

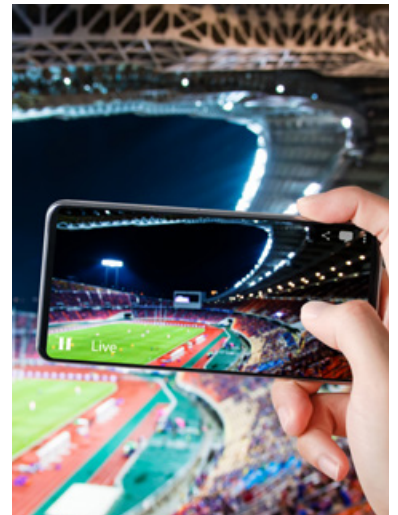
Checking into **the game:** *How social media is **shaping sports***



How social media
has changed sport
consumption

How sport and
social media will
intertwine in the
future

How 5G will
impact the
interaction of
sport's consumers



Introduction

Since the inception of social media, it has worked its way into every element of our day to day lives.

Whether that be interacting with friends and family, booking holidays, shopping for clothes, allowing an insight into different lifestyles and it has definitely affected the world of sport. The way that we consume sport, the interaction with sports stars and the changes in advertising with the use of sports stars.

The change social media has made to the consumption of sport

Gone are the days where you have to wait for a Saturday night/Sunday morning to stay up to date on the latest football highlights via Match of the Day, with social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter

**everybody has
instantaneous
highlights at
their fingertips
moments after the
goals go in.**



The consumption of sport

This ability to know everything that is happening without even being in the stadium has not only brought more eyes to sport, it has also driven more conversation surrounding sporting events, with a lot of this taking place on social media.

With the consumption of sport, Twitter has placed itself as an invaluable resource for fans, players, teams and the sports media alike. With a platform such as Twitter, you can have easy and immediate access to the most in-demand sports news on a streamlined platform. It is now normal practice for sports teams to include various forms of media such as hashtags, gifs, audio/visual content to take different forms of both information and entertainment. Sports teams that at the core are businesses, have had to adapt and become almost somewhat self-deprecating when it comes to fulfilling the entertainment quota.

Not only have sports teams adapted to be prominent on social media, it is now also common for athletes to have their own social media independently from the sports team they are contracted to. This allows fans to 'follow' the athletes that they idolise and to a certain extent has changed the way that athletes are viewed.

Before social media, the best players in every sport were inaccessible to 'ordinary' people but with the introduction of social media, those players are now on the other side of a Tweet or an Instagram message and has gone a long way to humanize some of the most talented people on the planet.

Another way that social media has changed the consumption of the sport is the fan to fan interaction. Before social media, there would be a community of fans, but it would be limited to: your friends that support the same team as you, people in the stadium during the games or fan groups within your local area. However, after the introduction of social media, a fan from Australia can interact with a fan from Germany, this type of relationship is beneficial for the industry as a whole. The fans start to feel more involved and part of a community, which increases revenue for sports teams and more eyes on the game which draws eyes to TV or newspaper articles and increases media revenue, which creates more money for athletes to be paid more money.

Why social media is important to sport?

At the end of 2017, football club Manchester City became the first football club to hit one million YouTube subscribers. Within the same year, City launched their own digital platform -- 'Cityzens', whilst their city rivals Manchester United unveiled their own in-house 'MUTV' app. These are just two examples of two of the biggest sports clubs in the world, in the same location looking at the new digital world we all live in and change their business approach to adapt to it. There has been a shift from club newspapers, magazines or physical programmes and moved more towards announcements via social media, whether that be announcing the team on Twitter, unveiling the new kit on Instagram or fulfilling a commercial sponsor deal on YouTube.

The sports industry is ever changing and expanding and by 2015 the sports industry and had fully embraced social media. 93.3% of global sports leaders believe that the engagement on social media from fans will continue to grow in the next 5-10 years. KnowTechie also found that 61% of sports viewers now follow sports online whilst the number of fans in 2015 who viewed sports content on their smart devices was up to 39% from 21% just two years earlier.

Article source

To view source, [click here](#).





Social media has also become very important for sport because it has allowed both athletes and sports teams to control the narrative more than ever before. Before social media, it would be very difficult for a sports team or an athlete to refute anything that was said about them in the media, whether it be a trade rumour or a story about something they had done. Whereas now, athletic stars can have their say and set a story straight before it becomes mainstream news, the most recent example of this was French football superstar Kylian Mbappe who was rumoured to be pushing for a move from his current club Paris Saint Germain to Spanish giants Real Madrid. Mbappe responded to a Tweet, trying to set the story straight before adopting the phrase coined by President Donald Trump: FAKE NEWS.



Social media influencers in sport

Influencers in the sport industry are different from a lot of other industries because they can consist of the usual influencers that have made a name for themselves on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, however, within the sporting world,

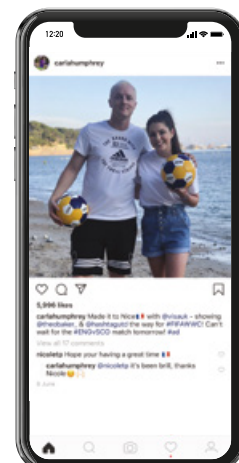
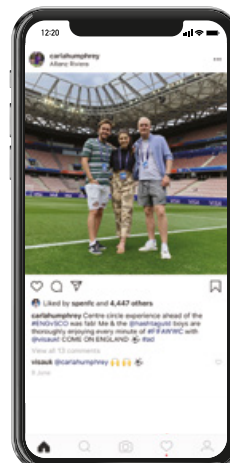
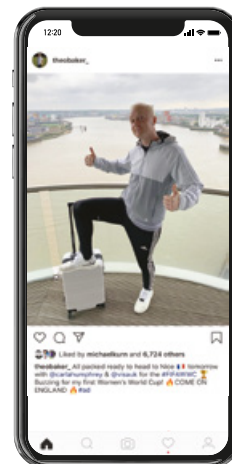
a lot of the athletes themselves become the influencers and are paid millions of pounds by brands to represent them, their products or to go to their events.



Sport and social influencer

The magnitude of sports on the economy is such that it isn't just sports companies that want to be involved with sports influencers. It is much more far reaching than that and there are many examples of titans of other industries becoming involved with social influencers and sporting events to promote their brand.

One of the most recent examples of this was during the first round of fixtures for the FIFA Women's World Cup in France as VISA combined the two types of influencers by taking both YouTuber Theo Baker, Lewis Preston -- a member of YouTube football team Hashtag United & Bristol City Ladies player Carla Humphrey to the World Cup to create a weeks worth of content to promote both the tournament and VISA as a brand. This campaign included presenting the women of the match trophy after England's opening game of the tournament and covering the match across their own and Visa's social channels.



In America, the NFL have also recently started to use their own players as social media influencers with various campaigns. The National Football League has a very strict uniform policy that restricts players from wearing outlandish footwear, altering their jerseys and more. However, in gameweek 13 out of 16 one of the largest sports associations in the world made an exception for the campaign 'My Cause My Cleats.'

The campaign, which first started in 2016 has grown year on year and in the 2018 version, more than 800 players took part, with the boots being auctioned off afterwards with the proceeds given to charity.

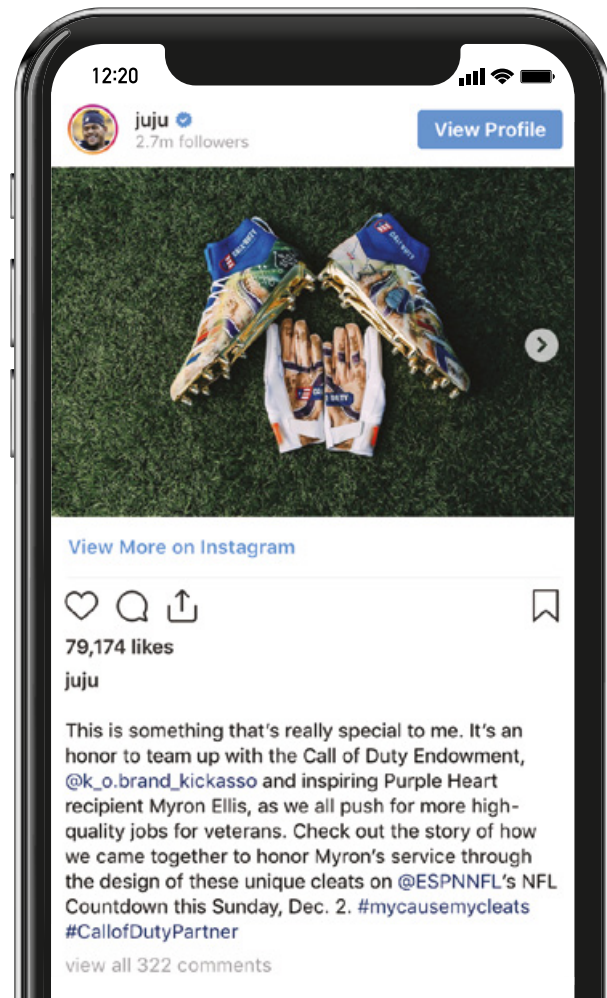
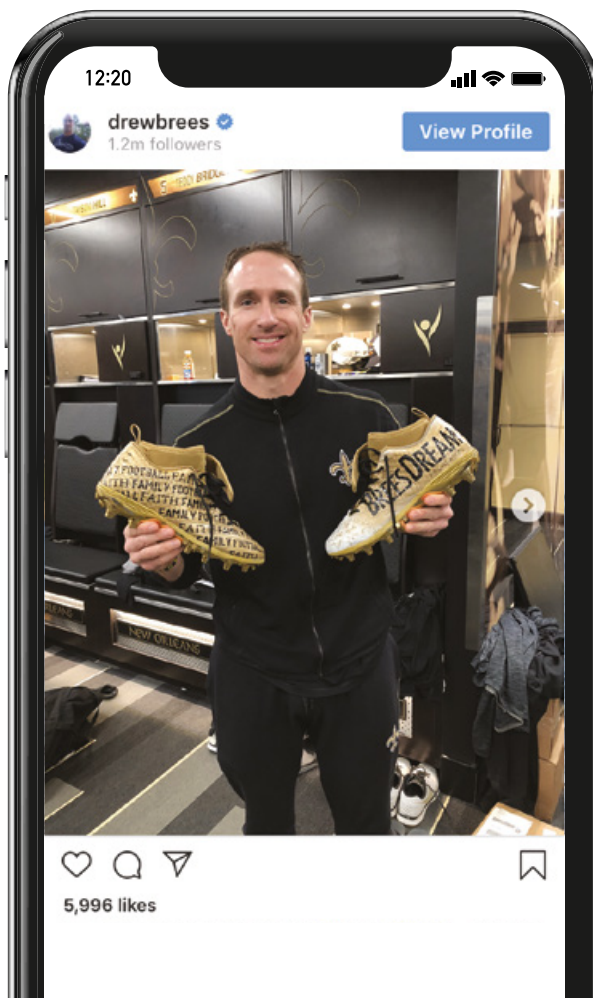
Using athletes for this type of campaign can only bring positivity to a sports organisation such as the NFL and a campaign like this would not have gained anywhere near the type of exposure had it not been promoted via social media.



Good Morning America @GMA

"With the help of the @NFL and the platform that I'm in right now, I want to raise awareness." @Giants RB @saquon reveals he's selling football cleats to raise awareness of a rare genetic disease called 22q. #GMADay #MyCauseMyCleats gma.abc/2NC8rCv

♡ 2,600 19:32 - 27 Nov 2018



How sport and social media will intertwine in the future

There is no doubt about it,

**technology and
social media
are shaping the
future of many
industries,
including sports.**

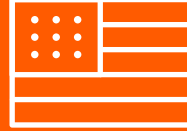
Esports by 2020



250 MILLION
people around the
world watching live
and online



11 BILLION
hours of esports
watched globally



3 BILLION
people around
the world hours
watched in the
U.S. (10% of all U.S.
sports viewing)



70+ MILLION
people will watch
an esports final -
more than MLB,
NHL, and NBA
finals

Esports

At the 2019 South by Southwest (SXSW) conference, Peter Moore, CEO of Liverpool FC and former EA Sports President, spoke to both gaming and sports fans about how the two worlds are becoming more and more intertwined.

During his talk, titled -- "Worlds Collide: The Virtual World Influencing Modern Sport", Moore explained how the world of technology, social media and the constant interest in improving technology will continue to affect sports teams, their players and supporters in the future.

One of the biggest changes that this new age could bring about is the look of the players of the future. The next generation of 'athletes' may not be the sports stars of today that are in peak physical condition, but are as likely to be regular men and women who take part in competitive gaming. With the increasing stronghold that technology has in the sports world, there is no reason that competitive gamers won't be considered athletes in the future.

There is also reason to believe that this new wave of 'athletes' are here to stay as sports bodies continue to embrace and push esports.

An example of this was the first ever E-Premier League that took place in March 2019 -- the E-Premier League was a tournament featuring representative fans and gamers of all the Premier League Clubs playing against each other. Each representative was spoken about by the club on their social media with lots of content being pushed out by each club, showing that they take it seriously and see it as a new revenue stream or they are simply adapting to the ever changing times.

Esports is growing even faster in the United States and there are estimations from Syracuse University's online MBA program that esports will have more viewers than every professional sports league apart from the NFL by 2021. The researchers at Syracuse University project that there will be 84 million viewers of esports, this is higher than both the 79 million viewers of the MLB and 63 million NBA viewers, if this be dwarfed by the 141 million NFL viewers.

One of the major benefits of esports is that unlike American football, basketball or cricket, the audience isn't defined by region or culture, so it has more of a global appeal.

Technologies of today that will have a big impact in the future

Performance tracking and wearable technology have beginning to gain momentum in the sports industry over the last few years. As sensors get smaller and smaller, they can become woven into clothing and are almost invisible. Some of the biggest companies in the world such as: Microsoft, Google and Apple are all developing smart fabrics and interactive garments that we can expect to see on the open market in the months and years to come.

The software itself has also become much more intelligent over recent years and now that they become combined with AI and virtual assistants, they can analyse the data they track in real-time and give tips to athletes about their health and training that will improve their performances moving forward. The possibilities for this could be endless, if there was a smart golf club, cricket bat or football boot that could measure performance and give contextualised data back to its user, then it could change the game completely.





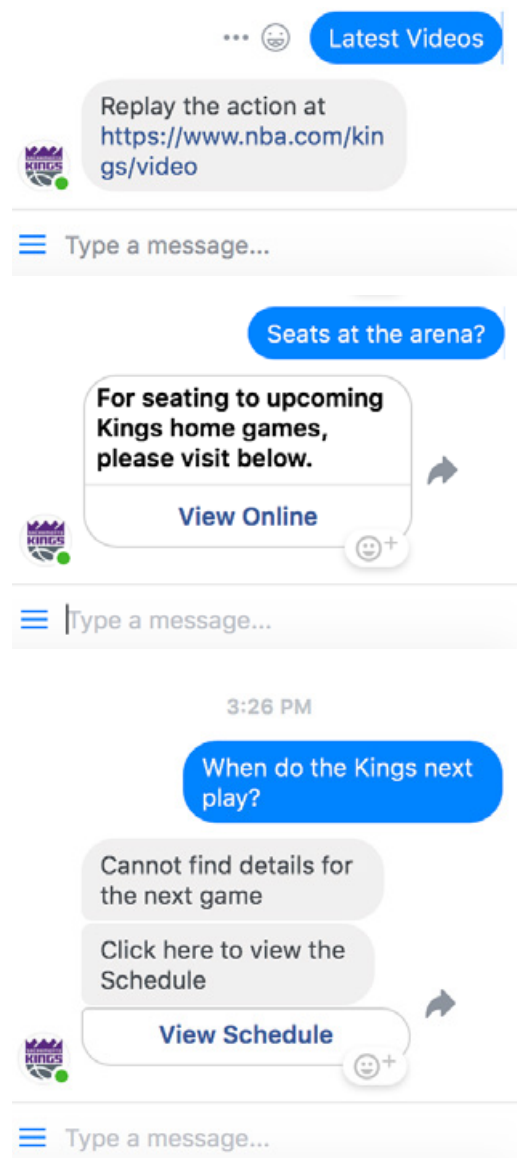
Artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality

There is a big trend in the marketing world at the minute that a lot of new campaigns are becoming more and more focused on artificial intelligence. It has also started to make its way into sport.

One of the newest examples of a sports team embracing this new era, is the Sacramento Kings, an NBA team who use an AI robot called KAI (Kings-artificial-intelligence) on their official Facebook page. KAI is used all day every day and can answer commands for anyone visiting the Kings Facebook page, this could include commands such as:

- When do the Kings next play?
- Are there any free seats for the next game?
- Can I see your latest videos?

(See on the right for responses)



Virtual reality has arrived

Some of the teams in the NFL have started using AR and VR on an increasing level as a way of getting fans back into stadiums and to enhance the live experience. The San Francisco 49ers started using special AR trading cards and collectibles before partnering with MYXR to expand the AR offering they will have. Another NFL team, the Minnesota Vikings have an AR app where on a match day their fans can use the team app to unlock special content on the day of the match and can even take a virtual reality tour of the Vikings museum at their U.S. Bank

Stadium to compete with their favourite athletes. In football, there are many examples of augmented and virtual reality being brought into the modern game to change the way that football is watched. One of the newest concepts is the “Soccer On Your Tabletop” system that takes the input of a video of a match, watches it carefully, tracks each player and their movement. The images of the players are then mapped onto 3D models of pitches from computer games such as FIFA.



Now, the source data being two-dimensional, low-resolution and in motion makes it extremely difficult to reliably reconstruct a realistic and accurate 3D pose of each player. Therefore, this technology is far from perfect, the characters' positions aren't 100% accurate and the ball isn't always in shot. However, this is just the start and can only improve in the future.

Soccer on your tabletop
Watch the video [here](#)



Live sports on social media

One of the ways that social media can really start to compete with sports media brands such as: ESPN, Sky Sports, BT Sport and FS1 is to win the rights to streaming.

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have been making moves in recent years to get the rights to coverage of the worlds biggest sports.



New rights holders?

An example of this is, in 2018, Facebook hired Eurosport CEO, Peter Hutton to lead their negotiations for worldwide live sports streams. Since being hired, Hutton has already managed to secure the rights for Facebook to show live English Premier League games in Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Whilst this is a start, Facebook's biggest coup to this point was when they purchased the right to stream live Champions League football for free in Latin America between 2018 and 2021. The deal entitles them to 32 live Champions League broadcasts per season. Whilst Facebook hasn't been able to crack into streaming in Europe as of yet and to do so, they will have to compete with the likes of Sky and BT who pay billions of pounds to stream the games.

Aside from Facebook, Twitter also began to make moves into sports streaming. They initially purchased the rights to stream live NFL Thursday Night action in a \$10 million deal, but since then these rights have been bought by Amazon. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are definitely the biggest threat to the more traditional broadcasting channels. This is because they have so much capital that there are times when they can afford to make a loss because they have enough money to adopt a trial and error approach until they get the broadcast packages and styles right.



Away from social media platforms, online streaming services such as Amazon Prime, YouTube and Netflix are due to become competitors. Amazon Prime and YouTube have already started to buy the rights for the Premier League. From the 2019/20 season UK Prime members will have exclusive access to watch 20 matches per season. In addition, Prime members will be able to watch weekly highlights of all Premier League matches throughout the season.

This isn't Amazon's foray into buying the rights to live sports who also show US Open Tennis, ATP World Tour Tennis events and even NFL games at no extra cost to the Amazon Prime membership. YouTube are also making their way into the sports streaming world and were sponsors of the NBA Finals that could be watched if you were a member of YouTube TV for \$49.99 a month. YouTube also do show some live sporting events for free, with the most recent example being the Champions League final between Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspurs streamed for free live on BT Sports YouTube channel. Not only did this give exposure to BT Sport with 4.8 million people tuning in via their digital channels, but also gave exposure to YouTube as yet another option for viewing live sports.

As the digital world becomes even more integrated with media and everyday viewing, the number of sporting events on these platforms can only increase. If this was to happen, and more digital and social platforms got the rights to stream sports it would be good for the consumer because they seem to be lowering the cost dramatically. In its current form though, the diversified platforms having content alongside each other is going to be very expensive for people that want to watch every week of football. In the 2019/20 season, supporters will have to shell out almost £700 to watch football every week across the three main broadcasters.



Return on investment

With the way that the social landscape has changed, many brands are looking to 'influencers' to talk about their latest products or to push the brand messaging. This is no different in sports and to an extent is the industry where you can find the most 'celebrity' influencers because the majority of influencers within sports are or were athletes and so

**are in a position
to talk with
authority and so
adds extra value
to the brands
that choose
to work with
them.**

The power of the celebrity

Celebrity endorsements are nothing new and have been happening for years in the more traditional space of TV, radio and print advertising, for decades, companies have been investing their marketing budgets into famous people in an attempt to interact with and engage varying audiences. In today's market, with instant access to analytics, number of followers and available engagement statistics, businesses can now better pinpoint the right athletes to approach for marketing. This has also allowed brands to find stars that really align with, represent and share their values.

Sports influencer marketing is also following the industry trend of beginning to take notice of micro-influencers (influencers with between 1,000-10,000 followers), but the biggest return on investment comes from established sports stars that have had a long-standing reputation within their chosen field.

Professional athletes are seen as a truthful and transparent influence when sponsoring social media posts. The number of followers that they have and the engagement that they get is a

result of the production on the field or court. If they do well during game time, by scoring a great goal, winning Championships, showing good sportsmanship all goes towards increasing the number of followers they have on social media.

With a well placed sponsored post with the right sports star, you could create millions of pounds worth of advertising for your brand. Whilst this type of result isn't easy to come by and will require a hefty investment to get the athlete on board in the first place, there are certain superstars in varying sports that are an almost guaranteed win.

Some sports leagues such as the NBA and NFL do not allow their players to be sponsored on the pitch/court - an example of this is the Cleveland Cavaliers star J.R. Smith getting a 'Supreme' logo tattooed onto his arm, but having to cover it up every game because it broke the NBA's rule of sponsorship on the court. Whilst a lot of these athletes can't be sponsored whilst playing, some clever marketing can make sure that your brand or products are at the forefront for the maximum time off of the sporting arena.



How 5G will change the way we interact with sports

Much has been promised in terms of 5G's impact on the sports industry. Though 5G may be a new concept to the consumer and the everyday person, telecommunications firms and technology companies have been grasping this concept for a while.

**Smartphone
operators such
as EE and
Vodafone set
up divisions
and have been
working on 5G
technology from
as early as 2015.**



5G in action

BT-owned telecommunications company EE have taken the first step into introducing 5G capabilities across several major UK cities, with the first 5G city being London.

In November 2018, EE, in association with Wembley Stadium staged the first live broadcast using the 5G network for the Wembley Cup. The Wembley Cup is an annual football game/tournament that was created by one of Britain's largest YouTubers in Spencer Owen (Spencer FC).

This would have been a great place to first trial this type of technology, some of the world's largest social media influencers along with some legends of the game come together and play a relatively light-hearted game of football, so doesn't have the same seriousness to it that a competitive game of football would be. However, the Wembley Cup is still streamed to millions of people on a huge platform with key sponsors and the pressure of knowing lots of people are watching at home. So therefore, this was a great chance for both EE and BT to showcase how 5G will make their own sports coverage better in the coming months and years.

Before the Wembley Cup, Jamie Hindhaugh, BT Sport's chief operating officer said:

"BT Sport has a rich history of the latest broadcast innovations...5G will next season enable BT Sport to deploy the most advanced remote production of any broadcaster."

Hindhaugh continued by saying:

"It will allow us to cover more live matches from more leagues and competitions, and to bring fans highlights action closer to the final whistle has ever been done before in the UK."

In today's sports market and especially as a sports fan, a lot of things that make being a sports fan so much fun (fantasy leagues, social media, streaming) requires a good connection. Now that 5G technology is almost ready to become mainstream, it is predicted that there will be a complete paradigm shift in the way that consumers view, share and engage with sports. From being 'virtually' pitchside at the game or in your own living room, the speed and low latency of 5G will forever change the way that sport is experienced.

Compared to the current 4G capabilities, the new technology brings up to twenty times the speed - up to 20 Gigabits per-second (Gbps) to mobile users. Even on the lower end of what 5G can do, it can still offer 100Mbps, which is still more than five times faster than the average internet connection that people use in their homes.

For the everyday consumer, such a low latency means that if you are sat at home watching the game or event on your TV, with 5G, you are much less likely to hear your neighbour reacting to a touchdown or goal or get that annoying message from a friend who has a better internet connection than you and sees something within the game before you do.

5G will also be able to take the application of AR and VR to the next level, Nicki Palmer, Verizon's head of Network Engineering believes that 5G means that high-quality, real-time virtual reality and augmented reality content will be increasingly available on portable devices.

Whilst this sounds like it should be years away, there are already beginning to be real world applications. Towards the end of 2018, Verizon partnered with the Sacramento Kings to provide a group of students with simulated courtside seats to a game against the Los Angeles Lakers.

There are also former athletes who recognise how VR can be paired with 5G. One of these is former NFL quarterback Trent Edwards who now owns company 'STRIVR Labs'. STRIVR Labs uses virtual reality for teams like the Dallas Cowboys and Clemson Tigers, the way that it works is the athletes wear a pair of virtual reality goggles and they can then play in real time using signals that are sent over a 5G network from a camera that is strapped on their heads.

Edwards said:

"The science behind everything we do says that once your brain is tricked into thinking that you're actually there, it has a real impact on the brain...it slows down the game, and that's when you can operate best. 5G technology allows football, or really any sport, to be taken to the next level in terms of preparation outside the actual event."

"It will allow us to cover more live matches from more leagues and competitions, and to bring fans highlights action closer to the final whistle has ever been done before in the UK."

Hindhaug



China's continued commitment to sport

In 2016, Chinese electronic retail giants Suning Commerce Group invested 270 million euros to acquire 70% of Italian football club Inter Milan, this was not the first or last time that European teams have been bought out by Chinese businesses, more recently Aston Villa were also invested heavily in by a Chinese businessman,

**a move that
enabled them
the financial
capacity to
get back to the
Premier League.**



China's six year plan

China's President, President Xi Jinping has encouraged investment as it is a step towards China's goal of creating a global sports empire that combines both football clubs and broadcasting rights, to create a sports ecosystem that the Chinese government hope will one day rival that of the European market.

President Xi has laid out a plan to create a domestic sports league that will value more than \$850 billion by 2025. If the Chinese government manage to fulfill their goals, then it will become a real statement of intent to achieve their ultimate sporting goal of hosting the FIFA World Cup. Hosting a World Cup would be a formal announcement to the world of China's intent to be a big part of the future of sport.

China is currently a leader in the development of 5G technologies, which will spur a whole new generation of innovation. One area that 5G promises to transform is the efficiency of China's massive and dense urban centers. With sprawling urban metropolises like Beijing, Shanghai and the Pearl River Delta region, the potential for developments in smart city infrastructure to augment China's urban management capabilities cannot be understated.

By the time China has the opportunity to host a World Cup, "smart cities" will have matured into much more than just a buzzword. Instead it will manifest at the forefront of urban planning efficiency gains. 5G will fundamentally revolutionize the way that urban citizens live their lives. China could be looking to host a World Cup to realise their sporting ambitions and capitalise on a growing consumer class and increased demands for entertainment, while simultaneously using the event as a worldwide expo for the implementation of their advanced 5G technologies.

It is not just the men's game in China that is getting a lot of investment. Chinese payment platform Alipay recently announced their commitment to investing one billion yuan (roughly \$145 million) over the next decade into the women's game in China. The overall aim of the investment is to make the game both more sustainable and also more available for girls who want to play.

The funds will be allocated to four main areas: injury prevention, career development of retired players, coaching education and youth development. Whilst the initiative is being backed primarily by Alipay, there are also significant contributions from Alibaba co-founders Jack Ma and Joe Tsai.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social media, technology and a new digital wave is already and will continue to change the landscape of sport as we know it. Gone are the days where you have to wait until the evening news to find out the updates on the latest games, transfer and trade news. In today's world you can get push notifications the second that a goal goes in or a buzzer beater is made.

You can watch the games from all over the world straight from your smartphone and with the likes of 5G, you won't even need to be connected to wifi and if you can't make it to the stadiums and arenas, then with the technologies of virtual and augmented reality, you will be able to strap on a headset and suddenly become immersed in a different world where you are sitting feet away from all of the action.

Moving forward, it will be interesting to see where and how social media and the digital landscape will continue to shape the world of sport and at Crowd,

**we hope to be
at the forefront
of it.**



Talk to us about your next marketing campaign



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