

Georgia Southern University

Digital Commons@Georgia Southern

Association of Marketing Theory and Practice
Proceedings 2023

Association of Marketing Theory and Practice
Proceedings

Spring 2023

Analysis of Collegiate Athlete Social Media Engagement on Instagram

Noelle Magann

Coastal Carolina University, nrmagann@coastal.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/amtp-proceedings_2023



Part of the [Advertising and Promotion Management Commons](#), [Marketing Commons](#), and the [Sports Management Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Magann, N. (2023). Analysis of collegiate athlete social media engagement on Instagram. Association of Marketing Theory and Practice Proceedings 2023. 24. https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/amtp-proceedings_2023/24

This conference proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the Association of Marketing Theory and Practice Proceedings at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Association of Marketing Theory and Practice Proceedings 2023 by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

Analysis of Collegiate Athlete Social Media Engagement on Instagram

Noelle Magann

Coastal Carolina University

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

On July 1st, 2021, monetizing ones Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) became legal for collegiate athletes. Due to this massive shift in collegiate athletics the following year has developed into a chaotic conglomeration of athletes attempting to monetize their NIL. This project is meant to determine the factors that impact a student athlete's ability to monetize their NIL. Specifically, through social media engagement at multiple levels of influence, social media is a popular example of how athletes can monetize their NIL (Bartholow, 2022). Many college athletes already have a presence on social media that they can now tie in their NIL aspirations with, however this presence overall is also rapidly increasing (Van Horne, 2021) as sponsorships through social media as a monetization of NIL is becoming more popular.

METHODS

This analysis focuses on SunBelt football players who have public profiles, varying amounts of followers, and are promoted by their team through being tagged in posts by their team's main account. This study focuses on male football athletes with existing influential presences based on the tiers of influence for social media influencers such as Nano, Micro, etc. (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Information was obtained by collecting the number of likes on one off-season post, 3 during season posts (after 1st game, between weeks 3-4, between weeks 6-8, respectively), and one sponsored post if available. Once these numbers are collected, a percent of engagement is produced for each athlete then averaged out for each post. All statistics are calculated then compared to determine what the most impactful factors of a post are (timing, verification, etc.).

RESULTS

When determining engagement rates of the Sun Belt Football athletes, it was important to compare as many variables as possible. First, the positions with the most engagement were Kickers (27.14%) and Offensive Linemen (26.18%), when only 2-4 athletes were studied. When 5 or more athletes in a position were studied, the positions with the highest engagement rate were Quarterbacks (22.77%) and Wide Receivers (21.50%). The influencer tier with the highest engagement rate was the Nano tier (1,000-10,000 followers) with a rate of 19.72%, followed by Mid-Tier influencers (50,000-500,000 followers) at 13.98% and Micro Influencers (10,000-50,000) at 13.26%. These engagement rates are astronomically high compared to those of professional football athletes studied, all being in the top sphere of influence (Mega; 1,000,000+ followers), which averaged only 7.21% on all posts. Also studied was the best point in the season for an athlete to post. This comparison delivered interesting results as there was only a 0.38% difference between weeks in the season. However, in the postseason (if posts were made),

engagement rates went up 5.71% compared to in season content. Additionally, posts made in the off season (spring/summer) had the lowest engagement rate of all posts studied with an average of only 8.65%. Comparatively, engagement rates on sponsored posts (advertisements) only averaged 8.25%.

Some athletes had a multitude of sponsored posts. For example, Camerun Peoples (RB-App. St.) had over five sponsored posts within the time constraints of this project, but only an average engagement rate of 2.87%. However, athletes had much higher engagement rates such as Grayson McCall (QB-CCU) and Kyle Vantrese (QB- GA. So.) with rates of 13.33% and 16.26%, respectively. Compared to their personal content (unsponsored), sponsored posts always averaged significantly lower on engagement. Grayson McCall, for example, maintained a 27.72% engagement rate on all unsponsored posts. Compared to popular professional quarterbacks Joe Burrow and Tom Brady who maintained 14.94% and 2.95%, respectively, McCall's engagement rate is much more potentially beneficial to a sponsor looking to market to either a regional area (Grand Strand, SC) or a typical following (college students/football fans). Brady, in fact, only maintained a 0.30% engagement rate on sponsored posts compared to McCall's 13.33% or Vantrese's 16.26%.

Other popular NFL athletes such as Rob Gronkowski, Davante Adams, and Aaron Donald only maintained engagement rates of 0.44%, 2.13%, and 0.28%, respectively, on sponsored posts. Verification (blue checkmark) of athletes was also studied to determine if it played an influence in engagement rates, and there was no direct impact found. However, verification did average a greater number of followers than unverified accounts. Of thirty accounts studied, thirteen were verified and maintained an average following of 16,457 while eighteen unverified averaged 4,727 followers. Finally, this research studied location to determine if it was a factor in engagement rates. Between the two divisions of the Sun Belt Conference (East and West), there was little difference in engagement rate (18.27% in the East, 17.38% in the West). Of the Universities studied where I was able to obtain information on greater than three athletes, the highest engagement rate belonged to Texas State University (21.51%). At universities where three or less athletes were studied, Old Dominion had the highest engagement rate (26.41%). The lowest engagement rate of any school in the Sun Belt belonged to Arkansas State University (9.14%).

CONCLUSION

This project aimed to generate a small representation of engagement on social media through Instagram for collegiate athletes. Overall, being of a smaller influencer tier, being verified, and posting regularly during the season ensured higher engagement rates on Instagram for Sun Belt Football athletes. This information can be used by athletes when developing social media content plans if they desire to become an influencer as part of their NIL goals. On the other hand, businesses looking to sponsor athletes can use this information to their benefit as well. When determining the best influencer for your business, and considering athletes, this research shows it is important to determine your goals. If impressions is your main priority, a Mid-Tier influencer who posts quality content often may be your best bet. However, if your goals are engagement, then a Nano influencer with a strong, committed following and good content is going to prove to be more valuable, the most "Bang for your buck". However, an important result from this

research showed that sponsored posts do not gain the same levels of engagement as unsponsored posts, so maintaining genuine quality and a strong, loyal following in your influencer are key in making your content successful.

Keywords: *College Athletics, Influencers, Name, Image, and Likeness, Sports Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Athlete Marketing*

REFERENCES - *additional references available upon request*

Bartholow, R. (2022). *How Student Athletes Can Profit from Their Name, Image, and Likeness Rights*. Finance Undergraduate Honors Theses. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/finnuht/79>

Campbell, C. et al. (2020) More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing. *Business Horizons*, 63(4), 469-479. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S000768132030032X>

Van Horne, Q. (2021). *Marketability: The History of Name, Image, and Likeness Legislation on Intercollegiate Athletics*. Bachelor of Science in Business Thesis. Retrieved from <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/handle/1794/26567>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Noelle Magann (B.S. Business Administration - Marketing, Coastal Carolina University) Noelle is currently a Senior Marketing major at Coastal Carolina University. While at CCU, Noelle has worked for over two years as a recruiting and operations intern for the Coastal Football team and for the past year as an Honors Fellow, conducting research on a multitude of NIL related projects. Even though she may no longer be an athlete, Noelle still enjoys golfing and recreational sports, and aspires to work in collegiate athletics in her future career.