

# Module 1. The Influence of Social Media in Sport

## Imagine the following scenario:

Adriana Gomez has just been hired as the Public Relations Director of a French feeder club, which is an affiliate for a professional football club in Spain. Adriana has just joined the feeder club after a career in the corporate sector, working as a Marketing and Public Relations Executive. The President of the club has tasked Adriana to integrate social media into the organization's operations. Whereas the club has historically been successful reaching its fans through traditional media channels such as television, radio, and the newspaper, the organization has noticed a decline in fan attendance and enthusiasm, particularly among millennials and Generation Z, audiences of great importance for the organization. Whereas the club has social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, the accounts are dormant, with content posted very inconsistently. Besides, the club has not developed a presence on platforms like Snapchat and TikTok.

Adriana has a staff of two direct reports. Jose is the Manager of Media Relations and has been with the organization for 30 years. Selena is a Corporate Communications Manager and has recently graduated from college, and this is her first job. During her first day on the job, Adriana meets with Jose and Selena to discuss establishing a social media strategy for the organization. Adriana is impressed with Selena's enthusiasm for the project and notes that she has a lot of creative ideas, including creating a Snapchat account for the club and pitching some creative ideas for TikTok. Jose, on the other hand, is quite indifferent to social media. He understands its importance, but tells Adriana that under no circumstances will he "create a Twitter."

As Adriana ponders her next steps, she realizes she needs to get Jose to buy into the new shift in communication strategy. She knows Jose is a valuable member of the organization and has built solid relationships with members of the local and national media, and she does not want to see him leave the club. At the same time, she is excited about Selena's enthusiasm for the project, including a suggestion that the club look for ways to integrate some of the corporate sponsors into their social media strategy.

While Adriana is reflecting on her next steps, she receives a knock at her office door. She is greeted by Emilio, one of the assistant coaches on the club. He takes out his phone and

shows her a tweet from one of the players, which contains homophobic language, and he also points out that the player's name is one of the top trending topics on Twitter in the local area and that the club's Twitter and Facebook accounts are seeing lots of replies from angry people. Adriana also learns that this player has a history of posting this kind of content, and several of his tweets from 7 to 8 years ago have surfaced. Emilio asks Adriana how the club is going to respond to the public and informs her they will need to meet with the General Manager immediately to discuss a plan of action. As Emilio gets ready to leave the office, Adriana notices that her phone keeps vibrating, and as she checks it, she sees multiple texts from reporters wanting a comment on the tweet.

As she walks to the meeting with the General Manager, and her phone continues to vibrate, she begins to wonder if she should have left the corporate sector.

# Unit 1.1 Understanding the Growth of Social Media

It is no secret that social media has had a profound effect on society. In the past decade, social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat, have become major societal forces. The power of social media can be seen in the number of users of these platforms. For example, as of late 2019, Facebook has 2.5 billion monthly active users (Clement, 2020). Twitter reports 330 million monthly active users, with 145 million daily users (Smith, 2020). According to an article published by the web page Omnicore, Instagram has over 1 billion monthly active users and over 500 million daily users; Snapchat possesses 360 million monthly active users and 218 million daily active users; and TikTok has 800 million monthly active users and has been downloaded over 1.6 billion times (Instagram by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts, 2020.)

## 1.1.1 Defining Social Media

Social media have been defined in many ways, but one of the more accepted definitions is that social media, “are architected by design to readily support participation, peer-to-peer conversation, collaboration, and community” (Meraz, 2009, p. 682). Additionally, Safko and Brake (2009) define social media in the following way:

(...) activities, practices, and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media... Web-based applications that make it possible to create and easily transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos, and audios. (p. 6).

In other words, we can characterize social media by the *Three C's*:

- *Collaboration* – Social media is fueled by the ability to collaborate with others. For example, many professional associations or people in a particular field (e.g., public relations) host Twitter chats where users participate via a designated hashtag. These Twitter chats bring people who have similar interests together so they ask and answer questions, and relationships are built and developed through this exchange of ideas while people learn from others who help them in their professional livelihood.
- *Conversation* – Collaboration would be impossible without conversation. Through social media, people can converse with others from whom they are separated by barriers of time and space. In other words, social media enhances communication

because users can reach out and communicate with a broad audience. Whereas this capability has existed prior to social media, the latter makes it convenient to access others and initiate dialogue and conversation. For example, think of your own job position. Are there others in similar fields that you could interact with via social media?

- *Community* – Through conversation and collaboration, community is built. Via social media, people can access others with a shared interest and engage in dialogue and conversation with minimal barriers to doing so. Think about the Twitter chats mentioned above. Many of these groups hold their Twitter chats at dedicated times each week, and as these chats perpetuate, a community is built, wherein people with shared interests can dialogue and work together.

Understanding the definition of social media is helpful, because it allows us to see the principles inherent to the technology that have driven its popularity. Social media has introduced unprecedented changes to communication and media, and it is important to understand these shifts.

### **1.1.2 The Rise of Social Media and the Evolution of Communication**

The rise of social media is intricately linked to the proliferation of the Internet. As the Internet became mainstream, it introduced significant changes in the way people communicate. For example, electronic mail (e-mail) and text messaging have for many people, supplanted writing letters and telephone calls as the primary way they communicate. In addition, in the early days of the Internet, through the development of web pages, bulletin boards, usenet groups, and chat rooms, the collaboration, conversation, and community discussed earlier drove people online. One significant development that the Internet ushered us in was the accessibility and convenience to create content. Essentially, the Internet made it possible for the average person to become a mass communicator. No longer did mass communication lay solely in the hands of mainstream media organizations. Additionally, organizations realized that the Internet would allow them to become a mass communicator as well, and while many of these organizations still utilize mainstream media resources, the Internet, and subsequently, social media, has allowed them to generate their own media and tell their stories in unique and personal ways.

The technology inherent to social media has been around for some time. E-mail, chat rooms and bulletin boards possessed similar characteristics of what we experience with social media today. These characteristics include the ability to create and post messages, and interact with others from whom we are separated by barriers of space and time. Early social media sites like Xanga, Friendster, and MySpace experienced some popularity before

eventually fading off, but as the above numbers indicate, the past decade has seen remarkable growth in social media. There are several reasons for this surge:

- ***The ability to create content.*** No longer are audience members passive. They can actively generate their own written and visual content, and disseminate that content to broad audiences.
- ***The ability to connect.*** Via social media, people can connect with others around the globe for personal, professional, and other reasons. For example, LinkedIn has become a primary source for recruiters to fill openings and for people to build their professional networks. Additionally, people can connect with organizations via social media. In fact, a lot of organizations hear about customer service issues via platforms like Facebook and Twitter, perhaps because people feel they will get a quicker response if the complaint is made visible.
- ***Mobile capabilities.*** The surge in social media can plausibly be attributed to the proliferation of smartphones. Smartphones enable people to search and post content on social media conveniently, and some reports indicate that 80% of social media time is spent via mobile (Sterling, 2016). Thus, it is not surprising that platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok are exclusively designed for mobile.

It is important to remember that while social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram may come and go, the underlying technology, and the convenience of accessing that technology, make social media a crucial tool for sport organizations.

### **1.1.3 Social Media's Proliferation in Sport**

Whereas essentially every sector and organization has been affected by social media, sport arguably has been one of the most heavily affected fields. For instance, athletes now have a platform to put out content at their disposal. While this capability can certainly be a positive thing, there is a multitude of cases where public relations issues have surfaced for organizations because of something an athlete has posted on social media, including content athletes posted years in the past. In addition, fans now have increased digital access to athletes, which can lead to positive exchanges, but also to negative interactions, which, again, can create public relations issues for organizations.

Sport fans are heavy users of social media, and, seemingly, have an insatiable appetite for content from sport organizations. Thus, many sport organizations not only have multiple social media accounts that are continuously updated each day, but also face pressure to put out compelling content on those platforms, using videos, GIFs, memes, and infographics.

Social media is also heavily integrated into sport broadcasts, with designated hashtags assigned to athletic contests, as well as sport reporters and broadcasters using social media to get content and stories distributed to fans. Social media has also become prominent with in-game events and operations, as these platforms are used to provide content for in-game promotions and contests; yet, social media can also preoccupy fans and keep them from watching the game! The list below summarizes some of the key ways social media is being used by sports media members, sport organizations, athletes, and fans.

## **Social media used in sports**

### ***Sports Media Members:***

- Reporting information including speculative news.
- Sourcing information (e.g., using tweets from athletes and organizational members as a *source*.)
- Linking to their articles on the web.
- Commenting on sports news and stories.
- Interacting and engaging fans.

### ***Sport Organizations:***

- Engaging fans through contests and games.
- Promoting the organization, athletes, and games.
- Integrating corporate sponsors.
- Responding to complaints and customer service issues.
- Addressing and responding to public relations issues.
- Telling the organization's story (e.g., highlighting community service work).

### ***Athletes:***

- Engaging fans (e.g., Twitter Q&A's).
- Breaking news (e.g., announcing contract signings).
- Expressing identity (e.g., sharing their pop culture and food favorites).
- Engaging in activism and social justice (e.g., speaking out on social issues such as racism).
- Generating content, such as using social media to promote podcasts and gaming streams from platforms like Twitch.

### ***Fans:***

- Sending both positive and negative messages to athletes and other organizational members (e.g., coaches).

- Sending both positive and negative messages to sport media members.
- Discussing sport news and stories.
- Posting comments while simultaneously watching games and events.
- Expressing fan identity, including engaging fans of rival teams.

As the list above illustrates, social media is a very symbiotic process. Sport media members, athletes, fans, and organizations have conversations via social media both about and within each of those stakeholder groups. As these conversations unfold, they fuel social media's integration into sport, reinforcing the connection between each of these groups and creating a very powerful force. As previously discussed, social media's rapid proliferation into society has fundamentally changed the way we communicate, including the audience who now has access to our communication. Thus, it is important to understand that there are differences in messaging between traditional communication media and social media.

#### 1.1.4 The Differences Between Social Media and Traditional Media Messaging

Whereas organizations do use social media and traditional media platforms, such as television and radio, simultaneously, there are key differences in messaging between the two platforms. These differences are now discussed:

- **Audience Dynamics** – In traditional media, an entity produces a message and disseminates it to an audience for consumption. For example, your organization might put an advertisement on a billboard by a busy highway, encouraging the public to come out to a game. While people will see the billboard, and a few of them may mention the billboard to others in their social circle, the likelihood of direct audience feedback is minimal. However, with a social media message, the audience can quickly and conveniently share the message *and* provide feedback directly to the organization. Understanding the active nature of the audience is very important when preparing to share information on social media. While there will always be a certain segment of people who will say negative things, no matter what content is shared, being cognizant of how quickly the audience can challenge and spread a message about the organization is imperative. For example, an organization that has an athlete get arrested will likely see conversations circulating about the athlete and the organization on social media platforms. Consequently, personnel will have to decide to respond and shape the narrative being disseminated on these platforms.
- **Controlling the Narrative** – This concept is closely related to audience dynamics, but it is important to remember that once an organization posts something on social media, it loses control over that message. While this exists with traditional media (e.g., people

not liking a TV ad), what is different is the ability for those opinions to be further distributed. For instance, consider an organization that has a player arrested for domestic violence, and then releases a statement on Twitter indicating that they are supporting the player through the investigative process. Although from an organizational perspective, this may be a show of support and/or transparency, it is also likely that the audience may perceive this situation differently (e.g., condoning domestic violence) and share such views across social media. These responses are outside the organization's control, yet, they shape the narratives around the organization. Thus, it is important to remember that messages put out on social media, such as hashtags, can be re-appropriated by the audience in ways that reflect negatively on the organization.

- **Message Permanence** – With traditional media messages, the duration of the message is often short. For example, an ad in a newspaper encouraging fans to take advantage of a ticket sale has a short duration. Once the promotion is over, another ad takes its place to promote a different campaign. With social media, however, messages live on in perpetuity. Even if an organization deletes a Facebook post or a tweet, chances are that the post or tweet has already been shared, and through screenshots, the message remains accessible. Even a platform like Snapchat, which is predicated on disappearing content, is not immune. Through apps such as Snapsave or screenshots, Snapchat content can be easily saved and disseminated.
- **Message Design** – Whereas messages via traditional media are often conformed to specifications by professionals in that industry, with social media, those tasked with managing social media must ensure that the content comes across in a compelling way, including being *mobile friendly*. For instance, with a magazine ad, the magazine publisher has staff who ensure that the ad looks good and conforms to specifications to be visually appealing to readers. Contrast that experience with a social media manager for a sports organization who must ensure that the graphics used for an Instagram post that reflects a promotion are mobile friendly and that the links embedded in the post work.

As this section describes, messaging via social media and traditional media needs to be done very strategically, and it is very important to consider the active audience. To help you better understand these differences, think of the scenario with Adriana at the opening of the chapter.

With respect to the player who posted the tweet containing homophobic language, complete the following tool to determine whether a response on traditional or social media is better for the organization:

**Table 1. Media Message Analysis Tool**

Media Message Analysis Tool		
	Traditional Media	Social Media
Audience for message		
What is the narrative of the message?		
How will the audience react to the message?		
What narratives will the audience use to react to the message?		
How far will these audience narratives circulate?		

As discussed earlier, one of the principles that social media is built on is conversation. Organizations need to be mindful that they are not the sole voice of conversation. In the era of social media, a multitude of voices exist, voices that can become louder or softer based on organizational decision-making. Thus, organizations should be mindful of conversations occurring on social media, the way they will or will not intervene in those conversations, and the way they will manage relationships with the stakeholders in those conversations.

# Unit 1.2 Understanding the Impact of Social Media on Sport Organizations

As noted earlier, sport has been one of the most visible industries influenced by social media. Social media has now been integrated into sport broadcasts and media coverage of sport, and audiences can actively share their feedback and opinions on organizational decision-making and transactions. Social media offers lots of benefits to sport organizations, such as the ability to tell their story and highlight things that often go uncovered in the mainstream media (e.g., community relations work); however, there are drawbacks as well. Sport organizations must also be cognizant of the fact that social media has made it very difficult for information to stay private, and it is hard for information not to become public. Thus, organizations must be mindful of trying to cover up scandal or other negative issues.

## 1.2.1 Using Social Media to Become an Active Content Producer

One of the advantages that social media provides organizations with is the ability to tell their own story and introduce narratives about the organization that may not appear in mainstream media coverage. However, as mentioned earlier, there is a lot of pressure on sport organizations, because fans are constantly seeking information and news about the organization, which is frequently being reported by media members. Thus, it can be challenging to be an *active* content producer, yet this is a responsibility that must be met. In other words, *if you don't tell your story, someone else will*. However, there are some steps that can be taken to help in becoming an active content producer:

- **Identify your Platforms** – It is important for sport organizations to determine what social media platforms they will be active on. This is part of a larger overall social media strategy, but to begin with, think about your different audiences: Who are they? What platforms are you most likely to reach them with? For instance, consider an American intercollegiate athletic football program. The audiences for that program might include: fans, potential student-athletes (recruits), current student-athletes, and university faculty and staff. The social media team might decide that the best platforms to reach fans are TikTok and Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram for prospective student-athletes, Instagram for current student-athletes, and Twitter for university faculty and staff. They may also decide that Facebook is the best platform to reach both fans and university faculty and staff, and Snapchat to reach both

prospective and current student-athletes. In that scenario, while the platform is the same, the messaging is likely to be different.

- **Identify the Message** – What is the message that you want to share on each social media platform? For example, in the preceding example, with the American intercollegiate football team, perhaps the message for fans on Facebook and TikTok is *insider access* or taking fans *behind the scenes* or places they cannot go. For prospective student-athletes on Instagram Snapchat, the message could be about the *swag* of the program. Thus, messages may consist of the amenities available for football players, or messages that show the player in the team uniform. When determining the messaging, it is important to take on the perspective of an outsider. Someone who works in a sports organization may take for granted things that fans or other audiences would find compelling.
- **Use a Calendar** – There are many great resources available to help plan social media content, one of which is a content calendar. A content calendar, as the name suggests, is simply that: a calendar that assists in planning social media content. This tool helps provide structure and management to the social media process, rather than coming in each day and trying to figure out what to post on social media.
- **Plan, but Be Spontaneous** – While it is certainly important to plan, it is also important to seize opportunities that appear organically. For instance, if a player is set to break a team or league scoring record in the next game, organizations should be prepared with stats or other content that would encapsulate that moment. Additionally, maybe an assistant coach happens to bring in something he/she baked at home, and no one was aware of this talent. A social media post highlighting the coach and this talent could be a great way to connect with fans! Be aware of things that may be common knowledge inside the organization, but are not outside it. Conversely, it is important to be mindful of national and international events and adjust social media content accordingly. For example, many organizations take advantage of planned posts – which is fine – unless something tragic happens. For example, if there was a local weather disaster and people are displaced from their homes, that is probably not the time to post about a ticket promotion.
- **Staying Current on Trends** – Staying informed on current trends in social media can be a challenge, but it can also be rewarding. Doing so helps ensure the organization is being responsive to change, as the preferences of social media audiences often fluctuate. For example, visual content, such as GIFs and memes are very popular with social media audiences, yet 4-5 years ago, this was not the case. Organizations who see what audiences are responding to and integrate that content into their social media strategy will see more engagement with their audiences and maintain a more robust social media strategy. This also helps organizations ensure they are staying

relevant with specific audiences such as millennials and Generation Z. For instance, these audiences are heavy users of Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, and organizations who recognize this audience dynamic can benefit from being where their respective target audiences are.

In an effort to help you better understand the planning process of being an active social media content creator, complete the sample content calendar below with one piece of content each day for a platform your organization currently uses for a two-week period:

**Table 2. Social Media Content Calendar**

Social Media Content Calendar						
Social Media Platform						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	Sat
S	M	T	W	Th	F	Sat

### 1.2.2 Social Media and Managing Media Relationships

As discussed earlier, social media allows organizations to tell their own stories, a task that has largely been the function of the mass media, more specifically, the sports reporter. Through social media, organizations have now a conduit to send messages directly to the public, and consequently, may not be as dependent on the mass media for coverage as they once were. Indeed, some sport organizations have hired their own writers for team websites and social media accounts, and are arguably now in competition with sports media members. Nevertheless, it is still very important for sport organizations to manage their relationships with the media. Some important factors to consider here include the following:

- **Access** – What stories will media members be given access to? What stories will be told internally? It is important to remember that media members need to be given access to stories to prevent negative press and public relations issues as well, so it may be in the organization’s best interest not to monopolize all the compelling stories.

- **Sourcing** – Whereas reporters have a longstanding history of cultivating sources, it is important to remember that social media content put out by athletes and team employees is now often considered a source (and permission is not often sought to use the content, due to social media being perceived as public.) Accordingly, it may be advisable to develop an internal media policy that addresses what kinds of content employees can post on social media and to determine to what extent the organization will confirm or disconfirm reports on social media.
- **Policies** – Some organizations have tried to restrict media members from using Twitter for play-by-play in order not to compromise broadcast rights. While this can be difficult to enforce, and indeed, can further constrain relationships with the media, it is important to ensure that media members are aware of boundaries. This understanding is particularly important with live-streaming tools such as Instagram Live. Reporters who live-stream events may be violating broadcast agreements, and sport organizations need to ensure that boundaries with live-streaming are clearly communicated to the media.

Social media has ushered in more competition between sport organizations and media members, yet this outcome need not be contentious. Organizations need to consider how they can make their relationships with media members work in mutually beneficial ways, even as sport organizations start to tell their own stories. Indeed, media members can provide support for the organization, particularly in negative times, so cultivating a positive relationship is well worth the investment.

### **1.2.3 Social Media and Public Relations Concerns**

Social media has become a valuable public relations tool for organizations, particularly those in sport. Through social media, organizations can engage their customers, or in the case of sport organizations, fans, in unprecedented ways. Social media opens up opportunities for interaction between the organization and its public, as well as to engage in marketing and promotion. Nevertheless, social media does bring risk with it, particularly because the organization does not have control over the message as it did with traditional media. For instance, in the past, sport organizations knew that certain players may say something inflammatory in the media and may have made those players off limits in media interviews or encouraged reporters to only ask certain questions of that athlete. However, with social media, athletes can post their feelings at any time and from any location that offers Internet access. Thus, it is nearly impossible to prevent public relations issues from occurring. However, sport organizations do need to be aware of the public relations issues

that can result both from athletes and those from the organization, and have a plan in place to deal with those public relations issues.

- ***Athletes and Public Relations Issues*** – A simple Google Search for *athletes and social media PR Issues* is a quick way to see the many ways that an athlete can initiate a public relations issue for an organization. Potential issues could include an athlete complaining about the Head Coach, or issues related to the team (e.g., lack of playing time, divulging an injury of another player), as well as broadcasting a questionable, at best, or illegal activity, at worst. In addition, many people are now going back and looking at athletes social media archives and then re-circulating posts that the athlete made when a teenager that can reflect poorly on the athlete and the organization. Often, this archival content surfaces at inopportune times for athletes (e.g., player drafts.) While not in the same realm, another public relations issue that sport organizations face is athletes' increasingly using social media to speak out on social justice issues, such as racism and police brutality. In deciding how to respond to these incidents, it is important to determine if the response will be made via social media or traditional media. As noted earlier, one benefit of using traditional media is that it does not offer a direct channel for feedback, although the organization may still be targeted via fans sending messages to team accounts. If social media is going to be used, perhaps a simple statement may be best, although if the statement appears to be too contrived or rehearsed, it may generate negative reaction from the audience. When the public relations issue involves an athlete speaking out on social justice issues, sport organizations are likely to be contacted by fans who are upset with the athletes, as well as those who support the athlete's position. This situation can be delicate for an organization, between balancing the desires of stakeholders such as fans along with the athletes' right to free speech and expression. Unfortunately, there is not a template that dictates how organizations should respond in every situation, but what organizations must do is determine how they will respond BEFORE a public relations issue becomes a reality.
- ***Internal Public Relations Issues*** – Organizations must also be mindful that they do not create or enflame public relations issues via social media. Some examples of issues that could initiate public relations issues include the following cases: the team social media account posting inappropriate content (this sometimes occurs because the employee responsible for social media believes he/she is posting from his/her individual account); making players that have legal or other issues that entice fans to respond with sarcasm available via social media (for example, having a Twitter Q&A with a player who has an arrest record is likely to lead to the audience posting questions about the arrests and other sarcastic responses, rather than genuine questions for the player to answer); and making efforts to explain organizational

decisions, which, while well-intentioned, could make a public relations situation better rather than worse (for example, if the team elects to trade a popular player, trying to justify that decision via social media is likely to lead to pushback, and there is really nothing that can be done on social media to remedy the issue.)

The scope of social media makes it impossible to prevent any public relations issues from occurring. However, it is possible to mitigate these issues by having a plan in place to address public relations issue when they arise, as well as to properly train those who are responsible for organizational social media accounts to ensure they are aware of expectations and requisite behavior. Additionally, it is important to take the *pulse* of the public before responding to certain issues, to ascertain how an organization decision might enflame a public relations issue, particularly if that response is distributed via social media, where feedback can be both, swift and hostile.

#### **1.2.4 Social Media and Organizational Transparency**

Social media has become a popular tool in our society, largely because of the access it provides to so many people. In other words, it is very easy for something that was not meant for a public audience to become public! Sport organizations need to be mindful of how easy it is for information to become public, and particularly, to become public for those it was not intended for. Organizations who are dealing with issues must be mindful that if they lie or try to be deceptive with the public, there is a good chance that these actions will come to light and make the organization look worse. Thus, it is crucial that organizations reflect their organizational culture in their social media content. Organizations need to stay true to their core values and beliefs, and not be afraid to admit they made a mistake. To be certain, when a sport organization acknowledges a wrongdoing, there will be negative pushback, and in the era of social media, that negativity can have a wide circulation. However, once the organization has absorbed that criticism, and, more importantly, shown that it is committed to doing better, the criticism can change to support and those who were detractors can become advocates.

For example, one common experience for organizations on social media is to get negative feedback that reflects a customer service issue. Some organizations choose not to respond to these critiques, which does not change the disgruntled person's view and leaves the audience wondering if the person who complained ever got his/her issue resolved. On the other hand, organizations that choose to use this feedback as an opportunity to rectify a problem, often win the person over, because he/she sees that the organization is listening and cares enough to respond. This also helps the audience to see that the organization is listening and that there was resolution given to the issue. With that said, organizations do

not need to engage someone who is being abusive, and there are steps that can be taken to block that person from the social media platform. In addition, there is a difference between a customer service issue and a complaint that cannot be solved (e.g., addressing a tweet about being treated rudely by a team employee area versus a tweet complaining about a coach not being fired.) One helpful reminder here is to treat the person on social media like you would treat them in person. If they came to the organization's facilities and complained about rude treatment, what would be done? Whatever that answer is for your organization, do the same thing on social media.

Sport organizations are subjected to a multitude of voices about them on social media. Consequently, it is imperative that organizations strive to be transparent in the way they present themselves on social media and their approach to issues and problems. While no one likes bad news, it does represent an opportunity to get better as an organization and to turn critics into advocates.

Social media has ushered in a variety of implications for society both, positive and negative. Social media has also become firmly entrenched in sport, and shows no signs of going away. Given the prevalence of social media in sport, it is paramount that sport organizations use social media as a relational management tool to cultivate and develop relationships with fans, sponsors, media members and others.

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