

Communicating the Athlete as a Brand: An Examination of LPGA Star Suzann Pettersen

Elsa Kristiansen

Norwegian School of Sport Sciences

Antonio S. Williams

Indiana University, USA

This article explored how a renowned LPGA golfer, Suzann Pettersen, has built and leveraged her personal brand. Using the athlete brand-equity model as the theoretical framework, a qualitative case study was built by means of interviews and document analyses. Specifically, this case detailed how Pettersen and her management team endeavored to build and manage her personal brand equity through organization-produced and -controlled brand-communications strategies. The findings of this case shed light on the challenges and opportunities that athletes and their constituents face when managing human brands. Moreover, the findings of this case support the use of previously proposed sport-branding conceptualizations in a real-world setting.

Keywords: athlete management, marketing communications, brand management, media stress

Professional athletes are responsible for more than their athletic performance; for many of them their athletic careers are intertwined with their personal lives and personae. The use of athletes as endorsers and spokespersons in a variety of industries (Baker & Boyd, 1997; Jones & Schumann, 2000; Stone, Joseph, & Jones, 2003) gives credence to the notion that athletes have become viable brands in and of themselves. Therefore, this article explores how Suzann Pettersen, a Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) golfer, endeavored to build and manage her personal brand equity through organization-produced and -controlled brand communications.

Arai, Ko, and Ross (2014) define an athlete brand as any athlete who has established value in the marketplace through the use of his or her name, likeness, or other brand elements. As such, personal branding among athletes is becoming commonplace. The branding process allows athletes and their stakeholders—the various individuals, groups, and organizations (e.g., league, team, sponsors) that are affected by the athlete's actions (Phillips, Freeman, & Wicks, 2003)—to use communication strategies to attach meaning to the athlete in the minds of consumers. Sport organizations and their corporate partners spend millions of dollars each year creating and reinforcing this sense of meaning and attachment between

Kristiansen is with the Dept. of Cultural and Social Studies, Norwegian School of Sport Sciences, Oslo, Norway. Williams is with the School of Public Health, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN. Address author correspondence to Elsa Kristiansen at elsa.kristiansen@nih.no

athletes and consumers (Thomson, 2006). The differential effect of the attachment and meanings (i.e., brand knowledge, brand associations) that consumers hold for an athlete brand is considered brand equity (Keller, 1993).

Sport-management scholars have begun to examine how the concept of brand equity is created for athletes. A body of research is emerging on conceptualizing athlete brand equity (Williams, Walsh, & Rhenwick, 2015) and examining athlete brand image (Arai, Ko, & Kaplanidou, 2013; Arai et al., 2014). However, research is limited as it relates to how athletes and their constituents employ branding constructs in the creation, management, and evaluation of athlete brand equity. Drawing from brand-equity theories, this article will add to literature by presenting one case study.

Brief Overview of LPGA Star Suzann Pettersen

Suzann Pettersen, affectionately known as *Tutta* to Norwegian fans, is the first professional Norwegian female golfer. Born in 1981, Pettersen became interested in golf at a very young age and began to frequent one of Norway's top golf courses. She admits that early on she realized golf was "her thing" (Pettersen, 2014). When she was 17 she proclaimed in an interview that she wanted to become the best golfer in the world, quite a bold statement for an athlete from a nation without any strong tradition in the sport (Laustsen, 2012). After a successful amateur career, she moved to Florida in the United States to become a professional golfer in 2000. In 2003 Pettersen qualified for the LPGA Tour for the first time. So far she has played in 189 tournaments and made the cut in 171 of them. Pettersen has won 8 tournaments and considers her 2007 LPGA championship her greatest achievement (Pettersen, 2014).

Over the course of Pettersen's career, details of her personal life have been kept very private. She has always been totally devoted to golf, and it has paid off. When it comes to earnings and endorsements, Pettersen is ranked number 7 on the career-earnings list, amassing \$11.6 million (Dorish, 2013). According to the LPGA's official sites she has earned \$12.6 million since her rookie year in 2003 (LPGA, 2014). However, this list only reflects what she has made on the LPGA tour (see Table 1). Pettersen currently has seven wins on the Ladies European Tour (Dorish, 2013). In addition, she has endorsements with Nike, Dow, BMW, Liquid Nutrition, Visitnorway, and NGF.

During the time of data collection, Pettersen was regarded as the top Norwegian Olympic hopeful for the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio. Since December 2013, her training has been supervised by the Norwegian Olympic Top Sport Program, which represents the best knowledge and support to achieve her goal. They will follow her closely in the years to come, and representatives will visit her regularly in Orlando, FL. Due to being a medal hopeful, she is also the source of increased media attention, which will be the topic of her upcoming reality television show. In addition to a Norwegian version, there are also plans of making American and Asian versions of the show by including their best golfers on and off the golf course with Pettersen.

Literature Review

A brand consists of tangible and intangible elements that are used in concert to add value to an organization, product, or, in this context, an athlete. In addition, branding enables a company or person to attach meaning to a product or him- or

Table 1 An Overview of the Suzann Pettersen Brand

Facts	Suzann Pettersen
Birth date	April 7, 1981
Win record	2013—Sunrise Taiwan LPGA Championship 2013—Evian Championship 2013—Safeway Classic Presented by Coca Cola 2013—LPGA LOTTE Championship 2013—Mission Hills Ladies' World Championship 2012—KEB-HanaBank Championship 2012—Sunrise LPGA Taiwan Championship 2011—Sybase Match Play Championship 2011—Safeway Classic Presented by Coca-Cola 2011—Ladies Irish Open 2009—CN Canadian Women's Open 2008—Deutsche Bank Ladies' Swiss Open 2008—AIB Ladies Irish Open 2007—SAS Masters 2007—Michelob ULTRA Open at Kingsmill 2007—McDonald's LPGA Championship 2007—Longs Drugs Challenge 2007—Honda LPGA Thailand 2007—Hana Bank KOLON Championship 2001—Open de France Dames Plus wins in the Solheim Cup: 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013
Key attributes (values)	Power, determination, focus/precision, commitment, authenticity/honesty, compassion, winning personality
Formal brand strategy	Yes Started in 2013 Objectives: become number 1 golfer in the world; have viable management company; secure endorsement deals and partnerships

herself, respectively (Aaker, 1991). For instance, it may be beneficial to attach the intangible associations (e.g., thoughts, feelings, and attitudes) people have with an athlete to tangible items such as mantras, symbols, and colors. Central to the process of attaching meaning and value is the concept of brand equity. Brand equity is the assets and liabilities linked to a brand that add or subtract from the brand's value in the minds of consumers (Keller, 1993). In today's competitive landscape,

creating and managing of brand equity is of paramount importance for sport entities at the league, franchise, event, and player level (Foster, Greyser, & Walsh, 2005). Sport teams have been the subject of most of the brand-equity research done in a sport context (Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008; Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998; Ross, 2006). These studies have to some degree modified and applied the seminal work of Keller (1993).

Keller's (1993) consumer-based brand-equity theory (CBBE) focuses on the relative psychological and behavioral values of a brand name. Moreover, Keller postulated that consumers control the creation of brand equity, so brand equity should be examined from a consumer's perspective. Keller's CBBE proposed attitude-based dimensions to measure brand equity and suggested that consumer-based brand equity is derived from the effect of brand knowledge (e.g., brand awareness and brand association) on consumers' reaction to the marketing and communication of the brand. Using CBBE as its theoretical framework, Arai et al. (2014) proposed a conceptual model of athlete brand image, which comprises three brand-association dimensions for athletes: athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle. Arai et al. (2013) found the proposed dimensions to be significant for professional athletes.

Recent research by Williams, Walsh, and Rhenwick (2015) has extended knowledge on brand equity by conceptualizing how it is created and how benefits are accrued for professional athletes. The athlete brand-equity model is similar to the previous sport brand-equity models (Gladden & Milne, 1999; Gladden et al., 1998; Ross, 2006) in that it posits that brand equity is the cumulative effect of brand awareness and brand associations, both of which are created through organization-, market-, and athlete-induced marketing communication efforts (see Figure 1).

Unlike the previous models, the organization-induced antecedents of athlete brand equity proposed by Williams, Walsh, and Rhenwick (2015) take into consideration how marketing communication strategies developed by an organization affiliated with the athlete outside of sport competition may affect consumer perceptions. The market-induced antecedent category considers the use of electronic word of mouth by the media and sport consumers to produce uncontrollable marketing messages about the athlete. Put another way, the athlete and his or her stakeholders have no control over comments made by fans or members of the media made via social media. However, these comments affect the way the athlete is perceived by the public. Finally, an athlete-induced antecedent category reflects the marketing communications efforts created and disseminated by the athlete. Furthermore, in the same vein as Gladden et al. (1998) and Ross (2006), Williams, Walsh, and Rhenwick propose consequences of brand equity for athletes, which include but are not limited to athlete-brand loyalty, brand extensions, licensing, and endorsement opportunities. Moreover, through a continual feedback loop the consequences foster the creation of more perceptions in the marketplace that add to the value of the brand (Gladden et al., 1998).

As previously mentioned, the athlete brand-equity framework is derived from the consumer-based approach to brand equity as proposed by Keller (1993), meaning that athlete brand equity comprises brand awareness and brand associations. From a consumer-based perspective, therefore, brand associations are the thoughts held in the minds of consumers regarding the brand (Aaker, 1991). However, for the purposes of this study brand associations are examined from an organizational/firm perspective. This approach to examining brand equity is referred to as identity-based

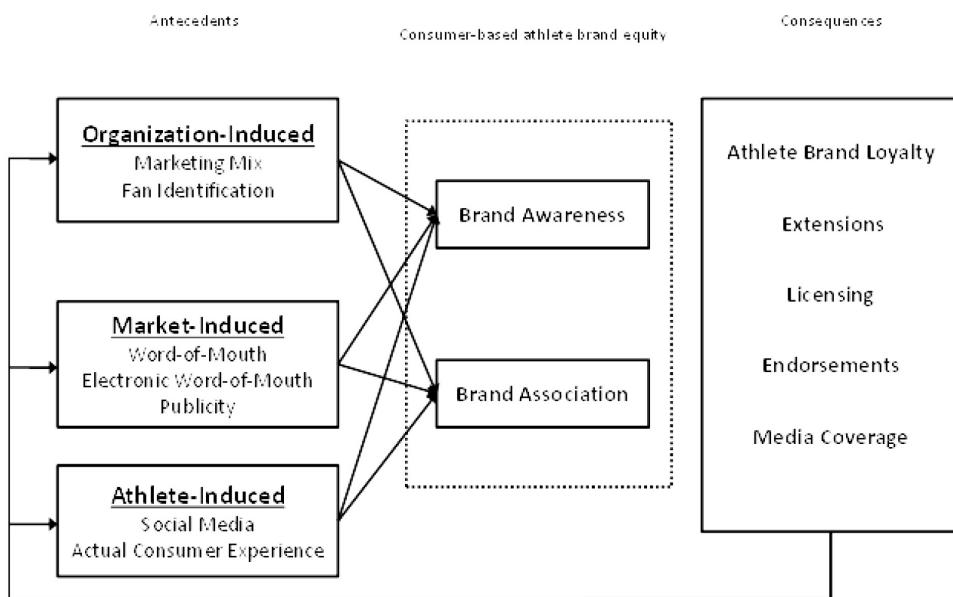


Figure 1 — Athlete brand-equity model. Adapted from Williams, Walsh, and Rhenwick (2015). The model illustrates a proposed relationship between antecedents and consequences of brand equity in the context of professional athletes.

brand equity (Aaker, 1996; de Chernatony, 1999; Kapherer, 2012). Proponents of this perspective suggest that brand identity precedes and is the fundamental basis for brand image (i.e., consumer-based brand associations; Burmann, Jost-Benz, & Riley, 2009; Kapherer, 2012). Specifically, brand identity refers to how the organization/firm wants consumers to perceive the brand (de Chernatony, 1999). Therefore, in the context of this study, brand associations refer to the associations that originate from the sport organization in an effort to create, alter, strengthen, or differentiate the brand (Nandan, 2005).

Drawing on insights from previous branding literatures, the issues of communicating and building brand equity were examined for Pettersen. This case details how she and her management team endeavor to build and manage her personal brand equity through organization-produced and -controlled marketing communication strategies. Therefore, the following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What organizational brand-communication strategies do Pettersen and her management team use to build brand awareness?

RQ2: What organizational brand-communication strategies do Pettersen and her management team use to communicate the desired brand identity (i.e., organizational brand associations) for the brand?

RQ3: What are the desired outcomes from the brand strategy efforts?

Method

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to investigate how a professional athlete and his or her stakeholders employ branding concepts to communicate his or her brand. We chose to conduct an in-depth case analysis of top-ranked LPGA golfer Suzann Pettersen. Previous research has suggested that an exploratory case study is appropriate for studying a phenomena—in this case the branding of a female athlete—in which there is limited research (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010; Williams, Rhenwick, Agyemang, & Pantaleoni, 2015). Therefore, given the dearth of literature related to the brand-building and -communication efforts of female athletes, we reasoned that a qualitative case study would be the appropriate methodological approach. The primary reasons for choosing Pettersen as the subject for this qualitative case study were access, quality of information obtained, and the observational skills of the researchers—which are said to be more important than sample size (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002).

In addition, Pettersen was chosen due to her popularity in her home country of Norway. Moreover, during the time of our data collection she was ranked as high as the number 2 golfer in the world and as low as number 6. We note that the analysis of a single athlete limits generalizations and applicability of this study. Therefore, this case may be labeled an intrinsic case study, as it provides understanding of the branding of this particular Norwegian golfer (Stake, 2005). Despite these limitations, we believe this case provides valuable branding and communications insights for athletes and their stakeholders.

Data Collection

To answer our proposed research questions, primary and secondary data were collected. First, we conducted a series of in-depth interviews over a period of 6 months (December 2013 to June 2014) with Pettersen, the chief executive officer (CEO) of her management company, and her parents (who also have roles in her management company). Each of these individuals was interviewed to obtain in-depth information on the brand-communication process (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000).

Data were collected via one-on-one interviews ($N = 4$) using a semistructured questionnaire. The interviews were developed and conducted according to ethical guidelines and criteria for the principal investigator's research institution. The interviews were conducted at different locations (e.g., cafés, office, training center) in Oslo, Norway, and lasted approximately 50–90 min each. The same question sequence and structure was used for each interview. The following areas were addressed in each interview: branding objectives, brand-strategy implementation, and brand-communication efforts. Each interview concluded with an open-ended question ("Do you have anything else to add?"). Additional probes and follow-up questions were used to further explore responses. To ensure the accuracy of the data, the CEO was contacted after the coding process to clarify any issues that may have stemmed from the interview and coding process.

After the interviews with Pettersen and her management team, secondary data were gathered, which included Pettersen's brand guide, business plan, and media kit. This was done to assess whether the themes that emerged from the interviews were reinforced in the brand guide and to provide additional information about

the brand strategy not captured in the interviews. The analysis of secondary data to provide support for preliminary findings and to uncover additional insights is consistent with previous sport-branding (e.g., Richelieu & Pons, 2006) and case-study design (e.g., Yin, 2013) research.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and data were analyzed through content analysis and pattern matching (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2013). The coding was conducted in two stages. First, the interview transcripts were coded. The main themes from each interview were extracted through the coding process. Next, all interview themes were compared to reveal any similarities and differences about the brand strategy, its implementation, and how it is communicated. Next, the themes uncovered in the interviews were compared with the information located in the secondary data sources. After the initial data analysis—and to build trust with the interview participants—Pettersen and her management team were sent a summary of our findings. They were instructed to comment on the degree to which the analyses were concordant with their own interpretations. We believe that this procedure would be more effective than requesting feedback on the transcripts alone (e.g., Holt & Hogg, 2002). The information provided supported our analysis and necessary changes were made. This procedure, along with the use of multiple sources of evidence, increased the trustworthiness of the findings (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). The themes were then compared with the athlete brand-equity model to verify the use of theory in the brand-development and -management process.

Results

Suzann Pettersen's brand strategy was examined by using the primary data obtained via semistructured interviews and secondary data from our document analyses. In particular, Suzann's brand strategy was analyzed as it relates to the communication of her brand by the organization. The most significant findings from the analyses of the data collected are discussed in the ensuing sections and are summarized in Figure 2.

Using Organization-Induced Antecedents to Create Brand Awareness

According to Ross (2006), organization-induced antecedents are forms of brand communications that are directly produced and controlled by the sport organization—in this case, SP Management. Moreover, Williams, Walsh, and Rhenwick (2015) proposed that organization-induced antecedents have a direct effect on athlete brand equity. However, due to an athlete's potential to have various managerial stakeholders (e.g., league, team, agent, sponsors) it must be noted that organization-induced communications may be inconsistent in nature based on their origin and intended purpose (Williams, Walsh, & Rhenwick, 2015). Therefore, in regard RQ1, we examined how Pettersen's management company used organization-induced brand-communication strategies to foster brand awareness in the minds of the public. Pettersen herself pointed out that the goal of organization-induced brand communications is to increase brand awareness. This stems from her lack

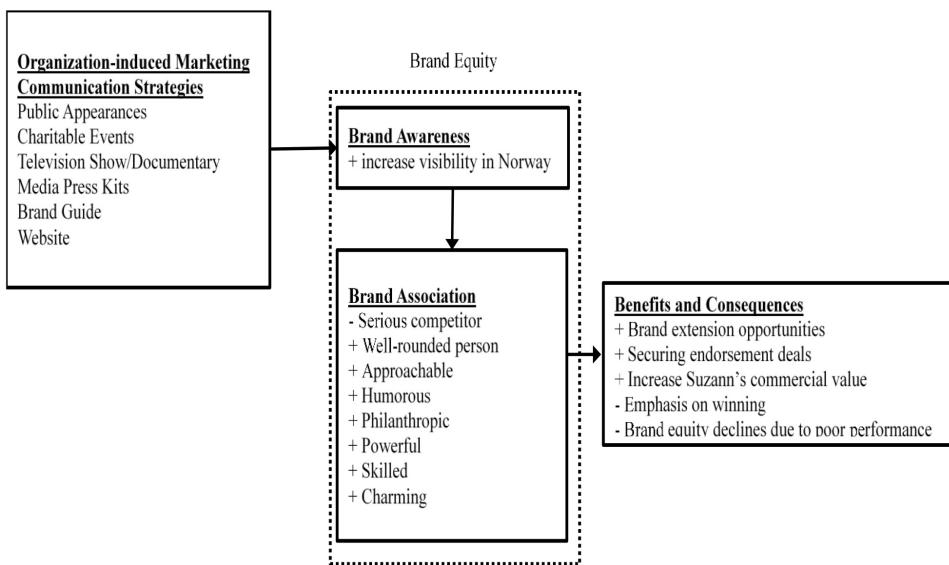


Figure 2 — Conceptual framework of Suzann Pettersen’s brand strategy. The model illustrates how the marketing communication strategies employed by the management team aim to create brand awareness and emphasize positive and deemphasize negative brand associations the public holds for the athlete. The brand associations lead to a set benefits and consequences for the athlete brand.

of visibility in her target market area—Norway. In addition, golf is a secondary sport in Norway and she has been living in the United States for over a decade. The goal of the organizational marketing efforts is to make her “more visible in order to become more popular.” As she commented herself,

I think there would have been a greater interest for golf in Norway if the TV channels showed tournaments every week. There is a huge interest for cross-country skiing and biathlon in Norway; TV weekly broadcasts the major events and not so major events. If golf had the same coverage, people would mobilize and relate to me as an athlete.

In an effort to increase brand awareness during her few visits to Norway each year, her management company schedules as many appearances and interviews as possible, which they feel “increase her commercial value.” As the CEO stated:

Then she will be more attractive to the companies that we want to work with. Naturally, this is a little “outside” of her sport career, and if the money had not been rolling in, her sole focus would be on golf, as that is what she breathes and lives for. But we have created balance in her life by adding the commercial aspect to sport.

According to management, since they have implemented this organization-induced marketing strategy her exposure in Norway has increased. "She has received

more exposure in Norway this past year. In a few years she will most likely return, and we are preparing now for that to happen.” Moreover, the goal is to not only increase her brand awareness for the 2016 Olympics but also build her brand awareness to leverage its equity after her competitive golf career is over.

The brand strategy for 2016 consists of the completion and airing of two biographies and a television show. Her management team stated that she is considered one of Norway’s best hopes for a gold medal at the 2016 Rio Summer Olympics. Consequently, she will garner increased media attention in the year leading up to the Olympics. She reflected on this extra attention and visibility herself:

Hopefully by doing the sport documentaries it will make me more visible here in Norway. I think a lot of people are curious about what is going on with me and the LPGA tour, so I will just have to expose myself.

Using Organization-Induced Antecedents to Create Brand Identity

The objective of the organizational brand-communication strategy is based not solely on the amount of visibility but also on managing how the athlete is perceived by the public (Williams, Walsh, & Rhenwick, 2015). Therefore, to examine RQ2, we explored how her management company used organization-induced brand-communication strategies to create their desired brand identity (e.g., organizational brand associations) in the minds of the public. For instance, her management company contends that the public perceives her as being a serious competitor—“Pettersen exudes concentration and self-regulation.” Pettersen’s management, however, would like to deemphasize the “serious competitor” brand association that Pettersen currently has in favor of what they consider to be a “well-rounded” athlete who is both approachable and competitive. However, altering Pettersen’s image has proved to be challenging given the media’s use of photos that reinforce the “serious competitor” association in their editorial pieces. Her CEO stated,

There are so many pictures of her when she is concentrated, and in Norway it is mostly pictures of her at the golf course. She is fierce, concentrated, and looks to be in her own world. People may want to see pictures of athletes outside the sport context and at home, as well. When you review the popularity of athletes, those things matter! Some of the cross-country skiers seem more approachable to people, so we have to work hard on her image, but we are heading in the right direction.

The management company indicated that Pettersen’s ranking as one of the top 4 golfers in the world is her most salient brand association among fans. Thus, marketing messages are centered on communicating that she is one of the best in the world. Her CEO feels that the threat of losing this distinction would diminish her brand equity and damage their current marketing efforts:

She needs to do well. When I create the activities I always think of her position as top, she is of no interest [to the public] if she is number 15 in the world. Next, we make a strategy over her media performances—and how she wants to frame herself in the media. She understands and is working hard to

implement this strategy, but it always takes some time to “anchor” this with the consumer. Therefore, she cannot afford to be grumpy and arrogant as the biathletes [some of the most popular athletes in Norway] sometimes have appeared; however, they can repair their relationship with the media the next weekend due to their frequent exposure. Suzann has limited access to the media; she needs to be charming whenever they approach her. As a Nike athlete she also needs to behave and follow guidelines. Tiger once left a tournament mad without talking to the media. He had to apologize—because you are a part of something bigger than yourself.

As an elite athlete representing your league, country, and sponsors, you are expected to behave, perform, and be generous with your time (Kristiansen, Hansstad, & Roberts, 2011). You need to stay “on brand” when communicating with media: “We have to have a story to tell.” The sport industry can be very harsh, and not winning compiled with a bad attitude is the recipe for creating negative brand associations.

When creating a brand strategy, it is vital that the brand identity be communicated to the target group to eliminate brand-perception gaps. Thomson (2006) added that to eliminate the perception gap the brand strategy must be based on authenticity. Pettersen’s CEO stated that authenticity is the foundation of their brand strategy:

She cannot play a role; it needs to be natural and she knows this is a drawback of increasing her commercial value. She understands the basics of marketing and branding, the core values she stands for are anchored in her understanding of herself, and she knows when interviewed it has to be in concert with her values. People meeting her or seeing the interview need to be left with a perception of her core values. . . . People will easily notice it if you try to sugarcoat someone—and body language is extremely revealing! Hence, we really talked a lot together about her positive sides; that she is funny, natural, has a sincere commitment for kids and charity, and it is not hard for me to focus on those qualities in her personality, which are depicted in the brand guide.

The management team has made a concerted effort to alter how Pettersen is depicted in the media. She is often depicted as a “focused athlete with no smile,” because photos of her are often taken during competition. Pettersen admits that she is overexposed as a *serious* athlete: “As a golfer you give a serious and concentrated picture of yourself when playing, to be part of a documentary on myself would be an opportunity to show other sides.” Furthermore, both she and the team around her admitted that she is quite perfectionistic and hardworking. Moreover, her parents stated the following about her brand attributes:

Her strength is her consciousness and ability to focus until the end, she has a lot of *will*, and her weakness is that she has thrown away or lost many social skills on her way to the top and that she does not have a normal social life. Moreover, she is a perfectionist, so she is never completely happy with a performance. Her success is due to her work ethic. However, she asks too many questions about how to improve her game and she expects every swing to be a good one. That is probably why she is still on the LPGA tour.

Desired Outcomes From Brand-Communication Efforts

The desired outcomes for Pettersen as a brand are twofold: to secure and create new corporate endorsements and to develop SP Management into a viable and profitable brand extension that will ensure Pettersen's financial stability after her career. At the time of our interview Pettersen was 32 years old and believed it was time for her to focus on something other than her golf performance. To this end, she stated,

The company gives me something else to think of; for example, I have to relate to sponsors. I think it creates a balance in my life, which is good for me. It has been a fun process to establish the company and work on the profile, and I have learned a lot.

The company's ability to create balance in Pettersen's life was a sentiment echoed in our interviews with her family and management team. As such, it was interesting to notice the extent of Pettersen's involvement in the strategic planning and implementation of ideas for her company. SP CEO said,

The first thing I did when I started the process of branding SP Management was follow the usual menu of creating a strategy—for Suzann and the company. They depend on each other, so the first thing I needed to do was create and implement Suzann—because she *is* the brand. First, we discussed her brand, created a profile and strategy, and determined the consequences for her. She had to agree with the guidelines we set, become the person we were framing her as. For example, be more smiley and friendly with the media. She has come to realize that she is more than just an athlete. Furthermore, when she is in Norway (two or three times per year), she needs to accept that it will be busy and demanding. She has to realize that this is the way branding works and what needs to be done in order to increase her commercial value—we have a strategy and we are sticking to it.

Pettersen's brand strategy is made evident in the brand guide (see Figure 3), where her core brand associations are outlined (i.e., power, precision, and determination in an easygoing, generous, and charming manner; Suzann Pettersen

BRAND EXPERIENCE

Power, precision and determination in an easy-going, generous and charming manner.



Figure 3 — Suzann Pettersen's brand experience. The picture illustrates the organization-derived brand associations that the management team aims to communicate to the public. Photo courtesy of modusdesign.no.

Management AS, 2014). The CEO believes that these associations should carry over to SP Management but stated that to do so she has to be more conscious of her own framing in the media.

To create a brand is not an easy or fast process; you need to be professional, and it takes time as success depends on the strategy and having long-term goals. The management company underlined the need to constantly create “*footprints*, so the big companies would like to work with us.” Furthermore, the CEO mentioned, “We do not expect to make money in the first few years.” The role of the CEO is also supposed to change from a sole focus on Pettersen to pursuing other athletes. In this process, no decision is made without Pettersen’s involvement, as the CEO underlined: “I constantly involve her in what is going on; the strategy needs to be implemented in what she does and anchored in her values.”

The second desired outcome from Pettersen’s brand-communication strategy is to turn SP Management into a viable brand extension. Pettersen and her team believes that her more salient brand attributes will serve as the cornerstone for creating a brand identity for SP Management, which will appeal to their target market (i.e., entertainers and corporations). When asked to describe the target market for the brand extension, Pettersen’s parents stated,

We are not just looking for other athletes to include in SP Management (i.e., the brand extension) but also other types of performers who want to share their experiences—they can also come from untraditional occupations, as well, and maybe all should be female. . . . She knows a lot about how to deal with the media and cope with stress. The company needs to first and foremost look after her interests and build her profile in Norway, like the tournament. It will require a lot of work.

In regard to targeting corporations, Pettersen and her team believe that her brand will appeal to major Norwegian companies, as opposed to U.S.-based companies, since professional female golfers are novel in Norway (see Figure 4):

We are aiming at major companies as they might have something to learn from her. But it must be the right timing, it has to be developed, make her more interesting product to sell, and then adapt it for the companies in question. For example, she might help a company with getting their employees in better shape as she has knowledge of how much work is needed in order to achieve fitness goals. She has to take part in cooperative days, this is what we work for, but we are not there yet. Such work requires time and we understand that this is not done in 1–2 years, but we are heading in the right direction. First, we need to build the brand, make her attractive. In order to do that she has to be more visible in the media. The more people see you on TV, the more attractive you are.

Recently, SP Management was able sign a deal with SEB bank in relation to Pettersen’s Pro Challenge. The bank’s interest stemmed from Pettersen’s commitment to Right to Play (SEB, 2014), which is a global humanitarian organization empowering children and youth by lessons taught by the act of playing. This is a 2-year deal worth \$200,000 with the option to renew.



Figure 4 — A high-profile endorser. The picture illustrates the brand attributes that Suzann's management team aims to leverage in order to attract corporate sponsors and partners. Photo courtesy of modusdesign.no.

Discussion and Conclusion

Drawing on insights from previous branding literature, the current investigation aimed to examine how Pettersen and SP Management created and managed her personal brand equity. The strategy is visible in the Pettersen brand guide, which is presented and elaborated on herein. Furthermore, the Pettersen case fits neatly into previously proposed consumer-based brand-equity frameworks (e.g., Keller, 1993; Ross, 2006; Williams, Walsh, & Rhenwick, 2015).

The results of our case analysis support previous conceptualizations for how brand equity is built, managed, and measured. First, Pettersen's management is using organization-induced antecedents by way of their marketing and promotional endeavors to expose Pettersen to her target audience as a brand—with the goal of creating strong and unique associations in the target audience's minds. This is a fundamental and crucial element in building brand equity. Ross (2006) stated that organization-induced antecedents allow the brand's stakeholders to create and control the information about the brand communicated to consumers. In regard to athletes, this is of chief importance since the predominant source of information about an athlete is controlled and produced by the media—and therefore uncontrollable by the athlete and his or her stakeholders. Not only does the use of organization-induced antecedents allow Pettersen and her management company to control the information about her brand presented to consumers, it also provides them with an opportunity to create and reinforce her image in the minds of consumers. For instance, Pettersen's management is strategically attempting to alter the brand perception that Pettersen is just a "serious competitor" by controlling the images of her used in their marketing pieces and being vigilant of the images of her used in the media. Her management team has created and produced a brand guide that they distribute to members of the media. In this guide the management team presents Pettersen's desired brand associations as powerful, dedicated, enthusiastic, outgoing, and compassionate (*Brand guide*, 2014). The brand guide is an illustration of how management firms can use organization-induced antecedents to create and manage athlete brand associations and ultimately brand equity (see Figure 5).



POWER DEDICATION COMPASSION

SUZANNGOLF.COM

Figure 5 — Suzann Pettersen’s brand-strategy guide. The brand strategy guide serves to control how the public, media, and other stakeholders perceive the Suzann Petersen brand. Photo courtesy of modusdesign.no.

Just being a successful athlete does not guarantee high brand equity. For example, in 1999 the U.S. women’s soccer team appeared to have succeeded in its struggle against invisibility by winning the World Cup (Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2003); however, the effect of winning was short lived as the success of the national team did not translate into a sustainable professional women’s soccer league (Kristiansen, Broch, & Pedersen, 2014). The point is that the value of an athlete’s brand is dependent on consumer perceptions (Arai et al., 2014). For some consumers, an athlete’s performance may be the dominant contributor to the commercial value they hold for that athlete’s brand, whereas other consumers may value the athlete’s persona more. Whatever the preference, research insists that a mix of the two is best for building brand equity (Arai et al., 2013; Williams, Walsh, & Rhenwick, 2015).

For Pettersen, the fact that she is rarely in Norway creates accessibility issues in regard to her ability to gain top-of-mind brand awareness in the minds of her target audience. Her few visits in Norway become very intense, and the continuity in her branding efforts is lost when she does not win. Being an individual athlete and not on a team also makes it harder for fans to identify with an athlete, to allow the athlete to become part of fans’ lives (Richelieu & Pons, 2006). In the same vein, Keller also argued decades ago, “Brand equity exists when the consumer is familiar with the brand and hold some favorable, strong and unique brand associations in

memory" (Keller, 1993, p. 2). The memory part is the problematic one, as underlined in the model, for successful brand equity. Hence, "no matter how hard they try, their global growth will remain limited" (Richelieu & Pons, 2006, p. 244). Put another way, because golf coverage is extremely limited in Norway there is an inherent disadvantage for building strong associations in the minds of consumers.

Future research should consider investigating the psychological effects that being a regarded brand has on professional athletes in their daily lives. Being a winning athlete may be a factor that helps in the branding process. Winning is "a necessity for a brand that aspires to become a super brand" (Richelieu & Pons, 2006, p. 238). However, winning alone does not give you the status of super brand. For an individual athlete this means extra pressure in the form of media attention and questioning that may negatively affect winning (Kristiansen & Hanstad, 2012). During the interviews it was often emphasized that it is important for Pettersen to have a story and to be friendly, smiling, and charming when giving an interview. It is not hard to imagine situations where such pressure may affect her performance on the course.

Sport managers seeking to employ the tenets of the athlete brand-equity model should be cautious when focusing branding effort on single aspects such as winning. Winning in particular seems to be an easy brand association to promote because it resonates with consumers. However, overemphasizing winning could be a detriment to the athlete's brand, because the brand's equity would be based entirely on the athlete's performance. This may place false expectations in the minds of consumers, resulting in decreases in brand equity and morale when the athlete does not perform up to the set expectations (Williams, Walsh, & Rhenwick, 2015). For athletes this could also become a factor leading to negative results, as to win, the focus of the athletes and the management company should not be on winning but on the tasks the players have to complete to place themselves in the position to be successful (Kristiansen & Roberts, 2011).

Because this article examined the brand-communication strategies of one female athlete in an individual sport (i.e., golf), the generalizability of our findings is limited, as brand-communication strategies may differ for male athletes or team-sport athletes. We believe, however, that the findings from our case study provide a host of opportunities for future research in this area. Moreover, in contrast to the commonly used outside-in brand-equity approach, we used the inside-out approach, which analyzes the sender of brand-communication messages rather than the perceptions of the receiver (e.g., consumer; Burmann, et al., 2009). However, we encourage scholars and practitioners to also measure brand equity from a consumer perspective. Given the experiential nature of the sport product—which includes an athlete's performance—it is best to use a consumer-based approach when endeavoring to create, manage, or evaluate an athlete's brand (Williams, Walsh, & Rhenwick, 2015). Previous research suggests that brand equity lies in the strength, uniqueness, and favorability of the associations consumers hold (Keller, 1993; Ross, 2006). Therefore, qualitative and quantitative research methods such as focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires should be administered to the brand's target audience to evaluate brand equity and the effectiveness of the brand strategy. The results of such research may yield valuable insights regarding the role of organizational brand-communication strategies in the creation of awareness, associations, and loyalty. Properly managing the aforementioned branding constructs offers a host of opportunities for athletes during and after their athletic careers.

Case Questions

1. In this case study, the athlete, Suzann Pettersen, is considered a brand. Do you agree that athletes are brands?
2. If athletes are indeed brands, are all professional athletes brands, and should we consider college athletes brands, too?
3. What impact do you feel that organization-induced brand communications have on consumers' perceptions of an athlete?
4. The authors suggested that organization-induced brand communications are created and controlled by the athlete's stakeholders (e.g., sponsor, team, league, management). Which stakeholders do you feel have the most influence on consumers' perceptions of the athlete?
5. Do you feel that marketing Suzann Pettersen in her home country despite its lack of interest in golf is an effective brand strategy?
6. What tactics should SP Management incorporate to minimize the perceived negative brand associations people have toward Suzann Pettersen's brand?
7. What marketing and communication tactics could SP Management implement around Suzann Pettersen's positive, strong, and unique brand associations?
8. The authors describe the positive consequences that SP Management wishes to gain from effectively communicating Suzann Pettersen's brand. Are there any negative consequences that they should be aware of?
9. How can SP Management assess Suzann Pettersen's brand equity in the target market?
10. How would you address SP Management's concerns about Suzann Pettersen's brand identity?
11. Do you agree with the authors' statement that athletic success does not guarantee high brand equity? Why or why not?
12. Do you feel that brand-communication strategies would be different for male athletes or athletes competing in team sports?

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their appreciation for the hard work and assistance provided by the anonymous reviewers and Editor Pedersen. Our manuscript was strengthened and made publishable because of their input and guidance.

Both authors equally contributed to the completion of the manuscript.

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