Original Article

How Social Media Enforces Athlete Accountability in Sport?

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B. Acquisition of data
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Abstract. This study aims to explore how social media enforces athlete accountability through a case study in badminton. This study employed netnography and supported by interpretive approach to understand accountability process in the social media, Twitter. The object of this study is a badminton fanbase account namely Badminton Talk. The research finding indicated that this badminton fanbase account in Twitter brings a complete component of accountability into social media. The process of accountability was presented by spreading information regarding the misconduct of Indonesian badminton athletes, posting a clarification video from an athlete, evaluating the athlete's explanation from the badminton fans, and followed by imposing sanctions for shortfalls in doing sport integrity. This study implies on enriching sport governance strategy to strengthening athlete accountability by using social media as it engages fans involvement. There is an opportunity for future research to employ mixed methods approach and also to conduct research in different settings of location and culture in obtaining interesting new findings of study.

Keywords: accountability; social media; netnography; badminton; sport

INTRODUCTION

On January 8th, 2021, the Badminton World Federation (BWF) as the worldwide governing body of badminton announced on its official website about the results of the investigation of two cases in integrity violations. One such case involved Indonesian badminton athletes. Eight Indonesian athletes were punished for committing match-fixing and gambling on badminton matches. This BWF publication sparked a lot of discussion among Indonesian badminton fans on Twitter. The reaction tweets to this incident from badminton fans on Twitter is an example of a mechanism that Scott & Orlikowski (2012) call an audit society. They posted comments on Twitter as part of the process of verifying accountability of Indonesian badminton athletes. The purpose of this study is to explore how social media namely Twitter enforces athlete accountability through a case study in the world of badminton.

The aforementioned case of cheating by Indonesian badminton athletes relates to the accountability in the sphere of individual to individual. Carmona & Ezzamel (2007) explain that individual-individual accountability is manifested as the implementation of social norms, when someone is trusted by another party to carry out a certain task. For Indonesian badminton athletes, the emotional bond with the spectators and the Indonesian people is truly part of this social norm. This is what Freeman et al. (2010) define as a stakeholder, that is a group or individual who can influence and be influenced by an organization. Badminton fans are referred to as stakeholders in the sports world since they have a close relationship with athletes. Badminton is a popular sport and is very close to the lives of many Indonesian people. Since the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, Indonesia has never failed to bring a medal in this sport event. The badminton players put forth a lot of effort and sweat to achieve their goal. For Indonesians, this sport is a source of pride. Every badminton match in Indonesia is always attended by a large crowd. These events demonstrate that badminton is one important source of social capital in Indonesian society. Sport, according to Tonts (2005), can increase social capital bonds by fostering new friendships and strengthening social relationships between players, coaches, and supporters thereby increasing a culture of trust and reciprocity. When Indonesian badminton athletes commit acts of cheating in the world of sport, they are certainly violating these social norms which can lead to regret among Indonesian badminton fans.

However, this is not the first time that Indonesian badminton athletes have been caught cheating. For Indonesian badminton fans, the women's doubles badminton matches at the 2012 London Olympics is noted as a reminder of an athlete's responsibility. The Indonesian duo, along with three other pairs from South Korea and China, were convicted of match-fixing at that time for not doing their best to win the game. In addition to the poor competition system that opened up gaps for cheating (Yang & Liu, 2013), this act also violated the Olympic values of "Faster, Higher, Stronger". This is obviously against to the principle of sportsman accountability. Athletes who have an accountability will embody goals, rules, and standards into their performance and motivation (DiPaolo, 2017; Joubert & Cloete, 2017; White & Rezania, 2019).

Furthermore, there was an increase in media attention. The news of match-fixing committed by Indonesian badminton athletes set people start discussing morality, formats and competition systems in the sports world. Likewise with the current condition when Indonesian badminton fans are discussing this shuttlecock sport on various social media as the development of information and communication technology.

Social media has changed a lot in the world of sport especially for the fans who determined by Samson & Oluwatoyin (2021) as an important social group of people who have contribution to the athlete. Badminton fans in Indonesia form a large fanbase on social media Twitter. Twitter users or well known as Tweeps talk about various aspects of the badminton including the athletes, coaches, clubs, national badminton associations, international

badminton organization, international matches and even the personal lives of badminton players that often discussed on the Twitter fanbase. Social media has an important role in building relationships between badminton fans and the athletes. This is supported by Stavros et al. (2014) which explains that the motivation for sports fans to interact using social media is to channel the values of passion, hope, self-esteem, and friendship to improve social relation in the world of sports. Meanwhile, Lee (2020) explains that Twitter provides an insight of opportunities the athletes have to develop distinct online engagement platforms with their fans that can generate dialogue in connection to the relationship building.

METHOD

This study employed netnography as its research method. Netnography is a tool for collecting, analysing, and observing data that is openly shared on the internet (Kozinets, 2015). This method is suitable for the purpose of this study since this method allows researchers to comprehend the social interaction that take place on social media Twitter. In fact, there is a number of social media that have information regarding badminton in Indonesia including Facebook. Facebook and Twitter are the most popular places where the users of social platforms having interactions. However, there is a key advantage between Facebook and Twitter is that most of the content on Twitter is publicly accessible via the Twitter Application Programming Interfaces (API) meanwhile most Facebook content is private due to the complexity of its privacy settings that affects the extent and type of data actually accessible to researchers (Giglietto et al., 2012; Ruiz-Soler, 2017).

By sharing messages on Twitter, badminton fans can build what Saxton & Guo (2011) call an interactive dialogue. That is to improve relations between parties, particularly in response to the stakeholders' request. In regards to this, badminton fan is one of the sports' stakeholders in Indonesia as they have strong relationships to this sport.

Social interaction in social media is not only displayed in words, but also picture, images, photos, sounds, audio-visual presentations, and other digital works of art (Kozinets, 2015). Therefore, the researchers also use an interpretive approach as a supporting tool in this study. Through an interpretive approach, researchers can translate products in social media such as comments from badminton fans on Twitter, into study analysis. Gummesson (2003) explains that the interpretive approach may codify subjectivity in the form of judgments, intuitions, and experiences of researchers but what distinguishes between research opinion from personal interpretation is the scientific demand to compile them systematically, relate them to theory, and present them transparently through scientific publication that easily accessible to the academic and practitioner communities.

To understand the occurrence of athlete accountability in social media, this study selected a badminton fanbase account on Twitter, Badminton Talk with the username @BadmintonTalk as the object of the study. As cited in its official website at https://badmintalk.com/joinus.php, Badminton Talk is a place that facilitate the sharing of information, aspiration and inspiration about badminton so that this sport is getting known and loved by Indonesian. It was founded on March 26th 2015 by four people of Indonesia. Its activity was started from the website and currently it has various social media to actively interact with the badminton fans, mainly on Twitter, Instagram, and Youtube channel. Twitter is chosen for this study as Puschmann et al. (2014) explain that this social media has become a key source of open data on a wide range of personal and societal practices. Meanwhile, Badminton Talk is one of the most popular badminton's fanbases on Twitter, having over 500 thousand followers. This fanbase has also been verified by Twitter, Inc. which is indicated by a blue check mark on the account. This demonstrates that the Badminton Talk account has become a popular destination for badminton fans in Indonesia to interact on social media.

Based on internal Twitter, Inc. data from January 1st to November 15th, 2021, this fanbase is clearly one of the most talked-about sports accounts in Indonesia in 2021.

Figure 1. Badminton Talk Twitter Account's Profile

This observational study was carried out from the beginning of December 2021 to the end of December 2021 by accessing the tweets on the @BadmintonTalk account which discussed integrity violations committed by Indonesian badminton athletes. The administrator of the @BadmintonTalk fanbase has tweeted about this case three times, on January 8th, 2021 at 12:35 Western Indonesia Time (WIB), January 8th, 2021 at 12:37 WIB, and January 9th, 2021 at 08:05 WIB.

Data is collected by taking screenshots of other Twitter users that posted replies or responses to the @BadmintonTalk fanbase's three tweets. The results of the collected screenshots were used to conduct data analysis. The findings of the data analysis will be used to draw conclusions about how athlete accountability operates in social media, particularly through Twitter.

In addition to reply, Twitter also provides "a retweet" facility that helps users to re-send a tweet and to share tweet quickly to other users. Meanwhile, "like" helps users to show appreciation for a tweet. These facilities make a tweet alive in Twitter as the Tweeps could communicate each other. The symbols of reply, retweet, and like are presented in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. The Symbols of Reply, Retweet, and Like on Twitter

Original data of this study is presented in Bahasa Indonesia or Indonesian language as @BadmintonTalk is a badminton fanbase account that is founded by Indonesian and its followers are mostly native Indonesian. The researchers translated those data into English language as this is a fundamental for understanding Indonesian culture. Werner (n.d.) and

Sturge (1997) explain that translation is a practice of intercultural communication which attempts to understand other cultures as far as possible from original terms.

This study follows the procedures proposed by Kozinets (2002) and Convery & Cox (2012) when conducting internet-based research which is the first, researchers must disclose their whereabouts, affiliations, and intentions while conducting research in internet and secondly, researchers must ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of sources. For the first, the researcher declared that he did not have a special relationship with Twitter users whose tweets were used as data in this study. He follows the @BadmintonTalk fanbase account on Twitter is intended to collecting data for this study and also as one of the badminton fans. The researcher's interest in this sport fostered intention to carry out this study. Furthermore, to maintain the confidential information and security of Twitter users who were used in this study, the researchers covered up their usernames and accounts' name.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The BWF, as the worldwide badminton governing body, has released the findings of an inquiry into two incidences of badminton integrity violations. One such case involved Indonesian badminton athletes. The eight Indonesian badminton athletes were found guilty of match-fixing and gambling in badminton matches by BWF Independent Hearing Panel (IHP) as stated in Decision No. 2020/2. The eight Indonesian badminton athletes were accused by BWF of not giving it their all to win the game, obtaining a monetary reward for committing fraud, changing the outcome of a match in a sport tournament, and failing to disclose match-fixing activities.

On January 8th, 2021 the BWF official website broadcasted the publication, which was then tweeted on the same day by the BWF official Twitter account, @bwfmedia. Right after that, Badminton Talk's Twitter account @BadmintonTalk retweeted the BWF posted tweet. Figure 3 shows a screenshot of a retweet from the @BadmintonTalk.

Figure 3. @BadmintonTalk Retweeted a BWF Tweet

It is clearly seen from the tweet above that there is a lot of engagement from other Twitter users. There were 145 retweets, 66 quote retweets, and 280 likes in response to the tweet. This demonstrates that badminton fans are eager to participate in the discussion of this issue. These social interactions that take place on Twitter are then defined using accountability components described by Ebrahim & Weisband (2007), namely transparency, answerability or justification, compliance, and enforcement or sanctions. Table 1 below defines each component of accountability.

Table 1. The Component of Accountability by Ebrahim & Weisband (2007)

The Component of Accountability	Process
Transparency	Collecting information and making it available for public scrutiny
Answerability or Justification	Providing clear reasoning for actions and decisions, including those not adopted, so that they may be reasonably questioned
Compliance	Monitoring and evaluation procedures and outcomes, combined with transparency in reporting those findings
Enforcement or Sanctions	Imposing sanctions for shortfalls incompliance, justification, or transparency

Badminton Talk Twitter account forms a transparency in the sports world

Indonesian badminton fans who follow the @BadmintonTalk fanbase account have responded in various comments after @BadmintonTalk retweeted the information on cases of violations to the badminton sport's code of conducts by Indonesian athletes. Several Tweeps remarked that the behaviour of Indonesian athletes who fraudulent acted was embarrassing. There was also a profanity-laced response from a Tweep whose identity was kept hidden. He said this as if he was expressing his displeasure with the athletes who had tarnished Indonesian badminton. Figure 4 shows a screenshot of the Tweeps' replies.

Translation:
First reply: *How embarrassing is that!*
Second reply: **A swearing response*… that's embarrassing to the country*
Third reply: *It just shameful*
Figure 4. Several Replies from Tweeps against to the News of the Athletes' Misconduct

Badminton Talk then followed up with a second tweet two minutes later. The second @BadmintonTalk tweet received more attention with 172, 98, and 254 retweets, quote retweets, and likes, respectively. The fanbase tweet went into greater detail about which athletes the BWF has sanctioned for breaking the sportsman's code of conduct. Figure 5 presents a screenshot of the tweet from @BadmintonTalk.

Figure 5. @BadmintonTalk Retweet about Sport Integrity Misconduct of Indonesian Badminton Athletes

On Twitter, the two tweets above garnered responses from badminton fans. They conveyed their dissatisfaction with the fraud incident. As one Tweep put it in response to the second tweet with a reply:

"*Lah, agri ngapain juga ikutan beeeuuuhhhh* 😡"

"*Hey, why is Agri also involved in the case* 😡"

as shown in the figure below. The use of the word "Lah" in Indonesian and an angry emoji shows that the fan feels regret to the mentioned badminton athletes.

**Figure 6**. A Reply from a Badminton Fan in Twitter

Fans' regrets voiced on Twitter are the consequences of a transparency to the fraud committed by Indonesian badminton athletes. Badminton Talk has engaged its followers to communicate each other in the social media. They expressed their feelings into an openly free tweet. The fans felt regret for the Indonesian badminton player, who failed to uphold his obligations as a professional in the sport they supported. According to Zeelenberg et al. (1998), feelings of regret emerge when people think about other people's faults, have the desire to fix those mistakes, and want for a second opportunity.

Twitter reserves space for athletes to explain their case

Following the numbers of badminton fans replied to the two @BadmintonTalk tweets above, on January 9th, 2021 the fanbase account posted a video from a badminton athlete who has been sanctioned by the BWF for violating the code of conducts. The video from Agripinna regarding his match-fixing case was taken from a video broadcasted on the Youtube channel on January 8th, 2021. It was then tweeted by @BadmintonTalk with the title "Video from Agrippina regarding his match-fixing case". When this video was reviewed, it was discovered that the athlete explained the detail of the situation that had occurred to him. The use of social media by the mentioned athlete to communicate an explanation about himself being sanctioned by the BWF is a type of public exposure of the athlete's responsibility. The target audience is a group of people who are regarded to be stakeholders in the sports world. It could be explained that the social media Twitter provides a space for the athlete to explain his actions and decision in regards to the case.

Response from Tweeps as an evaluation stage of the athlete's responsibility

However, badminton fans have diverse reactions to the athlete's video explanation. A Tweep inquired as to how the athlete had engaged in match-fixing fraud, which was then explained by another user. As we can see in this figure below.
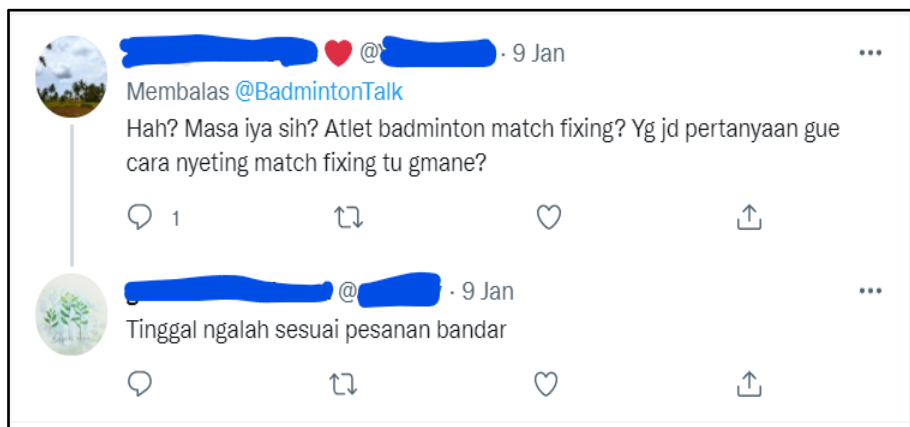
Translation:
The inquirer: *How come the badminton athletes did the match fixing?*
A Tweep replied it: *Just being lose as the gambler's request*
Figure 7. An Interaction Model in Twitter

The preceding tweets demonstrated the presence of a dialogue process and a relationship engagement between sports fans. The benefit of this is that Tweeps will have a greater sense of athlete accountability. It surely states that Twitter has become a knowledge sharing medium for nowadays.

Another sport fan responded to the video's tweet with more critical comment. According to a sport fan, the athlete in the video only revealed one claimed infringement, namely match-fixing, while the violation on his participation in the badminton match gambling game was not declared by the athlete in the video. Other Tweeps who sent the tweet also approved it.

Translation:
A Badminton Fan: *He just explained that he refused to do match-fixing that offered by HT. However, as referred to the BWF report, he was also involved in the match gambling in badminton. He placed a bet on badminton matches through HT.*

Figure 8. The Critical Response from A Badminton Fan

Translation:
An upper reply from a fan: *He should be speaking up with his club, national federation, or team-mates to discuss this case as a prove that he has disclosed it to another party.*
A lower reply from a fan: *In regards to the BWF report, in addition failing to report his match-fixing offering from HT, he also has an online betting account. So, the problem is not only to be speaking up.*

Figure 9. The Second Model of Interaction on Twitter

The supportive comments from Indonesian badminton fans to conduct sanction and rules

Different comments were sent by two other Twitter users expressed their appreciation to BWF for punishing athlete who violated sports integrity. A badminton fan wrote his response:

"*The Badminton World Federation should be firm to keep the sport integrity*"

While another fan tweeted:

"I only know Agripinna after saw the list of badminton athletes who doing misconducts. The punishment is also firm and consistent @bwfmedia, ensuring that badminton is kept clean"
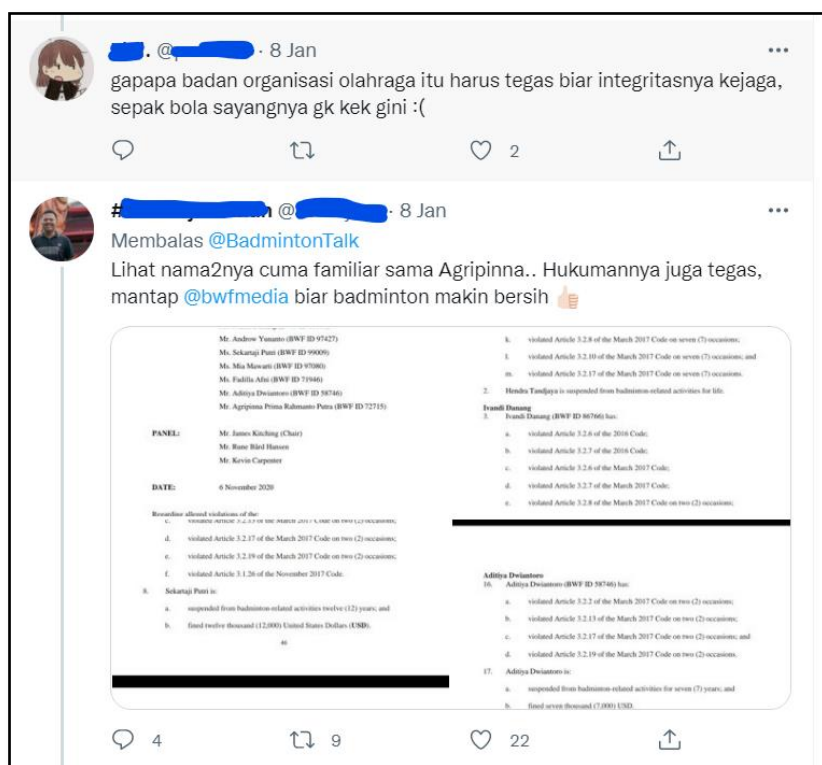

Figure 10. The Response from The Tweeps

From these tweets, it could be concluded that the fans surely supported BWF to charge against the athletes who doing misconducts. Most of them clearly understood that the sanctions will give beneficial impact for the sport, including for the athletes, the coaches, or even the national badminton association to make badminton better in the future. Hence, the badminton fans who live on Twitter that actively engaged and discussed on this case represents the process of accountability on social media.

CONCLUSION

Social media has become a place of accountability for the world of sport. Badminton fans on Twitter can voice their comments on athletes who have violated the sport integrity. The comments are not only expressed in words, but also emojis that show the feelings and emotional state of sports' fans. An accountability process composed of a transparency information, an opportunity for athletes to explain their cases, an evaluation process provided

by social media users on the disclosure of information presented by the athlete, and sanctions enforcement can be formed through the expressions of sports fans on social media.

This study can be used for practitioners and academics, especially for those who deal with sports governance and management to increase the role of social media in enforcing athlete accountability for a better world of sport. It is hoped that all stakeholders can be more widely involved using social media as a channel to improve mutual relationships between the athlete and sports' spectators.

However, there are several limitations to this study including in relation to the application of data collection method. This study only employed netnographical approach that analyse small scale of messages on Twitter although this social platform provides a big data to explore for getting more insights. Therefore, there is an opportunity for future research to conduct mixed methods approaches to gather data on Twitter by combining computational method, in instance, depending on the research questions and strategies. This research method requires collaboration among scholars coming from different backgrounds that will emerge interesting discussion and result of study. Constructing the same research in a new or different context and culture is another suggestion for future research.

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