

5-2-2019

Media framing in Southeastern Conference Football

Mary Catherine Molay

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Media framing in Southeastern Conference Football

By

Mary Catherine Molay

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science
in Kinesiology (Sport Administration)
in the College of Education

Mississippi State, Mississippi

May 2019

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2019

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Pages in Study: 114

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Media framing is present in everything one observes on social media. In athletics, mainly collegiate football, media framing goes into each and every detail that goes out to the public. With Power 5 sports, such as the Southeastern Conference, football is one of the most profitable, newsworthy and highly recruiting-based sports out there. Therefore, the planning that goes into all of the social media channels, specifically on the website called Twitter, is planned down to a science. However, there are times where that is not the case, as crises can arise at any given moment. This research explains how seven SEC football sports information contacts were interviewed about their social media habits for any and all situations that could arise on their platforms, and how they plan to handle it while keeping the brand, overall message and trust of its fanbases.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late granddaddy, Michael Joseph Lorino, Sr., who always said that girls can do anything that they put their minds to. Education was extremely important to him as he would often ask me over the telephone, “did you get your lessons done?” He would also remind me that “people can take everything away from you, but what they can’t take is what you know.” Granddaddy was the most selfless man I have ever known, and he always gave people the benefit of the doubt. His ‘can do’ attitude, strong faith and mindset to always treat others the way you want to be treated has helped to make me the person that I am today. He lived on this earth for 96 years, and built a strong family for which I have some of the best friends in the world through my aunts, cousins and uncles. I hope to be half of the person he was one day.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As someone who has found a lot of joy and purpose out of writing, I would like to thank The University of Alabama's College of Communications and Information Sciences from which where I was able to obtain my undergraduate degree in May 2017. Specifically, I would like to thank my undergraduate news writing professor Dr. Scott Parrott and adjunct professor Donna Cornelius for helping me to realize that I have a passion for writing. In addition, I would like to thank Mrs. Tracy Sims for her toughness and all of the work she did to help shape my writing to where it is today through her public relations writing class and for choosing me to be part of Platform Magazine, where I also learned how to interview people for content. To Dr. Kenon A. Brown for his guidance and support with my writing and research during my senior-level public relations campaigns course as we had FOX Sports as our client.

I would like to express thanks to The University of Alabama's Athletics Communications office for allowing me to work in the sports industry. After working in the office as a student assistant for two years, I was able to learn the ins and outs of communications for a Power 5 team in the Southeastern Conference with the help from mentor Nathan Sheehan.

A sincere thank you to Mississippi State University's Athletic Communications office for allowing me to become a graduate assistant in its office and to learn how to further excel my writing and researching skills through working with the women's volleyball and men's basketball teams. A special, and heart-felt, thank you to Gregg Ellis for all of his support and

mentorship over the past two years. I am also thankful for fellow graduate assistant, Caleb Garner, who has always been there for me even before this process started.

Special thanks to my advisor, Dr. Matthew H. Zimmerman as well as my committee members Dr. Younghan Lee and Gregg Twietmeyer. I would also like to express my thanks to Dr. Adam C. Knight for all he did to help me throughout this process also.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support in this endeavor as well. To Mary Holliman Lanphere, Matt Murphy, Sam Meesen for being some of the best people I have ever met in my life who are going to do great things with their careers. I am excited to see what is in store for you guys. I cannot forget to thank my close friend Katie Bell for her advice and guidance on how to actually do research, as she is one of the most thorough researchers I know. I would also like to thank her for still being my friend even after showing up late to get drinks one afternoon because my nails were wet ... I also showed up wearing a fedora which did not help my cause of being tardy. There are countless other people that I want to thank, but you all know who you are, and I am extremely grateful for you.

To my parents, Joe and Rosalie, my sister, Marena Messina, and brother-in-law, Taylor Messina, for their patience with me throughout this process, and for understanding that my interviewees were to remain confidential. They are my rock, and my everything. I would not be where I am today without them.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The power of social media has had a profound effect on the work of public relations practitioners. Twitter is part of the 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week news cycle that requires up-to-date, accurate and honest information for all audiences (Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012). In the world of public relations, specifically sports information, being able to get the message out in a timely manner is crucial to the organization as a whole (Sharpe, Kunkel, Scott, & Beaton, 2017). The immediacy of social media has thus become a large part of the public relations world because of how fast the message can get to the desired audience (Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012).

Twitter is a networking and microblogging service that is limited to 280 characters (Lee & Jensen, 2017) in which registered users can voice their own views with words, links, photos and short videos (Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012). The most recent reports indicated Twitter had more than 335 million active users, and its 2017 revenue was \$2.44 billion dollars. Twitter has made an initial public offering (IPO), which means that the company has gone from being a private entity to a public one where the public can buy into shares of the company (Roman, 2014). However, potential buyers have been reluctant to invest in Twitter because of the financial loss that could occur since the site does not offer many means of monetization (Roman, 2014; Tsukayama, 2016).

van Dijck (2011) described Twitter “as the ‘SMS of the Internet’ (2011, p. 334). Since beginning in 2006, an SMS (short message service) (Messaging in a 2.0 World, 2007) could be looked at as an e-mail, blog, and a short message all in one since it is more casual than sending an email and less casual than talking on the phone (van Dijck, 2011). Along those lines, Twitter is an online platform that is used to personally communicate with others in real time (Gibbs, O’Reilly & Burnette, 2014). Social networking sites (SNS) such as Twitter are platforms that give the user the resources to spread messages across a wide potential audience (Caerols-Mateo, Viñarás-Abad, & Conzáves-Valles, 2017).

One of the major conversations that occurs on Twitter pertains to sporting events, with perhaps the most passionately followed sport in the United States being football. For instance, the National Football League (NFL) is the most popular league in the United States in terms of attendance, media attention, and revenue. Starting in 1970, the ABC broadcast network featured Monday Night Football, which on both ABC and now ESPN has consistently achieved high prime-time television ratings and is one of the longest-running television series in history (Shetty, Ohlmann, & Gaeth, 2016). As of September 24, 2018, the NFL has 24.1 million followers on Twitter, which contributes to its popularity (Account, NFLVerified). The NFL’s popularity has led not only to individuals seeking top connect, but also business entities. Tsukayama (2016) noted that the NFL has partnered with Twitter for Thursday Night Football in an attempt to be more engaged and bring more people to the league’s own network, further adding to Twitter following. Likewise, the NCAA’s Southeastern Conference has the best combination in the Power 5 of popularity, national success and recruiting rankings. “In ‘09 when LSU was No. 1 and Bama and Georgia followed in the 3-4 spots, the SEC had what you could

call the most dominant recruiting year ever by a conference. It's not a coincidence that the SEC won the next four national titles after that" (Kirshner, 2019).

In this project, media framing within the context of Twitter use by franchises within the SEC will be identified and studied public relations practitioners who handle Twitter for SEC teams must have a plan for every situation that may arise (Cassilo & Sanderson, 2017). While Sharpe, et al., (2017) discussed the planning of posts to engage with fans on the various NFL Twitter accounts, more investigation is necessary to determine how sports teams would anticipate what their respective fans are looking for from the social media platforms. There is a lack of emphasis on crisis communication preparations such as fan disputes, coach and player controversies, as well as racism and terrorism (Filce, Hall, & Phillips, 2017; Jayawardhana, 2016; Olushola, 2015; Sanderson, 2009). Twitter is the appropriate place to address these questions because the immediacy of the platform allows for the message to reach the various audiences that the organization would want to reach (Chu, Chen, & Sung, 2016; Hull & Lewis, 2014; Olushola, 2015). In addition, this study can help better inform PR practitioners in regard to framing messages in a responsible, thoughtful way. For example, aspiring public relations practitioners - and even those currently in the field - can gain a stronger understanding of how to handle prominent brand or player names and potential crises in the midst of everyday work (Cassilo & Sanderson, 2017). This is an important task to understand since the immediacy and pressure is on such a high level (Chu, et al., 2016). Gibbs and Haynes (2013) interviewed sport media relations professionals about Twitter, and how the medium is utilized in the NFL, finding that "Twitter has given a direct voice for the athlete, the coach, and the manager to the fans" (p. 399). By being knowledgeable in how to combat potentially negative situations and give people

a deeper look on the teams via Twitter, the current study can help an organization operate more efficiently if team personnel understand best practices for the use of social media.

In addition, while it is important to stay up-to-date in all fields, there is not currently one unifying study that can explain all of the possible modern-day situations that sports information practitioners can face (Gibbs & Haynes, 2013). For example, while there has been research examining a day in the life of a sports information director (Scott, Beaton, Kunkel, & Sharpe, 2017), there has not been significant research that encompasses how the messages are created, the threats that can arise such as terrorism, actions by coaches and players, a fanbase dispute, and how they plan to monitor the brand and those associated with it through the use of media framing (Jayawardhana, 2016; Jodka, 2018; Mastrogiannakis & Dorville, 2013; Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012; Scheufele & Tewksbury). This study will examine how these various concepts might be applied by various football programs in the SEC. Popular sports leagues and conferences have immense amounts of power due to high levels of revenue, which allows the respective leagues and their media partners to craft certain meanings to distinguish themselves (Oates, 2016). This study will build from existing research that prepares public relations practitioners to be able to handle the unexpected and build relationships with their users.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to document and examine how public relations practitioners utilize media framing to strategically plan for the expected, as well as unexpected and uncontrollable, changes in SEC-related Twitter exchanges. To date, no published studies have investigated how to control messages when they can potentially become uncontrollable. This is important because within the 24-hour news cycle, current trends and the overall message can change quickly (Hull, 2016). Such changes cause potential adjustments in an organization's media schedule, pertain to how news might be perceived by a fanbase, and affect how the communications team responds (Cassilo & Sanderson, 2017). Scholars have found that most NFL franchises' separate Twitter accounts use framing techniques, such as putting a positive spin on news and events, to disseminate the most beneficial tweets in order to best represent the brand. This can completely sway the opinions and mindset of viewers (Cassilo & Sanderson, 2017; Clementson, 2016; Cork & Eddy, 2017; Sharpe, et al., 2017).

However, existing scholarly work does not tell the entire story about media framing within the SEC. Previous research lacks a comprehensive study or set of comprehensive studies that analyze all of the possible situations that may arise. These include pregame, in-game and postgame controversies, and crises or situations that are out of an organization's control which can affect the overall message and create even more media framing opportunities in order to

protect the overall brand. Therefore, researching Twitter and SEC media framing together will be beneficial to the enhancement of crisis communications as whole.

Theoretical Framework

Through the lens of media framing (Cassilo & Sanderson, 2017), this study will address how communications practitioners prepare for any and all factors that could inhibit the theme of the overall message for any given situation. Being prepared for all situations can potentially include many instances in which events hinder the public relations practitioner from being able to comment right away (Sharpe, et al., 2017). In fact, research has also explored how the various parties associated with an organization have responded while protecting the overall image of the brand (Cassilo & Sanderson, 2017; Clementson, 2016; Scott, et al., 2017; Tachis & Tzetzis, 2015). Scholars have approached framing differently over the years, leading to distinctly different approaches (Scheufele, 1999). The uncertainty regarding what media framing actually means can cause even more confusion within public relations work, considering the many ways in which framing can be practiced (Scheufele, 1999). Sport-related framing research thus far has mostly focused on framing without examining all of the potential factors including fan disputes and coach and player controversies, in addition to racism and terrorism (e.g., Flice & Phillips, 2016; Jayawardhana, 2016; Olushola, 2015). With regard to the SEC Network, which had its first fiscal year in 2014, the 2017 fiscal year saw a revenue of \$650 million. This means that each of the 14 SEC member schools averaged \$41 million in payouts. The SEC was able to achieve this increase due to the SEC Network and the College Football Playoff (Berkowitz, 2018). Seltzer and Dittmore (2009) examined how the NFL Network and cable operators attempted to frame their own separate public relations efforts toward the media to observe whether or not the NFL Network would work well on regular cable when not all cable subscribers are NFL fans. Results

found that the cable operators had an overall negative image within media coverage, but the NFL Network had fewer negative messages associated with it than the cable company (Seltzer & Dittmore, 2009). While the current study does not focus on television, it is important to note that the way questions are conducted and worded is extremely important. This topic will benefit academia with regard to communications practitioners because it will inform them about different ways to control the overall message they distribute on Twitter.

Media Framing

Media framing theory originated from Goffman (1974), who explained how framing occurs when an individual uses specific situations and social cues to change the overall meaning of the event (Cassilo & Sanderson, 2017). By observing the circumstances in the overall environment, an individual can manipulate the conversation toward a more positive outcome. For instance, journalists choose messages to make information more engaging for their readers (Clementson, 2016), but spinning the message can have positive or potentially negative results for audiences. Sharpe, et al. (2017) noted that it is important to ensure that the base of the message stays the same so that it does not threaten the loss of one's following. For example, if a negative situation occurs with one of the star athletes on a sports team, then the public relations practitioner must frame the messages to keep the public happy while also preserving the brand (Cassilo & Sanderson, 2017). "Framing effects refer to behavioral or attitudinal outcomes that are not due to differences in *what* is being communicated, but rather to variations in *how* a given piece of information is being presented [or framed] in public discourse" (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2012, 1).

One of the most vital parts of controlling the message is making sure that the messages stay true to the brand with its content while also being able to engage with the public. Cork and

Eddy (2017) explained how electronic Word-of-Mouth marketing and media framing can work together as the framed message can be used for directly engaging with consumers. It was noted by Asada and Jae Ko that sport organizations should focus more on eWOM because it is more important to know the effectiveness of the message rather than only the outcome of the consumers' behaviors (2016). There are also times where players could display support toward a certain view that may not coincide with the overall brand. Schmidt (2018) found that it is critical for an organization to respond appropriately and in a timely manner when a member of the organization shows activism with strong opinions toward a certain topic. In addition to communicating messages, social media can also give organizations the ability to build, and even strengthen, relationships with other businesses, individuals and stakeholders (Wang & Zhou, 2015).

Microblogging

Microblogging creates a platform for users to interact using small elements of content on the Internet through exchanges of short sentences, images or video links (Vaast, et al., 2017). Microblogging shows interdependence among its users, which can demonstrate independent and forward-thinking models that are useful for sharing information and knowledge on other subjects (Anderson, 2011; Giustini & Wright, 2009). "With microblogging, the single use of the retweet feature is representative of sequential interdependence" (Vaast, et al., 2017, 1182). In terms of communication tone, microblogging must be conducted with the same manners as a face-to-face conversation (Giustini & Wright, 2009; van Dijck, 2011). It has also been mentioned that the use of microblogging with sport teams can allow for a new channel of communication (Gibbs & Haynes, 2013). Similarly to a political campaign that has the same amount of immediacy,

microblogging has the opportunity to cover every topic imaginable (Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner & Welppe, 2010).

Equivocal Communication

Equivocal communication is language that is purposely vague so that the message is not clearly stated (Clementson, 2016). Without being directly stated within most of the journal articles, equivocal communication can be found within them all in some form or fashion when crisis communication is involved or has a threat of occurring because of the vague language (Clementson, 2016; Cork & Eddy, 2017; Devlin & Brown-Devlin, 2017; Walsh, Williams, & Kim, 2015; Yan, Pegoraro, & Watanabe, 2018). Situations can occur without warning, and some communications practitioners would rather bend the truth so that the overall impact for the organization can stay positive or harm can be minimized (Clementson, 2016). This can occur once individuals cause the message to change after a shift in the news or even when tragedy strikes. An example of this can be found in Yan, et al. (2018). Researchers examined the University of Missouri's football team engaging in activism on Twitter toward the school's administration because of what they perceived as racism. It showed that there are times when the message from the main organization (e.g., the Missouri football team's Twitter account) cannot be controlled due to outside forces, and practitioners will have to adapt to change the message to be positive due to the sensitivity of the situation. This situation in particular is an example of how the message on Twitter can be quickly changed and shows that practitioners need to be able to be direct and get the message back on track or to leave it as it is and let the furor die down (Yan, et al., 2018). While equivocal communication can help in public relations crises initially, it is important for an organization to be upfront and honest with the audiences so that they do not lose trust in the brand being represented.

Mega Sporting Event

A mega sporting event is an event that draws national spotlight and prestige to the area in which it is hosted, where investments, construction and infrastructure are associated (Jayawardhana, 2016). In recent years, the conversation around mega-sporting events has changed due to the potential dangers that can happen on the big stage. “Mega sport events have more terrorist threats than regional and localized sport events because they carry a significant economic, political, social and symbolic importance and attract global media” (Jayawardhana, 2016, p. 2). Due to these concerns, the content has been changing in terms of how to protect the organization because many people are concerned for attendees’ safety. For instance, the United States’ Department of Homeland Security has Special Event Assignment Ratings. The SEAR 1 ranking, which is usually only reserved for U.S. Presidential Inaugurations, is used for the Super Bowl because of the potential threats (Tajalli & Peña, 2017). To coordinate surveillance and security for the 2016 Super Bowl, the FBI reported that 60 federal, state and local agencies worked together (Tajalli & Peña, 2017). Scott, Beaton, Kunkel and Sharpe (2017) explained how engaging stakeholders, those who have interest in the program, and managing crises are imperative to the success of Twitter platforms because maintaining a positive outlook is key in any situation. Further, Henry (2015) explained that the same can apply to collegiate football events, such as the Rose Bowl, one of college football’s most prestigious games. The fact such an event has a certain level of prestige and is seen as iconic, plus the attendance level, slot a major college bowl like the Rose Bowl into SEAR 1 (Henry, 2015).

With the possibility of an event having a negative impact, it is important to ensure that the verbiage will be well-prepared. It is imperative to ensure that online marketing efforts are on point so the various team sponsors are kept happy and a positive relationship continues (Abeza,

Seguin, O'Reilly, & Nzindukiyimana, 2017; Alonso-Dos-Santos, Calabuig-Moreno & Montoro-Ríos, 2016). Throughout the established research, there was not a significant amount of insight regarding how to actually go about creating those messages in an online environment. It is also important to note that emotions play a huge part in mega sport events. Emotion can determine how mega sport events are framed in the spotlight (Billings, Burch, & Zimmerman, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative that in the event something negative were to happen at one of these events, the related emotion needs to be respected and formulated to better serve the organization and the impacted area.

Terrorism in Sporting Events

Terrorism is an act that creates fear and anxiety in an attempt to push an agenda such as politics, and have it broadcast for the world to see (Yarchi, et al., 2015). With almost every sporting event being publicized in some way, sports have drawn a higher level of unwanted attention by terrorists as they try and make their message known to the world (Galily, Tamir, & Levy, 2012). Terrorists understand that if they target major sporting events, their actions will be broadcasted all over the world, thus giving more attention to their stated cause (Yarchi, et al., 2015). For instance, the 1972 Munich Olympics attack was broadcast for the world to see as the hostage and murder situation was underway. Toohey and Taylor (2008) explained how that incident pushed the terrorists' agenda because of the national panic that ensued. Because of the large social, political and financial ramifications of terrorism, it is crucial that public relations practitioners have plans in place to control the messages during such an event (Toohey & Taylor, 2008). Because of the media coverage and money involved, sporting events are more likely to be targeted (Trim & Caravelli, 2007). To ensure safety for the spectators, Olympians, coaches and staff, the Olympics have "required more sophisticated security planning coupled with greater

organizational complexity as they have involved national and international collaboration between security organizations” (Toohey & Taylor, 2008, 460). Spaaij (2015) noted how the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta were the first of four separate bombing attacks by Eric Rudolph that started in 1996 and continued until 1998. Before the attacks when the bombs were in place, Rudolph tried to warn police in an attempt to hurt as many police officers as possible. In these situations, there was a lack of communication from the dispatchers and the police department itself. Considering the lack of communication, the injuries and deaths could have been avoided (2015). This example is crucial in the world of crisis public relation communications because the teams must be prepared for every situation. In the case of Rudolph, the responders did not take the matter seriously (Spaaij, 2015). To add, no matter what size the venue, there is no significant difference in preparedness for terrorism attacks (Baker III, Connaughton, Zhang, & Spengler, 2007). While preparing communications plans for the events, it is important to make sure that the team is prepared to respond accurately and quickly to any tip or situation that could arise so that people are safe and the team can protect the overall message.

Research Question / Hypothesis

Based on an examination of previous research and the goals of this study, the following research questions were determined:

RQ1: How do SEC teams utilize in-season social media to promote their brand?

RQ2: How do SEC communication personnel prepare for the crises that could arise for the franchise, and disseminate necessary information to the public?

RQ3: Do SEC teams have a specific plan in place to frame the messages in ways that benefit the organization during times of uncertainty?

RQ4: Do the public relations practitioners responsible for the social media accounts seek to connect with their audiences on the audience's terms, or do they adhere to the same trends that have been seen to have worked before?

As part of this study, investigation will include one research hypothesis:

H1: SEC teams will not be prepared to create and protect the overall message – and potentially, the public – for every possible situation that could arise.

Definition of Terms

1. *Agenda-Setting* – Examination of correlations between mass media coverage and audience perceptions of the importance of certain issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).
2. *Equivocal communication* – Language that is purposely vague so that the message is not clearly stated (Williams & Goss, 1975).
3. *Equivocation theory* – Indicates whether a public speaker's avoidance of tough questions can be interpreted as vague or credible answers (Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullet, 1990).
4. *Institutional theory* – Identifies the ways that certain techniques are used to sway a message, resulting in behaviors becoming more acceptable or unacceptable (Scott, 2004; Cassilo & Sanderson, 2017).
5. *Media framing* – Identifying which facts best position an organization to tell the story of its actions, results, etc. so that more of a positive image is brought upon the subject (Cassilo & Sanderson, 2017; Goffman, 1974).

6. *Mega sporting event* – An event which draws a national spotlight and prestige to the area where it is being hosted, in which investments, construction and infrastructure are associated (Jayawardhana, 2016; Mastrogiannakis & Dorville, 2013; Roche, 2002).
7. *Microblogging* – Creates a platform for users to interact using small elements of content on the Internet through exchanges of short sentences, images or video links (Java et al., 2007; Vaast, Safadi, Lapointe, & Negoita, 2017).
8. *Terrorism* – An act that creates fear and anxiety in an attempt to push an agenda, such as politics, and have it broadcast for the world to see (Yarchi, Galily, & Tamir, 2015)

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In order to determine the answers to the research questions and hypothesis, interviews were conducted with the assigned practitioners who run the various SEC teams' respective Twitter accounts. These interviews discussed how these practitioners intended to utilize the account, including whether that utilization is by a single individual or a group, how honest the practitioners plan to be when facing a potential crisis situation or situations, and how they utilized media framing when having to control the message. All 14 of the SEC teams were contacted with the goal of at least six responding for an interview (Potter, 2018; Roland & Bawden, 2012; Scott, et al., 2017; Sharpe et al., 2017). Considering the fact there is often some type of on- or off-field controversy during a typical SEC season (e.g., referees' calls, an athlete's image, Twitter gaffes), media framing can be expected to be used in some way to protect the overall brand of the team itself while also factoring in the brand of the SEC itself (Gudjonsson, 2012; Scott, et al., 2017; Sharpe, et al, 2017). Some of the controversies could be referees' calls (Layne & Hastie, 2014), an athlete's image (Browning & Sanderson, 2012) and Twitter gaffes (David, Ong, & Legra, 2016).

Sampling

Interviews are a reliable form of research because interactions with experts in the field can help to further expand on findings (Scott, et al., 2017; Sharpe, et al, 2017). This study used convenience sampling (Brewis, 2014), with the participants chosen for the interview sample being the listed Twitter contacts for various SEC teams. Each responding SEC school will be listed as Team A, Team B, and so on, in order that the interviewees will remain confidential with no identifying characteristics. While age and gender were not determinants in whether or not certain individuals are interviewed, the subjects' demographic information was recorded.

Instrument

Interviews and emails were utilized to collect data from the participants. The dependent variable is social media itself, while the independent variables are the social media contacts for the various SEC teams. The social media contacts are the independent variables because at the time of the interview, they will not change. The interviews and Twitter analytics allowed for a direct investigation on why both variables are conducted in a specific way. The information found will help the people managing the accounts to be able to understand how to better connect with its audiences.

Emails

While there are other forms of communication, email has proven to be more beneficial compared to calling on the phone because it gives the respondent time to check schedules and to think about any questions they have about the study (Park & Tosaka, 2015). The emails explained the purpose of the study and how the study is beneficial to academia, as well as how the study may be beneficial to practitioners. The email also indicated how the not-for-profit

study will also benefit current and future practitioners in regard to better social media practices (Sappleton & Lourenço, 2016).

Interviews

Interviewing the participants is a valid approach for this study as it will ideally elicit honest answers directly from the Twitter practitioners (Sharpe, et al. 2017). These questions aid in further understanding the planning that goes into creating content, and maintaining it, for SEC Twitter accounts. The types of questions that were asked ideally lead to responses that are timely, proactive in nature and noteworthy for other practitioners. Questions focused on multiple areas of strategy, crisis communication, fan feedback, and overall relationships on social media as well as platform ideation including some questions investigating overall content language. An example question could be stated as follows: “When controversy strikes, such as a critical call that determines the outcome of a game, how does the organization shape the overall message?” The questions were phrased in ways to elicit specific answers from the interviews that go beyond answering “yes” or “no.” The researcher believes there could be some change in behavior when the interviewee knows they are being observed on camera; however, that would only help with the study itself because the SEC Twitter accounts are already being observed by many people. The interviews are effective because they can provide “detailed, accurate and coherent answers to questions” (Gudjonsson, 2010, p. 161), and also offer the opportunity for interviewees to respond in their own terms, where answers can be longer in length and provide more information than written answers (Potter, 2018).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

For this study, data was collected through email and interviews. Through email, contact can be made with the participant and a letter of consent can also be administered and collected using the same channel. Phone interviews were conducted during the months of January and February 2019. During the interview, a list of questions were asked in relation to crisis communication, media framing and if there is a chain of command for the page and how it is conducted. The answers to the questions were collected on a recorder and then transcribed for the study.

Protection of Human Rights

In preparation for the study, the researcher completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) qualifications involving working with human subjects. The courses were taken through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative, which is in collaboration with Mississippi State University. From those courses, the researcher learned how to protect the rights of the participants. As stated previously, this study was created purely for educational research. Participation was not required, and those approached for an interview can decline or withdraw at any time as an informed consent form was sent to each participant.

Significance of Study

This study has been created to better educate current and future public relations practitioners on how to manipulate the public with media framing to better represent the overall brand. While there are many topics to learn from the study, there are some weaknesses to it as well. If no SEC team responded back to the interview request, then the study could not continue. Another weakness was that if nothing controversial were to happen during the SEC season, the

experiment and its results would not see much of a rise in activity. These two factors were not addressed as the topic should be focused on what will happen instead of what may not be able to happen. The study has importance because it can affect the policies that public relations practitioners give themselves in terms of how ethical it is to spin a specific message during a crisis (Scott, et al., 2017; Sharpe et al., 2017).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Out of 14 emails that were sent asking for participation in the current study, seven college football teams agreed to participate. Three schools declined interviews, and four did not respond. Two of the interviewees were female, and the remaining five were male. The interviews averaged approximately 25 minutes in duration.

Research question one asked how SEC football teams utilize in-season social media to promote their brand. The seven teams all stated that prior to the start of the season, they had a strategy meeting during the summer to plan for the upcoming year. In addition, team social media personnel would also meet on a weekly basis to go over strategy for the week, or to plan specific strategies for the specific opponent. All seven teams utilized Facebook, and Team One (2019) gave an equal amount of sharing on Facebook similar to the amount shared on its Twitter page.

We still use Facebook to communicate with fans, and pretty much everything we post on Twitter we post on Facebook. Which, some people might disagree with, but it's one extra step that you have to do. Actually, our engagements – honestly, I don't know why more people don't post more on Facebook because it's an extra step – because the engagement is actually, really, really good. We're reaching, [1.2] million followers on Facebook, and it's an audience that takes no extra work. We're not posting short videos on Facebook,

but everything else pretty much goes on Facebook. And like I said, it takes no extra effort, it's just an extra step but no real effort to do it (p. 56).

Two out of the seven teams stated that graphics are not intended to be on Instagram. However, all seven teams agreed that Instagram, particularly Instagram story, plays a huge role in recruiting for the coaching staff as it assists with helping to recruit players. In addition, Team Five (2019) noted that due to the older age of the full-time staffers, they assign the job of Instagram story to a younger student worker, that is typically in their 20s, to capture that information for them: "They are allowed to capture all types of things on their own video and photos, but everything has to be sent to the full-timer to put onto the story" (p. 96).

The teams also stated that they would capitalize on the events that take place on the field. However, some teams which were not as successful would stay away from spotlighting in-game events and occurrences. For example, Team Three (2019) finds importance in going dark on its platforms after a loss. In their opinion, it is best to go dark and let the situation handle itself, for the most part "at the end of the day, you're an informative account too, and you have to get certain [information] out there" (p. 79). This means that the account would go dark about the specific incident that happened, but would either provide updates from a press conference or do not post anything again until the next day. The goal with Team Three is to not belabor the negativity but rather to promote the positivity.

The manner in which teams communicate with their fans on and off the field is crucial in preserving the interest and commitment of their current and future fanbases. All seven teams proclaimed that they were careful in their cultivation of the image that needs to be maintained and portrayed on their platforms to continue to promote the brand in-season on social media.

For the second research question, the researcher sought to find out how SEC football team communications personnel prepare for potential crises that could arise around the program, and subsequently disseminate necessary information to the public such as a status update on the situation or even precautionary updates to keep fans in the know. In terms of being proactive from a game management standpoint, each team was asked if there was a system in place to educate the fans about safety precautions within the stadiums. All seven of the teams answered that there were safety measures in place, one of which is the Southeastern Conference-mandated clear bag policy. The purpose of the clear bag policy is to try and prevent harmful weapons from entering the stadium. Patrons may enter the stadium with any sized clear bag, or a smaller clutch or purse that measures 4.5 inches by 6.5 inches. During the 2018 season, one of the teams participated in metal detectors for fans and spectators prior to entry to the stadium. Team Two explained how it was a struggle with the fans as some of them felt that they were not being trusted. Henceforth, Team Two (2019) did its best to implement the new policy in a fun and whimsical way.

We kind of humanized it. Our football coach and [the team mascot] dressed up and walked through a metal detector to make it look funny. It was a way to use some humor in a difficult subject that some people find a nuisance (p. 68).

All seven teams also pushed the message that all schools in the SEC conference would have the metal detectors mandated at all stadiums by the 2020 season.

In fact, while not all seven of the teams implemented the metal detectors this past season, all had strategies in place to utilize social media to help disseminate information regarding security precautions to help patrons be as prepared as possible before entering the venue. The use of informational graphics and videos were utilized to help push for the safety implementations

with the fanbase. By having these strategies in place to get pertinent information out to the fans on social media, it was noted by all seven teams that these practices help the fans about ways to prepare before heading out to the game.

Continuing with the second question, it was asked of the participants what would be done if a coach or a player were to pass away during the season. Team Seven (2019) had a response in terms of putting the message out there, as this team had suffered a loss of its own

What we were trying to do was tell the fans, warn the fans, that it was serious. He wasn't just [at the hospital] because he was sick. In fact, it was serious. For lack of a better word, we wanted to get people praying for him. Honestly, we wanted more people thinking about him. That's kind of what happened. We did it ourselves and that's all we did was write a story and post it on our website, Facebook and social media. We just let people have it for what it was (p. 116).

Pertaining to this topic, one of the interview questions asked how the social media practitioners would respond to a terrorist attack taking place during the game. When that question was asked, all seven participants had a delayed response. Teams One, Three, Four, Five and Six explained that in that situation they would defer to the university and emergency personnel to take the lead. Team Seven declined to comment on the question. When asked if there was anyone who would be tasked to take over the social media accounts if they fell victim to the attack, Teams One, Two, Three and Seven indicated that there is no one who would access the account. In fact, Teams Four, Five and Six explained that there are outside parties with access to the accounts who could put the message out on their behalf. Moreover, Team Six's (2019) response was very clear cut and showed signs of preparedness

We also have one of my social media students that we actually put in the control room with the police officers, with the police management staff where they have all of those surveillance cameras on screens just so that [this] person is in tune with social media in that room ... We have a text message system that we use in the stadium where fans can text anonymously about anything in their section or anything that they see out of the ordinary (p. 108).

The third research question asked whether SEC football teams have a specific plan in place to frame the messages in ways that benefit the organization during times of uncertainty. The context in which this question was presented to the teams was by using the example of a coach resigning or a death occurring within the team. Aside from Team Six, the individual teams had their own unique strategy for handling that type of the situation or occurrence. However, there was one common denominator among all of the schools when it came to the death of a student-athlete. Their stated plan was to let the families grieve, and then ask them how they would like to proceed with what kind of information they would like released while also staying true to the fanbase. While interviewing all seven teams, it was clear from their responses that they see the SEC as a very tightknit community that relies on honesty from its channels. While the interviewees understand it is their job to protect the team itself, it is also important – within reason – to be as transparent as possible with the fanbase.

For the final research question, the participants were asked whether the public relations practitioners responsible for the social media accounts seek to connect with their audiences on the audience's terms, or do they adhere to the same trends that have been effective previously? Teams One, Two, Three, Five and Six indicated that they look to the fanbase for input, but they are not going to change their method if a small amount of people disagree. The one thing that all

seven teams agreed upon is that the coaching staffs have an influence on some of the content, as Twitter can be effective as a recruiting tool for the coaches who are trying to reach recruits.

In terms of what Team Four, Team Five and Team Seven plan to do, it was similar in nature, but also specific for that team in general. Team Four emphasized that even though they want to give the people what they want, they make sure they stay true to their brand and message; however, they monitor the comments to see what that is being said to try and implement the changes, if possible. Team Five (2019) indicated that

We don't engage very much back-and-forth with fans, but try to be consistent in what we post so that fans are continually adding us and seeing that we are a program that can be consistent. I use that again, but that's how we engage with our fans. We try to use the same hashtags and just continue building. As our team gets better, then our Twitter account gets better (p .97).

In fact, Team Four (2019) made sure to note that no matter what happens, they also need to stay true to the brand and focus on next steps

The way we lost a game, we're not going to be nearly as excited obviously. The messaging changes a little bit, but the tone and the voice and who we are doesn't change. If it's a loss, then instead of saying 'back at it' you say 'time to reset.' You just change it a little bit based on what happened based on wins and losses (p. 90).

Team Seven hinted that since they do not have a steady fan base, they are going to try new things to be more attractive to new fans.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis was to see if the majority of SEC teams would be prepared to handle any situation that could arise while being able to create and protect its overall message. Based on the

answers to the research questions as well as the interviews themselves, the hypothesis stands as the majority of the teams do not have a system in place to create and protect the overall message for every situation that could arise.

This hypothesis is supported based on the responses received from the teams during their interviews. As stated in the results section, only 57 percent of the teams interviewed were prepared if an act of terrorism were to take place. Therefore, those four teams are not able to create and protect the overall message for every situation that could arise. The only teams that were prepared for such situation, gauged by preparedness for terrorist attacks, would be Teams Four, Five and Six.

In conclusion, the hypothesis stands as the majority of the teams do not have a system in place to create and protect the overall message for every situation that could arise.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In the world of sports, Power 5 schools such as those in the SEC are superior to others. The reason that the SEC was chosen for this research over other Power 5 institutions was because of the combination of popularity, national success and recruiting rankings (Kirshner, 2019). In addition, the researcher has a professional connection with the subjects. The benefit of knowing some of the participants was that it was easier to elicit responses. The downside of knowing the some of the participants is that some answers could be less strict as there has already been a trust built between the researcher and the interviewee.

Based on the hypothesis, and from the results that were gathered from interview responses, this study shows that not all SEC teams are equipped for tackling difficult situations. It is important to note this because as public relations practitioners, communication has to be top priority. If the team itself has not sat down to explore every situation that could arise and how to react to it, then the team is doing a disservice to itself as well as stakeholders and the fanbase. The team accounts are the lifeline of the program, and must have a clear-cut response to crisis in order to give people comfort (Abeza, Seguin, O'Reilly, & Nzindukiyimana, 2017; Alonso-Dos-Santos, Calabuig-Moreno & Montoro-Ríos, 2016).

The purpose of the hypothesis was to provide an overarching answer for current or future public relations practitioners about the world of sports information in collegiate football, particularly within the Southeastern Conference. While conducting initial research, it was

discovered that while there were quite a few articles that encompassed what someone could deal with as a sports information director covering football, there was not a solid document in which pressing information could be found all in one spot. Therefore, this thesis was created as a potential guide for people looking to get all of the information in one spot.

Feedback from Research Questions

The research questions asked were based off of the research that was lacking from the literature review. It was information that the researcher had hoped would have been easily available for consumption when researching the topic at hand. The goal for the researcher was to give scholars access to the most up-to-date information on public relations practices within Power 5 college football schools.

When inquiring about question one, which asked how SEC football teams utilize in-season social media to promote their brand specifically using Twitter, all seven teams expressed using Twitter, Facebook and Instagram as modes of social media to get their messages out to their publics. The interviewees knew that the study was to focus on Twitter, but they made sure to include Facebook and Instagram in their answers also. This was important to note because it showed that the interviewees themselves were trying to be more thorough than needed as if to try and prove a point that their efforts were the best. All the researcher wanted to know was about their Twitter scheduling and thought processes.

In the results section, it was noted that all seven teams found that Instagram Story was crucial in helping with the recruiting trail. Instagram Story is the equivalent to Snapchat stories; however, the current social trends have caused Instagram Stories to be more beneficial than Snapchat stories as there is a photo gallery attached that can pull users to look at other sources of content from that specific platform in addition to the Instagram Stories which last for 24 hours.

There are also options to create a folder with that story to view until it is manually removed. This helps to keep previous work shown on Instagram so that recruits can go back and see the overall voice and message of the team whenever they want. With Snapchat, everything on its story is gone after 24 hours, and it will remain gone.

The extra information about the other platforms that were utilized actually helped the researcher's ability to configure how each platform related to each team in terms of following, thought process for postings and recruitment purposes.

Kirshner (2019) explained how due to the success that the SEC has had nationally with recruiting, it has helped to make the SEC even more dominant as the country's best players are picking the SEC over other conferences. Because of the success with recruiting, the SEC has also been successful with national championships. Since 2009, the SEC won the next four national titles after that recruiting cycle, three of which came from The University of Alabama, which was also ranked in the No. 3 spot for recruiting that season (Kirshner, 2019).

Pertaining to social media preparedness in the second research question, there was not enough information that could encompass anything that could arise – such as a terrorist attack or something that could impact the news right then and there during a live event. This is crucial because it has shown that the people in charge of these accounts do not have a contingency plan, and they are not prepared to make their fan bases safe. An example of this could be having to create a message quickly that is not well-organized (Clementson, 2016). All seven teams made a point to say that their fans are imperative to their jobs. If one is aware of that, then every effort needs to be made to ensure that messages can go out in order to tell the audience what is going on. Not only is that important for a crisis, but it is also important for every day information. Therefore, those four teams are not able to create and protect the overall message for every

situation that could arise. The only teams that were prepared for such situation, gauged by their responses, would be Teams Four, Five and Six.

Question three asked about how to manage the overall message for the team account when dealing with a difficult situation for the team such as a coach resigning or a player death, all seven made the point that they would let the families have input before putting information out there.

Without giving away an identifier of which school Team Seven happens to be, it was noted that when dealing with the loss of a player due to cancer, this school had an easier time telling and protecting its own story because of the level of hype that team usually received, which was not much. That situation showed that depending on the school, it is harder for some than others to protect its message because more people are in-tune to what is going out. For the ones with a heavier following, it is even more important to make sure that there is a plan for any situation because that means the program is receiving more attention.

The final research question focused on whether the public relations practitioners responsible for the social media accounts seek to connect with their audiences on the audience's terms, or do they adhere to the same trends that have been effective previously? Agenda-setting was the main theoretical idea behind this question, and it would show if the interviewees would stray from the plan to work with its publics (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). The interviews indicated that five out of the seven teams agreed that they would not change their plans based on the opinions of fans. The most interesting comment came from Team Four, who said they gave those comments consideration, but made sure to stay true to the brand when deciding whether or not to focus on the feedback that was received.

What Can the Interview Tell Scholars?

What was noteworthy about the questions during the interview is that most of the respondents had similar answers. The answers seemed safe, akin to being afraid to say the wrong thing, instead of seeming confident with every response. An example of a safe answer was shown when asking about how to manage the message during a terrorist attack. The responses gathered showed that not a lot of thought had been put into something like that, which was concerning as something as serious as a terrorist attack should always have a plan. This goes back to equivocal communication because the information would not be as vague as needed to provide the most appropriate answer (Williams & Goss, 1975).

Additionally, the tone of the interviewees would change based on the type of question. Light-hearted questions had more of a response, while serious questions were either shorter or had ramble-like responses where it was obvious that there was not an answer ahead of time. In response to how to manage communications during a terrorist attack, Team Three mentioned that the scenario was something they had all not thought about, and that it was going to be brought up at the next meeting. Team Two indicated that there was no backup plan whatsoever to communicate after the fact. Team Seven declined to comment on the question. What was interesting about Team Seven's comment is that were they being too cautious, or were they not sure about how to answer? The interviewer did not know how to respond in that circumstance, so the next question was asked.

When it came to conference mandated rules, all seven teams had similar responses that appeared to be answered as if they had been asked that question before. However, there was uncertainty for some when the metal detector implementation was discussed. Team Two was the only team that was participating at the time. Team One discussed having to get prepared to

market that specific message for the fans once it was time to implement the metal detectors on its campus.

Limitations to Study and Future Research

While the study was being conducted, the researcher noticed a number of limitations to the study. The first is that only the SEC was chosen to participate. If this study were to continue into a deeper discussion, it would need to have all Power 5 teams included to see which conference had the best system in place to handle the hypothesis given.

Meanwhile, another limitation that was noticed is that not all of the 14 SEC schools were participating, as only seven of them chose to participate. A possible option would have been to speak with the director of communications for each conference office regarding if this could be something that is required of the teams for a more accurate study. Communicating with the top of each communications representative for each conference would have also made for an interesting note to add to the study. It could have validated or rebuked some of what was reported by the individual teams. This can be done by asking if there is a handbook or list of guidelines that the conference office could mandate to each school.

Another limitation was that only Division I schools were considered for the study. Receiving input from Division II and Division III institutions could help with the findings of this study. A thought that came up when reviewing the results is do Division II and Division III institutions look to Division I schools as a way to frame their own messages? Do they study Division I schools as a way to better their own content?

Moreover, another limitation to the study was that the interviews were conducted over the phone and not in person. Had the interviews been conducted in person, the interviewer could have taken notes about body language, engagement and even overall appearance of the

interviewee. Those three descriptions could have a lot to say as to how the account is run and how it is maintained. It would have also been able to help the researcher note if they were truly confident in their answers, were they easily distracted, or if they had a guide to help them along the way with the questions.

In addition, there was not enough monitoring of the team accounts throughout the season to see if the interviewees responses held up to what was actually going on. Even though there are different circumstances for each situation that could arise, it would have been beneficial to have something to reference to see if the tactics were actually being carried out the way it was described in the interviews. Had that information taken place before the interviews, the interviewer could have picked out specific instances that stood out to him or her and asked the interviewee to comment on the thought process for that situation.

Furthermore, it is important to note that future research would look into polling sports fans to see what they want to see from the teams' social accounts. This is a limitation to the study because if this information was gathered ahead of time, that would have been helpful during the interview process. Had the interviewer had the results of those fans, it could have created more data for the study. The only issue would be being able to find the databases for people that are part of that specific teams following to reach out to them directly. Would it be over social media? Would the teams care to share their own data? There is a lot that could be done with a poll for this type of study.

Lastly, while there were a lot of scholarly articles about certain topics, there were not enough articles that were unique in nature as each article had similar findings. If there was more diverse information available, it would have helped to create more research questions and

interview questions for the interviewees. Having more information would only have made the research stronger as more questions could have been applied.

Conclusion

Based on what was observed from the participants when answering the interview questions is that there were a lot of cookie-cutter type statements, or one could tell that these questions had been responded to already; therefore, the hypothesis is correct that the interviewees would not be prepared.

It was not until a hot button issue, such as terrorism, was mentioned that the respondents either went silent for a few more seconds than normal due to lack of preparedness. For the researcher, that was concerning because for a topic as serious as terrorism, there is no cookie-cutter answer. It did not have to provide a full, detailed plan, but showing that there was some type of plan in place, and it was apparent that this was brought up before, would have been sufficient. The respondents should have been able to respond without even having to think twice with the simple question that was stated.

To close, this study will be able to help aspiring or current public relations practitioners be able to improve their communication techniques. In a world full of being number one and beating out your competitor, it is easy to forget about the little things that go a long way. While recruiting is one of the main lifelines of your team, having a trust with your fanbase, reassuring them and making sure they feel confident with the information that is going out here is the most important thing about this whole study. While all seven teams did understand the importance of that, it was clear that money and rules take precedence over the basic principles that build fanbases. It is more than just a beautifully designed graphic or video to gain attention. It is what can be done to make sure that no matter what happens, no matter who is controlling the account

at that given time, that the team is prepared to handle any and all situation that could become apparent.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

- 1) Do you run the account solo or do you have a social media team? Whether it be yourself or a team, how would you manage the content? Is there a content calendar?
 - a. How many people go into making the social media posts, graphics and animations?
- 2) When planning the social media strategy for the year, what is the team's main goal?
- 3) Are there any campaigns you have planned on the social media calendar?
- 4) What would you say is the style of how your team communicates? Is it sillier, more serious or evenly done?
- 5) Does the athletics director, players and coaches have a say in how you communicate with the team?
- 6) How does your team determine how to best communicate with the fans? Is there a system in place to have the various social media outlets work together, or are they unique from each other?
- 7) How does your team build the relationship with your consumers on social media, specifically Twitter?
- 8) Why does your team find it important to build the relationships with your consumers?
- 9) Does your messaging change based on the on-field fortunes of the team?
- 10) Does your team have a system in place to receive feedback from fans? If so, what is it?
- 11) What has been the biggest crisis you and you team have had to tackle, and how did you approach it?
- 12) When controversy strikes, such as a critical call that determines the outcome of a game, how does the organization shape the overall message using Twitter?

13) What plan (if any) does your team have in place if a terrorist attack were to take place during the game?

- a. Do you guys have any other people that can take over the accounts if you are unable to?

14) If your organization were to come to you and ask about ways to educate fans about new safety precautions in the stadium, how would you educate them?

15) If a situation arises, how do you frame the message so that you do not lose the trust of your fanbase, while also reassuring the public?

16) What is your team's priority when educating the fans during a difficult situation for the team?

17) How does your organization respond to fans who are angry over national anthem controversies?

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS

Team One Transcription

Q: Do you run the account solo or do you have a social media team? Whether it be yourself or a team?

Team One: “[I handle it mostly myself, but I have other people that help with content].”

Q: How would you manage the content? Is there a content calendar?

Team One: “Yes – we meet on the Thursday before games, or Thursday’s during football season and plan out the weekend and see if there is anything else going on – that’s what we usually look for going into that next week.”

Q: How many people go into making the social media posts, graphics and animations?

Team One: “If you count all of our photographers and videographers, it’s probably 10-15 [people]. At the core, it’s probably six I would say.”

Q: What would you say is the style of how your team communicates? Is it sillier, more serious or evenly done?

Team One: “I think it’s pretty even. We’re trying to move away from the generic press release style and get more toward having personality but also staying within the [team] brand, which is more conservative, but not just tweeting out paragraphs of information. Sometimes, we have to do that. It’s such a large account that it does have to be more professional and more press release style. For the majority of it, we like to have fun and keep it personal and not just so generic and boring.”

Q: Do you see a difference in how the message is perceived based on traditional style versus the fun typed style?

Team One: “I think for fan-engagement, it’s more fun and short. It doesn’t necessarily have to be fun, but mostly short and to the point will definitely get larger engagements,

and fans will pay attention compared to tweeting out the full 280 characters for a press release about a timeline of events.”

Q: When planning the social media strategy for the year, what is the team’s main goal?

Are there any campaigns you have planned on the social media calendar?

Team One: “Last year was our 125th season of football. A lot of [our strategy] centered around that and our graphics had a certain kind of look. For our poster was done in the summer. So, we met again [before the start of the season] to determine what else we needed to accomplish. I think that as our efforts on social media grow, there will be much more of a focus of goal setting. Last year was kind of unique because we didn’t have the dedicated social media or media person until three days before our first game. That kind of changed our mindset and the way we did things from originally to the day or two days before our first game. The success of the season dictated that as well. We went from not thinking we would be very good to being 4-0 to start off the season with two Top-10 wins. That definitely dictated what we did as well.”

Q: What has been the biggest crisis you and you team have had to tackle, and how did you approach it?

Team One: “Probably the biggest one last year is we had a special set of uniforms that we had been talking about in the summer – what we were going to do. We had a script written and voiced over. It was a two-month long process. When the uniforms finally came in, we did a video shoot and the day after we did the video shoot they ended up popping up at a Dick’s Sporting Goods because of the miscommunication on Nike’s end that they released the uniforms to retail before. One of the people who was on the project randomly went to Dick’s the next day after the photo shoot, saw it up and [realized they

weren't supposed to be there]. So, Nike had to come back and recall all of the uniforms that they had put out on the shelf. Thankfully no one even say them somehow. The week of the uniform [reveal] someone had leaked a picture of it. So that was pretty frustrating, but we stayed on schedule. There was a lot of negativity around it because people didn't know what the uniform was. So, we used it as an opportunity to tell the story. The shift from [it] being [so] negative about the uniforms to positive was probably the best I had ever seen because they had no idea what they were talking about, and they jumped the gun on their opinion and then we came back with what the story was – it went back to World War I and the historic season after World War II, which was 1942, I think? So, it just shifted completely, and people ended up liking the uniforms because of the story.

Q: How does your team determine how to best communicate with the fans? Is there a system in place to have the various social media outlets work together, or are they unique from each other?

Team One: “We made a point this year to be smart and strategic about what we posted. In the past, we posted a lot of graphics on Instagram. Well, Instagram isn't for graphics ... it's for photos and videos. We completely shifted, and I don't think we posted more than one graphic all year on Instagram. We still use Facebook to communicate with fans, and pretty much everything we post on Twitter we post on Facebook. Which, some people might disagree with, but it's one extra step that you have to do. Actually, our engagements – honestly, I don't know why more people don't post more on Facebook because it's an extra step – because the engagement is actually, really, really good. We're reaching, I think, [1.2] million followers on Facebook, and it's an audience that takes no extra work. We're not posting short videos on Facebook, but everything else pretty much

goes on Facebook, and like I said, it takes no extra effort, it's just an extra step but no real effort to do it.”

Q: How does your team build the relationship with your consumers on social media, specifically Twitter?

Team One: “Like we talked about earlier, it’s about being personable and not [being] just like a robot when you’re communicating – tweeting and making sure you’re interacting with the fans, which is kind of something we did this year. But, we definitely wanted to do more of responding to fans and engaging fans so they feel like they are part of the account. So, when we ask for something or we want fans to interact with us – they do. People want to feel like they are included.”

Q: Why does your team find it important to build the relationships with your consumers?

Team One: “I think you just want to engage with what you’re doing so that what you’re doing is worth it. You don’t just want to put out videos and no one engages with it because they don’t feel like they are part of it. You give them different access, pictures, videos – it makes them feel like they are in the locker room, they are on the field. We do periscope. We go live from inside the stadium through our videoboard during pregame, and [the fans] feel like they are part of pregame because they can watch the team warm up, run out and that’s what I think, on our end, is an extra step that they feel like they are engaged in it and that they are in it.”

Q: Does your messaging change based on the on-field fortunes of the team?

Team One: “We try not to, but it would be unrealistic to say that it doesn’t. We aren’t going to have the same type of energy after a win compared to a loss because we don’t

win. We're going to post a lot more after we win. When we lose, we don't post highlights. Because, the way I think of it is if I'm a fan, I don't want to see highlights of a game that we lost. We're not going to post the highlights. It's obviously a lot more fun if you win, but I try and think of it as a fan. I don't want to see pictures, tweets and videos, I want to move onto the next week. I think we have done that, both win and loss, a lot better this year. Some games, we are going to have a lot more content during the week than others. We try to honor the [NCAA mandated] 24-hour rule. So, after our last second win over Auburn, we ran more videos on Monday about fan reactions. I would say it changes based on wins and losses."

Q: Does your team have a system in place to receive feedback from fans? If so, what is it?

Team One: "We don't have a resource to see what they like or don't like. [We will monitor our social platforms] because they will tell us what they like or don't like [on there]. We try to pay attention to that, but at the same time, we have a job to do and not everyone is going to agree with what we post. We will look at it and if it's reasonable then we will adjust. Most of the time it is just fans being grumpy. A good example is the music that we use. Some fans don't like the rap music, but the purpose of our Twitter and Facebook accounts is to interact with different people so it's fans, donor, students and potential student-athletes and current student-athletes – there's such a wide range that if we hit more than 60 percent, than we are doing it right. A couple of people who [commented] about the music, I feel like the engagement says more if there are 5,000 people that like it or 2,000 people that retweet it – that means more to me than two or three people that comment on the music.

Q: Twitter has been cracking down on the use of copyrighted music. Do you all have a contact? How do you go about that?

Team One: “We use APM. Through the university, we have a contact where there’s a website with all of these different songs and music. What we learned is that we had some representatives from Twitter come down this year and they gave advice. Twitter doesn’t make a difference a lot, but a lot of people are scrolling through without even listening to your song. Whether they are driving or they’re in a meeting, they might just watch the video and not listen. So, you have to tell the video’s story within five seconds without using any music. We have actually been working on telling the story without music or telling it without the sound. What does it look like? Are we getting our point across?”

Q: When controversy strikes, such as a critical call that determines the outcome of a game, how does the organization shape the overall message using Twitter?

Team One: “[A specific game that cannot be said to protect the team’s identity]. To me, there is not much that you can say on Twitter that is going to change people’s minds with a game like that. There’s nothing we can say on our account but [just to say that we are going to come back stronger]. We tell the fans what they want to hear. They want to know that the student-athletes are going to come back stronger?”

Q: What plan (if any) does your team have in place if a terrorist attack were to take place during the game?

Team One: “We have our event management plan that we kind of defer to them and our local agencies – the message comes from them. We met, starting last year, about that so the message doesn’t come from us, it comes from the people that actually have the authority and understand what the plan is. So, we defer to them for that kind of stuff.”

Q: Do you guys have any other people that can take over the accounts if you are unable to?

Team One: “They have an account. What would happen in that instance is they would share that information with us through text or email or through [our internal communicating service called] Slack. So that’s how they could communicate in-game through radio or whatever. If it happened and there’s an emergency – at the edge of campus, there’s a channel that it would go through. I guess that would be deferred through the university. If it got to that level [where we were all taken out] there’s no one outside of the stadium with access. It wouldn’t be coming through [our account]. It would probably be coming through the university Twitters. If it was that bad, it would have to go through local authorities.”

Q: If your organization were to come to you and ask about ways to educate fans about new safety precautions in the stadium, how would you educate them?

Team One: “Last year we had the introduction of our metal detectors and how they were being implemented. That caused a lot of controversy because people were upset that we were adding metal detectors. So, we put out a Q and A and said that it was not just us, but it was the whole SEC that was starting to make this change in 2020. We were just taking precautions and testing it now so we don’t get to the point in 2020 where we are trying to do the whole stadium.”

Q: Does the athletics director, players and coaches have a say in how you communicate with the team?

Team One: “No, not really.”

Q: If a situation arises, how do you frame the message so that you do not lose the trust of your fanbase, while also reassuring the public?

Team One: “Like I said earlier, I think we just rely on the people who have the knowledge of emergency plans and all that kind of stuff. That’s when we defer to them. Other times, they defer to us about strategies and certain stuff. I don’t know anything about an emergency plan or how to get people out of an arena or anything. We use [the appropriate outlets] as a resource.”

Q: What is your team’s priority when educating the fans during a difficult situation for the team?

Team One: “We kind of experienced that a little bit for basketball because basketball did lose a player last year. It’s making sure that we have all of the facts and are taking the lead of the head coach. The priority goes to the student athlete’s first. There doesn’t need to be anything put out until it’s approved, but it’s appropriate. Last year, once the details were finalized, we put something out about our basketball player. [We remained] respectful and asked the other accounts to be quiet on social out of respect. You can never really prepare for that, but I think we did a very good job with that”

How does your organization respond to fans who are angry over national anthem controversies?

Team One: “In college, the only time we really ever dealt with that at any time was when something was said about Nike. That was the only time. It’s not like it was overwhelming – there would be one or two people who would comment that they don’t support Nike for whatever [reason]. With our players not out on the field during the national anthem, we really haven’t seen anything. None of our other sports have had any type of controversies,

so I'm not worried that it will trickle down. Who knows – two years ago, no one thought there would be an issue, but here we are. We haven't seen it, and I don't know if we will see it overwhelmingly based on the fact that the student-athletes aren't on the field. But, I'm not really sure.”

Team Two Transcription

Q: Do you run the account solo or do you have a social media team?

Team Two: “We have a team of folks – [four] people that will touch it.”

Q: Whether it be yourself or a team, how would you manage the content? Is there a content calendar?

Team Two: “We have a calendar of obligations that we put out on each day of the week during the season; however, that's always fluctuating. There could be announcements or things that come up that we don't know, or ideas that come to our head. ‘What is we do this?’ That could be posted that week. I don't try to be always set and structured on everything, and I know that's a fluctuation of things just because there are other ideas that come to your head and you want to get out there.”

Q: How many people go into making the social media posts, graphics and animations?

Team Two: “We don't actually make the animations and graphics. It is usually one to two people. We kind of set a direction with what we want and a look. [We could say] ‘hey, I've got an idea. Let's make this cool graphic on [a player] being named a Top 10 pick at the Senior Bowl.’ – Boom, we give [the designer] an idea.”

Q: When planning the social media strategy for the year, what is the team's main goal?

Are there any campaigns you have planned on the social media calendar?

Team Two: “I think the main goal is to set a vision and be consistent in that vision throughout the whole year. ‘What’s our goals?’ You kind of look at the team and what they have. This past year, we had a veteran team, a new coach and our message was sharing the vision of what our new coach wants. I think we did that pretty successfully. I know we lost five games, but we were pretty consistent in our messaging. Whether it was [a certain slogan] or something, I thought we did a good job with that.

“Campaigns – It’s still something we created four or five years ago called [slogan cannot be used to protect the teams identity] It’s been very valuable because we had so many successful NFL players, so any time we put out NFL content – whether it’s our future NFL guys, like right now at the senior bowl, or guys who are being successful [in the NFL already] like a [former player] on Sunday’s or during the week. That is featured on billboards, it’s on social media, that hashtag is pretty prominent and is something that we will continue to carry for sure.”

Q: How did you keep that message consistent during the five game losses?

Team Two: “I think there were less posts, you’re very careful about what you put out from a messaging statement after a loss. Obviously, we’re not going to put out video content from the previous game if we just lost it. We want to move on to the next game. What can we focus on to move ahead. Or after a game, we aren’t going to put out locker room content of a loss. Immediately after a loss of a game, we might put out a graphic that says ‘final’ and leave it, and not post for a while because there could be a lot of negativity out there and there is just not sense – you’ve gotta be smart.”

Q: What would you say is the style of how your team communicates? Is it sillier, more serious or evenly done?

Team Two: “I would say it’s a little bit of both. It’s a hectic world – lots of demands, lots of needs. Sometimes [we are] understaffed. We like to have fun with it, but also we are serious about it, we need to get this done, put this out there because everything is so deadline based when you’re during the week – during a football season week or [there are times] where we need to get things done.”

Q: What has been the biggest crisis you and your team have had to tackle, and how did you approach it?

Team Two: “[Dealing with a certain player’s past] is something I have been very passionate about. Obviously, [he] is a draft eligible junior who has been awesome throughout his career here, but he was seen, back in high school as a senior, involved in a fight involving his family and was seen hitting a woman. To this day, he admits he made a mistake and he could have and handled it better. Therefore, every time [his] name comes up in Twitter world, he’s attached to this. People always say, ‘well, but he beats women.’ When he has success and we post that he’s a [SEC] Player of the Week or an All-American or doing all of these great things and we try to humanize him and show all of the great things that he’s doing, there’s always going to be some negative fan that tweets at him or at us for what he did in the past. We made it a point that we are going to do whatever we could to help the kid from the moment he got here to the moment he left including on some of our social media pieces, which have been a big hit. Without a doubt, that crisis, and it’s not by means it’s not over yet, we’re going to have to deal with it before he gets drafted.”

Q: How does your team determine how to best communicate with the fans? Is there a system in place to have the various social media outlets work together, or are they unique from each other?

Team Two: “It’s interesting. Every sport is kind of unique and different. Women’s basketball here – it’s unbelievable. Our most read recaps on our website are women’s basketball recaps by far. Our fans get the traditional news from Facebook. A lot of our older fans are very Facebook heavy. Our new generation, and how we try to attract to 18 to 30-year-old’s, [use] Instagram [and] Twitter and whatnot. That messaging might be different. But, I do think that every sport is different and unique. Baseball has a little older fanbase at times. Football is a little bit of both. So, it depends. There are different strategies for each sport without a doubt.”

Q: Is there a call center where people can directly go to, or do you all rely on those individual platforms?

Team Two: “We do have [a part of our website] where it’s got everybody’s Facebook, Twitter, Instagram accounts from our coaches to our sports. I guess if they want feedback, we do pay attention to feedback and what people are saying to get a pulse of what’s out there, and what’s being talked about.”

Q: How does your team build the relationship with your consumers on social media, specifically Twitter?

Team Two: “A lot of what we do on Twitter [involves] not just fans, but it’s very recruiting based. We’re trying to sell a message of what our program stands for or what it’s accomplishing. We know a lot of prospective student-athletes are on Twitter and share a lot of the messaging we do. We try to be adapt to hip-hop culture, modern ways

of thinking and doing things and knowing that demographic on Twitter is not necessarily your 40 to 45 year old's – they're more Facebook driven and the data shows that. I think there is a balance there, but the messaging may be a little different for more hip-hop culture type at times.

[Building relationships on Twitter] is the speed of news. It seems like everybody gets their news on Twitter or Facebook. It's the first medium that people go to [so they] can see breaking information. We know how powerful it is. When it's shared and retweeted and liked, that's one of our primary methods of disseminating the information by making it the most primary method these days.”

Q: Does your messaging change based on the on-field fortunes of the team?

Team Two: “Yes. I think [there are] some years when you go in with a veteran team. Some years, you go with a young team. Some years, you have a new coach and it's a rebuilding year. Some years you have a new coach that's taking over a veteran team and you've always gotta be mindful of those things and strategize before the season what your tone and messaging is going to be. If you know it's going to be a tough year, and you might lose a few games, you may back off on a few things that you're doing. You're not going to go out there and promote a guy for the Heisman [Trophy] in August. You're not going to declare championships in your messaging. You're going to be very mindful of what you have to work with.”

Q: Let's say something good on the field happens during the week and you lost the game. How does that change your message?

Team Two: “Obviously, in game we try to promote [the accomplishment] big time. Wins and losses are what matters most to fans. After a game, people don't care about what

record was broke[n] in this game. If you lost to your rival, or your got beat by 20, people care about wins and losses. So, you've gotta be smart about how you're selling those things. Yes, [one of our players], in fact he broke a record, and we lost [that] game. We promoted it a few days after a little more heavy. Ultimately, after games in this conference, if you haven't won, people don't care. They want to know if you win or lose."

Q: Why does your team find it important to build the relationships with your consumers?

Team Two: This question was answered above.

Q: Does your team have a system in place to receive feedback from fans? If so, what is it?

Team Two: This question was answered above.

Q: When controversy strikes, such as a critical call that determines the outcome of a game, how does the organization shape the overall message using Twitter?

Team Two: "We will never criticize officiating, but we might be like 'tough luck. We'll bounce back' [We will continue to be] positive in our messaging. We [won't post] anything negative. I was looking at the [New Orleans] Saints [Twitter] after the call.

There's a professionalism and a balance you have to maintain, and I know some go off the deep end, but we will never be radical like that. When there's a tough call or things happen, we have to be mindful that we are in a conference and there are a certain set of rules and guidelines."

Q: What plan (if any) does your team have in place if a terrorist attack were to take place during the game?

Team Two: “Wow. One – don’t panic; stay calm. We have actually prepared, from a game management standpoint, if there is an emergency – fires, whatever it might be. Two – from a social standpoint, everybody’s following social media. They look at that for ways to keep updated whether it’s delays or things happening. So, trying to be clear in our messaging, but also staying calm and [remembering] we all have a job to do.

Q: Do you guys have any other people that can take over the account if you were to be victim of the attack?

Team Two: “We would hope that we have enough full-time staff that can take the reins and are trained enough to do it. On our staff, yes. Now if a terrorist takes us all out, then I don’t know what we’re going to do. A football game, and we’re all there and we all die – I don’t know. That’s a dire situation.”

Q: Would you say the SEC would take lead?

Team Two: “The SEC would be very valuable in helping us out in terms of messaging. Herb Vincent [is the liaison at the SEC office].

Q: If your organization were to come to you and ask about ways to educate fans about new safety precautions in the stadium, how would you educate them?

Team Two: “Well, one – in this mobile, internet-based world. [We use a specific part of our website]. It’s your central hub for sports. You go there and you have all [of] the maps, policies, diagrams, safety concerns, videos. I think that’s primary number one. Secondly, in-game, we do a lot of that stuff on our videoboards. You see a lot of signage outside of the stadium, and it’s also in our season ticket booklets. So, every season ticket holder gets every piece of messaging that they could possibly know in terms of safety.

Q: Were there any graphics or videos to help teach the fanbase over social?

Team Two: “Yes – this year, and especially with football being such a new role with metal detectors, we were very proactive months ahead of time in getting that messaging out that we were going to do that. We announced it via press release. It was brought up in every speech [and] every presentation that our athletic director did. [We reached out to] traditional media to get them to help spread the message. Then we also did a demo at the stadium for those who were available. Secondly – social media played a big part of that. Not just [a part of the website] where it has diagrams and what not. But [using social media], we tried to humanize it, and make it funny. It was a controversial new endeavor that everyone in the SEC is going to have to adopt here soon. We wanted to get ahead of it. We kind of humanized it. Our football coach and [team mascot] dressed up and walked through a metal detector to make it look funny. It was a way to use some humor in a difficult subject that some people find a nuisance.”

Q: Does the athletics director, players and coaches have a say in how you communicate with the team on Twitter?

Team Two: “Yes, I think we may like to get their input before the season. [We ask them,] ‘what are some things you like? Some things you don’t like?’ Maybe after the season we do the same thing – especially with our coaches. For us to be in-tune, well, what’s their message? [Our coach] talks about a Championship Standard. Every coach has a little different thing. We’ve got to be aligned with their thoughts and philosophies when we are sharing their message on social media.”

Q: What has been the biggest crisis you and your team have had to tackle, and how did you approach it?

Team Two: This question was answered above.

Q: Do you guys have any other people that can take over the accounts if you are unable to?

Team Two: This question was answered above.

Q: If a situation arises, how do you frame the message so that you do not lose the trust of your fanbase, while also reassuring the public?

Team Two: “There are times where we have had to do that. [We’d] film a video [after] a tough season or a tough loss. We put out a statement that one, you admit your faults and your mistakes and move forward. You’re going to try to do better, and you’re not going to hide behind failure. Wins, losses, when someone did something wrong – whatever it is, you admit your mistakes and you move on. You try to be proactive and get in front of it. There are times we have done that – a video or something very sincere [such as] a letter to the fans, email the fans, a graphic, whatever it may be.”

Q: What is your team’s priority when educating the fans during a difficult situation for the team?

Team Two: “One, I guess the priority is that we remember that the reason we do this is for the student-athletes. It’s our job to protect them – priority number one – and be in their best interest. That’s why we do this [profession]. For instance, if a student-athlete passes away, you go to their family. First, you get clearance from their family about how they want to handle things and do things. Then, work with the coach and the family on certain things. So, you have to be mindful [that] no matter what the public says, we’re always looking out for the best interest of our student-athletes, and yes, our fans, but in times like that, the student-athlete is priority number one.”

Q: How does your organization respond to fans who are angry over national anthem controversies?

Team Two: “Well one, I think – that’s a difficult one – well, football is in the locker room obviously. We get complains about that at times. I think you have to be very aligned with what your university – it’s very critical that your athletic department and your university[’s] stance on policies, and things of that nature, are aligned. On campus, the president is never caught off guard. We need to be consistent in our messaging. So, obviously, whatever their input is would be very involved in our input in terms of that stance. At the same time, student-athletes today have so much power and rights as a citizen that they can do what they want to. Now, a lot of times we don’t engage in, I call the ‘trolls.’ The people that will take to Twitter and talk negative and say a lot of things. That’s part of being a social media manager and being involved in that. You have to block out a lot of negativity from fans. Sometimes they’re right, sometimes they’re wrong. But from that standpoint, I think whatever the university’s stance is kind of the line we take.”

Team Three Transcription

Q: Do you run the account solo or do you have a social media team?

Team Three: I’m kind of the primary person, but we have a couple of other people on our staff that will jump in if something comes up and I cannot. So, it is really mostly people based out of the [strategic communications] office if that makes sense. They’re all on the strategic communications team.”

Q: How many people go into making the social media posts, graphics and animations?

Team Three: “Basically, what we do is we utilize – we have [a communication system] called Slack. So that’s where we populate a lot of our ideas and free thinking for our football channel. Basically, in the football creative channel, we have 36 people. Now do all 36 of those people provide content, no. I would say we have three full time graphic designers with one and a half being solely focused on football content. From a video standpoint, we have two. One is more of a creative video type position and another is more of your story teller and feature position. Then we have a staff of three student video interns that work a little bit more with creative, but they are not full time. I would say on a given week there are 10-12 content producers for what we are putting on the football account. But primarily, from the full-time standpoint, I think it’s five or six.”

Q: Whether it be yourself or a team, how would you manage the content? Is there a content calendar?

Team Three: “We meet once a week as a group. We will have representatives from our coaching staff come over. I lead those meetings. We have representation from our strategic communications/SID area. We have representation from our marketing area. We have representation from our video area. We have representation from our graphic design area so we are trying to get all of the areas that we feel social media impacts into a room and talk about what are we doing this week? Then, I take that, and I populate a content calendar for the month. I’ve got a calendar for the month that we go through and do, then we meet every week to talk about execution about what we would like to do. In-season and out of season are wildly different. I think in-season, we are on a structured plan. Ok, we know on Monday we are releasing our game week. We know on Wednesday we are releasing our mini-movie. We know on Thursday we are releasing our hype. Friday we

are releasing our uniform video. On Saturday we know it's gameday. We are kind of more structured a little bit during the season. But during the off-season, that's when a lot of the planning comes in. That's where we start to meet to continue our structure on building hype. Yeah, I try to plan it out. I don't necessarily do it in January, February and March, but as soon as spring camp opens and then the summer time. We try to have everything segmented out so we can stay on schedule with what needs to be done. It's a big collaborative process that allows us to stay on schedule and generate content."

Q: When planning the social media strategy for the year, what is the team's main goal?

Team Three: "I think each platform, one, has a different [pull]. I think the main thing with Twitter is kind of a cesspool, but it's also the easiest way to disseminate a lot of information. I think our foosball coaching staff looks at Twitter as a great recruiting tool because honestly, more than any other sport, I think Twitter impacts your football recruiting the most. Everyone has their own Twitter. Everyone has their own [direct messages]. I think from a Twitter standpoint, we're looking at what we can try and do from a recruiting lens. Everything we are putting out there is with more of a recruiting touch. But, there are some things out there that we are going to put out there from a marketing standpoint. From the informative side, major releases and things like that [will be put on there]. We try and look at the Twitter with more of a recruiting lens with a bit of informative [feel]. From an Instagram standpoint, I think Instagram is the most important thing that we can be doing in today's day and age. I think that's where the kids we are trying to reach are as far as a recruiting age. So, that's 100 percent recruiting focused material. Facebook is our old, what I like to call 'Q-tips' because they have white heads. That's where a lot of our older demographic fans are. That's where we need to be

pumping season tickets, ticket sales and things like that appeal to those 55-year-old people more so. Honestly, Facebook is where we see so much of the negative compared to Twitter and Instagram. It doesn't excite me as much to put things on Facebook, but [there is] a lot of opportunity there to reach people who are buying your tickets. So, you have to continue to do it regardless of how negative some people can be."

Q: Are there any campaigns you have planned on the social media calendar?

Team Three: "I don't know if we 100 percent do campaigns. I think the last major campaign we did was the [specific hashtag] stuff that we unveiled on our account. If you say the [specific hashtag] account, I think everyone is going to know who that is. That's the last major one that we did, and it hit all of our major platforms including our digital website. I think those are the things that from a campaign statement, I don't know. I think mostly we are trying to reflect the voice of what our overarching athletic department mantra is. And that's 'we're gonna out work you. We're gonna do more with less. We're going to develop the players.' Those types of things. We try to have the voice of our head coach on most of the things that we put on social media. Instead of being campaign driven, it's more of getting coach's message across for how he wants his program to be perceived as."

Q: What would you say is the style of how your team communicates? Is it sillier, more serious or evenly done?

Team Three: "I try to encourage as much collaboration and communication and teamwork as possible. I don't think you can do that with a lot of people who are sour grapes, and have bad attitudes. I think you have to keep it fun and engaging for everybody. I think the most important thing is when we get in a room and we all want to

talk – and this is something that I want to shift [going forward] – I don't want two or three people in the room assigning work to content creators. I think that's a backwards approach, and it doesn't make a real good feeling of togetherness or collaboration. What I really want to do is take a concept and talk about it. Then, have everyone pitch their ideas. If someone is really excited about something that they're talking about, that's how you end up assigning work because that person is going to be really excited about that job and want to tackle it and conquer it instead of saying 'hey I need this on this day. Can you get that done?' There's a little bit of that, but mostly, I want it to be everybody feels good about the work they are going to work on and are excited about it. I want to get content that's catered toward somebody's skillset in those meetings and say, 'hey, I know this person is really good at this. Hey, go ahead and run with it and make it your own.' I want to encourage creativity. In our industry, we talk a lot about how it's really taxing, tiring and time consuming. So sometimes, we always try to focus on being efficient and checking the box and getting the job done. At some point if you sacrifice creativity for too much efficiency [at times]. So, we try to encourage as much creativity as we possibly can. We sent out our meeting request for our football meeting next week. I just encouraged everyone to look at things you're seeing other schools doing that you want to try and do, and we can talk about ways we can try and do it. Everyone is encouraged to bring one creative idea to the meeting. Then we go around the table, and we talk about it and see if it's something we want to pursue.”

Q: What has been the biggest crisis you and your team have had to tackle, and how did you approach it?

Team Three: “For us, I’m sure you pay attention to the news, and the biggest thing we ever had [was an incident that has to be kept out to protect the teams identity]. It caused a huge trickle-down effect to a lot of people on campus losing their jobs, but yeah it was pretty ugly. The biggest thing that we had to face was that the large majority [of the nation] thinks that we are a racist school. Then we had the fact that all of our bold conservative fans pulled donations because our football team sided with the more liberal side of everything that was going on with the boycotts. So, we basically alienated everyone with everything that we were doing. We were asked with rebuilding the entire image of the campus and the football team. That’s not an easy thing to do we were the biggest story in sports. It trickled down to the national news more so than just sport as people started losing their jobs. How on Earth do you rebuild from that? That’s where we kind of took the [specific hashtag] brand, that campaign, and [expressed that we] were going to be the blue-collar school that [our state] can connect to. That’s the biggest trouble we were faced with. Honestly, every day, we still see some of the residual effects from that. You’re talking three and a half years later now. It’s crazy, but at the end of the day if you’re not willing to tackle those things and do it then you’re in the wrong industry. So, you’ve got to change perspective, and I think we have – or I guess perception, not perspective – but I think we have. It will always be a challenge to do that with the people that we lost, but we are starting to gain them back. Winning games is the easiest way to do that, but at the end of the day, too, we’re excited about what we are doing socially and digitally to try and do that.”

Q: How does your team determine how to best communicate with the fans?

Team Three: “That’s a good question. One, we do focus groups and things like that. The big thing is that what’s worthy of engagement on social media? Is it the troll that’s getting into your account saying how much you suck because you lose a game to Kentucky on a bogus pass interference call? Is that person worth engaging? Those are the types of things that you run into as you deal with social media. At the end of the day, you need to be able to connect with your fanbase. But at what point do you give these trolls and people who are ultra-negative a voice? I don’t know. I think we try and listen to our fans as much as we can with polls and surveys. But, we have big focus groups with our season ticket holders and we say OK, what’s working in the stadium? That’s the thing: We try to compile data and market research and go from there and figure out what’s the best way to change and make this thing more fan friendly?”

Q: Is there a system in place to have the various social media outlets work together, or are they unique from each other?

Team Three: “No. That’s the one thing that I was kind of put in the position of now. Because what I think we see it in a lot of high education places, is there are conflicting voices on their major accounts. Whether that be – well, let’s put it on a campus side. You have your main campus account, you have your business school and your journalism school, you have your vet school. They’re all tweeting different things with conflicting ideologies. That’s not good for a brand, but with major college athletics, it’s a similar problem as well if you’re all not on the same page. You’re got the person that’s running the football account having a different view of how to run that account than your basketball guy is doing things or how your volleyball person is doing things then it sends mixed messages. To take an overarching brand for your campus, well what’s that going

to be? We kind of decided, hey we are going to be this fully powered university that relates to [our fans]. Those are the types of things that we try to do when identifying our university. We [may] not have all of these things that other schools in the SEC have, but what we do have [are] great people who are driven. We have great coaches that are going to develop players. That's the attitude that we really try to take from a social media standpoint. Our men's basketball account is over the moon at branding what they have done. Our men's basketball guy has done a phenomenal job with that. So that's why each account needs to have its own voice but it all needs to relate back to a common goal that you're all trying to achieve. You know your athletics one is going to attract more for tickets. The main sport accounts are going to [individualize themselves] but they're all going to be [part of the team]. You're going to look at it and you're going to know it's [our team]. That's when you know its consistency and branding comes in with your graphics. Consistency and branding come with your videos. That goes down to things as small as music choice for your videos. Our men's basketball guy, with [the men's basketball head coach], they had an old school hip-hop vibe on their social media feed. It's incredible. That really identifies with our fanbase and a lot of the people they are trying to reach on their social media accounts. So that's just an example – I kind of rambled, but I hope that makes sense.”

Q: How does your team build the relationship with your consumers on social media, specifically Twitter?

Team Three: “I think that you go at it strategically because you don't know what people are digesting. The best thing about Twitter ever is the fact that you have instant gratification for how many people are seeing your stuff [using] analytics. I encourage all

of our people who are running social media to compile analytics for their accounts, specifically Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. I think they are vitally important. Numbers at the end of the day tell us the type of content people like and the type of content people don't like. If we are able to put those things together [then we will be successful] ... I present that in the meetings so that people can know.

“I'll give you another example. We had one of our video guys who insisted upon doing post game interviews with our players and coaches after a game. We would tweet them out and nobody would watch it, nobody would engage in them. We presented that data in the meeting and said ‘is this really the best way to use your time?’ How can we reallocate your resources? Is this really the best use of your time? Then we started turning into your hype-typed plays. What we ended up seeing was we used the interviews would get 1,000 views, but if we turned it into a cool [video] with a hip-hop beat, it would get 25,000 views. That's the difference between [having a plan at the beginning of the year] and this is what we are going to do. We were able to adapt to what we were able to do all season [because we saw what was and what wasn't important]. You don't necessarily need to reach out to your fans to see what they want. All you have to do is look at the numbers. What we saw is that people love hype videos and people love uniform videos. We have tried to [create] more of that stuff over the past couple of years. Those are the types of things that give [you] that instant numbers game. You can do that and analyze based off of it.”

Q: Does your messaging change based on the on-field fortunes of the team?

Team Three: “That's a great question. I always think that's a key answer that we're all trying to figure out how to go about [it]. I mean, you know as well as I do that in this

industry we're as connected to this thing as our fans are. It's hard to not let our personal [feelings get in the way of it]. We had as heart-wrenching of a loss as I've ever been a part of back in October. What do you end up doing? Is it easier to say, 'OK we're shutting it down; we're doing dark?' At the end of the day, you're an informative account too, and you have to get certain [information] out there. Yeah, do I think message and tone [can] certainly be affected by the outcome? Absolutely. But at some point, you have to let the fans be fans and if they want to bitch, you let them bitch. The second part of it is we do what we do. At the end of the day, if we are on a freaking losing streak, we still are going to put out the same type of stuff that we are doing because people come to expect it and the if data backs it up that what we are doing is working, then we are going to continue to do that regardless of what it is. I don't think you can ever let the on-field result effect what you end up doing. You have to continue to put the foot on the gas and keep piling on."

Q: Using the example of a gut-wrenching loss, do you use the final score and go dark or do you continue to keep putting other content out there?

Team Three: "Yeah, I think it's important for your fans to hear from your head coach after a game like that. So, regardless of what happens, you need to have some type of voice from your head coach on that account – win or lose. At the end of the day, I don't know how closely you watched the game, but there comes a point where we had a third and three deep in our own territory. If we had gotten the first down, we would have won the game. He elected to throw the ball, which obviously stopped the clock, and they came down and scored with enough time left. Our fans were just [ripping] him for calling that play. You at least need to get a voice out there from your coach that says, "ok, this is why

we did that.” We also had a similar thing in our bowl game too, where we ran a read option with our running back who had 250 rushing yards on the ground, or the cornerback who is going to be a first-round NFL draft pick. Those are the guys you want making that decision. Not a fourth and one with the game on the line. At least you want to give your coach the voice and to be able to explain what the thought process was there. I don’t think you necessarily have to go dark. I think there are always ways you can spin things – the basketball team loses to, God, I don’t know, Eastern Illinois? I don’t think you tweet something like “ah, tough one tonight against a team full of experienced seniors.” You’re just opening yourself up to get your ass kicked by your fan base. At that point, just tweet the final score and move on. Tweet your head coach press conference or whatever. At the end of the day, then you kind of go dark. I do think there is a type of importance that needs to be placed on our page. You can’t just shut it down. At the end of the day, engagement is important too. There are still opportunities for that.”

Q: Does your team have a system in place to receive feedback from fans? If so, what is it?

Team Three: “No, we really don’t have anything like that ... No, we don’t have anything that we kind of monitor. Other than the posts and what we see in the comments – but yeah, we really don’t have much of a system there.”

Q: When controversy strikes, such as a critical call that determines the outcome of a game, how does the organization shape the overall message using Twitter?

Team Three: “I think [putting the coaches press conference after a tough loss] is the best route to go. You can’t be critical from your account, especially for a college game. I think for the pro level, you have a little more [wiggle room] there. First of all, I think if you’re

doing football or men's basketball and you're tweeting a play-by-play during the game, you're really doing it wrong. I think it needs to be a supplement because most people are watching the game. It's not a wrestling account where that's how people are getting [the information] on what's happening. They're all watching. You need to supplement [the information] for what's going on. Everyone kind of talks about the Florida thing a couple of years ago where we were kicking the crap out of them up here, and they tweeted out a gif about 'this is fine, everything is fine' and it wasn't. [That wasn't a good look]. I think at the pro-level, that might be OK. But yeah, I think there are tactful ways to do that."

Q: What plan (if any) does your team have in place if a terrorist attack were to take place during the game?

Team Three: "Actually, I can't speak on a lot of it. From a social media standpoint, I think we would have to inform our fans and let them know what's going on. The second part is I know our game operations people have all sorts of evacuation plans, emergency plans, emergency reaction response – they work with our teams and all of that stuff. I can't really give you a lot of details for what they do because I do not play in that role, but I know that they have steps in place for how they would go about it."

Q: Do you guys have any other people that can take over the accounts if you are unable to?

Team Three: "No, I've never thought about that. But now I have. So, no, no we don't ... I think it's a good question, and is something I have never thought of. Our campus folks, the PR team for them, they obviously have a really great emergency response-type system. The official [team] account typically puts something out, then they have a [school] alert account. It's all tied [together]. You get a direct message, you get a text,

you get a notification, and I think some people get an emergency alert from those guys. The campus [takes a lot of that responsibility]. But no, I have never thought about it from an athletics standpoint if something like that were to go on. I'm putting it on my to-do list."

Q: If your organization were to come to you and ask about ways to educate fans about new safety precautions in the stadium, how would you educate them?

Team Three: "We would get it out. Now, we basically do that every year. We have a site called [Team name] Gameday, where it has a lot of our information. So, we try to put out a fan primer before every game, and that has emergency evacuation type stuff on there. That stuff is readily available for our fans."

Q: Do you guys ever get emergency material to post from a visual aspect?

Team Three: Oh, no question – all the time. We usually would do that from the football account because like I said, we use the Twitter account for more of your recruiting type and coaches voice. But that's what our main [team] athletics account would be for. [In the place of a video or a graphic, it would let everyone know what they need]. We would retweet it, though."

Q: Does the athletics director, players and coaches have a say in how you communicate with the team?

Team Three: "Our main athletic director delegates it to our chief communications operator. He is my boss so he kind of handles a lot of that stuff. But yeah, the reason that we do those content meetings – we do those for most of our sports that have massive Twitter followings. So that way, the coaches or whoever they designate from their staff. A lot of time it's a [defensive operations] person. At times it's someone from your

recruiting area or whatever it is. They have the option to send a representative. But a lot of it comes from personal relationships that you have from your players and your coaches, too. Sometimes, I think it gets lost on the social media thing. You can't just have your content when you're sitting behind a desk all day. I think your content producers need to be out, be around your kids, be around your coaches and see what's going on. If they're not willing to do that, then frankly they're not good content creators. I think the easiest way to do a lot of what we're doing is to tell stories, and you can do that a lot of different ways. That's shifted so much from what we're doing on social with social media. But, the more engaged our content creators are – I'd love to have a perfect system in a perfect world where you'd have a video person that is embedded in each team. You have graphic designers that are embedded in each team. In a perfect world, that's how you would do things. So, I think it's important to have those relationships with your coaches and your student athletes to get that done.”

Q: If a situation arises, how do you frame the message so that you do not lose the trust of your fanbase, while also reassuring the public?

Team Three: “Oh man, that's a tough question. I think each situation is different. The biggest thing that you have to do in a situation like that is to look at the issue on both sides and dissect it. What is the easiest way to disseminate a message that is going to alienate the least amount of people? Whatever that may be, while staying true to your values and your principles. Obviously, 2015 was unique for us with that. We pissed a lot of people off, but a lot of people were made happy. Ultimately at the end of the day, you have to look at the issue in the middle and look at everything with a very even lens [or] objective.”

Q: What is your team's priority when educating the fans during a difficult situation for the team?

Team Three: "I think it's doing it tactfully. I saw it yesterday where Oregon had a volunteer assistant coach passed way [who was] part of their softball team. You just get it out and you say what happened, but I think you have to check with everybody to make sure this information is OK to put out. What do we want to put out? Do we put out a statement from who? I think there is a plan that goes into it. Again, each case is different – a suicide versus a car accident. It's always going to be different, but you've got to be willing to say, 'OK, I need to talk to [various people] and the family to figure out what they want. Then you go on from there. I do think there are people that try and piggyback some of that stuff from other sport accounts to try and gain engagement, and I think that's bad manners."

How does your organization respond to fans who are angry over national anthem controversies?

Team Three: "National Anthem? Oh man. Luckily, we haven't had an example like that here. Now, the closest thing that we have had is that we are a Nike school and people are against Nike because of the [Collin] Kaepernick thing. But, we don't get a lot of that, and honestly, it's better to just ignore it. You're not going to change anyone's opinion on something like that."

Team Four Transcription

Q: Do you run the account solo or do you have a social media team?

Team Four: "We have a staff that handles that."

Q: Whether it be yourself or a team, how would you manage the content? Is there a content calendar?

Team Four: “Yes. We look at the calendar to see what’s happening with practices and things like that and making sure that we have content that goes up every single day that makes sense for what’s going on in the season. We also, for some of our long-term emotional fury-type things for trailers and things like that, we try and plan that out – at least the ones like homecoming and things like that when those dates are going to be – to the feel of the video and the content comes with those types of games. They can shift obviously, if it’s a big win or anything like that, we can shift from one week to the next. It’s certainly not set in stone, but also with NFL guys and things like that, we are on top of the news and conversations that are constantly coming out about those guys. For instance, we had something yesterday or the day before with the most former players in the Super Bowl this year. So, making sure that we always have that stuff coming out and making sure that our calendar kind of aligns with other types of calendars.”

Q: How many people go into making the social media posts, graphics and animations?

Team Four: “No. All of our social and our creative – pretty much our creative team handles graphics, video and posing and things like that. Including students, we have three full time. One full time designer, two full time video folks and we probably have somewhere between 10-12 total, give or take – That’s just for football. If you count the athletics side, you could, depending on the season and time of year, probably add five and seven more people to that.”

Q: When planning the social media strategy for the year, what is the team’s main goal?

Team Four: “A lot of it is to entertain our fans. A lot of it is recruiting based to make sure that we are putting content out to show what it’s like here at [school name].”

Q: Are there any campaigns you have planned on the social media calendar?

Team Four: “We have things that we come up with. This kind of year is a little bit different obviously with it being not quite practice yet and things like that. You know, leading up to our spring game, we will obviously have content leading up to that, [which] will be kind of spring game focused. Moving into late spring [and] summer, we are giving fans the taste of football that fans can’t get because football isn’t happening.”

Q: Would you say that your campaigns are specific to the event its leading up to?

Team Four: “I mean, currently, yeah. The Super Bowl is a big deal for the players who are here and are going to be in it. The spring game and spring practice coming up, those types of things. During the season, it is a little different because there is more happening. We have a little more access to put more of that type of stuff out with it being a trailer [or] it being practice. [It could even be] something the players are doing such as community service being out there in their communities or things like that.”

Q: What would you say is the style of how your team communicates? Is it sillier, more serious or evenly done?

Team Four: “It’s a little bit of both. I think you have to understand that what we are doing is [that] we want to be taken seriously. Football is a very intense sport, but also for us in showing that. These are also young guys, 18-22-year-olds, and we want to make sure we show those personalities as well because they do have a see two very unique personalities. We want to make sure when we do these types of things that we can certainly show those personalities and things like that often. Making sure that we balance

[it]. Obviously, everything we do is serious. We take everything very seriously, but we want to make sure that [we show] a lighter side. Being a student athlete at [team name] is more than just the sport that you play. It is well rounded, and showing those personalities and the interests of kids. Showing what it's like to be here. Showing the different programs that we have to help our student athletes get jobs, putting them outside of business leaders. Things that we have to do to help them do that. I think that is just something really important. You try to strike that really good balance with what it's like to be a player, what it's like to be a person, and what it's like to be a student.”

Q: Does the athletics director, players and coaches have a say in how you communicate with the team?

Team Four: “I think that from the players [standpoint] we do ask them what they like to see. We obviously want to make sure that we are staying current. As we get, I mean myself, get further and further away from the age group, we want to make sure that the content we are producing is still really relevant. We do ask our players those types of things. What do they like, and [what do] they not like? But as far as communication, I think we are really fortunate in that our bosses, athletics directors and things like that pretty much let us do. They trust us to do our job. Any time it's content that's from practice or something from the coaches themselves when they are in a meeting room, you want to make sure they see it just to make sure that nothing is in there that they don't want [the public to see]. If you're in a team meeting room with the quarterbacks, you want to make sure that whatever you're showing and talking about is something that isn't going to give away a game plan and things like that. That is something we want to make sure we run by them. Obviously, as a whole, we are all in-tune to those things. We've

been dealing, for the last couple of years, with this coaching staff. We're pretty in tune to what they are looking for."

Q: How does your team determine how to best communicate with the fans? Is there a system in place to have the various social media outlets work together, or are they unique from each other?

Team Four: "We do it based on where people are and what our interactions are a lot and what makes sense for each platform. Each platform [is a little different]. If it's something that's in real time, it's probably not going to go on Facebook. It's going to stick to Twitter, or IG story. Just pure – one or two photos from practice probably isn't going to go to Twitter, it's going to go to Instagram. There is crossover at times, but we also try to make sure that there is content specific to each platform because people consume it differently on other platforms. The demographics for each platform are a little bit different."

Q: How does your team build the relationship with your consumers on social media, specifically Twitter?

Team Four: "Making sure we give the people what they want. Give them access to the things they can't get access to, and also strictly talk to them if we have questions. Making sure that if we can't answer it, we try to. If somebody talks about us or tags us in something that we can communicate and engage with them to make sure that we try to do that as often as possible and let them know that they are just as much a part of us as we are to them and making sure that they know that they matter. I think that is something that we really try to key in on. Overtime, you look at the content that works and the content that doesn't and making sure that we can show fans enjoying a game for the first

time or show pictures at [the team walk]. If someone says, ‘I’m coming to my first game this weekend, I’m so excited!’ making sure that a like or a comment that says, ‘oh, we can’t wait to see you there. Don’t forget [the team walk] is at 2:15’ or whatever. Just trying to let them realize that social is something that gives people access to a team that they never really had before. We’re creating more and more access points to it, so we want to make sure that people do get to use them and see those.”

Q: Why does your team find it important to build the relationships with your consumers?

Team Four: “They’re the ones that come to the games. If it wasn’t for them, we wouldn’t be here. I think those people spend their time and their energy and their resources and things like that to come to a game to cheer to travel, to come cheer us on. That’s really important. It is important for people to realize that they do matter so to speak. They matter to us because it is really important. They can choose to spend their time and resources in any way that they choose. Whether it’s spending three and a half hours watching the game on TV or spending seven and half hours in [our school town], or driving 12 and a half hours to wherever – they’re choosing to spend that time, spend those resources on us, and we need to make sure that ... we want them to know that we appreciate that. Because, we can’t do it without them.”

Q: Does your messaging change based on the on-field fortunes of the team?

Team Four: “Yeah, I mean you try not to stray away from who you are at the core. The way we lost a game, we’re not going to be nearly as excited obviously. The messaging changes a little bit, but the tone and the voice and who we are doesn’t change. If it’s a

loss, then instead of saying ‘back at it’ you say ‘time to reset.’ You just change it a little bit based on what happened based on wins and losses.”

Q: What has been the biggest crisis you and your team have had to tackle, and how did you approach it?

Team Four: “Honestly, it’s making sure that copyrighted music [is used correctly]. Luckily, we’re good now, but what ended up happening is that there was some music that was on a page from several years ago that got caught in a copyrighted music thing. Our Twitter page got suspended for a second. We kind of had to go back and spend a very long time looking at every single thing that we posted that ever had copyrighted music no matter if it was two and a half or five and a half years ago or six years ago and making sure that every single bit of it was taken down. Just to avoid that in the past because that became such a big focus. Like I said, we knew it was, and we had already taken the steps to make sure it hadn’t happened. But obviously, we didn’t really think about something that was posted two years ago. We really didn’t think about that type of stuff. Spending time to make sure that [it] was taken down and ensuring that it would happen going forward [was important].”

Q: Does your team have a system in place to receive feedback from fans? If so, what is it?

Team Four: “I don’t know if it’s really a system. We monitor everything. We monitor comments and things like that so it’s not like we [don’t look at it]. I don’t think it would be possible in game to see every single thing that’s talking about [our team], ever. But, we do see feedback of the ‘hey we like this,’ ‘we don’t like this.’ [Through that] we see what works and what doesn’t.”

Q: When controversy strikes, such as a critical call that determines the outcome of a game, how does the organization shape the overall message using Twitter?

Team Four: “We can’t comment on anything so we won’t say anything [such as] ‘oh that was a bad call!’ We just kind of take it as what was called on the field and leave it at that. Obviously, our fans can get angry and mad, and we let them vent about it. We tend to not even touch it.”

Q: What plan (if any) does your team have in place if a terrorist attack were to take place during the game?

Team Four: “From the football account, there really isn’t one. That messaging would probably switch to our athletic handles and our university accounts. A lot of those decisions and things like that would move to police, and God willing that doesn’t happen, the messaging and things like that – so much of that would go through the uniform voice so there wouldn’t be as many people. There would be a lot of sharing and retweeting from law enforcement and the university and things like that so that we don’t have mixed messages going out at the same time.”

Q: Do you guys have any other people that can take over the accounts if you are unable to?

Team Four: “Yeah, there’s more than one person that has access to the account. [They would not all be in the same place at the same time].”

Q: If your organization were to come to you and ask about ways to educate fans about new safety precautions in the stadium, how would you educate them?

Team Four: “We’ve actually done this before. It was with our clear bag [policy] and things like that with the reasoning for why we were moving to that policy. We did it with

a video showing what is there. We did a couple of versions. One that was informational that said this is what you can have, here's a picture of it. Here's what you can put in it. We also have a set of uniform graphics that goes from all of our venues that do have clear bag policies in place that are uniform for every account so that we are not sending out mixed messages and things like that. Once we had the understanding that the clear bag policy was going to be in effect we also had a couple of slightly funnier ones so that people would see it as a reminder and things like that.”

Q: If a situation arises, how do you frame the message so that you do not lose the trust of your fanbase, while also reassuring the public?

Team Four: “For us, it’s making sure that we are as honest and transparent as we can be knowing that there can be times where we may not be able to say all of the information that we need. But, there is an understanding that we try to be as transparent as possible and try to be as honest with our fans as possible.”

Q: What is your team’s priority when educating the fans during a difficult situation for the team?

Team Four: “I think it depends on the thing. Obviously, a coaching change and something happening to a player whether they are injured or something worse – I think it does change. For us, it’s all about being as honest as we can be about things. If it’s something, for instance this isn’t football related, we had a former student-athlete who passed away in a car accident yesterday. She was a softball player. For us, that tone is a little bit different than if it was if [there] was a coaching change. For us, it’s reading the situation, understanding what the situation is and taking the right tone to make sure we

disseminate the information in the best way that we can with obviously the most respectful way that we can.”

Q: How does your organization respond to fans who are angry over national anthem controversies?

Team Four: “For us, a lot of times we let fans be fans and be angry because we can’t get into the weeds too much with that. We can’t weigh into every single thing. People are mad. There have obviously been instances when perhaps missed calls or controversial things have happened. At the end of the day, things like that we can’t change. Things that happened on the field are things that can’t change and we kind of take them for what they are and let our fans be angry.”

Team Five Transcription

Q: Do you run the account solo or do you have a social media team? Whether it be yourself or a team, how would you manage the content?

Team Five: “We have a social media team, but I am the one that posts 98 percent. We have a team that comes up with content, but it’s all sent to me so that all of the spelling is correct.”

Q: Is there a content calendar?

Team Five: “That’s kind of tricky. We meet each week and go through what we are doing. That’s the way we kind of keep our calendar so there isn’t a specific calendar per say but we go through when things are going out and what needs to be created.”

Q: How many people go into making the social media posts, graphics and animations?

Team Five: “We have one graphic designer in our athletic department that’s strictly for football. Then we have one guy in our football office that does all of the recruiting

graphics that is able to do graphics as well, so that's two. Then we hire a company on gameday that does our animated graphics for graphics, scoring and that kind of thing. That is with Infographic.”

Q: When planning the social media strategy for the year, what is the team's main goal?

Team Five: “For the year, we usually start now. The Super Bowl is when we start moving into our next years ‘theme’ per say. Once the Super Bowl hits, we put out a Super Bowl commercial. Once that hits, we kind of go into our next year, and our goal is to just provide the most brand and content that we can in order for recruits to like what we’re doing, our players to have the best experience and for our fans to be able to know what’s going on with [our team name] football.”

Q: Are there any campaigns you have planned on the social media calendar?

Team Five: “Well, we do have a Super Bowl commercial coming out. When I say Super Bowl commercial, it’s a commercial that will run across [our state], regionally, then we will put it out across our platforms. That kind of starts our campaign and we usually have a hashtag. That was something that we wanted our fans and our recruits to not only get up and be supportive of your team, but like ‘get up when you fall,’ ‘get up and get hyped,’ ‘get up out of your seat,’ ‘it’s time to get up, let’s get going.’ That kind of thing.

“Our head coach said in our bowl game in our first series of the game when [the other team] tried a fake punt and didn’t get it. He yelled out – and the video camera just happened to see him – and he was like, ‘bring it on.’ That kind of became our mantra of you bring it on. We’re doing a Super Bowl commercial sort of with that, and our hashtag will be something similar with that. So that will sort of be our campaign for this next year.”

Q: What would you say is the style of how your team communicates? Is it sillier, more serious or evenly done?

Team Five: “We are more serious than most social media accounts. [Our head coach] doesn’t like silly. He likes blue collar, hard workers, work ethic is his thing. He knows when there is a time that we can kind of goof around on social media and when there’s not, but we stay more toward the serious note of just facts, things we are doing. Videos [that] we can put out may be a little bit fun, but we aren’t going to be doing much really crazy, silly things.”

Q: Does the athletics director, players and coaches have a say in how you communicate with the team?

Team Five: “Really, our AD gives [our head coach] that power. If we were to do something, and our AD didn’t like it he would let us know. He doesn’t have to see everything we are putting out. We do have players who are on a leadership council that we go to if we have a question about some social media things or things that they want to see out. We do ask them. The leadership council has the voice of the entire team. That’s about 10 guys. [Our head coach] lets us know too. We also have a criteria of who we are going to promote and who we are not. You have to do what’s right on and off the field for us to promote you on social media.”

Q: How does your team determine how to best communicate with the fans? Is there a system in place to have the various social media outlets work together, or are they unique from each other?

Team Five: “Well, we do kind of put everything together. For example, we try to steer Instagram more toward recruiting especially Instagram story. That’s more for a recruiting

feel. Facebook is what our kids say ‘older people’ [use]. Our alumni [has] a former players Facebook page that we utilize but a lot of our graphics, we post on everything. But, the story for Instagram is definitely for recruiting. We have gone away from Snapchat now that there’s story on Instagram. I actually let more of the millennials run the Instagram story because they’re all in that world. That can be more in the millennial lingo of recruiting. We also use a system called INFLUNCR. Which has really, really helped us in allowing pictures to be shared with every single person on the team so that their social media is more [team] based. Now, they have access to all of the pictures that we tag them in, and they’re able to share them right from INFLUNCR onto their social media accounts. It really is helpful [with] as before, I had to physically download the photos, text them to the guys, and it was consuming my life. INFLUNCR is starting to sign a lot of schools. We were the first school to do it, and now it is just a great process. You just have to have someone in your office to be able to tag the photos. That’s the only thing.”

Q: Who is the millennial for the IG story?

Team Five: “Most of the time it’s a full-time staffer, but on gameday, what I have is a group of student workers. They are allowed to capture all types of things on their own video and photos, but everything has to be sent to the full-timer to put onto the story. We do have the students capture the videos, but they aren’t allowed to post it by themselves. We want to see everything before it goes out.”

Q: How does your team build the relationship with your consumers on social media, specifically Twitter?

Team Five: “That’s a good question. We just try to be consistent in our posting. We’re never going to put anybody down. We’re going to try and be factual. We’re trying to have the best content, videos and just when a team wins, you start really, really seeing your numbers on Twitter. We don’t engage very much back-and-forth with fans, but try to be consistent in what we post so that fans are continually adding us and seeing that we are a program that can be consistent. I use that again, but that’s how we engage with our fans. We try to use the same hashtags and just continue building. As our team gets better, then our Twitter account gets better.”

Q: Why does your team find it important to build the relationships with your consumers?

Team Five: This question was answered earlier.

Q: Does your messaging change based on the on-field fortunes of the team?

Team Five: “That’s a good one, too. I will say that we may have to back up as I’m thinking about this. I will say that if we lose a game, we’re not going to be putting a whole lot out. We’re going to put the final score and then it’s going to be done. Because we find that you’re just opening yourself up for bad tweets that have [at our team handle] in them. If we don’t put them up, then there’s nothing for anybody to @ us at – That type of thing.

“I’m going to have to say yes, it does. When we are doing well, we are busting out tweets left and right. Thinking of more graphics – what can we do? When we had [two players], and they were doing well and our team was winning, we were trying to put out as much content on our guys that we could. When we lost to [a team] or we lost to

[another team], you may see a little bit of stuff, but not much. Our messaging does kind of change as far as the season goes.”

Q: Does your team have a system in place to receive feedback from fans? If so, what is it?

Team Five: “No, we really don’t. I, myself and our marketing guy do look at the apps every day. If it’s a question that I can easily answer, I’ll answer them back. If it is negative things, then no. We let it go. We don’t say anything; we don’t reply back. We will only block somebody if they are using very, very foul language. Otherwise, we are going to let anybody say what they want to say. There really isn’t a system in place other than me and our marketing guy. We’ll go back and forth [checking with one another].”

Q: What has been the biggest crisis you and your team have had to tackle, and how did you approach it?

Team Five: “Well, obviously [when] dealing with children and their tweets, that’s a crisis that we are – I wouldn’t say crisis, but we are dealing with their posts on social media where they aren’t thinking. Those kind of things of having to get with the athletes, get them to take it down, explain to them why they had to take it down, possibly issue an apology – we’ve had to do that a couple of times this year. Now, we do social media training with our guys every year. 99 percent of them are great. Even the ones who slip up, it’s stuff that they weren’t even thinking would be an issue. Those are the kind of things – If I’m having to think – that’s really the only thing that has been considered a crisis is getting with the athlete and explaining why something needs to come down and making them understand it and not be mad.”

Q: When controversy strikes, such as a critical call that determines the outcome of a game, how does the organization shape the overall message using Twitter?

Team Five: “We don’t. Our AD would not want that. Our coach would not want that. We will just do some kind of blanket tweet of, ‘hey, let’s get back to work.’ That’s one of Coach’s mantras. [Another is] to keep your head down and do your work type of thing. We let the media deal with that. We won’t deal with a controversial call. We did have ... I don’t know if you saw last year’s bowl game where [our coach] touched the referee and got kicked out in the first quarter? Then there was a game where a head coach grabbed the referee, but nothing happened. Our group kind of went together on text message and [said] ‘let’s put up an emoji that just has the thinking man emoji, and that’s it.’ We did do that, and we got thousands of retweets. Everyone knew what it meant without [us] saying anything. That’s about the only time we’ve ever done something like that.”

Q: What plan (if any) does your team have in place if a terrorist attack were to take place during the game?

Team Five: “We have a football management group that we all are on the same radio channel. We have a system in place on gameday where if something ever were to happen, we have one voice that would tell us what to do. Then, we have one guy in our strategic communication office that would tweet something, and we would retweet it. It would come from [our team] Athletics and not [the] football [account].”

Q: Do you guys have any other people that can take over the accounts if you fell victim?

Team Five: “Besides me and the people in football? Yeah. The group that we meet [with] once a week that is in our football communicators meeting, all of those people have

access to Twitter. I'm just the one that's usually pressing send. Everyone has the passcode and can do something on Twitter if need be."

Q: If your organization were to come to you and ask about ways to educate fans about new safety precautions in the stadium, how would you educate them using Twitter?

Team Five: "We kind of do that with the clear bag policy, with the new stadium policies. We have graphics made that are easy for our fans to understand. We also will put links up to our website with the story, possibly a video where they can understand new policies. We try to make it as easy as possible for fans to have the information and have it in more than one place. So, it could start on Twitter, but [then there would be a link that would direct them to the website]. Then there would be more information there. We would keep putting it up, putting it up, putting it up so that they could see it and putting it out everywhere we could – a news release, Facebook, radio shows, those types of things. Using Twitter, we would just keep putting up graphics and posts and making sure they saw it several times."

Q: If a situation arises, how do you frame the message so that you do not lose the trust of your fanbase, while also reassuring the public?

Team Five: "That's a good one – I think our strategic communications group and our, what we now call, communications and PR group ... I think us working together on formulating a message and having one voice in that message is the best way to do any kind of PR crisis is to have one person talk, one-person answer questions and not having a bunch of people so that it doesn't get confusing. I think that we would just try to be very factual and ensuring our fans that we have the policy in place, and here's what

you're going to have to do. That message is just repeated, repeated, repeated, and there's no confusion."

Q: What is your team's priority when educating the fans during a difficult situation for the team?

Team Five: "Well we try to communicate with our team and make sure they have facts. We know how social media works. There [are] rumors, rumors, rumors so we try to get ahead of the rumor by having a team meeting. For instance, we had a coach and a player both diagnosed with cancer on the same day. We knew it was starting to get around so we called an emergency team meeting. We made sure that all of our guys head it straight from the coaches mouths of 'here's what's happening. There is no other information so whatever you hear, it's not true.' Or, 'these guys don't want this on Twitter right now. So please don't tweet.' Then when it was appropriate [we let them know that we were doing media next week and once we do that you can tweet what you want]. We just try to communicate and we have a system in place to with TeamWorks that allows you to text all of the players. If we need any message sent out immediately to the players on their phones, we can put that in TeamWorks and send it out in two seconds. It's all about communication and making sure that the players know what's going on."

Q: How does your organization respond to fans who are angry over national anthem controversies?

Team Five: "We just don't address it because what we do is the same thing we've been doing with our league policy. We're not out there for the national anthem, but some of our players like to stand at the door of the locker room and look out. That's their right, and we let them do it. We're not out there during the anthem, so we do not have anything

to comment on. We will always continue to play the anthem as long as that's what we are supposed to do. So, we really don't comment on it. We just try to keep putting the information out that is positive, and if one of our players wants to talk about it, that's his right. But as a team, we're not going to get into political issues like that."

Team Six Transcription

Q: Do you run the account solo or do you have a social media team?

Team Six: "We have probably four people who contribute to the football account. Myself, we have social media person that contributes. We have someone from our football staff that contributes, and one from our communications team that contributes."

Q: How do you manage the content? Is there a content calendar?

Team Six: "We do not have a strict content calendar. We certainly have an overall calendar of things we have going on, and it's an all-encompassing thing when it comes to football. We will know when season tickets are going on sale on the calendar. We'll know that [a player's] birthday is on a [specific] date, and we will want to do a specific post on that. We do not have a calendar that we are following daily."

Q: How many people go into making the social media posts, graphics and animations?

Team Six: "I'd say there were probably two to three more who contribute creating the actual graphic but maybe don't do the posting."

Q: When planning the social media strategy for the year, what is the team's main goal?

Team Six: "Our first goal is to make sure that our accounts are entertaining. I think there's always this internal debate whether they should be informative first or entertaining first or engaging first. I think we have taken the approach across all of our

accounts that first and foremost, people are going there to be entertained. Secondly, if we can provide them some information, we'd want to do that as well. Probably our third priority has been conversing with people on a one-on-one fashion. Maybe it isn't as important to us as we'd like for it to be because of our current staff structure hasn't allowed us to allocate as much time to that as we'd like.

“With football specifically, since that's what we are narrowing in on, there is certainly the recruiting aspect of it. It's important to make things come across cool and to present your football brand in a really positive and fun light. Our football guy specially spends a lot of time trying to convey the values of our program, and the values of [our head coach]. They try to convey that on Twitter.”

Q: Are there any campaigns you have planned on the social media calendar?

Team Six: “There are. Our kind of overall campaign really that had started last year that is kind of the sub-brand that has been created with football. Over the next couple of months, our main goal is to introduce our new signing class to our fans. It's probably going to end up being the highest ranked class in the history of [our team name] football. One of our goals has been to not just have signing day be that one day. We're really trying to extend that content and that excitement around that class over the next couple of months. So really that [is the] campaign we will be using until summer time. Then we will ramp up. We particularly don't have a name for this campaign, but it will be focused around getting people excited for the gameday atmosphere again.”

Q: What would you say is the style of how your team communicates? Is it sillier, more serious or evenly done?

Team Six: “That’s a good question. I would not label it as silly. I think we’ve made a point that there’s a line we don’t want to cross. We don’t intend to be serious. I definitely say it’s a middle ground.”

Q: Does the athletics director, players and coaches have a say in how you communicate with the team?

Team Six: “Our athletic director? No. Players? Probably not. I would say coaches, yes. I would say there are certain messages they will communicate to us or to the football staff a particular message that’s important to them to want to get out at that time.”

Q: How does your team determine how to best communicate with the fans? Is there a system in place to have the various social media outlets work together, or are they unique from each other?

Team Six: “It’s always a little bit of crossover among those three, but we do try to do something a little different on all of them. Facebook has always been a huge news repository for us. Pretty much every article that we have about our football team, we will post to our football Facebook page. We certainly wouldn’t do that on Instagram, and we would probably only do it half or so of the time on Twitter. Really, we’ve had varying philosophies on Instagram when it comes to our main athletics account versus our football account. Our main athletics account has only done the best of the best. Maybe the top five percent of content actually makes it to Instagram. Only the best of the best photos and the best of the best moments. With football, we have definitely taken a higher volume approach, and it does end up being a fairly frequent stream of highly edited photos and highly edited photos. For the most part, we still maintain that professional threshold we have tried to establish on Instagram.”

Q: How does your team build the relationship with your consumers on social media, specifically Twitter?

Team Six: “I think on Twitter specifically it’s very important to show empathy. There’s a very fine line, especially when you’re running a football team account, to convey that you understand how they’re feeling but doing that in a way where you’re not downplaying how much effort the players and the coaches are putting into the program. We had a really bad football season. [This team finished with a record that cannot be said to avoid giving the team’s identity away]. You don’t ever want to make it sound like you are upset with the players and the coaches. We are the players and coaches. But you want it to come across that you are feeling what they are feeling and really, we’re conveying that there’s this sense of hope. You don’t want to come across like you don’t know what’s going on. So, you have to recognize the struggle. If there’s ever a way to twist it in a positive light, of course you want to do that. But first, I think you need to establish that empathy factor, especially when you had a really difficult season like we did.”

Q: Why does your team find it important to build the relationships with your consumers?

Team Six: “Consumers are the lifeblood of our athletic program. There are a lot of different levels of those people, but they are all important to us in other ways. Certainly, with an account like football, you have to appeal to people who are your season ticket holders and donors. You have to appeal to recruits because at the end of the day, recruiting is really the thing that fuels it after that. But then, you also have to remember that there’s this audience that is not a season ticket or a donor yet. But that eventually, they’re going to get to that point in their life. Once they get to that point in their life, we

need to make sure that they have a strong enough relationship with our brand and really younger people – kids and young adults. They create relationships and establish feelings for sports teams particularly around the content that they consume on a daily basis. It's really important that we continue to fuel that.”

Q: Does your messaging change based on the on-field fortunes of the team?

Team Six: “Yeah, it does change. I think I kind of touched on some of my answer a few questions ago. You don't want to come across as you're not posting enough. But when you're [this season record], you cannot post like you're [another season record]. You cannot come across as unaware or tone deaf of what's going on with the program. I think that when you're struggling, your message is a lot more subdued. When you're doing really well, that's absolutely the time when you need to capitalize, and we probably post at a much higher frequency when we're doing really well.”

Q: Does your team have a system in place to receive feedback from fans? If so, what is it?

Team Six: “Not particularly on social media. Because I'm sure you heard, and maybe somebody else said this, the SEC fan feedback survey goes out to all season ticket holders of SEC schools and then we will get back the information that pertains to [our] fans. There are various points where we will solicit feedback on Twitter. Particularly on gamedays, we treat it as a customer service too. But I would not say that there is a hard methodology in place to get that feedback from social at least.”

Q: What has been the biggest crisis you and your team have had to tackle, and how did you approach it?

Team Six: “That’s good. I guess the biggest crisis I’d have to say was during a week or two stretch in 2017. Our athletics director was fired, and then our head coach was fired. I don’t know if that is a crisis per say, but that was definitely a hard time to manage the accounts. I’m knocking on wood right now, but I think that is the biggest one we’ve had.”

Q: When controversy strikes, such as a critical call that determines the outcome of a game, how does the organization shape the overall message using Twitter?

Team Six: “In the moment, we would probably tweet something that showed our disappointment without calling out the referees or someone specifically. We’d probably call it out in a passive aggressive way. One of those times where only in the moment would you know what that tweet meant. It would be decrepit. I think after that, we probably wouldn’t talk about it very much. We would probably accept it for what it really was. In a lot of moments like that, it’s important to take one whatever the message of the head coach is on something like that. There may be a point where we are waiting to hear what coach says after the game and then whatever he says after the game in the press conference. That’s the message that we would convey on social.”

Q: What plan (if any) does your team have in place if a terrorist attack were to take place during the game?

Team Six: “Wow. We have a really good internal communications system. I am constantly watching and listening to things on social during gamedays, and I have a direct line to our event management team that sits in the control room. We also have one of my social media students that we actually put in the control room with the police officers, with the police management staff where they have all of those surveillance cameras on screens just so that [this] person is in tune with social media in that room. So that would

probably be our level of contribution. We have a text message system that we use in the stadium where fans can text anonymously about anything in their section or anything that they see out of the ordinary. Certainly, the event management team has those kinds of extreme plans in place.”

Q: Do you guys have any other people that can take over the accounts if you fell victim?

Team Six: “At a home game, probably not. No. I would think that everybody that has access to the account would likely be in the stadium. Now, we do have a couple of people that do have passwords to the account that are not actively using them. Our senior associate AD for public relations, I always make sure that he has the important passwords incase anything ever happens to me. Now, I guess I don’t know if he would be affected by the terrorist attack or not, but no. The likely answer is no.”

Q: If your organization were to come to you and ask about ways to educate fans about new safety precautions in the stadium, how would you educate them?

Team Six: “[We would] probably create a series of engaging short-form videos. We’d create some videos with a lot of text over the top to make sure that if it was something like a voiceover that people [didn’t have to be] using the phone. They could listen to it on mute – that our message is actually getting to them. I’d probably have a heavy email communications plan. For most of things like that, email is our most effective method for things like that. Social will certainly support, and we’re happy to, but we cannot expect social to necessarily provide that message. We certainly rely on emailing directly to those consumers.”

Q: If a situation arises, how do you frame the message so that you do not lose the trust of your fanbase, while also reassuring the public?

Team Six: “That’s a hard question. I don’t know if I have an answer to that. Can I skip that one?”

Q: What is your team’s priority when educating the fans during a difficult situation for the team?

Team Six: “We will probably come up with talking points in advance before something like that occurs. Certainly, we knew that after that game our football coach was going to be fired. So, we were prepared with what messaging we were going to have. We knew we were going to do a Facebook Live with our interim athletic director. Having a plan in place to answer some preliminary fan questions knowing what you can say and what you cannot say is important for someone in my role. Actually, once something like that occurs, taking the cues from leadership. Amplifying what they have said in other mediums whether they said that in a press conference or to the newspaper. Making sure we are staying consistent with talking points is important in times like that.”

Q: How does your organization respond to fans who are angry over national anthem controversies?

Team Six: “Good question. I’m trying to remember. What did we do? I believe our chancellor made a statement in support of our students all across campus supporting their right to free speech. I don’t believe our athletic department talked about it very much publicly. I don’t believe we really addressed it on social media. Probably the only place it would have been addressed is in a press release format if I recall.”

Team Seven Transcription

Q: Do you run the account solo or do you have a social media team?

Team Seven: “We have somewhat of a social media team. I don’t do a whole lot with it anymore. We have a social media coordinator who kind of oversees the day-to-day of football then two or three others of us have the ability to tweet or retweet on different on behalf of the account.”

Q: How do you manage the content? Is there a content calendar?

Team Seven: “No, I don’t think we have much of a content calendar. We just try to send things in primetime for whatever platform it is and not overwhelm anybody if we can help it, and it’s not gameday. We do schedule a lot of tweets, but we don’t really have a content calendar.”

Q: How many people go into making the social media posts, graphics and animations?

Team Seven: “A team from anywhere of about three to five. We have two staff writers [that can] do some types of graphics. But we do have a graphic artist on staff that helps with that ... actually two. One in our [communications] office, and one at the football office. We also have people who can do the animations, and we have another staffer on board that does in that in communications. I guess for that matter, there’s another one of those positions in football.”

Q: When planning the social media strategy for the year, what is the team’s main goal?

Team Seven: “We’re trying to push [our coach’s] agenda. We’re [going over] steps with him. We’re always trying to brand the program the way he’s trying to brand it. He has this relentless, tough and intelligent mantra. He uses that a lot, and everything we retweet,

we use [two certain hashtags]. Generally, that. But more than that, I would probably say that [another staffer] can probably give you a deeper answer to that question.”

Q: Are there any campaigns you have planned on the social media calendar?

Team Seven: “[Using those hashtags, are those the campaigns you are using this year?] Pretty much. We’re working hand-and-hand with the marketing department. They have a slogan, a push, those types of things. All of us are trying to push what [coach’s] is pushing to his team just to try and be unified.”

Q: What would you say is the style of how your team communicates? Is it sillier, more serious or evenly done?

Team Seven: “I think I’s evenly done. I don’t think we take ourselves too seriously. We try to be informative, and when we can entertain I think we are weary when we try to entertain. We try not to make huge mistakes. If we capture good video or the opportunity arises evenly to entertain, we do that also.”

Q: Does the athletics director, players and coaches have a say in how you communicate with the team?

Team Seven: “[Aside from our head coach], they do not have much of an input, no. We try to work with various student-athletes on helping them brand themselves. If they have a certain objective when it comes to social media and what they want to get out of social media, then we will work with them. We don’t identify everyone on Twitter by their handles. We only do in cases of if they want it. In a certain case with an individual award we will because it is more targeted to individual players.”

Q: How does your team determine how to best communicate with the fans? Is there a system in place to have the various social media outlets work together, or are they unique from each other?

Team Seven: “They are unique. We’re very small staffed at [our school], we don’t have what most people have even with social media staffing. We’re a pretty small network and a pretty small team. But, on Monday mornings we have a content calendar where everybody gets together. Social media is definitely the key into that. They know exactly what everyone is doing all week, and we know what social media is pushing and planning to do.”

Q: How does your team build the relationship with your consumers on social media, specifically Twitter?

Team Seven: This question was already answered already after implying that the base is young.

Q: Why does your team find it important to build the relationships with your consumers?

Team Seven: “I think that’s how you’re telling people your story in this day and age to a degree. For one thing, the base is young. So, it’s difficult for [our team]. A young base is a new base as far as [our team] is concerned. I think it’s a great way of connecting with your fans in a way where really, teams have never been able to connect before. Here, the difficulty is the connection. It’s building the new fans. At a private school, it’s much more difficult than at a public school. You have a natural fan base that you’re trying to keep interested. Here, we’re just trying to create fans far more than other schools.”

Q: Does your messaging change based on the on-field fortunes of the team?

Team Seven: “I’m sure it does. The more successful you are, even [with our teams] football where we don’t have massive amounts of success, [it gets easier]. With social media, I’d like for it to be more positive. But by nature, a win over [a team] would make it more positive. I can’t say that we don’t ride the wave of success and failure. You can’t do that real well here because, in all seriousness, football is an uphill battle here. You’re going to have more disappointment than enjoyment. To a degree, you just have to let it happen. When those moments happen, and those trends happen, you have to go with them.”

Q: Does your team have a system in place to receive feedback from fans? If so, what is it?

Team Seven: “No, not really. We definitely listen to fans on Twitter and [read] responses. I think everyone has to be aware of if you’re being heard the right way or being heard the way you want to be heard. If not, how are you going to adjust it? We don’t have that much one-on-one because of social media, but we absolutely react to social media when it looks like a problem or it looks like it could be a concern.”

Q: What has been the biggest crisis you and your team have had to tackle, and how did you approach it?

Team Seven: “We have had some crisis here, so let’s think about that for just a second ... Two years after a sexual assault [happened] on campus, [a questionable] tweet went out, which was viewed as inappropriate, but only because of what had happened on campus before. It took us awhile [to deal with that]. What managers don’t understand is that if you can’t kill something, [it makes a difference depending on how long it’s out there].

Our manager at the time wouldn't kill something because he was afraid of what might happen, and it just made it worse. It had a longer shelf life."

Q: When controversy strikes, such as a critical call that determines the outcome of a game, how does the organization shape the overall message using Twitter?

Team Seven: "We don't talk about it. We ask that our coach does not talk much about officiating and not comment about it. We don't comment about bad calls on Twitter. We don't go there. I think we are an arm of athletics. [Our team] people, we could go all damn day long talking about bad calls. You just go down a path of no return after that. So, we don't do a lot of that. You can make your feelings known with a solemn tweet as easy as you can make them known with a hard-edged tweet. I think the SEC would shoot it down if we started questioning calls."

Q: What plan (if any) does your team have in place if a terrorist attack were to take place during the game?

Team Seven: "That's within the scope of management policies. [That's something] that I do not want to comment on publicly."

Q: Do you guys have any other people that can take over the accounts if you fell victim?

Team Seven: "No. Not that I'm aware of ... no, I don't think so."

Q: If your organization were to come to you and ask about ways to educate fans about new safety precautions in the stadium, how would you educate them?

Team Seven: "We do a lot of that on Twitter. I think that Twitter and Facebook are places where we try and do that in addition, in some cases, whether it's the clear bag policy for example. I think going forward, we're going to be using the metal detector. I think the

way you let fans know in advance of gameday that it's happening [is important]. I think on Twitter and Facebook are the best ways of doing that. You're not saying it's not safe, you're saying you're making it safer. Everybody in the conference is going to the same policy, and we're trying to give people the best atmosphere possible. This is one way of doing it."

Q: If a situation arises, how do you frame the message so that you do not lose the trust of your fanbase, while also reassuring the public?

Team Seven: "I think providing concise information in a calm fashion is the best way you can do that even on social media platforms. I just think that you have to be concise, you have to be clear about your objectives in your communications. You [also] need to be to the point, I believe. I don't think you need to be tremendously repetitive. It needs to be clear and concise and not repeated with much frequency."

Q: What is your team's priority when educating the fans during a difficult situation for the team?

Team Seven: "With departures, to tell you the truth, our main objective with coaching departures is not what the fans want to hear or not. We do not give a [special] notion to the fans. They find out when the press release goes out.

"We lost a player this past year. [Player's name was] a redshirt sophomore tight end. [He] had a diagnosis of melanoma about 14 months ago now. Nobody found out about it. He didn't play. He never played. People didn't think he was much of a player. If that happened [elsewhere], someone would have found out about it. It's just because of the nature of the beast. At [schools name] sometimes because of the number of beat reporters, fewer people with eyes on the program, things can happen and nobody knows

about it. Let me take that forward from 14 months ago. Six months ago, things had worsened for Turner. We knew that he was in for the fight for his life. You've got to make a decision at that point. 'OK, do we let this play out as it is? Do we try to warn our fans, the public, the media whoever it is about this individuals' condition?' What we did here that you can only do at [school name] as opposed to most places is we did a first-person account from turner from a hospital bed at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston where he was getting advanced treatment late in the process. What we were trying to do was tell the fans, warn the fans, that it was serious. He wasn't just there because he was sick. In fact, it was serious. For lack of a better word, we wanted to get people praying for him. Honestly, we wanted more people thinking about him. That's kind of what happened. We did it ourselves and that's all we did was write a story and post it on our website, Facebook and social media. We just let people have it for what it was. There was never another story written until he passed away. He passed away one week after the regular season finale in [late November]. I don't know if we handled it right or wrong, but that's the way that we handled it here. We're at a place where we can do that. [Other schools] couldn't have done that. It would have become more public, and you guys would have had to adjust that way. We celebrated [him] at the bowl game. His parents came to the bowl game. The bowl celebrated him. It was just a bad situation."

Q: How does your organization respond to fans who are angry over national anthem controversies?

Team Seven: "Last year, 2018, three-or-four-women's basketball players knelt. I would call that a controversy at [our school]. How did we handle that? One thing, our coaching staff supported the girls. The university supported the players. At the same time, the

administration talked to the girls [saying], ‘knowing what you’re doing and doing it for the right reasons you have to be able to know what you’re doing and adjust to it and be able to talk about it.’ It was brutal, to tell you the truth, because the team wasn’t very good. It was just another reason for people not to support them from a fanbase [perspective]. It’s an older conservative fanbase. Carrying that out a little bit further, the team met with the administration. Players, our coaches and administration met with fans in a forum later. This was probably held 10 days after. It wasn’t selectful, we invited all of the fans to come [and] 20 or 30 of the most noble fans [came]. I’m not sure they left feeling any different, but at least they from the students, it was a protest for the way that African-American’s were being treated and not having anything to do with not supporting the nation, supporting our armed service or that kind of thing. It was more [about] the treatment of certain things that were happening in the country at that time. I think the final thing that we did with that forum, it squelched a lot of concerns about it. But also, there are coaches on staff and in this building that would not tolerate someone kneeling. They just wouldn’t even tolerate it. This women’s coach did. I’m not sure if the men’s coach would have. I know the baseball coach wouldn’t. We try to be very big in student-athlete independence, but at some level, the coach runs the program.”