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Teaching College Athletes Social Media Appropriateness

Christina Murray
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TEACHING COLLEGE ATHLETES SOCIAL MEDIA APPROPRIATENESS

By

Christina M. Murray

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In Partial Fulfillment of the
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2021

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By

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all student athletes for their tireless effort balancing being a student and an athlete.

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My gratitude goes to Dr. Paul Turpin for his hours of guidance working with me throughout my journey as a graduate student. Teaching that Aristotle's principles on rhetoric are not only important to the discipline of Communication Studies, but to the social interactions I will experience in my own life, causing me to realize that rhetoric is not so bad after all. Dr. Teresa Bergman will continue to be someone who inspires me to remember that regardless of how busy I become with my own career, to never forget to give back my time to students; in order to have the opportunity, to make a positive impact in their lives as she has made in mine.

TEACHING COLLEGE ATHLETES SOCIAL MEDIA APPROPRIATENESS

Abstract

By Christina M. Murray

University of the Pacific
2021

It may come as no surprise that Twitter is the most popular social media platform where student athletes, particularly men, post inappropriate content. Male student athletes' inappropriate tweets have become such a problem for universities, athletic departments, and the NCAA that coaches are forced to place a ban on their players' social media usage or hire third party monitoring systems. Unfortunately, these reactive responses have not alleviated the problem of athletes differentiating what content is appropriate or inappropriate to tweet on their Twitter accounts. Analysis of the data collected from scholarly journal articles, textbooks, and popular press articles revealed that social media education would be the most effective prevention method to lessen student athletes' inappropriate tweets. This project uses Dr. Mark Robinson's approach to Personal Player Development in constructing its two resources—multimedia workshops and an interactive Canvas site. The purpose of this project is for student athletes to be more aware of their social media content by knowing how to post appropriate tweet messages on their personal Twitter accounts in order to enable athletes, especially men, to comprehend why certain tweet messages are classified as inappropriate and, therefore, should never be made public. This project is significant because it proposes a preventative method based on increased social media awareness, as opposed to typical reactionary measures.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There is no shortage of stories on collegiate athletes creating controversies over inappropriate content posted on their personal social media accounts. This thesis project identifies the problems with college athletes' social media misuse, ineffective remedies, and proposes to address it with education on social media appropriateness.

Social media is everywhere. Social media has become so ingrained in society that it is normal, especially among young people, to post messages and photos several times a day from electronic devices. The popularity of social media sites has grown among young people including college students because of the enjoyment to connect and share views or photos back and forth with their personal networks. College students often use social media to express themselves, including their political views, favorite foods, leisure activities, places to study, favorite classes, or television shows. These behaviors allow students to express themselves in meaningful ways, but they also cause viral social media mishaps because some young users post provocative words and photos.

College students also use social media to communicate to specific groups of people, such as friends, family, co-workers, and classmates for a variety of reasons. The most common reasons are to see what others are doing and to comment on their posts. Young users of social media enjoy expressing themselves by sharing their many interests on the Internet displaying their beliefs, values, ideas, and thoughts, that collectively form their identities. In Mark Robinson's book, *Athletic Identity* (2015), the term "holistic identity" is used to refer to the many interests, beliefs, ideas, thoughts, and values that collectively make up a young person's identity.

Each time young people share their variety of interests on their personal social media accounts whether it be a picture or a written message, it is a reflection of their holistic identity.

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social media accounts whether it be a picture or a written message, it is a reflection of their holistic identity.

Though many college students post on social media inappropriately, the difference between nonathletes and athletes lies in the amount of national or local media attention athletes receive. According to Robinson (2015), college athletes are just like ordinary college students, except for the media spotlight placed upon them. When student athletes post an emotional outburst on social media, it not only reflects poorly on the athlete but also their university, the athletic department, and the National Collegiate Athlete Association (NCAA). This can create a public relations crisis for the athlete's university, the athletic department, and sometimes, the NCAA. National, local, and regional media markets focus on college sports because of the revenue that cable networks are investing in television and digital coverage on collegiate athletes and their sporting events. The national media markets tend to focus their attention on the highest level of Division I athletes. Typically, these athletes play for the Power Five conferences—Atlantic Coast (ACC), Pacific-12 (PAC-12), South Eastern (SEC), Big East, and Big 12, which are the largest and wealthiest conferences in collegiate sports. These athletes receive national media attention when they make inappropriate social media posts. This does not exempt other Division I athletes (who play for smaller conferences) from receiving media attention for their inappropriate social media posts. This is also the case for Division II and III athlete.

Social media inappropriateness is a problem for all college students. However, athletes' inappropriate social media posts receive more attention than other students' inappropriate posts, with males receiving more attention than females. Regardless of whether students are athletes or not, the main issue concerning social media inappropriateness is how often it happens. A story that recently made headlines was Harvard University rescinding admission offers to ten

prospective students after discovering they had engaged in offensive behavior on Facebook. Harvard officials learned that the ten students participated in a messaging group that contained sexually explicit material and mocked the Holocaust (Phillips, 2017). The next news story on social media inappropriateness that made news headlines was Harry Vincent being suspended from Texas Christian University for racist comments posted on his personal Facebook and Twitter profiles regarding the rise of the Islamic State (Fire.org, 2015). A similar consequence over an inappropriate social media post happened to an Ohio State University soccer player, who received suspension from his team after he retweeted a picture of a lighter and what appeared to be marijuana with the message, “Marijuana is my favorite” (DiVeronica, 2017). Then, there was the news story on a profane tweet that cost a New Hampshire Men’s Basketball player his award for State Player of the Year (DiVeronica, 2017). Other examples of social media inappropriateness include college students posting pictures of themselves with alcohol at parties, selfies with sexual gestures, crude messages categorized as prejudiced to certain communities, and even messages that include profanity about mundane activities. These are just some of the examples that demonstrate how students are not social media literate.

Social media literacy is not just simply knowing how to post and communicate with others on social media, but also understanding what is appropriate to post based on audiences’ perception of social media messages. Karen Tillman says social media literacy is having the proficiency to communicate appropriately and responsibly and to evaluate conversations critically within the realm of “social-based technologies” (Tillman, 2010, p.50). In order for college students to be social media literate, they must understand what is appropriate and what is inappropriate to post online because their online messages have an impact on their audiences. In

fact, it is even more crucial for athletes to be social media literate because of the media attention they receive from their inappropriate social media posts.

Of all the social media platforms, the most popular one (social media platform) for athletes that receives the most national media attention is Twitter. Division I athletes receive national media attention when posting on their Twitter accounts because Twitter is the number one resource used to report stories (Aguilar, 2017). Twitter has overtaken 24-hour sports networks, sports radio stations, and newspapers because of its concise and real-time capability; no other traditional media platform can deliver or break news to the public as fast as Twitter can (Aguilar, 2017). Since Twitter is the fastest media source for breaking news, Division I athletes' inappropriate tweets make news headlines because journalists are constantly on Twitter. The number of likes and retweets of an athlete's inappropriate Twitter posts can inform journalists on what angle of the story the public wants to read (Aguilar, 2017). Journalists use Twitter so much that it has become a major source for a story thereby, a major tool used in their profession (Aguilar, 2017). Not only has Twitter come to dominate sport reporting for journalists, it has also brought changes for followers of college sports. One example in particular is turning followers from passive to active spectators that are now able to interact with student athletes. Unfortunately, this online interaction with fans has heightened the challenge of athletes inability to handle criticism from their Twitter followers. Student athletes face the challenge of being criticized through tweets--messages from followers and spectators that attack a student athlete personally or athletically (Browning & Sanderson, 2012). They often do not know how to handle the spectators' criticism, so they respond inappropriately, creating a problem for colleges.

One of the most pressing issues coaches face is helping their athletes avoid media controversy from their inappropriate social media posts. Many coaches hire a third-party

monitoring system to track their athletes' social media activity to catch these potential controversies as early as possible. Some coaches have even banned their athletes from using personal social media accounts entirely. These attempts to deal with athletes' inappropriate social media behavior have had mixed success. Coaches' methods are ineffective because athletes can bypass them by making fake social media accounts. Further, journalists can retweet athletes' inappropriate content from any of their social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat), since athletes' social media posts are public record. These methods are also reactive instead of preventive because administrators and coaches only focus on policing after the fact, rather than education. What would be more effective is for coaches and administrators to provide educational training to teach their athletes social media appropriateness to reduce the likelihood of media controversies happening.

The purpose of this thesis project is to solve the education problem by developing pedagogical materials to teach athletes how to use social media appropriately, in particular Twitter.

Popular social media sites, such as Twitter, can be vehicles for self-expression, because student athletes can display their many interests with each post. For example, student athletes might share their favorite activities with friends and family, or comment on their favorite sport or music. Social media sites give athletes the ability to shift between being a sports critic and a lover of hip-hop music when posting a message or photo online (Brown & Sanderson, 2012). However, social media sites also challenge student athletes because inappropriate posts can result in severe consequences.

I propose to adapt Robinson's argument (2015) that athletic departments need to invest in social media training resources to teach athletes how to properly use social media platforms to

express their holistic identity tailored to their unique experience as athletes. In order for student athletes to be social media literate they need social media education to learn strategies for utilizing their social media accounts to express their holistic identity to different audiences.

Chapters Summary

Chapter 1 identifies the root of the problem: Student athletes' social media behavior creates controversies for themselves and their universities because of the media spotlight. National and local media instantly react and report on athletes' inappropriate social media posts. For example, athletes' provocative Facebook posts can still get reported on Twitter because journalists have the ability to retweet original posts from other social media sites. Although athletes may post inappropriate content on other social media sites, Twitter is often where Division I athletes receive national media attention when posting inappropriate content.

Chapter 2 analyzes how athletes misuse their personal social media accounts, particularly on Twitter, due to their lack of social media literacy. This analysis concludes by explaining the positive effects on athletes having a social media presence. With athletes' proper management of their social media platforms, they can decrease the number of inappropriate posts and become brand ambassadors who successfully represent college teams and connect with fans. Chapter 2 also explains coaches' responses to athletes' social media misuse by policing their social media usage with policy guidelines and third-party monitoring systems. These responses are ineffective because student athletes evade them and bypass the restrictions of policy guidelines and third-party monitoring systems. This chapter examines how social media policies and third-party monitoring systems are ineffective at increasing social media literacy among athletes. Chapter 2 concludes by explaining the positive effects on athletes having a social media presence. With athletes' proper management of their social media platforms, they can decrease

the number of inappropriate posts and become brand ambassadors who successfully represent college teams and connect with fans.

Chapter 3 discusses the importance of athletes receiving social media education to become social media literate. Social media education can help student athletes manage their social media profiles, such as applying different strategies to appropriately deal with online criticism. Most importantly, social media education can help student athletes effectively express themselves on social media platforms, including posting about their interests in pop culture, leisure activities, and career aspirations, and ultimately, appearing more relatable to their peers.

Student Athletes' Online Misbehavior Has Created a Media Problem for Universities, Athletic Departments, and the NCAA

Media scandals and controversies about student athletes' misbehavior have always been an issue for athletic departments and universities because "student athletes behaving badly is nothing new" (Reynolds, 2006, p.5).

Before social media, coaches and athletic staff only worried about what journalists had to say about student athletes' misbehavior on and off the court from print media sources, such as newspapers or magazines. Today, with the popularity of social media, coaches and athletic staff have the added stress of athletes' inappropriate online behavior going viral because of the immediacy of social media platforms. In addition, journalists, specifically sports journalists, have an active presence on Twitter and reporting athletes' online and offline misbehavior.

Social media inappropriateness among male and female student athletes is a media problem for collegiate athletic departments across the country. Athletes receive national media attention for their inappropriate posts since they are public representatives of their prestigious universities, athletic departments, and the NCAA. So, when it comes to the Internet, negativity

about these public figures receives more national media attention than nonathlete college students (Osterman, 2015). For athletes, it is hard to escape regrettable online posts in this digital age because journalists and spectators retweet their social media mishaps and the Library of Congress has an archive of Twitter posts (Baltimore Sun, 2011). When applying for employment, this inappropriate content on social media could follow athletes after their college career.

Student athletes commit countless online miscues due to the increasingly widespread use of social media among college students (athletes and non-athletes); the media dynamics of social media sites such as Twitter (which features tweeting, retweeting, posting on multiple platforms, etc.); and the speed of sports commentary on Twitter, particularly from sports journalists. All three of these elements make up a potentially volatile media environment, which results in bad publicity for the athletes themselves, athletic departments, universities, and the NCAA, largely because of the inappropriate online behavior of student athletes. Therefore, it is crucial that student athletes are taught social media appropriateness due to the negative attention that quickly occurs from the three elements in this media environment. These elements will be explained in further detail in the following sections: “The Prevalence of Social Media Use among Young People,” “The History of Social Media Sites and their Popularity Among Users,” “The Dynamics of Social Media as a Media Source,” “The Use of Twitter as a Primary Tool for Sports Journalists,” and “How Immediacy of Social Media has Influenced Sports Journalism.”

The Prevalence of Social Media Use Among Young People

Since the emergence of social media sites in the 2000s, they have remained popular among young people, particularly college students (athletes and non-athletes), because sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, allow users to receive a steady flow of information from

family, fans, friends, teammates, and celebrities. Users are able to post links, videos, and pictures to visually showcase to their followers. Like most college students, athletes use social media because they want to have a commonality with their peers, and perhaps avoid being segregated or isolated (Gramlich et al., 2015). Social media sites like Twitter enable student athletes to engage with their peers in their media messages, a capability that brings their peers closer to them (Sanderson, 2011). This capability is especially important for high-profile student athletes who can seem untouchable to their peers due to their nationwide celebrity in college sports. The commonality of using Twitter, like their peers, also means student athletes are able to use social media to self-disclose details about their backgrounds and experiences, giving their followers intimate access to their personal lives (Sanderson, 2011). In his 2011 book, Jimmy Sanderson, a professor at Clemson University, writes:

student athletes particularly relayed stories that most of their followers had experienced in their own lives, boosting the commonality between student athletes and their peers ...social media enhances perceptions that student athletes are closer to their fans, as they gain digital and physical access ... fostering the direct lines of communication. (Sanderson, 2011, p.69)

Unlike traditional media outlets which have gatekeepers, social media has now become a venue that gives student athletes an opportunity to voice their feelings, thoughts, and personal interests while having the choice about how they want to express their persona to the public. Social media has the ability to reach a maximum audience, while traditional media audiences are generally more targeted often translating into specific demographics (Roy, 2016). Also, social media is immediate, while traditional media such as newspapers and magazines can be delayed due to press release dates and times (Roy, 2016). For instance, if fans want to find information about their favorite student athlete, they can look directly on the student athlete's social media account or fans can directly ask (by commenting or direct messaging) the student athlete.

Summary

Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are platforms that college students, especially college athletes, use to express their opinions, vent frustrations, and share information. For most college students, Twitter is a platform for raw unfiltered thoughts—a forum for college students to give their perspective on any topic without consequences (Burton & Jovanelly, 2011). But for college athletes, their posts of unfiltered thoughts receive more media attention because they are high profile students who are seen as public representatives of their university and the NCAA. Jeff Fellenzer, a professor at University of Southern California, says:

Twitter is both a blessing and a curse for anyone with a public profile, especially athletes. Twitter allows athletes to connect directly with friends and fans, but accounts are monitored by mainstream media and school officials. This can be potentially damaging for athletes when they reflect with emotion and without a filter. (Burton & Jovanelly, 2011)

The next section, “The History of Social Media Sites and their Popularity Among Users,” highlights why athletes and non-athletes cannot stop being active on social media sites, no matter the warnings or consequences. Since 94% of college students use social media (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2010), it is important to provide a history of how social media sites have become so popular, in order to understand why the popularity of these sites has created media problems for student athletes.

The History of Social Media Sites and Their Popularity Among Users

In 2004, a university-based social network (Facebook) debuted at Harvard University. Since its creation in 2004, Facebook has become a website and a service where users can post comments, share pictures, and access links to news (Nations, 2018). This content can be made publicly accessible. It can be shared among a select group of friends and family, or it can be

simply shared with one person (Nations, 2018). Facebook users can also play games, chat live, and stream live video; users can even order food on Facebook (Nations, 2018). Debuting in 2010, Instagram has grown to include more than 500 million active users, with many users being college students. The mobile app appeals to the visual nature of human beings gathering and interpreting information through sight from the posting of edited pictures (DeMers, 2017). Instagram reduces pictures to the same square format whenever someone is on the app while using their mobile devices (DeMers, 2017). Instagram appeals to users because it is approachable and offers professional networking to a wide number of people, while simultaneously having greater control over spam than Facebook (DeMers, 2017).

Another social networking site popular among college students is Twitter. Twitter has grown to be a site where users can access online news as well as communicate with other Twitter users in short messages (280 characters or less) called tweets (Gil, 2018). The act of tweeting is the sending of short messages typically including a hyperlink, to anyone who is subscribed to a person's Twitter account. Twitter, along with other popular social media sites like Facebook and Instagram, was initially introduced on college campuses by the college students themselves (Gramlich, Hull, Sanderson, & Snyder, 2015). Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram also prompted student athletes to use these sites for entertainment, amusement, social interaction, and inclusion amongst their peers.

Social media platforms, due to their rise in popularity among student athletes in recent years, have been incorporated into the dynamic structure and commercialization of college sports. Within this commercialization of college sports and the social media presence of sports journalists on Twitter, student athletes' social media actions have become more public because they are the public figures of the colleges for which they play. Thus, teaching social media

appropriateness to student athletes teaches them that they are public representatives of their institutions. Therefore, they can no longer be ignorant about their public presence on social media sites such as Twitter, which is a public venue that is able to reach multiple audiences.

Summary

The history of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter is given to display an explanation of how these particular sites can instantly reach millions of people. And why Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter each have remained so appealing to its users, including student athletes.

Unfortunately, the appeal of social media has led many student athletes to become reckless because of their lack of social media education of not being taught social media appropriateness.

Student athletes are arguably the most public figures among the general population of college students; therefore, how appropriately or inappropriately they use social media matters to the athletic department, the university, and the NCAA (DeShazo, 2016). Because student athletes are public figures, one inappropriate tweet, retweet, or joke could result in their suspension from their team or university (Gibbs, 2013). The next section “The Media Dynamics of Twitter as a Media Source” explains how athletes face media scrutiny for misusing their social media platforms.

The Dynamics of Social Media as a Media Source

Social media inappropriateness needs to be viewed as a public issue because college athletics have become a billion-dollar industry, causing the media to cast national or local attention on student athletes as they are the public faces of their schools. To sustain viewership and increase advertising revenue, media houses thrive from reporting on stories that feature the consequences athletes’ face from their inappropriate social media posts (Patil, 2011). Social media inappropriateness among college athletes can be a public liability for colleges and the

NCAA which can affect the revenue given by corporate sponsors. Both entities (colleges and the NCAA) make a lot of money off of student athletes (Ambron, 2016).

When college athletes post inappropriate content on Twitter, or on any other social media site, coaches and athletic directors need to react quickly to ensure that the university and athletic department's reputations are not damaged from the online misbehavior (Gibbs, 2013).

Traditionally, when the coaches and athletic directors catch the inappropriate message or photo, to sustain the school's reputation as an institution of integrity, coaches implement severe consequences to the student athlete for his or her inappropriate social media post. It certainly does not help matters that some student athletes are arrogant about being the most visible student representatives of their respected universities and many athletes are unaware that the content they post is considered public record, even when the content is later deleted from their Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram accounts (Rahmati, 2016). Many student athletes have grown up using social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram; however, they still have not learned to have good judgment on what content is appropriate and inappropriate to post online to avoid a media scandal. In the examples of inappropriate tweet messages included in my research, I focus on male student athletes' inappropriate social media posts. Though most of the student athletes being discussed in my research are men, there have been circumstances on social media sites where female student athletes have posted inappropriate content, too.

Since athletes do not receive social media education and do not learn to have good judgment when posting content on social media platforms, social media mishaps occur frequently. Here are some examples of how athletes have inappropriately handled their social media platforms. A Texas A&M University football player, Johnny Manziel's propensity to photograph and talk about everything he does has tarnished his image and caused headaches for

campus officials (Grasgreen, 2013). A University of Oregon football player once tweeted that the school shooting in Sandy Hook, Connecticut was a government conspiracy (Grasgreen, 2013). This football player's online misuse prompted University of Oregon officials to issue a statement distancing themselves from the athlete (Grasgreen, 2013). After suspending a football player, University of Oklahoma Football Coach Bob Stoops apologized for the football player's tweet that mocked the suicide of a student at the University of Texas (Grasgreen, 2013).

Another example includes a University of Kentucky basketball player, Josh Harrellson, who criticized a coach on Twitter (Burton & Jovanelly, 2011). Harrellson was reprimanded and banned from using the social networking site (Burton & Jovanelly, 2011). An Ohio State University football player, Cardale Jones once tweeted: "why should we have to go to class if we came here to play football, we ain't come to play SCHOOL, classes are POINTLESS" (Burton & Jovanelly, 2011). The Ohio State University Athletics Department saw Jones's tweet and ordered it to be deleted, but not before it was immortalized in screenshots and retweets from journalists and spectators. The consequence for Jones's improper tweet was the deactivation of his Twitter account and suspension (Grasgreen, 2013). So, instead of making the poor judgement to tweet that classes are pointless—a sentiment no doubt shared by many students whose social media usage is not under media scrutiny—athletes should highlight their favorite course or professor, an interesting thing they would like to learn, or a career aspiration (Grasgreen, 2013).

Another occurrence of an inappropriate social media post was an Auburn University football player, Jordan Spriggs, who attempted to solicit someone to write a paper for him. He tweeted: "man, who is good at writing papers?????????? I pay" (Burton & Jovanelly, 2011). A University of Pittsburgh football player, Elijah Fields, was dismissed from his football team for

posting pictures of multiple bundles of cash on his Twitter account. One of the captions read: “Never knew Football was gon get me all this money sike, I knew haha” (Burton & Jovanelly, 2011). These examples of student athletes’ social media transgressions demonstrate that student athletes are unknowledgeable on social media appropriateness. They are unaware how to decipher what online messages are inappropriate or appropriate to post on their own social media accounts to avoid triggering a media scandal.

College athletes who play for the power five Division I conferences are the highest profile student athletes who have the privilege of being the face of their university. In reference to student conduct on the Internet, these student athletes are held to a high standard by the NCAA, unlike the general population of college students. Whenever these well-known athletes, especially the male athletes, post inappropriate content on any social media site, their actions instantly become newsworthy. National media outlets enter a frenzy over the sensationalism created from reporting what happens to these high-profile student athletes. When college athletes receive national media attention for their messages and photos on Twitter and other online sites, the publicity is rarely positive because athletes are such high-profile students that their social media mishaps generate popularity among the public (Burton & Jovanelly, 2011). Thus, negative publicity forces coaches and athletic staff to deal with a public relation crisis. According to Teresa Valerio Parrot, Principal at TVP Communications, “student athletes are 19-24 years old; they are just like every college students on campus with one exception. And that is that they are under major [media] spotlight”(Grasgreen, 2013). The media, along with corporate sponsors and boosters, is quite powerful in the collegiate sports business. Media exposure from corporate sponsors and boosters can entice head coaches and athletic directors to make changes to their athletic teams that are inconsistent with the athletic department’s assumptions which are

athletes having control over their athletic obligations—including their online public image as student athletes (Comeaux & Jayakumar, 2016). Thus, when student athletes' inappropriate online posts go viral, they can tarnish their public image leading to costs in alumni donations and angry boosters, can alienate corporate sponsors, and can hurt admissions and the reputation of the university that took decades to build.

With the billions of dollars that the NCAA invests in college sports and the media's thirst for sensationalism and drama, press outlets are more than willing to publicize high profile student athletes' inappropriate social media messages and pictures to audiences nationwide (Ambron, 2016). Consequently, male and female athletes feel that their popularity as public figures makes them untouchable, believing that they have the leisure to behave in any manner they see fit on social media platforms and this causes them to ignore the fact that the NCAA invests billions of dollars into collegiate sports, which they are very much the face of.

Summary

Over the past three decades, college athletics have transformed into a multi-million-dollar franchise resulting in athletic departments of American universities commanding more and more attention from mass media outlets. College athletes at any university are in the media spotlight because they are public figures who not only represent themselves, but also their universities, athletic department, and the NCAA. Athletes need to learn how to use their social media appropriately because of the media dynamics of social media platforms, such as Twitter, which can be used as a news source to post information with the capability of reaching millions of people in a matter seconds, where people can also retweet the inappropriate content of athletes' posts on their own social media platforms with or without athletes' consent. The social media

content of anyone, especially public figures (i.e. student athletes), is accessible to the public to share.

Student athletes are public figures of their collegiate communities because they are the focal faces of a 13-billion-dollar college sports business (Novy-Williams, 2017), which causes the general public to become interested with athletes' actions online and offline. When student athletes post inappropriate messages and photos, the public becomes even more intrigued, prompting sports journalists to report on student athletes' social media mishandlings. College athletes from nearly every sport have a social media presence, which allows journalists to easily obtain immediate information when athletes post inappropriate content on any social media platform. Typically, coaches and directors issue an apologetic statement or have their athletes issue an apologetic statement to keep the athletic department and university's integrities and reputations in good standing with the general public, sports journalists, boosters and alumni donors. The next section, "The Use of Twitter as a Primary Tool for Sports Journalists," explains how sports journalists contribute to athletes' objectionable online posts going viral, which causes media controversies that coaches and athletic directors must publicly resolve.

The Use of Twitter as a Primary Tool for Sports Journalists

One market in particular where Twitter has influence is sports journalism. Twitter is the one platform that has become a breaking-news source for sports journalists to cover newsworthy sport stories because they are able to share quick thoughts on student athletes' behavior on and off the court (Rule, 2017). While being active on Twitter, sports journalists are able to provide play-by-play updates and instant news when athletes post inappropriate content on their social media pages.

When sports journalists are not active on Twitter to write their stories, they can always go back to their feed to finish writing their story about the athlete's social media misuse (Rule, 2017). A large part of what makes sports journalists' Twitter accounts valuable to the public is readers can learn about student athletes' social media mishaps without having to follow the athletes' personal Twitter or other social media accounts (Rule, 2017). Readers can just follow the sports journalists' accounts, which post headlines on Twitter about athletes' inappropriate posts. Twitter also makes it easy for readers to receive the news. Rather than readers waiting around for the newspaper or 5pm newscast, or checking a website or blog, readers can just look on Twitter for the latest social media posts where journalists provide headlines and links to their stories (Rule, 2017). Therefore, news teams expect journalists to use Twitter in order to keep readers informed and stay competitive with other journalists in the same market (Rule, 2017).

Summary

The popularity and the immediacy of social media outlets such as Twitter among college athletes has caused sports journalists to use their Twitter accounts to report on athletes' inappropriate posts. The following section, "How Immediacy of Social Media has Influenced Sports Journalism" explains how the immediacy of Twitter attracts sports journalists to use it as a tool to report athletes' inappropriate posts.

How Immediacy of Social Media Has Influenced Sports Journalism

The immediacy of the digital era has greatly influenced sports journalism because sports journalists tend to deal with immediacy: not only do they have to work with match reports, but also blog posts, live game updates and tweeting (Wasserstein, 2017). They are usually presenting news as it happens, from game updates on athlete performances to inappropriate posts from student athletes as the demand for sport news is high (Wasserstein, 2017). This style of

coverage fits the platform of Twitter perfectly because sport journalists use it for the necessity of constant and continuous update coverage on student athletes' athletic performances and any inappropriate online posts (Wasserstein, 2017). Journalists tweeting articles ensures the articles are seen and discussed and retweeted within a community of readers (Klein, 2013). Twitter is becoming the news itself because the accounts of athletes are now sources for many sports journalists. Several collegiate and professional athletes have Twitter and other social media accounts—these accounts tend to be accessible to not only sports journalists but also spectators to tweet online criticism (Klein, 2013). Whenever student athletes post inappropriate content on their social media, the posts are instantly newsworthy because journalists have a Twitter presence and report on athletes' inappropriate posts. With billions of dollars invested in college sports, coupled with audiences' thirst for sensationalism and drama, journalists are more than willing to publicize high profile student athletes' inappropriate tweets and pictures to audiences nationwide (Ambron, 2016). The countless news stories on athletes' inappropriate online posts causes the public to enter a frenzy over the sensationalism and negativity that student athletes are causing for themselves as public representatives of their universities, athletic departments and the NCAA.

With the increased use of social media platforms such as Twitter among young people, particularly college athletes, the media dynamics of Twitter and the sports journalists using Twitter as the primary tool of their profession due to its speed of immediacy to report media scandals have contributed to the media problem of social media inappropriateness among athletes. Thus, teaching social media appropriateness to student athletes teaches them that they are public representatives of their institutions and must behave in manner that is appropriate for their audiences.

Chapter 2 will further discuss how athletes misuse their social media platforms. This chapter will also analyze how athletes' social media presence can be positive because student athletes can use their social media accounts to humanize themselves and relate to others, such as discussing their favorite restaurants and how they spend their free time away from sports and academics (Greenhalgh et al., 2013). Finally, Chapter 2 argues that when student athletes learn about social media inappropriateness, the number of media scandals and controversies decreases.

CHAPTER 2: HOW ATHLETES MISUSE THEIR PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

Student Athletes' Introduction to the Media Spotlight

College athletes' careers as public representatives start when they disclose on television and social media platforms the university that they will play for during the four to five years of their college career. Some student athletes may simply sign the paperwork, or the university may produce some form of an announcement. Once that moment of declaration is made public, many Division I conference student athletes instantly receive nationwide attention. Others from Divisions II and Divisions III conferences may receive local attention. Student athletes gain media attention because of their athletic ability, such as their speed or scoring skills, which is typically why they get recruited from high school to play for a university. This instant popularity can include an increased number of followers on student athletes' social media accounts or attention from popular news publications. Universities' investment in their athletic departments means universities and their athletic departments have a big stake in their athletes media image. College sports, in general, are popular among ordinary people because the university is tied to the community. The people in that community either attended the college or know others who did, representing a community that actually cares about their student athletes (Tarver, 2017). Student athletes are always in the public's watchful eye, which means they are under a great deal of pressure to behave appropriately offline and online. This is particularly true on social media platforms, as student athletes' personal social media pages are judged with more scrutiny than regular college students (Karasik, 2017). Student athletes are held to a higher standard on social

media platforms because they are public representatives of the athletic department, the NCAA, and their university.

Summary

Though athletes are in the media spotlight and have the responsibility of being public representatives of their colleges and the NCAA, they typically post inappropriate content on their social media platforms due to their carelessness and impulsivity. Many athletes feel their popularity and high status as student athletes makes them untouchable, and believe they have the leisure to behave in any manner they see fit on their social media accounts. They behave poorly regardless of the potential consequences they could face from their actions. College athletes' lack of social media appropriateness is a media problem for universities because of the large revenue investment in their athletes' athletic talent and athletic departments.

The next section titled, "Athletes' Social Media Misuse," explains how and why athletes purposely post inappropriate content on their social media. In addition, the section explores why online misbehavior is causing media controversies for athletes, athletic department officials, universities, and the NCAA. In this section, examples details Division I student athletes who have made national headlines for their inappropriate online posts, along with the consequence each player had to endure. To stress the severity of the issue of social media inappropriateness among athletes, the inappropriate social media posts include, but are not limited to, profanity referencing sexual activities, harsh criticisms of athletic staff and governmental officials, and homophobic remarks.

Athletes' Social Media Misuse

Although many student athletes receive national media attention, they also sometimes lack social media literacy, and this causes a problem. Satterfield (2016) argues that carelessness is the main problem with objectionable postings on social media, especially when mixed with alcohol, but a lack of understanding appropriateness goes beyond simple carelessness. Student athletes fail to realize that they should not be posting inappropriate messages because of their fame and large following. “Regardless if the social media post is deleted in matter of seconds, because student athletes are public figures people will surely retweet their objectionable posts by the time the athlete deletes it” (Satterfield, 2016, p.2). Thus, this attention allows journalists even more access to report on athletes’ social media mishaps.

Student athletes’ lack of social media literacy leads them to think that they are immune from experiencing media controversies from social media misuse, or that they will not get caught by their coaches or coaches’ third party monitoring systems (Leccesi, 2018). Or athletes think that the media controversy and consequence (i.e. losing an athletic scholarship) that other players experience will not happen to them (Leccesi, 2018). A lot of young people including college athletes act on a whim without thinking about what they post online because they are caught up in the moment (Leccesi, 2018). They impulsively send photos or written messages that are inappropriate for public viewership (Leccesi, 2018). Specifically, college athletes continuously misuse their social media platforms with inappropriate messages that include profanity, sexual acts or even criticisms of their coaches without processing the effect that their inappropriate social media posts may have on their lives (Leccesi, 2018). Many athletes also do not process how these inappropriate messages may affect the lives of their coaches and athletic directors, who have to deal with the aftermath of the volatile media environment (Leccesi, 2018). When

using social media platforms, student athletes need to exercise caution; however, many athletes do not because they are young and are unaccustomed to the fame of being an NCAA athlete (Satterfield, 2016). Student athletes' social media misuse is mostly due to their carelessness and impulsivity, and it is causing a media problem for athletes, athletic departments, universities, and at times, the NCAA. College athletes are public figures which prompts journalists to report on student athletes' inappropriate online postings because controversies involving public figures always make great headlines (Satterfield, 2016). The general public including journalists are less forgiving when student athletes make even the slightest mistake of carelessly typing a few words on a keyboard to post on their social media platforms (Satterfield, 2016).

Twitter and other social media platforms have granted followers continuous access to their favorite student athletes. The 24-hour access that student athletes and their followers have on social media sites, like Twitter, has only worsened the problem of social media inappropriateness and has increased the number of media controversies for athletes and their universities. For example, University of Texas at El Paso basketball player, John Bohannon learned a lesson in tolerance after he posted “@BoGotti21 #letsbereal it is not cool to be gay” on Twitter (Parham & Sarkisova, 2013). “In rebuttal of his offensive tweet, Bohannon claimed he was quoting a Z-Ro (a hip-hop artist) line, but the anti-gay message did not sit well with the public as he quickly became under media scrutiny” (Parham & Sarkisova, 2013, p.8). The red-shirt Michigan State University (MSU) freshman basketball player, DJ Gardner, tweeted his displeasure about MSU basketball bureaucracy, “@OKOLONAEAST these b**** tried to f**** me over That’s y I red shirted But I wish my homies a great a** season... I don’t even know y I’m still here” (Parham & Sarkisova, 2013). Gardner’s tweet resulted in him being kicked off the basketball team. Athlete Twitter users often ignore the possible consequences that their

inappropriate tweets can cause. To illustrate, “Jamal Shuman, a football player at Elon College was angry about not getting enough playing time. He launched a series of obscene tweets that resulted in him being indefinitely suspended” (Satterfield, 2016, p. 3). Shuman later claimed that he did not realize that the tweets could be publicly read (Satterfield, 2016). Bradley Patterson, a football player at the University of Alabama, also got into trouble over his tweets insulting former United States President, Barack Obama Patterson’s punishment was being kicked off the football team (Satterfield, 2016).

If a student athlete decides to post an emotional outburst, such as reasons for disliking a class, what would be a harmless emotional outburst for a regular student could become a major problem for the student athlete. For example, when the Texas Tech University head football coach was late to a meeting, Marlon Williams (a Texas Tech University football player) felt he should tweet about such matters: “Wondering why I’m still in this meeting room when the head coach can’t even be on time to his on [own] meeting” (Parham & Sarkisova, 2013). The infamous tweet got Williams in trouble with school officials and his social media privileges were revoked (Parham & Sarkisova, 2013). Another example of an inappropriate tweet that caused media controversy was University of North Carolina (UNC) football player, Marvin Austin Austin tweeted: “I live in Club LIV so I get the tenant rate...bottles comin like it’s a giveaway” (Richardson, 2017). A number of Austin’s other tweets also alluded to NCAA bylaw violations (Richardson, 2017). The NCAA reprimanded UNC’s athletic department for failing to thoroughly monitor its athletes’ social media accounts. Austin’s 2,400 inappropriate tweets also led to investigations that uncovered an academic scandal from which UNC is still recovering today (Richardson, 2017). Other examples of athletes’ inappropriate tweets include Stanford University football player, Christian McCaffrey, who once tweeted “my name is Christian and i

have to poop” (Raymond, 2017). Mitchell Trubisky, who played for the UNC football team, tweeted “I love to kiss tittiess” (Raymond, 2017). Geronimo Allison, a football player at University of Illinois had a series of inappropriate tweets. For example, Allison wrote, “told baby girl I only give head if she swallow children” and “I wonder if iowa females got dat drip drop wet wet pussy” (Raymond, 2017). And lastly, Allison once tweeted, “wat two females wanna fuck me at da SAME DAM TIME tomorrow nite be for I leave college” (Raymond, 2017). In addition to student athletes’ lack of social media literacy, athletes also misuse social media because they are influenced by what their peers post (Karadkar, 2015). If a student athlete’s friends post about sexual conquests or hip-hop lyrics, then the student athlete is pressed to post the same content on their personal social media account. Despite some tweets being immoral or illegal, which attracts national media attention, athletes’ form social media habits from their peers and not from their coaches (Karadkar, 2015). Being student athletes means that they will be held to a higher standard than the average college student. The same is true for anyone else who is a very well-known whether they are actors, politicians, educators or CEOs (Satterfield, 2016).

Journalists report that student athletes, and male athletes in particular, often use their popularity to say whatever they want on social media, as many believe they can get away with it because they have a coveted position (Karasik, 2017). Basically, they think that they are untouchable (Karasik, 2017). However, the actual issue with athletes’ social media misuse is that many student athletes (both male and female) fail to understand why there is even a problem with their inappropriate messages. Student athletes lack judgement to evaluate the content of their posts to determine if these messages would be inappropriate or appropriate before submitting them for public viewership (Satterfield, 2016) .

Suspensions and loss of scholarships are prevalent because student athletes do not have effective social media training to learn the importance of their online presence, including learning how to be an extension of their university's brand and reputation. Social media training can encourage athletes and their followers to publicly see athletes as students with valuable ideas and opinions on an array of topics who simply had enough athletic talent to play a sport at the college level.

Summary

To combat student athletes' social media inappropriateness and the repercussions of their online actions, athletic departments have tried various methods to lessen media controversies. Thus far, the current methods have included implementing social media policies and hiring third-party monitoring companies. Social media policies and third-party monitoring systems do not provide players receiving social media training to lessen the chances of them, the athletic department, the university, and the NCAA experiencing a media scandal due to journalists reporting on athletes' misbehavior.

The following section titled, "Coaches Response to Athletes' Social Media Misuse," fully explains what social media policies are, and the two purposes social media policies serve for athletic departments. This section also introduces what third-party monitoring systems are, including the two companies that schools most frequently hire: Fieldhouse and UDillgence. Many social media policies are too vague and inadequately prevent behavior, and only after the public have seen and sports journalists reports on the inappropriate content will athletic coaches use third party monitoring systems to catch the objectionable content and discipline their athletes.

Coaches' Response to Athletes' Social Media Misuse

In response to student athletes' misuse of Twitter due to carelessness and impulsivity, and the repercussions of their online actions, athletic departments have tried various solutions to lessen the problem of athletes being social media illiterate. Rather than risk media controversy, some coaches find it easier to ban their players from using social media entirely (Smits, 2016). Coaches have implemented social media policies to avoid media controversies. A social media policy is an official document that explains the do's and don'ts of how student athletes should behave online. Normally, the document a college/university implements is a modified version of the NCAA's social media policy. Many universities and colleges enforce online policies as a behavioral and ethical code of conduct that student athletes agree to follow, given that playing a sport is a privilege that should not be taken for granted. Most online policies in athletic departments reinforce the concepts underlying the prohibited behaviors such as not making personal information—date of birth, social security number, address, bank accounts, phone numbers, class schedules, or details about daily routine—available, as all of these can facilitate theft or stalking (Williams, 2017).

Social media policies emphasize that “everything and anything posted is considered public information which is why it is so important for athletes to protect themselves by maintaining a self-image they can be proud of years from now” (Williams, 2017, p.4). Student athletes must consider their career by being aware that any information posted provides an image to prospective employers. Internet policies exist at both public and private universities and colleges regardless of division level because each educational institution's online policy directly and indirectly affects stockholders (Gramlich, Hull, Sanderson, & Snyder, 2015).

Unfortunately, the social media policies that athletic departments give to student athletes are an ineffective prevention method. The vague language featured in policies is problematic because there are too many interpretations between coaches and players on the concept of appropriateness. What is inappropriate to a 40-year-old coach may be appropriate to a 20-year-old student athlete, leaving the concept of appropriateness unclear (Browning & Sanderson, 2013). This produces the issue of relying on individual interpretations among head coaches and their athletes, especially when there is a significant age gap between both parties (Browning & Sanderson, 2013). According to Browning and Sanderson (2013), the vague language of social media policies is partially responsible for student athletes being social media illiterate. To illustrate, many policies feature the phrase “not to post inappropriate messages onto social media” but never define the word “inappropriate” or use examples to explain what inappropriate content is. It is common for online policies to note that social media is not a fad, and for student athletes to reference the athletic department’s accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, in an effort to provide “brand consistency” (Gramlich et al., 2015). That being the case, very few social media policies contain information or instructions that explicitly teach athletes how to use their social media accounts appropriately (Gramlich et al., 2015). Some social media policies mention that student athletes should be proactive in managing their online image, including the recommendation to “Google yourself every once in a while, to check your public image” (Gramlich et al., 2015, p. 60). But there is not enough information on what social media content is considered appropriate or inappropriate to post.

Aside from the implementation of social media policies, another solution that athletic departments propose is the hiring of third-party monitoring systems such as UDilligence and Fieldhouse Media. Typically, UDilligence and Fieldhouse Media are hired in attempts to protect

the interests and reputations of the university—as social media can cause headaches for athletic departments because any inappropriate post on a student athlete’s social media account is viewable to almost anyone with an electronic device (Emerson, 2013). Companies such as Fieldhouse Media, describe themselves as companies that provide social media education and monitoring services for student athletes, coaches, and administrators so that “they can develop a positive online reputation that benefits the players, their respective teams and programs. Because how student athletes conduct themselves on social media is often viewed harsher than nonathlete college students” (Emerson, 2013, p. 3).

The hiring of third-party monitoring systems to regulate student athletes’ content on Twitter and other social media sites is another ineffective prevention method because the monitoring systems are only reactive. This means that the systems can only monitor content that has already been posted by the athlete. For instance, UDilligence and Fieldhouse Media cannot monitor the content of followers’ online criticism that is featured on the student athletes’ Twitter feed nor recommend the proper protocol for how student athletes’ should handle their feelings when being recipients of such hurtful tweets. It is essential for college athletes to learn how to react to criticism and to be able to understand the line between appropriateness and inappropriateness, which UDilligence and Fieldhouse Media cannot provide.

Though ineffective, the reason coaches hire third party monitoring companies is to catch inappropriate phrases or words student athletes post on their personal Twitter pages. Monitoring companies have the equipment to filter through piles of social data to alert the academic coaches and their players of improper words or phrases that the student athlete has tweeted. If the student athlete chooses to post an inappropriate tweet, the coaches are immediately notified, and a notification is sent to the player to delete the inappropriate post. Furthermore, coaches hire

third party monitoring companies because they know student athletes are always in the public eye; therefore, how they conduct themselves on social media is often viewed with more scrutiny than a typical college student's actions. Unfortunately, third party monitoring systems are not sufficient enough to combat student athletes' social media illiteracy because these systems do not prevent any of the inappropriate content posted by their players. Once the improper word or phrase is caught by the third-party monitoring system, it is too late because the athlete's tweet instantly becomes public record. Even if a student athlete deletes the tweet, their followers and journalists can still retweet the original post, causing public relation problems for the athletic department, the university, and the NCAA. Student athletes, meanwhile, remain susceptible to consequences, such as loss of scholarships or suspension from their university or sports team. Rather than a sustainable solution, third party monitoring systems are simply a Band-Aid to the issue of student athletes' misuse of their personal Twitter accounts.

In fact, third party monitoring and social media policies for Twitter usage have only prompted athletes to be more aggressive in circumventing them, causing tensions between them and their coaches (Sanderson, 2011). For example, some student athletes choose to start a new Twitter account with a completely new username without informing their coaches or the third-party monitoring system. Athletes create a new account in order to have their public tweets unmonitored, and this allows for tweets to be unregulated by the third-party monitoring system. In doing so, players gain the freedom to tweet or post pictures that would typically be considered inappropriate to their coaches and the third-party monitoring system.

Summary

The next section, which is titled, "The Positive Effects of Athletes Having a Social Media Presence," explains the benefits of athletes having a social media presence, as student athletes

can authentically express themselves on their social media, while creating positive exposure for their athletic department and university. This particular section explains why male and female athletes use Twitter more than any other social media outlets.

The Positive Effects of Athletes Having a Social Media Presence

If student athletes were given social media education, it would be possible for them to properly express themselves and their many interests, thereby decreasing media controversies. Knowing how to properly express themselves, student athletes could exert more control over their online self-presentation and select certain aspects of themselves to share directly with their fans on social media (Sanderson & Smith, 2015). With the appropriate use of social media platforms, student athletes could also humanize themselves by discussing anything from their favorite restaurants to what they like doing in their free time (Greenhalgh et al., 2013). DeShazo (2013), founder of Fieldhouse Media, stated the following:

In my opinion, social media use comes down to making good decisions. Student athletes are really not any worse than anybody else. Obviously, a student athlete is going to be under a different microscope than the account down the street but banning it does not teach them anything. We're living in a social world, in a social economy, where the skills they can use on social media can help them get a job and can help them represent themselves. (Gibbs, 2013, p.5)

Twitter is the most popular social media outlet among male and female athletes because it allows users to have private and public communications and constant interactivity with family, friends, teammates, and fans. In particular, student athletes enjoy using Twitter because the social platform enables them to witness what their friends are doing without having to initiate a text to say, "Hey, what are you doing?" Also, college athletes enjoy utilizing Twitter to remain in touch with family, especially if the athlete is a plane ride away from home (Luppacini, 2013). The communication format of Twitter allows athletes and their families to remain in contact through the posting of pictures, where both parties can see what the other is doing during the months of

the semester that the athlete is away from home (Browning & Sanderson, 2012). Athletes can also interact on Twitter to discuss game performances with fellow college athletes and their followers. Additionally, student athletes simply want to be like the general population of college students, and conveniently express their opinions, memories, and experiences on an abundance of topics. Even with the added complication of being widely known in the collegiate community, social media sites such as Twitter, can allow student athletes to have more control over their public image, without having to rely on traditional mainstream media outlets to publicize their persona. With permission from their academic coaches, college athletes could also be direct resources for journalists to reach out for their opinions regarding game day, along with other sports related topics.

Twitter provides fans access to college athletes' personal lives, giving them a chance to learn more about their favorite players outside of athleticism. College athletes can then go from being untouchable figures that exist on the field to relatable individuals, who have interests beyond the arena (Greenhalgh, Greenwall, Hamrick, & Simmons, 2013). In 280 characters or less, Twitter enables athletes to express their many interests, to potentially show their relatability to the general population of college students, many of whom also have Twitter accounts. Twitter makes it possible for high profile college athletes and even lesser well-known athletes to directly connect with fans on issues and victories. No longer do athletes have to be at the mercy of having their messages filtered through the mainstream media (Greenhalgh et al., 2013). Twitter enables student athletes to have instant interactivity with their followers, which creates exposure for the athletic department, themselves, and the university that they attend. For example, the communication style and immediacy of Twitter allows student athletes to engage with multiple followers. The more opportunities fans have to connect with college athletes, the more likely it

is that fans will continue to identify with the collegiate team (Greenhalgh et al., 2013; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). This accessibility to college teams and, more importantly, to student athletes, is an important antecedent to the development of team identification (Cimperman, McDonald, Milne, & Sutton, 1997; Greenhalgh et al., 2013). Team identification is the fans who highly identify with a collegiate team and their players (Greenhalgh et al., 2013). One example of team identification is when fans use Twitter to create personalized spaces where they can express support for their favorite collegiate teams and athletes (Greenhalgh et al., 2013).

Accessibility can be an important element for college sports organizations as highly identified sports fans tend to engage in supportive behaviors (Greenhalgh et al., 2013). Such behaviors include greater frequency of game attendance (Branscombe & Wann, 1993) and more time and money invested in the collegiate team, as well as greater intentions to purchase a college team's sponsored products (Bennett, Dees, & Villegas, 2008; Greenhalgh et al., 2013).

Summary

Since college athletes from nearly every Division I sports program have a social media presence that allows fans and journalists to directly connect with athletes and obtain content, athletes can use their social media presence to engage with fans and promote athletic events. Athletes promoting their colligate sport programs can show the general public, and most importantly sport journalists, the unity they have with other student athletes. For example, using their social media platforms to retweet game schedules or memorable plays of their teammates and other athletes demonstrates that they support other athletes. This type of promotion contributes to a positive public image of college athletes being students receiving the opportunity to get a higher education. The next section titled, "How Social Media Training Can Decrease Media Controversies," explains how student athletes can present themselves properly if they are

given the opportunity to receive social media education, which can indeed decrease media scandals from occurring for the athletes, athletic departments, universities, and the NCAA.

How Social Media Training Can Decrease Media Controversies

Once collegiate athletes have a social media presence, they instantly become targets because social media, especially Twitter, is where journalists and spectators can find student athletes. For example, if they have a bad game, athletes can get tagged in a post or trolled with online criticism. The news is littered with athletes' missteps on social media because journalists closely watch what athletes post online (Cavale, 2018). Therefore, when athletes post something inappropriate or inflammatory, it reflects poorly on the athlete and their team, and old posts can resurface to create new controversies (Cavale, 2018). Most coaches rely on social media policies and/or third-party monitoring systems to avoid media controversies. But what these methods lack is teaching athletes social media appropriateness. This lack of social media education, focusing on online appropriateness, is why many athletes continue to post inappropriate content on their Twitter pages. Their inappropriate posts quickly become news headlines because most student athletes do not understand what content can or cannot be shared on social media or even understand why knowing what to share on social media is so important (Burnham, 2017).

Appropriate expression is needed every time an athlete posts on social media in order to avoid facing a media controversy (Cavale, 2018). Thus, student athletes need social media education to learn how to properly manage their social media platforms in order to decrease media controversies. With athletes receiving social media training they can learn to implement the best behavioral practices. Student athletes would learn skills to build their brand, which is sharing great content about themselves as athletes working hard to receive an education. They would also learn skills for sharing their many interests, such as what they do for fun with

teammates, friends, and family (Cavale, 2018). Athletes must understand that if they want to communicate without the risk of media scrutiny, they need to share statements or pictures in-person or through text messages and not through their social media platforms. Athletes' social media accounts, specifically their Twitter accounts, need to be used as public platforms to express their brand (Cavale, 2018). Athletes who receive social media training can become aware that they are public figures, and that everything they do offline and online is under the media's spotlight, which is why athletes' social media presence comes with great responsibility. This responsibility includes athletes thinking about their social media accounts not as private platforms to communicate with their personal networks but as public platforms to grow their brand as student athletes expressing their public image. Athletes must use their social media accounts to build their brand so that college sports can be a launching point for the rest of their life—and not the peak of their life (Cavale, 2018).

With the popularity of social media sites, along with the revenue generated from college sports, student athletes are under more pressure than ever before to be positive public representatives of their universities. Whenever student athletes present themselves on social media, they have to consistently uphold the reputation of the athletic department, their university, and the NCAA. If they fail to uphold this reputation, the media reacts to inappropriate behavior in lightning-speed. Learning about social media appropriateness can effectively decrease media controversies because student athletes are taught how to view themselves as public representatives who can properly manage their social public platforms to express themselves and represent their universities, their athletic department, and the NCAA. Social media training encourages student athletes to manage their brand by expressing their ideas and many interests on various topics, while followers see them as relatable.

Summary

In an era where student athletes' social media posts are distributed among the general public and reported by journalists, coaches take significant risks allowing student athletes to have access to their social media accounts. To help lessen the occurrence of media controversies resulting from student athletes' social media inappropriateness, many coaches use social media guidelines or hire third-party monitoring companies to surveil their athletes' social media activity. Some coaches even ban their athletes from using all personal social media accounts. Unfortunately, social media guidelines and third-party monitoring systems are ineffective at lessening media controversies. Journalists and the general public have already seen the athletes' inappropriate social media posts by the time the social media policy and third-party monitoring systems are enforced. A more effective method to lessen scandals is athletes receiving social media education to learn appropriate strategies for publicly expressing themselves. This method will help prevent media controversies, which can severely hinder student athletes' athletic careers and hinder the reputations in the athletic department, the university, and the NCAA. Chapter 3 will explain how social media education can provide student athletes with awareness on how to post content appropriately, while managing their social media persona that aligns with the values and traditions of their universities and the NCAA.

CHAPTER 3: IMPROVING SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACY AMONG STUDENT ATHLETES WITH SOCIAL MEDIA EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The Importance of Social Media Education

Social media education is an effective solution in preventing student athletes from using Twitter and other social media sites inappropriately. Many college athletes are often not aware that their online messages are inappropriate, because they have not received effective social media training. By being educated on how to use social media platforms appropriately, student athletes would then understand how their inappropriate online messages can and do create media controversies. The first step toward athletes becoming more social media appropriate is for them to understand how to manage their social media profiles and the role sports journalists play in the media. This step includes athletes viewing themselves as public figures of their universities, the athletic department, and the NCAA, which begins with abolishing the notion of being able to publicly say or do whatever they want online and offline. College athletes should instead view themselves as public representatives who have the responsibility to appropriately express their ideas, opinions, and interests through their social media persona in order to maintain the reputations of themselves, the athletic department, the university, and the NCAA.

Athletes becoming more social media appropriate does not encourage them to be inauthentic which would consist of them not expressing their unique personalities to their followers by constantly editing their social media accounts to the point that the messages seem robotic or their photos seem to mimic a professional photoshoot. As these online actions perform by athletes would cause their followers to become bored or prompt sports journalists to criticize athletes of not being themselves therefore inauthentic (viasport.ca, 2019). On the

contrary, being social media appropriate does mean that athletes should be authentic, therefore showcasing their unique personalities. For example, if an athlete is known to be funny, he or she should let their sense of humor come out in a manner where they are not using profanity or insulting students of their university or staff members of their athletic department (viasport.ca, 2019). Or, if the athlete is more cerebral, he or she should engage their followers in thoughtful conversation (viasport.ca, 2019). Student athletes can remain having an appropriate social media presence while also being authentic because athletes can develop certain online skills from receiving social media education. Such as athletes learning how to post content to connect with their followers, in return granting the followers of student athletes an exciting peak of the lives and personality traits of such high-performance athletes. After all, it will be easier to be social media appropriate to avoid a media controversy if athletes' social media accounts are authentic.

Summary

Scholars who are in favor of athletes receiving social media education realize the positive opportunities that student athletes' can gain from their social media presence. Athletes having the control to showcase to the media gatekeepers (i.e. sports journalists) the activities they are involved in, in addition to their sport, would be an opportunity for athletes receiving social media education. The activities that athletes can express online could include philanthropic work or leisure activities with their friends. According to Grasgreen's 2013 article:

Institutions that say they want to ban or monitor their athletes social media usage rather than require their athletes to receive social media education are missing an opportunity to highlight what student athletes can do off the court, resulting in sports journalists and the general public unable to hear about them as students. (p. 3)

Thus, athletes learning the appropriate strategies to express themselves "off the court" would enable them to highlight who they are as students while also enjoying their influential social media presence as college athletes.

Proposed Solution: Social Media Education

Rather than coaches and athletic directors banning their players from social media use or monitoring their players social media use, the best solution is to engage athletes on the importance of using their social media as an appropriate and a productive tool is social media education. The three models that can help student athletes with their social media inappropriateness are: encouraging athletes on being proactive with their social media presence (Sanderson & Smith, 2015); informing athletes what it means to have a digital identity as public figures (Stoller, 2015); and centering the personal player development program on social media usage (Robinson, 2015).

Sanderson and Smith (2015) state that social media platforms allow athletes to be proactive with their public presentation by sharing more aspects of themselves. This capability enables them to disclose information that prompts interaction with their followers (Sanderson & Smith, 2015). Athletes are arguably the one sport stakeholder group who is significantly affected by social media especially when they misuse their social media accounts by publicly posting inappropriate messages and photos (Sanderson & Smith, 2015). Online sites such as Twitter, allow athletes and non-athletes to feel more comfortable to emphasize salient self-expressions that are not appropriate or desirable to display in face-to-face interactions.

According to Sanderson and Smith (2015), athletes receiving social media training is liberating because they have control with expressing their unique personalities. Both scholars also think that athletes receiving social media education can lessen any misjudgments resulting in consequences for athletes during and even after their collegiate years (Sanderson & Smith, 2015).

Stoller (2015) thinks social media education is greatly beneficial to the athletes themselves. Stoller believes that athletes should be educated on how to use their social media accounts appropriately because higher education is all about learning. Therefore, student athletes should be educated in all facets especially that of social media (Stoller, 2015). Stoller continues to argue that student athletes should never be banned from using their social media accounts. When coaches ban players from using their social media accounts, essentially, the message it sends is athletes cannot possibly be taught about their digital identity or how to manage their lives as public representatives of their athletic department, their university, and the NCAA (Stoller, 2015).

Robinson (2015) argues that athletic departments should administer social media education by implementing it into their player development programs. Robinson (2015) believes that social media education should be a part of the culture of collegiate athletic departments in which athletes are encouraged to express themselves on their social media accounts.

Additionally, Robinson (2015) believes that athletic departments investing time banning or monitoring their student athletes' online usage as a precaution to avoid media controversies needs to shift toward social media training. The social media training needs to include the benefits and the needs that athletes have regarding properly using their social media pages due to social media markets now providing a new revenue stream for athletic departments (Robinson, 2015). According to Robinson (2015), one of the driving forces behind these social media markets, as it pertains to college athletics, is the student athlete. Finally, Robinson (2015), suggests that athletes should receive social media training to learn how to appropriately express themselves in seminars that mimic a classroom setting.

Student athletes should receive social media training on the proper ways to use social media outlets, such as their Twitter accounts. Twitter is one of the many social media platforms through which college athletes can build their “personal brand”—which consists of representing their university, the athletic department, the NCAA, their team, their family, and their hometown (DeShazo, 2011). With the proper social media training, Twitter along with other social media sites can then be a productive tool where athletes can authentically express themselves.

My Curriculum Plan: How I Would Teach Social Media Appropriateness

Social media training has historically been “don’t tweet this, don’t post this, don’t post that, don’t screw up, don’t, don’t, don’t because it’s going to ruin your life, which is not education --just warnings” (Leccessi, 2018, p.3). If coaches are going to teach the don’ts of social media usage to their athletes, there must be a rationale that would benefit athletes and prevent them from committing the inappropriate online actions (Leccessi, 2018). Coaches and athletic directors cannot count on young people being scared straight by news accounts of social media scandals. It is more productive for coaches to have athletes receive training on social media appropriateness to seek out what athletes want from their social media interactions. The solution of social media education with the encouragement of self-expression would work best because student athletes would have the opportunity to be directly involved in the process of being an active spokesperson. The process would be athletes learning about social media appropriateness in order to consider themselves active spokespeople who are both students and athletes that have the responsibility and privilege to represent their university which must be taken seriously especially with having an active social media presence. Social media offers student athletes access to large audiences: nonathlete college students, fans (strangers), other athletes, teammates, alumni, and family who are ready and willing to support student athletes

with or without invitation (Sanderson, 2011). These support mechanisms are available at little cost to the athlete, the university, and the athletic department. Social media sites such as Twitter become valuable public relations tools that would allow student athletes to prompt their followers to defend them against critical tweets or even criminal accusations from others (Sanderson, 2011).

Most importantly, social media education will teach student athletes that their personal brand is important. Therefore, student athletes should use their social media presence to appropriately express their identity through the content of their tweets. Student athletes are among the most visible and influential individuals who represent college sports. Although they have more control over how they present themselves on social media, their choices of being inappropriate counters the preference of their university, athletic department, and the NCAA, which may lead to conflict with coaches, athletic directors, and possibly other athletes (Sanderson & Smith, 2015).

To assist athletes to not be tempted to post inappropriate messages, I would teach athletes social media appropriateness by adapting a plan from Robinson's Personal Player Development (PPD) curriculum model. Robinson's curriculum model is a comprehensive approach to the personal development of student athletes of all division levels. This curriculum model is designed to help athletes achieve success athletically while also preparing athletes to achieve success outside of their sport by developing their personal, social, and professional skills. The foundation of my curriculum plan teaches athletes to develop their social and professional skills by understanding who they are publicly and how their social media content should be a reflection of their personal brand (that is, a college athlete who is fortunate to be receiving a higher education while being granted to play the sport that they love). While attending workshops,

student athletes will be trained on social and professional skills to appropriately express themselves on their social media platforms in order to avoid media controversies. The training will encompass how to tweet appropriate content while still expressing their personality and teaching them how to respond to critical tweets they receive from followers (Auerbach, 2013). As well as learning strategies on how they can repair their public image if they are ever involved a media scandal due to an accusation or problematic tweet. Since student athletes are the demographic that will be most affected by the social media training workshops, they will be surveyed to assess the effectiveness of the workshops.

My curriculum plan is organized around four social media principles adapted from Robinson's work: personalizing messages; remaining professional; responding to online criticism; and repairing your public image. These principles will be further simplified under two headings, "How to Communicate" (personalizing messages and remaining professional) and "When Things Go Wrong" (responding to online criticism and repairing your public image). Athletes will learn to apply these strategies whenever they choose to tweet written messages on their Twitter accounts. These categories, adapted from Robinson's PPD model, will be used to teach athletes how to appropriately express their public image of being an individual athlete and student while also being a representative of the athletic department, the university, and the NCAA. According to Robinson (2015), most athletes do not see the relationship between themselves and the respected college, the athletic department, and the NCAA in this manner. I want to use Robinson's strategies to give athletes the chance to strategically showcase different elements of their lives and personalities while appearing to use social media platforms for the "social" function inherent to these media. That is, the more genuine athletes appear or the more

they appear to share similar interests and characteristics with followers, the more appropriate their self-presentation will be (Sanderson & Smith, 2015).

The curriculum plan will emphasize that athletes are public representatives of not only their sport but also the athletic department, the university, and the NCAA. And that they cannot escape the effects of being public figures due to their athletic participation in collegiate sports and sports journalists having an active presence on social media particularly on Twitter. Thus, inappropriate online behavior can follow them, even when they enter the workforce as professionals, such as professional sporting leagues, which can create new media controversies (Lecessi, 2019).

The curriculum plan will take form through a series of multimedia workshops. The workshops will mimic a classroom setting, and the information will be presented to the athletes on PowerPoint presentations. The topics of my curriculum plan will be presented to the student athletes over the course of both Fall and Spring semesters or quarters (including the summer). Student athletes will receive the content of my curriculum plan throughout their 4-5-years at the university or for as long as they remain public figures at their college campuses. I will also be adopting the suggested time frame of Robinson's PPD model to teach athletes social media appropriateness via social media training throughout the Fall and Spring academic school year and summer because according to Robinson (2015), this time frame eliminates a large amount of stress for athletes while participating in their sport season. As they have plenty of opportunities to attend social media education workshops because student athletes must be able to fit going to social media education seminars into their already busy schedules (Robinson, 2015). Therefore, the fall, spring, and summer, will serve as sufficient time frames for male and female student athletes to attend social media training sessions because it allows them to self-reflect while

mastering how to brand themselves as public figures of their athletic department, university, and the NCAA.

Generally, most student athletes and young people do not have a marketing purpose for being on social media sites to promote themselves and their products or projects. Most are present on social media platforms because their friends happen to be present on the same social media platforms. However, it is crucial for young people, especially student athletes, to realize social media is a powerful tool (viasport.com, 2019). And sports journalists are often hungry for a public scandal, especially among public figures who exhibit inappropriate behavior online and offline. Additionally, the implementation of my curriculum plan on social media appropriateness will help student athletes fully understand what it means to have a presence on social media in addition to how they can create online communities by sharing a common purpose with their followers.

My Curriculum Plan: Can Help Lessen Media Controversies

Reducing inappropriate social media posts by athletes will decrease media controversies. The first series of my curriculum plan will teach athletes strategies on what and why they should refrain from posting certain messages about themselves, along with teaching them the social media principals (i.e. personalizing messages and remaining professional) of the category, “How to Communicate” to craft messages about themselves that should be expressed to lessen the occurrences of media scandals. The next series of my curriculum plan will teach student athletes the social media principles (responding to online criticism and repairing your public image) of the category, “When Things Go Wrong” on how appropriately deal with online criticism and how to repair their public image when involved in a volatile media environment.

Before student athletes are introduced to the four social media principles, categorized under “How to Communicate” and “When Things Go Wrong”, my curriculum plan will teach athletes what type of content they should never want to publicly post. Showing and discussing with athletes on what content not to post on their social media accounts reinforces that they have the sole responsibility to protect and safe guard important information about themselves. It also reinforces to athletes that “freedom of speech does not equal freedom from consequences” (Gaio, 2013, p.3), which is why certain information should refrain from their social media sites in order to protect their public image from being tarnished.

The content that should not be publicly posted includes revealing personal issues with the following groups: family, friends, acquaintances, teammates, romantic partners, or any staff or faculty of their university. Additionally, athletes will be taught at the multimedia workshops to not reveal training plans, game plans, training results, and injuries—all this information should be left off of social media. Athletes will be taught that they should refrain from posting personal issues and plans and results of games and training along with injuries because they can create a distinction between their personal and public lives (viasport.com, 2019). Student athletes maintaining a more polished and professional social media persona can add an extra filter between themselves and online trolls wanting to spread the personal issues that athletes have to thousands of people including sports journalists (viasport.com, 2019). Aside from teaching student athletes not to post any messages that include profanity or insults regarding themselves or other people, the crucial information that athletes should never post on their social media are their physical locations. Athletes should never post their physical locations because they could be targeted with people wanting to do physical harm due to their popularity status as college athletes.

Once athletes learn what messages should remain off their social media accounts, they will then learn strategies on what messages should publicly be on their social media accounts, starting with learning about personalizing messages strategies. The personalizing messages strategies that athletes will learn from my curriculum plan include using their social media (i.e. Twitter) accounts to share their hobbies, interests, and personality characteristics, enabling their followers to see them in ways typically not depicted by new and traditional media coverage. An appropriate tweet of how athletes will be taught to show their interests would be showing them positive tweet examples, such as, “Cheering on the Broncos! Let’s go boys!” (Sanderson & Smith, 2015). Other personalizing messages strategies featured in my curriculum plan that athletes will learn include expressing that they are family-oriented. Athletes using their Twitter accounts to share events with family members to emphasize to the public how much they cherish these times and relationships. An example tweet shown to athletes at the multimedia workshops will be, “Me and my two nephews making our annual ginger bread houses. Love our family traditions” (Sanderson & Smith, 2015). More general personalizing messages strategies of my curriculum plan that can prevent media controversies include athletes tweeting a message or posting a video on Twitter to express personalize stories. The stories do not have to be epic. For example, athletes can tweet messages or post videos about how they got involved in their sport. Or student athletes can express through tweets a funny anecdote about a training mishap or share what they have learned about a recent loss. Both examples properly show to followers who athletes are while they are in action both on and off the field (Sanderson & Smith, 2015). According to Sanderson and Smith (2015), while it is important for student athletes to show themselves competing, many athletes report that their most popular social media content

documents their day-to-day life: waiting at airports, training in the gym, enjoying a sunset or hanging out with teammates.

The remaining professional strategies of my curriculum plan teaches student athletes to not retweet excessively. When student athletes retweet excessively in addition to retweet compliments, some followers and some sport journalists may see it as bragging and vain. If athletes choose to retweet a compliment, they should show humility and give thanks (Sanderson & Smith, 2015). Specifically, one of the remaining professional strategies of my curriculum plan that will be taught to student athletes is using their social media platforms to express charitable work. Athletes can express their charitable work with the following tweet message, “enjoyed hosting basic skills clinic at Commodore Stockton Skills School for more than 100 kindergarteners teaching them basic soccer skills.” Using social media platforms (i.e. Twitter) constructively with implementing the remaining professional strategies, such as athletes expressing their humanitarian efforts, can humanize and increase their brand affinity (as student athletes who have been given the privilege to receive a higher education) (Sanderson & Smith, 2015).

In addition to learning about personalizing messages and remaining professional strategies in multimedia workshops, it will also be emphasized to student athletes that all public tweet messages and retweets should have little to no grammatical errors. Athletes should have limited spelling and grammatical errors whenever posting written messages because they should want to be portrayed as public figures who have enough intelligence to form appropriate yet clear messages for followers, especially sport journalists (Sanderson & Smith, 2015). Students athletes should not even publicly retweet other people’s tweet messages if their messages contain grammatical errors.

My Curriculum Plan: Can Help Athletes Handle Online Criticism

For student athletes, being in the public eye can be a glorious experience, with everyone knowing who they are, as they represent the reputation of and the decades of tradition at a university. However, the dark side of college sports fame is the harassment that occurs on social media specifically, on Twitter. College athletes are prime targets and hear the chirps of negativity on Twitter, which are sparked by something the athlete has said, by followers witnessing a poor game performance, or even by someone just trolling them. Thanks to Twitter's communication format, which allows followers to be anonymous, student athletes are subject to hearing these critical tweets over and over again (Auerbach, 2013). The biggest drawbacks for athletes using Twitter are followers' critical tweets. For example, University of Kentucky Basketball player, Willie Cauley-Stein, deactivated his Twitter account after receiving negative tweets from fans as the basketball team was experiencing a losing streak (Auerbach, 2013; Sanderson & Truax, 2014). When it comes to student athletes' shortcomings during game performances, spectators enjoy immediately taking to Twitter to tweet and retweet sarcastic, belittling, and threatening remarks about a student athlete. Such evidence was collected in a 2014 study by Jimmy Sanderson and Carrie Truax. Sanderson and Truax (2014) investigated tweets directed at University of Alabama placekicker, Cade Foster, after Alabama lost their rivalry game against Auburn University on November 30, 2013. For example, one of the sarcastic tweets toward Foster stated "@Foster__43 has already blocked his Twitter account out He finna go missing like Lebron's hairline" (Sanderson & Truax, 2014). Another belittling tweet toward Foster read "@Foster__43 when I find you on campus, I'm gonna show you how to kick—with a swift one to the nuts Jackass, thought u would learn after LSU" (Sanderson & Traux, 2014) And lastly, one of a follower's threatening tweets read "@Foster__43 you sorry piece of shit!! I

hope you get rapped & your mom gets the shit beat out of her” (Sanderson & Traux, 2014).

From the examples provided, it is clear that unlike professional athletes, student athletes are less psychologically immune to critical tweets because they are students who are managing educational pursuits, while holding, essentially, a full-time job with their athletic demands, and while still being only 18-22 years old (Browning & Sanderson, 2012).

Having to defend themselves against online criticism, student athletes sometimes lash out with profanity and insults over Twitter. Currently, coaches advise college athletes to simply ignore the online criticism (Karasik, 2017). Avoidance was possible with traditional media outlets, such as newspapers, television, or radio; however, avoidance is difficult for athletes using a social medium such as Twitter, with over 302 million users (Karasik, 2017). Twitter does not have an “off-switch” that college athletes can use whenever their mobile devices are “blowing-up” from notifications of critical tweets. The responses that student athletes give to these Twitter critiques can have negative effects on the athletic department, the university, and the NCAA. For instance, the NCAA banned the University of North Carolina from the 2010-2011 postseason and slashed its allotment of football scholarships for the next three years due to the profane language from their football team’s defensive and offensive players’ responses to spectators’ critical tweets (Karasik, 2017). Thus, to be a student athlete in 2019 is to be someone who has to deal with the personal struggles and frustrations of balancing dual identities of being both an athlete and a student, while simultaneously dealing with online criticism from having social media popularity.

With the overwhelming number of harmful tweets to which these amateur athletes are susceptible to, one may question why athletes would continue to use Twitter. The answer is student athletes, especially male athletes, have become public representatives for themselves and

their universities. A way athletes can attempt to brand themselves is by using their personal Twitter platforms to portray a digital persona—that is, expressing themselves through their holistic identity. As they check their personal Twitter pages to see what is being said about them, they are frequently the topic of conversation (Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Sanderson & Traux, 2014). Even though critical tweets are an unpleasant aspect, student athletes benefit from having a confident social media presence. A high confidence level will enable them to appropriately deal with such critical tweets. Specifically, my curriculum plan can help student athletes develop a high confidence level by learning strategic methods on how to appropriately deal with critical tweets which would be learning how to navigate between their different identity personas from athlete, to student, to representative of the university, and determining the best response before actually responding to the critical tweet(s). The curriculum of my plan will also teach athletes the appropriate strategic responses when they are experiencing online criticism rather it be a personal or athletic attack. A strategic response student athletes' would learn from my curriculum plan is to keep a record of the harmful tweets directed towards them. And, they could also report the harassment by showing the saved critical tweets to the athletic department's compliance coordinator or the director of student services or even their team's coach (Sanderson & Traux, 2014). Another strategic response athletes will learn from my curriculum plan is for them to request that the handler of the official athletic department's Twitter account to highlight the student athlete's accomplishments or perhaps starting a hashtag to encourage fans to support the athlete in order to silence the spectators' critical tweets (Sanderson & Traux, 2014). With such examples provided, these are just some of the strategic methods in my curriculum plan that student athletes can learn in order to seek support against critical tweets, while having their virtual audiences witness that they are simply human beings who want to enjoy the same

experiences as other young adults in college. If student athletes would like more information on how to respond to online criticism, they can simply watch a video or form a thread on the discussion forum on the supplemental resource to my curriculum plan which is the Canvas site.

Collegiate athletes will learn the proper strategies on repairing their public image if any media controversies still occur from sport journalists reporting an athletes' inappropriate online behavior. One strategy that student athletes will learn from my curriculum plan to repair their public image is using their social media accounts to tell their side of the accusation(s) by posting a sincere video clarifying any misunderstandings that may be reported. If the athlete is in the wrong, he or she can use the video post to admit responsibility for the wrongful act and ask forgiveness. When the audience believes an apology is sincere, most times it causes them to pardon the wrongful act (Benoit, 1995). Another strategy student athletes will learn to help repair their public image is having the leaders of their athletic department and even the leaders of their university to provide testimonials in support of the athletes experiencing such a volatile media environment. One overarching strategy that student athletes will be taught from my curriculum is remaining transparent. Student athletes remaining transparent when involved in a media controversy means expressing to their followers what happen, so, they understand the issue without athletes making excuses for their actions (Godlash, 2019).

To conclude, college athletes' learning how to properly express themselves on their social media platforms can grant them the opportunity to publicly display their viewpoints on a variety of topics. Student athletes would also be able to strategically "defend" themselves on their personal Twitter accounts against spectators without having to rely on the traditional media gatekeepers to do it for them.

Summary

Athletes will be learning what and why certain content should never be posted on their personal Twitter accounts. Under the categorization, “How to Communicate” athletes will then learn the first set of social media principles, (personalizing messages and remaining professional), whenever they post messages on their Twitter accounts. The categorization titled, “When Things Go Wrong” is where athletes will learn the second set of social media principles (responding to criticism and repairing your public image) where athletes will learn how to respond to online criticism and how to repair their public image while appropriately defending themselves against social media trolls and sports journalists. Both categories of the four social media principals will teach student athletes the importance of how they can avoid media controversies by knowing how to strategically use their Twitter accounts to post appropriate messages while continuously having an authentic social media persona.

The goal of my curriculum plan, taught in a series of multimedia workshops, is to teach college athletes that they can craft the messages they want without being pigeonholed to be inauthentic. My curriculum plan will teach athletes social media appropriateness by using their social media platforms constructively and not in a destructive manner that could ruin their public image. Under the categorizations, “How to Communicate” and “When Things Go Wrong” student athletes will apply the four social media principles to help them focus on dealing with different types of online situations. As well as developing a reflective attitude whenever expressing their social media persona to their many followers. For example, asking themselves the following questions: “is this a good way to personalize my message?” “Is this a good response to remain professional?” “How should I respond to this online criticism?” “What would be the proper strategy to rectify my public image?” Asking such questions will teach

student athletes the importance of avoiding media controversies by knowing how to use their Twitter accounts to post appropriate messages while continuously having an authentic social media persona.

While in attendance at the multimedia workshops, athletes will be taught that their fans (followers) want to connect with them because their fans love what athletes can do on the court, but they want to know what athletes do off the court (Howes, 2019). Additionally, giving athletes reasons on why they should use social media and how impactful their social media presence on Twitter and other social platforms are to their thousands of followers. Athletes will also learn that their social media influence is a tool that can be used to connect with people they may never meet, like fans of their team, supporters from their hometown, and members of the general public who like their sport. Therefore, they can use their social media influence to increase potential sponsorship or donorship from stakeholders and boosters for their athletic team (viasport.com, 2019).

Conclusion

With the peak of social media, student athletes' accounts have continued to cause controversy. Many college athletes are social media illiterate due to not receiving the proper education on how to use their social media platforms appropriately. Scholars have confirmed that solving student athletes' social media inappropriateness requires athletes receiving resources and education through social media training (Sanderson & Smith, 2015; Stoller, 2015; Robinson, 2015), which is why I am proposing a curriculum plan. My curriculum plan includes multimedia workshops and a noncommercial interactive site—formed from a standard learning management system such as Canvas, feasible for any private or public university to use. Both resources will benefit student athletes who need to know how to use social media appropriately. Athletes will

utilize the resources by attending the multimedia workshops and using the interactive site daily to become social media literate on the appropriate uses of social mediums, particularly, Twitter.

I want my curriculum plan to impact college athletes by strengthening their self-discipline on what content should remain off their personal Twitter accounts and what content should be exposed on their Twitter accounts, while remaining authentic toward their followers. I also want college athletes to realize how important it is for them to be educated on how to constructively utilize their popularity status on social media in order to avoid facing media controversies, especially when there are many eyes constantly on them from sports journalists to online spectators.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Responding to the Covid Pandemic: A Rationale for a Synchronous Online Workshop to Teach Student Athletes Social Media Appropriateness

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing private and public colleges to alter their course offerings from face-to-face instruction to online instruction. My planned pilot study, which is an instructional workshop session on social media appropriateness, can also be offered online with the provision that the workshop session be synchronous (everyone participates together at the same time) rather than asynchronous (each person does the work on their own). Delivering the workshop session online correlates with the topic itself, as I will be discussing college athletes' inappropriate online behavior, and how athletes can make their online behavior more appropriate. I will be administering the virtual workshop session to both male and female athletic participants because female athletes also have social media mishaps, though female athletes are given less media coverage on their online and offline behaviors than their male counterparts. According to a 2018 article in *The Guardian* titled, "Should female athletes sue the networks for equal coverage," Title IX passed a 1972 bill that would give girls more access to sports. Only one in 27 girls played sports (Alvarez, 2018). "Today, that rate has soared to two in five girls. Even with this increase of sports participation among girls, women collegiate sports only receive 5% of dedicated media coverage on their athletic competence and behavior unrelated to their sport" (Alvarez, 2018). Among the 17 popular press articles on Google Search and 21 scholarly journals found in library databases on social media appropriateness among student athletes, I only found one newspaper article where female athletes were featured about their inappropriate social media behavior. Sports economist, David Berri and writer for *The*

Guardian, Anya Alvarez, experienced a similar result. Both parties went to ESPN's website, and only found three stories about women athletes among the dozens upon dozens of headlines about male athletes (Alvarez, 2018). Although female athletes received less media coverage than their male counterparts, regardless of their gender, student athletes spend a great deal of their time online, specifically on popular social media sites, such as Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and TickTok, which is why conducting a synchronous workshop session via Zoom or Webex is needed. College students—athletes and non-athletes—are increasingly active on social media sites, and this activity is often a result of boredom and isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic and orders from state officials that require all citizens to quarantine to decrease the spread of COVID-19. This activity increases opportunities for inappropriate online behavior, particularly among male and female student athletes.

It is reasonable to use video conferencing software, such as Zoom or Webex, to virtually teach student athletes how to use social media appropriately because it will allow athletes to access information remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. This added option, to teach social media appropriateness online, shows that my curriculum for social media appropriateness can be adapted to any platform accessible to athletes. This rationale explains why a synchronous framework is preferable, how the workshop can be reasonably conducted in an online synchronous format, and how participants can be certified in their participation. Lastly, this rationale will explain how the online workshop session will be conducted.

Why a Synchronous Online Pilot Study (Workshop Session) Is Preferable for Teaching Student Athletes Social Media Appropriateness

The online format serves my purposes as a researcher, and my participants still have the opportunity to experience social engagement through their interaction with the learning material.

In the online workshop session, participants will complete evaluation worksheets and discuss examples of inappropriate and appropriate social media usage from amateur (collegiate) and professional athletes to explain why media controversies occur among all athletes.

Research demonstrates that a synchronous learning setting is one of the superior ways for students to engage in online learning because of the opportunities for social engagement. Social engagement is of key importance, especially when university students are learning new skills (Abawi, Brown, Henderson, Redmond, 2018). Through social engagement, a synchronous online format can be a way for students to form purposeful social interactions by talking about themselves and their experiences (Abawi et al., 2018). Using a synchronous online format to teach social media appropriateness is just as efficient as using an in-person format because athlete attendees can still be socially engaged with the learning of new skills and be able to talk about themselves regarding their experiences with social media platforms. This engagement will involve conversations about themselves related to my discussion questions on the evaluation worksheets and discussion questions in the PowerPoint presentation. With a synchronous online learning format, I can also guide athletes to have an open and honest dialogue about their own social media mishaps amongst their athletic peers.

Video conferencing software, such as Webex and Zoom, make it possible to not only ask questions and receive answers, but also collectively drive a conversation into unexpected directions through social engagement (“Synchronous Learning,” 2018). The use of video conferencing in “live” time will allow athletic respondents to engage in discourses that deal with real-life problems to which they can relate, such as dealing with media controversies caused by journalists reporting athletes’ inappropriate social media behavior to the general public. Social engagement opportunities that use content with real-life issues are important for student learning

in both online and face-to-face settings because they build community through the use of open communication on social platforms (Chen, Lambert, & Guidry, 2010; Abawi, Brown, Henderson, Redmond, 2018).

In general, online learning is beneficial for all university students—non-athletes and athletes—because it fosters their critical thinking and communication skills (Segaren, 2020). Unlike online environments, in face-to-face settings it can be difficult for students to orally offer critical commentary due to feeling intimidated by being physically present in a classroom setting (Segaren, 2020). Additionally, an online educational setting can offer college students knowledge, time flexibility, and accessibility to the learning material (Segaren, 2020). University students can also receive the option of using social media platforms for interaction, participation, and collaboration with each other (Segaren, 2020) while engaging in an online learning environment. The utilization of social media in both recreational and online academic courses provides an opportunity to enhance engagement through social interaction for athletes and non-athlete students (Everson, Gundlach, & Miller, 2013; Tess, 2013; Bolliger & Martin, 2018). This social interaction connects to my research topic on how student athletes can learn to appropriately communicate messages to their audiences on their personal social media platforms.

What Is Needed to Conduct an Online Workshop in a Synchronous Format

Besides having a strong Wi-Fi connection and a computer with a camera, there needs to be approval to conduct a synchronous online workshop from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at University of the Pacific. The primary researcher must also receive approval from the athletic department, and specifically from the Assistant Athletic Director at University of the Pacific. I had requested permission to recruit student athletes for the pilot study by sending an invitational email explaining the purpose of the study and its online format. Attached to the

invitational email was the consent form, the PowerPoint presentation, and the evaluation worksheet. The email had also contained instructions on how athletes needed to complete certain sections (e.g., discussion questions) of the worksheet prior to the study. Also, participants must have their evaluation worksheets present in order to participate in the workshop session and offer feedback.

Additionally, I had sought permission from the athletic department to make the workshop session be added to the department's list of Life-Skills workshops available for student athletes to attend in order to receive two-hours of study hall credit for the Fall 2020 semester. To persuade the athletic staff to designate this workshop as a Life-Skills workshop, I had argued that a synchronous workshop session will help enhance players' personal and professional development by guiding them to explore how they can be more proactive on their social media platforms. For example, the workshop taught players how to consciously express more of themselves by showcasing how they are well-rounded students who have interests and hobbies outside of their sport; these positives use of social media protects their celebrity statuses as student athletes and protects the reputations of the athletic department, the university, and the NCAA. With the attendance of this online workshop session, college athletes can start thinking about what information needs to remain offline and what content should be shared online with public audiences. This can hopefully improve student athletes' self-discipline and prevent inappropriate online behavior, especially during stay-at-home orders due to COVID-19. With the strong positive response and the strong data collected from the evaluation worksheets, the athletic department can offer this workshop session in recurring semesters.

I used the video conference software Zoom to host the synchronous online workshop session because of its superior video quality. As the only host of the workshop session, I had the

option to log in to my Zoom profile account to find the meeting by its title and click start. The athletic staff had sent this link to participants' email addresses before the workshop begins. Then, participants had clicked "join" to access the workshop session. I had also sent step-by-step directions for how the athletic participants can join the workshop session to the athletic department. To summarize, after clicking the URL invite, participants click the highlighted text, "Join from your browser," and sign in with their name to join the workshop session (Woo, 2020).

At the beginning of the workshop, I made an announcement to the athletic respondents that the workshop session will be recorded. The workshop session was recorded by using the record feature on Zoom. To record the workshop, I had selected the record icon in the Zoom window. Once the workshop session ends, I had saved the recording by using the conversion process. After the conversion process ends, the recording was automatically be saved in my Documents folder in a subfolder labeled Zoom. This was the folder where I have the option to playback the video or audio of the workshop session. If there were technical difficulties locating the recording on my desktop, I had the option to access the workshop recording through my private Zoom account. After the necessary data was collected to write my analysis, both recordings will be deleted. This process of recording and deleting the recording was explained to the IRB and the athletics department.

With approval from the IRB, and the athletic department at University of the Pacific, the online workshop session proceeded, this opportunity allowed athletes to learn about social media appropriateness and enhance their personal and professional development. A synchronous online workshop session provides the same level of accountability and engagement as an in-person workshop session ("Synchronous Learning," 2018). With a synchronous online workshop session, I saved the data (recorded from my observation notes and the recorded video) to write

the final sections of my thesis—the analysis of the pilot study, the limitations of research, and the suggestions for future research. If possible, I can continue conducting workshop sessions either remotely or in person for University of the Pacific and other universities to improve athletes' social media presences because social media mishaps continue to plague student athletes, college athletic departments, and professional athletic organizations.

How Athletic Participants Can Be Certified in Their Participation in the Workshop

Session

A key part of the workshop is a combined worksheet and evaluation form that was used as both a worksheet—that is filled out prior to and during the workshop—and as an evaluation survey once it concludes. The evaluation worksheet was used as a worksheet because it provided an overview of the workshop session's structure and purpose, examples, and discussion questions to prompt participants' own responses about how they use social media platforms inappropriately and appropriately in a variety of situations. The evaluation worksheet was also used as a survey because the participants offered feedback on and suggestions for the learning materials. Athletes became certified through the electronic submission via email of their evaluation worksheets. Once I had received all athletic attendees' evaluation worksheets, I emailed the athletic staff the attendees' names and their sports. This information served as a record of each athlete's attendance.

Data from the evaluation worksheets was analyzed using Google Form. I manually submitted student athletes' responses from the evaluation worksheets into a Google Form, and then convert the Google Form data into an Excel spreadsheet of numerical data. Once I used the data from the Google Form and Excel spreadsheet to write my analyses, I immediately shredded the evaluation worksheets and delete the Excel spreadsheet and Google Form.

The Structure of a Synchronous Online Workshop Session to Teach Social Media

Appropriateness

To begin the online workshop session, the plan was to wait at least four minutes, allowing time for all 20 athletic participants to click the link inviting them to the workshop session. I had then started the study by unmuting my microphone to thank the athletic participants for their participation in the online workshop, and to share its purpose. After thanking the athletic respondents for participating in the pilot study and explaining its purpose, I used the share content feature (that is, on Zoom) to show my PowerPoint presentation. Once the PowerPoint was visible to the respondents, I reviewed the content objectives of the study. One minute was spent defining social media appropriateness and its' importance. Social media appropriateness is defined as knowing how to post on social media while appropriately representing the NCAA, the university, the athletic department, and most importantly, themselves. Furthermore, social media appropriateness is important because student athletes are popular public figures, who represent prestigious universities, athletic departments, and the NCAA, they must consider their audiences by being aware of their online messages that are viewed particularly, by sport journalists.

I had the athletes self-introduce by stating their name, year in school, and sport, and answer two questions relevant to the workshop topic: "What are your top forms of social media?" "Have any of your online messages (i.e., tweets or photos) been inappropriate for public viewership?" These two questions prompted the first discussion, which lasted for six minutes. Three minutes devoted to each question. These questions were also on the evaluation worksheet (a Word document) where athletes would have already prepared their answers. While I was listening to the athletes' responses, I noted if they use different social media platforms for

different audiences, such as friends, professors, family, coaches, and peers to understand who the athletes are targeting when they use certain social media platforms. I also noted any omission of inappropriate postings that the participants have posted. Presenting the two discussion questions helped me guide the athletic respondents in thinking that no matter which audiences they use social media for, they must always be aware that journalists and trolls are constantly watching their online behavior, reposting/reporting any social media mishap to the general public—and—creating a media controversy for the athlete, their athletic department, their university, and the NCAA.

Next, The Four Social Media Principles was introduced with me giving a four-minute lecture on: their collective purpose and importance, listing each principle, two categories that each principle falls under, each principle's definition and the benefits that they serve. The purpose of The Four Social Media Principles are skills that can be used to help athletes' frame written messages whenever they are expressing themselves online. The Four Social Media Principles are important because they introduce to athletes the idea of seeing themselves as popular public figures with large audiences and thereby, must be constantly aware of their online behavior. With these social media principles the key lesson of the workshop session was emphasized, which is athletes are always being watched due to being popular public figures, who are the face of collegiate sports, and some of the people are watching them are NOT their friends. Thus, it is crucial for all student athletes to learn how to use their social media accounts constructively to avoid serious online mishaps that frequently result in media controversies.

The two categories The Four Social Media principles fall under are How To Communicate and When Things Go Wrong. How to Communicate encompasses personalizing messages and remaining professional and When Things Go Wrong consists of responding to

criticism and repairing one's public image. Beginning with the principle—personalizing messages, which are personal disclosures or social interactions with followers that expresses personal interests, such as religious faith, favorite consumer products, or favorite celebrities, professors, etc. (Sanderson, 2011). Personalizing messages are beneficial to use because this principle gives followers (i.e. sport journalists and fans) intimate glimpses into what athletes' think and feel about a variety of topics and people.

Next, remaining professional principle is any marketing or promotional tweets or photos of the athletes' sport. These marketing or promoting tweets will include but not limited to: ticket sales promos, special events occurring before, during, or after the game or/and advocating for philanthropic events (Sanderson, 2011). The benefits for using the remaining professional principle is it allows athletes as public figures to market their brand—student athletes receiving a college education while playing the sport that they love, while representing the athletic department, the university, and the NCAA and allowing athletes to direct how they want to be perceived professionally through the marketing of games, special events, and philanthropic events.

The responding to criticism social media principle is the student athlete choosing the proper ways to respond to tweets that attack them personally or/and athletically (Sanderson, 2011). Using this particular principle is beneficial because it can limit journalists especially, sport journalists reporting on any inappropriate responses by the athlete toward online spectators. And the final social media principle, repairing your public image is defined as choosing the proper techniques that can begin and eventually repair an athletes' public image (Sanderson, 2011). This social media principle is beneficial for athletes because they can appropriately

handle media controversies that have occurred from sport journalists' reporting on their (athletes) online misbehavior.

After my lecture on the social media principles, I then conducted a 12-minute exercise on how athletes can flexibly apply The Four Social Media Principles. Seven minutes was spent showing inappropriate tweets/messages, while having the athletic participants apply social media principles to make the posts more appropriate for public viewership. Prior to showing the inappropriate social media messages, I gave a 30-second statement to disclose to the participants that the presentation includes inappropriate social media tweets and messages with offensive and obscene language. The showing of inappropriate social media messages was from the following athletes: Auburn University football player, Jordan Spriggs' tweet to solicit someone to write his own paper; National Hockey League (NHL) professional player of the Washington Capitals, Brenden Leipsic's leaked private messages on Instagram displaying demeaning conversations on multiple women, NHL players and their significant others. The next example is University of Pittsburgh safety, Elijah Fields' caption underneath a picture of a large sum of money. And the last example shown to the respondents was, University of Alabama placekicker, Cade Foster being the recipient of online criticism and not responding back. When each of the athletes' inappropriate tweets or online messages are shown, the question—how would you fix this social media post(s)? Was asked toward the athletic participants for them to apply two or more social media principles.

Five minutes will be spent showing participants appropriate tweets that demonstrate when athletes get it right due to the application of The Four Social Media Principles. Starting with the proper usage of responding to online criticism, where professional basketball player of the Los Angeles Lakers, LeBron James publicly posts the harmful tweets from online spectators,

who were critical of James during his 2011 free agency. Next appropriate tweet shared, was the proper usage of remaining professional, where Golden State Warriors professional basketball player, Stephen Curry highlights his partnership with Chase Bank in recognizing local organizations helping adolescent girls. Lastly, the proper usage of personalizing messages was shared, where Oklahoma City Thunder professional basketball player, Chris Paul is referencing a funny moment occurred at dinner with his parents.

Unlike an in-person workshop session, instead of an open 20-minute discussion with questions centered on The Four Social Media Principles, there was a five-minute time limit spent on one discussion question—What is important for athletes to be constantly aware of their social media posts? That requires a verbal answer by participants to respond one at a time through the unmuting of their mic. To eliminate problems with background noise with everyone's microphones on at the same time, ahead of time, I structured all discussion questions on the evaluation worksheet that outlines the online workshop session.

Prior to the workshop, the evaluation worksheet was sent electronically as an attachment to the participants' email addresses so that the athletic respondents can have prepared answers and then take turns replying to the discussion questions through their microphones. I used the same questions on the evaluation worksheet (that they have already prepared their answers for) on the PowerPoint presentation shared on Zoom to prompt each discussion. According to Doris Bolliger and Florence Martin (2018), research findings support student engagement with online learning: "Students found it to be beneficial when discussions are structured with guiding questions and/or prompts in order to deepen their understanding of the content" (p. 213).

To start the conclusion of the study, 30 seconds was spent on my closing statements by thanking the athletes for their participation in the online workshop session. Next, I told them that

they can began filling-out the feedback section of the evaluation worksheet. Unlike an in-person workshop session, a verbal debriefing will not occur because I wanted ensure that the participants have enough time (which was seven minutes) to fill-out the feedback section of the evaluation worksheet. When the online workshop concludes at 40 minutes, I had politely instructed the athletic participants to send me (via email) their evaluation worksheet. Ideally, I had liked for all athletic respondents to have completely filled out their evaluation worksheet.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The pilot study of Social Media Appropriateness 101: Teaching Student Athletes Social Media Appropriateness (an online synchronous workshop) was conducted with 20 Division I student athletes who play for the University of the Pacific on October 5, 2020. The data of the study were collected from the Zoom recording and the evaluation sheets uploaded onto Google Form.

What Happened During the Workshop

The workshop on social media appropriateness opened with me thanking the Assistant Director of Student Services Athletics and the Athletic Coordinator, for allowing me to conduct the workshop session. To continue my appreciation, I thanked all the student athletes for their participation. Next, the purpose of the workshop session—how athletes should see themselves as public figures therefore, must be aware of their online behavior. I explained that the participants should think of themselves as public figures and not as private college students. The workshop session will help to guide them to use their social media pages productively because it is imperative for them to be sensitive to others' feelings, opinions, and beliefs due to trolls and journalists watching their online behavior. Even if they post something that they think is harmless, their [the athletes'] audiences may not see it the same way as they do. Finally, I emphasized to the athletes that this workshop session is not to police how they use their social media platforms but this workshop is to teach them how they as public figures can constructively use their social media platforms and avoid controversy.

Then I explained to the participants about filling out the evaluation sheets and the purpose of the evaluation sheets. To preview what the participants will be learning, I read the

definition and importance of social media appropriateness and the how online appropriateness can be applied with usage of the four social media principles. I also gave an overview of the activities and topics of the workshop session [introductions, discussion, exercises, discussion, closing statements, and survey]. Following the overview of the workshop, each participant introduced themselves by stating their name and their sport.

To begin the first discussion of the workshop, I asked the question, “What are your top forms of social media?” “Tom,” a baseball player stated that, “Twitter, Insta [Instagram], Snapchat, and Facebook,” are his top forms of social media. Another baseball player, “Dan,” said, “Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat,” are his top forms of social media. The second question asked was, “Describe the online messages (i.e. tweets or photos) that you have witnessed causing problems with the general public?” Participant “Sam,” a baseball player said, “Twitter is where he has witnessed online messages causing problems with the general public due to political arguments and controversial topics. The baseball player continued to say, that people seem to not be able to have civil conversations by simply agreeing to disagree; instead, people are just calling each other names making it a bad conversation.” “Tom,” another baseball player stated, “I don’t see too much on Twitter because I mostly use it for baseball stuff, therefore, I only see content related to baseball. But, on Instagram I see a lot of political views causing issues among the general public.” “Brittney,” a volleyball player stated, “For me, I see a lot parents arguing on Facebook because a lot of the parents are in their kids’ (teenagers) drama. So, they [the parents] call out teenagers.” Participant “Mya,” a women’s basketball player said, “On Facebook and Twitter you see people going back and forth but, not as much as on other things [other social media sites].” During this discussion, some athletes revealed using their social media for a particular audience, as one baseball player stated, he uses Facebook for older family friends.

Participant “Brittney,” a women’s tennis player stated that she uses Facebook to contact her family in Mexico.

After the discussion on problematic online messages concluded, I explained the four social media principles: personalizing messages, remaining professional, responding to criticism, and repairing one’s image. I explained the principles’ purpose, importance, benefits, and how they emphasize the key lesson of the workshop. I did not elaborate too much beyond what was written on the PowerPoint. I simply stated how personalizing messages and remaining professional are strategies of the more general principle, How to Communicate, and responding to criticism and repairing one’s image are both strategies for the general principle, When Things Go Wrong. To apply the four social media principles, I conducted a 12-minute exercise with the athlete participants.: I wanted them to apply which social media principle(s) would make these inappropriate posts appropriate for public viewership by asking, “How would they make the inappropriate post more appropriate?” Before proceeding with the exercise, I stated a disclaimer about the inappropriate posts: “A lot of these posts are obscene and I apologize for the offensive language.” I proceeded to give background information on the examples used in the exercise, such as the athlete’s sport, what school they play for (if the example was a student athlete), and the context of the inappropriate post. The first example was Jordan Spriggs, an Auburn University football player, who tweeted a solicitation for someone to write his paper. “Joe,” a baseball player’s suggestion to fix Jordan Spriggs’s inappropriate post was, “Man, who can help me write this paper?” “Sean,” another male athlete, who is also a baseball player, suggested that Spriggs’s could have posted, “Can someone help tutor me on this subject? I have to write this paper on it. Or just don’t say it anything at all.” The second example in the exercise was Elijah Fields, a football player for the University of Pittsburgh, who posted an inappropriate

caption underneath a picture of a large sum of money. A baseball participant's suggestion to fix this inappropriate post was to just delete the whole post because he thought the online message could not be fixed. His teammate agreed with him. Before moving onto the last two examples of the 12-minute exercise, a male athlete asked, "Were these inappropriate posts still there [online]?" He was curious and wanted to look them up. I explained that these posts may no longer be on the athletes' social media accounts, but they are still online because they can be easily found with a simple Google search, along with the other inappropriate posts by other athletes [not featured on the PowerPoint] due to journalists reporting and forming stories about athletes' inappropriate social media messages.

The third example was of Cade Foster, a University of Alabama football player, who was the recipient of online criticism. However, he did not respond back to such criticism. For this particular example, I phrase the question to the athlete participants, how would you handle these online criticism as a way to "fight back" aside from not saying anything? The first response to this question was from participant "Julia," a volleyball player. She explained, "I feel like not saying anything would work because no matter what is said you're [student athletes] just putting fuel in a fire. And people could twist whatever you say and just comeback with more insults; it is not good for your [athletes] mental health to see that [harsh online criticism]. And two, I don't even know how you [athletes] would respond back without being aggressive, there's no point of saying anything." The fourth and final example of the exercise was a professional hockey player who plays for the Washington Capitals, Brenden Leipsic's leaked private messages on Instagram displaying demeaning conversations on multiple women, on NHL players and on their significant others. Participant "Brandon," a baseball player, suggestion was to fix the inappropriate post was, "you could make a statement that kind of recants what you say and some

reflection.” During the 12-minute activity, none of the social media principles were applied to fixing these inappropriate posts. I can acknowledge that the failure to apply the social media principles to the inappropriate posts occurred because I did not reinforce the action in the question, how would you fix this social media post? That was addressed for each example. I can speculate that more examples modeling how to apply the principles could be helpful to encourage more participation among athletes.

During the “When Athletes Get It Right” segment of the study, examples of appropriate online posts were shown to the respondents to demonstrate how the four social media principles can be applied by other athletes and why these posts were appropriate. During this section of the workshop, no one gave commentary and all participants simply listened. This segment, a discussion among the athletic respondents was prompted by a question—what is important for athletes to be constantly aware of with their social posts? The responses to this discussion question began with participant “Sandy,” a women’s basketball player, who stated, “Their [student athletes] surroundings and what is around them. And what people are doing around them when they post something.” Another female athlete, participant “Julia,” a volleyball player, commented, “I feel like right now with Covid-19 and everything, if you [athletes] are, which we’re not supposed to, but if you [athletes] are in a big group, don’t post it.” Next, participant “James,” a baseball player chimed into the discussion by saying, “Be aware of other people’s feelings. You [athletes] may not always agree on certain topics with everybody else but just because you [athletes] don’t agree with someone doesn’t mean you [athletes] can go and degrade other people or hurt other people’s feelings.” A women’s tennis player, name, “Maria,” response was, “Be aware of your audience because you never know who follows you [athletes] like younger people. So, we [athletes] have to be mindful what we [athletes] post.” From this

discussion, I learned that athletes need to be constantly aware of their surroundings right now due to Covid-19 especially when they are among large crowds and they need to be aware of their followers' feelings and opinions even if athletes find them disagreeable. Finally, I began the closing statements of the study with thanking the Assistant Director of Student Services Athletics, the Athletic Coordinator, and most importantly, the athletic participants.

Table 1
Tabulation of Social Media Platforms Used Among Each Sport

Each Sport and the Social Media Platform Used	Baseball (6players)	Water Polo (3players)	Basketball (1player)	Cross Country and Track (1 player)	Men 's Soccer (3 players)	Men 's Swimming (1player)	Softball (1player)	Volleyball (2 players)	Women 's Tennis (1 player)	Women 's Basketball (1 player)
Instagram	6	3	1	1	3	1	1	2	1	1
Snapchat	6	2	1	1	3	1	1	2	1	0
Tik Tok	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Twitter	5	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Facebook	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 2
Tabulation of Evaluation Ratings

Questions and Percentages	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Q#1: Learning Objectives of Workshop: The Content Objectives of the Workshop	65%	25%	10%	0.0%
Q#2: What is and the importance of Social Media Appropriateness?	70%	20%	10%	0.0%
Q#3: Introduction of Presenter and Participant Introductions	80%	5%	15%	0.0%
Q#4: Discussion Question #1: What are your top forms of social media?	65%	15%	20%	0.0%
Q#5: Discussion Question #2: Describe the online messages that you have witnessed causing problems with the general public?	57.1%	28.6%	4.3%	0.0%
Q#6: The main purpose of the study	90.5%	9.6%	9.6%	0.0%
Q#7: The lecture on How Communicate:	76.2%	14.3%	9.5%	0.0%
Q#8: The lecture on When Things Go Wrong:	81%	14.3%	4.8%	0.0%
Q#9: The 12-Minute Exercise on how athletes can use the four social media principles	57.1%	9.5%	28.6%	4.8%

(Table 2 Continued)

Q#10: The lecture on When Athletes Get It Right	61.9%	14.3%	23.8%	0.0%
Q#11: How well did the social media principles: personalizing messages, remaining professional, responding to criticism, and repairing one's public image	76.2%	19%	4.8%	0.0%
Q#12: How well did this workshop session teach how to constantly be aware of social media posts?	90.5%	4.8%	4.8%	0.0%
Q#13: The Importance of the Workshop Topic	81%	9.5%	4.8%	4.8%
Q#14: The Delivery of the Presenter	85.7%	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Q#15: The Delivery of Learning Materials on PowerPoint	76.2%	23.8%	0.0%	0.0%

Analysis of Workshop Session

There were 20 athletic participants present at the workshop and all 20 filled out the evaluation sheet. Though the majority of participants were Freshmen, there were a variety of sports present. Participants represented the following sports (Table 1): 27% of the participants were baseball players; 10% of the participants were water polo players; 63% of the participants were players on the basketball team, softball, cross country/track, men's swimming, men's soccer, volleyball, women's tennis, and women's basketball.

Instagram and Snapchat were the top forms of social media platforms, as 15% of the participants use these platforms, which correlates to their verbal responses to the discussion question—What are your top forms of social media? The second most used social media platforms among the athletic participants were Tik Tok, Twitter, and Facebook, as 10% of the participants use these platforms (Table 2).

The findings from the evaluation sheets revealed the most successful aspects of the workshop were the main purpose of the study—question #6 and how well the workshop session taught how to constantly be aware of social media posts—question #12. Both sections received an excellent rating of 90.5%. Question #6 was received so well because the purpose was easy for the participants to understand why their online behavior needs to be appropriate and why they must constantly be aware of their audiences' reaction to their online messages. Several students' comments reaffirmed how easy the main purpose made them realize why they should be aware of their online behavior. For example, one participant wrote, "The main purpose cause me to understand how and why social media etiquette is vital as a student athlete." Question #12 was just as successful as question #6 because many students wrote how question #12 made an impactful on them because the question had them reflect on their individual social media

presence and reflect on the importance of their role as student athletes. The second most successful segments of the workshop were question #14—the delivery of the presenter, which received an excellent rating of 85.7% and question #8—lecture on When Things Go Wrong, with an 81% excellent rating. Both workshop segments (question #14 and question #8) received the second highest rating among the participants because the lecture on When Things Go Wrong was clearly explained and sufficiently supported with examples how athletes can properly respond to Internet trolls in order to maintain or repair a positive public image. While the When Things Go Wrong lecture and other workshop segments was delivered by the presenter with enthusiasm to keep participants engaged.

The workshop parts that did not received a high excellent rating among students were question #10—When Athletes Get Right and question #5—Describe the online messages (i.e. tweets or photos) that you have witnessed causing problems. Question #10 received an excellent rating of 61.9% and question #5 received an excellent rating of 57.1%, with such low excellent scores, both segments can be improved with more time being added to each section. For question #10, the presenter can add more time to show more appropriate examples of amateur and professional athletes constructively using their social media. Question #5 can be improved with the presenter allowing more time for more students to participate in the discussions instead of only allowing three. The weakest sections out of the entire workshop were question #9—the 12-minute exercise and question #13—the importance of the workshop topic because these were the only two sections of the study ranked unsatisfactory by students. Specifically, both sections received a 4.8% unsatisfactory rating. The 12-minute exercise received a rating of unsatisfactory because some participants felt confused and experienced difficulty with fixing the inappropriate posts. As one athlete wrote, “I liked it [the 12-minute exercise] but I felt like it was hard to fix

the wrongful ones.” Another athlete wrote, “I was a little confuse here.” The 12-minute exercise could possibility be improved with the presenter showing students how to make an inappropriate post to an appropriate one using the four social media principles to visually demonstrate how an inappropriate post can be changed into an appropriate one; that is viewable to followers. The importance of the workshop topic received an unsatisfactory rating due to certain sections being redundant. For example, an athlete wrote, “[Workshop] topic was relevant and helpful, but a bit redundant.” A possible improvement to the workshop topic could be for the presenter to discuss the mental issues that can arise with professional and student athletes when they constantly received harsh online messages by Internet trolls.

Question #1: Seeking evaluation on the content objectives of the workshop were to analyze if listing topics to preview what will be learned is actually helpful. Showing the content objectives to the athletic participants was successful in helping them understand what they will be learning during the study. Many student athletes confirmed with their comments that previewing topics of the study were actually helpful. One athlete in particular wrote, “It [the content objectives] helped me understand what I need to get from the presentation.” Therefore, it is helpful for student athletes to begin a workshop with the content objectives because they are able to know what they will learn from the content being shown.

Question #2: What is social media appropriateness and what is the importance of social media appropriateness? This question is featured on the evaluation sheet because I wanted to learn if the respondents would be able to understand the importance of social media appropriateness by learning its definition. Aside from the average rating of 70% of athletes thinking the definition and importance of social media appropriateness was excellent, commentary given from the students showed they indeed understood the importance of social

media appropriateness. Many athletes commented that “social media appropriateness is important because it is relevant for today’s athletes’ for being able to view themselves as public figures capable of influence. Therefore, it is very important for us [athletes] to be careful what we post because we represent our school and the NCAA.” I think the scores would be higher if the definition and the importance of social media appropriateness were both summarized at the conclusion of the workshop session.

Question #3: With the introduction of the presenter and participants, I wanted to seek evaluation on question three to find out if athletes want a presenter to give a brief introduction of themselves and if athletes want to introduce themselves. 80% of athletes thought the introductions of the presenter and the participants were excellent and one athletic participant suggested, “Along with saying our names and sport, we should also say a fun fact about ourselves.” I believe including an introduction activity, such as athletes saying a fun fact about themselves, could be a good ice breaker, as a way for them to learn something new about their athletic peers.

Questions #4 and #5: The two discussion questions are on the evaluation sheet to discover how well they prompted the participants to be interactive during the workshop. Due to the athlete participants’ commentary, the two discussion questions were well received. For example, for the “What are your top forms of social media?” discussion question, a student athlete wrote, “It [discussion question one] was interactive and kept students engaged.” For discussion question two—“Describe the online messages (i.e. tweets or photos) that you have witnessed causing problems with the general public?”—several comments from students were positive because discussion question two allowed them to feel comfortable to express the inappropriate behaviors they are witnessing online. Questions four and five could be improved,

with discussion question one having a 65% excellent rating and discussion question two with a 57.1% excellent rating. These low ratings of excellence were confirmed by the students' commentary. As one student wrote, "I think doing a poll of who uses what [types of social media] would help keep the audience more involved." Another athletic participant wrote, "There are a lot more ways to post than Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Facebook. Maybe [the presenter] should have covered more." Through my analysis of discussion questions one and two, I learned that the participants liked interacting with the learning materials because it gave them the opportunity to speak openly about topics that pertain to online activities. I also learned there needs to be other creative ways to get athletes involved during a workshop besides discussion questions.

Question #6: The main purpose of the study was a workshop segment that I wanted to evaluate to see if participants would be receptive to the key lesson of the study. Many students' comments revealed that they indeed understood the key lesson of the study. As one athlete wrote, "[the purpose of the study] is to understand your surroundings when posting on social media." Another participant wrote, "to teach us [athletes] to be careful what we post." Others wrote, "[the purpose of the study] is to be appropriate on social media and to be mindful of your audience." The majority of participants thought stating the main purpose of the study was excellent; specifically, 90.5% of participants rated question six as excellent. And, only 9.6% ranked question six as good and satisfactory. From these percentage responses, I learned stating the key lesson prior to beginning a lecture on social media appropriateness helps athletes to remember what they are learning, as it relates to their usage of social media platforms. For example, one student wrote, "Good lesson and easy to remember."

Question #7 and Question #8: I wanted feedback on the lecture on How to Communicate and When Things Go Wrong because the four social media principles that are put into these two categories shows how athletes can be appropriate online. When lecturing on the two categories of the four social media principles—How to Communicate and When Things Go Wrong—76.2% of participants thought the lecture on How to Communicate was excellent; 81% of participants thought the lecture on When Things Go Wrong was excellent. Thus, both lectures were well received among athletes. This was also confirmed from the general commentary. Due to many student athletes' thinking the examples shown during both lectures were good as well as thinking the content of both lectures was eye opening and straightforward. Specifically, for question seven, a participant commented, "This [lecture] helped me understand what I can do to prevent conflict [media controversies] from happening." "Sometimes our wording can be off-putting causing people to take it the wrong way," wrote another student. And for question eight, an athlete wrote, "Very important and valuable to know especially in tough situations."

One of the social media principles that stood out the most among the participants was responding to criticism. Several athletes thought it is most effective to ignore hateful comments from trolls; one student commented on their evaluation sheet, "This section was a little hard for me to understand because I thought ignoring hate comments was a good thing to do." Another student wrote, "I didn't know that we should be reposting negative comments, and personally, I don't know if I would be strong enough to do that." "For me, when I'm faced with hate on social media, I think it is best to pass it up or ignore it," wrote an athlete. From these written comments, the social media principle "responding to criticism" needs to be thoroughly explained. The workshop presenter should list specific strategies on how student athletes can properly respond to harsh comments directed towards them. And, the presenter gives them a

clear reason why not responding to harsh criticism is a never a good tactic because the comments will simply continue to be posted on their social media feed.

Question #9: I wanted question nine on the evaluation sheet to determine if having athletes participate in an activity would be an effective way for them to learn what not to post on social media. Unfortunately, question nine was the least successful segment of the workshop with a low excellent rating of 57.1% and an unsatisfactory rating of 4.8%. The reason for the low excellent rating of the 12-minute exercise is because the participants claimed the inappropriate posts were difficult to fix. In addition, there were time limits for conducting the exercise, as many students felt the exercise should be longer. From the commentary and the low percentage ranking of excellence, I learned that the 12-minute exercise needs improvement. One way to improve the exercise is giving an explanation to the participants on how the inappropriate examples could be fixed with the four social media principles. These percentage rankings could also be improved by playing video clips from press conferences of professional and amateur athletes discussing their own social media mishaps and the consequences they endured from their inappropriate posts. On the contrary, the inappropriate messages used as examples in the exercise were a good way to demonstrate how athletes misuse their social media platforms; this was confirmed by one student's comment: "I'm glad I got to see what not do so I wouldn't make that mistake." Another student athlete wrote, "When talking inappropriately it can harm your image." Other comments taught me that the inappropriate examples should reflect current events involving social and political issues.

Question#10: Question 10—the lecture on When Athletes Get It Right—was featured on the evaluation sheet to analyze students' reaction to appropriate posts from amateur and professional athletes after seeing the inappropriate posts from the 12-minute exercise. From the

athletes' commentary on the evaluation sheets, they definitely grasped the differences between appropriate and inappropriate posts. For example, an athlete wrote, "This [lecture] showed us how to use social media in the right way." "Good to see what is appropriate and okay to post or write about [on social media]," commented a participant. There were also critiques on the appropriate examples used in this lecture segment. One main critique among the participants' comments was to add more examples of appropriate posts reflective of current events. In agreement, there should be more examples added showing athletes using their social media constructively. The When Athletes Get It Right segment of the study received a 61.9% excellent rating compared to the 57.1% excellent rating for the 12-minute exercise. I can assume The When Athletes Get It Right segment received a higher excellent rating because there were examples and reasons given for why the athletes' online posts were appropriate for public viewership, resulting in this segment being less confusing than the 12-minute exercise. As a student commented on their evaluation sheet, "Gave good examples and she [the presenter] didn't only tell us what is good about the appropriate posts but she [the presenter] gave us examples."

Question #11: Question 11 is featured on the evaluation sheet because I wanted to know how well the four social media principles can be applied to messages suitable for public viewing. The 76.2% excellent rating and the 19% good rating for question eleven proved that the social media principles did a fair job demonstrating how athletes can practice social media appropriateness. Several students' comments revealed that learning about the four social media principles caused them to be more aware of their social media presence and also aware that their private messages can be leaked to the public. On the contrary, other participants thought learning about the social media principles was common sense. One student in particular thought

learning about the social media principles increased their anxiety: “This workshop did teach me how to be aware, but I also feel a little anxious about posting now.” Lessening athletes’ anxiety about posting on their social media is a topic that should be addressed in future studies to increase their comfort level for using strategies like the four social media principles to form appropriate messages.

Question #12 and Question #13: Questions 12 and 13 are on the evaluation sheet to discover the importance of learning about social media appropriateness and why the principles (the four social media principles) of social media appropriateness should be applied when posting messages online. From the commentary and percentage rankings of both questions, students did find learning about social media appropriateness to be useful. Specifically, in question #12, many students commented how the workshop was useful at making them aware: “How important it is to be a student athlete therefore, they must consider all factors [their brand] before clicking send [to post a message on social media].” Several comments for question #13 included how important this question is due to the relevance of the topic in modern society. Other students wrote how question #13 made them aware of how posting inappropriate messages can affect their statuses as student athletes. For example, “Bad things [inappropriate posts] can make us [athletes] lose our whole scholarship and even jobs [as professional athletes].” Another athlete wrote, “It [learning about social media appropriateness] is very important to me and other athletes here at school because of our status on campus.” An important point—how not all followers of athletes are their friends—was fully understood, as one athlete wrote, “It [the workshop] taught me that not everyone is your friend regardless if they follow you.”

The percentage results from question 12, “How well did this workshop session teach how to constantly be aware of social media posts?” were the following: 90.5% of athletes ranked this workshop session as excellent, and 4.8% of athletes ranked this workshop session as good and satisfactory. From these findings, I learned workshops can be good settings to teach student athletes how to constructively utilize their public social media platforms in order to avoid media controversies. For example, an athlete wrote, “I learned a lot from this workshop and I think this is something all student athletes should be able to see.” Question #13, “The Importance of the Workshop Topic,” received an 81% excellent rating, which means the topic of social media appropriateness is useful to teach athletes how they can appropriately engage with their followers on social media, even when they receive criticism from these same followers.

Question #14: The delivery of the presenter is on the evaluation sheet because I wanted to find out what it acquired to be able to engage student athletes during a workshop. Results of the evaluation sheet revealed that they really enjoyed how I conducted the entire study because 85.7% ranked question fourteen as excellent and 0.0% of athletes ranked the delivery as satisfactory. The evaluation sheets also revealed that the athletic participants thought a good presenter is someone who is entertaining and someone who includes athletes in the lesson. The presenter may have the athletes participate in the lesson via verbal discussions or activities, especially if the workshop session is conducted in a synchronous online setting. As one athlete commented on their evaluation sheet, “No one likes online learning, but she [the presenter] did not make the presentation boring and included us.” Other qualities that the athlete participants favor in a presenter’s delivery is to maintain their engagement and for the presenter to express enthusiasm, be easy to hear, speak very clearly, and show content that reflects current events in society and daily events in college. As one athlete commented on their evaluation sheet, “I was

able to stay focused because it was up to date information and the discussions gave me examples of what was being talked about.” Finally, I learned a good presenter must not read too much from the PowerPoint. He or she should elaborate on the concept featured on the PowerPoint. The presenter should also verbally ask a question on the concept to form a discussion to create a relaxing environment with the encouragement of open and honest conversation. This action also prevents the presenter’s delivery from being too scripted.

Question #15: The delivery of the learning materials on a PowerPoint is a question on the evaluation sheet to see if using a PowerPoint is a good tool to teach social media appropriateness. The percentage rankings of the learning materials were the following: 76.2% of students thought the learning material on a PowerPoint was excellent, 23.8% thought the learning material on a PowerPoint was good, and 0.0% thought the learning material on a PowerPoint was satisfactory. These percentages informed me that to successfully present learning materials on a PowerPoint presentation, it is best to have simple bullet points that are easy follow with only short sentences or phrases. Also, learning materials should include real-life examples. As one athlete wrote, “[the learning material] was very thought out and I like how there were real examples.” A presenter of a workshop session should have teachable learning materials to reflect the learning outcomes. For example, an athlete respondent wrote, “I definitely know what I should be watchful for when I post on social media platforms.” Another athlete wrote, “[The learning materials] taught me stuff I hadn’t thought about before.” Someone else recapped, “[The learning materials] it made me reflect on my own social media presence.” The open-ended comments section of the evaluation sheets was also helpful for the improvement of the presenter’s delivery and learning materials. Such as, the presenter slowing down when explaining the definitions of terms and adding more time for all student athletes to participate in

verbal discussions. One athlete wrote, “Great presentation and I learned a lot, but I think more time would be valuable to get everyone [the student athletes] involved.”

Limitations of Current Study

One of the biggest limitation of the synchronous online study was the lack of time for in-depth discussions with more respondents. Since the workshop occurred on Zoom, there was only enough time for a maximum of four athletes out of the 20 to voice their thoughts on the discussion prompts. If the study had occurred in-person, there would have been more opportunities for verbal feedback and engagement on the prompted discussion questions. However, the student athletes present at the workshop were still engaged with the discussion questions and content on Zoom due to the imagery of the PowerPoint, relevance of the topic, and the delivery qualities of the primary researcher. The next limitation of the study was lack of variety of student athletes, meaning the exclusion of upperclassmen as the workshop only consisted of Freshmen because the study was conducted in a SERV course. It would have been helpful if upperclassmen (Juniors and Seniors) were involved in the study to see the contrast in responses to the learning materials between the underclassmen (Freshmen and Sophomores) and upperclassmen. Throughout the workshop session, there were awkward moments caused by the unmuting of athletes’ microphone to speak; additionally, it was difficult to see who was speaking as the camera on Zoom kept switching. The last limitation was the distraction of background noise from one athlete participant entering the study late.

Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the findings of the pilot study, it would be helpful for there to be further research on teaching social media appropriateness, such as showing athletes how to fix inappropriate postings, since the 12-minute exercise was a weak segment of this study. There

should also be research on the types of data collection such as interviews with coaches. Future researchers can also find out what other settings (beside a synchronous online setting) could be used to teach social media appropriateness. These settings could be in-person, a hybrid, or an asynchronous. Another possibility for further research would be finding out what other learning materials (i.e. interactive activities, development of apps, training videos, etc.) can be used to teach constructive usage of social media platforms and comparing those learning materials to see which would work best among student athletes. Since student athletes social media mishaps are a major issue for athletic departments, more research is needed to convince collegiate athletic departments to invest more resources into teaching their athletes how to constructively use their social media platforms. Especially since social media platforms have been entrenched into society due to their continuous popularity.

Conclusion

Collegiate athletes posting inappropriate messages on their social media is causing media controversies for their athletic departments and hurting athletes' chances for future career prospects. Trying to heavily police or forbid the usage of social media has not proven to be an effective method to lessen the controversies from athletes' inappropriate posts. However, social media education can help lessen the problem by teaching them how to avoid media controversies and also repair their public image if a controversy occurs. This research project used a workshop format to teach student athletes four social media principles: personalizing messages and remaining professional strategies that can be applied to enhance engagement; the other two principles: responding to criticism and repairing one's public image are strategies use for defense against trolls and for repairing one's image.

The pilot study was conducted at a crucial time because the University of the Pacific athletic department had recently (during the Fall 2020 semester) experienced a social media controversy with one of their student athletes. The inappropriate post occurred on Snapchat, resulting in the university's administrative officials' involvement. The offense that the athlete committed was posting a private Snapchat story mocking police brutality toward Black men. Initially, I found out about the incident from the Assistant Athletic Director, Student-Athlete Services. The social media mishap was also mentioned by an athletic participant on their evaluation sheet.

Once again, this demonstrates how athletic departments need to invest in social media education to advise proper ways athletes can engage on their social media platforms. If athletic departments continue to not invest more resources into social media education, student athletes' social media mishaps will continue to cause major media controversies for the university, the athletic department, and the athlete's brand. Taking away opportunities for students to be engaged with their followers on their social media platforms in order to showcase themselves beyond their athleticism. Furthermore, my curriculum for social media education workshops is important because such workshop sessions can be the first step in recognizing and possibility, reaching an agreement in modern society on what it truly means to be social media literate—all people knowing how to constructively utilize their social media, rather they are a public figures (i.e. student-athletes) or ordinary people (i.e. nonathletic college students) because social media platforms are continuously poses challenges to everyone's online behavior.

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APPENDIX A: EVALUATION ASSESSMENT

Dear Participant,

The Communication Studies Department at the University of the Pacific would like to thank you for your participation, in this survey. We are studying how teaching social media appropriateness to student athletes when using their Twitter accounts can decrease media controversies. You are invited to participate if you play for a Division I NCAA sport at a collegiate institution. You must be at least 18 years or older to complete the survey. Please answer all questions as honestly as you can, as failure to do so, can alter our results. The survey is voluntary. You may end your participation at any time by exiting the survey.

The survey will approximately take seven minutes. Answers are anonymous. The results will be reported for the group of respondents as a whole. Individual results will not be reported.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of the Pacific Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 209-946-3903. If you have further questions about this study, please email the principle investigator, Christina Murray at, c__murray4@u.pacific.edu. Or you can contact the faculty advisor, Paul Turpin at, turpin.p@gmail.com. Once again, we thank you for your time and contribution to our research.

Sincerely,
University of the Pacific
Department of Communication Studies

Evaluation Worksheet

Sport/Date:

Section I: Discussion Questions

Directions: Please have your responses to the discussion questions prepared **before** the workshop session. You can either type your responses and save them onto your computer, or you can print out the worksheet and handwrite your responses to all three discussion questions.

Discussion Question #1: What are your top forms of social media?

Discussion Question #2: Describe the online messages (i.e. tweets or photos) that you have witness causing problems with the general public?

Discussion Question #3: What is important for athletes to be constantly aware of with their social media posts?

STOP HERE

Section II: Survey of Workshop Session

Directions: Participants will rate each section. As the participant, you could either use the worksheet electronically by highlighting your answer, using the Text Highlight Color function and email it, or you could print it out, write on it, and send a photo of the completed document. The email you will send your electronically completed worksheet or send a photo of the completed worksheet is at, c__murray4@u.pacific.edu. In either case, you will have your own notes and the primary researcher will get a copy.

I. Section 1: Learning Objectives of Workshop

a. Content Objectives of Workshop

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

- i. Excellent ii. Good iii. Satisfactory iv. Unsatisfactory
-

b. Definition and Importance of Social Media Appropriateness

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

- i. Excellent ii. Good iii. Satisfactory iv. Unsatisfactory
-

c. Introduction of Presenter and Participant Introduction

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section below

RATING: Please highlight one

i. Excellent ii. Good iii. Satisfactory iv. Unsatisfactory

A. Discussion Questions

1. What are your top forms of social media?

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

i. Excellent ii. Good iii. Satisfactory iv. Unsatisfactory

2. Describe the online messages (i.e. tweets or photos) that you have witness causing problems with the general public?

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

i. Excellent ii. Good iii. Satisfactory iv. Unsatisfactory

II. Section 2: The Four Social Media Principles

a. The definition and importance of the Four Social Media Principles

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

i. Excellent ii. Good iii. Satisfactory iv. Unsatisfactory

b. The key lesson of the workshop session

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

- i. Excellent ii. Good iii. Satisfactory iv. Unsatisfactory
-

c. The lecture on The Four Social Media Principles

i. How To Communicate: Personalizing Messages & Remaining Professional

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

- i. Excellent ii. Good iii. Satisfactory iv. Unsatisfactory
-

ii. When Things Go Wrong: Responding to Criticism & Repairing One's Public Image

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

- i. Excellent ii. Good iii. Satisfactory iv. Unsatisfactory
-

III. Section 3: Application Exercises

a. The 12-minute exercise on how athletes can use The Four Social Media Principles

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

- i. Excellent ii. Good iii. Satisfactory iv. Unsatisfactory
-

b. Showing of inappropriate social media messages

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

- i. Excellent ii. Good iii. Satisfactory iv. Unsatisfactory
-

c. Showing of appropriate social media messages

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

- i. Excellent ii. Good iii. Satisfactory iv. Unsatisfactory
-

A. Discussion Questions

1. What is important for athletes to be constantly aware of their social media posts?

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

- i. Excellent ii. Good iii. Satisfactory iv. Unsatisfactory

IV. Section 4: Overall Evaluation of the Workshop Session

A. How well did The Four Social Media Principles accurately cover how to practice social media appropriateness?

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

i. Excellent

ii. Good

iii. Satisfactory

iv. Unsatisfactory

B. How well did this workshop session teach how to be constantly aware of social media posts?

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

i. Excellent

ii. Good

iii. Satisfactory

iv. Unsatisfactory

1. Importance of the workshop topic

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

i. Excellent

ii. Good

iii. Satisfactory

iv. Unsatisfactory

2. Delivery of the Presenter

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

- i. Excellent ii. Good iii. Satisfactory iv. Unsatisfactory
-

3. Delivery of Learning Materials on a PowerPoint

NOTES: Write notes/comments on this section in the space below

RATING: Please highlight one

- i. Excellent ii. Good iii. Satisfactory iv. Unsatisfactory

C. Please provide any open-ended comments in the space below: