MEDIA AND YOUTHS' PERCEPTION OF SPORTS: THE REALITY SHAPED ON SCREEN

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Abstract

This study aims to examine young people's perceptions of sports through media and to explore how media influences these perceptions. Conducted within the scope of qualitative research, the study follows a phenomenological design. The sample consists of 11 volunteer youths living in Vezirköprü who actively use media and engage in sports. Data were collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews based on a form developed by the researchers, including nine questions. Audio recordings were taken to ensure data reliability. The analysis revealed that media content related to athlete profiles, influencer lifestyles, national athletes, personal progress in sports, clothing, achievements, routines, and dietary habits significantly affects youths' motivation to engage in sports. Participants reported that they tend to imitate or take inspiration from those they follow, adopt a more disciplined lifestyle, are influenced by female athletes' success, and consider athletes' educational lives as role models. Moreover, most participants expressed that they critically assess the information they encounter on social media. Traditional media was viewed as more controlled and limited in interaction and information, while social media was perceived as more open to exploration, dynamic, and enjoyable.

Keywords: Perception, Media, Media and sport, Social media.

INTRODUCTION

Sport is an enjoyable and educational activity performed individually or in groups, generally within the framework of competition, governed by its own rules, and aimed at enhancing a person's mental and physical development (Atasoy & Kuter, 2005). Akkoyunlu (1996) defines sport as a physical competition involving various challenges, representing the human spirit's effort and passion for victory within a system of order and fairness. Additionally, sport can be described as a systematic set of

activities designed to improve anatomical and physiological functions, enhance muscle and joint capabilities, and optimize overall physical performance. Furthermore, the literature indicates that sport serves as a practical method with the potential to develop social skills and improve quality of life (Çufadar, 2025).

Sport supports the personal development of young people by enabling them to set goals through positive experiences. It has also been stated that active participation in sports enhances academic achievement, develops leadership skills, and boosts self-esteem, among other positive outcomes (Aykara & Albayrak, 2016). Sport not only teaches young individuals bodily development and motor skills but also contributes significantly to personality formation. Through sporting activities, young people discover their self-confidence, improve motivation, and strengthen attention and focus. Moreover, they acquire characteristic traits such as team integration, coping with success and failure in competitive environments, and adhering to principles of fairness during activities (Avcı & Afacan, 2016).

Linguistically, the term "media" originates from the Latin word "medium." In Latin, "medium" means medium or means, and in contemporary usage, the plural form "media" is employed. Media encompasses communication tools with visual and auditory features that fulfill essential functions such as informing, educating, and guiding individuals or communities through the transmission of various information (Vardarlıer & Zafer, 2019). This concept refers to a mechanism that delivers multiple messages to diverse socio-demographic groups in accordance with its own publishing principles, transmitting the formatted communications of the medium unilaterally (Necla, 2008).

As in the rest of the world, individuals in our country use most traditional and modern mass communication tools to meet their needs for news, information, entertainment, and education (Kıran, 2021). The rise of alienation, violent behavior, sexually focused attitudes, substance addiction, indifference, and lack of goal-setting among today's youth is largely influenced by media tools (Can, 2015). Technological literacy plays a crucial role in social media usage (Aktulun & Elmas, 2019). Due to its continuous update capability and easy accessibility, social media currently stands as one of the most effective communication platforms. Through these platforms, individuals express

their thoughts and share diverse visual and auditory content. Social media, with its variety of tools, also serves as a powerful mass communication resource supporting efficient learning and teaching processes (Öztürk & Talas, 2015). It is evident that social media will continue to function as a functional tool in education in the future as it does today. Catering to individuals of all ages and education levels, social media is important for its free access, widespread use, ease of accessibility, contribution to social cooperation, enhancement of peer interaction, and provision of more flexible educational opportunities. Moreover, social media introduces various approaches to learning and assessment, supports research processes, and can be utilized without institutional support from universities or similar entities, making it a valuable educational tool (Sarsar, Başbay & Başbay, 2015).

Media holds a powerful role in the development of sport as a social structure. From a profit-oriented perspective, it is evident that sport significantly contributes to mass communication tools. In essence, sport and media are mutually influential dynamics. The impact of both sport on media and media on sport cannot be overlooked. Sport relies on media support as a field that reaches and influences large audiences (Güler & Demir, 1995). In today's world, where visuality is paramount, the shaping of sport according to the demands of media has become inevitable. Media organizes sport to serve its own interests without causing problems, focusing largely on the emotional aspect and advertising potential due to commercial concerns, viewership rates, and sales pressure (Demir, 2024). Additionally, media plays an important role in introducing, promoting, and disseminating sport. Through media channels, many individuals become aware of sports branches they had never noticed or known about before, gain information about them, and watch these sports. Over time, this interaction fosters curiosity and attachment to a particular sport, turning it into a continuously followed area (Kaçar & Kara, 2024).

In the contemporary world, media, especially television, internet, and social media platforms, plays a significant role in shaping young individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors regarding sport. Sports content and athlete profiles presented on these platforms not only promote sport but also influence and shape youths' perceptions of sport. On media platforms where visual elements are emphasized, sport is often

presented as a commercial tool centered on competition and high visual appeal. This situation causes young people to perceive sport primarily as a visual and entertainment medium, neglecting its values such as health, discipline, team spirit, and personal development. Therefore, examining how young people's sports perceptions are shaped through media is crucial for understanding societal perspectives on sport and socio-cultural parameters. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to investigate the impact of sports content and athlete profiles in the media on young people's perceptions of sport.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The execution of this study was approved by the Amasya University Social Sciences Ethics Committee with the decision number 108.01-260719.

Research Design

This study was conducted within the scope of qualitative research methods. Qualitative research has a flexible and interpretative structure that deeply examines the meaning of social phenomena. This structure provides both creativity and methodological consistency to the researcher (Dayanan Uğur & Saylık, 2025). The study employs the phenomenological design, which is one of the qualitative research patterns. Phenomenological research aims to understand the essence of individuals' lived experiences (Van Manen, 2007).

Population and Sample

The population of the study consists of young people aged 18 and above. The sample group includes 11 voluntary young individuals living in the Vezirköprü district who actively use media and participate in sports. Purposeful sampling, a type of criterion sampling, was used in the research. This sampling method aims to select samples directly related to the research problem by including objects, situations, or individuals with certain characteristics (Güvenç & Özdemir, 2025). The criterion in this study was the active use of media tools by the youth.

Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview approach was used for data collection. Face-to-face interviews were conducted using semi-structured forms (with 9 questions) developed by the researchers. The open-ended questions in semi-structured interview forms allow individuals to express their feelings, thoughts, and experiences in their own words (Güvenç & Özdemir, 2025). Additionally, open-ended questions provide flexibility in meaning. The semi-structured questions developed by the researchers are as follows:

1. How effective are famous athletes or influencers active on social media in directing young people towards sports?

2. Do the profiles and posts of athletes and influencers in the media affect young people's perceptions (nutrition, work life, education, etc.)?

3. To what extent does media influence young people's sources of sports information (nutrition, injury, pain, knowledge, comments, etc.)? Do you question or research the information?

4. Do sports success stories presented on social and visual media encourage young people to engage in active sports? Do they increase their motivation?

5. How do sports-related news and the language used impact young people's perspective on sports?

6. Do you normalize these negative attitudes, or do you interpret them as unethical behavior? Please explain.

7. Do negative news in the media (violence, doping, unethical behaviors) negatively affect young people's perceptions of sports? Please explain.

8. What differences exist between social media and traditional media (TV, newspaper, radio) regarding sports perception? For example, does traditional media provide more detailed information while social media offers more entertaining and superficial content?

9. How do young people's media consumption habits related to sports influence their participation in physical activities? (Does media consumption lead to social media addiction or encourage more engagement in sports?)

Data Collection and Analysis

The study was conducted using the interview method, which is among qualitative data collection tools. To prevent data loss during interviews, audio recordings were made.

The transcribed data were analyzed using the Nvivo software. Through content analysis, themes and codes were created. Codes were assigned to appropriate themes and reported accordingly.

RESULTS

Information related to the qualitative data analysis results is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participants

	Age	Gender	Income Level	Educational status	Sports Participation Level	Preferred Media Tool	Media Usage Time
K1	25	Male	Middle	High school	Professional	İnstagram	3-4 hours
K2	21	Male	Middle	Associate Degree	Amateur	İnstagram	6-7 hours
K3	21	Male	Middle	Associate Degree	Amateur	İnstagram	8-12 hours
K4	20	Male	Middle	Associate Degree	Amateur	İnstagram	6-7 hours
K5	20	Female	Middle	Associate Degree	Professional	X	4-5 hours
K6	22	Female	Middle	Associate Degree	Amateur	İnstagram	4-5 hours
K7	24	Male	Middle	Associate Degree	Amateur	İnstagram	1-2 hours
K8	25	Male	Middle	Bachelor's Degree	Amateur	İnstagram-TW	1-2 hours
K9	24	Male	Middle	Bachelor's Degree	Amateur	Facebook	7 hours
K10	23	Male	Middle	Bachelor's Degree	Amateur	İnstagram	3-4 hours

K11	23	Male	Middl e	Bachelor's Degree	Amateur	Youtube	2-3 hours

Table 1 presents information about the participants. The study was conducted with a total of 11 individuals, including 2 females and 9 males. Most participants preferred Instagram as their media platform, held an associate degree, and engaged in sports at an amateur level. The age range of the participants varied between 20 and 25 years, and they spent between at least 1-2 hours and at most 8-12 hours on social media.

Table 2. The Influence of Famous Athletes or Influencers on Encouraging Youth to Participate in Sports on Social Media

Name	Node Type	Coded Words	Coded Text
Encouragement to Sport	Node	36	Football player profiles
			Their bodybuilding
			Their healthy nutrition
			Their lives
			National athletes
			Their self-care
			Their approaches
			Their achievements
			Sharing their development
			Their sports routines
			National athlete achievements
			Training videos
			Their working lives
			Their outfits
			Professional athletes

Table 2 presents information regarding the influence of famous athletes or influencers on encouraging youth to participate in sports on social media. Analysis of the data revealed that participants stated factors such as athlete profiles, the lives of influencers, national athletes, sharing their progress in sports, clothing, achievements, routines, and

sharing their nutrition habits play an effective role in motivating youth to engage in sports.

Table 3. The Impact of Athlete Profiles and Influencers' Posts in the Media on Youth Perceptions

Name	Node Type	Coded Words	Coded Text
Perception	Node	15	Encouraging
			Being motivated
			Role modeling
			Achievements of female athletes
			Attracting attention
			Imitating
			Disciplined lifestyle
			Education

Table 3 presents participants' views on the impact of athlete profiles and influencers' posts in the media on young people's perceptions. Analysis of the data revealed that participants stated the videos caught their interest, they tended to imitate, occasionally modeled the athletes' educational lives, adopted a disciplined lifestyle, and were influenced by the successes of female athletes.

Table 4. The status of questioning information in the media

Name	Node Type	Coded Words	Coded Text
Information	Node	68	If I have knowledge, I do not question it
			I verify the accuracy from 5 to 6 sources
			I easily access information from the internet
			I research through social media
			I use trial and error method
			I look up words I do not know
			I research things that catch my attention

			I learn first, then research
			I always question
			There can be many false news
			I consult experts

Table 4 presents participants' views on the extent to which they question information in the media. Analysis of the data shows that the majority of participants (9 participants) stated that they question the information they obtain from social media; while other participants expressed that if they have prior knowledge on the topic, they do not question it, and one participant indicated using trial and error as a method.

Table 5. The effect of traditional media and social media on sports perception

Name	Node Type	Coded Words	Coded Text
Traditional and social media	Node	53	Traditional media is more rigid
			Traditional media language is formal
			Traditional media is insincere
			Social media is entertaining
			Traditional media is limited
			Social media is open to research
			Social media is more superficial
			Social media is cost-free
			Traditional media is regulated
			Traditional media is limited and controlled
			Interaction in traditional media is difficult

Table 5 presents participants' opinions on the impact of traditional and social media on sports perception. Analysis of the data revealed that the majority of participants (10 participants) stated that traditional media is more controlled, more limited in terms of information, and interaction is more difficult, while social media is more open to research and entertaining. Another participant (1 participant) expressed the view that social media provides more superficial information and is cost-free.

Table 6. Negative aspects of media consumption habits

Name	Node Type	Coded Words	Coded Text
Negative aspects	Node	49	Addictiveness
			Disconnecting from life
			Constant phone use
			Affecting daily tasks
			Not having time for surroundings
			Forming habits
			Not influencing
			Athlete comments
			Procrastinating life
			Desire to become famous
			Unconscious screen time
			Watching engaging videos for hours
			Desire to share every action
			Desire to earn easy money
			Adopting a sedentary lifestyle

Table 6 presents participant views on the negative aspects of media consumption habits. Analysis of the data revealed that the majority of participants (8 participants) stated that social media has negative effects such as postponing daily tasks, desire to become famous, watching videos for hours, desire to make easy money, the urge to share every action, inability to spend time with surroundings, adopting a sedentary lifestyle, and inappropriate language used by sports commentators. Meanwhile, other participants (3 participants) expressed that these issues have no impact on them and that with proper planning, everything can continue as routine.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This section of the study presents the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the obtained data.

In the study, it was determined that footballer profiles, the lives of influencers, national athletes, sharing of development processes in sports, their clothing, achievements, routines, and nutrition habits are effective in the tendency to engage in sports. These findings suggest that the posts shared by well-known figures in the sports world have a significant impact on young people's motivation to engage in sports. Additionally, providing information related to areas of interest and the desire to be like them contribute to starting and continuing sports activities.

When the literature is examined, there are various studies that show similarities or differences with this study in terms of topic and scope. For example, in a study conducted by Bilim (2020), it is stated that guidance through identification and mass media tools such as media and television are effective in people's initiation to sports. Moreover, media tools like television play an important role in introducing sports to societies and educating and guiding individuals through sports channels. Additionally, well-known and respected athlete profiles have a significant influence on people's orientation and initiation to sports (Bilim, 2020). Furthermore, a study by Tian et al. (2023) expresses that success stories and training routines of athletes shared on social media increase young people's interest in sports. Research by Weber et al. (2022) concluded that sharing athletes' successes and training on social media positively affects the motivation of especially young female athletes.

It was found that participants who follow athletes and influencers tend to imitate them, take athletes as role models, adopt a disciplined lifestyle, are influenced by the achievements of female athletes, and emulate their educational lives. These findings reveal that individuals who regularly follow athletes and influencers not only imitate and model them but also adopt their lifestyles and disciplinary approaches as role models. Furthermore, as young people identify themselves with these figures, they exhibit similar behaviors, imitate their educational lives and achievements, which increases their orientation towards sports and positively contributes to their development processes. For example, young people can shape their behaviors by observing and imitating their surroundings. In other words, the content they watch in the media can affect their behaviors positively or negatively. Sometimes, young people immediately adapt to the attitudes, situations, and behaviors conveyed through

messages in the content they watch in the media (Üstündağ, 2019). Indeed, as a result of this reciprocal interaction, individuals tend to imitate the behavior and consumption style of the character they identify with (Pelikli & Özkaya, 2025). For instance, Mürütsoy and Toksarı (2021) found that young people take the lifestyles of athletes they follow on social media as examples. Additionally, research by Alqefari et al. (2024) concluded that young people see athletes and influencers they follow on social media as role models.

Most participants stated that they question the information they acquire on social media, while perceiving traditional media as more controlled, offering more limited information and less interaction, and considering social media as more open to research and entertaining. This finding reveals that young people perceive media tools differently. In other words, in this study, young people found social media more attractive, entertaining, and open for accessing information; on the other hand, they viewed traditional media as limited in information access. Therefore, they stated that they find social media more advantageous due to the opportunities it offers. The literature includes various studies with similarities or differences to this finding. For example, individuals who share event results on social media platforms can receive support and feedback, which not only contributes to increasing their motivation but also enables them to be part of social support structures (Aydemir, 2024). On social media, celebrities, politicians, various companies, and public institutions have the opportunity to communicate directly and without intermediaries with their audiences. This allows them to respond quickly and easily to questions and criticisms from their audiences (Öztürk & Talas, 2015). In the literature, for example, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) found that social media users take a more active role compared to others. Kietzmann et al. (2011) stated that unlike traditional media, social media provides two-way interaction and creates strong communities among users.

Finally, it was determined that most participants view social media as causing negative situations such as procrastination of daily tasks, desire to be famous, watching videos for hours, inappropriate language use by sports commentators, desire to earn money easily, sharing every action, lack of time for the environment, and adoption of a sedentary lifestyle. This finding suggests that long-term interaction with social media

can lead to negative habits in individuals. Prolonged time spent on social media may lead individuals to adopt unhealthy lifestyles, pursue unrealistic goals, and experience negative role modeling through language use. In this respect, the findings show that poor-quality time spent on social media can result in individual and societal problems. The literature reveals similar or differing findings on this subject. Parents state that due to children's unconscious use of social media tools, they face problems such as losing daily routines, financial losses, academic failures, wasting excessive time, and spreading misinformation acquired from incorrect learning sources. All these negativities make children's lives more difficult (Çelik, Çelik & Aydın, 2019). Furthermore, sedentary or inactive times unknowingly spent with social media tools in digital environments are known to have negative effects on individuals' mental, physical, and psychosocial health. Insufficient social stimulation caused by media intensity emerging from technological devices and children's lack of adequate physical activity in their environment inevitably leads to abnormal developmental outcomes (Akbulut, 2013). For example, Andreassen (2015) found that social media addiction causes problems with time management, disruption of daily tasks, and negative psychological outcomes. Kuss & Griffith (2017) determined that excessive social media use is associated with sedentary lifestyle and low academic performance among youth. Additionally, Huang (2017) expressed that excessive social media use negatively affects psychological health.

Based on the analysis of the obtained data, the following recommendations are presented:

- The number of media literacy courses in educational stages should be increased to control and guide the negative effects of social media on young people in the desired direction.
- Functional monitoring mechanisms should be established to ensure that the language used by athlete profiles and influencers on both social and traditional media is positive, constructive, and complies with ethical rules.
- Awareness-raising activities should be conducted at all educational levels, especially primary education, to increase consciousness about social media use.

- Families and educational institutions should work on directing young people's perceptions toward physical activities to protect them from the negative effects of social media.

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