Research exploring intangible effects of sport events includes social impacts such as the feel-good-factor (Gibson et al., 2014), community involvement (Peterson et al., 2008), social cohesion (Fredline, 2006), and social capital (Oja et al., 2018). In addition to traditional event consumption (e.g., T.V. radio, etc.), social media offers new ways to engage with others because of the event (Smith et al., 2019), thereby boosting a sense of belonging (Cramm & Nieuboer, 2015) and possibly enhancing social impact experiences from events. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore if social media event engagement (SMEE) enhances social impact experiences (SIE) generated through that event. The Toronto Raptors’ championship performance during the 2019 NBA (National Basketball Association) Finals generated a hype (Campbell, 2014), offering a unique context to capture SMEE and SIEs from an event.

Panel data from four quota samples were collected from the following Canadian regions: Toronto (n=243; hometown of the Raptors), Ontario (but outside Toronto; n=264), Vancouver (n=258), and Atlantic (n=241); each was proportionally stratified according to gender. All participants (n=1011) completed an online self-administered questionnaire. SIEs were measured through the feel-good-factor (FGF, 4-items; \(\alpha=.85\)), community involvement (COMINV, 4-items; \(\alpha=.85\)), social cohesion (SOC-COH, 4-items; \(\alpha=.92\)), and social capital (SOC-CAP, 4-items; \(\alpha=.93\)). SMEE consisted of seven items which elicited how individuals engaged with social media because of the 2019 NBA Finals (e.g., I celebrated the 2019 NBA finals with others on social media; I shared my thoughts about the 2019 NBA finals with others on social media; \(\alpha=.96\)). Linear regressions were run to predict each SIE from SMEE while controlling for event consumption (live and non-live through various mediums: e.g., television, radio), affinity with basketball (participation, fandom, and affect) and socio-demographic characteristics (gender, education, employment, household income, ethnicity, and geographic region), as these factors can also affect sport event impacts (Koo et al., 2006).

All models significantly predicted each SIE (R\(^2\) ranging from .626 to .712; \(p<.001\)). SMEE was a significant predictor for all four SEIs, as was affinity with basketball. Specifically affect, which showed the highest coefficient (\(\beta=.500, p<.001\)), even if participants were not a fan of basketball. Except for the FGF, which was experienced equally by participants from all four regions, Torontonians showed significant higher levels of SIEs. Women experienced significantly lower levels of FGF and SOC-CAP; White respondents showed significant higher levels of the FGF.

The findings indicate that social media engagement through a sport event amplifies positive experiences of social impact from that event. Thus, sport marketers are encouraged to find ways to stimulate the usage of social media platforms during events, so spectators can express their emotional responses (e.g., Jones et al., 2012; Yu & Wang, 2015). We also found that fandom is not a prerequisite to be positively affected by a special event (Shank & Beasley, 1998). Without being a fan, one can experience a vibe from a special event, reinforcing SIEs (Pawlowski et al., 2014).