

SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACT ON ATHLETES, IDENTIFY & MENTAL HEALTH

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Introduction:

In today's digital age, social media has become an integral part of everyday life. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter influence how people communicate, express themselves, and build their identities. In the field of

sports, social media has brought a significant transformation by changing how athletes interact with fans, coaches, sponsors, and society. Athletes are no longer recognized only by their performance on the field but also by their online presence.

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Social media provides athletes with opportunities for self-promotion, recognition, and career growth. Student and developing athletes can showcase their talent, achievements, and training routines to a wider audience. This exposure can help them gain scholarships, sponsorships, and professional opportunities. However, along with these advantages, social media also creates mental pressure. Athletes often feel the need to maintain a perfect image, which can lead to stress, anxiety, and fear of failure. Negative comments, cyberbullying, and constant comparison with others can damage an athlete's self-esteem. The number of likes, followers, and comments may begin to define their self-worth. Therefore, it is important to understand how social media impacts athletes' identity formation and mental health, especially during their developmental years.

Data Analysis:

Data shows that social media usage among young athletes has increased rapidly in recent years. A

majority of student-athletes actively use platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, and TikTok. These platforms allow athletes to share personal stories, training progress, achievements, and opinions. Social media also plays a key role in Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) opportunities, where athletes can earn income through sponsorships collaborations. One of the positive outcomes of social media is access to broader communities. Athletes can connect with professionals, coaches, and peers from different regions. They can learn new techniques, gain motivation, and receive emotional support. Many athletes also benefit from mental health awareness content shared by well-known sports personalities. An athlete who's posting videos of their skills on the soccer field hoping to catch the eye of college recruiters or potential brand sponsors may be thrilled by a lot of positive feedback, but it's just as likely that they either won't get the views that they're hoping for or may even receive negative commentary as well.

However, the data also highlights negative impacts. Lack of likes or engagement can lower self-confidence. Constant exposure to others' success stories can create unrealistic expectations. Athletes may feel pressure to perform better at all times, leading to stress and emotional imbalance.

Observation:

Observations indicate that most athletes use social media daily, often spending several hours online. While social media helps maintain communication and motivation, excessive use increases exposure to unrealistic standards of success and appearance. Athletes may start comparing themselves with others and feel dissatisfied with their own progress. Criticism received through social media, especially from known individuals such as classmates or relatives, affects athletes deeply. This can lead to anxiety, self-doubt, and reduced focus on performance. On the positive side, social media also helps in spreading awareness about mental health and reducing stigma. Athletes sharing their struggles encourage openness and emotional expression.

SMedia and Student-Athletes:

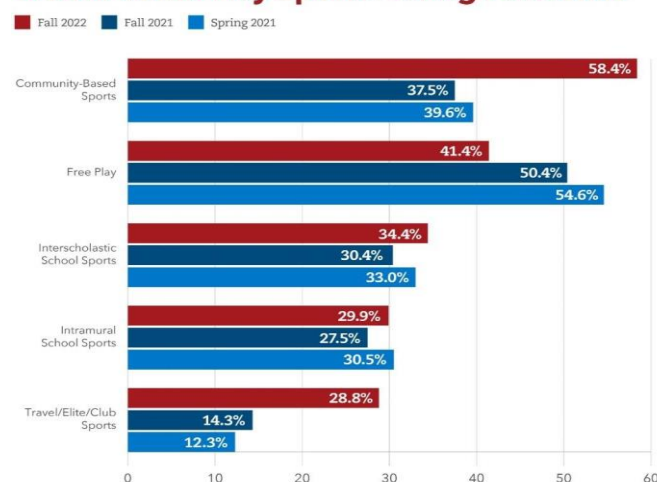
According to the Pew Research Center, about 60 percent of the teen population uses Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, while about 93 percent of teens use YouTube. For many young people, social media is a way of developing and sharing their identity—sometimes with communities that they otherwise would be unable to access.

This means that for caregivers, it's helpful to look at social media as a part of your athlete's life and think about ways to make their relationship with these online platforms a healthy one, rather than view social media as a problem or an app that should be deleted. "I'd love for caregivers to think about how we can support an athlete's identity development through social media rather than trying to fight its usage," Sumler says.

Results And Discussion:

The results of the study show that social media has both positive and negative effects on athletes' mental health. Many athletes reported feeling pressure to maintain a perfect online image. Cyberbullying and negative feedback were common issues affecting their confidence and emotional well-being. At the same time, social media provided athletes with a sense of belonging and motivation. Interaction with fans and supportive communities helped athletes feel valued and encouraged. The discussion suggests that balanced usage and proper guidance are essential to minimize negative effects. Coaches, parents, and institutions must help athletes develop healthy digital habits.

Where Youth Play Sports During Pandemic



Source: Aspen Institute, Utah State University, Louisiana Tech University, TeamSnap youth sports parent surveys, 2021 and 2022

Conclusion:

In conclusion, social media plays a significant role in shaping athletes' identity and mental health. While it offers opportunities for exposure, learning, and connection, it also introduces pressure, comparison, and emotional challenges. Athletes must be encouraged to use social media responsibly and focus on personal growth rather than online validation. Education on digital well-being, mental health awareness, and supportive environments is essential. Sports organizations, educational institutions, and

social media platforms should work together to promote positive behavior. With proper guidance, social media can become a powerful tool for empowerment rather than a source of stress.

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