

NCAA Recruiting in the Age of Social Media

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of the study is to determine the various impacts Social Networking Sites (SNS) have on Canadian full scholarship National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) Division 1 athletes' recruitment processes. The study employs a qualitative, interview-based methodology. Six Canadian athletes who received full NCAA division 1 scholarships in football, men's basketball, and women's basketball were interviewed, as well as three NCAA coaches involved in recruiting processes. It is evident from the findings that SNS have important roles to play in NCAA Division 1 athletes' recruitment process and there are various aspects of SNS use that determine recruiting effectiveness. All of the athletes who took part in the study along with the coaches were actively involved in SNS during recruiting processes. Twitter was the most preferred SNS platform that is used for recruiting purposes by both athletes and coaches in the study. A primary reason that the athletes gave for using certain SNS platforms is the ability to control the content of the platform and manage how others view them, aligning with Erving Goffman's self-presentation theory. However, coaches also shared the view that SNS, when not used appropriately, can lead to negative self-presentation, limiting the chances of getting recruited or receiving a full scholarship. This study provides key insights into the role of social media in Canadian high-performance athletes lives and how it impacts their recruitment in NCAA sport.

**Keywords:** Recruiting; Social Media; National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA); Amateur Sport; Presentation of Self.

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## *Chapter 1*

# **The Rise of Social Media and the NCAA Recruiting Process**

### **Introduction**

Recruiting high-level athletes is a central part of building successful teams in sport, especially at the university playing level. Social media now plays a significant role in this recruiting process, allowing for ongoing communications and interactions without geographic restrictions and minimal time constraints. Recent world events surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic have highlighted further significance of the rise of virtual recruiting with the use of social media, as in-person interactions have been significantly restricted at a key moment in the university recruiting cycle. This study focuses on the role of social media in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division 1 recruiting of Canadian athletes. Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat are social networking sites (SNS) that high school recruits use quite frequently in their daily routines (Clavio & Frederick, 2015). This analysis explores the self-presentation techniques of amateur Canadian athletes who have received a full scholarship to a NCAA Division 1 institution, concentrating the research on the Division 1 sports of football, men's basketball, and women's basketball. Overall, five primary research questions have guided this research including:

- 1) What SNS do NCAA student athletes and coaches commonly use in the recruiting process?
- 2) Which SNS do they prefer to use and why?

- 3) How do they use SNS in the recruiting process? And, what factors shape their use?
- 4) What impacts, both positive and negative, do SNS have on NCAA recruiting?
- 5) What strategies can lead to more effective use of SNS in NCAA recruiting?

Nearly all high school students use at least one of the five SNS on a daily basis (Statista, 2018). It is not uncommon for students to frequent all five SNS, spending hours a day interacting with others and presenting themselves to thousands sometimes millions of different people. Due to the recent popularity of SNS among adolescents in North America the likelihood of someone aged 13-24 having a social media account has risen from 80% in 2008 to 97% in 2014, while the average daily time spent using a SNS per day is 48 minutes, rising from the previous daily time amount of 17 minutes (Statista, 2018). A study conducted in 2018 found that 98% of student-athletes have a Facebook account, 95% have a Twitter account, 99% have an Instagram account, and 93% have a Snapchat account (DeShazo, 2018). Not only has social media become commonplace in the daily activities amongst the generation Y and Z (8 years old – 40 years old) in many instances SNS have become central to student athletes and their university recruitment process.

Today's amateur athlete has the ability to self-present their self to prospective universities in ways athletes in the past could never have imagined. For example, an athlete can now make a YouTube highlight video of themselves playing well, Tweet a message about a school that made an offer to them, or edit a picture of themselves in the uniform of the school recruiting them and then post it for hundreds of people to comment

and see on Instagram or Facebook. These examples have now become commonplace in the recruiting processes of high school athletes in the age of social media.

Acts of self-presentation are evident at all levels of the recruitment process. For less popular recruits, self-presentation on social media is vital to garner consideration amongst college coaches. These recruits might be more likely to post a YouTube video showcasing their skills because most college coaches are not familiar with their abilities, athleticism, and physical build. SNS and YouTube in particular have given these athletes a platform to be identified and scouted without a coach even having to see the athlete play in person. For popular recruits, social media can serve as a stage for universities and fans of the university to influence the individual. In many cases fans will comment on the student athletes' SNS with messages of support and praise that entice the individual to commit to a given institution. SNS also serve as a vehicle for recruits to update the public on their recruitment process. They might i) post a picture thanking a university for offering them a scholarship, ii) notify the public that they have shortlisted their recruitment list to a limited number of schools, and/or iii) announce their decision on what school they are committing to.

The recruitment process in the age of social media is now very different from what it was 15-20 years ago. Before the growth of social media, university coaches would often make trips to recruits' homes to have dinner with their families. They would attend numerous high school games to accurately evaluate their talent. Also, marketing materials from the institution, including promotional materials about how many professional players the school has produced would be mailed. Prior to the digital age university coaches were required to take on other time-consuming activities in order to

entice the perspective student-athlete, such as making weekly phone calls or mailing team apparel to potential recruits. Some of these practices are still used today however the impact of social media has negated many of these tactics.

Given the market value that a top high school recruit can have on a NCAA Division 1 program, players can help institutions earn millions of dollars and produce revenue that the entire institution depends on and benefits from. For this reason, acquiring the right talent is essential. Maintaining a connection through this process is easily facilitated through SNS. The process has always been an important one but now social media platforms have truly altered the nature of sport communication (Clavio & Frederick, 2015).

Although university sport programs understand the importance of recruiting over social media and invest heavily in scouting and player evaluation resources, mastering these techniques have proven to be extremely difficult (Sanderson, Browning, & Schmittl, 2015). NCAA history is littered with infractions and penalties against various NCAA athletic departments due to the improper use of social media in the recruitment process. Colleges have lost athletic scholarships, been fined thousands of dollars, and in some instances have been not allowed to participate athletically due to foul conduct over SNS networks (Esptein, 2012).

The motivation for this study is to further explore how athletes engage in impression management on social media sites in their recruitment process. Also, this study seeks to explore how athletes perceive different impression management strategies used by colleges and universities on social media sites. While some research has been done to assess both of these relationships, previous research has analyzed the impact

using content analysis of social media accounts and has not individually asked the amateur athletes how social media affects this process in a qualitative interview structured setting. This study attempts to fill that gap through the use of a qualitative interviewing methodology.

Additional information regarding how to properly recruit student-athletes over social media is vital for athletic departments in terms of what does and does not work. One collegiate admissions report stated, “98% of US universities have Facebook pages, while 84% are active on Twitter. And with 72% of incoming high school seniors reporting that they researched their prospective colleges on a social media site. (Croke, 2013). Proves that athletic departments are quickly realizing the impact that SNS can have in the recruiting process.

Also for the recruits themselves, obtaining guidance on how to conduct themselves over social media is crucial. One tweet, Instagram post, or comment on Facebook can drastically change the student athletes’ eligibility to participate in their sport at the next level. For example, Shedrick McCall III was a standout high school running back in the state of Virginia. McCall was also very popular on a Youtube channel he created. He would regularly talk about his personal life stories. In one video in particular, McCall described an incident when he was trespassing, and the video ended up going viral. At the time this occurred he was committed to an NCAA Division 1 school, Old Dominion University, but after they learned of the story via his Youtube channel his scholarship was immediately revoked (Ryan, 2018). Han et al. (2015) found that almost all Division 1 universities are using monitoring software on the accounts of current and

perspective student athletes to identify key words on social media accounts that could potentially harm the universities' image and reputation.

The self-presentation qualities shown on SNS are necessary to understand in order for a player to have a successful recruitment process (Clavio & Frederick, 2015). Understanding self-presentation techniques of amateur athletes and grasping the uses and gratifications of social media will never be an exact science and can continuously be analyzed. The objective of this study is to use semi-structured interviews to provide insight and information regarding self-presentation tendencies of amateur athletes and NCAA Division 1 coaches on SNS. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with athletes and coaches to determine the impact social media had on the recruiting process from their perspectives. All the athletes interviewed were current Canadian NCAA Division 1 football, men's basketball, or women's basketball players that completed their recruitment process and enrolled in university between the years of 2017-2018. All coaches interviewed were current NCAA Division 1 head coaches or lead recruiting assistants.

The results of this analysis can help universities and their athletic departments bolster the scouting process of potential recruits. Currently the 'best' practices for how student-athletes should use social media include watch what you post, share consistent and positive images of your brand, and support others on the team such as coaches, teammates, or other sports teams (Gaio, 2013). Moreover, by examining how student-athletes presented themselves over SNS, this study uncovers self-presentation tendencies along with uses and gratifications of the student-athlete. This can be of great benefit to future student-athletes who embark upon the NCAA recruiting process to determine how

to properly conduct themselves on SNS. This study also highlights trends in decision making by student athletes with regards to specific SNS, and provides great insight on how student athletes can appropriately leverage these platforms.

This thesis opens with a discussion of the existing literature on SNS research in sport, the recruiting process, and the theoretical approaches used in the study. A methodology chapter follows that outlines and justifies the use of a qualitative, interview-based approach, and identifies limitations with the use of this methodology. Key findings of the interviews are then noted and analyzed in chapter four. In the final concluding chapter, the key findings of this study are summarized, along with recommendations for athletes and coaches to effectively use SNS in recruiting processes. Furthermore, study limitations and potential directions for further research are identified.

## *Chapter Two*

### **Existing Research on SNS and the Recruiting Process**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I examine the literature as it relates to amateur athletes and the different facets of the recruitment process since the adaptation of social media. I begin with a discussion of Goffman's theory of self-presentation and how it has been used to study the athletes' behaviour on SNS. I then examine how sport organizations also practice impression management of their programs via SNS. Existing research on the NCAA recruiting process is briefly touched upon. I then turn to the relevant literature surrounding the governance of social media within the NCAA and other governing bodies. This includes research conducted on various school policies by different athletic departments and sanctions that have been placed on players and programs from different Division 1 universities for social media misconduct. I conclude by exploring research using another theoretical approach employed in this study, Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), to identify the reasons why student athletes use SNS sites and the motives behind their different platform choices. While previous literature has been centered around content analysis and creating themes in regards to what athletes have already posted on social media, my research builds on this literature by examining how social media has specifically impacted the recruitment process of student athletes. I also explore self-presentation tendencies, and the uses and gratifications demonstrated by these athletes.

## **A Dramaturgical Approach**

As the research that follows will show, athletes in general are tremendously active on SNS, whether they are professionals or amateurs. This leads to different self-presentation tendencies that take place on SNS by athletes world-wide that convey messages to their respective audiences. The specifics of Goffman's self-presentation theory and current literature on the self-presentation of athletes on social media are analyzed below.

Goffman first reported findings from his study of self-presentation in a 1959 book titled *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. The text brought forward the idea of his dramaturgical analysis approach, which argues the elements of human interaction are dependent upon time, place, and audience, suggesting the social world is a stage and we are all actors. The self is essentially a dramatic effect emerging from the scene being presented in the mind. Goffman (1959) uses the analogy of a theatre to depict the importance human social interaction and identifies how it can drastically change depending on the situation, similar to how an actor would stage different personas on a theatrical stage. Goffman argues that when we are in contact with others, we will try to control the impressions that they might have of us by changing our opinions, appearance, or mannerisms. In our 'front' stage we present an image that we want others to see, which include things like our demeanor, appearance, etc. In the 'backstage' we prepare for our role or set it aside. The dramaturgical approach insists that as humans we take on existing 'roles' we are comfortable with in order to create a sense of comfort and familiarity with our audience. Within Goffman's text the theory of self- presentation was proposed and is still used in the research of social media today (Treviño, 2003).

### **Athletes Self-Presentation on Social Media**

Goffman's self-presentation theory purports that self-presentation is the process by which individuals represent themselves to the social world. This process occurs at both conscious and unconscious levels and is usually motivated by a desire to please others or meet the needs of the self (Franzese, 2018). Self-presentation strategies normally differ across individuals (age, gender, and culture), but can also be influenced by environmental factors. Individuals may elect to alter their self-presentations in response to cues from the social environment (Franzese, 2018). In this research the dominant consideration is the college recruitment process as a type of social environment. Certain types of social environments can lead to both environmental cues and factors such as the social context (i.e., how public the setting is) and interpersonal cues such as the perceived responses of others. During the recruitment process individuals may also differ in the extent to which they engage in self-monitoring. Self-monitoring is the extent to which individuals monitor their behavior and self-presentation in response to real or perceived interactional cues. These interactional cues can develop through interactions with friends, coaches, family members, fans, and the media. While Goffman conducted his study and was theorizing long before the development of the internet and social media, his theory remains highly relevant and has been used in a contemporary context to examine online interactions.

Gawshaw, O'Reilly, Seguin, and Nzindukiyimana (2015) examined the history and current state of social media scholarship in sport management research. The study focused on all research completed in social media and sport from January 2008 to June

2014. This encompasses 123 research articles that were conducted in that time period. The literature identifies the main topic areas of focus, different platforms, theories that are predominately used, and research methods that are most popular. The study argues,

(a) that social media literature provides a solid foundation for an understanding of social media in sport management research, (b) a significant concentration of the sport management research is centered on two social media platforms—Twitter and Facebook, (c) the utilization of theories is still in the early stages, (d) there is a limited scope and range in the research methods adopted and data collection instruments employed, and (e) there is a lack of a framework that provides a summary of the current literature and provides direction for future research (Gawshaw et. al, 2015, p.609).

The researchers also highlight that Twitter and Facebook are the two most popular social media platforms in sports management literature, which is important to note when studying the impact SNS have on amateur athletes. This study seeks to contribute to this growing body of literature, employing a dramaturgical theoretical approach while moving beyond content analysis to examine athlete self-presentation in social media.

One significant study that has examined athlete self-presentation on social media was conducted by Korzynski and Panigua (2016), where they determined how the use of social media has the potential to have a substantially lucrative impact among soccer players in Europe. Their research uncovered how some of the highest paid athletes in the world use social media to their advantage. The study outcomes showed a positive correlation between activeness and popularity on social media, while also showing the

benefits of expressing oneself on SNS and the positive correlations it has on athlete contracts and market value in sport business.

Korzynski and Panigua (2016) do, however, caution athletes that although social media has tremendous benefits it can also have negative consequences; athletes need to find a balance between protecting their identity and sharing interesting news from their private lives. Scholars point out that online fans avidly expect information about athletes' personal lives on SM but the athlete needs to understand that sharing too much can actually be harmful. Korzynski and Panigua (2016) identified three primary purposes that social media has in sport: i) 'informing' because it helps fans understand athletes on a personal level, ii) 'interacting' because it has a positive influence on fans and also helps to attract sponsors and new fans, and iii) 'inspiring' because it makes fans want to attend games, train harder, and also support the team the athlete plays for.

Examining professional athletes only, Pegoraro (2010) found that the self-presentation of athletes on Twitter could be placed into seven categories: relating to personal life, relating to business life, relating to another sport or athlete, relating to their sport, responding to fans, responding to other athletes, and relating to pop culture. The research was conducted for a 1-week period in January 2010 through athletes who were deemed as "popular" on Twitter based on the number of Twitter followers they had. The professional sports examined were basketball, tennis, golf, American football, motor sports, and soccer. Some of the notable professional athletes followed over the seven days were Shaquille O'Neal, Serena Williams, Freddy Adu, and Paul Pierce. This resulted in 1,193 tweets that were organized and analyzed using content analysis. The study found that more than 50% of most athletes' tweets were used to engage with fans

opposed to previous research in the field that found self-branding, or self-marketing to be most prominent. Pegoraro (2010) finished the study by highlighting the popularity of Twitter among sport fans. Currently sport fans represent 19% of all U.S. Internet users and also tend to be early adopters of new communication technologies. Therefore, the importance of social media and the access it provides in building fan attachment in the era of websites that emphasize user-generated content, ease of use, participatory culture, and interoperability for end users is vital (Pegoraro, 2010).

Smith and Sanderson (2015) looked at the self-presentation of professional athletes through the SNS of Instagram. They also found themes that generally represent how athletes present themselves on this particular social media platform. The six self-presentation themes they developed from their research were: humanitarian, family driven, personality, traits and interests, dedicated athlete, endorser, and socialite. The athletes were selected based on popularity, name, and recognition. All posts were collected from March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014 working backward to the athletes' first post, and a total of 1,352 photos were analyzed. Smith and Sanderson focused most of their analysis on the differences between genders and how they present themselves. One discovery from the research revolves around Goffman's (1979) finding of ritualistic touching. Goffman noted, that self-presentation through touch is generally a feminine behavior. Consistent with previous research, female athletes were more likely to be engaged in this type of behavior. The most common form of touch was found in photos of female athletes with their friends. They commonly posed with arms around shoulders, or hugging individuals in some way. If an object was featured in the photograph, the female would typically be hugging it into her body in some way, such as hugging in a stuffed animal, or hugging in

a trophy that was won. When male athletes were found to engage in ritualistic touching in photographs, it was most often in photographs with friends or family members, posed with arms slung around each other's shoulders (Smith & Sanderson, 2015).

Clavio and Frederick (2015) examined how top high school football prospects use the SNS of Twitter. They collected tweets from amateur student athletes ranked in the top 300 on ESPN's high school recruiting rankings. They found that these athletes have a heightened sense of popularity compared to regular high school students with followers on Twitter being in the thousands. The final conclusion that comes from these tweets are that athletes are more candid than calculated. This makes for more personal tweets that help engage fans but also calls for a cautionary tale to athletes, administrators, and coaches to help educate athletes how to effectively use these types of social media. The five themes produced through the research were: personalist, interactivist, promotionalist, culturalist, and vocationalist. The NCSA which stands for Next College Student Athlete also wrote an article outlining the benefits recruits can have using social media to their advantage stating, "Social media when used properly, can be an effective recruiting tool. In fact, recruits can use the power of social media to contact coaches, show coaches what kind of recruit they are and even gain the attention of college coaches who weren't previously recruiting them." (NCSA, p.1).

Previous literature shows professional athletes use Twitter to promote themselves as a brand with fan interaction and calculated posts. David et al. (2018) found that athletes generally engage in responsible use of Twitter, however, they cannot completely avoid critical tweets directed towards them. The study also uncovered that at times gender dynamics can be a major indicator towards how student-athletes conduct

themselves on social media. Males for example tweet more about sport whereas females tend to engage more in topics like female empowerment and life outside of sport. Up to this point, minimal research has been conducted to analyze how ‘amateur’ athletes use twitter, but these researchers argue that amateur athletes show more candid self-expression, which is ripe for academic study.

Giesler (2017) looked at three facets of self-presentation for 179 intercollegiate soccer players from university teams in Canada (60 players), Germany (59 players), and Japan (60 players). The ages of the participants ranged from 18 years to 31 years old. All participants were full-time students as well as members of the top varsity soccer team at their respective institutions. All participants completed the brief version of the Fear of Negative Evaluation scale (FNE). The FNE is a self-report inventory with a 5-point Likert-type scale for each of 12 questionnaire items, and the participants had to indicate the extent to which the items describe them (Geisler, 2018). The research established that Canadian student athletes mainly wanted others to think that they were good players based on their individual performances, while being part of a good competitive team. Players also wanted to present to their peers that they were part of a good team atmosphere, showed personal effort, and met their coach’s expectations. Furthermore, more than the Japanese and German student-athletes Canadian student-athletes did not want their weaknesses exposed, which meant looking like an unskilled player, or to look like they played on a weak team. Interestingly, the most frequently listed target people for players in Canada were coaches (22.9%) (Geisler, 2018). This information is vital when observing Canadian student-athletes because it is easier to get a sense of their personalities and what they consider as most important.

Fox and Vendemia (2016) examined selective self-presentation and social comparison through photographs on SNS. The study focused on the variables that influence social media users' photographic self-presentation and compared it to other photographs on social media. The researchers identified a sample size of over 1500 participants who use social media in the United States. Additionally, the researchers analyzed male versus female photo-related behavior (posting photos, editing photos, etc.), and evaluated the differences between the genders. The study found that women put more effort into cultivating a socially desirable physical appearance online by editing photos. Female obsession with regards to body image and social comparison were the main behaviors identified in the findings. Men on the other hand cared less about their physical appearance when posting photographs on social media platforms, which is something to consider when predicting their behaviors of how social media influences their collegiate recruitment.

Lebel and Danylchuck (2014) examined how professional athletes present themselves on Twitter through their profile pictures. The self-presentation of the athletes was interpreted by an audience classified as Generation Y, born between the years 1977-1994. The participants assessed a sample of profile pictures from the most followed male and female athletes on Twitter. The participants were then asked to provide their first impressions of the photo and also evaluate the photo for effectiveness. The most important finding in the research was that the participants repeatedly ranked athletes who consistently incorporated the sport in which they participated within their profile picture as more positively impressionable. Erving Goffman's theory of self-presentation (1959) implied that individuals manage impressions of themselves through identity cues that are

given off both intentionally and unintentionally in an effort to compose preferred versions of themselves for public consumption. Goffman suggested that in this self-presentation process, individuals attempt to manage the impressions they give off, strategically emphasizing some characteristics while de-emphasizing others. He theorized that through the interpretation of these identity cues, individuals are provided the information necessary to make determinations about one another. In this research the athletes were self-presenting themselves to promote their own brand and image (Lebel & Danylchuck, 2014). When drawing connections from a student-athlete self-presentation perspective, the 'brand/image' portrayal shifts its focus to take into account the audience, including potential university coaches and fans.

Kassing and Sanderson (2010) investigated the self-presentation of professional cyclists during the cycling Tour of Italy called the Giro. Three themes were produced from the literature that relates to the self-presentation of athletes on SNS. The first is that Twitter serves to provide a platform for athletes to comment on and share their opinions about a whole host of issues. Second, Twitter can be used to foster interactivity amongst fans. Thirdly, by cultivating insider perspectives athletes can create intimacy with fans by providing an insider perspective into what is going on in their life. An interesting quote serves as a great summary of how self-presentation is conducted by athletes on Twitter:

Twitter clearly enhances fans' access to athletes. Given the large number of athletes now using this medium Twitter seems destined to have an impact on sports communication. Sports organizations will continue to struggle with governing this alluring new medium, athletes will continue to expand their use of the technology, and fans will continue to follow those athletes with unprecedented

access (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010, p. 126).

Even though the quote goes back eight years the prediction of how SNS will be used by athletes in the future was very accurate based on what is displayed currently. Sanderson (2011) asserted that blogs and Twitter revolutionized sports media by engaging athletes in producing content constantly.

Marder et al. (2016) also found that self-presentation is motivated by three goals: personal gains (social and economic), self-esteem, and to sustain an identity project. Self-presentation theory asserts that the motivation for an individual to manage their public persona is not just predicted by the standards of the audience but also their 'value.' Such value is largely determined by the perceived social and economic losses and gains that an audience has the power to inflict (Marder, Joinson, Shankar, & Thirlaway, 2016).

How athletes self-present themselves along with their personal brands on Twitter, and looking at the difference between self-presentation tactics of individual athletes versus team sports, are ongoing questions in a sports management research. Shreffler. Hancock and Schmidt (2016) attempted to answer these questions by analyzing the self-presentation of female athletes through their avatars on Twitter. The study found that female athletes were most likely to portray themselves as competent athletes, in selfies, or as social beings. The study also found that individual-sport athletes were more likely to display their athletic competence, highlight themselves as social beings, or be promotional figures compared to team sport athletes. According to the authors, "Twitter offers the opportunity for an athlete to shape the impression (i.e., front stage) others may have about him or her, while also allowing the athlete to engage openly and honestly with fans, friends, and family members (e.g., back stage)" (p.464). With the continuous

development of SNS and its use in sport, the power of athletes to shape impressions has grown exponentially. Athletes who were previously unable to control how they were depicted now can use user-controlled outlets like Twitter and have a greater ability to build and create their personal brands and personas (Shreffler et al., 2016).

Coche (2017) conducted a study analyzing student-athletes and how they present themselves on social media (Twitter). Coche found that male student-athletes were more concerned with how they are perceived when performing their sport, while women focus most of their attention on their legacy outside of their sport.

Kim and Kim (2017) analyzed college student's participation in sports and how this impacts their social media use. The researchers investigated whether or not sport participation leads to college attachment and consequently influences psychological well-being. The study used an online survey at a large NCAA Division 1 public university. The sample size of participants was 580 undergraduate students. Gratification Theory was the theoretical approach used by the researchers. The gratifications they concluded from the data were 1) entertainment (escapism, mood management, achievement and competition), 2) information/ surveillance (information seeking, information learning) 3) socialization (interpersonal communication, peer acceptance, relationship maintenance, social support, and sense of community), and 4) self-status (self-expression, self-presentation) (Kim & Kim 2017). Incorporating these gratifications in the analysis, the study found that sport participation is positively associated with social media use and one affinity to a college. They stated: "Those who participated in sports were more likely to use social media for posting, sharing their experience, and felt greater attachment." (Kim & Kim, 2017, p. 622 ). This study relates to social media and college recruitment process

because it uncovers the various reasons why college students use social media. Finding their attachment to certain sports, or reasons for liking a photo on Instagram, or retweeting a tweet from Twitter all help provide understand of common behaviours. This builds a foundation toward answering the question of why athletes conduct themselves on SNS in the manner in which they do, which this study explores.

### **Use of SNS by Sports Organizations**

Over the last decade collegiate athletic programs have begun the widespread use of social media. They do so to attract potential recruits, report scores and news, share pictures of student athletes, show the core values that a school and athletic department has, and promote sporting events (Ohio University, 2018).

Watkins and Lee (2016) observed that it is not only athletes that engage in self-presentation on social media but also sport organizations. They examined how universities in the United States use social media for athletic branding purposes, particularly looking at the sport of football. They found that the use of Instagram as a branding strategy is stronger than the use of Twitter when targeting young people. The respondents who were exposed to Instagram content reported higher perceptions of brand personality than those exposed to Twitter content. This information is important to consider because many of the participants in this study might feel the same way.

Researchers have attempted to identify how sport organizations are using social media to promote events in a sports and entertainment capacity. This involves analyzing what social media techniques appeal to young people who make up a significant percentage of ticket sales in professional sports. Black, Judson, and Beggs (2016) analyzed NCAA Division 1 athletic programs and different motivations and approaches

used on social media. Their research found that athletic programs are taking a heightened interest in their online image, by spending time and financial resources in an effort to appeal to prospective student-athletes for the purposes of recruiting, coaches, and other athletic staff (Black, Judson, & Beggs, 2016). Institutions are achieving this by leveraging apps like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube to create original content for their faculty, staff, and student-athletes to redistribute and share with those who follow them.

Examining effective marketing strategies for sport and entertainment venues, Rothschild (2011) determined that sport organizations should take marketing on social media very seriously and not just leave the work to volunteers or interns. The study advocates for social media as a serious marketing tool, especially amongst young adults, and demonstrates the benefits of companies that have already invested in it. Rothschild (2011) states:

Almost two-thirds of venues reported that they have someone dedicated to managing social media (62%) versus those without someone dedicated to managing social media (37%). A notable proportion of venues use interns or volunteers to enhance their social media efforts (43%)” (p. 140).

With this being said simply “handing over the keys” of all social media accounts to interns without an established social media strategy and effective training is very risky (Rothschild, 2011). To ensure maximum return on investment the study advocates that leadership groups should measure social media activity in their organization. They should calculate results of activity amongst adolescents and determine results that lead to higher levels of engagement. This will in turn drive more ticket sales. The connection to student-

athletes collegiate recruitment is relative to how a university might conduct themselves on social media and the part it plays in the decision-making process of certain student-athletes.

Yuan and Zhou (2015) conducted a similar study examining how NBA teams use social media. The literature articulates the growth of social media and how popular it is becoming in the world of sport, especially by sport organizations. The researchers decided to look at all 30 NBA teams and track their tweets for roughly one month. Over 5,000 tweets were analyzed using OPR, which stands for organization-public relationship. OPR is divided into 3 categories, which are professional relationship, personal relationship, and community relationship. The research found that most of the tweets produced by these NBA teams were for a professional relationship at 71.4%, followed by personal relationship at 14.9%, and community relationship at 13.6%. Student-athletes will experience some of the same relationships sport organizations experience within their interactions on social media with fans. Although the percentages might not be the same, student-athletes' behaviours might also align with Yuan and Zhou's study, with similar trends of fanship, activity/event, and entertainment.

### **The Amateur Athlete Recruitment Process in the NCAA**

College coaches at the NCAA Division 1 level invest many resources into recruiting the best athletes possible for their respective program, but trying to find and secure the right player for a team is at times tremendously difficult given the freedom of selection these amateur athletes have. Year after year coaches are tasked with building recruiting classes of multiple amateur athletes that will commit to attend the university and be an integral part of the program's success. Previous research shows that the more

top recruits a university possesses, the better that university performs athletically (Feldman, 2009). Several other studies (Humphreys & Mondello, 2007; Pope, 2009; Roach, 2017) analyzed the ranking of recruitment classes and demonstrated the corresponding athletic performance of Division 1 programs, which further highlights the necessity for collegiate coaches to recruit at a high level in order to remain competitive. Many coaches have been fired for their inability to recruit top amateur talent to their respective university, while on the other hand many coaches have been hired strictly because of their ability to attract and land top-level talent (Klenosky & Troutman, 2001).

The pressure to win has sparked the interest of NCAA coaches to recruit outside of the United States. As Weston (2006) writes, "The "arms race" in college sports is on - and it is fueling efforts to recruit top talent internationally, therefore increasing competition among schools to search worldwide for talented players." Canadian student athletes have become the beneficiaries of this international recruiting strategy. This has resulted in more scholarship dollars per capita since the NCAA first formed in 1906. In the sports of men's basketball, women's basketball, and men's football the necessity to find top players is even more paramount. These sports at most institutions generate the majority, if not all, the athletic revenue. Increasingly, Canadian recruits are the targets of NCAA coaches.

Pope (2009) examined the difficulty of recruiting at smaller private Division 1 institutions while exploring the flexibility of the admissions process in schools that generally have more successful athletic programs. Using SAT scores in relation to admissions and the athletic team's success the study found that there is a direct positive correlation between collegiate athletic success and enrolment at smaller Division 1

institutions. The author also mentioned the “Flutie factor” as a significant reason for the increase in admissions. The Flutie factor is based on the phenomenon of having a successful college sports team and how it increases the exposure and prominence of a university. This is named after former Boston College quarterback Doug Flutie, whose successful Hail Mary pass in the 1984 game against the University of Miami clinched a win that reportedly played a large role in an increase in applications to Boston College the following year. Mulholland et al. (2014) conducted a similar study in regards to the Flutie factor and found the same results.

It is also important to note that the process of recruitment has likely changed over the last decade with the implementation of social media. Previous research has not specifically identified how significant of an impact social media can have in the decision making process of student athletes, which is examined in this research study. For example, out of the top 300 football players in high school during the year of 2013, every single player posted the school they committed to over at least one form of SNS (Clavio & Frederick, 2015). How coaches are using social media to evaluate recruits is also something that is more common than ever before. Coach Jeff Scott who coaches NCAA Division 1 football at Clemson University stated, “At Clemson, we have an entire office whose sole duty is to go through the social media of our prospects. It’s extremely important for us to understand who we are dealing with. That office will look through the content and report to our coaching staff on what they are finding. Every year, we will eliminate prospects on our board because of questionable content. We’ve eliminated guys for inappropriate language, images, retweets or anything that we see as a red flag. Conversely, guys have moved up on our board because of the positive things we are able

to learn through the various social media channels. It serves as a tremendous resource for us.” (Hawley, 2019).

### **The Governance of Social Media by NCAA Institutions**

Researchers have also looked at NCAA institutions and the policies they have set on amateur athletes’ conduct on social media. Institutions have taken very different approaches on how they govern student-athlete usage of SNS. Loyola University, for example, banned all involvement between their athletes and Facebook in January 2006 (Maher, 2007, p. 139). John Planek who was the Athletic Director of Loyola University at the time stated: "we are responsible for the well-being and safety of our athlete's, and most young people don't realize how something like this can put them at risk." Planek went on to say that Facebook "is such a virgin technology" that he is afraid of “potentially hazardous problems that could arise from the site” (Maher, 2007, p. 139). How institutions have governed SNS have changed drastically since then but the risk of SNS still remain the same.

NCAA institutions have tried to control how student athletes conduct themselves on social media by making various social media policies. Sanderson (2011) looked at the athletic departments of Division 1 universities social media policies and offered suggestions on how these policies can be better suited for the current student athlete. He states: “Social media has greatly shifted sports media and sports communication practices, particularly in college sports, because both student-athletes and athletic programs can experience negative consequences stemming from problematic postings” (Sanderson, 2011, p. 494). Sanderson (2011) found that many of these policies were created by individuals that had minimal knowledge about the capabilities of social media,

which in turned placed unrealistic demands on the young student athletes. The study first revealed that social-media policies are largely composed of prohibitions and restrictions, but in delineating these restrictions many of the policies contained contradictory tensions. The study also points out that athletic departments should be cautious of how they frame the monitoring of athlete profiles because it could affect athletes' feelings on ownership of their social media accounts. One overarching conclusion was that there is a dire need for more policies to outline how social media can be used constructively. The data proved that only 7 of the 200 plus policies examined highlighted the positives social media can have on student athletes. The results of the analysis showed that although simply reading a policy can prove effective, it is imperative for student-athletes to receive significant social-media training, preferably from those with expertise. In addition to that consistent training, athletic departments should ensure that they are remaining well aware of social-media changes and updating their policies and training accordingly (Sanderson, 2011).

In Sanderson's (2011) analysis he uses Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM). Communication scholar Sandra Petronio developed CPM in 1991. She states: "At its core, CPM positions communication as a goal-oriented task. Thus, as people distribute information, impose regulations on that information, and negotiate rules about it with those whom they have shared it, their goals greatly influence their communicative choices" (Sanderson, 2011, p. 492). CPM was initially applied to interpersonal communication contexts, but scholars are expanding it to other contexts including communication technology" (Sanderson 2011, p. 497). Sanderson's (2011) results reveal three main themes in the current policies, which are 1) content restrictions, 2) monitoring, and 3) risk. Social-media policies are largely composed of prohibitions

and restrictions, but in delineating these restrictions, many of the policies contained contradictory tendencies. Athletic departments should also be cautious of how they frame the monitoring of athlete profiles because it could effect athletes feelings on ownership of their social media accounts. Thirdly, there is the need for more policies to outline how social media can be used constructively.

Importantly, Sanderson's (2011) study mentioned that only 7 of over 200 policies examined highlighted the positives social media can have on student athletes. Sanderson also notes that although simply reading a policy can prove effective, it is imperative for student-athletes to receive significant social-media training, preferably from those with expertise. In addition to consistent training, athletic departments should ensure that they are staying well aware of social-media changes and updating their policies and training accordingly. Sanderson followed up this study in 2015 by interviewing 20 different student athletes at a Division 1 university. He found that although student athletes expressed an interest in social media education, most of them found the current messages they were taught forgettable with no lasting impact (Sanderson et al., 2015).

Fortuna (2015) examined how students can be taught literacy skills through digital media and sports. The article analyzes the "change of the student" and relays how old fashion teaching styles, such as book reviews, are a thing of the past. She also explains to the reader how sports and pop culture can be effective practices in educating youth. Her study also demonstrates how student athletes think and the tendencies they carry as seniors in high school before entering post-secondary education, which is important to consider because these can be seen as factors that would have an impact on their collegiate recruitment. She writes:

Students can come to see that people use media coverage for different purposes: developing and maintaining social identities, feeling a personal sense of significance, engaging in social interaction, and maintaining social relationships. (p.87-88).

The results of her analysis help to understand how North American youth of today react to digital media. Furthermore, she reveals the important capabilities SNS can have in assisting in guiding activities and practices that are effective in educating youth and influencing their day-to-day decisions.

### **Athletes Uses and Gratifications on Social Media**

Hambrick et al. (2010) examined why athletes use Twitter through uses and gratification theory. To answer this question, the researchers conducted a high volume statistical study analyzing over 1900 tweets from professional athletes. They found that most professional athletes tweet about interactivity (24% of the time). Interactivity happens when the professional athlete is directly communicating with fans or other athletes. There are also five other categories which were used to group the uses and gratification of the athletes' tweets which were: diversion, information sharing, content, fanship and promotion. Professional athletes' tweets were drawn from NFL, MLB, NHL, NBA, WNBA, MLS, PGA/LPGA, auto racing, minor league baseball, and tennis. One major take away was that online users may receive huge benefits such as entertainment and diversion while tweeting, which would explain why athletes like using this type of SNS. The researchers also argue that a benefit of using social media (Twitter) is that it enhances fan interaction and gratification for athletes. These interactions are important because team and player accessibility has been shown to have an important role in fan

identification (Hambrick et al., 2010).

Browning and Sanderson (2012) also examined the positives and negatives of using Twitter from a student-athlete perspective using Uses and Gratifications Theory. The study found that there were three main uses for Twitter amongst student-athletes: i) keeping in contact with other student-athletes and friends back home, ii) communicating with followers, and iii) accessing information.

Kunkel, Scott, and Beaton (2016) interviewed Michael Lahoud a professional soccer player who talked about the importance of athlete branding through social media. In the study Lahoud stated,

I think without knowing what your brand is you cannot move anywhere. You cannot build anything and really develop into the complete athlete; you know, with the performance on the field and with social media, you kind of need to be now to be relevant. You need to know your target market and what they want. (p.416 in Kunkel, Scott, & Beaton, 2016).

Similarly, Ruggiero (2000) identified three key benefits of online use: 1) interactivity, 2) demassification, and 3) asynchronicity. The Internet facilitates interactivity, giving users the opportunity to correspond with other users, share information, and form personal relationships. With demassification, users can pick and choose activities of interest to them. They can also select with whom they interact, custom fitting the Internet to their specific needs. Finally, the Internet's asynchronicity provides users with more flexible communications. They can post messages for other users, plus read and respond to messages when it is most convenient for them (Ruggiero, 2000). Although a lot of these research articles correspond to how professional athletes use social media, many

amateurs while being recruited also utilize SNS and express parasocial interactions (PSI) and leverage the benefits of online use, interactivity, demassification, and dsynchronicity through the process, as this research study will show.

Whiting and Williams (2013) looked at why people, including non-athletes, use social media using Uses and Gratifications Theory. The researchers developed ten themes for classifying why consumers engage in social media through a set of 25 qualitative interviews. The ten themes were: social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing, and surveillance and knowledge about others (Whiting & Williams, 2013). The study found that social interaction (88%) was the most common gratification. Next in line was information seeking (80%), pass time (76%), entertainment (64%), relaxation (60%), communicatory utility (56%), expression of opinions (56%), convenience utility (52%), information sharing (40%), and surveillance and knowledge about others (20%). The results from the study show that uses and gratifications theory can help explain the many reasons why consumers use social media, while also effectively demonstrating how to analyze and influence people on SNS.

Witkemper, Lim, and Waldburger (2012) examined the motivations and constraints that impact sport twitter consumption (STC) amongst university students. The researchers used a model that consisted of 12 items with four measures of motivation (information, entertainment, pass time, and fanship) and 12 items with four measures of constraints (accessibility, economic, skills, social). The study reveals that motivations for STC among the respondents were positive and significant, while constraints were negatively related to Twitter consumption in regards to following athletes. Consumers

were found to be utilizing Twitter for information and entertainment purposes mostly. The researchers suggest that practitioners should ensure social media is being utilized for both information and entertainment in their marketing strategies in order to successfully reach consumers. Also specific motivation and constraint factors impacted STC among college students. The study concludes that Twitter represents a new avenue through which a relationship can be enhanced if proper motivation and constraint factors are accounted for.

Phua et al. (2017) applied Uses and Gratification Theory and Social Capital Theory to examine four social networking sites including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. The researchers were assessing the online bridging and bonding capital between the four SNS. They state:

Twitter users reported the highest bridging social capital followed by Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat. This may be attributed to Twitter being a micro-blogging platform, whereby users can follow other individuals with whom they do not have a real-life relationship, such as celebrities, politicians, brands, and organizations. (p. 19).

By interviewing 249 participants the researchers found that Twitter users had the highest bridging capital while Snapchat had the highest bonding capital. Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) explains how and why people actively seek out specific types of media. According to UGT, people receive gratifications through the media, which satisfy their informational, social, and leisure needs. This study will build on existing literature on social media and UGT by conducting qualitative analysis of high school recruitment of prospective NCAA athletes in the age of social media.

## *Chapter 3*

### **A Qualitative Case-Study Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

In exploratory case studies, interviews are useful for collecting valuable qualitative data. Interviewing allows participants to elaborate on areas of choice and provides perceived causal inferences from the interviewee rather than the researcher's point of view (Gratton & Jones, 2010). As Gratton and Jones (2010) note,

Interviewing is often associated with the collection of qualitative data, that is, the why and how of a phenomenon, from the respondents' perspective. Interviews can collect data concerned with concepts that are difficult or inappropriate to measure, tend to allow respondents much more freedom in terms of their answers (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p. 155).

As this research study aimed to gain a better understanding of the perspectives and experiences of NCAA athletes and coaches, interviewing was an effective method of data collection.

In this study, interviews were conducted over the telephone. This was done due to geographic constraints of face-to-face interviewing of athletes and coaches who are currently in the United States. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes in duration and followed a semi-structured interview schedule of questions. Semi-structured interviews can be defined as a conversation with a purpose, where an exchange of information and ideas take place (DeLuca & DeLuca, 2004), which if carried out

effectively will provide the study with key findings (Kumar, 2005). This method allowed me to provide a purpose to the research while refraining from asking general irrelevant questions, which in turn provided key findings. Semi-structured interviewing gives the researcher flexibility in order to alter or probe for more information with additional questions (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Semi-structured interviews allow the emergence of important themes to be developed that may not emerge from a structured interview format. This allows the subject to reveal insights into their attitudes and behaviors that may not readily be apparent to the researcher from their prior awareness of the phenomenon (Gratton & Jones, 2010).

Qualitative data produces detailed descriptions of topics, presenting an understanding and insight towards a subject, rather than numerical and categorical measurements (Richards, 2005). This type of data aligned well with the aims of my research study as the research was exploratory in nature. Exploratory research involves research that has the potential to discover and build knowledge in a new area of research (Beall, 2002). Qualitative research allows researchers to place an emphasis on understanding the world from the subjects' point of view, actions, and experiences (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), which is exactly what this research sought to do.

Qualitative research provided the study with an understanding of the participant's views, their personal experiences, and how they feel about particular topics discussed. This methodology was preferred over quantitative research because numerical data would not account holistically for the feelings and experiences of the participants and provide the same depth of understanding of how SNS impact NCAA recruiting. Using a qualitative case-study methodology with semi-structured interviewing, this research

provides in-depth analysis, probing of athlete's feelings, and exploration of uses of social media that are beneficial as the respondents were able to openly express their feelings, perspectives, and experiences which in turn provided more in-depth answers than other methods would have.

### **Sampling and Selection of Interview Participants**

In qualitative research there are generally two main types of sampling methods, probability-based samples and non-probability based or purposive samples (Baker, 2002). In this study non-probability based, purposive sampling was conducted in order to choose the participants of the study. Baker (2002) states that probability-based sampling can be a difficult procedure to carry out for individual student research, particularly of a qualitative nature, and is therefore not recommended.

Currently there is no definitive rule for sample size but qualitative research usually relies on smaller sampling sizes with the goal of creating depth and detailed responses (Patton, 1990). Using a smaller sample size delivered a specific direction to the study with exact purpose, with athletes that met specific criteria that the study focused on. The study is based on data obtained from interviews with a select number of current NCAA Division 1 athletes that were collegiately recruited in the year range of 2016-2018, and three current NCAA Division 1 collegiate college coaches.

A purposive sample approach was taken in order to select the athletes and coaches in the sports of men's basketball, women's basketball, and men's football. The sports included in the study are the only NCAA sports where every scholarship athlete on the team is on full scholarship. However, this does call for further research to be explored in the future, analyzing the differences between full scholarship and partial scholarship

Canadian NCAA Division 1 athletes, as well as exploring differences and similarities of the impact of SNS on the recruiting processes in a wide range of sports.

The distribution of participants selected for the study were: two NCAA Division 1 basketball players, two NCAA Division 1 women basketball players and, two Division 1 American football players. An additional criterion for the selected participants is that they were a Canadian attending and American institution. The reason for selecting Canadians who attend American universities was to find out the different self-presentation tendencies Canadian NCAA Division 1 athletes use in the NCAA recruitment process, without requiring social, cultural, and geographic differences in the use of SNS to be taken into account across nationalities and countries.

The athletes were all similar in that they are full scholarship NCAA Division 1 athletes from Canada. The majority of the athletes who participated had some sort of personal connection towards myself, the researcher, who had previously been a NCAA Division 1 athlete. This allowed me the opportunity to ask more in-depth questions, with more detailed responses given that a rapport had already been established.

The Canadian NCAA Division 1-student athletes and coaches who took part in the study will not be identified based on their actual names in this study, but instead numerical pseudonyms will be used. In Table 1 Participants were given the numerical designation in no particular order. A total of six (n=6) Canadian NCAA Division 1-student athletes and three (3) coaches (P7, P8 and P9) took part in the interviews. Among the six athletes, 2 were females (P1 and P2) while the remaining 4 were males (P3, P4, P5 and P6). The participants were also identified based the sport they played. As shown in Table 1, four (n= 4) of the participants played basketball: P1, P2, P3 and P4. Two of the

participants, P5 and P6, played football. Among the three coaches, one (P7) was male basketball coach while the other two (P8 and P9) were female basketball coaches.

**Table 1: Description of the study demographics/ personas**

| Participant (P) | Status  | Gender | Sport      |
|-----------------|---------|--------|------------|
| 1               | Athlete | Female | Basketball |
| 2               | Athlete | Female | Basketball |
| 3               | Athlete | Male   | Basketball |
| 4               | Athlete | Male   | Basketball |
| 5               | Athlete | Male   | Football   |
| 6               | Athlete | Male   | Football   |
| 7               | Coach   | Male   | Basketball |
| 8               | Coach   | Female | Basketball |
| 9               | Coach   | Female | Basketball |

The primary reason why Canadian NCAA Division 1 athletes were chosen to be the focus of the study was due to myself, the researcher, having a specific interest in the use of social media and how it impacts collegiate recruitment as a former Division 1 athlete, I felt the self-presentation tactics exhibited in my recruitment process had a lot to do with my experiences, and that gave me a natural interest in how others experienced the social phenomenon.

As the study is concerned with the use of social media within the recruitment process it was necessary to concentrate the selecting of student athletes that fall into the category of being ‘past their recruitment period’ Canadian Division 1 student athletes. This was critical as participants were able to be more reflective in their thinking, which resulted in more detailed responses, compared to the likelihood of student-athletes who are currently experiencing the phenomenon taking place.

## **Interviews with Athletes and Coaches**

The primary data that was used in the study was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with current NCAA Division 1 athletes. 20 questions, plus some occasional probing questions, were asked pertaining to their perspectives on how social media impacted their collegiate recruitment. The duration of each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes using a recording device to record the interviews. The recordings were then transcribed into a software program called 'TRINT'. The transcripts were then used to highlight the themes that emerged during the interviews. Transcribing interviews from oral to written format typically allows the conversations to be analyzed more closely (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest interviews are more appropriate when trying to study complex social topics, such as the impact of social media on college recruitment. Additionally, interviews have proven to be the preferred method in case study research as it provides rich data, unlike, questionnaires, which are sometimes viewed as simplistic and lack the necessary depth that qualitative research provides (Brindle, Douglas, Teijilingen & Hundley, 2005).

Conducting interviews was the preferred method in this case study for many reasons. The first is that interviews enabled the participants to talk about their own experiences and knowledge in their own words allowing them to elaborate (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Furthermore, the interviews allowed unexpected data to emerge, permitting the athletes to reveal insight into their attitudes and behaviours that may not occur through other methods such as a questionnaire. Thirdly the interviewing method created a wider range for attaining information around a subject and allows the researcher to

understand the meanings that everyday activities hold for people (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The interviews were semi-structured meaning an interview guide was applied although a necessary sense of freedom was encouraged (Flick, 2007).

The questions that served as the framework for the interviews were designed to acquire as much information around the topic as possible, acknowledging the quality and wording of the questions used directly affects the information and quality from the responses. The intent of the questions was to be thought-provoking, which created tremendous qualitative data provided by the participants.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Difficulties can be experienced when trying to carry out reliable and valid analysis of qualitative interview data (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Hernon and Schwartz (2009) identify that validity refers to whether the instruments used accurately measure what it proposes to measure, while reliability is the consistency of the measure. When administering a case study research project, it is important to ensure that the research being conducted is valid and reliable (Thomas, 2011). As such, I took specific measures to ensure valid and reliable results were obtained. For instance, I asked participants to define their understanding of terms, such as social media, to ensure our understandings aligned. Furthermore, I maintained confidentiality of research participation so that interviewees felt that they could speak openly without concern for reprisal.

### **Ethics**

Ethics approval for this study was provided by the Brock University Research Ethics Board in advance of contacting potential participants and conducting the qualitative interviews. The project was conducted following the principles of the Tri-

Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2). Before the interviews took place I provided the participants with information and consent forms for them to verbally agree with in order to take part in the research project. Informed consent involves informing the participants about the overall justification of the study, while also notifying the participants their power to withdraw from the study at any time (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Participants were given the option to withdraw from study participation, however none withdrew. The study posed minimal risk of harm to participants and no participants reported any issues or concerns during the research process.

### **Study Limitations**

As this study was specifically focusing on social media and how it affects Canadian NCAA Division 1 athlete's recruitment who play men's basketball, women's basketball, and men's football, it is important to highlight that the findings from each interview may only be relevant to Canadian athletes that participate in these sports and may not be applicable to athletes who participate in other sports, or are not Canadian, or do not compete athletically at the Division 1 level. This study looks at a select group of athletes and may not be generalized beyond that to other sports, countries, or playing levels.

Likewise, this study cannot be considered an all-encompassing representation of all Canadian NCAA athletes. To uncover how social media is related to collegiate recruitment I pursued personal contacts for the participants in the study. This unintentionally could have lead to similar experiences from the participants from a similar peer group, with similar backgrounds, demographics, and socio-economic

statuses. The nature of qualitative, interview-based case study research is that sample sizes are small and may not be generalizable to the larger population from which the participants are drawn from.

My positionality as both a former NCAA athlete and a current researcher studying an important aspect of NCAA sport also carried potential strengths and weaknesses. While I gained personal contacts and came to the research with an insider's understanding of NCAA sport, the use of social media, and the NCAA recruiting process, it could also be argued that my insider status also brought some potential for bias. To address this, I actively sought to understand the responses of the athlete participants, asking clarifying questions when needed, to ensure that I understood their meanings, understandings, and perspectives and was not making inferences based on my own experiences.

## *Chapter Four*

### **Virtual Recruiting in the NCAA: Findings and Analysis**

#### **Introduction**

The research was completed with the goal of determining the various impacts SNS have on full scholarship NCAA Division 1 athletes' recruitment processes as guided by the theories of self-presentation and uses and gratifications. The research was motivated by the limited information on the role of social media and how it impacts NCAA recruitment of Canadian athletes. I was therefore interested to explore the perspectives and views of Canadian NCAA Division 1-student athletes that participated athletically in the year range of 2017-2018, as well as the perspectives of current NCAA coaches involved in recruiting. By interviewing athletes who just recently finished their recruitment process, and coaches who are currently still recruiting using SNS, this ensured the findings are as up to date as possible in a constantly changing field of study which is social media.

To understand the views of the athletes and the coaches regarding the role of social media and how it impacts collegiate recruitment, I used phenomenology based qualitative methodological approach, which allowed me to explore the personal experiences and perspectives of the participants, which resulted in holistic understandings of the topic. Semi-structured interviews guided the implementation of the study and allowed the construction of knowledge based on the participants' understanding. This chapter provides an in-depth description and analysis of the results that were obtained.

The themes and subthemes that emerged from interviews are presented. Finally, a description of how the themes and subthemes answer the study objective is presented.

### **Thematic Analysis**

The themes and the subthemes were drawn from the responses that were obtained from the athletes' and coaches' interviews. The identification of the themes evolved after three cycles of detailed reading of the interview transcripts, which resulted in the identification of the emerging codes that summarized the major points made by the participants. The codes were later aggregated based on the assessment of similarity resulting into the emergence of themes and subthemes. Appendix I includes a comprehensive table that lists the coding of participant quotes into different themes. A total of six themes emerged, which included 1) type of social media platform used, 2) preferred SNS and reason for using specific platforms, 3) the nature of SNS use, 4) factors that shape SNS use, 5) strategies for effective use of SNS for recruitment, and 6) the effectiveness of SNS for recruitment.

#### **1) Type of Social Media Platform**

The first theme focused on participant descriptions of their commonly used social media platforms. From this theme emerged a sub theme of the preferred SNS of participants. It emerged from the obtained responses that there are four SNS platforms that are used by student athletes and coaches for recruitment. P1 and P6 identified YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat. P2 identified Instagram and Snapchat. P3 and P4 identified YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. P5 identified Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In total, six athletes indicated using Instagram, five used Twitter, four used YouTube, three used Facebook, and three athletes used Snapchat. All of the

coaches indicated that Twitter was the primary social media platform they used for recruitment, but that they also used Instagram and YouTube. When looking athletes and coaches combined, Instagram (n=9) and Twitter (n=8) were the most used SNS.

## 2) Preferred SNS

It emerged from the obtained responses that different individuals preferred different SNS for recruitment, and gave different reasons for their preferences. P1, P2 and P5 preferred Instagram since users are more active on the site. When asked about what SNS they used most frequently during the recruitment process, P5 responded, *“Instagram because everybody's more active. I'm going to go like [SNS] where people are more active and have the best content for me.”* P2 also added that she also preferred Snapchat for non-basketball activity. She states,

*“But aside from basketball, just being a university student, like you get to meet people all over Snapchat. For example, I can post whatever I want and not have to worry about what the public thinks. I can be myself. I think I like it the most because it's just me having fun outside of basketball.”*

It emerged that P3 preferred Twitter because of the ease of reaching the coaching staff. According to P3, other SNS platforms such as Instagram and YouTube do not allow conversation with this target audience but Twitter does. P3 states,

*“Twitter. Just because college coaching staffs communicate a lot more through Twitter. Like speaking to coaches during that time period where we are not supposed to can happen on Twitter opposed to just seeing them on Instagram or just seeing them on YouTube. It gives you actual verbal contact with your coach and it kind of helps your recruiting process.”*

In contrast, P6 preferred YouTube and Instagram because he believed it facilitated communication with the target audience. P6 indicated that he was able to get in touch with different people on YouTube who reposted his content and he was able to receive many views. P6 states,

*“I think I was on YouTube the most because so many people saw videos about my life and reposted it. And so I had a lot of views on YouTube. I also like when I showed my highlight to other people like my family and friends and then their friends and people they knew would even be posting it and I didn't even know them. But yeah, I would I say a lot of that stuff happened on YouTube and Instagram.”*

According to all of the coaches, Twitter is preferred because it allows them to have genuine conversation with perspective recruits. Coaches indicated that Twitter enables them to have faster communication with recruits while avoiding the distraction associated with other social media platforms. P7 states: *“I prefer Twitter. At least I am able to have genuine conversation with the perspective candidate.”* P8 states, *“Of course Twitter is the platform of choice. The site is free from clutter and allows faster feedback.”* P9 states, *“Although Twitter is good, Instagram also gives some level of insight into who the athlete really is.”* Overall, Twitter was preferred by coaches for recruiting purposes.

Based on the obtained responses, it emerged that different student athletes prefer the various SNS because of the perceived effectiveness associated with each of the different alternatives. Some of the participants (P1 and P2) cited the ability to control the content and the interaction on the site as the reason for the preference. Concerning Instagram, P1 states:

*“You have control over who follows you or who you follow if you choose to make your account private or not. Like 90 percent of the time that you're tracking and knowing that you have control over what you put in, how you want to promote yourself.”*

Concerning Instagram, P2 states: *“Keeping track of like who is following me, what they could look at on my page, having the ability to post when I want to, are all things I like with Instagram.”* From a self-presentation perspective, Instagram allows athletes to manage their image while also choosing their audience.

Enhanced reach emerged to be another prominent reason for the choosing one SNS over the other. In this research enhanced reach refers to the ability of the student athletes to communicate with a wide target audience. Some participants (P1) indicated that their preferred use of certain SNS is based on the ability to effectively connect with other students with similar interests and the ability to track the team and school of interest. This, in turn, helps the student-athletes gather information during the recruitment process. Concerning Instagram, P1 states,

*“It's visually appealing and you have comments on top of that. So a lot of athletes use Instagram to post cool basketball pictures or videos where there's a bigger platform. Definitely, like you get more insight on the truth behind how your school is through the social media outlets.”*

P5 indicated that Twitter is more preferable because it allows active communication with the target audience. P5 states,

*“I think it was useful because I don't know what would have happened if I didn't use Twitter. Maybe my current coach would've never saw me or talked to me. So yeah, Twitter was very helpful.”*

Concerning Snapchat P2 states, *I think a lot of coaches were following me through that [Snapchat].*

From a Uses and Gratifications Theory perspective, it is clear that various SNS are used to allow athletes to simultaneously expand their audience while having some measure of control over that audience, to gain access to information and knowledge about schools and programs, and to present a favourable version of themselves to coaches, family, and friends. They choose specific SNS over others for different aspects of the recruiting process because they see particular benefits to doing so.

### **3) Nature of SNS Use**

This theme describes how the athletes and coaches interviewed in this study use SNS in the recruitment process. A total of three sub themes emerged from this theme, highlighting different primary uses of SNS in NCAA recruiting, which included: a) a self-promotion tool, b) a recruitment tracking tool, and, c) a screening tool.

#### **a.) Self-Promotion Tool**

All participants shared responses that supported the view that SNS are used by athletes for the promotion of one's athletic prowess. One of the participants (P1) indicated that they created a highlight tape that was used to document their athletic skills and present to their SNS followers. P1 states, *“Yes, I use YouTube. I created my own highlight tape.”* The participants argued that they do not use SNS for personal life but to showcase their athletic skills. P2 states, *“Basketball testing, mostly professional. Nothing*

about my personal life. Social media is a great platform to market yourself in a positive way.” Similarly, P3 states,

*“I was just posting stuff like strictly basketball related (stuff). Tweeting out my other teammates or other guys I know who play basketball. And once you pass that recruitment stage, it's kind of like people want to see what it's like. And Instagram does a better job of visually representing that. Or even YouTube.”*

P5 states, *“I think I would just reach out more like try to create my own opportunities and make it out to camps. I try to get in touch with some coaches on Twitter and all that. Like more coaches post, just like get them to know me.”* By showcasing their abilities on SNS, athletes are able to self-present their athletic prowess to coaches opening up recruiting and other athletic opportunities.

The response from the coaches also indicated that the sites are used as promotional tools by the institutions. According the coaches, the institutions promote their teams by posting their achievement and training facilities on social media. Coaches also noted that media visibility enables the institutions/teams to be easily identified by prospective recruits. P7 states, *“I use twitter to announce the achievement of the school in big games and championships. We also post the facilities on our Instagram page.”* P8 states, *“Interested students can easily follow our school team progress via our Facebook and Twitter handles. We post the locker room conversation and training programs along with the results.”* Like athletes, coaches and their universities are also using SNS to present a managed image of their programs and accomplishments to potential recruits.

**b) A Recruitment Tracking Tool**

The responses obtained also showed that the SNS provide channels through which the universities or individuals announce their recruits. It emerged that universities can use SNS to announce the student-athlete they have signed and therefore redirect the focus of other universities on other available athletes. Obtained responses also indicated that SNS provide avenues through which students post the scholarship offers they have received, and therefore enable their followers to easily follow along with their recruitment journey.

P1 states,

*“Well, to me, what’s just right is when the team makes the official announcement. They will post something like “we have so-and-so signed to our team for the next whatever years or for the 2019 2020 season.” It just seems official.”*

P5 states,

*“I think it's important to announce your offers on social media. The first offer can lead to a lot more and it lets people know you're at the Division I level. So yeah I totally recommend everyone posting your offers and even interests.*

Further to this, in relation to making announcements of offers received P3 states,

*“I think it's a good idea. I think it brings more people to your games being able to say like, I'm coming to this game, you guys need to bring that the type of energy. I mean, I think there's nothing wrong with that.”* Presenting ones NCAA

scholarship offers appears to be yet another way athletes manage their athletic

identity on SNS, which can potentially lead to heightened interest in recruiting the athlete by other coaches.

Responses from the coaches also indicated that the coaches use the SNS platforms for announcing the recruits. Coaches responded that SNS allows new recruits to be introduced to the fans. The announcement of the recruits on SNS also allows the fans to follow and welcome the recruit. P8 states, *“Announcement of new signing is done on Twitter and all other social media handles. This is great for the new signing and the team. Especially for informing our fans.”* P9 states, *“Announcing our new signing on our social media platforms is key. It helps to rally the support of the fans behind the recruit.”* SNS are also used by athletes to identify and track the progress of their school of interest, in part to see who they have recruiting. P1 states, *“The best way possible to find out what’s really going on with the team is on Snapchat.”* For both athletes and coaches, SNS are a valuable recruitment tracking tool.

### **c) A Screening Tool**

This sub theme of using SNS as a screening tool emerged primarily from the responses obtained from coaches. The coaches indicated the SNS reduces the recruitment workload. According to the coaches, SNS provides a means through which one can screen large groups of recruits and identify the ones that should proceed to other stages of vetting. P7 states, *“I think the sites give me the opportunity to screen the many prospective individuals and narrow down on more suitable ones for further scrutiny.”* P8 states, *“Of course they may not be the only recruitment tools but they are key tools in the screening stage.”* P9 states, *“It would be hard to screen the large number of interested individuals without the help of the sites.”* For the coaches, SNS use alone would not

typically be sufficient in the recruiting process, but it is one step that allows coaches to see valuable information such as highlight film, body type in images, personality, interests and other information that can help them determine if the athlete is worth the time and resources to continue the recruiting process or not.

#### **4) Factors that Shape SNS Use**

This theme describes the considerations that inform how athletes use SNS in the recruitment process. The respondents identified intrinsic and extrinsic factors that determine their use of SNS. Five sub themes emerged from this theme including: a) resource demands, b) education level, c) social influence, d) fear-based restraint, and e) prohibitive regulations.

##### **a) Resource Demands**

Respondents identified necessary resources such as time, financial, and skill related resources as being important in shaping their use of SNS for recruitment. According to the obtained responses, the availability of given resources or the lack thereof partly determines their use of SNS. Concerning the influence of financial resources and film making skill, P4 states: *“I hope I had the knowledge on how to create YouTube content. I would have saved a lot. I ended up paying more than I had planned. Quality tape requires quality camera. This is costly unless you rent.”* Concerning the influence of time P6 states,

*“Woow. The use of Instagram is really time consuming especially when you are starting off. The challenge actually is in getting enough people to view your Instagram content. But [for my case] I just target the coaches anyway.”*

To effectively use SNS in recruiting, athletes reported needing time, financial resources, and content creating skills.

**b) Education Level and SNS Use**

It also emerged that the use of SNS is characterized by differences based on the stage of academic education, with increased use while in high school. Based on the obtained responses, the use of SNS decline as one enters University. P1 states,

*“I definitely was active on social media when I was in high school. But that slowed down in college because you saw how it could get people in trouble and made you just grow and realize that not everything you do needs to be on social media.”*

When asked about the frequency of posting in high school P2 states, *“Oh, probably like every two, three weeks.”* But concerning the frequency of SNS posting in university she indicates, *“probably once every four months.”* Concerning the changes from high school P3 states, *“Yeah. I wasn't posting videos of me going out with my friends, or pictures of me doing anything not sport related.”* While actively involved in the recruiting process as high school athletes seeking an athletic scholarship, athletes appeared to engage in more SNS use which then dropped off in university.

**c) Social Influences on SNS Use**

Interview participants reported that their family and friends influenced the way they used SNS. The social influence that emerged from the obtained responses mainly focused on how one should self-present and carefully manage their identity when using SNS to maximize the chance of being considered by recruiters for a scholarship. P1

states, *“Growing up, my parents always thought that I don't post things on social media that I didn't want recruiters seeing and all that stuff.”* P3 states,

*“My friends and family are the ones saying, like, coaches will stop recruiting you if you if they see some stuff like they don't want to see you drinking or smoking because it's like they don't want to bring that to their program.”*

P4 states, *“Then my parents always taught me, like, once you post something like this, there are always like, you know, I'm aware what I'm posting.”* Through family and friends, athletes learn the value and basic techniques of self-presentation on social media to reduce the likelihood of presenting a negative image that detracts from potential scholarship offers.

#### **d) Fear-Based Restraint**

This sub theme focused on how the perception of the student athletes towards the negative implication of improper use of the SNS caused fear, which caused them to restrain from certain SNS related behavior. According to the obtained responses, fear shaped the student's self-representation. Responses from the athletes reveal that they feared posting content or interacting with social media content that would get them in trouble if they posted their content in SNS. P1 states, *“So I was fearful of that, affecting my test, my offer or something. I just have that fear of like, oh, my God, what are they going to find?”* P5 states, *“So I would be really careful about certain things I would say or times where I had to restrain myself.”* P3 states, *“I guess you can get into a lot of trouble by posting the wrong things. You don't want coaches seeing those things because that's how you can stop getting recruited.”*

### e) *Prohibitive Regulations*

This sub theme describes how the students' understanding of regulations relating to SNS use influence their self-presentation on the SNS platforms. According to the obtained response, it emerged that the respondents who understand the regulations avoid posting content that could injure their image and limit their chances of landing a scholarship.

Concerning the rules that govern SNS use by athletes and possible negative outcomes associated with inappropriate use of SNS, P1 states, *"That slowed down in college because you saw how it could get people in trouble and made you just grow and realize that not everything you do needs to be on social media.* P5 states: *"I mean, it only takes like one bad action, that can take away your scholarship offer."*

While athletes report an awareness of not violating SNS regulations and presenting a positive image of themselves at all times on SNS, they also noted that prohibitive SNS regulations are often excessive and unnecessary. Although the respondents agreed that the regulations shaped their self-representation, they argued that they should not be applied by the recruiters. P1 states, *"I don't think any athlete should be judged or scrutinized by what they post during the recruiting process. Guess it's my opinion. Should not be the deal breaker for them."* P2 states, *"I wouldn't necessarily say they have to pay attention."* P5 states, *"That seems a bit crazy to me."* While prohibitive restrictions shaped athlete self-presentation on SNS, they did not feel that it should be as restrictive as it is with such harsh consequences such as the loss of a scholarship offer.

## 5) Strategies for Effective Self-Presentation on SNS

The athletes in the study described strategies of self-representation when using SNS in the recruitment process that they felt were effective. This section identifies what the respondents highlighted as the best approaches to ensure that one maximizes their SNS use for self-presentation and self-promotion. A total of four sub themes were identified including a) a targeted approach, b) presenting appealing content, c) self-education, and d) maintaining a clean image.

### a) *A Targeted Approach*

Respondents acknowledged that it is an important practice to ensure that the information posted on SNS is tailored-made for their target audience. Athletes self-portrayal on SNS is carried out with the intent of enhanced connection with target audiences. Describing this, P1 states, “I contacted coaches and put my highlight tape on YouTube and sent that link to like all the major Division one coaches I could email when I was in my 11th grade.” P6 states, “I just want people to see what I'm doing. I'm going for the coaches. I mean, coaches will go (check your SNS) before offering a scholarship. Things like that are like background checks on people.” P3 states, “I would tell them portray themselves as basketball players, because if they're serious about playing basketball, if they want to be a pro, then they have to portray themselves as a pro.” Athletes recommended that high school athletes in the recruiting process tailor their content to their targeted audience and avoid posting anything that is not suited to that audience.

### **b) *Appealing Content***

Not only should the content be tailored to a targeted audience of potential coaches and recruiters, athletes reported that content should also be appealing. The respondents indicated appealing content attracts the recruiters. According to the respondents, high school athletes need to post content that helps to present them as a good person and suitable for scholarship consideration. P1 states,

*“I ensured that I captured the best of my abilities and image. You know you need to enhance your outlook whatever the cost. More so when you really need that scholarship. So best presentation is key to show my skill, my level that I was good enough to play at the Division 1 level and that I could compete at that level as well.”*

When asked of how he would have changed his activity on social media during his recruitment P3 states, “Post, more pictures of like workouts of basketball, just trying to get as much exposure as I can.” P6 states, “Post more photos of being around good people, posting pictures in good areas to show people you are doing the right things.”

### **c) *Self-Education***

Research participants indicated that it is important to be well informed about the effective use of SNS for recruitment. SNS education is key. According to participants, education enables an understanding of effective self-presentation and why it is important to avoid negative forms of SNS representation and interactions. Identifying this P1 states,

*“Well, I was definitely educated on presenting myself like a professional on social media. I was not aware of certain images I posted when I was in*

*high school, literally all I cared about was, hooping, getting a scholarship, and finding a great school to do all of that."*

Likewise, P6 states, *"Oh, yes. I did a lot of camps in the US, like back in high school in Canada. And every time they said they we're going to go look at your pages on social media so just make sure everything is sharp."* He further states, *"I don't think I would change anything in my recruiting process. I think I did it the right way."* These athletes identify the importance of learning in advance about effective use through SNS education to ensure the best possible recruiting outcomes.

#### **d) Maintaining a Clean Image on SNS**

Participants also identified that the avoidance of unnecessary posting of compromising content is key in benefitting from the use of SNS during the NCAA recruiting process. According to the respondents, one needs to be careful with what they post on SNS, particularly since the content stays forever. The respondents identify establishing a clean look, without explicit materials posted, that focuses on portraying one's athletic qualities as very important. P4 states,

*"It's definitely being aware of everything you post haha. Like I said, everything is on social media forever. So you have to make sure to not do the things that can get you in trouble like, promote someone else or stuff. "*

When asked about what advice they would give to young student athletes being recruited by NCAA universities about their use of social media, P1 states, *"I would definitely tell them to keep their social media clean in the sense that anything that they say out there is going to be out there forever and can be used against them down the line."* Likewise, P6 states, *"I would say keeping it clean makes you look like you really like the sport you're*

*doing, like you really love it, but you work hard for it, that you're like really dedicated. Reach out more, look really professional.”*

The responses from the coaches also supported that view that it is important to keep a clean image on SNS. According to the coaches, the lack of clean self-presentation can lead one to miss out on scholarship opportunities. Coaches indicated that they avoid individuals who have questionable content in their SNS. P7 states, *“Without a clean image a candidate can easily miss out on the scholarship opportunity.”* P8 states, *“Good self-presentation is important. Individuals who are not able to maintain good and clean profile sends negative signals and I normally avoid those.”* Maintaining a clean image on SNS was highly recommended by athletes and coaches, with significant consequences for athletes who fail to do so in the recruiting process.

#### **6) Effectiveness of SNS for NCAA Recruitment**

While all athletes and coaches in this study indicated that SNS was a significant aspect of the NCAA process, they did not all agree on the effectiveness of SNS in successfully gaining a scholarship. Some of the respondents considered the use of SNS platforms as being key in enhancing the chances of being considered for scholarship. Others argued that the effectiveness of SNS depended on the self-presentation tendencies adopted an individual. One also suggested that in her case SNS did not actually end up playing a significant role in the scholarship offer that she received.

The use of SNS was perceive by most participants as being effective in enhancing the chances of being recruited. The respondents indicated that the use of SNS increases the potential of connecting with coaches who play a vital role in ensuring access to scholarships. The respondents indicated that SNS provide a means of reaching coaches

who may be located in different countries or locations within a large country with minimum cost. P3 states, “I think it helped my process for sure, especially coming from Canada. I try to like reach out to coaches in the States.” Likewise, P4 states, “I would say it helped cause it’s hard getting recognized in Canada.”

Coaches also indicated that SNS are effective tools in the recruitment process. According to the coaches, the use SNS allow faster identification of the recruits. Coaches also indicated that SNS help to reduce the cost and time needed to access potential recruits. P7 states, *“I would say they have really made it easier for us coaches to access a larger pool of prospective candidates. I am now more than ever able to access those from outside the country who may have the talent to deliver good results.”* P9 states, *“Definitely. Imagine the distance and cost and time that would have gone into visit all the prospective candidates. Yes, very helpful, I would say as a screening tool.”*

Although most of the respondents indicated that the use of SNS is effective, one of the respondents contested the effectiveness of SNS. Although P1 acknowledges that she knows of people that SNS have helped to get scholarship, she noted that she did not benefited from the platforms in her recruitment process. P1 states,

*“At the end of the day, I don't think it (SNS) helped my recruitment whatsoever because my scholarship didn't come from being seen on social media. Also, all the coaches I reached out to, to watch my highlight tape never really reached back Yeah, it didn't even help.”*

The athletes and coaches in this study have indicated that SNS has had a significant impact on the recruiting process, but this impact appears to be somewhat different based

on how SNS is used and other individual factors with each recruiting experience being slightly different.

## *Chapter Five*

### **Conclusion: Contributions, Implications, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research**

#### **Contributions**

The purpose of the study was to determine the various impacts SNS have on Canadian full scholarship NCAA Division 1 athletes during their recruitment process viewed through the perspectives of Self-Presentation Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory. The findings emerged from the interview responses from three NCAA coaches and six NCAA athletes. It is evident from the findings that SNS have important roles to play in NCAA Division 1 athletes' recruitment process and there are various aspects of SNS use that determine their effectiveness as recruitment platforms.

The themes and the subthemes that are presented in this research in Chapter Four address the research aims in different ways. According to theme one, while different SNS platforms play important roles in the recruitment process, Twitter was indicated by most of the respondents as the most preferred due to the ability to facilitate effective communication and engagement with their target audience. Theme two also addresses the research aims by highlighting the major roles that SNS play in the recruitment of athletes. According to the theme, coaches and athletes use the platforms as self-promotion tool, tracking tool, and for announcing recruitment offers and commitments. Additionally, it emerged that the coaches also use SNS platforms as a screening tool. Theme three addresses the research aims by highlighting the factors that determine self-representation techniques on SNS, which are influenced by prohibitive regulations, fear, restraint, and social influence. Theme four identifies strategies that coaches and athletes use in ensuring

appropriate self-representation in social media by highlighting the need for a targeted approach, appealing content, self-education, and maintaining a clean image. Finally, theme five concludes by describing the role of SNS and their effectiveness in facilitating the NCAA recruitment process. Overall, most of the coaches and athletes have the view that SNS platforms are effective tools for enhancing the recruitment process.

The outcomes show that all the athletes who took part in the study along with the coaches were actively involved in SNS which supports the existing literature on the topic (Clavio & Frederick, 2015; Smith & Sanderson et al., 2015). Findings from this study also align with Gawshaw et al.'s (2015) findings that Twitter is the most preferred SNS platform used in sport. One of the reasons that the athletes gave for using certain SNS platforms is the ability to control the content of the platform and how others view them, which aligns with principles of Goffman's self-presentation theory of managing one's presentation of self as well as one's audience. However, it should also be noted the coaches shared the view that SNS, when not used appropriately, can lead to negative self-presentation, which limit the chances of getting recruited or receiving a full scholarship. As argued by Goffman's self-presentation theory, it emerged from the obtained findings that the self-presentation of the athlete influences how the coach judges them based on how they interpret the content of their SNS platform. Coaches identified that athletes could forfeit their chance of a full scholarship based on how they portray themselves in SNS, giving them what Goffman termed a "spoiled identity" (Goffman, 1963, p. 1).

One of the unique contributions of the study to the existing literature relates to the identification of how much of an impact social media can have in the decision making process on whether or not to further pursue and offer scholarships to potential athletes.

The study provided a description of the use of SNS by coaches as tool to make decisions on who to recruit when screening a large pool of potential candidates. As noted in this study, coaches use SNS as a means of cutting down on cost, distance, and the time that would otherwise be needed to reach and screen potential recruits.

This study expands on existing knowledge regarding self-presentation tendencies on SNS. The findings are consistent with research done by Korzynski and Panigua (2016) who noted that active use of SNS by athletes can be beneficial but that without good self-presentation on SNS, social media presence can actually negatively affect athletes. The study noted that amateur athletes need to be careful about what they post on social media and ensure that they only post content that improves how others perceive them.

This study also elaborates on the significance of self-presentation by athletes as described by Clavio and Frederick (2015) who indicated that top high school football prospects use the SNS of Twitter mainly to provide personal tweets that help engage fans. Likewise, this research found that athletes need to be watchful and avoid personal life content and commentary but rather concentrate on sharing their athletic prowess and positive content.

It also emerged from this study that the self-presentation strategies that are adopted by athletes are influenced by various factors such as social environment, which aligns with arguments made by Franzese (2018). The social drivers of self-presentation that emerged from this study include the influence from friends and the family. Yuan and Zhou (2015) also observed that self-representation could be determined by the interaction with parents and friends, which they called interactional cues. This study also advances the view that self-presentation on SNS is influenced by how athletes perceive the

responses of others, which Franzese (2018) termed interpersonal cues. This study also advances some of the strategies that help the amateur athletes understand how to build positive self-presentation on SNS platforms and avoid posting content that could harm their chances of future success. It emerged from this study that early education on SNS use is vital in training high school athletes on how to use SNS to their benefit.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study have practical implications on the NCAA Division 1 athlete recruitment process. This study indicates that the use of SNS platforms such as Twitter in the recruitment process facilitates faster screening process, which helps to address existing difficulties in recruitment such as travel costs, time, and geographic constraints (Pope, 2009). Since the findings indicate that most of the coaches prefer Twitter in the recruitment process, this could inform prospective full scholarship candidates of the appropriate SNS platform that they should target if they wish to enhance their ability to connect with recruiting coaches. This study also confirms that SNS is important as a recruitment tool and is used by coaches to identify and connect with athletes in distant countries or regions away from their university. Prospective scholarship applicants who may be from different countries should consider SNS as a means of overcoming geographical challenges in reaching coaches in other countries. This research also has implications on the manner in which potential scholarship athletes should effectively use SNS platforms. As noted in this study, student athletes need to maintain a clean image that ensures positive self-presentation highlighting their athletic abilities and positive attributes without posting any content that could spoil their athletic identity and reduce their scholarship opportunities. This is vitally important since the

coaches indicated that image management on SNS could improve or limit the chances of high school athletes being awarded a full athletic scholarship.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

There are various limitations that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings of this study. One of the limitations is associated with the sample scope. The study only included athletes and coaches in the sports of basketball and football. Therefore, the findings are only relevant when applied to the two sports. Further research on this topic could include research on other sports that offer scholarships to NCAA athletes. The sample size of this research could also be considered a limitation. Even for the two sports included the use of only one respondent such as one football coach for example limits the generalizability of the findings to all NCAA football coaches. Future researchers should therefore consider including more respondents to develop more robust findings with greater generalizability. The study also used self-reports in the collection of data where the respondents were asked to recall events. It is likely the use of this approach might have introduced recall bias, where the participants might not have fully remembered how they used SNS during their recruiting process. Future research could use their social media posts as cues during the interview process, whereby the athletes go through their old posts with the researcher and describe why they posted what they did. Alternatively, future research could longitudinally track high school recruits and their use of social media throughout the recruiting process from their grade 10 year through to their first year competing in NCAA sport.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the highlighted limitations, the study provides important insights into the role of social media and how it impacts NCAA recruitment. The study shows that SNS platforms are effective tools for enhancing the recruitment process and have significantly changed the way NCAA recruiting is now done. According to the study findings, different SNS platforms play different, yet important, roles in the NCAA recruitment process. Twitter remains the most preferred, but different platforms provide different tools and possibilities in the recruitment process. The primary identified uses of SNS in NCAA recruiting include as a self-promotion tool, tracking tool, screening tool, and for announcing recruitment offers and commitments. This study also identified prohibitive regulations, fear, restraint, and social influences as important factors that determine how athletes self-present their identity and athletic self on SNS platforms. Importantly, this study revealed strategies for effectively using SNS to enhance self-presentation in the recruiting process and thus enhancing the likelihood of receiving a full scholarship to compete in NCAA sport. These strategies include using a targeted approach with appealing, sport-specific content that clearly identifies athletic prowess and abilities, engaging in self-education on effectively using social media, and maintaining a clean, positive social media presence. Social media has changed the recruiting game and it is important for athletes to know the rules and strategies to have their best chance at a NCAA athletic scholarship.

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**Appendix I:** Summary of the obtained themes and subthemes

| Theme                         | Sub theme     | Samples responses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Description                                                   |
|-------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Type of social media platform | Type          | <p>P1. YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat</p> <p>P2. Instagram and Snapchat</p> <p>P3. YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, twitter for recruitment</p> <p>P4. Twitter for recruit then Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat</p> <p>P5 Facebook, Twitter, Instagram</p> <p>P6 twitter for recruitment-YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook</p> <p>P7 Twitter Instagram</p> <p>P8 Twitter Facebook, Instagram</p> <p>P9 Twitter Instagram and YouTube</p>                                                                                                                                                            | This theme describes the commonly used social media platforms |
|                               | Preferred SNS | <p>P1 Instagram</p> <p>P2 Instagram</p> <p>P2. But aside from basketball, like just being a university student, you get to meet people all over Snapchat, like I can post, I think it's just me having fun outside of basketball.</p> <p>P3. Twitter. Just because college coaching staffs communicate a lot more through Twitter. Like speaking to coaches during that time period where we are not supposed to can happen on Twitter opposed to just seeing them on Instagram or just seeing them on YouTube. It gives you actual verbal contact with your coach and it kind of helps your recruiting process.</p> |                                                               |

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|------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reason for using | Ability to control | <p>P5: Instagram is where everybody's more active. I'm going to go on apps where people are more active cause that's where the best content for me is.</p> <p>P6 states: "I think I was on YouTube the most because so many people saw videos about my life and reposted it. And so I had a lot of views on Youtube. I also like when I showed my highlight to other people like my family and friends and then their friends and people they knew would even be posting it and I didn't even know them. But, Yeah I would say a lot of that stuff happened on Youtube and Instagram"</p> <p>P7. I prefer Twitter at least I am able to have genuine conversation with the prospective candidate</p> <p>P8. Of course twitter is the platform of choice. The site is free from clutter and allows faster feedback</p> <p>P9. Although twitter is good, Instagram also gives some level of insight into who the athlete really is</p> <p>Concerning Instagram P1 states "You have control over who follows you or who you follow if you choose to make your account private or not. Like 90 percent of the time that you're tracking and knowing that you have control over what you put in, how you want to promote yourself."</p> <p>Concerning Instagram P2 states "Keeping track of like who is following me. what they could look at on my page, having the ability to post when I want to, are all things that I like with Instagram.</p> | <p>This theme describes the features of SNS that makes it appealing for use in the recruitment process</p> |
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|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Enhanced reach | <p>P1 states, "most definitely has a huge influence on what school you want to go to, or what school attracts you the most because they base their job to promote your school the best way they possibly can on social media, especially to the audience of the 18,19, and 20 year olds coming into college because you want to make it seem like it's the best time."</p> <p>P1 states Definitely like you get more insight on the truth behind how your school is through the social media outlets.</p> <p>P2 states, I think a lot of coaches were following me through that P5 states, I think it was useful because I don't know what would have happened if I didn't use Twitter. Maybe my current coach would've never saw me or talked to me. So yeah Twitter was very helpful.</p> <p>P1 states, Saw how it evolved. Social media is obviously not. It's always an ambition, but it was not and has been on the rise now five years. It's not what it was five years ago.</p> <p>Concerning Instagram P1 states, "It's visually appealing and now you have comments on top of that. So a lot of athletes use Instagram to post cool basketball pictures or videos where there's a bigger platform."</p> | <p>This theme describes how the players use the SNS in the recruitment process</p>                                                                                                                                        |  |
| Nature of use  | Self promotion tool                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p>P1: Yes, I use YouTube. I created my own highlight tape</p> <p>P2. Basketball testing, mostly professional. Nothing about my personal life. Social media is a great platform to market yourself in a positive way.</p> |  |

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| Tracking tool           | <p>P3. And once you pass that recruitment stage, it's kind of like people want to see what it's like. And Instagram does a better job of visually representing that. Or even YouTube.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|                         | <p>P3. I was just posting stuff like strictly basketball related (stuff). Tweeting out my other teammates or other guys I knew who play basketball</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|                         | <p>P5: states "I think I would just reach out more like try to create my own opportunities and make it out to camps. I try to get in touch with some coaches on Twitter and all that. Like more coaches post, just like get them to know me. ."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                         | <p>P6 states, "showing my highlights and letting people know. I contact coaches. It's not official contact. "</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                         | <p>P7 states " I use twitter to announce the achievement of the school in big games and championships. We also post the facilities on our Instagram page"</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                         | <p>P8 states, interested students can easily follow our school team progress via our Facebook and Twitter handles. We post the locker room conversation and training programs along with the results. based on the responses obtained, it emerged that SNS is also used by athletes to identify and track the progress of the team of interest. P1 states, "The best way possible to find out what's really going on with the team is on Snapchat"</p> |
| Announcing the recruits | <p>P1 states "Well, to me, what's just right is when the team makes the official announcement. They will post something like "we have so-and-so signed to our team for next whatever years or for the 2019 2020 season." It just seems official.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

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More use in high school

P3 states, I think it's a good idea. I think it brings more people to your games being able to say like, I'm coming to this game, you guys need to bring that type of energy. I mean, I think there's nothing wrong with that.

P5 states, "I think it's important to announce your offers on social media. The first offer can lead to a lot more and it lets people know you're at the Division one level. So yeah I totally recommend everyone posting your offers and even interests."

P8 states "announcement of new signing is done on twitter and all other social media handles. This is great for the new signing and the team. Especially for informing our fans."

P9 states "announcing our new signing on our social media platforms is key. It helps to rally the support of the fans behind the recruit.

P1. I definitely was active on social media when I was in high school. But that slowed down in college because you saw how it could get people in trouble and made you just grow and realize that not everything you do needs to be on social media.

When asked about the frequency of posting in high school P2 states "Oh, probably like every two, three weeks." But concerning the frequency of SNS posting in university she indicates, "probably once every four months."

Concerning the changes from high school P3 states "Yeah. I wasn't posting videos of me going out with my friends, or pictures of me going out with my friends. "

*"Yeah. I wasn't posting videos of me going out with my friends, or pictures of me doing anything not sport related."*

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|                            |                  | Concerning frequency of use P3 states, "half as much probably. Right now I'll post stuff on my Instagram story or like just on Instagram about basketball or something like that. But it's not as much as Twitter."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                     |
|                            |                  | P4 states, "My university year probably was less frequent than high school"                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                     |
|                            | Screening tool   | In high school P5 states "maybe once or like sometimes twice a month" but in university he states "like every 3-4 months"<br>P7 states "I think the sites give me the opportunity to screen the many prospective individuals and narrow down on more suitable ones for further scrutiny"<br>P8 states "of course they may not be the only recruitment tools but they are key tools in the screening stage"<br>P9 states "It would be hard to screen the large number of interested individuals without the help of the sites" |                                                                                                     |
| Factors that shape SNS use | Resource demands | P1. It was hard to create. I had to solicit help from professional highlight reel creators.<br><br>P4. I wish I had the knowledge on how to create YouTube content. I would have saved a lot. I ended up paying more than I had planned. Quality tape requires quality camera. This is costly not unless you rent.<br><br>P5. Skills required to manage a YouTube account is sometimes an impediment                                                                                                                          | This theme describes the considerations that inform how athletes use SNS in the recruitment process |

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|                  | <p>P6. Woow. The use of Instagram is really time consuming especially when you are starting off. The challenge actually is in getting enough people to view your Instagram. But [for my case] I just target the coaches anyway. You still to have people like your Instagram stuff. So yes very challenging</p> <p>P4. The use of Instagram is time demanding and one needs to take time to regularly update it.</p> <p>P1states, you can create a good highlight tape and post in your YouTube account but without proper connection you can hardly be noticed. These days there are simply too many users and too much YouTube content.</p> |
| Social influence | <p>P1 states "Growing up, my parents always thought that I didn't post things on social media that I didn't want recruiters seeing and all that stuff.</p> <p>P3 states "My friends and family are the ones saying, like, coaches will stop recruiting you if you if they see some stuff like they don't want to see you drinking or smoking because it's like they don't want to bring that to their program."</p> <p>P4 states then my parents always taught me, like, once you post something like this, there are always like, its on their forever.</p>                                                                                  |
| Fear/restrain    | <p>Responses from the athletes reveals that they feared the response they would get if they posted their content in SNS. P1 states, "So I was fearful of that, affecting my test, my offer or something. I just have that fear of like, oh, my God, what are they going to find? "</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

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P3 states "I guess you can get into a lot of trouble by posting the wrong things. You don't want coaches seeing those things because that's how you can stop getting recruited."

P3 states, "You know, of course, all the time there are times where I could have said something, but that I would think about it like. Well, what if there's a million other people looking at this right now? They could not agree with me and that could cause conflict.

P5 states There is stuff that could keep me in trouble

P5 states So I would be really careful about certain things I would say or times where I had to restrain myself.

Prohibitive  
regulations

Concerning the rules that govern SNS use by athletes and possible negative outcomes associated inappropriate use of SNS, P1 states, That slowed down in college because you saw how it could get people in trouble and made you just grow and realize that not everything you do should be on social media.

Prohibitive  
regulations  
Targeted approach

Concerning whether coaches should pay attention to the prospective athlete's SNS activity P1 states, I don't think any athlete should be judged or scrutinized by what they post during the recruiting process. Guess it's my opinion. Should not be the deal breaker for them

Concerning the education and instructions on SNS use she got P1 states "You know, the basic stuff like don't anything that can threaten your scholarship. "Nothing you wouldn't show your Grandma."

When asked whether there are certain conversations she refrains from engaging or interacting with on SNS, P2 states Yes. I would definitely avoid certain conversations because I think they can get

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Strategies for effective self-representation                                                                                                                                                                    | Targeted approach<br>Appealing content                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | pretty inappropriate. Especially when they have anything to do with alcohol. I just don't like it."                                                                                                  | This theme describes the ways of effective self-representation when using SNS in the recruitment process |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Concerning whether coaches should pay attention to the prospective athlete's SNS activity P2 states I wouldn't necessarily say they have to pay attention."                                          |                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | P5 states "I mean, it only takes like one bad action, that can take away your scholarship offer. That seems a bit crazy to me."                                                                      |                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | P1 states, I contacted coaches and put my highlight tape on YouTube and sent that link to like all the major Division one coaches I could email when I was in my 11th grade.                         |                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | P3 states, I would tell them portray themselves as basketball players, because if they're serious about playing basketball, if they want to be a pro, then they have to portray themselves as a pro, |                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | P5 states, I try to get in touch with some coaches on Twitter and all that. Like more coaches posts, just like get them to know me.                                                                  |                                                                                                          |
| P6 states "I just want people to see what I'm doing. I'm going for the coaches. I mean, coaches will go (check your SNS) before offering a scholarship. Things like that are like background checks on people." | P1 states, I ensured that I captured the best of my abilities and image. You know you need to enhance your outlook whatever the cost. More so when you really need that scholarship. So best presentation is key to show my skill, my level that I was good |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                          |

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                          | <p>enough to play at the Division one level and that I could compete at that level as well.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <p>Appealing content<br/>Self<br/>education/effective<br/>packaging of<br/>information</p>               | <p>When asked of how he would have changed his activity on social media during his recruitment P3 states, "post, more pictures of like workouts of basketball, just trying to get as much exposure as I can."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                          | <p>P6 states "Post more photos of being around good people, posting pictures in good areas to show people you are doing the right things."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                                          | <p>P1 states "Well, I was definitely educated on presenting myself like a professional on social media. I was not aware of certain images I posted when I was in high school, literally all I cared about was, hooping, getting a scholarship, and finding a great school to do all of that."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <p>Self<br/>education/effective<br/>packaging of<br/>information<br/>Maintain clean<br/>image in SNS</p> | <p>When asked of whether he was educated on the importance of self-presentation on social media P1 states Definitely from my family and my coaches, they would tell us, what's been put out there. Recruiters are saying and we've heard stories of athletes in the NCAA ruining their opportunity and scholarships because they posted something or they did something.<br/>P1 states "Yes. Today in today's society? I definitely would recommend using social media as a tool to promote themselves. But I would do so knowing all the rules that come with it."</p> |

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Concerning P2, she was educated and she indicated that she would not want to change anything in her previous SNS posts during her recruitment.

However when asked whether she was aware of any violations that would make her ineligible P2 responded "I'm not aware of anything that would have made me ineligible like social media." When asked whether she was aware of any violations that would make her ineligible P4 states "That's one thing I wasn't aware of"

P5 states "I posted a little bit more, I think it might have given me more exposure for the coaches"

Concerning education, P5 states, "I got educated from my teachers at school. My coaches from 'Future' told me it's really important to, you know, keep the dirty stuff out."

Asked whether he was educated P6 states, "Oh, yes. I did a lot of camps in the US, like back in high school in Canada. And every time they said they we're going to go look at your pages on social media so just make sure everything is sharp." He further states, "I don't think I would change anything in my recruiting process. I think I did it the right way."

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Maintain clean  
image in SNS  
SNS

When asked about what they would advise young student athlete being recruited by NCAA universities about their future encounters with self presentation on social media, P1 states "I would definitely tell them to keep their keep their social media clean in the sense that anything that they say out there is going to be out there forever and can be used against them down the line"

P2 states, "I would say to always display yourself in a appropriate manner. Don't take anything for granted, make sure captions are appropriate. No cursing. Stuff like that."

P4 states "It's definitely being aware of everything you post haha. Like I said, everything is on social media forever. So you have to make sure to not do the things that can get you in trouble like promote someone else or stuff."

P5 states Just do things so coaches could see that I'm a good kid. I didn't really have any pictures of me drinking or doing bad things.

When asked about the advise to the young students concerning SNS use, P6 states, "I would say keeping it clean makes you look like you really like the sport you're doing, like you really love it, but you work hard for it, that you're like really dedicated. Reach out more, look really professional."

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|--------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Effectiveness of SNS for recruitment | SNS are Effective | <p>P7 Without a clean image a candidate can easily miss out on the scholarship opportunity</p> <p>P8 states “good self-presentation is important. Individuals who are not able to maintain good and clean profile sends negative signals and I normally avoid those.”</p> <p>P1. At the end of the day, I don't think it (SNS) helped my recruitment whatsoever because my scholarship didn't come from being seen on social media. Also all the coaches I reached out to, to watch my highlight tape never really reached back Yeah, it didn't even help my dilemma.</p> | This theme describes whether SNS use serve the intended purpose during the recruitment process |
|                                      | SNS are Effective | <p>P1. I've heard of it helping other people. I believe I do believe that coaches have an easier access to viewing them. So social media is an important part of the recruiting process, not only for the player, but for the entity. Allows for schools to know where you're going and allows for schools to not contact you anymore or stress you out after you make your decision,</p> <p>P3 states " I think it helped my process for sure, especially coming from Canada. I try to like reach out to coaches in the States. "</p>                                    |                                                                                                |
|                                      |                   | <p>P4 I would say it helped cause it's hard getting recognized in Canada.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                |
|                                      |                   | <p>P7. I would say they have really made it easier for us coaches to access a larger pool of prospective candidates. I am now more than ever able to access those from outside the country who may have the talent to deliver good results.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                |

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When asked whether SNS should be considered in the recruitment process P5 states "Yes, they can define a person a lot. Some people are not really good people. And I could see it just by social media and I could make the link immediately."

P9 states, "Definitely. Imagine the distance and cost and time that would have gone into visit all the prospective candidates. Yes, very helpful, I would say as a screening tool."

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## Appendix II: Interview Schedule

### Qualitative Interview Schedule for Athletes

- 1.) In what sport did you receive a scholarship to play at the Division 1 level?
- 2.) When you were being recruited as a Division 1 athlete did you use any type of social media?
- 3.) Using examples how would you say you portrayed yourself on these mediums?
- 4.) What social media sites did you use?
- 5.) What social media medium did you most frequent during your recruitment process, and why?
- 6.) Do you think social media helped or hindered your recruitment process?
- 7.) What would you change, if anything at all about how you presented yourself on social media throughout your recruitment period?
- 8.) Were you educated about how an elite athlete should use and portray themselves on social media from youth coaches, friends, or family?
- 9.) If you were a mentor for a young student athlete being recruited by NCAA universities what would you tell them about their future encounters with self-presentation on social media?
- 10.) Were you aware of any violations that would make you ineligible if you acted in a certain way on social media?
- 11.) What social media medium did you most frequent while attending your university and why?
- 12.) Did the social media activity of your school or the particular team you were committing to influence your collegiate decision in anyway?
- 13.) Were there any self-presentation tendencies on social media that you stopped doing once in university compared to when you were in high school?
- 14.) How frequent would you say you posted on social media in high school?
- 15.) How frequent would you say you posted on social media in university?
- 16.) Would you refrain from engaging in certain conversations or interacting with certain posts because you never knew who was “watching” during your recruitment period?
- 17.) What was your knowledge of the NCAA “Amateurism Status” during your recruitment, and if so did you ever think social media could affect that status?
- 18.) Follow up: Now that you are finished your recruitment process how knowledgeable are you about “Amateurism”?
- 19.) Would you recommend social media usage for high school recruits and if so to what extent?
- 20.) How do you feel about announcing your college choice on social media?
- 21.) In regards to college announcements. What would you consider over the top? And what is just right?
- 22.) Would you side with, “Expressing yourself how you like” or “Being watchful for what you post” as something you believe in for a young athlete currently in the recruitment process?

- 23.) Should coaches pay close attention to what perspective athletes do on social media?
- 24.) In your opinion, of the top social media platforms (Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook) which ones are the most harmless to most potentially harmful for athletes to use?
- 25.) Do you have any further comments that relate to NCAA Canadian high school recruitment in the age of social media?

### **Qualitative Interview Schedule for Coaches/Recruiters**

- 1.) What is your current role within your university team?
- 2.) To what extent are you involved in recruiting high school athletes?
- 3.) Do you currently use social media sites in the recruiting process?
- 4.) If so, what social media sites do you use?
- 5.) Can you describe how you use the sites to promote your university program?
- 6.) Do you examine or follow the social media sites of potential high school recruits?
- 7.) If so, what social media posts by an athlete could hurt them in the recruiting process?
- 8.) What social media posts could help an athlete in the recruiting process?
- 9.) In your opinion, how important is social media in the recruiting process?
- 10.) What advice would you give to high school athletes on how they can best utilize social media in the recruiting process?
- 11.) Do you have any further comments that relate to NCAA Canadian high school recruitment in the age of social media?

## Appendix III: Ethics Clearance Document



Brock University  
Office of Research Ethics  
Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035  
Email: reb@brocku.ca

Social Science Research Ethics Board

### Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

DATE: 8/9/2019  
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: FOGEL, Curtis - Sport Management  
FILE: 19-002 - FOGEL  
TYPE: Masters Thesis/Project STUDENT: Marcus Hanson  
Hanson  
SUPERVISOR: Curtis Fogel  
TITLE: High School Recruiting of Athletes in the Age of Social Media

#### ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: NEW Expiry Date: 8/1/2020

The Brock University Social Science Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 8/9/2019 to 8/1/2020.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 8/1/2020. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Office of Research Ethics web page at <http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/research-forms>.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

- Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
- New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
- Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:

Lynn Dempsey, Chair  
Social Science Research Ethics Board

Robert Steinbauer, Chair  
Social Science Research Ethics Board

**Note:** Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.