**FACULTY OF
HUMANITIES**
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—LOUAIZE—

SOCIAL MEDIA FANS POSTS AND REACTIONS AND THEIR EFFECT ON MEN BASKETBALL ATHLETES IN LEBANON

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in *ADVERTISING*

by

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Department of Media Studies
Notre Dame University – Louaize
Lebanon

Spring, 2019

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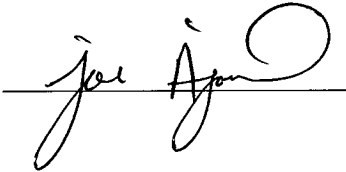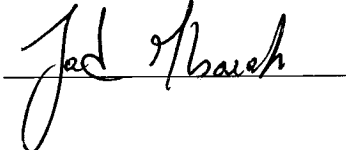Master in Media Studies - Advertising

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Table of Content:

Introduction

Sports are generally identified as a system of activities which are based on physical athleticism. Sports have held a significant place in society since before the first Olympic Games in Ancient Greece (Woods, 2011). Sports are considered in recent years as one of the escape arenas to some people in which they can practice, watch, analyze or interfere in some sports fields such as basketball, soccer and other games. It is said to be a physical exercise which requires continuous effort and a good number of hours spent whether practicing or playing; nowadays the game evolved a lot more and includes further interaction between the fans and the club such as players and management.

Sports allow a generally controlled and safe environment for those people to showcase their skills in each category. Since sports are mainly known by its big competitive battle, usually occurring between two or more individuals, it generates a feeling of victory, competition or defeat and the game is being transferred among the social media users (participants in a social post, group members or even a conversation online happening between friends). Thus, for participants, it is fnow known as a shared experience.

If a game is scheduled on a specific day, it becomes a trend the next day, either to criticize, cheer or highlight a part of that game and share the opinion with one another. For example, When the Golden State Warriors in the NBA broke the Bulls record with Wins vs. Losses, fans could recall where they were, what they were doing, and how they reacted. Locally, the 2017-2018 championship Homenetmen club was able to break the run of Al Riyadi Beirut Club in the Lebanese league and win the championship after many years of dominance from Al Riyadi club. Plenty of examples can be shared covering this topic with the merge happening between social media channels or platforms and the teams, athletes as well as fans interactions.

Another example is the world famous "Super Cup" which takes place in the United States; it became a world known trend reaching overseas countries (In Europe, GCC region as well as Middle East countries and other countries around the globe). The main challenge of these events is their ability to be shared or broadcast overseas especially with the presence of global fans and in the era of the new technology.

In recent years, the use of social media also increased throughout the world. Many people are now using social media channels such as blogging, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Instagram and the list goes on, to express their frustrations, beliefs, dreams, and general feelings/opinions or mood and maintain contact with others. Many studies conducted by various platforms especially Ipsos, show that the social media penetration is rapidly increasing reaching more than 80% with some age groups by end of 2018, whether for personal use and or work reasons (Acquired from Google insights, Google AdWords blog and consumer insights on google). Daily events, even seemingly every move a person makes is now photographed, spoken about or posted on multiple online social media platforms. All events are broadcast to the world from a micro-level to a macro audience. Individuals gather information about world events almost instantaneously, and remain informed constantly with just a click away from any news around the globe. Today, if basketball fans want to know the score of their favorite team's game, they would check it on google, on their team's Facebook page, twitter account or Instagram account, among others. It goes on and on to even if a person is a diehard fan of a player and wants to know details about a specific player, it is just a click away.

Social media became a basic ground for teams and athletes in many sports, to promote their image and send updates to their followers also known as fans, and then entice these viewers to like, re-tweet, comment and that's why the number of sports journalists and online sports pages

increased over the years and are all in for a scoop, an interview, or just sharing information to get more page readers, website visitors and with the current revolution of social media, the journalists are now looking left and right for scoops and shares from the social media users.

In recent years, teams have also entered the social media maze by creating official accounts and have a specialized media team to handle those accounts where they post and reach out to their fans directly. The rapid growth of social media and its updates also generates live stories and videos; teams now can even broadcast a full game online without waiting for TV rights and a TV channel to cover this game. Personally, I have started watching live games over Facebook and YouTube especially on the new pages created on Facebook in our local market such as SportsmaniaLB, Dribbling and Arabasket and others.

One of the most active social media platforms today in Lebanon is Facebook (according to latest data shared by GS Stat Counter) by end of 2018, Facebook reached around 38% of the total internet population in Lebanon.

Many fans and athletes (like Amir Saoud, Wael Arakji, Fadi El Khatib and others) are sharing their updates such as new signings, game opinion, dreams and motivational thoughts and generating engagement or interaction. Users are now able to comment and send messages to other people and share their opinions by creating some study groups or a debatable ground for other users, obliging athletes at times and management sometimes to interfere and reply to these posts.

When going global, many NBA athletes who are well known for their professionalism and the discipline they have are also showing emotions towards social media posts and I recall an incident where Kevin Durant was caught creating multiple fake profiles to defend himself against bad criticism on Twitter (The Guardian) and many other cases in the NBA and with famous Basketball players such as Steph Curry whom I quote saying "You've got derogatory stuff," Curry

said. "You've got people attacking your family. You've got people sending pictures of them and their families wearing your jersey. You have people on there who will send 40 messages in a row to try to get me to respond to them. I get wedding invites, prom invites, all of that stuff. And this last year, any type of political debate that comes up surrounding (President Donald) Trump and athletes, somehow I get tagged."

In addition to that, Steve Kerr the Golden State Warriors head coach said that players have to be very careful with everything they do on social media and added "You just have to understand it can come back and haunt you quickly, depending on what you write," Kerr said. "I think everybody is learning that as we go, as social media becomes more and more prominent. People are realizing all of the time now that you can get yourself into trouble. But it's so hard to keep from that impulse, especially if you're angry about something. But what it fosters is generally really unhealthy, the anger and the resentment, the divide."

Also, couple of years back in a NBA playoffs game, Zaza Pachulia made an illegal closeout play against Kawhi Leonard, Spurs forward, and the Spurs' superstar landed on Pachulia's foot and re-sprained his left ankle. Some thought Pachulia did it purposely and many were outraged. Pachulia and his family received death threats over their social media accounts, leading security guards to be sent to his children's schools.

"I just felt bad for my family," Pachulia said. "At the end of the day, we're basketball players. We're trying to play, to entertain, and do something special on the court. But off the court, we're just regular human beings. We have families, we have lives, and we have kids."

The examples shared above are but a part of many stories shared by journalists in the States that shows the danger in words and in those tools in the hands of fans and their direct contact with famous athletes no matter how private their account can be.

The purpose of this study is to prove that social media posts and groups and their usage have a direct effect on men Basketball athletes in Lebanon such as affecting the performance of a player, ruining the image of a player, and bringing to public personal problems and issues so on and so forth. The social media communication will be studied in the perspective of the Uses and Gratification theory in understanding the reasons why people use these platforms. Also, these particular platforms will be investigated in relation to the concept of a Public Sphere theory, since most Lebanese basketball and soccer fans (the two major sports in Lebanon) are utilizing the social media platforms for bashing players, putting extra pressure on players or just adding a negative or positive image about those athletes. Using those theories will help us study, research and conclude the actions and reactions of daily active users on FB as well as the athletes in the game of Basketball and come up with a conclusion that explains the level of involvement and magnitude of potential effects through social media. Do Fb Groups have any effects on athletes and perhaps on their performance? What about the fans? Do those groups create conflicts between the fans? What are those reactions leading to and are they escalating to problem on basketball courts? Do social media posts have a direct effect on men basketball athletes in Lebanon?

Literature Review

From various studies and news articles, the research is about the potential effect of social media on men basketball athletes in Lebanon. The fans are now more and more interested in analyzing basketball games and player's performance urging them to find solutions and proving the direct effect of social media through fans posts on those athletes.

Various research has been done in relation to the relevance of the topic presented in this study. These studies will be detailed below. First of all, Bireline (2010) stated that sports have been an avenue for people of all ages and ability levels to exercise their bodies, minds, and emotions in a way that is socially acceptable and positive. Sports even allowed for a socially acceptable way to let out pent-up emotions and remove one's self from the monotony or pressures of everyday life (Woods, 2011). Sports offer a level of playing field, no pun intended, for individuals of all races, genders, socioeconomic statuses, and life experiences in that sports offer an outlet to or from personal experiences. Through sports, the child in the inner city of New York can find hope for a bright future. Through sports, the adolescent farmer can escape the daily grind of working the earth. Through sports, the middle-aged business woman can entice her 13 male peers to a lucrative deal. Through sports, aging men can recount their better years. Among many other positives and negatives, sports offer something that many other pastimes cannot: the celebration of shared experience and achievement for both participants and spectators (Woods, 2011). Recently, social media allowed a celebration of shared experience and achievement by making the insignificant seem critical and the ethereal seem procurable. With social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook, minute-by-minute updates are possible. Now the world can know when your best friend is brushing her teeth, using the bathroom, cooking dinner, going to the local concert, and sleeping. With Pinterest, Instagram, and Tumblr, pictures of the man waiting to cross the street, wedding

arrangements, skateboard tricks, and the latest fashions offer laughs, inspiration, hope, ideas, affirmation, and more. MySpace, Facebook, and LinkedIn allow users to construct, govern, and enterprise their personal and professional lives through digital and virtual billboards, resumes, and connections. Yesterday's pictures and videos posted on Instagram, Pinterest, and Tumblr become today's topics for new posts and threads on Twitter and Facebook that are managed and interconnected with or through MySpace and LinkedIn. The web of interconnectivity grows thicker and thicker with every passing Tweet, post, Pin, and connection.

An article written by sports networker on their online website states that pressure is a perceived expectation of the need to perform well under challenging situations. Athletes in particular are known for either choking or excelling under extreme pressurized circumstances. Often, fear of failure is tied to pressure and can either fuel or exhaust athletes' efforts. A few examples of how fear plays into an athletes' performance: Fear of disappointing others (coaches, parents, fans); Fear of feeling embarrassed if they blow it; Fear of losing their place on the team if they underperform; Fear of not performing perfectly (by Michelle Hill, Sports Business 2010)

An athletes' level of experience, confidence, and self-belief play a vital role in how well he/she performs under pressure.

Some athletes have to overcome beliefs set upon them by parental pressure such as unspoken thoughts of, 'win or else I'll withhold love and approval.' The athlete must overcome that mental pressure by challenging their own thinking about the expectations they have adopted from their parents. They need to develop their own set of internal values and motivators.

Those and more articles were written about sports and the impact that social media and outside pressure may have on them, and this will attempt to prove or disprove this impact through the use of qualitative & quantitative research and analysis in addition to solid real life examples.

For example, Lebanon lost its chance to qualify to the world cup in 2019 where many players spoke clearly on TV and blamed Social media directly. Interviews revealed how many players, coaches and experts in Basketball spoke about the direct effect of social media on men Basketball athletes on both individual and team levels.

Almost every team and sports association has a social media profile. From the pros to the minors and from the high school athlete to the retired athlete, social media has been a force in the sports industry landscape.

According to "Navigate Research", sports fans are 67% more likely to use social media to enhance their viewing experience compared to non-sports fans. Essentially, social media is the virtual sports bar that fans refer to before, during and after the games. So the behavior of a team or an athlete on Social Media can directly influence a fan's perception of that team or athlete.

Almost every sports related program or event such as NBA, NFL, LBL and others has a hashtag associated with it and it is displayed, on screen, during an event or a game. It drives engagement and creates a relationship with the target audience that had not been possible few years ago.

Social Media is a powerful tool that drives sports talk today and the way fans interact with teams, players, and fellow fans. It's a powerful source for getting news, engaging in topical discussions, sharing personal thoughts and empowering brands.

Social Media has impacted the Sports Industry and that impact will continue to evolve in the upcoming years.

Many books, articles, and papers have been published relative to the relationship between an athlete's personal state and his or her performance. A point of consensus clearly stated in these published texts is that athletic performance efficiency is reduced by distraction. It is believed that distractions impacts the athlete's ability to focus. Distractions evoke negative mood responses,

anxiety levels, and stress, hence resulting in the consumption of mental energy. By concentrating effectively, an athlete can maintain physical energy by maintaining good technique and focus, executing skills properly, and pushing the body through pain and fatigue barriers as well as other external factors. Time spent fretting over distractions drains mental energy so that performance suffers (Manktelow, 2006). As Haverstraw (2002) noted, distractions may arise from various sources including: the presence of loved ones you want to impress, family or relationship problems, teammates and other competitors, coaches, underperformance or unexpected high performance, frustration at mistakes, poor refereeing decisions, changes in familiar patterns, unjust criticism, and the media.

Social media is changing the way sports, clubs and fans are interacting with each other. From live-broadcasting games, creating memes and cheering from their private accounts, spectators are no longer simply watching sport, and fans can often get news, insights and commentary straight from the source online.

Walter Lim a Singaporean commentator says that social media and sport are "a match made in heaven".

"The instantaneous, intimate and interactive nature of social and mobile technologies make them perfect platforms to fuel our sporting desires." (Narelle Harris, LA TROBE University)

While fans have engaged to social media to share their love of sport, some sporting clubs and athletes are finding it more challenging to interact with the rapid expansion of the technology known as social media.

If social media is allowing fans to be more engaged, it is also making it possible for sporting athletes to be more accountable for their public comments and the way in which they engage with their fans and wider community.

Social media platforms pose a minefield for some social media members. Posts and updates by sports officials, representatives and athletes that could at best be described as "incautious" are resulting in those fans being questioned in the media and sometimes being penalized.

"Stephanie Rice lost a valuable Jaguar sponsorship after using a gay slur in a tweet and in 2012, Voula Papachristou was ejected from the Olympic Games for posting a racist tweet". (Narelle Harris, LA TROBE University)

"Social media channels, including blogs and video channels, are changing the nature of sport reporting for journalists as well. A study by La Trobe University's Centre for Sport and Social Impact, Web 2.0 platforms and the work of newspaper sport journalists, found that all sports journalists are now required to research and report news across multiple platforms". (Narelle Harris, LA TROBE University)

Theoretical Framework

This part talks about the theoretical framework that will be used to guide the study. In this chapter I will be utilizing the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Public Sphere Theory. Merging these theories and the topic which I chose will reveal how and why Social media especially Facebook groups and posts, affect men basketball athletes in Lebanon whether directly or indirectly.

Uses and Gratification:

These and other days, access to media for several reasons and purposes. Through this access, the audience's needs are fulfilled from self-satisfaction, to information gathering, to social interaction and or entertainment according to Denis McQuail (McQuail 1987:73).

By saying that, this theory assumes that audience members actively seek out the mass media, fulfill expectations and actively select media and media content to satisfy individual needs. The most important assumption of this approach is that the audience is active and media use is goal-directed. "Uses and Gratification Theory seeks to understand why people seek out the media that they do and what they use it for. UGT differs from other media effect theories in that it assumes that individuals have power over their media usage, rather than positioning individuals as passive consumers of media. UGT explores how individuals deliberately seek out media to fulfill certain needs or goals such as entertainment, relaxation, or socializing." **(David L, "Uses and Gratification Theory)**

This theory was chosen because the audience using social media to post or engage or interact are adding pressure on sports and athletes, which is part of fulfilling their needs through being socially interactive with others.

In this theory, and according to the three theorists (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch) there are five assumptions to be identified:

i. The Audience is always conceived as active, meaning they are always in contact with the media to acquire info and gather knowledge.

ii. In the mass communication process, the audience member takes an initiative in linking between the need of gratification and media choice.

iii. The media competes with other sources, from news articles to rumors to social media posts to traditional media.

iv. Many users of the media seek out goals derived from data supplied by the individual audience members themselves, similar to the information retained from social media posts.

v. Value judgments about cultural significance of mass communication should be suspended, while audience operations are explored on their own terms.

Public Sphere

The Public Sphere is a place where citizens exchange ideas, information, and opinions about any topic that comes to mind. According to Jürgen Habermas; the public sphere is 'a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed, and a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body' (Habermas,1954, p. 50).

When explaining the public sphere, we intend to clarify that it is where people gather to discuss their ideas, information, and it is a form of discussion that takes place anywhere and is not linked to a specific time. It could be taking place right now in any part of the world through any means, and about any subject. It could also be on a social media platform or under a post.

Few years ago, humanity was introduced to the most advanced source of media: The Internet, which became number one source of information. Nowadays, public sphere is mentioned what immediately pops in peoples' minds is the web pages, the social networks. The Internet has become a large source of media and information for many people, and is one of the world's largest public spheres because it allows for discussion and debates about different ideas from all around the world through news sharing, Facebook and Twitter among several others.

Social media networks in general has created one of the largest and most recognizable Public Spheres of the Internet; Facebook is one of the main public spheres gathering, in which users are able to share their opinions on any topic, post pictures, write about a new trend, create pages, and also like, and comment on any of their interests. It is also one of the fastest ways to voice an opinion and get immediate feedback about it.

Public sphere is characterized by its critical nature in contraposition to the representative nature of the feudal system (Boeder, P., 2005). According to Hauser (Hauser, G., 1988), it is where people

can interchange their opinions to create a common judgment. This critical nature is endangered by the power of the social media that transforms most of the society in a public, to a culture such as internet population. It is interesting to note that the possibility of reaching larger numbers of audiences allows internet users to create merges that would have been difficult to maintain without the new tools, and these merges create networks, a popular word nowadays. But how is our society influenced by social media?

"Two theorists that have studied the influence of networks are Castells and Granovetter. Castells (Castells, M., 2004) recognizes the importance of networks stating that power doesn't reside in institutions, rather "it is located in the networks that structure society". That is why to have control, networks need to be created that counteract other networks, making it a question of "networks vs. networks"."

Although it is not clear how the new era of media is developing them both, it is clear that it is easier to create and maintain weak ties all over the world nowadays through the internet thanks to email, blogs, Facebook, Instagram and others. But the boost of weak ties hasn't been at the expenses of strong ties, at least nothing let us think so: "with the same tools we can keep in contact with our family and we probably have better relationships with them than in the 19th century". (Christopher Neal)

them when expressing their opinion over social media especially when addressing a specific player.

In this research, the researcher will go through several elements to try to prove the effect of social media on men Basketball athletes in Lebanon.

Research Methodology

This study aims to identify the potential impact of social media on Men basketball athletes in Lebanon. To do so, a qualitative research and a quantitative survey approach were utilized. They were conducted on different people of the game such as, Men basketball players as well as coaches and journalists and a sports psychiatrist.

The survey has been conducted on the fans to check on their point of view as well as looking into the new social media trends. Two different sampling techniques were used. For the basketball players, a probability sampling were used to ensure all members of a population have a chance of being selected. This was possible because the rosters of basketball players in Lebanon are available. The researcher was able to send out a message to the players asking them to participate in this study. The second sample was selected from different basketball fans, who are active on Facebook. A non-probability purposive sampling was used because not all the fans can be identified; thus a message was sent out to the basketball fan pages asking fans to participate in the study.

Qualitative Research

Based on the theories used in the theoretical framework: the Uses and Gratification Theory and the Public Sphere Theory, the thesis will use both qualitative research and quantitative research.

Qualitative research "is primarily exploratory research. This type of research is used to gain an understanding of several hidden reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research" (Denzin, 2000, p. 1).

This qualitative research will help us search and find answers to the questions, collect information and insights as well as reach findings that would determine a way forward on the topic we are investigating. Also different opinions and perspectives of the interviewees would be taken into consideration to define what we are trying to find for the questions we are asking. In addition, qualitative research is used to discover trends in opinions and thoughts and help us to dive deeper into the questions and the problem to reach our objective behind this thesis and because each question can lead to a new question, when any interviewee opens a new kind of potential question that could be discussed to add more information into the topic.

Last but not least, this type of research is a subjective research done in a natural setting and it helps us to move further into the issue and try to fix the problem or find solutions in this case, (the effect of social media on men basketball athletes).

Sample

Different interviews were conducted with experienced and famous players such as Elie Rustom, Jean Abdelnour, Joey Zaloum, Coach Joe Moujaes and others. An expert opinion was conducted with Nathalie Jbeily (The only certified Sports psychologist in Lebanon and a former D1 player), the answers generated by the interviews would help the researcher get an idea why social media does affect men basketball athletes in Lebanon and may offer solutions on how can we solve such incidents from occurring. It is then hoped that we can reach a stage where we can separate emotions from professional Basketball, giving fans the freedom to post and share their thoughts but also maintaining a professional atmosphere for the athletes by isolating them from social media at certain phases and by a similar decision as Al Riyadi club took during playoffs 2018-2019 season by assigning spokesperson and refraining players from conducting any interview whether live on TV/radio or on social media.

Procedure

The technique used for this research is the in-depth interviews.

In-depth interviewing is a technique "that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation" (Carolyn, 2006, p. 3). These interviews are useful when we have a lot of information to intake from the interviewees and the advantage of such techniques is that the people interviewed feel comfortable because the topic they are being interviewed about is of their expertise.

This will help them share a lot of information and give us insights of these fields and of course that is needed for the research.

The researcher has the option to ask follow-up questions (probe questions).

Moreover, this technique has an advantage as the sample is small and the researcher can observe the people closely, and can take from them all the details needed in addition to their gestures and face reactions. Interviews in general, need a low budget and less time to carry out.

The interviews were conducted in different ways, this author personally went and attended few teams' practices which allowed him to interview the respondents. Also, the expert opinion was done by meeting the interviewee at her office and couple of interviews were done by meeting couple of players outside the court at a coffee shop. All interviews were typed.

Variables

The interviewees discussed mainly issues related to social media, fans' posts and people's reactions to those players/coaches when on and off the court.

The interviews clearly revealed several problems with social media and the fans and how posts can or do affect a player/coach and it also revealed a digital community and how people now are

all into social media. Data were collected and then divided into several categories so each can be analyzed.

The last couple of questions were open-ended and generated various answers so more information can be gathered and more analysis can be done on the social media posts and reactions and their potential effects on men Basketball athletes in Lebanon.

Quantitative Research

According to Babbie (2010) "quantitative methods emphasize objective measurements and the statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires, and surveys, or by manipulating pre-existing statistical data using computational techniques. Quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data and generalizing it across groups of people or to explain a particular phenomenon."

Quantitative research is important for this paper for many reasons:

- The results can be generalized on a larger scale since the sample was taken out of a basketball fans' community.

- This thesis has clearly defined the research questions and hypothesis talking about the social media posts and reactions and their effects on Men basketball athletes.

- The questionnaire was created to suit the respondents by being as close as possible to their everyday experience such as career, daily social media activity and allowing them to express their opinion, so that the data collected from the survey would be valid.

- Data are collected in numbers and statistics are reported in forms of tables and charts.

Sample

In this survey respondents were 227 and all of them were Lebanese. The age group varied and the biggest chunk was of the 25-34 age group and those respondents were randomly selected without any planned selection.

Procedure

The questionnaire was done on an online survey and the link was shared with around 300 people out of which 227 replied and filled in the questionnaire.

The questions were close-ended: multiple choice and straight to the point answers. The survey followed the different measurements levels: categorical and continuous. The respondents were asked to select or fill in an answer from a pre-determined list making things easier for them and they definitely take less time.

Variables:

A variable is anything that has an amount or quality that shifts. The dependent variable is the variable a specialist is occupied with. An independent variable is a variable accepted to influence the depending variable. In other words the independent variable is the variable that is being tested by the researcher (Anne Marie Helmenstine 2018).

Variables used in the questionnaire were related to:

Demographics: the respondents were asked about their age, and answered varies between Under 18 and above 45.

They were also asked which teams they support and answers varied between 9 teams: Riyade, Hoops, Homenetmen, Champville, Sagesse, Byblos, Atlas and Beirut.

Data collected measured social media effect on Men Basketball Athletes under Likert-type scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree that social media do have an effect on men basketball athletes in Lebanon whether on the image, performance or even on supporting X or Y player.

Years of basketball experience: the respondents were asked about the time spent watching/playing basketball and how many years they have been watching the Lebanese league.

Social media behavior/usage: the respondents were asked about their social media behaviors such as the hours they spend online, frequency of posts and engagement rate. In Lebanon, users tend to engage a lot using social media platforms; they talk to players and express opinions and the research was investigating the time and type of posts these users write.

Positive/negative effect: the respondents were asked about whether social media have a negative or a positive effect on Men basketball athletes in Lebanon.

Along with the survey, a short description was written along and shared with each respondent for them to know and realize what we mean by such questions and the type of data we are trying to collect.

Fans' Behavior: this variable helped us to know if the behavior of fans is negative or positive by asking them if the posts on social media may or does affect the performance of these athletes.

Data Analysis

Interviews' Questions

The purpose of these interviews is to examine the feedback of the experts in the field especially the players who face such conditions and to observe what they think about social media entrance into the field of basketball.

Also, the opinions of these coaches/players reveal the actual information of an insider who plays, practices and has been in this game in a different era of past and present.

    i.   How old are you?

    ii.   Which team do you play for?

    iii.   Are you active on social media?

    iv.   How many hours do you spend daily on your Social Media Platforms?

    v.   Do you follow any Facebook/Instagram sport pages/groups?

    vi.   How often do you check fans' posts on those groups/pages daily on social media?

    vii.   Do you read all comments/replies on the posts or specific content only related to you personally?

    viii.   When do you mostly check social media posts, before or after the game?

    ix.   How do you see the fans posts about players before and after the games in Lebanon?

    x.   How often do you take an initiative and engage in a Basketball related post on Fb/IG with the fans?

    xi.   What do you personally like to post on your social media account pre and/or post a game?

    xii.   Do you think social media has a negative or positive effect on Basketball in Lebanon? Please explain.

xiii.   Do you think basketball fans posts on social media affect the performance of a player during the season?

Joey Zaloum

Joey is a 28-year-old Division 1 player, been playing in division 1 and 2 for 10 years and more now, he signed season 2018-2019 for Atlas Ferzol and is on social media. Joey spends around 2 hours daily on social media and checks posts related to him personally and sometimes reads what people write about other players.

He usually checks posts after the basketball games are over and thinks that some fans have knowledge about the games while others just post for a favorite player or to bash a player.

Joey rarely engages on social media posts but always checks and posts game-related pictures and highlights that are being posted on social media.

When asked about his opinion on whether social media have a negative or a positive effect on Basketball in Lebanon, Zaloum replied that it is negative and explained that "we compare ourselves to better countries in basketball (social media makes it very easy to have access and compare) whereas on a basketball level we lack a lot of professionalism in our system and in our country and I think that there should be better rules set by teams' to control any bashing towards players' in the league."

Finally, when asked if social media affect the performance of a player, he answered that only if the player has a low self-esteem and confidence. In some cases it is highly affecting the players as they start thinking about the feedback and the post-game talks while they play and that sometimes shows on court by a drastic drop in performance because in Lebanon some basketball athletes are emotional and they are not mentally tough.

Alex Abou Akl

Alex is a 26-year-old athlete, signed season 2018-2019 with Atlas Ferzol and it is his 2nd year in Division 1. He is very active on social media and follows many Lebanese basketball-related groups.

He likes to engage with his fans on social media and always checks posts after the games. He likes to reply to posts only when they relate to him and likes to post to motivate himself and his teammates whenever they have a game.

When asked about his opinion on whether social media have a negative or a positive effect on Basketball in Lebanon, Abou Akl replied that it has both. Positive because it makes the players feel good when they're getting praised, and sometimes bad because some people tend to disrespect some athletes which isn't appropriate or even sometimes they tend to praise someone's play or performance which makes them look overrated and end up adding more pressure on them for their next game.

Finally, when asked if social media affect the performance of a player he answered yes, especially on young players who may fall under the bashing of the fans. Veteran players tend to disregard and not look at what others say.

Jean Abdelnour

Jean is the Lebanese National Team captain and a 35-years-old veteran Division 1 player, he plays for Al Riyadi Club and is "a bit active" on social media.

Jean doesn't like to engage much with the fans on social media or reply to any comment even if it is about him.

When asked about his opinion on whether social media have a negative or a positive effect on Basketball in Lebanon, Abdelnour confirmed that people tend to exaggerate things, if a player plays a good game he gets praised and becomes a legend and that is not a good thing especially for young players to have an ego at a young age and the opposite is true also after one poor game.

Finally, when asked if social media affect the performance of a player and he answered that it shouldn't whatsoever but often it does. He later added about himself being an experienced player, he learned how to lock himself in a game situation or playoffs mode or when heading into a big game and stay away from social media to avoid adding pressure and stress.

Elie Rustom

Elie, is a 32-year-old NT player and an experienced Division 1 player, he signed season 2018-2019 with Homenetmen club and was one of their key players.

He is "somehow active" on social media and follows many basketball-related groups and pages, he checks and reads some of the comments and posts that appear on his newsfeed but does not engage with the posts to avoid conflicts with fans and he also checks the posts that his close friends, family members or even teammates shares with him privately.

Rustom mentioned that social media posts are always supportive before the game but after the game and depending on the outcome or the player's performance reactions and comments may vary. Even if a player plays well but the fans don't like him they will never support him and keep on bashing him publically or in private to his personal accounts.

He also added that the comparison should be youngsters vs experienced; experience plays a big role in protecting the players from falling into criticism and under pressure from the fans. In some cases, coaches tend to look at social media and reflect it back to players which is very

unprofessional and causes a lot of negative effects on players; after all they are all emotional human beings.

Finally, when asked if social media posts and engagement affect the performance of a player, Elie replied with "big Time". Fans in Lebanon sometimes cause problems for players, teams and coaches and some people in the field tend to take advantage of that to share or post rumors or ruin a player's image or sometimes agents try to send that rumor to increase the price of a player in the market.

Coach Alfred Mikael

Alfred is a 28-year-old division 1 fitness coach with Beirut club and currently a Division 2 player. He started his first basketball career by signing in Division 1 for Sagesse Club coming from Kuwait. He is "somehow active" on social media especially that he shares a lot of insights about his work as a coach.

He follows some local pages but thinks that some pages are biased. He gets a lot of private feedback or screenshots about those posts and he tries to avoid engaging with personal posts to avoid conflicts.

Mikael thinks that social media has a negative and positive effect on sports but knowing the players and being close to many Division 1 players including imports, he thinks that Social media has a huge effect on the performance of the Lebanese men basketball athletes and is reaching a stage where it gets into the mentality of the players and they start thinking about the fans feedback while the game being played.

Coach Joe Moujaes

A 43-year-old coach who signed season 2018-2019 with Homenetmen club and used to be the National team head coach and currently coaches the NT U18 and many other universities.

He is not very active on social media but sometimes receives many screenshots from family and friends for posts being written on social media and thinks that fans are very active on social media which is a normal activity in Lebanon.

He then added that social media has a negative effect on men basketball athletes in Lebanon and are easily taken into other peoples' opinions as they tend to be very emotional.

Lastly, when asked about the social media effect on the performance of men basketball athletes he agreed to that statement and added that it is all related to how much players are mentally ready and it affects the players in Lebanon easily because those posts sometimes captures them in a passive mode and forces them to surrender to what the fans are posting online, hence falling under social media pressure.

He then concluded with a statement "You can never ask players to stop social media in Lebanon, they might stop posting but will always read what others are talking about them. Social media ruined many basketball players in Lebanon".

Almost all interviewees spoke about the mental readiness of men basketball athletes in Lebanon and it seems that they all met at one point of comparing the age of players and the experience they have which in their opinion matters at that stage.

Experienced and mature players, tend to know and are able to control their feelings and emotions when it comes to receiving or reading fans' opinions on social media especially that a lot of players as well as coaches receivs some posts in private across all social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Youngsters and those who are more ego-driven tend to fall under pressure, especially the pressure caused by social media posts knowing that majority of players as well as imports in Lebanon are following and reading majority of social media posts by fans. They then tend to sometimes share it with each other privately which forces those players to break under pressure during the game.

Coach Joe Moujaes mentioned "Social media many basketball players in Lebanon" which the researcher think it is a bold statement when looking at players with big ego, that actually wait for social media posts to take screenshots of, repost them and at times use them to show off over their teammates.

From previous seasons until season 2018-2019, it is noticed that even legendary players like Fadi El Khatib, Ismael Ahmad and Rony Fahed have been posting on social media to a point where Fadi even spoke about it during many interviews on TV, speaking about him replying to all criticism on social media from fans on court.

Another recent incident happened when Aziz Abdulmasih missed a shot during a Sagesse vs Mouttahed game where Aziz was attacked and bashed on social media, he then posted on his

private account saying "Typical Lebanese Fans, they wait for the first incident to happen to start bashing you and talking badly about you"

Finally, several social media crises and trends were noticed whereby players, coaches and even referees get mocked and bashed on social media and this proves how social media platforms may affect players or others and get into their minds. For some players with ego problems and others with mental fatigue, social media posts may cause them to perform poorly during a game or fall under the pressure of fans. Such was the case in the recent Lebanese men national team games played in Lebanon when the national teams' manager as well as many players accused social media of being one of the problems which led Lebanon to not qualifying to the world cup for the fourth time.

Expert Opinion

As the research requires, this thesis looked into a new field that would give a lot of insights about the topic and hence the interview with the only sports psychologist in Lebanon, Nathalie Jbeily. Nathalie, an ex-Division 1 player and currently playing with Beirut Club Division 2, holds a master degree in physical education as well as a master degree in sports psychology; she is the only certified sports psychologist in Lebanon. She started her training in sports psychology in France. Nathalie thinks that social media is one huge channel to look into and the various effect of it on athletes in general. She thinks that athletes are now treated as "consumer goods" and always are pressured from teams' managers to deliver as per the money they are getting and they always expect them to play well.

Sports psychology does not exist in Lebanon even though multiple coaches admit that this is very essential now for teams and players. Below are some benefits:

- Performance (can deal with anything that has to do with that, stress anxiety, panic attacks, confidence, self-esteem)

- An athlete is an individual that goes through many problems which may affect them. Those effects may be eating disorder, personality traits, emotions and how to deal with them, among others.

For now sports psychology is not yet available in any basketball men's team or to any player. It might be utilized on an individual need rather than the team requirement, Nathalie added.

She added a point about sports psychology school in France where many athletes attend and are being sent to, INSEP in France is a very famous school and has a lot of athletes as patients who are being treated for performance drop, personal issues, getting players into a focus zone) etc.

Upon asking her about Social media and if it has direct effect on Men Basketball Athletes:

Yes, social media affect a lot of basketball athletes In Lebanon with a big impact on their performance. People in Lebanon love to hear about themselves and that is why they love social media and negative thoughts or opinions might not be accepted.

Players in Lebanon tend to want to get good feedback on social media for self-esteem and ego.

Finally, jbeily said that Social media may have cost us a lot, One of them is Asia Cup in 2017 and World cup qualification in 2019 (posts, social media attacks on players, bashing players) while players were all over social media checking and reading those posts.

Sports psychology should start at a very young age from schools to universities and then on to the professional level. Players and athletes should be able to block themselves of outside pressure especially in an emotional fan base in a country like Lebanon.

Ghayath Dibra

Ghayath is an ex Division 1 player, he stopped playing basketball and switched into coaching Kahraba youngsters along with Shafik Akiki and Patrick Saba and won 2 U18 leagues. He then became an assistant coach in D1 in Kahraba (stats coach) and the first to analyze the numbers and statistics in Lebanon. In 2001, Ghayath took a new challenge and switched to commenting on basketball and later started TV commenting on men's basketball league.

Ghayath follows a lot of groups and pages on social media and reads a lot of social media posts especially on teams' active pages and Lebanese basketball and checks it daily in the morning to read posts of the fans and read more of their points of view.

He said that he loves to read some fans comments and analysis, and sometimes he learns from people and this is the benefit of social media and the new communication, but unfortunately in Lebanon a lot of people write in a very personal and disrespectful way.

Ghayath also said that social media has both positive and negative effect, it depends on some fans posts and the way they are expressing themselves and sometimes it is very negative. He cited as an example what happened during season 2018-2019 with Coach Ahmad Farran (Riyadi Club Head Coach) and the bashing he received as well as the threats on social media with a lot of bad words and negative effect; If it wasn't for Riyadi's management things might have went out of control said Dibra.

He also stated that social media definitely affect men basketball athletes but that depends on whether the player is mentally tough or not; now the game starts before the jump ball on court because of social media and nowadays social media is a place that gets out of control at times especially through the direct communication between fans and players. Players are not robots, they get easily affected because of emotions but some players are mentally tough and the effect would be less on them than others.

Finally he said that sports psychology is very important in competition and players may have a lot of problems and need follow ups and teams should investigate this more and see that this is not something to be ashamed of. In Germany for example, soccer NT management in the world cup sent them a specialized sports psychiatrist to look into the problems those players are facing and to find solutions to better their performance during the games.

Fans Survey

Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Under 18 years	14	6.2	6.2	6.2
	19-24	73	32.2	32.2	38.3
	25-34	112	49.3	49.3	87.7
	35-44	23	10.1	10.1	97.8
	45 and above	5	2.2	2.2	100.0
	Total	227	100.0	100.0	
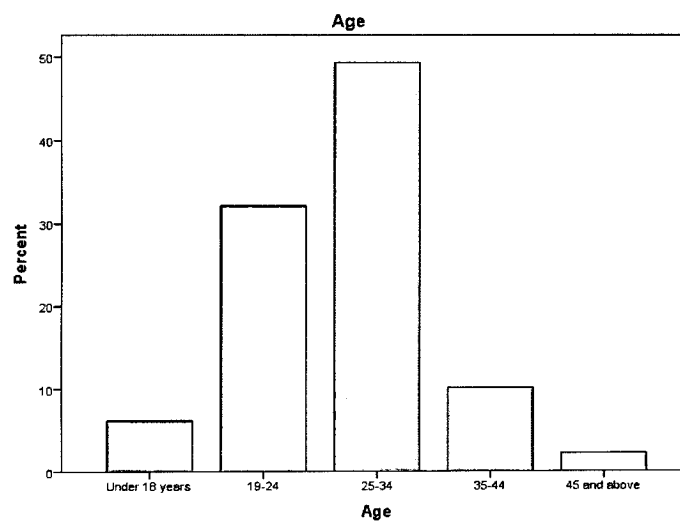
The age distribution of the sample was diversified, 49% of the sample were people who range between 25-34 years and 32% of the sample between 19-24 years.

86.1 percent of the respondents were under 34 years old. 13.9 percent were 35 years old and above.

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	191	84.1	84.5	84.5
	Female	35	15.4	15.5	100.0
	Total	226	99.6	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.4		
Total		227	100.0		
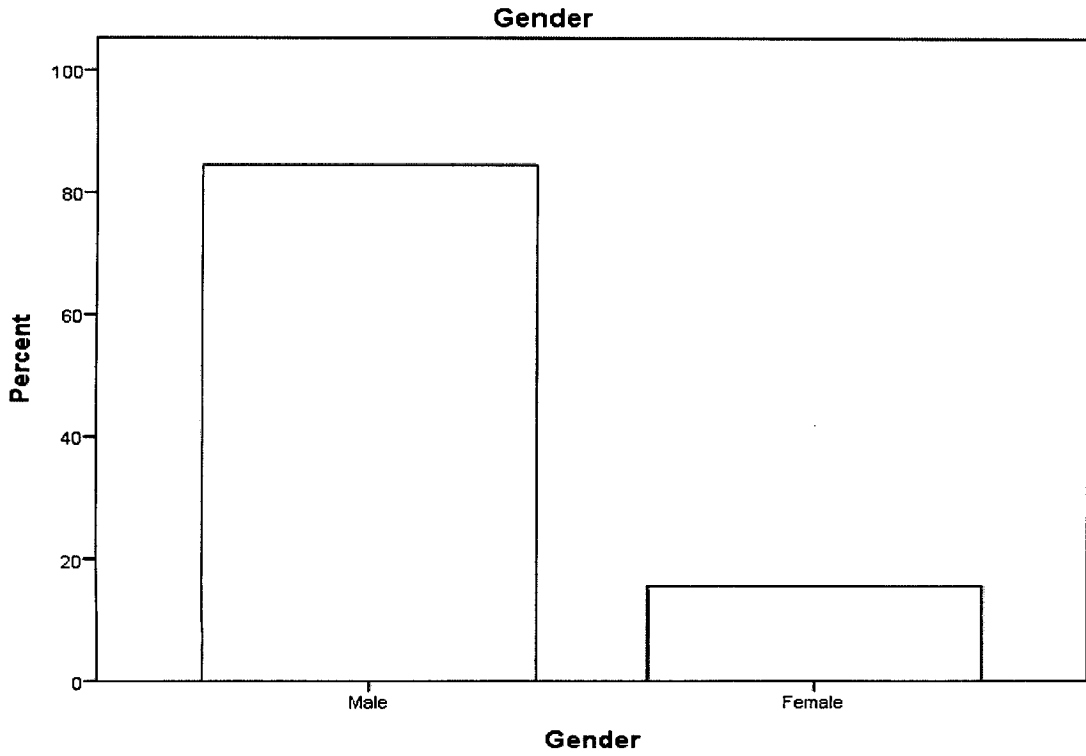
Gender

As for the gender, 85% of the sample were males, while the remaining 15% are females.

The team you support in the Lebanese basketball league

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Riyadi	76	33.5	33.8	33.8
	Homenetmen	17	7.5	7.6	41.3
	Chapmville	27	11.9	12.0	53.3
	Sagesse	93	41.0	41.3	94.7
	Beirut	6	2.6	2.7	97.3
	Mouttahed	4	1.8	1.8	99.1
	Byblos	1	.4	.4	99.6
	Atlas	1	.4	.4	100.0
	Total	225	99.1	100.0	
Missing	System	2	.9		
Total		227	100.0		

The team you support in the Lebanese basketball league

The team you support in the Lebanese basketball league
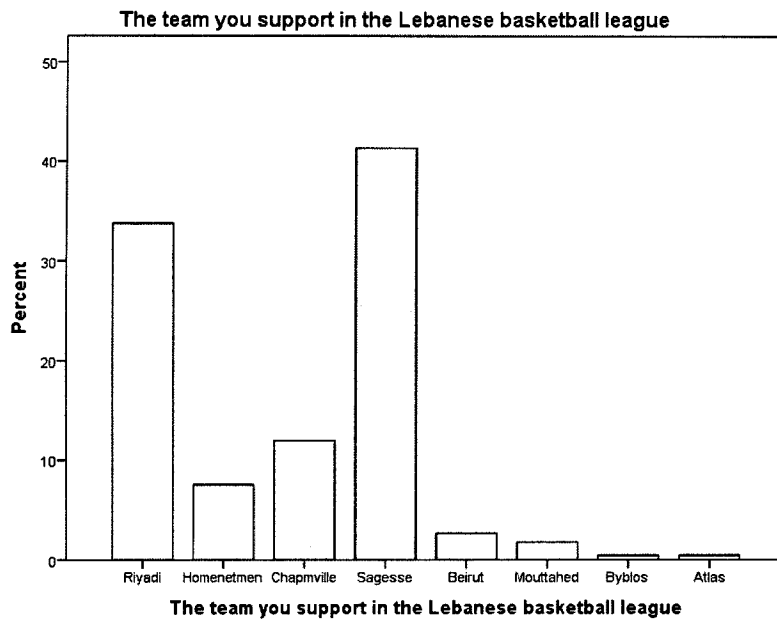
41 percent of the respondents stated that they support Sagesse in the Lebanese basketball league; 33.5 percent respondent with Riyadi; 11.9 percent asserted that they support Champville; 7.5 percent responded with Homenetmen; 2.6 percent replied with Beirut; 1.8 percent stated Mouttahed and 0.4 stated Byblos as well as Atlas Club.

How often do you play/practice basketball?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	57	25.1	25.4	25.4
	Occassionally (less than 1 time a month)	57	25.1	25.4	50.9
	Once in a while (1 time per month)	48	21.1	21.4	72.3
	Frequently (once per week)	62	27.3	27.7	100.0
	Total	224	98.7	100.0	
Missing	System	3	1.3		
Total		227	100.0		

How often do you play/practice basketball?

How often do you play/practice basketball?
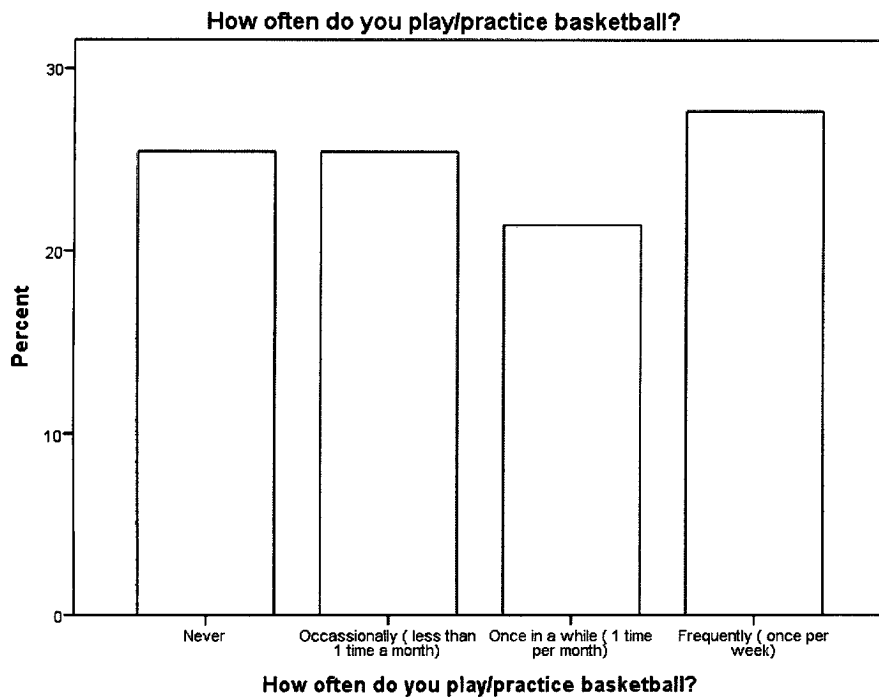
27.3 percent of the respondents stated that they frequently (once per week) play/practice basketball. 25.1 percent stated they never play while 25.1 percent stated they occasionally play/ practice basketball, which is less than 1 time a month;

21.1 percent stated that they do so once in a while, which is 1 time per month. The remaining 1.3 percent failed to give a response.

How long have you been watching the Lebanese basketball league?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than a year	6	2.6	2.7	2.7
	2 years	3	1.3	1.3	4.0
	2-5 years	19	8.4	8.4	12.4
	5-10 years	56	24.7	24.8	37.2
	More than 10 years	142	62.6	62.8	100.0
	Total	226	99.6	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.4		
Total		227	100.0		

How long have you been watching the Lebanese basketball league?

How long have you been watching the Lebanese basketball league?

62.6 percent of the respondents stated that they have been watching the Lebanese basketball league for more than 10 years; 24.7 percent of the respondents stated 5 – 10 years; 8.4 percent stated 2 – 5 years; 2.6 percent stated less than one year whereas 1.3 stated 2 years; the remaining 0.4 percent failed to give a response.

How many hours do you spend per day on social media platforms?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	less than 1 hour	14	6.2	6.2	6.2
	1-4 hours	124	54.6	54.9	61.1
	4-6 hours	48	21.1	21.2	82.3
	6-10 hours	30	13.2	13.3	95.6
	More than 10 hours	10	4.4	4.4	100.0
	Total	226	99.6	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.4		
Total		227	100.0		

How many hours do you spend per day on social media platforms?

**How many hours do you spend per day on social media platforms?**
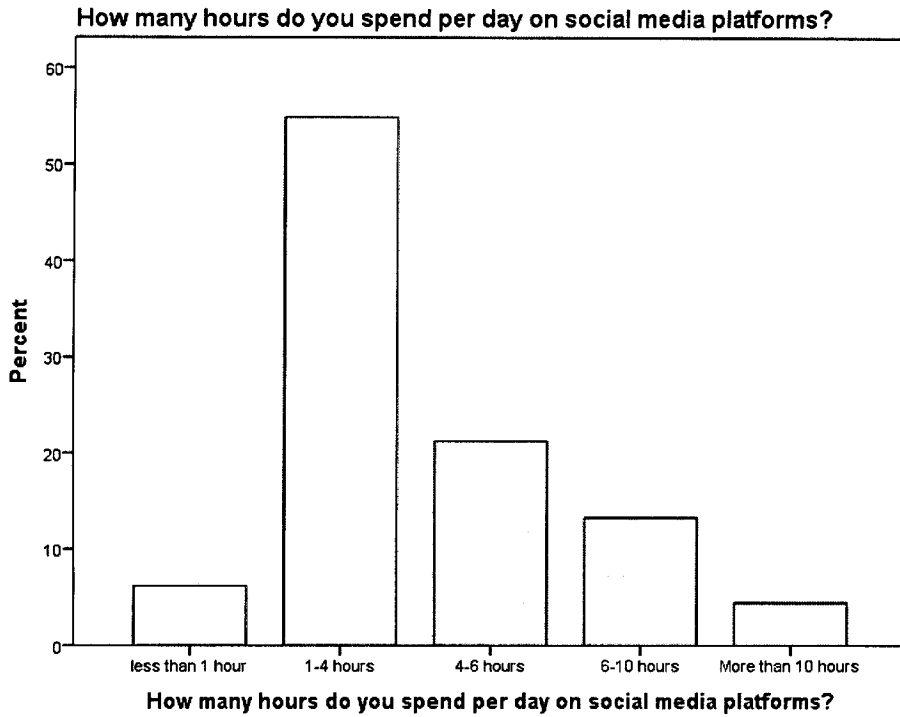
54.6 percent of the respondents stated that they spend 1-4 hours on social media platforms; 21.2 percent stated that they spend 4 – 6 hours on social media platforms; 13.2 percent stated that they spend 6 – 10 hours; 6.2 percent utilize them less than 1 hour whereas 4.4 percent take more than 10 hours; The remaining 0.4 percent failed to provide a response.

You post or engage in basketball pages/groups

|		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I do not post or engage	95	41.9	41.9	41.9
	Before the game	1	.4	.4	42.3
	After the game	29	12.8	12.8	55.1
	During the game	2	.9	.9	55.9
	Before and after the game	100	44.1	44.1	100.0
	Total	227	100.0	100.0	

You post or engage in basketball pages/groups
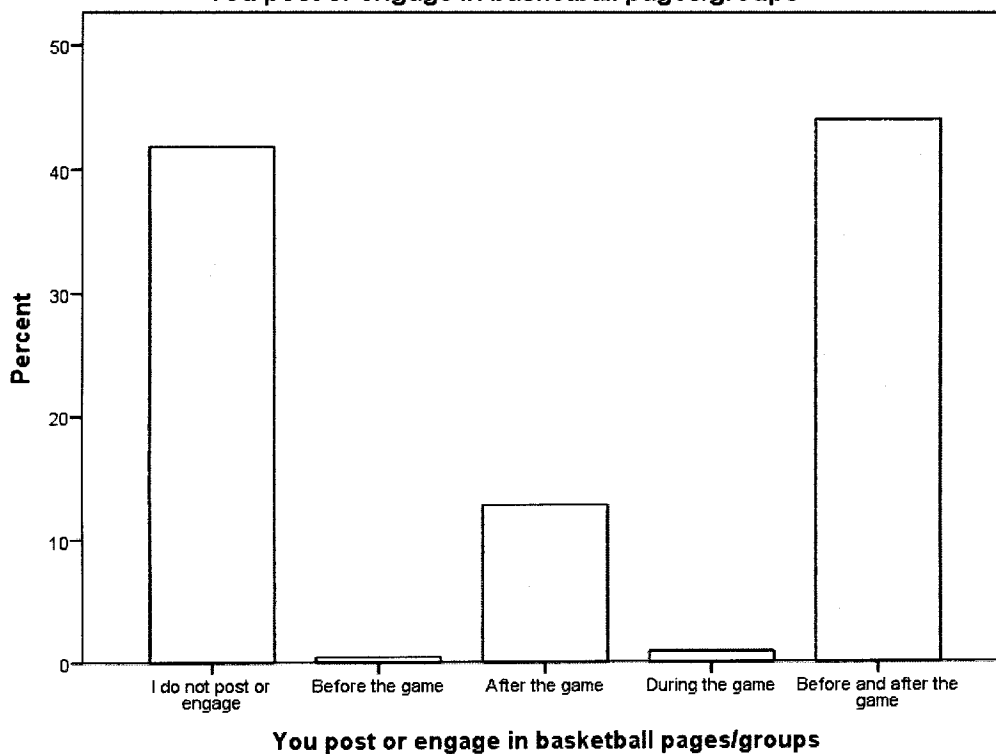
44.1 percent of the respondents stated that they post or engage in basketball pages / groups before and after the game; 41.9 percent stated that they do not post or engage at all; 12.8 percent stated that they do it after the game; 0.9 percent stated they do it during the game and the remaining 0.4 percent stated they do it before the game.

If yes, what do you personally like to post on your social media pre/post a game?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Team support	47	20.7	28.8	28.8
	Players Support	6	2.6	3.7	32.5
	Entertaining Posts	26	11.5	16.0	48.5
	Game Analysis	61	26.9	37.4	85.9
	Others	23	10.1	14.1	100.0
	Total	163	71.8	100.0	
Missing	System	64	28.2		
Total		227	100.0		

If yes, what do you personally like to post on your social media pre/post a game?
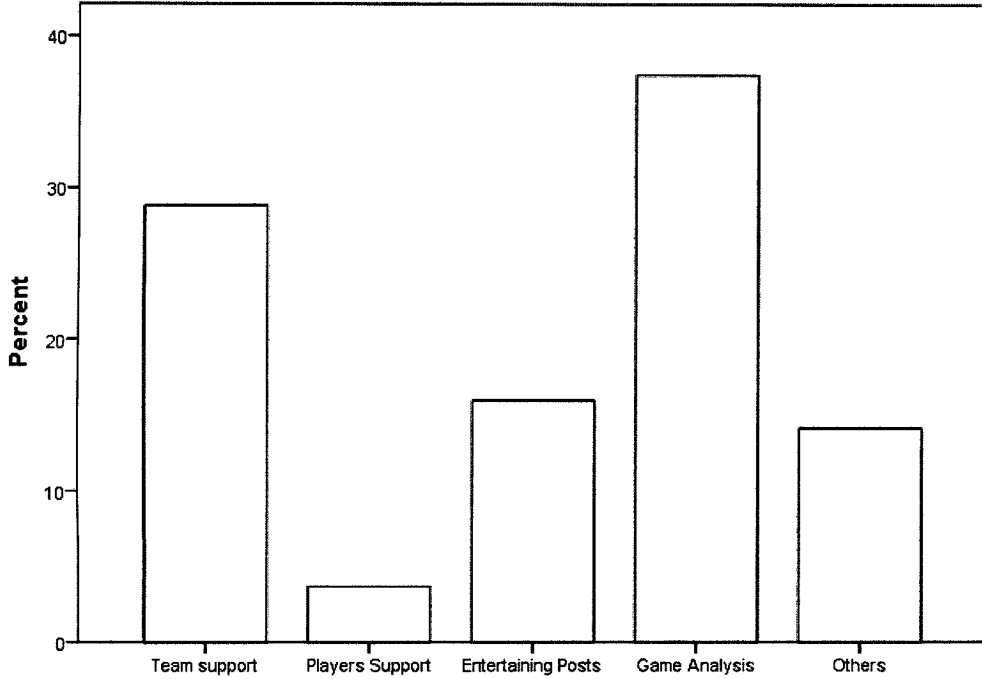
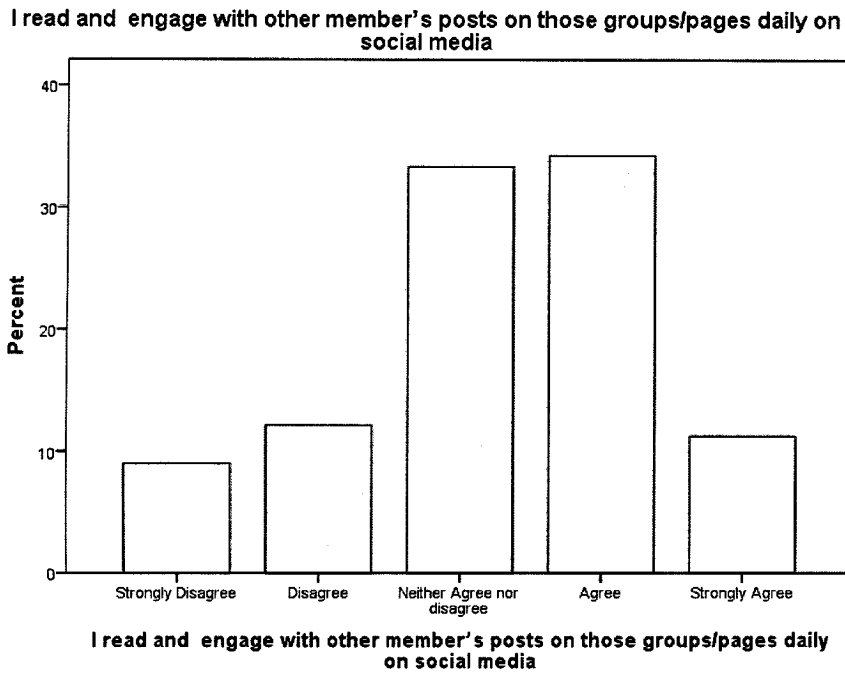**If yes, what do you personally like to post on your social media pre/post a game?**

The respondents were asked what they personally like to post on your social media pre/post a game; 26.7 percent stated that they do game analysis; 20.7 percent stated team support; 11.5 percent replied with entertaining posts; 10.1 percent stated other things; 2.6 percent responded with players support and 28.2 percent failed to give a response.

I read and engage with other members' posts on those groups/pages daily on social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	20	8.8	9.0	9.0
	Disagree	27	11.9	12.2	21.2
	Neither Agree nor disagree	74	32.6	33.3	54.5
	Agree	76	33.5	34.2	88.7
	Strongly Agree	25	11.0	11.3	100.0
	Total	222	97.8	100.0	
Missing	System	5	2.2		
Total		227	100.0		

I read and engage with other member's posts on those groups/pages daily on social media

I read and engage with other member's posts on those groups/pages daily on social media

44.5 percent of the respondents were in agreement that they read and engage with other members' posts on those groups/pages daily on social media; 20.7 percent of the respondents were in disagreement with the statement; 32.6 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. The remaining 2.2 percent failed to give a response.

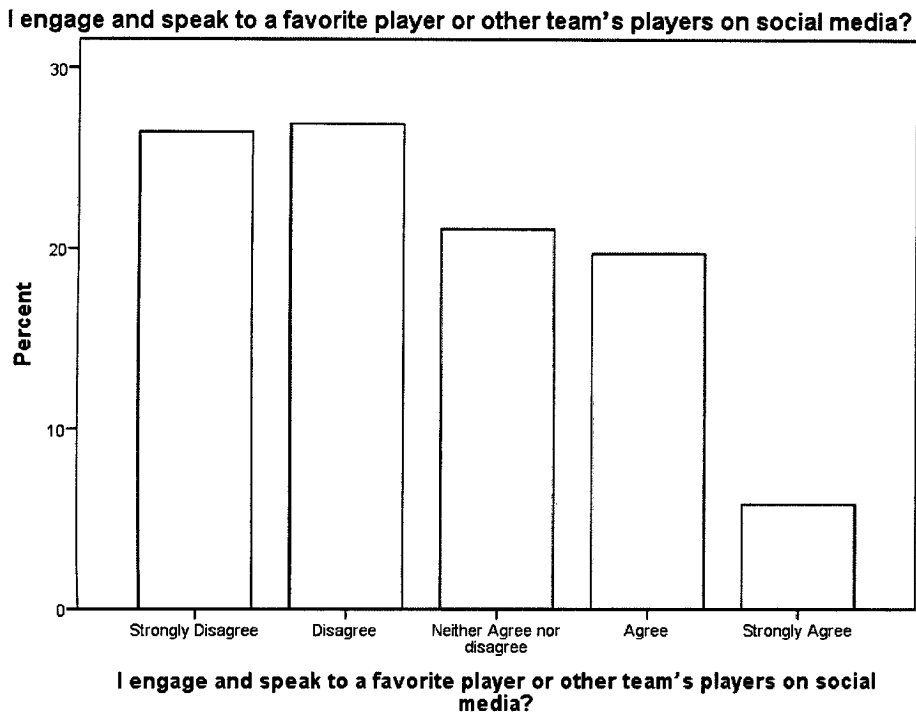**I defend my team's players on social media even when they perform poorly**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	57	25.1	25.7	25.7
	Disagree	77	33.9	34.7	60.4
	Neither Agree nor disagree	47	20.7	21.2	81.5
	Agree	28	12.3	12.6	94.1
	Strongly Agree	13	5.7	5.9	100.0
	Total	222	97.8	100.0	
Missing	System	5	2.2		
Total		227	100.0		

I defend my team's players on social media even when they perform poorly
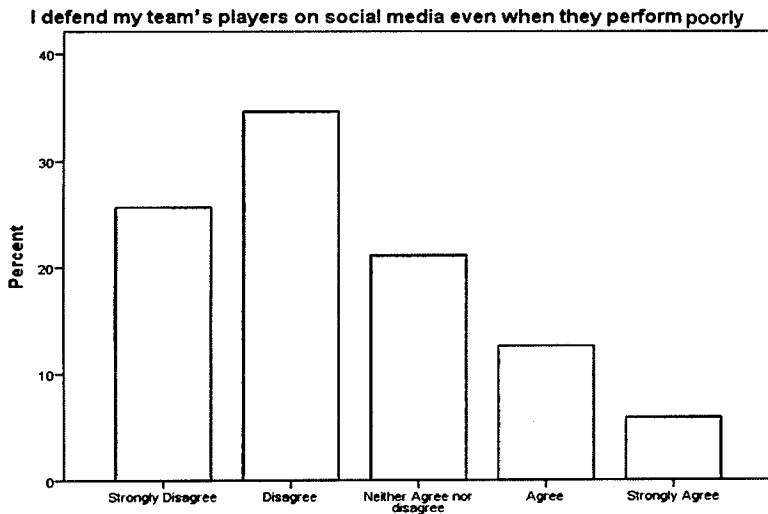
59 percent of the respondants disagreed that they defend their team's players on social media even when they perform poorly; 18 percent of the respondents were in agreement with the statement; 20.7 percent neither agreed nor disagreed whereas the remaining 2.2 percent failed to give a response.

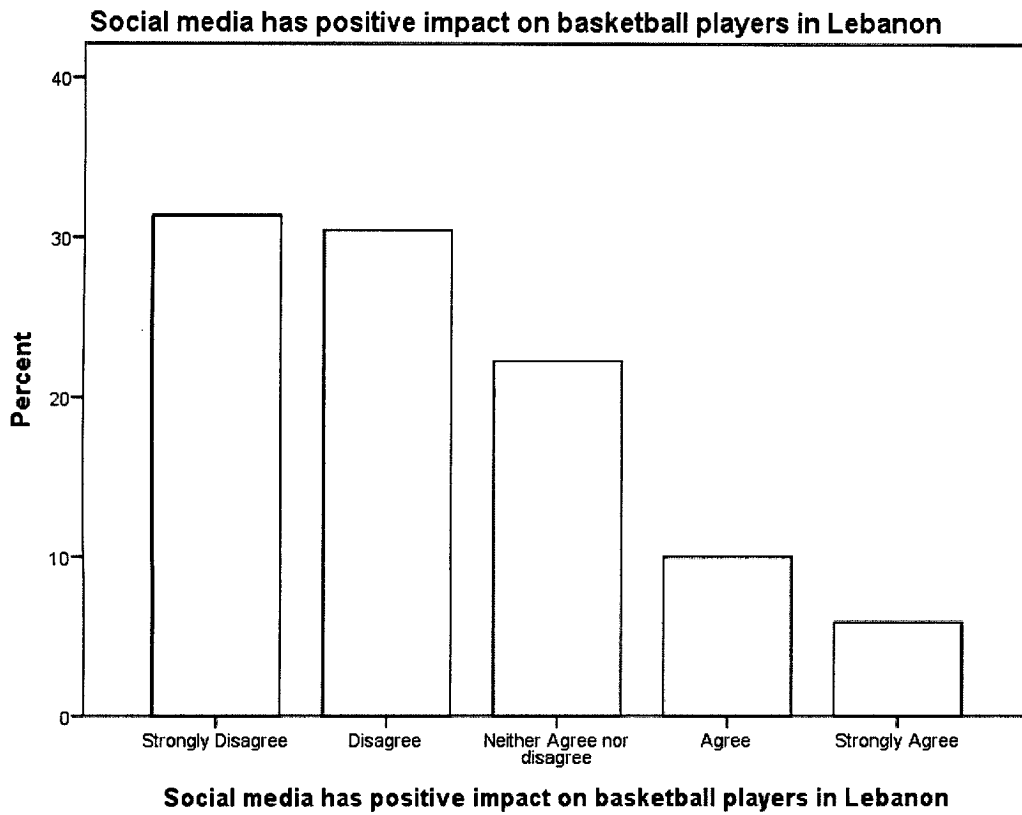**I engage and speak to a favorite player or other team's players on social media?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	59	26.0	26.5	26.5
	Disagree	60	26.4	26.9	53.4
	Neither Agree nor disagree	47	20.7	21.1	74.4
	Agree	44	19.4	19.7	94.2
	Strongly Agree	13	5.7	5.8	100.0
	Total	223	98.2	100.0	
Missing	System	4	1.8		
Total		227	100.0		

I engage and speak to a favorite player or other team's players on social media?

I engage and speak to a favorite player or other team's players on social
media?

52.4 percent of the respondents disagreed that they engage and speak to a favorite player or other

team's players on social media; 25.1 percent of the respondents were in agreement with the

statement; 20.7 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. The remaining 1.8 percent failed to give a

response.

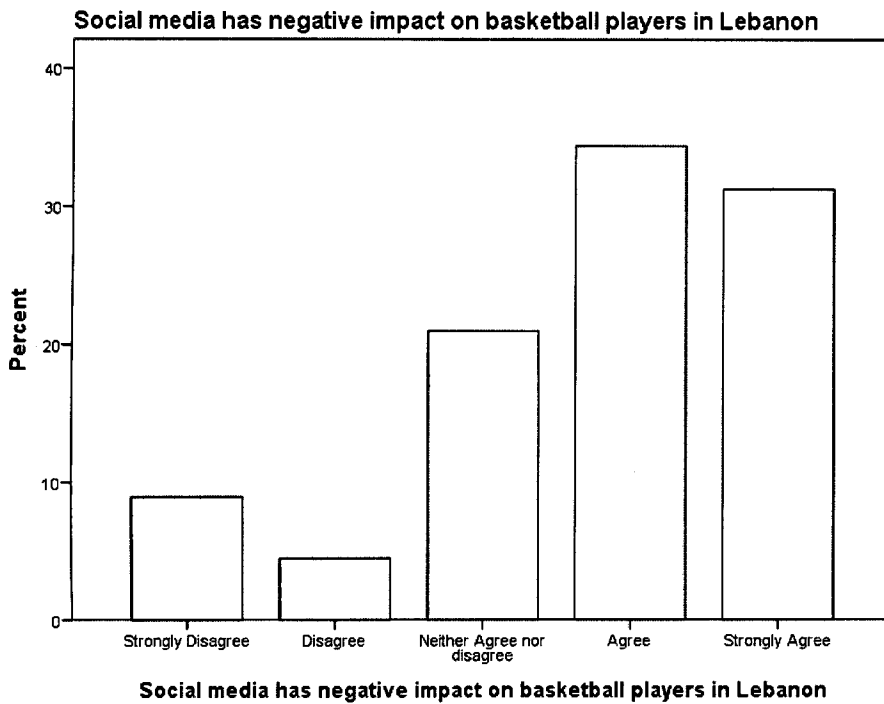**Social media has positive impact on basketball players in Lebanon**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	69	30.4	31.4	31.4
	Disagree	67	29.5	30.5	61.8
	Neither Agree nor disagree	49	21.6	22.3	84.1
	Agree	22	9.7	10.0	94.1
	Strongly Agree	13	5.7	5.9	100.0
	Total	220	96.9	100.0	
Missing	System	7	3.1		
Total		227	100.0		

Social media has positive impact on basketball players in Lebanon

Social media has positive impact on basketball players in Lebanon

59.6 percent of the respondents disagreed that Social media has positive impact on basketball players in Lebanon; 15.4 percent of the respondents were in agreement with the statement; 21.6 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. The remaining 3.1 percent failed to give a response.

Social media has negative impact on basketball players in Lebanon

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	20	8.8	8.9	8.9
	Disagree	10	4.4	4.5	13.4
	Neither Agree nor disagree	47	20.7	21.0	34.4
	Agree	77	33.9	34.4	68.8
	Strongly Agree	70	30.8	31.3	100.0
	Total	224	98.7	100.0	
Missing	System	3	1.3		
Total		227	100.0		

Social media has negative impact on basketball players in Lebanon

Social media has negative impact on basketball players in Lebanon

The statement was explained in the intro to the survey by explaining the purpose of such question and the response came as follow:

64.7 percent of the respondents agreed that Social media has negative impact on basketball players in Lebanon; 13.2 percent were in disagreement with the statement; 20.7 percent neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. The remaining 1.3 percent failed to give a response.

Basketball fans' posts on social media affect the performance of a player during the season

|		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	22	9.7	9.9	9.9
	Disagree	17	7.5	7.6	17.5
	Neither Agree nor disagree	56	24.7	25.1	42.6
	Agree	78	34.4	35.0	77.6
	Strongly Agree	50	22.0	22.4	100.0
	Total	223	98.2	100.0	
Missing	System	4	1.8		
Total		227	100.0		

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Basketball fans' posts on social media affect the performance of a player during the season
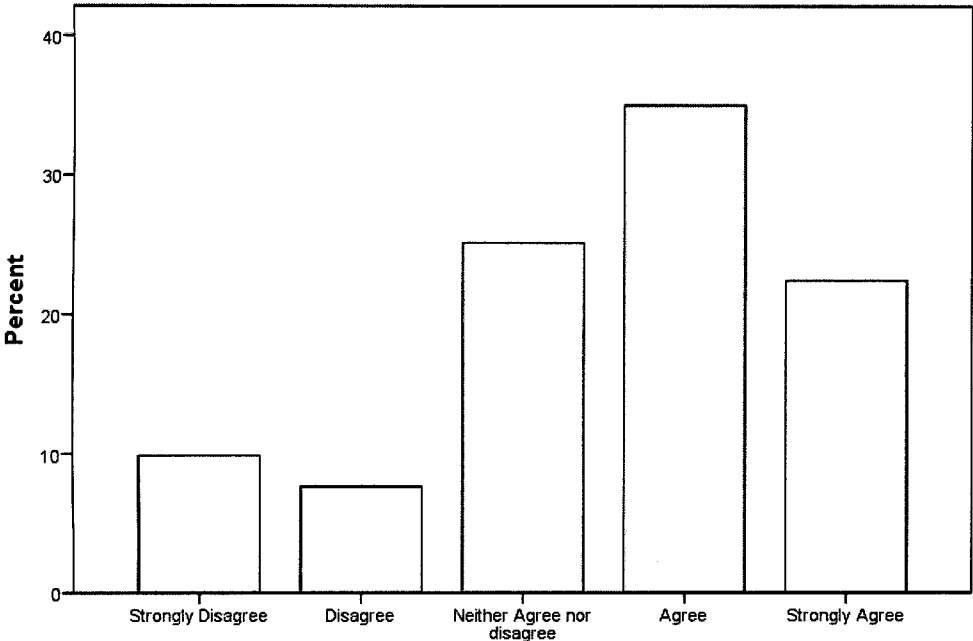
Basketball fans' posts on social media affect the performance of a player during the season

56.4 percent of the respondents were in agreement with the statement that Basketball fans' posts on social media affect the performance of a player during the season; 17.2 percent were in disagreement with the statement; 24.7 percent were neither in agreement nor disagreement. The remaining 1.8 percent failed to give a response.

2. Cross Tabs

Bar Chart
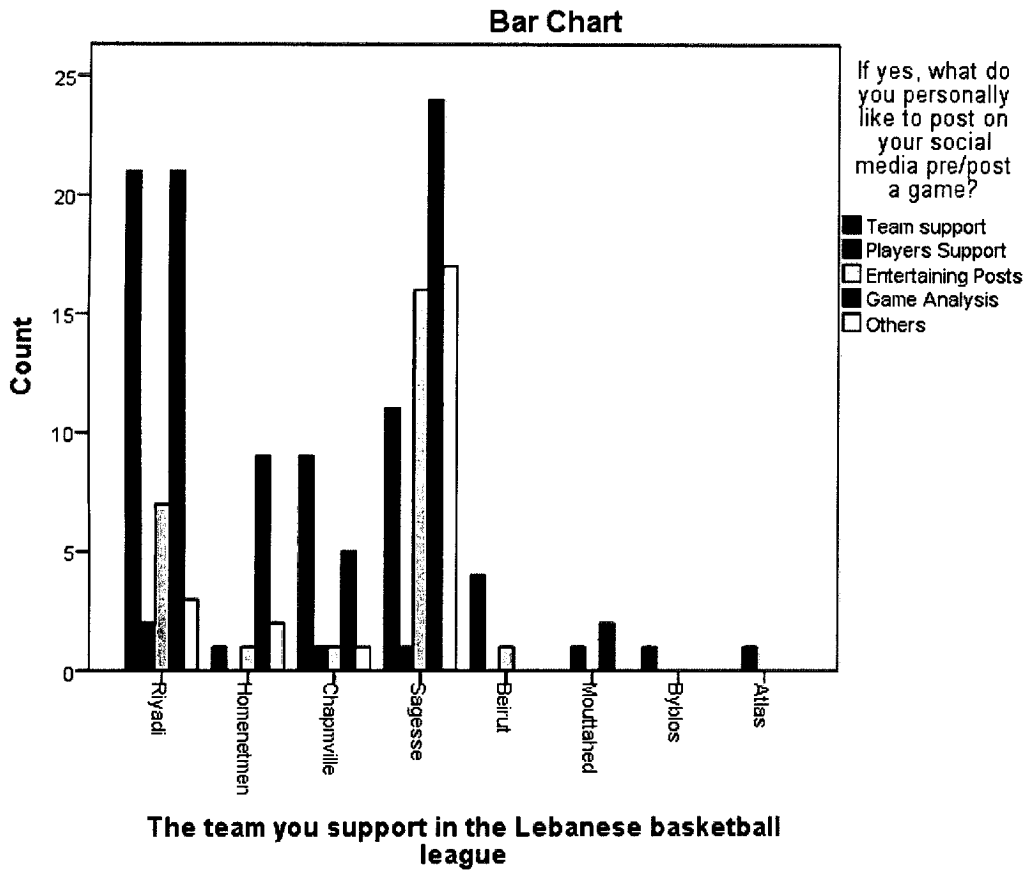
When studying the relationship between teams' fans' support and the type of engagement they
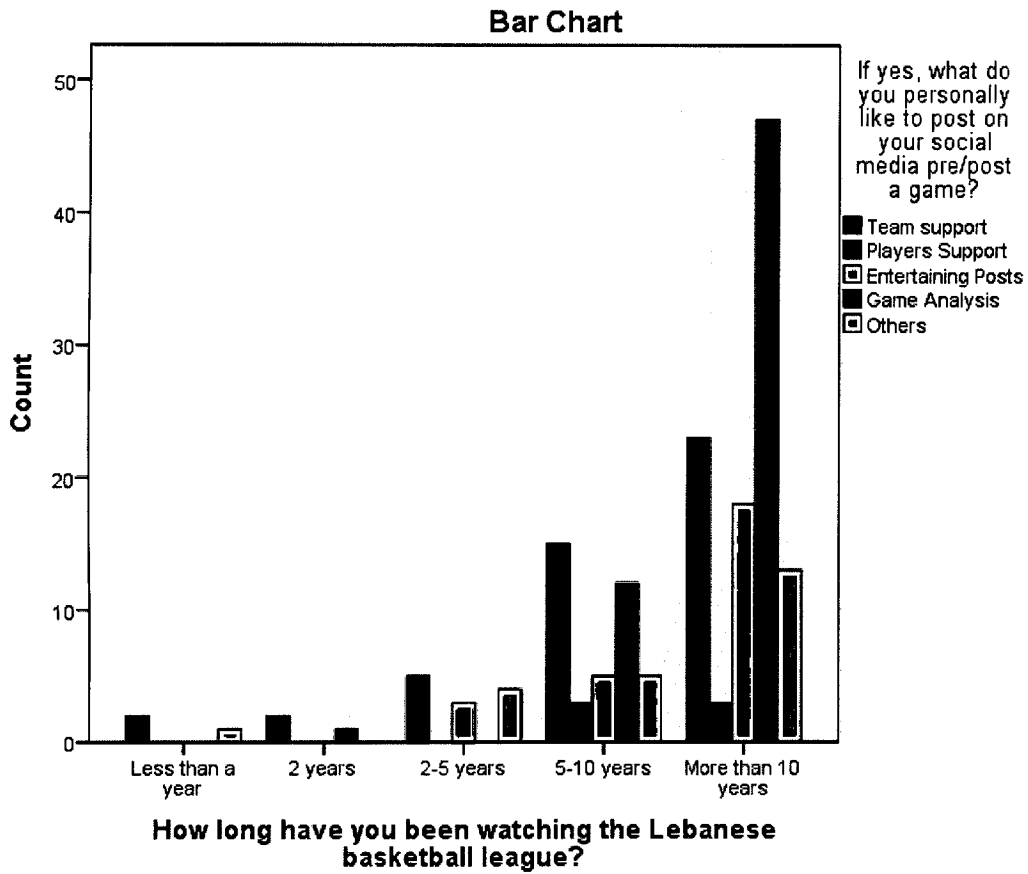
follow, the results were as follow:

Riyadi fans mainly support their team and analyze the game

Homentmen fans mostly analyze the game

Champville fans mainly support their team in their pots

Saggesse fans mostly post game analysis along with a big Margin of other types of posts

In general Lebanese basketball fans utilize social media for game analysis and team support

Bar Chart

If yes, what do you personally like to post on your social media pre/post a game?

- ■ Team support
- ■ Players Support
- ▣ Entertaining Posts
- ■ Game Analysis
- ▣ Others

How long have you been watching the Lebanese basketball league?

It is important to mention that the ones who do game analysis on social media are the ones who have been watching basketball for more than 10 years, unlike other categories whose members mainly engage in team support posts especially those who have been following the Lebanese basketball with 10 years or less.

The survey on the fans was conducted on 227 respondents, randomly selected from basketball fans in Lebanon to answer the survey and to highlight their opinion in this thesis.

81% of the respondents are of the age group 19 to 34 year old while 85% of the total respondents are male. The researcher then asked the respondents which team they support and the answers were split between all 9 teams in the Lebanese Division 1 league while as expected Sagesse club and Al Riyadi club consists of 74.5% of the total respondents which indicates an overall idea of the local fans' base in Lebanon.

Almost 50% of the respondents are people that plays the game of basketball which gives an idea that those fans actually understands this game, and knows many details such as rules and regulations. Also, almost 87.3% of the respondents has been watching the Lebanese league for at least 5 years to 10 plus years and all of the above summarize the knowledge, experience and ability to speak up hence writing freely over social media.

Given the respondents answers, the researcher found that majority of the Lebanese basketball fans until 2019 spends 4 hours or more over social media, posting and sharing online their personal opinions and engage with other members of the groups they follow on social media which sometimes led members to engage in an argument which requires the interference of group members to stop an argument, delete a comment or even the entire post and since around 45.1% of the respondents said that they do speak to players and engage with them on social media it proves that some of these members take screenshots and share them with those players.

Lastly, the researcher asked if social media has a negative impact on men basketball players in Lebanon and 64.7% agreed that social media indeed affects the players negatively whether on their ego or performance which allowed the researcher to look at and evaluate the effect of social media

on men basketball athletes and the answers came as 56.4% of the respondents thinks that the performance of the players indeed may be affected by certain social media posts especially the disrespectful posts or posts that tends to bash players and "few studies exploring the use of social networking sites by athletes found a large majority of athletes used Facebook two hours before their sport competition, with many using it during the competition. More importantly, they determined sport anxiety to increase when athletes spent time on Facebook prior to competition. Elevated sport anxiety can bring a wide array of other negative consequences like fear of failure and choking." (Nicole W. Forrester, Assistant Professor, School of Media, Ryerson University).

Data Collection and Analysis

RQ1: Do Social media posts be it through groups or private profiles have a direct effect on men basketball athletes in the Lebanese league especially on their performance and image?

Based on the questions and the recorded answers, majority of the respondents agreed that social media posts through multiple social media platforms have a direct effect on men basketball athletes in Lebanon.

This era of social media is causing a lot of trouble to those players, and since the general culture in Lebanon is yet to be ready when it comes to freedom of speech of the fans, those athletes are falling under pressure and we have witnessed many incidents in our local league whether in teams or even in the national team where some basketball athletes have underperformed during a game just because of the saying "What would people say?"

Here is where inconsistency in performance shows up, basketball athletes sometimes are able to overcome any external pressure and those are mainly the more experienced older basketball players while youngsters tend to sometimes fall for words and posts and tend to share it between them.

Another effect of social media is the image. Certainly like other people or groups, Lebanese people in general care about their image and ego hence the tendency to want to read or listen to everything other people are saying about them whether positive or negative. Social media posts sometimes becomes a tool for fans to praise or bash men basketball athletes reaching a stage of mockery or overrating players at times.

Many of the interviewees as well as the survey respondents confirm the say "Social media affects the performance and image of men basketball athletes in Lebanon."

RQ2: Should there be professional guidelines and strict rules for the teams in an attempt to create social media discipline for their athletes?

Observing the scenes and filtering out answers, feedback indicates that it is extremely important to follow certain guidelines and rules by the teams as well as by basketball players themselves.

To start with, teams should add in their contracts with the players specific sections asking athletes to log off social media during important phases of the game; after all, these players are humans and as previously mentioned they are emotional so adding that section would allow teams to place some rules on those players as a protective method to maintain focus of the players especially when those players are playing for the national team and representing the whole country.

On another note and as an additional measure, and since social media can be monitored and moderated through specific administratives and since majority of the pages and groups on social media have assigned administrative, a closer monitoring should be placed over the posts on social media especially during specific basketball games or competitions. Of course this all should be done while maintaining the freedom of speech and expression of those pages/groups followers and members. However certain posts should never be posted as cursing players online, mocking players or posting inappropriate content related to those players and/or the opponent teams. Example of the latest incident that could have been contained and majority of players, Lebanese basketball federation members as well as fans agreed on, is the massive impact of social media on national team players.

Each and every person should feel responsible in this case, setting personal rules on themselves especially when talking about other people online and reaching hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. Setting certain limits to avoid any conflict or potential harm to the team and to the performance of the players becomes of paramount importance.

RQ3: Should the fans be educated on Social media platforms?

All respondents agreed that fans should be educated about the potential effects of social media in Lebanon. The interviewees were asked about the posts of fans, negative or positive during a close game and the majority answered that fans' behavior is mostly negative; this could be linked to previous games where fights broke out during close games especially between Riyadi and Sagesse back in the days and more recently between Riyadi and Homenetmen where religious and political acts were posted on social media and unfortunately reflected on the court.

Another question related to the feedback received from the fans revealed that 56.4% believe that the posts are negative and of course because some fans lack education and knowledge about the real effect behind social media on men basketball athletes, the fans tend to just be subjective rather than objective and extremely biased where they just want to praise their favorite players and bash those playing for other teams reaching a state of calling them names on court.

According to NBA fan code, fans are more loyal and knowledgeable in the field, they respect each other and respect the players, they cannot enter the basketball court when the match is still on and players are playing and they cannot smoke inside the court (NBA.com/ NBA fan code of conduct) whereas in Lebanon, in many games fans do whatever they feel like doing with complete chaos, they simply do not accept the idea of losing especially on their home court. Usually, this chaos leads to many incidents such as throwing shoes at players, bottles of water, cursing, and in some situations attacking the other teams' players and staff.

Sadly all of the above, switches after the games into social media to start an online war between fans especially teams with big fan bases such as Riyadi, Sagesse, Homenetmen and Champville which shows how insensitive and disrespectful the fans can be.

In conclusion, fans should be educated and taught about social media to understand the game, get excited while watching and to learn how social media can cause trouble to players and reach a stage where they may differentiate between constructive criticism and disrespectful posts.

Limitations & Further Suggestions

Limitations

Just like in any research, this thesis includes several limitations. To begin with, the interviewees of course did not provide all the data and information needed knowing that players tend to always hide some personal opinions and who understandably may not state the complete truth related to topics such as the effect on their performance and the pressure of social media.

Furthermore, it is true that the sample used is the full population of the available current players and coaches in Lebanon, but not all men basketball players are in the division 1 league; Some of them were playing for other divisions and some of them did not even sign any contract this year, or did not get the offer they want. The sample chosen was not all active division 1 players in Lebanon. Also, a lot of players did not want to speak in an interview to avoid having their opinion published, knowing that a lot of them have had many problems with fans on social media before and that was a big obstacle so definitely the sample could have been larger with many more active players in Division 1 or from the National team.

In the qualitative research, more interviewees could have and should been questioned such as the President of the Lebanese Federation, the national team coach and some basketball groups/pages administrative to know about the stories they monitor and edit or filter; In addition, foreign basketball players of different Lebanese teams could be questioned to know the difference between the Lebanese league and leagues abroad, how fans react, and most importantly the way teams and managers abroad deal with such issues knowing that social media effect on men basketball athletes is a global issue.

For the expert opinion, it was extremely tough to find sports psychiatrists in Lebanon hence the sole interview with the only sports psychiatrist in Lebanon and hence no additional points of

view. Of course opinions of other psychiatrists could've been taken into consideration as men basketball athletes are not robots and can be evaluated based on their behavior on and off the court and we could have asked for cases faced by those psychiatrists when dealing with athletes. In the quantitative survey, the survey could have been conducted on a larger scale knowing that the Lebanese basketball fans base is one of the largest in the region. According to Saunders et al. (2009), research methodology serves as the backbone of a research study. Quantitative research's main purpose is the quantification of the data. It allows generalizations of the results by measuring the views and responses of the sample population. Every research methodology consists of two broad phases namely planning and execution (Younus 2014). Therefore, it is evident that within these two phases, there likely to have limitations which are beyond our control (Simon 2011). The quantitative survey is limited also because of the small number of respondents out of the population, where questions with yes or no and questions with a scale of strongly agree or disagree, can be accompanied with multiple explanations. In addition to that, such surveys require a lot of time to conduct and then to analyze.

Further Suggestions

According to the results discussed earlier, there are suggestions for future research. Teams should have a marketing specialist whose only responsibility is to share information and go on the media to discuss any team-related situation or even player's situation (Similar to what Riyadi club did in the 2018 2019 season, where they assigned the vice president of the club and the coach as their only spokesperson), this way media and fans would not have the flexibility to share false news or rumors online and spread negativity. It is hoped that teams are learning more and more about social media and its implications and that is why the idea of monitoring their official groups on social media is coming to life hence the idea of assigning a spokesperson.

Additional studies related to social media effect on athletes in general should be conducted with in-depth research in other sports such as soccer. Knowing that the fan base in Lebanon for soccer teams is huge as well, a study could be done at that end to investigate and compare two different sports.

Also future research could focus on experts of social media providing ideas and suggestions to help overlook social media groups and pages, with a closer eye from the teams especially on official pages and a closer monitoring from the federation especially on players in major events such as the national team qualification event to the world cup. In addition, awareness should be an essential part of the process in order to educate people at a young age about the effect of social media and conferences should be made in schools and universities to educate those fan bases starting at a young age on how to act and react when online.

Jbeily in her interview suggested many solutions, mainly related to sports psychology which is yet to be popular in Lebanon. To start with, universities should start introducing this major and highlighting the importance and use/benefits of it. Teams should start investing in this idea by assigning sports psychiatrists in their clubs to maintain a guiding hand to any problem a player or coaching staff member faces. In addition to that, the Ministry of Sports in Lebanon can have a department at the ministry for sports

psychology by assigning a psychiatrist to follow up with athletes dealing with frustration, anger, anxiety and other problems.

Further research should also tackle the role of politics and religion in the game of basketball in order to show how politics and religion in general affect the basketball fan base in Lebanon and how discussions are being transformed from social media to courts to even direct conflicts. Future research should also shed light on different sports besides basketball as mentioned earlier, because the effect of social media posts from fans in Lebanon exists among other sports and activities as well.

Last but not least, further research qualitative research could examine what women basketball athletes in Lebanon think, to know their opinion related to the effect of social media posts from fans.

Finally, those in charge in the field of sports, such as owners of clubs, journalists, fans committees representatives that love this game of basketball can start with changing the mentality of Lebanese society by trying to narrow the conflicts occurring whether on social media or on court from political conflicts to religious conflicts to bashing player X or player Y and putting more energy and passion into the game itself, its past, its present and definitely the future of the game to ideally reaching an environment free of disrespect, hatred and ignorance.

Conclusion

This study was designed to show that social media posts and reactions may affect men basketball athletes in Lebanon. Many articles, papers and authors discussed this topic abroad, but this was the first research that explored on social media's impact on men basketball athletes in Lebanon. The study gave an overview about the potential effects of social media fans' posts and reactions and the reasons behind it and if it is really affecting men basketball athletes or not and if yes how exactly.

Data indicated that social media plays an important role and has a negative impact on men basketball athletes while performing. Social media posts may be a significant factor affecting players mentally while playing a game hence the risk of losing the game may increase. According to the participants in this research, they believed that social media posts have several direct and indirect effects on the athletes whether on their performance, personality traits or ego and shed light on the power of social media in delivering the messages to those athletes.

In addition, after conducting the interviews and asking experts from the field of basketball; results revealed that fans and social media posts have in fact a negative impact on those athletes especially the younger ones. For this reason, federation, clubs, athletes and fans should work together to create a negative impact free environment and replace it with constructive criticism. Each should take responsibility for the posts they share online and think twice of its impact before clicking on that share button.

Furthermore, since Lebanese men's basketball league is broadcast all year long on an app as well as on live TV. Words of Nicole W. Forrester in her article about social media impact on athletes came alive. Said she: "In an effort to combat the negative effect media can have on performance, some athletes will engage in a "media diet" or a blackout period. This may involve

decreasing interaction with the media or directing all media requests to a team manager." And during 2018-2019 season we witnessed Al Riyadi Club applied that rule by directing all media interaction with either Ahmad Chaker (Al Riyadi Club general secretary) or the head coach Ahmad Farran.

Results also showed that education and culture are two important factors in social media effect on men basketball athletes. Fans in Lebanon should be educated from a young age about basketball norms and ethics and be able to understand the responsibility that falls on them when posting rumors or attacking a player personally.

Fans should know that men basketball athletes are human beings, just like the fans, they love the game and that is why they chose it as a career. Disrespectful treatment on social media is being transmitted on court to offensive chants and social media arguments between fans should stop or at least be limited. Athletes should have full support from their fans because after all athletes are the image of the club these fans love so any negative effect might result in crises such as failing to win a tournament or a league championship.

In Addition, the Lebanese culture in general and the mentality of fans should be worked on at a young age, starting from schools to universities through conducting workshops and creating a generation fully aware of the consequences of social media posts and reactions to avoid reaching a point losing the game we all love.

Applying the Uses and Gratification theory, the researcher tried to identify and explore how individuals deliberately seek out media to fulfill certain needs or goals such as socializing, an ego boost or on the intention of affecting players while in the second theory Public Sphere, this author is showing that social media platforms may be "the place where citizens exchange ideas,

information and opinions" (Habermas, 1954, p.50) Results show that fans in Lebanon, somehow misuse this privilege given in the new era of technology and social media organism, and express themselves without taking into consideration the after posting or sharing effect.

Data revealed that social media fans' posts and reactions indeed have a negative effect on men basketball athletes. This game is one of the most loved and followed sports worldwide and has a large fan base that includes loyal fans of all ages and different demographics who get really excited about the game (NBA.com), that's why results confirmed that social media posts and reaction indeed affect the performance of men basketball athletes in Lebanon whether through mental fatigue, self- confidence decrease or even players reaching a state of feeling devastated and annoyed by social media.

Results indicated that some or many fans are irresponsible when it comes to social media posts about the game of basketball and in a close game. Their negative reaction is transmitted from social media frustration and anger to on court activity such as cursing, mocking players or even starting fights.

To sum up the research basketball fans' posts on social media whether directly or indirectly shared with men basketball athletes is playing a magnificent role in affecting the performance of these athletes on courts especially in international events such as Asian Cup 2017 or the National team qualifications in 2019; some of the athletes are falling under pressure and failing to deliver up to expectations of the fans, which is leading to creating ongoing social media posts bashing these players and counter posts defending the same players transforming it all into a basketball social media battle or war. As mentioned earlier, the federation and clubs as well as players should follow certain guidelines when it comes to social media. Federation should start programs utilizing sports psychologists in Lebanon and why not follow the West in creating a sports psychology

school, responsible for helping athletes whether men or women, young or old to overcome any issue they may face by having a go-to person when in trouble. Also, clubs should start ideally have a sports psychologist on each coaching staff to continuously follow up with players' drop in performance; After all, players are human beings and they may have family problems at home which may affect their performance or even when being attacked on social media (recalling what happened with Fadi El Khatib season 2019 and coach Ahmad Farran in the same season when they were attacked on social media and attacked through private messages) which certain measures might help them overcome those fans' posts and reactions.

Lastly, social media can be looked at as a two-edged sword where it may motivate a player or destroy a huge prospect and the author thinks that many players are not yet mentally ready to overcome such pressure from the fans especially in Lebanon because of the fans' behavior on court and because of being close to men basketball athletes due to the small population. Also, people in this game tend to be passionate about basketball and their teams regardless of the situation any team is in. It is a responsibility that falls on all parts of this game; teams, players and fans should be responsible enough to deal with the privilege given by social media. The era of having a free-of-trouble environment between social media and basketball in Lebanon seems to be a bit off sight but because of the passion these fans have, and the love players have to their fans and the game and since it is their chosen career, negativity should be switched to positivity and this should happen sooner or later!

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