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Innovation and Entrepreneurial Ventures in Sport: 
Branding Athletes through use of New Media and Technology

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**ABSTRACT**

Due to the growing capacity of modern technology to build brands through digital integration and social media networking, athletes have begun to create their own digital presence in efforts to reach a wider target audience. As such, entrepreneurs who develop integrated networks of traditional marketing and social media strategies—designed to increase brand influence in the digital space—are beginning to develop ways in which to capitalize on the monetization of the digital athlete brand. Digital athlete branding involves creating a digital presence for the professional athlete through the development of personal websites, social networks, and new media to provide unique fan experiences built around an athlete’s image and personality.

This research involves a comprehensive analysis of the modern sport marketing strategies employed by Fusion Sports, Inc., a marketing group specializing in digital athlete branding, from its inception to its development as a successful and leading digital marketing agency in the sport industry. Data were collected through unstructured interviews with upper-level managers of the marketing firm over the course of a summer in 2012. Specifically, this paper was a case study of the methods and strategies employed by a marketing firm in its effort to monetize the value of an athlete brand. The main purposes were to explore the nature of athlete branding from a managerial perspective, and analyze the methods used to engage fans in the digital and social marketplace.

The findings shed light on the strategies used by a leading digital marketing firm in the field of sport business as a means to integrate the disciplines of entrepreneurship and sport marketing in an effort to build upon sports-based entrepreneurship theory. Due to its highly profitable opportunities, competitors will likely continue to enter the niche market of athlete branding. According to findings, however, the nature of the business is based on building relationships with the right mix of athletes willing to engage fans in the digital space. While athletes have begun to slowly take advantage of the currently existing digital channels, the services provided by FusionSports to athletes and the products they create for fans might serve as an inspiration to future innovators, and as a template for other digital and sport marketing firms.
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