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ABSTRACT

The sports marketing industry has changed in the new era of easy internet access and ubiquitous mobile devices. Sports marketers are beginning to use social media platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram, to promote their brands and to connect with fans. In addition, legislative trends and announcements by the NFL and NCAA show that individual athletes, early in their professional careers (at the college level), will be able to profit from their names, images, and likenesses. While research into social media marketing by sports brands is existent and growing, most studies are concerned with the strategies and impacts of social media use by sports leagues and teams, or by professional athlete celebrities. The use of social media marketing by individual professional athletes, early in their careers, as a tool to achieve sponsorship, has been unexplored. Therefore, this study uses both social media content analysis and interviews with early-career professional athletes to examine the strategies utilized and their impact on athletes' personal brands.