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*East Tennessee State University*

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Female Student-Athlete Golfers'  
Use of Online Recruiting Platforms to Seek Scholarships: A Global Perspective

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Media and Communication  
East Tennessee State University  
In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in Brand and Media Strategy

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by  
Linda Dobele  
May 2021

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Dr. Susan E. Waters, Chair  
Dr. Leslie A. McCallister  
Dr. Robert A. Dunn

Keywords: NCAA athletics, online recruiting platforms, prospective student-athletes,  
international students, diffusion of innovations, third person effect, elaboration likelihood model  
theory

## ABSTRACT

Female Student-Athlete Golfers'

Use of Online Recruiting Platforms to Seek Scholarships: A Global Perspective

by

Linda Dobebe

The prospective student-athletes' use of an online recruiting platform to seek college scholarships has become a norm. College coaches recruit prospective-student athletes often using tools like global personal contacts, on-site recruiting, and online recruiting platforms. Online recruiting platforms offer several services and vary in price. This study examines female student-athlete golfers' use of the online recruiting platform to seek scholarships from a global perspective. Previous research suggests that prospective student-athletes prefer online recruiting platforms while college coaches often use other outlets which can lead to miscommunication and lost opportunities. The services, price, and usability of 20 sports online recruiting platforms in the United States were examined to find out what is offered to prospective-student athletes. Interviews of NCAA Division I collegiate coaches were conducted to examine the most common recruiting tools used by the coaches and their opinions of the use of online recruiting platforms.

## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to family back home in Latvia who have supported me through my journey and inspire me to do more every day. It is also dedicated to my fiancé, David Lilly, who supports my decisions and motivates me to work hard along inspiring me through his personal success and work ethic.

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the governing body of intercollegiate sports in the United States. It is divided into three divisions (Division I, II, and III). Division I is the largest of the three and involves the greatest number of student-athletes (NCAA.org - the official site of the NCAA, n.d.)The NCAA and its represented schools seek to recruit not only domestic student-athletes but also international students, along with representing both men and women for the majority of the sports.

Specifically, female golfers both domestically and internationally are recruited annually to compete within the NCAA intercollegiate system. Understanding the recruiting needs from the point of view of an athlete, a coach, and existing recruiting online platforms can help determine the effectiveness of the communication amongst the parties.

This paper will examine the existing benefits and pitfalls of using college athletic recruiting agencies for women's golf athletes and coaches. A content analysis of recruiting agencies' websites is examined for the websites' ability to satisfy the needs of the collegiate women's golf coaches and prospective student-athletes. An interview process was conducted to find the current recruiting preferences of NCAA coaching staffs.



## Chapter 2. Literature Review

The United States is the only place globally where an athlete can compete at an elite level while studying to obtain a college degree (Jara, 2015). University athletics outside of the U.S. are organized relatively loosely, perhaps comparable to U.S. university club teams (e.g., England, South Africa), and often organized athletics are absent from the culture of the university (e.g., Germany) (Kaburakis & Constantinides, 2015). Athletes domestically and outside the U.S. understand the significance of competing at the collegiate level.

Women's golf is among several sports in which both individuals and teams are annually named NCAA national champions (NCAA Women's Sports Inventory, n.d.). Women's intercollegiate golf has a nearly 50 year old precedent in the US, as organized women's college golf programs first appeared in 1958 (Lewis & Miller, 2006). Sponsorship in women's golf has increased steadily in all three divisions for the last two decades and overall, 611 NCAA schools sponsor the sport (NCAA Women's Sports Inventory, n.d.). The NCAA women's golf increase in popularity and ability to earn ranking as a team and individual helps the sport stand out among other NCAA women's sports. The universities, athletic departments and fans evaluate women's golf programs similarly to revenue sport programs in such a way that high expectations to win and be successful are paramount (Earley, 2011). In women's golf, a mix of international and domestic players are recruited every year to compete within the NCAA intercollegiate system. Recruiting companies, athletes, and coaches are all involved in the recruiting process. Understanding the needs for each and the success of communication amongst the parties is what will determine the existing pitfalls and/ or advantages that are currently faced by all three. Examining the existing media theories will allow insight into the behavior patterns presented by coaches and athletes when using different forms of recruiting to either find a recruit or be

recruited. Importantly, the examination of current recruiting platforms utilized by women's golfers internationally and domestically will increase an understanding of the ways recruiting agencies present the athletes and communicate with the coaches in the U.S.

### **International Student Admission Process**

International students, including international student-athletes, have a significant financial annual impact on the U.S. economy. During the 2013-2014 academic years, it was estimated by the Institute for International Education that international students added over \$27 billion to the US economy (Cantwell, 2019). To arrive in the United States as an international student, specific steps need to be followed, including being admitted to a chosen university and receiving an F-1 visa. As of 2004, of the 12.8 million students enrolled in higher education in the United States during the last academic year, almost 600,000, some 4.6 percent, were foreign undergraduate and graduate students who were attending school on F-1 visas (Addressing the new reality of current visa policy on international students and researchers, 2005).

Before arriving in the United States, international students need to be admitted to a university by taking the standardized tests required by the institution (SAT, TOEFL, etc.). A passing score on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is a major entrance requirement for most public and private higher education institutions (Finder, 2005). Translated exam scores and transcripts from a high school in their native country also need to be provided. Once a student is admitted to the university, the immigration process begins. The registration mechanism of the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, (SEVIS) is mandated by the U.S. legislation (Reeves, 2006). This system is used to verify the location and academic status of international students and to fund the system; student visa applicants are charged a \$200 fee (Addressing the new reality of current visa policy on international students and researchers,

2005). Acquiring SEVIS is the first step that needs to be taken; the following is the process of securing an F-1 visa. To be able to start the visa process, a valid passport, an online nonimmigrant visa application (DS-160) with a fee of \$160, and a photo are necessary. Once the application is accepted and processed, an F-1 visa interview can be scheduled. According to the U.S. Immigration information, a passport, a signed I-20 form from the respective university, application payment fee receipt, DS-160 confirmation page, and a photo will all be required for the interview (Student Visa, n.d.). The interviewer also might ask the student or university to provide the standardized test scores required by the university. Transcripts and diplomas from one's high school, and evidence of how one intends to pay their educational, living, and travel expenses are also required. If the F-1 candidate is accepted, the visa is issued in the passport and a student is allowed to travel in and out of the United States. Also, the student needs to show proof of certain immunizations to the university admissions office to be allowed to arrive on the chosen campus in the U.S. This overall process can be lengthy, therefore, international students are advised to start the process well in advance.

### **Domestic Student Admission Process**

A domestic student's admission process includes providing examination scores (SAT or ACT), letters of recommendation, paying application fees, completing the FAFSA, and paying for the tuition or applying for scholarships (Ross & Moody, 2020). They also need to provide their final high school transcripts. Both domestic and international student admission to a university is heavily dependent on SAT or ACT exam scores. The SAT cost for domestic students is \$68 and \$117 for international (International Fees, 2020). Not many differences between domestic and international students can be identified from the academic point of view. Often, internationals do need to provide an English proficiency exam score to prove their level of

English, which is not a requirement for a domestic college applicant. Additionally, to be admitted to an institution, certain federal and institutional laws need to be met by international but not by domestic students.

### **NCAA Eligibility Center**

NCAA was formed in 1910 and renamed from the Intercollegiate Athletic Association (IAA) to draw up competition and eligibility rules that could be applied to the various intercollegiate sports (Smith, 2000). The NCAA Eligibility Center was created to determine the potential student-athlete athletic admission to become part of intercollegiate athletics. According to NCAA Eligibility Basics (2017), “student-athletes must register with the NCAA Eligibility Center to be eligible to play NCAA Division I or II sports in college” (para.1).

The NCAA Eligibility Center determines prospective student-athlete academic and amateur status. It does so by looking at SAT and ACT scores, one’s proof of graduation from a high school, a minimum of a 2.0 GPA in core courses as a requirement, and their athletic play and competition history (NCAA Eligibility Basics, 2017). As stated in the NCAA (2020), “An institution shall use the NCAA Eligibility Center approved by the Board of Governors to determine the initial eligibility of a student-athlete” (p.168). An athlete is considered a professional, not an amateur, if paid for athletic performance, signed a contract with a professional team, been on the draft list, played on a professional team, or took part on an amateur team where a compensation/salary of any kind was provided (NCAA Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). Once a prospective student-athlete is approved by the NCAA Eligibility Center, the admission process for the chosen university can begin. As stated in the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s manual, “A student-athlete shall not represent an institution in intercollegiate athletics competition unless the student has been admitted as a regularly enrolled,

degree-seeking student in accordance with the regular, published entrance requirements of that institution” (p.168). Once approved by the NCAA Eligibility Center and admitted by the institution, a student can start his or her athletic career at a Division I or Division II institution and participate in play and practice in a way that is guided by the NCAA rules.

### **International Student-Athlete NCAA Eligibility Process**

Besides the economic advantage, often there are cultural, academic, and athletic benefits gained by institutions in the U.S. when recruiting international student-athletes. According to Kaburakis and Constantinides (2015), “international student-athletes can present an incredible opportunity for an athletics department, because they may have specialized athletics skills, a diverse cultural background, and an emotional maturity” (p.57). Research suggests that international students tend to adapt better to the collegiate level because of their maturity, playing experience, and professionalism, such as discipline towards academics and athletics (Duchesne, Bloom, & Sabiston, 2011). Aspects of emotional maturity, diverse cultural background, specialized athletics, and discipline are a few factors that play a major role in the eyes of the institutions and their coaching staff members. Thus, U.S. coaches seek out characteristics as such and often use international athletes to fulfill their squad desires.

The recruiting process of an international student-athlete is delicate. According to Kaburakis and Constantinides (2015), in the U.S., educational institutions differ in terms of size, private versus public, and significant cultural geographic considerations. Thus, matching this set of characteristics to an international recruiting model can be challenging (Kaburakis & Constantinides, 2015). When recruiting international athletes, the educational institutions and coaches need to follow National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) eligibility rules. The researcher perceives that most recruiting agencies do not highlight the importance of meeting

certain NCAA rule benchmarks to successfully start a college career. For this reason, some of the rules will be highlighted in this section that pertain to recruiting. The first step of being recognized by NCAA is registering for a certification account with the NCAA Eligibility Center. Potential student-athletes need to provide their email, basic educational history, sports participation history, and make a payment: \$90 for domestic athletes and \$150 for athletes outside the U.S (Powell, 2019).

NCAA eligibility rules affect domestic and international student-athletes. However, some of the rules are particularly applicable to international student-athletes. Bylaw 12.2.2.2.1 states that, “provided they do not receive more than actual and necessary expenses, prospective student-athletes may participate and compete on professional teams (e.g., top European leagues) before enrollment” (NCAA Academic and Membership Affairs Staff, 2017, p. 69). When recruiting, coaches need to make sure that international athletes have followed the NCAA regulations. Otherwise, restrictions or inability to participate in NCAA Division I, II, or III sports might occur. Coaches also need to be aware of their educational backgrounds as often international student-athletes enroll in an educational institution at their home country and then choose to transfer to the U.S. If not careful, according to NCAA Academic and Membership Affairs Staff (2017), “a prospective student-athlete shall be charged with a season of intercollegiate eligibility for each calendar year after the one-year time period” (p.83). Without knowing, athletes might be triggering the start time of their college athletic career without participating in any sport. There are numerous rules and regulations mandated by the NCAA. Therefore, when recruiting international and domestic student-athletes, coaches that are far away from their recruitment location need to make sure that the collected information of the athlete is accurate.

## **Recruiting Agencies**

Recruiting agencies for intercollegiate athletics play a large role in connecting players with their desired institution. Recruiting potential student-athletes from the university coaching staff can happen on sight, through a personal contact, or through a recruiting agency. NCAA rules also apply to recruiting agencies. Recruiters for collegiate athletic programs must work within a limited time frame determined by NCAA rules (Whitley, 2001).

Before the extensive use of the internet, coaches would contact a recruiter and discuss the players via phone or meet in person. Currently, a large part of recruiting occurs online by looking at potential student-athletes and their profiles via a website. Coaching staffs all over the nation often still prefer an on-site recruiting option that allows selecting a player based on in-person observations. The three parts of recruiting that require the most amount of time are: (a) recruiting off campus, (b) recruiting on campus and (c) in office recruiting (online recruiting) (Earley, 2011). The larger institutions within greater conferences have budgets that allow the necessary travel to observe potential student-athletes in action. However, coaching staffs within smaller conferences need to identify who their potential athletes are sometimes without examining their skill in live motion and much recruiting takes place in the office without face-to-face contact (Earley, 2011). Therefore, recruiting agencies, personal research, personal contact utilization, and direct communication with foreign or domestic athletes are often used over in-person recruiting.

Opinions regarding the best-recruiting methods vary; Prospective student-athletes prefer to use recruiting agencies, while coaches prefer other methods (Jara, 2015). If athletes are mainly using online recruiting agencies as a tool of being recruited and coaches are utilizing personal networks, crossing paths becomes difficult. Therefore, even if an online recruiting platform is the preferred service for the athlete, there are many aspects to consider. Jara (2015) wrote, "Athletes

must pay for the recruiting services and prices generally range from \$1,000 to \$4,000” (p.42). Potential students tend to rely on the honesty and competence of the chosen agency. Arguably, to be credible, agencies need to offer more than an online platform for one’s profile. They need to connect athletes with the institutions of one’s choice and consider all the preferences and needs of the athlete’s dream institution. For a potential college student-athlete, a college career is mainly determined by their athletic and academic abilities. Nevertheless, there is a lot more to consider, like coaching staff and coaching philosophies, location, climate, college population, travel schedule, team size, athletic conference, housing, etc. If an honest evaluation of one’s potential options based on one’s abilities and desires would be conducted without cost, it could increase a student-athlete’s ability of finding the best personal fit. Such evaluation could open up an athlete’s perspective and understanding of college athletics. Once narrowing the path to the right direction and going through familiarization of the NCAA rules and regulations, athletes could be charged for a service of finding the right institution. Not all platforms offer a free evaluation and educational services without charging a significant amount of money, thus, potential student-athletes are left with a significant choice to make; doing the outreach and college search themselves or placing their complete trust in online recruiting companies. Importantly, online recruiting platforms do provide the luxury of presenting athletes contact information for college coaches, which otherwise is difficult to obtain. However, by providing such service, athletes also need to be able to stand out amongst thousands of profiles and numerous online platform sites. Another aspect to consider when choosing an online platform is education provided regarding NCAA rules and regulations. An example is verifying that prior to exploring a college athletic career, the athlete is confirmed as being an amateur. As stated in previous research, “a student-athlete participating in intercollegiate athletics in the United States



must meet specific educational academic standards, be classified as an "amateur," and comply with the numerous regulations of the NCAA” (Weston, 2006, p. 832). The definition of amateur is: “a person who engages in some art, science, sport, etc. for the pleasure of it rather than money; a nonprofessional, an athlete who is variously forbidden by rules to profit from athletic activity (Busby, 2011). Therefore, before attending college and/or investing in an expensive recruiting process, potential student-athletes would benefit from knowing if their current and prior athletic activities are compliant with the NCAA rules of amateurism.

A large part of the online recruiting platform design and functions can be traced back to a U.S. patent submitted in 2001. An online database for professional and intercollegiate athlete recruitment was invented to help professional leagues and college coaches find athletes. The U.S. Patent Application No. 09/780,980 submitted by Whitley was created for smaller colleges with limited budgets and personnel and athletes from lesser-known schools that received limited exposure to the recruiters (Whitley, 2001). The U.S. Patent Application No. 09/780,980 includes player search, positional search, a regional search, player profile, a player bookmark, and player video search (Whitley, 2001). Submitted 20 years ago, the U.S. patent was one of the landmarks in the recruiting agency platform choice that can be seen and used today.

Currently, recruiting agencies use a similar approach to present potential student-athletes on their platforms, and they have added exposure through social media. According to Conrad (2018), the process starts with coaches being made aware of a prospect through social media, then basic academic contact and physical information about the prospect is gathered and introduced. Recruiters often list different aspects first, for example, international-student academic achievements are listed first due to their potential ability to being awarded an academic scholarship. It can be both a benefit to the athlete and to the university, especially if the

university can combine the academic and the athletic scholarship. Depending on the size of the university, different amounts of athletic scholarship amounts can be awarded to a student-athlete, and often the athletic scholarship can be combined with other awards. Each sport within the NCAA is allowed to give out a certain amount of scholarships, and it is up to coaches how they are distributed within their respective teams. For example, according to Scholarships for Skilled Golfers (n.d.), “the NCAA sponsors 235 Division I Women’s golf programs and to regulate access to higher education funding, the NCAA places scholarship limits on athletic programs (para.4). Division I Women’s golf teams are limited to six full scholarships. According to Coaches' survey/'07 (2007), “Golf is an "equivalency" sport: Programs may split the value of a scholarship among multiple students, and coaches of women's teams reported an average roster size of 8.28 this season, with 7.04 players (85 percent) receiving scholarships” (p.1).

Often being able to combine an athletic scholarship with an academic or other award gives coaches the ability to increase their roster size. Coaches' survey/'07 (2007) also suggest, “only nine coaches had more than 30 percent of players without scholarships, remarkable considering per-team averages of 4.99 scholarships in Division I” (p.1). This indicates that often recruited women’s golf athletes are held to high educational standards. Players and recruiting agencies need to determine the right fit for the university based on the player’s skill and potential offers. Furthermore, if the recruiting process is done correctly, the Division I Women’s Golf players will often have an option to almost cover their college tuition completely by combining their athletic scholarship with other scholarship awards. According to Lyell (2019), “I’ve got a girl from my program playing Division I right now, and 80 percent of her scholarship money is academic and 20 percent athletic” (para. 20). Depending on one’s financial situation and preference, a player can choose to go to a highly ranked Division I institution and based on their

skill receive more athletic money combined with academic scholarships. Another player might choose a lower ranked school that offers a less athletic scholarship but potentially more academic awards. Such aspects are crucial when looking at potential institutions, and discussing the financial aspects with the college coaches early can help narrow the options. Recruiters should feel responsible for finding the best fit for both the athlete and the coach.

### **Positive and Negative Qualities of Recruiting Agencies**

Sports recruiting agencies have been effective for some sports more than others. Importantly, in the digital age, with every coach's email available at aspiring college athletes' fingertips, both students and coaches have to do a lot more to stand out (Feiner, 2015). According to Staff (2016), "98% of US universities have Facebook pages, while 84% are active on Twitter, and 72% of incoming high school seniors reported that they researched their prospective colleges on a social media site" (para. 3). Unlimited access to everything and everyone can be seen as an advantage and a disadvantage. The real challenge is the ability to stand out. Even with an impressive resume and athletic abilities, being recognized by college coaches requires a lot of work. Traveling to in-person recruiting sites to present oneself is expensive, therefore, it is smart to consider other cost-friendly options. As an example, Feiner (2015) looked at the lacrosse player from Seattle who spent approximately \$20,000 to \$25,000 during the second year of high school to travel to tournaments and pay for the equipment which is what is often necessary to be recognized by the largest universities in the nation. However, not all can provide such exposure. Therefore, reaching out directly to the university coach or using an online recruiting platform to become recognized can be useful. Often highly recognized high school or national team coaches that work with the respective student-athletes domestically or internationally have connections with the university coaches. Such connections sometimes

present a case of bypassing the use of recruiters and replacing on-site recruiting as college coaches will trust the student's coach who often will also become a trusted personal contact. Therefore, often picking the right instructor or coach during an athlete's junior career can be crucial. Similarly, recruiters often have built relationships with athlete personal instructors and/or junior coaches, which again, results in pre-college coaching contact guiding the athlete.

The benefits of using an online recruiting platform include worldwide accessibility, easy communication, worldwide exposure, and instant updates on communication with college coaches. The best college recruiting websites will put individuals in contact with coaches and direct communication with current players on the team, which will give the potential student-athlete a great picture of what the team and team environment will be like (Buren, 2019).

Services such as BeRecruited.com, Next College Student Athlete, College Fit Finder, The Sport Source and dozens of others allow prospective college athletes to post biographical information, academic expectations, and highlight videos to be distributed to schools based on the athlete's preference. (Lyell, 2019, para. 13)

Once committed and financially invested in the recruiting service, recruiters most likely will constantly provide feedback and check-in, so that the process of getting recruited does not stop. Also, a significant benefit is an opportunity for college coaches to look at credible statistics and provided scores of the athlete. Some of the top recruiting agencies require high school or personal coaches to help legitimize the information provided by the athlete by confirming statistics and performance records (Buren, 2019).

On the other hand, there are downsides to using online recruiting platforms. Like many businesses, the bottom line can be a priority, thus, an effective way of selling a product or a service needs to be designed and marketed to its target audience. Living in the digital age,

prospective student-athletes have the ability to research every institution and reach any college coach as their email address and often a phone number is listed on the website. For some institutions, emailing the athletic managers or secretary is essential to access the necessary content but it is certainly not impossible. Therefore, online recruiting platforms need to design an effective marketing strategy for selling the argument that paying to use an online recruiting platform is necessary to get in contact with coaches and find a college. With a college team roster being posted on their website and often college team official Instagram accounts tagging their players in their posts, reaching out to a current player and asking about the team and its environment is possible without the help of recruiting agencies. Thus, online recruiting agencies need to find and sell extra tools that will be attractive to their customers. According to Bastie (2018), “Like any industry, there are good recruiting services and there are companies that are just trying to separate you from your money” (para. 3). Some recruiting agencies still find ways to attract athletes that trust companies and believe that access to email addresses of the top Division I college coaches is exclusive. A seemingly exclusive service that might cost anywhere from \$500-\$3000 might not provide exclusive access to what a prospective student-athlete actually will benefit from. It is important to see how the recruiting platform will identify the colleges to contact, their success rate of signing athletes, and how many are signed with scholarships, and many more. One’s involvement in the process is also crucial for being able to follow the recruiter’s choices of contacted universities and athletic programs. Poor recruiting companies will try to find any option for the student-athlete, just to assure placement and turnover. Important financial, educational, and emotional aspects need to be considered before making a commitment to a college and a coach. Recruiting services need to be open-minded when helping find the best option for the student. Last year the Next College Student Athlete

(NCSA) recruiting platform helped 20,000 athletes receive scholarships for their sport (Lyell, 2019). Thus, the statistic does seem impressive, however, the total number of individuals using the service should be provided alongside the satisfaction rate from the athletes that have signed these scholarships. Nevertheless, online recruiting services can present the scholarship offer as if it is the best option available, but that might not be the case. Therefore, careful examination and research of the recruiting platform needs to be conducted before trusting one's future college career and scholarship potential in a recruiting platform.

### **Diffusion of Innovations Theory**

In this day and age, the majority of societies are constantly facing innovations and decision making on whether or not to engage with these innovations. “Rogers in 1962 suggested that diffusion of innovations explains how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology spread among participants in a social system” (Oliver et al., 2020, p. 20). With roots over a century old, DOI is one of the most popular and often cited theories for investigating and understanding the adoption and implementation of innovations (Jeyaraj et al., 2006). Athlete recruitment for many years has been mostly done through on-site recruiting and contacting. It was not until the year 2000 that one of the currently most known recruiting platforms was launched (NCSA, 2016). Online recruiting agency platforms were launched even later, therefore, using such tools to recruit athletes was indeed an innovation within college athletics in the U.S. The online recruiting platforms opened a new and cost friendly access to recruits all the world. The contact information and player statistics were accessible for college coaches without cost and for the first time allowed lower budget schools the ability to consider players globally. The initial access and freedom to reach players anywhere at any time was allowing recruiting companies to present more players to more institutions. However, the new technology of internet

use and player search options was a new tool that acquired basic computer knowledge and additional learning.

Diffusion of Innovations theory presents how an idea or product is adapted by societies over time and what determines society's adaption or rejection of a newly introduced innovation (Hawkins et al., 1998). Diffusion of Innovations can be classified into one of three categories: continuous innovation, dynamically continuous innovation, and discontinuous innovation (Hawkins et al., 1998, p. 248). Into which category an innovation falls depends on the degree of behavioral change required and the level of importance that users attach to the behavioral change (Hawkins et al., 1998). Hawkins et al. (1998), discusses the classifications of the diffusion of innovations based on the individualistic levels of interest of the innovation. Therefore, one cannot clearly distinguish which product or service could lead to a major behavioral change and adjustment before it is introduced to society. Certain services or goods could be aimed towards a certain target population that share the same interest and are expected to adopt a certain innovation, but this population still might choose an alternative or stay with previously used methods. Online recruiting platforms were introduced to entire college athletic populations in the U.S. and prospective student-athletes all over the world. The college population includes NCAA Division I with approximately 350 participating colleges, Division II with 350, Division III with 444, NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics) with 248, and NJCAA (National Junior College Athletics Association) with 525 colleges (White, n.d.). However, the prospective student-athlete target population is considered to be significantly larger than the college population. In this case, for an innovation to be successfully adapted by its target populations, both colleges and athletes need to be engaged with the service. In part, a phenomenon of athletes using recruitment platforms more than coaches was accruing. Opinions regarding the best-

recruiting methods vary; Prospective student-athletes prefer to use recruiting agencies, while coaches prefer other methods (Jara, 2015). Therefore, it is important to understand and examine how the adoption of online recruiting agency usage is adapting in current times and if it is still used by both the athletes and the college coaching staffs.

### **Third-Person Effect**

The study of the third person-effect focuses on suggesting that individuals tend to believe that advertising and media is effecting them less than their peers. As stated in Davison (1983), one of the frequently given replies amongst journalists discussing the effectiveness of propaganda was along the following lines: "The editorials have little effect on people like you and me, but the ordinary reader is likely to be influenced quite a lot" (p.3). Such observations were frequent perceptions amongst sociologists, which led to the birth of the third-person effect theory. The theory implies the understanding of one's interpretation of information influence on oneself and others.

Third-person effect theory often could help in predicting how certain information could affect the individual perception of its exposure. As stated by Davison (1983), the third-person effect approach suggests that "people will tend to overestimate the influence that mass communications have on the attitudes and behavior of others" (p.3). Therefore, predictions could be made towards individualistic ignorance of being affected by content that one is exposed to. Davison (1983) also noted that, "In the view of those trying to evaluate the effects of communication, its greatest impact will not be on 'me' or 'you,' but on 'them', the third persons" (p.3). Studies consistently lend support to Davidson's original prediction along with the perceptual component to the third-person effect that predicts that "people tend to underestimate media effects on themselves while overestimating media effects on others" (Perloff, 1993,



p.169). Particularly, the third-person effect seems to be often influencing opinions regarding media use.

When looking for an online service, individuals need to be aware of certain biases and sometimes even the inability to sense the influence of advertising and media on themselves. However, the third-person effect suggests that not only individuals are not believing that they are effected by media, they also believing that others are effected more. When choosing a service such as an online recruiting platform, certain factors can stir one's decision of committing to a service. The price of a recruiting service is often hidden within the platform and the websites are designed to make one interact with its features before paying for the full services. Due to the third-person effect, often individuals will not realize that such marketing strategies are affecting them and sometimes pushing them to make rushed decisions. Therefore, acknowledging such an effect can make one aware of the influence that one is exposed to each time looking for a service occurs. Such awareness can lead to more time spent in researching the best fit and service prior to making a commitment.

Another study involving the third-person effect by Golan et al. (2008) examined the mind's need of viewing other individuals as fewer experts and as being more vulnerable to any media content than oneself. Therefore, it can paint a picture in one's head suggesting that just discovered online recruiting experience is exclusive and others might have not been able to find it as easily as one did.

The third-person effect theory has been amongst our society for more than 25 years. However, the relativeness of the theory has peaked in recent years due to the constant individualistic media exposure. Media users fail to recognize the media effects, and believe that others are being more influenced by marketing strategies than themselves. When using an online

recruiting service, often it might seem that one has picked the best possible choice without proper investigation. It might seem that others have been offered opportunities that are not as good as the ones one has come upon himself. This can lead to not spending enough time investigating the options presented and limit one's future opportunities.

### **Elaboration Likelihood Model Theory**

According to Geddes (2016), the Elaboration Likelihood Model Theory illustrates how humans process stimuli differently and the outcomes of these processes on changing attitudes, and consequently, behavior. The theory posits that two routes to persuasion exist, the central route, and the peripheral route, which differ in how much cognitive effort they require to process the information (Petty et al., 1981).

This model is used to differentiate two routes of individualistic decision-making processes when making a purchase. The peripheral route of processing is for people that want to purchase an item but do not know specifics of it, and the central route involves individuals investing time in examining the item in great detail before making a decision (Geddes, 2016).

For example, a person who is using the peripheral route wants to purchase a set of golf clubs. The individual considers the color of the clubs and how good they look in Tiger Wood's bag. Another individual using the central route considers the practicality of the clubs and if their skill level is matching the specifics of the clubs. These two individuals might purchase the same set of golf clubs, but the decision-making approach differed. Similarly, when potential student-athletes choose a recruiting agency, some will choose one that has a high quality website and that can offer to make an athlete's online profile look good, and some will base their decision by thorough research on a platform's success rate of signing athletes with scholarship offers, its price, usability, etc. Marketing companies carefully examine their target audiences and market

them based on ways they respond to advertising. Therefore, recognizing which online platforms are transparent and provide a quality service can help the process of choosing an online platform less complicated.

RQ1: What are common services offered by online college recruiting platforms?

RQ2: How cost-effective are college platforms for exhibiting value?

RQ3: What are some advantages of using online recruiting platform?

RQ4: What are some disadvantages of using online recruiting platform?

RQ5: How well do online recruiting platforms educate prospective student-athletes on their college options, scholarships, coaching staffs, and NCAA eligibility?

## **Chapter 3. Method**

### **Content Analysis**

“Content analysis is a research method used to analyze content in a variety of formats (e.g., books, newspapers, television, internet) to understand patterns of messages” (Jordan, 2009, p.3). Kim and Kuljis (2010) suggest:

Content analysis is a widely used research method for objective, systematic and quantitative examination of communication content and the method has been employed not only in the field of traditional communication but also in studies of human computer interaction such as web-based applications. (p. 283)

This study is designed to examine existing benefits and pitfalls of using college athletic recruiting agencies for international and domestic golfer recruitment to the U.S. educational institutions. Content analysis of 20 recruiting websites offering online based college recruiting services was conducted. The main concepts examined were a) cost of online recruiting platforms b) international student access for the online recruiting platforms in the U.S. c) online recruiting platform athlete profile information, and d) online recruiting platform efforts in providing NCAA eligibility education to their customers.

### **Sample**

Convenience sampling of using a web search engine was used, selecting online recruiting platforms by inputting key words: college; online; recruiting; platforms. Each platform was selected within the search randomly. After a random platform selection, an online recruiting platform prospective-student athlete account was created. Upon the registration process, online recruiting platform access differs. For examples, see figures 1, 2 & 3 for reference.

**Figure 1**

*Recruiter Elite Service Description and Cost Prior Registering for an Account*

Online Basic	One Day Evaluation	Advisor Memberships	Retainer Memberships
<b>\$480</b> /year	<b>\$1,500</b> /session	<b>\$5,000</b> /year	<b>\$2,000</b>
<p>Research and Access to approximately 1,000 Teams and Coaches</p> <p>Track Communication with Coaches</p> <p>Search 1,000+ Nationally Ranked Junior Tournaments</p> <p>Access 100+ Recruiting Videos, Email Templates &amp; Scripts</p> <p><a href="#">BUY NOW</a></p> <p>Discount Code <input type="text"/> <a href="#">Apply</a></p>	<p>Spend a day with a Recruiter Elite advisor</p> <p>Evaluation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Overview of a proper practice routine and the structure of college practice</li><li>On-course evaluation to discuss course management, charting, pre-shot and putt routines</li><li>Update swing videos to use as part of recruiting tools</li><li>Meeting with the client and any other members of the client's family or team to discuss strategy moving forward</li></ul> <p><b>If a client decides to become an annual client within 30 days, fees paid toward the</b></p>	<p>Access to the Recruiter Elite App</p> <p>A One Day Evaluation</p> <p>24/7 Access to your Advisor</p> <p>Weekly calls to navigate College Recruiting</p> <p>Weekly calls to monitor Athletic Development</p> <p><a href="#">CONTACT</a></p>	<p>Access to the Recruiter Elite App</p> <p>10 Hours Access to your Advisor</p> <p>Ability to upgrade to a Day Evaluation and/or Full Time Advisor Membership</p> <p><a href="#">CONTACT</a></p>

**Figure 2**

*Athlete College Advisors Payment Requirement*

my.athletecollegeadvisors.com/register

**Athlete College Advisors**  
I.dobele@gmail.com

Card number

MM / YY  CVC

Remember me

[Subscribe](#)

Coupon ID

Golf (W)

[Register](#)

**Figure 3**

*Be Recruited Online Recruiting Platform Free Account Creation*



Registration for each online recruiting platform was created for a hypothetical 2022 high school graduate international women's golfer. Each platform was examined based on the price and the service that was offered, including examining a variety of sports scholarships and guidance, cost, profile information, international availability, video upload quality and guidance, NCAA eligibility education, overall college admission resources, score validation option, future tournament information, application use for platform, and overall quality of online recruiting platform website graphics and usability.

**Coded Variables and Procedures**

The variables created for the content analysis are specific to the industry of college athletic recruitment. Some of the common factors that college coaches look for when recruiting student-athletes are athletic performance/statistics, character, academic achievements, responsiveness, reliability/ work ethic, and try-outs/ video footage (5 Factors Coaches Look For When Recruiting Student-Athletes, 2020). Therefore, variables were chosen to see if online recruiting platforms

are advertising prospective student-athletes by allowing coaches access to what they are looking for. Other variables were added to examine the level of educational material provided regarding NCAA eligibility, cost, and international student-athlete access. According to Robb (2019), “Students can be recognized by their performance or work with agencies to promote their play” (para.2). Consequently, the following variables were created to examine how online recruiting agencies promote players that aspire to become college athletes.

- **Sport Selection** is defined as examining many different sports online recruiting platforms representing both male and female. Sport selection is important to see if women’s golf is represented on a specific platform. Such information can be used to see the size of the company. Depending on the employee capacity, the prospective-student athlete can see if the company has enough resources to assist and represent every sport to the best of their ability.
- **Cost** is an important factor in choosing any service and play role in consumer decision making. For research purposes, the cost was used to compare online recruiting platforms by cost and level of service provided based on the cost. Cost also was examined to identify free online recruiting platform service opportunities.
- **International Account Creation Ability** was coded for international student account access purposes to see if the online recruiting platforms offer availability to register as an international women’s golfer.
- **Player Profile Athletic Statistics** was coded to describe all the statistics each online recruiting platform provides on their respective online profiles for coaches’ view. This is important as coaches need to be able to determine player’s golf skill.

- **Statistical Verification** was coded to examine if athletic statistics/performance provided on the athlete's profile is verified and approved by a personal coach or a representative club. This is important as coaches can have an additional assurance that player's scores on an online recruiting website are accurate.
- **Player Profile Information** was coded to examine overall information provided on athlete's profile.
- **NCAA Eligibility Information** was coded to examine resources listed on each online recruiting platform regarding the NCAA rules and regulations. This is important as NCAA rules can determine athlete's career length.
- **Future event information** was coded to see if online recruiting platforms give up-to-date information about athlete's future events for coaches' view, so that a coach can view players compete in real –life setting.
- **Additional Resources** was coded to inspect other potential services provided by online recruiting platforms that could help in recruitment education for athletes.
- **Free Recruitment Assessment** was coded to discover if free online recruitment assessments are available as free assessments is an opportunity for athletes in becoming familiar with the recruiting process.

### **Technical Variables**

Technical variables of the online recruitment platform's level of usability for the consumer were examined. Technical variables were examined to measure consumer experience while using the online recruiting platforms.

- **Websites Usability was coded** to observe online recruitment websites' features. The website design features that have been investigated in past research have primarily



included usability, the attractiveness of recruitment websites in terms of their colors, fonts, pictures, and bulleted versus paragraphs of text (Braddy et al., 2003).

- **Level of Websites Graphics/Design** was coded to see how eye-catching and up to date the online recruiting platform websites are. Previous research has focused on hedonic elements of a website as they contribute to the user's experience (Childers et al., 2001). Visual design of the website has the potential to contribute to emotional appeal for users (Garrett, 2003) and many be displayed through images or color (graphics) (Rosen & Purinton, 2004).
- **Use of Mobile App** was coded to examine how many online recruitment platforms offer their services via mobile app. Previous research as reviled that as of 2018, smartphones held a 63% share of all retail website visits (27 eye-opening website Statistics, n.d.).
- **Social Media Account Information** was coded to see if online recruiting platforms comply with athlete social media accounts.

## **Interviews**

The interview process was used for qualitative research purposes. Four NCAA Division I college coaches were interviewed regarding their staff recruitment preferences and online recruiting platform use. The following questions were asked for qualitative research purposes.

- 1) What are your expectations/ requirements when possibly picking a recruiting platform to seek potential student athletes?
- 2) What is your preferred recruiting process?
  - a) The use of personal contact
  - b) at sight recruiting
  - c) use of an online platform
  - b) other?
- 3) If/when using an online recruiting platform, what challenges have you faced?
- 4) In your opinion, what would be some advantages of using online recruiting platform?

- 5) In your opinion, what might be missing in the recruiting industry and could be done better?
- 6) What challenges have you faced in an international athlete recruiting process?
- 7) Prospective student-athletes prefer to use recruiting agencies, while coaches prefer other methods (Jara, 2015). Do you agree with this statement? If so, what could be the cause of such phenomenon?

### **Interview Biographies**

**Anonymous 1.** NCAA Division I Head Coach, with more than 17 years of experience in coaching. During her time at the institution, she has won three conference championships, has five NCAA Individual appearances, four NCAA team appearances, and 13 team victories.

**Anonymous 2.** NCAA Division I Head Coach, with more than 14 years of experience in coaching at two different NCAA Division I institutions. Overall, has won 14 tournament titles and has 11 conference selections.

**Rachel Pollock.** Rachel Pollock is 26 years old, born in Ontario, Canada, and is the Assistant Women's Golf Coach at Arkansas State University, NCAA Division I institution. With over three years of working with the Arkansas State University Women's Golf team, her personal experience as a Division I collegiate golfer and LPGA Class B Teaching knowledge has helped the team set records. According to Arkansas State (n.d.), "A-State claimed three tournament championships, including back-to-back titles in spring events, the most in a season since winning three in the 2001-02 season, it marked the first time since the 2000-01 season A-State won back-to-back events, team A-State finished the shortened 2019-20 season with a 296.52 stroke average, marking the sixth-straight season to set a program-best" (para. 3).

**Abigail Chloe Evans.** Abigail Chloe Evans is 26 years old, a native of Rainham, Kent, in England and is the Assistant Women's Golf Coach at the University of Southern Mississippi,

NCAA Division I institution. According to University of Southern Mississippi Athletics (n.d.), “Her first spring on the coaching circuit involved working with all-time Southern Miss great Valentina Haupt, who in June 2020 earned an LPGA exemption thanks to her strong finish at the Energy Producers, Inc. Texas Women's Open, becoming the first in program history to clinch a spot on the game's highest stage” (para. 2).

Intercoder reliability was computed using Cohen’s kappa, correcting for chance agreement, and all questions reached acceptable levels above .8 (Cohen, 1960; 1968).

## Chapter 4. Results

This study examines the female student-athlete golfers' use of Online Recruiting Platforms to Seek Scholarships from a global perspective. In this section, the results will be shared from the content analysis of 20 online recruiting platforms and four interviews of NCAA Division I coaches. The qualitative variables in this study represent mutually exclusive categories. Tables were created using the Microsoft Excel software to describe the qualitative and quantitative variables in the study. First, research question one is explored.

**RQ1:** What are common services offered by online college recruiting platforms?

The sample consisted of 20 online recruiting platforms ( $n = 20$ ). Common services offered by online college recruiting platforms include online athlete profile publication within the specific platform including sports statistics: tournament score average, low 18 golf-hole, 36 golf-hole, 72 golf-hole scoring and low scoring, players HCP, Rsascounting and Smarthlete online recruiting platforms include individual club hit distance (7 iron). An athlete online profile includes academic scores: SAT, ACT, TOEFL, high school transcript, high school GPA, and academic honors if any, two online recruiting platforms include intended college major listing. Six online recruiting platforms have athlete online profiles that include athlete measurements: weight, height, left or right hand dominance.

**RQ2:** How cost effective are college platforms for exhibiting value?

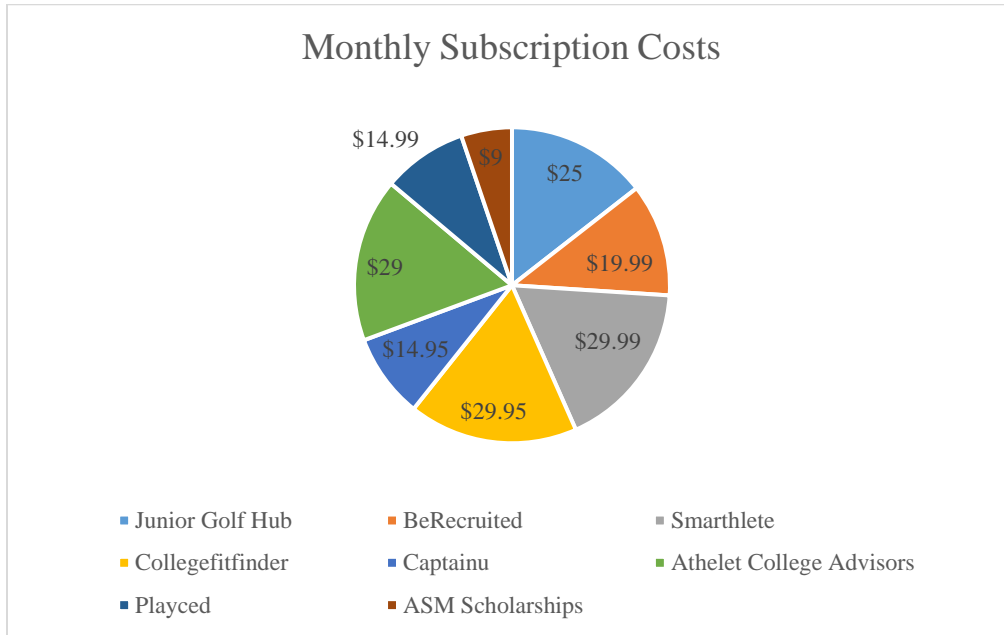
It is difficult to assess the cost-effectiveness of online recruiting platform services due to wide distribution of pricing and offered services.

The chart below represents online recruiting platforms that offer monthly memberships and provide a service of athletes profile creation that include commonly offered services. The athlete profile distribution to universities and their coaching staffs varies, additional coats might

apply. ASM Scholarships require further online meeting with a recruiter to start the recruiting process.

**Figure 4**

*Monthly Subscription Cost*



- Junior Golf Hub offers a free basic membership that includes: an athlete profile, blog subscription, sharing the profile with college coaches, instant app notifications when a college coach views or follows a profile, automatic upload of tournament results, five educational articles, and a tournament finder. A \$25 per month or \$249 yearly membership includes all of the above and additionally: the ability to see exactly who views or follows an athletes profile, access to all of the college programs in the U.S. including coaches contact information, additional resources.
- BeRecruited offers free basic membership that includes: an athlete profile and blog, access to school program information, the ability to follow school programs, free iOS app download, and free scout evaluation. A \$19.99 per month membership includes all the above and nine times more exposure to coaches than the free membership, sending emails

to coaches, inviting coaches to view a profile to find out if the coach is interested. A \$299 lifetime membership includes all of the above and additionally: a game film evaluation, a personalized scouting report, a sixty-minute recruiting consultation with a recruiting coach, and customized target schools list based on one's preferences.

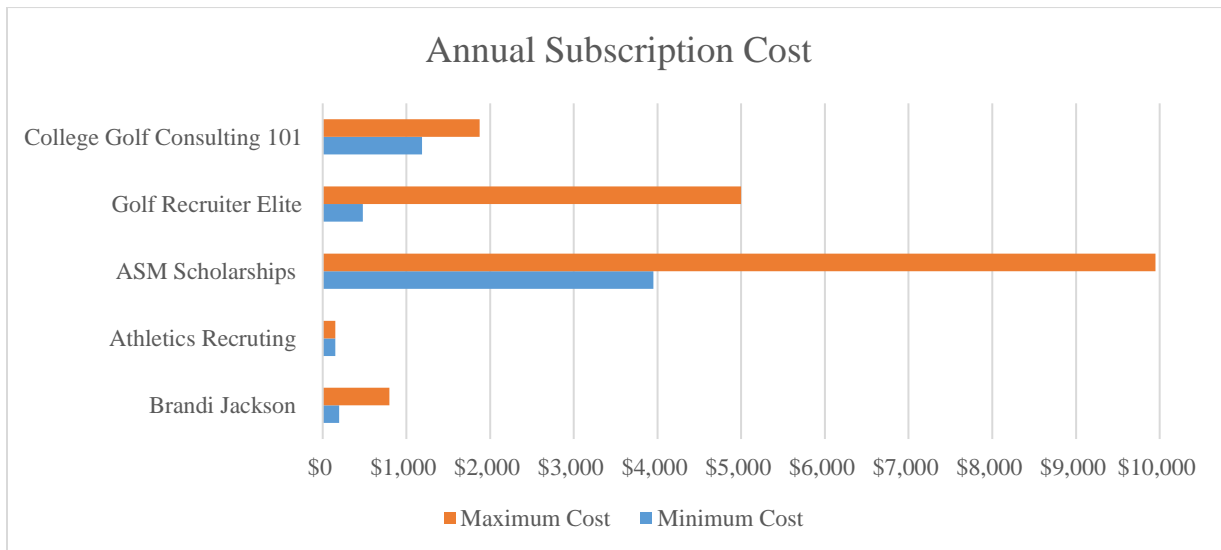
- Smarthlete offers free basic membership that includes: a recruiting profile a to-do list, a favorite university list, and coaches' contacts. A \$29.90 per month expert membership includes all of the above and a recruiting video guide, a conversation tracker, recruiting insights, university databases, increased visibility, unlimited messaging, and messaging templates. A \$299.90 per month expert + membership includes all of the above and a university list and video call with a recruiting expert.
- College Finder offers a \$29.50 per month membership but an athlete cannot register without acquiring a coupon from participating clubs' administration.
- CaptainU offers a basic free membership that allows creating a profile. A 14.95 per month silver membership offers: seeing profile traffic, messaging college coaches, finding colleges that fit tool, building a profile that stands out, online recruiting plan guidance, email support from recruiting experts. A \$29.95 per month gold membership include all of the above and limited phone call conversations with a recruiting coach, regular advice from a team of experts, and basic players golf swing video editing. A \$74.95 per month platinum membership include all of the above and athletic assessment and division recommendation, golf competition suggestions, personalized college matching, ongoing strategic guidance on communicating with college coaches, scholarships, and financial aid assessment.

- Athlete College Finder offers a free basics membership for a month and then \$29 per month that includes: ACA Recruiting Tool that determines the best fit colleges, allows contacting coaches in a highly personalized way, highlights strengths in the athlete profile, and makes connections. A \$59 per month starter plus membership includes all of the above and ACA Pathway Courses that include: videos, podcasts, data and guidance on college recruiting process, college recruiting industry information including deadlines and timelines, best fit school finder tool, and an effective coach communication strategy plan. A \$189 per month an annual commitment premium plan includes all of the above and Expert Advising that offers personal guidance from recruiters, email, and phone or text access to recruiters, video call with expert recruiter, and resume/application review.
- Played Athletic Recruiting offers basic free membership that includes: recruit spotlight on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, recruit tracker to manage process with each school, seeing which coaches follow the profile, personalized email messages to send college coaches, access to school, program and coach contact information, matching with college programs, players resume included in scouting report to coaches, priority appearance in college coach searches, coaches availability to access athlete's cell phone number, email address, Twitter handle and resume. A 29.99\$ per month membership offers all the above and coaches' ability to access highlight video, appearance in college coach search results, creating an online player resume (sharable link).

The chart below indicates individual cost for an online recruiting service that includes annual services and represents minimum and maximum plan costs for each online recruiting platform.

**Figure 5**

*Annual Subscription Cost*



- College Golf Consulting 101 offers \$5677 Level 101:30 hour program and yearly consultation (\$1695 following 1 year) that includes: personal consultation with Coach Kelson at client’s home/golf course or at world class facility in Southwest Virginia, insights into the college golf recruiting, advice on college placement/selection choice, tournament and practice preparation, assist with junior golf scheduling, 100% prepared for official and unofficial college visits, permissible NCAA Liaison, recruiting video/package, the mental game of golf. A \$1695 Level 201: 15 hour program that offers to help transfer to another institution.
- Golf Recruiter Elite offer a \$480 yearly online basic membership that includes: research and access to approximately 1,000 teams and coaches, track communication with coaches, search 1,000+ nationally ranked junior golf tournaments, access to 100+ recruiting videos, email templates, and scripts. A \$1,500 per session one day evaluation package includes: a day with a Recruiter Elite advisor, overview of a proper practice routine and the structure of college practice, on-course evaluation to discuss course



management, charting, pre-shot and putt routines, update swing videos to use as part of a recruiting tool, meeting with the client and many other members of the client's family to discuss strategy moving forward. A \$5,000 yearly membership includes access to Recruiter Elite app, a one-day evaluation, 24/7 access to a recruiting advisor, weekly calls to navigate college recruiting, and weekly calls to monitor athletic development. A \$2,000 retainer membership includes access to the Recruiter Elite app, ten-hour access to a recruiting advisor, and ability to upgrade to a day evolution and/or full time advisor membership.

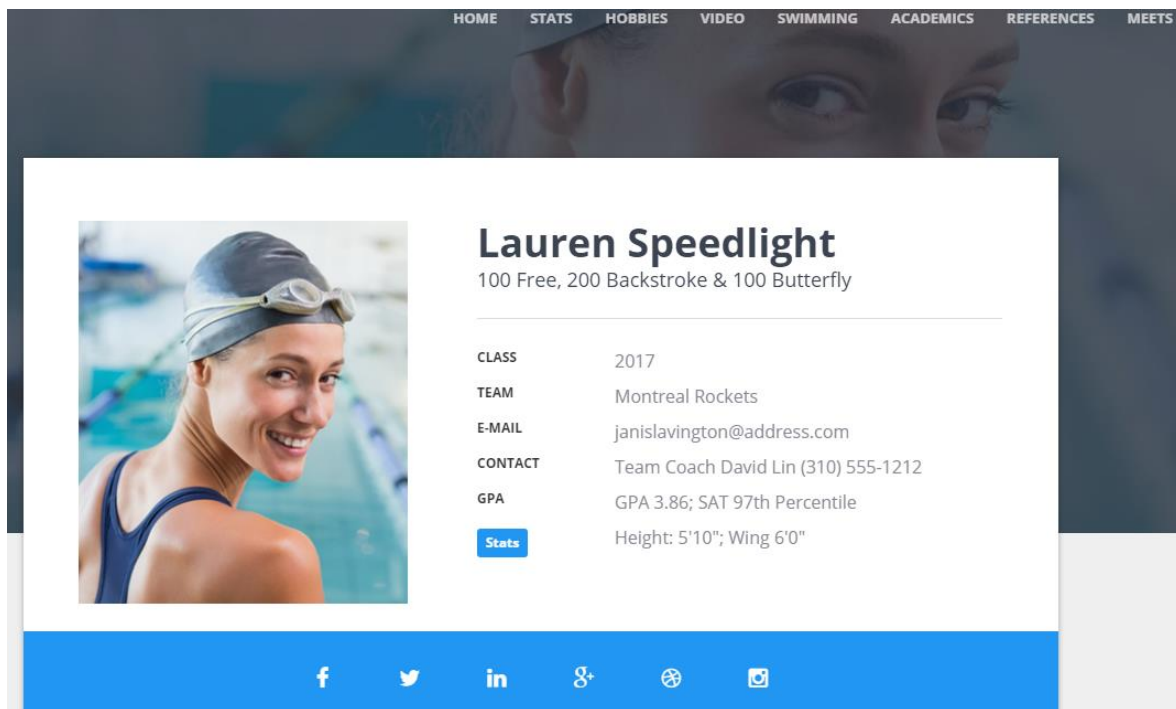
- ASM Scholarships membership pricing was accessed through a WhatsApp conversation with one of the platforms representatives. A \$ 3950 club membership includes customized recruitment plan, online profile and social media promotion, professional highlight video editing, university marketing and connections, sport and academic scholarship offers, university application paperwork, and enrollment. A \$4950 club+ membership includes all of the above, a personal tutor (three classes), and one year support and management (National Letter of Intent support, I20 and Visa guidance, travel concierge, support during university, university transfer service). A \$7950 premium membership includes a personal tutor with six classes, all of the above and eligibility exams and verification (SAT, TOEFL or ACT, NCAA or NAIA Clearinghouse, transcript translation), exam cost included, five university visits, the U.S. tournament preparation, and one year health insurance. A \$9950 VIP membership includes all of the above and offers twelve classes with a tutor, two exams, unlimited university visits, college camp planning, and four years of support and management (National Letter of Intent support,

I20 and Visa guidance, travel concierge, support during university, university transfer service).

- Athletics Recruiting offers a \$ 149 service of personalized athlete website creation. The figure below presents an example.

**Figure 6**

*Athletic Recruiting Personalized Athlete Website Example*



- Brandi Jackson’s online recruiting platform offers a \$49 initial online toolbox that includes: building a resume, draft emails, research od schools, sample email, mock phone call and question access, communication and research tracker, topics that help improving one’s golf game, performance training and nutrition information (4-week TPI training program included), life and personal development and parent section. A \$195 virtual comprehensive consultation includes all of the above and a comprehensive meeting to discuss expectations of the process, assessment of resume, advice on finding the right fit, and

create a strategy. A \$795 college recruiting evaluation package includes all of the above and a nine hole on course player development assessment, recruiting video filmed and edited, follow-up report and recommendations. A \$1495 consulting program for female golfers is also available and offers insight to navigate the recruiting process.

**RQ3:** What are some advantages of using online recruiting platform?

From investigation of the online recruiting platforms and Division I coach interviews, advantages of using online recruiting platform include:

- prospective student athlete mass data and contact sharing amongst the college coaches in the United States;
- ability to access prospective student athletes statistics, demographics, and potential school interest;
- athletes' personal online profile platforms that help coaching staffs find the statistic and tournament information on international athletes;
- coaches' access to athlete upcoming tournament information for potential in person scouting.

According to Division I Assistant Coach Abigail Evans, "An advantage is that all the information is right there at your fingertips, you do not have to travel or spend hours scrolling on social media to find a good player." According to Division I Women's Golf Assistant Coach Rachel Pollock, "It allows us to have a broad overview of a player in a matter of minutes and it typically states their scholastic ability, swing videos and scores; it is a great way to have a quick glance of an overview of a player." According to a Division I Women's Golf Coach, "The ease of mass circulation of an athlete's resume; online recruiters can send it to everybody like you want - south east and south- here you go and, also, create your video for you."

**RQ4:** What are some disadvantages of using online recruiting platforms?

From investigation of the online recruiting platforms and Division I coach interviews, disadvantages of using an online recruiting platform include:

- profile generalization and difficulty to stand out amongst thousands of profiles;
- an online recruiting platform promise of a college fit or placement without having interactions with college coaches and knowing their personalities; and
- variations in cost starting from \$9 monthly to \$9950 yearly.

According to Division I Assistant Coach Abigail Evans, “As a lower end Division I School, we do not get sent the top tier profiles that the top 50 Division I schools in the country get sent.”

According to Division I Women’s Golf Assistant Coach Rachel Pollock, “The biggest challenge we face is that the platform is so impersonal. Most of the time it feels as though the platform is sending out emails to every program in the country. “We are looking to create genuine connections and develop relationships with our players and recruits from the first initial contact and it is difficult to do this if the recruiting platform is sending out generic mass emails to coaches.”

According to Division I Women’s Golf Coach, “Two girls were sold to me by the guy who gave me one of my best players back in the day, so trusted platform, showed scoring average of 76 on their entire resume and they come here and cannot break 80.”

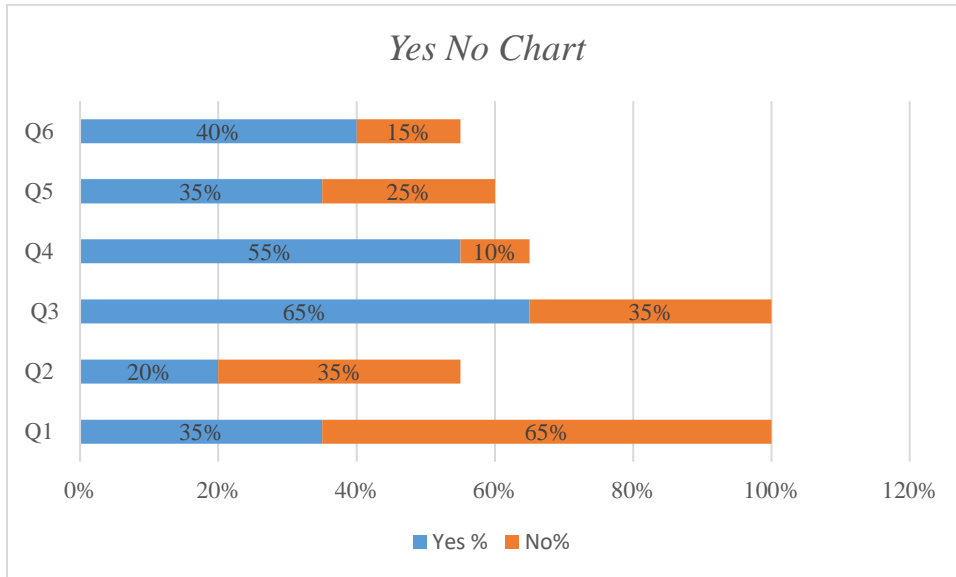
**RQ5:** How well do online recruiting platforms educate prospective student-athletes on their college options, scholarships, coaching staffs, and NCAA eligibility?

Some online recruiting platforms educate on all, college options, scholarship information, and NCAA eligibility, some provide misleading advertisements of services offered, and some only represent the athlete without any educational material access.

The chart below represents the answers for yes or no for questions Q1-Q6. Not all platforms were examined within these measurements as internal access was not available without making a payment.

**Figure 7**

*Yes No Chart*



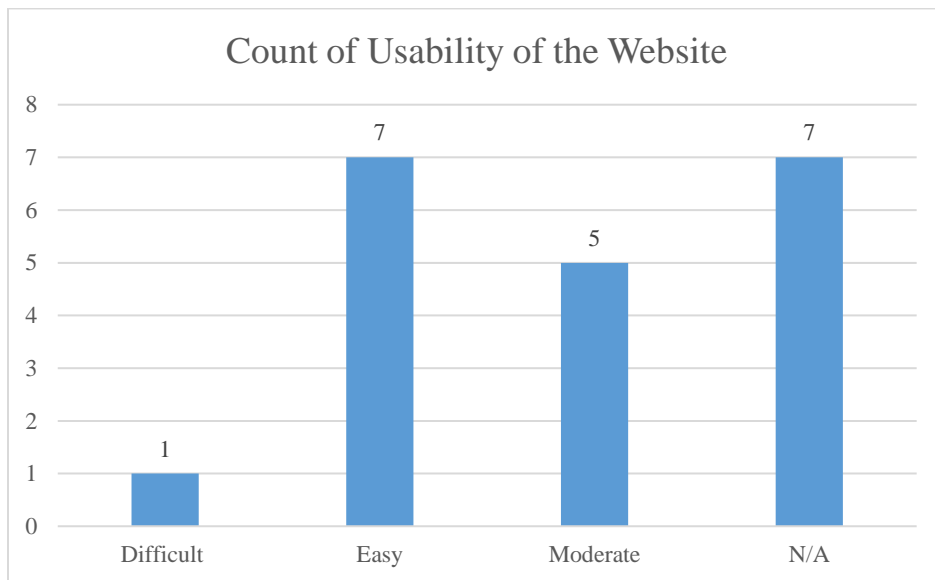
- Q1 identifies what percentage of 20 examined online recruiting platforms require athlete's personal coaches' verification of the scores that are provided on the platform.
- Q2 identifies what percentage of 20 examined online recruiting platforms provide NCAA Eligibility information to an athlete that is registered.
- Q3 identifies what percentage of 20 examined online recruiting platforms represent more than one sport.
- Q4 identifies what percentage of 20 examined online recruiting platforms allow athletes list their address internationally.

- Q5 identifies what percentage of 20 examined online recruiting platforms allow coaches view athletes' future tournament information (name of the tournament, date of the tournament, location).
- Q6 identifies what percentage of 20 examined online recruiting platforms provide registered athletes with additional educational resources.

The chart below represents the count of the usability of the website for each of the 20 platforms examined. Not all platforms were examined within these measurements as internal access was not available without making a payment.

**Figure 8**

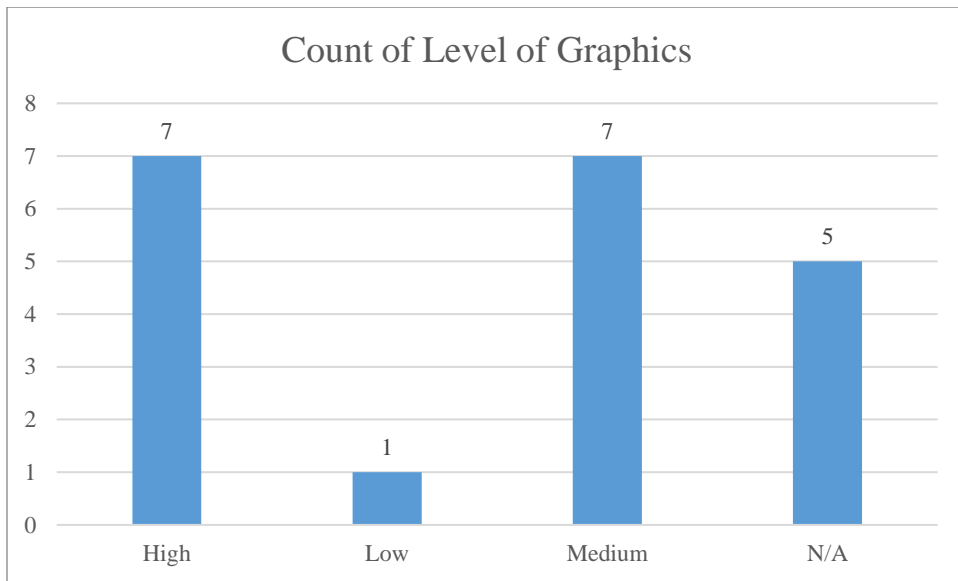
*Count of Usability of the Website*



The chart below represents the level of graphics for each of the 20 platforms examined. Not all platforms were examined within these measurements as internal access was not available without making a payment.

**Figure 9**

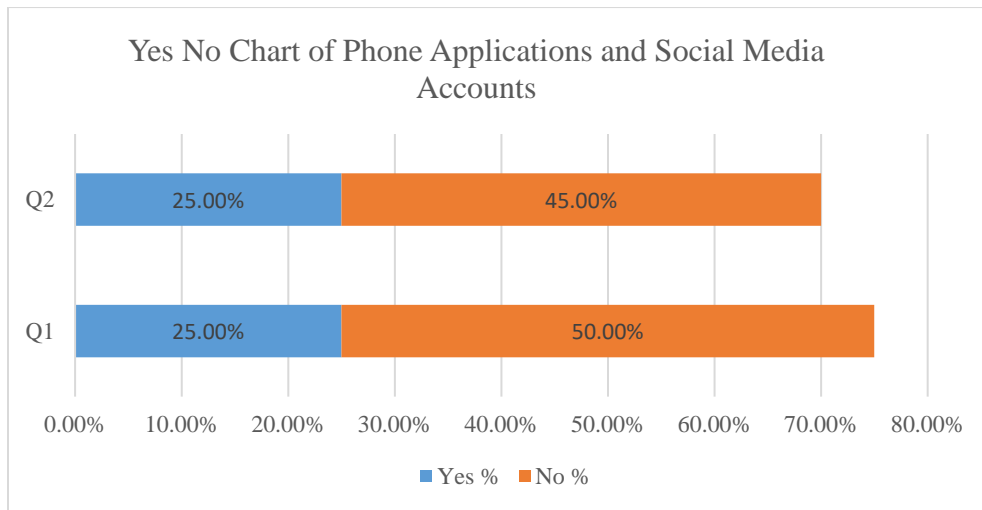
*Count of Level of Graphics*



The chart below represents answers yes or no for questions Q1-Q2. Not all platforms were examined within these measurements as internal access was not available without making a payment. Q1 identifies what percentage of the 20 examined online recruiting platforms have a phone application. Q2 identifies what percentage of 20 examined online recruiting platforms have athletes' social media accounts linked to the platform.

**Figure 10**

*Yes No Chart of Phone Applications and Social Media Accounts*





## Chapter 5. Discussion

### Discussion of Findings

In the review of the results, the research questions' findings reveal the advantages, disadvantages, services, and cost of the online recruiting platforms. The findings are reviewed in this section. The online recruiting platforms analyzed in this study represent online recruiting platform variety that is available for women's golfers to seek scholarships at a Division I collegiate level. The interview process in this study represents a portion of the NCAA Division I coaching perspective of online recruiting platforms. Previous studies have demonstrated the positive and negative aspects of utilizing online recruiting platforms to seek scholarships. According to Bastie (2018), "Like any industry, there are good recruiting services and there are companies that are just trying to separate you from your money" (para. 3). The online recruiting platform pricing and service model varies but is serving the same purpose. According to Conrad (2018), the process starts with coaches being made aware of a prospect through social media, then basic academic contact and physical information about the prospect is gathered and introduced. Recruiters often list different aspects first, for example, international student academic achievements are listed first due to their potential ability to being awarded an academic scholarship.

As viewed in Chart 1 and Figure 4, this study reviews 8 online recruiting platforms that are available for free and at a low monthly membership cost. Services available in the eight platforms examined are similar. Platforms vary on the website layout and usability. As viewed in Chart 2 and Figure 4, five online recruiting platforms offer more significant yearly membership costs and some significantly differ in offered services. The substantial increase in cost involves the virtual or in-person presence of a recruiting company representative, a recruiter, or a golf

coach who is also a recruiter. Offering real-life advice virtually or in-person seems to be what is driving the pricing from low monthly subscription costs up to a couple of hundred or even thousands of dollars. Golf is an "equivalency" sport: Programs may split the value of a scholarship among multiple students, and coaches of women's teams reported an average roster size of 8.28 this season, with 7.04 players (85 percent) receiving scholarships. (p.1) Basic athlete profile mass distribution to coaches is offered free of with low monthly subscription costs that add on services to be utilized in one's advanced if used properly but do not discuss scholarship, NCAA eligibility, school transfer, or international paperwork information. Thus, without professional guidance and one's profile ability to stand out amongst thousands of other athlete profiles, seeking college scholarships could be difficult. This could be considered as a disadvantage if the athlete does not put in work to make sure the profile stands out. Personal recruiter's advice could involve discussion of scholarship distributions athletically and academically at the university of interest along with potential information of the coaching staff characters, style of coaching, and team environment. Basic online recruiting packages do not provide such information even though some are offering to find a best-fit college which could be difficult to do without knowing the athletes' or college coaches' character and personality. Nevertheless, the college coach contact information that is provided by online recruiting platforms and college social media accounts can be located without needing help from an online recruiting platform. Overall, disadvantages examined include athlete profile generalization and difficulty to stand out when coaches are approached via email, best-fit guarantees that would require more feedback on coaching staffs and athletes, varieties of cost, and uncertainty regarding the services that are offered. According to Division I Assistant Women's Golf Coach Rachel Pollock, "It is difficult to believe an agency who does not possess that knowledge of a

player, that is often why NCAA coaches contact the player's coaches to gain more insight into the player and create a big picture of their qualities and skill." Assistant Women's Golf Coach Rachel continues, "Prospective SAs are taking the "easy way out" with such agencies, instead of researching and contacting coaches themselves as we often will open an email from a personal account rather than an agency."

Some of the advantages of using an online recruiting platform include mass contact sharing of prospective student-athlete data amongst the college coaches in the United States, and an athlete's resume can be sent out to every NCAA Division I, II, and III institution. The ability to access prospective student athlete's statistics, demographics, and potential school interest is an advantage, especially when seeking an international player. An athlete's online profile platform can help coaching staffs and coaches find the statistic and tournament information on international athletes and access to athlete upcoming tournament information for potential in-person scouting.

Chart 3 and Figure 7 in this study reviews that 35% of examined online recruiting platforms require athlete's personal coaches' verification of the tournament scores provided on the platform. An essential feature for recruiting international student-athletes is often coaches are not able to travel abroad and watch internationals play at sight.

Twenty percent of examined online recruiting platforms provide NCAA Eligibility information to a registered athlete. The five online recruiting platforms that are presented in Chart 2 and Figure 4 provide expert recruiter advice that could include discussing an NCAA Eligibility but such service has not been specified. Not knowing the NCAA Eligibility rules can heavily impact an athlete's college career as an NCAA rule violation can have serious repercussions, for example, losing a year of competition or not being able to participate in a

certain amount of tournaments. In some instances, recruiting platforms can harm an athlete's eligibility stance. According to NCAA, Division I Women's Golf Head Coach, "Two of my players were transferring, and I found them a school that offered both full athletic scholarships and a school's coach was ready to sign them after they talked to their recruiter company representatives. They informed me that they would like to skip a semester and then find a place as they were told that there will be more offers." NCAA, Division I Women's Golf Head Coach continues, "They denied my offer to find them a school and went on their own with the recruiter just to find out a semester later that they are academically NCAA ineligible and cannot play NCAA sports for one full academic year." Having a recruiter with NCAA Eligibility knowledge or resources to learn about NCAA rules and regulations is extremely important when perusing a career in college athletics.

Sixty-five percent of examined online recruiting platforms represent more than one sport on their online platform. Therefore, athletes need to evaluate how much of a specific sport to their knowledge will be offered from the platform.

Fifty-five percent of examined online recruiting platforms offer a profile creation for international student-athletes. The opportunity to see international athlete contact information without traveling to a specific destination or contacting international athletic clubs is a major advantage and can serve as a great way to locate players from all around the globe. According to University of Southern Mississippi Assistant Coach Abigail Evans, "An advantage is that all the information is right there at your finger-tips, you do not have to travel or spend hours scrolling on social media to find a good player."

Thirty-five percent of examined online recruiting platforms allow college coaches to view athlete's future tournament information. This tool can be utilized by college coaches as

often onsite recruiting can be challenging without knowing the name of contact information of the players that are at the tournament. Having the tournament information listed can allow college coaches to watch players they already have information on and that they are interested in. Forty percent of examined online recruiting platforms provide additional resources that can be very useful for athletes preparing for an intercollegiate career.

Chart 3 and Figure 7 represent the usability of the online recruiting platform website. Seven of the examined online recruiting platform websites were not accessible for a thorough examination of usability. Seven platforms were categorized as easy, five as moderate, and one as difficult in their usability.

Chart 4 and Figure 8 represent the level of graphics in each platform. Five of the examined online recruiting platform websites were not accessible for a thorough examination of their level of graphics. Seven platforms were described as having a high, medium, and low level of graphics on their website.

Chart 5 and Figure 9 in the study reviews that 25% of examined recruiting platforms have a phone application. Chart 6 and Figure 10 in the study reviews that 25% of the examined online recruiting platforms had athlete's social media accounts linked to the platform. College coaches utilizing online recruiting services and being able to access athlete's social media account information could help to judge athletes' character and personality.

This study was grounded in theoretical frameworks of diffusion of innovations theory which explains how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology spread among participants in a social system (Oliver, Raney & Bryant, 2020, p. 20). The application of the theory could support the argument that coaching staffs all over the United States took longer to adapt to the innovation of an online recruiting platform use to recruit student-athletes as previously used

methods of one site recruiting and personal contacts in past had been effective. Occasional online recruiting platform use as an additional tool to recruit has been found as a phenomenon in the qualitative research part of this study. Based on the diffusion of innovations theory, often coaching staff can be considered as a late majority in the adaption of the innovation. Research suggests that prospective student-athletes prefer to use recruiting agencies, while coaches prefer other methods (Jara, 2015). According to Arkansas State University Assistant Coach Rachel Pollock, “Most of the time it feels as though the platform is sending out emails to every program in the country.” Arkansas State University Assistant Coach Rachel Pollock continues, “We are looking to create genuine connections and develop relationships with our players and recruits from the first initial contact and it is difficult to do this if the recruit having the platform send out generic mass emails to coaches.” Findings suggest that coaches are only looking at received emails from the platform instead of engaging with the platform and its features.

Third-Person Effect Theory suggests that, “The editorials have little effect on people like you and me, but the ordinary reader is likely to be influenced quite a lot” (Davidson, 1983, p.3). As athletes navigate through the online recruiting platform to find the description of offered services and cost might not be aware of advertising techniques used to attract new customers. Moreover, the theory suggests that one tends to believe that there is no or very little personal effect on advertising influencing one’s decisions. Services offered by online recruiting platforms offer long descriptions of services and benefits that often have little value to the recruiting process. Therefore, reading service descriptions and reviews of platforms can help to understand the value of the service. Ignoring advertisement effects on oneself can lead to rushed decisions and committing to a recruiting service that will cover one’s chances of finding the best college.

Elaboration Likelihood Model Theory seeks to explain how humans process stimuli differently through the peripheral route of processing for people that want to purchase an item but do not know specifics of it and the central route that involves individuals invest in examining the item in great detail before making a decision (Geddes, 2016). As results in Chart 4 and Figure 8 show, only one online recruiting platform has low-quality graphics. For individuals that tend to use the peripheral route of processing and looking at the layout and surface of product or service, more in-depth research would be suggested to ensure making the best recruiting decision.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

**Limitations:** Due to the creation of athlete online profiles for each platform, it was only practical to analyze 20 online recruiting platforms in the given timeframe. Overall gathered data was limited. A larger sample size could reveal more recently launched recruiting agencies. Additionally, only four NCAA, Division I college coaches were interviewed; more interviews would provide more qualitative evidence on coaches' perspective on online recruiting platform use. The researcher does limit its scope to only a very specific group of participants. Division I Women's Golf is a very specific population, and the data results will only apply to that population.

**Future Directions:** Throughout this study, several considerations for future research were uncovered. Future research could focus on views of current women's golf players and their experiences using the online recruiting platforms to seek scholarships in the U.S. The scholarships received, the knowledge gained, and overall experience of the service could be examined from the lens of women's golfer that utilized online recruiting platform services. Future research also could investigate other sports represented by the online recruiting platforms.

## **Conclusion**

Online recruiting platforms utilized by female student-athlete golfers to seek scholarships globally can offer numerous services and vary in costs. Typically, an all-online service with an online database and opportunities is accessible via affordable monthly memberships. An online recruiting platform athlete profile use can be a good tool to learn more about college athletics and find out college coaching information. However, if choosing such a route of online recruiting platform assistance, the athlete seeking a scholarship needs to do most of the groundwork. An athlete needs to be considering sending emails from a personal email account and potentially only using an online recruiting platform for an email template provided by the platform (not all offer such service). Researching the desired school on social media and their team on their school's official website also is necessary, along with researching desired college team's tournament schedule, and their previous success. An athlete needs to research what academic scholarships are offered by the institution and search for a professional contact who is familiar with the NCAA Eligibility rules and regulations or seek a downloaded version of the NCAA Eligibility manual online.

If an athlete prefers a more expansive route of online recruiting platform assistance, such services will most likely involve a recruiting coach or an expert consultation that can offer more in-depth knowledge. However, one needs to be cautious of committing to invest funds in a service that does not clearly state the services offered and not seeing the description of recruiting expert's advice breakdowns. A service can advertise guarantying nine times more exposure to coaches or a 60-minute consultation that offers personal guidance. However, without an explanation of the statistics or the scope of the level of personal guidance offered, one cannot be sure if this will lead to a successful recruiting experience. Another useful approach for future



college athletes to learn more about the program and its culture involves following the official social media accounts of the institutions. Afterward, direct contact of one of the current players of the team can be explored to ask questions of one's interest. An option presented in the study of the creation of an athlete's website that can be easily distributed to coaches via a link or placed in one's social media bio could be another creative way how one could personally advertise.

Coaches interviewed reveal that getting to know players personally is extremely important for building a team culture. Also, assurance of the score's verification by the coaches or the golf courses they compete at is vital to trust the source. Most of the time, coaches will still try reaching out to trusted sources to confirm the player's abilities. The small population of interviewed coaches agrees on preferring to use onsite or personal contact recruiting methods. However, they do use online recruiting platforms for some services, like contact information look-up or look-up of the future tournament schedules.

Finally, seeking a scholarship is an important matter that needs to be taken seriously and treated responsibly. Conducting one's research on colleges of interest, learning NCAA rules, preparing for required tests, and organizing needed paperwork will help one succeed. Using one's current golf coach as a resource to open a line of communication with colleges of interest is also important. An organized and thoughtful process is required to be successful in finding the best college and team for a talented athlete.

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VITA

LINDA DOBELE

- Education: M.A. Brand and Media Strategy, East Tennessee State University,  
Johnson City, Tennessee, 2021
- MBA Business Administration in Sports Management, Tiffin  
University, Tiffin, Ohio, 2021
- B.S. Psychology, General Psychology, Sport Management Minor,  
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2017
- Experience: Graduate Assistant for Academic Service, East Tennessee State  
University, Athletic Department, 2019-202
- Graduate Assistant for Men's and Women's Golf, Tiffin University,  
Tiffin, Ohio, 2017-2019
- Honors and Awards: Deans List and Academic Honor Roll, East Tennessee State  
University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2015-2017