



Sport psychology practitioner's perceptions and use of social media

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ABSTRACT

While sport psychologists have recently been encouraged to embrace digital technology and social media use in their practice, little is currently known about the associated benefits and challenges of adopting these recommendations. Published studies in other professions have suggested that engaging in social media use can be a double-edged sword, offering great communication benefits, but at the same time having the potential to impact upon work-life balance and general wellbeing. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore practitioner social media use and perceptions, and to explore participant use of the Twitter social media platform.

Participants were initially 44 sport psychology practitioners who complete an online questionnaire, of which 28 also consented to their Twitter posts from the previous 30-days being analyzed using a reflexive thematic analysis approach. Analysis produced two main categories: tweets and retweets. The tweets were composed of seven first order themes (media comments, advice and opinion, thoughts on events, self-promotion, knowledge dissemination, recommendations and activity), with the retweets composed of eight first order themes (media programming, events, sports fixtures, promotion, sport-specific content, news stories, opinions, and dissemination). Of particular importance was the perceived link between social media use and mental health, and lack of training and development.

Introduction

The last 20 years has seen a significant change in the ways people communicate and interact with each other through social media channels (Cotterill & Symes, 2013) built upon rapid advances in electronic and digital technology. The development of social media as a communication format has increased the potential for people to be 'connected' with friends, family, peers, and clients in a way that is unparalleled in human history, with geography no longer presenting a realistic barrier to communication (Cotterill, 2019).

Social media has been defined by Carr and Hayes as "technologies emphasizing user-generated content or interaction" (Carr & Hayes, 2015). The term 'social media' is a broad term that is used to not only describe social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp; but also covers video and photo sharing sites such as YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat and Flickr; micro-blogging applications such as Twitter; aggregator sites such as Digg; and even virtual worlds (Cotterill, 2019). These social media platforms have been further described by Meraz to be "architected by design to readily support participation, peer-to-peer conversation, collaboration and community" (Meraz, 2009).

While there is research exploring social media use in other people-focused professions such as with health professionals

(Antheunis, Tates & Nieboer, 2013) and medical professionals (McGowan, Wasko, Vartabedian & Miller, 2012), to date there is very little explicitly focused on psychologists, and sport psychology practitioners in particular.

Within the context of sport the majority of research to date on the use of social media has focused either on marketing and promotion (Witkemper, Lim & Waldburger, 2012) the use of social media by fans and supporters (Naraine, 2019) motives for athlete use of social media, and the link between social media use and athlete performance (Encel, Mesagno & Brown, 2017). In the best knowledge of the authors there is currently no research exploring the use of social media by sport-focused professionals such as sport psychology practitioners. This lack of research is surprising as understanding links between social media use and performance could help to shape interactions between athletes and sport psychologists, also understanding the experiences of sport psychology practitioners using social media would be beneficial as. It has been suggested that there has been increasing demands placed on sport psychology practitioners to communicate with their athletes, players, teams, squads, colleagues and employers using social media platforms (Cotterill, 2019; Cotterill & Symes, 2013).

While there is currently limited empirical evidence outlining either the positive or negative impact that social media use could have upon sport psychology practitioners a number of potential benefits to social

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media use for practitioners have been suggested in the sport psychology literature in recent years. For example, blogging has been suggested as a great tool for communicating ideas, experience, commentaries, recommendations, and opinions (British Psychological Society, 2012), and also as an effective marketing tool for promoting businesses, services, and the experience of the sport psychology practitioner (Singh, Veron-Jackson & Cullinane, 2008). Another suggested use for social media platforms by sport psychology practitioners is to further enhance the support they provide to their athletes and clients. For example, (Heaney, 2013) utilized online technologies to deliver services while working with a national winter sport squad remotely from the UK. The specific use of social media in this case included a group website (Facebook) and Twitter to discuss matters and to ‘keep in touch’ with athletes. On reflection (Heaney, 2013) felt that the program of support had been just as successful as any comparative face-to-face driven support. Specific benefits highlighted included: lower cost, that as a result allowed more contact; and different squad members at competitions in different parts of the world could participate in group sessions. In this example internet access was highlighted as an obvious challenge. Interestingly, (Heaney, 2013) concluded that following the success of the program Skype conversations are now offered as an alternative to face-to-face meetings for clients. While this approach to utilizing social media, and Skype and Twitter in particular, offers potential for the field there are very few other published or disseminated examples of practitioners adopting such approaches, or how to develop the required knowledge and skills.

While some evidence is beginning to emerge of the potential effectiveness of social media use for sport psychology practitioners, there is currently little concrete understanding of any real risks and negative effects specifically applying to the field. Indeed, psychology as a profession appears to be a lagging behind in seeking to empirically explore practitioner engagement with social media and the resulting psychological impact upon individuals.

Of further interest to sport psychology practitioners is the potential impact of social media use on their clients. There is a developing evidence base to suggest that social media use can impact negatively upon athlete performance. For example, (Encel et al., 2017) reported that time spent on Facebook prior to competition was significantly (and positively) correlated with the concentration disruption component of sport anxiety. This finding is a concern, as when concentration disruption occurs prior to, or during competition, the effectiveness of an athlete’s mental preparation may decrease (Baker, Cote & Hawes, 2000). One of the reasons for this engagement in social media use prior to competition might be a “fear of missing out” (referred to as FOMO) from push notifications, a desire to stay connected with other individuals continually (Przybyliski, Murayama, DeHaan & Gladwell, 2013), a state of mind that could potentially develop in any social media users, including sport psychology practitioners.

While social media offers the potential to communicate more easily and instantly than has previously been the case, there are potential risks in utilizing this technology in a professional context. Research in other professions has highlighted a number of potential challenges facing the practitioner, as well as potential links to reduced mental health and reduced performance (Hardy & Castonguay, 2018; Primack et al., 2017). While a number of professions have already developed an evidence base of social media use for both professionals and trainees and associated training and guidance, the field of sport psychology appears to be lagging behind. Indeed, it is currently difficult to ascertain what support and training is required within the profession until a greater understanding of social media use and the perceptions of social media use for sport psychology practitioners has been developed. As a result, the first aim of this study was to explore the social media use and perceptions of sport psychology practitioners. In seeking to support this aim and building on the prevalence of Twitter use as a preferred social media communication tool in other related professions, the second aim of

Table 1
Age group characteristics of participants in the study.

Age Group	Number of participants
18–24	6
25–34	19
35–44	18
45–54	4
55+	0

this study was to explore the use of Twitter within the sport psychology profession.

Materials and methods

Participants

Participants were initially 44 sport psychology professionals and trainees (27 female and 20 male). A specific breakdown of age groups categories is presented in Table 1. Of the participants, 17 were qualified sport / exercise / performance psychologists, 24 were trainees, and 4 were researchers. Specific details are presented in Table 2. In total 28 of these participants agreed to their Twitter social media posts of the previous 30 days to be analyzed in the second part of the study. The participants were recruited through personal contact, and via advertisement on relevant online social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook) as sport psychology practitioners/trainees who were active on social media and were happy to participate in the study. Inclusion criteria for the study were as follows: (1) Over the age of 18; (2) either a qualified or trainee sport psychologist (or equivalent depending upon country of origin); (3) were active on social media for professional purposes (e.g., Twitter, Instagram or Facebook); and (4) where appropriate, were happy to agree to social media post content analysis. In this context ‘active’ on social media refers to users who share life experiences, create text, audio or video content and respond frequently to others (Montague & Xu, 2012). While the social media post information already exists in the public domain (has been posted by the relevant individuals), consent was still sought for this subsequent thematic analysis step. These participants were recruited as members of the profession and active users of social media for professional purposes in order to gain an informed perspective on how social media is being used within the profession, and to analyze the Twitter content of sport psychology practitioners who are active on Twitter.

Data collection

The study was composed of two distinct stages of data collection and data analysis. In the first stage, all volunteering participants were asked to complete an online survey hosted by SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com). This survey was composed of seven initial questions as presented in Table 3. The provision for informed consent was included as part of the online survey.

If participants did not explicitly ‘opt-in’ to the study by giving their informed consent subsequent questions were not made available on the online platform. At the end of the survey questions participants were asked if they were happy to consent to their Twitter social media posts being copied for content analysis (stage 2 of the study). In total 28 participants agreed to their involvement in this second stage of data collection and analysis. Specifically, the previous 30 days’ worth of Twitter posts were collected to be analyzed. All Twitter social media posts in this time were analyzed regardless of content. The social media posts were collected by accessing the public-facing Twitter page for each participant and printing the posts from the appropriate 30-day period.

Twitter is a microblogging and social networking service on which users post and interact with messages known as “tweets”. Twitter users

Table 2
Professional qualification status of participants.

Status	Number of participants
British Psychological Society (BPS) Chartered Psychologist	13
British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) Accredited	3
HCPC Registered Sport and Exercise Psychologist	5
AASP Certified Mental Training Consultant	6
BPS Trainee	8
BASES Trainee	3
AASP Trainee	4
American Psychological Association Registered	1
Researcher	4

Table 3
Initial survey questions.

Questions
Question 1 What social media accounts do you currently have?
Question 2 Do you have separate private and business social media accounts?
Question 3 Do you communicate with clients using social media?
Question 4 Do you feel that social media has had a positive impact upon your sport psychology practice?
Question 5 Do you feel that your social media activities has an impact upon your mental health and wellbeing?
Question 6 Do you engage in professional discussions via social media?
Question 7 Do you feel that you either currently or previously have received sufficient guidance regarding social media use from your professional body?

are networked to each other through a following–follower relationship. A user's followers are those who subscribe to receive his or her tweets, and a user's followings are the users whose tweets he or she subscribes to receive (Shi, Rui & Whinston, 2014).

In presenting the data from the social media posts in this study all references to people, places and organizations were removed to help to maintain the anonymity of participants when the data was presented for public scrutiny via publication. All participants were also allocated a number for reference purposes to maintain their anonymity. All data were stored in password protected files on University servers which were also password protected as well. These servers were GDPR compliant as the Institution has an agreement with their systems provider that only servers in the EU were used. Further usernames and passwords were required to access these servers offering a double layer of protection. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Institution where the author worked at the time of the study.

Data analysis

Data analysis was split into three specific stages: (1) analysis of the survey responses; (2) descriptive analysis of Twitter activity; (3) reflexive thematic analysis of the Twitter post content.

The survey responses were analyzed to explore the volume and frequency of responses in relation to the different category options presented to the participants in the study. Initial Twitter activity was analyzed to explore the frequency of online activity (number of posts/tweets) and the range across the participant group.

In the third stage of data analysis the Twitter social media posts were initially analyzed and split into two distinct categories of activity as either 'tweets' or 'retweets'. This split reflects a recognition by Twitter and a number of contemporary research studies (Ashlam et al., 2014) of different types of Twitter communication activity, as determined by the extent to which the posts involve content generation or content sharing. Contemporary research further suggests that both tweets and retweets serve a different communication function (Chen & Hossain, 2020; Holmberg & Hellsten, 2014). Tweets are characterized as original contributions from the author, whereas retweets are content developed and posted by a third party that the participant in the study chose to share with their microblog followers.

Participant social media posts were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Clarke, Braun, Terry & Hayfield, 2019). This approach

is similar to that adopted in other social media-focused studies (Caplan & Purser, 2019; Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2010; Snelson, 2016), and in sport and exercise domains (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016). Reflexive thematic analysis can adopt a number of different orientations including inductive, deductive, semantic, latent, realist, and constructionist approaches. The current study adopted an inductive approach as the coding and theme development were directed by the content of the data (Clarke, Braun, Terry & Hayfield, 2019).

In taking an inductive approach, rather than being influenced by theoretical interest, the focus is to explore the themes as they are organically identified by the researcher as part of an interactive process involving the data, the positionality of the researcher, and the research context. Participant responses were analyzed using the six stages of reflexive thematic analysis outlined by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first two of which focus on familiarization and coding, with stages three-five focused on theme development, refinement, and naming (Braun et al., 2016).

Adopting this approach, the first stage involved becoming familiar with the data, searching for meanings and patterns as the responses were repeatedly read. Next, the initial codes were produced. Participant responses were coded for key words, phrases, and sentences that indicated recurring patterns in the data. Where responses clearly addressed a number of dimensions these points were coded in a way that acknowledges each individual idea. The codes were then analyzed, organized, and combined into early themes. In this early stage all distinct and valuable ideas were categorized under a theme. The fourth stage involved the reviewing and refinement of themes. Themes were then deleted or collapsed with similar themes where there was not enough data to support them individually, or where the data was too diverse for the theme to be explicit. Themes were only collapsed together when their core meaning was homogenous; determined by the use of common words/phrases, or by examining and interpreting the latent meaning of the responses. The themes were then named and clearly defined. Where multiple themes were collapsed to become 'meta-themes' the given name was either entirely separate, or the most dominant name among the 'sub-themes' chosen.

Results

The results section is subdivided into two distinct parts. The first focused on the results from the initial survey questions. The second section

Table 4
Participant’s social media accounts.

Social Media Platform	No of Participants
Twitter	44
Facebook	41
Instagram	35
WhatsApp	36
LinkedIn	39
Tumblr	0
Google+	1
Viber	0
SnapChat	14
Vine	0

focuses upon the analysis of the Twitter post activity, which is further divided into the separate analysis of tweets and retweets. s

Survey results

It was interesting to note that the dominant social media platforms utilized by participants in this study were Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and LinkedIn (as presented in Table 4.). In the current study 27 Participants (61%) reported having separate private and business social media accounts, with 17 (39%) reporting joint accounts. In terms of communicating with clients 17 participants (39%) reported communicating with clients via social media, with 27 participants (61%) choosing not to communicate in this way. Social media was perceived by 81% of participants (n = 22) to have a positive impact upon their sport psychology practice, with 19% (n = 5) feeling that was not the case. It was also interesting to note that 55% of participants (n = 24) felt that social media use and online interactions could negatively impact upon their mental health and wellbeing. Also, a majority of participants (52%) did not choose to engage in professional discussions via social media. Also, 79% of participants (n = 34) felt that they neither currently nor previously had been provided with sufficient guidance relating to social media use from their relevant professional body (e.g., AASP, BPS, BASES).

Tweet post analysis

The Twitter post activity of participants was analyzed to develop an understanding of the different ways in which sport psychology practitioners were engaging in Twitter use, with a particular focus on their profession-focused activity. Over the duration of the 30-day period of data collection for the social media posts the mean number of posts was 24.6 per participant with a range of 8 to 65 posts. Tweets and retweets are considered separately in line with Twitter categorization of both as different forms of communication and approaches adopted in other similar studies.

The reflexive thematic analysis of the tweets in the current study resulted in the identification of seven first order themes (media comments, advice and opinion, thoughts on events, self-promotion, knowledge dissemination, recommendations and activity) composed of 32 s-order themes presented in Table 5. The analysis of the retweets resulted in eight first order theme (media programming, events, sports fixtures, promotion, sport-specific content, news stories, opinions, and dissemination) and 30 s-order themes as presented in Table 6. The first order themes for both tweets and retweets have been used to provide a structure to the presentation of results.

Tweets

Media comments

The first major area of participant content generation related to an interaction with other existing media across a range of different media platforms. For example, participant one reflected that an article they had read was:

Table 5
Themes emerging from Tweet thematic analysis.

First order themes	Second order themes
Media comments	Comments on television programmesNews story with commentsTV/Film content with commentsComments on contemporary news stories
Advice and opinion	Sport psychology adviceInspirational images and quotesComments of sport organizationViews on sports teams
Thoughts on events	View on sporting eventsCPD events attending
Self-promotion	Promoting own contentAdvertising blog postsOwn media engagementOwn books(s)Own conference communicationsOwn applied workOwn publicationsGiving away materialsOwn servicesOwn podcasts
Knowledge dissemination	Messages from read researchOwn infographicsConference presentations attending
Recommendations	Relevant appsOther people’s publicationsCommercial non-sporting companiesCommercial sport
Lifestyle	Watching sportTravel to eventOwn active livingWork environmentFamily life

in the subject area, and to develop the notion of them being a ‘thought leader’ within the online communities they belong to.

Thoughts on events

Another consistent use of Twitter by participants in this study was to offer opinions about and reflect upon events and learning opportunities. One such example of this was participant 11 who reflected:

Great CPD session last night at the BPS Southern Hub! Great work XXXX “be a lion – listen and observe and intervene only when it is needed” #sportspsychology #alwayslearning #ThursdayThoughts

Participants in this study also commented upon and supporting/advertising up-coming continued professional development (CPD) opportunities. One example of this was participant 8 who shared:

Learn how to build a private practice from the ground up during the AASP Virtual Conference presentation on April 9. Register by April 7 and earn 3 h of CE credit toward #CMPC certification.

There was also a group of participants who also sought to share experiences at events in real time. For example, participant 4 shared while at a conference:

First presentation of what is sure to be another wonderful day, this time it was XXXX to highlight why it is so important to study and understand wellbeing in sport. Definitions are a good place to start #mychildathlete (P4)

Again, the type of activity further supports the development of the content producer’s identity as an expert in their field, but also as a source of relevant and important information, reinforcing the rationale for potential followers to then choose to follow the sport psychology practitioners Twitter feed.

Self-promotion

A big part of sport psychology practitioner online activity in this study was to promote themselves, and their services. This promotion covered a broad range of activities that participants engaged in ranging from their services through to their publications and research.

For example, participant 4 stated “Great experience delivering at the XXXX conference today. Thanks for having me #coached”.

Participants also used social media to promote work they had been involved in with different clients’ groups. For example, participant 6 shared:

3 days with the XXX Senior Women’s team has come to an end. Fantastic bunch of players and staff – looking forward to joining them again in June #togetherstronger

Similarly, participant 7 reflected:

Great session with the open minded, talented youngsters with XXXX academy in XXXX tonight. Learning value of verbal and non-verbal communication on the pitch #communication #sportspsychology #5Cs #football

As previously mentioned, participants also used Twitter to update their followers on publications they had produced, were in the process of producing, or had planned. One example of this is Participant 2 who shared the following post promoting their most recent blog post:

Four weeks to @London Marathon and this blog is all about ways to distract yourself to tick off the miles. A great technique if your goal is to finish. If you want to hit a PB then focusing is your friend [link]

Twitter was also used to promote the completion of specific dissemination projects, such as participant 2 who shared the following relating to a recent book project:

When after 9 months of writing and 80,000 words you get to press send and your book manuscript heads off to your editor. Celebratory cake I am coming for you!

In addition, social media was also used as a way to run ‘giveaways’ or promotions. In one case, participant 2 offered the following:

I have five postcards left from the XXXX event at the weekend. Anyone got a race coming up that they could do with a confidence boost

for? DM me your address and 3 strengths and you’ll get a reminder of how fab you are before the big race.

Social media was also used by participants as a way to both promote and recruit participants for different projects and research studies. For example, one participant shared the following:

We are conducting a research study exploring sport psychology practitioners (both qualified and trainees) experiences and perceptions of profession-focused social media use. Please click here to take part in our survey

Another example of this use of Twitter was participant 2 who posted:

Have any female athletes identified a strength of theirs that they now use loads in their sport? Would you be up for chatting to be about it for a piece? #journorequest

This use of Twitter as a promotion and marketing tool is unsurprising, especially as followers self-select who they wish to follow, and as such have an existing interest in the knowledge and services participants advocated through their online account(s).

Knowledge dissemination

Another key use of Twitter by the participants in the current study was to share relevant knowledge, materials and resources that might be useful to their followers. These ranged from materials for professional colleagues, to potential clients and members of the wider general public. One example of sharing materials for a professional audience was participant 11 who posted:

Just read a paper where a coach would post the player’s scores from 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent) in the locker room after every game. Really interested to hear people’s thoughts on this. Seems quite absurd to me (although I can see some positives)

Another example of this professional sharing was participant 5 who shared a picture of a research poster from a conference “Fantastic research poster presentation by XXXX lecturer and researcher XXXX – a great program of research summarized in a visually stunning poster! #awesome”. One example of sharing materials and information for potential users of sport psychology services was participant 6 who shared the following “Doing a Marathon this year? Take our marathon mindset course and learn a bunch of useful #psychological skills and strategies”.

This type of posting activity appears to fulfill two functions. First, self-promotion and online impression management, and second to further enhance the perception of the participant’s subject expertise.

Lifestyle

Another big area of content generation on Twitter for the participants in this study was related to their lifestyle, the activities they engaged in and hobbies they enjoyed. This ‘sharing’ covered a broad range of different activities including watching television/video content. One such example of this activity was presented by participant 15 who shared:

Just started watching this and I am obsessed. If you haven’t checked it out yet I highly recommend it. Great stories! #sport #failure #perseverance #mindset

This sharing also involved non-work-related activities. Participant 8 shared the following as an example of this type of content “First world problems: Facebook has an outage; how will I watch the football fixture live on FB tonight?!”. Participant 2 offered another similar example, posting the following “Cycling headfirst into hailstones really, really hurts. Now I remember why I love the turbo!”. In addition, participant 5 also shared this football-focused post:

I beat Man City on FIFA2019 this morning, let’s hope the boys can do the same this afternoon – though I think the real game setting will be more difficult!!!

A number of participants also advocated active lifestyles and living through their posts, such as participant 7 who shared “Fantastic early morning run around Berlin this morning! #justrun”

There were also posts focused on travel relating to work, and work plans for the day. One example of this type of activity was participant 5 who shared the following dilemma:

Well I was thinking of working on the train to London this morning for today's XXXX Board meeting . . . then Netflix on the way home! #loveaboxset #psychology

Similarly, participant 9 shared the following information "Early start this morning heading up to XXXX to meet with staff and students as external examiner!"

This category of posting activity offered an interesting insight into the blurring of the boundaries between professional and private social media use and highlights a potential issue of consideration for sport psychology practitioners in the future.

Retweets

The second major category of social media posting activity for participants related to re-sharing or 're-tweeting' content developed and subsequently posted by other online users. This resharing of information in the current study ranged from posts from individuals to companies and organizations and focused on the following main themes: Media programming, events, sports fixtures, promotion, sport-specific content, news stories, opinions and dissemination.

Promotion

One of the main areas of retweeting activity of participants in this study related to the resharing of content that seeks to promote activities, events or opportunities that might be of interest to the individual participant's group of online followers. One of the areas of this type of activity related to relevant profession events. For example, participant 1 shared the following announcements "We're excited to announce that our first DSEP Northern Applied Hub biannual event will take place on Friday 5th April". A further example of this promotional use of social media was presented by participant 10 who retweeted the following message:

Registration is now open for a FREE psychology conference! September 3rd 2–19. East and West Midlands joining for the second Midlands Conference to be held in Derby UK #BPSMids19

A further example of this type of online activity was participant 9 who shared the following message "Join us for a mental training webinar with XXXX this Tuesday night. Topics to be discussed: mindset, confidence, emotions".

There were also opportunities shared regarding calls for volunteers such as participant 1 who shared the following post:

I am looking for recommended movies, tv shows and documentaries I can relate to the following sport psych topics: Motivation, confidence, coach-athlete relationships, leadership, psychological skills. Group dynamics too but I've loads for that already #help

In addition, there was also some resharing of content relating to employment/job opportunities such as participant 11 sharing "Netball coaching paid opportunity at XXXX for those wanting experience in a primary school"

This tactic of resharing of relevant information further reinforces the perception of the sharer as a source of relevant information that might further prioritize the participant in question as a viable and credible source of profession-related information. Resharing information appears to be an easy low cost (in terms of effort and time) way to achieve this outcome.

News stories

Another area of activity for participants in the current study relating to the retweeting of contemporary news stories, particularly where there was a sport psychology angle relating to the story. For example, participant 4 shared the following story:

Allardyce: Sports psychology starts at the top | Bolton News. Coaches are vital for our work to be effective. Support the people supporting people!

In addition, participant 2 shared the following:

Athletics mental health: Addicted to training, there is a thin, red line between training hard and too hard. XXXX considers which side of the fence an athlete could be on #performance #mental health

Opinions

Another source of resharing activity in the current study was the resharing of opinions, thoughts and views of other expert/professional people they followed. This was often, but not always, other professionals within the field of sport and exercise psychology; athletes; and professionals in related fields of expertise. One example of this type of activity was participant 1 who shared the following post:

The primary function of a grassroots football coach is to develop a lifelong love of the game based on mass participation and fun. This can never be achieved by excluding children of perceived lesser ability. This is not an elite sport. This is football for all.

Similarly, another example of this type of resharing was of participant 3 who shared the following message:

The hard thing about living with anxiety is realizing that all the things that make you a fast thinker, quick learner, and problem solver are working against you when it comes to your emotions. A mind always churning is a blessing and a curse. I wish people talked more about this.

These posts shared/reshared by participants could be information-based but could also be the sharing of positive messages and experiences. For example, participant 14 shared the following post:

This is why I'm so excited and honored to be working with XXX helping to empower young women golfers and engage them to develop a team atmosphere where they can thrive together!

Also, participant 15 shared the following message "XXXX has overcome more than most could imagine on her journey to XXX and now has a once in a lifetime opportunity".

This use of social media asks further questions about the specific nature of the user's social media account, and what the specific aims/objectives of the participant are.

Dissemination

The final category of retweeting activity focused on posts and messages that were information, specifically relating to sport psychology concepts, principles and themes. For example, participant 15 reshared the following message:

Another great #imagery study confirming how powerful our imagination is as well as providing evidence that it may not always be the best approach to imagine something positive [link] #highperformancehabits #thinkbetterperformbetter

Another example of this sharing of sport psychology information was participant 8 who shared the following post:

Smartphones: How can mental performance consultants help athletes and coaches leverage their use to generate more benefits than drawbacks?" is featured in the most recent issue of #JSPA AASP members have access to the full publication here [link]

Part of this type of retweeting activity also involved sharing or promoting relevant content from relevant experts or voices in the field. For example, participant 7 shared the following post:

Listening to a podcast recently by ironman XXXX reminded me of discussions on confidence versus arrogance – so I wrote a blog about it. You can read it here #selfconfidence #arrogance #performance #sportpsychology

There was also the sharing of future content, particularly in 'real time' media such as radio and television. For example, participant 10 retweeted the following post:

Chatting physical and mental health today on BBC XXXX with XXXX on #firstdayofspring – now is a great time to get active outdoors with so many opportunities to get cycling in Derby!

Discussion

The dual aims of the current study were to explore the social media use and perceptions of sport psychology practitioners, and to explore the use of Twitter within the sport psychology profession.

The results in this study highlighted a number of key uses of social media by participants in the study. Specifically, appeared to relate to the following categories of activity: promoting own services and dissemination activities, offering opinions on contemporary issues, sharing CPD opportunities, sharing other people's content and knowledge creation activities, and marketing and business development.

There are similarities between the use of Twitter by participants in the study and the reported uses of social media in other professions. For example, (Kettunen, Vuorinen & Sampson, 2014) highlighted four main uses of social media engagement in Danish and Finnish career practitioners. These included: 1) a means of delivering information to followers, (2) a medium for 1-to-1 communication, (3) an interactive workspace, and (4) to provide impetus for change and reform. Similarly, (Escoffery, Kenzig, Hyden & Hernandez, 2018) highlighted that social media use in healthcare practice fulfilled the following functions: sharing professional profile, building professional networks, career development, and positioning yourself as a thought leader within your field of expertise, this point in particular appears to apply to the participants in the current study. These uses in other professions suggests training and education opportunities for sport psychology practitioners in this regard might be beneficial. However, to date, professional bodies relating to sport psychology globally have been slow to offer guidance, advice, and training for their members in relation to understanding how to engage in social media use, what the advantages and disadvantages are as well as the potential ethical, moral, legal, and reputational implications. There are also some similarities between sport psychology practitioners in the current study and athletes in their use of Twitter, with keeping in contact, communicating with followers, accessing information, information sharing, and content promotion all identified as uses of Twitter by athletes (Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Hambrick et al., 2010).

A key message to come out of the survey data in this study was that participants are utilizing social media in their professional work but feel under skilled and under educated in terms of use and best practice. This is particularly problematic as key issues related to the participant's digital footprint, privacy, and understanding of ethical issues with social media communication have the potential to directly impact upon the health and wellbeing of sport psychology practitioners (Cotterill, 2020). As previously highlighted, it should then be a priority for sport psychology organizations and bodies to support the development of their members and registrants in this regard. This action should be underpinned by the provision of better guidance of social media use, best practice examples, and structured education and training opportunities both for sport psychology practitioners in training and post qualification / accreditation professionals.

While the participants in the current study felt they needed further support and education around social media use it is important to highlight there is some pre-existing information out there for psychologists. For example, The *British Psychological Society*, (2012) Division of Clinical Psychology has produced a guide for clinical psychologists, and Lannin & Scott, (2014) writing for the American Psychological Association (APA) magazine *Monitor on Psychology* also made 'best practice' recommendations. These included: (1) To manage boundaries online, and in particular to set appropriate boundaries with clients to avoid conflict of interest; (2) To develop online technological competence, and in particular to develop an understanding of social media; and (3) Reduce liability risk online, and in particular intentional or inadvertent disclosure of confidential information. For sport psychology practitioners

(Cotterill, 2020) has recently offered guidance relating to digital footprints, privacy, sharing professional information, and consuming information online.

The thematic analysis of the Tweets in this study suggested that there was a split in the primary approach to engagement on Twitter by participants. Some participants were particularly active content generators, with many other participants primarily resharing other people's posts, messages and links. Intentional and voluntary sharing of content and sometimes personal information with others is commonly referred to as self-disclosure (Chen, 2013; Posey, Lowry, Roberts & Ellis, 2010). Self-disclosure online includes the sharing of personal information such as dispositions, states, events, personal photos and videos, and locations (Chen, 2013). One rationale for why some participants were more likely to share original content is that they feel more comfortable sharing such personal information, and are more likely to want to be seen as thought leaders (Magno & Cassia, 2019) which can be conceptualised as using the power of ideas to transform the way we and/or other people think (McCrimmon, 2005).

One interesting finding of the current study was the engagement by participants in sharing (retweeting) other people's information in addition to content creation (Tweeting). Interestingly, where social network users reshare content with their followers, such content is likely to be reshared by its recipients (Kane, Alavi, Labianca & Borgatti, 2014) as the information is deemed worthy of sharing. Therefore social media users who simply reshare other posts can still have a significant impact upon their followers and a wider audience as it is deemed to be high-quality information (Eppler & Wittig, 2000). Information is of value if it makes a difference and leads such a follower to alter her/his behavior or way of thinking (McKinney & Yoos, 2010).

The current study offers a first step in seeking to understand both the use of social media and the associated impact amongst sport psychology practitioners. It is interesting that social media use in the current study was linked by participants to their mental health, and in particular highlighting the potential of social media engagement to negatively impact upon their mental health. Further research is required to further develop a better understanding, of this perceived outcome and in particular to better understand the impact of social media interaction upon the business and health of individual sport psychology practitioners. This enhanced understanding of social media use and the preferences of sport psychology practitioners alongside the associated opportunities and challenges this form of media presents could serve to better inform the design and delivery of education, training and support for individuals within the profession (Cotterill, 2020). Inevitably, the challenges of social media are not the same across all sports and for all consultants, with specific challenges being more prominent in some sports, at some levels, and varying according to the client group (Cotterill, 2020). As a result, future research is needed to better understand the social media use and requirements of sport psychology practitioners who work in specific areas of the profession and with particular demographic groups and/or sports. Also, there are unanswered questions regarding the effectiveness of the online environment for psychological service provision (Cotterill, 2019).

There is also further research required to better understand the real impact of social media engagement on the mental health of those engaging in its use. This link is starting to be explored in other spheres of human endeavor but has not, to date, been explored in sport psychology practice. It is important to understand this link as practitioners, as demonstrated in this study, are already engaging in social media use, but in the absence of an evidence base with which to underpin their practice.

While the approach adopted in the current study was novel relating to the field of sport psychology it did have its limitations, particularly the self-selecting nature of the participants, the 30-day period of posts analyzed, and the focus on one specific form of social media (Twitter).

In conclusion, this is the first study of its kind to explore social media use and engagement amongst sport psychology practitioners, high-

lighting that sport psychology practitioners appear to be attempting to position themselves as thought leaders within the domain of sport psychology. However, this online activity is taking place with a perceived lack of training and support available from the relevant professional bodies. This lack of formal expertise demonstrated by participants in the current study could be putting practitioners at risk in terms of their privacy, digital footprint and mental health. As such it is crucial that professional bodies within the field of sport psychology better support their members to positively engage in social media use for professional purposes and to develop clear expectations regarding the cross-over between professional and personal use, and the image and/or profile the individual practitioner is seeking to develop. Finally, it is also important that practitioners understand the reputational implications of online communication errors.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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