

Impact of Social Media on Athletes' Minds

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I. INTRODUCTION

Social media is a big part of life for almost everyone today, including athletes. It gives them a platform to connect with their fans, sharing achievements, raising awareness, building their image, and brand-building opportunities, etc. Sometimes it might seem fun and exciting, but being in spotlight all the time can be really stressful because they are judged by millions of people around the world, and one bad season can lead to harsh criticism, bullying, and racism. This can lead to anxiety and stress. Recent stories about footballer **Lucas Vázquez** and cricketer **Rishab Pant** have shown how even famous personalities can struggle with mental health. This shows how social media can ruin your mental health and performance.

II. POSITIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Support from Fans and Followers

One of the biggest benefits of social media for athletes is the support from their fans. Positive comments, encouraging messages and support from followers can make an athlete feel more appreciated. This type of support can boost their confidence and give them motivation to keep pushing forward after a bad game or injury.

Sharing Personal Journeys

Athletes can post about their personal experience with injury, mental health or loss. It also helps normalize struggle and recovery, making it easier for athletes to accept their own emotions and seek help. It also helps young athletes who follow their role models that a downfall in their career is a natural part of their journey.

Raising Money for Good Causes

As athletes are famous personalities with millions of followers. They often use their social media to raise funds for good causes. By sharing donation links or starting campaigns, they can help people in need who are suffering from any loss or disease. For example, footballer Marcus Rashford used Twitter to help children in the UK get free school meals. His efforts showed how powerful athletes can be when they use their voice for good.

Celebrating Achievements and Milestones

Sharing achievements like scoring a goal, winning a medal, or reaching a personal best. Positive comments can help athletes to stay motivated and confident. It also inspires young generation to do hard work if they really want to achieve something in life.

Promoting Balance and Life Outside of Sports

Athletes can share parts of their life which are not related to sports like cooking, travelling, any hobby or spending time with family. It helps the athlete feel more balanced and reminds them that it's okay to relax and enjoy other things.

III. NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Online hate and trolling

One of the biggest challenges that athletes face is online hate. When athletes perform bad in a game or make any mistake. Athletes face a lot of hate on social media, like racism, threats, or sexist remarks. Such abuse affects the athlete's mental health, anxiety, and loneliness. It also affects their physical health, due to which they are unable to perform in the game, and at last they give up.

Example: Marcus Rashford (2020 Euro Final)

Marcus Rashford faced a lot of racial abuse after missing the penalty in Euro 2020 final. He faced a lot of criticism, racial comments, and death threats. This kind of hate made him less confident, but he made a great comeback in 2022 for Manchester United.

Too Much Pressure to Be Perfect

Social media can make athlete feel like they always have to be perfect. They may feel pressure to look good, win every game or to perform in every game. As they are followed by millions of people around the world, one small mistake can lead to a negative impact on their careers.

Example: PRITHVI SHAW

Prithvi Shaw was an incredibly talented player who broke many records at a very young age. But over past few years, he has faced a lot of hate on social media because of late-night parties, fitness concerns, and questions around discipline. Instead of working on his potential, many people highlight his lifestyle. This shows how quickly people judge other people. This shows how one small mistake can lead to the downfall.

Unfair Comparison with Others

On social media, athletes often see posts of other athletes who are performing in a match, winning games, and breaking world records. This makes them feel like they are not well prepared, even though they are working hard. These unfair comparisons can lower their confidence and sometimes they are even depressed. It's easy to forget that most people only post the good parts of their lives, not the struggles or failures.

Example: Lionel Messi vs. Cristiano Ronaldo

Messi and Ronaldo have been compared for over a decade. While both are legends, the constant social media debates and fan fights put extreme pressure on them to always perform better than the other. This affected their performance in the World Cup and Champions League.

Toxic Fan Culture

While some fans are supportive, others can be negative. When athletes are not performing well or after a bad game, some athletes get rude comments, threats, and even they abuse their family members. It can make athletes feel anxious, upset, or even scared to speak or post online. We sometimes forget that athletes are human beings just like us, everyone has bad days. Poor performance, mistakes, and losses are a part of the sport. So, it's our responsibility to create a good environment on social media so that athletes can feel more confident and can focus on their upcoming games.

Example: Harry Maguire 2022

Maguire has often been targeted with online jokes and insults, especially after poor performances in Manchester United. In 2022, he received a bomb threat at his home after being criticized by fans.

Family Members Also Targeted

Sometimes, toxic fans also target the family members of athlete. Angry or toxic fans may send death threats or bad comments to an athlete partner and family member. this kind

of behaviour brings a lot of stress on athlete and can make athletes feel unsafe and helpless, knowing their loved ones are being dragged into the spotlight.

Example David Beckham (England)

After missing a penalty in 1998 World Cup for England, Beckham received a lot of criticism from his fans. Even his family members got death threats. The emotional impact was so strong that Beckham later spoke about how it affected both him and his loved ones

IV. REAL LIFE EXAMPLES

1. Bukayo Saka, Marcus Rashford, and Jadon Sancho (Euro 2020)

In 2020, England lost the Euro final against Italy in penalties, where Saka, Rashford and Sancho missed their penalty, and shortly after that, they received millions of racist comments and death threats. This incident deeply affected their mental health. Saka said that he was heartbroken and depressed. Rashford mentioned feeling like he had let the country down. This shows how social media can turn into toxic space for athletes.

2. Lionel Messi (Copa America Final 2016)

In 2016, Argentina lost the Copa America final against Chile in penalties, where Messi missed an important penalty for Argentina. Just after the final received so criticism on social media. Many people said that he was not good enough to lead Argentina, even though he had already achieved so much in his career. Just after this criticism, Messi decided to take retirement from international football by saying, "My thinking right now, and thinking about it in the locker room, I'm done playing with the national team.". But later he changed his decision and returned to international football. This shows how social media pressure can impact their decisions.

3. MD Shami (2021 World Cup)

Mohammed Shami was criticized a lot during the Champions Trophy 2025. The 34-year-old MD Shami was seen drinking an energy drink during the semi-final clash against Australia. Shami's cousin, Mumtaz, came out in support of his brother, saying that he is playing for the country and calling the people "shameful" for blaming the cricketer for not keeping the "Roza." Shami played an invaluable role in India's victory, returning with figures of 3/48 in 10 overs, and climbed to the second spot in the list of highest wicket-takers.

4. Arshdeep Singh – Online Abuse After Dropped Catch (Asia Cup 2022)

After dropping a crucial catch against Pakistan and India lost that match. Arshdeep faced a lot of hate on social media people started calling him Khalistani. Some people even trolled him on his religion and nationality. But Arshdeep stayed calm and he is just focused on his bowling. Later in 2023, he made a strong comeback in the IPL. Now he is one of the best bowlers in the world. This shows how social media can be very dangerous, one dropped catch led to hate and threats.

V. CONCLUSION

Social media plays an important role in an athlete's life. It helps them to stay connected with their fans, they can share their achievements, build their image etc. but sometimes it also becomes the place of hate, mental pressure, and judgement. Through the examples of athletes like **Rashford, Messi, Prithvi Shaw, Arshdeep Singh**, and many others, we see that even the most talented player is deeply affected by the hate from the people. This kind of negativity can hurt an athlete's mental health and confidence. Athletes are human too, and constant online hate can make their lives very difficult. While it's okay to give opinions about a game, people should not cross the line by attacking players personally.

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