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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Using Social Media: A Breakthrough to Encourage Generation Z Athletes in Independent Training during the COVID-19 Pandemic

[1]Mustika Fitri*, [2]Saepul Anwar, [3]Muhamad Hanif Ramadhan

[1]Sport Science Study Program, Faculty of Sport and Health Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia. [2]Sport Education Study Program, Faculty of Sport and Health Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia. [3]Physical Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Bina Bangsa, Serang, Indonesia.

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ABSTRACT

Background. The coronavirus pandemic began to have an impact on sports and athletes following the postponement of some sporting events. This change causes serious damage to the quality and quantity of training, by further setting athletes apart from the reality of daily training and uncertainty about their future. **Objectives.** This research aims to give Generation Z athletes the freedom to use social media in the process of physical and mental exercises. Therefore, this study was designed to determine how Generation Z athletes are keeping up with their training routines by using social media. **Methods.** This is a qualitative study. This study aims to describe, explain, and describe a phenomenon that is accompanied by evidence from various sources that have been narrated into scientific form. The location of this research takes place in Bandung, Indonesia. Ten professional Generation Z athletes in Bandung, Indonesia were interviewed to explore the freedom of using social media while they are doing exercises at home. **Results.** The result of the research shows that the use of technology for Generation Z athletes in improvising the process of physical and mental exercise is flexible, where they have the freedom to use social media so that their training spirit remains consistent. **Conclusion.** The use of technology for Generation Z athletes in the covid-19 pandemic by utilizing various social media can explore information that is useful for themselves in maintaining physical fitness and mental stability in various forms of exercise variation.

KEYWORDS: ***COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, Generation Z Athletes, Physical Training, Mental Training, Social Media.***

INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, public health was in an emergency state because of the emergence of the 2019 coronavirus novel version of beta-coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China, which would become a worldwide epidemic with high death rates and many people infected by the virus (1). In three months, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. The number of cases and affected countries is still rapidly increasing with over 6 million confirmed cases in 216 countries across the entire world until the date of this writing. This shows that the transmission rate of COVID-19 is much higher than the SARS outbreak almost two decades ago and has caused the majority of sporting events to be suspended and/or postponed. The International Olympic Committee (IOC), along with the Japanese government, announced on 30 March 2020 that the 2020 Tokyo Olympics will be rescheduled to July 2021, whilst keeping the name of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Likewise,

*. Corresponding Author:
Mustika Fitri, Ph.D.
E-mail: mustikafitri@upi.edu

many countries now set Lockdowns, with people living in their homes to avoid contracting or sharing COVID-19 disease (2).

In the current conditions, which enact social distancing, the daily lifestyle and practices of sports participants, including athletes, must change or even stop due to the pandemic. For those who train, we need a new strategy on how we can anticipate teaching the sport's participants. In general, coaches tend to have to answer several questions related to their athletes, such as how to monitor their performance, injuries, and other factors about training despite the limited interaction and distance between the coach and the athlete, even only through a webcam and computer screen (3) In this context, the training routines of a large number of athletes, including baby boomers and Z generation, around the world have suddenly been disrupted. This change causes serious problems with the quality and quantity of training by further setting athletes apart from their reality of daily training and uncertainty about their future. Physical, technical, and psychological health is affected and cannot be avoided. For athletes, significantly reducing training and losing their physical performance capacity can mean a loss of competitiveness in competing in a competition. Thus, coaches, parents, and science scientists are challenged to help athletes deal with several aspects that are relevant during this pandemic.

This research focuses on the young Generation Z athlete. This is because young Generation Z is characterized by being the most educated generation in history and the first generation growing up in a fully digital environment, which has resulted in young Generation Z having excellent technological skills (4). Generation Z is the most ethnically and technologically sophisticated generation. Generation Z has informal, individual, straight communication, and social networking form an important part of their life. They are the Do-It-Yourself generation. Gould (4) also shows that although the generation changes tend to be more gradual and stable in the previous group (baby boomers, Gen X, millennials), many changes in the Gen Z generation have been much faster, one factor that he points out is the onset of Smartphone and the widespread use of Smartphones by this generation. The fast start of these changes may be a catch-on for adults, such as teachers and coaches, which, unfortunately, they are required to work with.

In every area of modern life aspect, the Z generation has known the existence of cellular media and cellular access to the Internet. This shows that young people interact with their smartphones for an average of three hours per day and are interested in using their mobile phones in 'any free time', especially during waiting or 'unscheduled time'. Many in the 18 to 34-year-old demographic reports run no more than an hour without checking their cell phones, and they are involved in sporadic checks in almost all environments, including when they wake up in the middle of the night while having meals, and even going to the restroom. In addition, I Gen represents a heavy group of 'media-multitasks', that is, they use several tools and device features to do many tasks at once (5).

Athletes are important and unique members of IGen. Apart from the overall research interest revealed in the use of smartphones and social media, there are only a few studies examining athletes who are using smartphones. The use of athletes from these devices is interesting because they must consistently perform at a high level (under pressure) and rely on well-perfected psychosocial skills that can be influenced by smartphone usage. However, their capacity to manage themselves optimally can be directly affected by the ability of the smartphone itself (6). Several studies have shown that there is potential for smartphones to facilitate a variety of self-regulating behaviors (7). This can be considered a positive implication of smartphone use, especially since self-regulation behavior is also positively related to learning, development, and performance in sports (8).

Based on that explanation this study aims to find a breakthrough to encourage Generation Z athletes in an independent training during the COVID-19 pandemic using social media. Barr (2016) states that behind the scenes are several things that go into that triumph and at the top is technology. Technology has been utilized in sports for many years in various forms and plays a particularly vital role, especially in elite sports. Cave and Miller (2015) state that technology plays an increasing role in assisting professional athletes to engage in the sport (9).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methods. This research is qualitative. This study aims to describe, explain, and describe a phenomenon that is accompanied

by evidence from various sources that have been narrated into scientific form. The location of this research takes place in Bandung, Indonesia. The unit of analysis of this study is individuals, namely Generation Z professional athletes as users of social media and the internet.

Participants. Generation Z athletes who were used as informants for this study were determined by the purposive sampling method of ten professional Generation Z athletes.

Data Collection. The data were collected through in-depth interviews, using guide interviews. A guided interview gives informants freedom to express opinions, views, thoughts, feelings, and life experiences without rules and coercion from researchers. Some of the questions that have been used by researchers can be shown in Figure 1. The aim is to allow the interviewees to freely define themselves and their environment by using their terms about the phenomenon under study. The guided interview was developed based on previous literature on individual Z-generation athletes themselves (4).

1. Name any social media that you frequently use for exercise!
2. For what exercise do you use those social media?
   A. Technical
   B. Physical
   C. Mental
3. How long do you usually use those social media?

Figure 1. Sample of Interview Questions

RESULTS

From the data obtained, it can be seen that of the 10 participants, 5 people (50%) use two social media, namely Instagram and YouTube, the remaining 3 people (30%) only use YouTube, social media and 2 people (20%) use Instagram social media for doing the exercises at home (Figure 2).

Based on the results of question 1, participants use Instagram social media more than YouTube. In general, this indicates that Instagram users are more popular among Generation Z.

From the data obtained, it can be seen that of the 10 participants as many as 3 people (30%) did Technical and Physical exercises, then as many as 2 people each (20%) did only Technical or Physical exercises, and the rest 1 person each (10 %) doing Technical & Mentally or Physical & Mentally exercises, or all three (Technical, Physical, & Mentally) (Figure 3).

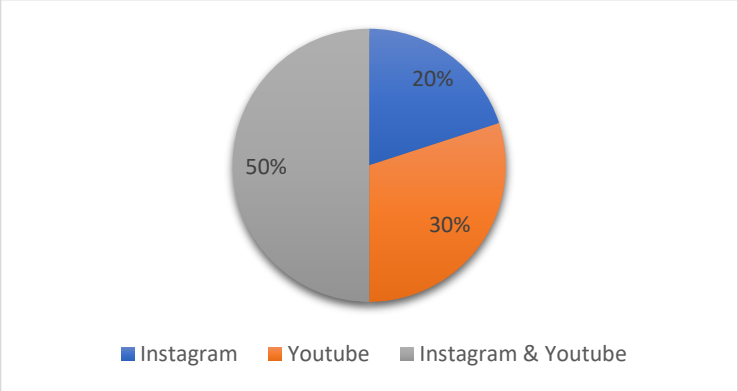

Figure 2. Question 1. Name any social media that you frequently use for exercise.

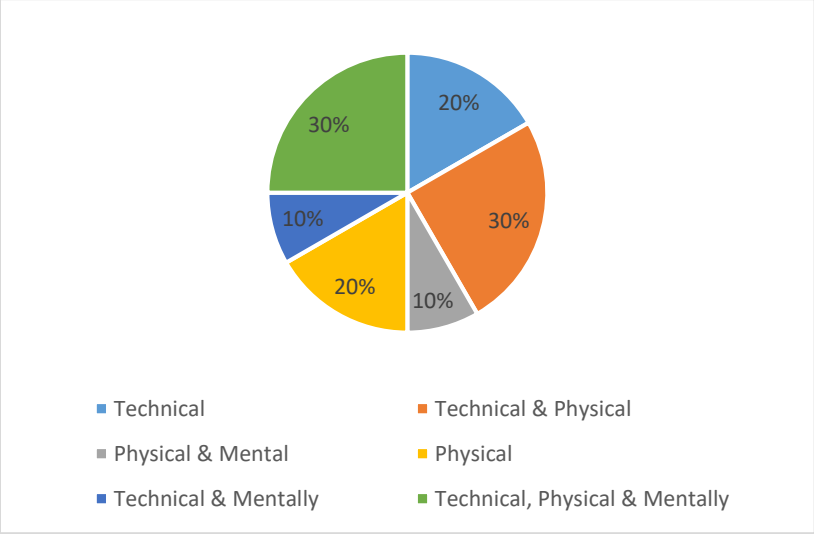

Figure 3. Question 2. For what exercise do you those social media? Technical, Physical, Mental**?**

Based on the results of question 2, participants used social media more to look for technical and physical exercise methods compared to looking for other exercise methods. This shows that technical and physical training is more important for Generation Z athletes during a pandemic.

From the data obtained, it can be seen that out of 10 participants, 4 people each (40%) did the exercises at home through social media for 2 hours/day or 3 hours/day, and the remaining 2 people (20%) did the exercise for 4 hours/day (Figure 4).

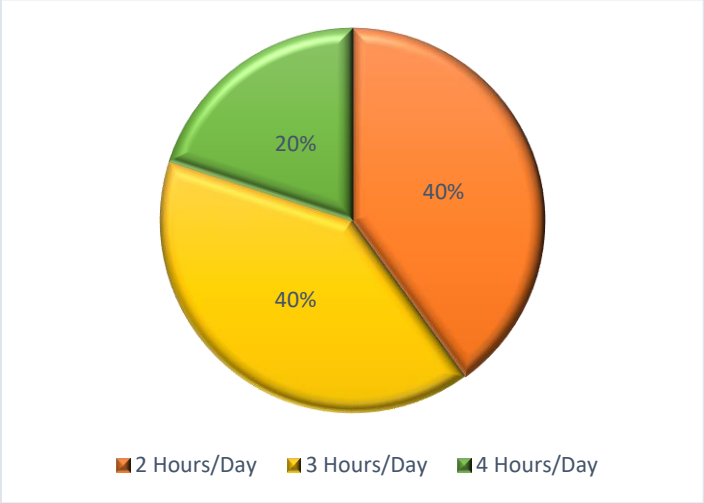

Figure 4. Question 3. How long do you usually use those social media?

Based on question 3, participants spent a lot of time playing social media for 2-3 hours/day.

The Role of social media for Generation Z Athletes. Generally, social media refers to communication tools between people where they can create, share and exchange information on internet networks. In addition, social media are also interpreted as a form of computerized mediated communication, such as email and online conversations that allow users to exchange content via the internet (10).

Social media has become an important part of modern society because it can be accessed by anyone with an internet connection or cell phone. Social media has also grown rapidly, and by 2018, 68% of U.S. adults use Facebook regularly (11). Other forms of social media include websites and applications (YouTube, Instagram, etc.) that are

designed to enable people to share content quickly, efficiently, and in real-time (12).

Social media has provided great benefits for young athletes, such as showing community service projects participated by athletes, attending school events for children in their city, and sharing team videos with their networks. Social media also allows the creation of private brands and allows young athletes to promote themselves and their schools to their followers, which is very good for them and their colleges/universities (12).

Participant 4 explained, "When the condition of the Covid-19 pandemic took place, social media became one of the most important sources of information for me. I can see my Instagram and Twitter idols like Cristiano Ronaldo and Neymar who still do exercises at home even in social distancing conditions. Therefore, encouraging me to keep doing exercises at home".

Maintaining Physical Conditions. At this time, routine maintenance of exercise is important for physical health (13). Regular exercise helps increase and maintain immunity which is important to reduce the risk of getting the virus infections. Thus, professional trainers, in the present possibility, must develop regular training for their athletes. Despite ongoing discussions about the effects of acute exercise intensity, this pandemic period requires caution and warning to not overdo exercises (not exceeding the total volume of training sessions), so that the accumulation of training load does not cause interference with the immune system and/or signs excessive exercise load (for example, skin irritation, sore throat, nasal discharge, and sleep disturbance) (14).

Another reason for staying physically active is to minimize the detraining effect and to facilitate a return to normal routines after the 'lockdown' at home. During this pandemic period, competitions and sporting events were suspended, and the date of return for many of this competition was uncertain. Considering the negative economic impact of this pandemic, it is likely that these events will continue shortly after the end of the 'lockdown'. Therefore, athletes mustn't experience a sharp decrease in physical fitness. In this sense, several studies have shown that periods without exercise cause a decrease in aerobic fitness, muscle strength, sprint performance, flexibility, and physiological adaptation in athletes from various sports (15).

For maintaining the condition during 'lockdown' at home, athletes may include training in the possibility of physical space and availability of the equipment (e.g., barbells, weight plates, dumbbells, kettlebells, and ribbons). In this case, if another family member uses the same equipment, cleaning the equipment after use, followed by disinfection using disinfectant to kill viruses on the surface is an important practice for the prevention of COVID-19 in the household. For those without equipment, regular exercise without equipment (e. g. jogging, squats, burpees, push-ups, sit-ups, and stretching) might be a good choice (16).

Participant 10 said, "With the condition of social distancing which requires me to stay at home, it does not prevent me from preserving my training program. Then I combine my exercise program with the ones that I found on the internet so my exercise program will be exciting and remain useful." Likewise, Participant 2 said, "Smartphones really helped me in doing the various exercises and I sometimes found new training methods that I didn't get from the coach. With the help of a smartphone, there is a lot of information that I can get".

Mental Health. Maintaining health conditions by doing daily exercises can also help reduce tension and stress from social distancing because negative life events affect the mental health of elite athletes (17). Sudden changes in their daily routine, the enactment of lockdown, and the uncertainty about when to return to normal activities can cause athletes to experience conditions that affect their mental health; Such as external sources of distress, including financial problems, bad daily news, and internal sources of distress, such as worrying about their performance when they return, and tension due to routine changes. This period can cause negative feelings such as anxiety, depression, and bad behavior, such as alcohol use and smoking, as well as eating and sleep disorders (18).

In this case, to deal with possible emotional problems during social distancing at home, coaches, trainers, conditioning, and athletes must pay attention to identifying and managing these experiences and seeking social assistance and support when needed. Such as meditation, mindfulness, body scans, and deep breathing, are also recommended (16).

Participant 8 said, "During the initial implementation of the PSBB (large-scale social restrictions) in Indonesia, I was very surprised by what happened and I was very confused about it. Training programs, learning techniques, physical,

tactics, and even mental training are also all over the place. But, over time I found the right solution to overcome this. Like doing relaxation activities using social media and playing games."

Based on the respondents above, it is indicated that by using technology, generation Z athletes can eliminate boredom and restore their moods to normal. So, they get their spirit back to do the exercise following the portion given by the trainer.

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to determine the condition of Generation Z athletes using social media with their physical and mental concerns. As well as obstacles and strategies such as what they do so that they can improve and develop their training in this current condition of the COVID-19 pandemic. 10 Participants were interviewed. What alteration did they do to improve the performance of the exercise through social media at the time of the pandemic? This shows that it is very helpful for athletes to develop mental toughness and endurance skills which are the most important and something that has been the focus of studies by sports psychology researchers (19).

The results of studies conducted show that the use of technology for Generation Z athletes in improvising the process of physical and mental training is flexible, where they have the freedom to use social media so that their training spirit remains consistent. This tends to contradict previous studies where athletes do not have the freedom to use technology that supports their training. This is because, during the COVID-19 pandemic, athletes practiced independently without the presence of a coach.

The freedom of using social media athletes to stabilize physical and mental training resulting them tending to use social media Instagram in which there is content in the form of variations of exercises that are preferred by their idols to maintain physical fitness and mental stability. This is similar to previous research which states that everyone can share content or information quickly, efficiently, and in real time by using various social media specifically in the form of Instagram (12).

The freedom of using social media athletes is supported by technological facilities provided by the athletes' parents. The form of support provided by the athletes' parents indicates that it is their responsibility in guiding their children to maintain physical fitness and mental stability in the form of exercise during the pandemic covid-19 period. This is in line with previous research which says that in social distancing conditions, most parents provide support in the form of technological facilities for their children to be physically active. Thus, the application of technology for Generation Z athletes is very useful for maintaining physical fitness and mental stability in social distancing situations during COVID-19.

CONCLUSION

The use of technology for Generation Z athletes in the covid-19 pandemic by utilizing various social media can explore information that is useful for themselves in maintaining physical fitness and mental stability in various forms of exercise variation.

Coaches should maximize the use of smartphones not only when there is a virus pandemic, but it shall also be able to be used sustainably after this pandemic ends. In addition, the Coach should set clear explanations about the time when to and not to use a smartphone. Likewise, athletes should maximize the use of smartphones to find information from social media that will be a partner as long as the trainer is not nearby. Coaches can use social media to communicate with athletes and provide feedback on their performance. This can include providing tips and advice on training techniques, sharing videos of correct forms, and answering questions that athletes may have. Coaches can use social media to research new training techniques and stay up-to-date on the latest trends in the industry. This can help them to develop new training plans and provide the best possible guidance to their athletes.

Social media can be used to motivate athletes by sharing success stories, inspiring quotes, and encouraging messages. Coaches can also create challenges and competitions on social media to keep athletes engaged and motivated. Social media can be used to track an athlete's progress over time. Coaches can use platforms like Instagram and YouTube to document an athlete's progress by sharing videos and photos of their training sessions. This can also help athletes see the results of their hard work and stay motivated. Social media can be used to connect athletes with other athletes who are training for similar events. This can provide a sense of community and support, as well as opportunities for sharing tips and training techniques.

It's important to note that while social media can be a useful tool for athletic training, it should not replace in-person coaching and training. Social media should be used as a supplement to traditional training methods, not as a replacement.

APPLICABLE REMARKS

- Social media can be a useful tool for athletic training.
- Coaches can use social media to research new training techniques and stay up-to-date on the latest trends in the industry.
- Social media is used as a supplement to traditional training methods, not as a replacement.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Study concept and design: Mustika Fitri. Acquisition of data: Saepul Anwar. Analysis and interpretation of data: All Authors. Drafting of the manuscript: Muhamad Hanif Ramadhan. Critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content: Mustika Fitri. Statistical analysis: Saepul Anwar. Administrative, technical, and material support: Muhamad Hanif Ramadhan. Study supervision: Mustika Fitri.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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