks associated with social media, the majority of NCAA membership institutions have developed social media policies to monitor the usage of social media by student-athletes. Such policies are much stricter than social media guidelines executed by professional leagues (Browning & Sanderson, 2012). One tweet showing a student-athlete participating in an impermissible activity could result in a loss of eligibility. Former University of North Carolina football player, Marvin Austin, lost his eligibility because he posted a message from a Miami nightclub on his Twitter feed (Browning & Sanderson, 2012). Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory describes that an individual cultivates a persona that he or she would expect the world to perceive. Due to the existing differences between professional athletes and college athletes, it is important to study and understand how and why student-athletes engage with social media, especially Twitter. In addition, it would be helpful to investigate whether "gender differences" exist between female and male student-athletes in the way of framing themselves on social media.

Informed by self-presentation theory (Goffman, 1959), the purpose of this study was to analyze how student-athletes frame themselves on Twitter and determine if the content of their Twitter profiles, background pictures, and biographies differed based on gender.

Literature Review

Sports Media and Gender Framing

Masculine hegemony ensures the domination of men who display accepted forms of masculinity and the subordination of women in society (Connell, 1987). Connell's (1987, 1993) believes hegemonic masculinity is the most desired form of masculinity in our hierarchical society where multiple femininities and masculinities are co-existing. Hegemonic masculinity has played a vital role of retaining the domination of men over women in this society (Connell 1987, 1993).

Scholars argue that sports and mass media are two main drivers that demonstrate hegemonic masculinity (Kian, Fink & Hardin, 2011; Vincent, 2004). The domination of men in different levels of sports media industries, from traditional media to internet blogs, can possibly explain the popularity of the male-dominated culture in sports media outlets (Gee & Leberman, 2011). In addition, Gee and Leberman (2011) also asserted that the media not only attempts to portray male athletes as naturally superior to female athletes in their sports coverage, but also enhances this gender hierarchy by profiling female athletes whose physical appearance adheres to a Eurocentric heterosexual femininity more than their male counterparts, with androgynous physical appearances (Creedon, 1994). Bernstein and Kian (2013) argued that gender framing in sports media exacerbates hegemonic masculinity in society. Media frames are defined as "principles of selection – codes of emphasis, interpretation and presentation," and "media producers routinely use them to organize media output and discourses" (O'Sullivan et al, 1994, p. 122). Framing plays a vital role in influencing audiences' interpretations by encoding media texts (Bernstein & Kian, 2013).

The media uses gender terminology when discussing women's sports, but it is not common in men's sports coverage (Coche, 2014; Tannen, 1993). For instance, "FIFA Men's Soccer World Cup" has been presented as "the FIFA World Cup", while "FIFA Women's Soccer World Cup" has remained the same. Scholars also pointed out that male athletes have always been called by their full names or last names on TV coverage, but female athletes have commonly been referred to by their first names (Coche, 2014; Halber & Latimer, 1994). Furthermore, scholars noted that the mismatch between femininity and athleticism has been emphasized by media features (i.e. physical strength, power, muscle and competitive spirit) are closely associated with masculinity, while female athletes would contradict this concept (Coche, 2014; O'Reilly & Cahn, 2007). Scholars found that the media often called male athletes "man" or "young man," while female athletes were referred to as "young ladies" or "girls" (Coche, 2014; Koivula, 1999; Wensing & Bruce, 2003). This example implies that the media more often refers to male athletes as adults, even though both male and female athletes are of similar ages (Bernstein & Kian, 2013, Coche, 2014). In addition, studies have found that the traditional media has mentioned more about female athletes' familial roles as well as their psychological characters (Daddario & Wigley, 2007). Female athletes have often been framed as small, less powerful, emotionally unstable and dependent on others (Bernstein, 2002; Wensing & Bruce, 2003). Sports commentators have also been blamed as they often mentioned female athletes' emotions rather than their athletic performance, framed female athletes as someone's wife and mother (Coche, 2014; Duncan & Messner, 2000; Messner & Cooky, 2010).

Previous studies have discovered that female athletes have often been portrayed and emphasized with their non-sport-related elements, such as appearance and attractiveness (Clavio & Eagleman, 2011). Studies have also found that the published pictures of female athletes were often more sexualized or hypersexualized compared to male athletes (Bernstein, 2002, Duncan & Messner, 1998). When studying the television coverage of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, Eastman and Billings (1999) revealed that commentators remarked more on physical appearance when commenting on women's sports as opposed to male sports. The process, which reinforces traditional gender stereotypes with media's involvement, preserves the hegemonic masculinity. The trend had some positive changes in recent years, with the advent of online media. In a content analysis examining how the NCAA Division I women's and men's basketball tournaments were covered by online media, Kian, Mondello, and Vincent (2009) revealed that online sport journalists were more likely to describe positive skill level/accomplishments and psychological strengths in women's tournament coverage than in men's coverage. It demonstrates that online sportswriters may subvert the gender-bias in sport media coverage, which has normally appeared in traditional media (Kian et al., 2009).

Gender in Sport and Social Media

The emergence of social media has provided a creative channel for athletes to bypass the gatekeeping of traditional media. Social media provides athletes with essentially a free marketing outlet in which to brand themselves, and directly interact with fans. The exposure that social media provide have given women's sports and athletes the opportunities now to appeal to a new and possibly larger audience (Pegoraro, 2010). Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, and Greenwell (2010) discovered that professional athletes were primarily using social media to interact with other athletes and fans, provide non-sport information, share information about their teams and teammates, direct users to get access information from other platforms, express their support to other sports, and promote their endorsers.

In addition, whether the new media has challenged traditional dominate gender ideologies pertaining to female sports and athletes has also been studied by different scholars. Lisec and McDonald (2012) indicated that users of sport blogs often shifted their discussion from commenting about the sport to making inappropriate sexualized jokes about female athletes' physical appearance. Moreover, sport fans are more interested in male sports than female sports on social media platforms. Wallace, Wilson and Miloch (2011) found the number of Facebook users' "likes" on the NCAA men's basketball tournament page were significantly higher than "likes" for the NCAA women's basketball tournament page.

The role Twitter plays in changing dominated gender ideologies has also been studied. Smith (2011) discovered that tweets associated with male sports were more prevalent than those for women's sports in terms of the number of tweets, the number of videos, pictures and retweets when he used the theory of hegemonic masculinity in framing to study the Twitter feeds of the NCAA Division IA sport conferences. Additionally, male and female athletes have also been found to present themselves differently while utilizing social media. Athletes who are competing in two individual professional sports, tennis and golf, have been studied more often here since male and female sports leagues have been developed more equivalently than other sports leagues (Coche, 2014). Lebel and Danylchuk (2012) studied how male and female professional tennis players self-represent themselves on their Twitter accounts during the 2011 US Open Tournament; however, no significant differences were found. In a later study regarding the interpretation of professional athletes' self-representation on Twitter by Generation Y users, Lebel and Danylchuk (2014) revealed that the types of athletes' photographs chosen impacted how teenagers perceived the athletes. Athletes who used athletic pictures on their profiles on Twitter would be viewed more favorably by teenagers than those who did not. Coche (2014) studied the gender difference of tennis players and golfers on Twitter, and concluded that males preferred portraying themselves as athletes since they used athletic pictures as their profile and background pictures and mentioned their athletic statues in their bios. However, female athletes always used professional pictures and personal pictures on their Twitter accounts and attempted to deliver a message that they were women first and then athletes. Whether student-athletes have the similar trend of using social media is the focus in this study.

Theoretical Framework

Goffman (1959) introduced self-presentation theory noting that an individual develops an image that he or she expects the entire world to see. In this theory, Goffman used the theater as an example emphasizing that the presentation of self in everyday life could be classified into two different types: frontstage and backstage. On the frontstage, actors have to promote their best to please audiences since they could be watched by audiences. However, the backstage area is

more private and informal where the actor can be more relaxed without disclosing themselves to their audience.

The theory has been applied by scholars (i.e. Hull, 2014, Lebel & Danychuk, 2012) to interpret how Twitter has been utilized by professional athletes to present themselves. Hull noted that social media, especially Twitter, provides athletes an unique platform where they could use to create their own identity. In this study, informed by self-presentation theory, researchers sought to analyze how student-athletes frame themselves on Twitter and to determine if the content of their Twitter profiles, background pictures, and biographies differed based on gender. The following research questions were addressed in this research:

RQ1: What types of visual images (such as profile and background pictures) do student-athletes use in their Twitter accounts?
RQ2: How do student-athletes describe themselves in their biographies?
RQ3: Do male student-athletes use athletic pictures as profile pictures more frequently than female student-athletes?
RQ4: Do male student-athletes use sport-related pictures as background pictures more frequently than female student-athletes?
RQ5: Do male student-athletes tweet more about their athletic activities than female student-athletes?

Method

Case study is the primary methodology for this study. According to Creswell (2007) a case study "explores a bounded system (a case)" (p. 73) using various means of data collection. For this study, document analysis of Twitter biographies and tweets, as well as information from audiovisual materials (i.e. profile pictures and background pictures) were utilized. Case studies are often determined by the "size of the bounded case" (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). This study is an instrumental case study due to its focus on the issue of how student-athletes at one institution represent themselves on social media. The goal is not to generalize, as cases differ, but rather to understand the behaviors of this particular sample (i.e. case).

Sample

Twitter profiles of 100 student-athletes from a NCAA Division I membership institution in the Midwest were randomly chosen in this study. This represented a convenience sample of 24% of all student-athletes at the university. To ensure the Twitter account belonged to a certain athlete, researchers located the student-athletes' roster photo on the athletic website to compare it to the account profile picture. Furthermore, researchers checked the student athletes' Twitter account to see if their sports team Twitter account was a follower. Fifty athletes that participating on male sports teams and 50 athletes participating on female sports teams were chosen to ensure the equivalence of information gathered. In order to make sure the representativeness of the sample, 25 student athletes from male athletic teams and individual sports were randomly selected, and the same approach was also applied while studying the profiles of the 50 student-athletes participating on female teams.

Codebook Construction

In order to reach the goal of the study, a coding protocol and codebook were created to provide a guideline to lead the study. Duncan (1990) suggested that photographs' meaning would be impacted by both features of sports photographs which are the content of photography (physical

appearance, pose, etc.) and its context (the surrounding written text, its captions, etc.). According to Twitter's characteristics, Coche (2014) noted that Twitter background pictures and Twitter biographies are worth studying since both of them provide context. Therefore, in remaining consistent with the literature, Coche's (2014)'s method of studying profile, background, biography of Twitter was utilized. Seven variables were included in this study: number of followers, gender (male/female), type of sports (team/individual), subject of profile pictures (i.e., no picture, athlete himself/herself, animal, family member, their sport, other), subject of background pictures, type of profile pictures (i.e., action shot, sport, professional, personal, headshot, other), type of background pictures, their biography (i.e. family, career, hobby, religion, student, other); and clothing worn on background picture (athletic/casual/formal).

Since the study also aimed to understand whether different tweeting activities exist between female athletes and male athletes, the content of tweets from these selected student-athletes were also investigated. The most recent 10 tweets were coded into three different categories: their sport, sports-related and non-sport related.

All information was obtained in July 2015 when few college student-athletes were in season competing. Among 100 students-athletes we selected, one-fourth of them were competing in revenue generating sports including men's football, men's basketball, and men's baseball.

Coding Procedure

In order to facilitate the coding process, four American university students majoring in recreation and sport management were selected to code the content of tweets based on the codebook. For ensuring intercoder reliability, the coders were required to join a training session that familiarized them with the coding protocol, as well as the content of athletes' Twitter profiles.

As Wimmer and Dominick (2009) recommended, between 10% and 25% of the contents should be selected and reanalyzed for improving intercoder reliability. In this study, a total of 100 student-athletes' Twitter accounts were selected to study, thereby each coder analyzed 20 student-athletes' profiles, and coded the content separately, to test intercoder reliability. Wimmer and Dominick (2009) also noted that the acceptable level of intercoder reliability was .75 or higher, using kappa coefficient. Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken (2002) also suggested that the reliability levels for individual variables should be counted as the basic principle of evaluating reliability, rather than that for overall variable. The results indicated kappa levels for all 10 variables above the .75 threshold standard. Therefore, all variables in this research were matched with an acceptable level of intercoder reliability.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 22.0 for Windows. Chi-Square tests were conducted in order to see if there were significant differences between male and female student-athletes in terms of the approach they used to frame themselves on Twitter.

Results

After investigating 100 student-athletes' Twitter accounts, the results revealed that each student-athletes' Twitter account had an average of 1829 followers (with a range varying from 95 to 21,353). Male student-athletes had more followers ($M = 3,175.46$, $SD = 5,185.02$) than female student-athletes ($M = 483.36$, $SD = 324.5$) on Twitter. All selected student-athletes contained a profile picture, but eight student-athletes did not contain a background picture. More

male student-athletes (12%, n = 6) did not include any pictures in the background than their female counterparts (4%, n = 2). The majority of selected athletes (89%, n = 89) provided information in their biographies whereas 12% student-athletes did not disclose any information.

Visual Images on Student-Athletes' Twitter

Profile pictures

There was a statistically significant difference between male student-athletes and female student-athletes in terms of different types of profile pictures chosen on their Twitter accounts, χ^2 (1) =24.008, p < 0.01. The majority of male student-athletes (94%, n = 47) selected pictures about themselves in their profiles of Twitter while only half of female student-athletes (n = 25) used their own pictures. Forty-six percent of selected female student-athletes had photos with their families or friends as their profile pictures (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Profile pictures used by student-athletes on Twitter*					
	Male student-athletes		Female student-athletes		
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	χ^2
Athlete him/herself	47	94	25	50	24.008**
With friends/family	3	6	23	46	
With the team	0	0	1	2	
Other	0	0	1	2	
No Pictures	0	0	0	0	
Total	50	100	50	100	
Notes: *p<.05, **p<.01					

Background pictures

The background pictures chosen by male and female student-athletes also depicted the athlete in a gender specific way. More than half of female student-athletes utilized either team photos (32%, n = 16) or scenery pictures (24%, n = 12) in their background, while male student-athletes would rather use pictures of themselves (26%, n = 13), pictures with their family/friends (20%, n = 10), pictures about their sports (20%, n = 10) and team photos (16%, n = 8) in their background.

Biographies on Student-Athletes' Twitter

Biographies

There was not a clear distinction between male athletes and female athletes in terms of the contents they provided in their Twitter's biographies. A majority of participants mentioned themselves as both the student (69%, n = 69) and the athlete (72%, n = 72) in their biographies. More male student-athletes (54%, n = 27) included mottos in their biographies than their female counterparts (18%, n = 9), χ^2 (1) = 12.703, p < 0.001. Male student-athletes were also more interested in encouraging others to follow their other social media platforms, such as Instagram, than female athletes. Male athletes (30%, n = 15) included other social media platforms in their biographies, which was higher than female athletes (10%, n = 5), χ^2 (1) = 5.211, p < 0.05. In addition, hometown was also mentioned more frequently by males students (70%, n = 35) than females students (32%, n = 16) in their biographies, χ^2 (*1*) = 14.446, p < 0.001 (see Table 2).

Table 2: *Content on Student-Athletes' Twitter Biography*

	Male student-athletes		Female student-athletes		
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	χ²
Athletics	38	76	34	68	
Family	6	12	2	4	
Religion	27	54	12	28	
Student	38	76	31	62	
Motto	27	54	9	18	12.703**
Hometown	35	70	16	32	
Platforms	15	30	5	10	5.211*

The third research question was to examine whether a difference existed in terms of what types of pictures were being used as a Twitter profile picture. The results of a chi-square test suggested that male athletes were more likely to use sport-related pictures (76%, n = 38), such as action shot and sport passive pictures, compared to their female counterparts (26%, n = 13), χ^2 (1) = 21.236, $p < 0.001$. Additionally, male athletes preferred portraying themselves as athletes since the majority (84%, n = 42) chose athletic clothing in their profiles. This was significantly higher than female athletes (36%, n = 18), χ^2 (1) = 26.272, $p < 0.001$ (see Table 3).

Table 3: *Profile Pictures (types of photos) and Clothing on Profiles*

	Male student-athletes		Female student-athletes		
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	χ²
Profile pictures					
Action shot	25	50	9	18	
Sport passive	13	26	4	8	21.236**
Sport related	38	76	13	26	
Professional photos	4	8	2	4	
Personal photos	8	16	33	66	
Headshot	0	0	1	2	

The fourth research question attempted to measure whether male student-athletes were more likely to use athletic pictures as background pictures, as opposed to female student-athletes. Even though both male and female student-athletes used sport-related pictures in their background, male athletes (20%, n = 10) used an action shot significantly more often to demonstrate their athletic abilities compared to females (6%, n = 3), χ^2 (1) = 4.332, $p = 0.037$ (see Table 4). However, there was not a significant difference in gender in terms of whether athletes wore athletic clothes in their background pictures, χ^2 (2) =1.020, $p = .601$.

The fifth research question sought to investigate whether there were differences existing between male and female student-athletes in terms of number of tweets relating to their athletic achievements. After studying 1000 tweets from these 100 athletes, the results of the chi-square test showed that there was not a significant difference between males (*n*=169, 33.8%) and females (*n*=134, 26.8%) in terms of the number of tweets that were associated with their sport, χ^2 (10) = 9.715, $p = 0.466$.

Table 4: *Background Pictures (types of photos) Used by Selected Student-Athletes*

	Male student-athletes		Female student-athletes		
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	x^2
Action shot	10	20	3	6	
Sport passive	11	22	20	40	4.332*
Professional photos	0	0	1	2	
Personal photos	11	22	11	22	
Headshot	0	0	1	2	
No Pics	6	12	2	4	
Other	13	26	12	24	

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how student-athletes at one institution portray themselves on Twitter and identify if the content of their Twitter profiles, background pictures, and biographies differed based on the gender. Significant gender differences were found with regard to different types of profiles pictures used and types of information included in biographies. The results revealed that male student-athletes were more likely to demonstrate athletic features on their Twitter profile pictures than their female counterparts since male student-athletes chose to use images in a sport setting or context.

Profile pictures on social networking sites (SNS) play a vital role of presenting users' identity. As Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin (2008) mentioned, SNS users normally leave a trail that could assist other users to find them on social media. Profile pictures are always the first information that can be viewed and accessed by SNS users (Hum, et al., 2011). When Twitter users utilized one person's name to search his or her account, the profile picture always appeared to assist them to confirm the identity of the individual they are searching. Thus, SNS users have intentions to select pictures to represent themselves on social media platforms since it is one of the first attempts to construct their own online identity (Hum, et al., 2011). Self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) appeared to be present throughout this case. Profile pictures could have assisted this sample in furthering their athletic image. Particularly, male student-athletes in this case ensured their profile picture depicted them in a way that could be perceived as masculine and athletic. In essence, male athletes were developing the image that was expected.

In this particular case, the study found that male and female student-athletes demonstrated different approaches in selecting their profile pictures on Twitter, with a greater proportion of males demonstrating their athletic features in their profiles than females, as the latter more often used personal pictures that contained other individuals. This finding illustrated that females were more social oriented while males were more independent. Gilligan (1982) indicated that relationships played a more significant role to women's identify formation compared to men. This may explain why female student-athletes used more group photos on their Twitter profiles than males.

No significant difference was found between men and women in terms of background pictures they selected. Both groups mainly uploaded sport-related photos as background pictures. However, similar to literature on masculine hegemony, female student-athletes emphasized their femininity visually on Twitter, and most of the female student-athletes used pictures that contained their teammates in a passive sport setting, rather than action shots as used by most males. In addition, females seemed to favor wearing casual clothing rather than athletic clothing

in their pictures. The finding is in line with Coche 's (2014) study that female professional tennis players and golfers were more likely to "present glamorized photos of themselves, taken in non-sport settings" on Twitter. Perhaps this implies that female student-athletes aim to refer to themselves as "normal" college students first, rather than adapting the "athletic" person. Their male counterparts were completely opposite, presenting themselves as college athletes first, and then as students.

Coche's (2014) found that female professional athletes used more artistic pictures including professional photographs in their background than pictures in a sports context. The results of this study differed in that the results indicated that female student-athletes were also interested in using sport-related pictures as their background images. Most female student-athletes uploaded their team pictures as the background perhaps due to the fact that as amateur athletes, female student-athletes do not have as much of an equal opportunity of sponsorship as professional athletes.

Although the results showed that male and female student-athletes demonstrated both their athletic stature and student stature in their Twitter biographies, males were more likely than females to disclose more personal information, such as hometown, family, motto, religion. The results were supported by a previous study, in which Tufekci (2008) found that male users more often provide their personal information such as their telephone numbers and addresses on their SNS profiles than female users. Also, Taraszow, Aristodemou, Shitta, Laouris, and Arsoy (2010) discovered a similar trend that young male Facebook users were more likely to reveal their contact information including email addresses, home addresses and telephone numbers than female users. The reason that females disclose less personal information than males may be that women are more likely to be the victims of online abuse (Hoay & Milne, 2010). Pew Research Center (2014) released a report of online harassment showing that men reported a higher percentage of online harassment than women. However, women experienced more severe forms, such as physical and personal threats, and 15% of women reported such harassment impacted their reputation. The information on social media sites may put the privacy of all users at risk as their information could be used inappropriately (Pew Research Center, 2014). Therefore, due to the concern of information being abused, females may be more careful about making their personal information available to the public.

Male student-athletes in this study also promoted themselves more than females since males included their other platforms (such as YouTube and Instagram) in their biographies, and encouraged other users to follow them. This finding is also consistent with Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2016)'s recent study on Olympic athletes' visual self-representation on Instagram. Geurin-Eagleman and Burch revealed that female Olympians were more likely to share their personal pictures whereas their male counterparts prefer posting variety of photos on Instagram for attracting more followers. Male college athletics are given more attention than female college athletics by the mass media and the general public due to their market values and a higher level of popularity; therefore, male athletes are more likely to promote their brand using various SNS. Even on social media, Smith (2011) found that nearly 70% of published articles, videos and photos on the official Twitters of four major sports conference (the SEC, the Big 10, the Pac-10, and the Big 12) were associated with male sports, while only 29% of Twitter messages mentioned female sports. Therefore, in this case male college athletes may have a higher desire to market themselves since they are attracting more attention than females. In addition, male student-athletes, especially those playing American football, basketball, baseball, ice hockey, and golf have more opportunities to compete in professional leagues and in the Olympic Games than their female counterparts. Thus, it can be assumed that the opportunity to

compete beyond the college level may motivate male student-athletes to engage with social media in a higher capacity and attract more attention from the media and the public.

Conclusion

Although the goal of this study was not to generalize but rather to better understand how student-athletes at one institution portray themselves on Twitter, there are some practical implications from this study. Both athletic departments and student-athletes can use the results of this study to assist in ensuring that the image of both institutions and the athletes are protected. Intercollegiate sport is popular within American culture, and ensuring that student-athletes represent themselves and protect themselves is vital. Social media also allows student-athletes to interact with fans and in essence to provide information to fans. The average student-athlete in this study had more than 1,000 followers. Student-athletes can use social media to further promote their personal brands. It is also important for athletic departments to use student-athletes social media as a way to promote their athletic teams. Due to NCAA regulations, and the fact that athletes competing at this level are considered to be armatures, utilizing social media is a great and cost effective way for promotion.

It should also be noted that this case may be able to assist institutions in further developing athletic departments' social media policy through inclusion in an overall social media education program. Athletic departments should provide social media training, and if student-athletes choose to have a Twitter account, they can be taught how to use social media for promotional purposes and personal branding. Athletic departments should encourage student-athletes to use their pictures to promote themselves on Twitter and in their biographies to even provide links to information regarding the athlete and his/her team. It was clear in this case that men used their Twitter accounts as almost an extension of their athletic identity. Men's sports, specifically revenue producing sports, receive a lot of media exposure. Perhaps Twitter and other social media outlets can provide female athletes a way to not only promote themselves, but also to raise awareness regarding women's collegiate sport.

Limitations and Future Research

It is important to acknowledge that this study has some limitations. First, results from this study should not be generalized, this was a case study that looked student-athletes at one institution. Although this is a case study, it is important to note that the sample size of this study was rather small, especially when compared to Coche's (2014) study, which examined 234 profiles of the world's top golf and tennis athletes. However, the goal was not to mimic Coche's (2014) study. Our goal was to fill a gap in the literature regarding how intercollegiate athletes portray themselves on Twitter. To our knowledge, this study is the first to look at Twitter profiles of student-athletes and to examine if those profiles do indeed differ based on gender. We hope that this study will lead to further exploration into this very specific population.

Further research should continue to study student-athletes from different universities and even from different conferences. Also, student-athletes from the NCAA member institutions competing in various divisions (Division I, Division II and Division III) should be analyzed as athletes competing in various divisions may have different athletic and career goals. Moreover, even though the gender differences were observed in the way the athletes portrayed themselves, it is worth continuing to study how student-athletes utilize social media to promote themselves. Scholars could continue to conduct a qualitative or quantitative inquiry to understand student-athletes' motives behind the pictures they choose for their profile, background, and what they write in their biography. Also, future researchers could continue to

explore how social media policies of universities, their athletic department and their coaches, impacts on how student-athletes present themselves on their social media usage.

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