Assessing the Social Media Landscape in Sport: Evaluating the Present and Identifying Future Opportunities

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This article introduces a special issue of the International Journal of Sport Communication containing insightful commentaries by distinguished scholars in social media scholarship in sports studies. By inviting 25 scholars in the field, who contributed a total of 16 scholarly commentaries, the issue benefits from their extensive knowledge of the interplay between social media and sport. The scholarly commentaries address current trends, critique methods, challenge theories, and propose fresh approaches to understanding the impact of social media in sport. These scholars offer unique perspectives, innovative methodologies, and engaging writing that caters to a diverse readership. The articles provide valuable critiques; shed light on critical issues, controversies, and gaps in knowledge; and identify future directions for sport and social media scholarship to traverse. Importantly, the diverse perspectives presented in this issue stimulate academic dialogue and foster productive discussions within the field of social media in sport studies.

Keywords: critiquing scholarship, social media and sport, sport management, social media and sport research

Social media has become a significant element of modern communication in sport, presenting both opportunities and challenges for scholars and practitioners. As such, we are pleased to introduce this special issue of the International Journal of Sport Communication, which focuses on insightful commentaries by distinguished scholars in the field of social media and sports studies. The issue represents a significant endeavor to explore the values and contributions of the social media and sport literature, which has grown significantly over the past decade. By bringing together these commentaries, we aim to stimulate intellectual discourse, advance knowledge, and inspire future research in the ever-evolving landscape of social media and sport.

From the outset, we held the belief that special issues serve as a platform for thorough exploration and wide dissemination of knowledge, fostering collaboration within the research community and facilitating intellectual discourse within our field of research. We are hopeful that we have succeeded in that endeavor. By inviting 25 leading researchers who have extensive experience publishing in social media and sport to contribute 16 scholarly commentaries to this special issue, their extensive knowledge and deep understanding of social media scholarship in sport studies provide a current assessment of the literature and identify future opportunities and directions.

As special issues often draw the interest of researchers, scholars, and practitioners, they garner a higher level of visibility within the academic community. In this regard, the commentaries included here address current trends, challenges, or developments, capturing the latest research and insights, and providing a snapshot of the field’s current state while also addressing timely issues. Through these commentaries, scholars share their unique perspectives and innovative ideas while also pushing the boundaries of existing knowledge, challenging prevailing theories, and proposing fresh approaches to understanding the impact of social media in sport. These thought leaders will have a great influence in shaping the intellectual discourse within the field and will inspire new avenues of research.

As you go through the commentaries, it becomes evident that the invited scholars have brought forth fresh perspectives, innovative methodologies, and novel insights that may not typically emerge in traditional single-article publications. With expertise from 25 authors representing 21 universities across five different countries (Australia, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom, and United States), these authors have explored the intersection of social media and sport from various angles. Moreover, their contributions exhibit an engaging writing style that caters to a diverse readership. One noteworthy aspect is the scholars’ ability to convey complex concepts in an accessible manner, which makes the contributions not only relevant to academics but also appealing to practitioners and policymakers. By making research more approachable, these commentaries contribute to the dissemination of knowledge and broaden the impact of the special issue beyond the confines of the academic community of social media scholarship in sport studies.

As noted, the articles in this collection encompass a wide array of topics and provide valuable critiques that will shape future research in the field. Notably, Wagner (2023) conducts a comprehensive review and critique of the research agenda for brand communities in sports, while Clavio (2023) offers a critical examination of the significance of dynamic or active audiovisual content research. Achen (2023) explores opportunities for advancing relationship marketing and social media research, Cianfrone (2023) critiques brand management research within the context of social media, and Geurin (2023) examines social media scholarship in relation to consumer behavior. Additionally, Kian and Zimmerman (2023) offer critical insights into social media and college athletes’ Name, Image, and Likeness opportunities. MacPherson and Kerr (2023) delve into the realm of social media and cyberbullying of athletes, while Kavanagh et al. (2023) focus on social media’s...
impact on athlete welfare. The use of quantitative methods is explored, and a research framework for social media research is presented by Kunkel et al. (2023), while Mamo (2023) offers a critique of big data and innovative research methods. Also, a critical examination of social media’s influence on sports-related legal and sponsorship issues is presented by Grady (2023), while Frederick and Pegoraro (2023) offer crisis communication research in social media studies. King-White (2023) critiques social media scholarship in sport studies and the state of cultural studies, and Fischer and Birren (2023) present a commentary on the use of social media in sport doping enforcement and control. The two opening commentaries are written by the coeditors of the special issue. Abeza (2023) presents a critical review of research works on social media and sport studies published over the last 9 years (2014–2023). In his commentary, Sanderson (2023) reflects on how social media and sport research have evolved over time and calls for more consideration to be given to critical approaches to social media research that look beyond analysis of social media content.

These works not only provide historical perspectives but also offer comprehensive summaries of key developments and highlight significant milestones in the field of social media scholarship in sport studies. Moreover, they shed light on critical issues, controversies, gaps in knowledge, and future directions, presenting a holistic view of the literature. Importantly, the diverse perspectives presented in these articles stimulate academic exchange and foster productive discussions within the field of social media in sport studies. They challenge existing notions, invite responses, and generate new research questions, igniting a dynamic and collaborative exchange of ideas among researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and students. By compiling these scholarly commentaries by some of the field’s leading scholars, this special issue of the International Journal of Sport Communication demonstrates the value of such a collection. The expertise, thought leadership, contextualization, synthesis of research, engaging writing style, and ability to foster dialogue exhibited by the authors contribute to the advancement of knowledge and understanding in this rapidly evolving field. We are honored to present this collection of scholarly commentaries and hope that it serves as a catalyst for further exploration, sparks fruitful collaborations, and inspires future research within the realm of social media scholarship in sport studies.

References


