

**Brands in a Transforming Society:
Theoretical Concepts and Emerging Research Phenomena of
Brand Management within the Context of Digital and Sustainable
Transformation**

Dissertation

zur Erlangung des Grades eines Doktors der Wirtschaftswissenschaft
der Rechts- und Wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Fakultät
der Universität Bayreuth

Vorgelegt
von
Lars Brand (né Griebel)
aus
Lauf a.d. Pegnitz

Dekan: Prof. Dr. Claas Christian Germelmann

Erstberichterstatter: Prof. Dr. Tim Ströbel

Zweitberichterstatter: Prof. Dr. Herbert Woratschek

Tag der mündlichen Prüfung: 30. September 2025

For Dad.

How I wish you were here.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing these final sentences of my doctoral thesis is truly special. They make me proud to have (almost) completed my PhD. They also make me sad, as they herald the end of my time as a research associate at the University of Bayreuth – but they also fill me with excitement for what lies ahead. Above all however, they make me deeply grateful for all the fantastic people who made this journey so special and without whom the completion of this PhD would not have been possible.

First and foremost, I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Tim Ströbel, my supervisor and academic mentor. He placed his trust in me to become his very first research associate – even before I had completed my Master’s thesis – and I felt that trust throughout my entire time at his chair. His unwavering support for my research projects, his insightful feedback, and his belief in my ideas, even when I doubted them myself, were invaluable to my development as a researcher. I am especially grateful for his leadership, which struck a rare balance between freedom and guidance, allowing me to grow both personally and professionally. Thank you for opening up so many opportunities for me during my time at your chair – I will always remember experiences such as attending various conferences all over the world, organising and executing the Global Consulting Projects with Ohio University and adidas, working on the research co-operation with FC St. Pauli, or pursuing my own research stay at Ohio University.

Further, I am grateful for Prof. Dr. Herbert Woratschek, who not only supported my work as second supervisor, but also guided me through my first academic steps as a student assistant at his chair. Collaborating on short papers during that time taught me invaluable lessons for my PhD. In this context, I would also like to thank Dr. Markus Buser, Dr. Jan Schönberger, and Dr. Franziska Kullak, who inspired and encouraged me to pursue a PhD and served as fantastic role models and mentors – especially at the beginning of my PhD.

I would also like to thank Martin Drust and the entire FC St. Pauli community for their support. From the beginning, Martin showed genuine interest and openness toward our research, creating every opportunity for us to bring it to life. Our discussions were always inspiring and have profoundly shaped the way I understand brand management today.

Next, I would like to thank my colleagues at the department and the BaySpo, who simply made the University of Bayreuth a fantastic place to work. These include, in particular, Carmen Back, Monika Marot, Matthias Anderski, Lucas Endres, Annalena Neder, Mahdi Niakan, Prof. Dr. Nicola Bilstein, Dr. Heiko Heidenreich, Dr. Christian Brandt, Dr. Kristoff Reichel, Robert Warnecke, Timo Koch, Dr. Lisa-Marie Arnold, and Dr. Pascal Stegmann. Explicitly, I would like to express my gratitude to Matthias and Pascal. Matthias, it was an honour

to grow as a lecturer and researcher alongside you. Pascal, you not only became a fantastic research partner, but also an academic mentor and friend.

Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful family – the most important people in my life. My mum and dad, Petra and Holger. You have made everything possible for me since I was a little kid and unconditionally supported me in everything I do. Mum, your empathy and your conscientiousness have shaped me a lot – and continue to guide me every day. Dad, your curiosity and critical thinking always inspired me – how I wish you were here to celebrate, and probably also discuss, my doctoral thesis with me. My sister Jana. You played a significant role in becoming the person who I am today. My wife’s family, who I now call my own. You are truly the best “Brand” Community one could ever imagine. And above all, my incredible wife, Linda. You were not only an indispensable discussion partner for my research, but also my sanctuary – making every setback easier to bear and every success even sweeter. You make every day brighter. I love you.

Munich, October 2025

Lars Brand

ABSTRACT

Digital and sustainable transformation are fundamentally changing the perspectives on brands and brand management, prompting a refocusing and rethinking of theoretical concepts of brand management and facilitating the formation of emerging research phenomena of brand management. Accumulating seven interrelated research and transfer articles that examine brand management at different analysis levels (i.e., intra- and micro-level; meso- and macro-level), this thesis provides an extensive conceptualisation of brand management within the context of a rapidly transforming society. In particular, it develops and refines theoretical concepts of brand management to enhance the understanding of brand co-creation among multiple actors (*Transfer Article 1* and *Research Articles 1* and *2*). Building on these theoretical advancements, this thesis examines selected emerging research phenomena of brand management (i.e., human brands as novel types of branded entities, brands embracing broader social roles, and brands navigating between brand heritage and brand innovation) to enhance their understanding and to refine the theoretical concepts in specific contexts (*Transfer Article 2* and *Research Articles 3, 4* and *5*). While sport brands serve as specific ‘over-the-top’ research context within the articles, the findings are broadly applicable to other brands across contexts and industries, offering significant contributions to brand management research and practice. Overall, this thesis guides both researchers and practitioners to comprehend and respond appropriately to the transforming realities of brand management.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Overview of the Research Articles and Transfer Articles.....	6
Table 2. Author Contributions to the Research Articles and Transfer Articles.....	16
Table 3. Overview of the Research Articles and Transfer Articles and their Theoretical and Managerial Contributions.....	221

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Research Framework.	9
---	---

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	IV
ABSTRACT	VI
LIST OF TABLES	VII
LIST OF FIGURES	VII
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Motivation and Aim of Research	1
1.2. Structure of the Thesis.....	5
1.2.1. Research Framework.....	7
1.2.1.1. Brand Management Level	7
1.2.1.2. Analysis Level.....	10
1.2.2. Links between the Articles.....	11
1.3. Author Contributions to the Articles	15
1.4. Contribution to the Third Mission of the University of Bayreuth.....	17
1.5. References	19
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – TRANSFORMING PERSPECTIVES ON BRANDS AND BRAND MANAGEMENT	27
2.1. Towards the Multi-Actor-Dominant Logic	27
2.2. Towards Emerging Research Phenomena of Brand Management.....	30
2.3. References	33
3. THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF BRAND MANAGEMENT FROM DIFFERENT ANALYSIS LEVELS.....	41
3.1. Integrative Branding – Brand Management in The Light of Value Co-Creation (Transfer Article 1).....	41
3.1.1. Traditional Perspective on Branding.....	41
3.1.2. The Concept of Integrative Branding.....	42
3.1.3. To put in a nutshell.....	44
3.1.4. References	46
3.2. Rethinking brand management within sport: advancing towards the integrative sport brand ecosystem (ISBE) (Research Article 1)	48
3.2.1. Introduction	50
3.2.2. Multi-actor-dominant logic of (sport) brands.....	51
3.2.2.1. Evolving logic of brand management	51
3.2.2.2. Integrative Branding.....	52

3.2.2.3. Towards a multi-actor-dominant logic of sport brands	53
3.2.3. Ecosystem perspective of sport brands	55
3.2.4. Research design.....	56
3.2.4.1. Sampling logic.....	56
3.2.4.2. Data collection and analysis	57
3.2.5. Integrative sport brand ecosystem.....	58
3.2.5.1. Ecosystem perspective based on the multi-actor-dominant logic of sport brands	58
3.2.5.2. Sport brand engagement platforms	60
3.2.5.3. Towards the integrative sport brand ecosystem	61
3.2.6. Contributions.....	65
3.2.6.1. Theoretical contributions.....	65
3.2.6.2. Managerial contributions.....	68
3.2.6.3. Limitations and future research.....	69
3.2.7. Appendix	70
3.2.8. References	71
3.3. Unpacking brand co-creation: A single case study and empirical consolidation of brand co-creation performances following qualitative meta-synthesis (Research Article 2)..	77
3.3.1. Introduction	79
3.3.2. Brand co-creation	80
3.3.3. Brand identity.....	82
3.3.4. Brand meaning	83
3.3.5. Performativity theory as midrange theory to unpack brand co-creation.....	84
3.3.6. Single-case study: method.....	86
3.3.6.1. Research context	86
3.3.6.2. Data collection and analysis	86
3.3.7. Single-case study: findings.....	88
3.3.7.1. Communicating	88
3.3.7.2. Bringing brand meanings to life.....	89
3.3.7.3. Criticising	90
3.3.7.4. Negotiating	90
3.3.7.5. Initiating brand development	91
3.3.7.6. Implementing brand development.....	92
3.3.7.7. Facilitating.....	92

3.3.7.8. Social listening	93
3.3.7.9. Assimilating brand meanings	93
3.3.8. Empirical consolidation of BCCP following qualitative meta-synthesis.....	94
3.3.8.1. Direct BCCP.....	95
3.3.8.2. Enabling BCCP	98
3.3.9. Contributions.....	99
3.3.9.1. Theoretical contributions.....	99
3.3.9.2. Managerial contributions.....	101
3.3.10. References	102
4. EMERGING RESEARCH PHENOMENA OF BRAND MANAGEMENT FROM DIFFERENT ANALYSIS LEVELS.....	111
4.1. Aufbau und Management von Eventmarken im Sport - Implikationen einer Multi- Akteurs-dominanten Logik für die Eventmarke UEFA EURO 2024 (Transfer Article 2, in German).....	111
4.1.1. Einleitung	111
4.1.2. Evolution der Markenlogik: Von einer Markeninhaber-dominanten Logik zu einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik von Marken.....	113
4.1.2.1. Markeninhaber-dominante Logik von Marken	113
4.1.2.2. Multi-Akteurs-dominante Logik von Marken.....	114
4.1.2.3. Das Konzept des Vernetzten Branding	115
4.1.3. Aufbau und Management von Eventmarken.....	117
4.1.3.1. Event Brand Creation Model.....	118
4.1.3.2. Brand Governance bei Eventmarken.....	120
4.1.3.3. Einordnung des gegenwärtigen Verständnisses von Eventmarken in die Multi- Akteurs-dominante Logik	121
4.1.4. Implikationen einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik für den Aufbau und das Management der Eventmarke EURO 2024.....	122
4.1.4.1. Die Eventmarke EURO 2024 aus einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik.....	122
4.1.4.2. Implikationen für den Aufbau und das Management der Eventmarke EURO 2024	127
4.1.5. Fazit.....	130
4.1.6. References	132
4.2. Conscientious Sport Club Brands as Ecosystems for Sustainable Value Co-Creation: the Roles of Stakeholders (Research Article 3, Extended Abstract).....	138

4.2.1. Introduction	139
4.2.2. Theoretical Background and Conceptualisation	139
4.2.3. Method	140
4.2.4. Findings	140
4.2.5. Contributions	142
4.2.6. References	144
4.3. ‘A Victimless Crime’? Implications of eSports Extensions of Sport Club Brands for Brand Management From a Multi-Actor-Dominant Logic (Research Article 4)	146
4.3.1. Introduction	148
4.3.2. Theoretical Background and Literature Review	149
4.3.2.1. Integrative Sport Brand Ecosystem	149
4.3.2.2. Sport Brand Extensions	150
4.3.2.3. eSports Research and its Implications for eSports Extensions of SCB.....	151
4.3.3. Method	154
4.3.3.1. Research Design	154
4.3.3.2. Data Collection.....	155
4.3.3.3. Data Analysis	156
4.3.4. Results	157
4.3.4.1. Building Brand Identity.....	157
4.3.4.1.1. Preserving Brand Identity	157
4.3.4.1.2. Translating Brand Identity	158
4.3.4.1.3. Discursive Processes to Building Brand Identity.....	159
4.3.4.2. Co-Creating Brand Meaning	161
4.3.4.2.1. Reinforcing and Changing Brand Meaning	161
4.3.4.2.2. Discursive Processes Among Extant Fans	162
4.3.4.2.3. Discursive Processes in the eSports Community.....	163
4.3.5. Discussion and Contributions	165
4.3.5.1. Theoretical Contributions.....	165
4.3.5.2. Managerial Contributions.....	168
4.3.5.3. Limitations and Further Research	168
4.3.6. Appendix	170
4.3.7. References	174
4.4. Empowerment of human brands: Brand meaning co-creation on digital engagement platforms (Research Article 5)	180

4.4.1. Introduction	182
4.4.2. Theoretical background.....	183
4.4.2.1. Personal and human brands.....	183
4.4.2.2. Athlete brands as particular types of human brands	184
4.4.2.3. Towards brand meaning co-creation of human brands	187
4.4.3. Methodology	190
4.4.3.1. Research design.....	190
4.4.3.2. Netnography	190
4.4.3.3. Interview study.....	191
4.4.3.4. Data analysis	194
4.4.4. Results	194
4.4.4.1. Brand meaning co-creation performances.....	194
4.4.4.1.1. Network-related performances.....	195
4.4.4.1.2. Human brand-related performances.....	196
4.4.4.1.3. Person-related performances.....	199
4.4.4.2. Multi-actor-perspective on human brands.....	200
4.4.5. Discussion	201
4.4.5.1. Theoretical contributions.....	201
4.4.5.2. Managerial implications	205
4.4.6. Limitations and future research.....	206
4.4.7. References	208
5. CONCLUSION.....	218
5.1. Summary and Contributions.....	218
5.2. Future Research.....	223
APPENDIX A: LIST OF INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CONTRIBUTIONS ..	225
APPENDIX B: TRANSFER ARTICLES CONTRIBUTING TO THE THIRD	
MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BAYREUTH	227
APPENDIX C: SPÖKO SCORE – INDUSTRY REPORT ON SPORT BUSINESS	
IN GERMANY	249

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Motivation and Aim of Research

‘Society is influenced by brands and society also influences brands’

Philip Kotler, in an interview with Thought Economics in 2023

Brands are widely recognised as an organisation’s most valuable asset, driving business success. This has led to significant attention from management practice, with corporations substantially investing in brand building (Forbes, 2020), and fostered extensive research on the concept of brands and the management of brands (Ind & Schmidt, 2019). Conventional thought on brands is grounded in managerial and psychological perspectives, and focuses on products and corporations as branded entities. Brands function as identifiers and images to help customers distinguish branded products, attribute utilitarian and symbolic benefits to them, and thus facilitate their purchasing decisions. Accordingly, brands are created from the brand owner *for* market actors such as customers, with the aim of *influencing society*. This implies a *brand owner-dominant logic*, which considers brands as assets that are deliberately and consciously built and nurtured by the brand owner. Brand owners develop their brand through a process of introspection, identifying what they perceive as the defining attributes and benefits of their brand (i.e., brand identity), then projecting that version onto the market to create consistent brand meaning. Brand owners are considered to be in complete control of the brand, building the brand in an insular, top-down manner (Aaker, 2002; de Chernatony, 2006; Forbes, 2018; Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 1993).

Today, in the light of a transforming society, this managerial logic of brands and brand management appears overly simplistic, too narrow and static, and only partially applicable to contemporary realities as *society is also influencing brands* (Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2015). Society as a whole, and thus brand management as well, is currently facing two major transformations – the digital and the sustainable transformation (Baumgarth et al., 2020; Diodato et al., 2023; Mäkitie et al., 2023). *Digital transformation* refers to the disruptive process of change in economies and societies induced by technological innovations. In particular, digital technologies create an ecosystem of digital infrastructure, offering innovative possibilities for communication, interaction, and collaboration (e.g., social media, online communities). Thus, digital transformation leads to heightened access to information and actors, and facilitates processes of co-creation among multiple actors (Hoffman et al., 2022; Nambisan, 2017; Verhoef et al., 2021). *Sustainable transformation* refers to fundamental shifts in established industries, socio-

technical systems, and societies towards more sustainable modes of production and consumption (Patterson et al., 2017; Salomaa & Juhola, 2020; Sustainability Transitions Research Network, 2025). In line with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), societies are engaging in sustainable transformation processes to reduce environmental impacts and eliminate social inequalities while maintaining economic viability, ultimately striving to move towards more sustainable and equitable futures (Köhler et al., 2019; United Nations, 2024). Sustainable transformation is considered as complex multi-actor process, emphasising that collaboration among various actors is fundamental to developing effective, just, and creative solutions to current social and environmental challenges (Chambers et al., 2022; Köhler et al., 2019; United Nations, 2024).

Digital and sustainable transformation are also transforming the perspectives on brands and brand management. In particular, these transformations prompt a refocusing and rethinking of *theoretical concepts of brand management* and facilitate the formation of *emerging research phenomena of brand management* (Baumgarth et al., 2020; Golob et al., 2020; Swaminathan et al., 2020). Digital transformation empowers multiple actors to actively co-create brands through the exchange of their inspirations, ideas, and meanings of the brand, thereby diminishing managerial control over brand meaning (Christodoulides, 2009; Ind & Schmidt, 2019; Siano et al., 2022; Swaminathan et al., 2020; Tajvidi et al., 2020; Veloutsou & Guzman, 2017; Wider et al., 2018). Similarly, the collaborative nature of sustainable transformation insinuates that brands must adopt a balanced actor approach, engaging various actors in strategic decision-making processes and sustainability initiatives to equally co-create business as well as social and environmental value (Abratt & Kleyn, 2023; Iglesias et al., 2023; Iglesias & Ind, 2020; Siano et al., 2022). Therefore, the transforming society requires brand management research to develop innovative *theoretical concepts of brand management* that consider the active involvement of multiple actors. Further, the transforming society requires brand management research to consider various *emerging research phenomena of brand management*. One of these emerging research phenomena of brand management are novel types of ‘branded entities’ (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020, p. 15; Swaminathan et al., 2020, p. 24), extending beyond corporations. Digital technologies now enable, for instance, humans, places, ideas, and non-governmental organisations that previously lacked branding capacity to adopt systematic approaches to brand building (Appel et al., 2020; Doyle et al., 2023; Swaminathan et al., 2020). Similarly, as sustainable transformation is reshaping societal values and norms, brands increasingly embrace broader social roles and become socially conscious and ethical entities that aim to address contemporary social and environmental challenges (Hajdas & Kłeczek, 2021; Iglesias & Ind, 2020; Schmidt et al.,

2022; Spry et al., 2021). Such consideration of social, but also digital, trends as well as socio-cultural phenomena further raises challenges for brands to navigate between brand heritage and brand innovation (Manoli, 2022; Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020).

Brand management research is gradually adapting to the transforming realities of today's society. In terms of *theoretical concepts of brand management*, research is progressively advancing the understanding of the influence of multiple actors on brand building, adopting a multi-actor-dominant logic of brands. In this logic, brands are conceptualised as dynamic social constructs that are constantly in flux as they are co-created in social interactions among multiple actors (Merz et al., 2009; Sarasvuo et al., 2022). However, the multi-actor-dominant logic is lacking theoretical concepts that specify and conceptualise the underlying structures of brand co-creation, the role of brand managers in brand co-creation, and how multiple actors co-create brands (Siano et al., 2022; Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020). Similarly, selected *emerging research phenomena of brand management* are increasingly considered in brand management research. However, while research has started to focus on building and managing human brands as novel types of branded entities, this research is neglecting the influence of multiple actors, thus insufficiently conceptualising the emerging research phenomenon (Johns & English, 2016; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016; Na et al., 2020). Further, although there is a growing debate on the broader social roles of brands in brand management research – evidenced by recent special issues on corporate social responsibility (Golob & Podnar, 2019) and sustainability (Golob et al., 2022) in brand management, and conscientious branding (Iglesias et al., 2023) – it is still in its beginnings, offering initial approaches that warrant further research. In particular, this research should examine how brands can facilitate the co-creation of shared societal value among multiple actors and how brands obtain credible sustainable brand meaning (Golob et al., 2022; Iglesias & Ind, 2020; Iglesias et al., 2023). As brands are responding to socio-cultural trends increasingly faster, research is also needed to understand how brands can navigate between brand heritage and brand innovation – for instance in the context of innovative brand extensions (Iglesias et al., 2020; Manoli, 2022; Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020).

Overall, this thesis addresses both levels of brand management: *theoretical concepts of brand management* and *emerging research phenomena of brand management*. In particular, it aims to conceptualise specific theoretical concepts within the multi-actor-dominant logic to refine the understanding of brand co-creation among multiple actors. Building on these theoretical concepts, this thesis empirically examines selected emerging research phenomena of brand management (*see above*; i.e., human brands as novel types of branded entities, brands

embracing broader social roles, and brands navigating between brand heritage and brand innovation) to both enhance the understanding of these and refine the theoretical concepts in specific contexts (*see chapter 1.2.1.1*). Considering the conceptualisation of brands and brand management as complex social phenomena, brand management research requires an analysis across multiple levels of aggregation. Such use of ‘oscillating foci’ provides distinct but interrelated perspectives on focal phenomena, enabling a deeper understanding of them (Akaka et al., 2023; Chandler & Vargo, 2011). This thesis, therefore, analyses theoretical concepts and selected emerging research phenomena of brand management at the intra- and micro-level as well as the meso- and macro-level, ensuring their comprehensive understanding (*see chapter 1.2.1.2*).

In order to empirically examine *theoretical concepts of brand management* and *emerging research phenomena of brand management*, this thesis uses sport brands as a specific research context, which is considered particularly appropriate due to several reasons. First, in the course of the increasing commercialisation of sport, brands are regarded as the most valuable asset sport entities possess (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). Brand management has thus become a strategic focus for sport organisations (Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020) and has reached a highly advanced stage today (Manoli, 2022). Second, sport represents a significant social institution in contemporary society, pressuring sport brands to respond to broader social issues, create shared value for society, and use their reach to promote social change (B. J. Baker et al., 2022; Cury et al., 2023; Doyle et al., 2023; European Commission, 2023). Third, sport brands are highly affected by the digital transformation, offering novel technology-induced opportunities to communicate brand identity and enable interactions among various actors to co-create the brand of traditional (e.g., clubs) and novel (e.g., athletes) types of branded entities (Stegmann et al., 2023; Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020). Professional athletes are among the most popular human brands worldwide (Doyle et al., 2023; Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). Finally, sport brands offer an emotional context (Biscaia et al., 2012) and actors are characterised by a high level of passion and identification (Abosag et al., 2012; Sutton et al., 1997), thus aiming to participate in the co-creation of the brand (Hüttermann et al., 2022; Kolyperas et al., 2019; Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020). This emotional context is also a result of the extraordinary tradition and heritage of most sport brands (Rose et al., 2021). Consequently, sport brands offer an exceptional ‘over-the-top’ context, where *theoretical concepts of brand management* and *emerging research phenomena of brand management* become ‘transparently observable’ (Pettigrew, 1990). Thus, the specific research context of sport brands enables an in-depth examination of brand management and the derivation of implications for general concepts in brand management and for brands from other fields and industries (Golob et al., 2020).

In conclusion, this thesis aims to provide an extensive conceptualisation of brand management within the context of today's transforming society. The ongoing digital and sustainable transformations necessitate a rethinking of theoretical concepts and the exploration of emerging research phenomena of brand management at different analysis levels.

1.2. Structure of the Thesis

In order to examine the influence of digital and sustainable transformation on brand management, this thesis accumulates and connects the research and transfer articles that the author developed during his time as a PhD candidate. Accordingly, this cumulative thesis consists of three main chapters. In the *second chapter*, the theoretical foundation is established by reviewing extant literature, while the *third* and *fourth chapter* present five research articles and two transfer articles that provide an in-depth examination of the influence of digital and sustainable transformation on brand management at different analysis levels. The research articles have either been published following a double-blind peer review process or are currently under review in an international scientific journal. The transfer articles have been published in research book series. Table 1 gives an overview of the articles, the scientific journals or research book series in which they were published, and common metrics used to assess the quality of the scientific journals. The research articles primarily build on empirical approaches within the context of sport brands, adopting qualitative methods to allow for an in-depth examination of complex social phenomena such as brands and to align with the sociological perspective on brands. To ensure consistency, the layout of the articles was adapted to the format of this thesis. Lastly, the Introduction (*first chapter*) and Conclusion (*fifth chapter*) embed the main chapters into the overarching context of this thesis.

Table 1. Overview of the Research Articles and Transfer Articles.

Title	Year	Authors	Scientific journal/ Research book series	Status	ABDC*	Scopus**
Research Articles (RA)						
RA 1: <i>Rethinking brand management within sport: advancing towards the integrative sport brand ecosystem (ISBE)</i>	2024	Lars Brand Pascal Stegmann Tim Ströbel	<i>European Sport Management Quarterly</i>	Published	A	9.0
RA 2: <i>Unpacking brand co-creation: A single case study and empirical consolidation of brand co-creation performances following qualitative meta-synthesis</i>	2025	Lars Brand Matthias Anderski Tim Ströbel	<i>Journal of Brand Management</i>	Published	A	10.0
RA 3: <i>Conscientious Sport Club Brands as Ecosystems for Sustainable Value Co-Creation: the Roles of Stakeholders</i>	n.a.	Lars Brand Pascal Stegmann Tim Ströbel	<i>European Sport Management Quarterly</i>	Under Review	A	9.0
RA 4: <i>‘A Victimless Crime’? Implications of eSports Extensions of Sport Club Brands for Brand Management From a Multi-Actor-Dominant Logic</i>	2024	Lars Brand Tim Ströbel Matthias Anderski	<i>Journal of Global Sport Management</i>	Published	C	6.0
RA 5: <i>Empowerment of human brands: Brand meaning co-creation on digital engagement platforms</i>	2023	Lars Brand Pascal Stegmann Tim Ströbel	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	Published	A	25.2
Transfer Articles (TA)						
TA 1: <i>Integrative Branding - Brand Management in The Light of Value Co-Creation</i>	2020	Lars Brand Herbert Woratschek Tim Ströbel	<i>SMAB Relevant Management Insights</i>	Published	n.a.	n.a.
TA 2: <i>Aufbau und Management von Eventmarken im Sport - Implikationen einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik für die Eventmarke EURO 2024</i>	2023	Lars Brand Tim Ströbel	<i>Erich Schmidt Verlag</i>	Published	n.a.	n.a.

Journal Quality Metrics: *ABDC Journal Quality List 2022; ** Scopus CiteScore Tracker 2024 (updated on 05 April, 2025)

1.2.1. Research Framework

In order to provide an overview of the various articles in this thesis and their interrelationships, the research articles (RA) and transfer articles (TA) are classified into a research framework (*see Figure 1*). This research framework encompasses two dimensions – brand management level and analysis level – each represented as a continuum between two poles. In terms of brand management level, the research framework distinguishes between *theoretical concepts of brand management* and *emerging research phenomena of brand management*. In terms of analysis level, the research framework distinguishes between *intra- and micro-level* and *meso- and macro-level*. Furthermore, the research framework uses icons to illustrate how the articles relate to digital and sustainable transformation. The research framework and its underlying logic are described in more detail below.

1.2.1.1. Brand Management Level

Brand management has evolved into a comprehensive and overarching term that encompasses three levels: theoretical concepts of brand management (e.g., brand equity, brand co-creation), specific foci of brand management (e.g., sustainability, digital technology), and different types of branded entities (e.g., human brands, event brands) (Golob et al., 2020). Following this classification of brand management, this thesis positions the articles along a continuum ranging from *theoretical concepts of brand management* to *emerging research phenomena of brand management*. The latter results from merging specific foci of brand management and different types of branded entities.

Theoretical concepts of brand management – brand management research is widely considered to be highly context-dependent. Given the digital and sustainable transformation of contemporary society, the context in which brand management operates is rapidly changing, significantly shaping theoretical concepts of brand management (Golob et al., 2020; Hughes et al., 2018). Consequently, extant theoretical concepts of brand management are increasingly considered to be insufficient (Swaminathan et al., 2020) and therefore in a continuous process of adaption to reflect contemporary social, theoretical, and managerial thinking (Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2015; Golob et al., 2020). Conceptualising, which is the process of abstract thinking to develop theoretical concepts, is critical to the vitality of academic fields (MacInnis, 2011) and the theoretical advancement of brand management research (Golob et al., 2020). In order to conceptualise and refine theoretical concepts of brand management, it is appropriate to blend conceptual and empirical approaches. Conceptual approaches enable to integrate, summarise, and synthesise extant knowledge of a theoretical concept to achieve conceptual integration

across multiple theories or literature streams (Jaakkola, 2020; MacInnis, 2011). Empirical approaches rely on empirical evidence (e.g., qualitative and quantitative data) to develop theoretical concepts, emphasising that grounding theoretical concepts in empirical data ensures their relevance and validity (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Case study research is recognised for its ability to conceptualise and refine theoretical concepts by connecting theory with empirical in-depth insights (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Eisenhardt, 1989; Järvensivu & Törnroos, 2010). In the context of brand management research, the vital role of interactions with practitioners (i.e., empirical approach) in theory development is underscored – particularly due to its applied nature (Baumgarth et al., 2020; Golob et al., 2020; Hughes et al., 2011). Thus, blending conceptual and empirical approaches is appropriate to advance theoretical concepts of brand management. Therefore, articles oriented towards the *theoretical concepts of brand management* pole predominantly focus on conceptualising and refining the multi-actor-dominant logic of brands through both conceptual (i.e., synthesising extant research) and empirical work (i.e., qualitative case study). These articles advance theory and build the fundamental theoretical concept for all other articles in this thesis.

Emerging research phenomena of brand management – research phenomena refer to what is being studied, encompassing ‘any problem, issue, or topic that is chosen as the subject of an investigation’ (van de Ven, 2016, p. 265). Accordingly, research phenomena are considered sufficiently significant and interesting to merit exploration and theorisation (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2024). Emerging research phenomena, drawing on the understanding of emergence as the ‘process of coming into being, or of becoming important and prominent’ (New Oxford American Dictionary, as cited in Rotolo et al., 2015, p. 1829), refer to radically novel problems, issues, or topics of scientific interest that are appropriate for systematic description and explanation (O’Mahony & Cohen, 2022; Rotolo et al., 2015; Yadav, 2018). Thus, emerging research phenomena represent promising novel research topics within a field that are at an early stage of development and academic inquiry (O’Mahony & Cohen, 2022; von Krogh et al., 2012; Yadav, 2018). Emerging research phenomena often stem from curious observation of contemporary developments due to changes such as novel technologies or social movements (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2024; Fisher et al., 2021; van de Ven, 2016). Given the applied nature of brand management research, analysing such emerging phenomena from the ‘real’ world is critical for addressing related challenges (Baumgarth et al., 2020). In brand management, digital and sustainable transformation are key drivers of emerging research phenomena. These include novel specific foci of brand management (e.g., brands embracing broader social roles, brands navigating between brand heritage and brand innovation) and novel types of branded entities (e.g., human

brands) (Baumgarth et al., 2020; Golob et al., 2020). Therefore, articles oriented towards the *emerging research phenomena of brand management* pole predominantly focus on the empirical examination of these phenomena arising from digital and sustainable transformation. The articles build on the theoretical concepts of brand management to examine selected emerging phenomena. However, adhering to the principles of phenomenon-based theorising (Fisher et al., 2021; Yadav et al., 2018), the examination of emerging research phenomena serves not only to understand them, but also to refine and iteratively develop theoretical concepts, particularly in specific contexts of a transforming society.

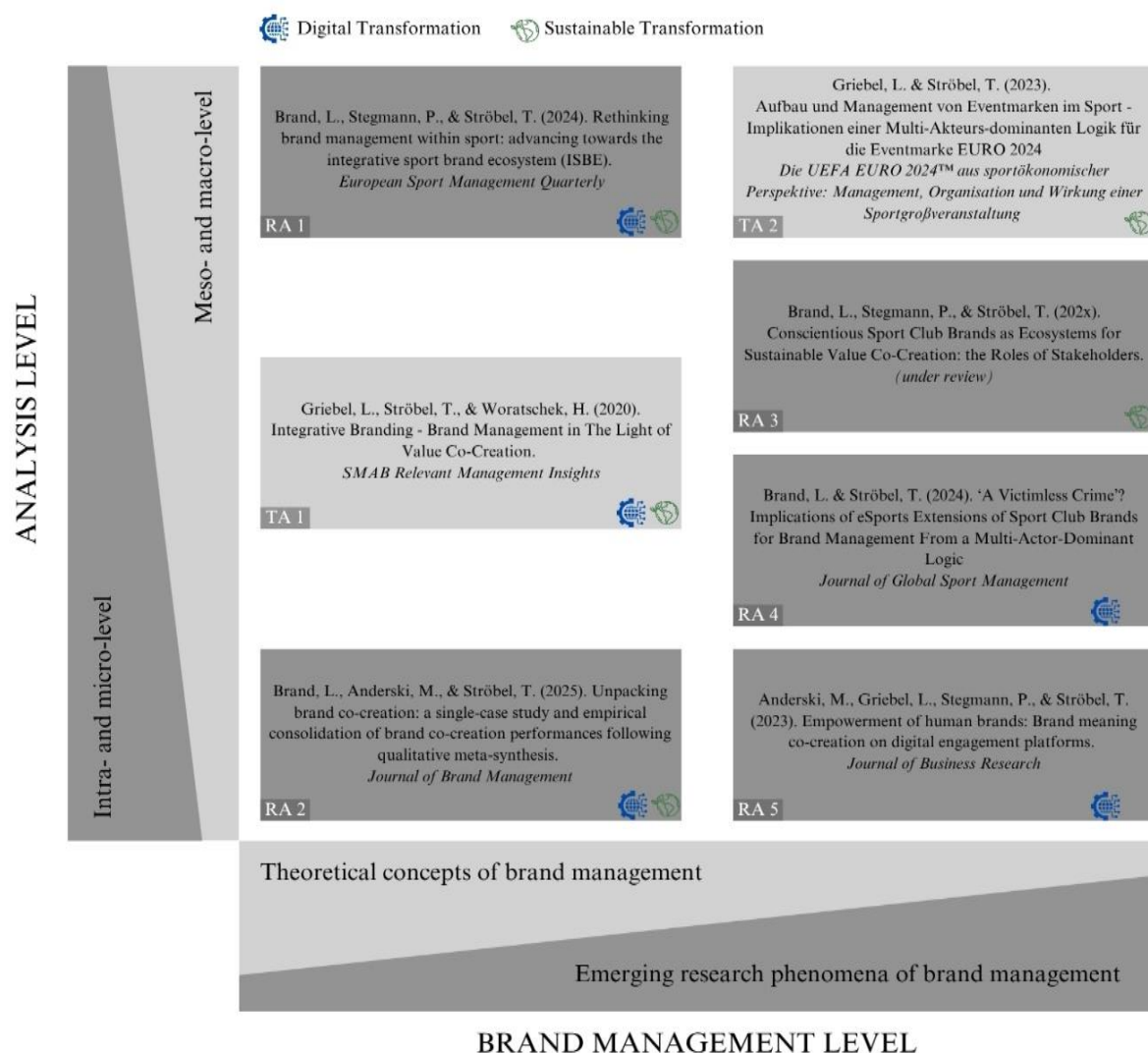


Figure 1. Research Framework.

1.2.1.2. *Analysis Level*

In order to understand complex social phenomena, such as brands and brand management, it is necessary to oscillate foci and analyse the phenomena across multiple levels of aggregation. The process of zooming in and out on focal phenomena provides distinct but inter-related perspectives (Akaka et al., 2023; Chandler & Vargo, 2011). Recent research in marketing and brand management distinguishes between intra-, micro-, meso-, and macro-level of analysis (e.g., J. J. Baker et al., 2022; Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Woratschek et al., 2014, 2020). However, these levels are relative, somewhat arbitrary, and inherently interconnected rather than entirely separable (Akaka et al., 2023). Therefore, this thesis positions the articles along a continuum ranging from *intra-* and *micro-level* to *meso-* and *macro-level of analysis* to examine brands and brand management.

Intra- and micro-level of analysis – analysis at this pole of the continuum comprises single actors (intra-level) and dyadic interactions between actors (micro-level) (J. J. Baker et al., 2022). Analysis at the intra-level focuses on aspects within individuals, examining constructs such as attitudes, intentions, or individual (brand) meanings (Woratschek et al., 2014). Analysis at the micro-level focuses on observable doings and sayings of actors in dyadic social interactions with other actors (i.e., organisations, customers) on engagement platforms (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Collins, 1981; Storbacka et al., 2016). Adhering to the Coleman ‘bathtub’ (Coleman, 1990), individuals and their social interaction form the micro-foundation for macro-level phenomena, enabling to unpack collective concepts such as co-creation (Storbacka et al., 2016). Within the context of brand management, this refers to the performances of actors in social interactions. Brands are dynamic social objects, continuously constituted, challenged, and stabilised by actors in recurring linguistic and socio-material brand co-creation performances (Lucarelli & Hallin, 2015; Onyas & Ryan, 2015; von Wallpach et al., 2017). Therefore, articles oriented towards the *intra-* and *micro-level of analysis* focus on individual actors, their internal processes, and how they interact in the context of brands with the brand and other actors, forming the micro-foundation of brand co-creation.

Meso- and macro-level of analysis – analysis at this pole of the continuum comprises interactions among limited sets of actors (meso-level) and the entire ecosystem (macro-level) (Buser et al., 2022). Analysis at the meso-level focuses on interactions among multiple actors on particular engagement platforms. Engagement platforms are digital, physical, or integrated touchpoints provided by focal actors to enable and facilitate interactions among actors (Breibach et al., 2014; Stegmann et al., 2023). Within the context of brand management, actors

with an interest in the brand (e.g., customers, employees, and partners) interact on brand engagement platforms to co-create brands (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016). Analysis at the macro-level takes a holistic perspective and focuses on the entire ecosystem, consisting of a network of mutually dependent engagement platforms (Breidbach et al., 2014). Within the context of brand management, focal actors aim to systematically orchestrate the complex relationships and brand co-creation processes between multiple actors on interdependent brand engagement platforms (Buser et al., 2022; Giannopoulos et al., 2021). Adhering to the Coleman ‘bathtub’ (Coleman, 1990), the institutional logic of an ecosystem forms the context for actors to interact on engagement platforms (Akaka et al., 2023; Storbacka et al., 2016). Dyadic micro-level interactions emerge on meso-level brand engagement platforms, which are mutually interdependent and constitute the brand ecosystem at the macro-level (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Storbacka et al., 2016). Therefore, articles oriented towards the *meso-* and *macro-level of analysis* focus on interactions among sets of multiple actors on brand engagement platforms and the interdependencies between brand engagement platforms in the brand ecosystem.

1.2.2. Links between the Articles

The thematic links between the articles result from the overarching logic of the research framework (see *Figure 1*), which is also reflected in the structure of this thesis. Consequently, the articles assigned to the *third chapter* develop and refine theoretical concepts of brand management, while the articles assigned to the *fourth chapter* examine emerging research phenomena of brand management – both at the meso- and macro-level as well as at the intra- and micro-level of analysis.

In the *second chapter*, the theoretical framework of this thesis is set out, illustrating the transforming perspectives on brands and brand management. Specifically, the multi-actor-dominant logic of brands is described and contrasted with the brand owner-dominant logic to provide an initial understanding of brand co-creation. In addition, it is described how digital and sustainable transformation have led to the formation of selected emerging research phenomena (i.e., human brands as novel types of branded entities, brands embracing broader social roles, and brands navigating between brand heritage and brand innovation). The chapter includes a sport brand management perspective to underscore the relevance of using sport brands as specific context in this thesis.

In the *third chapter*, the author focused on developing and refining the theoretical concept of brand co-creation, addressing conceptual shortcomings of existing brand management research that were revealed through an extensive literature review. *Transfer Article 1 (Integrative Branding - Brand Management in The Light of Value Co-Creation)* originated from this

extensive review of literature on brand management, summarising and applying the specific concept of integrative branding within the context of sport. In order to theoretically advance brand management research, the author analysed the theoretical concept of brand co-creation at different analysis levels. Aiming to develop a meso- and macro-level perspective on brand co-creation, the author investigated the various actors and overarching structures of brand co-creation. Thus, in *Research Article 1 (Rethinking brand management within sport: advancing towards the integrative sport brand ecosystem (ISBE))* the integrative sport brand ecosystem is conceptualised, which offers a systemic perspective on brand co-creation. The integrative sport brand ecosystem was developed following an iterative process of theoretical and empirical work. Therefore, theories from various literature streams, including integrative branding, current sport branding literature, and the sport ecosystem logic were synthesised and systematically combined. Simultaneously, the emerging theoretical framework was expanded and refined based on empirical findings from a single case study with FC St. Pauli (semi-structured interviews, N=26; secondary data, N=35). The integrative sport brand ecosystem emerges around a single sport brand and comprises all actors with an interest in the brand, as well as all interrelated institutional and emergent brand engagement platforms, where multiple actors interact to co-create the sport brand. The brand conductor is a focal actor-collective within the integrative sport brand ecosystem, obligated to develop and communicate brand identity, facilitate brand meaning co-creation processes, and constantly adapt brand identity in internal processes on the brand management platform. After gaining a holistic understanding of brand co-creation, the author altered the focus and zoomed in on the intra- and micro-level of analysis to investigate the micro-foundations of brand co-creation and the interactions of actors on brand engagement platforms. *Research Article 2 (Unpacking brand co-creation: A single case study and empirical consolidation of brand co-creation performances following qualitative meta-synthesis)* resulted from that consideration. It adopts a performative perspective on brands to identify the individual brand co-creation performances of actors. For this purpose, the authors conducted a single case study with FC St. Pauli comprising semi-structured interviews (N=26), internal brand-related documents (N=5), media content analysis (N=36), and social media analysis (N_{posts}=77, N_{comments}=3.944). Both the results of the case study and the results of extant primary studies were then empirically consolidated following qualitative meta-synthesis. This consolidation identifies eight interrelated brand co-creation performances of actors, which are divided into direct brand co-creation performances (i.e., communicating, implementing, contesting, and developing) and

enabling brand co-creation performances (i.e., negotiating, facilitating, social listening, and assimilating). Within direct brand co-creation performances, actors directly co-create brands, while enabling brand co-creation performances eventually enable the direct ones.

In the *fourth chapter*, building on the advancement of the theoretical concept of brand co-creation, the author applies this conceptual knowledge to examine selected emerging research phenomena of brand management resulting from the digital and sustainable transformation of contemporary society. *Transfer Article 2* and *Research Articles 3* and *4* are oriented towards the meso- and macro-level of analysis, while *Research Article 5* is oriented towards the intra- and micro-level of analysis. Thematically, the first two articles relate to sustainable transformation, considering the broader social roles of brands. The latter two articles relate to digital transformation, considering the challenge for brands to navigate tensions between brand heritage and brand innovation in the context of innovative brand extensions (i.e., eSport) (*Research Article 4*) and the formation of human brands as novel types of branded entities (*Research Article 5*).

Transfer Article 2 (Aufbau und Management von Eventmarken im Sport - Implikationen einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik für die Eventmarke EURO 2024) analyses the UEFA EURO 2024 event brand through the lens of the multi-actor-dominant logic. Building on conceptual considerations and observations within the context of the UEFA EURO 2024 event brand, an overview of relevant brand engagement platforms and the various actors that participate in brand co-creation is developed. In addition, the structured overview served as a foundation for deriving managerial implications for the brand management of event brands, with a specific focus on the UEFA EURO 2024 event brand. It is emphasised that organising committees must proactively involve various actors and provide brand engagement platforms that facilitate the implementation of brand identity and the collaborative co-creation of authentic brand meaning. Given the event organisers' emphasis on sustainability as a core element of the brand, particular attention is devoted to implications for co-creating sustainable brand meaning with multiple actors. Similarly, *Research Article 3 (Conscientious Sport Club Brands as Ecosystems for Sustainable Value Co-Creation: the Roles of Stakeholders)* is oriented towards the sustainable transformation of sport clubs, examining how brand management offers an innovative approach to sustainable value co-creation and the roles of stakeholders in this process. Therefore, the authors synthesised the logic of sustainable value co-creation and the concept of conscientious brands to conceptualise conscientious sport club brands. Furthermore, the sustainability reports (N=15) of conscientious sport club brands in the German Bundesliga and

semi-structured interviews with industry experts (N=18) were analysed to illustrate this conceptualisation and explore stakeholder roles. Conscientious sport club brands are characterised by conscientious brand meanings that enable collaborative relationships, thus forming ecosystems of like-minded stakeholders that engage in sustainable value co-creation. Stakeholders, connected through the conscientious sport club brand, assume four distinct roles (i.e., gardener, enabler, operator, and legitimiser) to co-create sustainable value. This research article is currently under review in a scientific journal. *Research Article 4 ('A Victimless Crime'? Implications of eSports Extensions of Sport Club Brands for Brand Management From a Multi-Actor-Dominant Logic)* focuses on sport club brands and analyses the influence of eSports extensions on brand management processes within the integrative sport brand ecosystem. eSports, a pop-cultural phenomenon driven by digital transformation, has captured the attention of sport club brands seeking to appeal new audiences and maintain relevance. eSports extensions are considered as brand innovations, particularly in culturally-diverse contexts. Brand innovations represent a significant emerging phenomenon in brand management, as brands navigate the challenge of respecting brand heritage while simultaneously innovating to secure their future. In order to examine the influence on brand management processes, a qualitative multi-case study of eleven sport club brands within the context of the German Bundesliga was conducted, comprising semi-structured interviews (N=20) and the analysis of a large number of social media comments (i.e., Forums, Instagram, and Reddit). Empirical findings show that sport managers constantly navigate between preserving and translating brand identity. Brand meaning is mainly reinforced by extant actors that also engage with the eSports extension. However, eSports extensions that are permanent, authentic, and competitively relevant attract novel actors that potentially change brand meaning and develop *Doppelgängerbedeutungen*. The digital transformation not only facilitated the emergence of eSports, but also the emergence of human brands as novel types of branded entities, through digital engagement platforms. This is the focus of *Research Article 5 (Empowerment of human brands: Brand meaning co-creation on digital engagement platforms)*. The digital transformation empowers individuals to build a human brand and actively engage with various actors. Thus, the authors specifically focused on digital brand engagement platforms of a human brand and conducted semi-structured interviews (N=25) and netnographic analysis (N_{posts}=299, N_{comments}=17.800) with relevant actors to understand the co-creation of human brands. Drawing on the concepts of integrative branding and performativity as a theoretical framework, the empirical study reveals relevant actors on selected digital brand engagement platforms and their performances to co-create the human brand.

In particular, considering the unique characteristics of human brands (i.e., person and brand are mutually interdependent but not identical), it introduces novel person-related performances.

In the *fifth chapter*, the author discusses the overarching implications of this thesis for brand management research and managerial practice. In addition, directions for future research are suggested.

1.3. Author Contributions to the Articles

This thesis consists of five research articles and two transfer articles that have been published or are under review at the time of this thesis's submission. Using the widely recognized Contributor Role Taxonomy (CRediT) (Brand et al., 2015), the contributions of the authors to these articles are detailed in Table 2. The taxonomy was slightly modified by excluding categories which were not applicable to the articles in this thesis. However, two additional categories (i.e., *revisions – original draft*, and *revisions – review and editing*) were added for a detailed illustration of the author contributions.

Conceptualisation comprises the development of the research idea, the refinement of the overarching research objective, and the elaboration of the theoretical foundations. *Methodology* pertains to the development of the research design, while *investigation* and *formal analysis* cover the collection and analysis of empirical data. *Writing – original draft* includes the writing of the initial draft of the manuscript, and *writing – review and edition* encompasses the critical review, commentary, and revision of the initial draft. Analogous to this, *revisions – original draft* and *revisions – review and editing* refer to the processing and incorporation of reviewer feedback throughout the double-blind review process. *Visualisation* is the creation of figures and tables to present theoretical frameworks, results, and the research design. *Supervision* involves overseeing and taking leadership responsibility for the research project through mentorship, particularly comprising continuous advice and guidance on developing and positioning the article. Lastly, *project administration* covers the planning and coordination of different tasks within the research project.

Table 2. Author Contributions to the Research Articles and Transfer Articles.

	<i>Authors*</i>	<i>Conceptualisation</i>	<i>Methodology</i>	<i>Investigation</i>	<i>Formal Analysis</i>	<i>Writing – Original Draft</i>	<i>Writing – Review and Editing</i>	<i>Revisions – Original Draft</i>	<i>Revisions – Review and Editing</i>	<i>Visualisation</i>	<i>Supervision</i>	<i>Project Administration</i>
Research Articles (RA)												
RA 1	LB	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X
	PS	X					X		X		X	
	TS						X		X		X	
RA 2	LB	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X
	MA						X		X			
	TS	X					X		X		X	
RA 3	LB	X	X	X	X	X				X		X
	PS	X	X		X		X	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>n.a.</i>		X	
	TS						X				X	
RA 4	LB	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X
	TS	X	X				X		X		X	
	MA	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X
RA 5	LB	X	X	X		X	X		X			
	PS	X	X		X	X	X		X			
	TS						X		X		X	
Transfer Articles (TA)												
TA 1	LB	X				X				X		X
	TS		<i>n.a.</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>n.a.</i>		X	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>n.a.</i>		X	
	HW						X				X	
TA 2	LB	X	<i>n.a.</i>	X	<i>n.a.</i>	X		<i>n.a.</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	X		X
	TS						X				X	

*Acronyms of authors: *LB*: Lars Brand; *TS*: Tim Ströbel; *MA*: Matthias Anderski; *PS*: Pascal Stegmann; *HW*: Herbert Woratschek; *n.a.*: not applicable

1.4. Contribution to the Third Mission of the University of Bayreuth

In addition to contributing to the scientific community through generating knowledge, the author also added to the Third Mission of the University of Bayreuth. This refers to the mutual exchange of knowledge among actors from the university and from the society (e.g., business, associations, and politics) for the economic, social, and ecological benefit (Universität Bayreuth, 2021b). First, *Research Articles 1* and *2* resulted from a long-term research cooperation the author and his supervisor set up with the German football club brand FC St. Pauli (FC St. Pauli, 2022). In addition to publishing the research articles, the author provided academic consulting to FC St. Pauli on the development and management of their brand through workshops and internal documents, thus transferring generated knowledge into innovative business applications (Universität Bayreuth, 2022). The research cooperation eventually led to winning the prestigious *EASM Sports Organisation Award* in 2025, which is given to a sport organisation that has recently collaborated with academic researchers on an ambitious research project (European Association for Sport Management, 2025). Second, the author contributed to the Sustainability Strategy of the University of Bayreuth (i.e., research pillar) as two articles included in this thesis adopt an interdisciplinary and innovative brand management perspective on sustainability (see *Transfer Article 2* and *Research Article 3*) (Universität Bayreuth, 2021b). Third, beyond the content of this thesis, the author edited the development of the *Spöko Score*, the industry report on sport business in Germany (see *Appendix C*). The *Spöko Score* was targeted towards executives in the sport industry. Thus, developing the *Spöko Score* aimed at underscoring and sharpening the reputation of the University of Bayreuth as one of the leading institutions in the field of sport management worldwide (Universität Bayreuth, 2024). Fourth, the author contributed to the Third Mission of the University of Bayreuth by authoring transfer articles. Notably, these articles are tailored to transfer scientific insights to practitioners and students, and are therefore less detailed and written in accessible, non-technical language to ensure clarity and ease of understanding for a broader audience. In addition to the transfer articles included in this thesis (*Transfer Articles 1* and *2*), the author has been involved in five additional transfer articles, which extend beyond the content of this thesis and are provided in *Appendix B*.

Moreover, the author added to the 2030 Internationalisation Strategy of the University of Bayreuth, specifically contributing to the strategic pillars of communication and global networks (Universität Bayreuth, 2021a). In order to increase the international visibility and reputation of the University of Bayreuth in the scientific community, all research articles included in this thesis were published or submitted to international scientific journals that are leading

their field. In addition, the author presented the research at several international conferences in Europe and North America to raise awareness for research of the University of Bayreuth and to extend and maintain the international research network. The author's conference contributions are listed in Appendix A. Each conference contribution underwent a double-blind review process and was approved by the respective conference scientific committees. Lastly, the author spent five months at Ohio University (Ohio, United States of America), which was the first institution in the world to offer an academic sport management program. This research stay aimed at fostering the international research network with researchers from a leading university in the field of sport management and enhancing the Sport Management Double Degree Program existing between Ohio University and the University of Bayreuth.

1.5. References

- Aaker, D. A. (2002). *Building strong brands*. Simon & Schuster.
- Abosag, I., Roper, S., & Hind, D. (2012). Examining the relationship between brand emotion and brand extension among supporters of professional football clubs. *European Journal of Marketing*, 46(9), 1233–1251.
- Abratt, R., & Kleyn, N. (2023). The conscientious corporate brand: definition, operationalization and application in a B2B context. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 38(10), 2122–2133. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-10-2021-0468>
- Akaka, M. A., Vargo, S. L., Nariswari, A., & O'Brien, M. (2023). Microfoundations for Macromarketing: A Metatheoretical Lens for Bridging the Micro-Macro Divide. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 43(1), 61–75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02761467211054349>
- Alvesson, M., & Sandberg, J. (2024). The Art of Phenomena Construction: A Framework for Coming Up with Research Phenomena beyond 'the Usual Suspects'. *Journal of Management Studies*, 61(5), 1737–1765. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12969>
- Appel, G., Grewal, L., Hadi, R., & Stephen, A. T. (2020). The future of social media in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 48(1), 79–95. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-019-00695-1>
- Baker, B. J., Kunkel, T., Doyle, J., Su, Y., Bredikhina, N., & Biscaia, R. (2022). Remapping the Sport Brandscape: A Structured Review and Future Direction for Sport Brand Research. *Journal of Sport Management*, 36(3), 251–264.
- Baker, J. J., Fehrer, J. A., & Brodie, R. J. (2022). Navigating the emergence of brand meaning in service ecosystems. *Journal of Service Management*, 33(3), 465–484.
- Baumgarth, C., Boltz, D.-M., Schmidt, H. J., & Roper, S. (2020). Fresh perspectives on brand management. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 36(11-12), 973–980. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1824658>
- Biscaia, R., Correia, A., Rosado, A., Maroco, J., & Ross, S. (2012). The effects of emotions on football spectators' satisfaction and behavioural intentions. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 12(3), 227–242. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2012.679949>
- Brand, A., Allen, L., Altman, M., Hlava, M., & Scott, J. (2015). Beyond authorship: attribution, contribution, collaboration, and credit. *Learned Publishing*, 28(2), 151–155. <https://doi.org/10.1087/20150211>
- Breidbach, C. F., Brodie, R., & Hollebeek, L. (2014). Beyond virtuality: from engagement platforms to engagement ecosystems. *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*, 24(6), 592–611. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MSQ-08-2013-0158>

- Buser, M., Woratschek, H., Dickson, G., & Schönberner, J. (2022). Toward a Sport Ecosystem Logic. *Journal of Sport Management*, 36(6), 534–547.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2021-0056>
- Chambers, J. M., Wyborn, C., Klenk, N. L., Ryan, M., Serban, A., Bennett, N. J., Brennan, R., Charli-Joseph, L., Fernández-Giménez, M. E., Galvin, K. A., Goldstein, B. E., Haller, T., Hill, R., Munera, C., Nel, J. L., Österblom, H., Reid, R. S., Riechers, M., Spierenburg, M., . . . Rondeau, R. (2022). Co-productive agility and four collaborative pathways to sustainability transformations. *Global Environmental Change*, 72, 102422. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102422>
- Chandler, J. D., & Vargo, S. L. (2011). Contextualization and value-in-context: How context frames exchange. *Marketing Theory*, 11(1), 35–49.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593110393713>
- Christodoulides, G. (2009). Branding in the post-internet era. *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), 141–144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593108100071>
- Coleman, J. (1990). *Foundations of social theory*. Harvard university press.
- Collins, R. (1981). On the microfoundations of macrosociology. *American Journal of Sociology*, 86(5), 984–1014.
- Conejo, F., & Wooliscroft, B. (2015). Brands Defined as Semiotic Marketing Systems. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 35(3), 287–301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146714531147>
- Cury, R., Kennelly, M., & Howes, M. (2023). Environmental sustainability in sport: a systematic literature review. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23(1), 13–37.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2022.2126511>
- de Chernatony, L. (2006). *From brand vision to brand evaluation: Strategically building and sustaining brands* (2nd ed., repr). *Marketing*. Elsevier/Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Diodato, D., Huergo, E., Moncada-Paternò-Castello, P., Rentocchini, F., & Timmermans, B. (2023). Introduction to the special issue on “the twin (digital and green) transition: handling the economic and social challenges”. *Industry and Innovation*, 30(7), 755–765. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13662716.2023.2254272>
- Doyle, J., Kunkel, T., Su, Y., Biscaia, R., & Baker, B. J. (2023). Advancing understanding of individual-level brand management in sport. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23(6), 1631–1642. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2023.2276809>
- Dubois, A., & Gadde, L.-E. (2002). Systematic combining: an abductive approach to case research. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(7), 553–560. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963\(00\)00195-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(00)00195-8)

- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building Theories from Case Study Research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532–550.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory Building From Cases: Opportunities And Challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 25–32.
- European Association for Sport Management. (2025). *EASM Sports Organisation Award*. <https://www.easm.net/sport-manager-award/>
- European Commission. (2023). Sport's contribution to the European Green Deal: A sport sector playbook. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2766/809359>
- FC St. Pauli. (2022, July 25). *Kooperation zwischen dem FC St. Pauli und der Universität Bayreuth* [Press release]. <https://www.fcstpauli.com/news/der-fc-st-pauli-und-die-universitat-bayreuth-gehen-kooperation-ein/>
- Fisher, G., Mayer, K., & Morris, S. (2021). From the Editors—Phenomenon-Based Theorizing. *Academy of Management Review*, 46(4), 631–639. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2021.0320>
- Forbes. (2018, August 10). *How Do Brands Become Part Of Our Culture?* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2018/08/10/how-do-brands-become-part-of-our-culture/>
- Forbes. (2020, February 24). *Council Post: Your Brand Is Your Greatest Asset*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2020/02/24/your-brand-is-your-greatest-asset/?sh=41ab18b563b7>
- Giannopoulos, A., Piha, L., & Skourtis, G. (2021). Destination branding and co-creation: a service ecosystem perspective. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 30(1), 148–166. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-08-2019-2504>
- Golob, U., Burghausen, M., Kernstock, J., & Davies, M. A. P. (2022). Brand management and sustainability: exploring potential for the transformative power of brands. *Journal of Brand Management*, 29(6), 513–519. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-022-00293-7>
- Golob, U., Davies, M. A. P., Kernstock, J., & Powell, S. M. (2020). Trending topics plus future challenges and opportunities in brand management. *Journal of Brand Management*, 27(2), 123–129. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-019-00184-4>
- Golob, U., & Podnar, K. (2019). Researching CSR and brands in the here and now: an integrative perspective. *Journal of Brand Management*, 26(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-018-0112-6>
- Hajdas, M., & Kłeczek, R. (2021). The real purpose of purpose-driven branding: consumer empowerment and social transformations. *Journal of Brand Management*, 28(4), 359–373.

- Hoffman, D. L., Moreau, C. P., Stremersch, S., & Wedel, M. (2022). The Rise of New Technologies in Marketing: A Framework and Outlook. *Journal of Marketing*, 86(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429211061636>
- Hughes, T., Bence, D., Grisoni, L., O’regan, N., & Wornham, D. (2011). Scholarship That Matters: Academic–Practitioner Engagement in Business and Management. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10(1), 40–57. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.10.1.zqr40>
- Hughes, T., Stone, M., Aravopoulou, E., Tiu Wright, L., & Machtynger, L. (2018). Academic research into marketing: Many publications, but little impact? *Cogent Business & Management*, 5(1), 1516108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2018.1516108>
- Hüttermann, M., Uhrich, S., & Koenigstorfer, J. (2022). Components and Outcomes of Fan Engagement in Team Sports: The Perspective of Managers and Fans. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 7(4), 447–478. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2019.1576143>
- Iglesias, O., & Ind, N. (2020). Towards a theory of conscientious corporate brand co-creation: the next key challenge in brand management. *Journal of Brand Management*, 27(6), 710–720. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-020-00205-7>
- Iglesias, O., Ind, N., & Schultz, M. (2020). History matters: The role of history in corporate brand strategy. *Business Horizons*, 63(1), 51–60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2019.09.005>
- Iglesias, O., Mingione, M., Ind, N., & Markovic, S. (2023). How to build a conscientious corporate brand together with business partners: A case study of Unilever. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 109, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2022.12.008>
- Ind, N., & Schmidt, H. J. (2019). *Co-creating brands: Brand management from a co-creative perspective*. Bloomsbury Business.
- Jaakkola, E. (2020). Designing conceptual articles: four approaches. *AMS Review*, 10(1-2), 18–26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13162-020-00161-0>
- Järvensivu, T., & Törnroos, J.-Å. (2010). Case study research with moderate constructionism: Conceptualization and practical illustration. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39(1), 100–108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2008.05.005>
- Johns, R., & English, R. (2016). Transition of self: Repositioning the celebrity brand through social media—The case of Elizabeth Gilbert. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(1), 65–72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.07.021>
- Kapferer, J.-N. (2008). *New strategic brand management: Creating and sustaining brand equity long term* (4th ed.). Kogan Page Limited.

- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299305700101>
- Köhler, J., Geels, F. W., Kern, F., Markard, J., Onsongo, E., Wieczorek, A., Alkemade, F., Avelino, F., Bergek, A., Boons, F., Fünfschilling, L., Hess, D., Holtz, G., Hyysalo, S., Jenkins, K., Kivimaa, P., Martiskainen, M., McMeekin, A., Mühlemeier, M. S., . . . Wells, P. (2019). An agenda for sustainability transitions research: State of the art and future directions. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 31, 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2019.01.004>
- Kolyperas, D., Maglaras, G., & Sparks, L. (2019). Sport fans' roles in value co-creation. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 19(2), 201–220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2018.1505925>
- Kowalczyk, C. M., & Pounders, K. R. (2016). Transforming celebrities through social media: the role of authenticity and emotional attachment. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 25(4), 345–356. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-09-2015-0969>
- Kunkel, T., & Biscaia, R. (2020). Sport Brands: Brand Relationships and Consumer Behavior. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 29(1), 3–17.
- Lucarelli, A., & Hallin, A. (2015). Brand transformation: a performative approach to brand regeneration. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(1-2), 84–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2014.982688>
- MacInnis, D. J. (2011). A Framework for Conceptual Contributions in Marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 75(4), 136–154. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.75.4.136>
- Mäkitie, T., Hanson, J., Damman, S., & Wardeberg, M. (2023). Digital innovation's contribution to sustainability transitions. *Technology in Society*, 73, 102255. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2023.102255>
- Manoli, A. E. (2022). Strategic brand management in and through sport. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2022.2059774>
- Merz, M. A., He, Y., & Vargo, S. L. (2009). The evolving brand logic: a service-dominant logic perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 37(3), 328–344.
- Na, S., Kunkel, T., & Doyle, J. (2020). Exploring athlete brand image development on social media: the role of signalling through source credibility. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 88–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2019.1662465>
- Nambisan, S. (2017). Digital Entrepreneurship: Toward a Digital Technology Perspective of Entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 41(6), 1029–1055. <https://doi.org/10.1111/etap.12254>

- O'Mahony, S., & Cohen, S. (2022). Navigating the promises and perils of researching emerging phenomena in strategy and organizations. *Strategic Organization*, 20(4), 872–885. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14761270221122394>
- Onyas, W. I., & Ryan, A. (2015). Exploring the brand's world-as-assemblage: the brand as a market shaping device. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(1-2), 141–166. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2014.977333>
- Patterson, J., Schulz, K., Vervoort, J., van der Hel, S., Widerberg, O., Adler, C., Hurlbert, M., Anderton, K., Sethi, M., & Barau, A. (2017). Exploring the governance and politics of transformations towards sustainability. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 24, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2016.09.001>
- Pettigrew, A. M. (1990). Longitudinal Field Research on Change: Theory and Practice. *Organization Science*, 1(3), 267–292. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1.3.267>
- Ramaswamy, V., & Ozcan, K. (2016). Brand value co-creation in a digitalized world: An integrative framework and research implications. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 33(1), 93–106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2015.07.001>
- Rose, M., Rose, G. M., Merchant, A., & Orth, U. R. (2021). Sports teams heritage: Measurement and application in sponsorship. *Journal of Business Research*, 124, 759–769. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.03.040>
- Rotolo, D., Hicks, D., & Martin, B. R. (2015). What is an emerging technology? *Research Policy*, 44(10), 1827–1843. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2015.06.006>
- Salomaa, A., & Juhola, S. (2020). How to assess sustainability transformations: a review. *Global Sustainability*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2020.17>
- Sarasvuo, S., Rindell, A., & Kovalchuk, M. (2022). Toward a conceptual understanding of co-creation in branding. *Journal of Business Research*, 139, 543–563.
- Schmidt, H. J., Ind, N., Guzmán, F., & Kennedy, E. (2022). Sociopolitical activist brands. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 31(1), 40–55. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-03-2020-2805>
- Siano, A., Vollero, A., & Bertolini, A. (2022). From brand control to brand co-creation: An integrated framework of brand paradigms and emerging brand perspectives. *Journal of Business Research*, 152, 372–386. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.08.001>
- Spry, A., Figueiredo, B., Gurrieri, L., Kemper, J. A., & Vredenburg, J. (2021). Transformative Branding: A Dynamic Capability To Challenge The Dominant Social Paradigm. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 41(4), 531–546. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02761467211043074>
- Stegmann, P., Nagel, S., & Ströbel, T. (2023). The digital transformation of value co-creation: a scoping review towards an agenda for sport marketing research. *European Sport*

- Management Quarterly*, 23(4), 1221–1248.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2021.1976241>
- Storbacka, K., Brodie, R. J., Böhmman, T., Maglio, P. P., & Nenonen, S. (2016). Actor engagement as a microfoundation for value co-creation. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(8), 3008–3017. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.02.034>
- Ströbel, T., & Germelmann, C. C. (2020). Exploring new routes within brand research in sport management: directions and methodological approaches. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 1–9.
- Sustainability Transitions Research Network. (2025). About us. <https://transitionsnetwork.org/about/>
- Sutton, W. A., McDonald, M. A., Milne, G. R., & Cimperman, J. (1997). Creating and fostering fan identification in professional sports. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 6(1), 15–22.
- Swaminathan, V., Sorescu, A., Steenkamp, J.-B. E., O’Guinn, T. C. G., & Schmitt, B. (2020). Branding in a Hyperconnected World: Refocusing Theories and Rethinking Boundaries. *Journal of Marketing*, 84(2), 24–46.
- Tajvidi, M., Richard, M.-O., Wang, Y., & Hajli, N. (2020). Brand co-creation through social commerce information sharing: The role of social media. *Journal of Business Research*, 121, 476–486. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.06.008>
- United Nations. (2024). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024*. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>
- Universität Bayreuth. (2021a). *Internationalization Strategy 2030: Summary*. <https://cdn0.scrvt.com/a534b4b72e47031e7c1755abc55cf709/f7b082805bd06c83/472272b55a95/internationalization-strategy.pdf>
- Universität Bayreuth. (2021b). *The University of Bayreuth’s Sustainability Strategy: Our path to a Green Campus*. https://www.nachhaltigkeit.uni-bayreuth.de/pool/dokumente/Sustainability_Strategy_University-of-Bayreuth.pdf
- Universität Bayreuth. (2022). *Transfer Strategy of the University of Bayreuth*. <https://cdn0.scrvt.com/a534b4b72e47031e7c1755abc55cf709/aaad71f2c1fbf79f/6ec5331648e7/transfer-strategy.pdf>
- Universität Bayreuth. (2024, December 12). *Spöko Score - Der Branchenreport zur Sportökonomie in Deutschland*. <https://www.sport.uni-bayreuth.de/de/Spoeko-Score/index.html>
- van de Ven, A. H. (2016). Grounding the research phenomenon. *Journal of Change Management*, 16(4), 265–270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2016.1230336>

- Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2016). Institutions and axioms: an extension and update of service-dominant logic. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 44(1), 5–23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-015-0456-3>
- Veloutsou, C., & Guzman, F. (2017). The evolution of brand management thinking over the last 25 years as recorded in the Journal of Product and Brand Management. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 26(1), 2–12. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-01-2017-1398>
- Verhoef, P. C., Broekhuizen, T., Bart, Y., Bhattacharya, A., Qi Dong, J., Fabian, N., & Haenlein, M. (2021). Digital transformation: A multidisciplinary reflection and research agenda. *Journal of Business Research*, 122, 889–901. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.09.022>
- von Krogh, G., Rossi-Lamastra, C., & Haefliger, S. (2012). Phenomenon-based Research in Management and Organisation Science: When is it Rigorous and Does it Matter? *Long Range Planning*, 45(4), 277–298. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2012.05.001>
- von Wallpach, S., Hemetsberger, A., & Espersen, P. (2017). Performing identities: Processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 443–452.
- Wider, S., von Wallpach, S., & Mühlbacher, H. (2018). Brand management: Unveiling the delusion of control. *European Management Journal*, 36(3), 301–305.
- Woratschek, H., Horbel, C., & Popp, B. (2014). The sport value framework – a new fundamental logic for analyses in sport management. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 14(1), 6–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2013.865776>
- Woratschek, H., Horbel, C., & Popp, B. (2020). Conceptualizing Resource Integration: The Peculiar Role of Pure Public Resources. *Journal of Service Management Research*, 4(2-3), 157–169. <https://doi.org/10.15358/2511-8676-2020-2-3-157>
- Yadav, M. S. (2018). Making emerging phenomena a research priority. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 46(3), 361–365. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-017-0575-0>

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – TRANSFORMING PERSPECTIVES ON BRANDS AND BRAND MANAGEMENT

Perspectives on brands and brand management have significantly transformed over the past decades (Merz et al., 2009; Veloutsou & Guzman, 2017). Influenced by broader developments in marketing thought (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004) and propelled by digital and sustainable transformation (Iglesias & Ind, 2020; Siano et al., 2022), the understanding of brands and brand management has shifted dramatically. Brands are no longer conceptualised as stable, consistent, and enduring entities, which are autonomously defined and controlled by brand management (i.e., brand owner-dominant logic), but as social constructs that are fluid, dynamic, and negotiated among multiple actors (i.e., multi-actor-dominant logic) (Ind & Schmidt, 2019; Inman et al., 2019). Moreover, digital and sustainable transformation are driving the formation of emerging research phenomena in the field of brand management, including novel types of branded entities (e.g., human brands), brands embracing broader social roles, and brands navigating between brand heritage and brand innovation (for instance in the context of innovative brand extensions) (Baumgarth et al., 2020; Golob et al., 2020; Swaminathan et al., 2020).

Taking a *sport brand management perspective*, sport brands offer an ‘over-the-top’ context to examine brand management. Sport brands gather multiple actors that engage in co-creation processes (Buser et al., 2022), underscoring the potential to develop and refine innovative *theoretical concepts of brand management* in this context. Additionally, athletes are among the most popular human brands worldwide (Doyle et al., 2023), sport brands are often under heightened public scrutiny to embrace their broader social role (European Commission, 2023), and sport brands are characterised by their extraordinary tradition and heritage, which makes brand innovations particularly challenging (Rose et al., 2021). Thus, sport brands equally provide a promising context to examine selected *emerging research phenomena* of brand management.

2.1. Towards the Multi-Actor-Dominant Logic

The *brand owner-dominant logic* reflects an existing hegemony of thought in brand management research since the concept of brand was first introduced into marketing research in the early 20th century (Stern, 2006). Brand management approaches grounded in the brand owner-dominant logic conceptualise brands as static results of conscious marketing tactics, implying the autonomous role of brand owners in strategically building and managing brands. In this logic, brands remain the prerogative of brand owners, as they unilaterally create brands as

identifiers and images for customers (Copeland, 1923; Merz et al., 2009; Park et al., 1986). Brand owners create brands through developing, nurturing, and communicating a distinctive and consistent brand identity, referring to a unique set of static and enduring brand components (i.e., name, trademark, and functional and symbolic associations) that distinguishes the brand from competitors (Aaker, 2002; Balmer & Gray, 2003; da Silveira et al., 2013; de Chernatony, 2006; Kapferer, 2008). Customers are considered passive recipients of brand owners' brand management efforts (Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård, 2004). Thus, the brand owner-dominant logic suggests that brand owners unilaterally create brand meaning (i.e., customers' set of static brand associations), which is directly linked to physical identifiers (e.g., brand mark), in the minds of customers through the communication of brand identity (Aaker, 2002; Gardner & Levy, 1955; Keller, 1993, 2003; Levy, 1959; Park et al., 1986). To summarise, the brand owner-dominant logic considers brands as firm-controlled assets, managerial creations, and static results of strategic marketing activities of the brand owner (Aaker, 1991; Burmann et al., 2009; Keller, 1993). This 'control-centric managerial mindset' (Wider et al., 2018, p. 301) is deeply engrained in brand management research (Siano et al., 2022). Accordingly, brand owners are conceptualised as 'guardians' of the brand, consciously managing and controlling brand identity and brand meaning (Michel, 2017, p. 454). This is further reflected in Keller's (2020, p. 1000) understanding of brand management as 'painting a picture of a brand in consumers' minds'.

Both digital and sustainable transformation foster a more dynamic, interactive, and interconnected environment that challenges the hegemonic brand-owner dominant logic and facilitates the emergence of the *multi-actor-dominant logic* of brands (see chapter 1.1) (Siano et al., 2022; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013; Wider et al., 2018). In this logic, brands are no longer considered the static results of unilateral brand management efforts, but are conceptualised as dynamic social constructs co-created in mutual interactions among multiple actors (e.g., Ind & Schmidt, 2019; Sarasvuo et al., 2022; Siano et al., 2022). Brands are in a constant state of becoming as actors (e.g., employees, customers, or partners) continuously constitute, challenge, and stabilise them in recurring linguistic and socio-material brand co-creation performances in social interactions (Lucarelli & Hallin, 2015; Onyas & Ryan, 2015; von Wallpach et al., 2017; Voyer et al., 2017). In other words, what actors 'say, believe, and express impacts the market's perception and evaluation of a brand' (Veloutsou & Guzman, 2017, p. 3). Brands are collective 'open-source' constructs with shared ownership (Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2015; Siano et al., 2022). Thus, the role of the brand owner shifts from that of a 'guardian' of the brand to

that of a ‘conductor’ of brand co-creation processes, enabling and orchestrating social interactions among actors (Iglesias et al., 2013; Michel, 2017; Riedmeier & Kreuzer, 2022). This disruptive transformation of the logic of brands towards the multi-actor-dominant logic raises critical concerns about control, influence, and openness, and has significant implications for brand management in a transforming society (Ind & Schmidt, 2019). Brand management research currently considers diverse outcomes of brand co-creation (i.e., brand identity, brand meaning, and brand value) (Markovic et al., 2022; Sarasvuo et al., 2022). Drawing on the distinction by Michel (2017) and Brodie et al. (2017), this thesis positions brand identity and brand meaning as fundamental concepts in brand co-creation. Brand identity forms the foundation for co-creating collective brand meaning, emerging from social interactions among actors (Brodie et al., 2017; Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2015), and collective brand meaning drives strategic advantage and brand value (Merz et al., 2018). Thus, actors create brand value ‘through the collective sharing and negotiation of brand meaning’ (Simmons & Durkin, 2023, p. 617), while the brand conductor facilitates these processes through developing and communicating brand identity. Brand identity and brand meaning serve as the fundamental drivers of brand value (J. J. Baker et al., 2022; Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2015). Accordingly, brands are defined as sign systems that represent the identity of a brand and on the basis of which co-creative processes develop that ultimately lead to the development of collective brand meaning and brand value (Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2015). Although brand management research is progressively advancing the understanding of the multi-actor-dominant logic, it is lacking theoretical concepts that specify, conceptualise, and detail the underlying structures of brand co-creation, the role of brand managers in brand co-creation, and how multiple actors co-create brands (Siano et al., 2022).

Taking a *sport brand management perspective*, brands are considered the most valuable asset entities within the sport industry possess (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). Developing and managing strong brands enables sport entities (i.e., sport clubs, sport leagues, sport events, and athletes) to differentiate from competitors, build fan loyalty, increase brand equity, and ultimately maximise revenue streams to become independent from sporting success (Gladden et al., 1998; Underwood et al., 2001). Consequently, strategic brand management has become a crucial marketing task for sport managers to ensure the sport entity’s long-term economic success (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Gladden et al., 2001; Gladden et al., 1998; Kahiya et al., 2023; Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020; Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020). This has prompted extensive research on brand management in sport, examining the creation of brand equity, brand awareness, brand image, brand personality, brand loyalty, and the strategic

management of brand architecture and brand positioning (Kahiya et al., 2023; Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020). Most of this research adopts the *brand owner-dominant logic*, conceptualising sport brands as bundles of static brand components that are built, strategically managed, and controlled by the brand owner through conscious, management-led processes (e.g. Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018; Doyle et al., 2021; Giroux et al., 2017; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Maderer et al., 2018; Manoli, 2020; Manoli & Hodgkinson, 2020; Parent et al., 2012; Parent & Séguin, 2008; Parganas et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2021). Traditional approaches to sport brands have only recently come under scrutiny with the proclamation of the ‘network turn’ in sport brand management research, proposing that sport brands develop through interactions among actors and cannot be autonomously built and controlled by the brand owner (Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020). Sport brands are surrounded by multiple highly identified actors (e.g., fans, sponsors, media, athletes, and social organisations) that engage in co-creation (Buser et al., 2022; Woratschek et al., 2014), making the *multi-actor-dominant logic* a main route for sport brand management research (Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020) and sport brands an ‘over-the-top’ context to develop and refine innovative theoretical concepts of brand management.

2.2. Towards Emerging Research Phenomena of Brand Management

The digital and sustainable transformation influence brand management by driving the formation of emerging research phenomena. In particular, novel types of entities (e.g., humans) are empowered by the digital transformation to build their own brands, brands are increasingly considered to have broader social roles, and brands face the challenge of innovating and appealing to novel, culturally diverse audiences without neglecting the heritage of the brand (Baumgarth et al., 2020; Golob et al., 2020; Swaminathan et al., 2020; Veloutsou & Guzman, 2017).

First, digital transformation enables novel types of entities, other than corporations, to take more systematic approaches to brand building. Particularly human brands are gaining prominence, as digital platforms (e.g., social media) empowered individuals to create their own brand and directly communicate with global audiences (Appel et al., 2020; Doyle et al., 2023; Swaminathan et al., 2020). While most theoretical concepts of brand management can be applied to human brands to a certain extent (Golob et al., 2020), they have special characteristics that need to be considered (Doyle et al., 2023; Swaminathan et al., 2020). In addition, human brands are often linked to corporate brands (e.g., influencers to corporations, athletes to sport club brands) and influence the corporate brand as much as they are influenced by the corporate brand and other actors (Centeno & Wang, 2017). However, this perspective is predominantly

neglected in extant research. Thus, it is significant to identify specific approaches to build human brands (Swaminathan et al., 2020). Taking a *sport brand management perspective*, professional athletes are among the most popular human brands worldwide, outperforming other human brands (e.g., actors, musicians) on digital platforms with regard to followership, and sport management research increasingly focuses on the management of individual-level brands as novel types of branded entities (B. J. Baker et al., 2022; Doyle et al., 2023; Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). This makes athlete brands an ‘over-the-top’ context to examine the building and management of human brands as novel types of branded entities.

Second, sustainable transformation is fundamentally changing societal values and norms, thus putting pressure on brands to embrace broader social roles, address contemporary social and environmental issues, and obtain sustainable brand meaning (Golob et al., 2022; Golob et al., 2020; Golob & Podnar, 2019; Iglesias et al., 2023; Schmidt et al., 2022). Brands need to embed conscience at the core of their strategy and business practices, and take a balanced actor-perspective to equally create business value as well as shared social and environmental value for the society (Abratt & Kleyn, 2023; Iglesias & Ind, 2020; Iglesias et al., 2023). In addition, brands are considered to become vehicles of social change, potentially acting as catalysts to change the behaviour of individuals (e.g., customers) (Hajdas & Kłeczek, 2021; Spry et al., 2021). Brand management research only offers initial approaches to the broader social roles of brands, therefore warranting further research. In particular, this research should examine the role of brands in facilitating the co-creation of shared societal value and how brands obtain credible sustainable brand meaning (Golob et al., 2022; Iglesias & Ind, 2020; Iglesias et al., 2023). Taking a *sport brand management perspective*, sport brands represent significant social institutions in contemporary society (Godfrey, 2009). Consequently, sport brands are particularly compelled to address broader social issues and collaborate with various actors to create shared value for the wider society (B. J. Baker et al., 2022; Doyle et al., 2023; European Commission, 2023; Gerke et al., 2024). In addition, due to their public visibility, sport brands offer an exceptional platform to promote and communicate environmental and social change (Cury et al., 2023; Mamo et al., 2021; Trail & McCullough, 2020). However, sport brands simultaneously face the challenge of achieving authenticity in the context of their sustainability efforts (McCullough, 2023). This makes sport brands an ‘over-the-top’ context to examine brands that embrace broader social roles.

Third, both digital and sustainable transformation emphasise tensions between brand heritage and brand innovation (Manoli, 2022; Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020). In order to remain

relevant, brands must consider social and digital trends and socio-cultural phenomena to potentially innovate the brand – for instance through innovative brand extensions. However, brands must also respect and preserve the heritage of the brand, which might be contaminated when appealing novel culturally-diverse audiences (Iglesias et al., 2020). Taking a *sport brand management perspective*, sport brands are increasingly engaging with social and digital trends to innovate their brand to attract younger audiences. However, sport brands are characterised by their extraordinary tradition and heritage, which makes brand innovations particularly challenging (Rose et al., 2021). In particular, the socio-cultural phenomenon of eSports, which is driven by digital transformation, is widely considered in sport management research, taking into account its potential to attract novel actors and rejuvenate brand meaning but also its potential to dilute the sport brand (Bertschy et al., 2020; Ke & Wagner, 2022; Pizzo et al., 2022). This makes sport brands extending into eSports an ‘over-the-top’ context to examine brands navigating between brand heritage and brand innovation.

2.3. References

- Aaker, D. A. (1991). *Managing brand equity: Capitalizing on the value of a brand name*. Free Press. <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/description/simon033/91010380.html>
- Aaker, D. A. (2002). *Building strong brands*. Simon & Schuster.
- Abratt, R., & Kleyn, N. (2023). The conscientious corporate brand: definition, operationalization and application in a B2B context. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 38(10), 2122–2133. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-10-2021-0468>
- Anagnostopoulos, C., Parganas, P., Chadwick, S., & Fenton, A. (2018). Branding in pictures: using Instagram as a brand management tool in professional team sport organisations. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 18(4), 413–438. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2017.1410202>
- Appel, G., Grewal, L., Hadi, R., & Stephen, A. T. (2020). The future of social media in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 48(1), 79–95. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-019-00695-1>
- Baker, B. J., Kunkel, T., Doyle, J., Su, Y., Bredikhina, N., & Biscaia, R. (2022). Remapping the Sport Brandscape: A Structured Review and Future Direction for Sport Brand Research. *Journal of Sport Management*, 36(3), 251–264.
- Baker, J. J., Fehrer, J. A., & Brodie, R. J. (2022). Navigating the emergence of brand meaning in service ecosystems. *Journal of Service Management*, 33(3), 465–484.
- Balmer, J. M., & Gray, E. R. (2003). Corporate brands: what are they? What of them? *European Journal of Marketing*, 37(7/8), 972–997.
- Baumgarth, C., Boltz, D.-M., Schmidt, H. J., & Roper, S. (2020). Fresh perspectives on brand management. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 36(11-12), 973–980. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1824658>
- Bertschy, M., Mühlbacher, H., & Desbordes, M. (2020). Esports extension of a football brand: stakeholder co-creation in action? *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 47–68.
- Brodie, R. J., Benson-Rea, M., & Medlin, C. J. (2017). Branding as a dynamic capability. *Marketing Theory*, 17(2), 183–199.
- Burmann, C., Hegner, S., & Riley, N. (2009). Towards an identity-based branding. *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), 113–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593108100065>
- Buser, M., Woratschek, H., Dickson, G., & Schönberner, J. (2022). Toward a Sport Ecosystem Logic. *Journal of Sport Management*, 36(6), 534–547. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2021-0056>

- Centeno, D., & Wang, J. J. (2017). Celebrities as human brands: An inquiry on stakeholder-actor co-creation of brand identities. *Journal of Business Research*, 74, 133–138.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.10.024>
- Conejo, F., & Wooliscroft, B. (2015). Brands Defined as Semiotic Marketing Systems. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 35(3), 287–301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146714531147>
- Copeland, M. T. (1923). Relation of Consumers' Buying Habits to Marketing Methods. *Harvard Business Review*, 1(3), 282–289.
- Couvellaere, V., & Richelieu, A. (2005). Brand Strategy in Professional Sports: The Case of French Soccer Teams. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 5(1), 23–46.
- Cury, R., Kennelly, M., & Howes, M. (2023). Environmental sustainability in sport: a systematic literature review. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23(1), 13–37.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2022.2126511>
- da Silveira, C., Lages, C., & Simões, C. (2013). Reconceptualizing brand identity in a dynamic environment. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 28–36.
- de Chernatony, L. (2006). *From brand vision to brand evaluation: Strategically building and sustaining brands* (2nd ed., repr). *Marketing*. Elsevier/Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Doyle, J., Kunkel, T., Kelly, S. J., Filo, K., & Cuskelly, G. (2021). Seeing the same things differently: exploring the unique brand associations linked to women's professional sport teams. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 1–15.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2021.1922489>
- Doyle, J., Kunkel, T., Su, Y., Biscaia, R., & Baker, B. J. (2023). Advancing understanding of individual-level brand management in sport. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23(6), 1631–1642. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2023.2276809>
- European Commission. (2023). *Sport's contribution to the European Green Deal: A sport sector playbook*. Publications Office of the European Union.
<https://doi.org/10.2766/809359>
- Gardner, B. B., & Levy, S. J. (1955). The Product and the Brand. *Harvard Business Review*, 33(2), 33–39.
- Gerke, A., Fehrer, J., Benson-Rea, M., & McCullough, B. P. (2024). A Typology of Circular Sport Business Models: Enabling Sustainable Value Co-Creation in the Sport Industry. *Journal of Sport Management*, 38(4), 225–239.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2023-0093>

- Giroux, M., Pons, F., & Maltese, L. (2017). The role of perceived brand personality in promotion effectiveness and brand equity development of professional sports teams. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 18(2), 180–195.
- Gladden, J. M., & Funk, D. C. (2002). Developing an Understanding of Brand Associations in Team Sport: Empirical Evidence from Consumers of Professional Sport. *Journal of Sport Management*, 16(1), 54–81.
- Gladden, J. M., Irwin, R. L., & Sutton, W. A. (2001). Managing North American Major Professional Sport Teams in the New Millennium: A Focus on Building Brand Equity. *Journal of Sport Management*, 15(4), 297–317.
- Gladden, J. M., Milne, G. R., & Sutton, W. A. (1998). A Conceptual Framework for Assessing Brand Equity in Division I College Athletics. *Journal of Sport Management*, 12(1), 1–19.
- Godfrey, P. C. (2009). Corporate Social Responsibility in Sport: An Overview and Key Issues. *Journal of Sport Management*, 23(6), 698–716.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.23.6.698>
- Golob, U., Burghausen, M., Kernstock, J., & Davies, M. A. P. (2022). Brand management and sustainability: exploring potential for the transformative power of brands. *Journal of Brand Management*, 29(6), 513–519. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-022-00293-7>
- Golob, U., Davies, M. A. P., Kernstock, J., & Powell, S. M. (2020). Trending topics plus future challenges and opportunities in brand management. *Journal of Brand Management*, 27(2), 123–129. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-019-00184-4>
- Golob, U., & Podnar, K. (2019). Researching CSR and brands in the here and now: an integrative perspective. *Journal of Brand Management*, 26(1), 1–8.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-018-0112-6>
- Hajdas, M., & Kłeczek, R. (2021). The real purpose of purpose-driven branding: consumer empowerment and social transformations. *Journal of Brand Management*, 28(4), 359–373.
- Iglesias, O., & Ind, N. (2020). Towards a theory of conscientious corporate brand co-creation: the next key challenge in brand management. *Journal of Brand Management*, 27(6), 710–720. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-020-00205-7>
- Iglesias, O., Ind, N., & Alfaro, M. (2013). The organic view of the brand: A brand value co-creation model. *Journal of Brand Management*, 20(8), 670–688.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2013.8>

- Iglesias, O., Ind, N., & Schultz, M. (2020). History matters: The role of history in corporate brand strategy. *Business Horizons*, 63(1), 51–60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bus-hor.2019.09.005>
- Iglesias, O., Mingione, M., Ind, N., & Markovic, S. (2023). How to build a conscientious corporate brand together with business partners: A case study of Unilever. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 109, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2022.12.008>
- Ind, N., & Schmidt, H. J. (2019). *Co-creating brands: Brand management from a co-creative perspective*. Bloomsbury Business.
- Inman, J., Campbell, M. C., Kirmani, A., & Price, L. (2019). JCR Call for Papers: “The Future of Brands in a Changing Consumer Marketplace” Special Issue: August 2021. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 45(6), i4. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucz010>
- Kahiya, E., Ashill, N., & Perkinson, O. (2023). Branding governance in international recurring sports events: the World Rugby ‘Sevens’ Series. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23(5), 1477–1499.
- Kapferer, J.-N. (2008). *New strategic brand management: Creating and sustaining brand equity long term* (4th ed.). Kogan Page Limited.
- Ke, X., & Wagner, C. (2022). Global pandemic compels sport to move to esports: understanding from brand extension perspective. *Managing Sport and Leisure*, 27(1-2), 152–157.
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299305700101>
- Keller, K. L. (2003). Brand Synthesis: The Multidimensionality of Brand Knowledge. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(4), 595–600.
- Keller, K. L. (2020). Consumer Research Insights on Brands and Branding: A JCR Curation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 46(5), 995–1001. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucz058>
- Keller, K. L., & Lehmann, D. R. (2006). Brands and Branding: Research Findings and Future Priorities. *Marketing Science*, 25(6), 740–759. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.1050.0153>
- Kunkel, T., & Biscaia, R. (2020). Sport Brands: Brand Relationships and Consumer Behavior. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 29(1), 3–17.
- Levy, S. J. (1959). Symbols for Sale. *Harvard Business Review*, (July/ August), 117–124.
- Lucarelli, A., & Hallin, A. (2015). Brand transformation: a performative approach to brand regeneration. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(1-2), 84–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2014.982688>

- Maderer, D., Parganas, P., & Anagnostopoulos, C. (2018). Brand-Image Communication Through Social Media: The Case of European Professional Football Clubs. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 11(3), 319–338.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/ijsc.2018-0086>
- Mamo, Y., Agyemang, K. J. A., & Andrew, D. P. S. (2021). Types of CSR Initiatives and Fans' Social Outcomes: The Case of Professional Sport Organizations. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 30(2), 146–160. <https://doi.org/10.32731/SMQ.302.062021.06>
- Manoli, A. E. (2020). Brand capabilities in English Premier League clubs. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 30–46.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2019.1693607>
- Manoli, A. E. (2022). Strategic brand management in and through sport. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2022.2059774>
- Manoli, A. E., & Hodgkinson, I. R. (2020). The implementation of integrated marketing communication (IMC): evidence from professional football clubs in England. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 28(6), 542–563.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2019.1593225>
- Markovic, S., Gyrd-Jones, R., von Wallpach, S., & Lindgreen, A. (2022). Preface. In S. Markovic, R. Gyrd-Jones, S. von Wallpach, & A. Lindgreen (Eds.), *Research Handbook on Brand Co-Creation: Theory, practice and ethical implications* (pp. XXIV–XLIII). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- McCullough, B. P. (2023). Advancing sport ecology research on sport and the natural environment. *Sport Management Review*, 26(5), 813–833.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14413523.2023.2260078>
- Merz, M. A., He, Y., & Vargo, S. L. (2009). The evolving brand logic: a service-dominant logic perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 37(3), 328–344.
- Merz, M. A., Zarantonello, L., & Grappi, S. (2018). How valuable are your customers in the brand value co-creation process? The development of a Customer Co-Creation Value (CCCV) scale. *Journal of Business Research*, 82, 79–89.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.08.018>
- Michel, G. (2017). From brand identity to polysemous brands: Commentary on “Performing identities: Processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction”. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 453–455.

- Onyas, W. I., & Ryan, A. (2015). Exploring the brand's world-as-assemblage: the brand as a market shaping device. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(1-2), 141–166.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2014.977333>
- Parent, M. M., Eskerud, L., & Hanstad, D. V. (2012). Brand creation in international recurring sports events. *Sport Management Review*, 15(2), 145–159.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2011.08.005>
- Parent, M. M., & Séguin, B. (2008). Toward a Model of Brand Creation for International Large-Scale Sporting Events: The Impact of Leadership, Context, and Nature of the Event. *Journal of Sport Management*, 22(5), 526–549.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.22.5.526>
- Parganas, P., Anagnostopoulos, C., & Chadwick, S. (2015). 'You'll never tweet alone': Managing sports brands through social media. *Journal of Brand Management*, 22(7), 551–568. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2015.32>
- Park, C. W., Jaworski, B. J., & MacInnis, D. J. (1986). Strategic Brand Concept-Image Management. *Journal of Marketing*, 50(4), 135. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1251291>
- Pizzo, A., Jones, G. J., Baker, B. J., Funk, D. C., & Kunkel, T. (2022). Sensemaking of novelty: the dynamic nature of integrating esports within a traditional sport organization. *Sport Management Review*, 25(3), 383–405.
- Prahalad, C. K., & Ramaswamy, V. (2004). Co-creation experiences: The next practice in value creation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), 5–14.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.20015>
- Riedmeier, J., & Kreuzer, M. (2022). Me versus we: The role of luxury brand managers in times of co-creation. *Journal of Business Research*, 145, 240–252.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.02.085>
- Rose, M., Rose, G. M., Merchant, A., & Orth, U. R. (2021). Sports teams heritage: Measurement and application in sponsorship. *Journal of Business Research*, 124, 759–769.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.03.040>
- Salzer-Mörling, M., & Strannegård, L. (2004). Silence of the brands. *European Journal of Marketing*, 38(1/2), 224–238. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560410511203>
- Sarasvuo, S., Rindell, A., & Kovalchuk, M. (2022). Toward a conceptual understanding of co-creation in branding. *Journal of Business Research*, 139, 543–563.
- Schmidt, H. J., Ind, N., Guzmán, F., & Kennedy, E. (2022). Sociopolitical activist brands. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 31(1), 40–55.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-03-2020-2805>

- Siano, A., Vollero, A., & Bertolini, A. (2022). From brand control to brand co-creation: An integrated framework of brand paradigms and emerging brand perspectives. *Journal of Business Research*, 152, 372–386. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.08.001>
- Simmons, G., & Durkin, M. (2023). Expanding understanding of brand value co-creation on social media from an S-D logic perspective: Introducing structuration theory. *Marketing Theory*, 23(4), 607–629. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705931231165098>
- Spry, A., Figueiredo, B., Gurrieri, L., Kemper, J. A., & Vredenburg, J. (2021). Transformative Branding: A Dynamic Capability To Challenge The Dominant Social Paradigm. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 41(4), 531–546. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02761467211043074>
- Stern, B. B. (2006). What Does Brand Mean? Historical-Analysis Method and Construct Definition. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 34(2), 216–223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092070305284991>
- Ströbel, T., & Germelmann, C. C. (2020). Exploring new routes within brand research in sport management: directions and methodological approaches. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 1–9.
- Swaminathan, V., Sorescu, A., Steenkamp, J.-B. E., O’Guinn, T. C. G., & Schmitt, B. (2020). Branding in a Hyperconnected World: Refocusing Theories and Rethinking Boundaries. *Journal of Marketing*, 84(2), 24–46.
- Trail, G. T., & McCullough, B. P. (2020). Marketing sustainability through sport: testing the sport sustainability campaign evaluation model. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(2), 109–129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2019.1580301>
- Underwood, R., Bond, E., & Baer, R. (2001). Building Service Brands via Social Identity: Lessons from the Sports Marketplace. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 9(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2001.11501881>
- Vallaster, C., & von Wallpach, S. (2013). An online discursive inquiry into the social dynamics of multi-stakeholder brand meaning co-creation. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(9), 1505–1515.
- Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2004). Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.68.1.1.24036>
- Veloutsou, C., & Guzman, F. (2017). The evolution of brand management thinking over the last 25 years as recorded in the Journal of Product and Brand Management. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 26(1), 2–12. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-01-2017-1398>

- von Wallpach, S., Hemetsberger, A., & Espersen, P. (2017). Performing identities: Processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 443–452.
- Voyer, B. G., Kastanakis, M. N., & Rhode, A. K. (2017). Co-creating stakeholder and brand identities: A cross-cultural consumer perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 399–410. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.07.010>
- Wider, S., von Wallpach, S., & Mühlbacher, H. (2018). Brand management: Unveiling the delusion of control. *European Management Journal*, 36(3), 301–305.
- Williams, A., Son, S., Walsh, P., & Park, J. (2021). The Influence of Logo Change on Brand Loyalty and the Role of Attitude Toward Rebranding and Logo Evaluation. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 30(1), 69–81. <https://doi.org/10.32731/smq.291.032021.06>
- Woratschek, H., Horbel, C., & Popp, B. (2014). The sport value framework – a new fundamental logic for analyses in sport management. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 14(1), 6–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2013.865776>

3. THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF BRAND MANAGEMENT FROM DIFFERENT ANALYSIS LEVELS

The articles included in this chapter contribute to the development and refinement of theoretical concepts in brand management, advancing the conceptualisation of brand co-creation at different analysis levels. *Transfer Article 1* summarises and applies the concept of integrative branding in the context of sport. *Research Article 1* explores brand co-creation at the meso- and macro level of analysis, examining the actors, processes, and overarching structures of brand co-creation to conceptualise the integrative sport brand ecosystem. *Research Article 2* zooms in on the intra- and micro level of analysis, identifying brand co-creation performances of individual actors as micro-foundations for brand co-creation.

3.1. Integrative Branding – Brand Management in The Light of Value Co-Creation (Transfer Article 1)

Authors Lars Brand (né Griebel), University of Bayreuth, Germany
Tim Ströbel, University of Bayreuth, Germany
Herbert Woratschek, University of Bayreuth, Germany

Published in *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*, 2020, 22, 1-5

3.1.1. Traditional Perspective on Branding

Traditional branding research perceives brands as being built and controlled autonomously by the brand owner (Merz, He, & Vargo, 2009). A brand's function is to identify products of certain firms and differentiate them from those of competitors (Aaker, 1991, p.7). Therefore, brands enable customers to get a comprehensive overview facilitating their buying decisions (Iglesias, & Ind, 2020). Brands consist of bundles of benefits, which differentiate sustainably the brands from competing other brands (Burmann, Riley, Halaszovich, & Schade, 2017).

Whereas many brand concepts are limited to symbols or subjective images in the consumers' minds (e.g. Keller, 1993), the identity-based brand management concept also adopts an internal perspective (Burmann, Riley, Halaszovich, & Schade, 2017). The benefits correspond with the brand identity when perceived by the internal target group (e.g. employees) and with the brand image when perceived by the external target group (e.g. consumers) (Ströbel, & Doenicke, 2020). The brand owner implements and enforces the brand identity, which represents the offered benefits. The corresponding marketing mix activities of the brand owner convey the brand identity to stakeholders outside the organisation (Burmann, Riley, Halaszovich, & Schade, 2017; Ströbel, & Doenicke, 2020) to create the brand image.

Consequently, traditional approaches, including the identity-based brand management concept, propose a firm-centric view leaving the customer in a passive role. Customers only react to the brand owner's marketing activities (Brodie, Benson-Rea, & Medlin, 2017; Ströbel, & Doenicke, 2020). Brand value is embedded within goods and emerges when goods are sold (Woratschek, Fehrer, Brodie, Benson-Rea, & Medlin, 2019). Therefore, the basic concept is in line with the logic of sport products. In contrast, branding is perceived as a dynamic and social process in the logic of value co-creation.

3.1.2. The Concept of Integrative Branding

The concept of integrative branding is a systemic and network-oriented approach (Brodie et al., 2017; Woratschek et al., 2019; Ströbel, & Germelmann, 2020). This innovative understanding of brand management mirrors the shift in marketing and sport management literature from a logic of sport products towards a logic of value co-creation (Merz et al., 2009; Woratschek, & Griebel, 2020; Woratschek, 2020). Firms and other interested actors engage in collaborative branding activities (Merz et al., 2009). Within this brand management concept, brands are sign systems that form a brand's identity. The brand identity is a starting point for various actors to integrate their resources and actively engage in co-creative processes leading to brand meaning (Woratschek et al., 2019). Brands develop through the interaction of different actors in a network (Brodie et al., 2017). Therefore, brand owners cannot autonomously build a brand, they can only try to coordinate the actors' activities on the brand platform to develop brand strength and brand value (Ströbel, & Woratschek, 2019).

Based on the network-oriented branding perspective, every actor integrates resources, e.g. skills or creativity, on a brand platform, combines them with the brand identity and constantly reshapes brand meaning (Figure 1). Hence, orchestrating and promoting activities on the brand platform is an essential task of the brand owner. By sharpening the co-created brand meaning through coordinated branding activities, the brand owner tries to align the different perspectives to a collective brand meaning. The brand owner further reinforces this collective brand meaning through its incorporation into the brand communication (Brodie et al., 2017; Ströbel, & Woratschek, 2019; Woratschek et al., 2019; Ströbel, & Germelmann, 2020). Integrative branding consists of two interrelated processes (see Table 1):

Building brand identity: The brand owner aims to create a unique brand identity that distinguishes the brand from other brands. Further, this brand identity needs to be communicated to the various actors of the network through a wide array of communication activities (Woratschek et al., 2019). This step can be understood as a brand meaning proposition by the brand owner. For example, the German football club FC St. Pauli conveys its local heritage in

the official club logo and emphasizes its social responsibility for the district. Furthermore, the club communicates certain values such as tolerance and respect. It was the first football club to explicitly refuse right-wing national tendencies in the stadium order (Ströbel, & Woratschek, 2019; Ströbel, Hüttermann, Hannich, & Nagel, 2018).

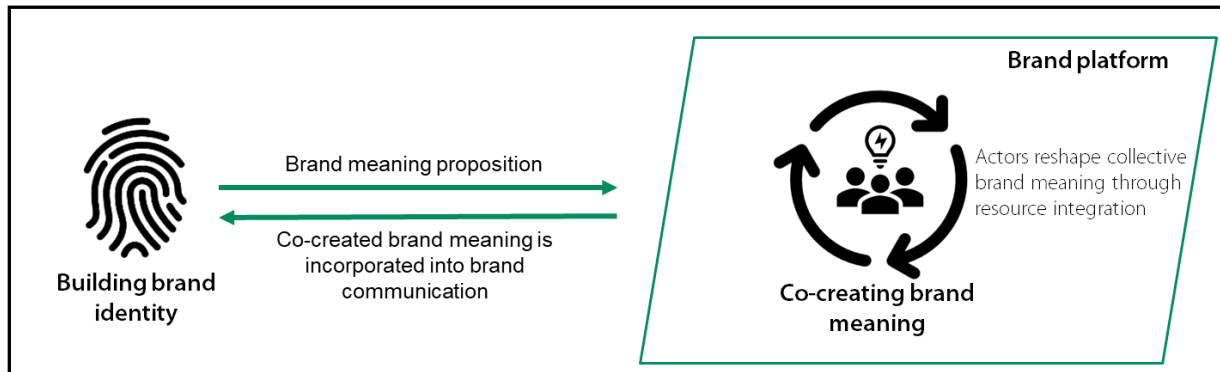


Figure 1. The concept of integrative branding in its main features

Co-creating brand meaning: The concept of co-creation of brand meaning adheres to the idea of actors involved on a brand platform who reshape collective the brand meaning through resource integration. Therefore, the brand owner must promote and coordinate co-creation processes within the brand platform's network. However, this process is emergent and, thus, cannot be entirely coordinated (Woratschek et al., 2019). Sometimes actors might not agree with the proposed meaning of a brand. In the case of FC St. Pauli, a group of fans adopted the 'skull and crossbones' symbol as their own unofficial emblem as cultural and political reference. For them, the meaning of the brand was not determined by the club (Kolyperas, Maglaras, & Sparks, 2019; Ströbel, & Woratschek, 2019). Today, the football club integrates the 'skull and crossbones' symbol into the brand identity and brand communication (e.g. through merchandise sales). FC St. Pauli promotes various possibilities to co-create brand meaning. The club's social responsibility is sharpened, for instance, by the stadium-based FC St. Pauli Levi's Music School, which gives people access to music lessons who could not afford them otherwise. Another example for promoting co-creation processes to develop a collective brand meaning is the fan hall which is managed by the club, but open to fans, club departments or initiatives from the surroundings of the club or the district (Ströbel, & Woratschek, 2019).

To sum up, integrative branding is an interactive process that builds on brand identity and brand meaning co-created by various actors. Neither can a sport organisation solely create a brand nor is value embedded in the brand. Brand value emerges from brand-related social interactions and economic exchange between many different actors.

3.1.3. To put in a nutshell

1. Traditionally, brands are perceived as being built and controlled by the brand owner.
2. The basic concepts of brands are in line with the logic of sport products because brands are regarded as bundles of benefits.
3. The brand identity is a bundle of benefits perceived by the internal target group.
4. The brand image is a bundle of benefits perceived by the external target group.
5. The firm-centric view leaves the customer in a passive role.
6. In the logic of value co-creation, customers play an active role.
7. The concept of integrative branding offers a systemic and network-oriented approach.
8. Two interrelated processes lead to brand meaning for different actors in a network: building brand identity and co-creating brand meaning.
9. The brand owner aims to create a unique brand identity as a brand meaning proposition.
10. Many actors reshape the collective brand meaning through brand-related social interactions.
11. The common and divergent brand meaning is constantly aligned and incorporated into the communication of the brand identity.

Table 1. The concept of integrative branding in detail (based on Ströbel & Woratschek, 2019 p. 42).

	Building brand identity	Co-creating brand meaning
Task of the brand owner	Communicating with many different actors (spectators, fans, sponsors, media, politicians, players, coaches, leagues, etc.) based on a sporting activity (e.g. professional football).	Providing a platform to facilitate interactions between all actors (spectators, fans, sponsors, media, politicians, players, coaches, leagues, etc.), who have interest in the sport brand (e.g. FC St. Pauli or FC Bayern Munich).
Objectives	Building a unique and distinctive brand identity which distinguishes the brand from other ones.	Promoting a unique and distinctive but also diverging meaning for the individual actors in the network.
Resource integration of the brand owner	- Skills, competencies and know-ledge to create a unique and distinctive brand - Skills and competencies to convince different actors through communication	- Skills, competencies and know-ledge how to provide efficiently and effectively a brand platform and how to facilitate actors' inter-actions - Skills, competencies how to balance diverging interests or the wisdom when to allow them to co-exist - Promoting actors' engagement to co-create the brand - Continuous ability to learn from interaction with other actors - Constant alignment of brand meaning - The aligned brand meaning must in turn be incorporated into the brand identity
Marketing activity	Communicating brand identity.	

3.1.4. References

- Aaker, D. A. (1991). *Managing brand equity: Capitalizing on the value of a brand name*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Brodie, R. J., Benson-Rea, M., & Medlin, C. J. (2017). Branding as a dynamic capability. *Marketing Theory*, 17(2), 183–199.
- Burmann, C., Riley, N.-M., Halaszovich, T., & Schade, M. (2017). The Concept of Identity-Based Brand Management. In C. Burmann, N. Riley, T. Halaszovich, & M. Schade (Eds.), *Identity-Based Brand Management: Fundamentals—Strategy—Implementation—Controlling* (pp. 17–90). Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler.
- Iglesias, O., & Ind, N. (2020). Towards a theory of conscientious corporate brand co-creation: the next key challenge in brand management. *Journal of Brand Management*, 27(6), 710–720.
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1–22.
- Kolyperas, D., Maglaras, G., & Sparks, L. (2019). Sport fans' roles in value co-creation. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 19(2), 201–220.
- Merz, M. A., He, Y., & Vargo, S. L. (2009). The evolving brand logic: a service-dominant logic perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 37(3), 328–344.
- Ströbel, T., & Woratschek, H. (2019). Sportmarken – Von traditionellen Ansätzen der Markenführung hin zum vernetzten Branding. In G. Nowak (Ed.), *Angewandte Sportökonomie des 21. Jahrhunderts: Wesentliche Aspekte des Sportmanagements aus Expertensicht* (1st ed., pp. 27–50). Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden; Springer Gabler.
- Ströbel, T., & Doenicke, J. (2020). Brand management – Traditional brand concepts and brand value creation. *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*, 13, 1-4. Retrieved from <https://www.smabayreuth.de/publishing/relevant-management-insights/>
- Ströbel, T., & Germelmann, C. C. (2020). Exploring new routes within brand research in sport management: directions and methodological approaches. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 1–9.
- Ströbel, T., Huettermann, M., Hannich, F., & Nagel, S. (2018). Die Inszenierung von Markenerlebnissen im Sport - Eine Fallstudien-Analyse der Vereinsmarke FC St. Pauli. *Marketing Review St Gallen*, 35(5), 82–89.
- Woratschek, H., & Griebel, L. (2020). A Logic of Sport Products – The Traditional Approach in Sport Management. *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*, 1, 1-3. Retrieved from <https://www.smabayreuth.de/publishing/relevant-management-insights/>

- Woratschek, H. (2020). A New Logic of Value Co-Creation in Sport Management. *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*, 14, 1-6. Retrieved from <https://www.smabayreuth.de/publikating/relevant-management-insights/>
- Woratschek, H., Fehrer, J., Brodie, R. J., Benson-Rea, M., & Medlin, C. J. (2019). Vernetztes Branding: Ein Konzept zur Markenpolitik aus der Perspektive der Service Dominant Logic. In F.-R. Esch (Ed.), *Handbuch Markenführung* (pp. 121–139). Wiesbaden: Springer.

3.2. Rethinking brand management within sport: advancing towards the integrative sport brand ecosystem (ISBE) (Research Article 1)

Authors Lars Brand, University of Bayreuth, Germany
Pascal Stegmann, University of Bern, Switzerland
Tim Ströbel, University of Bayreuth, Germany

Published in *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 2024, 24(6), 1174-1194
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2023.2264316>

© copyright # [2024], reprinted by permission of Informa UK Limited,
trading as Taylor & Taylor & Francis Group,
<http://www.tandfonline.com>

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 29th *European Association for Sport Management Conference (EASM)* (virtual conference; September 2021; peer-reviewed).

ABSTRACT

Research Question: Current research increasingly takes a multi-actor-dominant logic and situates sport brands within ecosystems. However, the multi-actor-dominant logic has not been captured in a holistic concept yet. We aim to advance current thinking of sport brands and therefore conceptualise the integrative sport brand ecosystem (*ISBE*), emerging around a single sport brand.

Research Methods: We adopt a qualitative single case study approach to the German football club brand FC St. Pauli. Semi-structured interviews with multiple actors ($N = 26$) and secondary data ($N = 35$) inform our conceptualisation of the *ISBE*. Following an abductive approach, the *ISBE* evolved simultaneously through theoretical and empirical work.

Results and Findings: The *ISBE* comprises all actors interested in a sport brand. Actors engage on institutional and emergent brand engagement platforms to co-create the sport brand. As the focal actor within the *ISBE*, the brand conductor develops and communicates a first brand identity and facilitates brand meaning co-creation processes. Brand identity needs to be constantly adapted and reinforced by the brand conductor.

Implications: This article provides a holistic perspective on brand co-creation among multiple actors and the role of the brand conductor. We examine the organisational brand management perspective, the network of actors actively co-creating sport brands, and the underlying structures of brand co-creation within the context of sport brands and the multi-actor-dominant logic. This opens new directions for research on sport brands, but also encourages sport practitioners to rethink their brand management.

KEYWORDS: sport brand ecosystem; integrative branding; brand co-creation; brand identity; brand meaning

3.2.1. Introduction

Brands are considered the most valuable asset entities within the sport industry possess (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). Strong brands enable sport entities to maximise their revenues (Gladden et al., 1998) and become independent from sporting success (Underwood et al., 2001). The strategic development and management of sport brands has thus become a key marketing task (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Gladden et al., 1998; Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020). The globalisation of the sport industry and the increasingly blurring boundaries between the sport and entertainment industry have aggravated competition between sport brands, but also between sport brands and entertainment brands (Kahiya et al., 2023; The Nielsen Company, 2020). The intensity of competition is fiercer than ever and it is essential for sport managers to build and nurture strong brands to ensure the sport entity's long-term economic success.

Perspectives on sport brand management are deeply rooted in the notion that brand owners strategically develop and control their brands. Sport brands are perceived as bundles of static brand components resulting from conscious management-led processes (Bodet & Séguin, 2021; Giroux et al., 2017). However, recent branding research implies that brand owners cannot autonomously create and control brands. Rather, brands are conceptualised as dynamic social processes co-created through resource integrating interactions between various actors initiated by the brand owner or other actors (Merz et al., 2009; Sarasvuo et al., 2022). Therefore, the brand owner's role shifts from a 'brand guardian' to a 'conductor' of dynamic brand co-creation processes (Michel, 2017, p. 454). Especially in the context of sport, stakeholders e.g. fans, sponsors engage in co-creation processes (Buser, Woratschek, Dickson, & Schönberner, 2022; Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020; Woratschek et al., 2014). Despite the clear significance of a multi-actor perspective on sport brands, only few approaches follow this branding logic (Bertschy et al., 2020; Kahiya et al., 2023; Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020; Taks et al., 2020). Sport brands co-exist in the *sport brand ecosystem*, where they are vertically and horizontally interconnected with other sport brands and external brands. While spillover effects are present within the *sport brand ecosystem*, there is limited understanding of the interactions among brands and organisational brand management (Baker, Kunkel, et al., 2022; Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). Current research further implies that additional actors (e.g. fans, employees) need to be considered when examining the co-creation of sport brands (Bertschy et al., 2020; Kolyperas et al., 2019) and identifies management practices to govern brand co-creation processes (Kahiya et al., 2023; Taks et al., 2020). These approaches offer valuable insights for an enhanced understanding of the co-creation of sport brands. However, they focus on very specific research gaps and, therefore, have several shortcomings. Primarily, existing approaches neglect several

actors as they mainly focus on fans (Kolyperas et al., 2019) and other brands (Baker, Kunkel, et al., 2022). Additionally, they ignore various levels of brand co-creation and either overestimate (Kahiya et al., 2023; Taks et al., 2020) or disregard (Baker, Kunkel, et al., 2022; Tjandra et al., 2021) an organisational perspective.

Thus, there is a need to conceptualise a holistic perspective, which considers the aforementioned shortcomings. Drawing on the concept of integrative branding (Brodie et al., 2017), current sport branding literature (Baker, Kunkel, et al., 2022), and the sport ecosystem logic (Buser, Woratschek, Dickson, & Schönberner, 2022), we conceptualise the *integrative sport brand ecosystem (ISBE)* that formulates such a holistic perspective by considering various levels of brand co-creation. Essentially, the *ISBE* details a single brand network within the *sport brand ecosystem*. Within the *ISBE*, actors engage on interrelated brand engagement platforms to co-create brands. Brand engagement platforms provide virtual and physical contexts for various actors with an interest in the brand to exchange resources and co-create the brand (Buser, Woratschek, Dickson, & Schönberner, 2022; Tierney et al., 2016). Following an abductive approach, the *ISBE* evolved simultaneously through theoretical (theory synthesis and adaption) and empirical work (semi-structured interviews and secondary data from the case of the German football club brand FC St. Pauli).

This study contributes to sport management literature as it enhances the understanding of the sport brand ecosystem (Baker, Kunkel, et al., 2022). The *ISBE* describes actors engaging in the co-creation of sport brands, the underlying structures of brand co-creation, and the brand conductor's internal management and integrative governing processes.

3.2.2. Multi-actor-dominant logic of (sport) brands

3.2.2.1. Evolving logic of brand management

Sport brands are predominantly perceived to be built, strategically managed, and controlled by the brand owner (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018; Doyle et al., 2021; Manoli, 2020; Williams et al., 2021). Within this *brand owner-dominant logic*, sport brands are conceptualised as 'complex offering loaded with intangible and tangible attributes' deliberately created through the brand owner's implementation of 'appropriate marketing strategies that will ultimately contribute to the development of strong brand equity' (Giroux et al., 2017, p. 180). Brand owners aspire to consciously develop, maintain, and communicate a clear and stable brand identity, i.e. bundle of static brand components such as symbolic associations and physical attributes (Aaker, 2002; da Silveira et al., 2013). Brand identity is transmitted to customers through brand owner-controlled marketing activities, aiming to create brand meaning, i.e. customers' set of brand

associations (Batey, 2008; Burmann et al., 2009). Customers are only considered passive targets for brand management in one-directional relationships, which are entirely controlled by the brand owner. Accordingly, brand identity, brand meaning, and brand equity are the static results of conscious management actions.

In contrast to this brand owner-dominant logic of sport brands, general branding research increasingly perceives brands from a multi-actor perspective. Within this *multi-actor-dominant logic*, brands are conceptualised as collaborative, open, and dynamic social constructs co-created among various actors (Merz et al., 2009; Veloutsou & Guzman, 2017). Multiple actors integrate resources (e.g. individual brand meaning, creativity) in mutual interactions to co-create brands. Current research identifies customers, employees, competitors, media, B2B partners, and the public as actors engaging in brand co-creation (Baker, Fehrer, et al., 2022; Sarasvuo et al., 2022). Accordingly, brands are not created solely through brand communication controlled by the brand owner. Multiple actors actively co-create brands in (1) brand owner-initiated, (2) actor-initiated, and (3) brand owner-facilitated interactions (Sarasvuo et al., 2022).

3.2.2.2. Integrative Branding

Integrative branding represents a specific conceptual approach of the multi-actor-dominant logic (Brodie et al., 2017). The concept builds on the premise that multiple actors co-create brand meaning in collaborative social processes, with brand identity serving as the foundation of these processes. It comprises two interdependent sub-processes: building brand identity and co-creating brand meaning. In the *first sub-process*, the brand conductor develops the identity and intended meaning of the brand and communicates it to internal and external actors. Building brand identity expands on the brand owner-dominant logic of brand management, which remains vital to ensure brand awareness and convey brand meaning propositions (Brodie et al., 2017). For instance, the German Football Association created and communicated the brand identity ‘Die Mannschaft’ for the German men’s national team, which is intended to convey meanings such as team spirit, unity, and success (DFB, 2022). In the *second sub-process*, the brand conductor provides access to interactions where multiple actors integrate resources to co-create shared brand meaning (Brodie et al., 2017). As the focal actor, the brand conductor is obligated to initiate, facilitate, and coordinate interactive brand meaning co-creation processes (Michel, 2017). However, the brand conductor is not capable of fully controlling the co-creation processes since interactions are also initiated by external actors (Sarasvuo et al., 2022). Building on our example above, ‘Die Mannschaft’ has constantly been criticised by fans and other actors in Germany. It was hardly associated with its intended meanings (DFB, 2022).

Both sub-processes are *mutually interdependent*. Actors use, change, and integrate the brand meaning proposition to co-create brand meaning and brand conductors need to constantly (re-)integrate co-created brand meanings into the brand identity to reinforce congruence and the development of collective brand meaning (Baker, Fehrer, et al., 2022; Sarasvuo et al., 2022). However, a uniform brand identity congruent with brand meaning is only a temporary state in a continuous process of change (Brodie et al., 2017). In this sense, brand identity is not an autonomous construct, but something the brand conductor needs to constantly seek, absorb, and adapt through the integrative processes of brand co-creation. Brand identity is indirectly co-created through the activities of various actors (Iglesias et al., 2020; Sarasvuo et al., 2022). Accordingly, brand management is conceptualised as iterative process of facilitating brand meaning co-creation processes and dynamically adapting brand identity to ensure the development of a successful brand (Brodie et al., 2017). Using the example of ‘Die Mannschaft’ again, the DFB decided to dispense with the brand name and to open up to emerging meanings for the men’s national team (DFB, 2022).

3.2.2.3. *Towards a multi-actor-dominant logic of sport brands*

Research on sport brands has predominantly taken a brand owner-dominant logic. However, recent studies increasingly acknowledge the influence of multiple actors on sport brands (Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020). We identified four approaches towards a multi-actor-dominant logic of sport brands: the sport brand ecosystem (Baker, Kunkel, et al., 2022; Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020), brand co-creation through fans (Kolyperas et al., 2019), brand governance (Kahiya et al., 2023; Seguin & Abeza, 2019), and co-creation of brand meaning (Bertschy et al., 2020; Tjandra et al., 2021).

Kunkel and Biscaia (2020) argue that in the (1) *sport brand ecosystem*, sport brands (federation-, league-, club-, human-brand) and external brands (sponsors, media, venues, host city) co-exist and affiliated brands influence each other’s brand meanings through spillover effects (Baker, Kunkel, et al., 2022; McCracken, 1986). For instance, negative publicity surrounding an athlete brand creates negative attitudes towards club brands (Doyle et al., 2014) and perceptions of a sponsor brand influence attitudes towards the sport brand (Kelly et al., 2016). Although the sport brand ecosystem acknowledges the significance of other brands on a sport brand, the framework neglects the relevance of multiple actors (fans, politics, and employees). Further, from a multi-actor-dominant logic, other sport brands or actors not only passively influence brand meaning through spillover effects, but also actively engage in brand meaning co-creation processes (Grohs et al., 2020; Merz et al., 2009). The *sport brand ecosystem* does not take an organisational branding perspective nor does it offer approaches to the

(internal) management of sport brands. Nevertheless, it provides an overarching framework for our study.

In contrast to passive meaning transfers between brands, sport brands are increasingly perceived to be (2) *co-created through fans* (Kolyperas et al., 2019). Fans are characterised by irrational passion and identification with sport brands (Abosag et al., 2012; Smith & Stewart, 2010; Sutton et al., 1997). Fans want to get involved, collaborate, and participate in decisions about the brand (Biscaia et al., 2018; Parganas et al., 2015) and start their own activities, e.g. choreographies, that become part of the sport brand (Hüttermann et al., 2022; Kolyperas et al., 2019). Thus, sport brands are perceived to be co-created through ‘the passion, excitement and involvement expressed by fans’ (Kolyperas et al., 2019, p. 204) and might be transformed into a version not intended by club management (Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020). This research stream offers insights into fans’ extraordinary role in the co-creation of sport brands, while neglecting the active engagement of other actors. For instance, competing and related sport brands communicate brand meanings via social media (Bertschy et al., 2020; Tjandra et al., 2021), sponsors integrate resources such as innovative ideas to leverage their sponsorship (Buser, Woratschek, & Schönberner, 2022), and media independently conveys meanings of the sport brand to a wide audience (Baker, Fehrer, et al., 2022).

(3) *Brand governance* refers to building brand equity based on the entity’s mission, vision, and values, as key components of brand identity (Seguin & Abeza, 2019; Taks et al., 2020). It suggests that sport brands should incorporate actors in all stages of brand thinking and implementation to ensure consistency between their activities and brand identity. For instance, brand conductors could bring the expertise of external actors inside the organisation to develop brand governance processes (Taks et al., 2020). Additionally, brand conductors actively engage actors on the operational level to systematically co-create a sport brand’s equity in collaboration with various actors (Kahiya et al., 2023). Although acknowledging the active role of external actors, the concept of brand governance is not formulated from a multi-actor-dominant logic of brands. From such a logic, brand conductors are not fully capable to consciously initiate and manage brand co-creation processes to strategically access resources from different actors whenever necessary.

Rather, actors can (4) *co-create the meaning of sport brands* also outside the brand conductor’s sphere of control. Tjandra et al. (2021) illustrate how brand meanings of the Olympic brand are fluid, dynamic and decentralised as they are socially constructed and negotiated in narratives of multiple actors’ brand experiences. Therefore, brand conductors are encouraged to facilitate collaborations between actors. Similarly, Bertschy et al. (2020) find that eSport

commitments of traditional sport brands increase the number of actors that participate in brand-related interactions and co-create new brand meanings. Bertschy et al. (2020) and Tjandra et al. (2021) show in their studies that multiple actors actively co-create brand meanings in interactions at various brand touchpoints. Although, they go beyond focusing solely on fans as actors in brand co-creation, they mainly offer snapshots of co-created brand meanings and lack a systematic and organisational perspective on brand co-creation.

To sum up, our literature review reveals that sport branding research is fragmented and does not sufficiently capture brand co-creation as it is discussed in brand management literature. While there is emergent literature adapting a multi-actor-dominant logic of sport brands, most studies focus on relationships between a limited set of actors and specific contexts. Thus, there is no approach to understand the number and variety of actors actively engaging in the co-creation of a sport brand within the *sport brand ecosystem*.

3.2.3. Ecosystem perspective of sport brands

Sport management research increasingly advocates for an ecosystem perspective to capture the nature and complexity of co-creation (Buser, Woratschek, Dickson, & Schönberner, 2022; Stegmann et al., 2023). Recently, Buser, Woratschek, Dickson, and Schönberner (2022) conceptualised the sport ecosystem logic as holistic perspective on the interconnectedness of all actors and engagement platforms within a sport context. The sport ecosystem is organised among various levels and assumes that actors with a joint interest in sporting activities integrate and exchange resources to co-create value (Buser, Woratschek, Dickson, & Schönberner, 2022). At the *microlevel*, the focus is on reciprocal dyadic and triadic exchanges among actors (e.g. sport brand-fan interactions, sponsor-sponsee interactions). These dyadic interactions occur on engagement platforms at the *mesolevel* (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Storbacka et al., 2016). Engagement platforms refer to digital, physical, or integrated touchpoints provided by focal actors as a resource to enable and facilitate the integration of multiple actors' resources within the sport ecosystem. As actors integrate resources on more than one engagement platform, they are mutually dependent (Breidbach et al., 2014; Stegmann et al., 2023). The emerging network of interdependent engagement platforms constitutes the sport ecosystem at the *macrolevel*. Within the sport ecosystem, focal actors aim to systemically govern co-creation processes of multiple actors on mutually dependent engagement platforms (Buser, Woratschek, Dickson, & Schönberner, 2022).

Brand management research increasingly situates the branding process in ecosystems (Baker, Fehrer, et al., 2022; Giannopoulos et al., 2021; Tierney et al., 2016). Sport branding research has yet taken an ecosystem perspective that takes into account the interrelationships

among all actors who engage in co-creating a sport brand. It enables to zoom out beyond dyadic exchanges (*microlevel*) and single engagement platforms (*mesolevel*) to regard brand co-creation from a systemic perspective (*macrolevel*). The ecosystem perspective offers additional avenues for sport brands, which enable a comprehensive understanding of the processes, structures, and interrelationships among all actors in the co-creation of sport brands. However, current knowledge about actors and engagement platforms constituting a sport brand ecosystem is scarce. Further, it is unclear how focal actors (e.g. the brand conductor) can systemically orchestrate mutually dependent sport engagement platforms (Buser, Woratschek, Dickson, & Schönberner, 2022; Stegmann et al., 2023).

3.2.4. Research design

We adopted a qualitative single case study approach (Eisenhardt, 1989) and followed an abductive approach, which is recognised for its ability to develop novel theories (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Järvensivu & Törnroos, 2010; Rashid et al., 2019). The initial phase of an abductive approach comprises the construction of a preliminary theoretical framework (Järvensivu & Törnroos, 2010). Drawing on approaches towards a multi-actor-dominant logic of sport brands, we adapt the concept of integrative branding in the context of sport (Brodie et al., 2017). Hence, we synthesised existing literature to conceptualise an initial version of the *ISBE* (Jaakkola, 2020). Within the next phases, the *ISBE* evolved in an iterative process of constantly expanding and adapting our theoretical preconceptions based on emerging theoretical domains (i.e. ecosystem perspective of sport brands) and empirical data. Thus, the *ISBE* evolved simultaneously by going back and forth between theoretical and empirical work (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

3.2.4.1. Sampling logic

Building theory from case studies requires the application of theoretical sampling to select a meaningful case. The deliberate selection of FC St. Pauli was made in accordance with the recommendation of Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), Patton (1990), and Pettigrew (1990), who suggest that case study research should be carried out in exceptionally meaningful and unusually revelatory contexts. Despite a lack of any notable sporting success, FC St. Pauli has become one of the most popular sport brands around the world. FC St. Pauli is especially recognised for its skull and crossbones symbol, which was adopted by fans in the 1980s as their own unofficial emblem. In the 1990s, FC St. Pauli became the first club in Germany to officially ban fascist activities and racism in its stadium, became a worldwide symbol for punk and related subcultures, and started being recognised for its political, anti-fascism, anti-homophobic, and anti-sexism attitude. These brand meanings mainly emerged from the fan scene and other actors

surrounding the club and did not follow an overall plan of the club's management. In 1999, FC St. Pauli became the first football club in Germany to actively manage its brand. Today, FC St. Pauli is popular for taking a clear stance on social topics, its left-wing tendencies, social activism, and values such as diversity, social responsibility, anti-discrimination, and tolerance. Particularly due to the unique brand management strategies of the club and its participative character, FC St. Pauli is one of the strongest sport brands in Germany (Woisetschläger et al., 2019) and sells approximately 9 Million € merchandise a year. Although the club plays second Bundesliga for more than 10 years, this value ranks among the top seven of all football club brands in Germany (Neumann, 2022). The club's management acknowledges the multi-actor-dominant logic of sport brands. It perceives the brand as a 'platform of possibilities' where 'people can be creative and things can arise' (Zimmer, 2018). Thus, FC St. Pauli provides a rich context in which the *ISBE* becomes transparently observable.

3.2.4.2. *Data collection and analysis*

In order to arrive at rich empirical descriptions and to ensure the validity, objectivity, and reliability of our research, we collected primary (semi-structured interviews with multiple actors) and secondary data (internal brand-related documents, media content analysis) (Eisenhardt, 1989; Meyer, 2001). Table 1 provides an overview of the empirical data. Overall, 26 semi-structured interviews were conducted with different actors. Interview partners were selected based on theoretical considerations (e.g. actors involved in brand meaning co-creation in previous research), exchanges with the club management and based on empirical discoveries emerging from the continuous interview process. Supplementary material contains the interview guide, which was slightly adjusted depending on the actor interviewed. The questions were designed to be open-ended, allowing respondents to bring up additional aspects. Questions were developed based on the two sub-processes within the theoretical concept of integrative branding and derived from illustrative examples in previous research (Iglesias et al., 2020; Kahiya et al., 2023). Interviews were conducted online between November 2021 and March 2022 and spanned an average of 66 minutes (minimum: 47 min; maximum: 104 min). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. To ensure our study's credibility, we collected secondary data in parallel to the primary data collection. Secondary data includes internal brand-related documents (e.g. brand-related reports to the supervisory board) and media content analysis (e.g. online media coverage) that allowed us to triangulate the primary data. Secondary data were used to deliberately enrich and contextualise themes emerging from the interviews.

Table 1. Data Sources

	Data Sources	No. of interviews/ documents	Length
Primary Data	Semi-structured interviews	26	Ø 66min
	Official	5	Ø 61min
	Management	4	Ø 56min
	Employee	8	Ø 65min
	Partner/ Sponsor	3	Ø 66min
	Media	2	Ø 84min
	Fan	4	Ø 76min
Secondary Data	Internal brand-related documents (ID)	5	
	Media content analysis (ED)	34	

Data analysis followed the process of content analysis proposed by Mayring (2015) and comprised four overlapping phases. First, we deductively coded the interview data and secondary data based on a codebook derived from our theoretical preconceptions. This allowed us to match quotes from actors with our framework. Second, we used inductive coding to search for unanticipated emerging themes in the data. In both phases, two researchers coded the data independently. Third, the theoretical framework evolved from ongoing discussions and negotiations of our coding and emerging theoretical domains (i.e. ecosystem perspective on brands) within the research team. This cooperative research process was utilised to discuss inconsistencies, verify the interpretation of the data and the adaption of the theoretical framework. Our evolving theoretical framework further directed our search for empirical data and theoretical concepts. For instance, the conceptualisation of the brand management platform and the distinction between institutional and emergent brand engagement platforms was included in the framework following the discussions of empirical data among the research team. Fourth, based on the theoretical framework developed, two members of the research team reviewed the data again. In order to ensure the quality of our findings, we conducted an intercoder reliability test, which yielded a high level of reliability ($r = .86$) (Perreault & Leigh, 1989).

3.2.5. Integrative sport brand ecosystem

3.2.5.1. Ecosystem perspective based on the multi-actor-dominant logic of sport brands

Approaching sport brands from an ecosystem perspective implies that every actor engaging with the sport brand is involved in brand co-creation – whether or not the brand conductor intends this or the actor does so intentionally. A sport brand's ecosystem is an open space that comprises multiple actors (fans, sponsors, media, other sport brands, employees, and political actors; cf. Baker, Kunkel, et al., 2022; Kahiya et al., 2023) directly engaging with the sport brand or interacting with other actors related to the sport brand. For instance, the FC St. Pauli brand is referred to as 'an ecosystem' (I-8, Club Official) and 'a grown biotope' (ID-2), which

constantly evolves in interactions among multiple actors and cannot be defined autonomously by the brand conductor.

FC Sankt Pauli is [...] a construct built by many different actors who are not only controlled by the corporation but have certain independence. [...]. It is a large field and ecosystem with thousands of actors who somehow produce the brand. (I-22, Partner)

In the case of FC St. Pauli, the brand is at the centre of a broad network of actors that has evolved around the club. This network comprises club officials, management, and employees; active fan scene and club members; passive and international fans; sponsors and partners; athletes and coaches; football associations; opposing sport brands; media; the public; non-sport celebrities; politics; the city of Hamburg and the district of St. Pauli; and civic organisations. However, the boundaries of the ecosystem are not rigid and no enumeration of actors can be complete. The ecosystem is open to every actor who has an interest in the brand: ‘everyone has the opportunity to create something at FC St. Pauli’ (I-13, Employee). Yet the influence of the actors on the sport brand varies depending on the context and the actor, which has also been described in distinctions made between primary and secondary actors in sport management literature (I-18, Employee; cf. Parent et al., 2018; Taks et al., 2020). Our results provide some indications that primary actors possess higher salience (i.e. power, legitimacy, urgency, and proximity) within the *ISBE* than secondary actors (Driscoll & Starik, 2004; Mitchell et al., 1997). Typically, primary actors seem to comprise employees, club management, club officials, sponsors and partners, athletes and coaches, club members, and the active fan scene. Primary actors appear to have more legitimate (e.g. contractual relationships with sponsors, institutionalised relationships through committees) and proximate (e.g. spatial distance of the active fan scene compared to international fans) relationships with the brand conductor, to regularly engage in brand co-creation, to launch their own activities in the name of the sport brand, to be considered with higher urgency by the brand conductor (e.g. claims from the active fan scene are given immediate attention by the brand conductor), and to have greater power to influence the sport brand in interactions with the brand conductor (e.g. the active fan scene expresses coercive power by boycotting home games). For instance, club members initiated FC St. Pauli’s sustainability efforts at the general meeting in 2016 (I-5, Club Management). In contrast, secondary actors seem to be less salient according to our data. They appear to be less legitimate, to have a greater spatial distance, to be not able to interact directly with the brand conductor regularly, to be not considered as urgently by the brand conductor, and therefore to have less coercive, utilitarian, or social power and influence on the brand conductor. In this case, they

include passive and international fans, football associations, opposing sport brands, media, the public, non-sport celebrities, politics, the city of Hamburg and the district of St. Pauli, and civic organisations. However, they still participate in interactions related to the sport brand and co-create brand meanings. For instance, fans and non-sport celebrities act as brand ambassadors to transport FC St. Pauli's image: 'There are people [...] who somehow appear in some form as FC St. Pauli sympathisers. [They do] not necessarily shape the club, but transport an image' (I-2, Club Management). Although secondary actors may be relevant for sport brands to disseminate their meanings, they are – in contrast to primary actors – hardly able to shape its brand identity.

3.2.5.2. *Sport brand engagement platforms*

Sport brands are not co-created in a loose network of actors and interactions, but within dynamically emerging structures of an ecosystem. Such a macrolevel ecosystem of sport brands is formed by interdependent mesolevel brand engagement platforms, which provide touchpoints for dyadic microlevel interactions between actors within the brand network (Stegmann et al., 2023). Brand engagement platforms enable multilateral interactions among actors with an interest in the brand and provide structural support for the exchange of resources and brand co-creation processes in virtual and physical contexts (Buser, Woratschek, Dickson, & Schönberger, 2022; Tierney et al., 2016). They are initiated either by the brand conductor (*institutional brand engagement platforms*) or by other actors within the ecosystem (*emergent brand engagement platforms*) (Kahiya et al., 2023; Sarasvuo et al., 2022). *Institutional brand engagement platforms* are resources integrated by the brand conductor, aiming to 'create a breeding ground' (I-13, Employee) to facilitate and coordinate interactions among actors. This was also described by an interviewee from the club management: 'Many issues are not in the hands of the [brand conductor], we do not have to do everything ourselves, but give them [actors] the platform to build it' (I-5, Club Management). Further, a partner requested that 'the [brand conductor] has the responsibility to moderate the process. They must facilitate and guide the co-creation process, stimulate, and structure it repeatedly. The [brand conductor] is a focal actor' (I-22, Partner). *Emergent brand engagement platforms*, initiated by external actors, emerge out of the brand conductor's sphere of control. An employee stated that 'there are many voluntary committees and [...] working groups. [...]. These are all things with which we [brand conductor] have nothing to do. That is driven from the outside' (I-18, Employee). However, the brand conductor may participate as an actor.

3.2.5.3. *Towards the integrative sport brand ecosystem*

Building on the fundamental perspective of sport brands as systems of mutually inter-dependent brand engagement platforms connecting all actors interested in the sport brand, we conceptualise the *ISBE*. To structure the *ISBE*, we argue along the two interrelated sub-processes of integrative branding: *building brand identity* and *co-creating brand meaning*.

Building brand identity comprises the development and communication of a unique brand identity. Multiple actors engage on the internal and institutional ‘brand management platform’. There is a ‘core group’ (I-21, Employee) consisting of club officials, club management, and employees that discusses about the brand’s identity and strategic direction on this brand engagement platform, thus performing the constructed and aggregated actor ‘brand conductor’. However, depending on the context, also other actors become part of that platform. For instance, members from different departments engage on the platform to make derivations from brand identity for their department. Accordingly, a member of the club management described his task to ‘work with colleagues [...] to make derivations from the brand [identity]’ (I-2, Club Management) for the departments (e.g. merchandising, communication). Overall, the development of brand identity is still perceived as a core task of the brand conductor, since its impulses are required for brand development: ‘FC St. Pauli’s profile needs to be sharpened by the club itself. [...]. They cannot just rely on their fans and leave the decision to those who are above’ (I-17, Employee).

The *ISBE* offers a more structured perspective on how the brand conductor communicates brand identity. The brand conductor constantly engages in interactions with multiple actors, thereby integrating the proposed brand meaning, deducted from interactions on the brand management platform, as a resource on institutional brand engagement platforms. Primarily, the brand owner communicates brand meanings via social media. These digital channels are perceived as most important, because of their ‘interactivity, velocity, and proximity’ (I-15, Employee). In communicating brand identity, the brand conductor is contextual and comprises every actor officially acting on behalf of the sport brand at the corporate level (e.g. social media manager). Thus, the communicating brand conductor may not necessarily be a permanent part of the brand management platform, where brand identity is co-created.

We have employees who shape the club, if only because they communicate with the outside world, they are visible to the outside world, and they do things [...]. It starts with the ticket centre and ends with the media department. (I-6, Club Official)

Co-creating brand meaning refers to multiple actors integrating their resources in interactions on interdependent institutional and emergent brand engagement platforms. Within

the ecosystem, the brand conductor (as in *communicating brand identity*) is obligated to enable and facilitate interactions through the provision of brand engagement platforms. On *institutional brand engagement platforms*, the brand conductor deliberately integrates brand identity as a resource, partially determines the participants of the platform, and coordinates brand meaning co-creation processes. FC St. Pauli enables interactions across various institutional brand engagement platforms, which differ in their objectives. Most institutional brand engagement platforms aim to solidify existing brand meanings. For instance, the institutional brand engagement platform ‘sponsoring’ is utilised to co-create brand meanings that align with brand identity. FC St. Pauli and sponsors jointly implement initiatives in specific thematic areas of the brand identity. Sponsoring is perceived as ‘an essential and significant factor when it comes to brand communication and building up the brand, sharpening the brand, but possibly also transforming the brand’ (I-13, Employee). Often, sponsors suggest creative ideas to leverage their sponsorships. However, these joint projects also bring brand identity to life. One sponsor, for instance, initiated an anti-racism campaign together with FC St. Pauli, in which the fan scene, journalists, activists, athletes, and anti-racism foundations actively participated and integrated their resources on the institutional brand engagement platform ‘FC St. Pauli social media channels’.

We wanted to be more involved in the issue of anti-racism. I talked to St. Pauli about it, they thought it was good, so I briefed a creative agency, and they came up with this idea of ‘No place for racism’, against the backdrop of giving initiatives on a match day space to take over and use St. Pauli’s social media channels. We extended this to the [sponsor] channels. (I-25, Sponsor)

These official brand-owned social media channels especially engage fans to perpetuate brand meanings with their liking and comments. In contrast to platforms where the brand conductor aims to co-create brand meanings that align with brand identity, the brand conductor also initiates platforms to get feedback and impulses for the development of the brand. For instance, FC St. Pauli has initiated brand engagement platforms to allow multiple actors to exchange about the strategic implementation of sustainability into the club brand.

We set up a process with a steering group made up of equal numbers of fans, members and applicants, and a large number of full-time staff. We broke it down into eight areas of action with clear criteria where we needed to develop goals. There were 51 people involved in regular workshop formats [...] and wrote a concept for these eight areas of action. (I-5, Club Management)

Further, in order to seek feedback and actively participate in brand-related discussions within the fan scene, FC St. Pauli initiates platforms like its social media channels, the general meeting, the permanent fan committee, and town hall meetings. These platforms are aimed at exchanging mainly with fans and members, to get feedback and impulses for current and potential brand developments and to negotiate brand meaning. For instance, current brand strategies adhering to more sustainability build on a club member's request for more sustainability in merchandising at the general meeting.

In 2016, there was a request for more sustainability in merchandising. [...]. Motion at the general meeting, working group with full-time staff and the applicant [...] and we then successively started to make Fairtrade and 'Global Organic Textile Standard' conversion. (I-5, Club Management)

This transformation of operations further contributes to building brand identity. One interviewee describes the decision to produce jerseys independently as an 'exclamation mark' (I-2, Club Management) to convey intended sustainability-brand meanings.

However, actors co-create brand meaning not only on institutional brand engagement platforms, but also on *emergent brand engagement platforms* that develop out of the brand conductor's sphere of control. Actors engage in the name of the sport brand on emergent brand engagement platforms that can, but do not have to, be focused on the sport brand. For instance, fans and members of the club regularly represent FC St. Pauli at the Christopher Street Day, thus co-creating the meaning of the brand as diverse and tolerant on a platform that is not directly linked to the brand conductor. Similarly, the fans of FC St. Pauli organise every year the 'Run against Fascism', a running event to raise awareness and money for anti-fascism projects, and holocaust memorial days. However, on these emergent platforms the brand conductor and other primary actors (e.g. athletes) are called upon to participate and integrate their resources.

In 2018 the [Christopher Street Day]: several members said, we also want to show our colours. Have designed a shirt together, black with rainbow skull and 'Love who you want' on the back, and several hundred have participated in the CSD. (I-9, Club Official)

Further, social media fan accounts, online forums, blogs, and traditional media represent emergent brand engagement platforms. On these platforms, fans and journalists share developments around the club and their interpretations of brand meaning with a wide audience, thus co-creating brand meaning. Fan blogs and traditional media represent a 'critical public' (I-20, Media) fighting for the sovereignty of interpretation of brand meaning within the *ISBE* and thus take an important role in the emergence of brand meaning. For instance, an interviewee

emphasised that ‘media are quite decisive for the image of FC St. Pauli among the general public’ (I-2, Club Management). Additionally, fans use media to publish their opinions: ‘The Ultras of FC St. Pauli issued a statement on the matter, which was adopted by Kicker and Spiegel [popular German newspapers]’ (I-20, Media).

Online forums and social media fan accounts offer a platform to negotiate brand meanings and to develop opinions about the brand. Especially, fan accounts perpetuate but also question existing brand meanings out of the brand conductor’s sphere of control. In a physical context, fan club meetings and the ‘Fan Rooms’, which are located in the stadium but belong to the fans, offer additional platforms for interactions among fans. An employee of FC St. Pauli emphasised the fan rooms’ relevance as she expressed ‘that these fan rooms are extremely important as a place to meet, but also as a place where issues can simply arise’ (I-23, Employee). To exemplify, the active fan scene uses the ‘Fan Rooms’ to prepare choreographies, organise activities (e.g. holocaust memorial days), host fan clubs parties, and organise topic-specific talks to discuss political and social issues – generally and in relation to the FC St. Pauli brand.

Building brand identity and co-creating brand meaning are *interrelated*. Building brand identity refers to the brand conductor’s integration of brand identity as a resource in brand meaning co-creating interactions on brand engagement platforms. However, the interrelated process of integrative branding implies that the brand conductor is also required to (re-) integrate brand meanings emerging from interactions among multiple actors on institutional and emergent brand engagement platforms into brand identity. Brand engagement platforms within the *ISBE* are mutually dependent as actors integrate brand meanings and resources on various platforms and in interactions with the brand conductor. Actors of the internal brand management platform need to pick up currents and integrate, discuss, and negotiate these brand meanings within the brand management platform to decide how brand identity should resonate, reflect, and reinforce emerging brand meanings or deliberately challenge them. ‘In the end, [what the brand stands for] is the cosmos from all currents, opinions, which, of course centralized with [the brand conductor] somehow run up, and in which the implementation then finds itself’, was concluded by an employee (I-10, Employee).

This adheres to the interrelationship of both sub-processes: brand meanings from brand engagement platforms are integrated as a resource into the brand management platform. Thus, brand identity is constantly adapted and reinforced through its integration into brand communication on brand engagement platforms. Brand management is perceived as a constant ‘checks and balances’ (I-13, Employee) and requires diplomacy, negotiation, and mediation towards

achieving congruence in brand meaning within the *ISBE*. This adheres to the perspective of sport brands as dynamic social processes, co-created through the interactions of multiple actors.

I do not think there is one person who can decide [what the brand stands for]. It is not top-down. It is a co-creative process that arises in a cooperation between the environment and the corporate leadership of the club. (I-22, Partner)

3.2.6. Contributions

3.2.6.1. Theoretical contributions

Following emerging branding research that perceives brands from an ecosystem perspective (Baker, Fehrer, et al., 2022; Giannopoulos et al., 2021), we originally take an integrative ecosystem perspective on sport brands. Sport brands co-exist within the overarching framework of the *sport brand ecosystem* and are subject to reciprocal spillover effects between brands (Baker, Kunkel, et al., 2022). Current sport branding research further points out that additional actors actively co-create sport brands within the network of actors emerging around a single sport brand (Bertschy et al., 2020; Kahiya et al., 2023). However, there is limited understanding about the brand conductor's role and the underlying structures of brand co-creation. The *ISBE* implies that brand meaning co-creation processes enfold (1) among all actors interested in the sport brand, (2) as they integrate resources in interactions on interdependent institutional and emergent brand engagement platforms, (3) which cannot be controlled, but only coordinated and governed by the brand conductor. Further, the *ISBE* implies that (4) brand co-creation also comprises the co-creation of brand identity by the aggregated brand conductor on the internal brand management platform. The *ISBE* extends existing sport branding research towards an integrative ecosystem perspective, providing a holistic understanding of structures and interrelationships among all actors in the co-creation of sport brands.

First, we contribute to sport branding research by examining the network of actors emerging around a sport brand and enhancing the understanding of the variety of actors engaging in brand co-creation. The *ISBE* has no rigid borders, but is open to every actor interested in the sport brand. Thus, all actors engaging in interactions with the brand conductor or in interactions related to the brand are part of the *ISBE* and co-create the sport brand. This confirms, converges, but also extends previous research that neglected various actors (Baker, Kunkel, et al., 2022; Bertschy et al., 2020; Kahiya et al., 2023; Kolyperas et al., 2019; Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). While acknowledging that no enumeration of actors within the *ISBE* can be complete, we systematically specify typical actors engaging in the co-creation of sport brands. We also find that the influence of actors within the *ISBE* varies. Actors are distinguished into primary

and secondary actors, which differ in their salience and are therefore more or less influential. This complements and extends previous research that has highlighted the extraordinary role of fans in brand co-creation (Kolyperas et al., 2019), as it allows for a differentiated classification of all actors.

Second, the *ISBE* provides a comprehensive perspective on the structures of brand co-creation. Building on the sport ecosystem logic (Buser, Woratschek, Dickson, & Schönberger, 2022), actors engage in dyadic interactions on brand engagement platforms that form the dynamic structure of the *ISBE*. Existing research neglects these interrelated levels of brand co-creation and examines exclusively dyadic interactions (Kolyperas et al., 2019), interactions on isolated brand engagement platforms (Kahiya et al., 2023), or the broad sport brand ecosystem (Baker, Kunkel et al., 2022). The *ISBE* recognises these contributions and integrates them into a holistic perspective that considers the interrelated micro-, meso-, and macrolevel of brand co-creation. This advances the understanding of the relationships among the network of actors within the *sport brand ecosystem* (Baker, Kunkel, et al., 2022). Brand engagement platforms are interdependent and actors integrate brand meanings in various contexts to negotiate brand meaning. This implies the active engagement of actors in co-creating brands (Kolyperas et al., 2019; Taks et al., 2020; Tjandra et al., 2021) rather than passive spillover effects (Baker, Kunkel, et al., 2022). We distinguish between institutional and emergent brand engagement platforms. Institutional brand engagement platforms adhere to the brand governance approach, where the brand conductor can consciously initiate and coordinate brand co-creation (Kahiya et al., 2023; Taks et al., 2020). They comprise social media channels of the sport brand, infrastructure like the stadium, sport and cultural events organised by the sport brand, sponsoring, committees, and forums (e.g. general meeting; Figure 1). Institutional brand engagement platforms aim to facilitate the co-creation of brand meanings that align with brand identity or to receive feedback and impulses for brand development. Emergent brand engagement platforms comprise media, social media fan pages and blogs, online forums, and fan initiatives (Figure 1). This conceptualisation aligns with Bertschy et al. (2020), Kolyperas et al. (2019) and Tjandra et al. (2021), who demonstrate how brands are co-created outside the brand conductor's sphere of control.

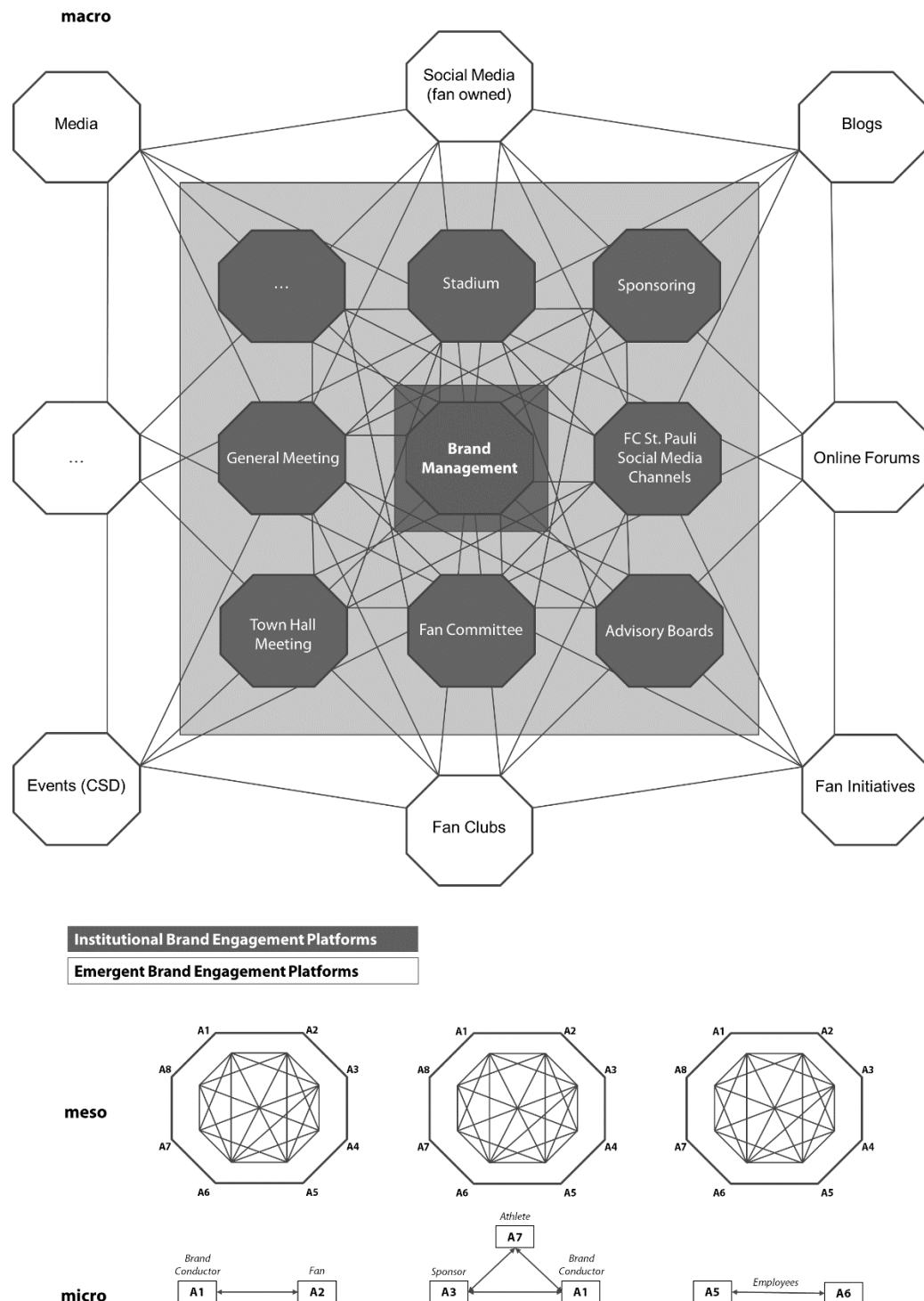


Figure 1. The Integrative Sport Brand Ecosystem.

Third, we contribute to sport branding research by taking an organisational perspective and detailing how sport brands are managed within the *sport brand ecosystem*. With the exception of approaches to brand governance (Kahiya et al., 2023; Taks et al., 2020), an organisational perspective is largely disregarded in previous research. The *ISBE* enhances the understanding of the brand conductor's role and activities in brand co-creation. The brand conductor

represents a focal actor within the *ISBE*, obligated to build brand identity and facilitate brand meaning co-creation. However, in extension to previous research (Kahiya et al., 2023; Taks et al., 2020), the brand conductor is no single actor. Rather, in developing brand identity, the brand conductor is a construct consisting of multiple internal actors that engage on the institutional ‘brand management platform’. In communicating brand identity, we conceptualise the brand conductor as a contextual and multi-layered actor, which comprises every actor officially acting on behalf of the sport brand at the corporate level. Brand conductors integrate brand identity as a resource into interactions on brand engagement platforms. Brand meanings emerging on institutional and emergent brand engagement platforms are integrated and negotiated among the actors of the brand management platform and either incorporated into brand identity or deliberately rejected. Thus, brand identity is constantly assessed and adapted in internal interactions on the brand management platform based on emerging brand meanings.

3.2.6.2. Managerial contributions

The *ISBE* offers manifold implications for sport management practice by providing a holistic perspective on sport branding. In contrast to existing management-oriented perspectives, the *ISBE* suggests that brand managers cannot autonomously control and develop their brands.

First, practitioners need to be aware that multiple actors affect their brand. Thus, they should systematically analyse and map actors and brand engagement platforms constituting the *ISBE* of their sport brand. Further, actors should be classified according to their salience on the sport brand. Developing a structured overview of the *ISBE* allows practitioners to understand where and by whom their sport brand is co-created. It further provides guidance to assess how much the brand conductor already adheres to a multi-actor-dominant logic within an ecosystem perspective and provides a starting point for concrete brand management measures. Therefore, practitioners should conduct workshops or interviews with selected actors identified in this study to develop a systematic overview of their *ISBE*.

Second, building on the systematic analysis of the sport brand’s *ISBE*, practitioners should establish an internal brand management platform, determine participating members, and set up regular meetings (i.e. brand tribe in the case of FC St. Pauli). On the brand management platform, actors perform the brand conductor aggregate and constantly assess, negotiate, develop, and adapt brand identity. Additionally, they collaboratively derive implications with other departments engaging in communicating brand identity. Thus, leveraging a brand management platform enhances the internal development and the consistent communication of the sport brand.

Third, practitioners are obligated to provide brand engagement platforms in order to facilitate brand co-creation among multiple actors. For instance, social media provides an institutional brand engagement platform to co-create brand meanings that align with brand identity (e.g. FC St. Pauli's 'No place for racism' campaign) and exchange formats provide an opportunity to receive feedback from actors and participate in brand-related discussions (e.g. town hall meetings). On brand engagement platforms, brand conductors should constantly integrate brand identity as a resource and absorb emerging brand meanings. These emerging brand meanings are constantly negotiated to either refuse them or integrate them into brand identity (e.g. FC St. Pauli followed the demand for sustainability at the general meeting). Thus, brand managers need to remain open for dynamic changes of their brand.

3.2.6.3. *Limitations and future research*

The focus on a single sport brand limits the generalisability and transferability of the *ISBE*. It is essential to examine additional sport brands within the framework of the *ISBE*. In line with the bottom-up logic of the *ISBE*, we detail directions for future sport branding research along the micro-, meso-, and macrolevel. On the macrolevel, future research could assess how the *ISBE* translates to other sport brands (e.g. athlete brands) as well as if and how actors and their salience for brand co-creation varies across the *ISBE* of different sport brands (e.g. across different sports). Additionally, macrolevel research should examine the measurement of evolving brand meanings, strategies to balance and govern diverging brand meanings within the *ISBE*, and network designs of institutional brand engagement platforms to facilitate interactions. Mesolevel future research may address the governance, design, and infrastructure of individual institutional brand engagement platforms, detail how actors interact on brand engagement platforms to co-create and negotiate brand meaning, and study how brand meanings are absorbed and brand identity is adapted within the internal brand management platform. Further, future research could assess, how brand conductors can participate authentically on emergent brand engagement platforms. On the microlevel, future research is needed regarding the understanding of brand conductors' management capabilities, the authentic and consistent communication of brand identity, and actors' motivation to engage in brand co-creation. Additionally, future research could examine the extent to which an actor's brand meaning evolves over time and what factors influence brand meaning.

3.2.7. Appendix

Interview guide.

Illustrative interview questions.

Self-description of actor

- When did you start working at/ with FC St. Pauli? Why?
- How are you involved in building the brand “FC St. Pauli” / How is the sponsor or partner involved in building the brand “FC St. Pauli”? and How can one imagine the partnership?
- What does the brand “FC St. Pauli” mean to you personally?

Building brand identity

- What is the brand’s identity? How did it evolve?
- How is the brand conductor communicating brand identity? Internally? Externally?
- Who decides about the strategic direction of the FC St. Pauli brand?

Co-creating brand meaning

- Which actors engage in the context of the FC St. Pauli brand? How?
- How does FC St. Pauli facilitate engagement? Does engagement also emerge outside of the brand conductor’s sphere of control?
- How does the engagement influence the FC St. Pauli brand?
- How does the brand conductor cope with diverging perspectives on the brand?

Closing

- What do you wish personally for the future of the brand “FC St. Pauli”?
- Are there any things we have not covered in the interview, but you would like to add?

3.2.8. References

- Aaker, D. A. (2002). *Building strong brands*. Simon & Schuster.
- Abosag, I., Roper, S., & Hind, D. (2012). Examining the relationship between brand emotion and brand extension among supporters of professional football clubs. *European Journal of Marketing*, 46(9), 1233–1251. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561211247810>
- Anagnostopoulos, C., Parganas, P., Chadwick, S., & Fenton, A. (2018). Branding in pictures: Using Instagram as a brand management tool in professional team sport organisations. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 18(4), 413–438. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2017.1410202>
- Baker, B. J., Kunkel, T., Doyle, J. P., Su, Y., Bredikhina, N., & Biscaia, R. (2022). Re-mapping the sport brandscape: A structured review and future direction for sport brand research. *Journal of Sport Management*, 36(3), 251–264. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2021-0231>
- Baker, J. J., Fehrer, J. A., & Brodie, R. J. (2022). Navigating the emergence of brand meaning in service ecosystems. *Journal of Service Management*, ahead of print.
- Batey, M. (2008). *Brand meaning*. Routledge.
- Bertschy, M., Mühlbacher, H., & Desbordes, M. (2020). Esports extension of a football brand: Stakeholder co-creation in action? *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 47–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2019.1689281>
- Biscaia, R., Hedlund, D. P., Dickson, G., & Naylor, M. (2018). Conceptualising and measuring fan identity using stakeholder theory. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 18(4), 459–481. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2017.1413580>
- Bodet, G., & Séguin, B. (2021). Team sports brand management. In S. Walzel & V. Römisch (Eds.), *Managing sports teams: Economics, strategy and practice* (pp. 141–159). Springer International Publishing.
- Breidbach, C. F., Brodie, R., & Hollebeek, L. (2014). Beyond virtuality: From engagement platforms to engagement ecosystems. *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*, 24(6), 592–611.
- Brodie, R. J., Benson-Rea, M., & Medlin, C. J. (2017). Branding as a dynamic capability. *Marketing Theory*, 17(2), 183–199. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593116679871>
- Burmann, C., Hegner, S., & Riley, N. (2009). Towards an identity-based branding. *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), 113–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593108100065>

- Buser, M., Woratschek, H., Dickson, G., & Schönberner, J. (2022). Toward a sport ecosystem logic. *Journal of Sport Management*, 36(6), 534–547.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2021-0056>
- Buser, M., Woratschek, H., & Schönberner, J. (2022). ‘Going the extra mile’ in resource integration: Evolving a concept of sport sponsorship as an engagement platform. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 22(4), 548–568.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2020.1820061>
- Chandler, J. D., & Vargo, S. L. (2011). Contextualization and value-in-context: How context frames exchange. *Marketing Theory*, 11(1), 35–49.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593110393713>
- Couvellaere, V., & Richelieu, A. (2005). Brand strategy in professional sports: The case of French soccer teams. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 5(1), 23–46.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184740500089524>
- da Silveira, C., Lages, C., & Simões, C. (2013). Reconceptualizing brand identity in a dynamic environment. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 28–36.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.020>
- DFB. (2022). DFB verzichtet künftig auf den Markennamen "Die Mannschaft". Retrieved from <https://www.dfb.de/news/detail/dfb-verzichtet-kuenftig-auf-den-markennamen-diemannschaft-242515/>
- Doyle, J. P., Kunkel, T., Kelly, S. J., Filo, K., & Cuskelly, G. (2021). Seeing the same things differently: Exploring the unique brand associations linked to women’s professional sport teams. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 1–15.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2021.1922489>
- Doyle, J. P., Pentecost, R. D., & Funk, D. C. (2014). The effect of familiarity on associated sponsor and event brand attitudes following negative celebrity endorser publicity. *Sport Management Review*, 17(3), 310–323. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2013.10.003>
- Driscoll, C., & Starik, M. (2004). The primordial stakeholder: Advancing the conceptual consideration of stakeholder status for the natural environment. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 49(1), 55–73. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:BUSI.0000013852.62017.0e>
- Dubois, A., & Gadde, L. E. (2002). Systematic combining: An abductive approach to case research. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(7), 553–560. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963\(00\)00195-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(00)00195-8)
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532–550. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258557>

- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 25–32.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2007.24160888>
- Giannopoulos, A., Piha, L., & Skourtis, G. (2021). Destination branding and co-creation: A service ecosystem perspective. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 30(1), 148–166. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-08-2019-2504>
- Giroux, M., Pons, F., & Maltese, L. (2017). The role of perceived brand personality in promotion effectiveness and brand equity development of professional sports teams. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 18(2), 180–195.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSMS-05-2017-092>
- Gladden, J. M., Milne, G. R., & Sutton, W. A. (1998). A conceptual framework for assessing brand equity in division I college athletics. *Journal of Sport Management*, 12(1), 1–19.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.12.1.1>
- Grohs, R., Wieser, V. E., & Pristach, M. (2020). Value cocreation at sport events. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 69–87.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2019.1702708>
- Hüttermann, M., Uhrich, S., & Koenigstorfer, J. (2022). Components and outcomes of fan engagement in team sports: The perspective of managers and fans. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 7(4), 447–478. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2019.1576143>
- Iglesias, O., Landgraf, P., Ind, N., Markovic, S., & Koporcic, N. (2020). Corporate brand identity co-creation in business-to-business contexts. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 85, 32–43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2019.09.008>
- Jaakkola, E. (2020). Designing conceptual articles: Four approaches. *AMS Review*, 10(1-2), 18–26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13162-020-00161-0>
- Järvensivu, T., & Törnroos, J. Å. (2010). Case study research with moderate constructionism: Conceptualization and practical illustration. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39(1), 100–108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2008.05.005>
- Kahiya, E., Ashill, N., & Perkinson, O. (2023). Branding governance in international recurring sports events: The World Rugby ‘Sevens’ Series. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23 (5), 1477–1499. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2022.2030383>
- Kelly, S. J., Ireland, M., Mangan, J., & Williamson, H. (2016). It works two ways: Impacts of sponsorship alliance upon sport and sponsor image. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 25(4), 241–259.

- Kolyperas, D., Maglaras, G., & Sparks, L. (2019). Sport fans' roles in value co-creation. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 19(2), 201–220.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2018.1505925>
- Kunkel, T., & Biscaia, R. (2020). Sport brands: Brand relationships and consumer behavior. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 29(1), 3–17.
<https://doi.org/10.32731/SMQ.291.032020.01>
- Manoli, A. E. (2020). Brand capabilities in English premier league clubs. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 30–46.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2019.1693607>
- Mayring, P. (2015). *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse: Grundlagen und Techniken*. Beltz Pädagogik.
- Beltz. McCracken, G. (1986). Culture and consumption: A theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13(1), 71–84. <https://doi.org/10.1086/209048>
- Merz, M. A., He, Y., & Vargo, S. L. (2009). The evolving brand logic: A service-dominant logic perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 37(3), 328–344.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-009-0143-3>
- Meyer, C. B. (2001). A case in case study methodology. *Field Methods*, 13(4), 329–352.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X0101300402>
- Michel, G. (2017). From brand identity to polysemous brands: Commentary on “Performing identities: Processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction”. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 453–455. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.06.022>
- Mitchell, R. K., Agle, B. R., & Wood, D. J. (1997). Toward a theory of stakeholder identification and salience: Defining the principle of who and what really counts. *Academy of Management Review*, 22(4), 853–886. <https://doi.org/10.2307/259247>
- Neumann, M. (2022, December 12). Merchandising: 24 von 36 DFL-Club mit positiver Entwicklung. <https://spobis.com/article/merchandising-24-von-36-dfl-club-mit-positiver-entwicklung>
- Parent, M. M., Naraine, M. L., & Hoyer, R. (2018). A new era for governance structures and processes in Canadian national sport organizations. *Journal of Sport Management*, 32(6), 555–566. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2018-0037>
- Parganas, P., Anagnostopoulos, C., & Chadwick, S. (2015). ‘You’ll never tweet alone’: Managing sports brands through social media. *Journal of Brand Management*, 22(7), 551–568. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2015.32>
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

- Perreault Jr, W. D., & Leigh, L. E. (1989). Reliability of nominal data based on qualitative judgments. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 26(2), 135–148.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/002224378902600201>
- Pettigrew, A. M. (1990). Longitudinal field research on change: Theory and practice. *Organization Science*, 1(3), 267–292. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1.3.267>
- Rashid, Y., Rashid, A., Warraich, M. A., Sabir, S. S., & Waseem, A. (2019). Case study method: A step-by-step guide for business researchers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919862424>
- Sarasvuo, S., Rindell, A., & Kovalchuk, M. (2022). Toward a conceptual understanding of co-creation in branding. *Journal of Business Research*, 139, 543–563.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.09.051>
- Seguin, B., & Abeza, G. (2019). Olympic brand governance: Future research directions. In M. Winand & C. Anagnostopoulos (Eds.), *Research handbook on sport governance* (pp. 368–383). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Smith, A. C., & Stewart, B. (2010). The special features of sport: A critical revisit. *Sport Management Review*, 13(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2009.07.002>
- Stegmann, P., Nagel, S., & Ströbel, T. (2023). The digital transformation of value co-creation: A scoping review towards an agenda for sport marketing research. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23(4), 1221–1248.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2021.1976241>
- Storbacka, K., Brodie, R. J., Böhmman, T., Maglio, P. P., & Nenonen, S. (2016). Actor engagement as a microfoundation for value co-creation. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(8), 3008–3017. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.02.034>
- Ströbel, T., & Germelmann, C. C. (2020). Exploring new routes within brand research in sport management: Directions and methodological approaches. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2019.1706603>
- Sutton, W. A., McDonald, M. A., Milne, G. R., & Cimperman, J. (1997). Creating and fostering fan identification in professional sports. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 6(1), 15–22.
- Taks, M., Seguin, B., Naraine, M. L., Thompson, A., Parent, M. M., & Hoyer, R. (2020). Brand governance practices in Canadian national sport organizations: An exploratory study. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 10–29.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2019.1690538>
- The Nielsen Company (Ed.). (2020). *Nielsen Sports 2020 Commercial Trends*. <https://nielsen-sports.com/nielsen-sports-2020-commercial-trends/>

- Tierney, K. D., Karpen, I. O., & Westberg, K. (2016). Brand meaning cocreation: Toward a conceptualization and research implications. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, 26(6), 911–932. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-06-2015-0137>
- Tjandra, N. C., Rihova, I., Snell, S., Hertog, C. S. d., & Theodoraki, E. (2021). Mega-events brand meaning co-creation: The Olympic case. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 30(1), 58–73. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-08-2019-2539>
- Underwood, R., Bond, E., & Baer, R. (2001). Building service brands via social identity: Lessons from the sports marketplace. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 9(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2001.11501881>
- Veloutsou, C., & Guzman, F. (2017). The evolution of brand management thinking over the last 25 years as recorded in the journal of product and brand management. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 26(1), 2–12. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-01-2017-1398>
- Williams, A., Son, S., Walsh, P., & Park, J. (2021). The influence of logo change on brand loyalty and the role of attitude toward rebranding and logo evaluation. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 30 (1), 69–81. <https://doi.org/10.32731/SMQ.301.032021.06>
- Woisetschläger, D., Backhaus, C., Hageböling, M., & O’Neill, V. (2019). *Fußballstudie 2019: Die Markenlandschaft der Fußball-Bundesliga*. Technische Universität Braunschweig.
- Woratschek, H., Horbel, C., & Popp, B. (2014). The sport value framework – a new fundamental logic for analyses in sport management. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 14(1), 6–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2013.865776>
- Zimmer, F. (2018, December 12). So denkt St. Pauli über Marketing: ‘Wir sind das Produkt von Fans’. Werben & Verkaufen. Retrieved from https://www.wuv.de/marke-ting/wir_sind_das_produkt_von_fans

3.3. Unpacking brand co-creation: A single case study and empirical consolidation of brand co-creation performances following qualitative meta-synthesis (Research Article 2)

Authors Lars Brand, University of Bayreuth, Germany
Matthias Anderski, University of Bayreuth, Germany; La Trobe University Melbourne, Australia
Tim Ströbel, University of Bayreuth, Germany

Published in *Journal of Brand Management*, 2025, 32(2), 150-165
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-024-00374-9>

Open Access. *This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), and indicate if changes were made.*

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 51st European Marketing Association Conference (EMAC) (Budapest, Hungary; May 2022; peer-reviewed) and the 32nd European Association for Sport Management Conference (EASM) (Paris, France; September 2024; peer-reviewed).

ABSTRACT

An increasing body of research adopts a performative perspective of brands, assuming that multiple actors co-create brands in interrelated brand co-creation performances (*BCCP*). While gaining traction in branding research, empirical work identifying *BCCP* is scarce ($n = 3$). *BCCP* have yet been discussed in single research contexts, evolving largely independent and leading to disparate findings. Initially, this research aims to expand existing empirical work. Using the unusually revelatory ‘over-over-the-top’ context of the sport brand FC St. Pauli, we apply semi-structured interviews, internal brand-related documents, media content analysis, and social media analysis to identify *BCCP* in a novel research context. Building on this single-case study and existing research on *BCCP*, we empirically consolidate these primary studies ($n = 4$) following qualitative meta-synthesis to unpack brand co-creation in various contexts. The empirical consolidation results in eight interrelated *BCCP* (i.e. communicating, implementing, contesting, developing, negotiating, facilitating, social listening, and assimilating), which are divided into direct brand co-creation performances (*dBCCP*) and enabling brand co-creation performances (*eBCCP*). This research contributes to branding literature by unpacking how (i.e. through which *BCCP*) multiple actors co-create brands. Additionally, it provides brand managers with an enhanced understanding of their brand and the influence of multiple internal and external actors.

KEYWORDS: brand co-creation; brand co-creation performances; brand identity; brand meaning

3.3.1. Introduction

Brands are commonly acknowledged as an organisation's most valuable asset (Forbes 2020), making it essential to comprehend the processes through which they develop. Conventionally, brands are conceived as bundles of static, enduring components consciously determined by the brand owner (Aaker 2002; Keller 1993). However, in today's 'hyperconnected world' (Swaminathan et al. 2020), this logic is considered insufficient (Merz et al. 2009; Veloutsou and Guzman 2017). Various actors create brand-related content, influence marketing decisions, and share their own brand meanings. Consequently, branding research increasingly adopts a multi-actor-dominant logic, perceiving brands as social constructs that dynamically evolve in interactions among the brand conductor and multiple actors. More specifically, brands are conceptualised as sign systems initially forming a unique identity, which initiates and facilitates processes to co-create brand meaning (Brodie et al. 2017). The exchange of co-created brand meanings ultimately creates value for actors and the brand (Conejo and Wooliscroft 2015). Therefore, brands are co-created constructs that cannot be controlled by the brand conductor (Merz et al. 2009; Sarasvuo et al. 2022). Rather, the brand conductor becomes a facilitator of brand co-creation processes (Michel 2017). While this logic is gaining traction (e.g. Black and Veloutsou 2017; Kornum et al. 2017; Voyer et al. 2017), current research on *how* actors specifically co-create brands in interactions is fragmented.

To unpack brand co-creation, we draw on performativity theory (Butler 1990), positing that social reality is continuously constituted and produced through recurrent linguistic and socio-material performances of actors (Orlikowski 2010). Accordingly, brands are socially constructed entities co-created through brand co-creation performances (*BCCP*) of multiple actors in interactions (Lucarelli and Hallin 2015). While an increasing body of research adopts a performative perspective of brands (Kristal et al. 2020), only three empirical studies investigated specific *BCCP* of actors in the context of one B2C brand (von Wallpach et al. 2017a), five B2B brands (Iglesias et al. 2020), and one human brand (Anderski et al. 2023). This research has evolved largely independent, leading to disparate findings. It is necessary (1) to examine *BCCP* in novel research contexts and (2) to empirically consolidate *BCCP* to obtain a more comprehensive conceptualisation of *BCCP* (Iglesias et al. 2020) and unpack brand co-creation. Thus, this research aims to answer the subsequent overarching research question: *Through which brand co-creation performances do multiple actors co-create brands?*

Building on the limitations of previous research, this research follows a two-pronged approach to address the overarching research question. First, we expand on existing empirical work through a qualitative single-case study in a novel research context. We use the unusually

revelatory ‘over-over-the-top’ context of the sport brand FC St. Pauli applying semi-structured interviews, internal brand-related documents, media content analysis, and social media analysis to identify *BCCP*. Second, building on the case study and previous research on *BCCP*, we ‘empirically consolidate’ (Hoon 2013, p. 527) these primary studies ($n = 4$) following qualitative meta-synthesis. This approach, comprising case-specific analysis and synthesising processes on a cross-study level, results in eight interrelated *BCCP* (i.e. communicating, implementing, contesting, developing, negotiating, facilitating, social listening, and assimilating), which are divided into direct brand co-creation performances (*dBCCP*) and enabling brand co-creation performances (*eBCCP*).

Overall, this research contributes to branding research by unpacking *how* (i.e. through which *BCCP*) multiple actors co-create brands in various contexts. In addition, it provides brand managers with an enhanced understanding of their brand and the influence of multiple internal and external actors.

3.3.2. Brand co-creation

Conventionally, the perception of branding is grounded in a brand owner-dominant logic, assuming that brand owners autonomously and strategically develop and communicate a consistent brand identity (i.e. set of static brand components) (Aaker 2002; da Silveira et al. 2013; Ward et al. 2020). This logic considers brands as rigid, firm-controlled properties and customers as passive recipients of unilateral brand communication, serving as the sole source of brand meaning (i.e. set of actors’ brand associations) (de Chernatony 2006; Kapferer 2008; Keller and Lehmann 2003). Consequently, the brand owner-dominant logic conceptualises brands as static results of conscious management decisions (Burmann et al. 2009; Keller 1993). Recent branding research responds to an increasingly dynamic, interactive, and interconnected environment by embracing a broader relational, social, experiential, and cultural perspective (Brodie et al. 2017). The logic of branding has shifted fundamentally towards a multi-actor-dominant logic, conceptualising brands as dynamic and interactive social processes involving multiple actors (Brand et al. 2023; Iglesias et al. 2013; Merz et al. 2009). Rather than being stable and exclusive products of unilateral management efforts (von Wallpach et al. 2017b), brands are understood as social constructs that are always in flux and in a constant state of becoming (von Wallpach et al. 2017a; Voyer et al. 2017). Beside the organisation (i.e. management, employees), customers, media, B2B partners, and other actors co-create brands in mutual interactions on institutional or emergent brand engagement platforms (Baker et al. 2022; Ind 2014; Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2016; Sarkar and Banerjee 2021). Particularly the emergence of social media has empowered actors to actively co-create brands (Le et al. 2022; Tajvidi et al.

2020). Therefore, brand owners need to accept a loss of control, shifting the role of the brand owner from a brand ‘guardian’ to a ‘conductor’ of interactive brand co-creation processes (Cooper et al. 2019; Hatch and Schultz 2010; Ind et al. 2020; Michel 2017; Riedmeier and Kreuzer 2022; Siano et al. 2022).

Despite increasing academic attention, research within the domain of brand co-creation is largely heterogeneous (Sarasvuo et al. 2022). First, research adopts various different but interlinked theoretical approaches. The concept of *brand experiences* is used to understand how customers co-create individual brand meanings through cumulative brand-related interactions across various direct or indirect encounters. In addition, research following an organisational perspective focuses on the role of the brand conductor to facilitate the co-creation of brand experiences (Andreini et al. 2018; Brakus et al. 2009; Payne et al. 2009; Stach 2019). *Service-dominant logic* is a pivotal theoretical pillar for brand co-creation (Ind and Schmidt 2019; Kovalchuk et al. 2023; Merz et al. 2009). This research stream examines the role of customers in the process of brand value co-creation (Merz et al. 2018), especially in digital contexts such as brand communities and social media (Chapman and Dilmeri 2022; Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2016; Simmons and Durkin 2023), and aims to understand the fundamental conditions that drive brand value co-creation (Mingione and Leoni 2020). In addition, service-dominant logic is used to adopt a macrolevel ecosystem perspective on brands and understand institutional arrangements in brand co-creation (Baker et al. 2022; Giannopoulos et al. 2021). Building on the overarching service-dominant logic, a comprehensive body of research has developed around the concept of *customer brand engagement*, referring to customers’ cognitive (i.e. mental processing and contemplation related to a brand) and behavioural activity (i.e. explicit behavioural manifestations in relation to a brand occurring beyond purchase) related to specific brand interactions (Hollebeek et al. 2014, 2019, 2021; Nyadzayo et al. 2020). Similarly, *social practice theory* is applied to understand social processes among members of brand communities (Schau et al. 2009), examine branding strategies as practice (Vallaster and von Wallpach 2018), and theoretically conceptualise the process of brand meaning co-creation (Tierney et al. 2016). Other research draws on *stakeholder theory* to understand the active role of multiple actors in brand co-creation (Hatch and Schultz 2010; Vallaster and von Wallpach 2013). This is linked to *role theory*, which pertains to the examination of how actors proactively adopt and enact various roles in brand-related interactions (Törmälä and Saraniemi 2018; Veloutsou and Black 2020). Within the theoretical realm of *user-generated-content*, research aims to understand how such content (e.g. user-generated-advertisements; branded social media posts) contributes to brand meaning (Burmam and Arnhold 2008; Christodoulides et al. 2011, 2012; Koivisto and

Mattila 2020; Teresa Borges-Tiago et al. 2021). In addition, research taking an organisational perspective sheds light on how to integrate user-generated content in the overarching branding strategy (Gensler et al. 2013; Shulga et al. 2023).

Second, brand co-creation research is differentiated according to the perspective (Brodie et al. 2017). Research taking a customer/actor perspective aims to understand how customers or other actors co-create individual and collective brand meanings (e.g. Tjandra et al. 2021). Research taking an organisational perspective aims to understand the role of the brand conductor and internal actors in facilitating and managing the comprehensive brand co-creation process among all actors (e.g. Essamri et al. 2019).

Third, the conceptual outcomes of brand co-creation remain ambiguous (i.e. brand value, brand identity, and brand meaning) (Sarasvuo et al. 2022). Building on the distinction made by Michel (2017) and Brodie et al. (2017), and in order to consider both customer/actor and organisational perspectives, this study refers to brand identity and brand meaning as essential concepts in brand co-creation (Iglesias et al. 2020; Koporcic and Halinen 2018). Brand identity initiates processes to co-create collective brand meaning, which develops through the social interactions of actors with the brand and other actors. This dynamically evolving collective brand meaning is a key determinant of strategic advantage and brand value—conceptualised as the perceived use value that is solely attributable to a brand (Brodie et al. 2017; Merz et al. 2018). In other words, all actors interested in the brand ‘bring brand value to life through the collective sharing and negotiation of brand meaning’ (Simmons and Durkin 2023, p. 617) and the brand owner facilitates these processes through the development and communication of brand identity. Therefore, the constructs of brand identity and brand meaning are the underlying drivers of brand value (Baker et al. 2022; Conejo and Wooliscroft 2015).

3.3.3. Brand identity

Brand identity is a managerial concept, representing the intra-organisational and ideal understanding of what the brand is, providing a sense of direction and the strategic impetus for the development of brand meaning (Burmam et al. 2009; Iglesias et al. 2013). However, based on the multi-actor-dominant logic, brand identity is co-created intra-organisational (Chung and Byrom 2021). Findings by Barros-Arrieta and García-Cali (2021) and Dean et al. (2016) demonstrate how employees co-create individual brand meanings through their brand experiences and social interactions with management, colleagues, and customers. This learned brand meaning is reflected in the employees’ development and communication of brand identity. Thus, brand identity co-creation refers to the brand conductor’s activity of absorbing opinions, inputs, and influences of external actors to dynamically adapt brand identity (Brodie et al. 2017;

Iglesias et al. 2020). In addition, Brand et al. (2023) and Juntunen (2012) find that management and employees constantly assess and develop brand identity within co-creative internal interactions. Furthermore, research indicates the active role of business partners and customers in developing and communicating brand identity. The involvement of external actors in organisational processes comprises the development of innovative products (e.g. France et al. 2018; Mäläskä et al. 2011; Törmälä and Saraniemi 2018), the company's branding strategy (e.g. Lindstedt 2015; Törmälä and Saraniemi 2018; Vallaster and von Wallpach 2018), the engagement in collaborative marketing activities (e.g. Essamri et al. 2019; Törmälä and Saraniemi 2018), the provision of brand-related feedback (e.g. Essamri et al. 2019; France et al. 2018; France et al. 2020; Mäläskä et al. 2011), and the involvement in the creation of brand nomenclature (i.e. brand name and logo) and brand communication materials (e.g. Juntunen 2012; Kim et al. 2018).

3.3.4. Brand meaning

Brand meaning represents a socially constructed concept, co-created in mutual interactions where multiple actors integrate and exchange resources (e.g. perceptions or opinions of the brand) to develop a collective understanding of the brand (Tierney et al. 2016). Accordingly, the brand conductor cannot control the process (Wider et al. 2018) and brand meaning is neither uniform among actors nor over time and might deviate from brand identity (Vallaster and von Wallpach 2013). Actors co-create brand meaning in social interactions (e.g. Dwivedi et al. 2016) and through brand-related experiences (e.g. Millspaugh and Kent 2016; Tjandra et al. 2021). In particular, brand promoters actively support, defend, advocate, and reinforce intended brand meanings (e.g. France et al. 2018; France et al. 2020; Mangiò et al. 2023; Mäläskä et al. 2011; Simmons and Durkin 2023; Törmälä and Saraniemi 2018). They become opinion makers and active co-creators of brand stories and meanings (e.g. Oliveira and Panyik 2015; Üçok Hughes et al. 2016). However, such brand engagement can be valenced negatively as well (e.g. Dong et al. 2024), when brand offenders transform brand meaning by sharing alternative and potentially negative brand meanings (Mangiò et al. 2023; Simmons and Durkin 2023; Vallaster and von Wallpach 2013). From an organisational perspective, the brand conductor initiates, facilitates, and coordinates interactions among actors, such as participating in brand communities, integrating brand experiences, or sharing user-generated content (e.g. Essamri et al. 2019; Gensler et al. 2013; Kahiya et al. 2023; Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2016). However, as described above other actors also initiate interactions outside of the brand conductor's sphere of control (Sarasvuo et al. 2022).

3.3.5. Performativity theory as midrange theory to unpack brand co-creation

Although the different theoretical approaches shed light on particular phenomenon of the dynamic interplay between actors and brands, the understanding of brand co-creation remains fragmented. Previous research lacks an overarching and consolidated perspective on *how* multiple actors co-create brands. For instance, Tierney et al. (2016) call for research to uncover the practices between multiple actors contributing to the co-creation of brand meaning. Similarly, von Wallpach et al. (2017a, b) or Iglesias et al. (2020) claim that research should aim to enhance the understanding of the complex and dynamic processes underlying brand co-creation.

We utilise performativity theory (Butler 1990) as a midrange theory to unpack brand co-creation. Midrange theories provide a theoretical bridge between theories with a high level of abstraction and empirical findings (Brodie et al. 2011). Performativity is a sociological theory rooted in the broader theoretical framework of social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Burr 2003), which is pivotal to a co-creative understanding in brand management (Ind and Schmidt, 2019). The core notion of performativity theory holds that seemingly stable phenomena (e.g. identity) do not exist but are rather characterised by an ontological reality; i.e. social processes that continuously constitute social objects (Gond et al. 2016). Thus, social objects are an ongoing process of production as actors continuously constitute, challenge, and stabilise them in recurring linguistic and socio-material performances (i.e. doing of an activity within a situated context) (Feldman and Orlikowski 2011; Law and Urry 2004; Orlikowski and Scott 2014).

Building on the perspective of brands as dynamic social constructs evolving in social interactions among multiple actors, performativity theory provides a rich theoretical approach to enhance and specify the understanding of *how* brands are co-created (da Silveira et al. 2013; von Wallpach et al. 2017a). Following a performative logic, brands have no final stable stage. Rather, brands are dynamically constituted through linguistic and socio-material *BCCP* of multiple actors in social interactions (Lucarelli and Hallin 2015; Onyas and Ryan 2015; von Wallpach et al. 2017a). Therefore, to unpack how brands are co-created, it is crucial to identify the underlying *BCCP* enacted by multiple actors that are constitutive of the brand (Iglesias and Ind 2020). This performative logic allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of brands and the intricate process of brand co-creation (von Wallpach et al. 2017a).

Performativity theory has been applied in prior branding research (e.g. da Silveira et al. 2013; Törmälä and Gyrð-Jones 2017). However, this research seldom focuses on pinpointing specific *BCCP* (Kristal et al. 2020). Only three studies identified 15 distinct *BCCP*. First, von

Wallpach et al. (2017a) identified seven *BCCP* in a single-case study of LEGO. Each *BCCP* is crucial in developing the identities of the brand and the actors involved. Although *playing and liking* (i.e. putting together LEGO sets) strongly relates to the studied brand and the development of a customer's identity, the other six performances are relevant for any brand. *Basement building and showcasing* relates to customers demonstrating their affiliation to the brand on online platforms or offline events by sharing their creations. *Creating and innovating* describes how customers exchange knowledge, discuss building techniques, and ultimately collaborate with the brand in product development. *Community building and facilitating* includes the development and maintenance of spaces for interactions initiated by the brand conductor or customers to enable social relationships among LEGO customers. *Brand storytelling* and *missionising* refer to customers narrating, recommending, and defending the brand. Finally, *market-place developing* describes how customers and the brand conductor initiate platforms to collect and re-sell brand-related products. While providing an initial approach to *BCCP* of customers and the brand conductor, the study largely neglects other actors, lacks an internal organisational perspective, and focuses on the development of actors' identities.

Second, within a multi-case study ($n = 5$), Iglesias et al. (2020) identified four *BCCP* in B2B contexts. *Communicating* refers to linguistically transmitting brand identity and is particularly performed by the brand conductor, involving traditional management-driven approaches. However, also other actors (i.e. customers, B2B partners) communicate brand identity among their network. *Internalising* is concerned with implementing brand identity into actual behaviours of the management and employees of the respective brand. Therefore, brand trainings are of high importance to ensure their consistent behaviour. In *Contesting*, actors (i.e. customers, employees, B2B partners) contrast brand identity with their perceptions of the brand. They either reaffirm or challenge brand identity with their own brand meanings. *Elucidating* refers to the conversational process by which the brand conductor, together with multiple actors (i.e. customers, employees), discusses and reconciles diverse brand meanings to build a common understanding of the brand. Iglesias et al. (2020) emphasise that their study is only representative for B2B brands and call for future research analysing brand co-creation in the context of B2C brands.

Third, Anderski et al. (2023) utilised the approach of Iglesias et al. (2020) to examine *BCCP* on social media platforms within the realm of human brands. Their findings were similar to those of Iglesias et al. (2020). However, four additional *BCCP* were discovered. *Cooperating* involves the brand conductor collaborating with other actors (i.e. customers, B2B partners) to communicate brand meanings. *Reinforcing* occurs when customers and B2B partners support

brand meanings that correspond with brand identity through posts and comments on social media. *Brand hating* and *loving* refer to customers' activities (i.e. comments on social media) to express their love or hate with the person behind the human brand, thus being very specific to human brands. Anderski et al. (2023) consider exclusively *BCCP* on digital platforms and focus on the co-creation of brand meaning, thus lacking an internal organisational perspective.

3.3.6. Single-case study: method

The empirical investigation builds on a qualitative single-case study, enabling the examination of complex phenomena that lack strong existing theory (i.e. *BCCP*) (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007; Yin 2018). Building theory from case studies requires the application of theoretical sampling to identify a significant case to analyse (Eisenhardt 1989). To replicate, refine, and extend emergent theory, it is reasonable to select extreme contexts in which the phenomena investigated become 'transparently observable' (Pettigrew 1990, p. 275). Sport brands provide exceptionally rich contexts to examine *BCCP*: they attract diverse and highly engaged actors (e.g. fans, employees, B2B partners, media, civic organisations, etc.), who actively participate in *BCCP*.

3.3.6.1. Research context

The German football club brand FC St. Pauli (FCSP) is an unusually revelatory 'over-the-top' case to examine *BCCP*. Especially recognised for its skull and crossbones symbol, FCSP is one of the strongest sport brands worldwide. Today, it is popular for taking a stance on social topics, social activism, and values such as solidarity and anti-discrimination. These brand meanings did not result from the club's management, but emerged from the fans and other actors surrounding the brand. Only 20 years ago, the club started to manage its brand actively. Today, the club perceives the brand as a 'product of luck, coincidences, and passion' (ID-4), as a 'platform of possibilities' where 'people can be creative and things can arise' (Zimmer 2018), and acknowledges the participation of multiple actors (e.g. B2B partners, media, civic organisations, fans, employees, etc.) in brand co-creation.

3.3.6.2. Data collection and analysis

Data collection followed the principles of case study research. To achieve detailed empirical descriptions and ensure validity and reliability, we employed multiple data collection methods (i.e. semi-structured interviews, internal brand-related documents, media content analysis, and social media analysis, see Table 1) (Eisenhardt 1989).

Table 1. Data Sources.

Data Sources	Interviews/ Documents/ Posts	Interview length/ Comments
Semi-structured interviews	26	Ø66 min
Board Member	5	Ø61 min
Management	4	Ø56 min
Employee	8	Ø65 min
Partner/Sponsor	3	Ø66 min
Media	2	Ø84 min
Fan	4	Ø76 min
Internal brand-related documents	5	
Media content analysis	36	
Social media analysis	77	3.944
Facebook	34	1.542
Instagram	43	2.402

We conducted 26 semi-structured interviews between November 2021 and March 2022 with various actors, including board members, managers, and employees as well as partners, media, and fans. Interviewees were selected based on theoretical considerations and exchanges with the Managing Director Brand to ensure diverse perspectives and limit bias in our research (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). All interviews were conducted online, lasting between 46 and 104 min in length, with an average duration of 66 min. Interviews were audio-recorded with the interviewees' permission and transcribed verbatim. Drawing on theoretical considerations and previous examples of interview guides (Iglesias et al. 2020), we asked our interview partners to explain how they and other actors participate in branding activities, leading to rich subjective descriptions of *BCCP*.

Data analysis of the semi-structured interviews followed the process of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). We repeatedly read the entire dataset to familiarise with the data. Thereupon, the research team inductively coded the whole dataset in an iterative and discursive process to generate first-order codes. We constantly assessed our coding within the research team and adapted the emerging codebook, but still followed an open process to inductively add new codes emerging from the data ($N_{\text{codes}} = 65$; $N_{\text{codings}} = 1.817$) (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). Using axial coding, we aggregated codes into nine overarching second-order themes that represent the data at a higher level of abstraction (Strauss and Corbin 1998). We then clustered the themes to generate a thematic map to identify interrelationships (Braun and Clarke 2006). Both, axial coding and generating the thematic map included iterative discursive processes among the research team to reach consensus that conclusions are representative of the data.

To deductively enrich and validate our interpretation of the interviews, we gathered data from additional sources of evidence (i.e. internal brand-related documents, media content analysis, and social media analysis). FCSP provided us with internal brand-related documents

($n = 5$) showing the brand's current strategy and the internal understanding of branding processes. Additionally, media content analysis and social media analysis were carried out to enrich and validate themes emerging from the interviews with a supplementary 'outside' perspective. We specifically collected media data ($n = 36$, e.g. newspaper articles) that provide further context for narratives from the semi-structured interviews. Social media analysis is a valuable method to approach brands from a multi-actor-dominant logic (Iglesias et al. 2020). Thus, after an initial screening of a total of 1.000 posts and 42.348 comments during pre-season and the first half of the Bundesliga season 2021/2022, we deliberately selected 77 brand-related posts including 3.944 comments. All of the additional data were deductively coded to provide evidence for our thematic map. The process of data collection and data analysis is summarised in Fig. 1.

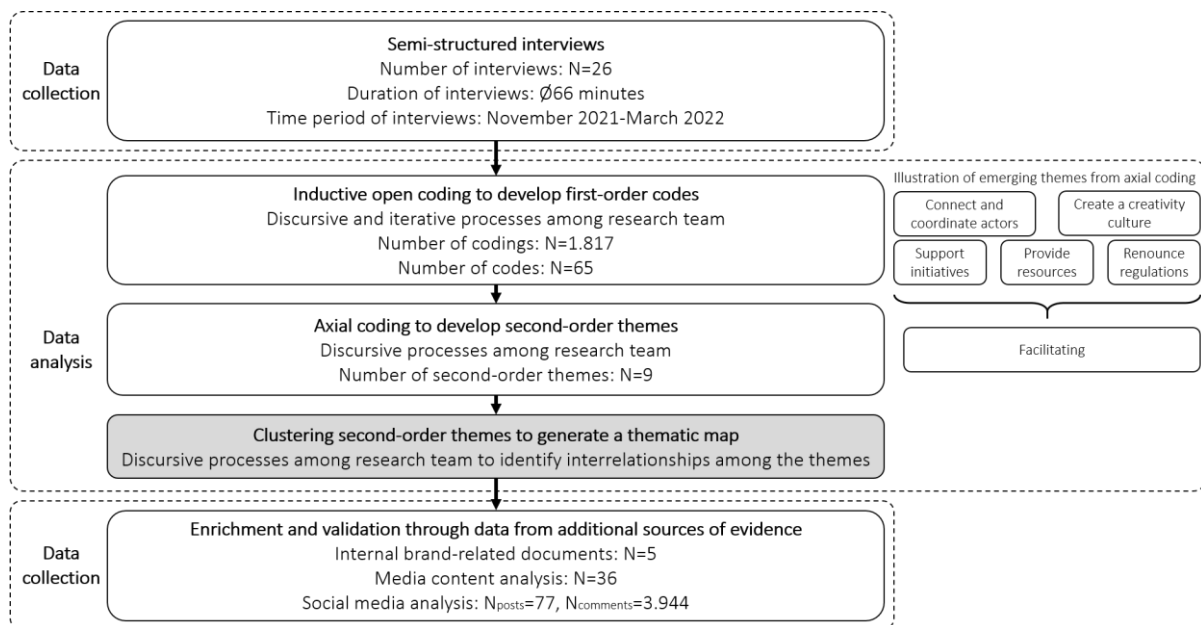


Figure 1. Data collection and analysis.

3.3.7. Single-case study: findings

3.3.7.1. Communicating

Communicating comprises the linguistic transmission of brand identity and brand meanings. Primarily the brand conductor employs various channels to convey brand identity to external actors. Especially social media are significant, allowing to pursue 'erratic moments' (I-2, Management) and 'docking on trends initiated by external actors' (I-10, Employee). For instance, FCSP responded to the ban of the rainbow flag during the UEFA EURO 2020: 'No international federation should prevent solidarity and an expression of opinion that speaks out in favour of a diverse society. [...] Love whoever you want!' (FCSP, Instagram, 22.06.2021).

Besides the brand conductor, other actors communicate as well. Fans utilise blogs and social media to share individual narratives and independently convey and reinforce brand meaning: ‘each [fan] talks about FCSP and thus creates the brand’ (I-22, Partner). Partners, celebrities, and media also communicate brand meanings via their own channels to a wider audience. Especially media ‘are quite decisive for the brand meaning of FCSP’ (I-2, Management), but celebrities are also important multipliers. For instance, a member of a popular German band supported FCSP’s decision to produce its own sportswear via Instagram: ‘My favourite club is no longer interested in fast fashion!’ (ED-36).

3.3.7.2. *Bringing brand meanings to life*

This performance refers to the socio-material transmission of brand meaning (i.e. behaviour) to underpin the brand. It is performed by the brand conductor to provide evidence that the communication of brand identity is not just a ‘platitude’ (I-25, Sponsor) or ‘empty shell’ (I-20, Media). For instance, implementing gender balanced staffing or social projects brings intended brand meanings such as diversity and solidarity to life: ‘There are many projects, with children and young people; we do much for refugees. This is brand-building’ (I-23, Employee). Frequently, FCSP collaborates with other actors to bring brand meanings to life. Especially partners ‘reinforce and support the brand by occupying values that make up the brand’ (I-25, Sponsors) with concrete initiatives. For instance, partners initiated a music school for socially disadvantaged children within the stadium or use the stadium to organise ‘Millerntor-Gallery’, a sociocultural art festival, where ‘all the work is done by [partner]’ and FCSP ‘benefits extremely and presents itself as a street-like brand’ (I-1, Management). This manifestation of bringing brand meanings to life is also evident in a Facebook post by FCSP (09.07.2021): ‘Artistically designed banners with important messages adorn the fence at the [stadium]. 🎨 Many thanks to @[sponsor] for the redesign. Together against racism!’.

Beside partners, other actors are consciously involved in bringing brand meanings to life. For instance, fans, athletes, and social institutions took over the brand’s social media channels to elevate consciousness about racism. Furthermore, actors frequently engage in this *BCCP* independently from the brand conductor. For instance, fans organise (political) choreographies, initiate socio-political activities (e.g. running event to raise money to fight fascism), and represent the brand in different contexts (e.g. Christopher Street Day (CSD)). This independence is reflected in the following quotes: ‘[The CSD commitment] was not the result of a marketing round, but it came from fans’ (I-19, Employee), who ‘participated in self-designed black [shirts] with rainbow skull and “Love whoever you want” on the back’ (I-9, Board Member).

3.3.7.3. *Criticising*

Criticising refers to linguistically and socio-materially challenging brand identity, branding processes, and brand meanings. Fans, in particular, are ‘critical observers’ (I-24, Fan) and a ‘corrective’ (I-23, Employee) of the brand. They defend established brand meanings and criticise progressive branding initiatives. Fans express their criticism predominantly online (i.e. blogs, websites, social media fan pages, or social media comments). For instance, they criticised the implementation of FCSP-Shop-TV (Instagram, 06.12.2021): ‘SELLOUT’; ‘What are you doing? Cut the crap’; ‘Not funny. Not in any way. I feel a little ashamed!’ or the replacement of the club flag on the stadium roof with a rainbow flag: ‘Please leave the club flag hanging. Just like our armband. The captain should wear a skull and crossbones and not a rainbow armband! Tolerance and solidarity is ok, but not in a cramped way and everywhere’ (User, Instagram, 23.06.2021). Further, fans criticise through boycotts or protests when they hoist banners in the stadium. Media takes up those critics and distributes them, but also criticises independently using its reach to set ‘brand boundary pillars’ (I-20, Media). In order to funnel criticism, the brand conductor initiates exchange formats with fans.

Criticising also occurs internally. Several employees describe an internal conflict between two groups. While one group wants to preserve the established brand and criticises progressive branding initiatives, the other group criticises the passivity of the brand, arguing for the potential for improvement in brand communication and demanding more communication about the brand values. Similarly, partners perform criticising in discrete interactions with the brand conductor. They challenge current branding strategies and demand more progressive branding decisions: ‘the club must place value themes on an equal footing with the sporting themes to reach younger target groups’ (I-25, Partner).

3.3.7.4. *Negotiating*

Negotiating comprises the process of harmonising diverging perspectives on the brand. First, it refers to an organisational perspective, where internal actors discuss directions for brand identity and its communication and implementation. This ensures that branding decisions ‘are better informed because wide varieties of opinions are incorporated. Ultimately, this participatory approach characterises the brand. It is an eternal struggle to do the right thing’ (I-13, Employee). Second, negotiating comprises boundary-spanning processes. Progressive leveraging activities of partners often have to be adapted or discarded by the brand conductor; opinions and criticisms of fans are considered in internal negotiation processes; or the brand conductor

negotiates brand meanings directly with fans through exchange formats. These negotiation processes are reflected in the following quote:

I approached the club and asked them how they see themselves in gaming. There were very heated discussions because FCSP was convinced that this would meet with resistance in the fan scene, because gaming is polarising. However, in intensive discussions, a strategy was developed together with the fans. [...] We always find a joint solution. (I-25, Partner)

Negotiating results in two dimensions: reinforcing emerging brand meanings and adjusting brand identity or deliberately refusing and challenging them. For instance, the brand conductor adapted the slogan ‘love whoever you want’ to its brand communication in response to fans using it for CSD (see above). Similarly, after receiving criticism from fans, the brand decided to terminate Shop TV (see above). Negotiating processes also occur among external actors only when they negotiate shared brand meanings. For instance, fans rejected a fan group that demanded less political positioning of the brand conductor and its environment. This is reflected in the discussion among fans in relation to the political banners within the stadium (Instagram, 09.07.2021):

User A: why do you send such derogatory smileys when it comes to a campaign against racism?

User B: not everything is discriminatory just because I don't think much of this campaign. “Football shouldn't be political” doesn't make it directly discriminatory [...]

User A: but that doesn't matter. St. Pauli is not just a sport club like any other club and if you want to see good football and you are only interested in the “sporting” side of things, I question your choice of club

3.3.7.5. *Initiating brand development*

This performance refers to giving impulses for the development of the brand. Predominantly internal actors engage in this *BCCP*. At FCSP, there is an inner circle of employees (i.e. ‘brand-tribe’), that initiates brand development processes (ID-2). Deriving from internal negotiating processes, the brand conductor ‘gives impulses’ (I-4, Club Official) and ‘sets the scope and direction’ (I-18, Employee) for the development of the brand.

External actors also engage in initiating brand development. Members of the club submit and vote on motions at the general meeting, which can result in ‘fundamental changes to the brand’ (I-8, Club Official). For instance, a motion prompted the brand to develop an overarching sustainability strategy as one interviewee explains: ‘[The members] have a very strong influence via the general meeting. We would not be so notable on the path of sustainability

today if a corresponding motion had not been made in 2016' (I-2, Management). Further, partners initiate brand development as an interviewee describes: 'We are a driving force. That was the case with eSports, but it is also the case with digitisation. We [...] try to open up new fields from time to time' (I-25, Sponsor).

3.3.7.6. *Implementing brand development*

Implementing brand development refers to turning impulses for brand development into concrete concepts and initiatives. This is a main task of the brand conductor. However, often FCSP intentionally includes various actors to access their expertise in different fields. In order to elaborate strategic concepts, FCSP regularly 'mobilises [actors] around a topic' (I-4, Club Official) and lets them 'carry [the brand] along the way' (I-5, Management). For instance, various actors were involved in conceptualising the brand's digitalisation, diversity, and sustainability strategy: 'We called on our members, fans, and interested parties to think about sustainability with us. We then held a series of workshops where we were able to involve interested actors and they created a catalogue of measures' (I-4, Club Official). Additionally, implementing brand development refers to the brand conductor using actors' expertise to receive feedback. One interviewee explains this process: 'The brand conductor always gets the separate opinion from the fan club spokesman council [...]. There are people who have trust in us and say: Here is an idea that just popped up, what do you say?' (I-16, Fan).

3.3.7.7. *Facilitating*

Facilitating refers to the support and promotion of interactions. One interviewee (I-22, Partner) explains: 'The brand conductor has the responsibility to moderate, coordinate, stimulate and also structure the co-creation process'. Therefore, facilitating comprises the creation of 'a breeding ground' (I-13, Employee), 'an enclosure like a greenhouse' (I-20, Media), and a culture for creativity to facilitate *BCCP*. In particular, the brand conductor provides brand engagement platforms, to consciously involve actors in brand co-creation. For instance, the 'brand-tribe' offers a platform to facilitate internal exchanges and the brand conductor provides additional platforms such as town hall meetings. Similarly, FCSP enables participatory processes to initiate and develop the brand's sustainability strategy together with multiple actors (see above). Further, offering its social media channel to other actors to elevate consciousness about racism describes a digital brand engagement platform.

Over the past few weeks, foundations, initiatives, clubs, groups and individuals have taken over the channels of FC St. Pauli and our partner @sponsor as part of the "No place for racism" campaign. [...] Thank you for enriching this campaign with your

content and information and for sharing your experiences with us (FCSP, Instagram, 09.06.2021)

One interviewee explains: ‘That is what is so special [...]. We do not have to do everything ourselves [...]. We sometimes just need to see ourselves as facilitators’ (I-5, Management). However, brand engagement platforms also emerge out of the brand conductor’s sphere of control, when external actors engage in facilitating (e.g. events, online forums, or social media fan pages).

3.3.7.8. *Social listening*

Social listening refers to recording developments in broader society and the direct context of FCSP. Mainly the brand conductor engages in this performance, but also other actors function as intermediaries that take up currents and approach the brand conductor. For instance, the brand conductor consciously reads fan blogs, keeps up to date on social media, or exchanges with key actors. Further, the brand conductor maps macrolevel societal developments to continuously adjust the brand and steer it towards new directions (ID-2). The brand conductor needs to be aware of currents to react, dock on them, and potentially adjust branding processes as one interviewee explains: ‘The cosmos of all the currents and opinions that come to us centrally is then reflected in the implementation’ (I-10, Employee).

3.3.7.9. *Assimilating brand meanings*

This *BCCP* refers to the psychological process by which actors understand the brand. One interviewee underscores its importance for the consistent communication and behaviour among actors: ‘It is essential that there are people at work who understand what the brand stands for’ (I-2, Management). Assimilating commences with the selection of new actors. The brand conductor consciously selects new hires and partners who align with brand values. For instance, the brand conductor uses a tool called ‘CSR check’ to evaluate and select potential partners. Further, the brand conductor facilitates assimilating processes through internal brand communication. Employees are confronted with posters, captions, and relics within the office space to ensure that they constantly ‘bathe in the brand’ (I-15). Partners, however, receive explicit explanations to sensitise them for the brand. An interviewee reflects on this process: ‘We are always in exchange. Especially in the beginning, a lot was explained’ (I-25, Sponsor). However, while formal processes are important, mostly informal interactions with senior employees or external actors initiate assimilation processes.

You get feedback from the fans. What do they think is good? What suits FCSP? Because many people write ‘That is exactly why I like the club [...]’. Then you also get more and more a feeling for the [brand]. (I-12, Employee)

Beside internal actors and partners, every actor is involved in assimilating. These actors constantly assess existing brand meanings based on their interactions, assimilate those brand meanings, and integrate them into their *BCCP*.

3.3.8. Empirical consolidation of *BCCP* following qualitative meta-synthesis

The outcomes of our single-case study add a novel and rich empirical context to existing research on *BCCP*, which comprises isolated work and reaches disparate conclusions. Qualitative meta-synthesis offers a powerful method to accumulate and empirically consolidate rich qualitative evidence from primary case studies to develop a generic theoretical understanding grounded in a broad range of contextual conditions. It comprises the systematic extraction, analysis, and synthesis of qualitative evidence and the interpretations of the original researchers of case studies to build theory and contribute beyond the original studies. Thus, qualitative meta-synthesis essentially encompasses the in-depth analysis of qualitative case studies and their synthesis on a cross-study level (Hoon 2013).

First, following an extensive literature review, we included four qualitative case studies in our meta-synthesis (i.e. Anderski et al. 2023; Iglesias et al. 2020; von Wallpach et al. 2017a; this study). The articles were selected based on three specific criteria. *Constructs*—only articles building on performativity theory within the context of branding research. *Methodology*—only articles building on qualitative case study research with primary data sources. *Content*—only articles providing insights into the specific *BCCP* of multiple actors. Second, all members of the author team carefully read and analysed each case study to identify core themes on a case-specific level. In the following, overarching cross-study patterns and themes were developed and synthesised in mutual discussions among the whole author team.

The qualitative meta-synthesis resulted in eight generic and interrelated *BCCP*, which are distinguished into direct brand co-creation performances (*dBCCP*) and enabling brand co-creation performances (*eBCCP*) (see Table 2). Within *dBCCP* (i.e. communicating, implementing, contesting, and developing), actors directly co-create brand identity and brand meaning. These *dBCCP* require *eBCCP* (i.e. negotiating, facilitating, social listening, and assimilating), which are foundational for brand co-creation, eventually enabling *dBCCP* and making them possible.

3.3.8.1. Direct BCCP

Communicating: Consistent with previous research, this study highlights the linguistic transmission of brand identity and brand meanings through internal and external actors. Especially internal actors, acting on behalf of the brand conductor, are pivotal in communicating as they transmit brand identity via various channels (e.g. social media, traditional media, website, corporate videos, or press releases). They make use of storytelling and communicate in relation to other actors or incidents (Anderski et al. 2023; this study). However, also external actors communicate brand meanings. They engage in word of mouth (Iglesias et al. 2020; von Wallpach et al. 2017a); express their brand love (Anderski et al. 2023); reinforce intended brand meanings by commenting and producing content on social media (Anderski et al. 2023; this study) and blogs (this study); advocate the brand when being criticised; write articles to endorse the brand; and develop brand-related narratives (von Wallpach et al. 2017a). Our results confirm previous research highlighting the linguistic dimension of *dBCCP*. Therefore, we conceptualise *communicating* as the linguistic transmission and reinforcement of brand identity and meaning by internal and external actors. This conceptualisation is also in line with the understanding of user-generated content as relevant activity in the formation of brand meaning (Shulga et al. 2023). In addition, it highlights the participation of other actors in brand communication (Essamri et al. 2019; Törmälä and Saraniemi 2018).

Implementing: Internal actors convey brand identity through its implementation in subsequent behaviour—consistent brand behaviour breathes life into brand identity and is a crucial success-factor. This is reflected in this study and the work of Anderski et al. (2023) and Iglesias et al. (2020). However, external actors also implement brand meanings into their behaviour. This expands beyond the conceptualisation of Iglesias et al. (2020), perceiving internalising as an internal performance, and follows the results of Anderski et al. (2023) and von Wallpach et al. (2017a). External actors create drawings, videos, or other socio-material artefacts such as brand merchandise, initiate joint activities in the context of the brand, and therefore breathe life into brand meanings. Therefore, *implementing* refers to internal and external actors participating in socio-material branding activities that reinforce brand identity and brand meanings. This conceptualisation is not specifically addressed within the broader body of research on brand co-creation.

Contesting: This study and previous research highlight how actors linguistically and socio-materially contest branding processes, brand identity, and brand meanings. While Anderski et al. (2023) restrict contesting to customers as external actors, this study and Iglesias et al.

(2020) indicate its internal dimension (i.e. employees contest the brand internally). Additionally, this study expands the understanding of external actors beyond customers to every actor engaging with the brand (i.e. partners, civic organisations, media, etc.) and highlights the socio-material dimension of contesting. Contesting occurs in emergent (e.g. fan blogs) and institutional contexts (e.g. brand-owned social media, exchange formats between brand conductor and actors). Building on Iglesias et al. (2020), Anderski et al. (2023), and this study, we define *contesting* as linguistic or socio-material performances of internal and external actors to challenge existing branding processes, brand identity, and brand meanings. This conceptualisation relates to the role of brand offenders (Vallaster and von Wallpach 2013), negative valenced customer brand engagement behaviour (Dong et al. 2024), and brand-related feedback activities (France et al. 2018; Mäläskä et al. 2011).

Developing: Developing comprises to the process of initiating new strategic directions. Actors set impulses, develop novel ideas, and drive the brand towards emerging topics. This strategic dimension is missing in previous research. While internal actors continuously develop the brand, external actors also give impulses. This study highlights the brand conductor's deliberate involvement of external actors to access their resources (e.g. expertise) in brand development. von Wallpach et al. (2017a) also describe how customers participate in lead-user workshops to innovate products and provide feedback to the brand conductor. However, this study expands on this, illustrating how the brand conductor deliberately includes various actors in the development of branding strategies (e.g. sustainability strategy for the brand). This strategic dimension of brand co-creation is also in line with the broader body of research (Ind et al. 2017; Törmälä and Saraniemi 2018; Vallaster and von Wallpach 2018).

Table 2. Empirical consolidation of *BCCP*.

<i>Von Wallpach et al. (2017a)</i>	<i>Iglesias et al. (2020)</i>	<i>Anderski et al. (2023)</i>	<i>This study</i>	Empirically consolidated <i>BCCP</i>	<i>BCCP</i> category
Basement building and showcasing Missionizing Brand storytelling	Communicating	Communicating Cooperating Reinforcing Brand loving	Communicating	Communicating	Direct Brand Co-Creation Performances (<i>dBCCP</i>)
Missionizing Brand storytelling	Internalizing	Internalizing	Bringing brand meanings to life	Implementing	
	Contesting	Contesting Brand hating	Criticising	Contesting	
Creating and innovating			Initiating brand development Supporting brand development	Developing	
	Elucidating	Elucidating	Negotiating Facilitating	Negotiating Facilitating	Enabling Brand Co-Creation Performances (<i>eBCCP</i>)
Community building and facilitating Marketplace developing			Social listening	Social listening	
	Internalizing		Assimilating	Assimilating	

3.3.8.2. Enabling BCCP

Negotiating: Anderski et al. (2023), referring to Iglesias et al. (2020), call this performance elucidating and describe it as conversational process between brand conductor and external actors to reconcile distinct brand meanings and negotiate a shared understanding of brand meaning. Internal and external actors engage in those processes when negotiating contestations or impulses for brand development as well as when collaborating with partners in branding initiatives. However, as found in this study, negotiating not only occurs between internal and external actors—it also expands among internal and external actors only. Internal actors negotiate strategic directions, how to communicate and implement brand identity, or they internally negotiate contestations to adapt brand identity. External actors engage in negotiating, when they discuss common positions towards the brand. Therefore, we define *negotiating* as ongoing conversational process of harmonising diverging perspectives on the brand among internal and external actors and among internal and external actors only. This perspective is hardly discussed within the broader body of research. Only Essamri et al. (2019) describe the brand conductor's exchange with a brand community to 'bridge' diverging brand meanings.

Facilitating: *Facilitating* refers to the provision of infrastructural conditions for *dBCCP*. First, it involves the development and maintenance of brand engagement platforms where multiple actors can engage in *dBCCP*. This is also reflected in the work of von Wallpach et al. (2017a), where especially customers facilitate discussions about the brand. However, this study highlights the brand conductor's role, but also the role of various other actors (e.g. partners) in providing brand engagement platforms to connect actors and encourage *dBCCP*. It shows how the brand conductor facilitates, supports, and promotes actor-initiatives by providing various resources (e.g. financial resources, network resources). Considering the broader body of research on brand co-creation, *facilitating* relates to the organisational perspective of brand co-creation (Essamri et al. 2019; Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2016).

Social listening: *Social listening* comprises the brand conductor's recording of macrolevel developments in broader society and within the direct context of the brand. Therefore, it is a prerequisite for *dBCCP* (e.g. developing). Even when considering the broader body of brand co-creation research, this *eBCCP* is not addressed.

Assimilating: *Assimilating* comprises the fundamental psychological processes to enable an understanding of the brand. This *eBCCP* is indicated in Iglesias et al. (2020); however, this study enhances and highlights the conceptualisation of assimilating. In contrast to Iglesias et al. (2020), assimilating includes not only internal actors, but refers to every actor interacting within the context of the brand. Assimilating is an important *eBCCP* since an actor's individual

understanding of the brand determines its *dBCCP*. This understanding is also reflected in research on brand experiences (Dean et al. 2016; Tjandra et al. 2021), highlighting the development of individual brand meanings through co-created brand experiences.

3.3.9. Contributions

3.3.9.1. Theoretical contributions

First, this study empirically consolidates *BCCP* from previous research and a single-case study. It offers an overarching approach to examine brand co-creation in various contexts by conceptualising eight generic *BCCP*. The first six *BCCP* are derived from an empirical consolidation of previous *BCCP* research (Anderski et al. 2023; Iglesias et al. 2020; von Wallpach et al. 2017a; and this study). Although these *BCCP* are not entirely new, we take into account their different manifestations in previous research to conceptualise them in a uniform manner. For instance, building on von Wallpach et al. (2017a) and this study, we extend on the strategic dimension of brand co-creation (i.e. *developing*). While not occurring in Anderski et al. (2023) and Iglesias et al. (2020), this conceptualisation is supported by the findings from Törmälä and Saraniemi (2018) and Vallaster and von Wallpach (2018), who highlight the participation of multiple actors in designing a branding strategy. This conceptualisation also refers to the strategic approach to brand co-creation (Ind et al. 2017). Social listening and assimilating emerge as novel *BCCP* from our case study. While *social listening* is not found in previous *BCCP* research, it is consistent with the findings of Sarasvuo et al. (2022), who highlight the brand conductor's process of absorbing opinions, inputs, and influences of external actors to adapt brand identity. *Assimilating* is an individual *BCCP* and refers to the traditional psychological approaches to branding (Keller 2003; Swaminathan et al. 2020) and brand experience research (Stach 2019). Referring to research on internal branding (Barros-Arrieta and García-Cali 2021; Dean et al. 2016), the brand conductor aims to facilitate assimilating processes of internal actors to ensure their consistent communication and implementation of the brand. However, also external actors engage in assimilating to develop an understanding of the brand, which they integrate in their *BCCP*.

Second, this study enhances the understanding of the complex interrelationships and consecutiveness among *BCCP* (see Fig. 2). We categorise *dBCCP* (i.e. communicating, implementing, contesting, developing) and *eBCCP* (i.e. negotiating, facilitating, social listening, assimilating). Within *dBCCP*, actors directly co-create brands, while *eBCCP* eventually enable *dBCCP*. In *communicating* and *implementing* internal and external actors linguistically and socio-materially transmit and reinforce brand identity and brand meaning. Additionally, actors

transform the brand in *dBCCP*. In *developing* actors collaboratively initiate innovative and potentially transformative branding strategies. However, actors not only reinforce and innovate existing brand meanings, but also *contest* them. Therefore, *dBCCP* are situated on a continuum between the two dimensions of reinforcing and transforming. Both dimensions are also emphasised by Simmons and Durkin (2023). In order to engage in *dBCCP*, actors first have to *assimilate* the brand and develop an individual brand meaning, which is manifested when actors engage in *communicating*, *implementing*, *developing*, or *contesting*. Further, all *dBCCP* can only occur if there are spaces for interactions. Brand conductors provide brand engagement platforms to *facilitate dBCCP* of various actors. For instance, events facilitate *communicating* and *implementing* performances, exchange formats with customers facilitate *contesting* performances, and workshops facilitate *developing* performances. However, also external actors engage in *facilitating*. *Social listening* is an *eBCCP*, where actors record developments in broader society and the specific context of the brand, to utilise them in *dBCCP*. *Negotiating* is a key *eBCCP*, often prompted by *contesting*. In *negotiating*, actors constantly balance perspectives on the brand that are reflected within *dBCCP*. For instance, internal actors negotiate *communicating* or *implementing* tactics based on *contesting* performances of external actors and developments in the wider society, derived from *social listening*. Thus, *dBCCP* require preceding *eBCCP* but also prompt successive *eBCCP*. There is a constant interaction between *dBCCP*, which can be either reinforcing or transforming, and *eBCCP*.

Third, this research specifies the actors engaging in particular *BCCP* (Iglesias et al. 2020; Kristal et al. 2020). It highlights interactions among internal actors to co-create brand identity. This dedicated organisational perspective, underscoring the heterogeneous composition of the brand conductor and the *BCCP* of internal actors (i.e. negotiating, contesting), has been neglected yet (Sarasvuo et al. 2022). However, it is consistent with the findings of Schmeltz and Kjeldsen (2019), who suggest that internal actors are not a homogenous actor collective, but rather a co-mingled group of actors, participating in individual *BCCP*. This research acknowledges the complexity of internal branding processes. Beside this organisational perspective, this research underscores the active role of various actors in brand co-creation. *BCCP* occur among the brand conductor and external actors, among external actors only, and among internal actors only.

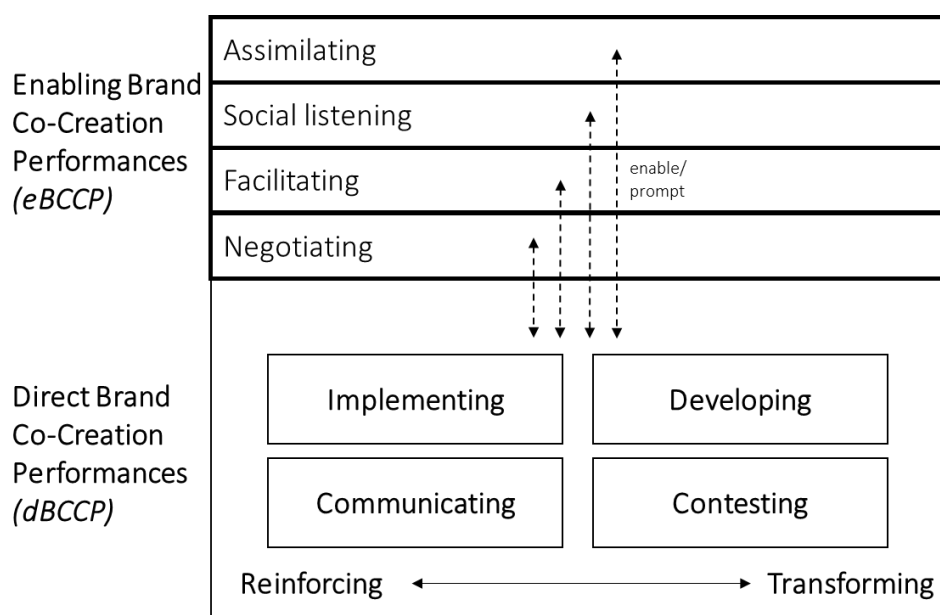


Figure 2. Interrelationships among BCCP.

3.3.9.2. Managerial contributions

This study offers brand managers an enhanced understanding of their brand, by unpacking *how* multiple actors co-create the brand. First, this study shows that brand managers need to communicate the brand, implement brand identity into brand behaviours, and continuously develop strategic directions for the brand. This is still an important source of brand meaning. Further, brand managers must appreciate the importance of contesting performances of internal actors, which leads to constant internal assessments of the brand. Thus, brand managers must also acknowledge the *dBCCP* and the influence of other actors on the brand.

Second, brand managers must engage in *eBCCP* to enable *dBCCP*. They need to facilitate *BCCP* of internal and external actors. Especially internal brand engagement platforms acknowledge the heterogeneity of internal actors and offer opportunities to raise criticism and develop branding tactics and strategies. However, brand managers must also facilitate interactions among internal and external and external actors only. Additionally, brand managers must engage in internal and boundary-spanning negotiating processes to balance brand identity and brand meaning. Brand managers need to remain open for adaptations of brand identity and accept the imperfect perfection of brand building. They take the role of negotiators, balancing and uniting diverging perspectives in the dynamic and infinite process of brand co-creation. Brand managers must further promote assimilating processes to ensure consistent *dBCCP* of internal actors. Since actors engage in *BCCP* also in contexts outside the brand conductor's sphere of control, brand managers must constantly engage in social listening to pick up currents and involve them in *dBCCP*.

3.3.10. References

- Aaker, D. A. (2002). *Building strong brands*. Simon & Schuster.
- Anderski, M., L. Griebel, P. Stegmann, and T. Ströbel. 2023. Empowerment of human brands: Brand meaning co-creation on digital engagement platforms. *Journal of Business Research* 166: 113905.
- Andreini, D., G. Pedeliento, L. Zarantonello, and C. Solerio. 2018. A renaissance of brand experience: Advancing the concept through a multi-perspective analysis. *Journal of Business Research* 91: 123–133.
- Baker, J.J., J.A. Fehrer, and R.J. Brodie. 2022. Navigating the emergence of brand meaning in service ecosystems. *Journal of Service Management* 33(3): 465–484.
- Barros-Arrieta, D., and E. García-Cali. 2021. Internal branding: Conceptualization from a literature review and opportunities for future research. *Journal of Brand Management* 28(2): 133–151.
- Berger Peter, L., and T. Luckmann. 1966. *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Garden City: First Anchor.
- Black, I., and C. Veloutsou. 2017. Working consumers: Co-creation of brand identity, consumer identity and brand community identity. *Journal of Business Research* 70: 416–429.
- Brakus, J.J., B.H. Schmitt, and L. Zarantonello. 2009. Brand experience: What is It? How is it Measured? Does it Affect Loyalty? *Journal of Marketing* 73(3): 52–68.
- Brand, L., P. Stegmann, and T. Ströbel. 2023. Rethinking brand management within sport: Advancing towards the integrative sport brand ecosystem (ISBE). *European Sport Management Quarterly* 24(6): 1–21.
- Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77–101.
- Brodie, R.J., M. Saren, and J. Pels. 2011. Theorizing about the service dominant logic: The bridging role of middle range theory. *Marketing Theory* 11(1): 75–91.
- Brodie, R.J., M. Benson-Rea, and C.J. Medlin. 2017. Branding as a dynamic capability. *Marketing Theory* 17(2): 183–199.
- Burmann, C., and U. Arnhold. 2008. *User generated branding: State of the art of research*. Münster: LIT Verlag.
- Burmann, C., S. Hegner, and N. Riley. 2009. Towards an identity-based branding. *Marketing Theory* 9(1): 113–118.
- Burr, V. 2003. *Social constructionism*. Milton Park: Routledge.

- Butler, J. 1990. *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Milton Park: Routledge.
- Chapman, A., and A. Dilmperi. 2022. Luxury brand value co-creation with online brand communities in the service encounter. *Journal of Business Research* 144: 902–921.
- de Chernatony, L. 2006. *From brand vision to brand evaluation: Strategically building and sustaining brands* (2nd ed., repr). Marketing. Elsevier/Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Christodoulides, G., C. Jevons, and P. Blackshaw. 2011. The voice of the consumer speaks forcefully in brand identity. *Journal of Advertising Research* 51: 101–111.
- Christodoulides, G., C. Jevons, and J. Bonhomme. 2012. Memo to marketers: Quantitative evidence for change. *Journal of Advertising Research* 52(1): 53–64.
- Chung, S.-Y., and J. Byrom. 2021. Co-creating consistent brand identity with employees in the hotel industry. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 30(1): 74–89.
- Conejo, F., and B. Wooliscroft. 2015. Brands defined as semiotic marketing systems. *Journal of Macromarketing* 35(3): 287–301.
- Cooper, T., C. Stavros, and A.R. Dobeale. 2019. The levers of engagement: An exploration of governance in an online brand community. *Journal of Brand Management* 26(3): 240–254.
- da Silveira, C., C. Lages, and C. Simões. 2013. Reconceptualizing brand identity in a dynamic environment. *Journal of Business Research* 66(1): 28–36.
- Dean, D., R.E. Arroyo-Gamez, K. Punjaisri, and C. Pich. 2016. Internal brand co-creation: The experiential brand meaning cycle in higher education. *Journal of Business Research* 69(8): 3041–3048.
- Dong, X., C. Veloutsou, and A. Morgan-Thomas. 2024. Negative online brand engagement: conceptualisation, scale development and validation. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing* (Ahead-of-print).
- Dwivedi, A., D. Wilkie, L. Johnson, and J. Weerawardena. 2016. Establishing measures and drivers of consumer brand engagement behaviours. *Journal of Brand Management* 23(5): 41–69.
- Eisenhardt, K.M. 1989. Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review* 14(4): 532–550.
- Eisenhardt, K.M., and M.E. Graebner. 2007. Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal* 50(1): 25–32.

- Essamri, A., S. McKechnie, and H. Winklhofer. 2019. Co-creating corporate brand identity with online brand communities: A managerial perspective. *Journal of Business Research* 96: 366–375.
- Feldman, M.S., and W.J. Orlikowski. 2011. Theorizing practice and practicing theory. *Organization Science* 22(5): 1240–1253.
- Fereday, J., and E. Muir-Cochrane. 2006. Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5(1): 80–92.
- Forbes. 2020. Council Post: Your Brand Is Your Greatest Asset. Forbes, 24 February, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2020/02/24/your-brand-is-your-greatest-asset/?sh=41ab18b563b7>. Accessed 20 October 2023.
- France, C., D. Grace, B. Merrilees, and D. Miller. 2018. Customer brand co-creation behavior: Conceptualization and empirical validation. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 36(3): 334–348.
- France, C., D. Grace, J. Lo Iacono, and J. Carlini. 2020. Exploring the interplay between customer perceived brand value and customer brand co-creation behaviour dimensions. *Journal of Brand Management* 27(4): 466–480.
- Gensler, S., F. Völckner, Y. Liu-Thompkins, and C. Wiertz. 2013. Managing brands in the social media environment. *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 27(4): 242–256.
- Giannopoulos, A., L. Piha, and G. Skourtis. 2021. Destination branding and co-creation: A service ecosystem perspective. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 30(1): 148–166.
- Gond, J.-P., L. Cabantous, N. Harding, and M. Learmonth. 2016. What do we mean by performativity in organizational and management theory? The uses and abuses of performativity. *International Journal of Management Reviews* 18(4): 440–463.
- Hatch, M.J., and M. Schultz. 2010. Toward a theory of brand co-creation with implications for brand governance. *Journal of Brand Management* 17(8): 590–604.
- Hollebeek, L.D., M.S. Glynn, and R.J. Brodie. 2014. Consumer brand engagement in social media: Conceptualization, scale development and validation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 28(2): 149–165.
- Hollebeek, L.D., R.K. Srivastava, and T. Chen. 2019. S-D logic-informed customer engagement: Integrative framework, revised fundamental propositions, and application to CRM. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 47(1): 161–185.

- Hollebeek, L.D., M.K. Clark, W. Hammedi, and R. Arvola. 2021. Cocreated brand value: Theoretical model and propositions. *Journal of Brand Management* 28(4): 413–428.
- Hoon, C. 2013. Meta-synthesis of qualitative case studies. *Organizational Research Methods* 16(4): 522–556.
- Iglesias, O., and N. Ind. 2020. Towards a theory of conscientious corporate brand co-creation: The next key challenge in brand management. *Journal of Brand Management* 27(6): 710–720.
- Iglesias, O., N. Ind, and M. Alfaro. 2013. The organic view of the brand: A brand value co-creation model. *Journal of Brand Management* 20(8): 670–688.
- Iglesias, O., P. Landgraf, N. Ind, S. Markovic, and N. Koporcic. 2020. Corporate brand identity co-creation in business-to-business contexts. *Industrial Marketing Management* 85: 32–43.
- Ind, N. 2014. How participation is changing the practice of managing brands. *Journal of Brand Management* 21(9): 734–742.
- Ind, N., & Schmidt, H. J. (2019). *Co-creating brands: Brand management from a co-creative perspective*. Bloomsbury Business.
- Ind, N., O. Iglesias, and S. Markovic. 2017. The co-creation continuum: From tactical market research tool to strategic collaborative innovation method. *Journal of Brand Management* 24(4): 310–321.
- Ind, N., N. Coates, and K. Lerman. 2020. The gift of co-creation: What motivates customers to participate. *Journal of Brand Management* 27(2): 181–194.
- Juntunen, M. 2012. Co-creating corporate brands in start-ups. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 30(2): 230–249.
- Kahiya, E., N. Ashill, and O. Perkinson. 2023. Branding governance in international recurring sports events: The world rugby ‘sevens’ series. *European Sport Management Quarterly* 23(5): 1477–1499.
- Kapferer, J.-N. 2008. *New strategic brand management: Creating and sustaining brand equity long term*, 4th ed. London: Kogan Page Limited.
- Keller, K.L. 1993. Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing* 57(1): 1–22.
- Keller, K.L. 2003. Brand synthesis: The multidimensionality of brand knowledge. *Journal of Consumer Research* 29(4): 595–600.
- Keller, K.L., and D.R. Lehmann. 2003. How do brands create value? *Marketing Management* 12(3): 26–31.

- Kim, H., S. Stepchenkova, and V. Babalou. 2018. Branding destination co-creatively: A case study of tourists' involvement in the naming of a local attraction. *Tourism Management Perspectives* 28: 189–200.
- Koivisto, E., and P. Mattila. 2020. Extending the luxury experience to social media—User-generated content co-creation in a branded event. *Journal of Business Research* 117: 570–578.
- Koporcic, N., and A. Halinen. 2018. Interactive Network Branding. *IMP Journal* 12(2): 392–408.
- Kornum, N., R. Gyrd-Jones, N. Al Zagir, and K.A. Brandis. 2017. Interplay between intended brand identity and identities in a Nike related brand community: Co-existing synergies and tensions in a nested system. *Journal of Business Research* 70: 432–440.
- Kovalchuk, M., M. Gabrielsson, and M. Rollins. 2023. Industrial BRAND-personality formation in a B2B stakeholder network: A service-dominant logic approach. *Industrial Marketing Management* 114: 313–330.
- Kristal, S., C. Baumgarth, and J. Henseler. 2020. Performative corporate brand identity in industrial markets: The case of German prosthetics manufacturer Ottobock. *Journal of Business Research* 114: 240–253.
- Law, J., and J. Urry. 2004. Enacting the social. *Economy and Society* 33(3): 390–410.
- Le, Q.H., L. Phan Tan, and T.H. Hoang. 2022. Customer brand co-creation on social media: A systematic review. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 40(8): 1038–1053.
- Lindstedt, J. 2015. A deliberately emergent strategy—A key to successful city branding. *Journal of Place Management and Development* 8(2): 90–102.
- Lucarelli, A., and A. Hallin. 2015. Brand transformation: A performative approach to brand regeneration. *Journal of Marketing Management* 31(1–2): 84–106.
- Mäläskä, M., S. Saraniemi, and J. Tähtinen. 2011. Network actors' participation in B2B SME branding. *Industrial Marketing Management* 40(7): 1144–1152.
- Mangiò, F., M. Mismetti, E. Lissana, and D. Andreini. 2023. That's the Press, Baby! How journalists co-create family business brands meanings: A mixed method analysis. *Journal of Business Research* 161: 113842.
- Merz, M.A., Y. He, and S.L. Vargo. 2009. The evolving brand logic: A service-dominant logic perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 37(3): 328–344.
- Merz, M.A., L. Zarantonello, and S. Grappi. 2018. How valuable are your customers in the brand value co-creation process? The development of a customer co-creation value (CCCV) scale. *Journal of Business Research* 82: 79–89.

- Michel, G. 2017. From brand identity to polysemous brands: Commentary on “Performing identities: Processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction.” *Journal of Business Research* 70: 453–455.
- Millspaugh, J., and A. Kent. 2016. Co-creation and the development of SME designer fashion enterprises. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 20(3): 322–338.
- Mingione, M., and L. Leoni. 2020. Blurring B2C and B2B boundaries: Corporate brand value co-creation in B2B2C markets. *Journal of Marketing Management* 36(1–2): 72–99.
- Nyadzayo, M.W., C. Leckie, and L.W. Johnson. 2020. The impact of relational drivers on customer brand engagement and brand outcomes. *Journal of Brand Management* 27(5): 561–578.
- Oliveira, E., and E. Panyik. 2015. Content, context and co-creation. *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 21(1): 53–74.
- Onyas, W.I., and A. Ryan. 2015. Exploring the brand’s world-as-assemblage: The brand as a market shaping device. *Journal of Marketing Management* 31(1–2): 141–166.
- Orlikowski, W. 2010. Practice in research: Phenomenon, perspective and philosophy. In *Cambridge handbook of strategy as practice*, ed. D. Golsorkhi, L. Rouleau, D. Seidl, and E. Vaara, 23–33. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Orlikowski, W., and S.V. Scott. 2014. What happens when evaluation goes online? Exploring apparatuses of valuation in the travel sector. *Organization Science* 25(3): 868–891.
- Payne, A., K. Storbacka, P. Frow, and S. Knox. 2009. Co-creating brands: Diagnosing and designing the relationship experience. *Journal of Business Research* 62(3): 379–389.
- Pettigrew, A.M. 1990. Longitudinal field research on change: Theory and practice. *Organization Science* 1(3): 267–292.
- Ramaswamy, V., and K. Ozcan. 2016. Brand value co-creation in a digitalized world: An integrative framework and research implications. *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 33(1): 93–106.
- Riedmeier, J., and M. Kreuzer. 2022. Me versus we: The role of luxury brand managers in times of co-creation. *Journal of Business Research* 145: 240–252.
- Sarasvuo, S., A. Rindell, and M. Kovalchuk. 2022. Toward a conceptual understanding of co-creation in branding. *Journal of Business Research* 139: 543–563.
- Sarkar, S., and S. Banerjee. 2021. Brand co-creation through participation of organization, consumers, and suppliers: An empirical validation. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 30(8): 1094–1114.

- Schau, H.J., A.M. Muñiz, and E.J. Arnould. 2009. How brand community practices create value. *Journal of Marketing* 73(5): 30–51.
- Schmeltz, L., and A.K. Kjeldsen. 2019. Co-creating polyphony or cacophony? A case study of a public organization's brand co-creation process and the challenge of orchestrating multiple internal voices. *Journal of Brand Management* 26(3): 304–316.
- Shulga, L.V., J.A. Busser, B. Bai, and H. Kim. 2023. Branding co-creation with consumer-generated advertising: Effect on creators and observers. *Journal of Advertising* 52(1): 5–23.
- Siano, A., A. Vollero, and A. Bertolini. 2022. From brand control to brand co-creation: An integrated framework of brand paradigms and emerging brand perspectives. *Journal of Business Research* 152: 372–386.
- Simmons, G., and M. Durkin. 2023. Expanding understanding of brand value co-creation on social media from an S-D logic perspective: Introducing structuration theory. *Marketing Theory* 23(4): 607–629.
- Stach, J. 2019. Meaningful experiences: An embodied cognition perspective on brand meaning co-creation. *Journal of Brand Management* 26(3): 317–331.
- Strauss, A., and J. Corbin. 1998. *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*, 2nd ed. London: SAGE.
- Swaminathan, V., A. Sorescu, J.-B.E. Steenkamp, T.C.G. O'Guinn, and B. Schmitt. 2020. Branding in a hyperconnected world: Refocusing theories and rethinking boundaries. *Journal of Marketing* 84(2): 24–46.
- Tajvidi, M., M.-O. Richard, Y. Wang, and N. Hajli. 2020. Brand co-creation through social commerce information sharing: The role of social media. *Journal of Business Research* 121: 476–486.
- Teresa Borges-Tiago, M., C. Arruda, F. Tiago, and P. Rita. 2021. Differences between TripAdvisor and Booking.com in branding co-creation. *Journal of Business Research* 123: 380–388.
- Tierney, K.D., I.O. Karpen, and K. Westberg. 2016. Brand meaning cocreation: Toward a conceptualization and research implications. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice* 26(6): 911–932.
- Tjandra, N.C., I. Rihova, S. Snell, C.S. Hertog, and E. Theodoraki. 2021. Mega-events brand meaning co-creation: The Olympic case. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 30(1): 58–73.

- Törmälä, M., and R.I. Gyrd-Jones. 2017. Development of new B2B venture corporate brand identity: A narrative performance approach. *Industrial Marketing Management* 65: 76–85.
- Törmälä, M., and S. Saraniemi. 2018. The roles of business partners in corporate brand image co-creation. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 27(1): 29–40.
- Üçok Hughes, M., W.K. Bandoni, and E. Pehlivan. 2016. Storygiving as a co-creation tool for luxury brands in the age of the internet: A love story by Tiffany and thousands of lovers. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 25(4): 357–364.
- Vallaster, C., and S. von Wallpach. 2013. An online discursive inquiry into the social dynamics of multi-stakeholder brand meaning co-creation. *Journal of Business Research* 66(9): 1505–1515.
- Vallaster, C., and S. von Wallpach. 2018. Brand strategy co-creation in a nonprofit context: A strategy-as-practice approach. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 47(5): 984–1006.
- Veloutsou, C., and I. Black. 2020. Creating and managing participative brand communities: The roles members perform. *Journal of Business Research* 117: 873–885.
- Veloutsou, C., and F. Guzman. 2017. The evolution of brand management thinking over the last 25 years as recorded in the journal of product and brand management. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 26(1): 2–12.
- von Wallpach, S., A. Hemetsberger, and P. Espersen. 2017a. Performing identities: Processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction. *Journal of Business Research* 70: 443–452.
- von Wallpach, S., B. Voyer, M. Kastanakis, and H. Mühlbacher. 2017b. Co-creating stakeholder and brand identities: Introduction to the special section. *Journal of Business Research* 70: 395–398.
- Voyer, B.G., M.N. Kastanakis, and A.K. Rhode. 2017. Co-creating stakeholder and brand identities: A cross-cultural consumer perspective. *Journal of Business Research* 70: 399–410.
- Ward, E., S. Yang, J. Romaniuk, and V. Beal. 2020. Building a unique brand identity: Measuring the relative ownership potential of brand identity element types. *Journal of Brand Management* 27(4): 393–407.
- Wider, S., S. von Wallpach, and H. Mühlbacher. 2018. Brand management: Unveiling the de-lusion of control. *European Management Journal* 36(3): 301–305.

Yin, R.K. 2018. *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*, 6th ed. London: SAGE.

Zimmer, F. 2018. So denkt St. Pauli über Marketing: “Wir sind das Produkt von Fans”. *Werben & Verkaufen*, 12 December, https://www.wuv.de/marketing/wir_sind_das_produkt_von_fans. Accessed 20 Oct 2023.

4. EMERGING RESEARCH PHENOMENA OF BRAND MANAGEMENT FROM DIFFERENT ANALYSIS LEVELS

The articles included in the *fourth chapter* build on the theoretical conceptualisations of the *third chapter*, as the author uses the theoretical advancements to examine selected emerging research phenomena of brand management resulting from digital and sustainable transformation at different analysis levels. While *Transfer Article 2* and *Research Articles 3* and *4* are oriented towards the meso- and macro-level of analysis, *Research Article 5* adopts an intra- and micro-level of analysis. The former two articles relate to sustainable transformation and the broader social roles of brands, examining the formation of sustainable sport event brands (*Transfer Article 2*) and the role of conscientious sport club brands as ecosystems to facilitate sustainable value co-creation (*Research Article 3*). The latter two articles relate to digital transformation, examining the challenges of brand management in navigating between brand heritage and brand innovation in the context of innovative brand extensions (i.e., eSport) (*Research Article 4*) and the co-creation of human brands as novel types of branded entities on digital brand engagement platforms (*Research Article 5*).

4.1. Aufbau und Management von Eventmarken im Sport - Implikationen einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik für die Eventmarke UEFA EURO 2024 (Transfer Article 2, in German)

Authors Lars Brand (né Griebel), University of Bayreuth, Germany
Tim Ströbel, University of Bayreuth, Germany

Published in *Die UEFA EURO 2024™ aus sportökonomischer Perspektive* (pp. 285-310). Erich Schmidt Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin. ISBN: 978-3-503-23713-5

4.1.1. Einleitung

"Die EURO 2024 wird eine Endrunde für alle sein, und wir freuen uns darauf, Fans aus ganz Europa und aller Welt im Sommer 2024 in Deutschland zu begrüßen. Zusammen werden wir eine tolle Fußball-Party feiern. Das Logo und die Markenidentität des Turniers verdeutlichen diese Botschaft auf perfekte Art und Weise."

Phillip Lahm, Turnierdirektor der UEFA EURO 2024

Die UEFA EURO ist eines der größten wiederkehrenden Sportevents weltweit: die EURO 2020 erreichte etwa 5,2 Milliarden Menschen auf der ganzen Welt, generierte insgesamt

7,5 Milliarden Interaktionen in den sozialen Medien (UEFA, 2021c) und realisierte Umsätze in Höhe von 1,9 Milliarden Euro für die UEFA (UEFA, 2021b). Die kommerzielle Verwertung der UEFA Wettbewerbe wird im Rahmen der UEFA Fünf-Jahres-Strategie als zentrale strategische Säule formuliert, um langfristig den ökonomischen Wohlstand für den europäischen Fußball zu gewährleisten. Um dieses Ziel zu erreichen, betont die UEFA insbesondere die Wichtigkeit der Entwicklung von starken Marken für die UEFA Wettbewerbe (UEFA Champions League, UEFA Europa League, UEFA Nations League und UEFA EURO) (UEFA, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

Sowohl die UEFA als auch gegenwärtige Fachliteratur erachten Marken als den wertvollsten Vermögenswert, den Organisationen in der Sportbranche besitzen (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020; UEFA, 2019b). Starke Marken gewährleisten die emotionale Bindung von Fans und anderen Akteuren mit der Sportorganisation, führen somit zu einem stärkeren Interesse von Sponsoren, Fans und Medien und ermöglichen Sportorganisationen dadurch die Maximierung ihrer Einnahmequellen. Im Zuge der zunehmenden Kommerzialisierung des Sports und des zunehmenden Wettbewerbs zwischen Sportmarken und Sport- und Unterhaltungsmarken hat sich das strategische Management von Sportmarken daher in den vergangenen Jahren zunehmend zu einer zentralen Marketingaufgabe für Sportorganisationen entwickelt (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Gladden et al., 1998; Gladden et al., 2001; Gladden & Funk, 2001; Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020; The Nielsen Company, 2020; UEFA, 2019b). Folgerichtig werden Sportevents wie die EURO 2024 als Marken verstanden, die den Aufbau einer Markenidentität und ein strategisches Markenmanagement erfordern (Bouchet et al., 2013; Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020; Parent et al., 2012; Parent & Séguin, 2008).

Aber wie werden eigentlich starke Marken geschaffen? Wer ist daran in welchem Ausmaß beteiligt? Konventionelle Perspektiven auf Marken und deren Management unterstellen, dass diese autonom durch einen Markeninhaber kreiert werden können. Im Kontext der EURO 2024 und dem aktuellen Verständnis von Sportevents als Marken drängt sich jedoch geradezu auf, dass diese Logik nicht ausreichend sein kann. Beispielsweise sind sowohl die UEFA als übergeordnete Marke und originärer Markeninhaber der Eventserie als auch die Austragungsstädte in das Management der Marke EURO 2024 involviert (Baker et al., 2022; Parent & Séguin, 2008; UEFA, 2021d). Außerdem engagieren sich vielzählige weitere Akteure (z.B. Sponsoren, Medien, Fans) ganz im Sinne der Markenidentität „Fußball für alle“ im Kontext der Eventmarke und entwickeln diese mit. Dieses Phänomen ist nicht exklusiv bei Sportevents zu beobachten. Vielmehr hat sich das wissenschaftliche Verständnis von Marken und deren Management in den vergangenen Jahren zunehmend zu einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik

verschoben (Merz et al., 2009; Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020; Ströbel & Woratschek, 2019). Entsprechend dieser Logik können Marken nicht autonom durch den Markeninhaber geschaffen werden, sondern werden immer durch vielzählige Akteure gemeinsam kokreiert. Mit der Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik schaffen wir erstmals einen theoretischen Rahmen für diese Thematik, der aufzeigen soll, dass eine solche Logik erforderlich ist, um die Eventmarke UEFA EURO 2024 erfolgreich zu entwickeln, zu managen und zu verstehen.

Im Folgenden skizzieren wir daher zunächst die Evolution der Markenlogik von einer Markeninhaber-dominanten Logik zu einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik. Dabei erläutern wir das Vernetzte Branding als ein zentrales Konzept im Rahmen der Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik. Im dritten Kapitel reflektieren wir das bisherige Verständnis von Eventmarken und zeigen auf, dass dieses Verständnis vorwiegend einer Markeninhaber-dominanten Logik folgt. Wir legen anschließend die Relevanz einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik insbesondere im Kontext von Eventmarken dar, zeigen auf was eine solche Logik für die Eventmarke EURO 2024 bedeutet und leiten daraus Implikationen für den Aufbau und das Management der EURO 2024 ab.

4.1.2. Evolution der Markenlogik: Von einer Markeninhaber-dominanten Logik zu einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik von Marken

4.1.2.1. Markeninhaber-dominante Logik von Marken

Das Verständnis von Marken und deren Management hat sich in den vergangenen Jahren stetig von einer Markeninhaber-dominanten Logik zu einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik weiterentwickelt (Iglesias et al., 2020; Merz et al., 2009; Ströbel & Woratschek, 2019). Konventionelle, Markeninhaber-dominante Logiken unterstellen, dass Marken strategisch und bewusst durch den Markeninhaber aufgebaut und kontrolliert werden. Diese Logik dominiert ebenso das gegenwärtige Verständnis von Sportmarken (Gladden & Funk, 2002): Sportmarken werden als Bündel statischer Markenkomponenten wahrgenommen, die als Folge von managementgesteuerten Prozessen entstehen (Bodet & Séguin, 2021; Giroux et al., 2017). Entsprechend der Markeninhaber-dominanten Logik besteht die zentrale Aufgabe des Markeninhabers insofern darin, eine klare und stabile Markenidentität (d.h. statische Markenkomponenten wie symbolische Assoziationen und physische Attribute) zu entwickeln, zu pflegen und zu kommunizieren (Aaker, 2002; Taks et al., 2020). In Folge der Markenkommunikation entsteht bei den Empfängern eine individuelle Markenbedeutung (Burmann et al., 2009; Burmann et al., 2017). Konsumenten werden als passive Ziele der Markenkommunikation betrachtet, die vollständig

vom Markeninhaber kontrolliert wird. Dementsprechend sind Markenidentität, Markenbedeutung und schließlich der Wert einer Marke das statische Ergebnis strategischer und bewusster Managementmaßnahmen. Schaut man sich die dynamische Evolution von Marken genauer an, wird offensichtlich, dass eine solche Logik kaum der Realität entspricht und somit für den Aufbau und das Management von Marken zu kurz greift. Gerade im Sport tragen Fans, Sponsoren, Medien und viele weitere Akteure zu der Markenbedeutung einer Sportmarke bei (Biscaia et al., 2018; Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020). Die Multi-Akteurs-dominante Logik von Marken ist insofern insbesondere im Kontext von Sport und im Kontext von Sportevents relevant. Die zentralen Konzepte und Prämissen der Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik werden im nachfolgenden Kapitel skizziert.

4.1.2.2. *Multi-Akteurs-dominante Logik von Marken*

Im Mittelpunkt der Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik von Marken steht die Konzeptualisierung von Marken als soziale Konstrukte, die von einer Vielzahl interner und externer Akteure kontinuierlich im Rahmen von ressourcenintegrierenden Interaktionen kokreiert und weiterentwickelt werden (Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2015; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). Der Markenaufbau kann somit gar nicht autonom durch den Markeninhaber kontrolliert und gesteuert werden. Vielmehr besteht die Möglichkeit, dass sich Marken in Richtungen entwickeln, die vom Markeninhaber möglicherweise nicht beabsichtigt sind (Merz et al., 2009; Veloutsou & Guzman, 2017). Markeninhaber können lediglich Kokreationsprozesse durch die Initiierung und Förderung von Interaktionen koordinieren. Interaktionen können jedoch ebenso von externen Akteuren und vollkommen unabhängig vom Markeninhaber initiiert werden (Sarasvuo et al., 2022). Marken werden entsprechend als dynamische Prozesse konzeptualisiert, die aus den Interaktionen zwischen dem Markeninhaber und externen Akteuren, Interaktionen nur zwischen internen Akteuren (z.B. Mitarbeiter und Management) und Interaktionen nur zwischen externen Akteuren (z.B. Kunden) resultieren (Sarasvuo et al., 2022).

Insbesondere im Kontext des Sports offenbart sich die Notwendigkeit einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik von Marken. Sportmarken versammeln vielzählige unterschiedliche und hoch identifizierte Akteure, die einbezogen werden wollen und sich aktiv an der Marke beteiligen (Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020; Ströbel & Woratschek, 2019). Beispielsweise wollen Fans in Entscheidungen über die Marke einbezogen werden und starten eigene Aktivitäten, z.B. Fanprojekte, die Teil der Sportmarke werden (Biscaia et al., 2018; Hüttermann et al., 2019). So beschreiben Kolyperas et al. (2019, 204), dass Sportmarken durch ‚die Leidenschaft, die Begeisterung und das Engagement der Fans‘ kokreiert werden. Neben Fans werden Mitarbeiter,

Sponsoren und Partner, Athleten, Verbände und andere Sportmarken, Medien und die Öffentlichkeit als relevante Akteure erachtet, die an der gemeinsamen Schaffung von Sportmarken beteiligt sind (Baker et al., 2022; Grohs et al., 2020; Kahiya et al., 2022).

Die Multi-Akteurs-dominante Logik von Marken folgt einer relativ abstrakten Denkweise. Um die Prozesse innerhalb der Logik daher besser zu verstehen und Implikationen für das Management von Marken ableiten zu können, greifen wir auf das Konzept des Vernetzten Branding zurück. Das Vernetzte Branding schafft einen konkreten Rahmen für die Prozesse der Markenbildung zwischen vielzähligen Akteuren und die Rolle des Markeninhabers darin (Ströbel & Woratschek, 2019).

4.1.2.3. Das Konzept des Vernetzten Branding

Das Vernetzte Branding beschreibt einen konkreten Ansatz im Kontext der Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik von Marken (Brodie et al., 2017). Das Konzept bietet einen übergeordneten Rahmen, um die Dynamik von Marken besser zu erfassen und zu strukturieren (Brodie et al., 2017; Brodie, 2017; Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016). Grundsätzlich basiert das Vernetzte Branding auf dem Verständnis, dass Marken in einem dynamischen sozialen Prozess konstruiert werden, in welchem physische Identitätselemente die Grundlage für die Entwicklung tiefergehender Bedeutungen bilden (Brodie et al., 2017; Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016; Evans et al., 2019). Der integrative Prozess des Vernetzten Branding umfasst folglich zwei wechselseitig voneinander abhängige Teilprozesse: (1) Aufbau der Markenidentität und (2) Kokreation der Markenbedeutung (Brodie et al., 2017).

Der erste Teilprozess des Vernetzten Branding umfasst die Entwicklung, konkrete Ausgestaltung und Kommunikation einer einzigartigen Markenidentität (d.h. physische Identitätselemente, intendierte Bedeutungsinhalte für die Marke) und wird in der Regel autonom durch den Markeninhaber initiiert und gesteuert (Brodie et al., 2017; Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016; Evans et al., 2019). Entsprechend soll durch den Aufbau der Markenidentität gewährleistet werden, dass Akteure ein Bewusstsein für die Marke und ein Verständnis für die intendierte Markenbedeutung entwickeln (Brodie et al., 2017). Die Marketingaktivitäten des Markeninhabers zum Aufbau der Markenidentität umfassen folglich sowohl die autonome Gestaltung als auch die unilaterale Kommunikation der physischen Identitätselemente sowie einzigartiger Markenbedeutungen innerhalb des Akteursnetzwerks (Brodie et al., 2017). Im Rahmen der Kommunikation der Markenidentität bieten sich dem Markeninhaber vielzählige Kommunikationsmöglichkeiten, die entsprechend einer integrierten Kommunikation koordiniert werden müssen, um die Konsistenz des Markenbilds zu gewährleisten (Coleman et al., 2011;

Woratschek, Fehrer et al., 2019). Der Markeninhaber benötigt daher Kompetenzen für die Entwicklung einer einzigartigen Markenidentität sowie deren koordinierte Kommunikation (Ströbel & Woratschek, 2019). Die kommunizierte Markenidentität kann dabei als „brand meaning proposition“ konzeptualisiert werden, die von den verschiedenen Akteuren im Rahmen des zweiten Teilprozesses des Vernetzten Branding als Ressource in die kokreativen Prozesse integriert wird (Brodie et al., 2017). Der Aufbau der Markenidentität bildet insofern die Grundlage für die Kokreation der Markenbedeutung.

Die Bedeutung einer Marke ergibt sich allerdings nicht nur aus den Markenaktivitäten des Markeninhabers, wie in der Markeninhaber-dominanten Logik angenommen wird, sondern wird immer in wechselseitigen Interaktionen zwischen mehreren Akteuren kokreiert (Merz et al., 2009). Im Rahmen von Interaktionen integrieren Akteure individuelle Ressourcen, z.B. Kreativität oder Erfahrungen, kombinieren diese mit den Ressourcen anderer Akteure sowie der brand meaning proposition des Markeninhabers (Stach, 2019; Tierney et al., 2016) und kokreieren dadurch kontinuierlich die Bedeutung der Marke (Brodie et al., 2017; Iglesias & Bonet, 2012). Der Markeninhaber agiert dabei als fokaler Akteur im Sinne eines „conductors“ (Michel, 2017), dessen zentrale Aufgabe in der Förderung und Koordination interaktiver Prozesse innerhalb des Akteursnetzwerks besteht, sodass eine unverwechselbare kollektive Markenbedeutung entsteht (Brodie et al., 2017; von Wallpach et al., 2017). Der Markeninhaber „can [only] guide, influence and inspire consumers [and other actors] to co-create brand meaning“ (Haarhoff & Kleyn, 2012, S. 112). Markeninhaber müssen Markenplattformen bereitstellen, um interaktive Prozesse zur Kokreation von Markenbedeutung zwischen allen Akteuren mit einem Interesse an der Marke zu ermöglichen, zu erleichtern und zu orchestrieren (Evans et al., 2019; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016). Die Kokreation der Markenbedeutung findet jedoch auch in emergenten Kontexten statt, die nicht vom Markenmanagement kontrolliert werden (Brodie et al., 2017; Wider et al., 2018).

Beide Teilprozesse des Vernetzten Branding sind eng miteinander verknüpft. So erfordert der zweite Teilprozess den stetigen Abgleich der intendierten Markenbedeutung mit der Bedeutung der Marke innerhalb des Akteursnetzwerks (Ströbel & Woratschek, 2019). Die dynamische Natur der Markenbedeutung bedingt die Entstehung inkongruenter Markenbedeutungen, z.B. Differenzen zwischen intendierter, individueller und kollektiver Markenbedeutung. Divergierende Bedeutungsinhalte einer Marke müssen durch koordinierte Branding-Aktivitäten hinsichtlich einer unverwechselbaren kollektiven Markenbedeutung harmonisiert und geschärft werden, z.B. durch Anregung des Dialogs zwischen Akteuren mit divergierenden Bedeutungsinhalten für die Marke (Brodie et al., 2017; Ströbel & Woratschek, 2019; Woratschek,

Fehrer et al., 2019). Obwohl die Markenidentität in der Regel vom Markeninhaber kontrolliert wird, muss sie auf der Grundlage der in den Interaktionen entstehenden Markenbedeutungen ständig bewertet, angepasst und dann in der Markenkommunikation gefestigt werden. In diesem Fall obliegt dem Markeninhaber die Entscheidung, inwiefern die emergenten Bedeutungsinhalte in die Markenidentität und deren Kommunikation integriert werden (Griebel et al., 2020; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). Das Verständnis des Vernetzten Branding ist in Abbildung 1 dargestellt.

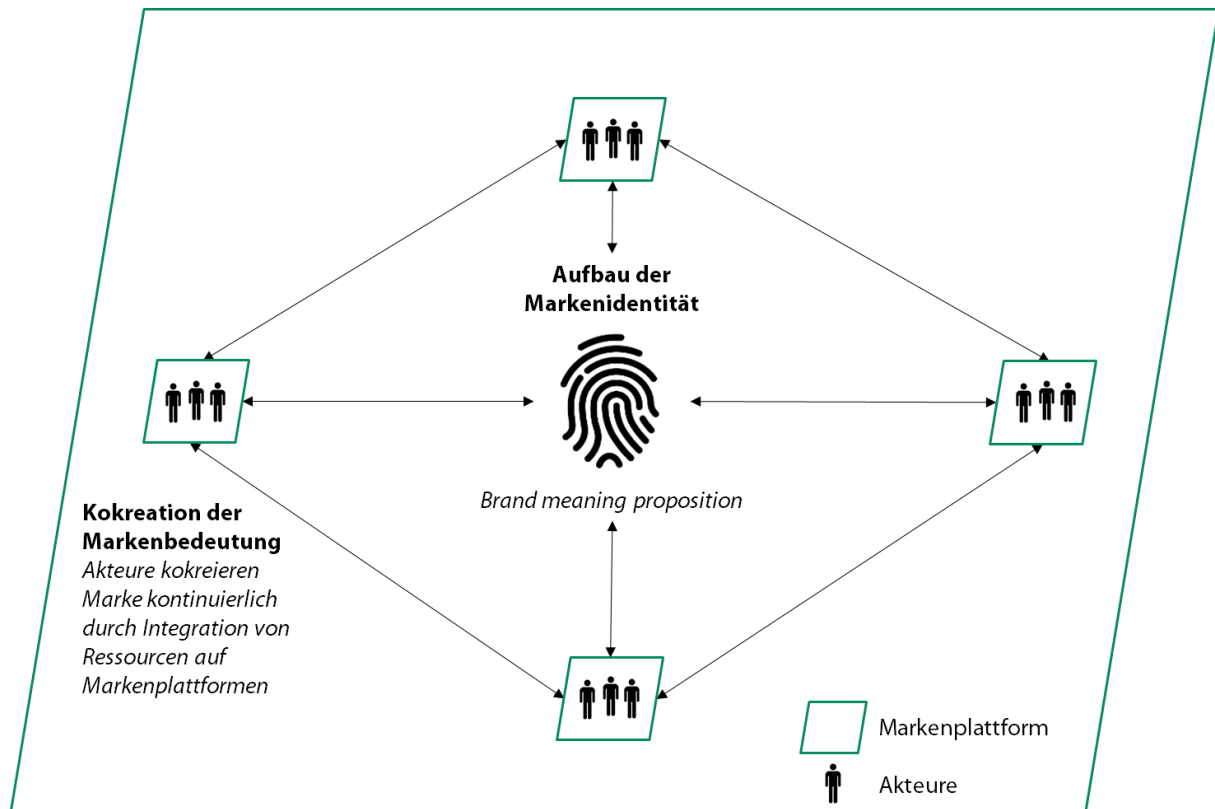


Abbildung 1: Das Konzept des Vernetzten Branding (in Anlehnung an Griebel et al., 2020)

4.1.3. Aufbau und Management von Eventmarken

Bisherige Forschung setzt sich bislang relativ einseitig mit dem Aufbau und dem Management von Eventmarken auseinander. Das Verständnis von Eventmarken beschränkt sich weitestgehend auf die Arbeiten von Parent und Séguin (2008) sowie Parent et al. (2012), die auf Basis von Fallstudien bei einmaligen Sportevents sowie bei international wiederkehrenden Sportevents das „Event Brand Creation Model“ entwickeln. Darüber hinaus beschreibt Kahiya et al. (2022) Brand Governance Praktiken von übergeordneten Sportverbänden im Rahmen von wiederkehrenden Events.

4.1.3.1. Event Brand Creation Model

Der Markeninhaber, in der Regel ein von einem nationalen oder internationalen Verband beauftragtes Organisationskomitee, steht im Zentrum des Event Brand Creation Model. Das Organisationskomitee kreiert auf Basis der zentralen Werte seiner Mitglieder und durch die Nutzung von deren Networking-, Management- und Eventmanagementkompetenzen die Markenidentität des Events. Durch eine kohärente und effektive Kommunikation der Markenidentität an externe Akteure, zum Beispiel Anwohner, Sponsoren, Medien, politische Akteure, Mitarbeiter der Organisatoren, Delegationen und Sportorganisationen, kreiert der Markeninhaber eine positive Bedeutung für die Eventmarke. Dabei besteht die Schwierigkeit des Organisationskomitees insbesondere darin, eine starke Marke aufzubauen, welche die Bedürfnisse der vielzähligen Akteure erfüllt (Parent et al., 2012; Parent & Séguin, 2008).

Das Event Brand Creation Model basiert insofern auf der fundamentalen Prämisse, dass der Markeninhaber eine Markenidentität kreiert, an externe Akteure kommuniziert und dadurch eine Bedeutung für die Eventmarke schafft. Das Modell folgt somit grundlegend der Markeninhaber-dominanten Logik. Gleichmaßen wird jedoch berücksichtigt, dass der Markeninhaber in seinen autonomen Bemühungen des Markenaufbaus von externen Akteuren und Faktoren beeinflusst wird (Parent et al., 2012). So wird das Modell um (1) kontextuelle und institutionelle Faktoren, die Bedeutung von (2) Medien und (3) Markenerlebnissen sowie um den (4) Einfluss des Feedbacks von externen Akteuren erweitert (Parent et al., 2012). Das Event Brand Creation Model ist in Abbildung 2 dargestellt.

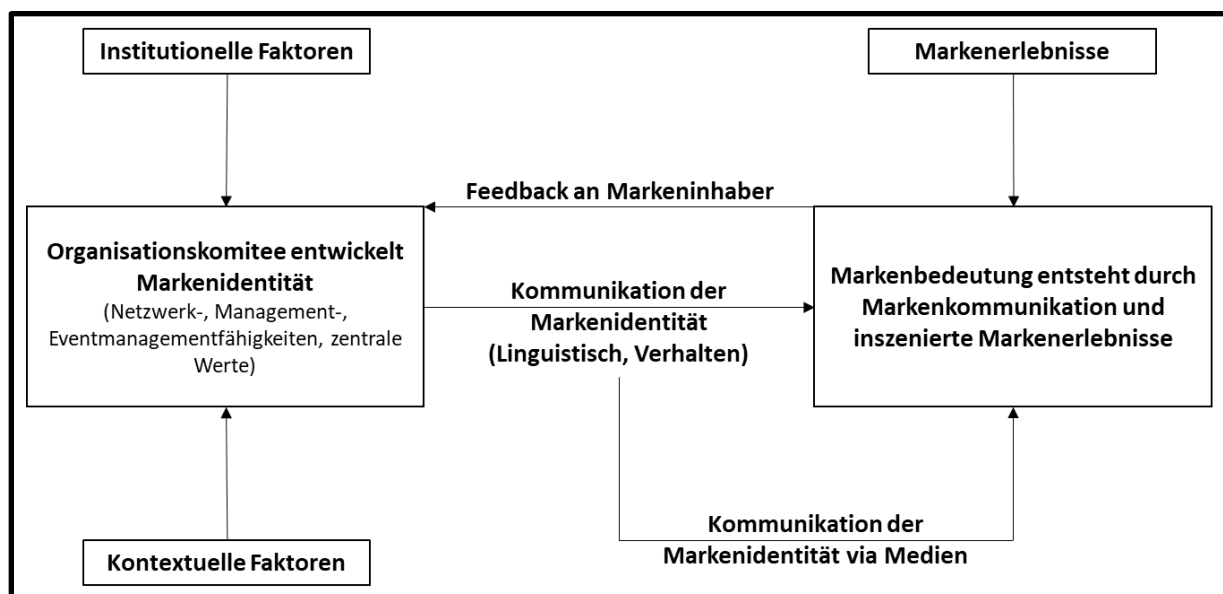


Abbildung 2: Angepasstes Event Brand Creation Model (in Anlehnung an Parent et al., 2012; Parent & Séguin, 2008)

(1) Eventmarken sind stets von kontextuellen und institutionellen Faktoren abhängig, die den Markenaufbau beeinflussen. Der Kontext bezieht sich auf das regionale und nationale Umfeld, in dem das Event situiert ist und moderiert die initiale Entwicklung der Markenidentität. Beispielsweise bedingt die Relevanz des Sports in der breiten Bevölkerung das Vermarktungspotential der Eventmarke. Institutionelle Faktoren beziehen sich auf die Beziehungen der Eventmarke zu übergeordneten nationalen und internationalen Verbänden. Nationale und internationale Verbände verfügen häufig selbst über starke Marken, an denen Organisationskomitees die Identität der Eventmarke ausrichten können (Parent et al., 2012; Parent & Séguin, 2008). Zugleich bestehen starke Abhängigkeiten zwischen dem Organisationskomitee und übergeordneten Sportverbänden. Emery (2002) beschreibt beispielsweise, dass sich übergeordnete Sportverbände zum Teil selbst als Inhaber der Marke verstehen und entsprechend einen starken sowie direkten Einfluss auf die Eventmarke nehmen können.

(2) Aufbauend auf der Entwicklung der Markenidentität wird die Marke durch das Organisationskomitee an die externen Akteure kommuniziert. In der Markeninhaber-dominanten Logik wird die vom Markeninhaber kontrollierte Markenkommunikation als alleinige Quelle für die Entstehung von Markenbedeutung erachtet (Parent & Séguin, 2008). Aufgrund der hohen Medienpräsenz im Kontext von Sportevents können jedoch auch die Medien von den Organisationskomitees genutzt werden, um die Marke an externe Akteure zu kommunizieren. Medien können demnach eine Vermittlerrolle spielen, die ungefilterte, aber auch "mediengeprägte" Versionen der Markenidentität an externe Akteure weitergeben. Die Markenkommunikation erfolgt insofern sowohl direkt durch den Markeninhaber als auch durch die Medien, gesteuert durch den Markeninhaber (Parent & Séguin, 2008).

(3) Neben der Markenkommunikation als Quelle für die Entstehung von Markenbedeutung indizieren die Ergebnisse von Parent et al. (2012) die Relevanz von Markenerlebnissen während des Events. Externe Akteure entwickeln individuelle Markenbedeutungen in Folge von markeninhaberinszenierten Erlebnissen im Rahmen des Events.

(4) Abschließend impliziert das Event Brand Creation Model, dass der Prozess der Markenbildung nicht mit der Markenkommunikation an die externen Akteure und die Inszenierung von Markenerlebnissen während des Events abgeschlossen ist. Vielmehr kommunizieren externe Akteure im Anschluss an das Event ihre Wahrnehmungen von der Eventmarke an das Organisationskomitee. Auf Basis des Feedbacks von externen Akteuren kann das Organisationskomitee die Markenidentität langfristig anpassen und verfeinern. Eine Anpassung der Markenidentität ist entsprechend ausschließlich im Kontext wiederkehrender Sportevents von Relevanz.

4.1.3.2. *Brand Governance bei Eventmarken*

Im Gegensatz zu dem Event Brand Creation Model wird im Rahmen der Studie von Kahiya et al. (2022) die Perspektive des übergeordneten Sportverbandes statt des Organisationskomitees eingenommen. Analog zu dem Modell wird jedoch die Relevanz von externen Akteuren berücksichtigt. Kahiya et al. (2022) beschreiben die „World Rugby Sevens Series“ als eine von globalen Partnern, lokalen Sponsoren, Athleten, Verbänden, Ausrichterstädten, Prominenten und Fans gemeinsam geschaffene Eventmarke. Der Brand Governance Ansatz impliziert, konträr zu dem Event Brand Creation Model, die aktive Rolle von externen Akteuren, die außerdem bewusst und explizit von dem Organisationskomitee in den Prozess des Markenaufbaus einbezogen werden sollten. Dies ermöglicht dem Organisationskomitee die Ressourcen der Akteure gewinnbringend auf einer strategischen und einer operativen Ebene einzubeziehen, um eine starke Marke zu kreieren (Kahiya et al., 2022; Taks et al., 2020). Die Umsetzung des managementgesteuerten Prozesses erfordert fünf elementare Brand Governance Praktiken.

(1) Aufbauend auf der im Event Brand Creation Model identifizierten Relevanz des institutionellen Umfelds für Eventmarken wird der Aufbau enger Beziehungen zu Partnern und Austragungsstädten als Brand Governance Praktik identifiziert, welche insbesondere auf der Ebene des übergeordneten internationalen Verbands von Bedeutung ist. So beeinflussen Partner häufig die Vergabe des Events aber auch die Auswahl der Austragungsstädte. Auf Ebene des Organisationskomitees sind die Ressourcen lokaler Sponsoren (z.B. Hotels, Eventmanagement Unternehmen) hingegen häufig essenziell für die Umsetzung des Events. Dies gilt gleichermaßen für die Austragungsstädte, die häufig stark in die operative Realisierung eingebunden sind.

(2) Die Durchführung inszenierter markenfördernder Aktivitäten (z.B. Corporate Social Responsibility Initiativen, öffentliche Veranstaltungen in den Austragungsstädten wie Paraden) bietet zusätzliche Möglichkeiten zur Kommunikation der Identität der Eventmarke. Zudem können gezielt verschiedene Akteure einbezogen werden. Beispielsweise kann durch die Einbindung von Mannschaften oder reichweitenstarken Athleten die Aufmerksamkeit für Corporate Social Responsibility Initiativen der Eventmarke erhöht werden.

(3) Die Nutzung sozialer Medien ermöglicht dem Markeninhaber auch im schnelllebigen Kontext von Sportevents Inhalte effektiv an externe Akteure zu kommunizieren. Insbesondere können junge Zielgruppen über soziale Medien erreicht werden. Aufgrund der Vernetzung von Akteuren über soziale Medien kann sich der Markeninhaber die Reichweite von Superstar-Athleten zu Nutze machen und diese in die Aktivitäten auf den sozialen Medien einbinden.

(4) Durch die Förderung von Kokreationsprozessen zwischen Akteuren während des Events soll die Eventmarke zudem zum Leben erweckt werden. Verschiedene Akteure werden durch das Organisationskomitee aktiv in die operative Umsetzung der Eventmarke einbezogen (z.B. Dance-Cams im Stadion).

(5) Analog zum „Event Brand Creation Model“ stellt außerdem die Installation einer 360°-Feedback-Schleife für die Akteure eine elementare Brand Governance Praktik dar. So sollte im Nachgang an das Event die Wahrnehmung der Eventmarke durch die Akteure evaluiert (z.B. mittels einer Umfrage) und zur Anpassung der Markenidentität des wiederkehrenden Events genutzt werden. Kahiya et al. (2022) betonen dabei, dass der Fokus des Feedbacks auf den Austragungsstädten, den Athleten und den Teammanagern liegen sollte.

4.1.3.3. Einordnung des gegenwärtigen Verständnisses von Eventmarken in die Multi-Akteurs-dominante Logik

Sowohl das Event Brand Creation Model als auch der Brand Governance Ansatz berücksichtigen den Einfluss externer Akteure auf den Aufbau von Eventmarken und bieten erste Ansätze für die Multi-Akteurs-dominante Logik von Eventmarken. Im Kontext des Event Brand Creation Models beeinflussen externe Akteure jedoch nur passiv den autonomen Markenaufbau des Organisationskomitees oder werden, wie im Falle der Medien, von dem Organisationskomitee bewusst für den Markenaufbau eingesetzt. Daran setzt auch das Brand Governance Konzept an. Demnach wird die bewusste Einbindung externer Akteure als elementare Aufgabe des Markeninhabers verstanden, um die Ressourcen von externen Akteuren aktiv für den Aufbau einer starken Eventmarke zu nutzen. Wenngleich im Rahmen des Brand Governance Konzeptes die aktive Rolle externer Akteure berücksichtigt wird, wird unterstellt, dass der Markeninhaber die Prozesse zur Kokreation kontrolliert. Akteure können demnach bewusst und je nach Bedarf in den Prozess des Markenaufbaus einbezogen werden. Grundsätzlich wird der Aufbau der Markenidentität und der Markenbedeutung also durch den Markeninhaber kontrolliert.

Basierend auf den Erkenntnissen aus der Markenforschung greifen diese Ansätze zu kurz. Die Kokreation von Marken wird, wie sie im Sinne der Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik verstanden werden sollte, nicht ausreichend erfasst. Eventmarken können nicht einseitig und autonom durch einen Markeninhaber, der durch kontextuelle und institutionelle Faktoren beeinflusst wird, aufgebaut und kontrolliert werden. Vielmehr sind Eventmarken dynamische soziale Prozesse, die aktiv von allen Akteuren mit einem Interesse an der Marke (z.B. Fans, Sponsoren, anderen Marken, Mitarbeitern) kokreiert werden. Der Markeninhaber kann zwar kokreative Prozesse initiieren und fördern, jedoch wird die Markenbedeutung für das Event

auch außerhalb des Kontrollbereichs des Markeninhabers kokreiert (Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020). Der Markeninhaber kann somit nicht bewusst und je nach Bedarf Ressourcen von Akteuren für den Markenaufbau nutzen. Verschiedene Studien zeigen die aktive Beteiligung von vielzähligen Akteuren im Kontext von Events auf (Grohs et al., 2020; Woratschek et al., 2014). Eventmarken müssen aus einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik verstanden werden, um relevante und effektive Implikationen für das Markenmanagement ableiten zu können.

Was bedeutet die Multi-Akteurs-dominante Logik also für den Aufbau und das Management der Eventmarke EURO 2024? Dieser Fragestellung gehen wir im folgenden Kapitel nach und betrachten die Eventmarke EURO 2024 vor dem Hintergrund der Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik und dem Konzept des Vernetzten Branding, um Implikationen für den Aufbau und das Management der Marke abzuleiten.

4.1.4. Implikationen einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik für den Aufbau und das Management der Eventmarke EURO 2024

4.1.4.1. Die Eventmarke EURO 2024 aus einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik

Aufbauend auf der Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik und dem Konzept des Vernetzten Branding werden Eventmarken als dynamische soziale Prozesse verstanden, die sich zwischen allen Akteuren mit einem Interesse an der Eventmarke entfalten. Akteure sind durch Markenplattformen verbunden und kokreieren kontinuierlich die Markenbedeutung der Eventmarke in wechselseitigen Interaktionen. Die Grundlage für die Prozesse zur Kokreation der Markenbedeutung sind jedoch physische Identitätselemente, die in der Regel durch den Markeninhaber entwickelt werden müssen (Brodie et al., 2017). Im Sinne der Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik von Eventmarken und dem Konzept des Vernetzten Branding ist es daher elementar zu verstehen, (1) wie sich die Markenidentität der EURO 2024 gestaltet, (2) welche Akteure im Kontext der Eventmarke EURO 2024 zu berücksichtigen sind und (3) welche Markenplattformen im Kontext der EURO 2024 relevant sind. Für die EURO 2024 können dabei Überlegungen weitestgehend nur auf Basis der bestehenden theoretischen Konzepte sowie auf Basis von übertragbaren Beispielen vergangener Sportgroßveranstaltungen vorgenommen werden. Gleichermaßen werden auch bekannte Informationen zur EURO 2024 genutzt.

(1) Die Markenidentität der EURO 2024 wurde in Zusammenarbeit zwischen der UEFA, dem Organisationskomitee (EURO 2024 GmbH) und den Ausrichtungsstädten entwickelt. Unter dem Markenclaim „United by Football. Vereint im Herzen Europas“ soll die EURO 2024 ein Event sein, das für alle Kulturen, alle Länder, alle Altersgruppen und alle Fans zugänglich ist. Entsprechend sollen insbesondere gesellschaftspolitische Markenbedeutungen

vermittelt werden. Die EURO 2024 soll für Einheit, Zusammengehörigkeit, Diversität und Inklusion stehen. Diese Markenbedeutungen spiegeln sich auch in den Grundfarben des Markenlogos wieder, die in verschiedenen Kombinationen die Landesflaggen aller 55 UEFA Mitgliedsverbände wiederspiegeln. Außerdem werden Fan Illustrationen in das Logo aufgenommen (DFB - Deutscher Fußball-Bund e.V [DFB], 2023a; UEFA, 2021d). Gleichmaßen soll die EURO 2024 die nachhaltigste Fußball Europameisterschaft aller Zeiten werden und nachhaltige Markenbedeutungen schaffen (DFB, 2023b; UEFA, 2021a). Die Multi-Akteurs-dominante Logik impliziert jedoch, dass die Eventmarke EURO 2024 nicht ausschließlich durch die Markenkommunikation des Markeninhabers aufgebaut werden kann.

(2) Die Eventmarke EURO 2024 steht vielmehr im Zentrum eines heterogenen Netzwerks von Akteuren, die kontinuierlich die Markenbedeutung der EURO 2024 kokreieren – unabhängig davon ob der Markeninhaber oder der Akteur dies beabsichtigen. Bestehende Literatur zur Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik von Sportmarken identifiziert insbesondere Fans, Sponsoren und Partner, die Medien, andere Sportmarken, Athleten, Prominente, Mitarbeiter und Offizielle des Organisationskomitees, die Öffentlichkeit sowie politische Akteure als Mitglieder des Akteursnetzwerks (Kahiya et al., 2022; Ströbel et al., 2019). Das konkrete Netzwerk von Akteuren im Kontext der EURO 2024 ist in Abbildung 3 dargestellt.

Das Organisationskomitee ist ein fokaler Akteur innerhalb des Akteursnetzwerks. In erster Linie obliegt ihm die Entwicklung der Markenidentität und deren Kommunikation an alle Akteure. Aufbauend auf dem Event Brand Creation Model (Parent et al., 2012; Parent & Séguin, 2008) und dem Brand Governance Konzept (Kahiya et al., 2022) stellen übergeordnete Sportverbände besonders relevante Akteure innerhalb des Netzwerks dar. Wie im Rahmen der Markenidentität der EURO 2024 dargestellt, nimmt insbesondere die UEFA einen starken Einfluss auf den Markenaufbau des Organisationskomitees. Darüber hinaus interagiert die UEFA im Kontext der EURO 2024 mit weiteren Akteuren. Beispielsweise wirken sich Äußerungen von offiziellen Vertretern der UEFA (z.B. von UEFA Präsident Aleksander Čeferin) auf die Markenbedeutung der EURO 2024 aus. Daneben werden die zehn Austragungsstädte der EURO 2024 insbesondere in der operativen Umsetzung des Events und der Markenmanagementmaßnahmen als zentral für die Eventmarke erachtet. Politische Akteure wie die deutsche Bundesregierung oder kommunale politische Akteure schaffen außerdem die institutionellen Rahmenbedingungen für die Umsetzung der EURO 2024 und nehmen Einfluss auf die strategische Ausrichtung der Markenidentität (siehe oben).

Analog zu dem Event Brand Creation Model sind auch die Medien Teil des Akteursnetzwerks. Durch die Berichterstattung kokreieren die Medien maßgeblich die Bedeutung der

Eventmarke, insbesondere in der Öffentlichkeit. Beispielsweise führten kritische Berichte im Vorfeld der FIFA Fußball Weltmeisterschaft 2022 in Katar zu negativen Assoziationen mit der Eventmarke. Sponsoren und Partner engagieren sich gleichermaßen im Kontext der Eventmarke. Sponsoren integrieren Ressourcen wie innovative Ideen, um ihre Sponsorings im Kontext der EURO 2024 zu aktivieren. Durch Kampagnen und andere Sponsoring Aktivitäten schaffen Sponsoren somit Aufmerksamkeit für die Eventmarke und füllen die intendierte Markenbedeutung mit Leben. Zu berücksichtigen ist, dass neben offiziellen Sponsoren, z.B. Adidas oder Alipay, auch andere Unternehmen Bedeutungen für die Eventmarke kokreieren. So schaffen die Ambush Marketing Aktivitäten von Unternehmen ohne offizielles Sponsoring gleichermaßen Aufmerksamkeit für das Event und vermitteln Markenbedeutungen. Athleten und andere Sportmarken, z.B. die Nationalmannschaften, engagieren sich autonom im Kontext der Eventmarke und beeinflussen die Markenbedeutung durch ihre Äußerungen und ihr Verhalten. Insbesondere Athleten haben durch soziale Medien häufig eine enorme Reichweite und äußern sich, wie im Rahmen der FIFA Fußball Weltmeisterschaft 2022 gesehen, zunehmend kritisch und politisch. Darüber hinaus kokreieren Fans und die Öffentlichkeit maßgeblich die Markenbedeutung der EURO 2024. Beispielsweise werden die FIFA Fußball Weltmeisterschaft 2006 auch heute noch mit der Atmosphäre und Stimmung in Deutschland verbunden. Durch die friedlichen Fan Feste zwischen Fanlagern aus allen Nationen wurde der Markenclaim „Die Welt zu Gast bei Freunden“ Realität.

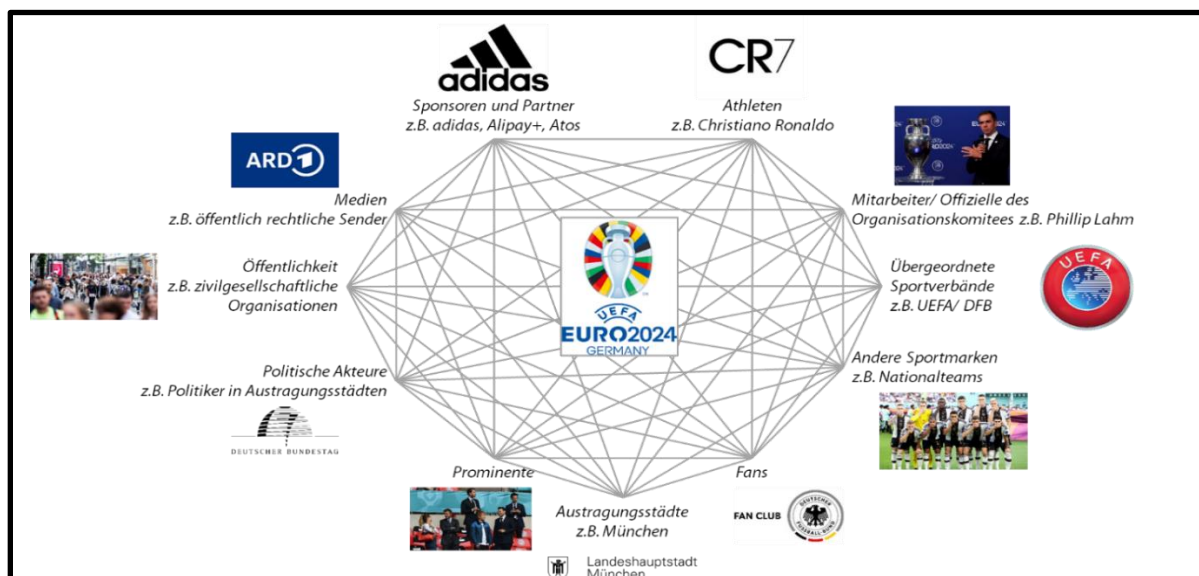


Abbildung 3: Das Netzwerk von Akteuren im Kontext der Eventmarke EURO 2024

Innerhalb des Netzwerks von Akteuren bestehen unterschiedliche Markenplattformen, welche die Akteure miteinander verbinden und somit wechselseitige Interaktionen zwischen

den Akteuren und dem Organisationskomitee und zwischen den Akteuren untereinander ermöglichen. Markenplattformen werden zum einen explizit durch das Organisationskomitee gefördert (Kahiya et al., 2022), entstehen zum anderen aber auch emergent und außerhalb der Kontrolle des Organisationskomitees (Brodie et al., 2017). Zentrale Markenplattformen im Kontext der EURO 2024 sind in Abbildung 4 dargestellt.

Aufgrund der engen Verknüpfung des Organisationskomitees und der UEFA bestehen formelle und informelle Markenplattformen, die Interaktionen zwischen den Akteuren ermöglichen. Beispielsweise besteht eine Steuerungsgruppe, die sich aus Vertreterinnen und Vertretern der UEFA, des Organisationskomitees sowie der Austragungsstädte, des Bundes und der lokalen Behörden zusammensetzt (UEFA, 2022). Im Rahmen dieser Steuerungsgruppe wurde unter anderem die Markenidentität der EURO 2024 entwickelt (siehe oben). Analog etabliert das Organisationskomitee Plattformen, um aktiv verschiedene Interessenträger (z.B. Fans, zivilgesellschaftliche Organisationen oder Sponsoren und Partner) in die Entwicklung und Umsetzung der Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie einzubeziehen (UEFA, 2021a). Ähnlich ist auch die von der Austragungsstadt Berlin initiierte Markenplattform zur Entwicklung eines Leitbilds der Nachhaltigkeit zur EURO 2024 zu verstehen. Das Leitbild wurde durch die Senatsverwaltung für Inneres, Digitalisierung und Sport angestoßen und in einem partizipativen Prozess gemeinsam mit lokalen Organisationen und Experten weiterentwickelt. Das Leitbild soll Akteure motivieren sich im Kontext der EURO 2024 proaktiv an der Gestaltung einer nachhaltigen Europameisterschaft zu beteiligen (Senatsverwaltung für Inneres, Digitalisierung und Sport, 2022). Erst durch die aktive Beteiligung von Fans, Sponsoren etc. kann das Markenidentitätselement der Nachhaltigkeit umgesetzt und zum Leben erweckt werden. Die Austragungsstadt Berlin schafft außerdem Markenplattformen, auf denen sich zivilgesellschaftliche Akteure engagieren und das Rahmenprogramm während der EURO 2024 mitgestalten sollen. Durch zahlreiche Veranstaltungen für vielzählige Akteure soll die soziale Interaktion sowie die nationale und internationale Vernetzung und Diversität gefördert werden (DFB, 2023b).

Meist entstehen Plattformen jedoch direkt im Rahmen der sportlichen Aktivität (Woratschek et al., 2014; Woratschek, Schafmeister & Ellert, 2019). Elementare Markenplattformen sind insofern die Stadien, in denen die sportlichen Wettbewerbe ausgetragen werden - bei der EURO 2024 also alle 51 Spiele in den zehn verschiedenen Stadien. Im Stadion interagiert das Organisationskomitee als Markeninhaber mit Sponsoren, Fans, Athleten und weiteren Akteuren. Insbesondere die kokreierte Atmosphäre in den Stadien kann zu einem Bestandteil der Eventmarke werden (Grohs et al., 2020). Die Sportveranstaltung selbst schafft also eine

Plattform, auf der die Eventmarke kontinuierlich kokreiert wird (Woratschek et al., 2014). Beispielsweise wird die FIFA Fußball Weltmeisterschaft 2006 noch immer mit der nie dagewesenen Stimmung und Atmosphäre in ganz Deutschland verbunden. Aufbauend darauf entstehen Markenplattformen durch offizielle, aber auch inoffizielle, Public Viewings der Spiele. Die Public Viewings im Rahmen der FIFA Fußball Weltmeisterschaft 2006 in Deutschland trugen zum Beispiel auch zu einer inklusiven Stimmung und der internationalen Vernetzung zwischen Fans aus der ganzen Welt bei. Public Viewings waren infolgedessen ein wichtiger Bestandteil des nachhaltigen Erfolgs der Marke FIFA Fußball Weltmeisterschaft 2006. Ähnlich stellen auch Fan Feste Markenplattformen dar, auf denen verschiedene Akteure interagieren und die Markenbedeutung des Events kokreieren (Smith et al., 2017). Wie sich jedoch im Rahmen der FIFA Fußball Weltmeisterschaft 2022 gezeigt hat, müssen Markenplattformen wie Fan Feste von den Akteuren genutzt werden, damit Markenbedeutung entstehen kann.

Darüber hinaus sind die sozialen Medien relevante Markenplattformen. Im Rahmen der EURO 2020 gab es insgesamt 7,5 Milliarden Interaktionen auf sozialen Medien. Der offizielle Account der EURO 2024, Fan-Accounts, Online-Foren und Blogs bieten entsprechend Möglichkeiten für Interaktionen vielzähliger Akteure. Auf diesen Markenplattformen teilen Fans und andere Akteure Entwicklungen rund um das Event sowie ihre Interpretationen der Markenbedeutung mit einem breiten Publikum und schaffen so gemeinsam die Bedeutung der Marke. Tjandra et al. (2021) zeigen beispielsweise wie Bedeutungen für Eventmarken durch Narrative (z.B. in Blogs, auf Social Media) unter anderem von Athleten, Zuschauer, Mitgliedern des nationalen Verbandes und Lieferanten des Organisationskomitees kokreiert werden.

Markenplattformen in sozialen Medien können sowohl durch das Organisationskomitee initiiert werden, als auch emergent entstehen. Beispielsweise nutzen auch Athleten soziale Medien, um autonom in Relation zu der Eventmarke zu kommunizieren. Insbesondere in den vergangenen Jahren äußerten sich Athleten auf sozialen Medien zunehmend politisch und kritisch gegenüber den Events. Die traditionellen Medien sind zum einen ein Akteur, der die Markenbedeutung kokreiert (Parent & Séguin, 2008), zum anderen aber auch eine Plattform für andere Akteure. Beispielsweise äußern sich Politiker, Athleten oder Offizielle über die Medien zu dem Event (z.B. kritisierte die deutsche Bundesinnenministerin Faeser die Fußball WM in Katar gegenüber der Tagesschau) (tagesschau, 2022). Die dargestellten Markenplattformen zur Kokreation der Markenbedeutung geben einen Einblick in umgesetzte Markenplattformen und potentielle Markenplattformen, die während der EURO 2024 initiiert werden könnten.

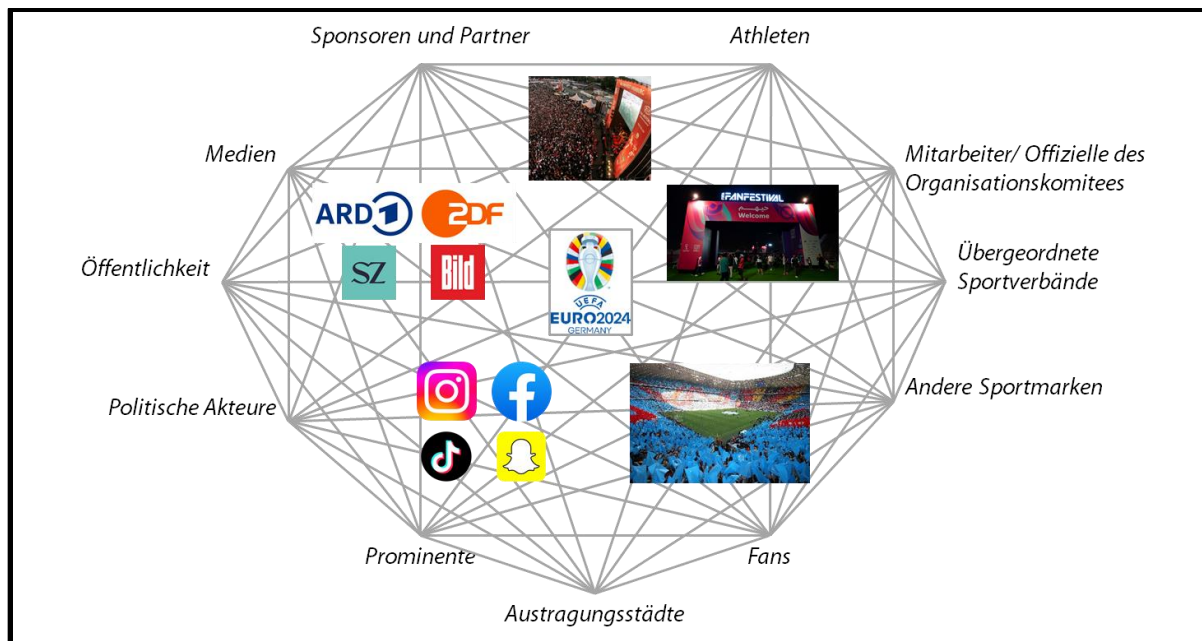


Abbildung 4: Markenplattformen im Kontext der Eventmarke EURO 2024

4.1.4.2. Implikationen für den Aufbau und das Management der Eventmarke EURO 2024

Die Multi-Akteurs-dominante Logik bietet vielzählige Implikationen für den Aufbau und das Management der Eventmarke EURO 2024. Im Gegensatz zu bestehenden Konzepten im Rahmen von Eventmarken (Event Brand Creation Model, Brand Governance) unterstellt eine Multi-Akteurs-dominante Logik, dass Eventmarken immer von vielzähligen Akteuren kokreiert werden. Akteure sind durch unterschiedliche Markenplattformen miteinander vernetzt, auf denen sie interagieren und die Bedeutung für die Eventmarke kokreieren. Die Markenverantwortlichen der EURO 2024 müssen sich bewusst sein, dass sie keinesfalls in der Lage sind, die Sportmarke autonom aufzubauen. Die Markenbedeutung hängt maßgeblich von dem Verhalten anderer Akteure ab. Obwohl das Organisationskomitee ein fokaler Akteur innerhalb des Netzwerks von Akteuren ist, kann es die kokreativen Prozesse, die zur Entwicklung und Veränderung der Markenbedeutung führen, nicht vollständig kontrollieren (Merz et al., 2009; Michel, 2017).

Die Eventmarke EURO 2024 ist das sich dynamisch verändernde Ergebnis eines sozialen Prozesses zwischen vielzähligen Akteuren. Akteure engagieren sich kontinuierlich in Interaktionen zur Kokreation der Markenbedeutung und verstetigen oder verändern somit die Bedeutung für die Eventmarke EURO 2024. Daher ist es in erster Linie elementar, die Akteure zu identifizieren, die Teil des Akteursnetzwerks der EURO 2024 sind. Im Rahmen dieses Beitrags wird eine erste Kategorisierung vorgenommen. Das Organisationskomitee muss diese Akteure

jedoch weiter konkretisieren und außerdem die Stärke der Abhängigkeiten zwischen den Akteuren definieren.

Unabhängig davon impliziert das Konzept des Vernetzten Branding, dass das Organisationskomitee eine einzigartige Markenidentität kreiert und innerhalb des Netzwerks von Akteuren kommuniziert. Aufgrund der Abhängigkeiten gegenüber der UEFA sowie den engen Beziehungen zu den Austragungsstädten erfolgt der Aufbau der Markenidentität im Kontext der EURO 2024 jedoch nicht autonom durch das Organisationskomitee. Es bedarf stetiger Absprachen zwischen den Akteuren, um eine kohärente Markenkommunikation zu koordinieren. Entsprechend müssen interne Markenplattformen etabliert werden, auf denen die Verbände, Austragungsstädte und das Organisationskomitee kontinuierlich interagieren und die Identität der Eventmarke EURO 2024 miteinander verhandeln. Im Sinne der Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik erscheint es außerdem wichtig, zusätzliche Akteure in den Prozess zum Aufbau der Markenidentität zu integrieren. Beispielsweise könnte durch die Einladung von Vertretern aus der Fanszene, aber auch von Athleten beziehungsweise Mannschaftsvertretern zu den internen Markenplattformen deren Meinung frühzeitig in die strategische Positionierung und die Kommunikation der Markenidentität aufgenommen werden. Diese frühzeitige Integration weiterer Akteure kann Eskalationen verhindern, die sich negativ auf die Marke auswirken können. Beispielsweise hätte durch Interaktionen zwischen den relevanten Akteuren im Rahmen der FIFA Fußball Weltmeisterschaft 2022 eine einheitliche Stellung zu gesellschaftspolitischen Themen bezogen werden können.

Der Markenbildungsprozess endet aber eben gerade nicht mit der Kommunikation der Markenidentität innerhalb des Akteursnetzwerks. Neben der Markenkommunikation ist es zudem wichtig, dass das Organisationskomitee die Markenidentität in konkretes Verhalten umsetzt. Diese Maßnahmen können im Sinne des zweiten Teilprozesses (Kokreation der Markenbedeutung) als Markenplattformen verstanden werden, auf denen sich verschiedene Akteure engagieren können. Akteure integrieren Ressourcen in gemeinsame Interaktionen und kokreieren so die Bedeutung für die Eventmarke EURO 2024. Analog zu der Perspektive von Kahiya et al. (2022) kann das Organisationskomitee Akteure (z.B. Athleten, Sponsoren) zum Teil gezielt in die inszenierten Markenaktivitäten einbinden um Markenbedeutungen zu kokreieren, die im Einklang mit der Markenidentität stehen. Dadurch kann die abstrakte Markenidentität authentisch umgesetzt werden und zum Leben erweckt werden. Im Falle der EURO 2024, die „eine Endrunde für alle sein“ soll und eine „tolle Fußball-Party“ ist ganz besonders die Einbindung von allen Akteuren zentral. Insbesondere Fan Feste und Public Viewings müssen durch

das Organisationskomitee initiiert werden. Trotz allem kann die Markenbedeutung nicht kontrolliert werden. Vielmehr hängt die Markenbedeutung davon ab, wie sich die Akteure auf der Markenplattform verhalten – d.h. ob sie sich nachhaltig, friedlich und inklusiv verhalten.

Markenplattformen entstehen außerdem emergent. Akteure können gleichermaßen selbstständig agieren und verfolgen ihre eigene Agenda, die nicht durch den Markeninhaber kontrolliert werden kann. Das Organisationskomitee sollte Initiativen von Fans oder anderen Akteuren bewusst zulassen und fördern, da diese erst die Markenbedeutung mit Leben füllen. Beispielsweise könnten Nachhaltigkeitsinitiativen von externen Akteuren, die entlang des entwickelten Nachhaltigkeits-Leitfadens ausgerichtet sind, gezielt durch das Organisationskomitee gefördert werden. Aus der Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Markenlogik sollten daher auch Ambush-Marketing Aktivitäten von Unternehmen, die keine offiziellen Sponsoren der EURO 2024 sind, nicht rigoros bekämpft werden, sondern aufgegriffen werden – solange sie keine markenrechtlichen Bestimmungen verletzen.

Eine weitere zentrale Implikation ist außerdem die Erkenntnis, dass kokreierte Markenbedeutungen systematisch durch das Organisationskomitee überwacht werden müssen. Im Gegensatz zu den bestehenden Konzepten zu Eventmarken sollten kokreierte Markenbedeutungen von Akteuren nicht erst im Anschluss an das Event und nur von bestimmten Akteuren erhoben werden (Kahiya et al., 2022; Parent & Séguin, 2008). Vielmehr muss das Organisationskomitee vor allem im Vorlauf, aber auch während und im Nachgang an das Event entstehende Markenbedeutungen systematisieren und entweder in die Markenidentität aufnehmen oder diese davon explizit abgrenzen. Insbesondere Eventmarken können sich in eine Richtung entwickeln, die vom Markeninhaber nicht intendiert ist – positiv wie negativ. Entsprechend muss der Markeninhaber dem frühzeitig entgegenwirken oder die Dynamik aufnehmen und sich zu Nutze machen. Dafür ist es erforderlich, dass das Organisationskomitee interne Markenplattformen nutzt, um mit der UEFA zu interagieren und die entstehenden Markenbedeutungen zu verhandeln. Der Markeninhaber ist ein fokaler Akteur innerhalb des Akteursnetzwerks, der sowohl kontinuierlich Interaktionen ermöglichen muss als auch bestehende Markenbedeutungen harmonisieren sowie die Markenidentität anpassen muss. Ein hervorragendes Beispiel hierfür ist die FIFA Fußball Weltmeisterschaft 2006 in Deutschland, die vielen heute noch aufgrund der einzigartigen Atmosphäre in ganz Deutschland als Sommermärchen bekannt ist. Diese Bedeutung wurde während und nach dem Event zunehmend auch durch den Markeninhaber geprägt.

4.1.5. Fazit

Im Rahmen dieses Beitrags argumentieren wir, dass die Multi-Akteurs-dominante Logik für den Aufbau und das Management der Eventmarke EURO 2024 vielfältige Implikationen mit sich bringt. Das Organisationskomitee und die UEFA müssen verstehen, dass Markenidentität und Markenbedeutungen nur bedingt autonom kontrolliert werden können. Vielmehr ist eine Vielzahl von Akteuren in die Kokreation der Markenbedeutung involviert – unabhängig davon ob der Markeninhaber dies beabsichtigt oder nicht. Im Kontext der EURO 2024 sind dies insbesondere Sponsoren und Partner, Medien, die Öffentlichkeit, politische Akteure, Prominente, Austragungsstädte, Fans, andere Sportmarken, Athleten, die UEFA als übergeordneter Sportverband sowie Mitarbeiter und Offizielle des Organisationskomitees.

Die Markenlogik muss sich dahin verändern, dass die proaktive Einbindung vielzähliger Akteure eine Chance bietet. Akteure können bereits in der strategischen Entwicklung der Markenidentität Impulse geben, aber insbesondere im Rahmen der Kokreation der Markenbedeutung ihre Ressourcen integrieren, um die Markenidentität umzusetzen und authentisch mit Leben zu füllen. Durch die Entwicklung der Markenidentität und die Bereitstellung von Markenplattformen kann das Organisationskomitee Leitlinien setzen, damit die Kokreation der Markenbedeutung entlang der Markenidentität verläuft und diese durch die Aktivitäten innerhalb des Akteursnetzwerks zusätzlich geschärft wird. Das Organisationskomitee erleichtert die Kokreation der Markenbedeutung durch die Bereitstellung von Markenplattformen, die Interaktionen zwischen den Akteuren fördern. Dennoch muss sich das Organisationskomitee bewusst sein, dass Akteure auch auf emergenten Markenplattformen interagieren, die nicht durch das Organisationskomitee moderiert werden können. Entstehende Markenbedeutungen müssen überwacht werden und gegebenenfalls in die Markenidentität involviert werden.

Es wird spannend zu sehen sein, in welche Richtung sich die Eventmarke EURO 2024 entwickeln wird und ob sie langfristig mit dem Markenclaim „United by Football. Vereint im Herzen Europas“ verbunden wird. Es gibt bereits erste dahingehende Ansätze (z.B. Nachhaltigkeits-Leitfaden für die EURO 2024). Grundsätzlich wird es aber davon abhängen, ob es dem Organisationskomitee langfristig gelingt, die verschiedenen Akteure hinter der intendierten Bedeutung zu versammeln und in die Umsetzung der Markenidentität zu involvieren. Aufbauende Untersuchungen zur EURO 2024 könnten entsprechend die Maßnahmen des Organisationskomitees vor dem Hintergrund des Vernetzten Branding evaluieren. Dabei könnte der Fokus auf die Akteure, die Markenplattformen und die Interaktionen auf diesen Markenplattformen gelegt werden. Gleichmaßen wäre es von Interesse die Abhängigkeiten zwischen dem übergeordneten Sportverband UEFA, der übergeordneten Turnierserie UEFA EURO und der EURO 2024

genauer zu untersuchen. Alle drei Marken können nicht unabhängig voneinander betrachtet werden und existieren in einem mehrere Ebenen umfassenden Sportmarken-Ökosystem. Es zeigt sich, dass bestehende Forschung hierzu bereits erste Ansätze bietet, die jedoch zu kurz greifen. Es bedarf weiterer empirischer und konzeptioneller Forschung, um einen theoriegeleiteten Rahmen zu schaffen, der die Komplexität der Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik erfasst.

4.1.6. References

- Aaker, D. A. (2002). *Building strong brands*. Simon & Schuster.
- Baker, B. J., Kunkel, T., Doyle, J. P., Su, Y., Bredikhina, N. & Biscaia, R. (2022). Remapping the Sport Brandscape: A Structured Review and Future Direction for Sport Brand Research. *Journal of Sport Management*, 36(3), 251–264.
- Biscaia, R., Hedlund, D. P., Dickson, G. & Naylor, M. (2018). Conceptualising and measuring fan identity using stakeholder theory. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 18(4), 459–481.
- Bodet, G. & Séguin, B. (2021). Team Sports Brand Management. In S. Walzel & V. Römisch (Hrsg.), *Managing Sports Teams: Economics, Strategy and Practice* (S. 141–159). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56495-7_8
- Bouchet, P., Hillairet, D. & Bodet, G. (2013). *Sport brands. Sports marketing series*. Routledge.
- Brodie, R. J. (2017). Commentary on “Working consumers: Co-creation of brand identity, consumer identity, and brand community identity”. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 430–431. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.07.013>
- Brodie, R. J. & Benson-Rea, M. (2016). Country of origin branding: an integrative perspective. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 25(4), 322–336.
- Brodie, R. J., Benson-Rea, M. & Medlin, C. J. (2017). Branding as a dynamic capability. *Marketing Theory*, 17(2), 183–199.
- Burmann, C., Hegner, S. & Riley, N. (2009). Towards an identity-based branding. *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), 113–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593108100065>
- Burmann, C., Riley, N.-M., Halaszovich, T. & Schade, M. (2017). The Concept of Identity-Based Brand Management. In C. Burmann, N. Riley, T. Halaszovich & M. Schade (Hrsg.), *Identity-Based Brand Management: Fundamentals—Strategy—Implementation—Controlling* (S. 17–90). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-13561-4_2
- Coleman, D., Chernatony, L. de & Christodoulides, G. (2011). B2B service brand identity: Scale development and validation. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(7), 1063–1071. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2011.09.010>
- Conejo, F. & Wooliscroft, B. (2015). Brands Defined as Semiotic Marketing Systems. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 35(3), 287–301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146714531147>
- Couvellaere, V. & Richelieu, A. (2005). Brand Strategy in Professional Sports: The Case of French Soccer Teams. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 5(1), 23–46.

- DFB - Deutscher Fußball-Bund e.V. (2023a, 8. Februar). *Fan-Illustrationen: Neu in der Marke der UEFA EURO 2024*. <https://www.dfb.de/news/detail/fan-illustrationen-neu-in-der-marke-der-uefa-euro-2024-244790/>
- DFB - Deutscher Fußball-Bund e.V. (2023b, 9. Februar). *Nachhaltigkeit: Leitbild zur UEFA EURO 2024 veröffentlicht*. <https://www.dfb.de/news/detail/nachhaltigkeit-leitbild-zur-uefa-euro-2024-veroeffentlicht-242266/>
- Emery, P. R. (2002). Bidding to host a major sports event. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 15(4), 316–335. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513550210430255>
- Evans, B. P., Starr, R. G. & Brodie, R. J. (2019). Counterfeiting: conceptual issues and implications for branding. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 28(6), 707–719. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-12-2017-1706>
- Giroux, M., Pons, F. & Maltese, L. (2017). The role of perceived brand personality in promotion effectiveness and brand equity development of professional sports teams. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 18(2), 180–195.
- Gladden, J. M. & Funk, D. C. (2001). Understanding Brand Loyalty in Professional Sport: Examining the Link Between Brand Associations and Brand Loyalty. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 3(1), 54–81.
- Gladden, J. M. & Funk, D. C. (2002). Developing an Understanding of Brand Associations in Team Sport: Empirical Evidence from Consumers of Professional Sport. *Journal of Sport Management*, 16(1), 54–81.
- Gladden, J. M., Irwin, R. L. & Sutton, W. A. (2001). Managing North American Major Professional Sport Teams in the New Millennium: A Focus on Building Brand Equity. *Journal of Sport Management*, 15(4), 297–317.
- Gladden, J. M., Milne, G. R. & Sutton, W. A. (1998). A Conceptual Framework for Assessing Brand Equity in Division I College Athletics. *Journal of Sport Management*, 12(1), 1–19.
- Griebel, L., Ströbel, T. & Woratschek, H. (2020). Integrative branding - Brand management in the light of value co-creation. *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*(22), 1–5. <https://www.sma-bayreuth.de/publishing/research-series/>
- Grohs, R., Wieser, V. E. & Pristach, M. (2020). Value cocreation at sport events. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 69–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2019.1702708>
- Haarhoff, G. & Kleyn, N. (2012). Open source brands and their online brand personality. *Journal of Brand Management*, 20(2), 104–114. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2012.43>

- Hüttermann, M., Uhrich, S. & Koenigstorfer, J. (2022). Components and Outcomes of Fan Engagement in Team Sports: The Perspective of Managers and Fans. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 7(4), 447–478.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2019.1576143>
- Iglesias, O. & Bonet, E. (2012). Persuasive brand management. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 25(2), 251–264. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09534811211213937>
- Iglesias, O., Ind, N. & Schultz, M. (2020). History matters: The role of history in corporate brand strategy. *Business Horizons*, 63(1), 51–60.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2019.09.005>
- Kahiya, E., Ashill, N. & Perkinson, O. (2023). Branding governance in international recurring sports events: the World Rugby ‘Sevens’ Series. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23(5), 1477–1499.
- Kolyperas, D., Maglaras, G. & Sparks, L. (2019). Sport fans’ roles in value co-creation. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 19(2), 201–220.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2018.1505925>
- Kunkel, T. & Biscaia, R. (2020). Sport Brands: Brand Relationships and Consumer Behavior. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 29(1), 3–17.
- Merz, M. A., He, Y. & Vargo, S. L. (2009). The evolving brand logic: a service-dominant logic perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 37(3), 328–344.
- Michel, G. (2017). From brand identity to polysemous brands: Commentary on “Performing identities: Processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction”. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 453–455.
- The Nielsen Company (Hrsg.). (2020). *Nielsen Sports 2020 Commercial Trends*.
<https://niensports.com/nielsen-sports-2020-commercial-trends/>
- Parent, M. M., Eskerud, L. & Hanstad, D. V. (2012). Brand creation in international recurring sports events. *Sport Management Review*, 15(2), 145–159.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2011.08.005>
- Parent, M. M. & Séguin, B. (2008). Toward a Model of Brand Creation for International Large-Scale Sporting Events: The Impact of Leadership, Context, and Nature of the Event. *Journal of Sport Management*, 22(5), 526–549.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.22.5.526>
- Ramaswamy, V. & Ozcan, K. (2016). Brand value co-creation in a digitalized world: An integrative framework and research implications. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 33(1), 93–106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2015.07.001>

- Sarasvuo, S., Rindell, A. & Kovalchuk, M. (2022). Toward a conceptual understanding of co-creation in branding. *Journal of Business Research*, 139, 543–563.
- Senatsverwaltung für Inneres, Digitalisierung und Sport. (2022). *DAS LEITBILD DER NACHHALTIGKEIT ZUR UEFA EURO 2024 IN BERLIN*. <https://www.berlin.de/sen/inneres/presse/weitere-informationen/euro2024-leitbild-broschure-nachhaltigkeit.pdf>
- Smith, A. C., Stavros, C. & Westberg, K. (2017). *Brand Fans*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-48854-7>
- Stach, J. (2019). Meaningful experiences: an embodied cognition perspective on brand meaning co-creation. *Journal of Brand Management*, 26(3), 317–331. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-018-0133-1>
- Ströbel, T. & Germelmann, C. C. (2020). Exploring new routes within brand research in sport management: directions and methodological approaches. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 1–9.
- Ströbel, T. & Woratschek, H. (2019). Sportmarken – Von traditionellen Ansätzen der Markenführung hin zum vernetzten Branding. In G. Nowak (Hrsg.), *Angewandte Sportökonomie des 21. Jahrhunderts: Wesentliche Aspekte des Sportmanagements aus Expertensicht* (1st ed. 2019, S. 27–50).
- Ströbel, T., Woratschek, H. & Durchholz, C. (2019). Clothes Make the Fan: The Effect of Team Merchandise Usage on Team Identification, Fan Satisfaction and Team Loyalty. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2018.1531354>
- tagesschau. (2022). *Bundesinnenministerin: Faeser kritisiert Fußball-WM in Katar*. <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/faeser-katar-wm-kritik-101.html>
- Taks, M., Seguin, B., Naraine, M. L., Thompson, A., Parent, M. M. & Hoyer, R. (2020). Brand governance practices in Canadian national sport organizations: an exploratory study. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 10–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2019.1690538> (European Sport Management Quarterly, 20(1), 10-29).
- Tierney, K. D., Karpen, I. O. & Westberg, K. (2016). Brand meaning cocreation: toward a conceptualization and research implications. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, 26(6), 911–932.

- Tjandra, N. C., Rihova, I., Snell, S., Hertog, C. S. den & Theodoraki, E. (2021). Mega-events brand meaning co-creation: the Olympic case. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 30(1), 58–73.
- UEFA. (2019a). *Gemeinsam für die Zukunft des Fussballs: UEFA Strategie 2019-24*.
- UEFA. (2019b, 15. Januar). *The role and importance of branding*. <https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/news/024d-0f8e67263a96-44340b8a02a8-1000--the-role-and-importance-of-branding/>
- UEFA. (2019c, 9. Juni). *Our mission and pillars*. <https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/football-development/innovation-hub/mission>
- UEFA. (2021a). *UEFA EURO 2024 DEUTSCHLAND: STRATEGIE FÜR EINE NACHHALTIGE VERANSTALTUNG*. UEFA. https://editorial.uefa.com/resources/027a-1643cd65ece0-3804ff6dd4ce-1000/euro_2024_strategy_de_spreads.pdf
- UEFA. (2021b). *UEFA Finanzbericht 2020/21*.
- UEFA. (2021c, 9. Februar). *Kumulierte Live-Zuschauerzahl im Rahmen der UEFA EURO 2020 beträgt 5,2 Milliarden weltweit*. <https://de.uefa.com/insideuefa/news/026d-13251e97842b-00404df0da89-1000--kumulierte-live-zuschauerzahl-im-rahmen-der-uefa-uefaeuro2020-betr/>
- UEFA. (2021d, 10. Mai). *Logo der UEFA EURO 2024 mit spektakulärer Lightshow im Olympiastadion Berlin enthüllt*. <https://de.uefa.com/euro-2024/news/026e-13685619db37-ddde20caf84c-1000--logo-der-uefa-euro-2024-mit-spektakularer-lightshow-im-olympias/>
- UEFA. (2022, 10. Oktober). *Sitzung der Steuerungsgruppe der UEFA EURO 2024*. <https://de.uefa.com/euro-2024/news/027a-164fb9cc77c0-d69e09b7a674-1000--sit-zung-der-steuerungsgruppe-der-uefa-euro-2024/>
- Vallaster, C. & von Wallpach, S. (2013). An online discursive inquiry into the social dynamics of multi-stakeholder brand meaning co-creation. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(9), 1505–1515.
- Veloutsou, C. & Guzman, F. (2017). The evolution of brand management thinking over the last 25 years as recorded in the Journal of Product and Brand Management. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 26(1), 2–12. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-01-2017-1398>
- von Wallpach, S., Hemetsberger, A. & Espersen, P. (2017). Performing identities: Processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 443–452.

- Wider, S., von Wallpach, S. & Mühlbacher, H. (2018). Brand management: Unveiling the delusion of control. *European Management Journal*, 36(3), 301–305.
- Woratschek, H., Fehrer, J. A., Brodie, R. J., Benson-Rea, M. & Medlin, C. J. (2019). Vernetztes Branding: Ein Konzept zur Markenpolitik aus der Perspektive der Service Dominant Logic. In F.-R. Esch (Hrsg.), *Handbuch Markenführung* (S. 121–139). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-13342-9_5
- Woratschek, H., Horbel, C. & Popp, B. (2014). The sport value framework – a new fundamental logic for analyses in sport management. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 14(1), 6–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2013.865776>
- Woratschek, H., Schafmeister, G. & Ellert, G. (2019). Das Wesentliche ist unsichtbar – Wert-Kokreation und Value Capture im Sportmanagement. In G. Nowak (Hrsg.), *Ange wandte Sportökonomie des 21. Jahrhunderts: Wesentliche Aspekte des Sportmanagements aus Expertensicht* (1st ed. 2019, S. 3–25).

4.2. Conscientious Sport Club Brands as Ecosystems for Sustainable Value Co-Creation: the Roles of Stakeholders (Research Article 3, Extended Abstract)

Authors Lars Brand, University of Bayreuth, Germany

 Pascal Stegmann, University of Bern

 Tim Ströbel, University of Bayreuth, Germany

Under Review in *European Sport Management Quarterly*

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 33rd *European Association for Sport Management Conference (EASM)* (Budapest, Hungary; September 2025; peer-reviewed) and was accepted for presentation at the 31st *Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand (SMAANZ) Annual Conference* (Auckland, New Zealand; December 2025; peer-reviewed).

At the time of publication of this thesis, this research article is under review in *European Sport Management Quarterly*. Thus, an extended abstract is provided, which summarises the main content of the submitted research article.

4.2.1. Introduction

Given today's complex social and environmental challenges, sport organisations are under increasing pressure to create sustainable value, which integrates economic with social and environmental value (Breitbarth et al., 2023; Köhler et al., 2019; Laukkanen & Tura, 2020). Sustainable value creation is a complex process that requires collaboration among multiple stakeholders to align their diverse interests and integrate resources effectively. It is, therefore, intricately linked with the logic of value co-creation (Brown et al., 2024; Freudenreich et al., 2020). Stakeholders assume roles in co-creating sustainable value, which structure and determine their interactions and resource integration behaviours (Akaka & Chandler, 2011; Davey & Grönroos, 2019). Despite recognising that collaboration among stakeholders could reduce resource scarcity – one of the main obstacles to sustainability in sport (e.g., Cury et al., 2023) – sport management research has largely neglected the perspective of sustainable value co-creation and has only hinted at distinct roles of stakeholders in this process rather than specifying them (Gerke et al., 2024). There is a need to explore how relationships among stakeholders contribute to sustainable value co-creation, how these relationships can be cultivated, and what roles stakeholders assume therein (Gerke et al., 2024). Therefore, this research aims to answer the subsequent research questions: (1) *How do conscientious sport club brands form ecosystems for sustainable value co-creation?* (2) *What roles do stakeholders assume in co-creating sustainable value?*

4.2.2. Theoretical Background and Conceptualisation

Sustainable value co-creation requires collaborative stakeholder relationships and sport organisations, therefore, have to foster such relationships (Freudenreich et al., 2020; Gerke et al., 2024). Brand management offers an innovative approach to this. Brands are containers of meaning, become important relationship partners for stakeholders, and serve as integrative forces that unite like-minded stakeholders with shared meanings in the pursuit of coherent goals (Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2015; Swaminathan et al., 2020). In brand management research, brands that embed morality and responsibility at the core of their brand and aim to actively contribute to positive societal and environmental change are conceptualised as *conscientious brands (CB)*. *CB* are characterised by an authentic brand purpose, which forms the rational for its existence, articulates the broader societal value the brand aims to create, and is a long-term component of brand meaning (Mirzaei et al., 2021). In accordance with the perspective described above, *CB* adopt a balanced stakeholder perspective, considering stakeholders' varying interests and engaging them in interactions to co-create sustainable value (Iglesias &

Ind, 2020; Lee et al., 2025). While sport brand management research has only begun to explore the role of sport brands in creating value for the society (Baker et al., 2022), the idea of brands as facilitators of sustainable value co-creation is consistent with the conceptualisation of sport brands as ecosystems that connect multiple stakeholders who co-create brands (Brand et al., 2024). Synthesising these ideas, we conceptualise conscientious sport club brands (*CSCB*). *CSCB* build on conscientious brand meanings that attract and connect like-minded stakeholders, facilitating collaborative relationships among them. Thus, *CSCB* form ecosystems where stakeholders integrate resources in mutual interactions to co-create both sustainable value and conscientious brand meaning.

4.2.3. Method

We draw on conceptual and empirical work to answer our research questions (Jaakkola, 2020; MacInnis, 2011). First, we synthesise the logic of sustainable value co-creation and the concept of *CB* to conceptualise *CSCB* (see above). Second, we conduct a qualitative study to both illustrate our conceptualisation of *CSCB* and to explore stakeholder roles in sustainable value co-creation. Using the German Bundesliga as research context, we identified 15 *CSCB* – i.e., clubs that implemented sustainability as core component of their brand identity. Empirical data consists of the selected clubs' most recent sustainability reports (Ø 82 pages), enriched with content from the club's websites, and semi-structured interviews (Ø 53 min) with executives from clubs (N=13) and sport marketing and sustainability agencies (N=5). Data were analysed following the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data were coded inductively and the codebook was continuously adapted in discursive processes among the research team. We then recoded all data with the final codebook and analysed every code. In addition, we developed a stakeholder – role matrix showing tendencies of which roles are assumed by which stakeholders.

4.2.4. Findings

Illustrative findings: CSCB as ecosystems of like-minded stakeholders – The findings illustrate how *CSCB* form an ecosystem of like-minded stakeholders that are connected through brand meaning and that co-create both sustainable value and conscientious brand meaning. Brands “give common meaning to [stakeholders] that live the values in collective cooperation” (*CSCB*-3), thus offering platforms for sustainable companies, initiatives, and other stakeholders to share resources and knowledge (*CSCB*-4; *CSCB*-6). Accordingly, the resources and expertise of like-minded stakeholders can be bundled and connected through *CSCB*. In particular, 14

typical stakeholder groups are identified – *CSCB* as institutions, management, employees, functional team (i.e., athletes and coaches), fans, sponsors, agencies, service providers, non-profit and public organisations, sustainability networks, academia and independent research institutions, sport associations, political stakeholders, and media. This collaborative logic and the connecting force of *CSCB* is illustrated in the following quote:

Forging the most important network in the region means: we want to learn from people, gather knowledge, exchange ideas, and be leaders. [...]. It is about working together to achieve goals. The idea is to bundle and strengthen the potential and expertise by connecting it via the [*CSCB-13*]. Especially when it comes to something as ambitious as sustainability. That is why we are always open to suitable partnerships – and actively seek them out. Whether companies, clubs or NGOs – we are happy to join forces with as many like-minded people as possible for a good cause (*CSCB-13*).

Explorative findings: Stakeholder roles in co-creating sustainable value – The findings reveal four distinct stakeholder roles in co-creating both sustainable value and conscientious brand meaning (i.e., *gardener*, *enabler*, *operator*, and *legitimiser*). These roles are specified through subordinate stakeholder roles. The *gardener* nurtures the ecosystem's vitality, fostering relationships between stakeholders and cultivating an environment for collaborative sustainability actions. It comprises two subordinate stakeholder roles. The gatekeeper role refers to involving stakeholders that align with conscientious brand meaning to create a network that supports the club's sustainability goals. Management, employees, and agencies predominantly assume this role. For instance, *CSCB* deliberately “build partnerships with regional stakeholders” (*CSCB-3*) and “sponsors that share common values” (*CSCB-14*). The networker role refers to facilitating relationships with and among stakeholders to foster the co-creation of sustainable value. Management, employees, sport associations, and sustainability networks predominantly assume this role. For instance, *CSCB-13* is a “bridge builder between partners [e.g., sponsors, non-profit organisations, educational institutions] and sustainable projects”. The *enabler* facilitates sustainable value co-creation, providing the necessary conditions, resources, and structures for stakeholders. It comprises two subordinate stakeholder roles. The driver role refers to providing the vision for sustainability efforts and pressuring other stakeholders to adopt sustainable practices. Sport associations, sponsors, fans, management, employees, and *CSCB* as institutions predominantly assume this role. For instance, fans of *CSCB-5* wanted the club “to pay more attention to sustainable aspects in the production of merchandise”. The financier role refers to enabling sustainability efforts through providing financial and in-kind resources for stakeholders. Sponsors, political stakeholders, sport associations, fans, and *CSCB* as institutions

predominantly assume this role. For instance, *CSCB-8* mandates that “partnerships are accompanied by the obligation to provide a specific amount of funding per partner, which is earmarked for [...] sustainable projects”. The *operator* executes sustainability. It comprises three subordinate stakeholder roles. The strategic sparring partner role refers to engaging in dialogue and collaboration to conceptualise sustainability strategies and measures. Management, employees, fans, sponsors, sustainability networks, and service providers predominantly assume this role. *CSCB-4*, for instance, initiated “an Ecology Advisory Board of fans, members and employees [that] supported [them] in developing [their] sustainability strategy”. The implementer role refers to executing specific sustainability measures. Employees, sponsors, non-profit and public organisations, service providers, athletes and coaches, and fans predominantly assume this role. An interviewee highlights that at their club they “have a diverse commitment to anti-discrimination, inclusion, participation, street work, violence prevention, and the LGBTLQ+ community – all these topics. This happens a lot in [their] fan scene” (*I-CE-7*). The communicator role refers to informing about sustainability measures within the sport brand ecosystem. *CSCB* as institutions, athletes and coaches, and media predominantly assume this role. For instance, athletes and coaches participate in sustainability measures to raise awareness of them, given their “extreme influence and peoples’ identification with them” (*I-CE-13*). The *legitimiser* is characterised by its expert authority, challenging and authenticating the sustainability efforts of *CSCB*. It comprises two subordinate stakeholder roles. The critical evaluator role refers to monitoring and auditing the sustainability efforts. Academia and independent research intuitions, sport associations, non-profit and public organisations, fans, management, and employees predominantly assume this role. For instance, sustainability officers and sustainability boards “track the implementation of sustainability measures” (*CSCB-12*) and “monitor progress toward sustainability targets across departments” (*CSCB-5*). The authenticator role refers to authenticating the sustainability efforts through stakeholders’ own expert authority. Academia and independent research intuitions, non-profit and public organisations, sustainability networks, and sponsors predominantly assume this role. An interview partner highlights that clubs should collaborate with partners that “already work in an extremely sustainable manner or stand for sustainability [...] because in the end, that is what is authentic” (*I-AE-2*).

4.2.5. Contributions

Theoretical contributions – This research advances sport management theory by introducing *CSCB* as an innovative, brand management-driven approach to sustainable value co-creation. It responds to recent calls for research to examine how sport brands contribute to cre-

ating sustainable value for the wider society (Baker et al., 2022), how sport organisations facilitate stakeholder relationships to co-create such value, and which specific roles stakeholders assume in this process (Gerke et al., 2024). First, this research conceptualises and empirically illustrates *CSCB*. *CSCB* are ecosystems of like-minded stakeholders connected through shared conscientious brand meanings. These brand meanings serve as reference points for stakeholders and form the basis to enter into collaborative relationships. Thus, *CSCB* facilitate relationships with and among stakeholders. Our empirical work further illustrates this conceptualisation, identifying 14 typical stakeholder groups that are connected through *CSCB* and that co-create both sustainable value and conscientious brand meaning. Second, this research enhances the understanding of sustainable value co-creation by defining four stakeholder roles (i.e., gardener, enabler, operator, and legitimiser) that reveal typical resource-integrating behaviours of stakeholders. While prior sport management research only hinted at specific stakeholder roles, this research systematizes, defines, and specifies stakeholder roles in co-creating sustainable value, clarifying which stakeholders assume which roles and how they contribute to sustainable value co-creation within *CSCB*.

Managerial contributions – This research provides implications for sport managers seeking to leverage brand management to facilitate sustainable value co-creation. It conceptualises and illustrates how brand meaning functions as the foundation for stakeholder relationships and the engagement in sustainable value co-creation. Sport managers should consider their organisation as *CSCB* – ecosystems of multiple stakeholders interconnected through shared brand meanings. In order to facilitate and strengthen stakeholder relationships, sport managers should invest in building and co-creating conscientious brand meanings. Furthermore, sport managers must recognise the active roles of stakeholders in co-creating sustainable value. As gardeners, sport managers should nurture the ecosystem, involving like-minded stakeholders and deliberately facilitating relationships that generate synergies. As enablers, they should draw on sustainability visions of stakeholders and leverage their own brand's influence to promote sustainable practices among stakeholders. Considering the cost of sustainability measures, sport managers should integrate sustainability into sponsorships, cultivate relationships with political stakeholders to secure funding, but also support other stakeholders' sustainability measures. Recognising sustainability as a collective effort, sport managers should regard other stakeholders – particularly those with expert authority – as strategic sparring partners, implementers, and communicators. Leveraging these stakeholders' resources to co-create sustainable value enhances the authenticity of the clubs' sustainability measures and conscientious brand meanings.

4.2.6. References

- Akaka, M. A., & Chandler, J. D. (2011). Roles as resources: A social roles perspective of change in value networks. *Marketing Theory*, 11(3), 243–260.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593111408172>
- Baker, B. J., Kunkel, T., Doyle, J., Su, Y., Bredikhina, N., & Biscaia, R. (2022). Remapping the Sport Brandscape: A Structured Review and Future Direction for Sport Brand Research. *Journal of Sport Management*, 36(3), 251–264.
- Brand, L., Stegmann, P., & Ströbel, T. (2024). Rethinking brand management within sport: advancing towards the integrative sport brand ecosystem (ISBE). *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 24(6), 1174–1194.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Breitbarth, T., McCullough, B. P., Collins, A., Gerke, A., & Herold, D. M. (2023). Environmental matters in sport: sustainable research in the academy. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23(1), 5–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2022.2159482>
- Brown, D. M., Apostolidis, C., Dey, B. L [Bidit Lal], Singh, P., Thrassou, A., Kretsos, L., & Babu, M. M. (2024). Sustainability starts from within: A critical analysis of internal marketing in supporting sustainable value co-creation in B2B organisations. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 117, 14–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmar-man.2023.12.006>
- Conejo, F., & Wooliscroft, B. (2015). Brands Defined as Semiotic Marketing Systems. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 35(3), 287–301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146714531147>
- Cury, R., Kennelly, M., & Howes, M. (2023). Environmental sustainability in sport: a systematic literature review. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23(1), 13–37.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2022.2126511>
- Davey, J., & Grönroos, C. (2019). Health service literacy: complementary actor roles for transformative value co-creation. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 33(6), 687–701.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-09-2018-0272>
- Freudenreich, B., Lüdeke-Freund, F., & Schaltegger, S. (2020). A Stakeholder Theory Perspective on Business Models: Value Creation for Sustainability. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 166(1), 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04112-z>

- Gerke, A., Fehrer, J., Benson-Rea, M., & McCullough, B. P. (2024). A Typology of Circular Sport Business Models: Enabling Sustainable Value Co-Creation in the Sport Industry. *Journal of Sport Management*, 38(4), 225–239. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2023-0093>
- Iglesias, O., & Ind, N. (2020). Towards a theory of conscientious corporate brand co-creation: the next key challenge in brand management. *Journal of Brand Management*, 27(6), 710–720. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-020-00205-7>
- Jaakkola, E. (2020). Designing conceptual articles: four approaches. *AMS Review*, 10(1-2), 18–26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13162-020-00161-0>
- Köhler, J., Geels, F. W., Kern, F., Markard, J., Onsongo, E., Wieczorek, A., Alkemade, F., Avelino, F., Bergek, A., Boons, F., Fünfschilling, L., Hess, D., Holtz, G., Hyysalo, S., Jenkins, K., Kivimaa, P., Martiskainen, M., McMeekin, A., Mühlemeier, M. S., . . . Wells, P. (2019). An agenda for sustainability transitions research: State of the art and future directions. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 31, 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2019.01.004>
- Laukkanen, M., & Tura, N. (2020). The potential of sharing economy business models for sustainable value creation. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 253, 120004. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.120004>
- Lee, D., Wan, C., & Leung, T. C. H. (2025). How can conscientious brands best influence consumers' sustainable behaviours? The role of sustainable brand equity in consumer responses to carbon offsetting messages. *Journal of Brand Management*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-025-00402-2>
- MacInnis, D. J. (2011). A Framework for Conceptual Contributions in Marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 75(4), 136–154. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.75.4.136>
- Mirzaei, A., Webster, C. M., & Siuki, H. (2021). Exploring brand purpose dimensions for non-profit organizations. *Journal of Brand Management*, 28(2), 186–198. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-020-00224-4>
- Swaminathan, V., Sorescu, A., Steenkamp, J.-B. E., O'Guinn, T. C. G., & Schmitt, B. (2020). Branding in a Hyperconnected World: Refocusing Theories and Rethinking Boundaries. *Journal of Marketing*, 84(2), 24–46.

4.3. ‘A Victimless Crime’? Implications of eSports Extensions of Sport Club Brands for Brand Management From a Multi-Actor-Dominant Logic (Research Article 4)

Authors Lars Brand, University of Bayreuth, Germany

Tim Ströbel, University of Bayreuth, Germany

Published in *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 2024, online first article

<https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2024.2438718>

© copyright # [2024], reprinted by permission of Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Taylor & Francis Group, <http://www.tandfonline.com>

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 19th *Sport Marketing Association Annual Conference (SMA)* (Charlotte, USA; October 2022; peer-reviewed) and the 31st *European Association for Sport Management Conference (EASM)* (Belfast, Northern Ireland; September 2023; peer-reviewed).

ABSTRACT

Adhering to the multi-actor-dominant logic of sport brands, this study examines the influence of eSports extensions on the dynamic branding processes within the ecosystems of sport club brands (*SCB*). The findings build on a qualitative multi-case study ($N = 11$ *SCB* in the German Bundesliga implementing different types of eSports extensions), using 20 semi-structured interviews and netnographic analysis of more than 70.000 social media comments. *SCB* preserve but also translate brand identity in the context of eSports. The fine line between both strategies is reflected in internal negotiation processes. eSports extensions receive little attention from extant actors. However, ‘relevant’ eSports extensions initiate discursive processes among extant and novel actors and the development of diverging brand meanings. This research contributes to literature on eSports and brand extensions by enhancing the understanding of the effects of eSports extensions on *SCB*. In addition, this study offers implications for sport managers, developing and implementing eSports extensions.

KEYWORDS: sport club brands; eSports extensions; brand management; brand co-creation; eSports

4.3.1. Introduction

eSports, the competitive gaming in professional and organized structures (Lettieri & Orsenigo, 2020; Pizzo et al., 2018), has developed from a niche subculture to a mainstream phenomenon in recent years (Butcher & Teah, 2023; Cunningham et al., 2018). Over 1.5 billion people follow eSports globally and generate revenues of just under USD 1.4 billion (Newzoo, 2022). In addition, the eSports audience is predominantly young and affluent (Butcher & Teah, 2023; Pizzo et al., 2022). Due to its vast economic potential and its attractive audience, non-endemic brands gradually begin to engage in eSports (Hüttermann et al., 2023; Rogers et al., 2020). Especially global brands, e.g. DHL, Adidas, or BMW, invest heavily into eSports sponsorships (Hüttermann et al., 2023). Another phenomenon of the ‘eSports revolution’ (Butcher & Teah, 2023) are traditional sport organizations using their established brands to engage in eSports (Lefebvre et al., 2023; Pizzo et al., 2022). Today, the majority of the most valuable SCB has eSports teams, aiming to attract the eSports audience, to strategically develop brand meaning, and move the brand beyond sport towards the broader sphere of entertainment (Lefebvre et al., 2023). Predominantly, SCB establish eSports teams in simulations of the respective sport (e.g. football SCB engage in the football simulation EA SPORTS FC) (European Club Association, 2021). However, eSports titles also comprise multi-player online battle arenas (e.g. League of Legends) or first-person shooters (e.g. Fortnite), which are, in comparison to football simulations, more popular and economically relevant (Newzoo, 2020).

The strategic decision to engage in the new category of eSports under the umbrella of the sport brand represents a brand extension (Ke & Wagner, 2022). Considering the challenge of sport brand managers of respecting brand heritage and yet orienting the brand towards the future, innovative eSports extensions have major implications for brand management. Introducing the multi-actor-dominant logic, sport brands are dynamic social processes co-created in mutual interactions among multiple actors (Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020). The integrative sport brand ecosystem specifies the processes of sport brand co-creation (Brand et al., 2024). Given that eSports encompasses an extraordinary interactive context, it is imperative to examine eSports extensions within the theoretical realm of the integrative sport brand ecosystem (Brand et al., 2024; Kunz et al., 2022).

Current research examining the impact of eSports extensions on SCB is scarce and contradictory, does not follow a dedicated branding approach, and predominantly builds on single case studies of SCB engaging in sport simulations. Accordingly, Bertschy et al. (2020, p. 63) call for research comparing branding processes ‘in a football club – football simulation game setting, to a setting of a football club extending [...] to a popular non-sport simulation

game.’ Tjønndal (2021, p. 84) further criticize the consideration of only a short period after the extension and argues for the need of ‘research designs that span over more than just the introductory season’ of an eSports extension. Building on the multi-actor-dominant logic of sport brands, we aim to understand eSports extensions of SCB from a dedicated long-term branding perspective. Thus, we posit the subsequent research question: *How do eSports extensions affect the management of SCB (i.e. building brand identity and co-creating brand meaning)?*

In contrast to existing research, we include several SCB that engage in football simulations but also other eSports titles (i.e. League of Legends) and analyze these extensions over a longer period, when long-term branding processes have developed. We carry out a qualitative multi-case study with SCB in the German Bundesliga (N = 11). In order to gain comprehensive insights into the influence of eSports extension on the brands, we first conduct semi-structured interviews (N = 20) with managers of the SCB and independent sport marketing agencies. Second, we examine branding processes and evolving brand meanings through a netnographic analysis of social media (i.e. Instagram, Reddit) and fan forums with more than 70.000 comments.

From a theoretical perspective, this research enhances the understanding of the dynamic processes within the ecosystem of a SCB and contributes to the current knowledge of innovative sport brand extensions. In addition, it offers significant implications for practitioners, currently developing and implementing eSports extensions—especially in other eSports titles than sport simulations.

4.3.2. Theoretical Background and Literature Review

4.3.2.1. Integrative Sport Brand Ecosystem

Due to the progressive commercialization and professionalization of sport organizations, the strategic management of their brands has become one of the most significant marketing tasks (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Gladden et al., 2001; Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020). Brands are considered the most valuable assets sport organizations possess (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020), enabling them to maximize existing revenue streams (Gladden et al., 1998), and develop new sources of revenue (i.e. via brand extension) (Apostolopoulou, 2002). Recently, the logic of sport brands has shifted towards the multi-actor-dominant logic, conceptualizing them as dynamic social processes acquiring meaning in continuous interactions among multiple actors within the integrative ecosystem of a sport brand (Anderski et al., 2023; Brand et al., 2024; Kahiya et al., 2023). Fans, media, sponsors, employees, and other actors integrate resources (e.g. creativity, own brand meanings) in mutual interactions on interrelated brand engagement platforms to co-create sport brands (Baker et al., 2022; Brand et al., 2024; Tjandra et al., 2021).

Therefore, brand owners cannot control brand meaning but become conductors of dynamic brand co-creation processes (Wider et al., 2018).

The integrative sport brand ecosystem specifies the processes of sport brand co-creation. It comprises two interrelated sub-processes: (1) building brand identity and (2) co-creating brand meaning. Internal actors jointly develop and communicate a unique brand identity (i.e. intended brand meaning) within the integrative sport brand ecosystem (Brodie et al., 2017). In developing brand identity, the brand conductor is no single actor, but a construct of multiple internal actors that discuss and develop brand identity on the internal brand management platform. The brand conductor is multi-layered and comprises every actor officially acting on behalf of the sport brand on the corporate level (Brand et al., 2024). Multiple actors engage in interactions on institutional and emergent brand engagement platforms to reinforce, refine, or challenge and thus co-create brand meaning (Kahiya et al., 2023; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). Despite the uncontrollability of these dynamic branding processes, the brand conductor remains a focal actor, obligated to provide institutional brand engagement platforms to facilitate brand meaning co-creation (Brand et al., 2024; Michel, 2017; Sarasvuo et al., 2022). Further, the brand conductor must constantly harmonize emerging brand meanings with the intended brand meaning (Brand et al., 2024; Brodie et al., 2017; Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016).

4.3.2.2. *Sport Brand Extensions*

Sport brand extensions comprise the use of an established brand to engage in a novel product category, thereby targeting current as well as new market segments (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Walsh & Lee, 2012). Thus, a SCB's strategic decision to use its established brand to engage in eSports constitutes a sport brand extension (i.e. extension team) (Apostolopoulou, 2002; Ke & Wagner, 2022). Sport brands pursue financial and brand-related objectives with brand extensions (Bouchet et al., 2013), as they can open up additional sources of revenue, appeal to new target groups (Apostolopoulou, 2002), offer opportunities to promote fan engagement, and strengthen their emotional bond with the team (Abosag et al., 2012; Walsh & Lee, 2012). In addition, sport brand extensions have the potential to positively influence customers' associations with the established brand and promote brand equity. However, unsuccessful sport brand extensions can also damage the established brand and create negative brand associations (Apostolopoulou, 2002).

Besides the strength of the established brand, the promotional support for the extension, and its quality and management, the fit between established brand and brand extension is identified as key success factor (Apostolopoulou, 2002; Papadimitriou et al., 2004). Fit refers to similarities between an extension and the established brand and is a multifaceted construct

(i.e. usage fit, goal fit, feature fit, and concept fit) (Butcher et al., 2019; Peng et al., 2023). Categorization theory suggests that individuals group objects into distinct mental categories, allowing them to reduce the complexity and enhance the efficiency of processing new information (Rosch & Mervis, 1975). Thus, when individuals encounter new objects they utilize similar mental categories to make summary judgments about the new object (Loken, 2006). Established brands are such mental categories and individuals access their stable category representations, utilizing preexisting beliefs and attitudes of the established brand to evaluate new (sport) brand extensions (Walsh & Williams, 2017). In particular, emphasizing and creating similarities in brand associations (i.e. concept fit) between established brand and extension positively affects the success of brand extensions (Peng et al., 2023). Thus, sport managers need to preserve the club-specific culture, heritage, and values throughout the extension (Abosag et al., 2012; Butcher et al., 2019; Chadwick & Clowes, 1998).

In addition, research on brand extensions emphasizes the role of brand identification. Fans with a high degree of identification evaluate brand extensions and their fit with the established brand more positively, and are less likely to change their attitudes towards the established brand. Conversely, fans with lower degrees of identification are more receptive to reassess individual brand meanings (Abosag et al., 2012; Shokri & Alavi, 2019; Walsh & Lee, 2012; Walsh & Ross, 2010; Walsh & Williams, 2017). However, building on social identity theory, sport brand extensions that do not reflect their unique identity, thus ‘contaminating’ and ‘intruding’ the original brand and culture, might dilute the established SCB and cause conflicts particularly with highly identified fans, defending ‘their’ brand (Abosag et al., 2012; Ke & Wagner, 2022; Winell et al., 2023; Woisetschläger et al., 2014). Respecting brand heritage and yet orienting the brand towards the future represents a major challenge for sport managers – especially within the context of innovative sport brand extensions such as eSports (Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020).

4.3.2.3. *eSports Research and its Implications for eSports Extensions of SCB*

Although early eSports research was primarily concerned with the classification of eSports in sport management (e.g. Cunningham et al., 2018; Funk et al., 2018; Hallmann & Giel, 2018), eSports is increasingly examined from a marketing perspective (e.g. Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Pizzo et al., 2018; Qian et al., 2020), and with regard to the interaction between SCB and eSports (e.g. Ke & Wagner, 2022). However, current research examining the impact of eSports extensions on the management of SCB is scarce and does not follow a dedicated branding approach. Therefore, a comprehensive perspective on eSports research has been adopted (i.e. eSports extensions of SCB, eSports sponsorship, value creation within the context

of eSports and the audience of eSports) to derive clues for the management of eSports brand extensions (i.e. building brand identity and co-creating brand meaning).

The process of *building brand identity* has been discussed contradictorily within eSports research. Particularly, research examining eSports brand extensions highlights potential cultural inconsistencies between an eSports extension and the established *SCB*, thus diluting the *SCB* (Ke & Wagner, 2022; McGehee et al., 2023). Tjønndal (2021), for instance, provides evidence of fierce resistance from existing fans to an eSports extension of a football league brand. eSports is met with skepticism, reluctance, and resistance particularly by existing fans. Accordingly, this research implies that *SCB* have to preserve and constantly reinforce their brand identity (i.e. heritage, culture, and values of the *SCB*) within the context of the eSports extension (Bertschy et al., 2020). The objective of creating similarities between the established brand and the eSports extension is consistent with traditional sport brand extension research (i.e. concept fit).

However, Lefebvre et al. (2023) demonstrate that some *SCB* deliberately aim to change and rejuvenate brand meaning, using eSports to move their brand beyond football towards the broader sphere of entertainment. eSports sponsorship research even indicates the necessity of adapting to the eSports context. Non-endemic brands must respect the specific cultural context of eSports titles (i.e. unique community with its own language, rituals, and symbols; Gray, 2018) and attempt to become an important part of the eSports community to increase their credibility and authenticity. Brands that are perceived as only wanting to exploit the eSports community are heavily criticized (Hüttermann et al., 2023; Rogers et al., 2020). These cultural differences between *SCB* and eSports might therefore lead to perceived inconsistencies within the context of eSports extensions (Ke & Wagner, 2022). Interestingly, Pizzo et al. (2022) describe how a *SCB*, extending to a non-sport eSports title, deliberately engages in brand demarcation strategies. Such strategies imply the development of a separate brand identity for the eSports extension. Through maintaining two separate brands, the *SCB* aimed to prevent the dilution and impairment of the brand and to better target eSports fans in a distinct market.

eSports research offers contradictory and irreconcilable implications for building brand identity within the context of eSports extensions of *SCB*. It remains unclear how *SCB* can preserve and reinforce the established brand identity to create concept fit, while also addressing the wider eSports community.

eSports research offers insufficient implications for *co-creating brand meaning*. In general, it emphasizes how various actors ‘co-create value in a complex array of interactions’ (McCauley et al., 2024, p. 7) within the eSports ecosystem. Interactions mainly enfold on digital

and innovative engagement platforms (e.g. forums, social media, streaming platforms), where fans, eSports athletes, content creators, or coaches, as well as journalists and commentators co-create the eSports brand (Kunz et al., 2022; McCauley et al., 2024). eSports athletes and content creators are particularly important as they are often followed to a greater extent than professional competitions and interact directly in entertaining livestreams with fans (Lefebvre et al., 2023). This is also emphasized by Wang et al. (2024), who underscore the significance of communications by other actors to influence brand associations within the context of eSports. Thus, eSports extensions of SCB cause an extension of the integrative sport brand ecosystem regarding brand engagement platforms and actors, who co-create brand meaning. However, research on eSports audiences suggests that this effect might be considered in a differentiated way, depending on the degree of the eSports extension. While sport simulations mainly reinforce connections with existing fans and actors that are already interested in the respective sport, other eSports titles attract the wider eSports community (Lefebvre et al., 2023; Lettieri and Orsenigo, 2020; McGehee et al., 2023).

Furthermore, eSports research considering the co-creation of brand meaning of a SCB is limited to a single case study in the context of a football simulation. Bertschy et al. (2020) and Mühlbacher et al. (2022) describe how various actors (i.e. extant fans, and eSports-specific fans, journalists, athletes, and managers) interact on social media to co-create brand meaning. Existing actors show little interest in the eSports extension, but eSports-specific actors co-create novel peripheral brand meanings. Although no evidence of discursive processes and conflicts is found, these are anticipated when two independent ‘*Doppelgängerbedeutungen*’ (i.e. core meanings of both domains compete and inconsistencies between established brand and eSports extension emerge) develop over time.

Although eSports extensions cause an extension of the integrative sport brand ecosystem of a SCB, it remains unclear how novel actors affect the co-creation of brand meaning. Existing knowledge is deficient as it builds on a single case study of a SCB in the context of a football simulation eSports extension. It is uncertain whether these findings transfer to other SCB and especially to SCB engaging in other gaming titles, thus attracting the wider eSports community to co-create brand meaning. Overall, current eSports research offers contradictory (i.e. building brand identity) and insufficient (i.e. co-creating brand meaning) implications for the management of eSports extensions of SCB. More research following a dedicated branding perspective is required to understand eSports extensions of SBC. Thus, we posit the subsequent research question: *How do eSports extensions affect the management of SCB (i.e. building brand identity and co-creating brand meaning)?*

4.3.3. Method

4.3.3.1. Research Design

Given the lack of research on eSports extensions of *SCB* and its contradictory implications, we adopted a qualitative and exploratory research design (Creswell, 2014). In contrast to previous research, mainly building on single cases, this research adopts the perspectives from multiple cases to yield more robust and generalizable results (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). We carry a multi-case study of *SCB* in the German Bundesliga ($N = 11$) that have extended their brand into football simulations only ($N = 7$) and in League of Legends as well ($N = 4$). The cases were selected purposefully to ensure diverse perspectives (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). At the time of data collection, the four *SCB* that extended into League of Legends are the only *SCB* within the German Bundesliga to do so. We consider all cases as brand extensions since there is a clear connection to the sport organization and the eSports teams represent a new category under the umbrella of the *SCB* (Ke & Wagner, 2022). Accordingly, the eSports commitments follow a unifying naming structure (i.e. ‘*SCB*’+ ‘eSports’ or ‘eFootball’), use the same colors, and all *SCB* have a dedicated eSports category on their website. In addition, the eSports commitments were announced via the traditional social media channels of the *SCB*, and both the traditional and the eSports channels regularly reference each other.

In order to examine the *SCB*, we apply a qualitative multi-method approach, including semi-structured interviews and netnographic analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). Implementing such a two-fold approach enables us to obtain in-depth and reliable insights into the dynamic branding processes among multiple actors in the context of an eSports extension of a *SCB* (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) (Table 1).

Table 1. Cases.

	eSports titles	Launch	Character/ Peculiarities
<i>SCB A</i>	EA SPORTS FC; League of Legends	2019	League of Legends extension (amateur level) during the Covid pandemic; was disbanded after one year.
<i>SCB B</i>	EA SPORTS FC	2018	Very traditional <i>SCB</i> .
<i>SCB C</i>	EA SPORTS FC	2019	Very traditional <i>SCB</i> , most valuable German <i>SCB</i> .
<i>SCB D</i>	EA SPORTS FC; League of Legends	2016	League of Legends extension (professional level, LEC). This spot was sold after financial difficulties of the <i>SCB</i> . Now the League of Legends team plays Prime League.
<i>SCB E</i>	EA SPORTS FC	2018	Very young and innovative <i>SCB</i> .
<i>SCB F</i>	EA SPORTS FC; League of Legends	2017	League of Legends extension (Prime League) was disbanded after first season when the team was not able to promote.
<i>SCB G</i>	EA SPORTS FC	2019	Very traditional <i>SCB</i> .
<i>SCB H</i>	EA SPORTS FC	2017	Very young and innovative <i>SCB</i> . Rebranding of the eSports extension in 2020.

SCB I	EA SPORTS FC; League of Legends	2018	League of Legends extension (Prime League) as a grassroots approach. Members can play within the structures of the SCB.
SCB J	EA SPORTS FC	2015	Very young and innovative SCB. First SCB to enter eSports.
SCB K	EA SPORTS FC	2018	Very traditional SCB. Had early sporting success in eSports.

4.3.3.2. Data Collection

First, we conducted semi-structured interviews with eSports and brand managers of SCB in the German Bundesliga ($N = 16$). In addition, we interviewed eSports executives from leading sport marketing agencies ($N = 4$) to consider independent and broad perspectives. Interviews followed an interview guide with open-ended questions. This allowed respondents to bring up additional aspects. The interview guide was developed based on the theoretical concept of the integrative sport brand ecosystem and comprised questions regarding building brand identity and co-creating brand meaning (see Appendix A). Interviews were conducted online between 2020 and 2022 and spanned an average of 68 min (minimum: 32; maximum: 98 min). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim with the permission of the respondents.

Second, within a netnographic approach, we systematically examined posts and comments of fans in relation to the eSports extension. Netnographic approaches allow to observe and examine the social activities and interactions of actors in digital contexts (Kozinets, 2015). This type of inquiry has proven its eligibility in branding research and is considered particularly appropriate in the digital context of eSports (Anderski et al., 2023; Tjønndal, 2021). Our analysis focuses on dynamic interactions among actors and investigates the semantics of emerging brand meaning. Within the netnographic analysis, we consider posts and comments on Instagram, in club-specific fan-forums, and on Reddit. Instagram was chosen due to the social media platform's significance for SCB. In order to ensure research efficiency, we collected posts and comments from the sports-related and eSports-related Instagram pages of the SCB over the period of two weeks, every two, four, and six years after the extension. Within the club-specific fan-forums we used keyword search ('eSports,' e-Sports') to identify discussions related to the eSports extension. We collected all relevant posts and comments since the start of the eSports extension to understand the reactions and interactions of fans. In addition, we systematically collected data from Reddit, which is a social media platform especially used by the eSports community (Bergstrom & Poor, 2021). We identified relevant communities (i.e. EA-SPORTSFC; official eSports dedicated community of the SCB; leagueoflegends; lolesports; and League of Memes) and searched for the SCB or the term 'eSports.' This allowed to identify discussions about the SCB since the start of the eSports extension. Overall, this approach covers

the long-term perspective of eSports extensions of SCB. All netnographic data (i.e. posts and comments on Instagram, club-specific fan forums, and comments on Reddit) were manually collected and inserted into a spreadsheet (Table 2).

Table 2. Data Sources.

Data Sources	No. of interviews	Interview length	No. of threads/ comments (Forum)	No. of threads/ comments (Reddit)	No. of comments (Instagram football/ eSport)
Sport Marketing Agency	4	Ø79 min	-	-	-
SCB A	1	82 min	6/ 142	-	2.195/ 714
SCB B	3	Ø63 min	8/ 429	-	10.172/ 1.076
SCB C	1	80 min	2/ 127	-	41.735/ 18.546
SCB D	1	74 min	303/ 11.065	135/ 6.878	18.545/ 1.081
SCB E	2	Ø85 min	1/ 18	-	860/ 795
SCB F	2	Ø52 min	2/ 306	10/ 531	3.262/ 2.466
SCB G	2	Ø67 min	2/ 98	-	9830/ 4.444
SCB H	1	57 min	5/ 111	-	6.689/ 13.250
SCB I	1	32 min	7/ 58	2/ 56	6.935/ 3.147
SCB J	1	77 min	1/ 92	-	3.181/ 275
SCB K	1	44 min	7/ 240	-	7.427/ 4.274
Overall	20	Ø68 min	344/ 12.686	147/ 7.465	

4.3.3.3. Data Analysis

Interview and netnographic data were uploaded to *MAXQDA 24*. Data analysis followed the process of qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2004). Building on our theoretical concept (i.e. integrative sport brand ecosystem), we developed a deductive codebook to analyze both interview and netnographic data. However, given the exploratory nature of our study, we coded data deductively and inductively to account for emerging themes in the data. In order to ensure the reliability of the coding process despite this inductive approach, we constantly engaged in discursive processes among the research team. These discursive processes aimed at reaching consensus of our coding and led to a continuous process of adapting the codebook (Hemmler et al., 2022). Thus, the process of qualitative content analysis included an iterative approach of going back and forth between coding and adapting the codebook. Ultimately, we recoded all data with the final codebook (see Appendix B), analyzed every code, and extracted vivid quotes to support the reporting of our results (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In addition to qualitative content analysis, we draw on text mining to explore brand meanings within the netnographic data (i.e. Instagram comments). Brand meanings are reflected in the most frequent words used within the context of specific brands in social networks (Alzate et al., 2022; Camiciottoli et al., 2014; Nogueira & Tsunoda, 2018; Saran & Shokouhyar, 2023). Word clouds represent a data visualization artefact in which the size of words contained in the data is proportional to its frequency (Nogueira & Tsunoda, 2018; Saran & Shokouhyar, 2023).

Thus, word clouds allow determining differences between brand meanings within the sports-related and eSports-related context of a *SCB*. Similarly, Bertschy et al. (2020) and Mühlbacher et al. (2022) used word clouds to examine brand meanings by football and eSports fans in the context of an eSports extension of a *SCB*. Thus, we applied *MAXQDA 24* word cloud function, which is an established tool to visualize word frequencies (Kalpokas & Radivojevic, 2022; Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019), to netnographic data to derive brand meanings within the sports-related and eSports-related context of each *SCB*. In this process, we excluded filler words and pronouns.

4.3.4. Results

The results are organized by the theoretical framework (i.e. integrative sport brand ecosystem and its underlying sub-processes). Within the context of *building brand identity*, eSports extensions lead to internal discursive processes about the development and communication of brand identity. The influence of eSports extensions on brand identity yields a continuum between the preservation and translation of brand identity in eSports. Within the context of *co-creating brand meaning*, eSports extensions prompt discursive processes among extant fans and within the eSports community, which predominantly reinforce brand meaning rather than changing it. We report our results in accordance with the two sub-processes of the integrative sport brand ecosystem. Comprehensive evidence for all cases is provided in Appendix C.

4.3.4.1. Building Brand Identity

4.3.4.1.1. Preserving Brand Identity

Among all cases, the significance of preserving the established brand identity is highlighted. eSports extensions need to be ‘narrated from the core of the brand’ (G-I-2). For this reason, the *SCB* are predominantly involved in football simulations. Football is ‘in their DNA’ (G-I-1) and eSports extensions are therefore considered as compatible fit with the established brand identity. For instance, an interview partner explains: ‘We have the claim “Football is everything” [...] and this includes virtual football’ (J-I-1). In contrast, other eSports titles are considered incompatible. For instance, an interview partner explains that ‘we will never [...] launch a League of Legends or Counter-Strike team because at some point we will not be able to narrate that [...] from the core of the brand’ (G-I-2). However, while all *SCB* exclude first-person shooter eSports titles because they fear too much alienation, they evaluate eSports extensions in multi-player online battle arenas inconsistently. Thus, some *SCB* engage in League of Legends, while preserving their established brand identities. An interview partner states that they use ‘the same brand identity in football and in League of Legends to reflect the values [of

the *SCB*]’ (D-I-1) and another interview partner highlights that ‘they try to implement the [*SCB*’s] values’ (F-I-2) also in League of Legends.

SCB deliberately align the positioning of the eSports extension with brand identity and implement the extension as authentically as possible in line with this identity—independent from the extent of the eSports extension. The endeavor of preserving brand identity is reflected in the statement of an interview partner, who outlines that ‘brand identity is always above the ambition to do eSports’ (SMA-2). Thus, eSports extensions are intended to contribute to the established brand identity of *SCB*. However, they offer innovative means to convey the brand and its values to a new target group. An interview partner explains that the eSports extension enables the *SCB* ‘to represent and uphold [its] values in the novel context of eSports’ (A-I-1). For instance, *SCB* underscore their heritage (e.g. through regional grassroots approaches) or other significant brand values (e.g. diversity) with their eSports extensions:

Diversity is very important to us. What is different in eSports from football? [...] Everyone has the chance to take part in eSports. It does not matter whether you are a man, a woman, or maybe even in a wheelchair. (B-I-1)

4.3.4.1.2. *Translating Brand Identity*

Although preserving brand identity is important, interview partners highlight that *SCB* cannot transfer their brand identity one-to-one to the eSports extensions. Rather, they need to translate it to the eSports community. An interview partner explains that ‘you have to understand eSports [...] as its own big cosmos with its own community and its own addressing’ and that ‘if you equate the communication with traditional football, you will not pick up the eSports community’ (SMA-3). While the adaption of brand identity is significant within the context of all eSports extensions, eSports extensions beyond football simulations require greater adjustments. An interview partner explains this phenomenon: ‘the further you get away from [football simulations], the more you have to change and translate things to be credible’ (SMA-1). However, translating brand identity is always implemented within the parameters of the overarching core of the brand: ‘Of course, you try to embrace the overarching values of [*SCB*], but you also draw your own curtain over it’ (F-I-2).

When it comes to the brand core and the brand values, the biggest guardrails of a brand, I hold on to this brand. However, when it really comes to the individual attribution of characteristics, in a smaller form, in small corners and edges, you can definitely make adjustments. However, I do not change the core of the brand through eSports – no. (B-I-2)

Translating brand identity comprises the adjustment of brand communication channels. *SCB* develop eSports-dedicated channels on digital platforms relevant within the eSports community (i.e. Instagram, Twitter, and Twitch). An interview partner highlights the importance of developing new channels: ‘if you want to interact or communicate with [the eSports community], you have to be [...] present where they are’ (K-I-1). *SCB* also adjust the tonality of brand identity to make the brand more accessible to the eSports community. They adjust ‘the look and feel, templates, graphics and design [on social media] to appeal to the new target group’ (B-I-3). For instance, an interview partner states that the ‘eSports blue is a little more neon blue’ (F-I-1) compared to the traditional brand. In addition, communication is bolder and more self-deprecating within the context of eSports: ‘[in eSports] we can speak a different language that we cannot and do not want to use in normal football’ (H-I-1). *SCB* communicate through memes, engage in trash talk, and communicate on an equal level with the community: ‘[in eSports] it is a different language and [brand identity] must be served culturally different’ (A-I-1).

eSports is more experimental [...]. You can do more things with a wink that might not be possible on the normal channels [...]. eSports is younger and more dynamic and experimental [...]. The language is also different. [...]. On the eSports channels, there is a different addressing and a different exchange. (E-I-1)

SCB communicate more interactive and entertaining content related to casual gaming. In particular, eSports athletes and content creators provide gaming advices via interactive livestreams or participate in challenges, thus interacting directly and ‘very extensively’ (G-I-1) with the eSports community, becoming important ‘brand ambassadors’ (J-I-1) for the *SCB*. Beside these interactive content formats, *SCB* communicate content about the eSports title itself and report information about the eSports athletes as well as professional competitions. In addition, *SCB* use the established infrastructure (i.e. stadium, training facilities) to engage with the eSports community. For instance, gaming zones and eSports tournaments or eSports camps for children are implemented on the club facilities.

We had the eSports Community Cup last year. All of our partners organized online qualifiers and then we held an offline final in the stadium at the end of the year [...]. Especially at these offline events, there is a completely different exchange, a completely different encounter. (B-I-2)

4.3.4.1.3. *Discursive Processes to Building Brand Identity*

There is a constant tension between preserving and translating brand identity, which becomes evident in mutual internal interactions. One interview partner describes this tension as

‘a fine line between being close to the eSports community and including things from the SCB and the entire brand strategy’ (SMA-3). This fine line becomes evident in discursive processes during the development and the implementation of the eSports extension. In developing the eSports extensions, interview partners report internal discussions with various departments and the management board to assess advantages, disadvantages, and risks and whether an eSports extension should be undertaken. Especially, internal discussions revolved around ‘which eSports extension would suit our brand [and] all the values that our brand stands for’ (K-I-1). In some cases, however, the decision-making processes also involved external actors such as fans, sponsors and sport marketing agencies. For instance, an interview partner reports how a sponsor created pressure to get involved in eSports: ‘It was a lot of pressure from the outside that we got involved in eSports’ (A-I-1). Over the course of implementing the eSports extensions, perspectives on the SCB and the eSports extensions are continuously negotiated in mutual internal interactions. While eSports-specific employees want to create a ‘completely new brand world for the eSports and gaming sector’ (H-I-1), employees from other departments perceive themselves as guardians of the brand, monitoring the compliance with the guidelines of the SCB. If the ‘fan no longer recognizes his club, this might cause conflicts’ (C-I-1). In one case (F), ‘communication was no longer focused on the core brand. [...] It was almost exclusively social media. A separate brand world was created that ran parallel to the main brand’ (SMA-3), leading to criticism from extant fans. This tension is reflected in the following statement:

There are efforts from the eSports department to separate from the established brand identity and to do something new that fits the young target group. From a brand perspective, we counteract this. [...]. We are a bit afraid that eSports will move away, do its own thing and convey messages that we would not communicate via the main channel. There are concerns that people no longer understand what [the SCB] stands for in the traditional sense. (B-I-2)

In addition, eSports-specific employees engage in boundary-spanning interactions with sponsors, sport marketing agencies, other eSports teams, and experts ‘from lifestyle, from fashion, from the music industry, the designer industry, who always give their input’ (B-I-3) helping to understand the *Zeitgeist* and implementing the eSports extension. Especially non-endemic sponsors integrate innovative ideas to implement the eSports extension.

We have weekly coordination meetings with our sponsors where we go through the contractual services to see what is coming up in the next few weeks and what we can activate together. Of course, we get creative together, it is not something we dictate on our own, but something we work out together. (B-I-2)

4.3.4.2. *Co-Creating Brand Meaning*

4.3.4.2.1. *Reinforcing and Changing Brand Meaning*

Among all cases, actors co-create brand meanings in the context of the eSports extensions that are mainly similar to those of the established SCB. Existing brand meanings are reinforced rather than changed by eSports. For instance, an interview partner highlights that ‘eSports further reinforced the brand attribute “innovative,” but has not caused a brand revolution’ (E-I-1). In addition, an interview partner (C-I-1) explains that eSports is ‘not ascribing a new or different facet to the brand’ and that he is ‘not aware of brand meanings that are completely new.’ Rather, brand meaning is ‘confirming and in harmony with each other’ (C-I-1) and interview partners could not ‘perceive a major adjustment of brand meaning through eSports’ (J-I-1). This is further reflected through the analysis of key words appearing across all analyzed platforms. The evolving word clouds reveal that brand meaning within the context of the eSports extension is very much in tune with the established brand meaning. Actors, in particular extant fans and few novel fans, rather reinforce than change the established brand meaning within the eSports extensions. Yet it is notable that fans tend to use eSports-specific expressions (e.g. edits, fifatrading, or tots) and focus on eSports-specific athletes and content creators.

However, in case *D*, we find evidence of novel brand meanings, emerging within the context of the eSports extension. An interview partner even talks about the development of a ‘parallel brand’ (I-5) with completely new brand meanings. The brand meanings ‘NullFear’ and ‘miracle’ emerged. ‘NullFear’ arose from nomenclatural misunderstandings when translating the entire SCB brand name into English and was later adopted from the brand conductor in building brand identity. Therefore, the community, together with the brand conductor, co-created this brand meaning, which is used by them on social media and in forums.

Whether these were adjustments, such as [...] the community simply being allowed to do things, hashtags being born such as ‘Null Fear,’ so ‘no fear.’ These are all things that were born with the community. I think we have infused the brand with things that have less to do with football, but have appealed to a huge target group (D-I-1).

‘Miracle’ was co-created by the eSports community. Although most fans associate it with positive memories, it also underscores the brand meaning of being the ‘winner of hearts’ (D-Reddit). Similar, a fan describes *D* as ‘the little brother who does nothing at all and fails miserably at every turn but somehow manages to mess up the standing for your more popular and competent brothers’ (D-Reddit). An extant fan is disillusioned that being a ‘semi-hilarious loser has virtually become [*D*’s] identity’ (D-Forum) and criticizes that the brand conductor even reinforces these meanings in brand communication. However, although these novel brand

meanings emerge, there are only limited discursive processes with extant fans and an interview partner explains that these processes are ‘not yet as drastic, because there are not quite as many fans on the League of Legends side as there are now in football’ (SMA-2). However, at some point, when the eSports extension is growing, conflicts are forecasted.

4.3.4.2.2. *Discursive Processes Among Extant Fans*

In general, extant fans are largely indifferent to the eSports extension. It runs parallel to traditional sport and attracts little attention from the majority of fans. Accordingly, interview partners call the eSports extension ‘a victimless crime, which is not necessarily noticed by the traditional fans’ (SMA-1). Similar, another interview partner explains that ‘there has been a complete absence of a fundamental, substantial, long-term and really relevant headwind. [...]. On the contrary, [fans] have assessed eSports [...] neutrally. The negative ones were always very low’ (C-I-1). In all cases, however, few extant fans discuss the eSports extensions and especially their launches in forums and on Instagram. In accordance with the interviews, only few ‘preservationist-fans’ (C-I-1) criticize the decision to engage in eSports. They portray eSports as a ‘non-sport’ played by ‘random nerds’ (B-Forum), call it a ‘trend’ (A-Forum), ‘crap’ (K-Instagram) or ‘joke’ (F-Instagram), and ‘cannot see the intersections’ (D-Forum) with the SCB. These fans express a feeling of disconnection with their SCB. For instance, a fan comments: ‘This is no longer my [SCB]!’ (A-Forum). However, most do not vigorously oppose the eSports extension. Although they cannot understand the decision, they show little resistance: ‘I am too old and not gaming-savvy enough for this stuff. Have fun gaming, but this is absolutely "not my cup of tea"' (E-Forum). Beside few critical fans, most extant fans react positively to the eSports extension. In particular, they acknowledge the potential of eSports. They perceive it as an opportunity to reach a new, young, and international target group, to develop an innovative brand image, and become attractive for sponsors.

[eSports] is a huge advertising campaign that will make our brand known in places where people have never heard of us before. We are tapping into new target groups who may turn out to be buyers of our merchandising articles, but who may also become fans of ours. (B-Forum)

Interestingly, many extant fans even criticize eSports extensions that only comprise football simulations, underscoring the greater potential of other eSports titles. For instance a user comments on Instagram: ‘I would also like to see an eSports commitment beside FIFA. [SCB] is more than just football, so why stick to just one game? E.g. a LoL, Overwatch or CSGo team’ (K-Instagram). However, not all fans agree with this demand. Such discursive processes occur among all cases:

Fan A: It is understandable for a football club to play FIFA when you are already getting into the game. However, I hope that if [SCB] wants to take this more seriously in the future, a League of Legends team will be set up. [...]. I think that would be exciting for the younger target group.

Fan B: I think these League of Legends games have no place in a football club. [...] Football is football, FIFA is still football, but if there is a [SCB] League of Legends team soon, that has nothing to do with sport for me. (G-Forum)

However, the interview partners highlight that some extant fans form an eSports-specific community, ‘detached from the traditional sport’ (I-10), which interacts extensively with the eSports extension. For instance, a fan comments: ‘In the last few years, I follow the eSports team almost more than “our team” in football’ (D-Forum). The development of such eSports-specific fan bases especially occurs within the context of League of Legends eSports extensions, but also football simulation extensions attract primarily young extant fans, interacting extensively with the eSports extension on Instagram. In forums, extant fans mainly post important news, results, and highlights from the eSports team, triggering a few discussions. For instance, fans celebrated the championship of the eSports team or the win over a great rival in traditional sport. In Forum A, a fan replied to another posting ‘Derby winner!’ by ‘You have to swipe the “Rauten” wherever you meet them. Very nice: -D.’ However, in only two cases (*D* and *F*) constant discussions within the community become evident. In particular, fans discuss the eSports roster and the matches of the eSports team.

4.3.4.2.3. Discursive Processes in the eSports Community

eSports extensions in football simulations do not lead to discursive processes in the eSports community. Solely the launch of the first eSports extension of a German SCB in 2015 (i.e. SCB J) was noted and the eSports community was enthusiastic for SCB to gradually extend into eSports. They expressed their hope that SCB will get involved in other eSports titles as well, thus further legitimizing eSports. However, since most SCB limited themselves on football simulations, the eSports community lost its interest in such eSports extensions and criticized the efforts of the SCB. For instance, a user comments on Reddit: ‘Many Football teams coming into eSports seem to treat it like an unwanted child that is kind of there but they do not have a real plan of what they want to do’ (F-Reddit). Thus, all other football simulation extensions were not even noted by the eSports community on Reddit.

eSports extensions in League of Legends lead to more attention from the eSports community. However, the eSports extension of case A was not noted, and the extensions of cases *F* and *I* have only initiated a few discussions. All three eSports extensions comprised League of

Legends teams in the German Prime League. In case *I*, sympathizers with the established brand commented the launch, using codes from traditional sport. For instance, a user refers to traditional fan chants of the SCB: ‘Black and white like snow... we win the DFB Cup and become prime league champions, champions!.’ In case *F*, discussions revolve around the playoff matches against a popular German team and the dissolution of the League of Legends team after losing them. Reactions are mainly maliciously and underscore that the brand had not succeeded in integrating into the eSports community. One user highlights that he/she ‘does not think [*F*] had a lot of fans in League of Legends.’ Another user explains this assessment through the overarching approach of the SCB: ‘I guess that is what happens if you just dip into a market having no actual idea or strategies of how to get into that market.’ Another user summarizes the dissolution: ‘That is the most [*F*] thing to do. Burn Money, achieve nothing, leave.’ Among these three cases, interview partners confirm our assessment from the netnographic analysis. They concede that mainly extant fans are attracted: ‘most of the [eSports] fans are also [SCB] fans’ (F-I-2). Although ‘already having a large fan scene in eSports’ (F-I-1) and having ‘built up a fan base over the last two years’ (I-I-1), these fans predominantly comprise extant fans.

In case *D*, however, significant discursive processes within the eSports community become evident. It is highlighted, that *D* was able to become an authentic part of the community. For instance, a user records: ‘I am really amazed at how good [*D*] fits into the eSports world although initially I thought it is a pretty wild move to make.’ In particular, the eSports community acknowledged *D*’s efforts to adapt to the eSports community: ‘I really love [*D*]; [...] their Instagram page is wild’ (D-Reddit).

The eSports target group realized that they [*D*] are really getting into it. It is not a tippy-toe solution, they just jump straight in, buy a place in the LEC and take the whole thing pretty seriously and are really committed to it. If you do it right [...] you can achieve a completely different impact on the target group. (SMA-2)

This resulted in the development of novel fans from the wider eSports community, who were not interested in *D* before. For instance, a fan reacted on Instagram to the sale of the LEC slot: ‘Not a fan of the football club, but I will miss your League team.’ Therefore, discursive processes emerge within the eSports community. Especially at the start of the extension, the community demanded *D* to embrace its heritage also in eSports. Interestingly, they are happy that *D* preserved the established logo, demanded that they wear the football kit also in eSports, and express their hope that die-hard fans develop an interest in eSports and support the team in eSports competitions.

Finally, discursive processes revolved around the sale of the LEC spot after *D* got in financial difficulties due to bad results of the football division. While most are sad and comment that they will miss the team, some express their anger towards the established brand: ‘It is a shame that a successful division of the brand had to go because they are trash in another area’ (D-Instagram). Interestingly, although *D* continued their League of Legends team in the German Prime League, fans were not sure if they still followed the team. For instance, a fan comments: ‘I don’t know how to feel about this, after supporting the team for many years now I have to find a new team.’ This is underscored when looking at the emergence of discursive processes. These have considerably diminished in the eSports community after the sale. Interestingly, extant fans still engage extensively with the eSports extension and engage in discursive processes in Forums.

4.3.5. Discussion and Contributions

This multi-case study reveals the dynamic branding processes within the context of eSports extensions. Generally, eSports extensions are ‘a victimless crime’ (SMA-1), unless SCB do not engage in ‘relevant’ eSports extensions (i.e. permanent, authentic, and competitively relevant) like *D*. Extensions in football simulations mainly offer opportunities to engage extant fans, reinforce established brand meanings, and therefore do not result in conflicts about brand meaning. eSports extensions in other eSports titles, if ‘relevant,’ attract extant as well as novel fans and therefore have the potential to change brand meaning and provoke conflicts. This offers several theoretical and managerial implications.

4.3.5.1. Theoretical Contributions

Overall, this study contributes to existing sport branding research by enhancing the understanding of the integrative sport brand ecosystem (Brand et al., 2024). In general, eSports extensions expand the macrolevel structure of the ecosystem of SCB. eSports-specific employees, sponsors, sport marketing agencies, eSports athletes and content creators, and fans become part of the ecosystem and engage on novel eSports-specific institutional (i.e. official Instagram channel) and emergent (i.e. Reddit) brand engagement platforms to co-create the SCB. However, the actor group fan requires a differentiated consideration. While eSports extensions predominantly attract extant fans, only ‘relevant’ (permanent, authentic, and competitive) extensions in League of Legends lead to significantly more novel fans (i.e. case *D*). Thus, in accordance with Lefebvre et al. (2023), this study underscores that sport simulations mainly reinforce connections with extant fans that are already interested in the respective sport, while other ‘relevant’ eSports extensions attract the wider eSports community. Nevertheless, the introduction

of eSports facilitates the development of an eSports-specific community within the ecosystem of a *SCB*. Furthermore, the discursive processes of brand co-creation contribute to the understanding of how actors interact on brand engagement platforms to co-create and negotiate brand meaning.

Thus, this study reveals how brand conductors build brand identity within the context of the eSports extension. Consistent with sport brand extension research, *SCB* deliberately preserve their core values, heritage, and culture to create consistency between the established brand and the eSports extension (i.e. concept fit) (Abosag et al., 2012; Apostolopoulou, 2002; Bertschy et al., 2020). In contrast to Pizzo et al. (2022) (i.e. brand demarcation strategy), *SCB* preserve their brand identity also within the context of eSports extensions in other gaming titles without a natural fit (i.e. League of Legends). However, deviating from extant sport brand extension research, *SCB* also adapt brand identity to become a credible member of the eSports community and attract the new target group. This corresponds with eSports sponsorship research (Hüttermann et al., 2023) and the findings from Pizzo et al. (2022), emphasizing the significance of communicating differently in this context in order to be evaluated authentically and positively by the eSports community. Therefore, the translation of brand identity becomes even more important in eSports extensions beyond football simulations. This antithesis of preserving while translating brand identity underscores the dynamic character of sport brands (da Silveira et al., 2013). We differentiate between core elements and peripheral elements of brand identity. Core elements of brand identity comprise the purpose and key values of a brand. They are constitutive elements of the brand identity that are stable in terms of time and theme and form the basis for all of the brand's activities. Peripheral elements of brand identity, on the other hand, include physical identity elements and the communication strategy. They require a basic alignment along the core elements, but can vary in terms of time, theme, and context. This contributes to sport brand extension research, underscoring that especially core elements of brand identity have to be preserved to create consistency (i.e. concept fit) while peripheral elements can be adjusted throughout brand extensions to attract new target groups.

Due to the fine line between preserving and translating brand identity within the context of eSports extensions, comprehensive negotiation processes on the internal brand management platform become particularly evident. While eSports-specific employees aim to adapt brand identity significantly, employees from other departments slow down these efforts. Furthermore, even sport marketing agencies as well as sponsors often participate in these dynamic processes and become situational members of the brand conductor collective (Brand et al.,

2024). These internal processes of brand co-creation have been neglected in previous research on eSports extensions (Bertschy et al., 2020; Tjønndal, 2021).

In addition, this study reveals the discursive processes among fans to co-create brand meaning within the context of the eSports extension. In particular, the results from both interviews and netnographic analysis (see *Discursive processes among extant fans*) provide no evidence of fierce resistance against the eSports extension by extant fans. Rather, most extant fans are indifferent, do not even notice the eSports extension, or highlight its potentials for the SCB. Extant fans do not feel disturbed by the brand development efforts of the brand conductor. While contradicting the findings from Tjønndal (2021), this study underscores the findings from Bertschy et al. (2020) and Mühlbacher et al. (2022). In conjunction with our discussion above, SCB must hardly face sustained and fierce resistance from extant fans when preserving their brand identity within the context of eSports extensions and facilitating consistency between both worlds. This not only refers to football simulation extensions, but also other eSports titles. These findings highlight that SCB are indeed able to create concept fit through preserving core elements of brand identity within the context of eSports extensions. In addition, as particularly highly identified fans engage on social media (Hüttermann et al., 2022; Yoshida et al., 2024), the findings indicate a positive effect of fan identification on the evaluation of brand extensions. Highly identified fans accept the visible manifestation of innovative branding activities (i.e. eSports extension) as beneficial for both themselves and the SCB (Abosag et al., 2012).

However, some extant fans are attracted by the eSports extension and form eSports-specific communities within the ecosystem of the SCB. This small number of extant fans participates in the conversations on eSports accounts, rarely engages in discursive processes, and does not change core brand meanings. They rather reinforce established brand meanings. Complying with categorization theory, extant actors engaging on social media utilize preexisting brand meanings to evaluate the eSports extension. Yet, complementing the findings of Bertschy et al. (2020), peripheral brand meanings emerge, as fans mainly focus on eSports-specific athletes and content creators, who become particularly significant brand ambassadors (Lefebvre et al., 2023). In addition, fans use eSports-specific expressions. These peripheral brand meanings do not harm the core of brand meaning.

However, in ‘relevant’ eSports extensions (i.e. *D*), we find evidence of novel fans engaging in dynamic brand co-creation processes. Novel fans cannot utilize preexisting brand meanings, thus inducing novel core brand meanings. There are signs of the development of a ‘*Doppelgängerbedeutung*’ (Bertschy et al., 2020), deviating from the established brand meaning. Thus, ‘relevant’ eSports extensions have the potential to prompt conflicts about brand

meaning. These findings underscore the dynamic nature of sport brands, which cannot be controlled by the brand conductor, but are social processes co-created among multiple actors. This contributes to sport brand extension research, which has to consider the expansion of the ecosystem of a sport brand through eSports extensions.

4.3.5.2. *Managerial Contributions*

This study offers two key implications for sport management practice. First, sport managers must respect the core elements of brand identity within the context of the eSports extension to ensure consistency between established brand and eSports extension. This prevents sustained and fierce resistance from extant fans. In addition, the distinction between core and peripheral elements of brand identity allows sport managers to adjust the latter. This allows engaging more authentically with the eSports community and attracting the wider eSports community. Especially sport managers developing and implementing an eSports extension beyond football simulations should take advantage of this implication as other eSports titles than sport simulations require stronger adaptations. Therefore, sport managers have to engage in conversational processes with various internal and external actors within the sport brand ecosystem to develop an understanding of the core elements of brand identity. This will facilitate the brand-related implementation of the eSports extension. In addition, sport managers have to negotiate the adaption of brand identity with relevant actors and constantly assess if external actors perceive that the eSports extension disperses too much from the established brand.

Second, sport managers must be clear about their objectives. Football simulation extensions predominantly attract extant fans and offer an additional opportunity to foster fan engagement. However, such an eSports extension hardly addresses a new target group and subsequently has little effects on the meaning of the SCB. ‘Relevant’ eSports extensions have the potential to address a new target group and innovate brand meaning. However, to achieve these objectives, it is key that SCB authentically become part of the eSports community and commit to eSports in the long term. If this succeeds, sport managers need to be aware that two separate brand communities might emerge with two separate ‘*Doppelgängerbedeutungen*.’ Therefore, sport managers must constantly reinforce the core elements of brand identity within the context of the eSports extension and develop institutional brand engagement platforms connecting both worlds.

4.3.5.3. *Limitations and Further Research*

As with any empirical research, this study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, due to research efficiency, we focused on Instagram, fan forums, and Reddit for

our netnographic analysis. Therefore, discursive processes and brand meanings emerging on other digital (e.g. Twitch, Discord) and physical (i.e. eSports tournament) brand engagement platforms were neglected. We encourage researchers to examine additional brand engagement platforms in the future to enhance the findings of this study. In particular, the streaming platform Twitch is widely used within the eSports community and provides detailed insights into the interactions among various actors. Second, while considering the perspectives of different actors, we recognize the perspective of fans only through a netnographic analysis. Further research should conduct interviews with extant fans as well as eSports-specific fans to better understand their interactions and brand meanings. Similar, it might be useful to carry out a quantitative study with fans to enhance our qualitative findings. This could be especially important since eSports fans are not yet organized, thus netnographic analyses might neglect some developments.

4.3.6. Appendix

Appendix A: Interview guide

eSports extension of the SCB

- How did the SCB get involved in eSports?
- Why has there been no/an eSports involvement outside of sport simulations?

Building brand identity

- What does the SCB stand for?
- To what extent does the eSports extension fit with the identity of the SCB?
- How does the SCB communicate within the eSports extension?

Co-creating brand meaning

- Which actors influence the meaning of the SCB through eSports?
- How do other actors (existing fans / eSports community) perceive the SCB?
- Are there different perspectives and are they discussed?
- How are interactions between actors promoted?
- To what extent are guidelines set for the co-creation of brand meaning?
- To what extent is brand meaning of actors integrated into brand identity?

Appendix B: Codebook

Main categories	Sub-categories
Organizational context of eS-ports extension	Development of eSports extension Goals of eSports extension Organization of eSports within the SCB Degree of eSports extension
Building brand identity	Internal discussions about brand identity (In-)compatibility of brand identity and eSports Reinforcement of brand identity through eSports Adaption of brand identity in eSports
Co-creating brand meaning	Reactions of fans to the eSports extension Reactions of the eSports community to the eSports extension Negotiation of brand meaning among actors Reinforcement of brand meaning Novel brand meaning through eSports Novel actors through eSports extension Novel brand engagement platforms through eSports extension
Interrelationship between building brand identity and co-creating brand meaning	

Appendix C: Tables

Table C1. Quotes from each case (1/3).

		SCB A	SCB B	SCB C
Building Brand Identity	Preserving Brand Identity	<i>Many things we have undertaken are very close to our normal strategy, to our normal identity and to what we are as a brand.</i>	<i>When it comes to the brand core and the brand values, i.e. what are the biggest guardrails of a brand, we stick to this brand.</i>	<i>I would say then as now, we try to implement eSports in the best possible way for the brand.</i>
	Adapting Brand Identity	<i>It is of course a different kind of communication in the social channels, that doesn't work on the normal channels.</i>	<i>The way of communication is different and the brand is presented differently: younger, more dynamically.</i>	<i>We definitely have eSports-specific channels [...]. eSports channels [...] are much more interactive.</i>
	Discursive Processes	<i>From the perspective of the [sponsor] and from the perspective of the brand, it was like: 'Yes, that would be good.' [...] Then a group comes together [...] and it was a joint decision to do [eSports].</i>	<i>From the eSports department, there are efforts to break away a little from the existing brand, to do something new that suits the young target group. From a brand perspective, we then counteract this.</i>	<i>We have always had regular discussions internally, including with the Management Board. Very, very high on our agenda. And we always weighed up the advantages, disadvantages and risks.</i>
Co-creating Brand Meaning	Brand Meaning	<i>Has eSports made a huge difference to our external perception that we are an innovative brand? Probably rather less.</i>	<i>It has a positive effect on innovation, but unfortunately it is not yet widely recognized because it is perhaps not yet so big.</i>	<i>There's no new or different facet to the brand [...]. I'm not aware of anything that's completely new [...]. It is rather confirming.</i>
	Discursive Processes Extant Fans	<i>[eSports] is just people who "play" on a PC or console. But if you're already "involved" as an SCB, I think it's good that you think carefully about HOW you do it and WHERE you set different signs and priorities than "everyone else".</i>	<i>I hope it's profitable otherwise it's pretty uninteresting garbage. I couldn't care less which nerd is the best at game xy and I think most SCB fans do too.</i>	<i>In my opinion, there is virtually nothing to be said against a FIFA team. After all, it's about football, which is the core of our club. I'm skeptical about other eSports. An SCB Counterstrike team? I wouldn't like that ...</i>
	Discursive Processes eSports Community	<i>Identification comes from players, creators, influencers and so on. You have to involve them at an early stage in order to tell a project in the spirit of the community.</i>	<i>Through eSports, we have gained new fans, new sponsors, but also new media or channels through which we stream, and of course employees.</i>	<i>The eSports athletes are brand ambassadors for us, in a very sensitive, large target group.</i>

Table C2. Quotes from each case (2/3).

		SCB D	SCB E	SCB F	SCB G
Building Brand Identity	Preserving Brand Identity	<i>The core brand is the same, we're the Malocher club, both in football and in eSports, we try to reflect these values.</i>	<i>These attributes of innovation and gaming are an integral part of our brand essence.</i>	<i>All that is being done in terms of branding is SCB's history of bringing the grass roots approach to eSports.</i>	<i>eSports is anchored at the core of the brand.</i>
	Adapting Brand Identity	<i>There are many advantages in eSports, where we have the opportunity to make things look different.</i>	<i>There is a separate CI for eSports. That's also deliberate, it should be clear that this is about eSports.</i>	<i>What can you do in eSports that you can't do in professional football? You can be brave, you can be a bit freaky.</i>	<i>We need these new channels to ultimately appeal to the young target group.</i>
	Discursive Processes	<i>We also consult different departments, whether it's merchandise, whether it's strategic marketing, so we are happy to be helped.</i>	<i>Ideas are worked out and modified in discussions with the sponsors.</i>	<i>There were discussions about adapting the logo. Personally, I still think that the SCB logo suits it best.</i>	<i>We work very closely with the corporate communications and marketing departments. It's certainly not a silo here, it really goes hand in hand.</i>
Co-creating Brand Meaning	Brand Meaning	<i>Are you the little brother who does nothing at all and fails miserably at every turn but somehow manages to f*ck up the standing for your more popular and competent brothers? Congrats, you're a SCB fan.</i>	<i>eSports further reinforced the brand attribute "innovative", but has not caused a brand revolution.</i>	<i>Chaos Club.</i>	<i>-</i>
	Discursive Processes Extant Fans	<i>It's kind of weird, but if it helps us get to know each other better in Asia, that's good.</i>	<i>I think it's a shame that SCB, which actually describes itself as an innovative club, is still on the track that killer games are not possible and doesn't fit in with its "innovation leadership".</i>	<i>Football and League are different worlds, most die-hard fans probably don't even know we have a league team and even less care.</i>	<i>I don't think the topic is controversial. eSports are popular in the area of football simulation. SCB as a club famous for football is not fishing in any foreign pools, but remains true to its roots.</i>
	Discursive Processes eSports Community	<i>We have a Discord server that is used by our managers, there is a very large fan base.</i>	<i>eSports promotes fan culture and exchange between fans through activities such as tournaments and social channels. We have developed a solid community.</i>	<i>We have job advertisements for a project manager and also look for graphic designers just for eSports. We want to set up our own department.</i>	<i>There are these people who interact very strongly with our content on the various platforms.</i>

Table C3. Quotes from each case (3/3).

		SCB H	SCB I	SCB J	SCB K
Building Brand Identity	Preserving Brand Identity	<i>Of course, we want to convey our brand values through eSports</i>	<i>a conscious decision was made in 2019 to enter eSports with a mass sports approach that is very regional in nature</i>	<i>We see ourselves as a very young, modern club that is also trying to enter new fields, such as eSports, and ascribes this value of innovation to itself</i>	<i>We don't want to break with our values in eSports, but we want a commitment that even contributes positively to the overall picture at SCB</i>
	Adapting Brand Identity	<i>The language on the channels. We can work with memes on them, communicate a bit more cheekily than on the club's main channels.</i>	-	<i>We have taken the step of using channels such as Instagram or Twitch to better reach this target group.</i>	<i>If you want to interact or communicate with [the eSports community], you have to speak their language and be present where they are.</i>
	Discursive Processes	<i>What is sometimes an issue for us [is] the language, et cetera, what can be published on the channels?</i>	-	<i>We worked with agencies [from the beginning], and since the beginning of the year with an eSports communications agency.</i>	<i>At the time, we discussed which eSports commitment would suit our brand.</i>
Co-creating Brand Meaning	Brand Meaning	-	-	<i>eSports fans see us more in the same way that we see ourselves. They also think that we are a modern, innovative brand acting as a pioneer and being future-oriented.</i>	<i>SCB, for example, is FC Bayern Munich in eSports.</i>
	Discursive Processes Extant Fans	<i>Cool advertising for SCB. Great thing - this will especially please the young SCB fans.</i>	<i>Kinda sad they have to buy their way to the top, I wanted the to succeed in play and promote because they are good enough not because they have the money to buy a spot... Still Nur die SGE</i>	<i>I am curious to see whether SCB will invest in "real" eSports in the next few years (i.e. LoL, Dota, SC2 etc.). [...] A team would be a cheap and effective advertising measure for a young target group.</i>	<i>I think it's great that SCB is now also interested in eSports. It's an EXTREMELY fast-growing market with an incredible amount of opportunities. It's nice that they're staying true to themselves and support FIFA (football) for the time being.</i>
	Discursive Processes eSports Community	<i>What we had already done more often was arena gaming or, last year during the corona period, the online cups.</i>	<i>We aim to bring new fans into the entire ecosystem of the club.</i>	<i>Over the years, the eSports athletes have really become brand ambassadors [...] for the brand.</i>	<i>There are a few eSports fanatics, who really follow everything we do.</i>

4.3.7. References

- Aaker, D. A., & Keller, K. L. (1990). Consumer evaluations of brand extensions. *Journal of Marketing*, 54(1), 27–41.
- Abosag, I., Roper, S., & Hind, D. (2012). Examining the relationship between brand emotion and brand extension among supporters of professional football clubs. *European Journal of Marketing*, 46(9), 1233–1251.
- Alzate, M., Arce-Urriza, M., & Cebollada, J. (2022). Mining the text of online consumer reviews to analyze brand image and brand positioning. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 67, 102989.
- Anderski, M., Griebel, L., Stegmann, P., & Ströbel, T. (2023). Empowerment of human brands: Brand meaning co-creation on digital engagement platforms. *Journal of Business Research*, 166, 113905.
- Apostolopoulou, A. (2002). Brand extensions by U.S. professional sport teams: Motivations and keys to success. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 11(4), 205–214.
- Baker, B. J., Kunkel, T., Doyle, J. P., Su, Y., Bredikhina, N., & Biscaia, R. (2022). Re-mapping the sport brandscape: A structured review and future direction for sport brand research. *Journal of Sport Management*, 36(3), 251–264.
- Bergstrom, K., & Poor, N. (2021). Reddit gaming communities during times of transition. *Social Media + Society*, 7(2), 205630512110101.
- Bertschy, M., Mühlbacher, H., & Desbordes, M. (2020). Esports extension of a football brand: Stakeholder co-creation in action? *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 47–68.
- Bouchet, P., Hillairet, D., & Bodet, G. (2013). *Sport brands. Sports marketing series*. Routledge.
- Brand, L., Stegmann, P., & Ströbel, T. (2024). Rethinking brand management within sport: Advancing towards the integrative sport brand ecosystem (ISBE). *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 24(6), 1174–1194.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Brodie, R. J., & Benson-Rea, M. (2016). Country of origin branding: An integrative perspective. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 25(4), 322–336.
- Brodie, R. J., Benson-Rea, M., & Medlin, C. J. (2017). Branding as a dynamic capability. *Marketing Theory*, 17(2), 183–199.

- Butcher, L., Sung, B., & Raynes-Goldie, K. (2019). Gotta catch 'em all: Invigorating Pokémon through an innovative brand extension. *Journal of Brand Management*, 26(3), 227–239.
- Butcher, L., & Teah, K. (2023). Setting the research agenda of the eSports revolution. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 8(2), 455–459.
- Camiciottoli, B., Ranfagni, S., & Guercini, S. (2014). Exploring brand associations: An innovative methodological approach. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(5/6), 1092–1112.
- Chadwick, S., & Clowes, J. (1998). The use of extension strategies by clubs in the English Football Premier League. *Managing Leisure*, 3(4), 194–203.
- Couvelaere, V., & Richelieu, A. (2005). Brand strategy in professional sports: The case of French Soccer Teams. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 5(1), 23–46.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Cunningham, G. B., Fairley, S., Ferkins, L., Kerwin, S., Lock, D., Shaw, S., & Wicker, P. (2018). eSport: Construct specifications and implications for sport management. *Sport Management Review*, 21(1), 1–6.
- da Silveira, C., Lages, C., & Simões, C. (2013). Reconceptualizing brand identity in a dynamic environment. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 28–36.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *The Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532–550.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 25–32.
- European Club Association. (2021). *Esports – Curse or Blessing for Football Clubs?* https://www.ecaeurope.com/media/4883/eca_esports-curse-or-blessing-for-football-clubs.pdf
- Funk, D. C., Pizzo, A., & Baker, B. J. (2018). eSport management: Embracing eSport education and research opportunities. *Sport Management Review*, 21(1), 7–13.
- Gladden, J. M., Irwin, R. L., & Sutton, W. A. (2001). Managing North American Major professional sport teams in the new millennium: A focus on building brand equity. *Journal of Sport Management*, 15(4), 297–317.
- Gladden, J. M., Milne, G. R., & Sutton, W. A. (1998). A conceptual framework for assessing brand equity in division i college athletics. *Journal of Sport Management*, 12(1), 1–19.
- Gray, V. (2018, June 8). *A breakdown of esports fan bases & communities*. Pulsar. <https://www.pulsarplatform.com/blog/2018/a-breakdown-of-esports-fan-communities/>

- Hallmann, K., & Giel, T. (2018). eSports – Competitive sports or recreational activity? *Sport Management Review*, 21(1), 14–20.
- Hamari, J., & Sjöblom, M. (2017). What is eSports and why do people watch it? *Internet Research*, 27(2), 211–232.
- Hemmler, V. L., Kenney, A. W., Langley, S. D., Callahan, C. M., Gubbins, E. J., & Holder, S. (2022). Beyond a coefficient: An interactive process for achieving inter-rater consistency in qualitative coding. *Qualitative Research*, 22(2), 194–219.
- Hüttermann, M., Trail, G. T., Pizzo, A. D., & Stallone, V. (2023). Esports sponsorship: An empirical examination of esports consumers' perceptions of non-endemic sponsors. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 8(2), 524–549.
- Hüttermann, M., Uhrich, S., & Koenigstorfer, J. (2022). Components and outcomes of fan engagement in team sports: The perspective of managers and fans. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 7(4), 447–478.
- Kahiya, E., Ashill, N., & Perkinson, O. (2023). Branding governance in international recurring sports events: The World Rugby 'Sevens' Series. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23(5), 1477–1499.
- Kalpokas, N., & Radivojevic, I. (2022). Bridging the gap between methodology and qualitative data analysis software: A practical guide for educators and qualitative researchers. *Sociological Research Online*, 27(2), 313–341.
- Kuckartz, U., & Rädiker, S. (2019). Exploring the data. In U. Kuckartz & S. Rädiker (Eds.), *Analyzing qualitative data with MAXQDA* (pp. 51–64). Springer International Publishing.
- Ke, X., & Wagner, C. (2022). Global pandemic compels sport to move to eSports: Understanding from brand extension perspective. *Managing Sport and Leisure*, 27(1-2), 152–157.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined*. SAGE.
- Kunkel, T., & Biscaia, R. (2020). Sport brands: Brand relationships and consumer behavior. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 29(1), 3–17.
- Kunz, R. E., Roth, A., & Santomier, J. P. (2022). A perspective on value co-creation processes in eSports service ecosystems. *Sport, Business and Management*, 12(1), 29–53.
- Lefebvre, F., Djaballah, M., & Chanavat, N. (2023). The deployment of professional football clubs' eSports strategies: A dynamic capabilities approach. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23(2), 315–333.

- Lettieri, E., & Orsenigo, C. (2020). Predicting soccer consumption: Do eSports matter? Empirical insights from a machine learning approach. *Sport, Business and Management*, 10(5), 523–544.
- Loken, B. (2006). Consumer psychology: Categorization, inferences, affect, and persuasion. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 57(1), 453–485.
- Mayring, P. (2004). Qualitative content analysis. *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, 1(2), 159–176.
- McCauley, B., Berndt, A., Helmefalk, M., & Hedlund, D. (2024). Innovation in the esports servicescape: A media business research agenda. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 2024, 1–31.
- McGehee, G. M., Cianfrone, B. A., & Sears, J. (2023). Brand extension evaluation in eSports: A case study of the NBA and NBA2K League. *Journal of Applied Sport Management*, 15(2), 84.
- Michel, G. (2017). From brand identity to polysemous brands: Commentary on “Performing identities: Processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction”. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 453–455.
- Mühlbacher, H., Bertschy, M., & Desbordes, M. (2022). Brand identity dynamics – Reinforcement or destabilisation of a sport brand identity through the introduction of esports? *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 30(4), 421–442.
- Newzoo. (2020). *Global Esports Market Report 2020*. <https://newzoo.com/insights/trend-reports/newzoo-global-esports-market-report-2020-light-version/>
- Newzoo. (2022). *Global Esports & Live Streaming Market Report*. Newzoo. <https://newzoo.com/insights/trend-reports/newzoo-global-esports-market-report-2020-light-version/>
- Nogueira, E., & Tsunoda, D. F. (2018). A proposed model for consumer-based brand equity analysis on social media using data mining and social network analysis. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 17(2), 95–117.
- Papadimitriou, D., Apostolopoulou, A., & Loukas, I. (2004). The role of perceived fit in fans’ evaluation of sports brand extensions. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 6(1), 27–44.
- Peng, C., Bijmolt, T. H., Völckner, F., & Zhao, H. (2023). A meta-analysis of brand extension success: The effects of parent brand equity and extension fit. *Journal of Marketing*, 87(6), 906–927.

- Pizzo, A., Baker, B., Na, S., Lee, M. A., Kim, D., & Funk, D. (2018). eSport vs Sport: A comparison of spectator motives. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 27(2), 108–123.
- Pizzo, A., Jones, G. J., Baker, B. J., Funk, D. C., & Kunkel, T. (2022). Sensemaking of novelty: The dynamic nature of integrating esports within a traditional sport organization. *Sport Management Review*, 25(3), 383–405.
- Qian, T. Y., Wang, J. J., Zhang, J. J., & Lu, L. Z. (2020). It is in the game: Dimensions of esports online spectator motivation and development of a scale. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(4), 458–479.
- Rogers, R., Farquhar, L., & Mummert, J. (2020). Audience response to endemic and non-endemic sponsors of esports events. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 21(3), 561–576.
- Rosch, E., & Mervis, C. B. (1975). Family resemblances: Studies in the internal structure of categories. *Cognitive Psychology*, 7(4), 573–605.
- Saran, S. M., & Shokouhyar, S. (2023). Crossing the chasm between green corporate image and green corporate identity: A text mining, social media-based case study on automakers. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 31(1), 116–139.
- Sarasvuo, S., Rindell, A., & Kovalchuk, M. (2022). Toward a conceptual understanding of co-creation in branding. *Journal of Business Research*, 139, 543–563.
- Shokri, M., & Alavi, A. (2019). The relationship between consumer-brand identification and brand extension. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 18(2), 124–145.
- Ströbel, T., & Germelmann, C. C. (2020). Exploring new routes within brand research in sport management: Directions and methodological approaches. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 1–9.
- Tjandra, N. C., Rihova, I., Snell, S., Hertog, C. S., den., & Theodoraki, E. (2021). Mega-events brand meaning co-creation: The Olympic case. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 30(1), 58–73.
- Tjønndal, A. (2021). “What’s next? Calling beer-drinking a sport?!”: Virtual resistance to considering eSport as sport. *Sport, Business and Management*, 11(1), 72–88.
- Vallaster, C., & von Wallpach, S. (2013). An online discursive inquiry into the social dynamics of multi-stakeholder brand meaning co-creation. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(9), 1505–1515.
- Walsh, P., & Lee, S. (2012). Development of a brand extension decision-making model for professional sport teams. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 21(4), 232–242.

- Walsh, P., & Ross, S. D. (2010). Examining brand extensions and their potential to dilute team brand associations. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 19(4), 196–206.
- Walsh, P., & Williams, A. (2017). To extend or not extend a human brand: An analysis of perceived fit and attitudes toward athlete brand extensions. *Journal of Sport Management*, 31(1), 44–60.
- Wang, X., You, X., Xu, Y., & Zheng, J. (2024). Online posting intention: Do the social communication and brand equity of esports matter? *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 25(1), 161–187.
- Wider, S., von Wallpach, S., & Mühlbacher, H. (2018). Brand management: Unveiling the delusion of control. *European Management Journal*, 36(3), 301–305.
- Winell, E., Armbrecht, J., Lundberg, E., & Nilsson, J. (2023). How are fans affected by the commercialization of elite sports? A review of the literature and a research agenda. *Sport, Business and Management*, 13(1), 118–137.
- Woisetschläger, D., Haselhoff, V., & Backhaus, C. (2014). Fans' resistance to naming right sponsorships. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(7/8), 1487–1510.
- Yoshida, M., Biscaia, R., Uhrich, S., Gordon, B. S., Hüttermann, M., & Nakazawa, M. (2024). Fan engagement behavior: Validation of a theory-based scale. *Journal of Sport Management*, 38(2), 133–150.

4.4. Empowerment of human brands: Brand meaning co-creation on digital engagement platforms (Research Article 5)

Authors Matthias Anderski, University of Bayreuth, Germany; La Trobe University Melbourne, Australia
Lars Brand (né Griebel), University of Bayreuth, Germany
Pascal Stegmann, University of Bern
Tim Ströbel, University of Bayreuth, Germany

Published in *Journal of Business Research*, 2024, 166, 113905
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113905>

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 29th *European Association for Sport Management Conference (EASM)* (virtual conference; September 2021; peer-reviewed) and the *FISU World Conference, 30th Winter Universiade Lucerne 2021* (Lucerne, Switzerland; December 2021; peer-reviewed).

ABSTRACT

Digital engagement platforms empower human brands by enabling them to directly interact with various actors. Human brands, especially athlete brands, are about to outperform traditional brands on digital platforms. Drawing on literature from human branding, integrative branding, and performativity theory, this study identifies actors and analyzes their performances based on a case study of a professional athlete brand. We apply a multi-method approach using netnography and interviews to gain a deeper understanding of brand meaning co-creation. We contribute to existing literature by introducing the concept of integrative branding to the management of human brands. Additionally, we reveal three novel performance categories for the co-creation of human brands on digital engagement platforms. Our findings extend the literature by delivering in-depth insights into the brand meaning co-creation of athlete brands as a specific type of human brands. This study marks a starting point for further research on human brands.

KEYWORDS: human brand; athlete brand; brand meaning co-creation; performativity theory; performances; brand management

4.4.1. Introduction

Within the last few years, professional athletes have set new benchmarks in terms of brand marketing. Cristiano Ronaldo, a professional football player and one of the most popular human brands worldwide, reached more followers on Instagram in 2021 than all Premier League clubs combined and became the first human brand to amass over 500 million followers across all his social media profiles (ESPN, 2021; Marland, 2021). Although human brands have emerged as a relevant topic in brand management (Levesque & Pons, 2020), research in this area is still in its nascent stage. While the branding literature has addressed brand building and brand management of celebrities (Centeno & Wang, 2016; Johns & English, 2016; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016; Moulard et al., 2015), our study focuses on athletes as a specific type of human brands (Osorio et al., 2020). We chose this research context deliberately because by now athlete brands have outperformed traditional brands on digital platforms with regard to followership. Moreover, human brands are backed by a real person, which distinguishes the research subject of this study from traditional corporate brands in terms of branding dynamics and co-creation of brand meaning on multiple levels.

The development of digital engagement platforms (e.g., social media) empowers athletes by enabling them to interact directly with various actors, such as fans, sponsors, media, and clubs. With the advent of social media, athletes have begun to build, develop, maintain, and expand their brands (Appel et al., 2020; Liu & Suh, 2017). Athletes use their social media profiles, especially on Instagram and Facebook, to communicate publicly and freely accessible as well as to interact directly with their followers on a global basis (Casalo et al., 2020; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Hudders et al., 2021). The top 10 players in FIFA World Cup 2022 accumulate more than 1.3 billion followers with an average follower growth rate of 32.4 % from August 2021 until July 2022 (Nielsen, 2022).

However, according to recent literature on the co-creation of brand meaning, athletes cannot autonomously build and control their brand. Rather, brands are conceptualized as dynamic social processes. Building on the concept of integrative branding, brand owners need to leverage dynamic branding capabilities to develop and communicate their personal brand identity as part of the first sub-process (building brand identity). Within the second sub-process (co-creating brand meaning) brand owners need to provide platforms and orchestrate the co-creation of brand meaning by other actors' performances (Brodie et al., 2017; Merz et al., 2009; Strobel & Germelmann, 2020). Therefore, this study is the first to apply the concept of integrative branding to human brands and identify performances for the brand meaning co-creation on different social media platforms. This background leads to the following research questions: 1.

Which actors co-create the brand meaning of human brands on digital engagement platforms?

2. Which performances are initiated to co-create the brand meaning?

This study is based on a single case study analysis by applying a multi-method approach (Venkatesh et al., 2013). We followed the research proposal of Centeno and Wang (2016) as well as Hasaan et al. (2020) and examined the brand meaning co-creation of a professional female athlete from Germany, who is active in the seasonal niche sport of biathlon. We applied a netnographic approach by observing (Kozinets, 2019) and examining the performances of multiple actors on the athlete's digital engagement platforms within the world cup season 2020/2021. Furthermore, 25 semi-structured interviews with various actors related to the human brand were conducted to obtain a deeper understanding. Through the combination of these two methodological approaches, this study provides in-depth insights into the brand meaning co-creation of athlete brands as specific types of human brands.

Our study provides three main contributions to the field of brand management: (1) we apply the concept of integrative branding for the first time in the specific context of human brands by identifying actors and performances for the co-creation of a human brand's meaning; (2) we contribute to performativity theory by analyzing and comparing the examined performances related to human brands with the current research in brand management (Essamri et al., 2019; Iglesias et al., 2020; von Wallpach et al., 2017); and (3) we mark a starting point for a more comprehensive understanding of human brands and further research by introducing the novel concept of integrative human branding. Moreover, the study enhances brand managers' knowledge of the dynamics of human branding, especially by using three different performance categories to build and maintain a unique and network-orientated human brand. The results can be applied to other human brand types, such as celebrities, entertainers, or influencers.

4.4.2. Theoretical background

4.4.2.1. Personal and human brands

Osorio et al. (2020) provide a systematic conceptualization of personal and human brands within their framework. Using the branding continuum, the authors describe the transformational process from personal brands to human brands. From this perspective, each person engages in individual self-branding activities daily and represents their own personal brand (Moulard et al., 2015; Shepherd, 2005). The objective is to coach or manage oneself, for example, for job interviews or projects, where personal branding can be useful to present unique individual attributes and to convey a specific message or storyline (Lair et al., 2005; Parmentier et al., 2013). Moreover, personal brands act autonomously and without the influence of other

actors, allowing the individual to maintain complete control over all branding decisions (Gorbatov et al., 2018).

Human brands are associated with traditional marketing and brand attributes. They do not evolve naturally; rather, they are the result of a strategic process of building, developing, and nurturing the brand over time (Osorio et al., 2020; Thomson, 2006). Due to increasing selfmarketing and significantly raised attention, individual personas are transformed into commercialized brands (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2019; Osorio et al., 2020). Human brands not only accomplish many of the functions, associations, and characteristics of traditional brands, they also provide enhanced opportunities for identification and emotional engagement (Arai et al., 2014; Thomson, 2006). Regarding source credibility and self-promotion, current research identified trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness as relevant factors for building a distinctive human brand and engaging with various actors (Na et al., 2020; Ohanian, 1990). Therefore, human brands are often referred to as commercialized brands such as entertainers, musicians, or influencers on digital platforms, which pursue the overarching goal of managing a brand that is a real person and strategically enhancing their brand equity (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2019; Lee & Eastin, 2020; Thomson, 2006). Contrary to personal brands, human brands do not have complete control over branding decisions as they are co-created by multiple actors in a dynamic branding process (Centeno & Wang, 2016; Preece & Kerrigan, 2015).

4.4.2.2. *Athlete brands as particular types of human brands*

Recent publications in brand management literature indicate increased significance as well as changing perceptions of athletes (Arai et al., 2014; Doyle et al., 2020; Hasaan et al., 2020; Hasaan et al., 2021; Kunkel et al., 2020; Su, Baker, Doyle, & Kunkel, 2020). However, the co-creation of an athletes' brand meaning remains unclear to this point. In general, athlete brands represent a specific type of human brands with unique personalities and characteristics in the field of sports (Carlson & Donovan, 2013). Nevertheless, athlete brands are not restricted to this specific segment; they have achieved recognition far beyond the boundaries of sport (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012). Many athletes have recognized the relevance of branding and have actively begun developing their individual brands (Ratten, 2015), establishing their own symbolic meanings and values by using various unique elements, such as icons or acronyms (Arai et al., 2013). Consequently, professional athletes are currently the most successful human brands in terms of followers on social media. Manchester United superstar Cristiano Ronaldo became the world's first person to reach the milestone of 400 million followers on Instagram. Only one account counts more followers, which is that of Instagram itself. During the last six

months alone, Cristiano Ronaldo increased the number of followers on his social media profile by more than 163 million, doubling it in the last two years (Garcia, 2022).

Current research on athlete brand building can be summarized according to Arai et al.'s (2013) Model of Athlete Brand Image. Based on Keller (1993), the authors considered athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle to be the three main dimensions of building an athlete's brand. The model does not consider co-creation of brand meaning in a dynamic branding process. An athlete's brand is autonomously developed and controlled by the athlete (Arai et al., 2013; Keller, 1993).

Due to the digital transformation, the media presence, communication, and engagement of actors in digital ecosystems are changing (Morgan-Thomas et al., 2020; Stegmann et al., 2021). Building on current research findings in the area of athlete branding, social media has become the most important and powerful branding platform (Doyle et al., 2020; Na et al., 2020). Nowadays, athletes use their own social media profiles to interact unfiltered and directly with fans, sponsors, media, or even other athletes (Hofmann et al., 2021; Su, Baker, Doyle, & Yan, 2020). Social media is not only used for communication with various actors but has also emerged as a strategic marketing tool (Green, 2016; Hodge & Walker, 2015). Recent publications have discussed the creation of athletes' brand identity and the development of a unique and distinctive brand image (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2012; Geurin, 2017; Hasaan et al., 2018; Hasaan et al., 2020). However, the role of digital engagement platforms for brand building and a consideration of brand meaning co-creation as dynamic and social process by relevant actors have not been examined. Table 1 provides an overview of human branding literature and its contribution to the concept of integrative branding.

Table 1. Literature review on human brands and its contribution to co-creation of brand meaning.

Author and year	Methodology	Purpose	Findings and main contributions to existing literature
Arai et al., 2013	Quantitative	Testing the conceptual model of athlete brand image (MABI)	Scale development and test of the introduced model of athlete brand image (MABI)
Arai et al., 2014	Conceptual	Developing a conceptual model of athlete brand image (MABI)	Providing the first comprehensive conceptual framework of athlete brand image
Carlson & Donavan, 2013	Quantitative	Testing how human brands affect consumer's identification	Athletes as unique personalities; effect of athlete prestige and distinctiveness on identification affecting consumer behavior.
Centeno & Wang, 2017	Qualitative; Conceptual	Examining co-creation of human brands in a stakeholder-actor approach	Stakeholder-actors' participation in the co-creation process of celebrity's human brand identity
J. P. Doyle et al., 2020	Mixed Methods	Examining consumer engagement with athlete brands on social media	Development and testing of the Model of Athlete Branding via Social Media
Fournier & Eckhardt, 2019	Conceptual	Understanding and managing brands that are also persons	Conceptualization of person-brands; highlighting the interdependent relationship between the person and the brand
Hodge & Walker, 2015	Qualitative	Investigating the branding of professional athletes	Identification of branding challenges faced by professional athletes as well as marketing strategies
Kunkel et al., 2020	Quantitative	Examining athletes promoting philanthropic efforts on social media	Positive effect of athlete's promotion of philanthropic activities on brand image, strengthening the connection between athlete and followers
Osorio et al., 2020	Literature review, Conceptual	Conceptualization and distinction of human and personal brands	Summary of literature on human brands and development of a branding-by-individual continuum
Parmentier & Fischer, 2012	Qualitative	Examining the dynamic processes of personal branding	Conceptualization of professional image and mainstream media persona as two core elements of athlete brands
Preece & Kerrigan, 2015	Qualitative	Analyzing the brands of professional artists	Co-creation of human brands (artistic brands) based on a multi-stakeholder approach
<i>Our study</i>	<i>Qualitative, Conceptual</i>	<i>Identifying actors and their performances on digital engagement platforms</i>	<i>Revealing three novel performance categories for the co-creation of human brands from a multi-actor perspective on different digital engagement platforms</i>

4.4.2.3. *Towards brand meaning co-creation of human brands*

Conventional brand approaches build on a management-oriented perspective and perceive brands as static results of strategic management actions. Brand owners autonomously develop and communicate a clear and stable brand identity to create brand meaning (Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 2008; Michel, 2017). Thus, consumers and other external actors are conceptualized as passive receivers of the brand identity conveyed through the brand owner's marketing initiatives. Brand meaning evolves through management-driven processes (Burmam et al., 2009; Keller, 2003). This management-oriented perspective is predominantly adopted in current research on human brands (Arai et al., 2014; Johns & English, 2016). For instance, Kristiansen and Williams (2015, p. 371) detail how athletes endeavor to 'build and manage [their] personal brand equity through organization produced and controlled brand communication'.

The perception on brand development and brand management has evolved from such a management-oriented perspective towards a multi-actor perspective (Merz et al., 2009; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Veloutsou & Guzman, 2017), which emphasizes the active participation of multiple actors in brand meaning co-creation (Iglesias et al., 2020; Ind, 2014; Sarasvuo et al., 2022; Tierney et al., 2016). Brand meaning co-creation 'refers to a process of intentional interaction between or among two or more [actors] that influences a brand' (Sarasvuo et al., 2022, p. 557). Drawing on performativity theory, multiple actors continuously perform brand meaning and thus constitute and co-create the social reality and meaning of a brand within these interactions (von Wallpach et al., 2017). Thus, the brand owner cannot autonomously build and control the brand. Rather, brands are perceived as dynamic and social processes that develop meaning in interactions of multiple actors (Merz et al., 2009; Woratschek et al., 2014). Accordingly, brand meaning cannot be determined by brand management alone but is always co-created by various actors that engage in collaborative brand co-creation performances (Brodie et al., 2017; Loureiro et al., 2020). The role of brand owners shifts from that of a "brand guardian" to that of a "conductor", who supports co-creative processes between multiple actors (Michel, 2017).

The concept of *integrative branding* offers an overarching framework to better capture and structure the dynamics of brands (Brodie et al., 2017; Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016). It conceptualizes brands as dynamic social processes among multiple actors that build on brand identity (Brodie et al., 2017; Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2015; Iglesias & Bonet, 2012). The concept consists of two interrelated processes: (1) building brand identity and (2) co-creating brand meaning (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017; Brodie et al., 2017; Brodie, 2017; Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016; Evans et al., 2019). Building brand identity refers to management-oriented approaches to

develop and communicate brand identity, which ensures brand awareness and builds the foundation for brand meaning co-creation processes. Brand meaning not only results from the brand owner's branding activities, as argued in current literature on human brands; rather, brand meaning is always co-created in interactions among multiple actors. Brand owners need to provide platforms to enable, facilitate, and orchestrate interactive brand meaning co-creation processes between multiple actors as well as to achieve brand engagement and brand equity (Pereira et al., 2022). However, co-creating brand meaning also occurs in contexts that are not controlled by brand management (Brodie et al., 2017; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016; Wider et al., 2018). Both sub-processes of integrative branding are interrelated. Although brand identity is typically controlled by the brand owner, based on the brand meanings emerging in interactions it must be constantly evaluated, adjusted, and then reinforced in brand communication. Thus, brand management adheres to an iterative process between building and adapting brand identity as well as co-creating brand meaning (Brodie et al., 2017).

Predominant research on human brands relates only to the first process of integrative branding. There is a lack of research that systematically maps relevant actors and, more importantly, *how* they co-create brand meaning of human brands. As indicated above, brand management literature increasingly builds on the sociological concept of performativity to better understand and explain how multiple actors co-create brand meaning (Da Silveira et al., 2013; von Wallpach et al., 2017). *Performativity theory* is concerned with performative constitutions of reality and argues that social objects are constituted by a set of performances (Austin, 1975; Butler, 1990). The fundamental premise for branding is that brand meaning is continuously co-created through the performances of multiple actors (von Wallpach et al., 2017). Brand meaning is – in line with the concept of integrative branding – not developed autonomously by brand management, but evolves through dynamic co-creation performances of multiple actors (Iglesias et al., 2020). So far, only three empirical studies identify specific performances of actors to co-create brand meaning and none of the existing research is carried out in the context of human brands. Initially, von Wallpach et al. (2017) identify seven performances through which the meaning of the brand identities of different actors are co-created. However, the performances identified are unique to the single case investigated. Similar applies to the work of Essamri et al. (2019), which focuses mainly on brand meaning co-creation performances initiated by the brand management. The authors identify three superordinate performances of the brand owner within a single case study in the context of a brand community. They neglect the relevance of other actors highly affecting and co-creating brand meaning by integrating their resources. Lastly, Iglesias et al. (2020) identify four performances of multiple actors to co-

create brand meaning in a B2B context. Since Iglesias et al. (2020) identified – in contrast to the work of von Wallpach et al. (2017) and Essamri et al. (2019) – brand meaning co-creation performances across multiple cases and by considering multiple actors, we draw on their work. They consider *communicating* as conveying brand identity within the network of actors. This performance is mainly performed by the brand owner and involves the traditional management-driven approaches. However, also other (external) actors may perform communicating. *Internalizing* is about bringing the brand identity to life by translating it into concrete brand behaviors. Management and employees need to be selected and trained according to the brand identity to ensure a consistent brand behavior. *Contesting* occurs when internal and external actors compare brand identity with their perceptions of the brand. They either reaffirm or challenge it with their own brand meanings. *Elucidating* refers to a conversational process where brand management, together with multiple actors, discusses and reconciles the diverse brand meanings to create a common understanding of the brand.

The development of digital engagement platforms not only empowers human brands to build their brands through management-driven processes but also entails direct interactions between multiple actors. We therefore emphasize the importance of a performative multi-actor perspective. The concept of integrative branding guides our study as an overarching framework. We thus introduce the notion of *integrative human branding* (cf. Fig. 1), which encompasses management-oriented approaches to build brand identity as well as multi-actor approaches to co-create brand meaning. However, integrative human branding remains inaccurate to explain how multiple actors co-create brand meaning. We thus integrate performativity theory to our conceptualization of integrative human branding. Since brand co-creation performances are yet solely studied in the context of corporate brands, the questions arise whether the performances can be applied to human brands and whether additional performances are relevant to better understand the brand meaning co-creation of human brands. The framework of integrative human branding – as a combination of the three theoretical concepts *integrative branding*, *performativity theory*, and *human branding* – consequently serves as the theoretical background of our study.

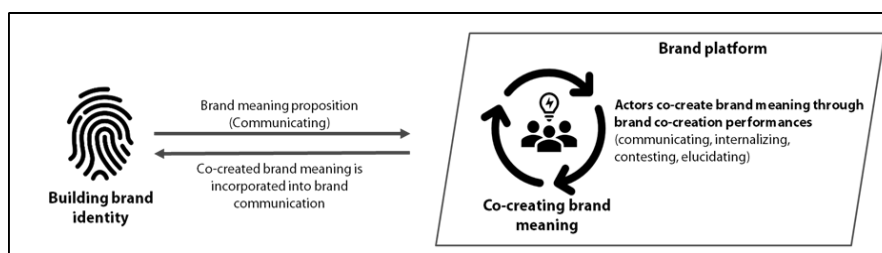


Figure 1. Integrative Human Branding (adapted from Griebel et al., 2020).

4.4.3. Methodology

4.4.3.1. Research design

As this study is the first to investigate brand meaning co-creation of human brands on different digital engagement platforms, we selected an exploratory research approach. We conducted a single case study by applying a multi-method approach (Eisenhardt, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2013) to gain first empirical insights regarding brand meaning co-creation performances of human brands (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). By systematic combining several qualitative research methods focused on the same human brand, we expand our database and gain deeper and more reliable insights regarding the brand meaning co-creation from a multi-actor perspective (Mingers, 2003; Mingers & Brocklesby, 1997). To obtain unique and novel results, this qualitative research builds on a systematic twofold research process (Creswell, 2014). First, a netnography was applied to a professional female athlete's brand by observing and examining the performances of multiple actors on different digital engagement platforms. By collecting and evaluating empirical data from digital engagement platforms during the survey period, we aimed to validate and strengthen our study. To further enrich our data, we conducted semi-structured interviews with various relevant experts of our actor groups related to the athlete brand, whom we identified in the first step of our methodology.

4.4.3.2. Netnography

We chose a systematic netnographic approach, which has proven its eligibility in the fields of digital engagement platforms and brand management research from a multi-actor perspective (Abeza et al., 2017; Heinonen & Medberg, 2018; Zaglia, 2013). Netnography refers to an ethnographic approach that enables the observation and investigation of social activities, resource integration, and interactions of multiple actors on digital platforms, such as public social media profiles (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018; Kozinets, 2019). Thus, it provides unique insights into various brand meaning co-creation performances initiated by multiple actors online (Kozinets, 2002). Recent publications in the fields of human branding, actor engagement and co-creation have proven that netnography is a suitable method for systematic data collection and data analysis on social media platforms (Centeno & Wang, 2016; Dessart & Pitardi, 2019; Kozinets, 2021; Pera et al., 2021). Our analysis focuses on the semantic aspects of the brand meaning co-creation process of the athlete brand on five different digital engagement platforms. We selected these five platforms since they are frequently used by the athlete and are furthermore among the most-used social media platforms worldwide (Hootsuite, 2022).

The netnographic approach was applied to a professional female athlete's brand from Germany, who is active in the seasonal niche sport of biathlon, by observing and examining the performances of multiple actors. The athlete brand has been active in the IBU World Cup for many years and has participated in numerous international competitions. Retrospective data collection for the netnography was conducted by recording all posts on the athlete brand's official Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, and LinkedIn profiles. A total of $n1 = 299$ posts (e.g., images, videos, and text) with more than $n2 = 17,800$ comments across all five official profiles were identified and recorded manually. During the research period, the athlete had approximately 60,000 followers on her Instagram channel and approximately 90,000 followers on Facebook, representing the two major digital engagement platforms. We consciously did not select an athlete at an early career stage or with exceptional sporting success with a very large social media reach for our case study and deliberately focused on a more experienced athlete to avoid bias effects in terms of digital affinity and social media behavior among various actors. In addition, we selected a female athlete because she most likely faces various obstacles, such as limited media awareness or prejudices, which restrict her potential to build and maintain her own brand (Mogaji et al., 2020). The data collection period covered the IBU World Cup Season 2020/2021 from November 1, 2020, to April 30, 2021, including the pre-season from May 1, 2020, to October 31, 2020.

4.4.3.3. *Interview study*

To understand brand meaning co-creation performances on digital engagement platforms, it is crucial to know which actors are involved. Based on the results of the netnography and the interviews with the athlete herself, eight relevant actor groups related to the athlete brand were identified. They consist of competitors, fans, clubs and associations, equipment suppliers, inner circle (e.g., family and friends, management), media, sponsors, and agencies. To further enrich our understanding of brand meaning co-creation on digital engagement platforms, semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of these actor groups. In total, 25 interviews were conducted with 23 experts (Bogner & Menz, 2009), including three consecutive interviews with the athlete herself. Table 2 provides an overview of the sample. The experts for the qualitative interviews were identified from the netnography and from the interviews with the athlete herself. All interviews were conducted online between June and December 2021, using Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or phone calls. The duration of the interviews varied between 19 and 62 min, with an average length of 36 min. All interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the interviewees and transcribed. All respondents voluntarily participated in the study and received no financial compensation or other transactions associated with the

interview participation. The respondents were informed transparently about the purpose of the data collection and agreed to its usage for scientific purposes. Personal data were further anonymized during the transcription.

Semi-structured interviews followed an interview guide and were conducted by two experienced researchers, leaving sufficient freedom for additional comments and aspects from the interviewed actors. The interview guide comprised four major parts that were slightly adjusted depending on the questioned actor group and pre-tested. First, actors were asked to describe themselves and how they use digital engagement platforms, followed by questions about the shared content on social media as well as the expected value and objectives of digital engagement platforms. The second section of the interview focused on the relationship with the human brand. Questions regarding the collaboration with the athlete brand and the perceived values and attributes of the athlete brand were also addressed. The next section included questions about social media channels and the general advantages and disadvantages of these platforms. Furthermore, participants were interviewed about their social interactions with the human brand and about other actors involved. The respondents discussed various types of communication and interaction as well as different formats that they use. In addition, the mutual interaction between other actors and the human brand is discussed, followed by broader questions on current challenges and future opportunities associated with human branding on digital platforms.

Throughout the data collection period, we conducted three semi-structured, guided interviews with the athlete herself, which were built on each other thematically. Interview one related to her general understanding of athlete marketing and self-marketing, perceptions of her athlete brand and her own brand management on digital engagement platforms. The second interview provided a detailed discussion on the use of her social media channels, the concept of integrative human branding, and brand meaning co-creation on digital engagement platforms. In the last interview, the athlete was subsequently confronted with preliminary results and reports from the netnography of her social media posts during the research project. This was followed by a retrospective summary of the study, which left space for open questions.

Table 2. Sample characteristics interview study.

No.	Date	Actor group	Actor	Length	Profession
1	23.07.2021	Agencies	Media Agency	45 min	Founder & CEO
2	03.08.2021	Agencies	Sport Agency	50 min	Senior Vice President
3	11.08.2021	Agencies	Sport Agency	56 min	Director
4	07.09.2021	Agencies	Sport Agency	25 min	Managing Director & Partner
5	30.09.2021	Agencies	Media Agency	39 min	Co-Founder
6	10.06.2021	Athlete	Athlete	20 min	Professional Biathlon Athlete
7	17.08.2021	Athlete	Athlete	23 min	Professional Biathlon Athlete
8	21.10.2021	Athlete	Athlete	30 min	Professional Biathlon Athlete
9	12.07.2021	Club & Associations	National Federation	62 min	Managing Director
10	28.07.2021	Club & Associations	International Federation	32 min	Head of Digital Marketing
11	04.08.2021	Club & Associations	Club	32 min	Executive Board Member
12	05.08.2021	Club & Associations	Foundation	26 min	Digital Marketing
13	13.08.2021	Club & Associations	Foundation	42 min	Marketing Manager
14	18.08.2021	Club & Associations	Foundation	26 min	Marketing Manager
15	07.07.2021	Equipment Supplier	Team Supplier	41 min	Sports Marketing Manager
16	04.12.2021	Fans	Supporters Club	27 min	Founder
17	08.12.2021	Fans	Supporters Club	33 min	Founder
18	14.12.2021	Fans	Athlete Fan	24 min	Student
19	17.12.2021	Fans	Biathlon Fan	27 min	Fan; former Athlete
20	09.08.2021	Inner Circle	Management	61 min	Manager
21	22.12.2021	Inner Circle	Family & Friends	19 min	Friend; former Athlete
22	23.07.2021	Media	Social Media	31 min	Marketing Manager
23	05.07.2021	Sponsors	Individual Sponsor	40 min	Marketing Manager
24	12.07.2021	Sponsors	Individual Sponsor	44 min	Marketing Manager
25	13.07.2021	Sponsors	Team Sponsor	45 min	Marketing Manager
ø average length				36 min	

4.4.3.4. *Data analysis*

We conducted a three-stage research procedure. In the first step, we used an inductive and open coding process in the netnography to identify the relevant actor groups and the performances they initiate on the five digital engagement platforms. The actor groups formed the basis of our interview study in step two (Qu & Dumay, 2011). We used open coding to organize and categorize the collected data from our netnography and our interview study before comparing it to the existing literature (Kozinets, 2019). We examined the existing literature that addresses the co-creation of brand meaning on digital platforms in the context of brand management. In this third step, we focus on performativity theory. This included a deductive data review and a comparative analysis with the pre-existing literature based on the identified performances (Essamri et al., 2019; Iglesias et al., 2020; von Wallpach et al., 2017).

The entire data collection and data analysis were carried out in German, and the relevant quotes were translated into English. To ensure the credibility and quality of the results, all data were coded independently by two researchers using MAXQDA 2020 (Creswell, 2014; McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Patton, 1990). The data analysis followed the thematic analysis procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). According to Perreault & Leigh (1989), we determined intercoder reliability for the netnography ($r = 0.86$) as well as the interview study ($r = 0.86$), indicating both good matches. In the case of incoherent coding, the researchers checked for inconsistencies and discussed them.

4.4.4. **Results**

4.4.4.1. *Brand meaning co-creation performances*

With regard to previous literature studying performances in brand management research, we identified the four brand meaning co-creation performances introduced by Iglesias et al. (2020) on the digital engagement platforms of the studied human brand (*communicating*, *internalizing*, *contesting*, and *elucidating*). However, in contrast to corporate brands, we identified additional brand meaning co-creation performances that seem to be unique to the specific research subjects of human brands and digital engagement platforms. These new performances (i.e., *cooperating*, *reinforcing*, *individual loving*, and *individual hating*) were initiated by various actors within the brand network. Across these eight types of performances, we recognized three generalizable categories that vary regarding the level of its brand-meaning co-creation that is given by the specific context of both theories of brand co-creation (e.g., multi-actor perspective such as co-branding processes) and human brands (e.g., interweaving of the athlete as an individual person and its brand). To be more precise, we differentiated between (1) network-

related performances (i.e., *cooperating*) that emphasize the collaboration of actors regarding the co-creation of brand meaning; (2) human brand-related performances (i.e., *reinforcing*, *communicating*, *internalizing*, *contesting*, and *elucidating*) that describe activities that are considered to directly affect the athlete brand; and (3) person-related performances (i.e., *individual loving*, and *individual hating*) that mainly target the individual person behind the human brand. A visual summary of the identified categories is shown in Fig. 2.

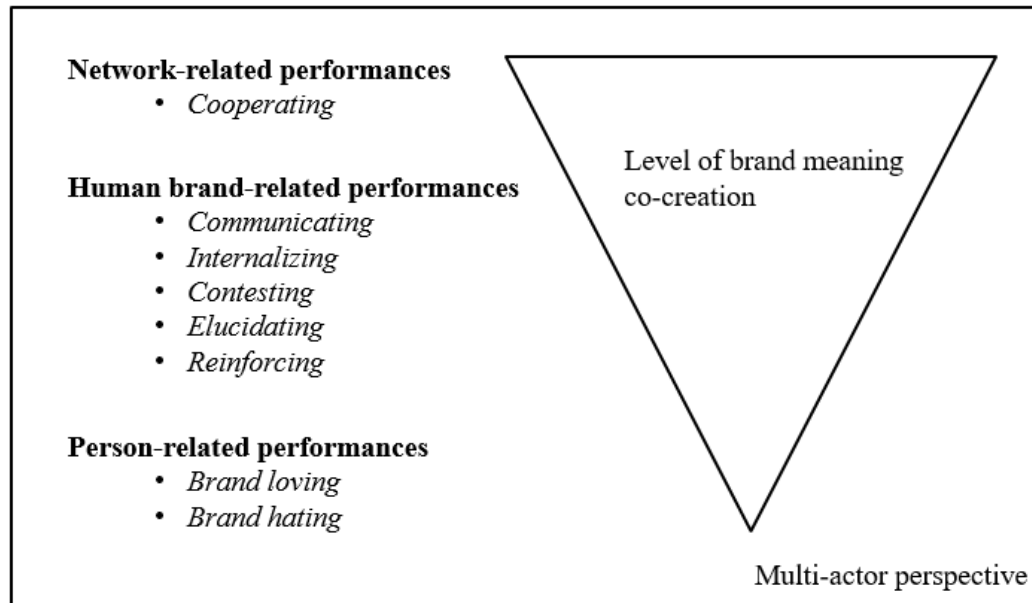


Figure 2. Brand meaning co-creation performances on human brands.

4.4.4.1.1. Network-related performances

In line with the theoretically outlined idea of the multi-actor perspective, we identified performances that reveal the relevance of integrating and collaborating with other actors to co-create the meaning of a human brand:

Interactions such as likes, comments, but also linking with sponsors, clubs or associations. [...] In their own content, where simply the idea of partnership actually arises everywhere - especially in the biathlon community. Here also among the other athletes. (Sponsor, Team Sponsor, 13.07.2021)

Specifically, we identified *cooperating* performances on the digital engagement platforms of the studied human brand, for example, when the athlete brand was connected with the brand of a sponsor:

At home, I want to feel good. Natural and healthy materials are the basis for this. At [Sponsor], the quality of the indoor air is even specially certified by TÜV - perfect

indoor air with letter and seal. This is not only a great way to read, but also a wonderful way to live! ☺🌱 #FollowYourFire #betterbuilding (Athlete, Facebook, 06.10.2020)

However, not only *cooperating* performances with sponsors, but also with other actors have been identified to co-create the meaning of the human brand. Especially, we identified various *cooperating* performances with other athletes, clubs or associations, where multiple brands make use of collaborating with each other:

I think you can picture a network there and meanwhile also more than just that. So work is already being done, also in this direction, to connect athletes, clubs, associations, and sponsors with each other. (Association 1, 2021)

Training session in the best company. 🏋️ Still fit as ever, bro! 🏠 #Followyourfire #Winterfans #[Friend Athlete] @[FriendAthlete] @[Sponsor] | @[Sponsor] (Athlete, Facebook, 19.09.2020)

Finally, we also revealed *cooperating* performances with fans of the brand, when the athlete requested her fans to search for “a suitable name for my little lucky charm on the drinking belt” and the fans answered:

- Voittaja - Finnish word for winner! 🍀☺ I think this is fitting for a sporty good luck charm. (Fan, Instagram, 04.01.2021)

The co-creation of brand meaning occurs without the influence or agreement of the brand owner or other actors involved:

There are no agreements of any kind, it all happens without the involvement of other actors. (Fans, Supporters Club, 04.12.2021)

4.4.4.1.2. Human brand-related performances

First, we identified the performance of *communicating* that describes the transmission of the brand identity within the brand community, for example, when the brand owner writes social media posts on what her brand stands for. Although any actor within the brand network may perform *communicating*, we identified it to be majorly brand owner-led. The athlete communicated several facets of her brand identity, for example, when she described her dissatisfaction with her last competition results, how important family, animal protection, or sustainability is to her, or when she posts about the World Women’s Day:

#followyourfire #winterfans Happy #WorldWomen'sDay to all the wonderful women out there. 🌍 [...] All you women and girls, no matter whatever your profession, hobby or sport, are a huge inspiration for me as an athlete and help me to push my limits! 💪 (Athlete, Instagram, 08.03.2021)

Additionally, the athlete engaged in the performance of communicating, when she advertised a campaign of one of her partners and combined the communication with her own brand identity (e.g., regional food to foster sustainability):

Fresh from the field straight into my #retterbox 😊🍷 You want to become a vegetable saver too? (Athlete, Instagram, 14.05.2020)

In summary, almost all 25 experts from the interview study independently described the athlete's brand identity in the same terms. These included keywords such as *sustainable*, *environmentally friendly*, *animal welfare*, *family and friends*, *ambitious* and *determined*, *athletic*, *passionate*, *fair*, *positive mindset*, *well balanced*, and *future-oriented*.

Beyond the transmission of the brand identity by *communicating* the various facets to the athlete brand community, bringing them to life by *internalizing* was a second brand meaning co-creation performance that we identified in this particular case. *Internalizing* describes the translation of communicated words into concrete brand behavior that reflects the brand identity. The athlete co-created the brand meaning, for example, by sharing a post with members of her family, where they enjoyed their joint time or with a thermos bottle, while she recovered from an illness and posted:

🔥🔥 #followyourfire #winterfans Hot water bottle has always helped! I treat myself to a little rest, a chamomile tea and fingers crossed for the girls now, make it like the boys. (Athlete, Facebook, 20.12.2020)

Internalizing performances, however, are not only limited to being demonstrated by the brand owner, but also by other actors in the brand network. Fans of the athlete, for example, reacted to a vegan food post of the athlete asking for the recipe or when a fan reacted to a post in which the athlete communicated her regeneration regime and shared it with her followers:

Fruits mixed with coconut water and bath with salt from Jentschura (there are ground gems in it 😊) (Fan, Instagram, 01.09.2020).

In addition, *internalizing* performances lead to specific actions performed by the brand owner herself or in collaboration with other actors, such as sponsors, agencies, or associations:

I took my clothes off for an animal welfare company a few years ago. As a person and a brand, I am completely committed to it. I think very few people would do that, but it also has something to do with my conviction. (Athlete, 10.06.2021)

This is also part of our partnership. The athlete likes to draw attention to animal welfare. And when she started travelling regularly to Romania to the animal shelter, she naturally received our support. (Sponsor, Team Sponsor, 13.07.2021)

Next to *communicating* and *internalizing* performances, especially by verbalizing and demonstrating behaviors to co-create brand meaning, the results also indicate different forms of reactive behavior of brand community actors towards the brand owner. First, in contrast to the research framework (Iglesias et al., 2020), we inductively identified *reinforcing* performances that occur when actors of the brand community provide support – and therefore co-create brand meaning – in a shared understanding with the athletes' brand identity. On digital engagement platforms, various actors from the athlete's network engage in *reinforcing* performances, for example, when a fan reinforced her as a role model in general or even more specifically regarding her engagement with animals:

On my 17th birthday, I wrote a long Instagram post describing of how she [the athlete] influenced me as a role model and idol during the last years. (Fans, Supporters Club, 08.12.2021)

Hello, I would regret if it would not work [to visit an animal shelter in Rumania]. I admire your commitment to animal welfare! 🐾😊💜 (Fan, Instagram, 04.10.2020).

However, not only fans of the athlete engaged in reinforcing performances but also other actors from the network. We also identified sponsors and partners, such as animal rights activists, that reinforced the athlete's brand identity.

We as animal welfare activists and animal rights activists find your commitment to the street dogs wonderful and important! The terrible misery of these dear fellow creatures must come to an end. [...] Thank you very much for your commitment! ❤️ (Sponsor, Facebook, 27.01.2021)

A contrasting performance to *reinforcing* has been identified as *contesting*, which is generally understood as the statement of incongruent perceptions of the brand identity by members of the brand community. In general, two main forms of *contesting* were identified. First, the network of actors *contested* the brand meaning itself and therefore contributed to its co-creation, for example, by criticizing how the brand owner raised her voice to promote the wearing of masks during the pandemic or with regard to the distribution of the athlete's effort:

If you leave all your energy in the social media, the power is missing on the track and at the shooting range. (Fan, Facebook, 03.03.2021)

Second, we also identified engagement in *contesting* performances to cocreate the brand meaning that is not directly targeted at the brand but rather to the network of the brand, especially to sponsors:

[Sponsor] no longer works at all! 🖤 (Fan, Facebook, 07.06.2020)

Honestly, how can you disfigure yourself as a handsome person like that with advertising ([Sponsor])? (Fan, Facebook, 13.10.2020)

Finally, we identified *elucidating* performances that refer to the conversational process of the brand owner and other actors to discuss and reconcile distinct brand meanings to create a shared understanding of the brand meaning. There has been such a conversational process introduced with the athletes' posting of a fully black picture posted on Instagram with the hashtag “#blackouttuesday” to express her support against racism and police violence. An actor from the network commented on the post and stated:

During the 2015–16 public New Year's Eve's celebrations in Germany, over 1,250 women [...] have been sexually assaulted with 24 of them raped, in most cases by men with non-European background. [...] When black migrants rape white women, this is certainly not racism. Yes? (Fan, Instagram, 02.06.2020)

The brand owner has responded to present and explain her perspective and understanding of brand identity with the following comment:

It is not racism; it is rapping what is just as bad. The problem is that you blame a whole group of people for some crime some people did, what actually is racism. Black people have to face racism every day. They are confronted that they do not “look right” to other human beings, have it harder to get jobs, get judged and treated badly. [...] Black people are just as worth as everyone else and they deserve every right everyone else has too! (Athlete, Instagram, 02.06.2020)

4.4.4.1.3. Person-related performances

In contrast to previous literature on corporate brands, we identified a special characteristic of human brands represented in two forms of person-related performances (i.e., *individual loving* and *individual hating*). Both types refer to the brand community's activities that are directed towards the person behind the brand, instead of towards the brand itself. *Individual loving*, for example, has been identified when fans express how much they like the physical attractiveness of the athlete; honor their physical performance in competitions, or when they phrase their admiration of the athlete. In addition, *individual loving* or *individual hating* affects actors' engagement in co-creation processes and has an impact on their loyalty towards the brand (Kaufmann et al., 2016):

You are such a lovely person, sweetie. I keep my fingers crossed for you for the next competitions and wish you continued success and especially good health. Keep your fun in biathlon and have a great time with your sister. 🐾☺️ (Fan, Facebook, 08.12.2020)

In contrast, fans also express themselves by engaging in negative performances towards the human brand on an individual level. We identified such performances as *individual hating*. Most of the identified comments were related to the athlete's sporting performance:

The same phrases every time, they are beginning to look untrustworthy, sorry. After the end of the season, ask yourself whether it still makes sense to pursue this beautiful sport in this form. (Fan, Facebook, 20.01.2021)

Moreover, the athlete herself increasingly experiences extreme engagement fostered by the characteristics of social media. *Individual loving* and *individual hating* refer to private and personal comments on her:

There is a lot of frustration and it becomes very personal. Both positive and negative comments turn out to be very private. (Athlete, 21.10.2021)

4.4.4.2. Multi-actor-perspective on human brands

Our results confirm recent research findings on the multi-actor perspective in brand management literature. Although several authors have already discussed brand meaning co-creation of corporate brands by internal and external actors (Merz et al., 2009; Strobel & Germelmann, 2020; Veloutsou & Guzman, 2017; Woratschek et al., 2020), this approach has been neglected in the context of human brands.

According to this study's results, it is evident that a heterogeneous network of actors (cf. Fig. 3 for an overview of digital engagement platforms and relevant actors) co-creates the brand meaning of the athlete under investigation by engaging in different performances (Table 3 summarizes the additional results of the study). Although the athlete is a focal actor within her brand community and thereby contributes to the co-creation of her brand meaning, for example, by engaging in *communicating* performances, the athlete cannot fully control the co-creative processes leading to development and changes in her brand meaning (e.g., Merz et al., 2009; Michel, 2017). Accordingly, this implies that all brand community members (cf. Fig. 3) may be facilitated by the nature of the digital context of social media platforms (cf. Stegmann et al., 2021) and contribute to the co-creation of the human brand meaning by integrating their resources within performances (e.g., by *reinforcing* or *contesting* the brand meaning of the athlete). Therefore, the network of actors may participate not only in the collaborative process of brand meaning co-creation in direct interactions with the human brand but also among themselves. Indeed, this study's findings indicate that all actors in the multi-actor network are considered relevant within the process of brand meaning co-creation:

I don't have the impression that one actor is extremely underrated or perhaps not considered at all. But I wouldn't say that one actor is more important than all the others.

So if you really break out one part of this overall construct or one part of this puzzle, then you see the gap. (Club & Associations, International Federation, 28.07.2021)

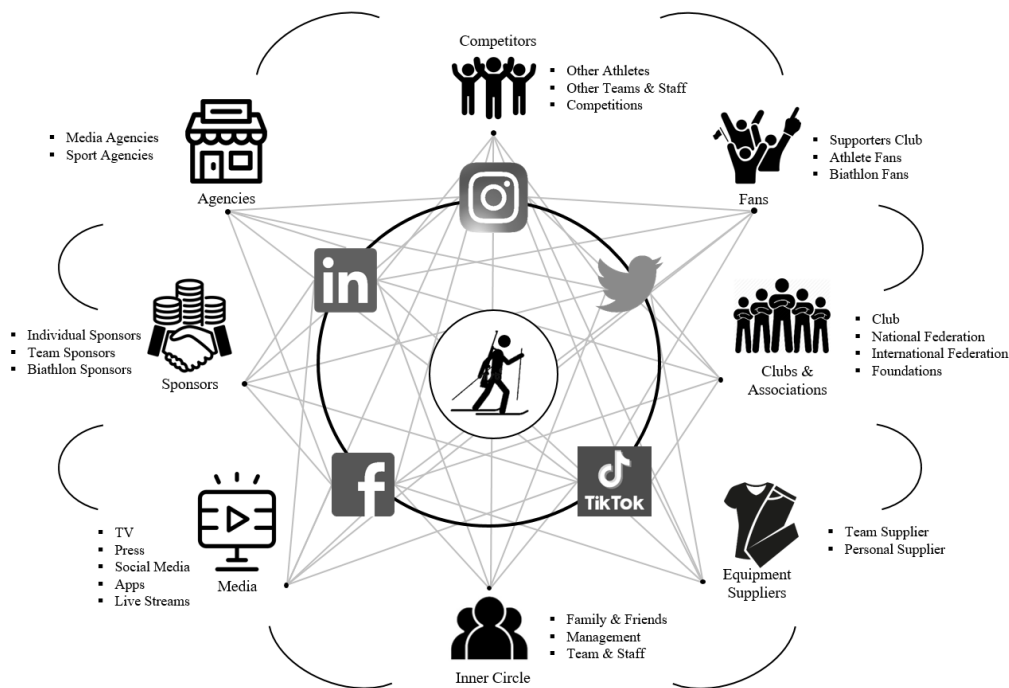


Figure 3. Digital engagement platforms and relevant actors.

4.4.5. Discussion

4.4.5.1. Theoretical contributions

This study makes three important contributions. First, it extends existing research on brand management and human branding literature by conceptually combining human branding, integrative branding, and performativity theory. We expand the concept of integrative branding towards integrative human branding by identifying actors who co-create human brand meaning through their performances. Accordingly, the results of our study especially contribute to the understanding of the second sub-process of integrative human branding and demonstrate how it offers unique propositions for the co-creation of brand meaning. In so doing, studying actors' engagement in performances such as *contesting* shapes the brand meaning of a human brand, which consequently could be incorporated – through the first sub-process of integrative human branding – in the brand identity of the human brand. Similar applies regarding the co-creation of brand meaning undertaken by the engagement in performances on a network-related level (i.e., *cooperating* that may lead to co-branding processes in which the human brands' meaning may be co-created). Finally, the brand meaning of an athlete brand is also co-created through performances on the person-related level (e.g., individual hating as a form of *contesting* that

challenges the individual human behind the brand). To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to empirically analyze the brand meaning co-creation of athlete brands, as particular types of human brands, from a multi-actor perspective in brand management through different performances on digital engagement platforms. These platforms enable and empower human brands to build their brands through management-driven processes, but also enable direct interactions between multiple actors relevant to the brand in an integrative human branding process. Our findings are consistent with previous research on the co-creation of corporate brands (Es-samri et al., 2019; Iglesias et al., 2020; von Wallpach et al., 2017). However, we were able to identify additional performances on digital engagement platforms in the specific context of human brands. This study can serve as a link between various fields such as brand management, marketing, sports management, and sociology, all of which focus on the different roles of actors involved in the brand-building process of human brands.

Second, our results contribute to the emerging field of human and athlete branding literature, which has so far focused mainly on athlete brand identity and image (Doyle et al., 2020; Hofmann et al., 2021; Kunkel et al., 2020; Na et al., 2020). Therefore, the present study extends the current state of research by investigating performances that co-create the brand meaning of human brands on digital engagement platforms.

Third, our findings reveal eight relevant actor groups (*competitors, fans, clubs and associations, equipment suppliers, inner circle, media, sponsors, and agencies*) that co-create the brand meaning through several performances on the five social media platforms. In contrast to corporate brands, we identified additional brand meaning co-creation performances that are unique to the specific research subjects of human brands (i.e., cooperating, reinforcing, individual loving, and individual hating). Across these eight types of performances, we recognized three novel and generalizable categories for the brand meaning co-creation of human brands. We differentiated among network-related performances (i.e., *cooperating*) that emphasize the multi-actor perspective of the co-creation of brand meaning, human brand-related performances (i.e., *reinforcing, communicating, internalizing, contesting, and elucidating*) that describe activities considered to directly affect the athlete brand and person-related performances (i.e., *individual loving, and individual hating*) that mainly target the individual person and thus only indirectly affect the human brand. Consequently, it can be argued that the co-creation of brand meaning cannot only be considered on the virtual level of the brand meaning (such as in corporate brands) but rather also in terms of collaborating forms of behavior (i.e., cooperating) and regarding the individual behind the human brand as well.

Table 3. Brand meaning co-creation performances of human brands.

Category	Performance	Sample post from digital engagement platform
Network-related performances	Cooperating	One round after the other! 🙌 For the classic complex today, I got an expert in this field 100👍 #Followyourfire #Winterfans @[Athlete friend] @[Sponsor] @[Sponsor] @[Sponsor] To Be A sport (Athlete, Facebook, 09.10.2020).
		My shooting today: ☁️ But for that Floggie has cleared everything today. 100 I'm very happy for you, @[Athlete friend] 🤗 #followyourfire #winterfans #friends (Athlete, Instagram, 12.03.2021).
		Time for a running session? ♀ These shoes in the brilliant color are only meant for sun. 😊☀️ #followyourfire #winterfans #running #eattrainssleeprepeat #adidas #colorful #smile #thesebootsaremadeforrunning @[Sponsor] @[Sponsor] (Athlete, Instagram, 08.07.2021).
Human brand-related performances	Communicating	It was so nice with you, Twin! ❤️ After 2 weeks at home and in Ruhpolding, it's now on to the next World Cup in Oberhof. I am looking forward to the home World Cup and will miss you fans very much #followyourfire #winterfans (Athlete, Facebook, 05.01.2021).
		A used day! After 2 mistakes in the 1st shooting it was very difficult for me to roll up the field from behind. In addition, I felt very bad physically today. Let's forget the race, put my feet up for the next 2 days and attack again on Friday #followyourfire #winterfans #timetoplay #notmyday #needmoreenergy (Athlete, Instagram, 14.12.2020).
	Internalizing	Mask Ball! 🦺👍 I wear the mask for my grandma, my parents, for all people who belong to the risk group and to contribute a part to contain Covid-19. It is important that we stick together now and stay consistent ❤️ #StillTogetherAgainstCorona (Athlete, Facebook, 29.08.2020).
		Recharge your vitamin D! I'm still enjoying the last moments of summer before the cold season starts again soon. How do you spend the last warm days? #FollowYourFire #Winterfans #sunnyday #summervibes (Athlete, Instagram, 11.09.2020).
	Reinforcing	Massage in the sun! ☀️👍 Could you relax better? #followyourfire #winterfans #timetorelax #seiseralm #thxmichi #legday (Athlete, Instagram, 30.07.2020)
		Family day with our bro.❤️ #homesweethome #followyourfire (Athlete, Facebook, 24.05.2020).
		First, it is good that you are giving yourself a break and listening to your body! I hope that you can now recover well and take something from the winter, despite the problems. Then the next season will certainly be as good as the current one has started (Supporters Club, Instagram, 18.03.2021).
		So nice to see you in the World Cup again. Have lately rarely in the sport so cheered along, as now this weekend with you. I'm already looking forward to the next races and congratulations for the already fulfilled WC-Nomination (Fan, Instagram, 29.11.2020).
		This is a very nice idea with the vegetable box. A beautiful message for all. Good luck for your preparation! (Fan, Instagram, 14.05.2020)

Person-related performances	Contesting	You can try it, but how the sporting "development" goes as a vegan, you have seen with others. The performance drops dramatically. As a vegetarian, top performances are still possible in the endurance area, as a vegan rather not (Fan, Facebook, 24.07.2020). Thanks. No. I prefer my burger with real meat (Fan, Instagram, 09.12.2020). You are like [another athlete], you are overtrained so you lack speed, it will come. Good luck. (Fan, Instagram, 20.01.2021).
	Elucidating	Yes, the shooting was top again. I'm just a little worried about your runtime... somehow the material doesn't seem to fit. Stay relaxed, have fun and then something will happen in the chase. It's not that far to the top 10-15, you can easily make it if you are stable and consistent in your shooting (Fan, Facebook, 18.12.2020). Why do you always and everywhere have sunglasses on...? Necessary, show or because of sponsors? (Fan, Instagram, 03.08.2020) How satisfied are you with the shoe? What distances on what surfaces do you run with it? I run regularly myself and am grateful for shoe tips. Answer Athlete: I like to run in different shoes. However, [this one] is perfect for forest floors. (Fan and athlete, Instagram, 08.07.2020)
	Individual loving	Finally found your site and glad to pass on my thoughts and greetings to you. I "follow" you since you are in the World Cup! In Finland was great and after your long injury can not go well yet! Then good luck in Hochfilzen and am of course on the TV and press everything I have, so that it goes great for you. (Fan, Instagram, 11.12.2020). You have a SUPER RACE 😊made and well presented 🙌😊? Too bad that in the end it was only this blink of an eye that has deprived YOU of the deserved place on the podium 😊? But this is great to build on, because next time it's YOUR turn again 🙌😊🙌 (Fan, Instagram, 13.12.2020). My beautiful twin ❤️ (Sister, Instagram, 12.02.2021)
	Individual hating	You're so bad, just stop and go to the kitchen or the office. You're getting paid for this, if I worked the way you work, I'd get immediate dismissal... (Fan, Facebook, 03.03.2021). Alcohol before training I know from the district league (Fan, Instagram, 05.07.2020). You really want to add another season? But then please in the IBU Cup. There you will also have a few successes. There you can even compete at the top halfway (Fan, Instagram, 18.03.2021).

4.4.5.2. *Managerial implications*

This study provides manifold implications for brand management practice and enhances brand managers' and athletes' knowledge on the dynamics of integrative human branding. It contributes to the analysis of different performances on digital engagement platforms, enabling athletes and brand managers to interact specifically with different actors based on our results and to build, develop and maintain a unique brand through strategic marketing concepts.

First, it advises brand owners that they cannot autonomously control their brands and branding decisions. Instead, they must be aware that brand meaning is always co-created by multiple actors in heterogeneous networks on different engagement platforms. However, these actors can change according to the dynamics of integrative human branding. It is crucial to consider digital engagement platforms (e.g., social media channels) as enablers and facilitators for the co-creation of brand meaning. Therefore, brand managers should take advantage of the benefits of digital engagement platforms and encourage interactions among various actors.

Second, brand managers should analyze which actors are relevant and involved in the brand meaning co-creation of human brands on their respective platforms. Various digital engagement platforms can be used to reach specific actor networks and actors with the targeted content. In doing so, brand managers must be aware that the use of selected digital engagement platforms must be strategically planned for the integrative branding process of human brands. For example, the actors on the social media channels Instagram and LinkedIn vary, with the latter specifically targeting business contacts. Furthermore, it must be understood through which performances different actors engage and how they co-create the brand meaning of the human brand. Network-related performances refer to strategic, long-term partnerships with corporate brands, such as sponsors and equipment suppliers. This leads to financial revenues, a targeted positioning of the brand's core and the building of a post-career life. The purpose of human brand-related performance is to share and communicate the brand's identity with the community. For instance, a practical application is the activism of athletes who use social media to clearly express their positioning on social issues and concerns, e.g., against racism or for gender equality and climate change. Person-related performances should look behind the scenes of the brand, focusing on the individual. Sharing private content on social media, such as pictures with family and friends, leisure activities or content without sports facilitates individual loving and strongly engages with the brand's community. This enables brand managers to specifically apply or promote various performances among different levels to facilitate the co-creation of the human brand.

To summarize, it is necessary for human brands to understand the process of co-creating brand meaning to identify, engage, and interact with all actors involved on their respective platforms. By recognizing and embracing the role of the various actors involved in the brand meaning co-creation process, human brands can establish a meaningful and authentic brand that resonates with their respective target audiences and leads to leveraged brand engagement, sustainable relationships with all actors as well as improved brand advocacy. By engaging in or enabling of different performances, human brands can increase their brand loyalty, enhance their brand reputation and develop a unique brand. Therefore, our study provides a significant contribution for human brand management.

4.4.6. Limitations and future research

As with any empirical study, this study has several limitations that need to be considered. Primarily, this research focuses on a single case study examining the brand meaning co-creation of one human brand. It is essential to extend the case and examine additional human brands (e. g., athletes, influencers, entertainers, coaches) to avoid individual case exceptions and ensure external validity and generalizability. Furthermore, it might be critical to refer the results back to traditional corporate brands. It seems reasonable that future research should examine human brands in other sports, differences between athletes and other types of human brands as well as comparing human and corporate brands regarding brand meaning co-creation performances. Brand meaning co-creation performances of a single-sport athlete can be certainly different from those of team sport athletes. Further research should investigate human brands with smaller and bigger followership on social media to determine similarities and contrasts with respect to the identified performances that contribute to the co-creation of brand meaning. In addition, a cross-cultural analysis would be valuable for identifying differences across various cultures and countries as well as gender and nationality of the athlete.

Second, we focused on five different social media channels and neglected other digital engagement platforms (e.g., brand communities, websites, and other social media platforms) as well as physical engagement platforms such as competitions, sports venues, or events. We encourage researchers to explore additional digital and physical engagement platforms to illustrate the diversity and heterogeneity of different actors and their brand meaning co-creation performances. In particular, other innovative digital engagement platforms (e.g. metaverse or web3), offer various novel possibilities for the empowerment of human brands, which could be examined in detail.

Third, this study represents a starting point for more research, as it is the first to examine various performances of brand meaning co-creation of human brands from a multi-actor

perspective. Therefore, future studies should examine how and which actors initiate performances that co-create brand meaning on digital engagement platforms. A promising path for future research would be to conduct surveys or experiments with fans or sponsors in order to study the determinants of actors' performances.

4.4.7. References

- Abeza, G., O'Reilly, N., Seguin, B., & Nzindukiyimana, O. (2017). Social Media as a Relationship Marketing Tool in Professional Sport: A Netnographical Exploration. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 10(3), 325–358.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/ijsc.2017-0041>
- Anagnostopoulos, C., Parganas, P., Chadwick, S., & Fenton, A. (2018). Branding in pictures: Using Instagram as a brand management tool in professional team sport organisations. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 18(4), 413–438.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2017.1410202>
- Appel, G., Grewal, L., Hadi, R., & Stephen, A. T. (2020). The future of social media in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 48(1), 79–95.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-019-00695-1>
- Arai, A., Ko, Y. J., & Kaplanidou, K. (2013). Athlete brand image: Scale development and model test. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 13(4), 383–403.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2013.811609>
- Arai, A., Ko, Y. J., & Ross, S. (2014). Branding athletes: Exploration and conceptualization of athlete brand image. *Sport Management Review*, 17(2), 97–106.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2013.04.003>
- Austin, J. L. (1975). *How to Do Things with Words*. Clarendon Press.
- Ballouli, K., & Hutchinson, M. (2012). Branding the elite professional athlete through use of new media and technology: An interview with Ash De Walt. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Venturing*, 4(1), Article 44818, 58.
<https://doi.org/10.1504/ijev.2012.044818>
- Bogner, A., & Menz, W. (2009). The Theory-Generating Expert Interview: Epistemological Interest, Forms of Knowledge, Interaction. In A. Bogner, B. Littig, & W. Menz (Eds.), *Interviewing Experts* (pp. 43–80). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/97802302442763>.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Breidbach, C. F., & Brodie, R. J. (2017). Engagement platforms in the sharing economy. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, 27(4), 761–777.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-04-2016-0071>

- Brodie, R. J. (2017). Commentary on “Working consumers: Co-creation of brand identity, consumer identity, and brand community identity”. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 430–431. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.07.013>
- Brodie, R. J., & Benson-Rea, M. (2016). Country of origin branding: An integrative perspective. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 25(4), 322–336. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-04-2016-1138>
- Brodie, R. J., Benson-Rea, M., & Medlin, C. J. (2017). Branding as a dynamic capability. *Marketing Theory*, 17(2), 183–199. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593116679871>
- Burmann, C., Hegner, S., & Riley, N. (2009). Towards an identity-based branding. *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), 113–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593108100065>
- Butler, J. (1990). *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
- Carlson, B. D., & Donavan, D. T. (2013). Human Brands in Sport: Athlete Brand Personality and Identification. *Journal of Sport Management*, 27(3), 193–206. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.27.3.193>
- Casalo, L. V., Flavian, C., & Ibanez-Sanchez, S. (2020). Influencers on Instagram: Antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 510–519. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.005>
- Centeno, D., & Wang, J. J. (2016). Celebrities as human brands: An inquiry on stakeholder-actor co-creation of brand identities. *Journal of Business Research*, 74, 133–138. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.10.024>
- Conejo, F., & Wooliscroft, B. (2015). Brands Defined as Semiotic Marketing Systems. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 35(3), 287–301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146714531147>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* ((4th edition,). international student edition). SAGE.
- Da Silveira, C., Lages, C., & Simoes, C. (2013). Reconceptualizing brand identity in a dynamic environment. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 28–36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.020>
- Dessart, L., & Pitardi, V. (2019). How stories generate consumer engagement: An exploratory study. *Journal of Business Research*, 104, 183–195. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.06.045>
- Doyle, J. P., Su, Y., & Kunkel, T. (2020). Athlete branding via social media: Examining the factors influencing consumer engagement on Instagram. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2020.1806897>

- Dubois, A., & Gadde, L.-E. (2002). Systematic combining: An abductive approach to case research. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(7), 553–560. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963\(00\)00195-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(00)00195-8)
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building Theories from Case Study Research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532–550. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1989.4308385>
- ESPN (2021). Cristiano Ronaldo has more Instagram followers than every Premier League club combined [Tweet] Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/ESPNFC/status/1432297050255810563/photo/1>. Accessed January 26, 2022. Twitter.
- Essamri, A., McKechnie, S., & Winklhofer, H. (2019). Co-creating corporate brand identity with online brand communities: A managerial perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 96, 366–375. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.015>
- Evans, B. P., Starr, R. G., & Brodie, R. J. (2019). Counterfeiting: Conceptual issues and implications for branding. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 28(6), 707–719. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-12-2017-1706>
- Fournier, S., & Eckhardt, G. M. (2019). Putting the Person Back in Person-Brands: Understanding and Managing the Two-Bodied Brand. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 56(4), 602–619. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022243719830654>
- Garcia, A. (2022). Man United's Cristiano Ronaldo becomes world's first person to reach 400 million Instagram followers. Retrieved from <https://www.espn.com/soccer/manchester-united-engmanutd/story/4588594/man-uniteds-cristiano-ronaldobecomes-worlds-first-person-to-reach-400-million-instagram-followers>. Accessed April 14, 2021 ESPN.
- Geurin, A. N. (2017). Elite Female Athletes' Perceptions of New Media Use Relating to Their Careers: A Qualitative Analysis. *Journal of Sport Management*, 31(4), 345–359. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2016-0157>
- Geurin-Eagleman, A. N., & Burch, L. M. (2016). Communicating via photographs: A gendered analysis of Olympic athletes' visual self-presentation on Instagram. *Sport Management Review*, 19(2), 133–145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2015.03.002>
- Gorbatov, S., Khapova, S. N., & Lysova, E. I. (2018). Personal Branding: Interdisciplinary Systematic Review and Research Agenda. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 2238. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02238>
- Green, M. R. (2016). The impact of social networks in the development of a personal sports brand. *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, 6(3), 274–294. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SBM-09-2015-0032>

- Griebel, L., Ströbel, T., Woratschek, H. (2020). Integrative Branding - Brand Management in the light of value co-creation. *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*, 22, 1–5. Retrieved from <https://www.sma-bayreuth.de/publishing/relevant-managementinsights/>. Accessed January 24, 2022.
- Hasaan, A., Agyemang, K. J., Biscaia, R., & Kerem, K. (2018). A conceptual framework to understand the creation of athlete brand and its implications. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 18(3), 169–198. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJSMM.2018.10012841>
- Hasaan, A., Biscaia, R., & Ross, S. (2021). Understanding athlete brand life cycle. *Sport in Society*, 24(2), 181–205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2019.1624722>
- Hasaan, A., Javani, V., Fisane, M., & Sato, S. (2020). Athlete branding in less popular sport: A triadic approach. *PODIUM Sport, Leisure and Tourism Review*, 9(4), 70–96. <https://doi.org/10.5585/podium.v9i4.17580>
- Heinonen, K., & Medberg, G. (2018). Netnography as a tool for understanding customers: Implications for service research and practice. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 32(6), 657–679. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-08-2017-0294>
- Hodge, C., & Walker, M. (2015). Personal branding: A perspective from the professional athlete-level-of-analysis. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 16(1/2), 112–131. <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijmmm.2015.074920>
- Hofmann, J., Schnittka, O., Johnen, M., & Kottemann, P. (2021). Talent or popularity: What drives market value and brand image for human brands? *Journal of Business Research*, 124, 748–758. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.03.045>
- Hootsuite,. (2022). The Global State of Digital 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.hootsuite.com/de/resources/digital-trends>. Accessed September 21, 2022 Hootsuite.
- Hudders, L., de Jans, S., & de Veirman, M. (2021). The commercialization of social media stars: A literature review and conceptual framework on the strategic use of social media influencers. *International Journal of Advertising*, 40(3), 327–375. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2020.1836925>
- Iglesias, O., & Bonet, E. (2012). Persuasive brand management. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 25(2), 251–264. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09534811211213937>
- Iglesias, O., Landgraf, P., Ind, N., Markovic, S., & Koporcic, N. (2020). Corporate brand identity co-creation in business-to-business contexts. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 85, 32–43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2019.09.008>

- Ind, N. (2014). How participation is changing the practice of managing brands. *Journal of Brand Management*, 21(9), 734–742. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2014.35>
- Johns, R., & English, R. (2016). Transition of self: Repositioning the celebrity brand through social media—The case of Elizabeth Gilbert. *Journal of Business Research*, 69 (1), 65–72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.07.021>
- Kapferer, J.-N. (2008). *The New Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- Kaufmann, H. R., Loureiro, S. M. C., & Manarioti, A. (2016). Exploring behavioural branding, brand love and brand co-creation. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 25(6), 516–526. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-06-2015-0919>
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1252054>
- Keller, K. L. (2003). Brand Synthesis: The Multidimensionality of Brand Knowledge. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(4), 595–600. <https://doi.org/10.1086/346254>
- Keller, K. L. (2008). *Strategic brand management: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity* (3. ed., internat. ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall.
- Kowalczyk, C. M., & Pounders, K. R. (2016). Transforming celebrities through social media: The role of authenticity and emotional attachment. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 25(4), 345–356. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-09-2015-0969>
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The Field behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39(1), 61–72. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935>
- Kozinets, R. V. (2019). *Netnography: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*. SAGE.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2021). Reprint: YouTube utopianism: Social media profanation and the clicktivism of capitalist critique. *Journal of Business Research*, 131, 349–365. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.10.052>
- Kristiansen, E., & Williams, A. S. (2015). Communicating the Athlete as a Brand: An Examination of LPGA Star Suzann Pettersen. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 8(3), 371–388. <https://doi.org/10.1123/IJSC.2015-0066>
- Kunkel, T., Doyle, J., & Na, S. (2020). Becoming more than an athlete: Developing an athlete's personal brand using strategic philanthropy. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2020.1791208>

- Lair, D. J., Sullivan, K., & Cheney, G. (2005). Marketization and the Recasting of the Professional Self. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 18(3), 307–343.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318904270744>
- Lee, J. A., & Eastin, M. S. (2020). I Like What She’s #Endorsing: The Impact of Female Social Media Influencers’ Perceived Sincerity, Consumer Envy, and Product Type. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 20(1), 76–91.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2020.1737849>
- Levesque, N., & Pons, F. (2020). The Human Brand: A systematic literature review and research agenda. *Journal of Customer Behaviour*, 19(2), 143–174.
<https://doi.org/10.1362/147539220X15929906305242>
- Liu, R., & Suh, A. (2017). Self-Branding on Social Media: An Analysis of Style Bloggers on Instagram. *Procedia Computer Science*, 124, 12–20.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2017.12.124>
- Loureiro, S. M. C., Romero, J., & Bilro, R. G. (2020). Stakeholder engagement in cocreation processes for innovation: A systematic literature review and case study. *Journal of Business Research*, 119, 388–409. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.09.038>
- Marland, D. (2021). Cristiano Ronaldo Breaks Social Media Record With 500 Million Followers. Retrieved from <https://www.sportbible.com/football/football-newslegends-take-a-bow-cristiano-ronaldo-is-the-first-person-to-have-500-millionfollowers-20210212>. Accessed December 16, 2021 SPORTbible.
- McIntosh, M. J., & Morse, J. M. (2015). Situating and Constructing Diversity in Semi-Structured Interviews. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, 2, 1–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2333393615597674>
- Merz, M. A., He, Y., & Vargo, S. L. (2009). The evolving brand logic: A service-dominant logic perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 37(3), 328–344.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-009-0143-3>
- Michel, G. (2017). From brand identity to polysemous brands: Commentary on “Performing identities: Processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction”. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 453–455. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.06.022>
- Mingers, J. (2003). The paucity of multimethod research: A review of the information systems literature. *Information Systems Journal*, 13(3), 233–249.
<https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2575.2003.00143.x>

- Mingers, J., & Brocklesby, J. (1997). Multimethodology: Towards a framework for mixing methodologies. *Omega*, 25(5), 489–509. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-0483\(97\)00018-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-0483(97)00018-2)
- Mogaji, E., Badejo, F. A., Charles, S., & Millisits, J. (2020). To build my career or build my brand? Exploring the prospects, challenges and opportunities for sportswomen as human brand. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2020.1791209>
- Morgan-Thomas, A., Dessart, L., & Veloutsou, C. (2020). Digital ecosystem and consumer engagement: A socio-technical perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 121, 713–723. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.03.042>
- Moulard, J. G., Garrity, C. P., & Rice, D. H. (2015). What Makes a Human Brand Authentic? Identifying the Antecedents of Celebrity Authenticity. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(2), 173–186. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20771>
- Na, S., Kunkel, T., & Doyle, J. (2020). Exploring athlete brand image development on social media: The role of signalling through source credibility. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 88–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2019.1662465>
- Nielsen,. (2022). FIFA World Cup 2022: The essential data hub. Retrieved from <https://www.nielsen.com/de/insights/2022/fifa-world-cup-2022-data-hub/>. Accessed October 17, 2022 Nielsen.
- Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and Validation of a Scale to Measure Celebrity Endorsers' Perceived Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, 19(3), 39–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1990.10673191>
- Osorio, M. L., Centeno, E., & Cambra-Fierro, J. (2020). A thematic exploration of human brands: Literature review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 29(6), 695–714. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-02-2019-2274>
- Parmentier, M.-A., & Fischer, E. (2012). How athletes build their brands. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 11(1/2), 106–124. <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijsmm.2012.045491>
- Parmentier, M.-A., Fischer, E., & Reuber, A. R. (2013). Positioning person brands in established organizational fields. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 41(3), 373–387. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-012-0309-2>
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods. *Sage Publications*. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1990-97369-000>.

- Pera, R., Menozzi, A., Abrate, G., & Baima, G. (2021). When cocreation turns into codestruction. *Journal of Business Research*, 128, 222–232.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.01.058>
- Pereira, T., Loureiro, S. M. C., & Sarmento, E. M. (2022). Achieving Brand Engagement and Brand Equity Through Co-creation Process. *Journal of Creative Communications*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09732586221083862>
- Perreault, W. D., & Leigh, L. E. (1989). Reliability of Nominal Data Based on Qualitative Judgments. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 26(2), 135–148.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/002224378902600201>
- Preece, C., & Kerrigan, F. (2015). Multi-stakeholder brand narratives: An analysis of the construction of artistic brands. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(11–12), 1207–1230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2014.997272>
- Qu, S. Q., & Dumay, J. (2011). The qualitative research interview. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, 8(3), 238–264.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/11766091111162070>
- Ramaswamy, V., & Ozcan, K. (2016). Brand value co-creation in a digitalized world: An integrative framework and research implications. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 33(1), 93–106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2015.07.001>
- Ratten, V. (2015). Athletes as entrepreneurs: The role of social capital and leadership ability. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, 25(4), 442–455.
<https://doi.org/10.1504/ijesb.2015.070217>
- Sarasvuo, S., Rindell, A., & Kovalchuk, M. (2022). Toward a conceptual understanding of co-creation in branding. *Journal of Business Research*, 139, 543–563.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.09.051>
- Shepherd, I. D. H. (2005). From Cattle and Coke to Charlie: Meeting the Challenge of Self Marketing and Personal Branding. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 21(5–6), 589–606. <https://doi.org/10.1362/0267257054307381>
- Stegmann, P., Nagel, S., & Strobel, T. (2021). The digital transformation of value cocreation: A scoping review towards an agenda for sport marketing research. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2021.1976241>
- Strobel, T., & Germelmann, C. C. (2020). Exploring new routes within brand research in sport management: Directions and methodological approaches. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2019.1706603>

- Su, Y., Baker, B., Doyle, J., & Kunkel, T. (2020). The Rise of an Athlete Brand: Factors Influencing the Social Media Following of Athletes. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 29(1), 33–46. <https://doi.org/10.32731/SMQ.291.302020.03>
- Su, Y., Baker, B. J., Doyle, J. P., & Yan, M. (2020). Fan Engagement in 15 Seconds: Athletes' Relationship Marketing During a Pandemic via TikTok. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 13(3), 436–446. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ijsc.2020-0238>
- Thomson, M. (2006). Human Brands: Investigating Antecedents to Consumers' Strong Attachments to Celebrities. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(3), 104–119. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.70.3.104>
- Tierney, K. D., Karpen, I. O., & Westberg, K. (2016). Brand meaning cocreation: Toward a conceptualization and research implications. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, 26(6), 911–932. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-06-2015-0137>
- Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2004). Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.68.1.1.24036>
- Veloutsou, C., & Guzman, F. (2017). The evolution of brand management thinking over the last 25 years as recorded in the Journal of Product and Brand Management. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 26(1), 2–12. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-01-2017-1398>
- Venkatesh, V., Brown, S. A., & Bala, H. (2013). Bridging The Qualitative-Quantitative Divide: Guidelines For Conducting Mixed Methods Research In Information Systems. *MIS Quarterly*(37), 21–54.
- von Wallpach, S., Hemetsberger, A., & Espersen, P. (2017). Performing identities: Processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 443–452.
- Wider, S., von Wallpach, S., & Mühlbacher, H. (2018). Brand management: Unveiling the delusion of control. *European Management Journal*, 36(3), 301–305. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2018.03.006>
- Woratschek, H., Horbel, C., & Popp, B. (2014). Value co-creation in sport management. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 14(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2013.866302>
- Woratschek, H., Horbel, C., & Popp, B. (2020). Determining customer satisfaction and loyalty from a value co-creation perspective. *The Service Industries Journal*, 40 (11–12), 777–799. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069.2019.1606213>

Zaglia, M. E. (2013). Brand communities embedded in social networks. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(2–2), 216–223. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.07.015>

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary and Contributions

Digital and sustainable transformation are not only transforming society as a whole but are also transforming the perspectives on brands and brand management. While brand management research predominantly assumes a brand owner-dominant logic, digital and sustainable transformation facilitate the active involvement of multiple actors in brand co-creation, diminish managerial control over brands, and ultimately condition brand management research to develop innovative theoretical concepts. In addition, digital and sustainable transformation cause emerging research phenomena of brand management such as the formation of human brands as novel types of branded entities, fuelled by digital technologies, the broader social roles of brands, fuelled by transforming societal values and norms, and the challenges of navigating between brand heritage and brand innovation, fuelled by social and digital trends and socio-cultural phenomena. The aim of this thesis was to provide an extensive conceptualisation of brand management within the context of the transforming realities of today's society – considering both theoretical concepts of brand management and selected emerging research phenomena of brand management at different analysis levels.

In order to address this research aim, this thesis builds on three main chapters. In the *second chapter*, the author reviews extant literature to build the theoretical foundation for this thesis and illustrate the current state of academic thinking in brand management and sport management research. In particular, the multi-actor-dominant logic of brands is described, distinguished from the hegemonic brand owner-dominant logic, and discussed from a sport management perspective to provide an initial understanding of brand co-creation. In addition, the second chapter illustrates how digital and sustainable transformation condition the formation of selected emerging research phenomena (i.e., human brands as novel types of branded entities, brands embracing broader social roles, and brands navigating between brand heritage and brand innovation).

The *third and fourth chapter* accumulate five research articles and two transfer articles, predominantly employing qualitative approaches to capture the complexity of brands as social phenomena, to analyse the influence of digital and sustainable transformation on brand management, using sport brands as a specific research context. To ensure a systematic and coherent structure, the articles were classified into a research framework with two dimensions – brand management level and analysis level – each represented as a continuum. The brand management level distinguishes between theoretical concepts of brand management and emerging research

phenomena of brand management, while the analysis level spans from intra- and micro-level to meso- and macro-level of aggregation, thus enabling a comprehensive understanding of brands and brand management.

In the *third chapter*, the general aim of the articles was to develop and refine theoretical concepts of brand management, eventually enhancing the conceptualisation of brand co-creation. While *Transfer Article 1* summarises and applies the concept of integrative branding in the context of sport, the other two research articles comprise empirical studies at different analysis levels to enable comprehensive theoretical conceptualisations. In particular, the integrative sport brand ecosystem was developed as a meso- and macro level framework to understand and examine brand co-creation, revealing the multiple actors and overarching structures of brand co-creation (*Research Article 1*). Building on this conceptualisation, the author focused on the intra- and micro level of the integrative sport brand ecosystem to identify individual brand co-creation performances of multiple actors on brand engagement platforms as fundamental micro-foundations for brand co-creation (*Research Article 2*).

The *fourth chapter* shifts the focus towards emerging research phenomena of brand management resulting from digital and sustainable transformation. While examining selected emerging research phenomena in depth, the articles also contribute to the refinement of the theoretical concepts developed in the *third chapter*. On the meso- and macro level, the multi-actor-dominant logic was applied to sport event brands in *Transfer Article 2*, identifying actors and brand engagement platforms in the context of the EURO 2024 to enhance the understanding of building sport event brands. Considering the event organisers' strong commitment to sustainability, a special focus was on the analysis how sustainable brand meanings are reinforced and co-created within the ecosystem of the sport event brand. Drawing on the theoretical concept of conscientious brands, *Research Article 3* illustrates how brand management enables sport clubs to facilitate sustainable value co-creation. Conscientious sport club brands form ecosystems of like-minded stakeholders, connected through conscientious brand meaning, that collaborate and engage in sustainable value co-creation. In particular, it identifies specific roles of stakeholders to co-create sustainable value. While these two articles relate to sustainable transformation and the broader social roles of brands, *Research Article 4* and *Research Article 5* predominantly relate to digital transformation. The former reveals how brand managers must navigate between brand heritage and brand innovation, preserving and translating brand identity in the context of innovative brand extensions (i.e., eSport). In addition, these brand extensions modify the integrative sport brand ecosystem and potentially result in *Doppelgängerbe-deutungen* emerging from brand meaning co-creation processes. The latter shifts the analysis

level to the intra- and micro level as *Research Article 5* revolves around the empowerment of human brands as novel types of branded entities through digital platforms, unveiling relevant digital brand engagement platforms, key actors, and their performances to co-create the human brand.

In sum, the articles provide pioneering insights into brand management within the context of a transforming society. While the findings and implications are especially relevant to the research context of sport brands, which ultimately provide an ‘over-the-top’ context for an in-depth examination of brand management concepts and phenomena, they also allow for broader application across contexts and industries, thus making significant contributions to research and management practice in general brand management. In particular, findings and implications are transferable to the management, co-creation, and innovation of other culturally relevant brands (i.e., brands with deep connections to their audiences and high levels of actor engagement such as Lego, Apple, Levi’s, or Disney), to other brands that aim to acknowledge their wider social role, and to other human brands than athletes, emerging in different industry-contexts (e.g., politicians, activists, influencers, actors, or musicians). Accordingly, this thesis guides both researchers and practitioners to comprehend and respond appropriately to the transforming realities of brand management. A detailed overview of theoretical and managerial contributions of the individual articles is presented in Table 3.

In conclusion, this thesis provides an extensive understanding of brand management within the context of a transforming society, conceptualising specific theoretical concepts within the multi-actor-dominant logic to refine the understanding of brand co-creation among multiple actors. Additionally, building on these theoretical concepts, this thesis empirically examines selected emerging research phenomena of brand management (i.e., human brands as novel types of branded entities, brands embracing broader social roles, and brands navigating between brand heritage and brand innovation) to both enhance the understanding of these and refine the theoretical concepts in specific contexts.

Table 3. Overview of the Research Articles and Transfer Articles and their Theoretical and Managerial Contributions.

Title	Theoretical Contributions	Managerial Contributions
Research Articles (RA)		
RA 1: <i>Rethinking brand management within sport: advancing towards the integrative sport brand ecosystem (ISBE)</i>	- Examining the network of actors surrounding a sport brand and engaging in brand co-creation - Revealing the structures of brand co-creation (i.e., brand engagement platforms) - Adopting an organisational perspective to examine the brand conductor's role and activities in brand co-creation (i.e., brand management platform)	- Develop a structured overview of the <i>ISBE</i> (i.e., actors, brand engagement platforms) - Establish an internal brand management platform - Provide brand engagement platforms to facilitate brand co-creation
RA 2: <i>Unpacking brand co-creation: A single case study and empirical consolidation of brand co-creation performances following qualitative meta-synthesis</i>	- Empirically consolidating eight generic brand co-creation performances that offer an overarching approach to examine brand co-creation amid various contexts - Uncovering the complex interrelationships and consecutiveness among brand co-creation performances (i.e., direct and enabling brand co-creation performances) - Specifying the actors that engage in particular brand co-creation performances	- Communicate and implement brand identity, and continuously develop strategic directions for the brand - Engage in enabling brand co-creation performances to facilitate direct brand co-creation performances of internal and external actors - Acknowledge the brand co-creation performances of other actors and remain open for dynamic adaptations of brand identity
RA 3: <i>Conscientious Sport Club Brands as Ecosystems for Sustainable Value Co-Creation: the Roles of Stakeholders</i>	- Conceptualising and empirically illustrating conscientious sport club brands as ecosystems of like-minded stakeholders that co-create sustainable value - Revealing four distinct stakeholder roles in co-creating sustainable value	- Understand brand management as an approach to facilitate sustainable value co-creation - Invest in building conscientious brand meaning to leverage the connecting potential of the brand and unite like-minded stakeholders - Recognise how stakeholders can contribute to sustainable value co-creation

RA 4: <i>'A Victimless Crime'? Implications of eSports Extensions of Sport Club Brands for Brand Management From a Multi-Actor-Dominant Logic</i>	- Enhancing the understanding of the <i>ISBE</i> in the context of innovative brand extensions - Demonstrating how innovative brand extensions expand the <i>ISBE</i> of sport club brands - Examining how brand conductors build and negotiate brand identity on the internal brand management platform within the context of brand heritage and brand innovation - Revealing discursive processes among fans to co-create brand meaning within the context of innovative brand extensions	- Identify and respect the core elements of brand identity within the context of innovative brand extensions - Be clear about the objectives of the innovative brand extension – become an authentic part of the 'novel' target group
RA 5: <i>Empowerment of human brands: Brand meaning co-creation on digital engagement platforms</i>	- Conceptualising integrative human branding - Identifying actors that co-create brand meaning on digital brand engagement platforms - Revealing actors' performances on digital brand engagement platforms to co-create brand meaning (especially considering unique characteristics of human brands)	- Analyse which actors are involved in co-creating human brands on digital brand engagement platforms - Strategically plan the use of different digital brand engagement platforms - Apply and promote performances
Transfer Articles (TA)		
TA 1: <i>Integrative Branding - Brand Management in The Light of Value Co-Creation</i>	- Integrating value co-creation and integrative branding in the context of sport brand management	- Explaining integrative branding and success factors of sport brand management to practitioners in clear, accessible language
TA 2: <i>Aufbau und Management von Eventmarken im Sport - Implikationen einer Multi-Akteurs-dominanten Logik für die Eventmarke EURO 2024</i>	- Enhancing the understanding of building sustainable sport event brands by leveraging the multi-actor dominant logic of brands - Identifying actors and brand engagement platforms in the context of a sport event brand	- Coordinate constant agreements between brand conductor actors to ensure coherent brand communication - Provide brand engagement platforms to facilitate the co-creation of (sustainable) brand meaning - Dynamically assess co-created brand meanings

5.2. Future Research

Despite this extensive contribution, both theoretical concepts and emerging research phenomena require further academic examination. In particular, the concept of brand co-creation (i.e., integrative brand ecosystem, brand co-creation performances) could be further refined in different – potentially emerging (*see below*) – research contexts. This is particularly significant as society is in a constant state of transformation, potentially further transforming the principles of brand management and requiring further advancements of theoretical concepts. In addition, this thesis builds solely on qualitative approaches. While this approach was particularly applicable in this thesis due to its explorative character and the sociological perspective taken on brands and brand management, future research could build on these conceptualisations to evaluate and refine them in quantitative approaches. For instance, the engagement in and the effect of brand co-creation performances within the brand ecosystem could be measured through a survey and the salience of actors within the brand ecosystem could be quantitatively examined.

Lastly, as brands operate in a rapidly transforming society, future research should be oriented towards societal developments and focus on emerging phenomena, allowing to refine theoretical concepts and understand these novel phenomena. At the time of writing, we are witnessing several developments that hold significant implications for brand management research. In the following, the author focuses on a few key developments. First, we live in an era of increasing polarisation in our society between progressive and reactionary tendencies. How can brands navigate this environment, what are the risks and rewards for conscientious – or even reactionary – brands taking a political and social stand, how can brands foster inclusivity and build bridges within society, and how can brands achieve authenticity in the process?

Second, closely linked to the societal polarisation, political parties and politicians are increasingly becoming brands, which means that brand management can offer an exciting perspective for political science. How can politicians establish themselves as authentic brands in an era of heightened scepticism, how does the increasing presence of deep fakes, misinformation, and fake news impact public trust, and how can brand management help in reinforcing credibility and trust in politicians and politics as a whole?

Third, artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming brand management, challenging traditional notions of authenticity and differentiation as AI-driven tools create hyper-personalised experiences but also automate brand interactions. How can brands utilise AI to facilitate brand

interactions, however, how can they maintain originality and authenticity as *AI*-driven automation makes brand interactions more interchangeable, and to what extent must brand management principles be adapted to *AI*-generated virtual influencers as human brands?

Fourth, within the specific context of sport brands used in this thesis, power dynamics seem to be shifting from traditional (i.e., clubs) to novel (i.e., athletes) types of branded entities, especially among younger generations. Do athlete brands become more relevant than club brands in the long term, how can clubs strategically leverage their athletes' brands in their own branding efforts and vice versa, but at the same time, how can clubs avoid becoming dependent on athletes to mitigate potential negative branding effects, such as those caused by transfers or instances of misconduct?

APPENDIX A: LIST OF INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CONTRIBUTIONS

The international conference contributions are listed chronologically from the most recent to the earliest contributions.

Accepted for presentation:

Brand, L., Stegmann, P., & Ströbel, T. (2025). *Actor-Roles in the Sustainable Transformation of Sport Organisations*. Accepted for presentation at the 31st Annual Conference of the Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand, Auckland, New Zealand.

Presented:

Brand, L., Stegmann, P., & Ströbel, T. (2025). *Brand Management As A Facilitator For The Sustainable Transformation Of Sport Clubs*. 33rd Conference of the European Association for Sport Management (EASM), Budapest, Hungary.

Philipp, Y., Brand, L., Ströbel, T., & Puchner, G. (2025). *Sport Clubs' Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives: The Effect Of Benevolence And Costliness On Fans' Pro-Environmental Behaviour*. 33rd Conference of the European Association for Sport Management (EASM), Budapest, Hungary.

Brand, L., Anderski, M., & Ströbel, T. (2024). *Unpacking Sport Brand Co-Creation: An Empirical Examination of Brand Co-creation Performances*. 32nd Conference of the European Association for Sport Management (EASM), Paris, France.

Brand, L., Stegmann, P., & Ströbel, T. (2024). *Sport brands have the power to change the world, don't they?! Sportklubmarken und ihr Einfluss auf ökologisch nachhaltiges Fanverhalten*. AK-IASE Conference 2024, Bayreuth, Germany.

Brand, L., Stegmann, P., & Ströbel, T. (2024). *Brands have the power to change the world, don't they?! An examination of the impact of co-created conscientious brands on pro-environmental behaviours among their consumers*. 17th Global Brand Conference, Edinburgh, UK.

Davies, M., Griebel, L., & Armstrong, C. (2023). *Branding Across Borders: A Comparative Analysis Of Brand Communication By League-Affiliated Domestic And International Instagram Accounts*. Sport Marketing Association Conference (SMA), St. Petersburg, USA.

- Brand, L., & Ströbel, T. (2023). *ESports Extensions of Sport Brands: Implications for Brand Management*. 31st Conference of the European Association for Sport Management (EASM), Belfast, Northern Ireland.
- Anderski, M., Griebel, L., Ströbel, T., & Ridpath, B. D. (2023). *Shine Bright Like a Diamond! An Analysis of the NIL Rule and its Impact on Athlete Brand Building from a Multi-Actor Perspective*. CSRI Conference on College Sport, South Carolina, USA.
- Anderski, M., Griebel, L., & Ströbel, T. (2022). *Athlete Activism: An Analysis from a Multi-Actor Perspective during the Olympic Games in Tokyo and Beijing*. 19th Sport Marketing Association Annual Conference (SMA), Charlotte, USA.
- Griebel, L., Anderski, M., & Ströbel, T. (2022). *eSports Extensions of Traditional Sports Club Brands: Opportunities for Brand Co-Creation Processes?* 19th Sport Marketing Association Annual Conference (SMA), Charlotte, USA.
- Griebel, L. & Ströbel, T. (2022). *How do Brands evolve? An Exploration of Brand Co-Creation Performances*. 51st European Marketing Association Conference (EMAC), Budapest, Hungary.
- Anderski, M., Griebel, L., Stegmann, P., & Ströbel, T. (2021). *The Role of Digital Engagement Platforms for Athlete Branding*. FISU World Conference, Lucerne (Switzerland).
- Anderski, M., Griebel, L., Stegmann, P., & Ströbel, T. (2021). *Empowerment of Human Brands: Brand Meaning Co-Creation on Digital Engagement Platforms*. 29th European Association for Sport Management Conference (EASM), virtual conference.
- Griebel, L., Ströbel, T., & Anderski, M. (2021). *Rethinking Brand Management within Sports: Advancing to a Multi-Actor Perspective*. 29th European Association for Sport Management Conference (EASM), virtual conference.

APPENDIX B: TRANSFER ARTICLES CONTRIBUTING TO THE THIRD MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BAYREUTH

A Logic of Sport Products – The Traditional Approach in Sport Management (Transfer Article 3)

Authors Herbert Woratschek, University of Bayreuth, Germany
Lars Brand (né Griebel), University of Bayreuth, Germany

Published in *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*, 2020, 1, 1-3

Traditional approaches in sport management often refer to sport as a product. For instance, Pitts, Fielding and Miller (1994, p.18) segment the sport industry along product types (Eschenfelder & Li, 2007, p. 4; Pedersen & Thibault, 2014, p. 11). Those approaches assume value is embedded within products and services. A sport event as a product is made by firms (or organisations). They combine resources such as financial, physical, legal, human, organisational, informational and relational resources to produce a sport event product (Hunt & Derozier, 2004, pp. 7-8; Chelladurai, 2014, pp. 352-353). Table 1 shows some examples of used resources in sport event production.

Table 1. Resources in Sport Event Production.

Resources	Examples
financial	cash, access to financial markets, returns on tickets, media or sponsoring, income
physical	arena, stadium, equipment, shops, VIP area, hoarding and screens
legal	trademarks, licenses, media rights
human	competences, skills and knowledge of individual employees
organisational	organisational competences, controls, policies, culture
informational	knowledge from fans/ spectators/ sponsors and competitive intelligence
relational	relationships with suppliers/ leagues/ fans/ spectators/ sponsors/ politicians

There is an important peculiarity in sport event production. Sport events are always produced by a collaboration of different organisations, e.g. sporting goods manufacturers, sport teams, athletes, referees, sport leagues, media companies, security, groundsmen, and many more. Hereby, it is constitutive that competitors have to cooperate and compete simultaneously in regard to sports as well as to business. If a sports club does not cooperate with an opposing sports club, a sport event cannot take place. This special feature of sport events is named co-

opetition (Robert, Marqués & Le Roy, 2009, p. 24). However, sport events as products always include some services. Therefore, we call this way of thinking a “logic of sport products”.

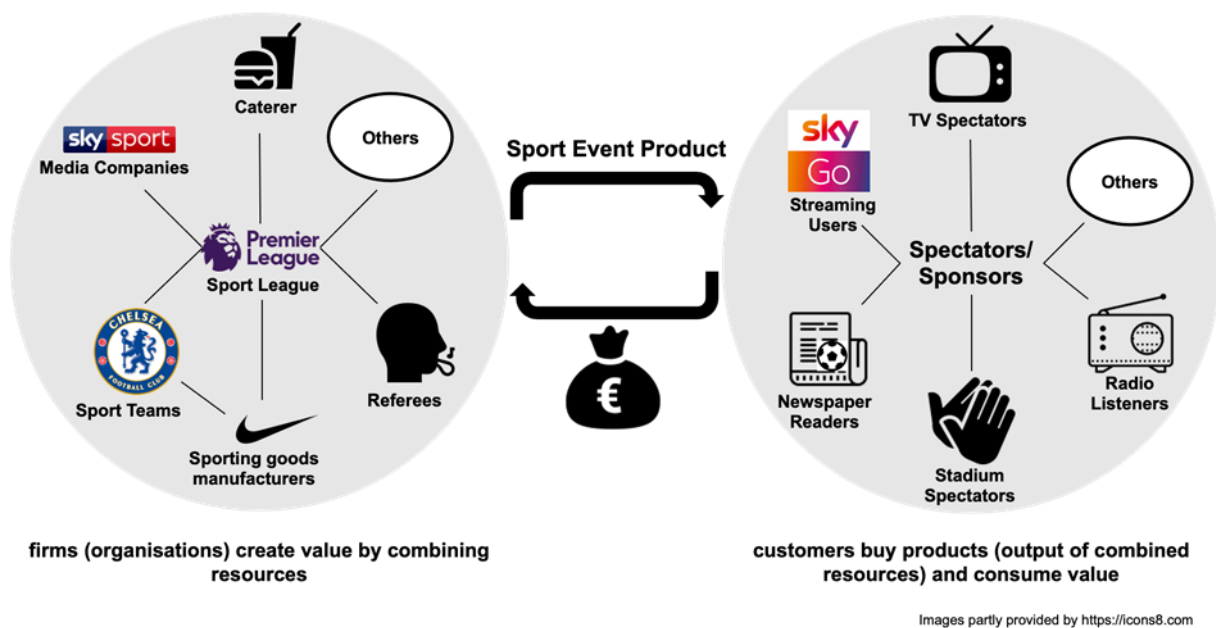


Figure 1. Logic of Sport Products – Traditional Approach.

The production process leads to value. Due to the production, the sport event has a higher value than the resources used. Therefore, products can be exchanged for money (figure 1). Consumers demand and buy sport events because they consume the embedded value. Hence, firms create the value of a sport event and consumers use it up. However, sport events can be sold for different purposes and several times in different markets. It can be marketed to viewers through the sale of tickets or to sponsors who wish to promote their products and services. Sport events can be marketed to spectators via newspapers, TV, radio, internet streaming, and other media (see figure 1). Therefore, in sports marketing we differentiate “marketing of sports” and “marketing through sports” (Milne & McDonald, 1999, p. 3). Marketing through sports implies sponsors as cooperation partners of sport leagues and clubs producing sport events, for example providing lotteries in the stadium. At the same time, they are paying customers consuming the sport event as advertisers (figure 1).

But why do consumers demand sport events? According to sport economic theories, value of a sport event is mainly derived from its uncertainty of outcome (Hoye, Smith, Westerbeek, Stewart & Nicholson, 2006, p. 4). No one knows in advance how a sport competition will end. This creates tension which in turn results in emotions. These are all special features of sport event products. They meet certain needs and thus satisfy different motivations of consumers.

To put in a nutshell

1. Partially competing firms (organisations) compete but also cooperate with others to produce a sport event through resource combination (co-opetition).
2. The production leads to value which is embedded in a sport event product.
3. The firms sell the sport event product for different purposes in different markets.
4. Consumers buy it because they want to use the value up and therefore, they are willed to pay. Consequently, a sport event product is exchanged for money.
5. We call this way of thinking a logic of sport products.
6. Sport event products have specific features, e.g. uncertainty of outcome.

References

- Chelladurai, P. (2013). A personal journey in theorizing in sport management. *Sport Management Review*, 16(1), 22-28.
- Eschenfelder, M. J., & Li, M. (2007). *Economics of sport*. Sport management library. Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.
- Hunt, S. D., & Derozier, C. (2004). The normative imperatives of business and marketing strategy: grounding strategy in resource-advantage theory. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 19(1), 5-22.
- Hoye, R., Smith, A., Westerbeek, H., Stewart, B., & Nicholson, M. (2006). *Sport management: Principles and applications*. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Milne, G. R., & McDonald, M. A. (1999). *Sport marketing: Managing the exchange process*. Sudbury, Mass: Jones and Bartlett.
- Pedersen, P. M., & Thibault, L. (2014). Managing Sport. In P. M. Pedersen & L. Thibault (Eds.), *Contemporary sport management* (pp. 4–31). Leeds: Human Kinetics.
- Pitts, B., Fielding, L. W. & Miller, L. K. (1994). Industry segmentation theory and the sport industry: Developing a sport industry segment model. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 3(1), 15-24.
- Robert, F., Marqués, P. & Le Roy, F. (2009). Coopetition between SMEs. An empirical study of French professional football. *International journal of entrepreneurship and small business*, 8(1), 23-43.

Special Features of the Product in Sport Economics (Transfer Article 4)

Authors Herbert Woratschek, University of Bayreuth, Germany
Lars Brand (né Griebel), University of Bayreuth, Germany

Published in *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*, 2020, 2, 1-4

Traditional approaches in sport economics correspond to a way of thinking, which we call a logic of sport product (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020). They acknowledge several special features of the sport product (Smith & Stewart, 1999, pp. 13-21) that impact how sport is managed. Figure 1 gives an overview of these features in sport economics.

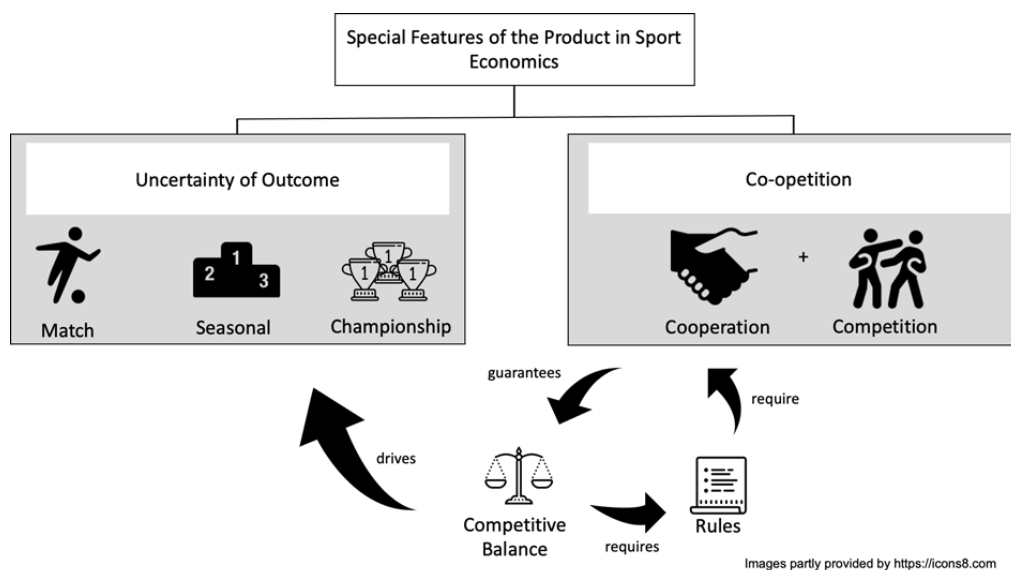


Figure 1. Special Features of the Product in Sport Economics.

Uncertainty of Outcome

The outcome of any game is uncertain and cannot be predicted in advance (Rottenberg, 1956, p. 246). This creates tension, which is one major motive for fans' interest in sport events (Humphreys & Watanabe, 2012, pp. 18-21). Sport fans actually purchase the excitement generated by the unpredictability of the event outcome (Dobson & Goddard, 2001, pp. 125-126). Literature distinguishes between three forms of outcome uncertainty (Szymanski, 2003, p. 1155):

1. Match uncertainty refers to the outcome of an individual match.
2. "Seasonal uncertainty means a close championship race within a include". It could also refer to the seasonal games within a football- or basketball league.
3. Championship uncertainty refers to a variety of championships over several years. If a league is balanced, there is no domination by one or two teams.

Consequently, the competitive balance is identified as a key driver for outcome uncertainty (Owen, Ryan & Weatherston, 2007, p. 290). The more balanced a competition is, the higher the uncertainty of outcome and the tension becomes. This leads to a higher demand for a sport event (Kringstad & Gerrard, 2007, p. 151) and to a greater commercial success (Byers, Slack & Parent, 2012, p. 11; Humphreys & Watanabe, 2012, pp. 18-19).

Competitive balance and uncertainty of outcome are measured by indicators, e.g. by comparing the win percentages or league standings of two clubs. Seasonal uncertainty can be approached by the range between the highest and the lowest win percentage of teams. The greater the range, the bigger the imbalance. One simple way to measure the championship uncertainty is to count the number of different champions over a number of seasons (Kesenne, 2015, pp. 11-12). To do such measures, rules are needed, e.g. rules about victory or defeat and league standings. Empirical research yet, does not offer clear evidence for the impact of outcome uncertainty or competitive balance on demand (e.g. Szymanski, 2003, pp. 1157-1158). There are some approaches declaring that consumers might prefer watching superstars dominating a sport (Humphreys & Johnson p. 153) experiencing the excitement of upsets or just enjoying their favourite team winning (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman & Sloan, 1976, p. 366). These cases show that demand may not always depend on competitive balance.

Co-opetition

Single sport events as well as league competition require competitors agreeing on general rules and time schedules (Smith & Stewart, 1999, pp. 15-17). Hence, sport teams have to cooperate to a certain degree. This act of simultaneous competition and cooperation is referred to as co-opetition (Robert, Marqués & Le Roy, 2009, p. 24). For instance, in the German football industry, 18 competitors are organised within the cooperative structure of the German “Bundesliga”. Moreover, rules are defined by co-opetition to guarantee competitive balance, e.g. draft or relegation system. The draft system ensures competitive balance in a league because the prior season’s worst teams get the right to draft players first (Grier & Tollison, 1994 pp. 294, 298). Promotion and relegation make sure that stronger teams move into higher quality leagues and worse teams into lower quality ones (Humphreys & Watanabe, 2012, p. 32). Sport teams know that they need each other to guarantee competitive balance. This may be why Bayern München financially supported several clubs in order to prevent their insolvency, including today’s biggest rival Borussia Dortmund (FC Bayern München AG, 2020). If they lost their strongest rival, the sport competition could be more imbalanced and consequently, less attractive for spectators and sponsors.

To put in a nutshell

1. Special features of a sport product are uncertainty of outcome and co-opetition from the perspective of sport economics.
2. The forms of uncertainty of outcome are match, seasonal and championship uncertainties.
3. These forms are measured by indicators such as win percentages, league standings or number of different champions over a number of seasons.
4. Competitive balance drives uncertainty of outcome.
5. Competitive balance requires rules to agree on, e.g. draft and relegation systems.
6. There is no clear evidence for the impact of outcome uncertainty or competitive balance on demand.

References

- Byers, T., Slack, T., & Parent, M. (2012). *Key concepts in sport management*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Cialdini, R. B., Borden, R. J., Thorne, A., Walker, M. R., Freeman, S., & Sloan, L. R. (1976). Basking in reflected glory: Three (football) field studies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34(3), 366-375.
- Dobson, S., & Goddard, J. A. (2001). *The economics of football*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- FC Bayern München AG. (2020). *Responsibility*. Retrieved from <https://fcbayern.com/us/club/values/responsibility>
- Grier, K. B., & Tollison, R. D. (1994). The rookie draft and competitive balance: The case of professional football. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 25(2), 293-298.
- Humphreys, B., & Johnson, C. (2020). The Effect of Superstars on Game Attendance: Evidence From the NBA. *Journal of Sports Economics*, 21(2), 152-175.
- Humphreys, B., & Watanabe, N. (2012). Competitive Balance. In S. Shmanske & L. H. Kahane (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of sports economics* (pp. 18-37). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kesenne, S. (2015). *Economic theory of professional team sports: An analytical treatment*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Kringstad, M., & Gerrard, B. (2007). Beyond Competitive Balance. In M. M. Parent & T. Slack (Eds.), *International perspectives on the management of sport* (pp. 149-172). Amsterdam, Boston: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Owen, P. D., Ryan, M., & Weatherston, C. R. (2007). Measuring Competitive Balance in Professional Team Sports Using the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index. *Review of Industrial Organization*, 31(4), 289-302.
- Robert, F., Marqués, P., & Le Roy, F. (2009). Coopetition between SMEs. An empirical study of French professional football. *International journal of entrepreneurship and small business*, 8(1), 23-43.
- Rottenberg, S. (1956). The Baseball Players' Labor Market. *Journal of Political Economy*, 64(3), 242-258.
- Smith, A. & Stewart, B. (1999). *Sports management: A guide to professional practice*. St. Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin.
- Szymanski, S. (2003). The Economic Design of Sporting Contests. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 41(4), 1137-1187.

Woratschek, H., & Griebel, L. (2020). A Logic of Sport Products – The Traditional Approach in Sport Management. *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*, 1, 1-3. Retrieved from <https://www.sma-bayreuth.de/publishing/relevant-management-insights/>

Special Features of the Product in Sport Management (Transfer Article 5)

Authors Herbert Woratschek, University of Bayreuth, Germany
Lars Brand (né Griebel), University of Bayreuth, Germany

Published in *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*, 2020, 3, 1-4

Uncertainty of outcome and co-opetition are special features of sport products that are mainly addressed in sport economics (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020). In sport management literature, these features are widely accepted as fundamental hypotheses (Hoye, Smith, Westerbeek, Stewart & Nicholson, 2006, pp. 4-5). Furthermore, IHIP characteristics, BIRGing superstar effects, CORFing, giant-killing effects, and backing the underdogs are acknowledged as special features of products (sport events) in sport management.

IHIP Characteristics

Sport events belong to the service sector, and services are described by the following IHIP characteristics: intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability (e.g. Edgett & Parkinson, 1993, p. 8110). Although IHIP characteristics are open to dispute, they are still applicable to different aspects of services because customers' resources are always required for the production of services (Moeller, 2010, p. 362). Spectators contribute to the stadium atmosphere (Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2010) and, consequently, integrate their resources in sport event production. This illustrates that IHIP characteristics are special features of sport events.

People watch (consume) games when they are played (produced), which means production and consumption cannot be separated. Accordingly, sport events must be presold and cannot be stored because sport event products are perishable commodities. Although on-demand videos, social media clips or newspapers extend the product life in a different form, the original event is transient (Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2007, p. 18). Additionally, sport consumers purchase the excitement generated by uncertainty of outcome (Dobson & Goddard, 2001, pp. 125-126; Woratschek & Griebel, 2020), which shows that sport events are heterogeneous and intangible goods.

BIRGing and Superstar Effect

BIRGing is an acronym for "basking in reflected glory". It reflects the desire of individuals to strengthen their associations with successful others. BIRGing has a positive self-presentation and an ego enhancement function (Cialdini et al, 1976, p. 366). Individuals describe the outcome of the match in terms of "we" (e.g. "we won") and achieve a positive image transfer from the club to themselves (Bernache-Assollant, Lacassagne & Braddock, 2007,

p. 382; Wann & Branscombe, 1990, pp. 103-104). Consequently, sport events help to shape an individual's self-identity. Fans identify with the club's success in order to enhance their self-esteem (BIRGing). Identification leads to an emotional and loyal binding between fans and their favourite club. High identification results in an extreme fan and a high spectator loyalty. Fans and spectators gladly provide their resources to contribute to an unforgettable event (described by IHIP-characteristics) together with the club. Star players attract spectators and, as a result, the attendance increases. The positive effect of superstars on attendance in professional sports leagues has been verified in several papers (e.g. Humphreys, Johnson, p. 153). This superstar effect may lead to a higher identification of spectators with their teams. The antecedents and consequences of unique features of sport products are summarized in figure 1:

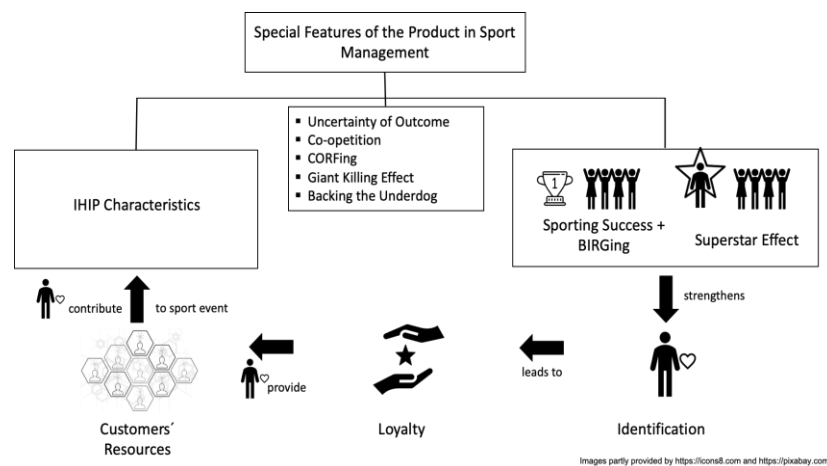


Figure 1. Antecedents and consequences of special features of sport products.

CORFing

CORFing means “cutting of reflected failure”. This notion is referred to people who tend to sever associations with others who have failed. CORFing serves an ego protective function and strives to avoid a negative evaluation by others (Snyder, Lassegard & Ford, 1986, p. 383). Losses are often described in terms of “they” (e.g. “they lost”) (Wann & Branscombe, 1990, p. 104). If a team fails, CORFing decreases spectators' identification with the team.

Giant-Killing Effect and Backing the Underdogs

Spectators' may be excited when the underdog beats the favourite (Coates, Humphreys & Zhou, 2014, p. 971-972). This aspect can be labelled as the giant-killing effect (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020), which may have a short-term influence on demand. Some spectators like when underdogs overcome the inferior status and upset the favoured opponent (Frazier & Snyder 1991, p. 380). Frazier & Synder (1991, p 387) state that by “focusing attention on the

underdog, a measure of excitement is returned to a potentially uninteresting event,” which is caused by an imbalanced competition. This kind of spectators’ behaviour is often connected with sport betting, and could be referred to as backing the underdogs (Express, 2020). It can be observed that clubs can regularly underperform, yet they still rely on the loyalty of their fans, who will not leave to a better performing team. For example, the German club VFB Stuttgart just had a very slight decrease in spectator numbers after relegating from the Bundesliga (Transfermarkt GmbH & Co. KG, 2020).

To put in a nutshell

1. Uncertainty of outcome and co-opetition are special features of sport products.
2. Customers’ resources are always required to produce a sport event.
3. Sport events as services show IHIP characteristics in different aspects.
4. IHIP characteristics are intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability.
5. Furthermore, BIRGing, super star effects, CORFing, giant-killing effects, and backing the underdogs are acknowledged as special features of sport products.
6. BIRGing, in combination with sport success and the superstar effect, lead to identification with a sport team.
7. High identification results in an extreme fan and a high spectator loyalty.
8. Loyal fans and spectators provide resources and contribute to a sport event.
9. CORFing, in combination with failure, decreases the degree of fans’ identification with the team.
10. Giant-killing effects and backing the underdogs may have an influence on demand.

References

- Bernache-Assollant, I., Lacassagne, M.-F., & Braddock, J. H. (2007). Basking in Reflected Glory and Blasting. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 26(4), 381-388
- Cambridge Dictionary. (2020). *Giant-Killing*. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/englisch/giant-killing>.
- Cialdini, R. B., Borden, R. J., Thorne, A., Walker, M. R., Freeman, S., & Sloan, L. R. (1976). Basking in reflected glory: Three (football) field studies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34(3), 366-375.
- Coates, Dennis; Humphreys, Brad R., & Zhou, L. I. (2014). Reference-dependent references, loss aversion, and live game attendance. *Economic Inquiry*, 52(3), 959–973.
- Dobson, S. & Goddard, J. A. (2001). *The economics of football*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Edgett, S., & Parkinson, S. (1993). Marketing for Service Industries-A Review. *The Service Industries Journal*, 13(3), 19-39.
- Express. (2020). *How sports fans are backing the underdogs in 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1226695/football-news-sports-fans-backing-underdogs-England-Euros-sports>.
- Frazier, Jimmy A., & Snyder, Eldon E. (1991). The Underdog Concept in Sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 8(4), S. 380–388.
- Hoye, R., Smith, A., Westerbeek, H., Stewart, B. & Nicholson, M. (2006). *Sport management. Principles and applications*. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Humphreys, Brad R., & Johnson, Candon (2020). The Effect of Superstars on Game Attendance: Evidence From the NBA. *Journal of Sports Economics*, 21(2), 152–175.
- Moeller, S. (2010). Characteristics of services – a new approach uncovers their value. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 24(5), 359-368.
- Mullin, B. J., Hardy, S., & Sutton, W. A. (2007). *Sport marketing*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Snyder, C. R., Lassegard, M., & Ford, C. E. (1986). Distancing after group success and failure: Basking in reflected glory and cutting off reflected failure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51(2), 382-388.
- Transfermarkt GmbH & Co. KG. (2020). *VFB Stuttgart - Entwicklung der Besucherzahlen*. Retrieved from <https://www.transfermarkt.de/vfb-stuttgart/besucherzahlenentwicklung/verein/79>.

- Uhrich, S., & Benkenstein, M. (2010). Sport stadium atmosphere: Formative and reflective indicators for operationalizing the construct. *Journal of Sport Management*, 24(2), 211-237.
- Wann, D. L., & Branscombe, N. R. (1990). Die-Hard and Fair-Weather Fans: Effects of Identification on BIRGing and CORFing Tendencies. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 14(2), 103-117.
- Woratschek, H., & Griebel, L. (2020). Special Features of the Product in Sport Economics. *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*, 2, 1-4. Retrieved from <https://www.sma-bayreuth.de/publishing/research-series/>

Value of Competitive Balance in Sport Management – Insights from the “Big Five” (Transfer Article 6)

Authors Herbert Woratschek, University of Bayreuth, Germany
Lars Brand (né Griebel), University of Bayreuth, Germany

Published in *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*, 2020, 4, 1-4

Uncertainty of outcome hypothesis (UOH) has been often tested in sport economics (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020a, p. 2). Championship uncertainty is indicated by a balanced league with a great variety of champions (Owen, Ryan, & Weatherston, 2007, p. 290). Hence, an equal distribution of championships among the teams indicates competitive balance. Sport economists state that competitive balance leads to greater commercial success (Byers, Slack, & Parent, 2012, p. 11; Humphreys & Watanabe, 2012, pp. 18-19; Kringstad & Gerrard, 2007, pp. 18-19).

Measuring Competitive Balance

Competitive balance driven by championship uncertainty can be measured by the distribution of different champions over years. In our sample, we measured the degree of competitive balance of the so-called “Big Five” by counting the number of championships and showing its distribution among teams. The big five European football leagues are “England, Spain, Germany, Italy and France” (Poli & Rossi, 2012, p. 2).

Table 1. Gini Coefficients and Normalised Gini Coefficients for the “Big Five”.

Income Ranking ²	League	Country	Gini Coefficient	Normalised Gini Coefficient
1	Premier League	England	0.84	0.88
2	La Liga	Spain	0.87	0.91
3	Bundesliga	Germany	0.88	0.92
4	Serie A	Italy	0.88	0.92
5	Ligue 1	France	0.78	0.82

The distribution can be measured using the Gini (G) or the normalised Gini coefficient (G*). G* takes a range between zero and one, where zero means equal distribution and one means unequal distribution (Trapeznikova, 2019, pp. 6-7). G and G* of the “Big Five” are shown in Table 1, which indicate that these leagues are not balanced at all. Furthermore, the leagues are ranked based on their revenue consisting of TV, sponsoring and ticketing income (season 2017/2018) in Table 1 as well as in Figure 1 (Statista, 2020).

Figure 1 shows the Lorenz curve, which is a graphical illustration of the distribution over the past 20 years (1999/2000 – 2018/19). An equal distribution is displayed by a 45-degree line. The more the Lorenz curve deviates from this line, the more unequal the distribution is (Trapeznikova, 2019, pp. 5-7). If the UOH is true, championships should be equally distributed in leagues with the highest incomes. However, the graphs of all five leagues deviate strongly from the equal distribution line (Figure 1) and all the normalised Gini coefficients are above 0.82 (Table 1), which indicate that the leagues with the highest income in Europe are not balanced at all.

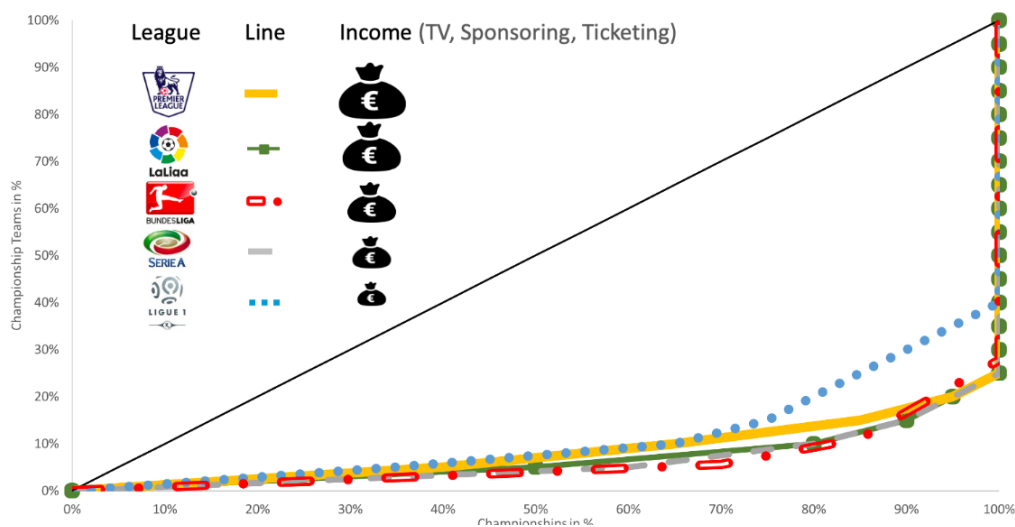


Figure 1. Lorenz curves for the European top five football leagues.

Within the big five, there is also evidence against the importance of competitive balance for demand. For instance, Ligue 1 has the best degree of competitive balance, yet its income is the lowest. On the contrary, the German Bundesliga is the most imbalanced league but ranks among the top three regarding income (Figure 1). These observations suggest that competitive balance and uncertainty of outcome do not appear to be the central determinants for the demand for sport events and, as a consequence, for commercial success. Rather, other influencing factors need to be considered, e.g. BIRGing or superstar effects.

Balanced Leagues and Commercial Success

Sport management literature acknowledges the UOH, but also discusses superstar effects and BIRGing that increase the fan identification with a specific team if this team wins often (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020b, p. 2). BIRGing and superstar effects, which are acknowledged factors that influence demand for sport events, contradict the UOC. To illustrate, customers' (e.g. spectators' and fans') high identification leads to high loyalty (Woratschek &

Griebel, 2020b, p. 2), while high loyal spectators and fans result in high commercial success (Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1994; Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2019). Hence, demand for sport events may also be driven by an unbalanced league.

To put in a nutshell

1. Competitive balance is perceived as prerequisite for a league's commercial success in sport economics and sport management literature.
2. Competitive balance within the "Big Five" European leagues is measured by looking at the distribution of championships over the last 20 years.
3. The Gini Coefficient as well as the Lorenz curve indicate a high imbalance of the leagues with the highest income in Europe.
4. Sport management literature discusses BIRGing and superstar effects, which both contradict the UOH and the concept of competitive balance.
5. Competitive balance and uncertainty of outcome are not the only determinants of demand for sport events. Other influencing factors need to be considered.

References

- Byers, T., Slack, T., & Parent, M. (2012). *Key concepts in sport management*: Sage.
- Heskett, J. L., Jones, T. O., Loveman, G. W., Sasser, W. E., & Schlesinger, L. A. (1994). Putting the Service-Profit Chain to Work. *Harvard Business Review*, 72(March-April), 164-174.
- Humphreys, B. R., & Watanabe, N. M. (2012). Competitive balance. In S. Shmanske, & L. H. Kahane (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of sports economics* (pp. 18-37). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kringstad, M., & Gerrard, B. (2007). Beyond competitive balance. In T. Slack, & M. Parent (Eds.), *International perspectives on the management of sport* (pp. 149-172). Routledge.
- Owen, P. D., Ryan, M., & Weatherston, C. R. (2007). Measuring competitive balance in professional team sports using the Herfindahl-Hirschman index. *Review of Industrial Organization*, 31(4), 289-302.
- Poli, R., & Rossi, G. (2012). *Football agents in the biggest five European football markets: An empirical research report*: CIES Football Observatory Neuchâtel.
- Raffinetti, E., Siletti, E., & Vernizzi, A. (2015). On the Gini coefficient normalization when attributes with negative values are considered. *Statistical Methods & Applications*, 24(3), 507-521.
- Statista. (2020). *Zusammensetzung des Umsatzes der europäischen "Big Five"-Ligen in der Saison 2017/2018*. Retrieved from <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/247148/umfrage/umsatz-der-groessten-europaeischen-fussball-ligen-nach-erloesbestandteil/>
- Trapeznikova, I. (2019). Measuring income inequality. *IZA World of Labor*, 1-12
- Woratschek, H., & Griebel, L. (2020a). Special Features of the Product in Sport Economics. *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*, 2, 1-4. Retrieved from <https://www.sma-bayreuth.de/publishing/relevant-management-insights/>
- Woratschek, H., & Griebel, L. (2020b). Special Features of the Product in Sport Management. *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*, 3, 1-4. Retrieved from <https://www.sma-bayreuth.de/publishing/relevant-management-insights/>
- Woratschek, H., Horbel, C., & Popp, B. (2019). Determining Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty from a Value Co-Creation Perspective. *The Service Industries Journal*, 40(11-12), 777-799.

The Logic of Sport Products in Sport Sponsorship (Transfer Article 7)

Authors Herbert Woratschek, University of Bayreuth, Germany
Lars Brand (né Griebel), University of Bayreuth, Germany

Published in *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*, 2020, 5, 1-4

Sponsorships play an integral role in the sport business environment. Global expenditure on sport sponsorship rights amounts to approximately 31 billion U.S. dollars (Rentz, 2019). The goals of sponsorship expenditures are the enhancement of brand image, the increase of brand awareness as well as the growth of market share and product sales (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998, p. 12).

The Evolution of Sponsorship Thinking

In the 1970s, sponsorships were perceived as gifts without consideration from the sponsor (Ryan & Fahy, 2012, pp. 1138-1140). This relationship is described as philanthropic approach in Figure 1.

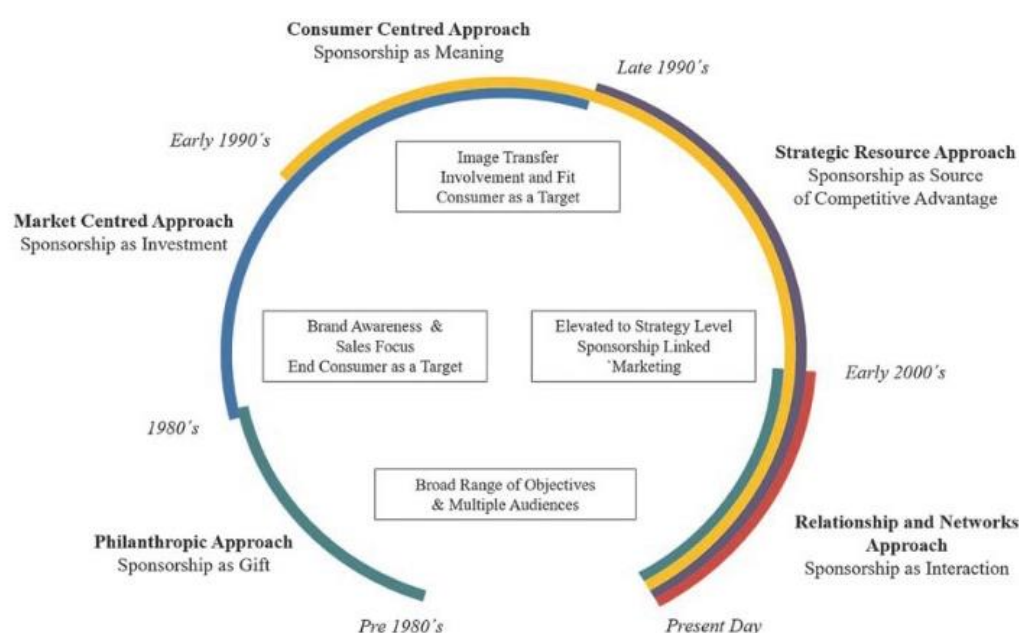


Figure 1. The evolution of sponsorship thinking (adapted from Ryan & Fahy, 2012, p. 1139).

It was not until the 1980s that the relationship between sponsor and sponsee became more symmetrical (Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007, p. 250), and approaches to sponsoring became more commercial oriented. In the 1980s, the analyses shifted towards a market-centred approach with end consumers as a target (Figure 1), and focused on sales and brand awareness. Sponsorship was perceived as an investment in an alternative communication tool alongside more traditional media, such as advertising (Ryan & Fahy, 2012, pp. 1140-1141).

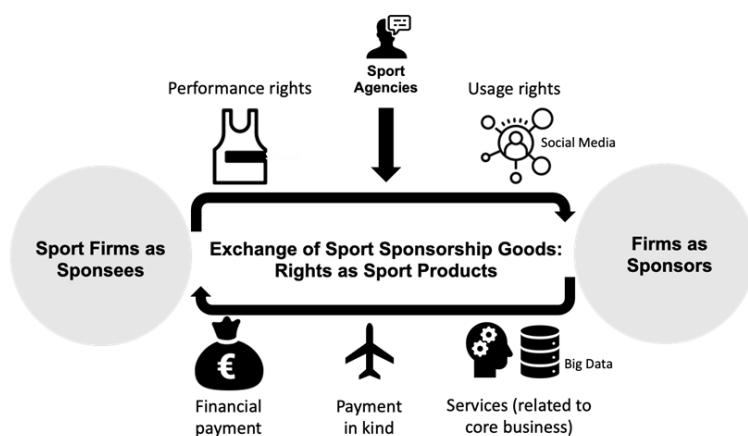
In the 1990s, the consumer-centred approach put the emphasis on the meaning of sponsorships considering all types of consumers (Figure 1). Positive image transfer, consumer involvement and the fit between sponsor and sponsee were analysed (Ryan & Fahy, 2012, pp. 1142-1143).

The strategic resource approach, which started in the 1990s, perceived sponsorships as sources of competitive advantage if managed properly (Ryan & Fahy, 2012, pp. 1142-1143). Yet, sponsorships alone are insufficient as a communication tool, and in order to obtain a greater value, they additionally require the use of sponsorship-linked marketing programs such as advertisements with the sponsored entity involved (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998, p. 1).

Recent analyses about sponsorship shift from the donor-recipient perspective towards a B2B-relationship and networks approach (Ryan & Fahy, 2012, p. 1145). However, the analyses are still mainly limited to the relationship between sponsors and sponsees.

Sport Sponsorship Rights as Products

Sponsorship is still regarded in textbooks as a communication tool, which has a significant importance in many companies' marketing mix (Séguin & Bodet, 2015, p. 306). The sponsor buys and exploits an association with a sponsored entity for marketing purposes (Thwaites & Chadwick, 2004, p. 351). In this process, the sponsor acquires rights "to affiliate or directly associate with a product or event for the purpose of deriving benefits related to that affiliation or association" (Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2014, p. 231). Therefore, sport sponsorship is mainly perceived as an economic exchange between sponsor and sponsee, where value is embedded in the sponsorship rights sold by a sponsee and used by sponsors. Therefore, traditional approaches follow the logic of sport products (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020), which is depicted in Figure 2.



Images partly provided by <https://icons8.com>

Figure 2. The Logic of Sport Products in Sport Sponsorship.

The sponsee, e.g. a team, creates value in form of sponsorship rights by cooperating with various actors such as leagues, media companies or consultants (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020, pp. 1-2). These rights include performance rights, e.g. jersey sponsorship, and usage rights, e.g. involve athletes to create content for social media (Woratschek & Buser 2018, p. 38). To use these rights, the sponsor provides the sponsored entity with financial payment, in-kind payment or services (Thwaites & Chadwick, 2004, p. 351). Sponsors utilize the value embedded within the rights to pursue commercial objectives. As shown in Figure 2, sport agencies often act as intermediary between sponsors and sponsees.

To put in a nutshell

1. Sponsorship is perceived as a powerful communication tool.
2. The evolution of sport sponsorship has gone from a philanthropic to a B2B-relationship approach.
3. Traditional approaches follow the logic of sport products.
4. Sport sponsorship rights are sport products with embedded value-in-communication.
5. Sponsees create value by selling performance and usage rights.
6. Sponsors pay for these rights and use the embedded value of sponsorship rights.
7. Sport agencies can serve as intermediaries to facilitate the economic exchange in sport sponsorship.

References

- Cornwell, B., & Maignan, I. (1998). An International Review of Sponsorship Research. *Journal of Advertising*, 27(1), 1-21.
- Mullin, B. J., Hardy, S. & Sutton, W. A. (2014). *Sport marketing*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Rentz, I. (2019). 30 Milliarden Dollar für Sportsponsoring - und so wenig fließt in den Frauensport. Retrieved from <https://www.horizont.net/marketing/nachrichten/statistika-studie-30-milliarden-dollar-fuer-sportsponsoring---und-so-wenig-fliesst-in-den-frauen-sport-178891>
- Ryan, A., & Fahy, J. (2012). Evolving priorities in sponsorship: From media management to network management. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 28(9-10), 1132-1158.
- Séguin, B., & Bodet, G. (2015). The sponsors' perspective. In M. M. Parent & J.-L. Chappelet (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Sports Event Management* (pp. 306–326). Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.
- Seitanidi, M. M. & Ryan, A. (2007). A critical review of forms of corporate community involvement: from philanthropy to partnerships. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 12(3), 247-266.
- Thwaites, D., & Chadwick, S. (2004). Sport sponsorship and endorsements. In J. Beech & S. Chadwick (Eds.), *The business of sport management* (pp. 350–367). Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Woratschek, H., & Buser, M. (2018). Was bringen Sponsoren außer Geld?: Sport Sponsoring als Engagement-Plattform. *Transfer, Werbeforschung & Praxis*, 64(2), 31-42.
- Woratschek, H., & Griebel, L. (2020). A Logic of Sport Products – The Traditional Approach in Sport Management. *SMAB Relevant Management Insights*, 1, 1-3. Retrieved from <https://www.sma-bayreuth.de/publishing/relevant-management-insights/>

APPENDIX C: SPÖKO SCORE – INDUSTRY REPORT ON SPORT BUSINESS IN GERMANY

This thesis only comprises selected contents of the *Spöko Score* (i.e., title page to foreword). The full report can be accessed via the following link: https://www.sport.uni-bayreuth.de/pool/dokumente/Branchenreport_Sportoeconomie_Digital.pdf



UNIVERSITÄT
BAYREUTH

SPÖKO SCORE



Der Branchenreport zur
Sportökonomie in Deutschland

SPÖKO SCORE

Der Branchenreport zur Sportökonomie in Deutschland



Herausgeber:
Sportökonomie Uni Bayreuth e.V.
BaySpo – Bayreuther Zentrum für Sportwissenschaft

Projektmanagement und redaktionelle Leitung:
Annika Saunus (B.Sc. Sportökonomie)

Kontakt:
Sportökonomie Uni Bayreuth e.V.
BaySpo – Bayreuther Zentrum für Sportwissenschaft
Universitätsstraße 30
95447 Bayreuth

Design & Gestaltung:
SPORTFIVE
info@sportfive.com
www.sportfive.com

Druck:
WIRmachenDruck GmbH

Inhaltsverzeichnis

Grußwort	5
Practice Insights – Wirtschaftlicher Beirat der Sportökonomie	6
Science Insights – Wissenschaftsbeiträge der Uni Bayreuth	8
Spöko Score – What's Behind?	10
Next Five	
01 Internationalisierung	11
Science Insights – Prof. Dr. Reinhard Meckl	14
Practice Insights – Tobias Müller	15
Spöko Score – Internationalisierung	16
02 Digitale Transformation	17
Science Insights – Prof. Dr. Christoph Buck	20
Practice Insights – Robert Zitzmann	21
Spöko Score – Digitale Transformation	22
03 Nachhaltigkeit	23
Science Insights – Prof. Dr. Manuel Steinbauer	26
Practice Insights – Tobias Gröber	27
Spöko Score – Nachhaltigkeit	28
04 Ethik & Moral im Sport	29
Science Insights – Prof. Dr. Claas Christian Germelmann	31
Practice Insights – Steffen Busch	33
Spöko Score – Ethik und Moral im Sport	34
05 Diversity und Frauen im Sport	35
Science Insights – Prof. Dr. Susanne Tittlbach	38
Practice Insights – Heike Ullrich	39
Spöko Score – Diversity und Frauen im Sport	40
Bayreuther Sportökonomie	41
Quellenverzeichnis Science Insights	43

Grußwort

Sehr geehrte Leserinnen und Leser, liebe Sport-Interessierte,
der Spöko Score ist der Branchenreport für alle sportökonomischen Berufsfelder in Deutschland. Als Teil der Sportbranche in Deutschland wissen Sie aus erster Hand, wie dynamisch und vielfältig dieser Sektor ist. Der Sport vereint nicht nur Leidenschaft und Begeisterung, sondern bietet auch vielfältige Herausforderungen, die es zu verstehen und zu gestalten gilt. Der Studiengang Sportökonomie wurde vor 40 Jahren an der Universität Bayreuth erfunden. Wir verfügen daher über die Expertise und das Netzwerk, Zukunftstrends der Sportbranche in Deutschland frühzeitig zu erkennen. Ziel dieses Reports ist es, diese Trends mit Experteneinschätzungen aus Wissenschaft und Praxis verständlich einzuordnen.

Die Idee zu diesem Branchenreport ist im Kreis des Wirtschaftlichen Beirats der Sportökonomie an der Universität Bayreuth entstanden. Der Wirtschaftliche Beirat ist ein Gremium an der Universität Bayreuth und setzt sich aus zwölf Absolventinnen und Absolventen der Bayreuther Sportökonomie zusammen. Ein Hauptziel des Wirtschaftlichen Beirats besteht in der Förderung eines regelmäßigen Austauschs zwischen sportökonomischer Praxis und Forschung. Diesem Ziel wird mit der Entwicklung und Veröffentlichung des Spöko Scores weiter Rechnung getragen.

Im Kern des Spöko Scores stehen die *Next Five* – fünf Zukunftsthemen, die der Wirtschaftliche Beirat für die Entwicklung der Sportbranche definiert hat. Die *Next Five* werden im Spöko Score durch Experteneinschätzungen vertieft und jeweils durch eine Perspektive der Wissenschaft – repräsentiert durch Professorinnen und Professoren der Universität Bayreuth – sowie eine Perspektive der Praxis – repräsentiert durch Mitglieder des Wirtschaftlichen Beirats der Sportökonomie – näher beleuchtet. Die herausgearbeiteten Ergebnisse werden anschließend im Zuge einer quantitativen Befragung unter Unternehmerinnen und Unternehmern sowie Entscheidungsträgerinnen und Entscheidungsträgern aus dem sportökonomischen Berufsfeld einem größeren Meinungsbild unterzogen.

Mit dem Spöko Score folgen wir dem Markenleitbild der Sportökonomie an der Universität Bayreuth, indem wir als Pioniere innovative und individuelle Ideen Realität werden lassen.

Ganz nach dem Motto: Spöko. Passion meets Performance.

Dieser Claim vereint alle Spökos und war auch für alle Mitwirkenden am Spöko Score stets von zentraler Bedeutung. Daher möchten wir an dieser Stelle unseren Dank aussprechen an die Mitglieder des Wirtschaftlichen Beirats für ihre innovativen Ideen und unermesslich wertvolle Beratung sowie an das BaySpo – Bayreuther Zentrum für Sportwissenschaft für die Übernahme der Herausgeberschaft zusammen mit dem Alumniverein der Sportökonomie an der Uni Bayreuth. Darüber hinaus geht unser besonderer Dank an alle Autorinnen und Autoren für ihre Experteneinschätzungen sowie an die Kreativabteilung von SPORTFIVE für die Umsetzung der Inhalte zu einem Branchenreport.

Viel Spaß beim Lesen!



Tim Ströbel

Prof. Dr. Tim Ströbel
Inhaber des Lehrstuhls für
Marketing & Sportmanagement
und Direktor BaySpo



L. Brand

Lars Brand
Vorstand Alumniverein
Sportökonomie Uni Bayreuth e.V.



U. Saunus

Annika Saunus
Redaktionelle Leitung
Sportökonomie
Branchenreport