

**A LOOK AT COLLEGE
BASKETBALL'S
CHANGING SOCIAL
MEDIA LANDSCAPE**



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February 10, 2022

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INTRODUCTION

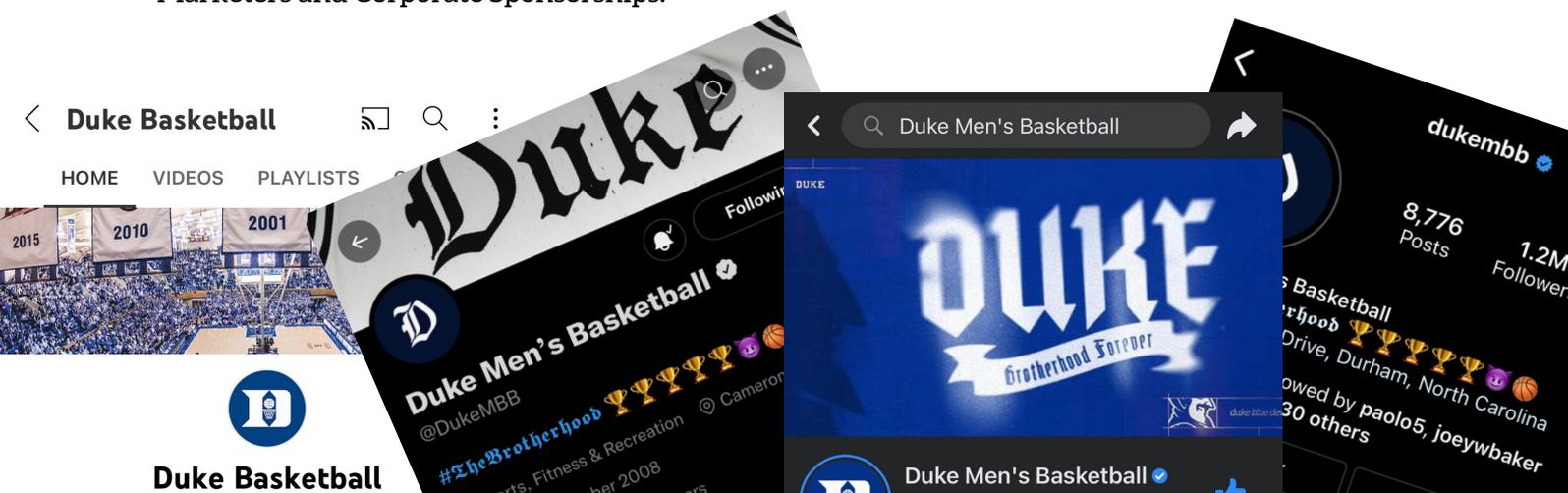
When it comes to sports, there is a new age. With the evolution of social media platforms and the ever-changing world of media, College Basketball programs need to keep up to date with these practices. This paper will discuss the main social media platforms that fans utilize, specific fan demographics, and the influence that corporate sponsorships have on fans.

College Basketball and the NCAA stand to make over \$1 billion each year for March Madness which includes their Corporate Sponsorships and Media Deals, which account for a majority of this \$1 Billion, this total is about 90% of their yearly earnings for the NCAA (Parker, 2021). But are there more targeted campaigns that they can use to help better promote sponsors and their products? How can social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok increase engagement from fans? What steps need to be made in order to successfully integrate sponsorships and social media?

As a whole, it is assumed that there are specific demographics that tend to use specific social media sites. In the article posted by SproutSocial, they dive into the social space demographics so companies can gain a better understanding of social demographics to strategically brand companies or teams/sponsors in this case (Barnhart, 2021). Demographics that are listed below, and collected from SBRNet suggest that the main age bracket for College Basketball fans in 2020 was 35-49. From the article, based on that demographic provided Twitter and Facebook will be the most engaging social sites for fans because their demographics fit in between the ages of 25-39 (Barnhart, 2021).

The purpose of this paper is to truly show how social media can be used as a tool for athletics programs as well as their athletes. AthleticDirectorU researched 290 schools' social media and found that on average they have a following of 200,000 across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. As well as the fact that sports fans are some of the most engaged followers on social media (Boettger, 2021).

The problem that stands in the way for College Basketball is how engaged their fans are with sponsors and the influence it has on buyers purchasing products. Based on the Market Profile, provided by SBRNet, this paper will break down key factors and target areas for Sports Marketers and Corporate Sponsorships.



DATA

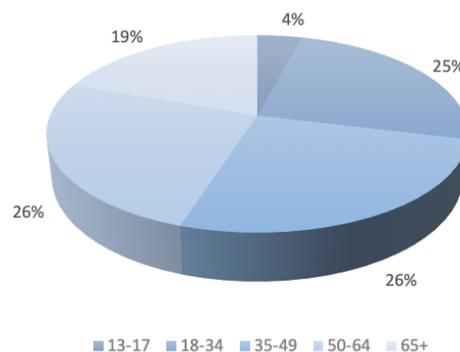
All of the data presented in this section was gathered from SBRNet. SBRNet is a research network with data from all different sports, leagues, and teams that is easily accessible. Participation data, market statistics, and performance data are some of the areas that SBR focuses on. But in this paper, data was pulled from the market summaries for College Basketball. The data presented was pulled from the full data set on how to create a full story on how college basketball fans interact with social media and sponsors. With any data set, there are limitations, and the main one with the data that is available is that there is no data from 2021, and the most recent year reported is 2020. But from the available data, there are relevant statistics to help support further research into this question of understanding social media and its potential effect.

BODY

Figure 1, below looks at the age demographics of College Basketball fans specifically in 2020, but the full data set did have similar numbers shown across the board. When looking at the breakdowns the most predominant age categories are 35-49 and 50-64. These two brackets make up over 51% of the market. When understanding more about the consumers and how you should market to them, and in this case hopefully understand their social media engagement, when it comes to College Basketball.

Figure 1

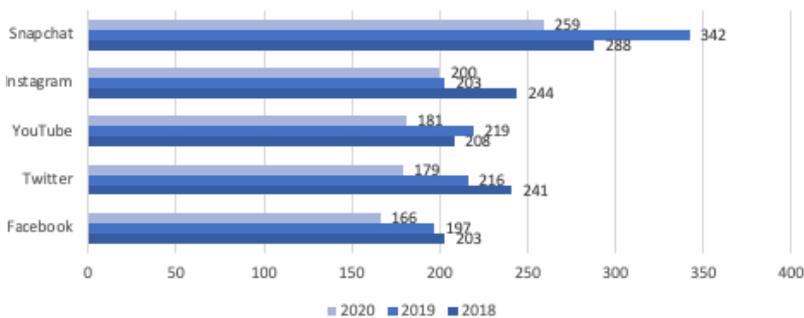
Age Group of all College Basketball Fans - 2020



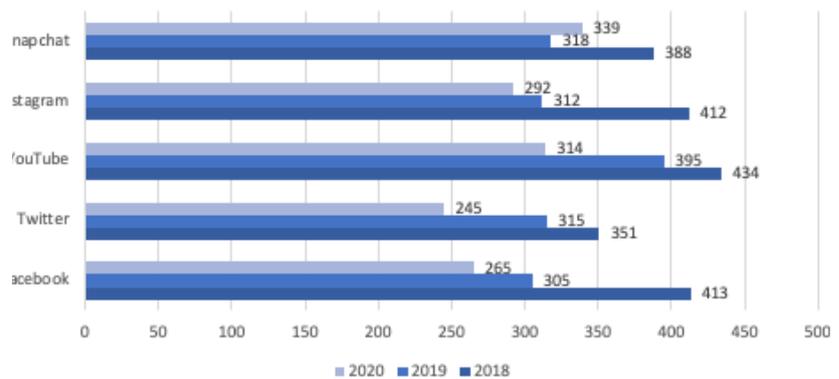
Figures 2 and 3 below took data from the participants in this research to compile statistics on their social media usage in regards to following college basketball outlets. The figures depict self-reported data where it looks at fans' usage of social media to follow college basketball daily or just in general. Overall from the statistics, more fans claimed to follow college basketball activity daily. From this marketers, players, and teams can utilize this data to understand how active and engaged fans are across different platforms. As well as be able to take advantage of these statistics when it comes to marketing for sponsors and towards different demographics. Considering the statistics from Figure 1, as well marketers can evaluate which of the following social media sites is worth investing in.

Figures 2 and 3

Utilizing Social Media to Follow College Basketball-related Activity



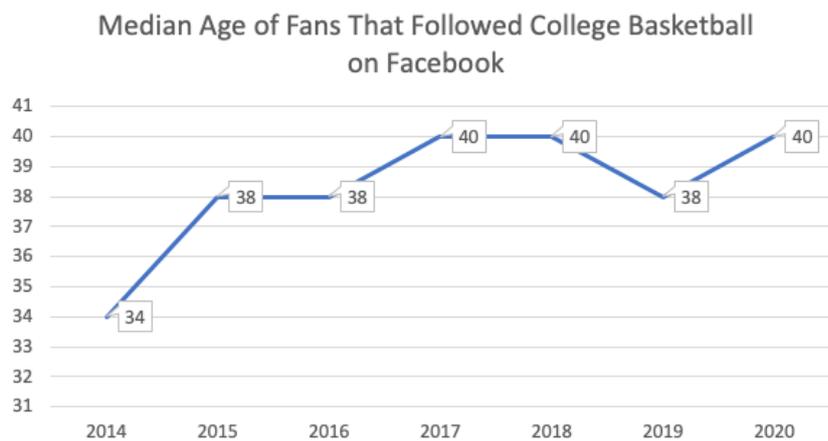
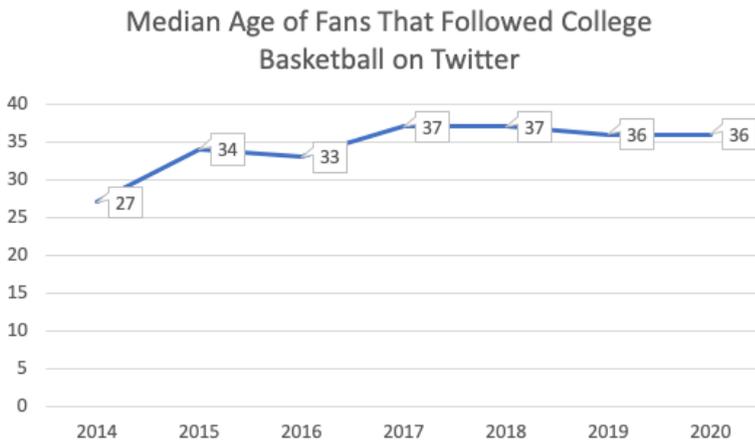
Utilizing Social Media to Daily Follow Related Activity



Figures 4 and 5 cover specifically the median age of college basketball fans on Twitter and Facebook. According to research done by Social Sprout, as discussed in the introduction, College Basketball fans will be most engaged on these sites because of the demographics of the fans and average age on the site (Barnhart, 2021). The statistics below are in comparison to those which were presented in figures 2&3, showing overall usage of fans. Similarly to the data provided above, figures 4 &5 can be essential to the key success of sponsors

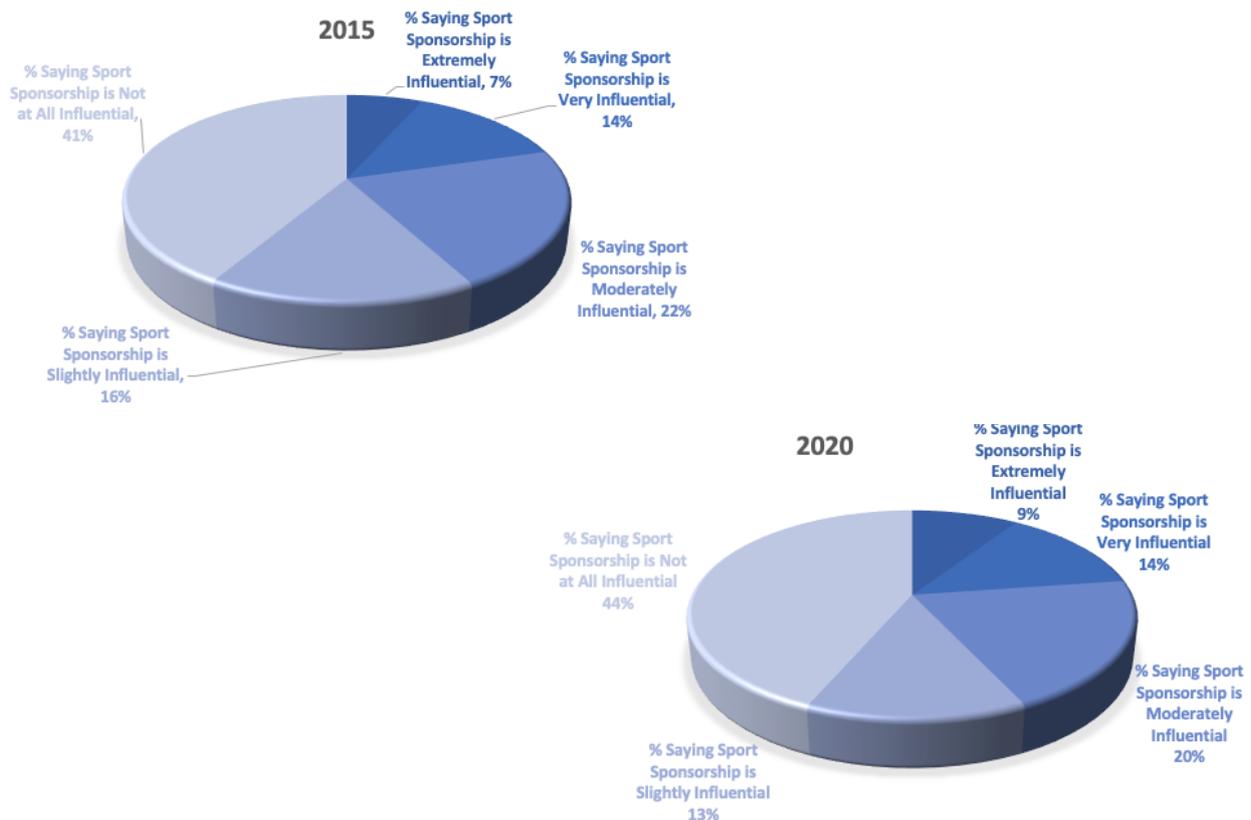
and benefactors. These graphs can also suggest different industries that College Basketball can target for corporate sponsorship due to overlap within their demographics.

Figures 4 and 5



To tie this all in together, the last set of data that was analyzed was the influence that sports sponsorship has on the purchase of their products. Figures 6 and 7 below show a comparison between influence in 2015 and then 2020. All in all the numbers across the board have stayed pretty even. This is shocking with the evolution of social media, engagement with fans, and the number of sponsors that are present in college basketball. But these numbers are still something that corporate sponsorship departments can work with. Even though fans find sponsorships 44% not influential, this is not considering new and innovative ways that sponsors can be incorporated into college basketball programs across the country or the NCAA as a whole. Moving forward into this new age of media and sponsorship both parties must utilize their resources, look at their consumers, and make decisions that will make an impact.

Figures 6 and 7



SUMMARY

All in all, sports are in a new age. This idea needs to be realized by Sport Marketers, Corporate Sponsors, student-athletes, athletic programs, and The NCAA. For all things to go smooth and for it to be a win on both sides it is going to take buy-in. But this market is an untapped environment where schools and athletes can now be doing more than ever to connect sponsored brands and products directly to their fans. As touched on in the On3 article, this is a new territory that is ever-changing, with room for growth and adaptation (Prisbell, 2022). Engaging fans of all ages on social platforms and understanding fans' demographics is also something that always needs to be taken into consideration as well. Because if your main demographic in college basketball is your students where most of them are under the age of 21, it wouldn't make sense for a beer company to sponsor them. But if this college team has more of a following from the members of the community where their median age is 35, it would make sense. In conclusion, looking at demographics, data, and social media engagement is integral for the betterment of sponsorships for all parties.

ACTION STEPS

Based on research from SBRNet and other supplemental articles, the following action steps have been made to enhance sponsorships through social media platforms. By utilizing these steps sponsors, The NCAA, teams, and players can all win by directly engaging with customers.



No. 01 – Prioritizing NIL Social Media Campaigns

NIL is in a new age and adding a new dimension to sponsorships in college athletics. In the article written by On3, they discuss how early the NIL market still is, and the challenges that activations have when it comes to student-athletes. But companies still need to be smart, to ensure that their brand and messages align with the student-athletes and the universities that those athletes play for (Prisbell, 2022).



No. 02 – Build strategic plans for branding and social media

In an article by ViaSport, they looked at "10 ways to start engaging your sponsors and partners via social media". This plan consisted of research, understanding your client's branding, telling a clear story, and showing results ("10 ways to engage"). New media is something that needs to be explored but can also be scary for sponsors because it can be an unclaimed territory. But in the end, a plan and strategy make it more clear for sponsors about what their ROI can be.



No. 03 – Create more interactive ways for engage with sponsors

In a Sports Illustrated article, they discussed Opendorse. Which is a revenue-sharing venture where athletes can make money off their content which will be crafted for specific groups (Dellenger, 2021). This idea of student-athletes making content that fans and sponsors want to see to enhance their products or brand image is something that is still evolving and something that marketers should be looking towards.

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