

Exploring toxicity in professional women's sport social media discourse

Some encouraging findings about the women's sport discourse:



>1.5x increase

Throughout the season cycle, more individuals online are interacting and posting content related to women's sport leagues.

Toxicity analyses conducted using CommuAnalytic and Perspective API revealed insights on the state of the discourse for the WNBA and NWSL:



Throughout their respective season cycles, toxicity scores rose and peaked during times when leagues are most visible.

NWSL

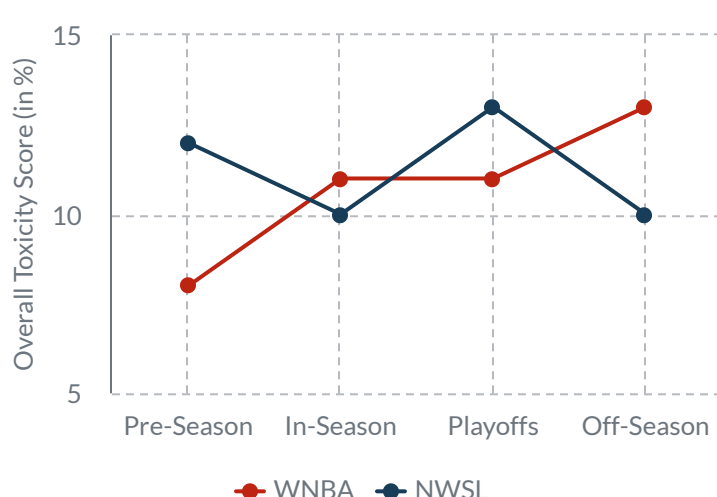
All toxicity scores during playoff period of the women's league on Twitter and Reddit were higher than the MLS.



WNBA

Toxicity within posts on Twitter and Reddit were higher than NBA during the pre-season and playoffs.

The highest rates of toxicity among the women's sport leagues were related to use of inflammatory language (insults, profanity, threats).



Three strategies women's sport organizations can use to manage toxicity on social media



1. Be aware of toxicity present in the online discourse

Toxicity rose over both the WNBA and NWSL season cycles when competitions were at their peak in terms of more "higher profile" activity such as playoffs. From a macro-perspective, executives can use this information to understand from a strategic standpoint when they might need to be more actively involved in the discourse or reactive towards toxicity. If such activity occurs in patterned sequences over several seasons, this offers information to practitioners on how to more effectively engage on social media throughout the season cycles. It is necessary that increased attention be given towards implementing streamlined marketing and communication practices to manage toxic discourse.



2. Adopt a proactive role on social media during peak periods of the season when toxicity is highest

Public league-affiliated hashtags and networks to engage in women's sport discourse provide a degree of protection against highly toxic individuals who may not directly name the sports they intend to demean. An advantageous step for organizations may be to take a proactive role in these spaces to engage with fans and promote positive conversation. Rather than being reactionary, SM managers and individual public-figure accounts have the opportunity to become more involved in mitigating toxic activity before it becomes rampant.



3. Recognize and focus on the online communities and spaces that are created to support women's sport

For women's sport fans to continue engaging on SM and in networked conversations, environments must be cultivated to support these users and organizations can assist in making these spaces inclusive to reduce toxic influence. By being more active in spaces that fans frequent most, organizations and athletes can strengthen brand loyalty and fandom. But if this is the case, the appropriate resources and training must be provided to these individuals in how to respond to and manage toxicity.

