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ABSTRACT

Interplay Between Social Media Use and Mental Health Among UTM Student Athletes

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study explores the interplay between social media use and mental health among UTM student athletes. With growing reliance on digital platforms, concerns about psychological effects have intensified. By measuring usage patterns and mental health levels, this research aims to investigate the link between social media use and student athletes' mental health, addressing limitations in prior studies.

II. METHODS

Data were collected via a Google Form questionnaire from a sample of 132 UTM student athletes. Social media use was measured using the Social Media Use Scale [1], and mental health was assessed using the DASS-21 instrument [2]. Participants were randomly selected from a population of 200 athletes registered with UTM's Sport Excellence Unit. The responses were analyzed to determine levels and the relationship between social media use and mental health among the student athletes.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Level of Social Media Use Among UTM Student Athletes

UTM student athletes primarily engaged in consumption-based (4.66 ± 1.58) and image-based (4.11 ± 1.65) social media use, especially on TikTok and Instagram. These platforms support passive browsing and visual engagement. Comparison-based (3.93 ± 1.92) and belief-based (3.50 ± 2.20) activities were less common among the respondents. All subscales had a possible range of 1 to 9, with actual minimums and maximums reflecting this range, except for the consumption-based scale, which had a minimum of 1.6.

B. Level of Mental Health Among UTM Student Athletes

DASS-21 results showed high levels of emotional distress among participants, with 58.3% having depression symptoms, 65.2% anxiety, and 42.4% stress. Findings revealed that participants reported moderate levels of anxiety (2.95 ± 1.66), low to moderate levels of depression (2.47 ± 1.46), and low levels of stress (1.98 ± 1.33). Scores ranged from 1 to 5 across all three constructs, with anxiety showing the highest mean among the three psychological dimensions. This suggests that while stress was relatively low in the sample, anxiety was

more pronounced and may warrant further attention concerning social media usage.

C. Relationship Between Social Media Usage and Mental Health of Student Athletes

Spearman's correlation revealed that comparison-based use had the strongest links with depression ($r = 0.375$), stress ($r = 0.351$), and anxiety ($r = 0.227$). Image- and belief-based use also showed moderate, significant correlations. In addition, consumption-based use was significantly and positively correlated with depression, anxiety, and stress. These patterns highlight that emotionally taxing online behaviors, especially comparison, are associated with poorer mental health across multiple domains, underscoring the urgency of preventive interventions for student athletes.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that high social media use, particularly comparison-based, is significantly associated with poorer mental health among UTM student athletes. Findings highlight the psychological vulnerabilities of this group and underscore the importance of targeted interventions to manage social media habits and support mental well-being in high-performance academic-athletic environments.

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