

Social Media Literacy for Student-Athletes

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Social Media Literacy

Social media literacy is the ability to critically analyze, evaluate, share, and create social media (Vanwynsberghe et al., 2012)

There are examples of both recruited high school athletes and current collegiate athletes suffering serious consequences from posting unsuitable content including loss of reputation, eligibility, scholarships, and future career prospects (Browning & Sanderson, 2018; Toler, 2017)

Current Approaches

To date, techniques used by athletic departments to address the social media use of their student-athletes has varied widely:

- Coaching staff actively monitoring use
- Contracting external consultants (Varsity Monitor, Centrix Social, UDiligence, 5.0 Communications, and Fieldhouse Media)
- None (40% of student-athletes per Thomas & Schwartz, 2014)

Program Development

Guided by previous research, an online social media literacy training program was devised that includes four educational modules in YouTube video format, each 8-12 minutes in duration.

1. **Showcase Your Strengths; Showcase Your Character:** This module teaches athletes to recognize how their social media behavior influences their present and future. Strategies for posting effective content are promoted, such as identifying one's values, avoiding taboo topics and profanity, and having friends monitor social media behavior.
2. **Use Social Media With a Critical Mind:** College students are poor at analyzing the validity of social media news content (Wineberg et al., 2016). This module develops media awareness and critical evaluation of information. Users are taught to evaluate source credibility and motive prior to consuming content.

Program Development

3. Enrich Sport Performance: This module educates users about relationships social media behavior has with one's performance. Highlighted recommendations throughout the module include expressing support for teammates through social media posts, ensuring feedback sources on social media are credible, and avoiding social media prior to competition.

4. Manage Personal Attacks and Cyberbullying: College athletes are unfortunately positioned to be victims of cyberbullying. This module provides strategies for addressing cyberbullying and also educates users how to use techniques such as mindfulness and cognitive restructuring to prevent adverse mental health effects due to social media use.



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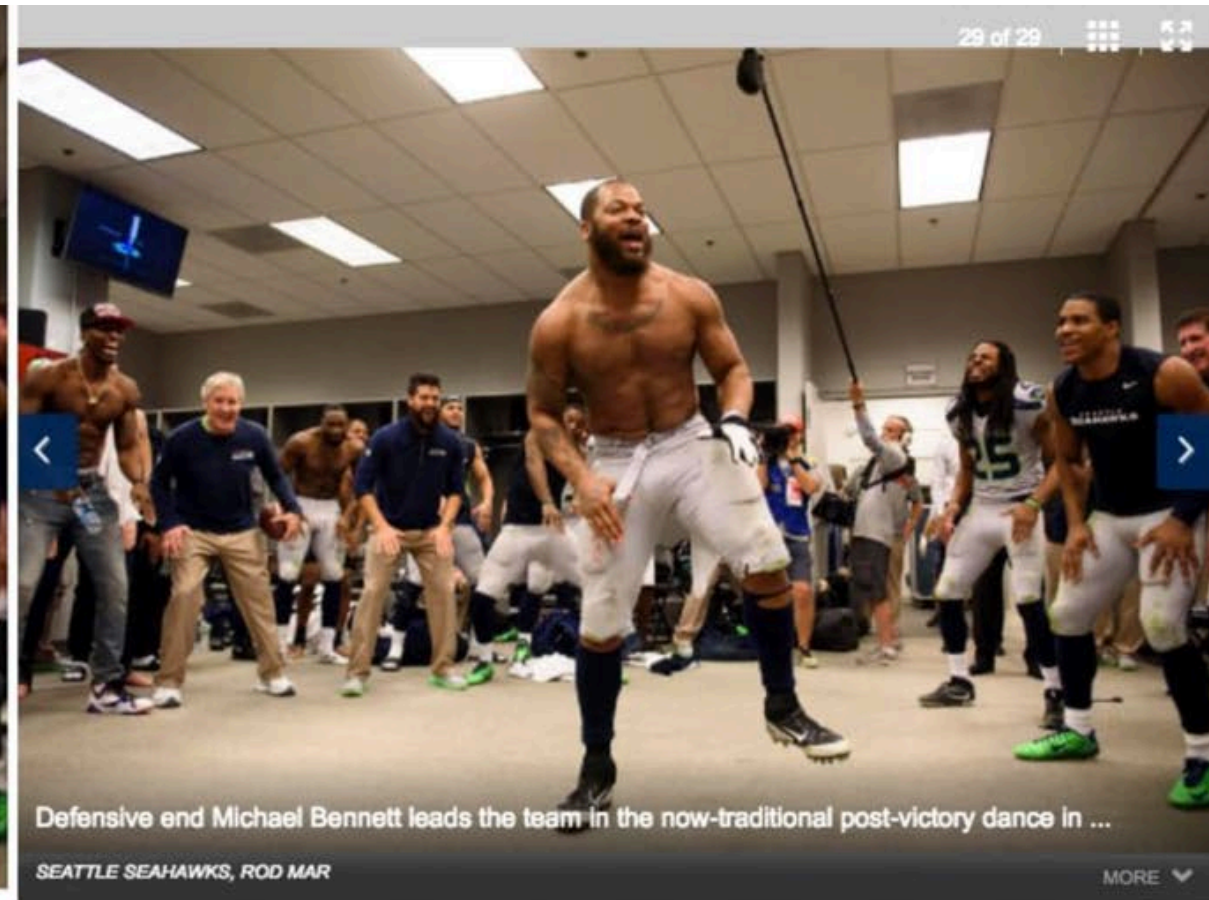
"I feel like I can help people keep their family relationships alive and bring people together through food. Who wouldn't want to do that?"

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Inauthentic



Authentic

Methodology

Participants

- 114 current Division I and II athletes
- 65 females and 49 males
- 7 sports

Assessment

- 16 items on 1-10 Likert scale indicating one's understanding of the concept
- Example: "I understand how to identify bias in a social media account"

Procedure

- Informed consent → demographics form → pre-test → modules 1-4 → post-test → qualitative feedback → retention test

Quantitative Results

Module	Pre → Post	Post → Retention	Pre → Retention
Showcase Your Strengths; Showcase Your Character	+10.3%*	-5.3%*	+6.2%*
Use Social Media With a Critical Mind	+12.5%*	-3.7%*	+11.5%*
Enrich Sport Performance	+22.6%*	-5.8%	+18.3%*
Manage Personal Attacks and Cyberbullying	+8.2%*	-2.8%*	+5.7%*

* Indicates significance at $p = .05$

Qualitative Results

Positive Feedback

- Pilot participants praised the inclusion of elite athlete social media examples to complement key concepts
- Participants learned a significant amount about identifying “fake news”
- Participants learned how social media use can improve individual and team performance, with numerous users admitting they had never before considered that a relationship existed between social media and performance

Negative Feedback

- Participants believed the modules could be shortened by increasing narration cadence and eliminating some examples

Implications for Campus Programming

- Findings indicated student-athletes have room for growth regarding their social media literacy.
- Institutional approach to social media does not need to be prohibitive; the alternative positive approach has merit.
- Developing athletes' ability to critically analyze, evaluate and create social media content should be the objective of institutional responses to social media. Results indicated the current program would effectively support efforts to do so.

Thank you

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