

Impact of basketball players' performance on Social Media Engagement

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Abstract:

Within this broader analytical framework, what appears to be the convergence of sports and digital media seems to have substantially transformed the landscape of modern athletics. Basketball, in particular, what appears to represent a competitive sport, seems to have evolved into what might be characterized as a global cultural phenomenon, predominantly propelled by the pervasive influence of social media platforms. What this paper endeavors to dissect, therefore, is what appears to be the intricate relationship between on-court performance and online popularity for basketball athletes. Through what appears to be a comprehensive literature review, accompanied by a critical analysis of existing research limitations, and the proposal of what seems to be a novel methodological approach, this study appears to provide evidence that may support the assertion that the connection between athletic prowess and social media influence is ostensibly not linear, but rather appears to be heavily mediated by an athlete's star status and role within the sport.

Keywords: Basketball social media influence; Athlete brand value; On field performance and online popularity

1. Introduction

1.1 . Background of Basketball Development

Originally invented in 1891 by Dr. James Naismith in Springfield, Massachusetts, basketball appears to have journeyed from what seems to be a simple indoor pastime to what now represents a multi-billion-dollar global industry. Its intrinsic characteristics—what might be characterized as fast-paced action, high-scoring plays, and the prominence of individual stars—appear to have typically lent it well

to entertainment. What also appears significant in this context, however, is that the late 20th and early 21st centuries seem to have witnessed what appears to be an unprecedented acceleration in its global reach, what seems to represent a phenomenon inextricably linked to technological advancement.

The advent of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), and TikTok appears to tend to suggest a substantial dismantling of what might be characterized as traditional barriers between athletes and fans. Within this broader analytical framework, the digital arena tends to suggest what appears to be as crucial as the physi-

cal court for building a brand, engaging a global fanbase, and driving what appears to be the cultural conversation around the sport. The game, what appears to be, is no longer entirely confined to the hardwood; it is played out on the screens of millions, in real-time, seemingly making it substantially easier than ever to "get a game" on digital channels.

1.2 . Significance of the Study

In the study, we not only examined the development of basketball, but also discovered how basketball is largely influenced by the newly rising social media. For example, we researched the intrinsic connection between player performance and media trends. In this way, this paper is crucial for sports communication in the future. Also, the paper can help people realize the influence of social media in our society.

2. Literature Review

We mainly focus on athletes' qualities, social media engagement indicators and the platforms' effect on that process. We aim to lay out some foundation in the future research. We use analysis and discussion to reach our goal.

2.1 . Athlete Characteristics and the Hierarchy of Stardom

Within this broader analytical framework, what the existing research appears to tend to suggest is a segmentation of athletes into what appear to be distinct categories based on their market and performance status.[1] and other scholars, for instance, have appeared to discuss what seems to be the "superstar effect," where a select few athletes (e.g., Michael Jordan, LeBron James) appear to transcend their sport to become global icons. Their brand value often appears to be largely detached from short-term performance fluctuations, what seems especially noteworthy in this analytical context. Beneath them are what might be characterized as the "All-Stars" or "elite players"—consistent high-performers who tend to be the perceived face of their franchises. Finally, there are the "role players" or "general players," whose contributions appear to be vital but often seem less celebrated in mainstream media. The existing literature seems to have largely covered what appears to be how traditional media (TV, print) covers these different tiers, but what tends to remain is a perceived gap in how this hierarchy maps onto the ostensibly more democratic terrain of social media, what appears to warrant further interpretive consideration.

2.2 . Social Media Engagement Indicators

What academic work appears to reveal is a move beyond simple follower counts as what appears to be a primary

metric. Engagement rate—measured through likes, comments, shares, and video completion rates—now seems to be generally recognized as what appears to be a substantially more robust indicator of true influence and audience connection. [2] The type of content shared also tends to appear critical, given the complexity of these theoretical relationships. Personal, behind-the-scenes content often appears to largely generate higher engagement than corporate-sponsored posts, tending to suggest what seems to be a fan craving for authenticity [3]. What also appears significant in this context is that the platform itself appears to largely dictate the nature of interaction; TikTok tends to favor short-form, viral content, while Instagram appears to be a hub for curated visuals and Stories, and X (Twitter) for real-time commentary and conversation. The majority of previous studies, what appears to be a crucial caveat, however, is that they tend to have focused on a single platform, seemingly failing to entirely capture what appears to be the multi-platform nature of a modern athlete's digital identity, in light of these methodological considerations.

2.3 . The Construction of Athlete Celebrity

Quantitative Data points would typically encompass follower growth metrics, engagement rates (such as likes, comments, and shares per post), and, perhaps most notably, core performance statistics (including Points, Rebounds, Assists, and Player Efficiency Rating). Qualitative Data, on the other hand, often involves what might be characterized as a systematic content analysis of post captions, fan comments, and the broader nature of shared content (e.g., whether it is promotional, personal, or advocacy-oriented) in an effort to understand the underlying narrative and emotional context that appears to reside behind the quantitative numbers.[4]

3. Analysis and Discussion

What seems to emerge from applying the proposed analytical framework to the illustrative data and existing knowledge tends to point toward what appears to be several key conclusions that may challenge what seem to be rather simplistic assumptions, given the complexity of these theoretical relationships.

3.1 . The Superstar Paradox

There are 150 million followers of LeBron James on Instagram. This wasn't built on one great game or one single season. It was built over his entire career. He is not only just a basketball player, he is a symbol.

Because of this, a bad game or even a bad season doesn't cause him to lose a lot of followers. His popularity comes from other things, like his shoe brand, his charity work, his life vlog, and his public image as a good father and

community leader.

Once an athlete becomes a "superstar," their fame protects them from their on-field performance. People will pay attention to them and follow them online no matter how they play in their current games. [5]

3.2 . The Role Player Correlation

However, for role players, the connection is the complete opposite. Their social media success is directly related to their on-field performance. Players like Bobby Portis or Josh Richardson aren't global superstars although they have great skills. They become popular only by having great games or winning champions. When they perform well or even win the champions, their follower count will jump.

4. Conclusion

This study delved into the complex interplay between on-court performance and online popularity for basketball athletes in the digital age. Our analysis reveals that the relationship is not straightforward but is significantly mediated by an athlete's position within the sport's hierarchy. For global superstars, social media influence exhibits a degree of decoupling from short-term athletic performance, sustained by a multifaceted brand built on longevity, off-court ventures, and personal narrative. In contrast, for role

players, online popularity remains closely tied to on-court success and immediate team achievements.

Looking forward, this research underscores the evolving nature of athlete branding and fan engagement. Future studies should employ longitudinal and multi-platform data to further quantify these relationships and explore cross-cultural variations in how fans interact with athletes online.

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