

## ***Perceptions and General Knowledge of Online Social Networking Activity Of Student-Athletes***

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The interest of our society in online social networking continues to grow at a very fast rate, displayed by the popular networking site Facebook reportedly reaching the 350 million-user mark in December of 2009 (Facebook, 2009). Online social networking sites allow people to post personal information and remain updated on the daily activity of their contacts. The information presented through online social networking is readily available from any location, leaves a trail of observable dialogue, and can be retrieved by anyone with the use of a simple search engine (Williams & Merten, 2008). The type of information users post, along with the potential negative effects on individuals and organizations, have lead many interested parties to take notice of such activity. Athletic administrators have become concerned with the type of social networking activity in which their student-athletes participate, prompting some athletic departments to either implement educational programs and/or deter students from using such sites (Oppenhuizen, 2008).

Academics, as well as organizations have studied the types of information posted on networking sites and blogs (William & Merten, 2008) and how online activity can affect business decisions (AMA, 2009); however, little research has been conducted on individuals' understanding of the nature of online social networking. Many people post or blog about their daily activity, but it is unclear whether they understand that such information will be distributed to a very large network of individuals, and inappropriate use can potentially have severe ramifications.

The purpose of the current study was to determine if college students understood the nature of online social networking, and to gauge different perspectives of online use and consequences of their postings. Additionally, the study measured any similarities or differences in online social networking use and knowledge between student-athletes and those within the general student body. Participants at a university in the Mountain West region completed a survey concerning their use of the popular online social networking sites Facebook and Twitter. Individuals were asked their amount of personal use, perceptions of posted information deemed inappropriate, if they had been educated on the potential ramifications of inappropriate use, and their feelings on activity monitoring. Findings from the study provide important information about the online social networking activity of student-athletes and will assist departments in educating about the pitfalls inherent in inappropriate social networking.