

## *The innovative use of new media in NCAA Division I electronic branding campaigns*

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In today's competitive economic climate, NCAA athletic departments are now faced with diminishing revenue streams due to the fact that many boosters, corporate sponsors, and consumers have less disposable income (Drape & Evans, 2008). Further, with the increase in competition in the entertainment industry, sport organizations have turned to the development of innovative marketing strategies to differentiate themselves from their competitors (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007). While there are a variety of marketing strategies that have been implemented, NCAA athletic departments have identified branding as an element that is critical in the development of loyalty among consumers (Ross, 2007).

Past sport management research has illustrated several monetary benefits that coincide with strong organizational brand equity (Ross, Bang, & Lee, 2007; Robinson & Miller, 2003). In particular, scholars have emphasized that the development of a strong brand image with consumers can result in the following marketplace benefits: enhanced product image (Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998), improved product value (Keller, 2003), and increased repeat purchase habits (Gladden & Milne, 1999). Further, Gladden and Funk (2001) reinforced the value of product positioning when indicating that consumers with strong brand loyalty were significantly more likely to remain fans when a team struggles from a performance standpoint.

With the financial benefits linked to building brand image with consumers (Gladden & Funk, 2001; Robinson & Miller, 2003; Ross, Russell, & Bang, 2008), one rapidly growing platform that sport organizations are now utilizing is electronic branding. However, segments of the sport industry are in the infancy stages of developing long-standing practices for communication via new technology (de Chernatony & Christoudoulides, 2004). Thus, the purpose of the current research was to explore the technologies that NCAA Division I (FBS and FCS) athletic departments implement to build their brand image with consumers.

Overall, the research illustrated that NCAA Division I athletic department's rated the social network (e.g., Facebook) and video sharing (e.g., YouTube) sites as the top mediums for building brand image with consumers. Further, the data also supported the notion that FBS and FCS athletic departments had slightly different philosophies when utilizing technology to develop their brand with consumers.