

# Digital Sports Branding: A Comparative Study Of Critical Success Factors For Digital Branding Strategies Of High-End Company Brands Versus Celebrity Athlete Brands

Haupt, Tobias<sup>1</sup>; Sotiriadou, Popi<sup>2</sup>; Schöttl, Katharina<sup>3</sup>; Lohneiss, Annika<sup>2</sup>; Werner, Christian<sup>4</sup>; Kainz, Florian<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>International Football Institute, Germany; <sup>2</sup>Griffith University, Australia; <sup>3</sup>University for Health and Sports, Engineering and Arts, Germany; <sup>4</sup>Private University Seeburg Castle, Austria

E-mail: [haupt@institut-fussballmanagement.de](mailto:haupt@institut-fussballmanagement.de)

## Aims and anticipated benefits

In digital sports branding, company brands and human brands are two different manifestations of brands.

The differences in the branding strategies result in particular from the fact that one case is a human person and the other case a business organization. The personality of the individual person plays an important role in the shaping of human brands, while corporate brands are characterized not least by their product range and their sector. In addition, the life cycle of a human brand is usually limited by the lifetime or the duration of careers, while company brands often have survived for several generations.

The purpose of this study is to examine the strategies of successful company brands and celebrity athlete brands to uncover critical success factors for applied digital branding strategies of both brand constructs. This will be achieved in two steps. First, the aim is to understand the digital branding strategies of celebrity athletes before investigating company brands in similar fashion. Understanding critical success factors for both brand concepts will be the basis of the third part of the study which aims to identify differences and similarities of the applied branding strategies between company brands and celebrity athlete brands.

## Research gap

Although there is a large number of studies dealing with the theme of digital branding strategies, no studies could be found in the literature research that deal with a comparison of the branding strategies of corporate brands and human brands.

The studies deal either with the special features of the management of human (sport) celebrity brands or with the requirements in Online Marketing for companies.

Examples for studies which give a look at the attachments of human celebrity brands are Thomson (2006) as well as Loroz and Braig (2015). Keller (2009) deals with the development of strong brands in a modern marketing communications environment. Carlson and Donovan (2013) put their focus on the professional sports sector and deal with the personality and identification of an athlete brand. In turn, Labrecque, Markos, and Milne (2011) refer to processes, challenges, and implications of online personal branding.

All the studies named before, investigate the phenomenon of branding strategies, either for company brands or for celebrity athlete brands. However, there is a lack of scientific knowledge about the differences and similarities between critical success factors for digital branding strategies of these two types of brands especially in the context of online branding.

The study described here is based on a three-stage model. First it examines digital branding strategies for celebrity athlete brands and company brands separately, before they are derived from similarities and differences.

## Research design and timetable

The research design includes a mix of different research methods. On the one hand it contains an empirical analysis of social media posts of top-tier brands and athletes. On the other hand there were carried out qualitative interviews with experts in the field of digital sports branding (e.g., relevant brand managers) from the US, APAC and Europe regions are used to get inside informations of the bench and enable international comparisons.

The quantitative survey of the social media posts is currently being executed and will be completed by the end of June 2017. The guide for the qualitative interviews with experts has already been developed and is currently in the pretest phase so that qualitative data collection can be carried out in the period from 15 June to 15 July. The evaluation, interpretation and aggregation of data packages is planned for the period from 15 July to 10 August.

This study also requires collaboration and support from industry partners from US, APAC and Europe region that seek a potential benefit from the research outcomes.

## Results and implications

The study is still in progress with the main goal, that the results will assist the design of effective digital sports branding strategies for athletes and their representatives as well as companies and offer systematic understanding of digital sports branding and applied strategies. Moreover it provides an international comparison of digital branding strategies of high-end company and celebrity athlete brands and offers a model for improving digital branding strategies. Overall the study can be understood as a contribution to extend the theoretical knowledge in the area of digital sports branding.

It is intended in particular to assist marketing organizations in aligning their marketing activities with the specifics of corporate brands and or human brands. The results can identify both synergy effects in marketing activities, but also significant differences at the same time.

## References

- Carlson, B. D., & Donovan, D. T. (2013). Human brands in sport: Athlete brand personality and identification. *Journal of Sport Management, 27*, 193–206.
- Keller, K. L. (2009). Building strong brands in a modern marketing communications environment. *Journal of Marketing Communications, 15*, 139–155.
- Labrecque, L. I., Markos, E., & Milne, G. R. (2011). Online personal branding: processes, challenges, and implications. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 25*, 37–50.
- Loroz, P. S., & Braig, B. M. (2015). Consumer Attachments to Human Brands: The “Oprah Effect”. *Psychology & Marketing, 32*, 751–763.
- Thomson, M. (2006). Human brands: Investigating antecedents to consumers’ strong attachments to celebrities. *Journal of Marketing, 70*(3), 104–119.