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The trend I am choosing to examine for this assignment is the changing media landscape, specifically related to the sport industry. The media landscape has undergone significant changes in recent years, and these shifts have had a significant impact on public relations. Sports has traditionally been viewed for consumption using “legacy media” outlets such Fox, CBS, NBC, and ESPN. While these companies as a whole are still very prevalent, they are shifting their focus to more readily available streaming services, podcasts, and social media platforms. Traditional legacy media would use public relations in commercials, news paper ads, and radio ads but users can now easily access information through the internet making it more compelling to skip out on old forms of media. The PR professional is now tasked with adapting to these current trends.

According to the article “Mind the Gap” the study preformed by USC school of public relations asks the question how relevant several types of media channels will be in meeting their objectives by 2030? The top four answers are as follows. Social media (53%), podcasts (35%) smartphone apps (34%) and influencer promotion (30%). In contrast the four lowest are cable news (11%), print news or magazine (13%), network television (16%) and celebrity endorsement (17%) (Cook.) Unsurprisingly generation Z is the outlier when it comes to their appreciation for these new media platforms. When separating responses by each of the 4 age groups studied (Gen Z, Gen X, Millennials, and Boomers) Gen Z believes that these new media categories will be most relevant by 2030 which is significantly higher than the other three age groups with a difference of 18% compared to boomers (the oldest generation studied). In regard to influencer promotion, Gen Z PR practitioners believe that influencers are taking the role of the typical celebrity when it comes to helping form public opinion regarding certain products as they are more relatable to the younger consumer. The concept of new media is not slowing down and it will be interesting to see how it is innovated in the future.

One advantage this new media landscape offers is 24/7 access to information in tandem with the ability for fans to customize and interact with the companies that shape their viewing experience. This new type of direct-to-fan communication via social media platforms is bypassing traditional media outlets and creating a direct line for PR professionals to reach the public. This is good for crisis communication and to notify the public of potential issues. For example, YouTube TV was in the middle of contract negotiations to continue to carry fox sports and its programing right at the start of the college football season. This was to the dismay of many college football fans and viewers who ditched regular tv for streaming service platforms. Using social media fans were able to hear the news directly from both parties that after a few days of negotiations they were able to reach a deal and continue their coverage of college football. These are just a few of the ways that the sports media landscape has and will continue to change in the coming years. These trends are now fully being embraced and adopted by typical legacy media outlets, and this can be seen in several ways.

The first example I will touch on is ESPN's recent acquisition of social media influencer Katie Feeny as a sports and lifestyle content creator. Katie is a recent graduate of Penn State university who was hired by ESPN in August of 2025 to create content across all of their social media platforms. Before her time started at ESPN Katie had started a following of her own which started with her posting videos of her own personal life before getting more involved in the sport community at her college. From making sport content relevant to Penn State, she got attention from the NFL where she became the social media correspondent for the Washington Commanders. Katie uses a newly "refreshed" approach to sport center on various social media platforms to include Snapchat which reaches approximately nine million viewers daily (Panitz.) This coincides with the recent release of ESPN's direct-to-consumer platform. She delivers short form video content and contributes to Sunday NFL countdown, Monday night countdown, and college game day. She hopes to bring her first-person lifestyle-driven approach with a blend of onsite access to fashion and culture. Executives call her the perfect match for their reimagined social media coverage. Katie has built an impressive connection with her Gen Z audience by providing sport centered content that is fresh and engaging. This all ties back into one of my key points that traditional media is no longer enough to be successful in today's market. By investing in this short form style of content ESPN can now spread themselves across platforms to a larger audience.

ESPN is not the only organization that is trying to adapt to this modern style of media, the NFL is now finding alternative forms to broadcast to their customers. Football is one of if not the most popular sport in American society. What was a sport one could only see on large media and cable networks is now being distributed in a way that can be viewed in multiple ways on multiple screens. Over the last several years the NFL has negotiated with several streaming platforms and even created their own direct to consumer subscription service. The NFL's recent negotiation with Prime Video has the streaming service in charge of their Thursday night football package which was previously run by CBS (NFL.) The benefits of making the switch to more streaming services in this case Amazon Video is that it is able to reach more fans in more places around the world for a lower cost. It also helps to modernize the brand as forward thinking and innovative while reaching its younger audience. The NFL also offers fans a "Sunday ticket package" which allows fans to view every live out of market game on Sunday afternoons. This package was recently acquired by Google the owners of YouTube from its previous owner Direct TV. From a PR standpoint this positions both YouTube and the NFL as leaders in live sports and entertainment. YouTube benefits from this position as well elevating its status while using fan centric features such as Multiview, real time stats, interactive overlays, and fantasy tracking. The NFL breaking away from Direct TV limits the exclusivity of the NFL following the trend of making your product available to all that want to purchase and not just Direct TV customers. The NFL recently dove into the direct-to-consumer space as previously mentioned. They launched an exclusive streaming service called NFL+ in July of 2022. With NFL+ fans can take their games on the go. NFL+ offers access to live out of market pre-season games across all devices live local and primetime regular season and post season games on mobile devices and audio feeds of every game (Rizzo.) The goal is to deepen the relationship with their fans by creating a service that cuts out the go-between. This example of the NFL along with ESPN's use of influencer talent are perfect ways to adapt to the ever-changing media landscape in terms of catering to fans and broadening demographics.

Through my research into these two companies, I have been further educated on the changing landscape of sports media. Some of my key takeaways after performing research include the use of social media, the implementation of streaming services, and the use of direct tactics. All of these takeaways are similar in purpose but do offer different advantages.

The use of social media allows sports media companies to reach new age demographics, come with fun and engaging ways to entertain current fans, as well as potentially recruiting new ones. Especially those who do not typically fit the bill of the average sports fan. ESPNS hiring Katie Feeny does its best to bridge that gap between current sports fans who enjoy her previous content during her time at Penn State and those who appreciate more of her home and lifestyle content. It is the perfect way of blending traditional media and new media together, allowing companies to engage with their audiences in more authentic ways.

My next take away is the implementation of streaming services. Similarly to the use of social media streaming services provide a more innovative way to reach customers. The NFL's commitment to bettering their fan experience by making it more enjoyable, accessible, and cost effective for their customers is obviously at the top of their minds. As it relates to public relations, measures like this help to enhance its brand image, audience engagement, and perception in the media. All these things are key for any company to expand and grow.

Lastly the use of direct-to-consumer tactics allows for a more personalized sports viewership experience. Examples of this include YouTube's personalized Multiview as well as the premium version of the NFL+ subscription which is a football junkies dream as it comes with coaches' film and exclusive views from every angle imaginable. In general, this direct-to-consumer tactic and the personalization of sports media is vital for maintaining a positive public relationship and improving customer satisfaction.

In conclusion these three best practices of the use of social media, the implementation of streaming services, and the use of direct tactics must continue for this type of sports viewership to still be relevant by 2030. The ever-changing landscape of media follows the trend of personalization and customization. People want things more easily accessible and customizable to fit their needs. It will be interesting to see how things change over time.

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