

## Perception of Athletes During a Negative Situation

Social media has become a crucial part of modern society. Social Media is used by not only individuals but also companies and businesses. It has become a vital part of communication in today's culture. Sport fans and professional athletes have taken social media by storm. Fans use social media to keep up with their favorite teams and athletes. Every professional team and the majority of professional athletes use social media to keep in touch with their fans (Hambrick, 2010.) The problem is that when an athlete is under scrutiny, social media plays a huge role in entertaining thoughts about the situation. When sports fans experience controversial plays by athletes or debatable calls by referees, they react in two different ways: (1) supporting the athlete or referee; and (2) speaking out against them. The comments made on social media sites may influence a fan's perception on the athlete (Atkin, 2008.) The accommodation theory explains that when talking to someone, people will gravitate towards acting or talking like that person. By applying the accommodation theory we attempt to test whether the social media messages made by professional athletes and coaches will change a sport fan's perception of their favorite athlete. The results of our pilot study support the hypothesis that an individual's attitude toward athletes or sporting teams can be changed according to the social media messages he or she sees or hears in the social media sites. Therefore, we conclude that a sports fan would attempt to form or change his or her attitude toward an athlete or team by accommodating what other sports fans, athletes, or coaches say on social media sites. The results of the main study will be presented at the conference.