



Year III, v.2 2023 | Submission: 12/25/2023 | Accepted: 12/27/2023 | Publication: 12/29/2023

Image and visibility of the athlete: media and brand building.

Image and visibility of the athlete: media and brand building

Larissa de Freitas Coutinho Oliveira

Abstract

This article analyzes how traditional and digital media impact the public perception of female athletes, influencing their visibility, reputation, and monetization opportunities, including sponsorships and Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) agreements. The method employed combines a narrative review of academic sources with the analysis of case studies, including the FIFA Women's World Cup, the WNBA, the NWSL, and combat sports, as well as industry evidence. Frequent challenges were identified, such as the unequal distribution of resources, gender and race-related stereotypes, disparities in contracts, risks such as harassment, image crises, overexposure, etc.

Also noteworthy are best practices that have already been developed in the field of visual representation. Practical tools are suggested, such as the Athlete Brand Playbook and a Brand Building Matrix, which provide indicators for increasing followers, conversion rates, and organic media analysis, serving as a useful guide for athletes, agents, and organizations.

Keywords: personal branding; sports media; women in sports; intersectionality; reputation.

Abstract

This article examines how traditional and digital media shape public perceptions of women athletes, influencing visibility, reputation, and monetization opportunities, including sponsorships and Name, Image and Likeness (NIL) agreements. The method combines a narrative review of academic sources with case analyzes of the FIFA Women's World Cup, the WNBA, the NWSL, and combat sports, complemented by sector evidence. Recurrent challenges are identified—unequal resource allocation, gender- and race-based stereotyping, contractual disparities, and risks such as harassment, reputation crises, and hyper-exposure. The study also highlights recommended practices already consolidated in visual representation. Finally, it proposes practical tools—an Athlete Brand Playbook and a Brand-Building Matrix—with indicators for follower growth, conversion rate, and earned/organic media analysis, offering a practical guide for athletes, agents, and organizations.

Keywords: personal branding; sports media; women in sport; intersectionality; reputation.

Introduction

The reconfiguration of the media landscape and the rise of digital platforms.

They have profoundly transformed the way female athletes construct and project their image.

In the context of the attention economy, visibility has become a strategic asset that, in addition to...

In addition to maximizing monetization opportunities and direct engagement with the audience, it also exposes

These athletes face new symbolic, emotional, and contractual risks. The multiplication of content

Own media and the flexibility of traditional mediation structures have repositioned

Athletes as brand producers, simultaneously agents and objects of consumption.

In this sense, recent institutional policies — such as the Name, Image and

Likeness (NIL) in the United States — changed the incentive architecture for athletes.

universities, anticipating entry into the sponsorship and licensing market even during the

Year III, v.2 2023 | Submission: 12/25/2023 | Accepted: 12/27/2023 | Publication: 12/29/2023

sports training. This new arrangement requires legal, fiscal, and communication training, as well as Image management.

From this perspective, this article aims to answer the following research questions: (i) what Traditional media and digital platforms influence image building and value. (i) symbolic engagement of female athletes? (ii) what are the theoretical mechanisms that explain engagement, reputation and conversion into economic value? (iii) what barriers and risks are recurrent in this process and how can they be mitigated? (iv) what institutional and managerial strategies support the Brand governance and responsible monetization?

By combining contributions from media theories, personal branding, symbolic capital and Through an intersectional lens, the study proposes a brand building matrix and a tactical *playbook*. The approach is aimed at athletes, clubs, agents, and brands, offering practical recommendations. to obtain a sustainable reputation and a source of income for female athletes in The contemporary digital age.

2. Theoretical Framework

The concept of personal branding refers to the strategic construction of an identity. public discourse that is based on genuine narratives and visible characteristics, these being applied in a way to provide uniqueness to the individual. In sports, personal branding has become a A crucial tool for differentiation in the market, playing a central role in attracting Business partnerships, especially in scenarios of unequal visibility. Elements such as Visual consistency, identity narrative, and emotional engagement on social media are highlighted. in the literature as factors that enhance the brand equity of female athletes.

Agenda-setting, framing, and gatekeeping theories offer an important analytical basis. to understand the processes by which the media affects the construction of athletes' public image, based on the selection and framing of disseminated narratives. Through these framings, Different levels of perception regarding competence, charisma, and legitimacy can be achieved. This impact is visible both in public engagement and in the strategic decisions of organizations. sponsors. In the context of the attention economy, the scarcity of qualified attention and the The intensification of competition for relevance demands that athletes develop enhanced management skills. active in managing their own image, especially for those in the early stages of their careers. professional.

Specialized literature indicates that athletic identity is significantly... correlated with social markers, especially gender, race, and class. Female athletes, in

Year III, v.2 2023 | Submission: 12/25/2023 | Accepted: 12/27/2023 | Publication: 12/29/2023

particularly those who belong to racialized groups or who come from marginalized communities, They face stereotypes that limit their visibility and restrict monetization opportunities. These stigmas, by reinforcing traditional patterns of femininity and processes of sexualization, They often overshadow the value of athletic performance, creating the need for strategies. specific communicational and symbolic readjustment processes.

The implementation of Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) rules in the United States marks... This is a significant point in the field of sports entrepreneurship, as it validates the monetization of... Image of university athletes. This regulatory change broadened access to sponsorships. licensing and commercial partnerships, while establishing new requirements in terms of licensing and commercial partnerships. Compliance, financial education, and contractual security. The monetization of symbolic capital of Proactive implementation requires the creation of governance systems and access to specialized technical support. resulting in particular relevance for athletes at the beginning of their careers.

According to Bourdieu's theory (1986), symbolic capital can be understood as a representation of the social validation of other forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. In the space In sports, public visibility acts as a type of capital, which, once recognized... Institutionally — through the media, the public, and sponsors — it can transform into Contracts, licensing, and financial return. The process of converting attention into value requires... mechanisms of discursive and practical legitimation, such as proven athletic performance, the Commitment to causes and evidence of social impact.

3. Methodology

This study employs the integrative narrative review method, with an approach interpretative and interdisciplinary, with the aim of understanding the mechanisms in detail. that influence the image formation, reputation, and monetization processes of female athletes. in the current sports and digital landscape. The data was collected between January and September 2022. using the Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and SciELO databases, prioritizing peer-reviewed articles. peer review, technical reports, and institutional documents from entities such as the Committee International Olympic Committee (IOC), FIFA, NCAA, and professional leagues such as the WNBA and NWSL.

The following inclusion criteria were defined for the selection of materials:

- Clear focus on aspects related to personal branding, visibility, reputation or Monetization strategies for female athletes;

Year III, v.2 2023 | Submission: 12/25/2023 | Accepted: 12/27/2023 | Publication: 12/29/2023

- Analyses grounded in concepts of media, identity, intersectionality, or capital.
symbolic;
- Institutional documents that provide guidelines or regulations relevant to the topic.

Opinion-based materials lacking empirical support were excluded.

promotional advertising campaigns without measurable metrics and texts that do not present a clear methodological reference. In addition, industry reports, such as those from WNBA Insights and... WWC 2023, were included with the aim of triangulating market information.

The methodology used allowed for the identification of recurring patterns, theoretical gaps, and emerging trends, resulting in the creation of an analytical matrix for brand building and from a tactical *playbook*, both with potential application by athletes, clubs, agents and organizations. sponsors.

4. Results and Synthesis of the Evidence

The participation of female athletes in sports media has been increasing, especially during periods of international mega-events, through actions in various Institutional platforms and campaigns carried out by leagues and federations. However, the literature This indicates underrepresentation, both in quantitative aspects and in framing. Biased qualitative patterns continue to be a reality. These patterns are often based on physical characteristics or aspects of personal life, rather than focusing on performance. athletic. These approaches compromise the symbolic validation of the athlete and reduce her value. perceived by sponsors and brands.

Building brand equity for female athletes encompasses a set of four... Key vectors, widely supported by literature in sports marketing and digital media:

Genuine narratives and a coherent visual identity — elements that favor... They create symbolic distinction and encourage connection with specific audiences.

Presentations of technical performance and reliability, evidenced by data. Statistics, behind-the-scenes activities, and competition documentation;

Community participation and relevant interaction, including the development of materials. educational and collaborative;

Alliances that align with principles and tactics of co-creation, strengthening trust and extending the duration of trade associations.

Year III, v.2 2023 | Submission: 12/25/2023 | Accepted: 12/27/2023 | Publication: 12/29/2023

These components function interdependently and need to be adjusted.

depending on the stage of their career, the sport they are participating in, and their goals within the context of... market visibility.

Intermediary entities — such as agents, clubs, federations, and platforms — have a direct impact on how the athletes' public image is portrayed.

Guidelines, such as those contained in the IOC Portrayal Guidelines, establish standards with the aim of avoiding sexualization, promoting diversity and prioritizing technical competence in Media representation. The implementation of these guidelines by leagues, such as the WNBA, has been... linked to increasing the brand value of the athletes, engaging new audiences and diversification of advertising portfolios.

Greater notoriety, while desirable from a financial perspective, also increases the... Vulnerability to reputational risks, online harassment, and image crises. Recent research. They demonstrate that female athletes deal with a significant emotional burden. arising from the obligation to maintain a continuous digital presence. This situation requires... Implementation of risk governance strategies, development of contingency plans. communication and the establishment of security protocols, both psychological and cyber.

The formalization of the image monetization market — especially after the introduction NIL policy in the United States — boosted the professionalization of branding practices to starting at the university level. This dynamic demands that the athletes improve their skills. Specifics in accordance with contractual requirements, royalty accounting, impact metrics assessment. (such as media acquisition value, brand elevation and conversion rates), as well as the ability to Negotiating in asymmetrical situations with agents and platforms.

5. Discussion

To transform visibility into economic value, it is essential, first and foremost, to recognize Symbolically, the athlete represents technical excellence, authenticity, and relevance. Cultural. Institutional norms, along with branding strategies focused on truthfulness. (coherent narratives, performance indicators, and consistent identity) function as mediators in this transformation process, increasing attractiveness for brands and Strengthening partnerships.

The way the media presents female athletes continues to play a crucial role in shaping their image. Visual and narrative emphases that highlight physical attributes or personal life diminish The perception of competence directly impacts the alignment between the athlete's image and identity.

Year III, v.2 2023 | Submission: 12/25/2023 | Accepted: 12/27/2023 | Publication: 12/29/2023

brand *fit*. Intersectionality intensifies these distortions, making it essential to...
development of diverse narratives and communication practices that respect different
trajectories, origins and aesthetics.

Mastering the management of data and performance indicators in digital media becomes a
A competitive advantage for up-and-coming athletes. Metrics such as *SOV* (share of voice), *EMV*, and rates.
Conversion rates must be constantly monitored, which requires digital research and strategies.
Legal protection and detailed contract analysis. The proactive professionalization of the presence.
Digitalization must be accompanied by an institutional support infrastructure to prevent exploitation.
or premature damage to the image.

6. Strategic Protocols for Managing Personal Branding in Women's Sports

Based on specialized literature on sports branding, symbolic capital, and the economics of
Please note that a practical protocol is proposed to assist in the establishment and management of
Personal branding for female athletes on digital platforms. The protocol consists of six steps.
subsequent steps that, when interconnected, provide a framework for implementing actions.
strategic and for continuous monitoring.

The initial phase consists of a strategic analysis of the digital presence. This phase includes...
Audit of the channels in operation, analysis of the athlete's share of voice (*SOV*).
in digital spaces, as well as mapping the audience based on demographic information and
behavioral.

Next, the brand positioning and narrative are developed. At this stage,
The content foundations, value proposition, and main thematic axes are established.
(such as performance, social causes or lifestyles), constituting a matrix of messages that
It is in harmony with the athlete's strategic objectives.

The third stage concerns the creation and dissemination of content in various...
platforms. The development of an editorial calendar, the selection of appropriate formats (such as
(short videos, live streams, or behind-the-scenes content) and the structuring of a media kit.
These activities are essential to ensure consistency and engagement.

In the fourth phase, the organization of collaboration management and the portfolio of
products. This includes developing sponsorship packages, affiliate programs, and strategies for
Licensing and commercial releases, such as collaborations or partnerships with brands.

The fifth stage refers to contractual governance, compliance with legal regulations, and risk
mitigation. It is essential to implement control mechanisms regarding the use of...



Year III, v.2 2023 | Submission: 12/25/2023 | Accepted: 12/27/2023 | Publication: 12/29/2023

image, of fiscal responsibilities, especially in regimes like the NIL, of security
Cybersecurity and reputation crisis management preparedness.

7. Critical Components of Brand Building in Women's Sports

There are five pillars that determine the construction of a solid personal brand for athletes.
women. Each of them has a specific strategic function.

The first pillar is athletic performance, which serves as evidence of technical competence.
and professional value. Visibility of results, behind-the-scenes training, and competitive highlights.
It contributes to the consolidation of a symbolic authority figure.

The second pillar refers to authenticity, a central element in building relationships.
Emotional connections with the public. The use of their own voice, involvement with social causes, and communication.
Aspects of personal routines contribute to organic engagement.

The third pillar is community, which refers to the ability to build defense, loyalty, and
Active participation. Live streams, Q&A sessions, fan-generated content, and training.
Engagement clubs are effective strategies for strengthening this aspect.

The fourth pillar refers to monetization, which is implemented through collaborations.
Consistent commercials, co-creation projects with brands, and licensing initiatives. Monetization.
It must be done without affecting the symbolic integrity of the athlete's personal brand.

Finally, the fifth pillar addresses reputation protection. To maintain brand resilience.
In the face of negative exposure or attacks, it is essential to have portrait guidelines, digital security,
Crisis response plans and image governance mechanisms.

8. Limitations and Research Agenda

Although it addresses various analytical dimensions and recent evidence, this narrative review
It has limitations that need to be acknowledged. The lack of a systematic review protocol.
This makes it difficult to compare different sports, geographic areas, and career stages.
Furthermore, the primary focus on sources from English-speaking countries limits the scope of some.
generalizations.

The future research agenda can progress in five priority areas. The first involves
the empirical application of the branding matrix and protocol in field studies with athletes in
various contexts, analyzing the effects on performance metrics, monetization, and well-being.

Year III, v.2 2023 | Submission: 12/25/2023 | Accepted: 12/27/2023 | Publication: 12/29/2023

The second axis covers the modeling of the impacts of media framing on decisions of consumption and engagement, using visual experiments, content analysis, and simulations of public behavior.

Thirdly, it is suggested that the personal brand life cycles of athletes be analyzed, encompassing the transitions between the formative phase, the elite phase, and retirement in sports. Understanding these stages can expose weaknesses and create opportunities for strategic interventions.

The fourth axis proposes the use of intersectional approaches with mixed methods, integrating techniques from computational social science, such as sentiment analysis, data mining and Natural language processing on social media platforms.

Finally, it is important to critically analyze the effects of the NIL regime on equity, economic, especially with regard to the distribution of revenue among athletes of different socioeconomic, ethnic-racial profiles and less popular modalities.

9. Final Considerations

The increasing exposure of female athletes, facilitated by mega-events and digital platforms, and regulatory changes reveal a strategic opportunity for symbolic reconstruction in the sporting universe. However, this visibility is still marked by structural inequalities, both in media coverage as well as in transforming that attention into tangible economic value.

This study suggests a holistic approach that unites institutional guidelines and practices based on evidence and reputational governance tools, such as aspects fundamental to the development of sustainable career paths. Building a personal brand... Athletes' success depends not solely on visibility or massive engagement, but on their narrative value, recognition by institutions, and the ability to manage symbolic risks and operational.

Transforming symbolic capital into economic value therefore requires strategic mediation: through athletic performance, consistency in identity, and fairness in media coverage. With the arrival of new regulations, such as the NIL, which alter income flows and the role of athletes, given that athletes are economic agents, the institutionalization of inclusive practices becomes crucial. Transparent and data-driven practices not only promote greater autonomy, financial, but they also redefine the positions of female athletes in the current sports economy.

References

AAKER, DA *Building strong brands*. Free Press, 1996.



Year III, v.2 2023 | Submission: 12/25/2023 | Accepted: 12/27/2023 | Publication: 12/29/2023

BANET-WEISER, S. *Empowered: Popular feminism and popular misogyny*. Duke University Press, 2018.

BOURDIEU, P. The forms of capital. In: RICHARDSON, J. (Ed.). *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. Greenwood, 1986. p. 241–258.

COOKY, C.; MESSNER, MA; MUSTO, M. “It's dude time!”: A quarter century of excluding women's sports in televised news and highlight shows. *Communication & Sport*, vol. 3, no. 3, p. 261–287, 2015. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479515588761>

CRENSHAW, K. Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, p. 1241–1299, 1991. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>.

DAVENPORT, T.H.; BECK, JC *The attention economy: Understanding the new currency of business*. Harvard Business School Press, 2001.

ENTMAN, RM Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 51–58, 1993. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>.

GEURIN, AN; BURCH, LM User-generated branding via social media: An examination of six running brands. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 2, p. 61–71, 2016.

GEURIN, A. Elite female athletes' perceptions of new media use relating to their careers: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Sport Management*, vol. 31, no. 4, p. 345–359, 2017. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2016-0157>.

HENRIKSEN, K. et al. Consensus statement on improving the mental health of high-performance athletes. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, vol. 18, no. 5, p. 553–560, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2019.1570473>.

INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE (IOC). *Portrayal Guidelines: Balanced portrayal of athletes in the media*. 2022. Available at: <https://olympics.com>. Accessed on: October 29, 2025.

JUDELMA, J.; SANDERSON, J. The NIL era: Reconfiguring athlete branding in college sports. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, vol. 15, no. 2, p. 189–201, 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1123/ijsc.2022-0032>.

LOBPRIES, JL; BENNETT, G.; BRISON, NT Using brand personality to examine sport brand relationships. *Journal of Sport Management*, vol. 32, no. 6, p. 540–555, 2018. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2017-0215>.

MCCOMBS, ME; SHAW, DL The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 2, p. 176–187, 1972. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/267990>.

RATTEN, V. Sport entrepreneurship and innovation: Disrupting the status quo. *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 133, p. 255–259, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.05.004>.

SHANE, S.; VENKATARAMAN, S. The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research. *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 25, no. 1, p. 217–226, 2000. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/259271>.

Year III, v.2 2023 | Submission: 12/25/2023 | Accepted: 12/27/2023 | Publication: 12/29/2023

SARASVATHY, SD Causation and effectuation: Toward a theoretical shift from economic inevitability to entrepreneurial contingency. *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 26, no. 2, p. 243–263, 2001. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2001.4378020>.