# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## 1. INTRODUCTION
1. Introduction to the dissertation
1.1. The purpose of the dissertation
1.2. The structure of the dissertation
1.3. Overview of the three articles
1.4. Limitations

## THEORETICAL CONTEXT

### 2. CONCEPTUALIZING CLASSIC BRANDING AND SPORTS BRANDING
2.1 What is classic branding?
2.1.1 The dynamic development of classic branding
2.2 Sports branding
2.2.1 Conceptualizing sports branding
2.2.1.1 Sports branding in a historic light – roots in classic branding & sports marketing
2.2.1.2 Definition of sports branding – a dynamic concept
2.2.1.3 The distinctive field of sports branding
2.3. Brand equity in the business of sports

### 3. CONCEPTUALIZING STRATEGIC CSR
3.1 Defining strategic CSR and its implementation in the business of sports

## THEORY OF SCIENCE

4. Theory of science in a sports branding context
4.1. Symbolic interactionism
4.1.1 Meaning, language and thought
4.1.2 The ‘generalized other’
4.1.3 The self, the ‘I,’ and the ‘me’
4.2. Paradigm definition and its relevance to research
4.3 Ontology and epistemology
4.4 Concluding on the application of symbolic interactionism

## METHODOLODY & RESEARCH DESIGN

5. Research design and research techniques
5.1. Research design and techniques broken down into segments
5.1.1. Personal sports brand level
5.1.1.1 Semi-structured face-to-face interviews
5.1.2. Product sports brand level
5.1.2.1 Semi-structured focus group interview and semi-structured face-to-face interviews
5.1.3. Organizational sports brand level
5.1.3.1 Semi-structured focus group interviews with sports management practitioners and academics
5.2. Methodological summary
THE THREE ARTICLES

Article 1: Annika Sörenstam - a hybrid personal sports brand 56
Article 2: Re-branding women’s football by means of a new sports product 82
Article 3: Capitalizing on CSR-based partnerships in sports branding and sports sponsorship 105

6. BRIDGING THE THREE ARTICLES 129

CONCLUDING THE DISSERTATION

7. Concluding remarks 134
7. Overall concluding level 134
7.1. Concluding on the personal sports branding level 137
7.2. Concluding on the product sports branding level 139
7.3. Concluding on the organizational sports branding level 140

SUMMARIES

8.1 English summary 143
8.2. Dansk sammendrag 145

List of figures 149

List of tables 149

List of appendices (see USB-key) 149

Appendices related to article 1
Appendices related to article 2
Appendices related to article 3

LIST OF REFERENCES 151
1. Introduction to the dissertation

This dissertation is founded upon an agreement between Kenneth Cortsen, Aarhus University, School of Business and Social Sciences, Department of Business Communication, Centre for Corporate Communication, www.au.dk, and University College of Northern Denmark (UCN), www.ucn.dk.

The purpose of this research collaboration is to add value to the qualitative groundwork of research activities within the context of sports branding and more specifically that of strategic sports branding at the personal, product and organizational levels.

The overall contribution to theory and practice is to obtain empirical evidence from strategic sports branding practice as to how three different, yet interdependent, levels of strategic sports branding can shed light on how these levels of sports branding are interrelated and how they contribute synergetically to capitalize\(^1\) on the holistic process of hybrid sports branding by improving a sports brand's interactions, cf. see below.

In that regard, a sub-focus related to this dissertation includes the relationship between sports branding, sports sponsorship and strategic corporate social responsibility (CSR). The purpose of this sub-focus is to investigate how the strategic application of CSR may guide sports branding initiatives and sports sponsorship partnerships and lead to increased levels of brand capitalization via enhanced brand interactions.

This dissertation is seeking to find a suitable scientific and qualitative approach that may guide future researchers and practitioners striving to produce new knowledge and to gain a deeper understanding within this context of improving a sports brand's interactions.

This PhD investigates sports branding while applying qualitative methodology and theory of science tied to the traditions of symbolic interactionism. Consequently, this dissertation concentrates on finding a research umbrella under which strategic sports branding practices can be optimized and can add value to the strategic focus of sports-related entities whether these are persons, products or organizations. When strategic sports branding (in part of the work strategic CSR) is investigated within a symbolic interactionist and qualitative context, the outcome is a thorough explanation of why and how the many intertwining building blocks of sports branding contribute to one another and come together and benefit the sports branding process (and act for the greater good of the sports world and the surrounding society), i.e. improving a sports brand's interactions as stated above. So, the essence is to create better interactions for sports brands.

\(^1\)This dissertation also investigates brand equity and thus the capitalization on brands and branding, cf. section 2.3.
To investigate these aspects, this dissertation draws on the field of sports branding (as a subfield of classic branding), and consequently, it contributes to this field with new insights, conceptualizations and empirical evidence to enhance the scholarly knowledge base and the strategic recommendations.

1.1. The purpose of the dissertation

Sports branding (as a subfield of branding) is a research field in its own right. One research focus within sports branding is the study of how sports-related entities brand themselves: What values and associations form the brand? How are the sports-related entities branded strategically? How do their strategic branding efforts translate into commercial success? In the pursuit of these research interests, research within sports branding has not paid sufficient (if any) attention to the fact that sports branding can be conceptualized as taking place at three different, but closely interrelated, levels, i.e. the personal, product and organizational levels. The conceptualization and reconstruction of these three levels can yield interesting and valuable insights into how sports-related entities brand themselves. Through isolating and untangling these intertwined levels, it becomes much clearer on which level the most effective and important strategic branding efforts (“working strategically with”, cf. page 4) take place. This knowledge can be useful for strategic planning and the implementation of sports branding efforts.

Sports branding has been taken to new heights. Sports-related entities are increasingly being operated as businesses. The business of sports accounts for a dominant force in society. To capitalize on the economic potential of sports, sports branding is vital when sports-related organizations strive to stand out in cluttered market places (Pedersen et al., 2007). In that sense, strategic CSR (McElhaney, 2008) may seem to act as one method when sports-related organizations utilize sports branding processes to differentiate themselves. So do the strategic interactions between sports brands (and other brands) and between different branding levels, i.e. the personal, the product and the organizational levels. In an era when experience-based communication and marketing (Schmitt, 1999; Ørnbo et al., 2008) are significant keywords on business agendas for many sports-related organizations, this interactional approach to sports branding adds an extra aspect to sports-branding processes in the post-modern era. Along with business operations come responsibilities to fans, sponsors, investors and the surrounding community in general. Slack (2004, p. xxii) highlights the vitality of this development in the following citation:

"Stadiums and arenas bear the names of businesses that pay to buy the naming rights to these venues. Commercial sponsors’ logos appear on athletes’ clothing and equipment, on the facilities in which they play, and in the titles of the events in which they compete. Media companies spend vast sums of money on rights to broadcast sporting events, and advertisers pay to promote their products and services in the commercial breaks during the screening of these events."

As evidenced by the above citation, sports have a business value. Academically and practically, the reasons to link sports and brand management with commercialization are many (Slack, 2004; Carter, 2010; Miloch, 2010), e.g. to increase profitability, to enhance reputational capital, to exploit brand assets and to improve brand interactions. Charging more money for the experiences, which can supplement the functionality aspect surrounding sport, leads to economic opportunities for sports-related entities through a high level of commercialization. The rapid popularity and conceptualization of the experience economy, which was coined partly due to Pine and Gilmore’s book “The Experience Economy”, have placed experience economy at the heart of sports and sports branding (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Darmer & Sundbo, 2008). Moreover, there are still innovative commercial activities taking place to exploit the full potential of sports branding from a business perspective.

Combined with the fact that many sports-related entities are industries in growth (Jensen, 2006; Darmer & Sundbo, 2008), this dissertation explores processes which can guide many sports brands
in their pursuit of business development aimed at generating increased return on investments (ROIs) via better brand interactions. This dissertation’s focus on ‘capitalization’ and ROIs may seem to be in contrast to its interpretative and qualitative position and methodology, but this focus is thought to be an important contribution to its business-oriented and thus pragmatic as well as theoretical focus on the capitalization of sports branding processes, cf. the focus on brand equity (section 2.2). Despite some quantitative data from desk research, cf. article 1’s page 39, to support some of this dissertation’s qualitative points, the focus on ROIs is linked to the investigation of the meaning that is associated with sports branding, cf. sections 3 and 4 of this dissertation. So, ROI becomes a ‘social construction’ that is derived from the meaning related to this dissertation’s empirical body.

In The Experience Economy, the authors argue for the fact that different entities may benefit from the link between experiences, sports and branding, e.g. Nike (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). In addition to these perspectives, Cortsen (2010) emphasizes that positive remarkable and memorable experiences appeal directly to the ‘hearts’ of stakeholders, i.e. these experiences build emotional capital reflected in brand value and goodwill (Thomson, 1998, p. 7). The same goes for remarkable and memorable negative experiences, although the outcome is not positive emotional capital but negative instead.

Looking at the coverage of the literature in relation to sports branding and strategic CSR in a sports business setting, it seems clear that these concepts are very important for the development of new sports business models to replace traditional ones, cf. section 2.1.² In the commercial world, sports branding holds a central spot, and now strategic CSR is also part of the formula when searching for new sports branding processes.

In the light of the research interest, i.e. the way in which the theoretical field of sports branding presents itself today (cf. sections 1 and 2) and the preliminary distinction between branding at the personal, product and organizational levels (and the sub-focus of CSR), this dissertation aims to answer the following research questions:

**Main research question:**

“Why and how does working strategically with sports branding manifest itself on the personal, product and organizational branding levels?”

The main research question leads to a composition of the following three underlying research questions that help to provide more in-depth and thorough answers to the main research question:

RQ1: “Why and how does working strategically with sports branding at the personal branding level manifest itself as an interplay with the product and organizational branding level?”

RQ2: “Why and how does working strategically with sports branding at the product level manifest itself as an interactive vehicle to successfully re-brand women’s football?”

RQ3: “Why and how does working strategically with sports branding and CSR and sports sponsorship manifest itself on the organizational branding level?”

RQ1 relates to article 1, RQ2 relates to article 2 and RQ3 relates to article 3 of the dissertation, while the concluding remarks of this dissertation strive to bridge the findings from the three articles to discuss similarities and contrasts.

In the theoretical sections, cf. sections 2 and 3, this dissertation defines central theoretical concepts like sports branding and strategic CSR. ‘Working strategically’ with these concepts is a vital part of the research question(s). Therefore, the researcher finds it important to clarify this process to give

²Sports marketers should scan the environment and adapt their business models to the changes of society to match societal tendencies (Robinson et al., 2013).
a complete understanding of the framework for this research process before going into sections 2 and 3. For this purpose, the thesis builds on the thoughts of Amis & Cornwall (2005), which state that the process of working strategically with sports branding and CSR is defined by whether or not this working process fits the strategic planning and strategic directions of the involved entities, i.e. persons, products and organizations. This definition also describes the meaning entailed in ‘strategic fit’ from a sports sponsorship perspective, cf. article 3’s focus on the organizational sports branding level. In that sense, strategic fit is the strategic match between the involved entities and their strategic parameters like mission, vision, objectives, values and target audience (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006).

The dissertation also applies other relevant concepts such as sports-related organizations and sports entities; these are defined in the following. Sports-related organization is a term that refers to sports entities that have sport as a core function, cf. article 3. The terms sports-related entities and sports-related organizations are used interchangeably throughout the dissertation. This comprises sports events, sports leagues, sports clubs, athletes, professional sports teams, sports governing bodies, sports equipment manufacturers and so on. However, it also includes entities where sport is not a core function, but merely something to be applied as a marketing, communication, branding, sponsorship or promotional platform to create ‘added value,’ e.g. Heineken and the company’s engagement in football (soccer) sponsorships.

This dissertation applies the idea of personal, product and organizational branding to the field of sports branding. The distinction between these three levels is a widespread notion within ‘classic’ branding under the terms personal, product and organizational (corporate) branding. The three concepts can be found in an array of publications where the authors place their focus on the person, the product and the organization, respectively: The individual is the center of interest in personal branding in sports (Carter, 2010; Rein et al., 2006). In product branding, the branding revolves around the product (Aaker, 1996), and in corporate branding it is the organization that is the object of branding (Balmer & Greyser, 2003).

In this dissertation, the researcher will define the levels in the following way:

- **Branding at the personal level** refers to branding which is centered around a particular individual and derives its brand values from that individual’s status, characteristics, history and actions. Branding at the personal level is especially relevant in sports branding because sports-related organizations and sports entities very often are closely related to, if not directly dependent on an athlete. To illustrate this phenomenon, one can just turn to examples like Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, David Beckham and Cristiano Ronaldo. The empirical body in this dissertation emphasizes the branding process of Annika Sörenstam as an individual athlete.
- **Branding at the product level** refers to branding that is centered on a particular product and derives its brand values from that product’s quality, look, features and use. Branding at the product level is relevant in sports branding because a lot of sports-related organizations and sports entities are producers of both tangible sports products like clothing, shoes and equipment, and intangible sports products like events, media programs and sports experiences (e.g. the promotion of a specific sport). To demonstrate this occurrence, one can look at Adidas’ promotion of the Predator football boot as a tangible sports product and the broadcasting of the FIFA World Cup as an intangible sports product. The empirical body in this dissertation highlights the branding process of ‘Sensational 1,’ a new football for women, and women’s football.
- **Branding at the organizational level** refers to branding that is centered on an organization and derives its brand values from that organization’s history, reputation, stakeholders and purpose (license to operate). Branding at the organizational level is relevant in sports branding because a lot of sports-related organizations and sports entities are organizations like the prototypical sports-related organization the sports club. To portray this, one only has to look at the branding of UEFA, the IOC, FC Barcelona, Nike or Heineken. The empirical body in this dissertation stresses the experiences of corporate brands like Carlsberg, Team Denmark or the city of Copenhagen.
It is important to emphasize that the distinction between these three levels is an analytical and artificial construction, since in almost all cases of sports branding, all three levels can potentially be identified. This is also why in the following section (cf. section below and section 2), the researcher will discuss the notion of the ‘hybrid’ sports brand, which expresses the intertwining and interdependencies of the three levels. However, despite the high degree of merging of the three levels in a sports brand, there are several reasons why they add value to both the theory and practice of (strategic) sports branding:

• The distinction between personal branding, product branding and organizational branding (under the name of corporate branding) in ‘classic’ branding theory has evolved gradually from product branding to corporate branding to personal branding (Olins, 2003; Lair et al., 2005) and has brought a meaningful differentiation into branding theory and practice. It makes good sense to transfer that distinction to sports branding, as sports branding is a subfield under ‘classic’ branding (cf. section 2).

• Sports brands may be ‘hybrid,’ i.e. they unfold and manifest their brand on all three levels at the same time, but they do so to a different extent. Looking at a sports brand while bearing the distinction of the different levels in mind enables the researcher to investigate the level with the greatest importance and relevance for the given sports brand, and thus with the highest scholarly or analytical interest.

• With a distinction between these three levels, it will be easier for the brand strategist and practitioner to identify where a given brand equity is located and subsequently to direct the brand effort towards the commercially most relevant level.

• Branding at the personal level in particular is extremely important in sports branding. So if not for any other reason, the mere possibility of identifying branding at the personal level would be reason enough to make the distinction.

• Sports brands today are characterized by more interplay and interdependence than ever before (Carter, 2010), although this development actually rather serves as an argument for applying the distinction than for abandoning it because it becomes even more interesting for both the researcher and the strategist/practitioner to untangle the branding elements and relations on the various levels in order to improve brand interactions.

1.2. The structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is structured so that it accounts for its underlying fundamental assumptions in terms of the theory of science and methodology, and how these approaches interrelate with the chosen theoretical framework and research techniques (including data collection methods). This is done with the central areas of study in mind, cf. primarily sports branding and the sub-focus of strategic CSR. Additionally, the dissertation clarifies and explains the background to this study and mirrors some of the main points of the implemented research topics concerning this dissertation’s main purpose.

The second part, cf. the sections entitled “Theoretical context,” “Theory of science” and “Methodology & research design,” contains a discussion and presentation of the scientific and theoretical approaches and methodologies to be applied to answer this dissertation’s research question(s). The “Theoretical context” defines sports branding, cf. section 2, and strategic CSR, cf. section 3, and touches upon the theoretical development and origin of the two concepts. Moreover, section 2 introduces the concept of brand equity, as this dissertation also investigates the capitalization on sports branding, cf. section 2. The “Theory of science,” cf. section 4, explains this dissertation’s scientific position and why this position is focused around symbolic interactionism. Section 5 explains this dissertation’s “Methodology & research design,” i.e. elements like the data collection methods including a description of the sampling process and the link to this dissertation’s position in terms of theory of science. Moreover, this section breaks the methodology down into different segments aligned with the three sports branding levels.

The chosen format for this dissertation is not a monograph. Instead, it presents a collection of articles
that intends to meet the PhD requirements by its contributions to research and the potential for publication, and/or acceptance for publication in peer-reviewed academic journals. In doing so, the dissertation addresses sports branding from different angles in three individual, but relatively symbiotic, studies intended to generate research contributions to the management of and the capitalization on the strategic interactions between sports brands at different branding levels, i.e. the personal, the product and the organizational levels. The benefit of this approach is to explore sports branding in separate but interdependent studies while allowing for the opportunity to apply different several data sets and hence a richer data pool to enhance the outcome of this dissertation. In this regard, the objectives are to construct connecting research interdependence across the three articles by focusing on the personal, the product and the organizational sports branding levels, respectively, and by bridging the findings in this dissertation.

The first article was published in Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal. The third article was published in the International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing, while the second article has been submitted to and accepted for publication in Soccer & Society. Via these articles, the dissertation aims to answer the above-mentioned research questions. Following the section with the three articles, there is a section that bridges the three articles and hence explores, discusses and explains the articles’ interdependence concerning the strategic interactions between sports brands at the three different branding levels, cf. the section “Bridging the three articles.” Next comes the “Concluding remarks” section, which reveals the dissertation’s complete conclusions as an answer to the overall research questions. Finally, the dissertation provides a summary in English and in Danish.

1.3. Overview of the three articles

The three research articles composing the main substance of this dissertation are summarized in figure 1 below. The figure is designed to present an overview of the aim, methodology and findings of the articles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUMMARY OF THE THREE ARTICLES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOCUS: PERSONAL BRANDING LEVEL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 1: “Annika Sörenstam – a hybrid personal sports brand”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To investigate sports branding at the personal level by focusing on the evolvement, growth and sustainability of the ANNIKA BRAND – an extension of Annika Sörenstam’s success on golf courses worldwide.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3The article has not been published yet. However, it has been accepted.
conducted in accordance with interpretative research traditions and hence based on two individual qualitative semi-structured research interviews. The data sets were analyzed by the use of interpretative research traditions.

FOCUS: PRODUCT BRANDING LEVEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tr>
<td>To investigate sports branding at the product level through ‘Sensational 1,’ a new football (soccer ball) invented to improve the game of women’s football (soccer) so that it becomes more attractive for all the relevant stakeholders. ‘Sensational 1’ acts as a product that is investigated as a vehicle to assist the re-branding process of women’s football (soccer). This approach is related to the principles of ‘hybrid sports branding’ and an interactionist approach, in which a sports brand at the product level may interact with sports brands at the personal and organizational levels, and which thus may enhance the brand equity level of all the involved parties.</td>
<td>A qualitative case study method stimulated by symbolic interactionism focusing on how hybrid sports branding elements can boost the enhancement of the brand equity of ‘Sensational 1’ and women’s football (soccer) in Denmark via re-branding. Data collection was conducted as four individual qualitative semi-structured research interviews and one semi-structured focus group interview and the data sets were analyzed by the use of interpretative research traditions.</td>
<td>From a long-term perspective, ‘Sensational 1’ is thought to be able to generate technical, tactical and physical changes to women’s football (soccer) so that the game becomes more dynamic, faster, safer and more attractive for participants and stakeholders (e.g. spectators, sponsors, the media etc.). The article presents insights into how to take advantage of the commercial opportunities linked to enhancing the brand equity of women’s football (soccer), and thus creating a new and brighter future for all stakeholders in the sport of women’s football (soccer). In doing so, the article stresses some important and dynamic parameters to be taken into consideration by academics and practitioners with an interest in improving the game of women’s football (soccer): The positive meaning of shaping the game so that it retains its overall meaning but improves the aspects of tempo, dynamism, technical aesthetics, safety and attractiveness for active and passive participants in the sport. Moreover, these parameters matter: Winning and success, nourishing the passion of all stakeholders, strategic support, and the accountability and willingness to invest in the sport. Hybrid sports branding is crucial, and the convergence between the passion for women’s football, the improvement of the sport via ‘Sensational 1’ and the business side should preferably go hand in hand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FOCUS: ORGANIZATIONAL BRANDING LEVEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tr>
<td>To investigate sports branding at the organizational level by developing a toolkit for academics and practitioners, which elaborates on how the strategic application of CSR may guide sports branding initiatives and sponsorship partnerships and lead to increased levels of brand capitalization. In that regard, the aim was also to investigate the interacting nature of sports branding by researching how sports brands at the organizational level interact with sports brands at the personal and product levels in the light of the effects of strategic CSR on sports brands.</td>
<td>A qualitative study inspired by symbolic interactionism and concentrating on sports branding processes utilizing strategic CSR and sports sponsorship. Data collection consisted of two qualitative semi-structured focus group interviews analyzed by the use of interpretative research traditions.</td>
<td>It is essential for sports-related organizations to recognize their social responsibilities in various ways, which underscores the importance of strategic CSR as a relevant concept in sports management. In terms of the application of strategic CSR in sports branding, it is vital for sports-related organizations to incorporate: Commercial potential, ROIs, pride and emotional equity, strategic match, appropriate articulation and a combination of elements from professional and amateur sports. The implementation of a sports-related organization’s strategic sports branding initiatives should be assisted by CSR strategies that are communicated transparently and clearly while being aligned with the concept of ‘commercial idealism,’ which aligns the implementation with a strong basis to secure sustainable CSR-related sports sponsorship and sports branding initiatives. This motivates players in the sports business to create new insights into and interactions within the intersection between strategic sports branding, sports sponsorship and strategic CSR, and sparks the development of more authentic, legitimate and profitable initiatives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Overview of the three articles.

1.4. Limitations

This dissertation briefly touches upon the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Jensen, 2006; Darmer & Sundbo, 2008), cf. section 1.1., as sports have become an integral element of it. This explains why the experience economy and theories regarding the concept are included in this dissertation. The concept is recognized for its ability and relevance to contribute to a thorough understanding of the overall framework of ‘sports and business’ and more explicitly that of sports branding, cf. the introductory and concept defining parts of this dissertation. However, this dissertation limits itself from focusing on the experience economy as an explicit and integral part of its focus on investigating sports branding at different levels. This concept is simply excessively broad as it involves so many sectors other than the business of sports.

As strategic CSR is only a sub-focus under the investigation of sports branding at different levels, cf. the personal, the product and the organizational levels, the defining section regarding strategic CSR, cf. section 3, does not receive as much attention as that regarding sports branding, cf. section 2.
2.1. What is classic branding?

Before defining, describing and discussing sports branding, it is natural to explore and discuss how sports branding is rooted in classic branding. Calkins (2005) follows the American Marketing Association’s (AMA) definition from the 1960s of a brand as something tied to a name, mark or symbol that is associated with a product or a service. Calkins (2005) emphasizes the important difference between a brand and a name, which is that a brand has associations, whereas a name is a static entity, thus arguing that a name becomes a brand when it is connected to other things. Hanby (1999) and later Andersen (2007) offer a re-conceptualization of the classic, ‘sender’-orientated and marketing-driven approach to branding presented in the definition from the AMA. The older and classic approach to branding is ‘sender’ orientated in the sense that a brand acts as a “lifeless manipulable artefact” (Hanby, 1999; Andersen, 2007, p. 7), whereas the later conceptualizations of branding introduced by David A. Aaker and Jean Nöel Kapferer in the 1990s approached branding from a perspective in which a brand was conceptualized as a “living entity” (Hanby, 1999; Andersen, 2007, p. 7).

2.1.1. The dynamic development of classic branding

To fit with this dissertation’s metatheoretical stance of social constructivism and symbolic interactionism, this section argues for how branding has changed over the years from being marketing driven and ‘sender’ orientated to becoming ‘open source brand management’ (Andersen & Antorini, 2013). The latter defines branding as an interactive process in which consumers’ and other players’ thoughts and opinions are prioritized just as much as those of the brand manager. This ‘open source brand management’ is a clash with older definitions and with the related understandings of what the concepts of brand and branding comprise, and that is what will be discussed in this section. There are different understandings of branding. This section offers an explanation of what the concept of branding constitutes and what to emphasize in the definition of branding. Whether the focus is on the branding of a person, a product or an organization, branding is a dynamic process through which the involved parties act to influence the symbolic perceptions regarding the person’s, the product’s or the organization’s position on the market positively (Andersen et al., 2003). So, branding refers to the identification or differentiation of a person, product or organization in a competitive market place (Andersen, 2007). Branding also has to do with a person’s, product’s or organization’s construction and communication of specific values. In interactions, identification, differentiation and these values add direction, meaning and purpose to the brand (i.e. person, product or organization). This interactive approach argues that branding and thus a brand are not fixed and static concepts, which also means that a brand cannot be identified unambiguously, but is dependent on the context in which the brand is to be found and the applied approach to branding, cf. see just below.
Based on a literature review of state-of-the-art readings within marketing and branding, Andersen (2007) found four approaches to branding, 1) a product approach, 2) an identity approach, 3) a relational approach and 4) a cultural approach. The theoretical and metatheoretical building blocks of this thesis are mainly built on the relational approach, but also include aspects of the cultural approach. Andersen (2007) emphasizes that these four approaches to branding display two opposite communication paradigms, i.e. a transmission-based paradigm and an interactional paradigm (Heath & Bryant, 1992). In a sports marketing context, Hopwood (2005) argues for the interactional approach (Heath & Bryant, 1992) in public relations activities when defining interpersonal communication as a symbolic process that creates a relationship between the players engaged in this communication. This helps to explain why symbolic interactionism is applied as a metatheoretical cornerstone in the investigation of sports branding.

In considering these different approaches to branding, it becomes evident that defining a brand cannot be done precisely, although earlier scholars and practitioners have done so, e.g. AMA, Aaker, Kapferer etc. There is no absolute truth or solution that is universal and independent of time and context, cf. section 4 of this dissertation. Going back to Hanby (1999), AMA’s definition reflects a ‘mechanical brand metaphor,’ whereas the later definitions and the work by Aaker and Kapferer mirror an ‘organic brand metaphor.’ Andersen (2007) clarifies this division when arguing that the works of Csaba & Bengtsson (2006) and Buhl & Bech-Hansen (2003) took the ‘organic brand metaphor’ to new heights by dividing the anthropomorphizing brand approach in two relevant approaches, i.e. one formed by a static identity conceptualization (e.g. Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 1997) and another shaped by a postmodern identity conceptualization (e.g. Fournier, 1998). The position in this dissertation is mainly to be found within the latter conceptualization, which entails that the brand identity conceptualization is dynamic and discursive so that the meaning associated with the brand is multifaceted and constantly negotiable, cf. section 4. Consequently, this position that mainly reflects the relational approach while accounting for some aspects of the cultural approach corresponds with the researcher’s scientific stance that brands, branding and the associated meaning are a social and interactionist construction between the brand and its users. As displayed in table 1, the brand is to be understood as a person, and the brand and its users act as partners in shaping the brand in a dyadic interactional relationship. This is in contrast to earlier approaches to branding, cf. the product approach and the identity approach, which are scientifically rooted in an economic and positivist paradigm, in which meaning or values are directed from the ‘sender’ (brand manager/company) to a ‘receiver’ (brand user/consumer), whereas the relational and cultural approaches are rooted in a humanistic and interpretative paradigm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consumption Perspective</th>
<th>Rooted in an economic positivist paradigm</th>
<th>Rooted in a humanistic interpretative paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Utilitarian Consumption is the purpose (means-end)</td>
<td>Symbolic Consumption is the path to other purposes (circular)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Perspective</td>
<td>Communication as transmission One-way communication</td>
<td>Communication as process Interactionist communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Perspective</td>
<td>Product perspective</td>
<td>Identity perspective</td>
</tr>
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This dissertation also investigates brand equity and thus the capitalization on brands and branding. To place this dissertation’s viewpoint on brands and branding under an interpretative paradigm is still valid. The contemporary perspectives on branding show the dynamic evolution of branding and brand management as consisting of relational and cultural components, which via the theory of science, cf. section 4, allows the researcher to place the economic dimension of brands and branding under another tradition than the conventional positivistic approach. The economy is an essential part of human society and one of the greatest social constructions. It reflects that everything can be capitalized and that economic currencies and the value of something are interactional elements that are negotiated between people (Fast & Clark, 2008, drawing on Schutz), cf. section 4. Accordingly, the qualification of the economy is subjective and when arguing for the world and thus brands and branding as being subjective, it does not make sense to argue that the economy is a positivist concept. Of course, the classic approach to branding, especially in the early conceptualization of brands and branding conducted by the AMA and partly by Aaker (1996) and Kapferer (1997), applies a mechanical perspective in which a brand is a measurable entity, cf. the brand equity concept. From a critical viewpoint, this positivist approach, which is seen in these early approaches to classic branding, does not lead to a sufficient understanding of what constitutes brands and branding. As mentioned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphoric Conceptualization</th>
<th>Brand as expanded product</th>
<th>Brand as identity</th>
<th>Brand as person/partner</th>
<th>Brand as (sub)cultural symbol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generation of meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consumer Motivation (why buy?)&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Physical &amp; physiological needs (the stomach's needs)</td>
<td>Rational &amp; psychological needs (the brain's wants)</td>
<td>Emotional &amp; narcissist needs (the heart's desires)</td>
<td>Metaphysiological &amp; symbolic needs (the eye's recognition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Perspective</td>
<td>The mass consumer</td>
<td>The segmented consumer</td>
<td>The individual consumer</td>
<td>The tribal consumer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred method</td>
<td>Quantitative experiments</td>
<td>Quantitative measurements</td>
<td>Qualitative phenomenological interviews</td>
<td>Qualitative, ethnographic studies, field work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1: Four perspectives on brands and branding – (Andersen, 2007, pp. 26-27) - Translated from Danish into English by KC

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Østergaard & Jantzen 2000. Their scholarly work is mentioned in the text during this section.

<sup>5</sup>It serves a purpose to emphasize that there are differences between the ‘early’ Kotler and the ‘later’ Kotler, i.e. the ‘early’ Kotler (e.g. 1965) represents a more behavioristic marketing perspective compared to the ‘later’ Kotler (e.g. 2003). In his foreword to the book *Kellogg on Branding*, he states that “The haunting truth is that traditional marketing is not working.” (Kotler 2005b: ix). So, the ‘later’ Kotler recognizes that branding is about more than effective marketing stunts and it “is much more than attaching a name to an offering” while highlighting that organizations live their brands (Kotler 2005b: ix).
above, everything can be capitalized which corresponds not only to these early approaches to classic branding but also to the later approaches, cf. the relational and cultural approaches, as a thorough understanding and conceptualization of brands and branding is grounded in an understanding of what Fast and Clark (2008) emphasize as being found beneath the surface of economics. This means that the researcher cannot claim 1) on one hand to be subjective and hence to investigate people’s experiences of brands and branding, and 2) on the other hand base this solely on positivist and quantitative stances. So this explains the researcher’s qualitative position.

This marks the orientation that this dissertation encompasses when distinguishing between a quantitative and qualitative approach to brands and branding. In a historic clarification of the evolvement of classic branding, Andersen (2007) argues that the gap between the earlier conceptualizations of 1) ‘a brand as an expanded product’ and 2) ‘a brand as identity’ makes a distinction between product and brand, which means that the evolvement depicted a development from 1) conceptualizing a brand in terms of product or product-related benefits to 2) conceptualizing a brand in terms of its organizational, symbolic and personal attributes. At the same time, it is argued that the gap between 1) ‘a brand as identity’ and 2) ‘a brand as relation’ marks fundamentally (rooted in different scientific traditions, e.g. positivist vs. interpretative paradigms) different approaches to identity as a concept and to how identity is formed. The common denominator is the understanding that a brand possesses certain personal attributes concerning the construction of brand identity, which incorporates ‘a brand as a person approach.’

To critically discuss the differences between approaches to classic branding (with this dissertation’s stance on the theory of science in mind), the expectations between brand and users (i.e. expectations as a concept that is pervasive within symbolic interactionism), are understood through the interactional relationship between brand and users. Specifically, people have expectations for themselves, for other people and for the brands with which they interact, and when these expectations are met or broken, people come to really understand what constitutes their expectations. This means that branding is created by these interactions and is a social construction. The AMA’s definition and Aaker’s personal attributes are characterized by a one-sidedness (directed by the ‘sender’ to the ‘receiver’) and by an invasive and possessive targeting of the brand users. In contrast, Fournier’s (1998) brand as a person is differentiated from Aaker’s conceptualization in that it views the brand and the brand users as equal partners characterized by different interactional relations capable of constructing meaning. The latter fits well into the scientific argument of this dissertation in that brand and brand users engage in social constructions and symbolic interactions through which meaning is produced and the respective partners are influenced.

This critical discussion forms the theoretical and metatheoretical foundation applied in this dissertation to illustrate the notion of hybrid sports branding. This concept is also rooted in the evolution found in classic branding, which is grounded in the relational approach to brands and branding (the hybrid approach). Csaba and Bengtsson (2006) support this in their research when defining brands, branding and more specifically brand identity as dynamic concepts. The meanings regarding these concepts are discursively and interactionally shaped and negotiated. This dissertation’s point is that hybrid sports brands influence each other or are shaped in a similar fashion. Fournier (1998) also distinguishes between the focus on the individual brand user and that user’s relation to the brand (the relational brand approach) and the brand’s cultural meaning to be found in the interactions between the brand user and groups of brand users (the cultural brand approach). This dissertation’s position is mainly within the context of the relational brand approach. However, the earlier point that the dissertation’s position also includes aspects of the cultural approach is grounded in its position within the business of sports and sports branding and in scholarly findings in classic branding and consumer research. Østergaard and Jantzen (2000) spotted the difference between focusing on the individual and focusing on social groups and thus tribe members (Maffesoli, 1996); the latter is evident in sports contexts, e.g. in football research regarding fan relations (Giulianotti, 2002) or in practice around clubs like FC St. Pauli and Union Berlin in Germany, Club Recife in Brazil or Hammarby IF.
in Sweden. In terms of this dissertation's empirical findings, this relates to London Marathon, ‘der Hamburger Weg’ and Sörenstam’s participation in Michelle Obama’s ‘Let’s move campaign’ to fight obesity. This is also illustrated in the research concerning women’s football (soccer), in which the empirical data underscore a form of movement to improve the game of women’s football. So, the difference between focusing on the brand user who frames his/her consumption based on emotional and narcissistic intentions and meanings, and focusing on the brand user as a social tribe member helps to distinguish the relational and cultural approaches to branding, cf. table 1. According to Andersen (2007) and Østergaard and Jantzen (2000), the relational approach acknowledges brand users as being motivated by individual needs, whereas the cultural approach recognizes brand users as being socially orientated in their interactions (i.e. tribe members). Østergaard and Jantzen’s (2000) research summarizes the differences between the two approaches in the following two citations (the first citation as a representation of the relational approach and the second citation as a representation of the cultural brand approach):

“(…) [Consumption is] based on a desire for a meaning in life (…) because the consuming individual, in this approach, uses the consumption of products and services as bricks in the construction of a meaningful life. It is an ongoing project for the individual to construct meaning, and it is based on emotions and feelings where the single consuming individual tries to create a coherent life.” (Østergaard & Jantzen, 2000, p. 17.)

“In consumption studies, we are moving beyond the individual as the unit of research. Consumption creates a metaphysical universe for tribe members and they are searching for the ‘right’ symbols so that they can be recognised by the other members of the same tribe. This recognition process is guided by the eye in a metaphorical sense: the reason for choosing a product is not based on deep psychological motives, but is instead guided by the awareness of the symbolic surface.” (Østergaard & Jantzen, 2000, p. 19.)

To sum up, the evolvement of classic branding has gone from 1) positivist and quantitatively oriented approaches towards 2) interpretative and qualitative approaches, and the above-mentioned citations help to emphasize the critical stance taken here on branding research founded solely on the positivist and quantitative approaches. To gain a full level of understanding, the later and more dynamic approaches guide researchers to identify and understand that brands, branding and brand management are scholarly and practical phenomena that require complex and in-depth investigations. The citations help to underscore that the differences between the relational and cultural approaches are to found in the differentiation between a psychological oriented (relational) approach with a focus on the individual brand user (and the relations between the brand and brand user) and a socially oriented (cultural) approach in which the focus is on the social relations between the brand and groups of brand users (i.e. consumer-consumer).

In a critical light, the earlier versions of classic branding theory were not holistic enough to account for more than the identification of needs and use-value and then to ‘frame’ a message guided by brand managers towards brand users. The newer versions of classic branding account for approaches that fit into this study’s view of humanity and understanding of the world, cf. symbolic interactionism, in which brand use is an integrated part of the brand user’s life and thus a fundamental way to construct meaning and interact with the world. Sherry (2005) and Arnould and Thompson (2005) have researched the symbolic characteristics of consumption (and hence branding) and found a heavy concentration on the dynamic relations between brand users, the market place and cultural meanings that are produced in these interactions. Ahuvia (2005) argues that brand use develops a “fragmented and multiple sense of self,” but nevertheless the points in the newer versions of classic branding theory must be that brand users and brands define themselves and thus re-define themselves in the multiple interactions that exist throughout the market place. These final remarks take me to the context of sports branding as this section of classic branding builds a good bridge to sports branding. The later points in this section show that the newer versions of classic branding as well as sports branding are ‘hybrid’ constructs. This is also exemplified in sports settings in which the football shirt metaphor
constructs narratives about increased brand strength to be produced through the interrelationship between an individual brand user and enhanced shirt sales when the team wins. This shows how sports brands and patterns of brand users are embedded in social and economic contexts and how this creates a ‘hybrid’ consumption through which fragmented and multiple senses of self motivates the brand user to jump between various identity projects. So, this dissertation is written on the basis that there is an ongoing, everlasting process of meaning construction and thus brand creation in which brands have meaning(s) that are constantly subject to negotiation or re-negotiation via their multiple interactions.

2.2. Sports branding

In modern contemporary society, sport is not only about sport but about the mix between the roots and rules of a specific sport and the entertainment and experiences being integrated into or encompassing the whole sports package (Rein et al., 2006; Ferrand & McCarthy, 2008; Tuchman, 2009; Carter, 2010; Hardy et al., 2012). This meta-sporting perspective reveals that there is more to sport than athletic competitions.

Commercialization efforts to capitalize on the economic potential of sports have not made the ‘business of sport’ less complicated. Slack (2004, p. xxii) clearly highlights the importance of sports to business, and vice versa, when emphasizing that “one of the most visible aspects of the modern sport is its strong links to commercial enterprise” and this is supplemented by Carter (2010, p. 1), who states that “sports and entertainment have been converging since the dawn of capitalism.” Transformation from the happy amateur days to increased professionalism and business-oriented approaches in sports has brought about new needs and requirements for any sports manager (Carter, 2010; Beech & Chadwick, 2007; Ferrand & McCarthy, 2008; Jozsa, 2004).

According to the existing literature (Slack, 2004; Miloch, 2010) and this dissertation’s empirical studies, sports branding is a concept that seems to be vital for the commercial success and sustainability of sports-related entities. This statement is aligned with the research findings of Rein et al. (2006), Ferrand & McCarthy (2008) and Hardy et al. (2012), which portray sports branding in a historic light. Their findings review and explore topics that make up a history of sports branding and emphasize how sports branding is characterized by a long history encouraged by entrepreneurs and organizations via equipment, rule-making, the application of new technologies and distinctive names. Andrews (2004) states that sport should be perceived as a highly integrated ideological and economic part of global capitalism (Jozsa, 2004). Although sports-related goods and services have a wide span in terms of production and consumption, e.g. the manufacturing of sportswear and apparel, travel, biomedicine, building and construction, and entertainment, it is the area of mass media that clearly displays the postmodern capitalist nature of sport (Gorman & Calhoun, 1994; Andrews, 2004; Brick et al., 2009, pp. 21-22). The mass media add to the business of sports by giving sports entities a platform that can reinforce their commercialization efforts due to the popularity of sports in the mass media.

Researchers also argue that the media play a role when utilizing the intertwining elements of sports branding for commercial and hence branding purposes (Duffy & Hooper, 2003; Slack, 2004).

“Ignoring MediaSport today would be like ignoring the role of the church in the Middle Ages or ignoring the role of art in the Renaissance; large parts of society are immersed in media sports today and virtually no aspect of life is untouched by it.” (Slack, 2004, p. 3.)

So, mass media is a necessary and inescapable element for enhancing the strength of a sports brand. The influence of the mass media may help to develop brands in general, including sport brands whether they are of a corporate, product or personal character. Thus, with the influence of mass media and the experience economy, a celebrity culture has been intensified (Darmer & Sundbo, 2008)
– something that has played a key role in the context of sports branding as well, e.g. Super Bowl Sunday or the FIFA World Cup may exemplify this scenario (Wenner, 1998). Nike’s commercial success with the branding campaign Write the future and its staging of personal football superstars during the FIFA 2014 World Cup in Brazil also exemplifies this. Commercial mass media with their concentrated presence and influence direct people towards the most culturally significant sector (the sports media) of the sports industry. As Andrews (2004, p. 3) notes, “sport and the sports media, as cultural goods par excellence, are clearly a central element in a larger process (or set of processes) that is reshaping society and culture.” It makes the interactions between different sports brands and sports branding levels an interesting research area with the capability to influence society and culture (Slack, 2004) and additionally to improve a sports brand’s interactions.

This doctoral study in sports branding holds a strong business-orientation, which is evident in the dissertation’s focus on the management of sports branding as means of monetization. This focal point relates to how sports branding has grown in popularity and significance as a result of the growth of the business of sports (Stotlar, 2001; Johnson Morgan & Summers, 2005; Greyser, 2006). Greyser (2006, p. 11) sheds light on this development in illustrative terms, cf. figure 2 below, and this highlights the importance of time and context, cf. section 4:

- “More professional/collegiate leagues and sports competing for fans’ time and money and for marketing/sponsor support.
- More big events seeking fan attention, sponsor support, and broadcast exposure.
- More broadcast channels and hours providing opportunities for league and team rights fees but requiring company marketing/advertising support.
- More opportunities for company/brand sponsorship of leagues/teams/events – ‘the official (product/service) of the (league/team/event)’ – with pressures for more dollars and for measurable return on investment.
- More licensed manufactured merchandise (for leagues/teams, colleges, events, players) – plus the memorabilia and autograph industry – and more distribution channels and retail space devoted to it, all competing for consumer purchases.
- New financial revenue paradigms for franchises in terms of new stadiums, more revenues from season ticket-holders, and more corporate sponsorships, but with more complex relationships (e.g. team revenue sharing, a more powerful role for players/agents etc.).
- Greater attention to and concern over the business of intercollegiate sports, including conference realignments, broadcast rights fees, and implications for both the ‘student’ and ‘athlete’ dimensions of the players.”

Figure 2: Illustrating parameters of growth in the business of sports (Greyser, 2006, p. 11).

However, while keeping in mind that the above-mentioned perspective offers a North American perception of the growth of the business of sports, e.g. the attention of collegiate sports including conference realignments, students and student-athletes, there are many commonalities with the development of sports in European and other markets. For instance, the conference realignments in the business of intercollegiate sports show a pattern of business-orientation and thus brand focus that have similarities to the development of the UEFA Champions League. The prestigious European football (soccer) tournament went through a transition from the European Cup to the UEFA Champions League in 1992 to enhance the commercial and branding control of the tournament (Chadwick & Holt, 2007). The change to the tournament meant that UEFA obtained the commercial opportunities to be exploited from the fact that more top teams from the most prominent football leagues in the world, e.g. the English Premier League, the German Bundesliga, the Italian Serie A and the Spanish La Liga, participated in the tournament each year. This change offered UEFA and the participating teams better capitalization potential as the capital injections from corporate sponsorships and broadcasting were intensified due to the higher flow of star players and top quality teams in the tournament. This exemplification also highlights the influence and meaning of mass
media in the commercialization of sports. In terms of UEFA's enhancement of the commercial and branding control of the tournament, consider the demanding branding manual that the participating clubs have to follow to accommodate UEFA's requirements as protection of the commercial rights of UEFA sponsors. Everything in a participating team’s stadium has to be covered to make room for, to protect and to display the logos and rights of UEFA's paying sponsors. In terms of presenting a framework for understanding the management of sports branding from a commercial and business-oriented angle, Greyser’s (2006, p. 12) model of the business of sports is illustrated below.

MODEL OF THE BUSINESS OF SPORTS

The model in figure 3 offers a model for the business of sports that entails four central components: Competition (‘the game’), Incremental Revenue Sources (beyond tickets), Other Key Elements (e.g. fantasy leagues) and the main driver for the entire engine of the business of sports, i.e. Fans. According to Greyser (2006), the model is grounded in marketing to highlight the role of marketing, selling and promotion within the context of sports management. It is thus interactive and dynamic in the sense that many components on the left, e.g. Competition, have marketing components that interact with and draw from the Revenue Sources on the right. Hearts stand for the psychological value for fans, i.e. an essential component that differentiates sports marketing and sports branding from generic
marketing and generic branding. Although the above-mentioned framework (model), cf. figure 3, demonstrates a North American typology concerning the business of sports, this framework still brings value to a European context. As with the parameters listed in figure 2, the exemplification of intercollegiate athletics and the differences in the competitive arena of sports, i.e. the influence of ‘competitive balance’ in North American sports, are elements to be accounted for when aiming to manage and capitalize on sports brands in Europe and elsewhere outside North America. For instance, it opens up an interesting discussion that the market of professional players is more regulated in most American major sports leagues due to tools like revenue-sharing, salary caps and the draft system than the market of professional sports, e.g. football (soccer), in Europe. However, UEFA has implemented Financial Fair Play, which is a tool to regulate the market of football in Europe and to prevent football clubs from over-spending, but the implementation still reflects ‘work in progress’ in the sense that the effectiveness of the tool remains yet to be seen. UEFA’s interest in punishing the top teams that help to secure commercial revenues and thus help to boost UEFA’s brands of businesses is a debatable topic. Still, Greyser’s (2006) model holds value in this regard as it presents a dynamic and interactionist method to investigate sports branding and for setting the sports business agenda for defining the same.

2.2.1. Conceptualizing sports branding

According to Slack (2004), sports-related entities can experience great branding effects by integrating mass media in their interactive sports branding processes. The sports media landscape and the value-adding characteristic in the experience economy are other arguments for this development, cf. section 1.1. “The purpose of the dissertation” and section 2.2. “Sports branding.” This dissertation puts an emphasis on sports branding at different levels, e.g. the personal, the product and the organizational sports branding levels.

2.2.1.1. Sports branding in a historic light – roots in classic branding & sports marketing

Given its interactive nature, sports branding is a highly dynamic concept, for which reason there are several accepted definitions of sports branding related to academic and practitioner definitions, cf. see below. However, branding a person, a product or an organization with a specific name, label or mark is “a process as old as the human sense of property or identity” (Hardy et al., 2012, p. 482). As mentioned in section 2 above, sports branding stems from classic branding theorists (Aaker, 1991, 2002; McCracken, 1993; Aaker & Joachimstahler, 2000; Keller, 2003; Kotler, 2003; de Chernatony, 2006) and practitioners (American Marketing Association, 2015), and therefore, branding may be defined as a distinguishing “name, term, sign, symbol®, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Kotler, 2003, p. 418). This marks one of the most applied definitions of the term brand, which dates back to 1960 and the American Marketing Association. This builds on the introduction of the work with brand management in the 1950s as part of the marketing field (Andersen & Antorini, 2013). The practitioners’ utilization of branding and brand management goes back to long before the definition of branding and belongs to practices when the concept of branding was not conceptualized and defined in academic terms. The same goes for the concept of sports branding, cf. the citation below.

4In this regard, the model emphasizes its North American typology as economic success is interrelated with competition and especially ‘competitive balance,’ i.e. the uncertainty of the outcome of the competition must be present to a great extent (as compared to the Spanish football/soccer league in which Real Madrid and FC Barcelona are powerhouses season after season).

7The interesting aspect is that this takes places in the US, which is commonly known as a powerhouse for a liberalized market economy and hence an unregulated market place.

8Symbol may relate to logo, trademark or package design.
“In February 1927, Toronto’s struggling NHL franchise, the St Patrick’s, was sold to an investor group doing business as the Toronto Maple Leaf Hockey Club, Limited. Managing partner Conn Smythe made two quick and significant decisions. The first was to secure a well-known war hero as board chairman, to ‘burnish the club’s image’ (Ross, 2008, p. 163). The second was to use a new crest on the team sweaters – a maple leaf similar to that which had adorned Canada’s gold medal-winning 1924 Olympic hockey team. Smythe later recalled (Smythe and Young, 1981, p. 86) that he knew the leaf ‘meant something across Canada.’ Today’s sport marketers would say that Smythe was engaged in ‘branding’ his team with people and symbols that would increase name recognition, perceived product quality, emotion, and loyalty among his fan base. In marketing jargon, he would increase his ‘brand equity.’” (Hardy et al., 2012, p. 482)

Ferrand & McCarthy (2008) explain that sports marketing goes back to the 1870s. Tobacco companies that placed baseball player cards in packs of cigarettes to enhance sales and build brand loyalty exemplify this. Hardy et al. (2012, p. 483) build on this by stating that “the history of sport is filled with examples of events, actors, and practices that imply some elements of branding. Ancient sources suggest that they elicited strong emotion and loyalty among consumers.” According to research conducted by Kyle (2006), Mann (2009) and Fagan (2011), there is evidence that archeology, epigraphy and social psychology have “expanded knowledge of gladiatorial contests and careers both west and east in the Roman Empire” (Hardy et al., 2012, p. 483). The International Olympic Committee has created partnerships with businesses since the organization’s foundation in 1894, which is another example of the long existence of sports marketing and sports branding in practice. A third example is Jesse Owens during the Berlin Olympics in 1936 (Ferrand & McCarthy, 2008). He received free shoes from Adidas as one of the first cases of athlete endorsements in sports. Mullin et al. (2014) and Funk & Gladden (2001) have dealt with the historic development of sports branding through a historic sports marketing focus and they have concluded that sports branding has a long practical tradition in sports. Figure 4 below illustrates an overview of this development.

Figure 4: ‘The tree of sport branding, general chronology.’ (Hardy et al., 2012, p. 486 (original); Mullin et al., 2014, p. 156).

Figure 4 above depicts the historical development of sports branding. Each of the developmental phases, from family to line to type to property and brand, stems from the work of entrepreneurs that exploited new technology to design rules, equipment, stories, apparel and images that could win the loyalty of consumers. For instance, the categorization of different kinds of sports brought about a form of conceptualization that is part of the branding process of sports, which evolves more
when further interactions are added (Hardy et al., 2012), cf. “Theory of science” in section 4. This development happened long before the conceptualization of the terms sports marketing and sports branding. However, sports branding has experienced a long period of research (Hardy et al., 2012) due to the long tradition of classic branding theory because it is a term that has been defined based on inspiration from classic branding and it falls under the umbrella of sports marketing, i.e. “the process of designing and implementing activities for the production, pricing, promotion, and distribution of a sport product to satisfy the needs or desires of consumers and to achieve the company’s goals” (Stotlar, 2001, p. 4-5). Stotlar’s definition of sports marketing is generic and in harmony with the traditional parameter mix. This adds relevance, but at the same time, it should be critically discussed that the world of sports has undergone significant changes with an impact on sports marketing (Robinson et al., 2013). With these changes in mind, it can be argued that a definition of sports marketing should also entail parameters like people, process and physical evidence, while Schwarz et al. (2012) also argue for the fact that PR should have its own significant role in the parameter mix given sport’s innate ability to generate PR interest. From a holistic angle, the context of sports marketing should also consider changes to society and adapt to current and future societal tendencies, i.e. a good sports marketer must also account for the specificities of the sports objects, i.e. services, events and brands (Robinson et al., 2013). Due to these changes, Mullin et al.’s (2014, p. 13) definition of sports marketing seems to be more updated, cf. the citation below:

“Sport marketing consists of all activities designed to meet the needs and wants of sport consumers through exchange processes. Sport marketing has developed two major thrusts: the marketing of sport products and services directly to consumers of sport and the marketing of other consumer and industrial products or services using partnerships and promotions with sport properties.”

This cited definition of sports marketing (Mullin et al., 2014, p. 13), cf. mentioned above, encompasses the same breadth as Stotlar’s (2001) definition. However, it is a definition that mirrors that sports marketing has developed its commercial framework over the span of the decade that had passed since Stotlar’s definition in 2001. Moreover, Mullin et al.’s (2014) definition encapsulates Fullerton and Merz’s (2008) perception of sports marketing that recognizes and activates the differences between the marketing of sport and marketing through sport. The latter is a perception that is included in this dissertation as it investigates the branding of sports and branding through sports, cf. the definition of sports-related organizations in section 1.1. This is especially true in article 3 when focusing on sports branding at the organizational level.

2.2.1.2. Definition of sports branding – a dynamic concept

Sports branding falls under the umbrella of sports marketing. Therefore, Shank (2009, p. 206) has developed a definition of sports branding, i.e. “a name, term, design, symbol, or any combination that a sports organization (or individual athlete as is the case with David Beckham) uses to help differentiate its products from the competition” (Shank, 2009, p. 206). This definition guides this research process on sports branding, and it encompasses the differentiating element of sports branding that is needed to enhance the brand equity levels of all interacting brands. Thus, this definition of sports branding is in harmony with other definitions of the same concept from The American Marketing Association, other leading sports marketing academics (Beech & Chadwick, 2007; Fetchko et al., 2012; Schwarz et al., 2012) and branding experts (Aaker, 1991; 2004; Kotler, 1991; Keller, 1993; Kapferer, 2008). Carter (2010) has intensified the work on sports branding and its links to commercialization in what can be coined ‘the sports and entertainment economy,’ as his research deals with how to generate profits from the convergence of sports and entertainment. Carter’s research and the updated work of Bouchet et al. (2013) and Rein et al. (2014) show that the recent decades of a more in-depth focus on sports branding has helped to construct different elements that are central in the building of brand equity for sports-related entities, e.g. sports governing bodies, sports leagues, sports teams, sports stars, sports events, sports facilities, sports services and sports equipment manufacturers.⁹ In

⁹As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, this may also include ‘branding through sports.’
doing so, Carter (2010, p. 76) connects a sports brand with a “collection of perceptions in the mind of the consumer” and, although this connection reflects the definition of brand positioning, Carter associates this understanding with the conceptualization that a sports brand is shaped through the mix of a unique and identifiable set of qualities meant to generate value and differentiate the brand.

Rein et al. (2014) stress the dynamic nature of a sports brand when noting that it is a common sports branding trend to aim to capitalize on the potential opportunities arising from new technology platforms and media fragmentation. Bouchet et al. (2013) confirm the dynamic feature of sports brands and support this dissertation’s symbolic interactionist approach in stating that sports brands act as vehicles capable of forming consumer expressions and beings and conveying values for intergenerational entities. This method of identity expression explains why strong revenue-generating sports brands like Cristiano Ronaldo, the FIFA World Cup and Nike are followed by huge groups of people across a wide variety of demographic and psychographic variables (Cortsen, 2014; 2015). For this reason, Bouchet et al. (2013) conclude that the dynamic characteristics of sports brands make it complex to clearly define the concept. This understanding makes perfect sense when relating the dynamic notion of sports branding to the development of classic branding theory, i.e. when Andersen and Antorini (2013) discuss classic branding theory associated with the integration of central concepts like differentiation, positioning and brand identity formation along with the emergence of new technologies and hence the changing playing field for any brand and the sudden growth of open source brand management. For instance, the MLS (the major men’s professional football/soccer league in the US) has an open source approach to its logo as a built-in process in branding the league. Due to fierce competition with other and more developed and therefore prominent sports leagues, e.g. the NFL, the MLS has strategically sought to cater for younger generations by exploiting the popularity of football (soccer) among young Americans and to accommodate the lack of media attention on football (soccer) as well as the younger generations’ habitual behavior of spreading their passionate involvement with the MLS logo virally via online technologies. The league has successfully experienced this as it has allowed fans to ‘play’ with and to adapt its logo to the fans’ favorite MLS teams.

The complexity of sports branding is derived from the ambiguity that may arise when different academic fields apply and define the concept. Bouchet et al. (2013, p. 5) highlight that “for many economists and management experts, sport brands are first of all corporate brands supplying sporting goods, clothes and shoes” and this definition is not all-encompassing as it is interconnected with product purchases and usage by sports participants, which is a definition that ignores sports services providers, e.g. sports events and media companies that have bought the rights to broadcast sports. In alignment with these views on sports branding, it serves a purpose to emphasize that the dynamic aspect of sports branding also touches on its interactive backbone. This should be understood from the angle that a sports brand on one hand, e.g. Manchester United, has a legal, implicit and patrimonial ownership, whereas on the other hand, the stakeholders in the form of fans, sponsors and media have an explicit consumption and identification ownership. This leads to the acknowledgement of two complementary axes with brands, companies, organizations and markets on one hand and consumers and consumption on the other hand. For these reasons, Bouchet et al. (2013) have issued the following guidelines for sports brands, see figure 5 below:

- a) “The brand must be valorized to satisfy commercial, industrial or organizational purposes by an entity clearly identified and recognized as capable of such.
- b) The brand possesses a name and an identity designating goods and services identified as belonging to the sport industries.
- c) The brand is at the core of the industrial and organizational activities or integrated among the primary missions of the owner, which exclude opportunistic brands which only surf on the sport trend and fashion and are not primary attached to the sport industries.
- d) The brand is registered nationally or internationally in a category of products and services

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10 This is compared to the well-established major sports leagues, e.g. the NFL.
which are directly linked to the sport market and industries; this excludes counterfeiting brands for instance.

e) The brand is recognized as part of a sport sector by socio-professional actors and is then listed in the databases of branches and sector organizations (for example, Kompass Sport, Sport & Social Industry Association, and Sporting Goods Industry Association).

f) The brand has to make the majority of its turnover in the sport industries and sectors.

g) The company or organization owning the sport brand has to explicitly conduct marketing and promotional activities centered on products and services targeting sport consumers (B2C) or sport sectors’ professionals and companies (B2B).

h) Consumers have to be able to easily and sustainably access the products and services designated by the brand within sport markets and sectors.

i) The brand has to possess a sufficient notoriety and reputation in its market sector to clearly define a specific and recognized brand territory.”

Although the work of Bouchet et al. (2013) acts as fine inspiration for the defining building blocks of sports branding and for establishing a more in-depth understanding of the concept, Shank’s broader definition is a better fit for this dissertation as it gives room for the links and interdependence between sports brands and sports branding processes at the personal, product and organizational levels, as well as the core business and profitability potential to be found when engaging in activities that enhance the brand equity and brand loyalty levels of the involved sports brands and/or sports-related brands. In particular, the feature of engagement is critical when touching on the concept of sports branding and it seems fundamental to pursue a high level of engagement among stakeholders when trying to capitalize on the effects of sports branding at different levels. “The hallmark of a good experience is (using) goods and services as the stage to engage each customer in an inherently personal way and create a memory” (Food Service Director, 2000). Moreover, the emergence and influence of new media as part of utilizing aspects of sports branding for commercial purposes underpin various stakeholders’ engagement with sports brands and reflect the dynamics of sports branding in the postmodern era.

2.2.1.3. The distinctive field of sports branding

To provide insight into the dynamics of sports branding and an understanding of why and how this influences sports brand management and can lead to better brand interactions, it is relevant to include an illustration of how managing in the business of sports is different from managing in other business sectors, see figure 6 below. However, it is vital to note that the figure below is associated with sports management in a North American context, which takes into consideration aspects like ‘supporting the weakest,’ ‘handicapping the strongest’ and ‘revenue pools and allocation rules’ to accommodate competitive balance. The latter is a key driver in the cultural DNA of professional sports in North America as it is an integral part of most North American major league sports, cf. this section above (the researcher’s comments regarding figure 6).

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<th>AREAS OF COMMONALITY</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGY MATTERS</td>
<td>1. WINNING ON THE FIELD CENTRAL</td>
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<td>2. VALUE CREATION AND VALUE SHARING</td>
<td>2. DIVERSE OWNER OBJECTIVES</td>
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<td>3. SEARCH FOR REVENUE GROWTH</td>
<td>3. MANAGING IN THE FISHBOWL</td>
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Baseball differs in this sense from other leagues, e.g. the NBA and the NFL.
As seen in figure 6, Foster and Walsh (2006) confirm the fact that branding matters in business while arguing that it seems even more important in the sports industry in which it takes place at the personal, product and organizational levels (e.g. television network, league, club, player and athlete-endorser company levels). This fact is a driving force behind the motivation to investigate the interaction between different sports branding levels. In this regard, it is also essential to note the differences between the North American approach and the European model by acknowledging that the North American method applies a more centralized approach guided by the league level (e.g. the NFL), whereas European football (soccer) clubs to a greater extent apply a decentralized approach to branding (Rosner & Shropshire, 2011). This should be understood from the perspective that the American structure in some ways is more controlling as to how teams can maximize revenues, e.g. the regulated inclusion of revenue sharing. The importance of sports branding is also confirmed in the following citation:

“The manner in which a sport entity crafts and disseminates its message, combined with its ability to capitalize on opportunities for branding and respond to challenges, has a dramatic impact on the public’s perception of the brand. In today’s market place, brand perception plays a key role in the financial vitality and long-term success of sport companies.” (Miloch, 2010, p. 3.)

Clearly, branding is not to be neglected in the sports industry. It is a platform delivering the opportunity to connect with stakeholders based on positive associations. Several scholars argue for the importance of sports-related entities communicating their core brand messages given the fact that consumers are most likely already educated on product features (Madrigal, 1995; Funk & Gladden, 2001; Bedbury, 2002; Godin, 2002; Chang et al., 2004). This dissertation goes beyond the fact that people know the products of, for instance, Hummel, Nike, Adidas, Puma or other sports brands by demonstrating the significance of communicating what the personas associated with these products or the organizations behind these products stand for, i.e. an exemplification of the meaning of having a good sports brand at the personal, product or organizational levels.

Branding authors Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2000) elaborate on shifts in branding practices over time. In early versions of branding, the holistic strategic feature of branding was often set aside or ignored, whereas the shift in focus from brand image towards brand equity indicates that a strong branding process has become a significant asset for organizations; an asset that may lead to competitive advantages and sustainable profitability (Ourosoff, 1994; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Establishing branding as a high priority on managerial agendas places management, leadership and communication
in a strategic light where managers must be capable of visionary and symbolic management (Schmitt, 1999). These trends have also been transferred to the context of sports branding.

According to Aaker & Joachimstahler (2000), support at the strategic management level is important when trying to build brand equity and a strong brand promise. At the same time, they regard it as imperative to avoid situations where this promise does not have the required funding from the organization. Such a scenario makes organizations suffer due to portrayed gaps between what an organization actually stands for and how its stakeholders perceive the same organization (Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Balmer & Greyser, 2003). Therefore, it surely becomes a problem for sports-related entities if they cannot live up to stakeholder expectations via the solid execution of their brand promises. In terms of building strong sports brands, sports-related entities must concentrate on giving their stakeholders good brand experiences. Thus, how a brand acts, reacts or sees future scenarios by being proactive determines the success under the roof of this arena (Haudan, 2008).

The level at which people identify with personal, product and organizational sports brands has an impact on the commercial value of those brands and the higher the level of identification with personal, product and organizational sports brands, the better it is in terms of utilizing the commercial values of those brands. In the experience-based business of sports, the concept of ‘experience’ accounts for a large portion of our decision-making process when purchasing or consuming brands in contemporary societies (Waterhouse, 2000; Ingram & Ransley, 2004). Therefore, sports branding also incorporates experiential aspects and thus the celebrity aspect of the experience economy (the fascination of sports stars) underpins this fact (Crawford, 2004; Smart, 2005; Redmond & Holmes, 2007; Currid-Halkett, 2010). It is therefore essential to take the role of image transfer in relation to the creation of sports brands at different levels into consideration. It is also crucial to consider why people identify with personal sports brands in comparison with sport brands at the product and organizational levels, respectively. So, it is significant to acknowledge the meaning of the concept of ‘experience’ for different sports stakeholders, e.g. both providers and participants of experiences (Bitner, 1990; Blodgett & Wakefield, 1996; Mannell, 1999).

To sum up, there is value in applying Shank’s definition of a sports brand as “a name, term, design, symbol, or any combination that a sports organization (or individual athlete as is the case with David Beckham) uses to help differentiate its products from the competition” (Shank, 2009, p. 206). However, in part of this dissertation, the following definition of sports branding is included while discussing this from a critical angle: Sports branding can be defined as:

“**A long-term, intensive, and successful partnership between a sponsor and a sponsoree in which both parties are equal and have brand status at their disposal. This partnership is based on trust. Both partners have a high mutual identification and pursue mutual strategic goals.**” (Adjouri & Stastny, 2006, p. 116)

Translated from German into English by KC

The reason for encompassing Adjouri and Stasny’s definition of sports branding should be seen in relation to its links to sports sponsorship and hence commercial partnerships. Part of the research process, cf. article 3, on sports branding investigates the interrelationship between sports branding, strategic CSR and how this can be taken to a capitalization level via the inclusion of sports sponsorship. Moreover, the dialogical and interactionist approach characterizing the scientific perspective of this research process stresses the importance of mutual benefits and trust among partners; this is created because partners are getting closer to a stage of ‘common meaning and understanding’ in partnerships affected by dialogical interactionist processes (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1986; Fast, 1996).

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12The researcher acknowledges that this definition is similar to definitions of sports sponsorship although the authors (Adjouri & Stasny, 2006) label it as a definition of sports branding. It is included in this dissertation to facilitate the relationship between sports branding and sports sponsorship, cf. article 3.
2.3. Brand equity in the business of sports

To manage a sports brand in an optimal manner and to capitalize on this process, it is important to link the above-mentioned definitions of sports branding to the conceptualization of brand equity. In introducing the sports branding process, cf. figure 7, Shank (2009) mentions the importance of producing high levels of brand equity. Other scholars (Mullin et al., 2014, p. 155) support this by marking brand equity as a “crucial concept for sport marketers.” Fetchko et al. (2012, p. 129-130) present the concept of brand equity in sports in connection with the stages shown in figure 5, i.e. “as a set of assets linked to a brand’s name and symbol that adds to the value by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers.” This view places brand awareness, brand image and brand loyalty as assets that help to construct brand equity.

![Figure 7: The sports branding process (Shank, 2009, p. 211).](image)

Shank (2009, p. 211) refers to the work of Gladden et al. (1998) in his statement that brand equity reflects “the difference in value between a branded product and its generic equivalent.” As illustrated in figure 7, there are interactions between the different phases in the sports branding process so it emphasizes that brand equity acts in association with and thus in interdependence with the other phases, i.e. brand awareness, brand image and brand loyalty. In a critical discussion of this process and as a natural consequence given the dynamic and interactionist nature of sports brands, it may be argued that the arrows should not be one-way only. The football (soccer) brand of Liverpool FC has been enhanced by the attention and awareness generated over the span of the club’s most successful periods, which date back one or more decades and which have impacted the club’s image positively, which have primarily arisen as a derived effect of successful on-pitch performances. This development has helped the club to create high levels of brand equity on a global scale, which has boosted brand preferences and positive stakeholder engagement leading to high sponsorship, ticket and merchandise sales, as well as good television value, i.e. a good level of brand loyalty. The pinnacle of this exemplification is that Liverpool FC’s sporting performances in recent years are negatively distanced from the high points of the club’s most successful times. This has resulted in seasons outside the prestigious branding stage of the UEFA Champions league, for which reason all the stages of the sports branding process and the associated revenue-generating potential are influenced in a negative way.

To accommodate the dynamic and interactionist character of sports brands and to fully comprehend and manage the sports branding process from a capitalization standpoint, the inclusion of Gladden et al.’s (1998) conceptual model for assessing brand equity serves a purpose, cf. see below.
Stakeholders who perceive a brand as having a high level of brand equity are more prone to having a preference for that brand, which adds to the business-orientation and consequently the revenue potential of the brand. The model in figure 8 has its origin in classic branding (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; 1998; Kapferer, 1997) in alignment with other models of sports branding. However, there are differences between branding in the context of sports and generic branding, cf. figure 6. Therefore, the main focus is on perceived quality, brand awareness, brand associations and brand loyalty, which are key perceptual constituents serving as a guiding force in this dissertation. This interactionist perspective places the selection of theories in alignment with this dissertation's position concerning the theory of science and methodology, e.g. the choice of symbolic interactionism and this dissertation's qualitative and in-depth research methodology (cf. sections 4 and 5 of this dissertation). For instance, Annika Sörenstam's success on the golf course has had a crucial impact on perceived quality as it relates to her brand equity and hence her brand strength, cf. article 1. In a similar fashion, the market-related antecedent of media coverage partly explains Sörenstam’s high brand awareness given the fact that her years of being the world’s best ranked female player in the popular global sport of golf gave her exceptional international media coverage. The familiarity of Sörenstam's brand and her positive reputation led to positive brand associations and enhanced the brand loyalty levels tied to her brand as she became very attractive to corporate sponsors.

Kotler & Dubois (1997) have researched branding from a marketing viewpoint and investigated facets like brand attributes and characteristics (e.g. the German national football/soccer team is a strong ‘tournament team’ that takes the notion ‘never give up’ to high standards), brand benefits that may be of functional, emotional and social character (e.g. Procter & Gamble’s success with building emotional equity linked to the brand’s ‘Thank You Mom’ campaign during the 2012 London and 2014 Sochi Olympic Games), brand values (e.g. Nike’s appreciation of innovation), the brand’s cultural affiliation (e.g. FC Bayern Munich as a legendary powerhouse of German football/soccer), the brand’s customer profile (e.g. FC St. Pauli’s popularity among fans from the political left wing in Germany) and brand personality (e.g. the ‘cult’, appealing, dribbling and ultra-attacking characteristic of the Danish national football/soccer team in the 1980s). These facets help to explain and understand...
these elements and the cohesion between them, as shown in figure 7. The complexity of the sports branding concept points back to the dynamic and interactionist disposition of sports branding, cf. section 2.1. This viewpoint is supported by Shank (2009, p. 212) in his statement that at times, it may be difficult to attract customers and generate revenues as a result of managing the brand equity process due to “the inconsistent and intangible\textsuperscript{13} nature of the sports product” while acknowledging that the model “can be extended beyond the notion of a team” to other sports brands. This assists in qualifying the researcher’s adoption of this flexible approach to sports branding and brand equity and also displays an evident link to the research of Kotler & Dubois (1997) because Gladden et al.’s (1998) conceptual model leaves an imprint that can assist academics and practitioners within the field of sports marketing (e.g. the antecedents give sports marketers an understanding of how to influence brand equity) while deepening the understanding of how to manage the sports branding process and to exploit its commercialization potential.

\textsuperscript{13}Of course, sports branding also includes tangible elements, but in this situation, intangibility is applied to emphasize the complexity of sports branding, cf. the emotional attachment to an athlete or a sports team or the experience of attending a sports event.
The reason for including a short section about strategic CSR is based on the integration of the concept in part of this dissertation, cf. article 3. However, it is important to note that strategic CSR is only a sub-focus of this dissertation and is included merely to assist the investigation of sports branding at the organizational level. Nevertheless, the conceptualizing of strategic CSR is included to facilitate the understanding of the theoretical umbrella under which this dissertation has researched sports branding at different brand levels.

Sports branding is at the core of sports and commercialization. Therefore, it was very natural for the researcher to conduct research and to secure knowledge-based innovation in relation to the commercial aspects of sports. Sports in Denmark has solid roots in a culture filled with voluntary instructors and leaders (Danmarks Idræts-Forbund/Danmarks Olympiske Komite, 2000),\(^\text{14}\) which has inspired the researcher’s motivation to focus on investigating the commercial value(s) of personal, product and organizational sports brands and the influence of strategic CSR on this matter.

### 3.1 Defining strategic CSR and its implementation in the business of sports

Ever since the work of Carroll (1979; 1991),\(^\text{15}\) cf. figure 9 below, and Freeman’s book Strategic Management: a stakeholder approach (Freeman, 1984), CSR has been a developing practice and field of study. Carroll (1979) mentioned the importance of businesses fully addressing the full range of obligations to society, i.e. that a business expresses and embodies the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary categories of business performance, cf. figure 9 below. This is a good foundation. However, this dissertation adopts strategic CSR by emphasizing its application in connection with corporate strategy and as a tool to interact with and influence the strategic sports branding process.

\(^\text{14}\)And there has not been much research into the commercialization of sports in Denmark (Storm & Brandt, 2008).

\(^\text{15}\)Carroll, in her social performance model, investigated the concept from a rather broad angle reflecting on the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary responsibilities of organizations (Carroll, 1979, p. 499) but also integrated the corresponding literature that dates even further back in time, cf. Bowen (1953), Cheit (1964), Davis & Blomstrom (1966) etc.
Figure 9: Social responsibility categories (Carroll, 1979, p. 499).

For this reason, the following definition (McElhaney, 2008) of this concept is applied in the dissertation:

“Strategic corporate social responsibility: a business strategy that is integrated with core business objectives and core competencies of the firm and from the outset is designed to create business value and positive social change, and is embedded in day-to-day business culture and operations.” (McElhaney, 2008, p. 5.)

According to this viewpoint, strategic CSR is perceived to be essential in a corporate communication and branding setting when seeking to maximize business value, as many organizations may be afraid of communicating CSR initiatives (McElhaney, 2008). In this regard, it is relevant to emphasize why and how to define a strategic CSR initiative in a sports branding setting. It is relevant because CSR is significant in the business of sports and in particular in sports communication and branding contexts (Bradish & Cronin, 2009; Skinner, 2010), i.e. “sport social responsibility is of increasing importance for sport teams, franchises and organizations” (Skinner, 2010, p. 72). Research also places the importance of strategic CSR in a sports context in the sense that it “can deliver competitive advantage to a sport team, franchise or organization in a number of different ways, most of which concern the ethical and philanthropic applications of CSR/SSR in order to generate positive perceptions of, and support for, sport teams, franchises and even mega-events” (Skinner, 2010, p. 80). With this in mind, there is a clear relation between strategic CSR and sports branding (and brand equity in a sports setting) as “CSR can generate long-term profits for business through positive brand perceptions, which can lead to an increase in consumer support for particular companies” (Skinner, 2010, p. 80). This also leads to greater demand for products (Quazi, 2003; Juholin, 2004).

Some scholars argue that if the thousands of sports fans worldwide adopted a thorough understanding of the importance of CSR, it would not last long until CSR was a mainstream mindset (McElhaney, 2008). This is a powerful scenario and an illustration of the power patterns surrounding the subject.
matter in a strategic, economic and commercial light. In a 2007 Sports Illustrated article under the title *Going Going Green*, author Alexander Wolff argues what the sports world does to approach CSR from innovative angles and how it does it (Wolff, 2007). Elements of the so-called political consumers and their identification with good causes may thus be transferred to a relative explanation of the behaviors of CSR-conscious sports fans and why sports-related entities integrate aspects of strategic CSR in their sports branding efforts, i.e. with value-adding commercial intentions in mind.

In a sports business context, CSR has developed significantly in the past decade and has started to take up space in the minds of strategic management, as demonstrated in the citation below:

“Over the past decade, there has been a groundswell of support within the sports industry to be ‘good sports’, as evidenced by a growing number of, and commitment to, ‘giving’ initiatives and ‘charitable’ programs.” (Bradish & Cronin, 2009, p. 691)

With the role of sports in society, cf. affecting masses of people, and with CSR having influenced strategic managerial agendas in the general corporate world for decades now, the reasons are clear as to why it is something to pay attention to for sports-related entities as well in their business and sports branding processes. Skinner (2010, p. 80) adds to this proposal by stating that competitive advantages can be created by sports-related entities via the utilization of CSR, and that it is reflected by offering consumers, supporters, fans or other stakeholder groups greater value, e.g. by offering greater benefits, services or experiences. CSR can be seen as an integrated part in this context as well, and may reflect one of the new tendencies within the framework of sports branding (Zadek, 2004). In addition to Zadek’s work from (2004) “The Path to Corporate Responsibility,” where Nike is portrayed, it also makes sense to refer to Nike’s co-branding efforts with the Lance Armstrong Foundation, i.e. the LiveStrong initiative (Lance Armstrong Foundation, 2010). In relation to their stakeholders, sports-related entities should be able to clarify the advantages of a CSR-based partnership by communicating concrete advantages containing a rational and an irrational appeal and hence by avoiding remarkable and memorable negative experiences. As a result of this development, sports-related entities are met by the same expectations as those of other business entities; that is, to assume responsibility for business operations and the impact of those operations on the surrounding society (Skinner, 2010, p. 69). Bradish and Cronin (2009, p. 692) mention that “It has been acknowledged that sport is unique for being both a social and an economic institution, and as such, well-suited with this dual orientation to be interpreted by the business principles and practices of CSR.” This citation reflects that sports have multiple meanings and roles in society. Sports appeal to and involve masses of people and may have different meanings depending on the focus of those involved. Thus, this dissertation sets out to investigate how sports-related entities are influenced by strategic CSR in their interactions with stakeholders and thus in their strategic sports branding processes to improve their brand interactions. This is supported by other research pointing towards the great potential of the intersection between sports and CSR as a driving-force behind business development (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007; Babiak & Sheth, 2009). Therefore, part of this dissertation studies how the combination between sports and strategic CSR may lead to new sports branding platforms and how this combination affects sports-related entities and their interactions with stakeholders and sports branding strategies. By doing so, this part of the research study also explores the relationship with sports sponsorship in order to emphasize the economic sustainability and the capitalization on the work within this context of sports branding. In this regard, it is noted that strategic CSR for sports-related entities is about meeting the expectations to give back to society and to fulfill the expectations and needs of stakeholders (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007).

This is in line with the current development in many countries throughout the world and, as Thomas Persson (2008) notes in his research, there is a correlation between CSR and social capital that is established and visualized in the official stand on the social responsibility of individual and umbrella sports governing bodies, as well as Danish government policy (Persson, 2008). Moreover, Persson states “Ness’s definition of corporate social responsibility (Ness, 2005) as the necessity and the duty
of companies to behave responsibly, ethically and sustainably, and to be transparently accountable to their stakeholders, is transferred to sport associations" (Persson, 2008, p. 35). Suddenly, there is evidence in today’s business environments worldwide that it is possible to successfully mix innovation, profitability and CSR (Lenderman, 2006), and the transformation process that successful organizations have portrayed towards their stakeholders equals positive experiences or high impact experiential marketing seen from the stakeholders’ side. Given the popular rise of CSR and the importance that many organizations place on it as a source of brand differentiation (Guzman et al., 2008, p. 90), this dissertation includes interesting findings on the influence of the relationship between sports branding, strategic CSR and sports sponsorship, cf. the concluding section of this dissertation. In terms of this dissertation, sports branding is related to the strategic use of CSR in the sense that there must be a strategic fit, cf. section 1.1., between the values of the CSR initiative and the sports brand to optimize the branding process (Guzman & Montana, 2006). Different countries may have reacted differently to this development, which is briefly touched upon in the empirical data of this dissertation, although it is not a main focus area of this research study. The aim in terms of applying strategic CSR in this dissertation is to investigate sports branding, and this is linked to the application of sports sponsorship, cf. Adjouri & Stastny’s (2006) above-mentioned definition in section 2.1. Therefore, the third article incorporates a focus on sports branding via engagement in sponsorship-based CSR partnerships to break through the PR clutter and hence create competitive advantages for the benefit of the strategic sports branding process. Therefore, this part of the dissertation aims to investigate the intersection between the various aspects of sport management to shed light on the effectiveness of sport as a branding platform to utilize the commercial values of strategic CSR for sports brands at the personal, product and organizational levels. More specifically, this dissertation concludes by discussing how different types of persons, products and organizations can optimize their sports branding efforts by applying CSR strategically, i.e. what the impact of strategic CSR on sports branding is.

16 The media play a role given their ability to communicate the values of a sports brand to external stakeholders. For instance, Adidas and the Danish newspaper Information do not exemplify a good strategic fit. Adidas would be a better fit for a Danish business newspaper like Jyllands-Posten.
The validity of any research study is strongly influenced by the scientific nature of the fundamental assumptions that guide the research process. These assumptions guide the path applied for analyzing and interpreting the theoretical and empirical material linked to this research process. Consequently, this section of the dissertation intends to qualify the academic status of this dissertation. Thus, this section clarifies the researcher's approach and considerations in relation to the theory of science, which is intended to build a good platform for a scientifically stringent dissertation.

4. Theory of science in a sports branding context

“Traveling to a sporting event makes the intangible tangible. People long for an interactive experience. What can be more exhilarating than inhaling the dust from the streets of Pamplona, Spain, while you frantically run from the bulls? You cannot get any more hands-on than walking the streets of Monaco immediately after the Grand Prix. How about being part of the electric crowd at Kentucky’s Midnight Madness? It is a great way to relive your youthful days and be a part of something so special.” (Tuchman, 2009, p. 2.)

The above citation demonstrates this dissertation's scientific and methodological research intentions, ontology and epistemology. Thus, this dissertation follows a qualitative methodology based on traditions under the interpretative paradigm and the framework of symbolic interactionism. Therefore, this dissertation's arguments incorporate experiences gained from interacting with the investigated entities and from participant observations.

Connecting intangible and tangible elements seems natural in the context of sports branding. What constitutes and how to constitute a sports brand is not encompassed by one isolated factor, cf. section 1.1. On the contrary, sports brands are products of multiple interactions, including those between intangible and tangible elements. These considerations are kept in mind on the journey to investigate sports branding (and as a sub-focus strategic CSR) by applying a qualitative methodology in conjunction with symbolic interactionism. This builds on the works of Mead (1934) and Blumer (1986), which to some scholars represent a niche tradition in sports studies under the social sciences. Symbolic interactionism offers a micro-sociological paradigm. The motivation to apply this in this dissertation originates in the researcher's ontological and epistemological standpoint and the ambition to contribute to sports branding research from a theoretical direction and a pragmatic position, respectively.

Furthermore, this stand is motivated by John R. Kelly's application of symbolic interactionism in leisure studies as it relates to people’s leisure time activities and how it can be transferred to sports studies in the sense that the appeal of sports may be central in people’s lives but can change over the span of a
lifetime, i.e. this dynamic and interactive element is relevant (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). This is also relevant in relation to this dissertation’s meta-theoretical focus. In this dissertation, meaning is a central part of any player’s definition of a situation, for which reason this dissertation applies a symbolic interactionist approach to investigating the deeper meaning of sports branding and why and how it manifests itself at various branding levels, cf. section 1.

Discussing the value of paradigms and the theory of science also serves as a significant point when dealing with aspects of sports branding that concern the more social or management-related side of the sports world (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Therefore, this dissertation accounts for its fundamental assumptions and ties this scientific position to its overall theoretical and empirical framework to give a sufficient answer to the research questions.

Norbert Elias (1986) argues for the significance of sport as a social phenomenon, for which reason the depth of sports branding and the related aspects and players cannot be understood based on causal relationships, and thus positivism.

4.1. Symbolic interactionism

This dissertation is built on a foundation of symbolic interactionism, which is a subjectivist theory of science developed by sociologists G. H. Mead (Mead, 1934) and Herbert Blumer (Blumer, 1986). Keeping a close-knit link between the fundamental assumptions, cf. ontological and epistemological perspectives, and the essence of symbolic interactionism, the utilization of a qualitative methodology seems natural in this dissertation, cf. sections 4 and 5. This section accounts for what symbolic interactionism is, and what this choice and thus the researcher’s ontological and epistemological foundation mean for this dissertation when attempting to comprehend the meaning of symbolic interactionism’s important concepts in this context.

With this in mind, symbolic interactionism is important for this dissertation because the researcher acknowledges that the “empirical world,” as stated by Blumer (1986, p. 22), is the testing ground for any claims made about this world. So, ‘reality’ for empirical science only takes place in the empirical world, for which reason this world is the place to collect data and verify scientific knowledge. The researcher’s ontological position favors reality as being constructed from several realities, and this understanding is central and rooted in human interactions within the human social process (Mead, 1934, p. 75). In this sense, symbolic interactionism is central for this dissertation in that 1) meaning is essential and 2) the real test of any scientific work is whether it is applicable when explaining multifaceted social scenarios (Griffin, 2003, p. 5; Jarvie, 2013).

Symbolic interactionism acts as a label for a unique approach to “the study of human group life and human conduct” (Blumer, 1986, p. 1), which is founded on three premises: 1) “that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them,” 2) “that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows,” and 3) “that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters” (Blumer, 1986, p. 2). This approach is inspired by John Dewey’s (1859-1952, cf. Dewey & MacDermott, 1989) assumptions that human beings are best understood in a practical and interactive relation to their context. This helps to explain why this approach fits this dissertation’s interactional tactic of analyzing sports brands at different levels, cf. with contributions to academics and practitioners. Mead (1934) claimed that human beings engaging in communication are at the core of human activity. The researcher’s ontological view is that the world is complex due to the inclusion of human beings with different subjective realities. Blumer’s (1986) core elements of symbolic interactionism that highlight meaning, language and thought have

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17There are other notable scholars who have applied the approach or contributed to its intellectual basis, e.g. John Dewey, W. I. Thomas, Robert E. Park, James Mark Baldwin, Robert Redfield, Florian Znaniecki, William James, Charles Horton Cooley and Louis Wirth (Blumer, 1998).
influenced the researcher's subjective ontology and epistemology in which the experiences of human beings add meaning to a given context. Accordingly, our world is meaningful to discuss, and so is our relationship with this world.

4.1.1. Meaning, language and thought

Blumer's (1986) first premise lays the foundations for discussing the importance of meaning for this dissertation. As previously stated, human beings attach labels to everything. To exemplify this in a sports branding setting, athletes (or other sports brands) can be labeled as good or bad players, which accounts for two contrasting extremes when interpreting them. Hence, sports fans assign meaning based on the social interactions they have with these athletes (or with other types of sports brands). The meaning is not inherent in the words, but is socially constructed through language (and interactions), and the sports fans act towards the athletes as if these labels exist, i.e. fans will often stay loyal to a good player to a higher degree than to a bad player. The labeling or the symbols of naming is fundamental to what it means to be human (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1986), and the process of naming or branding objects (persons, products or organizations in the context of this dissertation) demonstrates the nature of those interactions, and thus the social process and situation. For instance, the power possessed by sports journalists when labeling a player good or bad shows that our assumptions and our understandings of reality, i.e. meaning, are to be found within language. The labels and the process of naming (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1986) are main aspects of symbolic interactionism for showing how meaning, language and thought make sense in this sports branding context. What we chose to call certain objects actually influences who and what they are, which leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Blumer (1986) finds this in the reflective process that is to be found in the fact that individuals have an effect on how others perceive themselves. A self-fulfilling prophecy explains the process through which one's expectations about a person eventually lead that person to behave in ways that confirm those expectations (Brehm et al., 2002). For instance, a sports brand may try to fulfill a specific role. Mourinho behaves like the ‘special one’ no matter where he reigns, and in contrast, Jürgen Klopp recently labeled himself the ‘normal one’ after he was appointed the new manager/head coach of Liverpool FC. This is to say that human beings and sports brands tend to act in ways that arise from how they understand themselves symbolically. Linking this to the researcher’s empirical world, the ambition of ‘Sensational 1’ was to change the reality of women’s football, so this has influenced the actions surrounding this brand. Likewise, the empirical data from the Annika Sörenstam article mirror that Annika was labeled a world-class athlete and that her brand manager as well as herself cared about delivering at a high level, i.e. “she has world class partners that are the best in their space and she has been with them for a long time and the fact that they have renewed or signed or even started in some places with her after she stopped playing shows what a great ambassador she is for a brand,” cf. page 48 in the Sörenstam article. Additionally, the McDonalds versus Team Denmark discussion in the focus groups from article 3 demonstrates that the participants would not recommend this action as it is in opposition to the respondents’ understanding of themselves symbolically.

This helps to emphasize that a sports brand’s situation is unique and complex, for which reason a certain brand cannot be 100% copied for another person, product or organization. The sports brand is a product of communication. Mead (1934, p. 82) stresses that the experiences of human beings find that which is representative, which is vital for an adequate theory of meaning, as is the element of particularity. “What we recognize in a dog is not the group of sensuous elements, but the character of being a dog, and unless we have some reason for interest in this particular dog, some problem as to its ownership or its likelihood to bite us, our relationship to the animal is to a universal – it is just a dog” (Mead, 1934, p. 82). The citation concerning the production of meaning states that some things may be universal, but whether the focus is on universal or particular phenomena, they are socially constructed through meaning, language and thought.
This process influences this dissertation and the search for meaningful sports branding experiences. For instance, Ian Thorpe and Michael Phelps have some similarities, e.g. they are both branded as top swimmers, but the interesting angle is that their situations are unique (their popularity refers to different time periods, they originate from different contexts etc.). The researcher's point is that these brands equal meaning. Ian Thorpe has a different meaning for an Australian than for an American, and this affects the social interactions and thus the articulation and thought processes surrounding Ian Thorpe in Australia and the US. The brand essence for a sports brand, e.g. Ian Thorpe, also depends on who is directed towards or feels an appealing attachment to the brand, cf. the branding section of this dissertation. An iconic brand is a label (a meaning) that stems from the social interactions with fans and consumers. Hence, the researcher's underlying assumptions from symbolic interactionism affect the research process for this dissertation while highlighting that a qualitative researcher always prioritizes time and context because meaning cannot escape these two aspects. When the Dane Bjarne Riis won the Tour de France in 1996, he gained brand meaning and strength because of time and context, e.g. ‘it is right here, right now.’ The same phenomenon took place when Maria Sharapova broke through and won Wimbledon at the age of 17 (Gilbert, 2007). The essence is that breakthroughs are important and that some events (time, place or context) are more meaningful than others, e.g. the Tour de France and Wimbledon compared to other cycling races and tennis tournaments. Having said that, it makes no sense to say that Annika Sörenstam, Michelle Wie, Rory McIlroy and Tiger Woods are similar brands; they are all top golfers but each of them is characterized by their own unique situations. The same goes for the different cases presented in article 2 and article 3, i.e. Carlsberg’s experiences with strategic CSR, sports sponsorship and sports branding may have similarities to those experiences of Fitness DK but they each have their unique stories to attach to this context. The same goes for ‘Sensational 1,’ which has found a good time and place to strive to break through to rebrand women’s football, as the participation numbers for women’s football in Denmark have shown much progress over the past decade.

The researcher’s position in symbolic interactionism becomes central in that meaning is a concept that can be defined, explained, accounted for or specified in terms of symbols or language at a complicated stage of development, i.e. via human experiences. Language becomes a means to an end in making meaning understandable via the social process or social interactions (Mead, 1934). Mead (1934, p. 78) and Blumer (1986, p. 8-9) emphasize social interactions as a process that constantly produces the rise and existence of new objects in social interactions, i.e. objects that are the results of the meanings that are socially shaped during these interactions. This helps to explain why the researcher views sports branding as a very dynamic concept. It also emphasizes the researcher's stand on classic branding and sports branding, cf. section 2, and to understand the researcher's methodological choices for data collection, cf. case studies, participant observations and interviews.

4.1.2. The ‘generalized other’

Symbolic interactionists perceive human beings as acting organisms (Blumer, 1986, p. 12), which is to be understood in response to Mead’s understanding that the social process affects the behavior of human beings engaged in this process in the form of ‘the generalized other.’ Time and context are essential as to Blumer’s (1986, p. 2) notion that the meanings of things are shaped in the context of social interactions and are derived by the human being from these interactions. Consequently, this matches Blumer’s claim that new joint action always occurs on the basis of previous actions, for which reason we cannot detach a given action from its historical roots. This argument explains why the researcher chose to elaborate on sports branding’s roots in classic branding to provide an understanding of the development of sports branding. This also explains why an in-depth qualitative methodology is important to help sports brands improve their interactions.

18“The generalized other is an organized set of information that the individual carries in her or his head about what the general expectation and attitudes of the social group are. We refer to this generalized other whenever we try to figure out how to behave or how to evaluate our behavior in a social situation. We take the position of the generalized other and assign meaning to ourselves and our actions.” (Griffin, 2003, p. 60)
Additionally, it is through these interactions that society influences the behavior of its individual members and vice versa, e.g. the social process (or the society) influences the individual as a determining factor in the individual’s minding or inner dialogue (Mead, 1934, p. 155). In other words, the individual applies the attitude of ‘the generalized other,’ which happens when specific meaning is communicated via language and shapes an individual’s interpretation of symbols, and thus modifies the individual’s thoughts when he/she takes the role of the other. This presents and supports the researcher’s earlier statement that time and context play a central role in sports branding. By having this inner dialogue where people think about the symbols they are using, it becomes possible to experience what it is like to be another person in a specific context and how we look to that person. This influences the researcher’s perception of reality and humanity in the sense that athletes or sports brands may put themselves in the situation of sports journalists, coaches, sponsors and fans to understand how these persons value a good player, or in other words, how these people understand what constitutes a good player. These symbolic projections and understandings are important for sports brands in terms of improving their interactions with vital stakeholders and marketplace performance.

During the participant observation and interview processes, the researcher depicted and took part in sports branding settings in which important discussions between the participants took place at the symbolic level and led to indications as well as interpretations of these indications (Blumer, 1986). Being reflective is part of the inner dialogue of human beings, which according to Mead (1934) is interesting in the sense that it is a way to consider our next response while considering different alternatives and predicting the responses of others. This fits with the researcher’s process of investigating sports branding given that there is always room for thought and reflection in encounters with sports brands, which shows the dynamic social interactions in the process of sports branding. Moreover, these fundamental assumptions influenced the researcher to pursue the focus group interviews due to the interesting dynamics from respondents ‘taking the role of the others,’ e.g. Rasmus Ingerslev taking the role of the media in the discussion about doping in the fitness sector, Majken Gilmartin, Brandi Chastain, Thomas Slosarich or Tiffeny Milbrett taking the role of the sports governing bodies in the discussion of the governing bodies’ accountability for the progress of women’s football, or Mike McGee taking the role of the sponsors in explaining why it means something for the sponsors to interact with a world-class athlete. Mead (1934, p. 156) goes so far as to state that only through taking the role of ‘the generalized other’ is thinking possible, which is aligned with the researcher’s fundamental assumptions that the social meanings found in a sports branding setting act as a part of a socially constructed context of communication. Therefore, it was essential for this dissertation that the respondents when engaging in a sports branding context looked at the world through the lenses of the sports brands involved in the dialogues and discussions. In doing so, it became evident to the researcher that ‘the generalized other’ is present in the communication and branding of sports, i.e. if the respondents view a particular sports brand as being strong, there must be some truth to it. From a critical perspective and based on the researcher’s fundamental assumptions, this not only relates to having a large number of respondents, but instead to the fact that these respondents are meaningful participants within the business of sports and/or sports branding. So, a sports brand cannot be defined only by the number of followers, but in synergy with symbolic interactionism, it must account for other elements as well, e.g. the value of the brand for different individuals and stakeholder groups. For instance, human beings reflect themselves in others, so if a sports brand is important for you and at the same time for the people that you look up to or want to interact with, then you will most likely be more motivated to use that brand. When considering ‘the generalized other,’ it is argued here that we tend to perceive sports brands in certain ways based on our experiences (is this a positive or a negative brand? And what does this entail and how does it affect our understanding?). This is a complex and dynamic process to depict from a research angle.
4.1.3. The self, the ‘I,’ and the ‘me’

The view taken here of humanity and the world is that the world is interconnected and so are meaning, language and thought in symbolic interactionism. Blumer (1986, p. 61-62) portrays other central elements in the interconnected context of symbolic interactionism and how this may explain the role of the self in human society. Blumer presented 1) the self in close connection with 2) the act, 3) social interaction, 4) objects and 5) joint action. Building on the former section, this interconnection between the self and these other elements influences how we communicate with others, i.e. we have labels for different objects. In these interactions with others, there are four different meta-levels that affect our way of engaging with others: 1) my perception of you, 2) your perception of me, 3) my perception of what your perception of me is, and 4) your perception of what my perception of you is.

Mead’s (1934, p. 173) point that “self does not consist simply in the bare organization of social attitudes” raises the central argument in symbolic interactionism of the nature of the spontaneous and intuitive ‘I’ and its interplay with the social ‘me.’ Consequently, the ‘I’ is less concerned with what other people think, e.g. Tiger Woods or Lance Armstrong before their misconduct was brought to the public spotlight. On the other hand, the ‘me’ is more socially aware and this reflects a situation in which the sports brand has been cultivated and thus acts more intentionally and is consciously symbolic through what has been learned via social interactions with others, e.g. within the context of sports or society. In this case, the ‘me’ may help to explain why Lance Armstrong and Tiger Woods came out with public apologies. This can be explained according to what Mead (1934, p. 174) labels in this way: “If one determines what his position is in society and feels himself as having a certain function and privilege, these are all defined with reference to an ‘I’.” The ‘me’ is not there at birth but acts as cultivated behavior stemming from repeated social interactions with others. The balance between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ comes into the discussion when the ‘I’ reacts to the self via “taking the attitudes of others and introduces the ‘me,’ which we react to as an ‘I’.” In the empirical context of this study, consider the media’s witch-hunt and portrayal of the fitness centers when these entities found that a member had used doping in a test. Instead of acknowledging that tests have a preventative effect and are helpful in fighting doping, the media intuitively criticized the entire fitness industry. The interplay between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ was also present in Carlsberg’s discussion about sponsoring a football tournament for homeless people while acknowledging that some people in an extreme case may say that it is Carlsberg’s fault that these people are homeless in the first place. Similarly, ‘Sensational 1’ thought that it was a good idea to launch the slogan ‘size matters’ without realizing the social implications in other markets via the associations with Viagra’s brand (i.e. ‘size matters’).

Thus, in sports branding, the ‘me’ must be developed, which presents an interesting critical discussion. In sports branding, it is the sports brand’s responsibility to educate and cultivate its stakeholders, but at the same time to manage the balance between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ in the sense that the business of sports must include room for spontaneity. Part of the motivational factors (Funk et al., 2009) for attending sports events is the ability to act spontaneously and to get the chance to act childishly and scream at the opposing team, its athletes or fans for $10. When determining which side needs to win, i.e. the intuitive side or the side that is more subconsciously symbolic, depends on the situation, but sports brands should be socially aware concerning the considerations of stakeholders’ perceptions of time and place (context) for the interaction with (or consumption of) the sports brand. The subjectivist character of human beings is depicted in Blumer’s (1986, p. 62) argument that the self transforms the human being into a unique player, and converts his/her relation to the world, and hence adds the uniqueness to his/her actions.

Therefore, the creation of reality emphasizes that social interactions mirror a social drama of a constant negotiation. These fundamental assumptions help to form the researcher’s argument that classic branding and sports branding are complex, dynamic, and hybrid phenomena, and help to influence the methodological search for (via case studies, participant observations and interviews) a path to assist sports brands in improving their interactions. In any interaction, meaning is negotiated and is in constant negotiation. The same goes for the sports branding setting in which no symbols are fixed,
so once the brand is something, it can always become something else (e.g. just look at article 2, which deals with the rebranding of women's football). Of course, this does not mean that it does not require lots of effort to do this. Often, once labels are attached, they may be hard to get rid of, but brands still negotiate with others. From a deeper and more critical point of view, the negotiation may mean that although a brand desires to change and become something else, the end result of the negotiation may be that the brand maintains the label that has been assigned to it. Ross (1977) coined the term ‘fundamental attribution error,’ which explains the tendency to focus on the role of personal causes and underestimate the impact of situations on other people’s behavior, and this concept may help to shed light on the label of a good or bad player. In football, the former Danish national team player Dennis Rommedahl played more than 100 matches for Denmark and scored 21 goals but throughout his career he was the victim of much public criticism (Sky Sports, 2015). Was Rommedahl a good or a bad player? Which of these interpretations is correct? It depends on the negotiation, but if the researcher were to take the role of Dennis Rommedahl, he would be satisfied with his CV and call that a good performance. The researcher’s argument is that symbolic interactionism provides meaningful research and goes beyond explanation but must meet the ultimate goal of helping people, and in this context sports brands to symbolically interact in better ways, i.e. to become more effective, profitable, ethical etc. in their interactions.

The intentions and fundamental assumptions behind the researcher’s position as a symbolic interactionist clarify the purpose of this dissertation; that is, to help sports brands interact in better ways, which is interconnected with positive ROIs, ROOs, and ROEs for these sports brands. Symbolic interactionism presents a subjectivist scientific approach that adds a new understanding of sports brands by seeing these brands in a different way by understanding these brands’ symbolic values through meaningful research that helps them improve their interactions.

4.2. Paradigm definition and its relevance to research

The underlying philosophical approaches and knowledge principles of a research process form a fundamental understanding of the entire research process. Choosing a specific scientific paradigm for structuring and completing a research project has a significant influence on theoretical constructions and methodological choices. This is due to the fact that the research process involves fundamental assumptions regarding reality and a research-based access to this reality (Andersen, 2007). More specifically, a paradigm can be defined by answering the question “what are the conceptual and/or methodological models that relate to a scientific discipline during a particular period of time?” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 13). Thomas Kuhn (1970) coined the concept of paradigm in the form used in this type of research when trying to differentiate the development within the natural sciences from the development within the social sciences. Although Kuhn (1970) argues for the lack of a specific paradigm for the social sciences, the concept of a paradigm is frequently used in the social sciences and business-related research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Later, researchers such as Guba & Lincoln (1994) argued for new meanings of the paradigm concept that are distinguishable from Kuhn’s notions in linking the term paradigm to a world view or a belief system guiding a researcher’s work.

Hudson & Ozanne (1988) talk about the fundamental characteristics of the positivist and the interpretative paradigms in relation to business research and touch on the philosophical underpinnings of the two approaches to research. Founded on Burrell & Morgan’s (1979) paradigm discussion, Hudson & Ozanne utilize the following table, cf. table 2 below, when depicting the essence of the main differences between the extremes of each research tradition.

19ROO = Return on Objectives.
20ROE = Return on Engagement.
## A SUMMARY OF THE POSITIVIST AND INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Positivist</th>
<th>Interpretive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ontological</strong></td>
<td>Objective, tangible</td>
<td>Socially constructed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nature of reality</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fragmentable</td>
<td>Holistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Divisible</td>
<td>Contextual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nature of social beings</td>
<td>Deterministic</td>
<td>Voluntaristic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reactive</td>
<td>Proactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Axiological</strong></td>
<td>“Explanation” via subsumption “Understanding” based on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overriding goal</td>
<td>under general laws, prediction Verstehen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemological</strong></td>
<td>Nomothetic</td>
<td>Ideographic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge generated</td>
<td>Time-free</td>
<td>Time-bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Context-independent</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• View of causality</td>
<td>Real causes exist</td>
<td>Multiple, simultaneous, shaping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Research relationship</td>
<td>Dualism, separation</td>
<td>Interactive, cooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Privileged point of observation No privileged point of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>observation</td>
<td>observation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Summary of the positivist and interpretative approaches (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988, p. 588)

Initiating a discussion about the choice of paradigms for sports study research purposes, Gratton & Jones (2004) created the following table 3 comparing the positivist paradigm with the interpretative paradigm, while emphasizing the growth of qualitative research in sports studies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative Research</th>
<th>Qualitative Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses numerical analysis to measure social phenomena to provide facts</td>
<td>Relies on non-numerical analysis to provide understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumes a single, objective social reality.</td>
<td>Assumes social reality is a subjective experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumes social reality is constant across different times and settings.</td>
<td>Assumes social reality is continuously constructed and related to the immediate social context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses statistical analysis to determine causal relationships.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study samples with the intention of generalizing to populations.</td>
<td>Objectives are description, understanding and meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The researcher is objective, and detached from the subjects under investigation.</td>
<td>Uses smaller samples, or cases.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

21 And to link this section to the subject matter of the dissertation.

22 In table 3, the quantitative research supports the positivist paradigm and the qualitative research supports the interpretative paradigm (Gratton & Jones, 2004).
The setting is often contrived.

The data are collected using inanimate objects, for example paper and pen.

Associated with the positivist approach.

Generally deductive.

The data are rich and subjective.

The location of the research is often natural.

Flexible approach to data collection.

Often non-traditional approaches, e.g. content analysis.

The researcher is the data collection instrument.

Associated with the interpretative approach.

Generally inductive.

Table 3: Characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research (Gratton & Jones, 2004, p. 24).

Given the interpretative and qualitative approach to answering this dissertation's research question(s), it is also important to state that the researcher is fully aware of the fact that the division between qualitative and quantitative is not only black and white. In fact, this dissertation is not limited from the use of numerical data (statistics) in different parts of the research process before digging deeper into the qualitative meaning (cf. article 1). Among other things, this is done to facilitate this dissertation's role within the social sciences and its business-oriented focus on sports branding and the capitalization on the process of sports branding, cf. the discussion about ROIs in section 1.1. ROIs are a common theme in the context of sports and business, and symbolic interactionism holds the position that people use the themes that are available to them in a given context, e.g. culture or society. The quantitative illustration of Michael Jordan’s positive impact on Gatorade’s ‘Be like Mike,’ campaign which is depicted in article 1, is a causal and nomothetic portrayal. However, this study's epistemological approach is ideographic, time-bound and context-dependent, cf. table 2, and shows that a sports brand’s situation is unique and complex. So, there is no privileged point of observation as under the positivist traditions. Instead, the focus is on the interactive research relationship and the understanding of complex and multiple realities in play within the research arena. In a critical discussion about whether or not to apply qualitative methods as the primary empirical stand in the research process, Brinkmann & Kvale (2009, p. 336) argue that research within the social sciences should let the research topic and the purpose of the research be central when determining whether to apply qualitative or quantitative methods, cf. the critical discussion in section 2 about the economy as the greatest social construction. According to Maguire (2014), it is one of the weaknesses of symbolic interactionism to explain how the studied micro-settings, cf. sections 5.1.1.1., 5.1.2.1., and 5.1.3.1., in which meanings are constructed and exchanged, relate to wider social structures and issues of power and inequality. However, the researcher does not agree with this criticism given the fact that the studied micro-settings provide the researcher with a thorough understanding from the interactional context of sports branding. The discussion stresses the paradox that the researcher’s freedom of choice in terms of scientific methods that are relevant for his/her research context are threatened under many academic circumstances. For instance, table 1 shows that many earlier brand studies applied a quantitative and positivist methodology. This is in contrast to authors (outside the academic world) within marketing and management because they have the freedom to select the relevant (‘so-called’ research) methods as long as their work is aligned with the objectives of their employers. The thoughts of Brinkmann & Kvale (2009) are in line with the approach taken in this dissertation, cf. section 5, in which the research questions guide the researcher to conduct in-depth research into the context of sports branding. This is motivated by the effectiveness of the participant observations and interviews in producing knowledge about human situations (e.g. personal, product and organizational sports brands and the human interactions surrounding sports brands at all levels).
Talking about the nature of sports, the framework surrounding sports, and its place in popular culture and contemporary society, this dissertation also intends to play an important role in touching upon the relationship between sport and context in order to obtain a better understanding of human experiences in a sports branding setting. Hence, this dissertation supports the perspective that the human engagement of the phenomenal worlds occurs across several domains (Roth, 1987) and that human behavior is a symbolic expression and thus never an objective fact (Schutz, 1965). To account for the stringency in the scientific approach to this dissertation, the perception regarding ‘symbolic expressions’ relates to symbolic interactionism in the form that human behavior should be perceived as dialogic developing from the interaction between the self and the other (Goffmann, 1959). Accordingly, there is this focus on meaning, depth, and symbolic terminologies that establishes some level of cohesion between the qualitative and interpretative approaches of social constructivism, and symbolic interactionism.

4.3 Ontology and epistemology

The ontological and epistemological position of this dissertation follows symbolic interactionism and thus the interpretative paradigm. Paradigms are characterized by how their supporters answer three fundamental questions, i.e. the illustration below in the form of table 4 (Guba, 1990, p. 18):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature of Paradigm</th>
<th>Answers the question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontological</td>
<td>What is the nature of the ‘knowable’? Or, what is the nature of ‘reality’?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemological</td>
<td>What is the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological</td>
<td>How should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Characteristics of a scientific paradigm (Guba, 1990, p. 18).

From an ontological perspective, this dissertation has its origin in that reality is made up of several realities constructed within people’s perceptions, for which reason reality is inter-subjective and socially constructed. This creates a cohesive interrelationship between phenomenology (Schutz, 1932) and social constructivism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). However, symbolic interactionism is aligned with this dissertation’s primary perception of reality given that meaning is created in social interactions (Mead, 1934). Accounting for the epistemological perspective, this dissertation is based upon the interdependency between the phenomena studied and the researcher. This should be understood in the way that what can be known depends on the researcher. When taking this approach, it is critical that the researcher asks himself/herself to assume the existence of multiple interpretations of reality and to apply an understanding of how individual players construct their own reality within their social context (Mead, 1934; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Blumer, 1986).

Deetz et al. (2000) defined fundamental assumptions partly by stating that a concept is influenced by what an individual sees as being right and appropriate and hence how an individual perceives concepts such as reality, space, time, human nature, and human relationships. Noting the significance of the impact of fundamental assumptions on research, which is due to the deep integration of these assumptions in scientific research, it serves a purpose to state that an individual does not become conscious about his or her fundamental assumptions until the moment when those assumptions collide with those of others (Deetz et al., 2000). Just consider the incidents in sports in which the
media (as a watchdog) find an athlete’s behavior as being blameworthy (negative) and thereby forces
the athlete to present a public apology, cf. the case of the American football star Michael Vick and
his dogfighting incident (ESPN, 2007) or the case of the American swimming star Michael Phelps and
his marijuana incident (New York Times, 2009). People may have perceived Michael Phelps as a ‘good
boy’ but his reputation and personal sports brand suddenly lost positive power and sponsorship
income due to this incident. Again, this understanding is derived from social interactions or originates
from the interpretation that is associated with the meaning that the activity or thing, e.g. marijuana,
has for the athlete (Phelps). This backs up the position of symbolic interactionism.

4.4 Concluding on the application of symbolic interactionism

Dominic Malcolm (2008) remarks that different loosely associated sociological approaches to sports
studies described as micro-sociological, interpretative, or interactionist perceptions (idealism,
macro- and micro-sociology) exist. Malcolm adds that “of these micro-sociological approaches,
symbolic interactionism has probably had the greatest influence in the sociology of sport.” (Malcolm,
2008, p. 258.)

The application of an interpretative approach and more specifically that of symbolic interactionism
is a way to understand specific sports cultures and socialization processes (Donnelly, 2000). Therefore,
the application of symbolic interactionism serves a noteworthy purpose in this dissertation. This is
meaningful as this dissertation seeks to build a bridge between the theoretical and practical worlds
and the spheres implicitly integrated in these worlds. This bridge is particularly relevant in article 3,
in which theoretical considerations are intertwined with practical recommendations based upon the
findings in the empirical data. Based upon discussions that are critical towards the findings in the
empirical data, article 3 further suggests courses of action in the case of improving a sports brand’s
interactions. This is done based upon the idea that meaning is central to the concept of branding.
And to alter the meaning of not only the branding of a sports brand, but also how we understand
branding as a concept, could benefit from new courses of action and discussion. By discussing the
concept and acting differently based upon these findings, the ambition is not to dictate the field
of sports branding. On the contrary, the researcher does not believe that one single truth about
the field is possible to find. Hopefully by adding to the field with new suggestions of action and
discussions, the researcher hopes to contribute to both the theoretical and practical field with new
insights. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, the truth is based on meaning. It is ‘meaning’
that creates the situational context in a market place, and when the meaning and the value of objects
shift, the same happens for the situational context in the market place. For instance, the premises
guide the dissertation in the way that ‘meaning is vital,’ which is something that may have faded in
many business studies, cf. the discussion of the traditional branding approaches in section 2. Blumer
(1986, p. 3) supports this by emphasizing that “the meanings that things have for the human beings
are central in their own right.” With this in mind, the interesting angle in this dissertation is that
the meaning that a brand has for an individual is fundamental. In the empirical data, Mike McGee
(Sörenstam’s brand manager, cf. article 1) talks highly of Annika Sörenstam’s positive personal traits.
This is a good reminder that ‘meaning is significant’ in this dissertation, illustrated by the hypothetical
exemplification that if Annika misbehaves, it will make her brand vulnerable because her misbehavior
will change the meaning that her surroundings attach to their experiences with her brand. On the
other hand, if a brand through meaning, like in Annika’s case, can be perceived as telling positive
stories, it adds to strengthen the value of her brand.

24This parallels the example with the ‘good player’ versus the ‘bad player,’ cf. earlier in section 4.
25Malcolm (2008) states that “micro-sociologists typically focus on relatively small-scale, face-to-face interaction between
individuals” (Malcolm, 2008, p. 159), and that approach tends to favor qualitative research methods.
26Here specifically refers to taking the study of sports branding to a more in-depth level by elaborating on symbolic
interactionism as a premise for my fundamental assumptions and hence my way of perceiving the construction of
meaning.
However, from a scientific standpoint, it is worth considering the main criticisms of this approach. Being too participative when following this approach and hence empathizing so intimately with respondents that you are not able to critically study their actions (Malcolm, 2008) is not the proper path to meaningful and high-quality academic research – nor research with solid practical implications. Therefore, the researcher chose a combination of participant observations and interviews. The researcher is aware that some of the interviewed respondents may have an objective to present specific brands positively, e.g. Mike McGee presenting Annika Sörenstam as her brand manager and husband or Majken Gilmartin as the founder of ‘Sensational 1.’ As a result, symbolic interactionism and its ties to the sociological ethnographic aspects of this dissertation act as a good fit to this research process. This is due to the aim of this approach in terms of comprehending the complexity of the culture(s), social world(s), or group(s) being studied, and its pursuit of understanding how the phenomena studied behave in their ‘natural’ settings (Brick et al., 2009, p. 57). Sports branding is so embedded in culture and socialization processes (Adjouri & Stastny, 2006), which Donnelly also (2000) refers to, that this dissertation would end up without the required in-depth understandings if the research approach deviated from this chosen scientific approach. Donnelly (2000, p. 80) notes the importance of interpretative fieldwork and hence interactions with the phenomena studied in a more in-depth way than that offered by quantitative methodologies. Via this interpretative approach, there is an acknowledgement of the importance of meaning as a catalyst for future interpretative work in sports brand studies, along with the sociological represented by Mead and Blumer (Donnelly, 2000, pp. 4 & 80). This matches the standpoint of Blumer (1998, p. 143), who expresses that “theory is of value in empirical science only to the extent to which it connects fruitfully with the empirical world.” In that sense, symbolic interactionism provides a good micro-sociological method for in-depth studies in sports branding. This signifies that the meanings that sports branding holds is central in its own right depending on the interactions affecting the sports brand in focus.

Using the approach of symbolic interactionism means that meaning is generated from a process of interpretation has some methodological consequences, which will be described in the next section. This means that the researcher has to specify the things or concepts towards which he is acting and to identify the things or concepts that have meaning. This requires an internalized social process in which the researcher interacts with himself/herself so that this process of communicating with himself/herself becomes a process of handling meanings. This allows the researcher to choose, suspend, rearrange and transform the meanings in the light of the setting in which he is located and the focus of his actions (Blumer, 1998). It also highlights symbolic interactionism and its foundation in “root images” that “refer to and depict the nature of the following matters: human groups or societies, social interaction, objects, the human being as an actor, human action, and the interconnection of the lines of action” (Blumer, 1986, p. 6). The intention is to apply symbolic interactionism as a well-suited meta-theoretical level for analyzing sports branding at different levels. In this way, the aspiration is to allow for analytical generalizations to take place so that understandings, tendencies or theories constructed (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009) in a sports branding context can be acknowledged and transmitted to other similar sports branding contexts with the purpose of improving brand interactions. According to this perspective, meaning is neither inbuilt in objects nor preexistent in a state of nature, but it is to be found through the use of communication, which is a fundamental reason for using the qualitative approach to be explained in the following section. For instance, dynamic is not an integral part of the word ‘sports branding,’ but through communication with others, i.e. symbolic interaction, the researcher has revealed that ‘dynamic’ is an ascribed meaning and symbolic discourse for the topic of interest in this dissertation (sports branding).
5. Research design and research techniques

On top of this interpretative and qualitative approach echoed in the use of symbolic interactionism, this dissertation applies an explorative and inductive path to investigating its subject matter. It attempts to define and explore “Why and how does working strategically with sports branding manifest itself on the personal, product and organizational branding levels?”, cf. section 1.1. Via this process, the dissertation attempts to explore the reasons behind this development and the branding strategies to be identified in relation to this development for sports-related brands. Moreover, this dissertation intends to define and investigate 1) “Why and how does working strategically with sports branding at the personal branding level manifest itself as an interplay with the product and organizational branding levels?” 2) “Why and how does working strategically with sports branding and CSR and sports sponsorship manifest itself on the organizational branding level?” and 3) “Why and how does working strategically with sports branding at the product level manifest itself as an interactive vehicle to successfully re-brand women’s football?”

The unit of analysis, i.e. the phenomena which are in focus in this dissertation (De Vaus, 2002), is divided into different segments based on the different brand levels to be investigated, cf. the main research question and the three underlying research questions mentioned in section 1.1. The different brand levels act as the distinctive segments surrounding the units of analysis to be perceived from a theoretical as well as a practical understanding, i.e. this dissertation attempts to vary the perception from an abstract theoretical to an operational level. The research-based choices and methodology, and hence the research design and techniques in this work, follow the thoughts on social constructivism and in particular symbolic interactionism. The following citation elaborates on some of the commonalities and differences between scientific approaches and explains why symbolic interactionism connects with the methods described and discussed in this section:

“Symbolic interactionism argues that human beings are oriented toward meaning, and meaning is the emergent result of ongoing symbolic interactions. We’re symbolic creatures, but meaning doesn’t reside within the symbol itself; it must be pragmatically negotiated in face-to-face situations. We have learned a great deal about how people create meaning in different situations because of symbolic interactionism’s insights.” (Allan, 2007, p. 414.)

The above citation is important to discuss in connection with this dissertation’s research question(s) and the derived methodological choices. The chosen interview-based approach to answering the research question(s) works well in playing along with a position founded on symbolic interactionism. By applying different types of interviews ranging from focus group interviews to personal face-to-face interviews, this dissertation takes into consideration Allan’s (2007) proposal that meaning is not in the
symbol or sports brand itself. Rather, it is something that must be tied to negotiations in face-to-face situations. In that sense, the chosen meta-theory and thus methodology serve as a reinforcement to support that interviews is a good method to open up for these negotiations of meaning, which is derived from the respondents’ abstract or practical interactions with the sports-related brand(s) in focus. With this in mind, this dissertation goes in the direction that particular objects in the sports world, whether the focus is on sports governing bodies, sports teams, athletes, sports fans, sponsors, media or other stakeholder groups, may have the ability to create new trends and tendencies that are meaningful and influential for sports-related brands. In Denmark, the National Olympic Committee & Sports Confederation of Denmark may have exemplified this when the organization hosted its annual congress in 2015 and wanted to articulate the role of sports in society as an object to be found between the state, the market and civil society, cf. something of interest to many players in the sports sector in Denmark.

Having initially explained the scientific motives behind choosing a methodological strategy for this dissertation’s research design and research techniques, the next step is to dig deeper into explaining the operational strategy regarding this research design and these research techniques. The idea is to operationalize the road to a solution of the research question(s) by dividing the research techniques and research design according to the above-mentioned segments, i.e. the different brand levels (and their relationships to strategic CSR). The operational strategy is in harmony with the scientific motives. The fact that the researcher has carefully assessed and discussed the meaning of choosing one scientific approach over another for the purpose of this dissertation accounts for a qualitative level of stringency in the research process and a holistic way of producing proper research. These considerations are important for the matter of getting closer to knowing the optimal research methodology, which leads to the best solution to the research question(s). This is an interesting discussion to engage in when dealing with sports-related research within the social sciences. Writing about symbolic interaction and ethnographic research, Prus (1996, p. 4) notes that such discussions are often neglected due to an operational focus on variables and other observable phenomena. This dissertation acknowledges that the operational focus is important but it cannot stand alone in research situations. From this viewpoint, proper research is dependent on an operational focus, which is built on a thorough understanding of the underlying fundamental assumptions leading to this focus. Sports branding, whether it is perceived from a practical or research/academic angle, is a highly interactive phenomenon, which supports the choice of the interpretative paradigm and the fundamental assumptions aligned with this paradigm. Sport is interactive given its competitive nature and the level of engagement from the masses of people surrounding the sports world, to mention a few interactive aspects. The same can be said about the intersection between sport and branding in that sport is an effective way of creating brand-relevant and brand-building two-way interactions between brands and stakeholders (Smilansky, 2009, p. 125). The interactive nature of sports branding does not necessarily imply that the methodology has to be interactive. However, the interactive methodology applied in this dissertation in the forms of social constructivism and symbolic interactionism provides the researcher with a methodology that prioritizes understanding and meaning over causal explanations, cf. Arbtor & Bjerke (1997). Positivists tend to overlook and neglect the interactive processes that are so vital in understanding why and how human behavior is developed. Prus (1996, p. 9) adds to the contrast between positivists and interpretivists by stating “interpretivists observe that the study of human behavior is the study of human lived experience and that human experience is rooted in people’s meanings, interpretations, activities, and interactions.” This also fits well with this dissertation’s notion that sport equals human lived experience. Additionally, it explains how the research questions guided this dissertation’s position in terms of symbolic interactionism and qualitative methodology. The following sections explain the procedures for the sampling, data collection methods and data analysis.
5.1. Research design and techniques broken down into segments

On top of symbolic interactionism and the application of qualitative methods, this dissertation contains an influence of theories and theoretical concepts, models, and figures from the context of sports branding, strategic CSR, brand management, the experience economy and market communication. It is important to mention these important theoretical parts of the dissertation. However, there is much focus on the above-mentioned scientific and theoretical framework, but still this dissertation takes the methodological freedom to integrate other relevant theories or theoretical concepts, models and figures, which may be brought to the surface as part of the future empirical research process – new groundbreaking literature may also appear and it is essential to emphasize that this research process is an ongoing interactive process under an interpretative paradigm highly influenced by symbolic interactionist research traditions. Although symbolic interactionism is the main theoretical direction guiding the researcher's fundamental research assumptions, the social constructivist aspects are also implicitly integrated via the thoughts of phenomenological sociology. Building on the works of Mead (Mead, 1934), Alfred Schutz (1962) had a huge influence on the world of interpretative social sciences. His words, as seen in the citation below, illustrate one meaning of sports branding when this dissertation considers the role of intercommunication and language in a sports branding context.

“From the outset, we, the actors on the social scene, experience the world we live in as a world both of nature and of culture, not as a private but as an intersubjective one, that is, as a world common to all of us, either actually given or potentially accessible to everyone; and this involves intercommunication and language.” (Schutz, 1962, p. 53.)

All the people surrounding sports-related brands who have their own individual perceptions about these brands exemplify the complexity of the world and that of sports branding. These brands belong to all of us if we choose to interact with them, and our perceptions are dependent on and shaped as a consequence of our interactions with these brands. This perspective helps to explain why this dissertation has disregarded the positivist tradition of generalizing how the context of sports branding works for the benefit of the chosen interpretative path. Berger & Luckmann (1966) contribute to the world of social construction by highlighting the close cohesion between scientific discourses and the common-sense elements of empirical worlds. This supports this dissertation's attempt to understand abstract theoretical statements and the reinforcement of these statements through the application of practical examples – something that is linked to the citation below.

“What remains sociologically essential is the recognition that all symbolic universes and all legitimations are human products; their existence has its base in the lives of concrete individuals, and has no empirical status apart from these lives.” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 128.)

Generally, desk research helps to conceptualize the context of this research process and to give an understanding of this dissertation’s objectives, i.e. why is it relevant to study sports branding at different brand levels (and to put that in relation to strategic CSR). Additionally, the application of desk research adds to the search for answers to this dissertation's research question(s), although at a superficial and general level. For instance, desk research is primarily potent in answering the historical development in terms of sports branding at various sports branding levels (and strategic CSR), cf. sections 2 and 3. However, this is not sufficient to answer this dissertation's research questions. Therefore, the desk research is complemented with field research to provide more accurate, valid and reliable conclusions.

This dissertation employs multiple case exemplifications to state and reinforce the scientific points based on qualitative and ethnographic research traditions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). These case
exemplifications are divided into three segments: personal, product, and organizational sports brands; and this dissertation includes exemplifications under each segment that are intended to reinforce not only its scientific but also its practical validity. On top of these case exemplifications, which are subject to this dissertation’s interpretative approach, this dissertation concentrates its data collection on respondents that are relevant to each of the three segments. This is clarified in the sections below.

The data were collected primarily via qualitative research. This qualitative research is partly participatory in nature and takes form via observations, semi-structured focus groups and semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Interviews, cf. either focus group interviews or face-to-face interviews, take place under each of the three segments. Thus, this research study is conducted using multiple methods (Botan et al., 2000), which increase the validity and reliability of the study, but also strengthens the understanding of the area of interest, i.e. sports brands at the personal, product and organizational levels.

Before going into the sections below that explain the research methodologies applied in each of the three studies, cf. the personal, the product and the organizational sports branding levels, it is relevant to thematize and account for the idea behind and the differences between the three sports branding levels. The reason for investigating the three sports branding levels is inspired by the analytical and theoretical distinction that is based on the objects that constitute the subject matter for the studies, i.e. the objects at the different sports branding levels. These objects are defined as the empirical objects meant for investigation. At a superficial level, it seems easy to distinguish the objects, e.g. Sörenstam as a person, but when searching for a more in-depth understanding it becomes clear that Sörenstam's brand is characterized by having a supporting organization and underlying products, so in that case, there are some blurred boundaries. In a similar fashion, 'Sensational 1,' cf. the product level, is characterized by having ambassadors, cf. the personal level, as well as a supporting organization, cf. the organizational level. However, the methodological structure is chosen in alignment with this dissertation's position in terms of the theory of science, cf. section 4, to investigate the meaning that is attached to the different objects. This also accommodates the differences between the different levels, i.e. that winning is more vital for a personal sports brand's (e.g. Sörenstam) brand equity than for that of a sports event (e.g. the London Marathon), cf. section 6.1.1.

The samples of this dissertation are carefully (purposively) selected based on the respondents' affiliations with each of the three segments: sports brands at the personal, product and organizational levels. These segments are inspired by the relevant literature within sports management, sports marketing, sports branding, the experience economy, strategic CSR and market communication contexts, i.e. including narrower assumptions from the spheres of sport marketing and branding. Below, more concrete information regarding the research design and techniques for each segment is offered.

5.1.1. Personal sports brand level

5.1.1.1. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews

The first article is a qualitative study is a case study (Denzin, 1970; Hamel, 1993; Stake, 1994; Maaløe, 2002; Amis, 2005; Yin, 2008) concentrating on Annika Sörenstam's personal sports brand. Through an expedition in the sense of being granted admission to the ‘closed world’ of a world famous sports star, this case study is a great fit with the methodological ambition of understanding the personal behaviors and actions of a post-modern sports celebrity in a business-oriented way linked to sports branding. Based on semi-structured personal face-to-face interviews (Pettigrew, 1990; Amis et al., 1997; 1999; Botan et al., 2000; Shaw & Amis, 2001; Andersen, 2007; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009) with the professional golfer Annika Sörenstam and her brand manager Mike McGee, the path to investigating Sörenstam's personal sports branding level and its interactions with other sports branding levels
follows a qualitative methodology. This case study and its methodology combined with Sörenstam’s willingness to participate in a transparent way provide this dissertation with a dual way to transfer the implicit elements of a sports star’s personal branding process to explicit explanations (Schön, 1983) related to the significant stages of the process of personal sports branding.

The interviews took place at the ANNIKA Experience, an event under the overall ANNIKA brand, cf. article 1 later in this dissertation, which was held in New Jersey in the US on October 11th 2010. This gave the researcher some observational data to support the interview method and thus the qualitative research strategy. This provided qualitative support that is critical for the success of this overall research and article 1 in particular, i.e. it is significant for the dissertation to explore stakeholders in a setting where they engage with the brands. According to Gold’s (1958) roles that observers may take in observing everyday interactions, the researcher took a mixed role during the event characterized by elements of the observer-participant and of the participant-observer. Participant observation is a popular reflection under the naturalistic interpretative paradigm, cf. section 4.1.1., and “a participant-observer becomes involved as fully as possible in a social situation where people know that they are being studied,” whereas “an observer-participant primarily observes and participates only to a limited extent” (Botan et al., 2000, p. 267-268) Given these roles, the researcher participated in the event but only to a limited extent (observer-participant), whereas the researcher adapted to the social setting making it possible to record notes unobtrusively. Hence, the researcher did not participate actively in the activities but tried to fit into the observed environment and people, e.g. by behaving and looking like other potential participants at the ANNIKA Experience. On the other hand, the researcher tried to become as fully involved as possible (participant-observer) in other situations. The researcher took on that role when observing people at the ANNIKA Experience via a role as a participant (Botan et al., 2000). However, the primary element was observation, although this did not exclude the researcher from interacting with the observed participants. Therefore, the chosen method of observation mostly stems from the role of observer-participant (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) and only as a support to generate additional understanding (to support the data generated by personal face-to-face interviews) of the investigated topic of interest, i.e. Sörenstam’s personal sports branding level and its interactions with other sports branding levels. This supplies the methodological foundation for this dissertation (article 1) with an ethnographic aspect that emphasizes and qualifies the inter-subjective nature of human group life and which gives the researcher an opportunity to open the life-world of the studied phenomena via interpersonal interchange (Prus, 1996). However, it can analytically be discussed whether this research process is ‘true’ inter-subjective research, as the foundational theoretical literature regarding sports branding does not totally encompass a scientific basis from scholars working in an inter-subjective tradition. Nevertheless, the theoretical foundation and the methods used are so flexible that they can be changed to accommodate ongoing studies, which is another inter-subjective element. So, the intention with the observations was to make them serve as a supplement to the two personal face-to-face interviews applied and to accommodate the premise that time and context are important, cf. section 4. These interviews are the main (in-depth) methods of answering the research question(s) and in completing article 1. The observations also contain one-day observations (observer-participant) at Sörenstam’s golf academy in Orlando, Florida, to gain a more in-depth understanding of how Sörenstam works with clients such as sponsors, golf customers/fans, and so on.

From a critical perspective, it can and should be discussed how many interviews and interview subjects that a research process should include to conduct valid research. Brinkmann & Kvale (2015, p. 140) answer this question by stating that the researcher should “simply interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know.” This part of the research process only contains two personal face-to-face interviews, which is thought to be enough, as the aim is to understand Sörenstam’s personal sports branding process or in other words to understand the world as experienced by Annika Sörenstam. The interview with Sörenstam is supplemented by an interview with Mike McGee, Sörenstam’s husband and brand manager, who is also close to Sörenstam’s person and thus her personal sports brand, and thereby serves as a significant source to provide an understanding of
the world of Annika Sörenstam’s personal sports brand and its interrelated (sports) brands.

This part of the dissertation connects with the notion of symbolic interactionism, cf. section 4, in that “science walks on two legs – theory and observation; that the logical phase of science is of equal importance with the activity of the fact-finder and verifier” (Mead, 1934, p. xi). The qualitative case study approach founded on an observational and in particular an interview basis emphasizes that theory and observations are inseparable and that it is important to use contemporary sports branding research to bring about new meaning for academics and practitioners, and thus to build a bridge between theory and practice. This methodological approach gives the researcher the opportunity to develop and analyze scientific ideas and material and thereby to produce new meaning and sports branding knowledge based on reference to fact, which is in alignment with Mead’s (1934) scientific position.

5.1.2. Product sports brand level

5.1.2.1. Semi-structured focus group interview and semi-structured face-to-face interviews

The qualitative methodology for investigating sports branding at the product level consists of one qualitative semi-structured focus group interview and four qualitative semi-structured personal face-to-face interviews. The sports brand at the product level that was selected for investigation was ‘Sensational 1,’ a new football (soccer ball) that was developed to enhance the game of women’s football so that it becomes more appealing for all the appropriate stakeholders. ‘Sensational 1’ was chosen to investigate the potential of a sports brand at the product level as a ‘driver’ in the re-branding process of women’s football in Denmark. For that reason, this study was also placed at the heart of ‘hybrid sports branding’ and the interactionist approach, cf. sections 5.1.2.1 and 5.1.1.1., to investigate the interaction with other sports brands and sports brands at different levels as an influencer on the brand equity levels of all the parties involved.

To generate good qualitative findings, this research study is a case study that emphasizes how ‘hybrid sports branding’ elements constructed by a sports product can elevate the brand equity of ‘Sensational 1’ and women’s football in Denmark via re-branding, i.e. placing the specific cases of ‘Sensational 1’ and women’s football as the central focus point. This case-study approach (Hamel, 1993; Stake, 1994; Maaløe, 2002; Amis, 2005; Yin, 2008) integrates a semi-structured focus-group and a semi-structured face-to-face interview methodology (Pettigrew, 1990; Amis et al., 1997; 1999; Botan et al., 2000; Shaw & Amis, 2001; Andersen, 2007; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009), and this qualitative approach has incorporated purposively selected respondents, i.e. following the advice from the other articles of using a judgment sample. The respondents from the focus group were purposively selected young (age 22-25) respondents (Gaskell, 2000; Madriz, 2003; Berg & Lune, 2004), who were selected because of their strong relationship with the context of sports management (current or former Danish sports management students), women’s football, and their roles as current or former active football players and/or participants, i.e. some of them play or have played at the highest elite level in the best Danish women’s league and for the Danish women’s national football team, while all of them are passionate about football as passive participants (e.g. television viewership). The respondents in the focus group chose to be anonymous, which the researcher accepted as a premise for conducting the focus interview and for applying the findings in a written article for academic publication. The respondents in the four individual face-to-face interviews were also purposively selected due to their roles as being highly involved in shaping the sport of women’s football at the highest participation level (cf. Olympic and World Cup champions), the sports product level (cf. CEO of football events and tangible football products like the ‘Sensational 1’ football), and the coaching and sports governing level (cf. talent development and coaching at the highest national and international levels).
The applied methodological structure and implementation is based on a dialogical and symbolic interactionist character that strives to produce qualitative meaning, understanding, and theory construction based on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) via the aim of inductively arriving at new theoretical ground and an empirical body that is analyzed via transcriptions of the interviews and open coding, cf. that has similarities to article 1 and article 3. The open coding approach refers to the process of the analysis, investigation, comparison (this can be utilized to check specific interactive patterns among or between specific topics or categories of interest in the empirical body), conceptualization, and categorization of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009). In contrast to quantitative analysis, the open coding approach takes a qualitative stand of the interrelationship (interactions) between other codes (or categories if that is preferred) and their roles in the overall (in this case sports branding) context as well as the behavioral consequences. The codes or categories are what can be defined by what the researcher describes as the central experiences and actions from the interview data (Charmaz, 2005). This process is thorough and can be described as the consistent and continuous comparison of data examples with the purpose of finding similarities or differences leading to the selection of new central experiences and actions. As the coding becomes more focused, the data analysis moves from a descriptive level to more theoretical levels, which generates a ‘saturation’ of the data material when additional coding procedures do not allow room for new insights and interpretations (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009).

5.1.3. Organizational sports brand level

5.1.3.1. Semi-structured focus group interviews with sports management practitioners and academics

This part of the dissertation seeks to demonstrate that utilizing strategic CSR and thereby sports sponsorship partnerships sustains brand building (e.g. the equity aspect) at the organizational sports branding level with the potential to influence other sports brands at the personal and product levels. Methodologically, this research study, cf. article 3, embraces a qualitative approach under an interpretative paradigm (Guba, 1990; Gratton & Jones, 2004). In this section and the sections regarding the personal and product sports brand levels, cf. articles 1 and 2, there is an application of the advice of Corbin & Strauss (1998, p. 269) on the incentives for selecting the sample for the empirical data collection. This relates to how the sampling is selected, i.e. what gounds act as the basis for this dissertation’s production of knowledge. The sampling was done during the research process, as theoretical sampling cannot be planned before embarking on a study. The same goes for selecting the respondents. These are steps that may help to justify the aspect of this dissertation that is intended to build new theory (and to find suggestions that can lead to increased levels of brand capitalization, cf. section 1 ‘Introduction’).

Concentrating on sports branding at an organizational level and strategic CSR, this study is developed as a qualitative study; the most influential empirical data integrated here stem from two qualitative semi-structured focus groups with purposively selected respondents. The first focus group was held at Carlsberg’s headquarters in Copenhagen in 2009. The focus group meeting consisted of respondents with different levels of experience from the sports management field, explicitly a group of highly experienced sports management practitioners covering the fields of entrepreneurship, sports journalism, sports management, sports governance, sports marketing and sports branding at the corporate as well as the municipal and governmental levels. The meeting took place during a session on CSR and sports arranged by the National Olympic Committee & Sports Confederation of Denmark (DIF) and was held at Carlsberg’s headquarters in Copenhagen to illustrate the commercial focus on the concept of strategic CSR. The empirical data serve the purpose of helping to develop a useful toolkit for people working with strategic CSR in an organizational sports branding context – so

27Carlsberg is an interesting sports-related brand given the company’s intensive involvement in football (soccer) sponsorships.
on top of the overall research focus of this dissertation, the expected findings should also serve a practical purpose in motivating these busy respondents to participate. The empirical data are also used to confirm existing knowledge from the literature. Minor aspects from a former case study conducted by the researcher regarding the Danish sports brand Hummel International Sport & Leisure A/S are included along with perspectives from other relevant corporations, as such exemplifications representing best practice examples from practical sports branding at the organizational level under the influence of strategic CSR, cf. the intention to use practical exemplifications as listed in previous sections of this dissertation. Given the relatively small number of practitioners dealing with this subject matter, this focus is assumed to be highly representative of the number of practitioners in Denmark, and the procedure for drawing this sample followed the advice of Ghauri & Grønhaug (2005, p. 146) of using a “judgment sample,” which is used to aim to find a sample that is representative of the population.

The second focus group was held in Aalborg in 2010 and consisted of current or former sports management students with good academic and some internship and/or work experience within sports-related organizations, and with a clear understanding of the intersection between sports and strategic CSR. This focus group also followed the advice of applying a judgment sample, cf. focus group 1 above. Focus group 2 was thought to differentiate and supplement focus group 1 with the objective of getting a broader but, more importantly, a deeper level of understanding of the subject matter.

Paying attention to the symbolic interactionist nature of this dissertation, a wide variety of topics were approached in the focus group meetings to cover the depth of the main topics investigated, primarily sports branding at the organizational level and the sub-focus of strategic CSR. The literature was an integral part of this research study in order to gain an understanding of the theoretical focus points and to guide the researcher’s interview process and the data analysis, cf. the introduction and the following sections of this dissertation.

To operationalize the empirical data in an optimal way, the previous considerations regarding the theory of science and fundamental assumptions have had a central purpose. Operationalizing in this sense refers to how this dissertation intends to use empirical data to evaluate the theories and answer its research question(s). Along with the ideas of Järvinen (2005), the focus group interview at Carlsberg (and the accompanying focus group interview with current or former sports management students with good academic and some internship and/or work experience linked to sports-related organizations) was based on interactionist inspiration in the sense that the researcher as the interviewer when using a semi-structured interview protocol also acted as a co-producer of knowledge. The same goes for the two other studies, cf. articles 1 and 2. The intention was to let respondents indicate their opinions on what sports-related entities may gain or should be aware of when engaging in strategic CSR-initiatives in relation to sports branding at the organizational branding level. The outcome of the focus group interviews is to be perceived as a result of the researcher’s meeting with the respondents, and thus the interactions, which took place during the meeting (Järvinen, 2005, p. 29). The reasons for choosing the respondents were affected by the expectation that all of these respondents would be individuals highly engaged in sports branding (and strategic CSR) and hence able to comment on this intersection at a highly qualitative level. Discussing the pros and cons related to this approach, this dissertation acknowledges that the researcher is a co-producer of knowledge, but not to an extent where this would violate the ethnographic feature of the research approach intended to construct meaning based on the experiences of the respondents.

The researcher came to the conclusion when considering the methodological research strategy and the underlying operational strategy that an interview-based way of solving the research question(s)
would be optimal. The focus group interviews with highly relevant practitioners and students working within sports-related branding at the organizational level and strategic CSR, gave this dissertation the logical and empirical depth and the support needed for the scientific assertions (Babbie, 2010, p. 4). According to Babbie, empirical data may support or disqualify desk research and produce new knowledge, but most importantly, empirical data act to avoid speculation for the benefit of facts. The interactions produced in the focus groups facilitated some serious discussions and dialogues that offered new advice on branding strategies for sports-related brands and the development and opportunities linked to those brands in relation to strategic CSR. The inductive nature of this dissertation is also dependent on empirical research to produce new ideas and theories that are perceived as being more valid than new ideas only based on existing research (Gratton & Jones, 2004, p. 8), e.g. the idea of ‘commercial idealism’ as it relates to this subject matter. Together with practical exemplifications, the empirical data are correspondingly used to confirm existing knowledge from the literature on the subject matter.

5.2. Methodological summary

Following the eight elements of the research process advised by Gratton & Jones (2004), the research process for this dissertation is illustrated below, cf. table 5. According to Gratton & Jones (2004), the process is

1. Selection of topic

2. Reviewing the literature

3. Development of theoretical and conceptual frameworks

4. Clarification of research question(s)

5. Research design

6. Data collection

7. Data analysis

8. Drawing conclusions

Table 5: The research process (Gratton & Jones, 2004, p. 32)
Annika Sörenstam – a hybrid personal sports brand

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to investigate sports branding at the personal level by focusing on the evolvement, growth and sustainability of the ANNIKA BRAND – an extension of Annika Sörenstam’s success on golf courses worldwide.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative case study method inspired by “symbolic interactionist” aspects and focusing on Annika Sörenstam’s commercial success with personal sports branding and its interdependence with sports branding at the product and corporate levels. Data collection was conducted in accordance with interpretative research traditions and hence based on qualitative semi-structured research interviews.

Findings – The “hybrid” nature of sports brands draws highly on “emotional capital” and “social currency”. Personal sports branding acts as a “hybrid”, which facilitates “hybrid” branding relationships between personal sports brands and sports brands at the product and corporate levels – often underlining good ROIs for all involved parties if the sports branding process is executed well strategically. This article presents personal sports branding as a hybrid phenomenon, which is dynamic by heart and part of a well-coordinated process engaging several partners.

Practical implications – The practices and activities of the ANNIKA BRAND is a showcase for sports branding practitioners thinking about sustainable business models.

Originality/value – This paper is unique in offering a roadmap for how personal sport stars may approach brand development and growth while discussing key points of the interdependence between sports brands at the personal, product and corporate levels.

Keywords Personal branding, Sports branding, Annika Sörenstam, Corporate social responsibility, Sponsorship

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This paper investigates the development, growth, maturity and sustainability of personal sports brands while also touching key points of a personal sports brand’s interdependence (“hybrid” relationship) with sports brands at the product and corporate levels. The conclusions and empirical data collection draws heavily upon the experiences of world famous women’s golfer Annika Sörenstam.

Adjouri and Stastny (2006, pp. 45-50) indirectly describe and explain elements of personal sports branding in ways highly aligned with the empirical data collection for this paper. Specifically, this paper deals with the interdependence between sports branding at various levels, i.e. the personal, product and corporate levels. Thereby, this paper will also clarify why personal sports branding acts as a “hybrid” created and enhanced by sports brands at various levels. There are many examples of personal sports brands on a global scale, e.g. US basketball star Michael Jordan, who “made clear how closely athletic success is associated with the sales of sports products, especially the brand of Nike. So saying, Michael Jordan became a brand himself” (Adjouri and Stastny, 2006, p. 48).
Research methodology

The empirical element of this case study (Maaløe, 2002) centred on Annika Sörenstam’s personal sports brand. It is of an interpretative nature and based on qualitative semi-structured research interviews with Annika Sörenstam and her brand manager Mike McGee to unfold the meaning of their experiences with building a personal sports brands (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009; Botan et al., 2000; Chen and Pearce, 1995; Hamel, 1993; Stake, 1994). Moreover, one-day observations at Sörenstam’s golf academy (ANNIKA Academy) in Orlando, Florida and at Sörenstam’s ANNIKA Experience Event in Fiddler’s Elbow, New Jersey were applied. A key element in this research methodology was to design a methodology capable of investigating contemporary empirical factors central in the brand building and brand management processes of Annika Sörenstam’s personal sports brand for what reason the qualitative case study approach proved to be relevant. To study human behaviour and actions, qualitative observations and semi-structured interviews were chosen to disclose what these behaviours and actions regarding personal sports branding mean for Sörenstam and her personal brand building process. Applying such data collection methods underscores intimacy, empathy and presence as integrated tools in the methods to understand human behaviours and actions and (Maaløe, 2002; Denzin, 1970).

The case-study approach is like an expedition in terms of gaining access to open “a closed world”. Sörenstam provided that opportunity qua her openness, which forms a dual way to transform implicit issues into explicit explanations related to personal sports branding through an inductive[1] method aiming at creating understanding (Schor, 1983).

Via qualitative semi-structured face-2-face interviews with Sörenstam and McGee, data collection was designed to concentrate on qualitative discussions and understanding as set forth in research pervaded by symbolic interactionism (Mead and Morris, 1934; Blumer, 1986) and aspects of hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2004) where respondents’ human experiences are central when deriving meaning from the interpretation of these experiences (Clark and Fast, 2008). To understand, to derive meaning and to develop theories linked to the processes and phenomena in personal sports branding requires depth, concrete experiences and qualities associated with cultural, daily and situated facets of human learning, thoughts, knowledge, actions and self-understanding gained from qualitative interviews (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009). The meaning and theoretical conclusions presented in the following parts of this paper is thus derived from analysis based on grounded theory (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and transcriptions and coding of the qualitative data from Sörenstam and McGee to be able to define and reflect “actions and experiences mentioned by the respondents” (Charmaz, 2005; Gibbs, 2007). Coding and interpretation of meaning is founded upon theoretical concepts and knowledge integrated in the knowledge generating process, which is closely tied to contextualising and re-contextualising in relation to the convergence between sport and branding (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009). The validity of the inductive generalisations is a critical discussion point in terms of scientific validity. Readers must keep in mind that according to the dominant interpretative paradigm, phenomena are unique and have their own structures and logics. Thus, in this case study, the generated and historically and socially contextualised knowledge portrays and is relevant for actors in personal sports branding (Stake, 1995).

On top of the methodological body mentioned, this work is theoretically built on inspiration from classic branding literature (Aaker, 1991, 2002; Aaker and
Joachimsthaler, 2000; Keller, 2003; de Chernatony, 2006) and traditional sports branding literature regarding brand management and brand building, cf. the sports branding process (awareness, image, equity and loyalty) applied by Shank (2009) and Miloch (2010). Thereby, this research asks for a disclosure of the linkage between classic branding, personal branding and sports branding to clarify where personal sports brands are positioned in a conceptual branding universe.

Often, theoretical focus is developed from simple pragmatic examples and illustrations of an athlete’s actions (Carter and Rovell, 2003). This work seeks to challenge this norm by offering insights and knowledge established on the grounds of well-structured qualitative analysis from Sörenstam and McGee revealing their personal experiences with building and managing Sörenstam’s personal brand. Throughout the paper, these experiences are discussed and analysed in the contextual perspective of the researcher’s knowledge of other personal sports brands. The methodology applied forms a scientific basis for an inductive (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009) approach to determine and discuss brand influencers, revenue streams and “hybrid” characteristics in the brand building process of personal sports brands. Finally, quantitative data from literature review are integrated to prove some qualitative points.

What is personal sports branding?
Talking about personal sports branding, it is essential to acknowledge that the inspiration related to development of the concept originates from classic branding theory (Aaker, 1991, 2002; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Keller, 2003; de Chernatony, 2006; McCracken, 1993). According to this, brands have a core identity but should also encompass room for extended identity aspects providing new power and brand strength. Notions taken from here add the fact that a brand is capable of devoting meaning to a product, service or person. In classic branding theory, brands are developed to meet demand or attract specific target groups whereas personal sports brands are often built on existing values and characteristics of an athlete. This places the athlete “as the main influence on the core identity of the brand” but also as a risk factor depending on the athlete’s actions. MIT Sloan School of Management (2011) gathered a pool of data from a panel of sport marketing practitioners discussing personal sports branding. This supports that personal sports branding apply fundamentals from classic branding theory. Consistency is important but given the personal feelings and thoughts of athletes, a personal sports brand is subject to instinct positive or negative changes caused by personal actions. Additionally, in personal sports branding the athlete’s performances on the field are changing over time from the athletic breakthrough, over maturity as a star, and towards the end of the athletic career. Therefore, it is important for athletes to build consistent character sides on top of the capabilities on the sports side. In that sense, athletes themselves have a strong role in helping out when pursuing to build their personal sports brands as brands being profitable long after their active athletic careers. The Sörenstam case is well chosen in presenting this process. Miloch (2010) touches upon the challenges of sports branding by mentioning the ever-changing and dynamic facets of sport. The pool of data from MIT Sloan School of Management (2011) in alignment with the interviews and observations conducted regarding Annika Sörenstam’s brand building experiences reflect that personal sports brands are “hybrid” and hence dependent on various brand influencers mentioned later in this work.
Carter (2010) defines a personal brand as a brand “composed of people’s perceptions about a particular individual” and adds that it is what differentiates one person from...
another in terms of personality, reputation and character. Montoya (2002) highlights that the concept entails what values, proficiencies, ideas, personality and actions a person communicates for the purpose of stimulating consistent and meaningful perceptions. Personal sports branding on the other hand is a concept, which is relative undefined in academic terms; rather something to be found in “how to do it” literature. Though, features from personal branding are also integrated in personal sports branding. Andrews and Jackson (2001) argues for the fact that personal sports branding speeded up due to the increased number of television sets in use in the 1950s. This allowed fans to root for idols such as Muhammad Ali and Joe DiMaggio – two athletes capable of differentiating themselves and creating entertainment. Another scenario saw reality when Mark McCormack established International Management Group (IMG), the world’s first international sports management firm in 1960 while representing and managing golf icons Gary Player, Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer (Carter, 2010; Carter and Rovell, 2003). That formed a kick start for what we know as “personal sports branding” – a concept underlining the commercial potential of popular athletes and capable of rising above international borders, cultures, languages and even sports itself. Lusted (1991) notes that “personalities are central to the institution of television” for what reason Andrews and Jackson (2001) placed personalitites as a focal point for the institution and era of televised sport. Designing a personal sports brand involves the influence of other persons’ perceptions of the athlete, which implies that the general public talks about who the athlete is, what he/she does and how he/she is different from other athletes (Montoya, 2002; Holmberg and Essevad, 2006). To define personal sports branding, Carter (2010) emphasises the positioning of athletes as personal brands to convey life stories, values, charisma, authenticity, believability and athletic prowess into significant revenue. Adjouri and Stastny (2006) supplement this notion by emphasising that a personal sports brand is synonymous with receiving massive amounts of positive public spotlight. Richelieu (2003) attaches the significance of “winning” when attracting followers and building loyalty in sports[2]. According to personal branding research, (Chadwick and Burton, 2008, p. 307; Montoya, 2002; Gobé, 2007; Carter, 2010; Adjouri and Stastny, 2006; Temporal, 2010, p. 170; Shepherd, 2005; Crawford, 2004; Hamlin et al., 2006; Carter and Rovell, 2003; MIT Sloan School of Management, 2011; Holmberg and Essevad, 2006), there has been a rising development in the area of personal sports branding in the past decades – also facilitated with influx of new technology and hence more communication and branding platforms (Andrews, 2004).

Companies seeking to take advantage of the image transfer derived from these personal sports brands in terms of winning global exposure and recognition lift endorsement deals of individual athletes (Temporal, 2010, p. 170; McCracken, 1989; Braunstein and Ross, 2010; Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; Musante et al., 1999; Gladden and Funk, 2002; Gladden and Milne, 1999; Carter and Rovell, 2003). Though, not all personal sports brands are equally successful and they do not all possess the same strength in terms of building a successful business around themselves at a critical point of intersection, i.e. when the playing years are over or when the athlete has won a major title or is high in popularity (Elberse and Golod, 2010; Elberse and McCall, 2010). Hamlin et al. (2006) mentions the linkage between personal branding and high visibility as significant in personal brand building, i.e. strong personal brands are characterised by their differentiation points and their “high visibility capabilities” in terms of creating awareness and attention around their actions. This is in alignment with Carter’s (2010) definition of a personal brand. Terms like “fame, star, celebrity, and
icon” are often associated with highly visible persons (O'Reilly and Braedley, 2008). In that sense, personal sports branding and other forms of personal branding spheres such as personal branding of movie stars or musicians tied to “stardom” are unique given that there are many identifiable stars to be found in these areas of personal branding. Personal sports branding is a vehicle of personification given the awareness and attention around star athletes and the same can be said in other creative industries like music and movies (Nicholson, 2007; Hamlin et al., 2006). Holmberg and Essevad (2006) argues that personal sports branding is associated with athletes seeking to monetise on their names. Personal sports branding is thus linked to an athlete strategically monetising on his/her market opportunities during but also after his/her athletic career via media communication and transfer of values and associations (e.g. with products, services, fans and business partners) into market opportunities connected to and transcending the athlete's physical sports venue and athletic performances.

**Why is personal sports branding of interest?**

Carter (2010) argues for the roles of IMG and founder Mark McCormack in establishing personal sports branding’s vital position in today’s “celebrity-oriented culture and is backed by other researchers” (Hoye et al., 2006; Boyle and Haynes, 2000; Nicholson, 2007; Carter and Rovell, 2003; Burton, 2004; O’Reilly and Braedley, 2008). Certainly, one can argue that the business of sports branding in general has to do with “gambling on athletes” and their potential for driving business accomplishments. That goes for sports branding at various levels, i.e. the corporate, product and/or personal levels. The unpredictability of sport products and personalities is linked to risks of declining revenue streams when “on the field performances” are weak or “off the field performances” are misplaced or inappropriate for what reason sport entities have started to place even greater emphasis on recruiting and retaining loyal followers through effective brand building (Miloch, 2010). There is a “hybrid relationship” or interdependence between brand levels initiated by sport stars, who are “popular”, which is due to the fascination of great athletes as “living brands[3]” (Horn, 2004; Gorman and Calhoun, 1994; Silk, 2004; Crawford, 2004; Coakley, 1994; Smart, 2004; Horne, 2006; Rein et al., 2006). Take the example of Nike and the influence of Michael Jordan in building a sports brand at the corporate level that is well known in the ears of most people globally – an example that can also be turned around by looking into what Nike has meant for Michael Jordan as a personal brand and what it has meant for the sales of sport brands at the product level, i.e. “Air Jordan's bestselling” shoes (Currid-Halkett, 2010). This type of interdependence has had great meaning for athletes and hence personal sports brands (Carter and Rovell, 2003; Gladden and Milne, 1999; Boone et al., 1995), which is also illustrated by other examples, e.g. Annika Sörenstam’s partnership with Cutter & Buck (design of golf wear), David Beckham’s partnership with Adidas, John Madden’s (NFL “Hall of Fame” member) partnership with Electronic Arts, Danish tennis player Caroline Wozniacki’s partnership with Adidas and Stella McCartney, and the US Women’s Soccer’s success exemplified in collaboration with players like Brandi Chastain, Tiffeny Milbrett and Mia Hamm.

**Personal sports branding – illustrating a “hybrid” phenomenon**

When extending the endorsement agreement with star tennis player Venus Williams in 2000, chief marketing officer of Reebok, Angel Martinez said that “there’s no better
athlete, no better individual in the world who is better suited to represent our brand. Our goal is not to show Venus as a tennis player but Venus as a lifestyle icon, someone inspiring with the power of her presence” (Temporal, 2010, pp. 170-1). Those words clearly indicate the strategic considerations (Fisher Buttinger and Wallaster, 2008) behind a “hybrid” branding connection where successful sports brands at various levels “engage in a marriage”, which goes beyond the tennis competencies of Venus Williams. Instead, it draws upon her personal characteristics, beliefs and attitudes and hence creates an overlap between her and various values associated with Reebok’s products and the corporation but also with whatever Venus Williams is perceived to stand for. This is a form of brand positioning, which may affect her business orientations and – plans positively or negatively (depending on the strategic direction). Ergo, if Venus Williams does not act in ways aligned with her communicated values, it will hurt the strategic opportunity to positively transfer her personal sports brand to a product or corporate level. The empirical data shows that Sörenstam managed to overcome this risk of branding failure due to her high level of authenticity, integrity, consistency, persistence, distinctiveness and goodwill associated with her personal sports brand (Rampersad, 2009, p. 17). Sörenstam mentions that “when we talk about the brand, I need to deliver to what we call the promise […].” This knowledge and understanding of “brand promise delivery” is an important management competency for personal sports branding practitioners given the high visibility of professional athletes where the risk of brand failure from a ROI-perspective is likely to happen if the athlete is “caught up” by improper behaviour (Hamlin et al., 2006).

Annika Sörenstam is responsible for most of her own success given the fact that she sat the tone on golf courses world wide as the greatest ambassador of the game the women’s golf has ever seen (International Golf Federation, 2011). Nevertheless, the success of Annika Sörenstam off the golf course, even after her playing career and frequent participation in the LPGA circus, which is expressed via her ANNIKA brand (ANNIKA Business Guide)[4], is not only a product of her individual efforts. At the same time, the ANNIKA brand’s development, growth and sustainability has been characterised and shaped by some of the factors that also characterise and shape other personal sports brands (cf. list below).

Brand influencers for personal sports brands:

- media exposure (visibility and PR)[5];
- career wins (athletic performances)[6];
- endorsement deals[7];
- fan interest (fan culture and followers)[8];
- junction of sports and entertainment[9];
- corporate social responsibility (CSR values)[10];
- personality (positive vs negative)[11];
- extraordinary activities (positive vs negative)[12];
- timing[13];
- consumption patterns[14];
- brand development and innovation[15];
- strategy planning and collaboration[16];
availability, work ethic and integrity[17];
• passion[18];
• brand execution and communication[19]; and
• → all these brand influencers point out “the hybrid nature of personal sports brands”.

To illustrate the meaning of the above-mentioned brand influencers, winning major tournaments has also been beneficial for the ANNIKA brand while the people surrounding the ANNIKA brand also have had a huge impact in terms of determining where the ANNIKA brand is today. The latter refers to “what it took Annika Sörenstam and the ANNIKA brand to get to where they are today” and that includes the people involved in this process. Finally, another exemplification of Annika Sörenstam’s utilisation of brand influencers emphasises the meaning of endorsement deals. Her success and its combination with the “corporate appeal” (sponsorship money) of golf in mind generate significant media coverage; that is something that is also the case for successful tennis players.

In the following, it will be clarified how developmental elements from the sports branding process (Shank, 2009; Miloch, 2010) like “awareness”, “image”, “equity” and “loyalty” is related to the sports branding process of Annika Sörenstam and the ANNIKA brand of businesses.

**Awareness**

Currid-Halkett (2010, p. 21; Boone et al., 1995; Miloch, 2010; O’Reilly and Braedley, 2008; Greyser, 2011) underscores the importance of media exposure in building, developing, growing and maintaining a personal sports brand but also indirectly reveals what it means in relation to securing a sustainable business model for personal sports brands (Horn, 2004, p. 20; Nicholson, 2007, p. 168). That means that media exposure may be a good agent to drive business in terms of creating awareness and starting the sports branding process (Hamlin et al., 2006). Annika Sörenstam has been very competent in reaching positive exposure via various media outlets. Recently, she was featured on *ABC’s Good Morning America* promoting her ANNIKA Foundation and active and healthy lifestyles and thus adding additional value to her personal brand and society by integrating these elements of CSR in an authentic way (*ABC Good Morning America*, 2010). Her differentiated way of applying elements of CSR authentically and strategically (McElhaney, 2008), which is a rare phenomenon in the arena of professional athletes, has proved to drive valuable media exposure and business success for Sörenstam.

A recent survey measuring media coverage in 2010 (in foreign newspapers for Danes)[20] indicates that athletes receive the most publicity of all groups – the tennis player Caroline Wozniacki being a clear number one with her name being mentioned in more than 16,000 papers (Nordjyske, 2010). In top 12 in the same survey, only two persons were not athletes, which tunes to how sport appeals to the masses (Carter, 2010). First step in the sports branding process is to create awareness about your “brand”. In that regard, it helps that sport is a very popular topic in society and in all media (Greyser, 2011; Carter, 2010; Andrews and Jackson, 2001; Smart, 2004; O’Reilly and Braedley, 2008) – something that Annika Sörenstam has taken advantage of through headlines in Sweden and later on abroad due to her unique golf talent. According to research, arguments reveal that sport and sports stars were not always
attached with the same chic or fashionable stickers as in today’s contemporary media and brand pervasive culture (Rowe, 1995). Now, athletes are included in the popular culture domain and media’s portrayal of “celebrity lifestyles” – where the strongest brands act as “branded commodities” with diversified and differentiated identities (Smart, 2004; Horne, 2006; Gorman and Calhoun, 1994; Crawford, 2004).

Due to media impact from a growing number of media outlets, top athletes are performing on a very visible stage. From a commercial perspective, the lives of athletes have changed as well over the years. Turner (2007, p. 197) acknowledges the potential for athletes to see expanded ROIs related to more than what goes on within the frames of the playing field by stating that “celebrity can spin-off into many related sub-industries through endorsements, merchandising and so on. Individuals can become brands in their own right, with enormous commercial potential.” Today’s professional athletes and sport stars experience “solid opportunities” to capitalise on their “talents and sports brands” and hence names on and off the playing fields. The latter requires that the athlete is capable of expanding his/her sports brand to activities off the field (later stages of the sports branding process). The celebration and exploitation of athletes have many faces, and may cause positive and negative branding effects, which is hidden in Whannel’s interpretation of the lives of professional athletes (cf. citation below):

It is their labour and performance that is minutely scrutinized and whose skills are bought and sold in the sporting marketplace, their bodies which are punished, manipulated and invaded in the quest for greater efficiency, and their images moulded and displayed to sell and promote goods and services (Whannel, 2002, p. 113).

It can be argued that building and sustaining a rock-hard fan base comes natural for professional athletes (personal sports brands) in media intensive sports performing at the best venues globally and that this profitable groundwork can be transformed into a sustainable business model securing direct revenue streams[21]. As seen in Whannel’s citation, personal sports branding and sports branding implies “hard work” and is very “commercial and business-oriented” in a professional sports environment. This has been the case for Annika Sörenstam. Fans of Sörenstam and hence the ANNIKA brand generate revenues via their purchases of ANNIKA merchandise (autographed books, flags, ANNIKA fragrances, ANNIKA academy visors, etc.), golf experiences at ANNIKA Academy or via ANNIKA course design, donations to ANNIKA Foundation, consumption of Annika’s TV-appearances (which also adds value and recognition to her brand by offering sponsors unique opportunities for exposure), love for ANNIKA wine, or need for financial advice from an athlete that has succeeded in “taking her sports brand to the next level financially”. This is supported by empirical evidence implying that there is a “changing fan and/or consumption culture surrounding personal sports brands” linking the athletes with significant income prospects if the sports branding process is managed well from a professional and strategic viewpoint – but as goes for sports; there is also room for a degree of unpredictability serving as the emotional charm of sports. To exemplify this, Mike McGee, brand manager for the ANNIKA brands states that all the side activities and different entities of the ANNIKA brands combine and make up the personality of the overall ANNIKA brand. He says that “it is not just who she is anymore, it is all these projects and what we do that is the ANNIKA brand so that is everything”. Thus personal sports branding becomes a “never ending story” dependent on what the athlete thinks, says and does – also reflecting the dynamic feature of the concept. McGee’s statement reveals that the
ANNIKA brand found room for extensions of the core identity of Annika Sörenstam, which shows evidence that personal sports branding as a discipline somehow traces back to classic branding as discussed earlier.

Research backs up the empirical evidence when recognising that although sports brands saw difficulties cultivating “passive” sports fans and consumers into “active” seekers/purchasers of experiences related to their favourite sports brands, good monetising opportunities exist for brands like Sörenstam capable of creating ROIs via “brand audience building” (Hamlin et al., 2006, p. 103). Sörenstam’s ability to convert stakeholder interests into revenue is the main reason for her monetising success (Forbes, 2010)[22]. Mike McGee adds to this by mentioning that “companies see value in her being a spokesperson”. Additionally, McGee admits that “companies are not going to give just to give, they are not going to sponsor just to sponsor, they want to know that their dollars are going to work in a positive manner”. The latter is reality when Annika Sörenstam adds the elements of CSR and giving back in her sports branding process to secure ROIs for all involved parties. By converting people into active buyers of her products and by keeping an “active link” to sponsorship income, Sörenstam has managed to retain a good revenue stream even after her retirement from the professional tour. On top of integrating CSR-based aspects in her strategic rhetorical processes and into her personal sports brand, but also into her brands at the product and corporate level, Sörenstam has some “investment-worthy” sports brands possessing great potential for synergetic effects. Around Annika Sörenstam’s personal sports brand, ANNIKA Inc. has built a life-style related “brand umbrella”, which relies on a sustainable business model. The following list lists the revenue stream potential for the personal sports brand, Annika Sörenstam.

Revenue streams for personal sports brands[23]:

- prize money;
- appearance money;
- endorsement deals;
- gate money; and
- products (tangible and intangible).

As a long time “winner” and the “all-time” most dominant player in women’s golf, Annika Sörenstam expresses her personal brand by way of various channels. One of these channels is the ANNIKA Experience, an event under the ANNIKA Foundation[24], which is to be found under the overall ANNIKA brand (ANNIKA Foundation, 2011). The ANNIKA Experience[25] is an event teaching and preaching the core of what the ANNIKA Foundation and Annika Sörenstam in particular stands for on top of being a unique golfer; the event as well as Annika symbolises the essentiality of having an active and healthy lifestyle filled with the joy of sports. Through this event, Sörenstam signals authenticity, legitimacy and trustworthiness around her personal brand, which acts as a driver for her other brands. Hamlin et al. (2006, p. 16) write that ”to be marketed successfully, individuals need to obtain control of their images and make decisions based on a thorough understanding of the high visibility industry”. By letting her actions reflect her personality and vice versa, she exemplifies an international sports star with an understanding of the high visibility industry of professional sports – that operates as a positive reinforcing circle for the ANNIKA brands. Shaping an athlete’s image and brand comes through performances...
on and off the playing fields. Control is a critical element in managing the sports branding process (Whannel, 2002; Nicholson, 2007) but one way to show that you have control is by turning to the revenue generation, which has served Sorenstam well. In his work titled “The Economy of Celebrity”, Graeme Turner states that “McDonald and Andrews report that one year after signing Michael Jordan for Gatorade’s ‘Be like Mike’ promotion, Gatorade’s annual revenues had increased from $681 million to over $1 billion” (Turner, 2007, p. 197; originally from Andrews and McDonald, 2001, p. 20). The statement proves “the hybrid essence” of personal sports brands but also that engaging in the right processes and being able to manage them can lead to increased ROIs for all involved “branded properties”. Schultz (2005) refers to the latter when underlining the meaning of Sorenstam’s participation in 2003 in “battle of the sexes” as the first woman to play on the PGA Tour for 58 years (Golf Today, 2011) – an event displaying the opportunities for another positive reinforcing circle for the ANNIKA brands.

Image
CSR may act as a constituent working to create awareness. Though, if done properly, it takes the “awareness” factor of the sports branding process to the next step (Shank, 2009, pp. 210-11; Greyser, 2011). Acknowledging that image is vital to the branding success of organisations, products and persons (Edwards and Usher, 2010; Benoit, 1997), Annika Sorenstam and the brands surrounding her personality at all branding levels have not suffered from any major offensive acts for which she has been held responsible. That sort of situation is good news for any sports brand since it does not leave room for any need for image restoration (Edwards and Usher, 2010, p. 128). Ergo, the right awareness constructed via good media exposure is important in order to create a sound and positive image for what reason sport stars like Sorenstam should always consider the meaning of their interactions.

In the branding process, it matters to recognise that brands do not stand alone but rather that they are “dynamic creatures[26]” surrounded by life and victims of recurring interactions with this world around them. Gobé (2007, p. 3) utilises the phrase “jazz up” to indicate the importance of initiating branding processes through the use of an emotional language, which appeals to the senses and inspires the emotional side of people. Gobé (2007, p. 6) takes things a bit further by linking power to the state of brands and branding and hence signifying that the strength of “jazzing up” in a branding process brings the brand to a new position where its truth ultimately goes beyond the brand. It refers back to Annika Sorenstam’s personality and thereby hold the characteristics of a “lifestyle brand”. For Annika Sorenstam, it becomes true that the sum total of all meanings is present in her ANNIKA brands, which are no longer just commodities but rather brands portraying an experience like the ANNIKA Experience or displaying a lifestyle like the ANNIKA Foundation and the notion of “giving back”. That exemplifies when a personal sports brand transforms into a lifestyle brand, e.g. when the ANNIKA brands possess the power to turn consumption into reflections of people’s lifestyles – a power leading to higher ROI potential. This power of being a trendsetter reveals the definition of a personal sports brand as being capable of turning the qualities and values of the athlete into substantial revenue, cf. earlier section of this work. A personal sports brand given Sorenstam’s athletic status holds the power to shape behavioural patterns, actions and trends so that stakeholders absorb these “celebrity and lifestyle based” personal sports brands and brands.
associated with these (Kornberger, 2010). Putting that into perspective, it corresponds well with the empirical data pointing towards the new position of the ANNIKA brands. Whether focus is on Annika Sörenstam as a person or on her corporate endeavours and the products under that umbrella, there has been a slight perceptual shift. Today, when people's eyes fall on Annika Sörenstam they do not only recall her admirable and remarkable performances on the golf course. She has started her approach of turning into a successful “lifestyle brand” – a reflection that in harmony with the discussion about the definition of personal sports branding displays what it means for athletes to monetise on their personal brands on and off the fields and during and after their active athletic careers:

Consider American boxing: Cassius Clay was a talented boxer among many striving to survive and thrive within a cutthroat world of brutes. In Cassius's time, boxing was based on raw force and destruction. The likes of Sonny Liston, Joe Frazier, and Larry Holmes inspired interest the way a car wreck inspires rubber-necking. You look, you can't help but notice, but frankly you don't like what you see. Then came “Ali”. Muhammad Ali, the greatest boxer of all time, changed the whole game. He took the world of brute violence, absorbed its rules, but also rose above them. He took this world of cruel beatings – what you might consider raw commodities measured by punches, muscles, and knockouts – and “redesigned” its meaning with purpose and inspiration (Gobe, 2007, p. 6).

Muhammad Ali understood what it takes to turn a professional athlete into a successful lifestyle brand only many years after his athletic retirement – an understanding he gained when forming Muhammad Ali Enterprises after earlier periods with many less successful capitalisation efforts (Fox News, 2011). Thereby, Ali proves Gobe’s point that any generic person, product, organisation and/or the image(s) of these can be converted into mythos and more so into powerful and uniquely inspiring expressions of modernity. Lifestyles are trends and tendencies but Annika also signals a new era. Like Ali at his time, Sörenstam has begun a great journey toward lifestyle branding, but without shameful crashes. For the ANNIKA brands, much of the great work is still tied to golf. But adding a sense of CSR and retaining the strategic fit with golf is a good direction (McElhaney, 2008; Ferrand et al., 2007; Carter, 2010, p. 91). According to the ANNIKA brands, those branches under Annika’s governance, which do not link directly to golf, indirectly link to golf. This is exemplified by Annika’s passion for food – it is about lifestyle in the way that she enjoys and loves food – but indirectly it ties to her serious attitude as a golfer where a well-balanced life and nutrition are brought into play along the lines of CSR in terms of promoting the essence of living a healthy and active life. Growing a positive image and building a brand requires support, which is also underlined by the empirical data as reflected in Annika Sörenstam’s comment that “we need some support and I have been with some of my sponsors for 16 years and now it is a lot more than just playing”. Annika Sörenstam and the ANNIKA brands have seen the financial trust of sponsors for years – some of these sponsors have been with Sörenstam for nearly a couple of decades now. The expression “more than just playing” is natural given Sörenstam’s retirement from the LPGA[28] so instead the importance of “lifestyle” and a “dialogical-based process” (Cortsen, 2010; Howell, 1983; Carter, 2010, p. 92) of creating mutual sponsorship ROIs for all parties dominate the way of working. Lexus[29] buys into Sörenstam’s food- and wine-related brands given their wish to add appeal to targets not solely reached via Sörenstam’s competitions on the court. Cutter & Buck[30] also buys into Sörenstam’s consumer-focused brand section when drawing on Annika’s playing experience to design functional golf wear with supporting enhanced playability.
The strategic fit is evidently visual in all parts of these partnerships – it is not only about Annika Sörenstam, the golfer, but about “how sharing the same goals about different things may bring the ANNIKA brands and present and potential partners together” on the journey of lifting common initiatives. Callaway[31] is also one of the sponsors, which has been with Sörenstam for years. They are still there Sörenstam recalls but today they are just working in a different direction – not on Sörenstam’s own game but using her expertise to test clubs and hence ultimately to reinforce the playing experiences of Callaway consumers positively.

The real meaning in the exemplifications above is to link the image building process of a personal sports brand to its characteristic as a “dynamic creature” and in the end to the importance of a brand’s “interactionist nature” (Kornberger, 2010; Atkin, 2004; Pedersen et al., 2007; Aaker, 1991; Whannel, 2002). Sahnoun (1986) perceives sponsorship as a discursive communication tool enabling sponsors to link their brand(s) to an athlete, who appeals to given audiences. Moreover, sponsorship is a communication discipline aiming at shaping consumer associations (also evident for sports branding, cf. Shank, 2009, pp. 210-11) to the sponsor’s brand via the spirit of a sporting event (Piquet, 1985, p. 15). So it seems natural for Sörenstam’s sponsors given their markets that they want to take advantage of Sörenstam’s strong image and brand within the sport of golf and they want to exploit golf’s corporate appeal – something that works well for luxury brands such as Lexus and Rolex (Ferrand et al., 2007[32]; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). Sörenstam’s strategic partnerships with different sponsors reflect a “two-way process”, which is mutually beneficial for all parties. The process illustrates the “dynamic creature” of a sports brand and thus the “interactionist nature” of the ANNIKA brand given the fact that the partnerships have evolved and changed over time – for instance when Sörenstam retired. Although, Sörenstam retired from the professional tour, Sörenstam and the sponsors found a way in this “two-way process” to retain a valuable strategic relationship and that is what matters in sports branding. That tells a story of the power of the ANNIKA brands and displays the importance of image transfers around a strong personal sports brand.

Equity
When dealing with personal sports branding, it is interesting and highly relevant to investigate the convergence, intersection and multidisciplinary character that exists and is constantly constructed in and around personal sports brands. For instance, Annika Sörenstam’s personal brand has shown positive spillover effects directed from her personality and personal brand towards her overall corporate brand and the product brands hereunder – something that is strongly evidenced by the empirical data material. Mike McGee adds to this by mentioning that “she has world class partners that are the best in their space and she has been with for a long time and the fact that they have renewed or signed or even started in some places with her after she stopped playing shows what a great ambassador she is for a brand”. This condition leaves the ANNIKA brands with the label of “hybrid” sports brands – sports brands affected by the convergence between the athlete’s strong personal sports brand and hence underlying or surrounding sports brands at the product and corporate levels. For years, athletes have merged athletic excellence with commercial partnerships to achieve better brand equities worth millions of dollars (O’Reilly and Braedley, 2008; Burton, 2004). This is exemplified via the ANNIKA Foundation and it serves the understanding of sports branding to ask if the ANNIKA Foundation would exist without Annika Sörenstam’s athletic abilities and common and authentic interest in
helping to promote healthy living and active lifestyles? She has a passion and she applies her passion to transform management and business in the sports sector and that is typical for lifestyle brands (Kornberger, 2010). The brand equity for Annika Sorenstam is the value that her personal brand and that her partners’ brands adds to the ANNIKA brands in the marketplace (Shank, 2009, p. 211). An imperative point here is Shank’s (2009) belief that stakeholders, who believe that a sports brand has a high level of brand equity, are often satisfied with that sports brand for what reason these stakeholders are likely to become brand-loyal followers — reflected through Sorenstam’s long-term partnerships.

Loyalty
Keep in mind that Sorenstam’s sponsors have been loyal for years. Does that tell us that Sorenstam and her ANNIKA brands have a high level of brand equity? Or does it tell us that Sorenstam and her ANNIKA brands give sponsors a high and unique value for money that is tough to find elsewhere in professional sports — something derived from a high level of awareness of Annika Sorenstam, the golfer, which has been turned into a positive image for Sorenstam and hence her related ANNIKA brands, i.e. image transfer?

“[…] An inability to fully feature one’s athletic prowess can undermine the ability to establish and extend a personal brand.” (Carter, 2010, p. 85) Sorenstam distances herself from that problem. She has played at the best venues in the world, at the highest level in the world and won competitions at that level, not only once but again and again. This process has created a perfect “footing” for building, maintaining and further developing a great personal sports brand with associated and closely related brands.

Sorenstam has understood the “message-direct world” (Carter, 2010) in which she lives. Benefitting from communicating the depth and breadth of her passionate endeavours in life through the slogan “Share my Passion” gives her stakeholders an understanding of a well-rounded, sound and serious athlete who stands for much more than good golf performances — an athlete who knows the importance of supporting themes and causes that the world is already trying to battle and which therefore has a strong position on the public agenda. Drawing on this knowledge and understanding has given Sorenstam a cutting-edge personal branding advantage that shines through in extending her potential for brand-ROIs well beyond her playing years — her way of leading the “brand life” has produced significant corporate appeal although she has already retired as a pro-golfer. It adds extra value that Sorenstam has always held a professional responsibility towards her stakeholders in terms of “staying out of trouble”.

“Hybrid” sports branding – a revised model
The evolution regarding the World Wide Web and social media has created new platforms leading as a new “kick starting foundation” for driving personal sports brands (Carter, 2010; Adjouri and Stastny, 2006, p. 49). Merskin (2009, p. 142) mentions a phenomenon where persons “perceived to be larger than life” plays a large role in branding processes and specifically in branding physical products. There are elements from this phenomenon, which can be transferred to personal sports branding processes and personal sports brand’s interrelationship with sports branding at the product and corporate levels. Mike McGee points to the fact that Annika Sorenstam has done what is significant for a female athlete due to her success with establishing a brand of
businesses, which have been successful under her first name, i.e. ANNIKA. According to Mike McGee, that process is also linked to creating exceptional experiences for fans and other followers on and off the golf course. Following Annika Sörenstam around during the ANNIKA Experience, a golf event staged to promote the ANNIKA Foundation and the importance of leading an active and healthy lifestyle, shows what it means when great athletes are “perceived to be larger than life”: The ANNIKA Experience, which is centered on Sörenstam's personality, is a good practical example showing what it means for golf enthusiasts to be able to engage with Sörenstam. Given her athletic prowess, she already positioned herself positively in the minds of these stakeholders but linking her personality with sound and popular opinions (active and healthy lifestyle) and displaying this in a face2face event add credibility, authenticity and trustworthiness to her personality as well as her overall “brand umbrella” – Sörenstam’s relationship with her stakeholders is placed at the heart of this brand experience. Holt (2004) conducted an ethnographic case study on ESPN and found that brand loyalty generation was a product of stakeholder interactions. This plays well with the concept of “hybrid” sports brands, i.e. Sörenstam’s personal sports brand management showed appropriate management of relationships across different stakeholder groups. This has led to the creation of the following developmental framework to consider when building a personal sports brand (cf. Figure 1).

Stakeholders’ symbolisation of and associations with Sörenstam had the power to add value to everything related to the ANNIKA brands given the fact that expectations of Sörenstam’s greatness were positively reinforced by her way of acting on the golf course but also off the course – a process leading to increased brand equity and loyalty capable of spreading good “buzz” about Sörenstam's business-oriented endeavours (Ind, 2007, p. 22)[35]. Ind also talks about “a brand life” with a high relevance and consistency and that is supplemented by Knapp’s (2008, p. 36) suggestion that a brand should treat stakeholders better than they expect – both factors are something, which Sörenstam has interpreted in superior manner. Fans, sponsors and other followers of a sports brand like ANNIKA carefully watch how they spend their money and Mike McGee adds the perspective that in order to secure a sustainable business model for personal sports brands “you have to over-deliver, you have to give more, you have to work harder – I would never say lower the prices because we have such high-end things, high-end sponsors, high-end products so it is not about lowering the prices for us but about making it such an exceptional experience that people realise that it was worth the money[36]”. Personal sports branding is hard work and athletes must realise that they must give so much more than work on the field alone to build successful top-notch personal brands in sport.

This simplistic “hybrid” input/output framework for building a personal sports brand shows that personal sports brands are affected by various brand influencers (cf. defined and discussed throughout the paper) and vice versa. The same is true for a personal sports brand’s relationship with different revenue streams, i.e. a strong

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**Figure 1.**

“Hybrid” framework for building a personal sports brand

| Brand influencers for personal sports brands | Personal sports brand | Revenue streams for personal sports brands |
personal sports brand produces different revenue streams and these revenue streams form a strong basis for further development of the personal sports brand. An example of a brand influencer for a personal sports brand is “superior athletic performances and/or abilities”, which work as “a living example” of a powerful brand asset for a personal sports brand. This asset can generate different revenue streams, e.g. endorsement deals. This reflects the “interactionist” and “hybrid” nature of a personal sports brand given the interplay between different factors in building and determining the strength of the personal sports brand.

Social media act as a supporting tool to enhance the “buzz” when good words are spread about Sörenstam’s personality, athletic or business performances and hence it serves as a method to build brand power via improved brand equity and loyalty. At the same time, it portrays how it is possible to link the personal sports branding level to sports branding at the product and corporate levels. Indirectly, Leonard (2010, p. 166) touches upon this theoretical statement when discussing Michael Jordan’s retirement from the NBA and whether there would be someone to fill his Air Jordan shoes on the field and what that question would mean to the marketing of the league / NBA. The role of sports and sports branding and personal sports celebrities in popular contemporary culture is significant (Dyer, 1986, p. 18; Gitlin, 1998, p. 81; Bell and Campbell, 1999, p. 22; Marshall, 1997; Andrews and Jackson, 2001; Andrews and McDonald, 2001, p. 20; Friedman, 1999, p. 3; Oprah Winfrey Show, 1997[37]; Cole and Andrews, 2001; Carlin, 1999, p. 29; Archetti, 2001, p. 151) and history proved this when LeBron James filled the shoes and shined through as one of the biggest stars in the history of the NBA (Elberse and McCall, 2010). In July 1997, Oprah Winfrey added to this scenario when using Tiger Woods as a social marker for a more racially diverse USA following Woods’ victory in the Masters Championship (Uchacz, 2009). History has proved the same brand strength of personal sports brands in regards to Sörenstam’s income potential and business success even after her retirement from the tour circus of women’s professional golf (Forbes, 2010[38]). As illustrated in the LeBron James and Sörenstam exemplifications, social media is a proficient agent in terms of leveraging social interactions between personal sports brands and consumers and between personal sports brands and other sports brands, cf. at the personal, product and corporate levels. Social media also allow and enhance personal sports brands’ “viral lives” while keeping niche marketing and relationship marketing at the core of building and commercialising personal sports brands at a global level (Santomier, 2008; Smith, 2008; Bei et al., 2004; Porter, 2001; King, 2004). Paul (2007) supplements by acknowledging that via the inclusion of Twitter and Facebook, which are applied by many personal sports brands, it becomes easier for personal sports brands to create relationships and to produce or reproduce the “reality” of these sport stars online and thus supporting sports branding processes.

Sörenstam’s legacy is still very much alive leading her to obtain ROIs based on her personal sports brand and related brands (Forbes, 2010; Friedman, 1999) while leaving and retaining a “vital footprint” of personalisation on her brands via events such at the ANNIKA Experience (Gerzema and Lebar, 2008, pp. 97-101). The ANNIKA Experience seems as a perfect example of an event competent enough to promote and personalise Sörenstam’s passions as well as the essence of the ANNIKA Foundation and the significance of fun brand experiences. This is exemplified via the ANNIKA Experience when “breathing and consuming the vibes of Annika Sörenstam and her related brands” and it works as another way of communicating and exercising brand building focused on generating ROIs while acknowledging that “social media is a cocktail party” or that a “cocktail party atmosphere” may generate the buzz needed from social
media to add positively to brand building (Scott, 2010). Social media possess the handiness to customise and target sports branding messages to specific stakeholder groups and hence “frame” the sports branding process in a desired way (Brown, 2003). A lot of “buzz” and “vibe” are created around personal sports brands in the new social media landscape. By engaging in this process, a personal sports brand maintain some level of control concerning the “framing” of stakeholders’ perceptions of the brand (Pedersen et al., 2007; Yang et al., 2003; Filo and Funk, 2005). This is also evidenced in the fact that many professional sport stars engage with stakeholders through personal blogs, e.g. Annika Sörenstam’s blog (Annika Sörenstam Blog, 2011) or Caroline Wozniacki’s blog via TV2 Denmark (TV2 Denmark, 2011). Today, millions of sports fans and consumers do not rely solely on traditional mass media but have moved to the commercial and interactive communication tools facilitated by the World Wide Web (Stafford et al., 2004; Pedersen et al., 2007). Sörenstam has understood to take advantage of social media by acknowledging their importance of being more than a public relations tool (Brown, 1998, 2003). Social media supports revenue generation (Migala, 2004) for the ANNIKA brands, i.e. Migala argues that successful commercial web sites may generate revenue from advertising, ticket sales and other sources – the latter may include data collection about stakeholders for b2b and b2c purposes. Featherstone’s (2007, p. 86) proposal where he divides people into classes in terms of sports consumption does not appeal highly to golf given the change surrounding the sport of golf. This change has taken the sport from a pure “high-class” sport “towards a more mainstream image” affordable and accessible for every layer of society (Paulsen, 2007, p. 12). Observations and data have proved that Sörenstam appeals to a larger audience ranging from kids through senior citizens, from blue-collar to white-collar workers, from private golfers to large corporations – Sörenstam covers a lot of ground in terms of market reach and potential. The team behind the ANNIKA brands are very cognitive about that process as evidenced by Mike McGee stating that “with the road to all different entities being important” it serves a key strategic purpose in the sports branding process to recognise that focus should not be entirely on the overall ANNIKA brand nor on one of the underlying brands but rather on the interrelationships between all the ANNIKA brands as one big family.

Concluding remarks and limitations
One thing comes to mind after reviewing this research process. For personal sports brands to succeed financially by monetising on a person’s name, athletic potential and talent, a vital requirement is a “large stage” and a product and/or brand with wide appeal.

Some essential conclusions of this paper include:

1. The meaning of “hybrid” in terms of personal sports branding, i.e. personal sports brands are not only personal but also affected by the product and organisational branding levels. Of course that affects the commercialisation process in that personal sports brands cannot stand alone when seeking to optimise ROIs.

2. The emphasis on brand influencers and revenue streams for personal sports brands indicate the “hybrid” nature of these sports brands. Specifically, Annika Sörenstam would not have been taken to the same strong brand level only due to her performances on the playing fields.
(3) The fact that without factors like media exposure, a great team around her, successful corporate sponsors, powerful CSR-initiatives and fan interest, the case of the ANNIKA brand of businesses would not have entailed the same value as a best practice example for sports branding practitioners. Thus, it serves personal sports brands well to add value to their product(s) and organisation(s) by linking for instance CSR or other brand influencers to this intertwined process that sports branding becomes when athletes drag their successful experiences from the field into highly branded properties on several scales, i.e. by adding extra brand equity and loyalty to their personal sports brands and making that rub off on related product and corporate brands. Everything (all the initiatives under the ANNIKA brand of businesses and related actions) add to the table in terms of having built Annika Sörenstam's personal sports brand as it is to be perceived today. Athletic ability at the superior level was just the start as Mike McGee and Annika Sörenstam recall it.

(4) The influence of brand evolution for Sörenstam's personal sports brand. That process has been very dynamic and creating good “hybrid” connections have caused her brand to become very powerful even after her active career. The findings present that “athletes only go a certain distance” regarding the power of their personal sports brands due to athletic abilities. To optimise the power of a personal sports brand, athletes must “engage in hybrid relationships”, be strategic about this engagement and thus rely on these actions to “brand themselves” via relationships outside the athletic field to gain higher ROIs than what is constituted only from athletic abilities.

(5) The fact that Annika Sörenstam's personality and her brand have melted together and adds some “legitimacy, authenticity and trustworthiness”.

(6) A fine balance between brand influencers, revenue streams, Annika Sörenstam's personal brand and the related ANNIKA brand of businesses displays the brand strength of Sörenstam's “hybrid” personal brand and its “interactionist nature” (as evidenced in the input/output framework in Figure 1) The “lifestyle” type of brand extension has more to say for itself than simply “endorsing equipment” (although still important) after the peak of an athlete's career. Annika's iconic status and the characteristic of golf consumers attach meaning to this and partly explains why Annika has been successful in driving positive revenue streams even after her active career (other explanations can be found via the brand influencers). Golf is different than many other sports. Given that Sörenstam is not part of a sports team (e.g. soccer, volleyball, etc.), she has a high level of control over her brand management process. Additionally, golf is a popular sport for people of all ages, even for senior citizens. That means that there will be a lot of people playing golf in 30 years from now and Annika has positioned herself well in their minds. That extends the potential for future revenue streams since these people will remain “active consumers”. She shapes. behavioural patterns.

(7) A consistent brand promise delivery and brand strategy alignment has been significant for Annika Sörenstam, also in terms of linking her personal brand to positive revenue streams after her active career.

Discussing and analysing the “hybrid” character of Sörenstam's personal sports brand reveals the “ambiguity” often associated with personal sports brands. While being
linked to “high-end” products and sponsors, i.e. Lexus and Rolex, Annika Sörenstam her personality in CSR-related endeavours and in building the sports-business related sub-brands. Brand critics may argue that these actions cannot go hand in hand and will add indistinctness to the ANNIKA brand of businesses while others may state that it reveals “perfect staging” of Sörenstam’s personal sports brand in terms of giving the brand “wider appeal” and combining successful organisation’s and Sörenstam’s wishes to give back to less fortunate people or aspiring golf players (strategic fit). Nevertheless, it displays a “hybrid” character of personal sports brands where “ambiguity” becomes a factor that must be carefully managed to reach a status like Sörenstam.

This case study on Annika Sörenstam is unique based on her relative sovereignty as an athlete for what reason it may be hard to draw direct generalisations to other athletes at different levels. Additionally, it serves a purpose to mention that the sport of a particular athlete and its popularity also may influence the outcome of personal sports branding processes. Finally, a different methodology would have led to different conclusions but it was important to seek availability to “go behind the curtains” and collect a firsthand impression of the experiences of the athlete and her team in terms of their branding processes. The latter focuses on whether or not this case study is applicable in the real world? To answer that question, it is essential to mention that: this research presents a bridge between scientific knowledge and practical applicability in a field short of in-depth academic and empirical research; this research provides a relevant contextual framework for understanding the gaps, overlaps and differences between various levels of sports branding, i.e. organisational, product and personal levels; this research defines and discusses key brand influencers to be applied in the development, management and capitalisation phases of personal sports branding while taking into considerations content from classic branding and personal branding theory; this research has generated scientific knowledge and practical applicability in relation to strategic initiatives in various sports organisations; this research displays that McGee and Sörenstam both emphasise the importance of “delivering”, a metaphor building a bridge between sports and business where “perfect delivery” is essential to survive as a brand; this research shows evidence based on the qualitative observations and interviews that answers from Sörenstam and McGee were (of course different in wording but) highly aligned in meaning in terms of placing Sörenstam’s personality and passions as a central focal point when providing stakeholders with exceptional “brand interaction experiences”. Concerning the latter, the research presents facts that the ANNIKA brand of businesses make use of some brand values, which tend to be “generic” (risk factor), i.e. honesty and integrity. That is true for other personal sports brands as well and if personal sports brands seek to capitalise on “generic brand values”, they must be true to these values in their actions, exemplified by Sörenstam. Sörenstam revealed that she understands the importance of creating synergy between her personality and all related brands. Her personal brand must be in cohesion with and complement related brands and live up to the brand promises, which is where other personal sports brands have met difficulties in terms of running their businesses.

Notes
1. Although keeping in mind that deduction is implicitly applied in case studies based on grounded theory (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008).
2. Though, there are exemptions in that regard, e.g. Anna Kournikova.
3. Fans want to act and be like them, inspired by Crawford (2004) and Smart (2004).
4. Annika Sorenstam retired from professional golf in 2009 to focus on the ANNIKA brand of businesses. Under the overall ANNIKA brand, you find other branded properties such as ANNIKA Academy, ANNIKA Financial Group, ANNIKA Foundation, ANNIKA Experience, numerous golf course design projects around the world, the ANNIKA collection of apparel with Cutter & Buck, an Annika wine label with Wente Vineyards, and a fragrance with SA Fragrances.

5. Intensified via the application of new media, e.g. Facebook and Twitter.

6. Being the world's number one for many years adds positively to Annika Sorenstam's personal sports brand.

7. Annika Sorenstam & Callaway or Michael Jordan & Nike. These endorsement deals has affected the involved parties positively.

8. Fan interest is a great driver for ROIs linked to personal sports brands. Look at the amount of soccer shirts associated with David Beckham's career but also with soccer stars like Lionel Messi, Christiano Ronaldo and Wayne Rooney. The corporate appeal of golf links Annika Sorenstam with great ROIs from high-end sponsors and indirectly end-consumers around the world.

9. David Beckham is a great example when highlighting his effect on popular culture and vice versa, i.e. the movie “Bend it like Beckham” or look at the entertainment created by Annika Sorenstam via her ANNIKA Experience where she invited famous chefs like Ming Tsai to promote the importance of good and healthy food for active lifestyles.

10. Annika Sorenstam inspires healthy kids through her ANNIKA Foundation and featured on ABC's Good Morning America in October 2010 to highlight the importance of such CSR initiatives in sport.

11. The drive and energy of Annika Sorenstam causing her to continue to make a difference in the world of sports via her ANNIKA brands, e.g. the ANNIKA Foundation, ANNIKA Academy or ANNIKA Experience emphasises a positive sports personality (she is a real genuine athlete never caught in harmful discrediting actions). Edgy sports personalities caught in bar fights, infidelity or alcohol abuse reflect negative sports personalities. There is a fine balance between positive and negative sports personalities since some edgy sports personalities with controversial behaviours on and off the playing fields may seem appealing to sports fans (Dennis Rodman and John McEnroe illustrate this phenomenon).

12. The ANNIKA Foundation or Andre Agassi's College Preparatory Academy underscores positive extraordinary activities whereas a famous athlete caught in a doping scandal illustrates the negative angle.

13. Timing is important when looking to monetise from a strong personal sports brand. Annika Sorenstam's great off the course work has created a good platform for ROIs. Maria Sharapova and IMG coined some good endorsement deals after her 2004 Wimbledon title.

14. Personal sports brands compete with upcoming stars, i.e. Lionel Messi passed Diego Maradona given his current popularity and performances. The popularity of a specific sport also plays a role in determining or driving the strength of a personal sports brand, i.e. the popularity of World Wrestling Federation and especially Hulk Hogan in the 1980s and 1990s.

15. Annika Sorenstam has been capable of developing her ANNIKA brand of businesses and this continuous development has formed a positive reinforcing circle due to extra publicity and branding circles leading to enhanced brand strength.

16. For personal sports brands to reach their optimal branding potential, it requires a strong team and good strategic collaborative partners portrayed via the strong team and sponsors around the ANNIKA brands. Sorenstam sets new goals when current goals are reached – a process succeeding through team effort, network and winning mentality.
Annika Sörenstam has applied the important practical task of making herself available to key audiences such as the press, vital stakeholders like sponsors, fan groups or non-profit organizations. That adds integrity and authenticity to her branding processes. She seems like a “modern super woman” capable of managing multiple tasks successfully and that blends well with expectations of modern stakeholders.

The passion of Annika Sörenstam when involving herself in the ANNIKA brand of businesses adds trustworthiness and authenticity to her endeavours – to all underlying brands under the ANNIKA umbrella as well as to endorsers’ brands. It illustrates the essence of having a well-orchestrated brand architecture guided by passion of all key decision makers.

“Share my Passion” reveals a slogan pointing to the strategic direction of the ANNIKA brands of businesses and demonstrate the strength of Annika Sörenstam’s own personal involvement in the branding processes.

According to Nordjyske (2010), athletes are highly exposed personalities compared to other personality groups. The survey is based on a collaborative survey from the news database Outside24.dk and the analytical group Kaas & Mulvad. Every week, they monitor what 1,700 newspapers from 94 countries write about Denmark and Danes.

Look at David Beckham’s stints with Real Madrid and LA Galaxy and how that impacted the sales of soccer shirts with the “Beckham name” (Wahl, 2009).

The “money list” from Forbes (2010) covers income figures from June 2009 through June 2010, including endorsements, prize money, exhibitions and appearance fees. The list is dominated by female tennis players and golfers, totally accounting for eight out of ten spots.

“The athlete, with a strong brand backing him, can potentially garner off-the-field earning opportunities like speaking engagements, youth camps, memorabilia sales, and coaching. These additional income opportunities also have the potential to continue after their playing days are over” (Craft, 2008, p. 7). The revenue streams mentioned here are integrated into the factors mentioned in list above.

The ANNIKA Foundation’s purpose is to teach children the vitality of living a healthy, active lifestyle via fitness and nutrition and offers aspiring junior golfers opportunities to follow their dreams (ANNIKA Foundation, 2011).

The ANNIKA Experience is an event under the ANNIKA Foundation aiming at fundraising for the ANNIKA Foundation. The event also aims at preaching the purpose of THE ANNIKA Foundation by engaging children, sponsors and other key stakeholders in what the Foundation and other ANNIKA brands is all about (ANNIKA Foundation, 2011).

The notion “dynamic creatures” supports the hybrid nature of sports brands. Behind the personal brand Annika Sörenstam stands an organization. The interview with Annika Sörenstam reflects that Annika perceives the sports branding process for the ANNIKA brands as a team process. She refers to “my team” and “we” when talking about the future opportunities for her ANNIKA brands.

From a commercial perspective and measured in $.

LPGA is the Ladies Professional Golf Association.

Lexus is a high-end car brand.

Cutter & Buck is a producer of high-end golf-inspired apparel for men and women with a preference for innovative, high-quality sportswear.

Callaway is a global producer of golf clubs, golf balls, golf equipment and innovative golf technology.

Rolex used golf sponsorships to “upmarket” its watches.
33. This stems from an interpretation of Shank's (2009, p. 211) explanation of brand equity in a sporting context.

34. Sörenstam's personal brand has a higher value for sponsors than that of other women's golfers given her brand strength associated with being number 1 in the world for years and holding a sound commercial rationale due to her serious and positive mindset.

35. Keeping in mind that the creation and consumption of brands stems from the stakeholders around the brand(s) (Ind, 2007, p. 22).

36. Strategic fit is implicitly contained in this process.

37. After winning the 1997 Masters Championship, Tiger Woods appeared on “The Oprah Winfrey Show” on 29 July and during the hour-long interview, Oprah referred to Tiger Woods as “America’s Son” several times, an indication of a sport star’s powerful position in popular culture (Uchacz, 2009).

38. This development has also been evidenced via the massive portrayal of LeBron James’ career path and what some people labeled “a new era of sports branding” (Esquire, 2008) as well as through the development of other stars, e.g. Maria Sharapova (Elberse and Golod, 2010; HBO, 2006).

39. Although he admits that reality is more complex and varied (Featherstone, 2007, p. 86).

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Via a position at University College of Northern Denmark (UCN), Kenneth Cortsen has helped develop and implement the first professional (applied sciences) bachelor’s degree in sport management in Denmark as well as other educational and research activities related to sport economics, sport management, and sport marketing. This includes collaboration with and consulting for various sport organizations and personalities in Denmark and abroad, which has provided a better framework for sport management research in Denmark. Kenneth Cortsen can be contacted at: keco@ucn.dk

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‘Re-branding’ women’s football by means of a new Sports product: a case study of women’s football in Denmark

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Women’s football (soccer in the US) does not reach the same overall popularity levels as men’s football measured on a variety of factors, i.e. league attendances, participants, media attention, fan engagement or strength of business models as it translates into brand equity and revenue generation. This article investigates how a new sports product, i.e. a new football (soccer ball) labelled ‘Sensational 1’, and its interaction with positive participation numbers concerning women’s football in Denmark can enhance the brand equity of women’s football in Denmark and exploit the associated commercial opportunities. In doing so, the article discusses how this development relates to factors like winning and success, passion and the business of sports, accountability and role models, brand articulation and marketability in the context of women’s football in Denmark.

1. Introduction

As a sport with successful and increasing participation levels (DBU; DIF),1 the sport of women’s football in Denmark is still struggling to find recognition at the broadest societal level.2 Women’s football has wrestled to break through the media clutter and to ‘re-brand’ the sport as an activity, in which it is not only fun to participate but also a sport that is appealing to stakeholders surrounding the sport. The fan perspective that ‘women’s football does not equal men’s football’ seems to be pervading for what reason this research aims to investigate potential factors, which may increase the brand equity of women’s football and drive higher degrees of stakeholder engagement.3 The investigation, which is placed at the heart of ‘Sensational 1’,4 a new football (soccer ball) invented to improve the game of women’s football to become more attractive for all relevant stakeholders, examines the potential of ‘Sensational 1’ as a vehicle in the ‘re-branding’ process of women’s football. This new ball, which has a smaller circumference and a lower weight, was invented to produce changes to the game of women’s football due to the fact that this new ball can be kicked 3–4m longer.5 Other studies point to the fact that to encourage sports participation, football players must be able to perform to the best of their abilities for what reason the equipment should be adapted to the needs of the players.6 In general, innovation is a strong vehicle to drive brand equity, also in a sports product and sports branding landscape. Innovation theories suggest that consumers are met by five perceptual issues when determining whether to adopt a product innovation,
i.e. product advantages, usage complexity, value compatibility, divisibility and communicability. Thus, in the long run ‘Sensational 1’ is thought to be able to generate technical, tactical and physical changes to women’s football so that the game becomes faster, safer, and more dynamic and attractive for participants and stakeholders (e.g. spectators, sponsors, media etc.). For instance, research emphasizes that ‘The sensation of a lower strain on the lower legs and ankles could potentially increase the motivation of the participant and maximize the chance of continued participation in the sport, especially for beginners’. This angle is related to the premises of ‘hybrid sports branding’ and an interactionist approach, in which a sports brand at the product level may interact with sports brands at the personal and corporate levels or with other sports brands at the same branding level and thus enhance the brand equity level of all involved parties.

2. Development of women’s football in Denmark and abroad

Whereas football is the main sport in many countries around the globe, evidence shows that there are variations in the structure of football between different countries. Often, the structure of the game is based on strong societal positions manifested in the country’s sport culture, lifted and maintained by the grassroots level. This is also the case in Denmark where a strong voluntary club structure is one of the key assets of football development from the grassroots level to the professional level.

Football has grown in reach and popularity as a result of various factors like globalization tendencies, changed fan consumption patterns and media development. However, certain countries (e.g. the US and Australia) are facing challenges in terms of developing the sport of football commercially given the fact that football is not the most consumed sport in the nation. According to Doug Logan, former Major League Soccer Commissioner, the MLS has worked hard to create a strong platform for football in the US but he recalls that it is a long process. He states;

It’s a step-by-step approach where we claw our way up the ladder to being the fifth league. It’s important to know who we’re not, to have respect for our consumers and cater to their passion for the game. Our main focus is the product because that’s what they care about the most.

Compared to many other countries worldwide, the MLS and hence football in the US stays behind other sports as the most consumed sport at the professional level. That is not the phenomenon in Denmark or its European neighbouring countries that are drawn into this article where football ranks as number 1 in terms of sports consumption regarding professional sports. Nevertheless, the overall popularity of football in Denmark and other European countries has not yet reached a stage where it transfers into an optimal valuable and sustainable commercial development regarding women’s football. That brings parallels to Australia and the US that seems to experience similar challenges regarding the general popularity of football. A research project regarding football in Australia clearly indicated that Australian football had found itself in a ‘vacuum’ and therefore balanced on the verge of a new beginning to drive the sport forward with new energy and an enhanced following. As the scholars list;

A key strategy in the new competition was to ensure that the new clubs were ‘Australian’ and not the purview of any single ethnic or cultural group, thus divorcing the A-League from the problems and negative images associated with previous leagues.
and that statement marks the interesting point of significance in terms of negative connotations related to a brand, which is present in women’s football in Denmark as well.\textsuperscript{21} Statements mark the negative brand equity of the women’s game in Denmark when linking brand equity to the commercial business model of women’s football. Female players and stakeholders feel that ‘women’s football is given a lower priority’ compared to men’s football in Denmark. This is often associated with the conditions surrounding the game, e.g., fields, stadiums, sponsorships, economics, game operations, elite development which female players and stakeholders perceive as being of a lower quality than the conditions related to men’s football.\textsuperscript{22} There are business model problems to address for women’s football in Denmark for what reason the balance between what takes place on and off the field must be optimized because commercially the current situation leads to a vicious circle and the need for ‘re-branding’ to boost the business model of women’s football in Denmark seems all-pervasive. Studies at the University of Minnesota have shown that although there is a growing number of female sports participants, women receive less than 5% of all media coverage and only 1.62% of sporting broadcasting time on the large networks\textsuperscript{23}, although it is also revealed that women’s sports start to show more business and branding potential.

Football Federation Australia (FFA)\textsuperscript{24} spent much money ‘re-branding’ football in an attempt to replace ‘old football’ with ‘new football’ when pursuing to make the A-League more attractive to a broader fan base.\textsuperscript{25} In Australia, the formation of the A-League was a follow-up and redevelopment of the National Soccer League (NSL), which was intended to establish a connection between the huge football participation rates in Australia and an increased interest among stakeholders of the game such as sponsors, fans and the media. The establishment of a positive connection to such stakeholder groups was also a concern in earlier research on women’s football in Denmark.\textsuperscript{26} The NSL had failed in reaching the peak potential of football in becoming a ‘mainstream sport’ at all levels in the Australian society.\textsuperscript{27} The reason for underscoring this scenario is its linkage to the women’s football context in Denmark, where the Danish FA (DBU) has experienced the same problems in converting great participant numbers (women’s football) into vivid and avid fans.\textsuperscript{28}

According to Allan Hansen, former Chairman of DBU, the lack in popularity and national recognition of women’s football in comparison to men’s football is due to long-lasting structural problems around women’s football in Denmark. Allan Hansen states;

\begin{quote}
The women are not to blame. But as a starting point we won two world cup titles without having the foundation to follow up on that success. Today, we have this foundation, which will be improved even further in the years to come. We have established a talent development system and a license system for elite youth women’s football, which account for the food chain that makes it possible to retain and enhance the position of Danish women’s football internationally.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

This articulation of the challenges of women’s football acknowledges the role of a leading sports-governing body like DBU in helping to re-shape and ‘re-brand’ women’s football and thus highlights the fact that women’s football requires support activities surrounding the sport in order to gain a stronger brand equity level.\textsuperscript{30} However, it is not enough to emphasize positive words. There must be action and accountability behind the words to move away from empty rhetoric and from the
statement of a former DBU Chairman, Vilhelm Skousen that women’s football players find themselves in a no-man’s-land.31

3. Branding and re-branding in sports

It is easy to recognize a car. What is sport? Is tennis a sport? What about walking or aerobic dance? Some of you will contend that walking and aerobics are not sports. Other will argue the contrary. To prevent such arguments we need some definition so that we all have a similar image of sports in our minds.32

Based on the above-mentioned citation, a sports product is no different from a car and so it is a combination of interrelated tangible and intangible features. The essence is that all stakeholders in women’s football must evaluate the current product of women’s football and take all tangible and intangible elements in consideration when striving to produce enhanced brand equity.33 Discussing the theoretical framework on product branding is thus fundamental when looking to ‘re-brand’ women’s football in cohesion with the invention of ‘Sensational 1’, a new football designed to improve the game of women’s football. Classic brand management research34 is a good starting point while acknowledging that there are overlaps between different brand levels (personal, product, and corporate/organizational brand levels) to take into consideration when dealing with ‘re-branding’ in a sports setting.35 As with sports branding, the concept of ‘re-branding’ has its offset in traditional branding definitions and theory.36 However, from a metatheoretical perspective, ‘re-branding’ in sport studies is a relative untouched topic. That marks some methodological challenges when pursuing sources to help shed light on this theoretical phenomenon, which consciously or unconsciously is present among many sport marketing and sport management practitioners. Bridgewater37 directs the responsibility of ‘re-branding’ as part of football management, which refers to the need to do something when an organization or sport has lost momentum. Aaker38 underscores the importance of creating product breakthroughs, which are more sustainable because they blend positive growth potential and competitive advantages. Other scholars39 support this although they refer to ‘re-branding’ as repositioning or re-framing as they promote that it is the frame of reference, which needs change. Pitts and Stotlar and Fatis addressed the need for ‘re-branding’ in sports and Batchelor and Formentin worked with the topic in a case study examining NHL’s promotional activities over the past two decades.40 Their research found that the league’s focus on ‘My NHL’, an integrated marketing and branding set-up, did add positively to the ‘re-branding’ process although this process needed constant maintenance to successfully ‘re-brand’ the NHL. The latter evidence is in alignment with research findings on the ‘hybrid nature’ of sports brands,41 stressing that one branding or ‘re-branding’ initiative cannot be isolated and stand alone if the aim is to succeed in the highly competitive and dynamic sports marketplace where athletes, products, and organizations are examined on and off the field on a daily or weekly basis.42 To elaborate on the meaning of ‘hybrid sports branding’, the introduction of a new sports brand at the product level, e.g. the ‘Sensational 1’ football, may illustrate that if the sport of women’s football becomes more popular and commercialized this will most likely (as seen in other sports business examples) have a positive spillover effect on athletes in terms of attractiveness of individual performances (personal branding level) and on sports-governing bodies in terms of higher
participation numbers and more corporate appeal (organizational branding level). It is also supported by the fact that all tangible and intangible elements of the brand should be considered. The ‘hybrid’ element is backed by Martinez, who stresses the importance of the intersection between different narrative constituents meant to charm the audience in a specific culture. So, carefully chosen strategic partners capable of adding extra brand value should surround a sports brand at any branding level.

4. Research methodology

Empirically, this case study focuses on how ‘hybrid sports branding’ elements, see, Section 1, generated by a sports product can spark the enhancement of the brand equity of ‘Sensational 1’ and women’s football in Denmark via ‘re-branding’. Thus, this case-study methodology implies intensive study of concrete cases, i.e. ‘Sensational 1’ and women’s football in particular, in terms of development over time and in-depth analysis of the context within which human activities take place.

This case-study research is founded on four individual qualitative semi-structured research interviews with respondents that have been highly involved in influencing the sport of women’s football at the highest participation level, the sports product level and the coaching and sports-governing level, thus illustrating the ‘hybrid nature’ of sports branding via the personal, product and corporate branding levels. Additionally, this case study will integrate data from a qualitative semi-structured focus group interview grounded in the above-mentioned metatheoretical context with ‘purposively selected’ young (age 22–25) respondents. These respondents were chosen due to their knowledge about sport management, women’s football and their roles as either current active football players or passive football participants (Tables 1 and 2).

The methodological approach of this research has a dialogical and interactionist nature to reveal respondents’ meanings and understandings of how the brand equity of women’s football in Denmark can be enhanced via ‘re-branding’ of women’s football and the sports product ‘Sensational 1’. This qualitative design is appropriate when aiming to produce meaning, to comprehensively understand and to construct theories concerning sports branding at any branding level, i.e. personal,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Overview of respondents from the individual interviews.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual interviews – current sport management practitioners representing various high-profile sports-related organizations:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Brandi Chastain, former elite female football player, Olympic and two-time World Cup Champion for the US, former player and captain for the San Jose Cyberrays of the WUSA and FC Gold Pride of the WPS in the US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tiffeny Milbrett, former elite female football player, Olympic and World Cup Champion for the US, former player for the New York Power of the WUSA in the US, Linköping FC, Sweden, FC Gold Pride of the WPS in the US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Thomas Slosarich, talent and youth national team coach for the Danish FA, U15 and U16, UEFA P-licensed football coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Majken Gilmartin, Creator of Cph MOVES, CEO Sensational Football/Sensational Street Soccer, Head of Sports at City of Copenhagen (worked with IOC Congress), recreational football player and football coach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
product and corporate level. To build a bridge from context and existing theory to the empirical analysis in this research, qualitative open coding is integrated to study and analyse interview data. In doing so, the main points in this research are created from analysis founded on grounded theory, i.e. transcriptions and open coding of the qualitative data from the various semi-structured interviews.49 This methodological interaction with and among respondents is thought to stimulate new ideas and to provide definitions and depictions of meanings and experiences from the respondents.50 The character of this qualitative methodology is interpretative and coding and analysis is grounded in relevant context-related literature, theory and knowledge, which means that this approach is aligned with the knowledge-producing process tied to contextualizing and re-contextualizing regarding ‘re-branding’ and branding in sports at various branding levels.51

The purpose behind the case-study method,52 which is supplemented with qualitative ‘interactive’ semi-structured personal face-to-face interviews and one focus group interview,53 is to find the most notable issues tied to the case of ‘re-branding’ women’s football in close cohesion with the application of a new ball invented for female football players.54 The interactive interviews imply an interpretative paradigm55 for analytical purposes and follow a symbolic interactionist56 approach to obtain holistic experiences of the respondents engaged in the research area of interest.57

5. From theory to practice – a new future for women’s football in Denmark

Various factors are vital for enhancing the brand equity of women’s football in Denmark. ‘Sensational 1’ may help to push this in a positive direction and this research presents some categories, which highlight these factors, see, Sections 5.1–5.4. These categories are the inductive result of qualitative open coding linked to the empirical data analysis. The categories will assist in constructing and emphasizing vital building stones that may be applicable for academics and practitioners aiming to improve the game of women’s football. The data analysis process has led to a portrayal of the most meaningful categories, which serve as the empirical body of this research. This part of the article illustrates the inductive method of this research, which is

Table 2. Overview of respondents from the focus group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group – current or former Danish sport management students (anonymous):</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, age 22, personal relationship to football: plays in the 3F* league for AaB, former player for Skovbakken, watches football 1–2 times per week live and on TV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, age 24, personal relationship to football: has played for 10 years at the recreational level, watches football 1–2 times per week live and on TV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, age 24, personal relationship to football, has played for 15 years at the structured amateur level, watches football 3–4 times per week live and on TV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, age 24, personal relationship to football: plays in the 3F league for Fortuna Hjørring and for the Danish national team, watches football 3–4 times per week live and on TV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, age 25, personal relationship to football: has played for 12–15 years at the recreational level, watches most of the live games of the local Super League team and watches some football on TV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*3F is a title sponsor of the best women’s football league in Denmark.
founded upon a research tradition where the empirical categories also reflect associations to relevant theory.

5.1. The importance of winning and success (elite and grassroots)

Scholars\(^5\) elaborate on the importance of vicarious achievements, and a sport’s positioning may most likely be boosted from winning performances. For that reason, it makes sense to relate sports products to different degrees of winning, e.g. a dominant winning product, a product that wins often enough to be competitive and a product that loses enough to disconnect from its fan base without the possibility of winning in any reasonable time frame.\(^5\) The importance of winning was also positively associated with the brand equity of women’s football.\(^6\)

Brandi Chastain recalls the significance of winning performances in terms of how that can move a sport and individual athletes by stating that;

"Things like being in the first Olympic Games and going to the first Women’s World Cup, you know, winning championships and everything, those are all amazing and of course as a competitive person and somebody who enjoys being challenged, those were necessary."

Thomas Slosarich subjoins by expressing that ‘We all like to be good at something. We like to win, we like to score goals. Really all the things that football is capable of’. In response to a question about what it takes to build, grow and sustain women’s football at various levels, Brandi Chastain also notes;

"That is a thesis in itself … You have to be able to define what is soccer (football) in this country and what is the level you are talking about because, you know, what may be completely satisfactory or satiate the desire of one group, let’s say grassroots soccer may not fulfill the requirements or the needs of the collegiate game or may not fulfill the needs of the professional game. I think attempting to have one identity is very difficult, and I think that is why we have so many fractions here."

That is supplemented by Tiffeny Milbrett who mentions that

"I just think that in general as you become more and more successful and it\(^6\) reaches greater audiences, you know, more eyes, it attracts more people because they can see your performance."

Brandi Chastain also touches upon the fact that women’s football must have a good infrastructure and learning environment, i.e.

"The fundamental reality of sport is the development and if you lose sight of that development, especially when you get to the higher levels from the collegiate to the professional level, you don’t have the quality anyway to be what you think you ought to be."

This links to the vital paradox and dilemma in sports that there is no proper elite level without the grassroots level and vice versa and the optimal set-up should thus be found in an understanding of this balance and positive interactions between both poles to avoid unhealthy polarization. According to Brandi Chastain, this process should include the fact that ‘Participation, to me, should equal development, should equal education’. Tiffeny Milbrett adds to this topic by underlining that proper development builds massive amounts of positive identification;
I think sometimes it’s hard to truly translate why watching a performance at the highest level and watching the US team win like the World Cup gold medals, the Olympic gold medals, why does that affect and touch people? But it does and I think for me, I have always tried to lead by example.

Winning also plays a central role in another regard. A sports product like ‘Sensational 1’ may be capable of transforming the brand equity of women’s football and thus help to ‘re-brand’ the game. As Brandi Chastain stresses, ‘The pinnacle would be for this ball to be accepted and used in the World Championship and there is no reason why it couldn’t be’. So the brand association with strong winning performances, which equals being at the finest national and international stages will add to the brand equity of the sports product and may help to ‘re-brand’ the game positively given the ball’s features, see, Section 1. Majken Gilmartin complements this notion by saying that ‘We have a huge thing to do in getting recognition from society’. This recognition may stem from winning performances or successful experiences, which may be generated by applying ‘Sensational 1’ and thus from implementing a form of ‘re-branding’ by changing the perception of the game like we have seen in other sports where there have been made small adjustments to women’s sports.62 Thomas Slosarich articulates it this way;

When the men suddenly under-performed extensively after the good old days with the candy boys, then all of us became crazy about women’s handball with Anja Andersen and Rikke Solberg and company. Among other things, I think this was due to the fact that they were capable of delivering technical delicacies. They were capable of playing fast handball because they could throw and catch that ball.

Additionally, this element is brought up by the focus group without any previous framing from the interviewer. This is also in alignment with research which points to the fact that brand equity in sports is a phenomenon to be found as a result of interaction between different brands and brand levels while also encompassing various team, organization and market-related antecedents like winning and success of the sports products, the entertainment package related to the product and the entire format that surrounds the sport or the sports product like rules and regulations of the game.63

The importance of winning in sports branding is evident in various research projects. Lock et al.64 called attention to vicarious achievements as a key factor in team identification, which is supported by other research65 and the fact that individuals strive for proximity to successful others.66 A vital finding reflected in my qualitative empirical body is that of ‘having a guiding star’, which is winning, to lean on in the process of seeking enhanced brand equity around ‘Sensational 1’ and women’s football and to re-brand the latter. Thus, it serves as an important asset that the successful Danish football star Christian Eriksen, who plays for Tottenham Hotspur in the English Premier League, acts as a product endorser on the website associated with ‘Sensational 1’. Moreover, focus group data reveal that good results are key for DBU in recognizing women’s football but that the governing body is hesitant to provide the resources necessary to gain the same level of success seen in neighbouring countries like Sweden and Germany. One of the respondents who plays for a top club in Denmark and the national team stresses this by saying that;

How can we expect to create results if we are not provided with the necessary development and resources in our daily practices. Then, we cannot expect that our level is comparable to those in Sweden and Germany, which spend much money on women’s
football. I think that it is a big problem wanting results on one hand but not being willing to put something into it on the other hand. Then, it is hard to create the results and it will create a negative circle given that women’s football will not see increased revenues before the results are created.

So monetizing on women’s football and hence reinventing the brand around the sport is linked to positive results, which is also in harmony with a sports brand’s dependence on athletic performances. 67

5.2. Passion and the business of sports

Several scholars have elaborated on an economy where brands on their own are no longer sustainable and where consumers are central with emotional and functional needs in mind 66 and where brands can cash in on the passion and high identification levels that characterize brand management in the business of sports. 69 Brandi Chastain backs this point when she expresses her passion for the game of football, which is in alignment with scholarly arguments 70 that brand equity (in this case football in general) arises when people hold strong, unique and favourable brand associations in memory;

My mother was the … now people would call it the soccer mom, you know, the traditional soccer mom, you know organizing all the other parents and the functions that happened kind of around the outside of the soccer field and we just started going to the soccer field every weekend and we became season ticket holders to the San Jose Earthquakes when they were from the North American Soccer League so that was in the 1970s. I still have the ticket stubs from back in those days. We had no idea what we were getting in to. We just … we all recognized that it was something that … that it became part of our lives and then everything else kind of starting revolving around that and …

Nonetheless, there is a paradox found in the different perceptions of men’s vs. women’s football and as Thomas Slosarich states there is a lot of room to promote women’s football positively;

When I sit and watch the Danish women’s national football team or Fortuna Hjørring vs. Brøndby, which for many years have been the two leading clubs in Denmark, and I think that the technical and tactical quality is far below what I expect from the best. […] I think it was an excellent opportunity I got to again join the work when Majken came and presented the idea. And then I would say that there is also an opportunity to kick down the barriers.

To fully exploit and promote the potential of women’s football, the convergence between the passion for the game and the business side should be explicit. Tiffeny Milbrett expresses this by mentioning ‘I was able to experience so many sports, what I can tell you is that truly soccer was the one sport that I just loved the most, enjoyed the most’. She continues by highlighting the importance of opportunities to break through and to attract business interest when playing at the finest stages;

The opportunities are out there so being in the Olympics, which is a goal of sports, being in the Women’s World Cup […] You have opportunities to challenge yourself and be at the highest level as a female. […] First of all I think it takes support. It takes money. It takes funding and with that … that is what creates the opportunities of day in and day out training. You really need that. I mean not that you need 365 days of training, but what you need is, you need money given in order to focus 100% on what you need to become the best player you can be. Even in this country, even in the
places where I have played, Sweden and Japan where they were mostly semi-pro and what that meant is that most players had to work during the day and then they trained at night. Even that is not unnatural. You need people who are willing to, organizations, clubs, national governing bodies, US Soccer Federation, even the national teams’ federations in the rest of the world to say, you know what, these women deserve to be at the highest … even at very young, even at U12s or U13s, they deserve the opportunity to train and play at the highest that they can for the better part of the year and that takes money, investment.

So, it is imperative that the most essential stakeholders of the game do what they can to act in accountable ways in alignment with what is best for the development of women’s football at all levels. Thus, the fine move here would be to blend the most passionate contributors to women’s football with commercial support that gives women’s football optimal conditions to play the game.  

5.3. Accountability and role models

For women’s football, ‘Sensational 1’ and for other sports products to be successful in building added brand equity, it is vital to exploit the commercial potential tied to co-branding initiatives and collaboration with game-changers like other successful brands at various levels (e.g. UEFA, FIFA, IMG, or Adidas). Respondents stress the importance of accountability and engagement from athletes, sports-governing bodies, and other stakeholders and role models capable of helping to shift focus on women’s football to become valuable from a brand equity perspective. This also points to the importance of ‘hybrid sports branding’. In an interview in a Danish newspaper, Steen Klingenberg, Project Coordinator for DBU hopes for the same branding and idolization processes in Danish women’s football, which have been seen around women’s tennis (Wozniacki) and handball but also to be able to bridge the gap to men’s football if women’s football finds a player who is a star on the Danish women’s national soccer team to hang on the wall and look up to. Brandi Chastain says;

It’s an interesting debate because there are those who feel it’s not my responsibility, not me personally, but like as an athlete it’s not my responsibility to worry about what other people expect from me or want from me, and then there are those who feel, well here is an opportunity to really influence, either the game, the brand, my person, my philosophy whatever it is. And I think I tend to lean towards more the ambassador who should uphold, not a higher standard, I think everybody should be held to a high standard, everybody should have the same value of themselves, whether or not they get their picture on the cover of the magazine, you know. That just seems obvious to me. But I feel like if you are going to put yourself in the public arena, then you have a responsibility, a social responsibility to, I don’t know if it is to self-behave, but it is to be accountable. And that’s hard because some days, like yourself, like me, like anybody else you can pull from the street, you have your good days, and you have your bad days. And so my standard shouldn’t be any higher than yours, Kenneth, and your standard shouldn’t be any less than the next person.

Tiffeny Milbrett supplements by mentioning;

I am an example. I think I am an example of what’s possible what I’ve had to endure, where I’ve come from but ultimately look where I’ve ended up, okay. And then with that I think I have to pass on the knowledge that I gained from all those years of experience as well as my personal theories and opinions and share those things as well. So I think it’s those two things combined. Being the example but also sharing that knowledge and passing that on and trying to give that to others.
Tiffeny’s articulation reflects the combination of taking passion and turning that into a situation where your dreams come true and those stories are also important when seeking to produce brand equity in women’s football.

To successfully brand and implement ‘Sensational 1’ in the football world, it would probably require the support of a strong sports brand or sports organization. Brandi Chastain elaborates on this;

The obvious, I think, the pinnacle would be for this ball to be accepted and used in the World Championship and there is no reason why it couldn’t be. I mean, there are balls being produced every day, to make it a foreign one half-sized ball shouldn’t be the deal breaker. So I think that for it to be used in the championship, for it to be played on …

I even think anybody younger than 13 no matter if you are a boy or a girl, should be playing with a ball like this. Just because your body is not developed, you know? You are not strong enough.

This links to the overall conditions and environment for women’s football, which is also noted in the introduction and backed by Tiffeny Milbrett;

Again it goes back to what I said about balance. Because as an athlete that’s been around, you know, I think a lot of unhealthy environments … you can try as an individual to be as responsible as you need for yourself. Like a balance, you can have your own philosophies and theories and you can actually practice those and say, well I need this, but you know what? If you are in an environment where the person in charge says, no you don’t. Get back out there and work harder, when in fact you know what you need or you need something different at the time, it doesn’t matter how balanced you are as an athlete when you are being controlled, if you will, and being asked to do something that you know, you don’t need at that time. So I think it’s super important, and I mean from the ownership down or the investors down, we need to come to an understanding of what is a better environment for athletes, for people, men’s game, women’s game, because ultimately, like I’ve said before, mentally stronger and an emotionally healthy person is going to facilitate a better soccer player, a stronger, healthier, more able soccer player.

Majken Gilmartin adds that it is important;

That this is about girls illustrates once again the debate in terms of us not being good enough at turning this into business, but there is also a need for a role model on our side, that we know how to find a sponsor and to turn this into business. That is also a strategy to be a good role model. […] To give the football players a chance to play the game that they can. […] We should preferably have some kind of collaboration for a couple of years so that we work on adjusting the whole women’s side. […] It is fun to play with it, but on female terms.

Thomas Slosarich takes this discussion a step further when he touches on the motivation to join this branding process due to women feeling the need to be accountable for their own development but also due to the safety parameter linked to ‘Sensational 1’;

There are a lot of great, strong women who take responsibility for their own development and that means that they are the ones that we will have to approach and put behind us as a movement. […] Regardless of UEFA, FIFA join this, then you can say that if we do the same work as has been done in Denmark then you will definitely and proportionally be able to move the same amount of balls in other countries as well and especially, as we talked about, the Americans, who focus so much on safety where girls have been playing football for years and because it is a safe sport, a safer sport than what they could have been offered if they had been boys.
5.4. Brand articulation and marketability

When bringing the brand to life, it is essential that there is alignment between the ideas and values behind the product, market place needs and a positive future-oriented direction.74 Brandi Chastain comments on how the ‘Sensational 1’ football may improve the game of women’s football. She states that;

‘I think it’s a smart … it’s smart in that way and I also feel that it’s … it has … there’s an intuitive quality to it that makes sense. When you take a man who is 6’3 and 185 lbs or 190 lbs and the force that most soccer players, you know, 5’7 and 130 lbs, it’s not going to be the same, so it doesn’t make sense. So this to me intuitively is a much smarter ball than the ball we are using.’ ‘So this to me is a solution to what I think is a problem, which is, maybe people don’t see it as a problem but I think if you got down to the nuts and bolts, you see a problem, that we are using the same ball as a population that should use that ball, you know, given their size and their strength. Then, you know, you add something like injuries. That is truly a concern and if that is something that, you know, for FIFA’s longevity, they have to deal with that. How can this ball improve the quality of the game as well as the quality and the health of the players? It’s a no-brainer to me. It just makes perfect sense.’

One of the respondents from the focus group, a member of the Danish women’s national team, notes that ‘Well, if you think that it is brilliant that we have a ball, which suits us. It makes sense’. Another respondent supplements her, who states, ‘I think that it is a really good idea if it reduces injuries, becomes a faster game, etc’. The latter respondent also raised the question of whether or not the ball was invented just to reduce injuries and to create a faster game and thus also touched on the attractiveness of the game of football, which caused another respondent to bring up an interesting dilemma as the ball interacts with a lot of emotions. The emotions are related to whether or not and how this ball should be implemented, i.e. ‘There are mixed emotions involved when you ask people if we should implement it’.75

Brandi Chastain placed an interesting comment in that regard by mentioning that the implementation of the new ball will not revolutionize the nature of the game, but will rather enhance vital aspects of the game such as minimizing injuries and enhancing the attractiveness of the game by making it faster and more dynamic;

And that is what I think something like this ball, it doesn’t change the game. I mean, the ball still has to go into the net, it still needs to be shared with all the other players on the field, it will still take special players to make special plays but it will enhance those things as opposed to detract from them.

This goes well with the thoughts of differentiating aspects of women’s football from men’s football. Majken Gilmartin adds that it is important that women’s football is somehow differentiated from men’s football;

It is fun to play with it, but on female terms. […] The more that think and work along with us, the stronger is our process. […] We should preferably have some kind of collaboration for a couple of years so that we work on adjusting the whole women’s side. […] We must not be like the boys again. We must find our own methods.

Generally, the question about differentiating vital aspects of women’s football from men’s football formed an interesting interaction in the focus group where respondents concluded on the marketability potential and the brand articulation of ‘Sensational 1’, i.e. one respondent says;
At least, I think that it is a really good idea, well now I think like there is no reason to hide that there are differences between men and women and their strength. I just think that you are accommodating that with this ball. In team handball, there is also differences in the size of the ball.

Another respondent notes that ‘It would be really good if you chose to say that you start with the ball in the youth years and then you can bring it up’. That blends well with what one of the elite players say, i.e.

You have to get used to it. But I really think that it is a good initiative. It shows that there are people who bother to think about women’s football and do something about it. It is a huge step …

When answering the question of whether or not ‘Sensational 1’ can contribute positively to women’s football in terms of raising awareness among the general population, the media and sponsors, the general opinion in both the focus group and the personal interviews is in favour of the new ball. As a direct confirmation of this claim, the women’s national team player from the focus group starts by emphasizing that ‘I definitely think that it would, people just need to dare to accept it.’, a statement that is backed by other respondents, i.e. ‘Yes, exactly.’ and ‘We also have the Jabulani ball and we also got that from one day to another. And it has been really weird. But when you get used to it’. Tiffeny Milbrett takes the concepts of brand articulation and marketability a step further. She highlights the importance of making these concepts applicable in the practical process of bringing ‘Sensational 1’ to life in the world of women’s football;

You have to be able to market it. So show that it works, it can’t just be a lemon that you are trying to sell. Show that it works but also you got to break through, you know, the companies and the products that have, if you will, like formed a great wall or a barrier to the rest of the consumers. That is your challenge, I mean, that a lot of people have a lot of great ideas and products and they work, it’s just that good luck, so you need a lot of money, a lot of backing, in order to carve out your own market share, if you will.76

Thomas Slosarich supports this when he notes that ‘If we can get the right people to speak in a country like the US, then there will be huge opportunities in terms of producing and selling balls there’. But he also breaks into an interesting dilemma, which arises in the interaction between accountability, brand articulation and marketability. He lists;

There is a lot implied in the permission, the opportunity to use the ball in official matches at all levels. […] But as long as it is not the one that we are allowed to play with in our adult games, well then it does not matter that we train with it 2 or 3 times per week because we must play with the other ball after all.

That speaks for the essence of implementing it in the youth years and to bring it up from there as mentioned above but it also integrates the ‘hybrid’ and hence interacting nature of sports branding 77 at any level when aiming to build brand equity around ‘Sensational 1’ and women’s football or to ‘re-brand’ the latter. That dilemma is also brought up in the focus group where one respondent lists the importance of collaboration between sponsors of women’s football and the governing bodies, i.e. ‘If you made some kind of contract with 3F then you could probably fix something. Between the Danish FA and 3F’. Majken Gilmartin adds that ‘Sensational 1’ has already articulated some relevant stories and thus added to its brand
equity and marketability and she believes that it may spark more interest in a new future for women’s football:

The way I see it right now, we have pushed it far enough into the systems so now the discussions are unavoidable. And then you could preferably have the situation where we need the stories – the recognition stories, my story where I say that I go in and do this and that is really a little mission impossible but we do it anyway. [...] Hopefully, it inspires other women and maybe other women in my generation who maybe say that we can also make a difference in this for the coming generations in raising demands for football to be adapted to us so that it matches all of us and so that we have a chance to be recognized for what we can do.

6. Concluding remarks and future research

Given the positive participation numbers in relation to women’s football in Denmark over the past couple of decades, the invention of ‘Sensational 1’ presents an interesting case of how to take advantage of the commercial opportunities tied to enhancing the brand equity of women’s football and thus creating a new and brighter future for all stakeholders in the sport of women’s football.

However, to find the ‘Promised Land’ in terms of optimizing the brand equity of ‘Sensational 1’ and thereby women’s football in Denmark and abroad, this article stresses some dynamic and fundamental parameters that should be taken into consideration by academics and practitioners with an interest for improving women’s football:

- Existing research and the empirical data showed that ‘Sensational 1’ is meant to produce physical changes to women’s football so that stakeholders may find the tactical, technical and mental side of the game more appealing. Thus, all stakeholders should consider the positive meaning of shaping the game so that it retains its overall meaning but improves the aspects of tempo, dynamism, technical aesthetics, safety and attractiveness for active and passive participants in the sport.

- Winning and success matter in women’s football as in any sport and can build brand equity and higher levels of acceptance, but winning does not do the job alone. The emotional equity linked to winning and success is of course important, but so is the emotional equity tied to the passion of sport. So there is a fine balance of what to bring in play in interactions with various groups, i.e. at the grassroots, recreational and elite levels. Success and winning are not the same phenomena, but a key element in this aspect of the sport also stems from successful experiences associated with participating in the sport and from how ‘Sensational 1’ is implemented and affects the game, e.g. via an acceptance of this ball for the highest national and international competitions. These successful experiences may stem from the interactions with persons, products and organizations in association with the sport.

- Creating a strong platform for women’s football is a long process that must integrate and nourish the passion of all stakeholders. At present, the popularity of women’s football in Denmark is reflected in growing participation numbers so the timing to act accordingly is good. As we have seen in other countries, it would make sense to build a strong bridge between positive participation numbers and the interest among other stakeholder groups. The purpose should not
be to change the game of women’s football but to make it more attractive by adapting the factors, which add positive meaning to the game and can be controlled, e.g. that has also been the case in children’s football where football associations have implemented smaller fields, fewer players and smaller goals so that it is easier for players to get around on the field with the ball while optimizing the flow of the ball in relation to the size of the field.

- This research emphasizes that football associations and other stakeholders should recognize women’s football in a way where recognition equals the accountability and willingness related to investing in the sport. Investments may refer to support for a product like ‘Sensational 1’, which may enhance the brand equity of the sport, or to support for other aspects of the sport with positive impact. Focus should be on creating an environment in which women’s football players do not feel neglected and overlooked. Various stakeholders may change the current culture so that it goes towards a situation where more people will participate and enjoy women’s football. This requires that stakeholders are more accountable in terms of providing a better environment for women’s football. That means that there should be investments in finding and promoting good role models, financial contributions, CSR-initiatives to improve the game via focus on injury reduction and a concentration on a better and more appealing product due to increased flow of the game so that it will enhance the appeal for players, sponsors, media, fans and sports-governing bodies. If a ball like ‘Sensational 1’ can improve the game of women’s football it does not seem accountable not to recognize this potential.

- Strategic support is essential for ‘Sensational 1’ and women’s football to enhance the brand equity levels for what reason ‘Sensational 1’ is a sports product which marks a step in the right direction given the fact that the physical conditions of women’s football players do not perfectly match the current size 5 ball. That places the importance of ‘hybrid sports branding’ at the centre of attention since any sports brand needs the proper strategic interactions and ongoing maintenance to enhance its brand equity. So far, women’s football has been associated with being boring so a reinvention of the sport will most likely equal higher brand equity and thus better commercialization of women’s football. The convergence between the passion for women’s football, the improvement in the sport via ‘Sensational 1’ and the business side should preferably go hand in hand. The game of football should not be changed but ‘Sensational 1’ can differentiate women’s football from men’s football in a way that takes what is best for the female actors into consideration.

For women’s football in Denmark to be more successful in the future and to enhance its brand equity, it requires good international results and successful stakeholder experiences. This can be created through transformation in the sense that integrates passion for the game and an understanding of a new reality where growing participation numbers are exploited via a situation where DBU and other relevant stakeholders improve the brand articulation towards more fun and entertainment associated with women’s football. To sum up, this requires a good interaction between ‘being accountable’ and proper brand articulation and marketability with the best of the development of women’s football in mind.
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Notes
1. As an example, the amount of female football players up to 18 years of age has increased from 22,273 in 1988 to 52,384 active players under the Danish Football Association/DBU in 2010 and in 2010 there was a total of 71,273 female players in Denmark under DBU, see DBU, ‘Oversigt over aktive’, 2011; DIF, ‘Medlemstal’, 2011.
3. More specifically, stakeholder engagement is tied to a holistic perception of the business model and hence the brand influencers surrounding women’s football. These may include more concrete elements like fan affiliation, fan engagement, media and sponsorship interest, see Camp, ‘Latest Thinking’.
5. Andersen et al., ‘Kicking Velocity’.
6. Stiles et al., ‘Natural Turf Surfaces’.
8. See, note 5.
9. See, note 5, 1637; Farrow and Reid, ‘The Effect of Equipment’.
12. Houlihan and Green, Comparative Elite Sport Development.
13. DIF, Idrætten i Danmark; Skille, ‘Sport for all’; and Hylton, Sports Development.
15. Keeping in mind that women’s football in the US has been successful from a participation viewpoint, see Martinez, ‘Soccer in the USA’.
18. Football ranks as the number one sport worldwide but in terms of these rankings readers must keep in mind that they refer to the overall popularity of football and hence the hidden detail that it is by far the most popular men’s sport. In other words, there is still improvement to be done concerning women’s football, see Schossberg, Sports Marketing; Mullin et al., Sport Marketing (2007); and Gómez et al., Value Creation and Sport Management.
19. Lock et al., ‘Starting with’.
20. This refers to the amount of significant change, which professional Australian soccer has undergone since 2003. Despite high participation rates at the grassroots level, Australian professional soccer have struggled to capture stakeholders, part of which is associated with the predominance of ethnically based teams, see Lock et al., ‘Starting with’, 19.
21. See, note 2; Brus, ‘Fodbold’.
22. Sorensen, ‘Et Kvindeligt Opråb’.
23. ‘Game, Sex and Match’, The Economist.
26. Brus and Trangbæk, ‘Asserting the Right’
27. See, note 19; Skinner et al., ‘Coming in’.
28. Standing Committee on Recreation & Sports, Exercise (2002); Standing Committee on Recreation & Sports, Exercise (2003); Standing Committee on Recreation & Sports, Exercise (2004); Standing Committee on Recreation & Sports, Exercise (2005); Standing Committee on Recreation & Sports, Exercise (2006); Exercise, Recreation, and Sport...
34. Aaker and Joachimstahl, Brand Leadership; Keller, Strategic Brand Management.
37. Bridgewater, Football Management.
38. See, Aaker, Managing Brand Equity.
39. Tybout and Sternthal, Focus Groups.
40. Pitts and Stotlar, Fundamentals of Sport Marketing; Fatsis, ‘The Coolest Game’; and Batchelor and Formentin, ‘Re-branding the NHL’.
41. See, note 10.
42. Smith et al., ‘Brand Personality’.
43. See, note 15.
44. Hamel, Case Study Methods; Stake, ‘Case Studies’; Maaløe, Casestudier; Amis, ‘The Art of Interviewing’; and Yin, Case Study Research.
45. Chen and Pearce, ‘Even if’.
47. Gaskell, ‘Individual and Group Interviewing’; Madriz, ‘Focus Groups’; and Berg and Lune, Qualitative Research Methods.
48. Mead and Morris, Mind, Self and Society; Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism; and Fast, Videnskabsteori og metodologi.
51. See Brinkmann and Kvale, Interviews.
52. See Hamel, Case Study Methods; Stake, ‘Case Studies’; Maaløe, Casestudier; and Chen and Pearce, ‘Even If’.
53. See Brinkmann and Kvale, Interviews.
54. Gratton and Jones, Research Methods for Sport.
55. Burrell and Morgan, Sociological Paradigms; Bryman, Quantity and Quality.
56. See, note 48.
57. Denzin, Interpretive Biography; Sparkes, ‘Illness, Premature Career-Termination’.
58. Fink et al., ‘An Examination of Team’; Beech and Chadwick, The Marketing of Sport; Smith, Introduction to Sport Marketing; and see, note 10.
59. Rein et al., The Elusive Fan.
60. See Brus and Trangbæk, ‘Asserting the Right’; and ‘Game, Sex and Match’, The Economist.
61. This marks an evident and strong relationship between winning, success and reach in terms of a greater audience for what reason Tiffeny just as well could have added a ‘therefore’ at this point.
62. In women’s sport, there have already been made meaningful adjustments to sports like women’s handball (smaller ball size), women’s basketball (ball size) and women’s tennis (women play best-of-three-sets in the four Grand Slam tournaments). This is alignment with research that marks a bridge between elements like ball size, format changes, sporting quality and aesthetics and the popularity and branding of sports, see, note 5; Hardy et al., ‘Toward a History’; Funk et al., ‘Measuring the Motives’. The same
research highlights that the size and mass of balls in basketball and team handball are smaller for females than for males to accommodate the physiological gender differences and the technical skill execution, see, note 5.

63. See, note 10; and Gladden et al., ‘A Conceptual Framework’.
64. See, note 19.
65. See, Fink et al., ‘An Examination of Team’; Cialdini et al., ‘Basking in Reflected Glory’.
67. De Chernatony and McDonald, Creating Powerful Brands; Holt, How Brands become Icons; Hanlin et al., High Visibility; and Jensen, Dream Society.
68. Ind, Living the Brand; Malthouse and Calder, ‘Relationship Branding and CRM’.


Capitalising on CSR-based partnerships in sports branding and sports sponsorship

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to develop a toolkit for academics and practitioners, which elaborates on how strategic application of corporate social responsibility (CSR) may guide sports branding initiatives and sponsorship partnerships and lead to increased levels of brand capitalisation. Inspired by Shank’s (2009) notion of the sports brand building process, i.e.: 1) brand awareness; 2) brand image; 3) brand equity; 4) brand loyalty, the interacting nature of sports brands exemplified by how sports brands at the corporate level interact with sports brands at the personal and product levels is integrated in the article. This is done to propose how these interactions may increase the effect of the work with strategic CSR on corporate sports brands.

Keywords: strategic corporate social responsibility; CSR; emotional equity; brand equity; ROI, sports management; sports marketing; sports branding; sports sponsorship.

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1 Introduction

Sports-related organisations, which some people may refer to as sports entities, is a term used throughout this article. The term includes entities having sport as a core function, i.e., sports events, athletes, professional sports teams, sports governing bodies, sports leagues, sports clubs, sports gear manufacturers etc.; it also includes entities where sport is not a core function, but merely something to be used as a communication, marketing, branding, sponsorship, or promotional platform to create ‘added value’, i.e., Carlsberg, Mastercard or Rolex. This view is backed by Fullerton and Merz (2008, p.90) and Pitts and Stotlar (1996) who stated that, “in order to fully appreciate and understand the dynamics and differing perspectives of sports marketing, it is imperative that the task of marketing through sports also be accepted as an integral component of the industry”. Pitts and Stotlar (2002, pp.3–4) define sport management as “the study and practice involved in relation to all people, activities, businesses, and organizations involved in producing, facilitating, promoting, or organizing any good that is sport, fitness and recreation related. Sport products can be goods, services, people, places, or ideas”. Their definition fits my definition of sports-related organisations.

A powerful sports brand is capable of building brand equity (Boone et al., 1995; Apostolopoulou and Gladden, 2007) by means of strategic communication; this is true not only for the brand itself but also for allied sponsor brands (Mueller and Roberts, 2008). That reflects the impact of sports branding. It also allows room for strategic corporate social responsibility (CSR) (McElhaney, 2008; Babiak and Wolfe, 2009; Bruch and Walter, 2005; Bradish, 2006; Babiak and Sheth, 2009; Kott, 2005; Kent and Walker, 2009; Van de Ven, 2008) as a defining element in building brand equity, which is vital for financing sports operations. Hence, building a sports brand has numerous positive effects on the allied partners, e.g., influencing consumer behaviours by improving attendance, merchandising sales, or participation in sports (Shank, 2009). Brand satisfaction is associated with brand equity and so is the economic value of the brand and those partnering with the brand by linking brand equity to brand-loyal stakeholders that secure value or incoming cash flows via repeated purchases (Shank, 2009; Berry, 1999; Funk and Gladden, 2001; Milochn, 2005; Ruekert et al., 1994). As a result of increased focus on brand management (Beech and Chadwick, 2007; Milochn, 2010; Fiedler and Kirchgeorg, 2007; Meffert and Bierwirth, 2005; Wheeler, 2006; Sherry, 2005; Eagleman, 2010), there has also been a rapid increase in the importance of building relationships with stakeholders (Shank, 2009).

2 Defining theory

The interrelationship between sports branding, sports sponsorship and strategic CSR makes sense based on the fact that strong sports brands produce emotional reactions that will rub off on a sponsor’s products since the actors engage in a ‘hybrid sports branding marriage’ where brand values interact (Cortsen, 2013); this is also true in interactions with other sports brands or partners at various levels. CSR has a similar emotional appeal, which motivated this article’s aim to interrelate these concepts.
2.1 Sports branding

Sports branding can be defined as:

“a long-term, intensive, and successful partnership between a sponsor and a sponsoree in which both parties are equal and have brand status at their disposal. This partnership is based on trust. Both partners have a high mutual identification and pursue mutual strategic goals.” [Adjouri and Stastny (2006), p.116] (Translated from German into English by the author)

While it is also relevant to consider sports branding as “a name, term, design, symbol, or any combination that a sports organisation (or individual athlete as is the case with David Beckham) uses to help differentiate its products from the competition” [Shank, (2009), p.206]’, Adjouri and Stastny’s definition of sports branding is in harmony with the aims of this article as it is closely linked to sports sponsorship. That is interesting because this article takes the interrelationship between sports branding and strategic CSR to a capitalisation level through the integration of sponsorship. This stems from the perception that the involvement of strategic CSR for sports branding purposes most often requires the establishment of partnerships based on positive associations.

Bedbury (2003) and other researchers argue for the importance that sports-related organisations communicate their core brand messages given the fact that consumers are most likely already educated on product features (Funk and Gladden, 2001; Madrigal, 1995; TianShiang et al., 2004; Godin, 2002; Holt, 2004) and Miloch (2010, p.3) supplements in stating that “Brand perception plays a key role in the financial vitality and long-term success of sport companies”. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) elaborate on shifts in branding practices over time. Years ago, the strategic feature of branding was often set aside or ignored whereas the shift in focus from brand image towards brand equity indicates that a strong branding process becomes a significant asset for organisations; an asset that may lead to competitive advantages and sustainable profitability (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Ourossoff, 1994). FC Barcelona exemplified this when assessing the club’s partnership with UNICEF meant to improve the conditions for children worldwide. This is a good fit between UNICEF’s mission and FC Barcelona’s slogan ‘More than a Club’. The toolkit presented later in this article goes beyond the fact that people know the products of corporate sports brands by displaying the vitality of communicating what the organisations behind these products stand for.

2.2 Strategic CSR

Ever since the work of Carroll (1979), CSR has been a developing practice and research field. However, this article strategises CSR by emphasising its application in connection with corporate strategy for what reason McElhaney’s (2008, p.5) definition of strategic CSR is applied, i.e., “a business strategy that is integrated with core business objectives and core competencies of the firm and from the outset is designed to create business value and positive social change, and is embedded in day-to-day business culture and operations”.
From this viewpoint, strategic CSR is essential in a corporate branding setting when seeking to combine maximisation of business value with positive social change (McElhaney, 2008). In a sports context, CSR has also developed and started to take up space in the minds of strategic management as demonstrated by Bradish and Cronin (2009). With the role of sports in society, cf., affecting masses of people, and CSR having influenced strategic managerial agendas in the general corporate world for decades, it is something to pay attention to for sports-related organisations.

3 Research methodology

Empirically, this research is based on two qualitative semi-structured focus group interviews with 'purposively selected' respondents working with sports-related organisations to clarify the connotation of their experiences with strategic CSR and building and managing sports brands at the corporate level (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009; Botan et al., 2000). This research embraces a qualitative approach under an interpretative paradigm (Gratton and Jones, 2004; Guba, 1990). The dialogical and interactionist approach emphasises the importance of covering respondents’ opinions and understandings of the application of strategic CSR in a sports setting (Mead and Morris, 1934; Blumer, 1986; Fast, 1996). This design is relevant because to derive meaning, to fully understand and to develop theories linked to phenomena in sports branding is a process, which requires a qualitative research methodology (Smith and Stewart, 2001). Techniques inspired by qualitative open coding are applied to analyse the interview data. The focus group interviews facilitate this research methodology by portraying concrete understanding and qualities linked to cultural, daily and situated facets of human learning, knowledge, thoughts, actions and self-understanding (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009; Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Thus, conclusions are constructed from analysis based on grounded theory (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and from transcriptions and open coding of the qualitative data from the focus group interviews to be able to characterise and mirror ideas, thoughts, experiences and actions mentioned by the respondents (Charmaz, 2005; Gibbs, 2007). Coding and interpretation of meaning is grounded in relevant theory and knowledge and thus integrated in the process of generating knowledge, which is strongly connected to contextualising and re-contextualising in connection with the junction between sports branding, strategic CSR and sports sponsorship (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009).

The interpretative school of thought and qualitative methodology may often lead to more in-depth coverage of the same phenomena [Gratton and Jones, (2004), p.24]. The goal of this article is to generate knowledge about phenomena in a circumscribed social context (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1997), cf., a sports-related marketplace. To account for stringency in the scientific approach to this research, the concept of symbolic interactionism is brought to life. This is exemplified in the form that human behaviour should be perceived as dialogic developing from the interaction between self and other (Goffmann, 1959; Blumer, 1986; Mead and Morris, 1934).
Table 1  Overview of respondents from the two focus groups

Focus group 1 – current sport management practitioners representing various high-profile sports-related organisations:
- Keld Strudahl, Marketing Director at Carlsberg
- Jens Bekke, Communication Executive Officer at Carlsberg
- Louise Rømer Møgelvang, Project Manager – Business Development at Carlsberg
- Susanne Hedegaard Andersen, Director at TSE Consulting Scandinavia and former Director at Team Denmark and former Olympic Coach in figure skating
- Rasmus Ingerslev, CEO at Wexer, European Council Member at IHRSA, Board Member at Danish Fitness and Health Organization, Board Member at Anti Doping Denmark and former CEO and Founder of Fitness DK
- Majken Gilmartin, Creator of Cph MOVES, CEO Sensational Football/Sensational Street Soccer and Head of Sports at City of Copenhagen (worked with IOC Congress)
- Steen Ankerdal, Sports Journalist, Chairman for Danish Sport Journalists and former sports editor for various national Danish media corporations.

Focus group 2 – current or former Danish sport management students (anonymous):
- Female, age 26
- Female, age 26
- Male, age 23
- Male, age 24
- Male, age 26
- Male, age 27
- Male, age 28

The two focus groups were conducted to achieve a deeper understanding of the experiences related to how the process of applying strategic CSR may enhance sports branding initiatives and sponsorship partnerships as it refers to improved levels of brand equity and thereby better monetisation. Focus group 1 consists of sports business professionals with extensive practical experience. Focus group 2 consists of current or former sports management students with good academic and some internship and/or work experience within sports-related organisations. Focus group 2 was chosen to differentiate and supplement focus group 1. The focus group interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews in which the interview guide in Table 2 was used to stimulate open answers.

The methodology is built to provide knowledge and understandings founded on the platform of in-depth qualitative analysis based on various sport management practitioners revealing their personal understandings of the application of strategic CSR to commercially develop and manage sports brands. These understandings are then examined and analysed in the circumstantial perception of my experiences with other sports brands. Thus, the methodology creates an academic ground for an inductive (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009) style to determine and present a toolkit to be applied by academics and practitioners working within this context. Lastly, quantitative data from literature review and a series of well-known examples from the sports world are incorporated to evidence some qualitative points and to illustrate essential themes. Thus,
the article’s presentation of reflections is manifested in an extensive literature review followed by the inclusion of practical examples and empirical data. For that reason, a mix of theoretical discussions, practical examples as well as empirical data built on sport management practitioners’ and scholars’ discussions of the theoretical and practical topics of interest leads to the article’s findings and conclusions.

### Table 2 Questions applied in the two focus groups

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is it feasible to engage in CSR-based partnerships in sports (why/why not?) and what stakeholders are essential to collaborate with?</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>How do you suggest overcoming the barrier of getting different cultures to collaborate about a CSR-based initiative in sports and what is the meaning of culture (corporate or national) when strategic CSR is to be applied to create a corporate sports brand?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What problem areas must organisations (corporations, sports governing bodies, associations, clubs etc.) consider if they are to create partnerships based on the intersection between sports and CSR?</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Where is the limit in terms of what can be considered a CSR-based initiative and how important is it to clearly articulate the social responsibility in a given initiative or partnership?</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>What is the meaning of the relationship to media when aiming at creating successful CSR-based partnerships in sports?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>How do the framework for professional and amateur sport influence the work with CSR-based initiatives, partnerships and branding?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Do you see a change in the number of sports-related organisations, which apply aspects of CSR in their business activities and what are your expectations for the future?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Regarding CSR and sports branding, what is the meaning of stakeholder expectations concerning sports-related organisations’ capabilities to leverage brand promises and how do you perceive sports-related organisations’ appeal to stakeholders’ functional and emotional benefits?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>What factors are important when applying strategic CSR to create a corporate sports brand?</td>
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### 4 Creating corporate brand value via strategic aspects of CSR – finding a toolkit

The categories below, cf., 4.1–4.5, are inductively derived via qualitative open coding of the empirical data. This will help to structure the road towards a valuable corporate ‘sports branding/strategic CSR’ toolkit by applying the most meaningful categories to highlight the application of strategic CSR for commercial sports branding purposes, i.e., brand enhancement and brand capitalisation (the latter in relation to growing sports sponsorship potential). The categories were identified based on how many times certain topics were discussed, how specific the discussions were and the weight of the interactions among participants. That forms the framework for the toolkit.

#### 4.1 Is strategic CSR relevant in sports management?

Different scholars have emphasised CSR to be an important and beneficial tool for sport organisations (Breitbarth and Harris, 2008; Bradish and Cronin, 2009; Kent and Walker, 2009; Smith and Westerbeek, 2007; Babiak and Trendafilova, 2009; Ioakimidis, 2007;
Kent et al., 2007; O’Reilly et al., 2009; Robinson, 2005; Wolff, 2007; Bradish et al., 2008) and that sport is a suitable platform for CSR giving its attributes of being both a social and an economic institution (Babiak and Sheth, 2009; Smith and Westerbeek, 2007).

4.1.1 Key empirical findings

Strategic CSR is important – sports-related organisations should see much significance in applying strategic CSR for commercial purposes. The concept has come to stay and may help any sports-related organisation to create better sports sponsorship concepts and hence brand management processes.

This is supported by the following citations:

- Keld Strudahl comments on whether or not it is feasible to engage in commercial CSR partnerships in a sports context by stating “If I look at things from a commercial perspective, we spend tons of money on sports sponsorship. CSR is an area, which has not been fully exploited – maybe due to the fact that the potential has not thoroughly been pointed out but I see many opportunities now that it has come to the surface”.

- Several respondents from focus group 2 indicate the flourishing nature of the intersection between sports branding, sports sponsorship and strategic CSR, e.g., “There has been a huge change within, at least, the last 10 years. From being almost non-existing to flourishing everywhere”. Although there is widespread agreement among the respondents that the intersection is developing rapidly, one respondent from focus group 2 notes “It is not as much in Denmark as in foreign countries”.

- The articulation, knowledge and understanding of the concept in relation to sports branding is a key management constituent for the practice of sports branding, which is supported by continuous dialogue in the focus groups, e.g., Keld Strudahl states “CSR in sports has come to stay; that’s for sure. We have the potential and chance to help shape this debate. At the moment, we are negotiating with Liverpool FC (among others) and one of our objectives is not more tickets but merely to support a good cause, which we can utilize in our work”.

- Conversely, there is interaction in the focus groups emphasising that sports-related organisations are working with an area with much commercial potential, but there is still work to be conducted to exploit it holistically, e.g., Keld Strudahl mentions “I am sure that the area will develop and that it will create value for sports, the state and municipalities”, while Susanne Hedegaard Andersen notes “CSR should also be integrated in the internal perspective of corporations and not solely focus on support of external activities but also include a focus on activities in a corporation’s internal environment”.

- Accordingly, all parties must contribute in a CSR-partnership. That holds value for all sports-related organisations interested in promoting the positive impact of sports on various issues, e.g., health, education, and nutrition. Majken GilMartin puts it this way, “How everybody gets something out of it”, and Rasmus Ingerslev supplements by introducing the idea of ‘commercial idealism’ when he wonders why “it cannot be
extremely visible that there is a connection between the idealistic and the 
commercial”. Susanne Hedegaard Andersen indicates “And that’s where the big 
challenge is for you (Carlsberg, KHC) that it is projects with integrated motives; it is 
not only empty rhetoric. Like branding, you must be able to see that there are actions 
behind the words[…].”

• The future of sports management may see a growing number of more ‘active’ and 
‘innovative’ two-way dialogical partnerships based on CSR and ‘active’ should be 
perceived in the sense that partnerships should provide meaning for all parties, 
e.g., Susanne Hedegaard Andersen adds “It is all about finding meaningful projects”. 
Often the innovative and differentiating factor is found outside the elite sports 
playing field and the established corporate structures, i.e., among fans and 
grassroots. Steen Ankerdal states “If you want to find collaborative partners, you 
must also be deeply engaged in what happens on street corners or in the cities”. 
This spins off into the significance of the commercial interaction among engaged 
partners as Keld Strudahl mentions “As a corporation, we are born to make a profit 
for our investors and that can be accomplished in many ways no matter the size of 
the corporation”. Keld Strudahl goes on by underlining “Everybody must chip in…. 
(the media) you have to communicate the good message and if the good message is 
available then we hang on and benefit from it, but if we are constantly bombarded 
with the message that it is no good, then we do not have the guts anymore and we are 
no longer allowed to spend money on similar projects since it is perceived to be 
waiste of money”. A CSR-based partnership is a popular strategic factor for many 
or ganisations and CSR-based partnerships in a sports setting have come to stay. The 
latter may especially be true in a Danish context where application of strategic CSR 
through sports may serve as an implicit response to public grants or subsidies.

• However, a critical voice raises awareness of the impression that it may be an 
exception that professional sport is operated with a conscious social angle 
(it is often more about creating a win-win situation), e.g., Steen Ankerdal says 
“If we have to be objective, then it is an exception that sport is operated with a 
conscious social angle. All managers and coaches will say that they do social work. 
Basically, they do but that is not what is driving it. It is personal motives and 
self-satisfaction, which drives it. There is not a lot romanticism behind it”.

4.2 A stakeholder perspective – commercial potential tied to pride and 
emotional equity

The theory review advises that sports-related organisations trying to build their corporate 
brands via engagement in strategic CSR-based initiatives must pay close attention to 
internal and external stakeholders (Hatch and Schultz, 2001, 2008; Porter and Kramer, 
2006; Barnett, 2007; Bruch and Walter, 2005; Balmer and Greyser, 2003; Freeman et al., 
2010; Christensen et al., 2005; Elberse, 2013; Lee, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c).
Capitalising on CSR-based partnerships in sports branding

4.2.1 Key empirical findings

Optimal stakeholder management – sports-related organisations should keep the stakeholder perspective in mind when engaging in CSR-activities. For instance, an open dialogical approach where potential partners meet at an early stage is what private corporations and hence potential sponsors often expect from sports-related organisations wanting to establish a CSR-based partnership. That increases the chances that the branding outcome of the partnership is optimised while leveraging authentic and legitimate initiatives.

Pride and emotional equity – sports-related organisations should consider exploiting the commercial potential tied to engagement in brand building activities, which integrate sports sponsorship, emotional equity and pride. For instance, this gives sports-related organisations the opportunity to take advantage of sports’ appeal to the masses, hybrid sports branding and the balance between the emotional and functional side of a brand when focusing on ROIs via concentration on stakeholder interests, strategic focus, legitimacy and marketability.

This is supported by the following citations:

- Susanne Hedegaard Andersen refers to a discussion in national media about the difficulties concerning measurement of CSR; she mentions the vitality of pride in appealing to stakeholders, i.e., “We talk about a sponsorship from Carlsberg, then you are also dealing with pride in terms of being a sponsor for something with a social responsibility [...] You sponsor in a socially responsible way in sport and set the standard for the sport, so I would estimate that you will also obtain a greater sense of pride if employees feel pride due to you supporting Liverpool; not just because it is Liverpool but merely because they do something in terms of social responsibility”.

- A participant from focus group 2 says “We all have to do something about it and there is somebody that must lead. And the sports clubs are some of the entities that you could relate to in terms of starting this, so that you are socially responsible through them”.

- Majken Gilmartin adds that sport is a powerful vehicle to drive strategic CSR commercially, e.g., “A lot are looking up to the athletes and thus feel integrated in the athletes and thereby they can have a good influence on people…” She also suggests that the sports world in Denmark needs “Inspirational cases for Danish sports clubs and municipalities so that they can understand the scope of opportunities and thereby offer something”.

- The interactions revealed in the focus groups emphasise that the emotional side (equity) may be transformed into something functional. A participant from focus group 2 mentioned “It is emotional, but I also believe that you can turn the emotional into the functional”. This relates to brand identification and another respondent from that focus group repeats, “It becomes emotional as well as functional when you apply it”.


Sports-related organisations aim at minimising the risk of gaps by allowing themselves a legal possibility to cancel a branding or sponsorship partnership if specific areas of responsibility are violated. There are various examples from the world of sports, e.g., golf star Tiger Woods was dropped by different sponsors as a result of infidelity, swimmer Michael Phelps was dropped due to association with marijuana, football quarterback Michael Vick lost sponsor revenues due to involvement in dogfighting, and cycling legend Lance Armstrong’s commercial revenue streams were hurt when he admitted to doping. Keld Strudal says “It is not easy. We are quickly mentioned in the press as being cynics, just trying to exploit things. But I still see big opportunities. We must also be willing to take higher risks. To give an example, we have been co-hosting the homeless football tournament in Copenhagen, which I thought was brilliant where others quickly say that it is our fault that they are homeless. That may be the case but why shouldn’t we admit it and then try to help them out of that situation. But there is no backing in our corporation to go out and announce that we will do that”. Jens Bekke supports “We experience from other corporations that when you become involved in such things you are immediately suspected for not doing it honestly”.

Sports-related organisations should possess the expertise to lay the groundwork for a constructive dialogue in order for CSR-initiatives to happen. Majken Gilmartin offers, “As a city and municipality, it is nice when Copenhagen bid for some events and have an opinion about what opinions event people entering Denmark bring in their luggage”. Susanne Hedegaard Andersen goes a step deeper when exemplifying how strategic application of CSR may benefit sports branding or sports sponsorship initiatives, e.g., “I have been in Odense today where I met at the city director’s office; he started to talk about events in which the city should create something about health […] That’s fine, but it requires an organization, which can lift something about health, otherwise it would be empty words. If there is a match and you decided to support OB’ and created something about health with the municipality […] That may do that you think ‘wow’ something happens in Odense, something happens at OB, something happens at Carlsberg – you think in a different way, we are proud of this while you do something with your money”.

Participants underline the importance of the collaboration needed among governmental entities, municipalities, corporations and sports-related organisations in taking a stand in terms of what opinions these potential partners carry. To enter these partnerships, sports-related organisations must be sure to collaborate with entities that can lift the task of establishing authentic and legitimate initiatives under the principles of strategic CSR for sports branding and sports sponsorship purposes. Susanne Hedegaard Andersen mentions, “It requires a lot and you cannot do it with everything, but for that reason you must choose, not your failures with care, but your victories with care in this matter and really analyze who can do what”. Louise Rømer Megelvang follows up, “Yes, there is a long way to recognition – it is difficult to get approval, which is the entire problem. It is really about finding something, which underpins your business and what is it that matches? It does not make sense that we in Carlsberg support youth football and serve beer”.

K. Cortsen
Many ‘best practice examples’ illustrate the points made in the focus groups. One applicable example portrays FC Barcelona’s partnership with UNICEF in 2006 where the football club donates around $1.9 mio. per year to UNICEF plus exposes thousands of fans to UNICEF’s logo via the club’s jerseys (UNICEF, 2006). Another example is Hamburger Sport Verein’s (HSV) co-branding effort with the city of Hamburg under the name ‘der Hamburger Weg’ (the Hamburg Way) in which the club, the city of Hamburg and allied sponsors collaborate to strengthen Hamburg’s reputation as a city of sports and to support various social initiatives related to areas such as sports, education, and health (Hamburger Sport Verein, 2010). Respondents from focus group 2 elaborate on the points made by focus group 1 by illustrating the importance of strategic CSR, i.e., “I also believe that there are many that are not directly strategic but there are many who would like to be and therefore just say ok”. Thus, it is underlined that some corporations may have the intention of being strategic without actually meeting that intention whereas another respondents demonstrate the opposite, i.e., “There is the ‘Hamburger Weg’ which we have looked intensively at and that is a good example; they have had great success and probably also made a lot of money on it. And also have had branding advantages and economic advantages related to it”.

4.3 The meaning of ‘strategic match’ and ROIs when uniting corporate sports branding and CSR

There is research pointing towards a positive relationship between CSR-initiatives and financial performance (McElhaney, 2008; Margolis and Walsh, 2003; Lee and Cornwell, 2011; Babiak and Wolfe, 2009). Good strategic match is indeed a result of taking a glance at the bigger picture. The depth found in using a dialogical approach when working on sports- and CSR-related corporate branding implementations helps to secure that (Babiak and Wolfe, 2006).

4.3.1 Key empirical findings

- Strategic match – sports-related organisations should emphasise the importance of aligning CSR-activities with strategic direction and values. For instance, sports-related organisations can enhance their strategic interests by investing in CSR-initiatives: this concerns elements like brand recognition, brand equity, reputation, ability to evoke emotions in stakeholders, stakeholder identification, celebrity prestige, CSR expertise, ability to set up non-traditional partners, and sports facilities but also when investing in the capability to generate sponsorship revenues. The depth of the dialogical approach is essential to align these elements and internal and external determinants. This will also consider cultural differences among the various parties in the set-up.
• ROI potential – sports-related organisations should take advantage of their role in society and engage in CSR-based partnerships to enhance their brand equity. For instance, this allows sports-related organisations to provide for the better of society while improving their financial bottom lines by linking these activities to branding or sponsorship sales efforts. Meaningful, well-timed, active, innovative and differentiated partnerships based on mutually beneficial dialogues and covering the range from grassroots to professional sports are relevant. This is obtained when finding the right mix between the public agenda and that of the partners at a time where this leads to first-mover or differentiated branding effects.

This is supported by the following citations:

• A participant from focus group 2 says that getting sports sponsorship support may be easier if “you have some good initiatives”. This forms an interesting interaction between the sports world, the public sector, and the corporate world. Steen Ankerdal adds “If municipalities are forced to cut down their subsidies for sports and cultural activities because other things are a higher priority and there is less money and if there is a business world, which has not been completely damaged then it may be the case that these partnerships are established of simple necessity”. Keld Strudal responds, “Whether you are Jensen the baker or Carlsberg, you ask yourself the question what’s in it for me?” o Rasmus Ingerslev adds that “I do not have any problems that it smells like money and good business”. Keld Strudal highlights that this is not all about altruism but “as a corporation, we are born to make a profit for our investors and that can be accomplished in many ways no matter the size of the corporation”.4

• Keld Strudal got back to an earlier discussion about McDonalds, Team Denmark and sports sponsorship when he stated “To return to the stuff about McDonalds. Is it then also forbidden to start speculating in winning medals or where are we? McDonalds can also choose to turn it and make good PR out of it, but then we are back at the point where they are accused of doing it for their own benefit. Is that ok or not ok?” I responded “For me that is fine. If I am in the position of Team Denmark’s Director I will accept the money”. That shaped an interesting interplay when Susanne Hedegaard Andersen (as a former Director of Team Denmark) said “I would not”. Keld Strudal responded “If McDonalds went out and used their resources on getting the youth to eat proper food. Is that shame on you if they chose to make good PR based on that?” Several respondents said simultaneously “But they don’t”. And respondents from focus group 2 also included McDonalds in their discussion, i.e., “Because I would agree with Christian, why would you collaborate at all with McDonalds when its products are not exactly positive, in relation to CSR”.

• There are some potential pitfalls in the way that timing plays a major role in terms of determining when specific partnerships are on the agenda; it is about hitting the right spot regarding the public agenda and the agendas of the partners. Louise Romer Mogelvang states, “You must also not only focus on the corporation, but also on uniting the sport organizations so that they also create meaning about what they want to focus on so that the corporations can match the requests”. Keld Strudahl inserts that if “Municipality x comes and says; now you have to give me 100 DKK to help me in terms of CSR, but again what is it that I gain? They cannot answer this except for mentioning that it is a good cause. But you are in a financial situation in the
corporation where you have to cut to the bone so you don’t do it because if you don’t get anything for the 100 DKK why should I give them away? If we look at the US then there is another attitude where you join actively, where there are both volunteers and active people, where you want to give if you get something in return. You are not afraid of going to school and boast that you have Baker Jensen’s logo on your school uniform because I am proud of that and at the same time a part of the community”.

- One respondent from focus group 2 continues about this tendency by stating “It is clear that it has been more visible that you create these marketing events and they also construct experience economy”. He adds “It has a lot to do with the cultural differences, e.g., in the US where you establish events around anything. In the US, it may be too much sometimes, right? And we must first learn that here – to do it in their way”. Another respondent from focus group 2 emphasises that “we see how it is that you have done with CSR and now we have the opportunity – what shall I say – to exploit it or apply the opportunities, which are contained in the application of CSR for branding”. A third respondent from focus group 2 points to the US where “Everything is commercialised. As a professional you must be where there is money”.

- HSV and Hummel are two sports-related organisations, which understand to make use of competitive advantages linked to CSR and to connect with the financial bottom line, cf., HSV selling sponsorships, jerseys etc. under the framework of ‘der Hamburger Weg’ and Hummel sponsoring Tibet’s football team and having celebrities such as Bono from U2 and Richard Gere wearing Hummel’s Tibet Jerseys (Hamburger Sport Verein, 2010; Asian Football Business Review, 2007; Football Shirt Culture, 2007). Steen Ankerdal tied this to an English setting by saying, “There are in fact examples from Leeds, which made, in relation to the professional football club, something with young people that could fall under this concept. There were some that helped finance this project, also the public sector and the city”.

- The focus group discussions provide new meaning about strategic match and ROIs in relation to strategic CSR in sports branding initiatives. Respondents from focus group 2 offered this meaning derived through interaction about whether or not sports-related organisations for strategic reasons simply buy the label that they are being socially responsible while supporting sports at the same time. For example, one respondent offers “If there is just enough money in it”. Another respondent mentions, “I would agree with Christian, why would you collaborate at all with McDonalds when its products are not exactly positive, in relation to CSR, whereas – to mention Americans again – they may not think about it; there are corporations that are worse than McDonalds”. A third respondent from focus group 2 responded, “It is also about culture, if you look at it. Other countries may not look at Carlsberg as a part of the sports world”.

4.4 The importance of articulation of strategic CSR for branding purposes

Critical and media-savvy stakeholders (Yan, 2003) result in sports sponsorship and sports branding initiatives being constrained by contractual issues due to the fact that the exposure and articulation of these initiatives must be optimised.
4.4.1 Key empirical findings

Articulation to support branding – sports-related organisations should carefully consider the influence of media and derived PR-effects in terms of their CSR-activities to support brand management. For instance, sports-related organisations engaging in CSR-based partnerships should focus on defining the common meaning in mutually supported initiatives and thus be transparent about these and make sure to tell a common story. Thus, it is more profitable to supplement charity and sports sponsorship initiatives with the essence of strategic CSR for sports branding purposes. Proper CSR-initiatives and brand communication should be aligned with the strategic path to influence related revenue streams positively and this can be obtained through formal and informal education, e.g., a CSR-policy, CSR user-guide, CSR-matrix and so on to turn the idealistic grasp of this context into a form of commercial idealism.

This is supported by the following citations:

- Steen Ankerdal highlights, “You can create sponsorship contracts in which it is listed that you receive tickets etc., but nothing is mentioned about how to go into something in depth, into the subject. But if you start to create contracts that are CSR-based that the sport is not used to signing [...] In other words, there is a mindset, which is moved around. The law of necessity may be that we initiate it. We say: okay now we make a contract, which is about content and that is financed with help from the respective corporations. But it takes time to move opinions and perceptions. So you can only hope that there are more and more, who understand that this is where the opportunities are. Old-fashioned sponsorship has gradually reached its limits. You can almost not tantalise more effect out of it”.

- This allows for a dialogue with stakeholders and leaves room for the transparency so important when sports-related organisations deal with CSR (Babiak and Wolfe, 2009). Thus, it is decisive that sports-related organisations perceive the media as a fundamental stakeholder group (Wenner, 1998; Whitson, 1998; Smith and Westerbeek, 2003) given the reason that communication of authentic and legitimate CSR-initiatives perks up the crossroad between strategic CSR and brand management. Jens Bekke outlines, “It is important that both parties can vouch for the work and be transparent about it. I also believe that if you have a common story then you can go really far”. Steen Ankerdal adds “The borders for the partnership go as far as the conditions in the contract allow”., which is backed by Keld Strudahl, who states “We actually do that in more and more cases”.

- Steen Ankerdal acknowledges this by stressing how sports-related organisations may engage the media, i.e., “You must interfere and see what kind of a project it is that you launch together. And there you commit absolutely contractually and you have not been used to that in sports. But then I also believe that if you do that then you can simultaneously get the media and the press to understand that here is a new approach”.

• The dialogical approach to CSR-based partnerships shines through in the diverse environment of sports-related organisations collaborating with external entities with the purpose of driving (corporate) branding efforts via strategic CSR. Jens Bekke touches the importance of mutual collaboration in his statement above while Rasmus Ingerslev supports this “At any rate, you need to clarify that the ones you work with and yourself tell the same story”.

• The process of working with and articulating strategic CSR has the capability to optimise CSR-based sports sponsorship and sports brand management. One respondent from focus group 2 explains “We see how it is that you have also done it with CSR and now we have opportunity to, what shall I say, exploit it or utilise the opportunities that are integrated in applying CSR as branding”. Rasmus Ingerslev explicates “I think that you can eliminate really many sport clubs because they do not have people, who can sit and follow up on things. It requires work to acquaint yourself with the scope and sign the contract and then give feedback etc”. Thus, the problem area about the articulation of this context is present, which is also evident in a statement by Steen Ankerdal, i.e., “You cannot even base this on professionalism because they would always rather spend the money on a new player than spending the money on educating those they have”. This described paradox from the professional sports world is very relevant, also in the way of maintaining the close cohesion between the sports-related organisation’s internal and external direction. In the end, the ideal process is to educate and engage all members of the organisation in the CSR-based branding initiatives, i.e., including employees from the administration and the sporting side.

• Susanne Hedegaard Andersen says “The question is: wouldn’t it help if you had a clear strategy so that you could communicate it and visualise it”, while Keld Strudal adds “Thus, everybody must be ready to take the objective approach to it. It is important that everyone takes part”. A good example of not clearly having defined what CSR is and how to work with the concept for branding purposes includes Team Denmark’s sponsor-partnership with McDonalds. The partnership has been the victim of much public criticism for not living up to the standards of what to expect from an elite sports governing body in Denmark because there is a gap between what McDonalds and Team Denmark respectively stand for (Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c).

• Employee buy-in seems to be very vital when wanting to build a successful corporate brand in the sports industry. Steen Ankerdal touches upon this interplay, i.e., “In the case of McDonalds, it directly goes against Team Denmark’s and the other sports associations’ official policies and values that say that they want their members to eat properly. You have had that total sports cafeteria problem about that the food sold there is the worst junk”. Susanne Hedegaard Andersen responds “Then, the intentions can be just as good, but if it is not authentic and if you buy that Team Denmark burger as the only one in your family then they will just laugh at you. The athletes also feel that they cannot be responsible for it so it is not a question about being sacred but about being smart and having a connection between what you say and what you do”.


• Linking this to the Team Denmark/McDonalds example, respondents discussed if winning for any price is the right way to brand your sports-related organisation. They came to the conclusion that this is a ‘grey area/zone’ due to the fact that some sports-related organisations are put in the world to win and saying no to sponsorship income may lead to losing. It is important for sports-related organisations to label their CSR-efforts with concrete values signalling in what direction they want to go. The expression of ‘commercial idealism’ was brought up in the empirical data as a way of asking “why can’t we allow sports-related organisations to portray that there is a cohesion between the idealistic in helping society via sports and the commercial aspect of profiting from it?” This question seems to be a good parameter for showing sports-related organisations a route to solid CSR-based corporate branding. Rasmus Ingerslev declares “That is why I do not understand that it cannot be incredible visible that there is a connection between the idealistic and the commercial. Because you cannot afford to be more idealistic than the economic situation allows. If you are not a competent businessman you do not have money to be idealistic”. This is linked to the limit in terms of how idealistic commercial organisations can allow themselves to be when bearing the economic implications. Therefore, it is underscored that sports-related organisations must develop CSR-strategies and hence communicate transparently and clearly.

4.5 Mixing professional and amateur sports – a look into the future

Danish conditions for sports are different than in more ‘commercialised sports countries’, i.e., the US, England and Germany to mention a few, due to the fact that sport in Denmark has a breeding ground on voluntary leadership (Danmarks Idræts-Forbund/Danmarks Olympiske Komite, 2000; Brandt and Storm, 2008) for what reason there is not much research aimed at exploiting the commercial values of corporate branding efforts in sports-related organisations via CSR in Denmark. The slogan ‘Sport for all’ (The National Olympic Committee and Sports Confederation of Denmark, 2010) seems to be a great one, but it also leads to the importance of distinguishing between professional sports settings and amateur sports settings when looking at branding efforts via strategic CSR.

4.5.1 Key empirical findings

The difference between professional and amateur sports – sports-related organisations should consider the surrounding context and acknowledge that there may be positive learning transfers between professional and amateur sports. For instance, amateur sport may utilise professional athletes as role models whereas professional athletes may win CSR-legitimacy by engaging in this endeavour. This also holds a cultural dimension in the sense that sports-related organisations in Denmark are affected by the permeating voluntary character of the sports sector for what reason sports-related organisations do seldom apply a professional approach to CSR and lack the effectiveness of communicating with corporations in that regard. It presents the importance of two parts of vital professionalism, i.e., the athletes and the administration.
Capitalising on CSR-based partnerships in sports branding

This is supported by the following citations:

- There is a need to develop a better transfer between professional sports-related organisations and voluntary-based sports-related organisations. Susanne Hedegaard Andersen notes, “I really think that this is moving. For instance, take London Marathon, it acts as a really good example and I believe that you look in that direction”, while Majken Gilmartin adds “Yes, that is a gigantic cultural project”.

- This interchange is relevant since it provides two elements of professionalism in sport, i.e., the athletes and the administration. Susanne Hedegaard Andersen states that London Marathon “Started as an elite event. That is not what people are interested in today. The profits go to good causes where you have a professional organization. It is more about outfits and the cultural part and entertainment, and all profits, after the professional organization has received its pay, etc., go to good causes”.

- It is a trend that you have a good mix of professional athletes running the marathon for years and amateurs wanting different kinds of experiences, i.e., a bridge between professional and amateur sport service the greater good of society. The latter also portrays the importance of commercialisation in this context (Slack, 2004). Susanne Hedegaard Andersen talks about London Marathon’s turnover, i.e., “Huge turnover and the trend is that you look in that direction”. Steen Ankerdal proposes “Here you have the elite and the well-known that have implemented it for 10 years, but today they are not the important ones”.

- Respondents suggest that companies want to be a part of it, i.e., helping to provide people with great experiences and that seems like a modern and sustainable way to conduct corporate branding via strategic CSR in a sports setting. Jens Bekke mentions “I merely believe that we go out and become a part of such an event. We are the ones who provide the water; that is the water that people experience, and that is the way that we are part of it. It is not as a part of what we communicate externally but it is the experience you have, Carlsberg joins. We have also worked with having Red Cross on the water bottles but that does not give more sales”. The last sentence in that citation underlines the importance of strategic match, which is backed by Steen Ankerdal’s comment “But that does not connect either”.

- Professional sports-related organisations hold much power and hence should act as role models for other participants in sport. So, some CSR-based partnerships in sports like London Marathon may be chosen because that way the sports-related organisations can target a broader audience, often the purpose of CSR-initiatives (Neergaard, 2010). Basically the intersection between professionalism and amateurism presents a scenario where sports branding via strategic CSR may be more effective and thus affect more people and sponsors through a bridge from the elite level to the non-elite level. It also emphasises that there is no elite sports without the non-elite sports and vice versa. Susanne Hedegaard Andersen talks about the importance of London Marathon’s elite athletes as role models in this regard, i.e., “They are important in terms of sending messages. They send some messages but they are not the turnover”.
5 Conclusion and future outlook

Whatever focus is on sports-related organisations and their roles as either profit-maximising organisations or organisations as societal or social actors without profit-maximising intentions, it is important for sports-related organisations to acknowledge their social responsibilities in various directions.

This article contributes to further development of the crossroad between sports, strategic CSR, sports sponsorship, and brand building and brand management at the corporate level. To sum up, strategic CSR is relevant in sports management; the following elements linked to sports-related organisations’ areas of social responsibility are vital for success: a strong link between commercial potential, ROIs, pride and emotional equity, strategic match, appropriate articulation and combination of elements from professional and amateur sports. Specifically, sports-related organisations can implement this by developing CSR-strategies and communicate them transparently and clearly while integrating the concept of ‘commercial idealism’ that secures a strong platform to produce sustainable CSR-related sports sponsorships and sports branding projects on a continuous basis. This presents a new way for how to work with strategic CSR in a sports setting in Denmark and this may provide inspiration for sports-related organisations elsewhere. This may also guide employees from the administrative and sporting sides of sports-related organisations to obtain knowledge and skills to be integrated in these processes. This is thought to establish new insights and interactions tied to whether or not sports-related organisations really are socially responsible in their actions or simply buying the label that they are; this interplay may drive more authentic, legitimate and profitable projects.

References


Capitalising on CSR-based partnerships in sports branding


Notes

1 This definition is aligned with other definitions of the same concept from *The American Marketing Association*, sport marketing scholars (Beech and Chadwick, 2007; Schwarz et al., 2012; Fetchko et al., 2012) and branding gurus (Aaker, 1991; 2004; Keller, 1993; Kotler, 1991; Kapferer, 2008).

2 OB is the top professional football/soccer club in Odense.

3 FC Barcelona moved UNICEF’s logo to the back of their jerseys and sold the front of their jerseys to Qatar Foundation to get a capital injection aimed at helping the club pay for its sporting development (Rogers, 2011).

4 This is in alignment with Babiak and Sheth’s (2009) claims that sponsors do not give away funds to disadvantaged entities just for any reason; on the contrary they work strategically to make sure that their CSR-initiatives positively influence other sides of their own business while at the same time affecting the local community positively.

5 Team Denmark is an entity under the umbrella of the National Olympic Committee and Sports Confederation of Denmark that works to promote elite sports in Denmark, including their conditions and results (Team Denmark, 2010).

6 This is in alignment with Smart (2005).
This section of the dissertation is included to provide a better understanding of the interrelationship between the three articles, i.e. how the findings in the different studies have motivated and defined each other and how the qualitative nature of the research methodology connects these separate but still interdependent studies, cf. section 1, of sports branding at different levels (and strategic CSR).

Article 1 focuses on the personal level, i.e. the branding process revolves around an individual’s status, characteristics, history and actions. It is the specific, individual athlete Annika Sörenstam who makes up the brand. Her outstanding performances have created the foundation for the sports brand Annika Sörenstam, and after she transferred that image from the golf course to other activities (e.g. clothing line, academy, foundation, golf course design, wealth management consulting for young upcoming players), it is still the personal level, i.e. the sports brand built on the person Annika Sörenstam, that is the cornerstone of the brand. However, even though there is no doubt that the Annika Sörenstam brand is clearly a sports brand which is based on and has been strategically built on the person Annika Sörenstam, two other levels of branding are not completely missing: The product level is represented in the brand through the physical, tangible objects that become the vehicle through which the personal brand is capitalized. The organizational level is represented through the legal, administrative, and organizational structure behind the personal sports brand. Annika Sörenstam may be a personal brand, but that does not mean that there is not an organization behind her brand. This organization consists of a legal structure such as the founding, documentation, and authorization of the trademark and the company Annika Sörenstam, of an administrative structure that allows stakeholders to get in touch with the organization, e.g. the relatively mundane possibilities of e-mailing, phoning, writing, and visiting the company/organization, and of the human resources that are a necessary part of any organization, such as the very central figure of Mike McGee as an advisor, consultant, and manager of the personal brand (and, incidentally, the life partner of) Annika Sörenstam.

The analysis from the observations and especially from the two semi-structured personal face-to-face interviews with Annika Sörenstam and Mike McGee from article 1 presented the conceptualization of ‘hybrid sports branding,’ coined at the personal sports branding level and showing that the concept to a great extent incorporates ‘social currency’ and ‘emotional equity’ in its brand building and brand management processes. Accordingly, the construction of ‘hybrid’ branding relationships between personal sports brands and sports brands at the product and organizational levels, and hence the capitalization potential generated from ‘hybrid’ and strategically well-executed sports branding processes, was a significant finding. This finding inspired the researcher to continue the research process of seeking to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamic and interactionist approach to sports branding in terms of how to capitalize on sports branding processes centered around sports brands at the product and organizational levels, e.g. ‘Sensational 1’ and women’s football as two sports brands at the product level and Carlsberg as a sports-related brand, or FC Barcelona and Team Denmark as examples of sports brands at the organizational level. With this in mind, the first
article transferred into articles 2 and 3 by setting the stage for defining ‘hybrid’ sports branding. In
that sense, article 1 guided the studies and coding processes surrounding articles 2 and 3 in terms
of including the dynamic and interactionist focus of interactions between different sports branding
levels. It also guided the process of highlighting the coordinated process in brand building and brand
management that takes place when several engaging partners interact to capitalize on their sports
brands or sports-related brands at the product and organizational levels. All partners in a hybrid
sports branding relationship have an interest in improving their interactions.

Article 2 focuses on the product level, i.e. the branding process revolving around a product and its
look, qualities, features and use. It is the specific product ‘Sensational 1’ that makes up the brand.30 Its
specific features, developed specifically for the purpose of making women’s football safer and more
dynamic and attractive, are the basic ingredients in this sports brand. The construction of the brand
is centered around the product, and the strategic branding efforts take their point of departure at the
product level. Nevertheless, although ‘Sensational 1’ is clearly a brand which is branded predominantly
at the product level, it is not entirely without branding elements at the other two levels: First of all,
was initiated and invented by people (Majken Gilmartin as the founder along with her team of professionals),
who in the branding processes around ‘Sensational 1’ have drawn on the experience from their professional careers, and who also have and will put their personal brands at the product’s
disposal in order to promote the product brand through endorsing it. Secondly, very much like the
Annika Sörenstam brand, the ‘Sensational 1’ also has an organization, however small or informal,
to back up the branding processes at the product level, such as a Facebook profile or a homepage
(e.g. Facebook, 2015). In other words, working strategically with ‘Sensational 1’ is concentrated at
the product level, but also includes the personal and the organizational levels, just to a (much) lesser
extent.

Article 1 shows the imperative finding31 that the ‘hybrid’ nature of sports branding can strengthen
sports brands at one branding level, e.g. the personal sports branding level, by allowing room for the
sports brand’s positive interactions with sports brands at other branding levels, e.g. the product and
organizational levels. Article 2 also encompasses the significant role of ‘hybrid’ sports branding when
heightening the concept’s role in conjunction with the passion for women’s football, the improvement
of the sport via a sports product, i.e. ‘Sensational 1,’ and proper business orientation when presenting
why and how working strategically with sports branding at the product level manifests itself as an
interactive vehicle to successfully re-brand women’s football (soccer). Article 2 also validates the
dynamic nature of sports branding shown in articles 1 and 3. As an exemplification of a sports brand’s
dynamic characteristic, the interaction between ‘Sensational 1’ and the game of women’s football
offers some technical, tactical and physical changes to women’s football, enhances the dynamism
of the game, and shows the capability of allowing for a faster, safer, and more attractive game of
women’s football for participants and commercial stakeholders such as fans, sponsors and the media.

Building on the capitalization parameters of articles 1 and 3, article 2 provides an understanding of
why and how working strategically with sports branding manifests itself at various sports branding
levels when highlighting how to benefit from the commercial potential associated with boosting the
brand equity of women’s football. So, like articles 1 and 3, the second article succeeds in connecting
theory and practice when providing academics and practitioners in a sports management setting with
a commercial understanding of how to enhance a sports brand’s interactions. In this case, article 2
presents essential and dynamic parameters that may lead to an improvement of the game of women’s
football without spoiling the game’s core identity. This finding is backed up by Hardy et al. (2012),
who determined that the rules and regulations of a particular sport have placed the importance
of decisions on product development in sports and by Aaker (1996), who believes that rules and
regulations are linked to brand identity. This links to how the application of ‘Sensational 1’ may help
to re-brand the sport of women’s football in a way that secures that women’s football retains its

30 However, the sport of women’s football (soccer) is also a sports product that is included in article 2.
31 This finding is transferred into article 2, as mentioned in the above sections of Bridging the three articles.
overall meaning, but heightens the elements of tempo, dynamism, technical aesthetics, safety and attractiveness for the active and passive participants in the sport.

Article 3 focuses on the organizational level, i.e. the branding process derives its brand values from the organization’s history, reputation, stakeholders and purpose (license to operate). As opposed to the other two articles, this one does not investigate one object, but has gathered a group of highly profiled sports professionals and experts to discuss their views on CSR in a sports branding context. The CSR perspective has its focus on the organizational level built in, since it is the corporate social responsibility that is at the center of interest. The branding on the organizational level for organizations such as Carlsberg, Team Denmark or FC Barcelona clearly involves the organization as the object of branding with all of its historic roots, image etc. But the other levels are also present in these cases. For instance, some organizations are heavily connected to particular persons such as managers (Sir Alex Ferguson to Manchester United), players (Lionel Messi to FC Barcelona) owners (Abramovich to Chelsea), and the personal brands of those persons rub off on the organizations. Additionally, branding at the product level such as jerseys and other merchandise is an expression of strategically working with those sports brands on the product level.

Article 3 concludes that strategic CSR is a relevant concept in sports management. This fact was placed in article 1’s opening remark that strategic CSR and CSR values play an influential role in terms of their capability of adding to the brand strength, brand equity and capitalization level of a personal sports brand (in the case of Annika Sörenstam), cf. article 1. For instance, Sörenstam utilizes her ANNKA Foundation to emphasize the importance of healthy living for various stakeholder groups, e.g. children, and given her role as a sports star, she generates PR exposure that enhances the overall branding impact of her CSR-initiatives. Although strategic CSR was not a main focus in article 2, but merely a concept that gained implicit importance due to the outcome of the article’s empirical body, article 1 sets the tone for article 3 and for inspiring the researcher to investigate sports branding at the organizational level along with a concentrated focus on strategic CSR, sports sponsorship and the ‘hybrid elements’ of sports branding. Mike McGee emphasized the the point that the sponsors of a personal sports brand do not ‘just’ give money away. When evaluating whether or not to enter a long-term commercial partnership, i.e. sports sponsorship agreement, sponsors want to ensure that their money is going to work in a positive manner. Sörenstam has succeeded in signing and operating long-term commercial partnerships, which is partly due to her inclusion of CSR values and ‘giving back’ to shelter the ROIs, ROOs, and ROEs of all the parties concerned. Sörenstam is an example of a postmodern sports star capable of incorporating CSR values in her strategic brand management processes at the personal sports branding level and of transferring this positive brand building element to her sports brands at the product and organizational levels. This highlights the ‘hybrid’ nature of sports branding and places strategic CSR as a concept that may very well lead to a positive synergetic branding impact, which became a motivational element for investigating strategic CSR at a deeper level in relation to sports branding (the awareness, image, equity and loyalty stages of a sports brand) and sports sponsorship in article 3.

Article 3’s investigation of sports branding at the organizational level and its relation to the sub-focus of strategic CSR confirmed the positive brand influential capability of strategic CSR on sports branding and its links to commercial potential, ROIs, pride and emotional equity. In doing so, the empirical body emphasized the effects of sports sponsorship, cf. as an in-depth explanation and further sophistication of the concept compared to its role in article 1. This acts as a bridge that takes strategic CSR in a sports branding context to a capitalization level by showing that sports sponsorship can give sports-related organizations working with strategic CSR (in a sports branding context) capital injections. Inspired by article 1, the interacting (and ‘hybrid’) characteristic of sports brands is integrated in article 3 as an acknowledgement of the fact that although article 3 focuses on sports brands at the organizational level, the interactions with sports brands at the other levels, i.e. at the personal and product levels, may boost the effect on organizational sports brands when working with strategic CSR. As briefly mentioned in article 1 (p. 47), strategic fit is key in the brand building
and brand management processes in sports branding, and this concept gains even more importance when placed in a focused sports sponsorship context as in article 3. The influence of strategic CSR and strategic match in sports sponsorship and sports branding processes exemplifies why and how organizational members and external members, e.g. fans and/or customers, may feel a sense of pride and emotional equity, and thereby positive emotional attachment to and identification with a given sports brand and sports sponsorship initiative based on the premises of strategic CSR. Consider what the football club Sport Club Recife in Brazil has accomplished when working with strategic CSR in the club’s campaign Immortal Fans. The club came up with the first organ donor card for a football team to increase the number of organ donors in Brazil. Fans could get the donor card at the club's stadium, via the club’s Facebook page, or at home by mail and in an integrated campaign. The club featured real patients on transplant waiting lists, which gave a good reason to use football as a platform to provide positive societal solutions and change. The club’s campaign created a reason to donate organs other than the fans’ own families, and the campaign succeeded in handing out more than 50,000 donor cards, thus increasing the number of organ donors in Brazil, which reflects the pride and emotional equity linked to this strategic CSR initiative, Sport Club Recife, and the revenue-generating potential connected to this campaign due to the enhanced sports branding impact and sports sponsorship effect.

The above-mentioned example also illustrates article 3’s finding that the appropriate articulation of strategic CSR, its meaning, and effect in sports branding and sports sponsorship contexts is vital when sports brands at the organizational level want to succeed in working with these elements. The above-mentioned donor card example demonstrates why and how working strategically with sports branding manifests itself on the organizational branding level (branding of the club Sport Club Recife) via the integrated campaign and its media presence and articulation among fans of the club. Given the inspiration and learning outcome (findings) from article 1, this research process demonstrates why and how working strategically with sports branding manifests itself on the organizational branding level by reflecting that the implementation of sports branding initiatives guided by strategic CSR provides a foundation to assure the sustainability of CSR-related sports sponsorship and sports branding initiatives. ‘Commercial idealism’ may also serve as a guide (emphasizing the importance of CSR-strategies) for the development of more authentic, legitimate and commercial initiatives under this umbrella. The concept of ‘commercial idealism’ constitutes a potent platform for generating sustainable CSR-related sports sponsorships and sports branding projects on a continuous basis, cf. article 3, and it refers to the balance between commercialization and idealism (a true CSR relation). This balance contains the question “why can’t we allow sports-related organizations to portray that there is a cohesion between the idealistic in helping society via sports and the commercial aspect of profiting from it?” cf. article 3. In the article, Rasmus Ingerslev declares “That is why I do not understand that it cannot be incredibly visible that there is a connection between the idealistic and the commercial. Because you cannot afford to be more idealistic than the economic situation allows. If you are not a competent businessman you do not have money to be idealistic.” The concept is...
interesting in that there are practical limits in terms of how idealistic commercial organizations can be when considering their grounding in profitability.

The three articles, and especially articles 1 and 2, are interconnected by the fact that ‘winning and success in sports’ matter. Winning is one of the key brand influencers listed in article 1, and it also shines through in the empirical body of article 2, while it only acts minimally in article 3 when emphasizing that some sports organizations are put in the world to win. However, article 1 and article 2 share the similarity that winning has a central meaning in establishing and enhancing a sports brand’s positioning. But winning is not enough and the brand influencers of article 1, the focus on the strategic execution of CSR in sports branding and sports branding in article 3, and article 2’s argument that to create a strong platform for women’s football is a long process summarize the findings from all three articles, which provide evidence that successful and sustainable sports branding platforms require a long process that must integrate and nourish the passion of all the stakeholders. This includes the ‘hybrid’ essence of sports branding and its dynamic feature that becomes so evident when suggesting the popularity of women’s football in Denmark via increasing participation numbers should be exploited in a market-oriented way that places the meaning of timing in sports branding processes. The opportunity to commercialize on women’s football via ‘Sensational 1’ stems from (among other things) exploiting the positive participation numbers and the interest among stakeholder groups of being connected to this positive development. Thus, the essence of article 2 reflects the importance of re-shaping the brand identity of women’s football in a ‘hybrid’ interplay with ‘Sensational 1,’ and this ‘hybrid’ interplay is an ongoing process illustrated in all three articles. Therefore, ‘hybrid’ sports branding also becomes a matter of adapting or ‘playing on’ these factors, which can add positive meaning to the sports brand and can be controlled. For instance, this was exemplified when FIFA actively let its commercial partner Adidas introduce the Jabulani ball as the official ball of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa; this is thought to be an action that strengthened the sports branding tie between FIFA and Adidas although other stakeholders, e.g. the players, were not always happy with the ball.

This exemplification also illustrates the importance of strategic support, the accountability and the willingness to invest in a sport from central brands when trying to maximize a sports branding effect.

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32 This dissertation recognizes that this negative articulation from players may have a diminishing effect on the sports branding process but the FIFA and Adidas example was thought to illustrate other points, i.e. those of the importance of strategic support, accountability and the willingness to invest in a sport.
The aim of this section is to conclude on the overall findings of this dissertation, which consist of the findings of the three studies in the dissertation, cf. articles 1, 2, and 3. First, the overall conclusions, which are related to the main research question, are presented, followed by the specific conclusions of the individual articles, which are related to the subordinate research questions.

7. Overall concluding level

The answer to the main research question

“Why and how does working strategically with sports branding manifest itself on the personal, product and organizational branding levels?”

can be formulated in the following way: Strategic sports branding is a dynamic, interactionist and hybrid process influenced by different factors (cf. brand influencers). Each level is represented in every sports brand to a different extent, and the levels are closely intertwined. This is why working strategically with sports branding materializes on the personal, product and organizational levels. Because the process of sports branding is a complex one that cannot be (re)constructed on one level only, it permeates all the levels: The level of the individual athlete(s), whose personal appearance, attitudes, actions and achievements obviously shape the sports brand and subsequently is the background against which the sports brand is presented; the level of the sports product (be it tangible or intangible), which is the physical manifestation and symbolization of the sports brand; and the level of the organization, which through its structure, identity, and communication provides the platform for the manifestation of the sports brand at the organizational level. The concluding section presents new knowledge in the context of sports branding at the different levels. From this perspective, this dissertation has made the following realizations:

- Sports brands at any level have a dynamic, interactionist and ‘hybrid’ nature that makes the sports branding process dynamic, interactive and ‘hybrid’.
- The interplay between different factors (e.g. brand influencers) sets the tone for the process of sports brand building and management, and determines the strength of the sports brand. The understanding of this process can help sports brands improve their interactions.
- Sports brands cannot stand alone when aiming to optimize ROIs in the commercialization process, so the capitalization on a sports brand and a sports branding process is to be found in the dynamic, interactive and ‘hybrid’ relationship between the sports brand, its brand influencers and revenue streams.
- Ambiguity is an element that must be carefully managed for any sports brand to obtain good brand equity.
- Winning matters and so do proper strategic interactions and ongoing maintenance.
The overall findings of this dissertation point to the brand influencers of sports brands that help to clarify why sports brands hold a ‘hybrid’ characteristic that is strongly influenced by the interactions with the brand influencers; that speaks to the importance of how sports entities strategically manage the relationships across different stakeholder groups and interacting brand levels. The developmental framework, cf. figure 1 in article 1 and figure 10 above, illustrates the interdependence between a sports brand, different brand influencers and the capitalization potential in the form of the revenue streams of that sports brand. The dynamic, interactionist and ‘hybrid’ nature is manifested in the interactive relationships between the different stages in figure 10, i.e. brand influencers, sports brand, and revenue streams and this understanding can guide a sports brand at any level to better brand interactions. This framework can be extended to work with sports brands at the product and the organizational levels as well, which is in line with Shank’s thoughts that Gladden et al.’s Conceptual Model for Assessing Brand Equity, cf. figure 6, works with sports brands other than sports teams. So whether the attention is placed on Annika Sörenstam’s brand (the personal sports branding level), the enhancement of the football (soccer) experience for players, spectators, sponsors and media through ‘Sensational 1’ (the product sports branding level) or Carlsberg and the UEFA Champions League (the organizational sports branding level), the dynamic, interactive and ‘hybrid’ nature is reflected in the powerful strength of these brands due to their association with winning. Winning is a brand influencer that in the end helps to produce stronger brand equity and to add to the revenue streams of any of these brands. It also confirms that any sports brand is dependent on proper strategic interactions and ongoing maintenance to sustain, and more importantly, to add to its brand equity, cf. the former conclusion that the understanding of the ‘hybrid’ sports branding process can guide sports brands to better brand interactions. This nature also expresses the importance that the interactions between a sports brand at any level and other brands at various levels include interactions between different brand values that can produce emotional reactions that may be transferred between brands.

The why and the how of the main research question are two elements that are reinforced by the mass and emotional appeal of sports and the strategic process of managing all brand assets at various levels to influence the brand in an optimal way for capitalization reasons. From a critical angle, the above examples are mostly related to premium sports brands, but even weaker sports brands are dependent on the dynamic, interactive and ‘hybrid’ process of sports branding to improve their brand equity. For instance, a new and relatively unknown sports brand like ‘Sensational 1’ or women’s football (soccer) in contrast to the more exposed and followed sport of men’s football (soccer) depends on media attention to raise awareness and to spark its brand development.
From a critical angle, a couple of discussion points should be addressed or at least mentioned here. First of all, the three levels of sports branding mentioned throughout the thesis are constructions. That is not problematic per se since the qualitative, constructive and symbolic interactionist approach has been thoroughly accounted for in section 4. On that account, it is not relevant to ask if there could be more, fewer, or other levels since that would represent an essentialist view. However, it could be argued whether one might have constructed other levels that were more relevant. For instance, the contribution to the overall sports brand and sports branding process might have been just as recognizable if one had constructed levels of sports branding processes at the brand level, the brand influencer level and the revenue stream level, cf. figure 11 above. In the analysis and discussions in this section, these levels clearly are addressed and they do play a very important part in the construction of a sports brand. Such an approach would on the one hand have fitted quite well with the relational and cultural perspectives of branding (cf. section 2). These brand ‘internal’ levels are especially relevant because the strategic implications and the possibilities of working strategically with sports branding are roughly speaking limited to the brand internal levels of the sports brand in question. For instance, the possibilities of ‘Sensational 1’ to influence its own brand are first of all the possibilities to develop and optimize the product (product level), to build up and strengthen the organizational setup behind the product brand (organizational level), and to draw on the inventors, endorsers and ambassadors of the brand that are already part of the brand (the personal level). Because the three levels are a construction, the borders between them are not clear-cut. Despite these fuzzy borders, there are both analytical insights and strategic recommendations to be gained from the distinction. Firstly, the analytical and theoretical distinction can help grasp the complexity and interactional nature of the sports brand to help academics and practitioners create better brand interactions. The various factors contributing to the sports brand can be positioned at the different levels, which helps in analyzing the sports brand. Secondly, the positioning of the sports brand’s elements at different levels can contribute greatly to the strategic sports branding process: By identifying the levels on which the sports brand is located, the interaction between the levels can be strategically supported and modified. For instance, if a sports brand with a clear focus on the organizational level should come under pressure, the product level and/or the personal level could be strengthened while there could be less focus on the organizational level.

One limitation of this study is the fact that the empirical evidence is limited. Although the qualitative approach is followed wholeheartedly, it is conceded that the empirical data pool could have been larger. More brand studies, more interviews could have been conducted, and other methods might have been applied (e.g. analysis of artefacts, textual or discourse analysis). What remains, though, is the fact that for a more conceptual research interest like the one pursued in this thesis, qualitative analyses of the shape and extent of the ones presented in the three published peer-reviewed articles seem very well suited. In other words, an extension of the empirical data pool would only be a
second step in the research process, and a step that is outside the scope of this thesis. Instead, this dissertation enhances the interactional understanding of and informs the current state of the literature on sports branding by providing a symbolic interactionist approach to sports branding, which includes an understanding that is differentiated from the otherwise positivist understood and measured relations, e.g. ROI. Moreover, this dissertation develops an analytic distinction between three constructed levels of sports branding, which can help identify the core of a sports brand and thus help them strengthen the brand through improved interactions, relations and synergies between the three levels.

7.1. Concluding on the personal sports branding level

The conclusion about dynamics, interaction and ‘hybridity’ comes from the process of studying Annika Sörenstam’s personal brand and her brands of businesses, cf. article 1, and the above-mentioned conclusion can be transferred to all the sports branding. This finding becomes apparent when investigating Sörenstam’s personal brand. This dissertation aspired to investigate whether the finding was applicable to the other sports branding levels (the product and organizational levels), which proved to be true although there are slight differences between the importance of the brand influencers at each sports branding level. For instance, winning is more vital for a personal sports brand’s (e.g. Sörenstam) brand equity than for that of a sports event (e.g. the London Marathon), cf. section 5.1.1.1. Nonetheless, the appearance of this finding deserves space in this section given its origin in the study mentioned in article 1 and RQ1, which goes “Why and how does working strategically with sports branding at the personal branding level manifest itself as an interplay with the product and organizational branding level?”

The why and the how of RQ1 is founded on the ‘hybrid’ characteristic of personal sports brands and is exemplified at a deeper level when considering the meaning attached to the interactive nature of Sörenstam’s personal brand, which stresses the fact that Sörenstam would not have been taken to the same strong brand level due to her sporting performances only (i.e. winning and success on golf courses worldwide). Her strong brand equity has a strong basis in her winning sporting performances. However, the meaning found in the empirical body (Mike McGee’s statement “it is not just who she is anymore, it is all these projects and what we do that is the ANNIKA brand so that is everything”) points to all the side activities and different entities of the ANNIKA brand as the method as to why and how her personal brand can manifest itself so strongly at the personal, product, and organizational branding levels. These combined activities and entities make up the strength of the overall ANNIKA brand and place the interesting interplay that Sörenstam’s personal brand, cf. discussed in the above-mentioned overall concluding section (figure 11), has with its brand influencers and revenue streams. So, the why has to do with the above-mentioned combination’s capability of constructing a solid interplay between different sports branding levels that has a positive brand transfer effect on all the involved parties at all the branding levels. Sports, and in particular the sport of golf, are popular with mass numbers of people, and the corporate and media appeal of golf as well as Sörenstam’s leading role in the sport are influential aspects that explain why working strategically with sports branding at the personal level manifests itself as an interplay with other sports branding levels. The how has to do with what happens during the process, and it is clear that Sörenstam is capable of generating much brand awareness, a good brand image and a high level of brand equity and loyalty because of her winning sporting performances accompanied by a winning personality that turns into a good brand image as she understands the importance of good behavior. This established meaning has led to a potent interplay with influential elements such as good media exposure, a strong supporting organization behind her, successful sponsor partnerships, great CSR-initiatives and convincing fan interest. This interplay is a method of adding value to a personal sports brand and to other relevant sports branding levels linked to the personal sports brand; this should be understood as adding value to the personal sports brand’s own business as well as to the sports brands with which the sports star...
is engaging. The interplay between the sports brand at the personal level, its brand influencers, and revenue streams becomes a manifestation of the personal sports brand at any sports branding level. For instance, there are many similarities between sports brands at different levels, but from a critical perspective, it is also essential to understand that there are subtle differences, cf. the discussion in section 5.1.1.1. This emphasizes the finding and the metatheoretical aspect that time and context play a central role in ‘hybrid’ sports branding, i.e. Sörenstam was extremely popular in Sweden but was able to transfer that popularity to other markets. This also takes the discussion into the sporting abilities of an athlete, cf. the personal branding level, in terms of influencing the ability or a sports team, cf. the organizational branding level. In that sense, there are multiple interactions between the two, but in the end, it is the athlete’s abilities that can take a team to a higher level.

The strategic process of working with personal sports branding and the quality of this work play a role in whether or not the personal sports brand is proficient in creating good ‘hybrid’ connections that add to the long-term sustainability of the personal sports brand. Sörenstam exemplifies this proficiency positively, but the research process linked to article 1, and the understanding gained from it, has also created a few dynamic lessons in this regard. During the strategic process, personal sports brands should strive to find a way to merge their personalities and their brands so that they do not conflict with each other and so that they are effective at producing legitimacy, authenticity and trustworthiness, e.g. the empirical body of article 1 (Annika Sörenstam’s statement that “I need to deliver to what we call the promise”) points to the importance of brand promise delivery on and off the field. The why and the how also highlight that personal sports brands only go a certain distance concerning their sporting performances and their influence on their brand equity, i.e. athletes must engage in ‘hybrid’ sports branding relationships off the athletic field to obtain higher levels of brand equity.

For personal sports brands to extend their businesses even after their active careers are over, it becomes imperative that the athletes find meaning in ‘lifestyle’ types of brand extensions, as this is different from simply ‘endorsing equipment.’ For instance, Sörenstam finds value and meaning in endorsing a healthy lifestyle. Sörenstam plays out a ‘best practice’ personal sports branding example when interpreting the commercial meaning associated with her ability to engage with positive long-term brand influencers and constructive long-term revenue streams. Looking at personal sports brands in a critical light, the empirical findings regarding Sörenstam reflect a new historic development among premium personal sports brands in which successful brand-building athletes (i.e. Sörenstam) with their own organization, direct production and products gain more control over the entire value chain. In this regard, the ANNIKA brand is an illustrative example that many other personal sports brands can learn from.

Personal sports brands must assess the ambiguity that may arise during the sports branding process and in their ‘hybrid’ relationships. For instance, there are conflicting interests in the personal sports brand/product sports brand interrelationship as seen when a professional athlete endorses a product that conflicts with his/her own values. This is seen in other sports branding relationships at other levels, e.g. when McDonald’s sponsored Danish elite sports via a Team Denmark partnership (cf. article 3). However, the uniqueness (e.g. the relative peak sporting performances and the good behavior) of Annika Sörenstam makes it difficult to make direct generalizations for all other athletes. As do the differences among different sports in terms of popularity, as this may reveal a gap between the theoretical findings and practical solutions in a sports branding context. Nevertheless, it presents some actual experiences linked to a personal sports brand and the team, for which reason, it definitely contributes with many findings that can be of use to academics and practitioners within the field of personal sports branding in order to guide them to better brand interactions. An interesting discussion point in this regard is that of personal sports brands seeking to capitalize on ‘generic brand values.’ This requires that the athletes be true to these values in their actions, which some sports stars have found difficult, e.g. when an athlete admits wrongdoing and thus implies future honesty but is still caught in future misbehavior.
7.2. Concluding on the product sports branding level

As concluded above, ‘hybrid’ sports branding also plays a central role at the product sports branding level. Specifically, the conjunction between the passion for women’s football (soccer), the improvement of the sport via ‘Sensational 1’ and the commercialization process should be aligned strategically. Therefore, the clarification of this finding is included in this section as one of the conclusions of article 2 and RQ2 that asks “Why and how does working strategically with sports branding at the product level manifest itself as an interactive vehicle to successfully re-brand women’s football?”

When searching for meaning in the historic development of sports branding, it was found that the rules and regulations of sport are important for the sport’s branding impact, cf. section ‘Bridging the three articles.’ This conclusion has its origin in the empirical body, but also has theoretical and practical implications. This places the rules and regulations of a particular sport in connection and interaction with product development and sports branding at the product level, e.g. as linked to brand identity. In a long-term perspective, ‘Sensational 1’ has the potential to make changes to the game of women’s football (soccer) at the technical, tactical and physical football levels with the aim of turning the game into one that is more dynamic, faster, safer and more attractive for participants and commercial stakeholders such as fans, sponsors and the media. In this way, it presents a path that explains why working strategically with ‘Sensational 1’ and women’s football, i.e. sports branding at the product level, manifests itself as an interactive vehicle to successfully re-brand women’s football. In doing so, it emphasizes how ‘Sensational 1’ acts an interactive vehicle that can help to re-brand women’s football (soccer) while safeguarding that women’s football (soccer) preserves its overall meaning but enhances the tempo, dynamism, technical aesthetics, safety and attractiveness for the active and passive participants of the game. The positive participation numbers in relation to women’s football (soccer) in Denmark partly explains an incentive for why and how ‘Sensational 1’ can manifest itself as a product that boosts the re-branding of women’s football, cf. this is aligned with the importance of a sports brand adapting to societal tendencies as mentioned in section 2.1.1 and to the time and context as stressed in symbolic interactionism. With the ‘hybrid’ and interactive elements in mind, the empirical body presented that ‘Sensational 1’ can make the game of women’s football (soccer) more appealing by constructing physical changes that improve the tactical, technical and mental perceptions of the game while retaining the game’s overall meaning.

When implementing a sports brand at the product level, e.g. ‘Sensational 1’ or women’s football, with the aim of building brand equity, there are similarities between articles 1 and 2 in that winning and success matter. In this case study, winning did not do the job alone either; the emotional equity connected with winning and success is an important factor. The same goes for the emotional equity connected with the passion for the sport. This shows an interesting finding that when working with sports branding at the product level, there are elements, e.g. brand influencers that are more important than others, that come into play in interactions with sports brands and sports-related brands at various levels. For instance, winning and success and the meaning attached to these concepts have more weight at the elite level and professional levels than at the grassroots level. There is a differentiation between winning and success, as success also stems from successful experiences from participating in the sport and from how ‘Sensational 1’ is implemented and influences the game, e.g. through the approval of the ball in elite competitions at the national and international levels, or via interactions with sports brands across different branding levels. Successful experiences turn into the aim of improving the sport of women’s football, which is a long process that should cultivate the passion of all the stakeholders in the game.

In a market-oriented light, timing is essential in order to take advantage of the societal tendencies, cf. section 2.1.1., of the growing numbers of women participating in football (soccer) in Denmark, so
the ability to ‘act with due care’ has meaning in the ‘hybrid’ sports branding process of building a bridge between positive participating numbers and the interest among other stakeholder groups. The dynamic element of sports branding shines through in that the purpose of enhancing the brand equity of ‘Sensational 1’ and women’s football (soccer) can happen via an adaptation of the brand influencers and their impact on the revenue streams of ‘Sensational 1’ and women’s football (soccer). This scenario takes place in practical sports branding at the product level on a continuous basis. This sparks the meaning and articulation of accountability and the willingness to invest in ‘Sensational 1’ and the sports of women’s football (soccer) to accommodate positive changes to the current game. Thereby, the relevant actors concentrate on shaping an environment in which those participating in women’s football can shine and enjoy the game to a greater extent while safeguarding or improving key elements of the sport, e.g. the dynamism that adds to the fun of the game and the ability to prevent injuries. If ‘Sensational 1’ or another sports brands at the product level has the skills to improve the game, it is accountable to recognize this potential. \[33\]

Article 2 reveals insights into why it is significant to and how to exploit the commercial opportunities related to boosting the brand equity of women’s football (soccer) and to establishing a new and sunnier future for all the participants in the sport of women’s football (soccer). Similar to article 1, ambiguity is present in the sports branding process. This should be considered as the intention to build a bridge between theory and practice being affected by the conflicting interests in the practical context of sports branding. The latter refers to interests found between sports-branding at the product level in the form of ‘Sensational 1’ and the interactions with sports governing bodies in the form of the Danish FA and UEFA, which may be obliged by ties to sponsor partnerships with a strong sports brand like Adidas. This is expressed via the meaning of strategic support in that a product-based sports brand is dependent on interactions with sports brands or sports-related brands at various levels to succeed in raising its brand equity. This is especially true in a sports world in which some organizations hold a lot of power and to a great extent set the agenda for what is doable or feasible, e.g. the national FAs, UEFA and FIFA. Given the type of sports brand that ‘Sensational 1’ is, this study, as revealed in article 2, offers good insights into why and how a sports brand at the product level can manifest itself in the re-branding process of a specific sport. However, the distinctiveness of ‘Sensational 1’ and the development of women’s football in Denmark mean that it becomes a complex task to produce direct generalizations for all other sports brands at the product level.

7.3. Concluding on the organizational sports branding level

In a similar fashion to the conclusions above, sports branding at the organizational level also displays a ‘hybrid’ characteristic that is meant to enhance the brand equity level with a positive influence on the capitalization process. Consequently, the conclusions from the study in article 3 are explained here as an answer to RQ3, i.e. “Why and how does working strategically with sports branding and CSR and sports sponsorship manifest itself on the organizational branding level?”

Strategic CSR is a relevant and important concept in sports management and sports branding, and in accordance with sports sponsorship, it is a tool that explains why and how working strategically with sports branding, CSR and sports sponsorship manifests itself on the organizational branding level. It may guide sports brands and sports branding at the organizational level to create innovative and strong sports sponsorship concepts as well as brand management processes that stimulate the sports brand’s or the sports branding process’ capitalization progression positively. First of all, this can happen because the area of sports sponsorship and its integration of CSR has not been fully developed or fully exploited at a time when the application of CSR for commercialization purposes

\[33\] After article 2 was accepted for publication, it was announced that the Danish FA and Danish national broadcaster DR agreed on showing the matches of the Danish women’s national team on TV, i.e. investing more in women’s football.
has been gaining more popularity. Right now, it is on the agenda of many players in the business world, and that opens up new opportunities to exploit this context for sports brands at the organizational level.

Interactions between sports brands at the same branding level or across various branding levels are dependent on strategic match to produce enhancements to their respective brand equity levels; this conclusion also means that all the parties in a CSR-partnership under this context of sports branding and sports sponsorship must contribute to providing and promoting the positive impact of sports on various issues, e.g. integration and socialization. For instance, if a football club receives money from a city/municipality and from businesses to establish good integration and socialization procedures among the citizens in the football club’s disadvantaged neighborhood, all the parties must show an interest in contributing. This means that if the businesses do not know how to activate the sponsorship of this CSR-initiative, the football club must assist in helping given the club’s experiences when working with sports sponsorships. Likewise, the city/municipality must apply the generated know-how to promote the initiative to other cities/municipalities as a positive articulation of that initiative. That way, the sports brand and the sports branding process are enhanced as this produces more ‘active’ and ‘innovative’ two-way dialogical partnerships (i.e. better brand interactions) based on CSR and that gives a competitive advantage to all the involved parties and more “meaningful projects,” as mentioned in the empirical body. To assist in guiding and providing proper articulation, formal and informal education, e.g. a CSR-policy, a CSR user-guide, a CSR-matrix, and so on, turn the idealistic understanding of this context into a form of ‘commercial idealism.’

The latter exemplifies the importance of optimal stakeholder management, which shows evidence that this holds much commercial value along with the pride and emotional equity that can be generated from these sponsorship-based CSR initiatives in sports branding at the organizational level. This can be transferred to other branding levels as well, as evidenced in article 1, and sport’s appeal to the masses and the inclusion of ‘hybrid’ sports branding features open for commercialization on the premises of the functional and emotional sides of sports branding; this can be accomplished via a focus on stakeholder interests, strategic focus, legitimacy and marketability. Pride and emotional equity are linked to winning in sports. The brand influencers of pride and emotional equity work in different directions, i.e. internally and externally, and this portrays another reason for how working strategically with sports branding, CSR and sports sponsorship manifest itself on the organizational branding level. It may improve corporate performance (work internally) because the employees feel a sense of pride and emotional equity because their employer is engaged in specific projects, e.g. being a sponsor of the London Marathon or Liverpool FC (e.g. examples from the focus group), while adding to the brand (work externally) because it creates goodwill and reputational capital due to positive PR.

Producing good ROIs in sports branding interacts with strategic match, pride, emotional equity and optimal stakeholder management. This presents a bridge between strategic sports branding, strategic CSR, strategic sports sponsorship and ROI-potential in that a sports-related organization should take advantage of its visible role in society and engage in activities in this context to enhance its brand equity. The external direction of these activities highlight the significance of the articulation of strategic CSR for branding purposes while carefully considering the influence of the media and the derived PR-effects in sports branding at the organizational level (and at other sports branding levels as well).

Despite providing know-how and an in-depth understanding of sports brands and sports branding at the organizational level in relation to strategic CSR and sports sponsorship, article 3 (like article 1 and 2) also provides cases that may be too unique to be directly generalized to all other sports brands at the organizational level. This means that any given sports brand at the organizational level is affected by time and context; e.g. what may be a good strategic match for one sports brand at the organizational level may not work for another sports brand at that same level. There are also differences
between sports that may make the process of combining elements from professional and amateur sports harder, e.g. that can refer to the economic reality of the sports brand at the organizational level (in Denmark, it would be easier for the Danish Football Association to invest in this context than it would be for the Danish Tennis Federation). This may also be linked to the fact that some athletes are more safeguarded than others due to the level of professionalism in their respective sports (football/soccer compared to basketball players in Denmark). Nevertheless, article 3 shows evidence of the relevance of CSR in sports settings and provides an understanding of brand influencers that can be implemented for sports brands or in sports branding processes at the organizational level as well as in interrelationships with sports brands at the other levels. It also shows that there are learning transfers between professional and amateur sports to acknowledge, e.g. that of professional athletes as role models (a bridge between article 1 and article 3) and professional athletes gaining CSR-legitimacy by engaging in CSR (another bridge between article 1 and article 3). It also brings importance to the fact that there are two vital parts of professionalism, i.e. the athletes and the administration (some of the sports-related organizations in Denmark do not always apply a professional approach to CSR, cf. McDonalds and Team Denmark example – this underscores the essence of ambiguity at this branding level). The empirical body also offers the critical insight that it may be an exception that professional sport is managed with a consciously social angle. Nonetheless, professional sports organizations are under a lot of pressure when violating their responsibilities in relation to CSR.

[34] This lack of professionalism has to do with the limited economic and human resources available in many of the Danish sports organizations.
8.1 English summary

Within the postmodern society sport is not only about sport. Sport in this era should be seen as a mix of many intertwined elements that have gained increasing importance in the intersection between sports and entertainment that characterizes the role of sport in the experience economy. Therefore, sports branding has achieved intensified significance in a sector of sports, which has experienced enhanced focus on commercialization at all levels.

Therefore, there is more attention on producing knowledge, developing tools, and creating the foundation for new business models that may boost the role of sports branding in the commercialization of sport to improve a sports brand’s interactions. Moreover, the trends within this context mean that there is more cohesion in the relationship between general business development and commercial development in sports. In this regard, a term like ‘corporate social responsibility’ (CSR) has gained potent ground in the sector of sports for what reason strategic CSR has become a tool, which can be integrated into sports branding and sports sponsorship. In this way, the concept can be utilized commercially as a response to public grants (and deteriorating public grants in a Danish context). Strategic CSR in interaction with sports branding and sports sponsorship is a partial focus of this dissertation, which has its primary focus in investigating sports branding and the relationship between sports branding at various levels, cf. the personal, the product and the organizational sports branding levels.

It is in the above-mentioned subject matter that this PhD dissertation has its starting point. This dissertation seeks to answer the following main research question:

“Why and how does working strategically with sports branding manifest itself on the personal, product and organizational levels?”

This dissertation’s structure consists of three separate research articles founded on a clarifying, debating and analyzing meta-text. These empirical studies that comprise the three research articles illustrate the subject matter on the basis of the overall research question and the three underlying research questions. These underlying research questions are included below:

1) “Why and how does working strategically with sports branding at the personal branding level manifest itself as an interplay with the product and organizational branding levels?”
2) “Why and how does working strategically with sports branding at the product level manifest itself as an interactive vehicle to successfully re-brand women’s football?”
3) “Why and how does working strategically with sports branding and CSR and sports
Article 1, *Annika Sörenstam - a hybrid personal sports brand*, relates to the first of the underlying research questions and investigates, explains and discusses the factors that affect a personal sports brand (Annika Sörenstam) and the athlete’s ability to capitalize on its personal sports brand. This is done through an investigation of the development, growth and sustainability of the ANNIKA brand, which is commercial brand extension of Annika Sörenstam’s success on golf courses worldwide. Furthermore, the article has its focus on investigating, explaining and discussing the ‘hybrid’ branding relationships between personal sports brands and sports brands at the product and organizational branding levels.

Article 2, *Re-branding women’s football by means of a new sports product*, relates to the second of the underlying research questions and investigates, explains and discusses the ‘hybrid’ branding relationships that have an influence on whether a sports brand on the product-based level (‘Sensational 1’ and women’s football/soccer in Denmark) can strengthen its brand equity. Furthermore, the article has its focus on investigating, explaining and discussing whether ‘Sensational 1’ can help to facilitate a re-branding of women’s football (soccer), so this sport becomes more attractive for all relevant stakeholders (seen from a commercial angle that aims to enhance the potential of women’s football).

Article 3, *Capitalizing on CSR-based partnerships in sports branding and sports sponsorship*, relates to the third of the underlying research questions and investigates, explains and discusses the relationship between strategic CSR, sports sponsorship and sports branding at the organizational level. This is done in order to develop a toolkit for academics and practitioners, which can help to increase the capitalization on sports branding initiatives and sponsor-based partnerships within this intersection. It also investigates the interactive factors that affect an organizational sports brand and the brand’s ability to increase its brand equity through strategic CSR.

From a methodological viewpoint, this dissertation applies a problem-oriented and pragmatic approach, which is grounded in theory of science, i.e. social constructivism and primarily symbolic interactionism. The interaction between the research interest and the empirical data has guided the choice of methodology in line with this dissertation’s progress. The dissertation follows an interpretative approach to data analysis based on qualitative methods (semi-structured personal face-2-face interviews, semi-structured focus group interviews and observations and a data analysis based on open qualitative coding). Article 1 is anchored in data from two personal face-2-face interviews with Annika Sörenstam and her brand manager Mike McGee and observations (respectively an interaction between ‘participant-observer’ and observer-participant). Article 2 is anchored in data from a focus group interview with respondents with strong relations to women’s football (soccer) and four personal face-2-face interviews with respondents that have or have had a prominent role in women’s football (soccer) in Denmark or internationally. Article 3 is anchored in data from two focus group interviews with respondents with much practical or theoretical and/or experience with the intersection between sports branding, CSR and sports sponsorship.

Overall, this dissertation’s contributions are of both theoretical and empirical nature. The theoretical contribution is to produce and portray some of the differences that exist in the ‘hybrid’ interaction between sports brands at the personal, the product and the organizational levels, e.g. the importance of winning is more important for personal sport brands than for sports brand at the product level. Moreover, this dissertation highlights the interaction between different branding levels in sports branding. This shows that sports brands at all levels, cf. the personal, the product and the organizational branding levels, have a dynamic, interactionist and ‘hybrid’ character, which gives the sports branding process the same characteristics. Theoretically, this dissertation provides a deep understanding of the interactions that take place between different brand influencing factors, which influence the sports branding process and the associated brand management. This understanding helps to determine a sport brand’s strength and to improve its interactions. This dissertation also provides some practical
tools for the strategic work with sports branding at all levels, e.g. a toolkit that can be used to strengthen the commercial effect of the work on strategic CSR in the context of sports branding at all levels and sports sponsorship via the improvement of a sport’s brand’s interactions. In this context, this dissertation displays that sports brands cannot stand alone when focusing on optimizing ROIs in the process of commercialization for what reason the capitalization on a sports brand or on a sports branding process is to be found in the interrelationship between the dynamic, interactionist and ‘hybrid’ relationships of the sports brand and the understanding of why and how these relationships interact with the brand influencers and the revenue streams of the sports brand.

Additionally, this dissertation concludes that there may be some ambiguity in the sports branding process that must be managed carefully to ensure the achievement of good brand equity. ‘Winning’ makes a decisive difference in sports branding, although it is more important for a personal sports brand than for a product based sports brand (an example of the nuanced differences that may exist between the various sports branding levels), and so do the appropriate strategic interactions and ongoing maintenance.

The brand influencers show why a sports brand has a ‘hybrid’ nature, which manifests itself at all sports branding levels. Furthermore, these brand influencers contributes to creating an understanding of how a sports brand can manifest itself at all levels because this manifestation occurs in the interaction between brand influencers, the sports brand and the sports brand’s revenue streams. This understanding helps to improve a sports brand’s interactions, which is an important tool for academics and practitioners within a sports branding setting.

8.2 Dansk sammendrag

Indenfor det postmoderne samfund omhandler sport ikke længere bare sport, men skal opfattes som et mix af mange elementer, som er kommet til eller har opnået stigende betydning i det krydsfelt mellem sport og underholdning, som karakteriserer sportens rolle i oplevelsesøkonomien. Derfor har sportsbranding også opnået intensiveret vigtighed i en sportsverden, som både på professionelt samt breddeniveau har oplevet større kommercieliseringsfokus, bl.a. som følge af overgangen fra forening til forretning.

Med dette in mente er der også blevet kastet mere opmærksomhed på at producere viden, udvikle værktyger, samt skabe fundamentet for nye forretningsmodeller, som kan forstærke sportsbrandingens rolle i kommercieliseringen af sport. Samtidig har udviklingen indenfor denne kontekst betydet, at der er en vis samhørighed i forholdet mellem almen forretningsmæssig udvikling og kommerciel udvikling indenfor sport. Med dette udgangspunkt har et begreb som ‘corporate social responsibility’ (CSR) vundet indpas indenfor sportens verden, hvorfor strategisk CSR er blevet et værkøj, som med formel kan integreres i sportsbranding og sportssponsorering. På den måde kan begrebet udnyttes i kommerciel forstand som et modsvar til offentlige bevillinger, men også som et modsvar til forringede offentlige (jf. dansk kontekst) tilskud til idræt og sport. Strategisk CSR i samspil med sportsbranding og sportssponsorering er derfor et delvist fokus i denne afhandling, som har sit primære undersøgelsesfokus i sportsbranding og samspillet mellem sportsbranding på forskellige brandniveauer, jf. det personlige, det produktbaserede og det organisatoriske brandniveauer.

Det er i ovennævnte genstandsfelt, at denne ph.d.-afhandling har sit udgangspunkt. Afhandlingen søger således at besvare følgende overordnede forskningsspørgsmål:

“Hvorfor og hvordan manifesterer det at arbejde strategisk med sportsbranding sig på de personlige, produktbaserede og organisatoriske brandingniveauer?”

Afhandlingens struktur består af tre enkeltstående forskningsartikler med afsæt i en afklarende,
diskutere og analyserende metatekst. De empiriske studier, der er tilknyttet de tre forskningsartikler anskueliggør det forskningsmæssige genstandsfelt med afsæt i det overordnede forskningsspørgsmål og de tre underliggende forskningsspørgsmål. Disse underliggende forskningsspørgsmål lyder som følger:

1) “Hvorfor og hvordan manifesterer det at arbejde strategisk med sportsbranding på det personlige brandning niveau sig som et samspil med de produktbaserede og organisatoriske brandning niveauer?”
2) “Hvorfor og hvordan manifesterer det at arbejde strategisk med sportsbranding på det produktbaserede niveau sig som en interaktiv platform, som succesfuldt kan re-brande kvindefodbolden?”
3) “Hvorfor og hvordan manifesterer det at arbejde strategisk med sportsbranding, CSR og sportssponsorering sig på det organisatoriske brandning niveau?”

Artikel 1, Annika Sörenstam – a hybrid personal sports brand, relaterer sig til det første af de underliggende forskningsspørgsmål og undersøger, redegør for og diskuterer de faktorer, som har betydning for et personligt sportsbrand (Annika Sörenstam) og atletens evne til at kapitalisere på sit personlige sportsbrand. Dette gøres via en undersøgelse af udviklingen, væksten og bæredygtigheden af ANNIKA BRAND’et, som er en kommerciel videreudvikling af Annika Sörenstams succes på golfbaner verden over. Desuden er der samme fokus på at undersøge, redegøre for og diskutere de ‘hybride’ brandingrelationer mellem personlige sportsbrands og sportsbrands på de produktbaserede og organisatoriske brandning niveauer.

Artikel 2, Re-branding women’s football by means of a new sports produkt, relaterer sig til det andet af de underliggende forskningsspørgsmål og undersøger, redegør for og diskuterer de ‘hybride’ brandingrelationer, som har betydning for, om et sportsbrand på det produktbaserede niveau (’Sensational 1’ og kvindefodbolden i Danmark) kan styrke sin brandkapital (jf. ’brand equity’). Yderligere er der samme fokus på at undersøge, redegøre for og diskutere, om ‘Sensational 1’ kan medvirke til at facilitere en re-branding af kvindefodbolden, så denne gøres mere attraktiv for alle relevante interessenter (set fra en kommerciel vinkel med fokus på styrke kvindefodboldens potentielle).

Artikel 3, Capitalizing on CSR-based partnerships in sports branding and sports sponsorship, relaterer sig til det tredje af de underliggende forskningsspørgsmål og undersøger, redegør for og diskuterer relationen mellem strategisk CSR, sportssponsorering og sportsbranding på det organisatoriske niveau. Dette gøres med henblik på at udvikle en værktojskasse til akademikere og praktikere, som kan medvirke til, at sportsbranding-initiativer og sponsorbaserede partnerskaber indenfor dette krydsfelter fører til styrket brandkapitalisation. Desuden undersøges de interactive faktorer, som har betydning for et organisatorisk sportsbrand og dette brands evne til at forøge sin brandstyrke ved hjælp af strategisk CSR.

Metodemæssigt har afhandlingen en problemorienteret og pragmatiske tilgangsvinkel, som er funderet i et videnskabsteoretisk ståsted, som relaterer sig til socialkonstruktivisme og primært symbolisk interaktionisme. Forskningsinteressen har i samspil med undersøgelsens data været styrende for valget af metode i takt med undersøgelsens fremdrift. Afhandlingen har således en fortolkende tilgang til dataanalyse baseret på kvalitative metoder (semi-strukturerede personlige face-2-face interviews, semi-strukturerede fokusgruppeinterviews samt observationer, hvor dataanalysen finder sted v.h.a. åben kvalitativ kodning). Artikel 1 er forankret i data fra to personlige face-2-face interviews med Annika Sörenstam samt hendes brandmanager Mike McGee samt på observationer (henholdsvis en vekselvirkning mellem ’participant-observer’ og ’observer-participant’). Artikel 2 er forankret i data fra et fokusgruppeinterview med respondenter med stærk relation til kvindefodbold samt fire personlige face-2-face interviews med respondenter, som på hver deres måde har eller har haft en fremtrædende rolle indenfor kvindefodbolden i Danmark eller internationalt. Artikel 3
er forankret i data fra to fokusgruppeinterviews med respondenter med stor praktisk eller og/eller teoretisk erfaring med krydsfeltet mellem sportsbranding, CSR og sportssponsorering.


Afhandlingen konkluderer endvidere, at der kan være envisdobbeltydighed i sportsbrandingprocessen, som skal håndteres med forsigtighed i brandledelsen for at sikre opnåelsen af god brandkapital (jf. ‘brand equity’). ‘At vinde’ gør en afgørende forskel i sportsbranding, om end det er vigtigere for et personligt sportsbrand end for et produktbaseret sportsbrand (et eksempel på de nuanceforskelle, der kan forefindes mellem de forskellige sportsbrandingniveauer), og det samme gør passende strategiske interaktioner og konstant vedligeholdelse.

De brandinfluerende faktorer viser, hvorfor et sportsbrand har en ‘hybrid’ natur, som maniiserer sig på alle brandniveauer. Endvidere er disse faktorer medvirkende til at skabe en forståelse for, hvordan et sportsbrand kan maniiserer sig på alle niveauer, da denne manifestation finder sted i samspillet mellem brandinfluerende faktorer, sportsbrandet og indtægtsstrømmene. Denne forståelse kan i sidste ende, og det er en vigtig pointe i denne afhandlings konklusion, hjælpe et sportsbrand til bedre interaktioner.
List of figures

Figure 1: Overview of the three articles
Figure 2: Illustrating parameters of growth in the business of sports
Figure 3: Model of the Business of Sport
Figure 4: The tree of sport branding, general chronology
Figure 5: Qualifications to be met by a sports brand
Figure 6: Managing in the sports industry vs. managing in other industries
Figure 7: The sports branding process
Figure 8: Conceptual Model for Assessing Brand Equity
Figure 9: Social responsibility categories
Figure 10: ‘Hybrid’ framework for building a sports brand
Figure 11: Two levels of interactions of the ‘hybrid’ framework for building a sports brand

List of tables

Table 1: Four perspectives on brands and branding
Table 2: Summary of the positivist and interpretative approaches
Table 3: Characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research
Table 4: Characteristics of a scientific paradigm
Table 5: The research process

List of appendices (see USB-key)

Appendices related to article 1

Article 1 - Interview with Mike McGee - transcription
Article 1 - Interview with Annika Sörenstam
Article 1 - Interview with Mike McGee
Article 1 – Proof of Downloads

Appendices related to article 2

Article 2 - Coding example - Interview Tiffeny
Article 2 - Coding example - Interview with Brandi Chastain
Article 2 - Coding example - Interview with Majken Gilmartin
Article 2 - Focus group Interview – Women’s football - transcription
Article 2 - Focus group Interview - Women’s football
Article 2 - Interview with Majken Gilmartin - transcription
Article 2 - Interview with Thomas Slosarich - transcription
Article 2 - Interview with Brandi Chastain - transcription
Article 2 - Interview with Tiffeny Milbrett - transcription
Article 2 - Personal face2face interview - Brandi Chastain
Article 2 - Personal face2face interview - Majken Gilmartin
Article 2 - Personal face2face interview - Thomas Slosarich
Article 2 - Personal face2face interview - Tiffeny Milbrett
Article 2 - Correspondence with Soccer and Society - Follow up on submission
Article 2 - Proof of early submission to Soccer and Society

Appendices related to article 3

Article 3 - Coding example - Focus group Interview at Carlsberg CSR
Article 3 - Focus group Interview at Carlsberg - sport management practitioners
Article 3 - Focus group Interview at Carlsberg - transcription
Article 3 - Focus group Interview at UCN - sport management students
Article 3 - Focus group Interview at UCN – transcription
Article 3 - International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing - Proof of acceptance

Please note that the respondents from the focus group in article 2 wish to be remain anonymous. The same goes for the focus group in article 3 (cf. the sports management students). For additional information, please do not hesitate to contact the author.

Please note that article 2 was submitted in July 2014. It has now been published in Soccer & Society, a journal under Taylor & Francis. Article 3 is published in the International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing.

Please note that the research findings related to article 1 and to article 3 have been applied in other academic work (e.g. textbooks) within the context of sports business (e.g. article 1 has been downloaded 305 times since 2013). Among others, this relates to the following work:


LIST OF REFERENCES


