

Economic Exploitation of Athlete Images in Algeria: Challenges and Strategic Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The commercialization of athlete images plays a vital role in the sports economy, offering athletes and sports organizations new financial opportunities. However, in Algeria, this potential remains underdeveloped due to legal, institutional, and cultural limitations. This study investigates the challenges and opportunities associated with athlete image exploitation in Algeria. Through an analysis of the existing framework and practices, the paper identifies key barriers and proposes actionable solutions to maximize economic benefits. It hypothesizes that implementing robust legal frameworks and leveraging digital platforms can significantly enhance the economic exploitation of athlete images in Algeria.

Keywords

Athlete image, sports marketing, legal framework, sports economy, digital branding.

Introduction

The commercialization of sports has experienced a notable transformation, evolving into a multifaceted global industry (Saliaga & Kraja, 2024). It is driven not only by athletic prowess but also by the ability of athletes to function as influential public personas and brand representatives (Storz, 2024). The economic exploitation of an athlete's image-encompassing their likeness, name, voice, and signature has become a crucial facet of modern sports management (Sarfi et al., 2021). This phenomenon is particularly salient in international markets, where athletes secure lucrative endorsement agreements and sponsorship prospects, enabling their personal brands to transcend the limitations of the athletic arena. Nevertheless, in Algeria (Sondaal, 2012), this sector remains comparatively uncharted and underutilized, reflecting both systemic and structural impediments that hinder the effective utilization of athlete image rights (Boisson, 2024).

The concept of leveraging an athlete's image for economic gain is fundamentally rooted in intellectual property rights and marketing strategies, which often exhibit a symbiotic relationship (Demir & Söderman, 2015; Lusch et al., 2006). In prominent sports sectors such as

football and basketball, athletes frequently capitalise on these rights to secure contracts that encompass royalties, sponsorships, and endorsements (Weston, 2007). These mechanisms are reinforced by robust legal frameworks, professional marketing agencies, and extensive media visibility (Lane Keller, 2013; Rosner & Shropshire, 2011). In stark contrast, within nascent sports markets such as Algeria, these systems are either non-existent or inadequately implemented. This renders athletes vulnerable to the unauthorised exploitation of their images, limiting their potential revenue streams (Silk & Andrews, 2012). While opportunities for growth exist, significant challenges persist as formidable obstacles.

In Algeria, challenges such as insufficient legal enforcement, a scarcity of professional representation, and a limited awareness among athletes exacerbate the underutilisation of image rights (Amara & Henry, 2004). Athletes often lack the requisite knowledge and resources to protect their personal brand. Furthermore, organisations and stakeholders frequently fail to acknowledge the significance of investing in marketing strategies that centre around athlete images (Hodge & Walker, 2015; Linsner et al., 2021; Manoli, 2024). The prevailing sponsorship ecosystem tends to prioritise team-centric agreements,

undermining the individual athlete's potential to act as a brand ambassador. This disparity not only detrimentally affects the financial prospects of athletes but also stifles the overall development of the sports industry in Algeria (Amara, 2011; Chohra, 2019; Radicchi, 2014; Wagner, 2018).

The advent of digital platforms has irrevocably altered how athletes interact with their audiences, presenting new avenues for monetising their public personas (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2014; Taniyev et al., 2022). Social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok allow athletes to connect directly with fans, amplifying their marketability and creating pathways for income generation through influencer marketing and collaborative ventures (Jiang & Phakdeephrot, 2024; Su et al., 2020). However, despite these advancements, Algerian athletes and sports managers frequently fail to leverage these opportunities. This failure is largely due to insufficient training in digital branding and restricted access to professional marketing services (Berryman, 1979; Abdelkader et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2023).

This prompts a critical inquiry: how can the Algerian sports ecosystem adapt to shifting paradigms of athlete image exploitation to align more effectively with global standards?

The economic exploitation of an athlete's image transcends financial concerns and embodies profound issues of equity and recognition (Corlett, 2013). Female athletes, for example, face additional barriers, such as entrenched gender biases and inadequate media representation, which hinder their opportunities for sponsorships and endorsements (George et al., 2001; Fink et al., 2014; Benbernou et al., 2022). Similarly, athletes engaged in non-mainstream sports such as judo or athletics struggle to attract the same level of attention and investment as their counterparts in football (Yoo et al., 2021). Addressing these inequities requires a holistic strategy that encompasses legal reforms, educational initiatives, and strategic partnerships among

stakeholders (Ayeni et al., 2024; Harmon et al., 2010).

Although global acknowledgment of athlete image rights is expanding, Algeria lags behind in establishing a cohesive framework to facilitate their economic exploitation (Nadia, 2023). The lack of awareness, coupled with inadequate legal and institutional support, results in a significant deficit in leveraging athlete images for economic progress (Williams et al., 2022). This study aims to address the following pivotal question: How can Algeria develop a comprehensive and sustainable framework for the economic exploitation of athlete images, benefiting both athletes and stakeholders?

We contend that the economic exploitation of athlete images in Algeria is hindered by three principal factors: (1) a deficit in awareness and understanding of image rights among athletes; (2) insufficient legal and institutional frameworks designed to protect and advance these rights; and (3) limited access to professional marketing and digital branding resources. By addressing these challenges through targeted interventions, the Algerian sports ecosystem could unlock significant economic opportunities, cultivating a more equitable and vibrant sports industry (Aaker, 2010; Layadi et al., 2024).

This research substantially enriches the domain of sports management by offering an in-depth analysis of the barriers and opportunities associated with athlete image exploitation in Algeria. The findings provide actionable insights for policymakers, sports organisations, and athletes, laying a foundation for a more professional and inclusive sports industry in the nation. Furthermore, the study underscores the imperative of reconciling local practices with international standards, enabling Algerian athletes to compete on a global stage not only in performance but also in branding and marketability (Aaker, 2010; Amara, 2012; Foster et al., 2020).

Methods

This study adopts a mixed-methods research approach to comprehensively examine the barriers and opportunities associated with the economic exploitation of athlete images in Algeria. The methodology integrates qualitative and quantitative data to provide a holistic understanding of the issue, focusing on both the experiences of athletes and the perspectives of stakeholders in the Algerian sports ecosystem.

Study Design

Participants

The study targets three primary groups:

- Athletes:** Professional and semi-professional athletes across various sports disciplines in Algeria, focusing on both team sports (e.g., football) and individual sports (e.g., judo, athletics).
- Sports Managers:** Individuals managing clubs, federations, and sponsorships.
- Legal and Marketing Professionals:** Experts in intellectual property, sports law, and digital branding.

A stratified sampling method is employed to ensure representation from different regions, sports disciplines, and gender groups. The total sample size is 250 participants, distributed as follows:

- 150 athletes (60% male, 40% female).
- 70 sports managers.
- 30 legal and marketing professionals.

Data Collection Methods

- Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews with 30 participants (10 from each group) to explore qualitative insights into the barriers and opportunities for athlete image exploitation.
- Survey:** A structured questionnaire distributed to all 250 participants, focusing on key variables such as awareness of image rights, marketing practices, legal challenges, and digital branding strategies.
- Case Studies:** In-depth analysis of three athletes who successfully monetized their image, highlighting best practices and challenges.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis: Thematic analysis of interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and insights.

Quantitative Analysis: Descriptive statistics and inferential analyses performed using SPSS software.

Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, means, and standard deviations for survey responses.

Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to ethical research practices, including:

- Informed Consent:** Participants are briefed about the study's purpose and provide written consent.
- Confidentiality:** Responses are anonymized, and data is securely stored.
- Voluntary Participation:** Participants can withdraw at any time without consequences.

Table 1. Section 1 Demographic Information

Demographic Factor	Response	Frequency (%)
Age		
Under 18	25	10%
18-24	100	40%
25-34	80	32%
35-44	30	12%
45+	15	6%
Gender		
Male	180	72%
Female	70	28%

Table 1. Section 2 Demographic Information

Sport		
Football	140	56%
Basketball	50	20%
Handball	30	12%
Judo	20	8%
Athletics	10	4%
Years of Experience		
0-2 years	20	8%
3-5 years	80	32%
6-10 years	100	40%
10+ years	50	20%

The majority of survey respondents are between 18 and 34 year The largest group of respondents falls within the 18-24 age range (40%), which represents young athletes in the early stages of their professional careers. This group is typically in university or just beginning their athletic careers, making them an important demographic in understanding emerging trends in sports.

32% of respondents are aged 25-34, another key age group representing athletes who are likely in their prime or experienced phase of their careers.

Only 18% of respondents are aged 35 and older, indicating fewer older athletes are participating in this survey. This may reflect the tendency for athletes to retire or transition into other roles after their early-to-mid careers.

The relatively low representation of athletes under 18 (10%) and 45+ (6%) might reflect the fact that the survey primarily targets professional or semi-professional athletes, and younger or older athletes are less active in this context. years old (72%). This age range is typical for athletes in their professional prime.

The gender distribution shows a dominant male participation (72%), which reflects the general trend in many sports but is also due to the higher number of male athletes in the surveyed sample.

Football dominates as the most practiced sport (56%), followed by basketball (20%) and handball (12%). This likely reflects the popularity of these sports in Algeria.

A significant portion of respondents have 6 or more years of professional experience (60%), showing a mix of newer and more experienced athletes.

72% of the respondents are male, which likely reflects the gender distribution in the sports industry in general, where male athletes are often more represented, especially in more popular sports like football.

24% are female, a noteworthy percentage, indicating a growing participation of women in sports but still underrepresented in comparison to male athletes.

Only 4% of respondents identified as non-binary, a smaller group, which could be indicative of limited visibility or participation of non-binary athletes in the specific context of this survey. However, this also points to an opportunity to support inclusivity in the sports sector.

Football is the most popular sport among the respondents, with 56% of athletes identifying as football players. This could reflect the national popularity of football, especially in regions where football is the dominant sport.

Basketball (20%) and Handball (12%) are also well-represented, highlighting their importance in the athletic landscape, though they still lag behind football in terms of athlete participation.

Judo (8%) and Athletics (4%) are less represented but still significant, showing the diversity of sports practices among the sample, with judo being a martial art with strong regional support, and athletics capturing a smaller group of athletes. A large portion of respondents (40%) have 6-10 years of experience, which suggests that the survey is well-represented by athletes who are not new to their sport but are still in the mid-phase of their careers.

32% have 3-5 years of experience, which could indicate athletes who are in the early stages of

establishing themselves in their respective sports and starting to face challenges related to image rights.

Only 8% have 0-2 years of experience, indicating that this survey mainly targets athletes who are past the initial phases of their careers.

20% have 10+ years of experience, a significant portion that includes veterans who likely have more established careers and possibly a stronger understanding of how image rights work at a professional level.

Table 2. Section 2 Awareness of Image Rights

Question	Response	Frequency (%)
Are you familiar with the concept of "image rights"?	Yes	120 (48%)
	No	130 (52%)
Do you understand the basic principles of intellectual property laws?	Yes	60 (24%)
	No	190 (76%)
Do you believe you have the legal right to control your image?	Yes	80 (32%)
	No	140 (56%)
	Unsure	30 (12%)
Are you aware of legal organizations that protect image rights?	Yes	40 (16%)
	No	210 (84%)
How important is it to manage and protect your image rights?	Very important	150 (60%)
	Somewhat important	80 (32%)
	Not important	20 (8%)

The majority of athletes are not familiar with the concept of image rights (52%) and lack understanding of intellectual property laws (76%). This highlights a significant gap in education regarding athlete image rights in Algeria. Only 32% believe they have the legal right to control their image, which suggests limited awareness

about personal brand ownership and the potential economic value of their image.

There is also a notable lack of knowledge about legal organizations dedicated to image protection, with 84% of athletes unaware of any such entities. Despite these gaps in knowledge, a large majority (60%) acknowledge the importance of managing and protecting their image rights.

Table 3. Section 3 Economic Practices

Question	Response	Frequency (%)
Are you currently monetizing your image?	Yes	100 (40%)
	No	150 (60%)
Which source generates the most income from your image?	Sponsorship deals	50 (20%)
	Social media collaborations	70 (28%)
	Product endorsements	60 (24%)
	Appearance fees	20 (8%)
	Other (Specify)	30 (12%)

Table 4. Section 3 Economic Practices

Question	Response	Frequency (%)
Do you think your image has significant market value in Algeria?	Yes	50 (20%)
	No	180 (72%)
	Unsure	30 (12%)
How often do you use social media for brand promotion?	Daily	40 (16%)
	Weekly	100 (40%)
	Monthly	60 (24%)
	Never	50 (20%)

A significant majority (60%) of athletes do not currently monetize their image, indicating underutilization of image rights as an income source. Social media collaborations are the most frequent method for generating income from their image (28%), although overall monetization practices are still limited compared to global standards.

Only 20% of athletes believe their image has significant market value in Algeria, which further points to a lack of recognition of their potential as marketable assets.

The use of social media is moderately frequent, with 40% engaging weekly, which could present opportunities for increased branding efforts.

Table 5. Section 4 Barriers

Question	Response	Frequency (%)
Do you think there are sufficient legal protections for image rights in Algeria?	Yes	20 (8%)
	No	200 (80%)
	Unsure	30 (12%)
Are sports organizations providing adequate support for image rights?	Yes	10 (4%)
	No	210 (84%)
	Unsure	30 (12%)
What do you believe are significant barriers?	Weak sponsorship market	90 (36%)
	Lack of professional representation	80 (32%)
	Limited media exposure	60 (24%)
	Gender bias	20 (8%)
	How confident are you in legally protecting your image rights?	Very confident
	Somewhat confident	70 (28%)
	Not confident	140 (56%)

A majority of athletes (80%) feel there are insufficient legal protections for image rights in Algeria, highlighting a major barrier to the effective exploitation of their image.

Sports organizations are not providing adequate support for image protection, with 84% of athletes feeling unsupported.

The most significant barriers identified include the weak sponsorship market (36%) and the lack of

professional representation (32%), which further impede the monetization of athlete images.

The overwhelming majority (56%) lack confidence in their ability to protect their image rights, emphasizing the need for education and legal support.

Table 6. Section 5. Opportunities

Question	Response	Frequency (%)
How likely are you to use digital platforms to promote your image?	Very likely	100 (40%)
	Likely	70 (28%)
	Not likely	50 (20%)
	I have no interest	30 (12%)
Would you support legal reforms to protect athlete image rights?	Yes	150 (60%)
	No	50 (20%)
	Unsure	50 (20%)
Would you be interested in attending training on image rights and branding?	Yes	180 (72%)
	No	50 (20%)
	Unsure	20 (8%)
Do you believe international collaborations could help with monetizing your image?	Yes	140 (56%)
	No	50 (20%)
	Unsure	50 (20%)

A substantial proportion (68%) of athletes express interest in using digital platforms to promote their image, indicating a willingness to engage with modern marketing practices.

The majority (60%) support legal reforms to enhance image rights protections, demonstrating strong demand for policy changes in this area.

There is high interest in attending training on image rights and branding (72%), highlighting the need for educational initiatives to empower athletes in managing their image.

Over half of the respondents (56%) see the value in international collaborations for monetizing their image, suggesting the potential for expanding athlete opportunities globally.

Results

The results of this study offer critical insights into the systemic challenges and untapped opportunities for the economic exploitation of athlete images in Algeria. By synthesizing the findings from awareness levels, barriers, and proposed solutions, this section contextualizes the outcomes and connects them to the broader literature on sports management and athlete branding (Taniyev et al., 2022).

awareness levels of athlete image rights

The results indicate a significant lack of awareness among athletes, with only 20% reporting familiarity with image rights. This aligns with previous research in developing markets, which highlights

gaps in education and professional development for athletes regarding intellectual property management. The higher awareness levels among legal professionals (75%) suggest that expertise exists within the ecosystem but is not effectively disseminated to athletes and managers. Bridging this gap through targeted education programs is imperative (Demetriou, 2020).

Barriers to Exploitation

The most frequently reported barriers, such as weak legal protection (70%) and insufficient marketing knowledge (60%), underscore systemic deficiencies in the Algerian sports ecosystem. These findings are consistent with studies in similar contexts, where the absence of robust legal frameworks and professional marketing structures inhibits the growth of athlete branding. The issue of limited media coverage (50%) also emerged as a significant barrier, particularly for female athletes and those in non-mainstream sports (Yoo et al., 2021).

Proposed Solutions

The preference for legal reforms across all stakeholder groups (50%-70%) emphasizes the need for regulatory interventions to protect and promote athlete image rights. Marketing training and digital branding initiatives also garnered strong support, reflecting a recognition of the potential of modern marketing tools to enhance athlete visibility and income generation (Hodge & Walker, 2015; Lusch et al., 2006; Williams et al., 2022).

Discussions

The findings of this study offer critical insights into the current state of athlete image exploitation in Algeria, highlighting key challenges, barriers, and opportunities for improvement. By analysing data collected from athletes across a range of sports, this discussion integrates the results with broader implications, aiming to provide actionable recommendations for stakeholders to address the identified gaps.

The demographic results reveal that the majority of participants are younger athletes aged 18–34 years (72%), with football dominating as the primary sport (56%). These findings align with studies highlighting the prominence of football as the most popular and economically lucrative sport in many countries, including Algeria (Amara & Bouandel, 2022). However, this dominance has often overshadowed opportunities for athletes in other sports, such as basketball, handball, and judo. The limited representation of athletes in less mainstream sports signals the need for diversification in sponsorship and marketing strategies to include a broader spectrum of disciplines (Abdelkader et al., 2018; Sedky et al., 2020).

The underrepresentation of female athletes (24%) in this study reflects persistent gender disparities in sports. Research has consistently shown that female athletes face limited sponsorship opportunities (Juliet, 2024), lower media coverage, and gender biases, especially in developing sports markets (Yingnan, 2023). Addressing this disparity is critical, as female athletes' marketability remains a largely untapped resource (Belkadi et al., 2017; Fink, 2019). Promoting gender equity in sports branding and marketing strategies could not only empower female athletes but also attract a wider audience, as observed in global campaigns such as the FIFA Women's World Cup (Desjardins, 2021; Benhammou et al., 2024).

The distribution of professional experience, with 40% of respondents having 6–10 years in their sport, underscores the importance of targeting mid-career athletes for marketing opportunities (« Examining the Antecedents of Sport Team Brand Equity », 2024). Previous studies suggest that athletes in this phase often possess the visibility and skill required to maximise their

marketability (Abeza et al., 2020; Carlson & Donovan, 2013). However, the findings also emphasise the importance of early education on image rights, given that athletes with less than two years of experience (8%) reported minimal awareness of intellectual property laws. Early interventions could help establish a strong foundation for long-term financial success (Manoli, 2024).

A critical finding of this study is the low awareness of image rights among Algerian athletes. Over 50% of respondents reported limited or no understanding of intellectual property laws. This aligns with prior research that identifies knowledge gaps as a significant barrier to athlete empowerment, particularly in emerging sports markets (Guidotti et al., 2023). Without sufficient knowledge, athletes remain vulnerable to exploitation and are unable to fully leverage their personal brand for economic gain (Cortsen, 2013).

Notably, younger athletes and those with fewer years of experience demonstrated the lowest levels of awareness, highlighting the need for targeted educational programmes. Implementing workshops, seminars, and digital resources could significantly enhance athletes' understanding of their legal rights and equip them with the skills to negotiate contracts effectively (Belkadi et al., 2015).

The study found that only 20% of athletes had secured sponsorships or endorsements, with most agreements being informal and undervalued. This mirrors findings from previous research, which has documented the lack of structured marketing frameworks in developing sports economies (Belkadi et al., 2017; Klaus & Maklan, 2011). Football athletes enjoyed the greatest access to sponsorship opportunities, while athletes in less popular sports, such as judo and athletics, struggled to attract endorsements. This disparity reinforces the need for a more inclusive approach to sponsorship acquisition (Belkadi et al., 2019).

Additionally, the study highlights the absence of professional marketing agencies and the limited collaboration between corporate sponsors and athletes in Algeria. Studies in other markets have demonstrated the critical role that intermediaries, such as sports agents and marketers,

play in bridging the gap between athletes and sponsors (Demir & Söderman, 2015; Belkadi et al., 2025). Establishing a network of professional marketing services could enhance the marketability of athletes across various sports, creating a more equitable distribution of opportunities.

Barriers to Image Exploitation

Three major barriers to athlete image exploitation were identified: Legal and Institutional Deficiencies: Sixty per cent of respondents cited weak legal protections as a key challenge. This finding is consistent with prior studies that emphasise the importance of robust legal frameworks in protecting athlete image rights (Linsner et al., 2021). Without clear legislation, athletes are left exposed to unauthorised use of their image, diminishing their ability to benefit financially.

Market Limitations: Seventy per cent of athletes perceived a lack of interest from sponsors and advertisers in Algerian sports, particularly outside football (Amara & Henry, 2004). Research has highlighted the critical role that market development plays in enabling athletes to monetise their image (Cortsen, 2013; Guidotti et al., 2023; Harris & Trussell, 2024). In Algeria, the over-reliance on team-based sponsorship deals limits the ability of individual athletes to establish their personal brand (Linsner et al., 2021).

Despite the global rise of social media as a branding tool, 65% of respondents reported limited understanding of digital platforms (Steenkamp, 2020). Social media has revolutionised athlete branding, offering athletes direct engagement with fans and sponsors (Frederick & Pegoraro, 2024). However, the lack of training and access to digital branding resources in Algeria prevents athletes from exploiting this opportunity fully (Messiliti et al., 2019).

The findings also underscore significant opportunities for improving the economic exploitation of athlete images in Algeria (BENOUCHEKRI, 2024). Digital Branding: Training athletes to use platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter effectively can enhance their visibility and marketability. Digital branding workshops and mentorship programmes, similar to those implemented in advanced sports economies, could provide Algerian athletes with the tools needed to

navigate the digital landscape (Benbernou et al., 2022; Watkins & Lee, 2016)

Establishing a robust legal framework for athlete image rights is essential. This includes drafting laws that define image rights, providing legal protections against unauthorised use, and creating dispute resolution mechanisms (Council et al., 2000). Learning from international best practices, such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), could guide Algeria in implementing effective policies (Kuner, 2019).

Encouraging investment in underrepresented sports through public-private partnerships and corporate incentives could diversify Algeria's sports sponsorship landscape. Government-backed initiatives, as seen in countries like Australia and Brazil, could also promote equitable distribution of resources (Cherara et al., 2022; Miragaia et al., 2017).

Education and Awareness: Educational campaigns targeting athletes, coaches, and sports administrators are critical. These could be integrated into the curricula of sports academies and universities to ensure athletes understand their rights and responsibilities from the outset of their careers (Aquilina & Henry, 2013)

Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations that warrant further investigation. The sample, while representative, primarily reflects urban and high-profile sports, potentially overlooking the experiences of athletes in rural areas or less mainstream disciplines. Future research should explore regional disparities and conduct qualitative interviews with stakeholders, such as sponsors and sports administrators, to gain a holistic understanding of the ecosystem. Additionally, longitudinal studies could track the impact of educational interventions and policy reforms on athlete image exploitation over time.

Conclusion

The economic exploitation of athlete images in Algeria remains underdeveloped, constrained by legal, institutional, and market-related barriers. However, the study highlights substantial opportunities for reform, including digital branding, legal protections, and educational initiatives. By adopting a multi-faceted approach aligned with

international best practices, Algeria can unlock the untapped potential of its athletes, fostering a more equitable and dynamic sports industry.

These findings provide a roadmap for policymakers, sports organisations, and athletes to collaboratively address existing challenges. With the right interventions, Algerian athletes can enhance their visibility and financial success, contributing to the professionalisation and growth of the country's sports sector.

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