

Professional Analysis

As explained in the Method section, interviews were conducted with both Jontay Porter and Nick Joos, the Mizzou Basketball Sport Information Director, and tweets were collected from Jontay Porter's personal twitter account.

Jontay Porter was used for this study because he is a high-profile athlete in a Division I school in the Southeastern Conference. Jontay Porter followed in his brother, Michael Porter, Jr.'s footsteps when he came to the University of Missouri to play basketball. Michael Porter, Jr. was the nation's No. 1 overall recruit out of high school and chose to come to the University of Missouri to play basketball. Jontay was also a highly ranked recruit coming out of high school, but being only a year younger than his brother Michael, decided to reclassify and graduate high school a year early. He then went on to follow in his brother's footsteps and commit to play basketball at the University of Missouri with his brother.

During Michael's time at the University of Missouri, he suffered a significant back injury early on in the season, that was detrimental to his college basketball career. Michael took to social media to share his thoughts and try to debunk the medias timeline of how long his injury would sideline him. Michael eventually released a video on social media, documenting his journey throughout his college basketball career: injury and all. Michael voiced on social media that there had been a lot of talk about his injury, but this was his way to get his side of the story across.

Jontay, continued to play throughout the year that Michael was injured. After the season ended, Jontay had a decision to make if he would enter the NBA draft or come back for the 2018-2019 college season. Jontay decided to continue playing at the University of Missouri for another season. However, like his brother, Jontay suffered a severe injury before the season began. The injury was then leaked by the media and put on social media before Jontay ever had an opportunity to explain what happened.

While Jontay Porter does not represent all college athletes, with him being such a high-profile college athlete, if this study applies to him, it should apply to other athletes as well.

Nick Joos was used for this study because not only of his direct connection with Jontay Porter at the University of Missouri, but also his qualifications. Joos is the Deputy Athletics Director of Communications at the University of Missouri. Prior to joining Mizzou Athletics, Joos spent time at Baylor University as the Associate Athletics Director for Media Relations/Broadcast Properties from 2003 until 2007, then became the Associate Athletics Director for External Affairs, before he was promoted to Senior Associate Athletics Director for External Affairs. Joos has spent 32 years in college athletics and is a former president for the College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA) and spearheaded the organization's hybrid relationship with the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA).

Joos was a 2014 CoSIDA Hall of Fame inductee and received the organization's 2015 Arch Ward Memorial Award for outstanding achievement in athletic communications. Joos is a former NCAA Honors Committee member and continues to serve on CoSIDA's Academic All-American Committee. All of these qualifications, along with his currently role and involvement with the basketball team at a top tier Division I school in the Southeastern Conference, gives Joos the capability to represent sport information directors.

Over the course of those interviews, I discovered insights into both how a student athlete views and uses social media, as well as how an athletic department shapes and trains their students to use social media. Mr. Joos also provided me with the training guide that Mizzou Athletics provides to all of their student athletes to help train them for how to use social media as a way to build their personal brand.

Porter's interview showed great insight into a former college athlete due to the nature that he is formerly a Mizzou Men's basketball player (2017-2019) but is no longer enrolled at Mizzou and is able to speak freely. Porter has not yet reached the realm of professional athlete, so he has not switched his social media mindset or habits and was able to speak freely in an open and honest way.

Contextual Analysis

Also, in the Method section, I explained how tweets from Jontay Porter's Twitter account would be collected and used to perform a contextual analysis. There were 45 tweets collected from Jontay Porter's Twitter, with 19 of those being original tweets. The quantitative results for those texts are below. I observed the time the tweets were made, the day, how many replies each tweet received, the number of retweets, the number of likes, and also mentioned the subject of the tweet.

Date	Time	Replies	Retweets	Likes	Subject
7/10/17	2:41pm	5	17	205	Basketball
7/21/17	10:44am	3	18	182	NBA/Basketball
7/23/17	6:43pm	1	20	170	Music
8/9/17	7:54pm	132	2,700	8,500	Mizzou Basketball with Pic
8/22/17	1:28pm	8	17	194	NBA
8/27/17	1:29pm	6	13	95	NBA
11/30/17	6:55pm	14	57	1,500	Mizzou Basketball
12/11/17	5:31pm	9	14	229	Investing
12/23/17	8:04pm	19	70	903	Unknown
2/8/18	7:24am	5	9	294	Unknown
2/22/18	12:48pm	34	547	3,000	Unknown
5/31/18	2:11pm	15	14	330	Movies
5/31/18	5:43pm	14	56	629	Unknown
6/21/18	6:32am	19	92	2,100	NBA Draft
6/21/18	3:02pm	43	221	3,100	NBA Basketball
7/2/18	2:50pm	0	31	297	Unknown
10/21/18	3:22pm	251	355	5,600	Injury
11/12/18	6:02am	50	0	76	Books, asked question

1/8/19	1:43pm	6	18	563	Mizzou Basketball
2/3/19	7:15am	15	29	460	NFL/Tom Brady

After reviewing these numbers, I found that the tweets that had a subject of basketball, specifically Mizzou basketball, had a higher number of engagements with Porter’s followers. Before this research, I expected fans and followers to interact more with Porter’s account during his season of play due to the high focus on the athlete and sport at that time. This was verified in my findings. Out of Porter’s 19 original tweets, nine of them were during the Mizzou Basketball season. He had a higher volume during that time period and received, overall, more interaction with his tweets.

The texts of the tweets are all in a personal voice and very informal. The tweets are all 140 characters or less, but Porter often uses only a few words or a short sentence in his tweets. The tone of the tweets tell us that Porter is very informal and is creating a casual, personal touch to the audience. Often times, the tweets subjects can be inferred or there is an underlying subject, but it may not be always clear. The audience must know the background of the tweet, or other information than what is in the text itself.

Before I began my research, I set out to look at 1) What topics Porter tweets about and 2) What types of tweets get the most traction. I answered these questions by finding that Porter tweets about Mizzou, Basketball, NBA, and other “unknown” subjects. The types of tweets that get the most engagement or traction, how I originally asked, seems to be the topic of Basketball as a whole.

Key Word: Mizzou

While looking at Porter’s tweets, I noticed a theme among them with a keyword “Mizzou”. When Porter used this word as a subject, underlying context, or was in the text itself,

the number of engagements on the tweet skyrocketed. The one and only time Porter used a picture in his original tweet, along with the word “Mizzou”, the tweet received the highest volume of engagements among all of his original tweets. This tweet generated 132 replies, 2,700 retweets and 8,500 likes. The second highest number of engagements did not include the word “Mizzou” and generated 251 replies, 355 retweets and 5,600 likes.

Key Word: Basketball

Out of the 19 original tweets collected, nine of them had the subject of “basketball” or had that keyword in the tweet. The highest level of interaction with basketball tweets, came when the word Mizzou or NBA was also paired with the key word or theme of basketball. The specificity of basketball to Porter shows that his followers like to see information from him about what he is known most for.

Key Word: NBA (National Basketball Association)

With the 19 original tweets, five of the tweets either contained the subject NBA or “NBA” was a keyword in the tweet. The two highest interaction tweets about NBA were created on the same date and received collectively, 62 replies, 313 retweets, and 5,100 likes.

While the key words of Mizzou, Basketball, and NBA were predominate among Porter’s tweets, they were also the key words that received the highest level of fan and Twitter user engagements and interactions. The tweet with the second highest level of engagement came from Porter’s tweet about his injury. The tweet received 251 replies, the most out of all of his original tweets, 355 retweets (the third highest among all of his original tweets), and 5,600 likes (the second highest of his original tweets). While the tweet did not contain any of the key words, the underlying message of his injury and that it meant he would be out for the entire basketball season, resonated with fans enough to gain this high level of engagement.

I found that for this case, fans want to follow student athlete accounts and are interested in primarily information about the sport the athlete plays, the university or team the player is associated with, and the chance at a future organization. In my own experience working with collegiate athletes and communications departments, key words are used to generate a higher level of engagement. Twitter users showed that they care more about those topics than others that Porter tweeted about. Porter uses these keywords and trigger words so that they can be “searched” on twitter and pop up on users accounts to gain more exposure. After this study, I can conclude that a majority of Porter’s Twitter followers followed his account to gain more access to information about him and the team and want to see that information primarily via his social media account.

Twitter as a Means of Communication

While looking at the Mass Communication Theory, Baran and Davis questioned “How can and should we understand the role media now plays in the world?” (Baran, Davis, 2008). During my content analysis, it was clear to find that Twitter is very large medium for communication in society. I found that the importance the public assigns to various issues may be strongly influenced by the media, as stated previously.

While Filo et. Al., examined the relationships between athletes on Twitter and their fans, I was able to find an similar conclusion to that study. I found that the fans that interact with athletes on social media are concerned with the athlete’s personal lives, to an extent. The fans want a more personal touch, but still like to be informed about relevant information. Porter’s tweets about basketball generated a much higher engagement than his tweet about book recommendations.

When I concluded this research, It was important for me to note that Porter did not reply to any fans tweets throughout the sample period. While Twitter is a means of communication, Porter did not use it as a two-way communication channel, but rather a one-way channel. Before this study, I expected to find that players used Twitter to bypass mainstream-media outlets and interacted with fans on their own. This was partially found to be true in Porter's case. Porter used Twitter to bypass the media by getting his message across to the public on his own Twitter account, however he did not interact with fans on his own.

Training College Athletes to use Social Media

When interviewing both Joos and Porter, they both mentioned there is a type of social media training that all of the athletes at Mizzou receive at the beginning of the year. Joos went further in-depth with this by providing me the Mizzou Athletics Social Standards. Porter simply put that it was more so common sense and if you "had a good head on your shoulders" you knew what was right and wrong to post. However, these are college athletes and a simple "do what is right" is not as easy as it sounds.

After analyzing the Social Standards Mr. Joos provided to me, like he does all of the Mizzou Athletes, it is clear that Mizzou encourages their athletes to use social media. One of the quotes in the training guide states "We don't have a choice on whether we do social media, the question is how will we do it?". This emphasizes the type of weight Mizzou athletics puts on social media and encourages their athletes to use it, but in what way?

When looking over the guide, the main ideas that stuck out to me were 1) Have a consistent voice/Give your student athletes a voice, 2) Have a plan, 3) Entertain First, Inform second. While Mizzou also encourages the athletes to focus on engagement and "focus on getting retweets".

While this guide is more so a “best practices”, like Joos said, it does give pretty specific guidelines and tips on how to use social media, specifically Twitter, and what to do/not to do. Joos emphasized that while Mizzou can give the athletes a guide, they cannot tell them what they can and can’t post due to The First Amendment’s freedom of speech right that the athletes have. The guide tells the athletes to be short and concise, with simple and to the point messages being used in their tweets.

This guide does however, indicate that the athletes are highly trained in how to use social media, and molded to fit a specific brand the team and organization has as a whole. When looking at my question of “How trained is Porter by Missouri basketball sport information director?”, I would conclude that he is highly trained on what to post/what not to post. Porter even admitted to having guidance in what to post after his injury and surgery. This answers the question with a definite “highly trained” answer.

Using Twitter to Build a Personal Brand

The final results of this study aligned with the results of Labrecque et al’s study. The results concluded that branding is “inevitable when participating in an online environment”, whether intentionally or not (Labrecque et. Al., 2010). While Nick Joos said that Mizzou Athletics encourages their players to use their social media platforms to help build their personal brand, Jontay Porter said that he feels as though he did not do a good job of that. It may be that he wasn’t sure how to do that, or that he simply did not see that side of Twitter. Porter admitted to using Twitter solely for entertainment purposes and did not use it as a tool for personal branding in the future.

It is important to note, and interesting in itself, that Jontay Porter did not simply reply to a tweet during the time period that the sampling was taken. Porter created his own tweets, and

would “quote tweet” a tweet, which is when a user retweets another person’s original tweet but adds a comment above. Porter never once replied to any account or engaged in any direct replies to his tweets or others. This actually shows that the alignment of his voice and message was consistent when he was only tweeting original tweets, coming from his voice alone.

The Media Sets the Agenda for What Athletes Tweet

As stated in my research, the theory of agenda setting has a basic assumption of the press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it (Freeland, 2012). This was especially true in Porter’s case whenever he was injured for the first time. The media sent out a tweet that Porter had torn his ACL, before anyone had confirmed that information. This then shaped the reality that Mizzou fans had and ultimately led to Porter creating a tweet to validate what happened. By the injury getting leaked on social media by a member of the media, Porter then had his agenda already set for him.

When interviewing Joos, he stated that often times the media does help set the agenda for the athletes, but the athletes should be aware of that. Joos stated that the athletes should be wary of not posting any injury updates via social media, that could give the opponent team an advantage. While this doesn’t necessarily set the agenda for what the player tweets about, the lack of information the athlete provides via social media is in itself, set by the media. If an athlete does not take to social media to post injury or team updates that the media could take and inform the public with, the media is in fact altering the player’s agenda.

After concluding my interviews and content analysis of the tweets, I concluded that the media does set the agenda for reality and help shape the public’s view. If a member of the media reports an injury, game update, or other important information, that then becomes the reality for the public unless another source, such as the athlete, debunks or confirms that reality.

NCAA Social Media Policies and Monitoring Players Tweets

Epstein's study found that there are very strict guidelines that must be examined thoroughly in order to not infringe on the First Amendment rights of the athletes (Epstein, 2011). Hopkins et al. journal discusses the emergence of social media and how the NCAA has approached the situation of monitoring, as well as give a legal argument against monitoring (Hopkins et al., 2013). Mr. Joos clearly stated in his interview that, while the school can monitor the player's tweets and help guide them in a positive light, there is such thing as The First Amendment and players have the right to their own voice.

Porter confirmed this in his interview by saying that, while his accounts were monitored, it was more in a, "we have your back" type of way. Porter said the sport information directors and coaches would monitor the teams accounts to look out for them and make sure the media didn't take anything the wrong way or cause a negative impact to the player or team. These interviews showed that while the NCAA does have strict policies, the athletes do have the right to freedom of speech, but each school can implement repercussions if there is negativity.

Discussion

When beginning my research, I was interested in learning how college athletes used Twitter. Specifically, I wanted to answer the research questions of: How can a college athlete use Twitter to tell his/her side of a story? and How effective is using Twitter in getting a specific message to the audience?

While looking at Porter's tweets, some of what I found did not surprise me. It is apparent that the key words of Mizzou, Basketball and NBA generated a higher engagement among Twitter users. While Porter used Twitter to tell his side of the story when it came to his injury, the media set the stage for him. Joos said that Mizzou encourages the student athletes to utilize social media to tell their personal side of their life but to focus on what is best for the team and the institution. Porter

was able to tell his side of the story by getting the same information out to the public that the media had put out, but on his own account. The first-hand information is much more reliable to fans and college athletes can use Twitter to release important information immediately to their fans and followers. A higher profile athlete has a higher chance of getting their voice across simply due to the volume of followers they typically have, but all student athletes have the same accessibility to their fans via social media. The best way to get their voice across to the media is to be authentic and release real information that the public wants to know but is also accurate.

The social standards that Mizzou provides to their student athletes shows that the best practices the students can use is to be authentic and create original content to reach their fans best. Original content is proven to have the biggest level of engagement and credibility versus a third-party information or tweet being retweeted by the athlete. The player should use Twitter to get their message across by being authentic and honest, being short and concise, and going directly to their fans via an original tweet.

While I originally set out to find how effective Twitter is in getting a message across, I found that this research question was no longer relevant to the study. I intended to collect a large sample of tweets that had a clear message, but instead found a small sample of tweets with a large portion having an unclear subject or message. Since I did not perform a focus group to study the interpretation of the tweets themselves by outside viewers, research question number two is no longer relevant to this study.

Throughout the study, I ended up asking myself how college athletic departments could help their athletes utilize social media to gain an audience and a voice. It is in the best interest of the athletic department to encourage their players to build an online voice because this is another

avenue for fans to interact and make the team visible. This could mean more revenue and a growth in fanbase if players can help grow their brand and fanbase on social media.

When interviewing Nick Joos, I discovered that while there is a social media training process set in place for Mizzou athletes, the athletes are often left alone to make their own decisions, with the athletic department helping out retroactively. Jontay Porter confirmed this in his interview when he noted that there were times “when some dudes go out and put something on their story, we’d always get a call the next day like you need to take that off”. This retroactive monitoring is tough to manage, but proactive monitoring also has its limitations with the athletes First Amendment rights.

During my time spent working with college athletic communications departments, I learned that often times, even the coach’s personal Twitter account is run by the Sport Information Director, or merely given the seal of approval prior to sending a tweet. In this case, Cuonzo Martin’s personal twitter account’s tweets are either generated by the Sport Information Director themselves, or edited and given the seal of approval to hit “tweet” beforehand.

Conclusion

After looking at Porter’s tweets and the engagement he received from specific messages and themes, I found that if athletes use certain key words they can gain a larger audience and engagement online. Athletic departments, specifically the communications director and sport information director, should advise their athletes that tweets that contain keywords of their sport and university receive a higher engagement online. This will help the athlete to gain a larger audience and have their message seen by more people. Athletes social media accounts can also serve as an avenue for team related news and events, without having to be publicized through the media.

As noted before, Jontay Porter did not simply reply to a tweet during the time period that the sampling was taken. Porter never once replied to any account or engaged in any direct replies to his tweets or others. In contrast, Tua Tagovailoa, the quarterback for the University of Alabama, suffered a season ending injury as well. Tagovailoa posted about his injury on social media, but unlike Porter, Tagovailoa has replied to users on his personal twitter account. Something even as simple as a “Thank you guys! Roll Tide!” reply to a user wishing him a get well, shows Tagovailoa interacts with his fans more than Porter.

This is interesting to note, but all of Tagovailoa’s replies are positive and filled with gratitude. Interestingly enough, Porter’s teammate during the 2017-2018 season, Kevin Puryear, replied to users on his personal twitter during basketball season. Puryear’s replies were generally a “thank you” or some type of gratitude in response to fans congratulating him or the team on an accomplishment. While Puryear was healthy and did play throughout the season, Porter opted to not engage with fans throughout his injury during the season.

Porter took a different approach and did not reply to any comments on twitter. In my experience, Porter did this not to avoid interacting with fans, but rather to keep from stirring up any negative replies that could come. While there were many fans wishing Porter a get well, there were also users that did not have the nicest things to say to Porter. For Porter, it was a matter of blocking out all of the noise, both good and bad, and thus he made the decision to not reply to anyone. Porter did not see the replies as beneficial to his account or his brand at the time.

In Browning and Sanderson’s publication, they found that student-athletes perceived critical tweets in varied ways. Some reported that the critical tweets had no effect on them, some reported the tweets bothered them, and others reported that they used the tweets as motivation to excel in their next performance. One athlete in their study shared that “Sometimes I did respond

to them and in a negative way and I'd tweet back to the world and I'd apologize for being upset; I should've handled it a little better you know and people would say "we understand – they don't have a right to say that to you." So really, I'd just block them (on twitter) when they say something negative."

This can be a good indication of why Porter did not reply to any tweets. He could have been trying to not let his emotions get the best of him and make any tweets that he would later regret sending. He could also be just trying to stay away from the critical tweets in general and not look at, as he calls it "noise". This wasn't something that was per say taught by the social media training, it was more so a choice by Porter. The social media training that is done, gives the student-athletes a list of how to generate a larger following and build a brand.

While the social standards Mizzou has included best practices for social media, with their retroactive monitoring policy, it would be wise to put what type of content is generally preferred vs what is generally asked to take down. This would help the athletes to monitor the posts on their own before they even create it and can potentially save the reputation of an athlete. When I concluded my research, I was able to answer the question of "How can college athletic departments help their athletes utilize social media to gain an audience and a voice?".

College athletic departments can:

- 1) encourage their athletes to use social media as a way to build their brand
- 2) encourage athletes to be authentic on Twitter
- 3) give a guide for what type of content is appropriate vs what is not seen as favorable
- 4) advise student-athletes to utilize keywords of their sport and their university

All of these things will help grow the student athlete's presence on social media, helping them gain a voice and avenue for getting their message out to fans. With Twitter being used as a

means of communication, the media can and will set the agenda for what the public wants to know from the athletes. The athlete can use this to their advantage by giving the audience what type of content they want via keywords that the followers want to learn about. This will help the athlete get their message out and their own voice, with the help of their athletic department as well.

With Porter being a reluctant high-profile athlete, someone who did not want the spotlight on them but was simply forced into it, this study was able to find how a similar athlete can handle themselves on social media. Porter was able to tell his side of the story by using his Twitter account, and able to generate a brand and build a following for himself in the future. In the training guide Porter was given, it states “We don’t have a choice on whether we do social media, the question is how will we do it?”. As a high-profile athlete, many athletes want the spotlight on them, Porter did not but gives an example for how all college-athletes can use social media to benefit themselves.

Professionally moving forward, this research has allowed me insight into how I can personally utilize social media in my professional endeavors to gain a following and voice in my own social media. I will also be able to take my knowledge to any other professional or collegiate organizations I work for or with and give them insight on how they can brand their social media and give their athletes an avenue to voice their side of the story.