

Title of Project
Social Media Strategies used in Sports Marketing
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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the impact of social media in the field of sports marketing. This is carried out through an in-depth analysis on sports marketing and the rising popularity of social media marketing for sports brands in the world. One such brand is Nike, Inc. This company has shifted its focus to digital marketing. As social media marketing started to explode, the traditional marketing methods such as print, radio and television have begun to slowly fade off into the sunset. The research revolves around the evolution of marketing from traditional to digital techniques over the years. Social media marketing can be an effective extension of traditional marketing for sports brands. This study demonstrates that sports brands do not need to eliminate traditional marketing methods altogether but must use social media as a supporting factor to their traditional media marketing techniques.

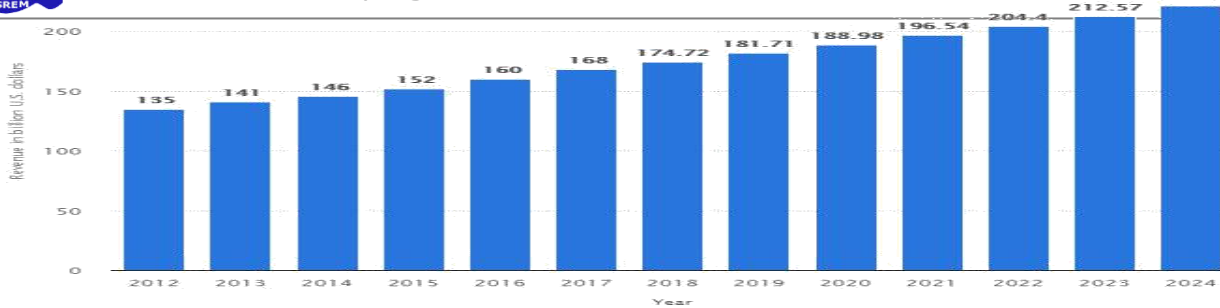
Social media has an enormous impact in the sports marketing industry. If athletes aren't connected and tuned in, they're not even in the game. All sports have extremely loyal fan bases. Most fans have participated in competition within their preferred sport, whether youth, collegiate, corporate, intermural, or through other avenues. This is why fans support the sports industry. It offers a relatable experience.

Most professional athletes get to live a lifestyle the average fan can only dream about. They are participating in something they love and are given the physical ability to showcase their talents on a grand stage. Most fans will never get the chance to physically interact with their favourite player or sports team, so they use their support as a means to interact and relate to each other. Social media provides an outlet and opportunity for fans and athletes to digitally connect and interact with each other at any time.

Social media can be utilized from many different angles. Not only is it useful for player-fan communication, but for promotions, endorsements, and joint ventures, etc. There are numerous partnership opportunities with companies who are searching for a professional athlete with relatable attributes to become a brand ambassador. Athletes should embrace their celebrity status by strategically making their brand relevant through leveraging their personal highlights and benefits.

1.1 Impact of Social Media in Sports Marketing

There might be ups and downs in the overall scheme of things, including the revenue generated by the sports industry; but given the stiff competition from other forms of entertainment, the global sports industry continues to not only survive but thrive. This is made possible due to the continuous improvements in technology and the way that sport is being presented to the viewer in the year 2016. The expansion of different sports to new markets around the world and the significant interest shown by the public to view this quality content has helped improve the health of the sports industry. Social media has also played a significant part in the grand scheme of things concerning sport in the last 10 years. Sponsors are biting their fingernails in anticipation of latching onto the next hottest thing in sport. Their aim is to build new relationships with popular sports brands, players and leagues to promote their products and services to millions of people worldwide.



The concept of social media is more important now than it has ever been before. Social media is not only being used by youngsters and adults to share their personal pictures and messages with their family and friends; but also most companies across the world as a medium to promote their brand and interact with their consumers in a systematic manner. It's a new, improved and a much faster technique of spreading the brand's message and connecting with the consumer on a personal level. Social media and its networks offer companies around the world a digitalized platform to interact effectively with its consumers and gain a significant understanding of consumer needs and interests. It has become the go-to medium of communication, promotion and various other marketing and advertising techniques for brands. Social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube have become media destinations for brands to advertise their products because it reaches a huge audience. Nike, Inc. is one such sports brand that has taken social media marketing to the next level and created an iconic image for itself in doing so; as explored later in this research.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

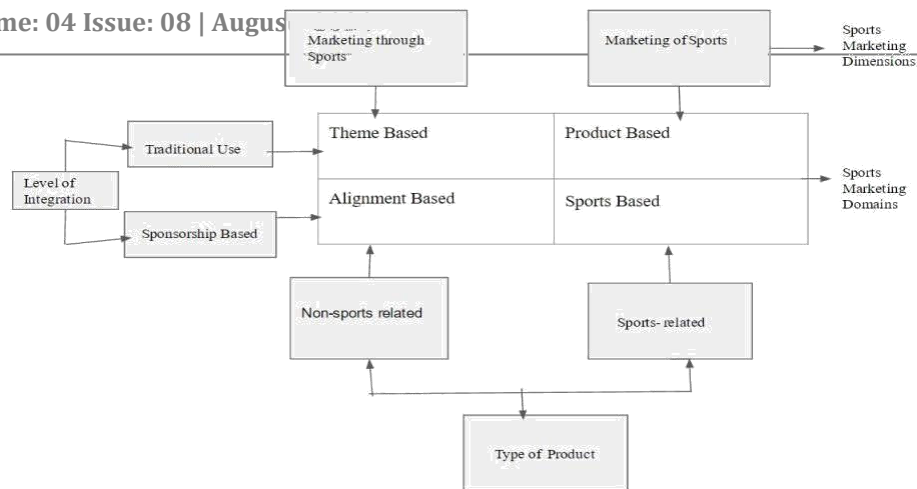
- 1) To provide an overall perspective and cover the main aspects of literature that surround the issue in question to gain a fair understanding of Social Media in Sports Marketing
- 2) To understand the concepts of social networks and how they have changed the view of marketing in the current digital age using Nike as the primary example.
- 3) To understand and analyze the social media strategies of Nike.
- 4) To understand Nike's approach in evolving from traditional marketing to social media marketing methods.

1.3 Benefits of social media marketing

Although there is a perception out there that social media marketing is a dying fad, statistics beg to differ. In an article for Forbes (2014) by Jayson DeMers, —According to Hubspot, 92% of marketers in 2014 claimed that social media marketing was important for their business, with 80% indicating their efforts increased traffic to their websites. And according to Social Media Examiner, 97% of marketers are currently participating in social media but 85% of participants aren't sure what social media tools are the best to use. Jayson points out certain benefits that companies will experience by using social media marketing. Some of them include:

- a. Increased Brand Recognition
- b. Improved Brand Loyalty
- c. More opportunities to convert
- d. Decreased Marketing Costs

The four domains of sports marketing



1.4 Social Media Marketing

Social Media can be effectively used to create marketing wonders. For businesses and organizations social media basically boils down to building a conversation with its customers and clients. While this interaction between brands and its consumers used to be established only at the physical location of site of selling; with the advent of technology and the boom in social media, the type of interaction nowadays occurs mostly on the internet. Marketing on social media has taken a life of its own with brands promoting their products and services to their target audiences on social platforms across the web. —Investopedia describes social media marketing as —the use of social media websites and social networks to market a company’s products and services. Social media marketing provides companies with a way to reach new customers and engage with existing customers. Various authors have also defined social media marketing. Weinberg (2009), —a process that empowers individuals to promote their websites, products, or services through online social channels and to communicate with and tap into a much larger community that may not have been available via traditional advertising channels. According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), social media is a hybrid element of the promotion mix because in traditional sense it enables companies to talk to their customers, while in a non-traditional sense it enables customers to talk to one another. The companies utilize this concept by producing online content on social media which they hope will be shared by consumers with their friends and family. When a user likes a Facebook page or an Instagram page and reposts the same message, video or picture of the brand’s content on their personal profile, this enables friends and followers of that user to see that post. That post can further be shared by more people and so on. Gaining instant feedback from consumers has never been easier than now for brands either. Brands can observe if the latest product that they are marketing on social media is getting praised or criticized. The amount of positive and negative reactions towards the message of the brand can also be tabulated and a concrete hypothesis can be generated. According to a report generated by social media company called Share this (2015), brands have adopted a mobile-first strategy.

With 80% of consumers now owning a mobile device, strategies of social media marketing and ads shown by brands revolve around mobile centric user-base. Since sharing is a social activity, it makes sense that consumers perform it from the privacy of their mobile devices and tablets, which they use more at their leisure. According to Social Media Examiner (2015), with desktops and laptops serving as work platforms, consumers would be concerned about employers tracking Internet activity there. As seen in the figure below, presented by Share This (2015) agency, the percentage of sharing of information on Smartphone (+23.3%) and tablets (+48.6%) is more than that of desktops (-30.2%). This is due to the decrease in the use of desktops after the introduction of Smartphone and tablets. Social media marketers are adapting quickly to what is new in the market to help their cause as effectively as possible.

Sports athletes and brands on Social Media

Having a strong and cult following on social media is very important for sporting bodies to ensure that they are in the thick of things and in touch with the online community. It also helps when negotiating with potential sponsors who would be interested to forge a relationship with

sports leagues and its players. In an article for the Telegraph, Andrew Cave and Alex Miller (2015) were quoted as saying, —By engaging fans via social media, sports rights holders can open new communication channels with their audience that can be measured and valued as a new commercial opportunity with sponsors. Businesses that get involved through sponsorships and social media promotions, meanwhile, benefit from increased brand affinity and loyalty. Since Smartphone and tablets seem to keep everyone occupied for most of their time at any place, marketing on the internet makes more sense now than ever. Small videos, eye-catching images and hilarious GIFs are what are trending with today's audience. Smart sport marketers have realized this and have made most of their marketing campaigns revolve around social media. Sponsorships are one of the biggest contributing factors to the growth of the sports industry as explained earlier. Brands want to associate themselves with the most famous sports athletes who have a good reputation on and off the field. According to Carvalho, Scheerder, Boen and Sarmento (2013), just because people enjoy watching Soccer on television doesn't mean that they will attend live games at the stadium. Popular athletes like Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, Roger Federer, Wayne Rooney and Virat Kohli to name few have made big money by sponsoring brands. These athletes who have a huge social media following that accumulates millions of people across many social media platforms often post or tweet about the product or service that they are sponsoring. Thus, their message is seen by millions of their fans who follow them on social media and this generates more sales of the respected product or service.

Cristiano Ronaldo is one these world famous athletes who has an enormous social media following. Ronaldo was the first athlete to cross more than 100 million Facebook fans. This is the reason why some of the biggest brands in the world like Nike, Tag Heuer and Herbalife have signed Ronaldo to endorsement deals to promote their products. With over 111 million Facebook followers and more than 42 million twitter followers and counting as of this writing, Ronaldo is the most followed sports athlete on social media. Kurt Badenhausen (2016) who also writes for Forbes notes in one of his articles that, Ronaldo posted six times on Facebook over two days about the watch brand —**Don't** crack under pressured campaign. The posts were viewed 35million times with 2.4 million - likes over two days. The posts generated an estimated value of \$380,000 for Tag, according to research firm Repucom. Such social media marketing success speaks volumes for brands as their products are advertised to millions of people through these popular icons.

Popular sports brands using social media

Social media marketing comes in very useful for sports organizations to promote their major events with interesting campaigns that involve the audience. Fans want to be engaged in action on social media. They are looking to enter sweepstakes, contests and other such activities through which they can express their love for their favorite club, player, team, organization or any other sports entity and also benefit from it by winning tickets to a match, autographed merchandise by the players and other similar prizes. Alan Cassinelli, a marketing specialist wrote an article for Postano' (2015) looking at some of the best sports marketing campaigns that embraced social media in the recent past. Some of the examples that Alan notes are:

a. WrestleMania 29 —Coming Home campaign:

World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. (WWE) which is a sports-entertainment and wrestling organization hosts its biggest event every year called WrestleMania. People from all around the world attend this event that takes place in the United States of America every year. In 2013, WWE's marketing, digital and social teams did a phenomenal job of using their strong social media presence to engage their fans with creative crowd sourcing initiatives. One of these campaigns included the fans taking pictures of themselves pointing towards MetLife Stadium along with the number of miles they traveled to get there written on the sign. This social media campaign blew up all over Twitter, Facebook and Instagram with the fans using it proved to be a giant social media success for WWE.

b.ESPNW – # 98 Days To Shine

With a goal of making its fan base feel more connected to the ESPNW brand, ESPNW started a campaign called —**98 Days to Shine** that involved a new challenge every day of the summer. Fans

were asked to document their challenge and post it on social media using #98daystoshine. Prizes included the opportunity to be on Google+ hangouts with women sports icons like Skylar Diggins and Kerri Walsh Jennings. All the social media pages of espnW were filled with its followers posting their challenges with pictures and videos. By the end of the contest, espnW had winners from 30 states and 9,000 pictures posted on its main website. Alan notes in his article that the hash tag #98DaysToShine reached over 17 million social users, increasing espnW's social footprint by 24% on Twitter and 7,500% on Instagram.

c. NIKE

Nike is one of the world's largest suppliers of athletic shoes and apparel. It also manufactures sports equipment. Research by Hoovers, Inc. (2012). By 1982, Nike topped the list of suppliers for athletic/sports and training shoes in America. While it was deemed too/ be a success, it was not until the early 1980's that the swoosh company achieved global success with the help of popular athletes as the face of their brand. Nike (2015) indicate that the company designed a first- ever signature shoe called —Air Jordan for ace basketball player Michael Jordan and they registered record breaking sales thanks to Jordan's increasing global popularity at that time. Throughout the next decade Nike would go on to sign endorsement deals with the world's elite athletes and teams such as the US Men's and Women's soccer team, the Brazilian football team and golfer Tiger Woods. These working relationships were formed as a result of Nike's branding strategy of having the world's elite athletes defining its brand.

1.5 Evolution from traditional marketing to digital marketing

In the year 1996, Nike began to experiment with digital marketing. As the internet was gaining more steam, Nike officials felt that it would be the perfect time to adopt the marketing techniques of the new digital era that was just ushering in. As a result nike.com was launched in that year for the Summer Olympics. Utilizing its global popularity to the fullest, Nike began to launch innovative marketing campaigns on the worldwide web. According to Cendrowski (2012), Nike had its stumbles when it was still adapting to the digital world just like any large company would have. For example, it was promoting the NCAA March madness on its homepage in every country. Its consumers in Europe had no clue what this was about. But it improved over the years and Europeans began to follow the action too.

In the year 2000 an exclusive website for sports called Nikefootball.com was launched. According to Ofek and Johnson (2011), the company worked with a media group called Gawker and internet video site YouTube in 2004 to gain a fair understanding of consumer interaction with brands on social media. In 2005 when Nike released the —Touch of Goldad on its YouTube channel that it had created. This ad involved the popular Brazilian footballer Ronaldinho receiving a new pair of Nike shoes on the field. He then kicks the ball back and forth off the goal's crossbar which looked to be a very impressive feat to accomplish. The ad was so unique and it went viral across the internet by accumulating a mammoth 20 million views on YouTube in just a few weeks after it was release. Through this experiment, the marketing team at Nike understood the power of social media and reaching the consumer through this new platform. Cendrowski (2012) notes that in the same year, Nike's id-online store which was deemed to be revolutionary at that time because customers were able to design their own shoes became an instant success with sales reaching more than \$100 million in just a few years.

Nike changed its social marketing approach and decided to go where the consumer is and provide them with great content and stories. Before the advent of social media, maximum number of eyes was on a commercial of Nike during the Superbowl. At once instance, about 200 million people tuned in to the Superbowl and that was the biggest audience that Nike ever had. Cendrowski (2012) notes with all its social media accounts and a strong presence on the web, Nike can hit that number any day of the week. Jones (2009) states that we need to become part of people's lives and digital allows us to do that. There are going to be times when a TV ad is the right way to go, but that's the exception rather than the rule. Nike invests a lot of money on creating quality content instead of spending all that money in buying media.

Most shared World Cup Focused ads

Nike's social media popularity was at an all-time high in 2016 before the Football World Cup was about to begin. According to a report released by Unruly', the videos that Nike created topped the chart for the most shared World Cup focused ads, even going past the ads made by the official sponsors of the world cup like Budweiser and Sony which ranked 16th and 18th respectively. Tomalin (2016) shows that Nike received 1.28 million social shares followed by Samsung with 971,504, and Castrol with 962,206; as seen in the figure below;

While the inspiring stories of athletes that Nike tells through its ad campaigns remain of the same type, the platforms through which these stories and being distributed and displayed has changed dramatically over the last ten years. Social media and digital networking has made the communication between Nike and its consumers more interactive.

Nike Digital Sport

After Nike+ proved to be a successful endeavor for Nike, the company wanted to keep the innovation going on the digital side of things. It was clear to Nike officials that digital and social media was the way to go as far as branding and marketing were concerned in the future. Keeping this in mind, Nike launched a new division in 2010 called Nike Digital Sport. The objective of this division was to create products and services that help users track personal statistics in any sport which they are a part of. According to Cendrowski (2012), through this process of producing products exclusively under its digital sports division, Nike understood its consumer needs more now than it ever had before.

One of Nike's premier products under its digital sport division was called the Nike+Fuelband and it was launched in the year 2012. This was a digital wristband to track the user's movement throughout the day. Nike believed that this would keep the user active for most of the day and stay motivated by checking their results and the progress which they made whenever needed. Retailing at a price of \$149, the Nike+ Fuelband also showed a new metric called the Nike Fuel.

Nike's Social Networking

Instagram: Nike keeps it short and sweet on Instagram. The official Instagram account @nike has over 57 million followers as of this writing and is filled with slick pictures with inspirational quotes as captions. Short videos are also posted from time to time of athletes using the Nike gear and playing different sports. Nike uses simple hashtags like JustdoIt, Find Greatness, Always Believe and other similar ones that people can easily connect with on an emotional level.

Nike's followers on Instagram are encouraged to use such hashtags and thus a community is formed with people sharing pictures and videos all in the name of Nike.

Twitter: Due to its enormous popularity across social media, Nike maintains several official twitter accounts for separate entities. An account dedicated to football @nikefootball, an account for the Nike Women series named @nikewomen and of course the main Nike twitter account @nike which has over 6 million followers as of this writing. Nike's main account generally post inspirational tweets and quotes and associate it to its brand. These tweets get over a couple of thousand retweets and likes. This further spreads their messages or tweets to many twitter users who weren't following the Nike account before. Nike interacts very well with its followers and inspires them individually.

Facebook: With over 24 million followers on its main Facebook account page, Nike is a marketing powerhouse on this social network. It doesn't spam its followers with continuous posts. Every once in few days an inspirational picture or video is posted. When a new product is about to be released, it is promoted with inspiring captions. Athletes who endorse the brand of Nike are prominently featured in posts on Facebook. Nike also has separate Facebook accounts for Nike Football and Nike Basketball.

1.6 Findings and Analysis

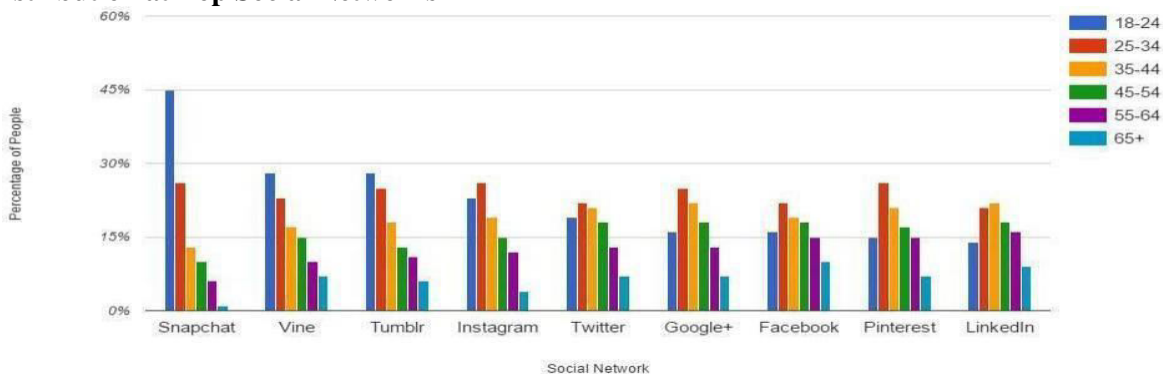
Sports industry is one of the most financially thriving industries in the world. The main revenue generators for the sports industry are sponsorships, merchandising, gate revenues and media rights. By the year 2019, the global sports industry is expected to be worth \$73.5 billion. Everyone has always had an opinion. Now with the power of social media, people get to express their opinion. As Berthon, Pitt, Plangger and Shapiro (2012) pointed out; general issues seldom

remain general these days due to the power and reach of social media. If the products of the brand get bad reviews in one country, the message spreads through tweets on Twitter and Facebook posts and anybody in the world can see it. This brings bad publicity to the brands.

It is pretty evident from the analysis conducted and the findings obtained that social media marketing is a huge plus for sports brands. While traditional marketing has been existing for a while now, marketers are relying less on such methods with the evolution of technology and the utilization of social media networks in the marketing efforts of brands worldwide. Also, from the theoretical research in this work, it is understood that social media definitely plays a major role shaping the landscape of the marketing industry worldwide. Social media marketing can and must be an effective extension to traditional marketing methods for sports brands. According to Samuel Scott (2015), the problem is regarding the digital marketers in this day and age who do not have much experience of using traditional forms of media for marketing. Nielsen reports in 2016 also showed that television ownership has been increasing year over year in the United States of America.

The television audience is still existing even with the over the top digital platforms that are available these days. The myth that —Television is dying has been spreading for almost 10 years now and yet many companies are still fighting to purchase on-air time to showcase their commercials. Kathleen Elkins of Business Insider (2015) points out a recent example of a small pizza company in Philadelphia that became a traditional media sensation by offering customers an extra slice to the homeless. This strategy received so much television and newspaper attention. The owner of the company was also invited to be a guest on the Ellen Show hosted by popular television host Ellen DeGeneres that attracts millions of viewers worldwide. This publicity on traditional media outlets helped the online presence of this company as the number of likes on its Facebook page increased by an enormous amount within days due to the brand awareness that was achieved. Therefore, marketers must find the appropriate linkage between social media and traditional media marketing methods to get the best results and cater to a larger audience. It is not an impossible solution.

Age Distribution at Top Social Networks



Top Social Networks

Social networks have taken the worldwide web by storm. Some of the best and most popular ones are as follows:

1. **Facebook:** Founded by Mark Zuckerberg and his college roommates in 2004 in the United States, Facebook has emerged to be the most popular social network in 2016. With over 1.5 billion users, Facebook has truly connected the world like no other social media network has. The ability of making new friends and finding old ones on this platform has helped it grow by leaps and bounds over the years. This site allows its users to share written posts, pictures, videos, links, status updates and also connect with their favorite sports teams, celebrities and others on its network. According to Clapperton (2009), Facebook was possibly the site that got social networking moving. It has more or less coincided with the social media revolution and is today the largest social network site to date in terms of numbers.

Facebook by the numbers

Number of active users	2.32 billion
Average daily time spent	38 minutes
Mobile usage of Facebook	78%

Desktop usage of Facebook	22%
Millennial on internet using Facebook	82%

2. **Twitter:** Twitter might be the simplest social network to access. With a character limit of 140 characters for a ‘tweet’, it is sufficient to post a link, share a picture and write a message to one’s favorite celebrity or brand. More than 100 million users log in daily on this social networking site to connect with others.

Twitter by the numbers

Monthly active users	321 million
Average daily time spent	19 minutes
Mobile usage of Twitter	88%
Desktop usage of Twitter	12%
Millennial on internet using Twitter	32%

3. **Instagram:** Instagram is a unique photo sharing app that allows its users to not only share pictures but also add various filters to make the picture look more beautiful. With over 400 million users on its platform, Instagram has become a huge hit especially among the 18 to 35 years demographic section who utilize their Smartphone for social networks the most. Facebook bought Instagram in 2012. While there may be several reasons as to why Facebook made this purchase, Tim Loughran who is the business professor at University of Notre Dame believes it is because Facebook didn’t want a competitor like Google to snap it up first.

Instagram by the numbers

Monthly active users	1 billion
Average daily time spent	28 minutes
Mobile usage of Instagram	98%
Desktop usage of Instagram	2%
Millennial on the internet using Instagram	55%

4. **LinkedIn:** LinkedIn is the most popular social media site for business connectivity and networking. It is really useful for maintaining a formal profile, applying for jobs and gaining new Contacts in this technologically driven business world. From the employer’s perspective, LinkedIn is used as a platform for recruiting new employees, forming new partnerships with vendors and having a strong foothold with regards to business and industry news. With over 400 million users, LinkedIn has become the go-to social media network for professionals.

LinkedIn by the numbers

Monthly active users	250 million
Average daily time spent	15 minutes
Mobile usage of LinkedIn	34%
Desktop usage of LinkedIn	66%
Millennial on the internet using LinkedIn	22%

1.7 CONCLUSION

It was observed that the growth of social media is definitely a big blow for traditional marketers. People are spending more time on the internet these days. The short attention span of consumers and a huge variety of content that is available on the internet in recent years has made life difficult for marketers focused on traditional marketing techniques. These marketers must find a way to collaborate the social media marketing strategies with their traditional marketing methods to reap rewards at both ends. While it is not easy, it can be done with strategic thinking and innovative marketing practices.

Hence, marketers should not completely shun away traditional forms of marketing but use them more wisely than before as there is still an audience for it. The bottom line is that social media marketing must be an effective extension of traditional marketing for sports brands but not a replacement of it.

This research study is useful for both academic and professional purposes. The case of Nike's marketing strategies was thoroughly explored and analyzed in this thesis. Nike's evolution from traditional to digital marketing will be useful for students studying in the marketing field at the Bachelor's and Master's level in universities. A lot can be learned from how the marketing industry in general was impacted with the ushering of the digital era and why sports marketers chose to embrace this phenomenon. This work may also be used in professional areas as it covers a wide range of marketing methods. If found useful to the reader, this work may be cited in future academic and professional undertakings of further research on topics involving social media and sports marketing.

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