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## **ETHICAL ASPECTS OF PERSONAL BRANDING OF ATHLETES**

**Abstract:** Some athletes earn many times more profit from their sponsorship contracts than from professional contracts with their the clubs, competitions and the like. Also many of them commercialize well their popularity on internet. Creating the reputation is a hard and time consuming process which can quickly disappear with millions worth contracts with sponsors. The necessity of ethical behavior is the imperative that is imposed on athletes. It reduces the cost of business transactions, creates trust among shareholders, increases the chances that teamwork will be successful. It also keeps social capital and provides extra value for customer and reduces risks. Modern society can truly be said that it is the media society, conceived as a system of endless communication links and inter-actions which are established among its members. In this process it is the unavoidable role of mass media and it's importance. Because the modern means of this field offer the possibility of a successful personal branding.

**Key words:** ethics, sport, branding, image, mass media.

### **Introduction**

The sports industry continues to grow and globalize, and sporting events provide an excellent opportunity for countries to be in the media spotlight for a short period. A well-known sports personality can easily be transferred to a product brand, and the best outcome is the connection with the branding of an entire nation. Regions, states, nations, and even entire continents actively compete in promotion, with one goal: to develop a positive association with a specific destination, especially if it is chosen to host a particular sports competition such as the Olympic Games, World Cup, basketball championships, and similar international events, becoming a strong economic driver for the host country.

In 1997, Tom Peters wrote a revolutionary article titled "The Brand Called You," 1self-improvement books, websites, and consulting services, particularly

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in the United States. So far, it seems that little of this interest has permeated the marketing discipline, whether in terms of formal research, textbook content, or academic programs [5].

This theme explores the theoretical foundations of personal marketing and personal branding, identifies some conceptual, practical, and ethical issues facing the discipline, and points out challenges that higher education faces in creating a framework in which marketing professionals can learn how to brand themselves and effectively enter the market. An exceptionally successful individual with charisma can create a cult-like a good corporate brand. A popular term for the social dimension is leadership, embodying a strong social dimension means being naturally social, a person who is called upon to make others feel good, an entertaining or kind person, an interesting personality, someone whom others admire [2].

Building a reputation is a lengthy process, created through hard work, but it can also disappear very quickly, along with multimillion-dollar sponsorship deals. Ethical promotion of products and services is a key marketing activity, usually thought of only in terms of promotion and as the sole aspect of marketing. As the range of promotional techniques expands, there is a growing need for coordinating messages and their execution. This problem has led to an increasing number of companies adopting integrated marketing communications. Integrated marketing communications represent a system through which companies coordinate their marketing communications to convey a clear, convincing, and competitive message about the organization, its products, and services [3].

In today's world, where we encounter a large number of marketing messages daily, a legitimate question arises: where is the boundary beyond which something ceases to be merely present and becomes irritating and unethical? The latest ethical challenges for brand management and the concept of branding arise at a time when a significant portion of business is facing major changes initiated by globalization, which has imposed new rules of the game [4]. This paper examines numerous illustrative analyses of the ethical aspects of personal branding for athletes. The necessity of ethical behavior is an imperative that applies to athletes as well, as it reduces the costs of business transactions, builds trust among stakeholders, increases the likelihood of successful teamwork, and preserves social capital while providing additional value to the customer and reducing risks [5].

### **Sport as a global phenomenon**

In contemporary social sciences, the study of private life, especially the private lives of business people, has become highly intensified in recent years. In our country, the book "A History of Private Life" by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, in five volumes published by "Clio," has been translated. The study of

these authors emphasize the necessity of moral behavior in private life, as behaving otherwise would negatively impact their business.

Today, sports has become a significant business, with the English Premier League being one of the strongest leagues globally, not only due to the quality of football but also because of its enormous marketing potential. In 2014, over 800,000 people visited England to watch a Premier League match. Estimates suggest that over 1.2 billion people worldwide are fans of English football. The massive attendance brought financial gains to Premier League clubs (over €942 million in 2014) and successfully branded, improved the image, recognizability, and attractiveness of the destination, Great Britain. Well-known sports personalities can also be crucial factors in creating a positive image and recognition of a nation globally [6], with Novak Djokovic being unparalleled in this role for Serbia.

If we ask who the most famous brand in Great Britain is, I am confident that the vast majority would answer Manchester United. This football team plays globally, has branded stores in Shanghai and Singapore, and goes on tours in the United States every year. David Beckham is undoubtedly the most famous player in the team's history and an excellent ambassador for the United Kingdom, according to many, despite the club's controversial decision to sell him to Real Madrid. In a temple in Bangkok, a splendid golden statue of David Beckham is placed next to the feet of Buddha, alongside other lower deities. Beckham has concluded his football career, but he remains highly sought after in the world of fashion and business. Many footballers, after ending their professional football careers, fade into obscurity, but the Beckham brand will evidently endure. Some elements are impossible to change, but others require work with the assistance of experts from various fields. Many public relations agencies, in addition to their usual services, offer individuals advisory assistance for building or affirmatively positioning themselves. The media's influence on shaping the personal image of athletes is crucial, as new media have global accessibility and reach every consumer. Personal branding is a broader category than career marketing, which is important to understand when we talk about athletes as brands. Knowledge, skills, and professionalism are the focus of career marketing, while in personal branding, we also consider the relationship with family. Certainly, the fundamental rule of brand building applies in both cases, and it involves the systematic application of appropriate marketing tools. A successful athlete who wants to build an image around their name must assess their limitations, strengths, and opportunities before implementing the appropriate marketing tools. [10].

Sports is undoubtedly a global phenomenon that has a significant impact on societies worldwide. Here are several key aspects that make sports a global phenomenon:

**Universality:** Sports are present in all cultures and societies, and people worldwide enjoy various sports activities. Creating a common language through sports contributes to global connectivity.

**Mass Appeal:** Sports such as football, basketball, athletics, and tennis have mass appeal and are followed by millions of people worldwide. Global sports events, like the Olympic Games and the World Cup, bring together people from different cultures and nationalities.

**Media Reach:** Thanks to modern media, sports events are broadcast live worldwide. Television, the internet, and social media enable people to follow their favorite sports and teams regardless of geographical distance.

**Identity and National Pride:** The success of sports teams and athletes often becomes a source of national pride. Sports events often serve as a platform for expressing national identity and solidarity.

**Economic Dimension:** The sports industry has a tremendous economic impact globally. Ticket sales, television rights, sports equipment, and sponsorships contribute to the global economic landscape.

**Diplomacy and International Relations:** Sports often play a role in international relations and diplomacy. International sports events provide an opportunity for cultural exchange and dialogue between countries.

**Unity and Fair Play:** Sports promote values such as unity, fair play, respect, and tolerance. These values transcend national borders and contribute to the global social fabric.

In essence, sports serve as a mechanism that brings people together from different parts of the world, bridging cultural, linguistic, and political barriers. Its global presence makes it a crucial aspect of modern society.

### **Ethical aspects of personal branding**

Often cited as a "ubiquitous feature of modern marketing," the engagement of celebrities in advertising is said to generate significantly more favorable consumer reactions. Research shows that this type of engagement produces higher levels of attention to promotional messages, better recall and brand name recognition, as well as more favorable evaluations and intended purchases of the brand, compared to using unknown personalities. Moreover, a positive impact on a company's profitability and even stock prices has been observed. Therefore, marketers, guided by the belief that celebrities are effective ambassadors in building a positive brand or company image and enhancing competitive positions, invest substantial sums annually in signing contracts with them. However, this is not a strategy that guarantees success in every case, as it requires careful consideration of various factors [7].

Daniel Lair and a group of authors argue that within the personal branding movement, individuals and their careers are sold as brands, accompanied by promises of performance, specialized design, and marked lines for success. Since personal branding offers a remarkably open invitation to self-modification, this phenomenon calls for careful analysis and exploration. The authors suggest a correlation between parallel trends in contemporary communication and employment climates, concluding that personal branding emerges as an extreme form of a fitting response to the market [8].

One of the most significant steps in the branding process is creating the brand image. The brand image consists of a set of ideas, beliefs, and impressions that individuals or communities generally have about a particular brand. It is about how consumers perceive the brand. The image can also be defined as a set of associations that consumers have, organized to have clear meanings. With the increasing influence of globalization and markets becoming more interconnected with technological advances, the importance of how attitudes and beliefs about your brand will impact consumer decisions is growing [9].

Famous personalities can lose popularity or, worse, be caught in a scandal or humiliating situation. When NBA legend Magic Johnson publicly announced his HIV diagnosis and discussed his affairs in 1991 while married, the commercials he participated in were withdrawn, and contracts with him were not renewed. McDonald's decided not to renew the \$12 million annual contract signed with basketball star Kobe Bryant after he was accused of rape.

Some athletes earn several times more from their sponsorship deals than from their professional contracts with clubs, competitions, and the like. The question arises, is Roger Federer the greatest tennis player of all time? Is David Beckham the best footballer? Is Tiger Woods the only successful golfer from the U.S.? Of course, they are not, although they come close. What they all have in common is that they excel at personal branding; they have succeeded in commercializing their popularity and success.

Maria Sharapova, the renowned Russian tennis player, ranked as the wealthiest woman in sports from June 2013 to June 2014, despite playing only one match in 2013 due to an injury. Nevertheless, she remained the highest-paid female athlete on the planet, earning \$2.4 million from sports and an incredible \$22 million from sponsorship deals with Nike, Avon, Samsung, Tag Heuer, Evian, and Head [10].

However, when it was revealed that the world's highest-paid female athlete was using the banned substance meldonium, Nike and Porsche suspended their sponsorship deals on the same day, while Tag Heuer announced it would not renew the contract and continue collaboration with the famous tennis player. Doping involves the use of drugs or administration by an athlete or their support staff before or during a competition to enhance performance. Former French Minister of Health and Sports Roseline Bachelot accused Rafael Nadal of

failing a doping test in 2013. In the world of tennis, cases of doping are not publicly disclosed, nor the penalties imposed, but everything becomes known when a player suddenly does not participate in tournaments for several months. Rafael Nadal had a "famous injury" in 2013, during which he did not play for seven months. However, it is known that he tested positive for doping [11].

The story of the brand can be extremely effective, as it represents a significant part of the brand itself. A brand does not only offer inspiration and optimism; it also preserves and enhances heritage, motivating customers, employees, and all those connected to it. The power of a good story lies in its depth, credibility, and a message that hits the target and reaches all stakeholders. Jing Fan from Brunel University in London, a controversial scientific publisher in the field of ethical branding, notes that companies are constantly under public scrutiny lately. Regardless of what goes wrong, from small incidents to major crises, the blame falls on brands: the brand image and the company's reputation are always victims. Brands are easy targets for all the bad happenings in the company, and the reputation built over the years, with significant financial investments, can be tarnished overnight [12].

Let's recall some mistakes of top athletes. American cyclist Lance Armstrong admitted to using banned substances, leading to the stripping of all seven Tour de France titles he had won. Footballer Diego Maradona used ephedrine during the 1994 World Cup in the USA, and prior to that, he tested positive for cocaine, resulting in a 15-month ban from playing football. In 2016, it was reported that American swimmer Ryan Lochte and his friends were robbed in Rio de Janeiro. It was later revealed that Lochte had fabricated the story, presumably for insurance purposes and to deflect attention from his poor athletic performance. The ultimate result was gaining public attention but in a negative light [13,14].

Ethical aspects of personal branding play a significant role in today's society, where individuals increasingly build their personal brands to stand out and achieve success. Here are several key ethical questions that often arise in relation to personal branding:

**Authenticity:** The ethical question of authenticity arises when individuals present themselves in a way that is not consistent with their real values, skills, or experience. Pretending or exaggerating to create an illusion can lead to a loss of trust from the audience.

**Accuracy of Information:** Personal branding often involves sharing information about oneself through various media. Ethical issues arise when this information is inaccurate or intentionally presented in a way that can deceive the audience.

**Manipulation of Perception:** Every personal branding strategy aims to shape the public's perception of the individual. However, manipulation or misuse of

marketing techniques to create an inaccurate or misleading image can spark ethical controversies.

**Social Responsibility:** Personal brands often have a significant impact on society. Ethical questions arise when individuals fail to recognize their social responsibility or when they use their influence in a way that can negatively affect the community.

**Privacy and Boundaries:** Establishing boundaries between personal and professional life is a key ethical issue in personal branding. Sharing private information can cause problems if boundaries are not clearly defined.

**Targeted Groups and Manipulation:** Targeting specific audience groups can be an ethical issue if it involves manipulating emotions or stereotypes to achieve a certain marketing goal.

**Social Justice:** Questions of social justice may arise if personal branding supports or advocates values that contradict principles of social justice or if it ignores important social issues.

At the end, building a personal brand carries responsibility and requires careful management to preserve ethics and integrity. Individuals engaged in personal branding should be aware of the consequences of their actions and strive to build authentic and responsible brands.

## **Conclusion**

Athletes are now expected to be entertainers and easily available in a variety of ways, and athlete branding is becoming more and more important. Many fans follow their favorite sportsmen on many platforms thanks to social media, and they're always seeking for ways to interact and engage. Building trusting connections with fans is important, and having a positive athlete brand may help an athlete succeed and remain relevant outside of their sport through endorsements, sponsorships, and post-career opportunities [15]. Although doping is most popular in sports, it did not initially arise for sporting results. It is believed to have been first used by soldiers in wars to artificially increase endurance and courage in certain battles. As seen in numerous examples, some athletes faced bans from further competition, questioned their future professional careers when it was discovered that they were using prohibited substances. However, in addition to that, they also lost their multimillion-dollar sponsorship deals.

Modern society can rightfully be called a media society, understood as a system of countless communication links and interactions among its members. In this process, the role and significance of mass media are unavoidable, as contemporary media provide the opportunity for successful personal branding. Modern media, with the help of public relations experts, can subtly create the media reality that suits them. In contemporary media environments rich in

manipulation tools, there are excellent opportunities for those who want to use them for their purposes. Media manipulation often shapes public opinion through spinning, where information about events and personalities is manipulated. "Using modern achievements in the media field, there are multiple truths, depending on the creator's message capabilities and the recipients' readiness, regardless of the geographical specificity of the situation and the topic".

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## ETIČKI ASPEKTI PERSONALNOG BRENĐANJA SPORTISTA

**Rezime:** Pojedini sportisti zarađuju mnogo više novca od svojih sponzorskih ugovora nego od profesionalnih ugovora sa svojim klubovima, takmičenjima i slično. Takođe, mnogi od njih uspešno komercijalizuju svoju popularnost na internetu. Stvaranje reputacije je težak i dugotrajan proces koji može brzo nestati zajedno sa ugovorima vrednim milionima sa sponzorima. Neophodnost etičkog ponašanja je imperativ koji se nameće sportistima. Smanjuje troškove poslovnih transakcija, stvara poverenje među akcionarima, povećava šanse za uspešan timski rad. Takođe održava društveni kapital i pruža dodatnu vrednost za korisnike, smanjujući rizike. Savremeno društvo zaista može biti nazvano medijskim društvom, osmišljenim kao sistem beskrajnih veza i interakcija koje se uspostavljaju među njegovim članovima. U ovom procesu neizbežna je uloga masovnih medija i njihov značaj. Jer moderna sredstva u ovoj oblasti pružaju mogućnost uspešnog ličnog brendiranja.

**Ključne reči:** etika, sport, brendiranje, imidž, masovni mediji.