**The ever-changing social-media landscape has revolutionized the ways in which sport is consumed. While traditional sport consumption occurs through means such as attending events, viewing games on television, listening to games on the radio, or reading about sports in newspapers and magazines, the infiltration of social media into the sport realm has led to changes in sport consumption. Consumers are using their personal electronic devices to participate in “second screen” behaviours instead of focusing solely on the sport event through traditional methods of consumption. Second-screen behaviour entails using a smart phone, tablet, or laptop while watching television to access the Internet and other social-networking sites to obtain more information (de Zuniga, Garcia-Perdomo, & McGregor, 2015). In other words, consumers use multiple distribution systems to meet different needs that are not fulfilled by one system alone (Boehmer, 2015). Second-screen behaviours allow sport consumers to connect with other fans, feel the adrenaline rush of big moments in real time, be the first to broadcast content, and have their voices heard (Yorke & Greenwood, 2014).**

## **Web 2.0 encompasses the various segments of social media such as blogs, social networking sites (SNSs) (e.g. Facebook, Twitter), content communities (e.g. YouTube), team websites, forums and bulletin boards. While the underlying functionality of social media sites is similar, the way the sites function and the type of users they attract can be drastically different (Lipsman 2009). Some social networking sites focus on users and their life (e.g. Facebook), some focus on the message (e.g. Twitter), some focus on collecting and discovering ideas (e.g. Pinterest), some focus on knowledge creation (e.g. Quora), while some other focus on pictures (e.g. Instagram), or finding jobs (e.g. LinkedIn). Facebook and Twitter are the most utilized sites for both sharing and accessing news and updates on the unfolding events. Research shows that due to the ‘walled garden’ approach, Facebook has become less accessible than Twitter for public communication Bruns and Stieglitz (2012).**

Twitter is a unique medium where both traditional and more interpersonal forms of interaction are possible. Because social media platforms like Twitter provide multiple avenues for interaction, it is vital for sport communication scholars to understand the nature of these communication tools and how they impact fan–athlete relationships (Clavio & Kian, 2010; Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010)

Furthermore, Clavio and Kian (2010) stated that it would be worthwhile for sport communication scholars to begin formulating an understanding of the interactions taking place between sport personalities (i.e., athletes) and sport consumers (i.e., fans) on Twitter.

## ****Literature review****

Just like any other consumer-facing industry, the world of professional sports has seen a lot of disruption from the rise of social media. (Force 2016)

**Quickly becoming a normal way to communicate, this has transformed the way sports are reported (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010) and consumed (Clavio & Kian, 2010), allowing athletes the freedom to interact directly with their fans and enabling them to become rulers of their own domain (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010). It is argued that the rapid revolution social media has achieved in sport may be unrivalled in terms of impact compared with any other industry (Sanderson, 2011)**

Sports and Twitter

**Twitter has been particularly dominant in the digital-media-sport landscape and has been embraced by the sporting world at amazing speed. We have now reached the point where it is unusual to watch a sports event, attend a live match, or even read a sport-related article without a Twitter reference mentioned. In 2015** South America's Copa America soccer championship generated 14 billion impressions. The women's soccer world cup generated 9 billion impressions. Wimbledon generated 8 billion Impressions over two weeks and the champions league final generated 834 million impressions in one day. (Laird 2015) (Twitter defines an "impression" as how many times a tweet is seen online, both on Twitter and off.)

Research surrounding Twitter use in sport has been conducted from a variety of perspectives. Clavio and Kian (2010) used an internet based survey to ascertain the demographics, uses, and gratifications of a retired athletes Twitter followers. Clavio and Walsh (2014) surveyed Division 1 college sport fans and found that social media should not be viewed holistically due to distinct variability between what attracts fans to Facebook and Twitter. Hull (2014) explored how professional golfers participating in the Masters tournament used Twitter during the week of the event. Basing the research in self-presentation theory the author conducted a content analysis of 895 tweets by 39 golfers. Lebel and Danylchuk (2012) compared male and female athletes' tweets relayed by all professional tennis players. Hambrick et al. (2010) used content analysis to place 1,962 tweets by professional athletes into one of six categories: interactivity, diversion, information sharing, content, promotional, and fanship. Pegoraro (2010) investigated athletes' use of Twitter and found that athletes are talking predominantly about their personal lives and responding to fans' queries through Twitter. The results indicate that Twitter is a powerful tool for increasing fan-athlete interaction. Professional cyclist Lance Armstrong once invited his fans to meet him for a ride around Dublin after completing the Tour of Ireland. 1,000 fans showed up hours later (Cromwell, 2009). Serena Williams even asked her Twitter followers for pregnancy advice, “Any tips on how to turn over at night? I'm having trouble from going from my left ....to my right.... to my left side,” She received over 1200 replies.

**Female Athletes on Twitter**

Of interest to this study is the representation of female athletes in social media. Originally, traditional media was the main source of the portrayal of female athletes to society. The creation of social media changed all that. Research on the representation of female athletes in traditional-media outlets has spanned decades (Kane & Maxwell, 2011; Messner, 2002; Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1993).

**Researchers have found female athletes are considerably underrepresented in terms of the amount of coverage received in comparison with their male counterparts (Buysse & Wolter, 2013; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Grau, Roselli, & Taylor, 2007; Kane & Maxwell, 2011; Kian, Vincent, & Mondello, 2008; Messner et ah, 1993).**

**Cooky et al. (2015) found a decline in the amount of coverage of female athletes from 1989 to 2014. In 2014, only 3.2% of network television coverage focused on women’s sports. The lack of representation of women in media’s coverage of sport contributes to the perception of sport as a male domain. Birrell (2000)**

**The media maintain notions of sport as a male domain through displays of masculinity, strength, and power. On the other hand, when women athletes receive coverage, they are consistently portrayed in ways that emphasize their femininity through caregiver roles and sexuality versus their athletic competence (Cooky et al., 2015)**

**When sport media actually do cover female athletes, they often describe their physical appearances and attire, delve into their personal lives and relationships, trivialise their accomplishments and athleticism, and focusing on perceived psychological weaknesses ( Billings, Halone, & Denham, 2002; Eagleman, Pedersen, & Wharton, 2009; Hardin, Simpson, Garris, & Whiteside, 2007).**

**This notion was supported by research on top-ranked sport blogs that found while women were the primary focus of only 8.7% of photographs, they were posed in sexually suggestive ways 73.7% of the time (Clavio & Eagle-man, 2011).**

**While it is clear that mainstream media feminise and sexualize sportswomen (Douglas & Jamieson, 2006; Kim et al., 2006), further examination into how female athletes engage in strategic self-presentation compared to their male counterparts in user-generated media is necessary.**

Online coverage of women in sport.

Gender-related descriptors employed within articles on men’s and women’s basketball that were so surprising, since many of the findings previous sport media researchers cited to justify the presence of hegemonic masculinity were contradicted. Arguably more surprising was the fact that there were a significantly higher proportion of descriptors about the positive skill level/accomplishments and psychological/emotional strengths in women’s basketball articles than those on men’s basketball. (Kian et al. 2009). Cunningham (2003) found university websites actually provided more coverage of women’s tennis than men’s tennis. In a further analysis of NCAA college websites, Cooper (2008) concluded that coverage of male and female athletes in the same sport was mostly equal. This suggests that there is a greater opportunity for women to expand their coverage in the online world rather than the traditional main stream media.

**Self-Presentation Theory**

Goffman’s (1959) theory of self-presentation suggests that individuals present themselves in manners in which they wish others to view them. Goffman alludes to life being a “drama,” and the two types of self-presentation depicted by individuals as daily life “performances” are front-stage performances and back-stage performances. In front-stage performances, individuals are especially concerned with the impression they create in the minds of others. On the other hand, in back-stage performances individuals are more candid, often sharing information as if no audience or an audience of familiar people were present (Goffman, 1959).

Research on the self-presentation of athletes suggests that athletes engage in back-stage performances on social-media platforms (Hambrick et al., 2010). Professional cyclists offered insights into the terrain and conditions of the event route, adding a level of personal knowledge for fans that journalists would not have necessarily focused on. (Kassing and Sanderson 2010).

When it comes to front-stage performances, Krane et al. (2010) investigated female college athletes’ self-presentation preferences. They found that female athletes wanted to be portrayed in ways that emphasized their power and strength. Support for the preferences of female athletes to be portrayed as powerful athletes was found in later research by Lebel and Danylchuk (2014).

Krane et al. (2010) found their qualitative study demonstrated how these women were driven toward masculine behaviours for their sport while at the same time they tried to stay in the feminine role off the field of play. As one athlete in the study said, “If you're an athlete, then you have to transform into entirely someone else when you come off the field.” This corresponds to Goffman's (1959) front-stage/back-stage performances theory.

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