



Instagram Posts of Turkish Olympic Athlete in the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze Instagram posts of Olympic athletes during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Research four men and four women a total of eight Olympic athletes have begun to examine the Instagram account on the day of the proclamation of the first pandemic cases in Turkey. This review covered the dates from March 18 to June 26. The data of the research are 132 photos and captions. Photos were analyzed by quantitative content analysis and photo captions were analyzed by qualitative content analysis. Quantitative findings of the study show that both male and female athletes shared the most sports life (58.3%) in the pandemic period. The photo of athletes about COVID-19 is 9.1% and all of these photos are the shares of male athletes. The qualitative findings of the research were collected under three themes. These are Being a role to society in the COVID-19 pandemic period, dedicated athlete for postponed Olympics, sports life in quarantine days. Results revealed that both female and male athletes are role models for society in the pandemic period via Instagram posts.

Keywords— Instagram, social media, Olympic athlete, COVID-19 Pandemic.

COVID-19 Pandemisinde Türk Olimpik Sporcuların Instagram Paylaşımları

Öz

Bu araştırma, COVID-19 pandemisi sürecinde olimpik sporcularının Instagram gönderilerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla, Türkiye'de ilk pandemi vakalarının ilan edildiği günden itibaren, dört erkek ve dört kadın olmak üzere toplam sekiz olimpik sporcunun Instagram hesabı incelenmiştir. Bu inceleme 18 Mart - 26 Haziran tarihlerini kapsamıştır. Araştırmanın verileri 132 fotoğraf ve fotoğraf alt yazısından oluşmaktadır. Fotoğraflar nicel içerik analizi ile fotoğraf başlıkları nitel içerik analizi ile analiz edilmiştir. Araştırmanın nicel bulguları, hem erkek hem de kadın sporcuların pandemi sürecinde en fazla spor hayatına (% 58,3) dair paylaşım yaptığını göstermektedir. Sporcuların COVID-19 ile ilgili fotoğrafı % 9,1'dir ve bu fotoğrafların tamamı erkek sporcuların paylaşımlarıdır. Araştırmanın nitel bulguları üç tema altında toplanmıştır. Bunlar: COVID-19 sürecinde topluma rol olmak, ertelenen olimpiyatlara adanmış sporcu ve karantina günlerinde spor hayatı. Araştırmanın sonuçları, hem kadın hem de erkek olimpik sporcuların Instagram paylaşımları aracılığıyla pandemi sürecinde topluma rol model olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Instagram, sosyal medya, olimpik sporcu, COVID-19.

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INTRODUCTION

Internet users spend more time on Instagram than on other sites (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). As of June 2018, the social network reported more than 1 billion monthly active users worldwide and the social media network's daily active users stood at 500 million (Clement, 2020a). The United States heads the ranking among the countries with the most Instagram users with 120 million users accessing the photo-sharing and editing app as of April 2020 (Clement, 2020b). Turkey ranks 6th among the countries that use most Instagram. In March 2020 there were 38,870,000 Instagram users in Turkey (Johnson, 2020).

Instagram is the fastest growing social network site globally (Sheldon and Bryant, 2016) and the sports world is no stranger to this trend (Graham, 2013). Almost all sports world is influenced by the role, function, motivation, benefits, and challenges of social media (Antunovic & Hardin 2012; Arai, Ko & Ross, 2014; Clavio & Eagleman, 2011; Eagleman, 2013 Geurin, 2017). Social media provides athletes opportunities such as develop a relationship with stakeholders (Hambrick & Kang), directly interact with fans (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010), information shared about themselves (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012), develop their brands (Abeza et al., 2015; Arai, Ko & Rose, 2014), build visual self-presentation (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Li et al., 2017), and sponsorship opportunities

(Hambrick & Kang, 2015; Geurin, 2017). Social media provides a means by which elite Olympic athletes and others (e.g., actors, musicians, entertainers) can build their personal brand, solicit sponsorships, engage with stakeholders, and extend their fan followings (Geurin, 2016).

COVID-19 Pandemic, Social Media and Sport World

A novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) has been identified as originating in Wuhan, Hubei province, China. It has widely and rapidly spread in China and several other countries, causing an outbreak of acute infectious pneumonia (Bao et al., 2020). Social media can and should be harnessed to support the public health response. For example, in China during the massive community-wide quarantine, it is particularly important to use social media wisely as social media provide an opportunity to communicate the reasons for quarantine, providing reassurance and practical advice to pre-empt rumors and panic (Depoux et al., 2020). The peak of Internet searches and social media data about the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak occurred 10–14 days earlier than the peak of daily incidences in China (Li et al., 2020). For example, the Chinese government strives to improve the public's awareness of prevention and intervention strategies by providing daily updates about surveillance and active cases on websites and social media. Increasingly, psychologists and psychiatrists use the internet

and social media (eg, WeChat, Weibo, etc) to share strategies for dealing with psychological stress (Bao et al., 2020).

COVID-19 is having a substantial impact on sporting schedules as some of the world's largest sporting events come to view in 2020 (Nicola et al., 2020). For example, UEFA announced that Euro 2020 has been postponed until the summer of 2021, with new dates of June 11 to July 11 next year proposed. The official announcement from European football's governing body also confirmed that the Euro 2020 play-offs, due to be played later this month, will now be played in the June 2020 international break. The 2021 Nations League finals, UEFA Under-21 European Championships, and the Women's Euro 2021 were also postponed (The Independent, 2020). The international Olympic committee was committed to staging the Tokyo 2020 Olympics postponed to 2021 due to coronavirus pandemic (The Guardian, 2020). Similarly, the Australian Formula one Grand Prix has been postponed with Bahrain and Vietnam opting to cancel their fixtures until further notice. These are but a few examples; golf, tennis, athletics, basketball, rugby, cycling, boxing, snooker, and ice-skating fixtures have all faced cancellations and delays in an attempt to curb the spread of disease. Inevitably this will have a significant financial burden, the gravity of which has yet to come to light (Nicola et al., 2020).

During this pandemic, athletes like other celebrities can be role models. They can

encourage appropriate behaviors including social distancing to stem the spread of the virus through social media and athletes can thus make a difference in this fight against COVID-19 (Leng & Phua, 2020). So many professional athletes have been showing as society continues to practice social distancing because of the coronavirus pandemic. These top-tier athletes have used social media as a tool to stay connected with the world, while using their platform to spread positivity and joy however they can (Valenzuela, 2020). Professional athletes had to go into self-isolation, doing workouts at home to stay fit, as the seasons in almost every branch of sports were put on hold (Erozden, 2020). Since mid-March, professional sports have been on an indefinite hiatus because of the coronavirus pandemic athletes from every sport have taken to Instagram and other outlets to share their experiences in self-isolation (Cavill, 2020).

Using social media is very popular for elite athletes. Research on social media and sport show that athletes engage in social media to interact with their fans (Geurin, 2016; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Marshall, Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2019; Smith & Sanderson, 2015; Thorpe, Toffoletti & Burce, 2017). As such, it is easy for athletes to leverage on this medium and encourage appropriate behaviors from both their fans and the public during this pandemic (Leng & Phua, 2020). In this context, the current research aims to analyze Instagram posts of Olympic athletes during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

METHOD

We analyzed photos with the descriptive statistics analysis method and texts with the content analysis method.

Sampling

In this study, team sports were excluded, and we chose to examine only individual sport athletes. The sports selected were cycling, fencing, gymnastics, and judo. The researchers decided to select two athletes from each sport; one female and one male. Athletes for the analysis were selected based on sportive victory and popularity within their sport, their activity level on Instagram, and the number of Instagram followers they had. Another reason why these final participants are selected from the possible participants is that these athletes give feedback that they voluntarily participate in the research. We had 44 potential participants in the first place. We reached all of them via Instagram message. Eight athletes accepted our research invitation. Information about the athletes' Instagram accounts and personal information are as follows: Female judo athlete is 24 Years Old. She is an Olympic athlete in the Judo branch. The number of Instagram followers is 2134. Male judo athlete is 22 Years Old. He is an Olympic athlete in the Judo branch. The number of Instagram followers is 12600. Male athlete of the cycling branch is 27 years old. He is an Olympic cyclist and has an Instagram following count of 14600. Female athlete of the cycling branch is 26 years old. She is an Olympic athlete who

represents our country in cycling. The number of Instagram followers is 3643. Male Olympic athlete of the gymnastics branch is 26 years old. He is Turkey's first artistic gymnastics world champion. The number of Instagram followers is 28500. Female Olympic athlete in the gymnastics branch is 30 years old. She is the first female athlete to represent Turkey at the 2012 London Olympic Games. The number of Instagram followers is 5884. Female fencing athlete is 27 Years Old. She is an Olympic athlete representing Turkey in the fencing branch. The number of Instagram followers is 3241. Male fencing athlete is 25 years old. He is an Olympic athlete who represents our country in fencing. The number of Instagram followers is 2487.

Coding Procedures

We created a codebook for use in the analysis of social media data. When creating the codebook, we used the conceptual framework and research conducted with social media analysis about our research problem (such as Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Smith & Sanderson, 2015). Coding procedures were utilized only for the photographs. Each photograph was coded for the following 5 items: date, sex, athlete name, athlete's sport, photo category (personal life, sports life, relating to COVID-19 pandemic and celebration).

Data Collection

Researchers selected the date of March 18 and June 26, 2020 collected the photographs from

each athlete's Instagram account. Sharing of athletes throughout the COVID-19 pandemic was analyzed. Between these dates, each athlete shared different numbers. Only photos of athletes were analyzed, not videos. A total of 132 photographs were analyzed.

Data Analysis

Photographs and captions were analyzed separately using separate schemes and analyses. While the captions may refer to the photograph or the action in the photograph the majority of the time, at times a caption will have nothing to do with the photograph (Smith & Sanderson, 2015). Firstly, we performed a quantitative analysis of the percentage and frequencies of the photos. Secondly, we conducted qualitative content analysis for capture with eight athletes. To prepare the textual data for analysis, we transferred the captures to the computer and put them into the word (transcript). We obtained a total of 17 pages of raw data. We have read the texts line by line and we have generated codes to the sides of the lines. We have created a code list (coding) and categorized similar pieces of information and reached categories (category construction) (Merriam, 2009, p.178). We tried to gather the concepts resulting from coding under a meaningful theme and determined themes in both the theoretical framework of the study and the data (Patton, 2002). We conducted this process by two researchers.

Procedure and Credibility

We received ethical approval from the Cukurova University for the study (Decision no: 40). The Instagram profiles of the participants consisted of open accounts. We asked the participants to sign the consent form and received permission to use their Instagram data in the study. We used pseudonyms for all participants and shared raw interview data with participants.

For the credibility of the study, we used method triangulation (qualitative and quantitative), and researcher triangulation (in the analysis of data, two researchers made independent evaluations) (Denzin, 2009, p. 302). The use of triangulation reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (Denzin, 2012). We also used member checking which is a valuable strategy for establishing trustworthiness (Cope, 2014; Kornbluh, 2015). We emailed the qualitative raw data and completion of data analysis to the participants. To establish reliability, each independently coded all photos. The percentage of agreement was 88.9 % which is above the threshold of 80% (Riffe et al., 2014), indicating a high degree of reliability.

RESULTS

Descriptives

The sample yielded 132 photographs and captions. The breakdown for photographs is as follows: 15 came from judo, 13 from fencing, 59 from cycling, 45 from gymnastics. 60 of the

photographs came from female athletes and 72 from male athletes.

Photograph type

Sport life photos were the most popular, constituting 58.3% (n = 77) of the entire sample. Next were personal life photos at 31.8% (n=42), COVID-19 photos at 9.1% (n = 12) and celebration photos at 0.8% (n = 1). For

all eight athletes examined, sport life photos ranked as the most commonly posted photo. The least shared photo-type is COVID-19 and celebration photos, respectively. Photos of COVID-19 came from fencing (n=10) and gymnastics (n=2). All other photo categories for each athlete can be viewed in Table 1.

Table 1. Overall photos by each athlete

Photo Type	Gym F		Gym M		Cycling F		Cycling M		Fencing F		Fencing M		Judo F		Judo M	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Sport Life	22	57,9	5	71,4	6	66,7	34	68,0	2	66,7	3	30,0	2	20,0	3	60,0
Personal Life	16	42,1	0	-	2	22,2	6	12,0	1	33,3	7	70,0	8	80,0	2	40,0
COVID-19	0	-	2	28,6	0	-	10	20,0	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-
Celebration	0	-	0	-	1	11,1	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-
Total	38	100	7	100	9	100	50	100	3	100	10	100	10	100	5	100

Gender Differences

Photo-type by gender and indicates which photo types exhibited differences and similarities between males and females. When we look at the shares of the athletes over the total values, there are obvious differences (Table 2). For example, male athletes shared more photos than females during the period under review. Of the 132 photos in total, 72 (54.5%) came from male, and 60 (45.5%) came

from females. Sharing of male athletes in total sports life photographs is higher than female athletes. 45 (58.4%) of 77 sports life photos came from males and 32 (41.6 %) came from females. Personal life photos of female athletes are more than male athletes. 27 (64.3%) of 42 personal life photos came from females and 15 (35.7 %) came from males. All photos of COVID-19 came from male athletes.

Table 2. Differences in photo-type based on gender according to the total number

Photo Type	Total (n)	Total (%)	F (n)	F(%)	M (n)	M (%)
Sport Life	77	58,3%	32	41,6%	45	58,4%
Personal Life	42	31,8%	27	64,3%	15	35,7%
COVID-19	12	9,1%	-	-	12	100,0%
Celebration	1	0,8%	1	100,0%	-	-
Total	132	100,0%	60	45,5%	72	54,5%

In Table 3, the percentage of athletes' photo-sharing was obtained from the total number of photos of their gender. When we look at the shares of the athletes over their gender total values, there are both differences and similarities (Table 3). Both female and male athletes shared the most common category was sports life photos. 32 (53.3%) of 60 photos of women and 45 (62.5 %) of 72 photos of men are about sports life. Both female and male athletes shared the second common category

was personal life photos. 27 (45.0 %) of 60 photos of women and 15 (20.8%) of 72 photos of men are about personal life. While female athletes did not share any photos for the COVID-19 pandemic, male athletes shared 12 photos. 12 (16.7%) of the total 72 photos of male athletes are about COVID 19. The clearest difference in terms of male and female athletes can be seen in the posts regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3. Differences in photo-type based on gender according to the total number of photo-type

Photo Type	F (n)	F (%)	M (n)	M (%)
Sport Life	32	53,3%	45	62,5%
Personal Life	27	45,0%	15	20,8%
COVID-19	-	-	12	16,7%
Celebration	1	1,7%	-	-
Total	60	100,0%	72	100,0%

We examined the captions used by the athletes with their Instagram photos. After analysis, six prominent themes emerged from the captions. The themes were used fairly equally between the genders; no theme emerged as being used predominantly by one gender over the other (Smith & Sanderson, 2015).

Qualitative

Being a Role Model During COVID-19

Many of the athletes shared events with the COVID-19 Pandemic and emphasized how much they carefully these times. Explanations such as stay home, stay healthy, stay still, keep move and keep your social distance are at the

forefront in the posts on this theme. For example, athletes posted these sentence:

“Build love bridges on your life#stayhomeTurkey#homeoffice#staysafe#stayhome#staypositive” (Female Olympic gymnast).

“For Good days, strong tomorrows #Stay home!” (Male Olympic cycling athlete).

The most important message athletes have highlighted through their Instagram shares during this period is the stay-at-home non-sports message. Olympic athlete in fencing posted, "Stay at home, don't stay without sport." In addition, athletes have shown their solidarity with people who are experiencing economic problems due to the COVID-19

pandemic. For example, Olympic athlete in cycling posted, "We cannot end the evils but we can duplicate the good." Moreover, they have motivated the community through online interviews. World gymnastics champion took part in a 'social solidarity' project in which elite level athletes participated due to the corona outbreak. "Happy tomorrows project under the same roof: I am very happy to be in this beautiful project with beautiful people, I believe it will be an enjoyable broadcast. It starts today at 16: 00. Don't miss out."

Dedicated Athlete for Postponed Olympics

Athletes posted an upbeat message reflect on the sacrifice was necessary to help keep people safe. Athletes advocating patience, and they underline that the date is different, but the goal is the same. They emphasize that this period provides an opportunity to prepare better. For example, male judo athlete shared "The date changes, the dream remains... #TOKYO2020 #2021" and female athlete postponed "#Roadtotokyo2021 what the dates matter after the destination is the peak." They stated that postponing the Olympic Games was the right decision not to spread the virus and that Turkey would be better prepared to participate in the games. Male cycling athlete commented, "Everything can be compensated, but health cannot be compensated! Priority Health! #Teamturkey as stronger, more ready to target #Tokyo2021"

Sports Life in Quarantine Days

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the athletes informed their followers about their training

programs at home and encouraged them to exercise at home as well. For example, cycling athlete shared, " You can work at home roles/Trainer Program: 30 minutes warm-up; 10*5 seconds sprint; 20 seconds rest between sprints. 15 min rest, 10 * 5 seconds sprint, 20 seconds rest between sprints, 30 min cooling off. You can continue for 45min/60min if you want. Stretching, feeding, and relaxing in the afternoon 1/1,5 hours of light driving or working at the gym within the facilities at home. I'll share different programs daily. We will also be working towards strength. Don't think too much about it as a start!

#StayhomeTurkey

#StayhomeDon'tstaywithoutsport."

In addition, they made comments that they missed their sporting lives before the quarantine. For example, female judo athlete posted, " I miss being in Tatami."

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study sought to examine eight Olympic athletes' Instagram account during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings serve as an important starting point for sport sociology researchers seeking to better understand athletes' use of Instagram during quarantine days to communicate with audiences. This result is closely related to social media allowing athletes to communicate directly with their followers (Geurin-Eagleman & Clavio, 2015; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012; Sanderson, 2008; Sanderson, 2013; 2014).

According to the results of the study, both female and male athletes shared the most sports life content photos during the pandemic period (58.3%). The type of photos that athletes share the most after their Sports life is private life photos (31.8%). Although athletes did not share many photos about the pandemic (9.1%) they made comments about the pandemic in their photo captions. This result, as Smith and Sanderson note, is associated with the fact that photography and writing about photography mean different things.

Some differences and similarities by gender have been revealed in athletes' Instagram shares during the pandemic process. If we look at the differences, for example, the shares for COVID-19 came from male athletes only. In addition, male athletes shared more photos than female athletes during this period (Table 2). When we look at the photos of female and male athletes within their respective gender categories, the photos of men's Sporting Life (58.4%) are higher than those of women's (41.6%). Private life photos of female athletes (58.4%) are more likely than male athletes (35.7%). These results were obtained from a total of 60 photos shared by women and a total of 72 photos shared by men. While some research analysing athletes' social media use by gender difference does not find a difference in social media use by gender (Burch et al., 2014; Geurin-Eagleman & Clavio, 2015; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2014), while others have revealed differences by gender (Geurin Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Lebel & Danylchuk,

2012; Smith & Sanderson, 2015). The results of this research coincide with previous research. The results of the study reveal that all athletes are role models to society in the pandemic process. Accordingly, athletes have urged their followers to stay home, stay safe, through photo captions. And they have made hopeful comments that these crisis days will soon pass. In addition, they shared detailed information about their training programs at home during the quarantine process and encouraged the community not to stay still, to exercise. They organized solidarity and relief campaigns with those who suffered from subsistence difficulties due to the pandemic. However, they have motivated their followers through online interviews. Finally, athletes have shared with the postponement of the Olympic Games due to the corona outbreak. They stated that this postponement was the right decision for human health and that this postponement was an opportunity to better prepare for the Olympics and encouraged the community to remain poetic. These results are consistent with research results that show that athletes have a positive role model in society. Both coincide with research results from Leng and Puha (2020) showing that athletes are role models through positive messages in the COVID-19 pandemic process.

As a result, this research shows that Turkish Olympic Athletes Try to make society positive, motivate them and give positive messages through Instagram shares during the pandemic process.

The results of this research open the door to new research questions for sports and social media studies. Future research, for example, could analyze the Instagram accounts of both athletes and sporting institutions in the pandemic process. Students will be able to make cross-country comparisons in athletes' messages to the community about the pandemic. The similarities and differences between athletes 'and sports institutions' use of Instagram in the period before pandemic and the pandemic process can be analyzed. This research is limited to the period studied and the athletes studied.

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