

Sport Communication

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Introduction

The sport management research community has published over 55 sport communication (and related) articles in the field's various journals over the past seven months of 2021. During this period, a few sport communication research works have been published in journals such as the *Journal of Sport Management*, *Sport Management Review*, *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, *European Sport Management Quarterly*, *Journal of Global Sport Management*, and others. Two journals in particular, *Communication and Sport* (six articles) and *International Journal of Sport Communication* (three articles) published studies on the topic of *media representation* and *media consumption* – the two themes on which this section of the issue focuses. Nine articles from these two journals, representing the work of 43 authors from 20 different universities, are summarized in this issue. Of the nine articles, five covered media representation (TV, print, and social media) of disability, mental illness, and women in sport. Four articles dealt with media consumption behaviour of (a) television viewers (activities while viewing televised sports), and (b) college and professional football players and fans (consumption of social media).

Advances in sport management communications

The nine studies under consideration were researched in different contexts of sports such as the Olympic Games (e.g., the Rio Olympics), professional team sports (e.g., NFL, NBA), and college sport (e.g., D-I Football). Also, the studies were guided by different theories and conceptual frameworks such as social cognitive theory, framing theory, interpersonal behaviour theory. In addition, research methods such as surveys, in-depth interviews, social media data, TV broadcast recordings, and print media archives were used as sources of data to address the studies' research objectives.

As extensively covered in the media representation articles, the media have long been criticized for contributing to the stigmatization of athletes with disability, mental illness, and women in sport, which has contributed to people experiencing stereotypical behavior, prejudice, and discrimination in different social settings (Parrott et al., 2019). The articles emphasize the media's crucial role (through their selection and framing of stories as well as frequency of coverage) in influencing peoples' perceptions of (a) athletes with disability, (b) mental illness, and (c) women in sport. The studies investigated the issue of fair media representation, and made some encouraging, and not so encouraging, findings.

The studies that focused on disability (McGillivray, O'Donnell, McPherson, & Misener, 2021) and mental illness (Parrott, Billings, Buzzelli, & Towery, 2021) encouragingly reported positive progress in media coverage and the representation of athletes with mental illness and disability, in contrast to the stereotypical news coverage that has been a feature of the media for a long time. As McGillivray et al. reported, while one cannot fully claim that the balance of media representations of the Rio Paralympics was fully positive, the trend in the coverage of disability has been encouraging but needs to be tested further with future events. Similarly, Parrott et al. reported positive media responses and coverage of professional athletes' disclosure of mental illness, which contrasts with the stereotypical news coverage. The media framed the disclosed athletes as showing strength of character for revealing their personal experiences with mental illness.

In contrast, the two studies that focused on the coverage of women in sport on traditional media reported that coverage of men's sports was dominant on TV and in the print media. Particularly, a study by Cooky, Council, Mears, and Messner (2021) reported on the most recent iteration (findings for the year 2019) of their 30-year longitudinal study of gender in televised sports. Their study found that the quantity of coverage of women's sports on TV news and highlights shows has continued to be dismally low. In a similar manner, Taylor, Linden, and Antunovic's (2021) investigation of print media archive data covering 45 years showed that journalists trivialized women's participation in football, and the coverage has maintained hierarchies of gender.

The unequal coverage of women's sport on social media is similar to that of the traditional media. A study by Fraidenburg and Backstrom (2021) that investigated the representations of sportswomen on espnW's and ESPN's Instagram accounts reported that women's sport received less coverage and separation (i.e., of having an espnW's

women's focused account), which upheld male dominance. The study found that ESPN's Instagram rarely carried posts on sportswomen or feminism. On the other hand, while espnW's Instagram posted female empowerment messages, it posted a relatively lower number of postings about sportswomen compared to ESPN's coverage of sportsmen, and communicated less engaging content. This is contrary to the assumption that social media has great potential to serve as an alternative venue to enable and enhance a better media representation of sportswomen.

On the topic of media consumption, Lewis, Gantz, and Wenner (2021) investigated the activities people engage in while viewing televised sports, and found that viewing live sports involves a number of different simultaneous in-person and second-screen activities. Sports viewers, in fact, use the time available to watch sports to do other things simultaneously. As they view sports, viewers also meet other obligations in their lives such as taking care of the household and engaging in work- or school-related tasks. The study reported that more concurrent behaviors are displayed when games are not close, relative to games that are close.

On a related topic of social media consumption, Lim, Donovan, Kaufman, and Ishida (2021) studied how critical athletes' social media activity is for NFL athletes' in-game performance. The authors found there is a negative relationship between the frequency of social media posting and athletes' on-the-field performance. Players who post social media content with a higher level of humility are more likely to perform better. According to the authors, humility enhances self-control and positively impacts team performance. Hence, players who exhibit humility have the potential to create a team's collective humility, which leads to enhanced team performance. Equally, the authors noted that too little or too much humility may compromise athletic performance.

Relatedly, considering the value of hashtags in today's social media communication, Kim, Cho, and Kim (2021) investigated why sports fans use hashtags in their communications. The authors reported that sufficient habit (i.e., automatic responses to specific situations) and facilitating conditions (e.g., network speed, devices) would lead sports fans to share information through hashtags on social media platforms. Cranmer, Cassilo, Sanderson, and Troutman (2021) also examined how social media users react to announcements by student athletes of an early exit from their sport. By early exit, the authors mean that the student athletes voluntarily disengage from their teams prior to their planned exit dates. The findings showed varied reaction from fans depending on

their fandom to a team. While, for example, the exiting player's fans supported the athlete, other teams capitalized on the early exit announcements.

These nine studies provided us with four new important insights. It is worth noting that the methods used in the studies played a critical role in producing these insights. The new insights are : (a) the media coverage of athletes with disability and mental illness is showing positive progress in terms of positive coverage, (b) media coverage of women's sports on traditional and social media is still underrepresented, (c) viewing of live sports involves a number of different simultaneous in-person and second-screen activities, where more concurrent behaviors are displayed when games are not close, relative to games that are close, (d) players who exhibit humility in their social media communication have the potential to create enhanced team performance. Equally, too little or too much humility in social media communication may compromise athletic performance, (e) sufficient habit and facilitating conditions lead sports fans to share information through hashtags on social media platforms, and (f) expectedly, fans' social media reactions to student athletes early exit announcements vary, depending on their fandom to a team.

Annotated bibliography

McGillivray, D., O'Donnell, H., McPherson, G., & Misener, L. (2021). Repurposing the (super) cripp: media representations of disability at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games. Communication & Sport, 9(1), 3-32.

The above four authors from the United Kingdom and Canada examined UK print and online media coverage of the 2016 Rio Paralympics. The researchers studied the dominant media frames and framing techniques practiced by media outlets (e.g., The Telegraph, The Guardian, The Sun, Daily Mail, etc.) to identify any trends and patterns of reporting on disability. The authors focused on one of the main discourses that has developed since the early 2000s – supercrip. The “supercrip” narrative is the narrative of para-athletes overcoming the odds and achieving athletic excellence. Researchers have debated the merits and demerits of the “supercrip” narrative. The study found that the supercrip discourse continued to ‘enjoy rude health’ during the Rio Paralympics, supporting previous research works on the topic area. According to the authors' findings, while one cannot fully claim that the balance of media representations of the Rio Paralympics was fully positive, the trend has been encouraging, but its continuation remains to be seen.

Parrott, S., Billings, A. C., Buzzelli, N., & Towery, N. (2021). "We All Go Through It": Media Depictions of Mental Illness Disclosures from Star Athletes DeMar DeRozan, and Kevin Love. Communication & Sport, 9(1), 33-54.

The above researchers from the University of Alabama examined how the media conveyed and characterized the disclosure of personal experiences with depression and anxiety by two professional basketball players – DeMar DeRozan and Kevin Love – in 2018. The authors investigated news stories about the athletes' disclosure and their experiences with mental illness, particularly how the media presented the athletes as mental health advocates and models for pro-health attitudes and behavior. Guided by social cognitive (mass communication) and framing theories, the authors examined the ways in which news stories were covered by mainstream news outlets (i.e., professional newspapers, college publications, magazines, news wires, and online-only news sources). The study considered stories that appeared in 177 publications, most of which were published in the United States and Canada, but also in China, France, and New Zealand. The study reported positive media responses and coverage of the athletes' disclosure, which contrasts with the stereotypical news coverage of mental illness. The media framed the athletes as showing strength of character for revealing their personal experiences with mental illness.

Cooley, C., Council, L. D., Mears, M. A., & Messner, M. A. (2021). One and Done: The Long Eclipse of Women's Televised Sports, 1989–2019. Communication & Sport, 9(3), 347-371.

These researchers from Purdue University and the University of Southern California have been tracking and analysing the quantity and quality of coverage of women's and men's sports in televised news and highlights shows for three decades. In this study, they reported on the most recent iteration (findings for the year 2019) of their 30-year longitudinal study on gender in televised sports. The study was based on recorded sports news and highlights segments from Los Angeles network affiliates (KCBS, KNBC, and KABC), and ESPN's SportsCenter. The authors attempted to find if there was any change or continuity over time. The study reported that the amount of coverage of women's sports on TV news and highlights shows has continued to be dismally low. Most sports news or highlights shows are dominated by stories of men's sports. According to the authors, "when a women's sports story does appear, it is usually a case of "one and

done,” a single women’s sports story partially eclipsed by a cluster of men’s stories that precede it, follow it, and are longer in length” (p. 366). The authors also noted that there has been growth in the quantity and quality of live televised coverage of some women’s sports over the past 30 years.

Taylor, K., Linden, A. D., & Antunovic, D. (2021). “From Beach Nymph to Gridiron Amazon”: Media Coverage of Women in American Football, 1934–1979. Communication & Sport, 9(3), 458-475.

Guided by feminist sport studies literature, these three scholars from universities in the UK and US examined the media coverage of women footballers in the US. The study used over 100 newspaper and magazine articles published from 1934 to 1979. The authors employed a textual analysis to examine the coverage of women footballers. While American football is dominated by men, according to the authors women have participated in the sport for over 100 years. One of the first formal women’s football leagues began in 1934 and women’s football witnessed the establishment of its most successful franchise, the National Women’s Football League, in 1979. The study’s findings inform us that journalists trivialized women’s participation in football, and coverage has maintained hierarchies of gender.

Fraidenburg, K., & Backstrom, L. (2021). Separate and Unequal? Representations of Sportswomen on espnW’s and ESPN’s Instagram. International Journal of Sport Communication, 14(2), 168-194.

Based on the argument that social media (compared to the traditional media) serve as an alternative venue to enable and enhance the media representation of sportswomen, these two authors from Florida Atlantic University examined ESPN’s (@espn) and espnW’s (@espnw) Instagram accounts between February 2018 and August 2019. Assuming that ESPN and espnW’s Instagram audiences differ by gender, the authors examined whether the difference in the target audience was affecting the content each account was posting about sportswomen. The authors noted that while ESPN predominantly has a male audience, espnW was launched by ESPN in 2009 as a digital product marketed to women aged 18–34. Their study found that ESPN’s Instagram rarely posted about sportswomen or feminism. On the other hand, while espnW’s Instagram posted female empowerment messages, it upheld male dominance through its separation from ESPN, putting out a

relatively lower number of postings about sportswomen compared to ESPN's coverage of sportsmen, and communicating less engaging content.

Cranmer, G. A., Cassilo, D., Sanderson, J., & Troutman, B. (2021). Social media discourse about Division-I football players' early exit announcements: The role of expressed fandom. Communication & Sport, 9(4), 550-575.

These researchers, from Clemson, Kennesaw, and Texas Tech Universities, examined social media users' replies to six Division-I college football players' early exit announcements on Twitter and Instagram during the 2018 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) football season. By early exit, the authors are referring to student athletes' voluntarily disengagement from their teams prior to their planned exit dates. Most of the six student athletes considered in this study transferred either because they wanted more playing time or wanted to be closer to home. One athlete said he exited early to recover from a core muscle injury and focus on the 2019 NFL Draft. The study's findings showed that members of social media who expressed fandom for the teams from which the athletes had exited supported the athletes. However, those who expressed fandom for other teams capitalized on the announcements, and those who expressed no fandom noted the significance of, and disagreed with, the student athletes. The authors recommended that athletic department personnel should handle their public commentary of student athletes' transfer with extra care and should refrain from infusing any negative interaction between exiting athletes and the public.

Lim, J. H., Donovan, L. A., Kaufman, P., & Ishida, C. (2021). Professional Athletes' Social Media Use and Player Performance: Evidence from the National Football League. International Journal of Sport Communication, 14(1), 33-59.

These four researchers from Illinois State University and Pace University examined how athletes' social media (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) activities are associated with their on-field performance. Combining the social media activities of NFL players over one season with that of the performance and profile information of 61 professional offensive players in the league, the authors investigated how critical the athletes' social media activity was for their in-game performance. Their findings showed that there is a negative relationship between the frequency of social media posting and athletes' in-game performance. The authors also reported that players who post social media content with a higher level of humility are more likely to perform better.

Kim, H. S., Cho, K. M., & Kim, M. (2021). Information-sharing behaviors among sports fans using# hashtags. Communication & Sport, 9(4) 646-669.

These researchers from the University of Mississippi and Yonsei University (Republic of Korea) explored sports fans' hashtags usage for information sharing. Guided by the theory of interpersonal behavior, the authors examined the primary factors that influence information sharing behavior on social media platforms. The authors gathered their data from an online survey of 323 social media users who had employed hashtags to exchange sports-related information over a one-year period. The authors reported that sufficient habit and facilitating conditions (e.g., network speed, devices) would lead sports fans to share information through hashtags on social media platforms. Here, habit refers to sequences of acts that have become automatic responses to specific situations.

Lewis, N., Gantz, W., & Wenner, L. A. (2021). What We Do When We Watch Live Sports: An Analysis of Concurrent Viewing Behaviors. International Journal of Sport Communication, 14, 153–167.

These three authors (from the University of Kentucky, Indiana University, and Loyola Marymount University) studied sport fans' concurrent viewing behaviors, meaning live sports viewing behaviors while watching a normal game, a close game, and one in which the outcome was clear. Using an active audience perspective, the authors gathered survey data from 630 U.S.-based participants. The authors found that live sports viewing involves a number of different simultaneous in-person and second-screen activities. According to the study, some of the activities focused on the sporting events themselves (e.g., text others about the game, use social media to access more facts about the game), and other activities focused on meeting the responsibilities of daily life (e.g., taking care of household tasks).