PERSONAL BRANDING OF ELITE FOOTBALL PLAYERS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

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This bachelor's thesis focuses on personal branding of professional football players in social media. Giovanni Quartana, Co-Founder of a start-up football agency TalentBox Group has commissioned this thesis.

The reason for writing this thesis on personal branding for football players is because TalentBox is aiming to revamp their Marketing and Sponsorship department. This department will focus on improving football players' personal branding by developing a unique and customized plan for their social media accounts and webpages. To be able to offer comprehensive and functional services, the company needed a detailed study of how to apply personal branding in an effective and profitable way through social media and its benefits to football players.

The main objective of this thesis was to find out ways to strategically plan, create and develop personal branding in social media, so that the players can increase their visibility, create potential sponsorship deals and as a consequence increase their market value and personal income.

The secondary data used for the theoretical framework consists of books, online publications and other studies related to the topic – these were analyzed from a sports marketing and personal branding viewpoint. The research was of a qualitative nature and it utilized benchmarking as the method, which was implemented by following and analyzing successful football players' social media and webpage content.

According to both the benchmarking research and the theoretical framework, an elite footballer must build a strong personal brand in order to be recognized and considered by brands within the football industry. The ultimate outcome of a carefully run personal branding strategy is an increase in the player's overall value. A powerful personal brand identifies the key characteristics, processes them into important qualities and most importantly chooses the dominant attribute that operates as an anchor of the brand. Different components of a brand such as the name, logo, slogan, nickname and design have to be created when branding a football player. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram are the key social media channels and in addition to them a webpage is also essential. Content generation plays an integral role when branding a footballer in social media. It has to be versatile, truthful and appealing to individuals as well as to sponsors and other positive influencers. The content has to be related to both the professional and private life of the player, with the aim of building a complete image of their life.

Key words: personal branding, social media, sports marketing, benchmarking

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1   INTRODUCTION

This bachelor's thesis focuses on personal branding for professional football players. Giovanni Quartana, Co-Founder of the start-up football agency TalentBox Group has commissioned this thesis.

TalentBox Group is revamping their Marketing and Sponsorship department, which will focus on providing a whole new service for football players. The department will aim to improve the personal branding of the players by running their social media accounts and official websites with the objective of increasing the players' sponsorship deals. The aim is to maximize the presence of the players' in social media, as the company strongly believes this increases the players' overall value.

The topic is of immediate relevance due to the establishment of a whole new service. Because of this the company requires a detailed research concerning the best practices of personal branding for professional football players. The company's objective is to offer the best possible services to the players with the aim of increasing their sponsorship deals and consequently their value and income.

Branding people, also known as personal branding, is a fairly new and topical part of marketing, and has gained a lot of attention during recent years (Malmi 2014, 26). Various social media channels have been created and different kinds of communication devices have increased their popularity. In particular personal branding has become popular among professional football players.

Sports is one of the biggest businesses in the world, and football is the sport that dominates the world due to its substantial, international viewership. Nowadays football is considered the king of all sports.

1.1   The commissioner – TalentBox

As said, Giovanni Quartana, one of the founding members of TalentBox, commissioned this thesis. TalentBox was officially established in Barcelona in April 2014. TalentBox

is a start-up company formed by a team of professionals specializing in sports management, marketing and direction, with the mission to advise and guide clients to boost the value of their sports related activity. The company operates primarily with football entities, footballers and large corporations that engage in football to evolve their marketing plans.

TalentBox provides footballers, clubs and sponsors custom-built solutions in order to maximise their benefits holistically, from the creation of strategic plans to their implementation. In the case of football players, the three main tasks are scouting them, representing them and negotiating their contracts with current or future teams.

Off the field TalentBox is beginning to work on building and managing players' personal brand, in order to maximise their appeal with their followers and attract potential companies wanting to be commercially associated with them.

TalentBox is divided into three separate departments: Representation of players, marketing and sponsorship and consulting & future projects. The different departments are explained in the following paragraphs.

The representation of players department is responsible for scouting, recruiting and analysing potential new players on the base of their football abilities. This department is also responsible for the athletes that are already represented by the company by following their development on a daily basis, satisfying their needs, and keeping a record of their *on the field* performances. Finally this department will talk with professional football teams, by phone, meetings or by attending conventions to consistently promote their players.

The marketing and sponsorship department is responsible for looking after the athletes' image *off the field,* specifically in regards to nurturing and maintaining their personal brand. This department will also scout for potential sponsorship deals that could be linked with the athletes. This will mean being in constant communication with companies and corporations that engage in football to evolve their marketing plans.

Lastly the consulting and future projects department is where the company uses their experience and contacts in the football world to offer consulting services to professional

football teams that are badly run or in need of a transformation. This department is also responsible for finding other sources of income, which is possible as the football world congregates from businessmen and companies that cover different markets. This means that there are always opportunities to develop new projects that are linked with football.

TalentBox is currently formed by three founding members and each of them are responsible for one of the three departments. The company has its headquarters in Barcelona and has a wide range of collaborators located across the globe, some of which are subcontracted by TalentBox. The company is still in the early stages but as they increase their list of clients, they are looking to incorporate new members on a full time basis to their team to continue process of growth.

1.2   Football and business

Bill Shankly, one of the most successful football managers of Great Britain, once quoted: " Some people believe football is a matter of life and death. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that" (Fieldoo Blog 2013). The most fanatic fans of football surely agree with Shankly's quote. Football is a game that brings millions of passionate people together to watch 11 men on the field running after the black & white ball and to cheer for their favourite team, but the question is, is it just a game anymore? (Fieldoo Blog 2013.)

Over the past couple of decades football has transformed from being not just a sport but a multi-million-dollar business as businessmen have discovered the huge business opportunity in cooperating with football clubs (Fieldoo Blog, 2013). As a consequence of football being equal parts sport and entertainment, it builds additional emotional pressure among the people involved with business related decisions (Calzada 2013, 3). Football being such a unique business makes it exceptionally interesting.

The amount of money involved in the biggest football tournaments is difficult to understand. To give an example, the revenue of The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup South Africa in 2010 was 3.655 million USD, compared with the revenue of the Beijing Olympics in 2008, which was 2.401 million USD. The difference is over a hundred million dollars, and taking into account that the FIFA

World Cup focuses on one single sport whereas Olympics include around 40 highlights the disparity between them. (Calzada 2013, 5.) This example gives an idea of how much money is involved in the biggest football tournament in the world, and also a general idea of how enormous the business of football is.

According to Calzada (2013, 6-8) sports properties are divided in four different groups; all of the groups generating revenue in their own peculiar way. The first group consists of the tournaments and championships. There are a lot of different tournaments from local ones to the abovementioned FIFA World Cup or European Championship. All these are traditionally friendly in nature and organized on a regular basis. The second group covers the national teams where all the players share the same nationality and are divided into groups according to the players' age. National football federations are included in this group as well, due to the fact that they are in charge of their national teams. The third group includes football clubs, mostly privately owned. The clubs enable the possibility of marketing diverse products as well as services. Lastly the fourth group and the most important one regarding to this study, consists of the football players themselves, as they have an independent position in all of the above-mentioned groups. The individual players have their own unique ability and potential to market products. (Calzada 2013, 6-8.)

This last group, footballers, as mentioned in the previous paragraph closely relates to the thesis topic, and so should be highlighted. In order to be recognized as one of the best football players, the player needs to stand out in his niche, club and national team. This is achieved by branding the football player, in other words creating a unique and notable personal brand for the player. It is not enough anymore if one is good at the sport or the most skilful, in the current business-forward and commercially driven market one has to create a strong personal brand in order to succeed. (Altaee 2009.)

1.3   Research purpose, objectives and questions

The reasoning behind electing to write this thesis on personal branding for football players is due to the fact that TalentBox is aiming to revamp their Marketing and Sponsorship department which will focus on improving football players' personal branding by developing a unique and customized plan for their social media accounts and

webpages. To be able to offer comprehensive and functional services, the company needs a study about the benefits of personal branding for a football player and how to apply branding in an effective and profitable way through social media.

The main objective of this thesis is to find out ways to strategically plan, create and develop personal branding in social media so that the players can increase their visibility, promote potential sponsorship deals and as a consequence increase their market value and personal income. In order to fulfill this objective it is also important to understand the benefits of carefully planned and implemented personal branding in social media for a professional football player.

As the company is now at the starting point of establishing a new service, they have to thoroughly take into consideration the different aspects of the benefits that a football player can gain through personal branding. It is important to know how to make social media accounts and webpages appealing to individuals but more importantly to the possible sponsors, football clubs and football fans.

The main research question is: how to create a personal brand for a professional football player using social media. On top of the main question, there are two sub-questions to be answered throughout the thesis, the first of which being: why is personal branding essential for an elite professional football player. The second sub-question is about how to run a professional football player's social media accounts in an efficient and profitable way. In addition to the main question, these two sub-questions play a critical role in this study.

1.4   Structure of the study

In addition to the introduction this thesis consist of several key parts, beginning with introduction of the research methodology, the research method being benchmarking. Following on from research methodology it then focuses on theoretical framework and goes through relevant theories and concepts. This chapter includes theories of sports marketing, personal branding and running social media channels and webpages.

Following the theoretical framework, the thesis continues with detailed explanation of benchmarking and the implementation & analysis of the research methods. Finally the thesis answers the research questions whilst giving suggestions of how to create a personal brand for an elite football player and how to run a football player's social media accounts.

1.5 Research methodology

The thesis is of a qualitative nature, using benchmarking as primary data collection method and applying the relevant theories related to the thesis topic. The secondary data used for the theoretical framework consists of books, online publications and other studies related to the topic – these are then analyzed from a sports marketing and personal branding viewpoint.

2   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework consists of concepts and theories that are of great importance regarding this study. It utilizes and analyzes books, online publications and other studies related to the topic. The first chapter is about sports marketing in general and about the relevant issues concerning sports marketing. The second chapter is about branding and especially personal branding. The third and last chapter is focuses on running social media channels and webpages.

2.1   Sports marketing

The following chapters will explain several points, namely disclosing the world of sports marketing, distinguishing the difference between traditional marketing and sports marketing, explaining sport products and consumers, defining sponsorship, and lastly the end of the chapter includes the social networking sites and content from the sports marketing point of view.

2.1.1   The world of sports marketing

Calzada (2013) quote Masteralexis, Barr & Hums by saying, "Sport is too much of a game to be a business and too much of a business to be a game" (Calzada 2013, 3). To rephrase, the line between sport being a game and sport being a business is quite vague generally. For instance, if sport is understood from a fan's point of view, it is clearly a game, but if it is thought from a sponsor's point of view, it is clearly a business. There are not many things in the world that attract such vast amounts of people as the biggest sport events do - they have more viewers than any other event in the world. The interest in sports has increased dramatically over the passed decades, one of the main reasons being that it is constantly advertised as companies invest money in sport events and use sport personalities for their marketing campaigns. As sports attract hundreds of millions of different kinds of people, it makes the sporting events and sportsmen perfect for advertising campaigns. (Sport marketing… 2012;Calzada 2013, 3-4.) At this point it is

highly essential to understand the popularity of sports in order to understand the market potential in this unique industry.

According to Calzada (2013) sports marketing is the generation of revenue by making use of the major assets of sport property, such as brand, facilities, stadiums, championships and individual athletes (Calzada 2013, 17). This definition explains quite accurately the concept of sports marketing while also doing a good job summarizing the different components of the industry. There are two approaches to sports marketing and it is important to understand the difference between them. Firstly there is marketing of sport and secondly there is marketing through sport. The aim when it comes to marketing of sport is to increase the consumption of the products and services of sport. Marketing through sport means the non-sport-related companies using sport as their marketing technique and as they pay for the marketing space, it makes them sponsors of a certain sport property. (Blakey 2011, 3.)

The biggest benefit of sports marketing is that the marketer will earn the trust and attachment of a sports fan though their favorite sports team or athlete. If a person has admired a team since youth, the marketer is oftentimes instantly considered trustworthy in the fan's mind. (Sport marketing… 2012.) In a way it can be said that sportsmen are the Hollywood stars of our generation.

A significant downside in sports marketing is the difficulty inherent in distinguishing oneself from the masses since the sports marketing industry is enormous. In conclusion, sports marketing offers companies tremendous amount of different marketing possibilities and at the same time various sponsors for the different sports properties. It is a win-win situation as the companies get visibility through sport and the sport properties make profit. (Sport marketing… 2012.)

2.1.2   Sports marketing vs. Conventional marketing

There are few differences between sports marketing and conventional marketing, yet the biggest difference is the wide variety of situations that the sport marketer doesn't have control over. To give a couple of examples about these circumstances; the results of sport and changing roles, the high influence of emotions when making a decision, the

difficulty of predicting the results, the extensive inconsistency in demand and the decisions made by third parties. All these influential factors have to be taken into consideration in the field of sports marketing. The factors can be either good or bad depending on the situations and their outcomes. (Calzada 2013, 22-23.) Concluding this, the nature of sports marketing is quite different to conventional marketing and has its own special characteristics as the control over a wide variety of situations is very minimal.

2.1.3   Sport products and consumers

Mullin, Hardy & Sutton (2014) define a product as follows "…any bundle or combination of qualities, processes and capabilities (goods, services, or ideas) that a buyer expects will deliver want satisfaction." Sport product is a unique product and it differs from a normal product by its peculiar elements. Firstly sport product can be a competition, for instance a football game, secondly it differs by the separation of normal time and space, thirdly the specific regulations makes it quite disparate, fourthly it can be physical if a sport is practiced and lastly, sport product requires exclusive facilities and equipment. (Mullin et al. 2014, 19.) These previously mentioned factors make sport product quite special and different from other products and it is essential to understand the distinctions in order to understand the sports marketing concepts.

According to Calzada (2013), sport products are divided into three groups and customers into two groups. The first product group, *Stadium and season ticket holders* consists of the products associated with the commercial utilization of the stadium, such as tickets, catering and licensed products. The second group, *commercial and marketing,* includes the sponsorships, advertising, image rights and merchandising licenses. The third group is *media* and it contains the television rights, the website and the social networks. The two customer groups are the end consumers, business to consumer (B2C) and companies, business to business (B2B). All the products that are sold directly to the end customers belong to the B2C group. The products offered to companies that are the end users or to the companies that operate as intermediaries are part of the B2B group. (Calzada 2013, 18-20.) See Figure 2 about the breakdown of sports marketing products by concepts and types of customers.
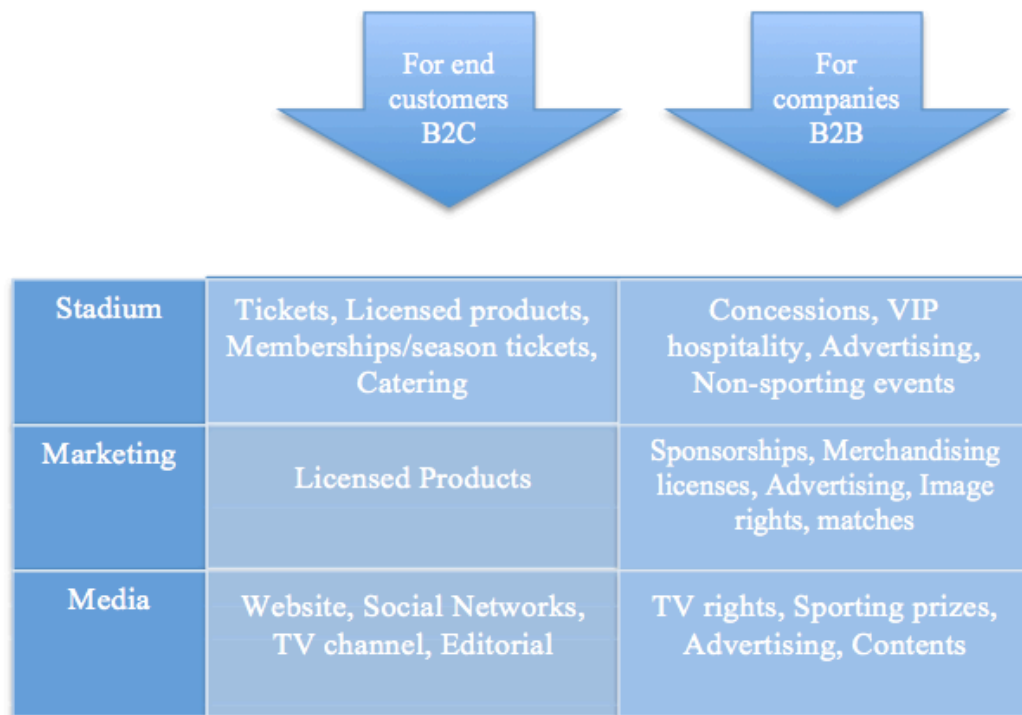
	For end customers B2C	For companies B2B
Stadium	Tickets, Licensed products, Memberships/season tickets, Catering	Concessions, VIP hospitality, Advertising, Non-sporting events
Marketing	Licensed Products	Sponsorships, Merchandising licenses, Advertising, Image rights, matches
Media	Website, Social Networks, TV channel, Editorial	TV rights, Sporting prizes, Advertising, Contents

FIGURE 2. Sports marketing products by concepts and type of customers (Calzada 2013, 19)

2.1.4   Sport sponsorship

Sport sponsorship is a dominant part of sports and non-sport organizations' promotion mix where their main goal is to improve media exposure, increase brand awareness and sales. Sport sponsorship is a business relationship where both of the parties, the sponsor and the 'sponsee' (sponsored party) benefit from. It is a mutually profitable agreement where the sponsor achieves commercial gain and in return the sponsee receives money, goods or services. Sponsorship is about building long-term business relationships, the longer the sponsorship lasts, the better the derived value is. A lot of times sport organizations, sport event managers, leagues and individual athletes consider sponsorship as a fundamental path to profitability. (Blakey 2011, 110-111; Get sponsored…)

Sport sponsorship enables brands to communicate with the sport target markets, this kind of marketing is defined as 'lifestyle' marketing as it appeals precisely to the activities and attitudes enjoyed by sport consumers. As a consequence brands have increased

their investments in sponsorships, for instance Adidas invested around 330 million euros only to sponsorships in 2009. Sporting events such as the Olympics have made their way to many organizations' global marketing communications strategy. Football plays the biggest role in the sponsorship market as it has an enormous spectator base, marketing appeal and media profile. (Blakey 2011, 110-111.)

The concept of personal sport sponsorship is of particular relevance to this study as it deals with individual athletes, the footballers. In exchange of the athlete providing media exposure for the sponsor, the athlete gets an agreed payment as well as the company offering some of their products for the athlete to use while doing sport or during their free time. Usually the sponsorship contracts contain numerous conditions where, for example the sponsee is expected to wear the sport equipment from the sponsoring brand during the games or competitions. In this way the company increases its media exposure and brand awareness. (Get sponsored…) When watching a football game, all the players wear the same uniform; t-shirt, shorts and socks due to the football clubs exclusive sponsorship deals, but oftentimes the players are wearing different football boots due to their personal sponsorship deals with other brands (Are there any… 2014).

2.1.5   Presence in media

Media presence plays a significant role in sport properties' success. Achieving systematic, intensive and free media presence is the key to become a significant sport property. Sports marketing does not simply exist without the press, the numerous amounts of sponsors' logos placed around the football stadium are not targeted to the people watching the game within its grounds but to the people watching it on the TV. Essentially, the press boosts the value of content generated by a sport property. Without the existence of reporters, the introduction of a new player is pointless. (Calzada 2013, 51.)

Media presence should achieve the following goals; attract supporters, influence the decisions of sponsors and opinion leaders etc., publicize the sport property's B2C products, and lastly promote and strengthen positioning. In order to achieve these previously mentioned goals, the content has to be appealing and include sporting, communication, and private life activities and conventional advertising. The content of sporting activity is maybe the most interesting activity for the media as it consists of matches and train-

ing sessions. If something out of the ordinary happens during a match, it catches the attention of the media right away and creates valuable content to be shared. Communication activities are associated with events, presentations and media conferences, where for instance new agreements are presented. It is also essential to add private life activities to the media content as it certainly makes the presence more appealing and interesting. On this note content regarding private life requires care in order to avoid possible negative presence. Lastly it is important to advertise the sport property's as well as the sponsors' products, which improves the brand awareness and visibility. (Calzada 2013, 52-55.)

In addition to the traditional media; TV, Radio and newspapers, online media and social networking sites also play an essential role in the industry of sports marketing (Calzada 2013, 62). As the research focuses mostly on social media, it is important to go through the relative social networking sites and therefore the study focuses on them and not on the traditional media.

Social networking is an explicit, inexpensive and straightforward way of communicating with followers from all around the world. Regarding sports marketing, the most essential social media channels are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram. By using these four social media platforms it is possible to distribute audio-visual content, which can make it possible to decrease the utilization of an expensive traditional media such as TV. Nowadays most of the sport properties have the social media channels mentioned earlier and on top of them they also have their own webpage. Essential information about the sport property is found from their webpages. (Calzada 2013, 62-65.) This issue is discussed further in the last chapter of the theoretical framework.

2.2   Personal branding

This chapter is about personal branding, which is composed of defining a brand, explanation of how to create a brand and the benefits of branding. After the brand is explained the chapter moves on to personal branding, how to build a strong personal brand and the benefits of having a personal brand.

2.2.1   A brand

Before going to the definition of personal branding, it is important to understand the meaning of a brand. Miletsky and Smith (2009, 2) define a brand as "…the sum total of all user experiences with a particular product or service, building both reputation and future expectations of benefit." This definition states quite clearly the true nature of a brand. The aim of the brand is to build a bridge between the company and its consumers and, as a consequence, create mutually beneficial long-term relationships (Malmi 2014, 27).

2.2.2   Creating a brand

According to Miletsky & Smith (2009) the elements that make a trustworthy brand are divided into three different groups; the promise, the personality and the unique selling proposition. A brand has to promise something unique to its customers, for example Nike does not only promise sneakers but they also promise a fashionable and athletic experience for their customers. Creating an exclusive personality for the brand is important as it builds an emotional connection between the brand and its consumers. Miletsky & Smith (2009) state "A brand is the relationship a customer has with a company and / or its products and services. It's more than just a logo; it's the total experience that acts as the emotional trigger." Lastly the unique selling proposition differentiates the brand from the competitors. It is highly essential to have at least one quality that makes the brand unique and distinguishable. The previously mentioned elements have to be taken into consideration when starting the process of building a brand. (Miletsky & Smith 2009, 3-4.)

According to Blakey (2011) a branding process is divided into four different aims, see Figure 3. The first objective is *brand awareness;* the target market has to be aware of the brand, recognize and recall it. Personality of the brand is essential here as it is linked with the brand recognition, and without brand awareness the next objective, *brand image* does not exist. Brand image is something that is in the consumers' minds; the attitudes towards the brand are based on the expectations and beliefs that the consumers have about the brand. The third aim is *developing brand equity*; this is the increased value generated by the brand image, brand equity is the power of the brand itself. The

key factor in achieving brand equity is perceived quality of the brand. The fourth objective is *driving brand loyalty;* obtaining brand loyalty is quite psychological transaction and it requires that the consumer believes that the brand is trustworthy and that the brand brings satisfaction to the consumer. To gain consumers loyalty, it is vital to achieve all the previously mentioned three aims. (Blakey 2011, 69-70.)

FIGURE 3. Branding process (Blakey 2011, 69)

2.2.3   Benefits of branding

Branding is an effective way of creating a devoted customer base that chooses the certain brand purposely over other brands. Customers that buy randomly a certain product do not generate as much revenue as the customers that constantly and consciously choose to purchase a product from the certain brand. In order to gain loyal customers it is important to maintain a positive brand image by fulfilling the promises and assuring the visual factors such as the logo are easily recognized. Branding can be an essential part of short-term gains as well as long-term shareholder value, for instance it can help in price premium protection. (Miletsky & Smith, 2009, 6-7.)

Clifton, Simmons & Sameena quote fortune magazine by saying, "In the twenty-first century, branding ultimately will be the only unique differentiator between companies. Brand equity is now a key asset." (Clifton et al. 2003, 17-18.) When it comes to the ultimate benefits of branding, uniqueness and ability to differentiate a product from other similar ones are essential factors. Therefore the previous sentence from Fortune magazine is quite legitimate. Building strong brand equity means that the consumers have a certain brand in mind every time they need the specific product, they trust the brand and don't want to use other brands. (Clifton et al. 2003,18-19.) Concluding this, branding has a clear economic influence as it makes a product more valuable and constantly purchased by the loyal customers. Branding improves the awareness of a certain product and as a consequence more and more people prefer that certain brand. As the concept of

branding is now familiar it is time to move on to personal branding, which plays a significant role in the study.

2.2.4 Personal branding

Personal branding as a concept is nothing new, in fact it has been around for decades but today more people are realizing the benefits that can be achieved by creating a personal brand (Cijo 2014, 1). To reinforce the previously mentioned vision about personal branding and referring to Montoya (2002, 13), personal branding has always been present but the key to success depends on how to take control of it. So in fact everyone has their own personal brand but the question is how to create a strong personal brand and how to benefit from it. A personal brand is not about how a person sees him- or herself but about how other people see them. (Dulworth 2007, 63.)

Basically personal branding is product-based branding but instead of branding a product, it is about branding a person (Malmi 2014, 16). In order for a personal brand to be recognized and recalled it has to have it's own unique features that make it easily identifiable. In conclusion personal branding is about an individual differentiating him- or herself and emerging from the crowd. In order to achieve this, a person has to identify and articulate their particular value proposition. (Dulworth 2007, 63-64.)

2.2.5 A strong personal brand

A personal brand does not necessarily have to be recognized by everyone and everywhere in the world for it to be successful. When it comes to a strong personal brand, the most important aspect is to be perceived in the network where a person needs to be identified. The key in achieving a strong personal brand is to control the message and to define oneself clearly. A personal brand is practically a sum total of the qualities that people link the person to. (Dulworth 2007, 63-64.)

There are two qualities that can be measured within a personal brand. The first is *brand strength*, meaning the brand has to output a clear idea of what the brand stands for. The second is *brand quality*; the brand has to have a positive reputation in order to be per-

ceived as a high quality brand. A personal brand can only be influential in its network if it is both strong and positive, and has a clear mission and identity. A strong personal brand is about being genuine and letting people know the truth about the person behind the brand as people are curious about the real person behind it and not a fake one. A personal brand must be credible in order to be strong. Credibility is gained through networking with the right people who have positive influence on one's personal brand. To be considered as trustworthy, the brand must meet the promises that it makes. (Dulworth 2007, 64-68.)

A powerful personal brand has identified the key characteristics, processed them into the most important qualities and most importantly chosen the dominant attribute that operates as an anchor of the brand. If too many key attributes are highlighted it can cause confusion among the audience, therefore it is important to focus on one leading quality and choose a few characteristics that create value and understanding in the audience. A strong brand should have at least three different attributes that are clear to the people who are familiar with the brand. Attributes are an essential part of building a personal brand as they give a clear sense of what makes a brand exclusive. (Montoya 2002, 17-18.)

2.2.6 Benefits of personal branding

Personal branding works in the same way as any other form of branding, only difference being that personal branding is about branding a person, however it still has similar benefits. Montoya (2002) states about personal branding that it is "A personal identity that stimulates precise, meaningful perceptions in its audience about the values and qualities that person stands for. " In other words, personal branding enables one to promote their message and share the values and character behind the person to the audience. (Montoya 2002, 15.)

There are numerous advantages in personal branding that can be achieved with a strong personal brand. Personal branding boosts potential value as it increases visibility and gives actions more weight. It attracts the right people and enables opportunities as when someone is looking for a potential candidate, by having a personal brand one can be recalled and considered more effectively. Through personal branding a person obtains

recognition and as a consequence gets credit and opportunities. Therefore it is possible to conclude that having a personal brand increases one's visibility, recognition and most of all value. (Montoya 2002, 23-24.)

2.3   Running social media channels and webpages

As mentioned before the key social media channels in sport industry currently are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram. These four channels have become a crucial part of sports marketing and the most powerful communication tools for a sport property. Generally every sport property, regardless of the size or profile, has these above-mentioned channels and on top of these channels each has its own webpage. (Calzada 2013, 65.) Therefore this chapter focuses on these social media channels and webpages as they are of high relevance to this study.

2.3.1   Social media channels

According to the Oxford Dictionary (2015), social media is defined as "…websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking." This definition explains quite accurately the idea behind social media. Social media consists of a natural and genuine conversation between people with a mutual interest. It is about sharing thoughts and experiences with the other participants. (Kabani 2013.) As said, social media is a direct, inexpensive and straightforward way of communicating with the audience from all around the world.

Facebook

Facebook was established in 2004 and it is one of the most enormous social medium of all time having today around 1.44 billion monthly active users and around 1.25 billion mobile users, 65% of them using daily. These numbers continue to grow every day. (Protalinski 2015.) People are using Facebook everywhere in the world and they are using it primarily to express themselves and connect with others. Business entities however are using Facebook as a tool to attract people, gain visibility, build trust, create relationships and most of all, brand themselves. (Kabani 2013.)

Facebook consists of five main functions; profiles, pages, groups, events and advertisement. Profiles are for individual users where they can share their personal content. Businesses use the Facebook pages to brand themselves, these pages having an unlimited follower base and they show in Google search results. Groups can be either public or private and they are similar to online forums in that they are great way to create communities. Facebook events are used for promoting any event or milestone and the event pages can be either public or private. Facebook also enables advertising on their site but it is not yet considered being such a successful way of marketing as people are not on Facebook to see the advertisements. Therefore having a page for a company is a more efficient way of gaining visibility and attracting people. (Kabani 2013.)

Out of the above-mentioned functions of Facebook, the pages are the most important aspect relating to this study as it is used in branding a company or a product and in this case, a person. A Facebook page is customizable; it has a profile picture and a cover picture that can be set according to the brand and as such will be recognized easily at a glance. Also brief information about the company can be included in the Facebook page. As mentioned earlier, when someone is searching a company on Google the company's Facebook page will show in the search results, which leads more people to the page. (Kabani 2013.)

It is highly essential to post content on a regular basis in order to maintain and improve the follower base. The content needs to be carefully chosen, it has to be appropriate, interesting and comprehensive. The content does not necessarily have to be something that the person managing the page has created, it can also be items such as shared articles, videos, pictures or news. The page can also be used in launching for example some kind of a campaign or contest, these help in engaging new followers and also ensuring that the current followers come back to the page. (Kabani 2013.)

YouTube

YouTube is a social media channel where the users can share videos. It currently has over a billion users and is competing with Facebook over the title of largest social media channel. Every day people all over the world watch millions of hours of video con-

tent on YouTube with over half of the viewers using YouTube on their smartphones. (Statistics 2015.) Ciampa, Moore, Carucci, Muller & Wescott (2015) compare YouTube with the early days of television when it seemed like only the sky was the limit, YouTube offers the businesses and entertainment outlets new and limitless ways of being creative.

Everyone who wants to share their video on YouTube can do so by creating their own channel. YouTube is about meeting the varied interests and needs of the audience and captivating the attention of more than a billion people from every corner of the globe. The fact that YouTube is such a huge social media platform, having such a large amount of people using it, makes it quite challenging for users to stand out from the crowd. Yet it is extremely important for businesses to have their own successful YouTube channel when creating their brand image. (Ciampa et al. 2015.)

YouTube enables the users to link other social media channels to their biography, therefore it links the other channels in a convenient way. It is an easy and effective way to share seemingly spontaneous videos of unexpected happenings and videos often planned beforehand. A direct message can be delivered to the audience via video, which makes it intriguing for the audience as they don't have to put effort into reading. YouTube is a convenient way of finding news, general information and social happenings and updates. These videos can then be shared with other social media tools creating additional content for the other social medias. (Ciampa et al. 2015.)

Even though a YouTube user often does not have their own content to share, it is worthwhile to create a channel. It is possible to generate personal playlists where the users can collect all the videos they want to, for example videos related to the business. YouTube is a great social media channel for branding as it lets the user put up the logos, biographies, images and other recognizable components of a brand to their YouTube channel page. It is also possible to insert a three second intro clip before the actual video. The users are also able to subscribe to other users' channels and automatically be informed with updates of those channels. YouTube also offers an analytic tool where the users can see the engagement of their videos. These factors make YouTube a lucrative channel when aiming to getting more audience and visibility. (Ciampa et al. 2015.)

Twitter

Following its establishment in 2007, Twitter has become the most popular social media site after Facebook and YouTube. It has 316 million monthly active users with 80% of them being mobile users (Twitter usage 2015). People communicate through twitter by 'tweeting' which dictionary.com (2015) determines as "a very short message posted on the Twitter website: the message may include text, keywords, mentions of specific users, links to websites, and links to images or videos on a website". Approximately 500 million Tweets are sent each day consisting of a maximum of 140 characters, making them direct, clear and simple (Twitter usage 2015).

Following someone on Twitter does not mean that they have to be followed back, which is one of the reasons why Twitter differs from Facebook. The followers see the followed account's user's Tweets on their Twitter home page and all the tweets show in a personal timeline of the person who posted them. As mentioned, sending a message via Twitter is known as tweeting, and sharing someone else's Tweet is called 'retweeting'. A Tweet oftentimes includes a 'hashtag', which is a keyword of the post and the post can be found in the Twitter search engine. Also it is possible to link other users' Twitter names to a Tweet, this way the tweets also show in the linked user's timeline. 'Favoriting' a Tweet is used when a user likes a Tweet, but it is not solely liking a Tweet, in addition to that it saves the tweet to the user's list of favorite Tweets. (Kabani 2013.)

The personal Twitter page can be customized according to the brand and a profile picture and cover picture can be chosen. Twitter does not give as much space for information, so the user's information has to be well summarized. (Kabani 2013.) According to Morris (2011), Twitter is about support, inspiration, daily motivation and more importantly building a new form of community. Morris calls the wisdom gained through Twitter, 'Twisdom'. (Morris 2011.) The shared content in Twitter should be valuable, genuine and original. A Twitter account that is used in an efficient way can attract people with these people transforming into customers and consumers. As with other social media tools it is important to share dignified content regularly in order to attract people and keep them interested. (Kabani 2013.)

Instagram

Instagram is the newest social media platform out of the four channels that are included in this study. It was established in 2010 and today it has around 300 million active users and daily, 70 million pictures or videos are shared in the application. Instagram is purely about visualization, pictures and videos generally taken by smartphones. (Our story 2015.)

As noted, Instagram is a photo and video sharing application for mobile phones. The user chooses to follow the accounts he or she desires and the pictures or short video content posted by the followed accounts shows in the Instagram feed. It is also possible to search photos or videos by using a hashtag, a certain place or a specific user's name. The pictures posted by the user are shown in their own Instagram feed with a person being able to be tagged to a photo with these photos then shown in his or her tagged pictures feed. (McCracken 2015.)

Instagram is a great social media tool for businesses due to the idea of visually building a social media presence. Instagram also allows the sharing of the updates from the user's Twitter and Facebook accounts, which makes the content creation easier as the same post can be shared across these three social media platforms. The same video clips from YouTube can be shared in Instagram although they have to be a lot shorter. Instagram enables the user to share his or her Instagram content across their entire social marketing presence and as the different social media channels are linked together the user gets more visibility and possibilities in content creation. (Hines 2014.)

As Instagram is about visualization, the brand image can be built quite easily as the different brand characteristics can be included to the Instagram account, the user can choose a profile picture, write a brief introduction and link their webpage to the biography. The user's Instagram feed gives an idea of what the user is about as the content has a backstory, which is created and controlled solely by the user. (Hines 2014.)

2.3.2 Social media content

Content generation plays an integral role when running social media channels. It is highly essential to create exclusive, high-quality and authentic content in order to make the most out of the possible benefits of social media. The content has to be appealing to the audience and therefore it is important to take them into account when creating it. The content needs to be created using the language that the person behind it speaks and his or her communication style has to be used. The significance of authenticity is essential. (Calzada 2013, 64-65.)

Running a successful social media presence means publishing content on a regular basis. The content should also include 'bad news' due to the fact that the audience is interested in both good and bad news, and they will no matter what hear the bad news from somewhere else. Disappearing from social media for a long time should also be avoided. It is important to interact with followers and give them opportunity to ask and, questions answered. Followers have the feeling of getting involved and by allowing them to be part of something ensures that they will keep following. (Calzada 2013, 64-65.)

Content that is visual such as photos, gain more visibility than just pure text, except in the case of Twitter that is not the case as it is about publishing short texts. There is a saying, 'a picture is worth a thousand words', and this saying can be applied to content generation as well. A picture draws one's attention more likely than text as every picture has a story behind it and people can use their imagination when interpreting it. Content also has to be topical, for instance a posts that are related to holidays, festivals or other important events. Creating informational value and sharing interesting facts engage the followers as they learn something from the posts. (Malhotra et al. 2012.)

As a conclusion, the key to a successful social media channel is a constant presence; publishing exclusive content on a regular basis and interacting with the followers; for instance, answering to possible questions and creating social media competitions (Calzada 2013, 63-65).

2.3.3   Webpage

According to Blakey (2011, 149) sport property that doesn't have a webpage does not exist. It is vital to have a webpage so that the information about the sport property is easily available for the consumers. A webpage is a key asset in media presence and it is not enough that it simply exists, it also needs to be maintained and updated constantly. The webpage needs to be found without putting much effort in when searching and the audience needs to be aware of the webpage's existence. (Blakey 2011, 149.)

The webpage has to be designed according to the sport property's brand image, as the brand needs to be recognized immediately. The layout of the webpage must be professional and interesting, yet it has to be simple, clear and quick to use. The story behind the sport property needs to be interpreted through the webpage therefore it is essential to have useful information about the property and also visual content to attract the audience. The webpage has to link all the social media platforms the property has and they need to be easily located within it. To build a good reputation for the website it needs to fulfill any promises made, the information has to be truthful and the site needs to be secure to use. (Blakey 2011, 149-150.)

3   BENCHMARKING

This chapter defines the concept of benchmarking and introduces the methods used for the research. As a concept, benchmarking is difficult to define as the definitions vary greatly depending on the field of business in question. Strapenhurst (2009) defines benchmarking as follows: "It is commonly applied to a wide variety of activities that organizations undertake to compare their performance levels with others and/or identify, adapt, and adopt practices that they believe will improve their performance." Benchmarking, it should be said is not only copying from other companies but it also requires building a perception of oneself and utilize the best practices from other's ideas. (Strapenhurst (2009, 3)

The previously mentioned definitions explain the concept of benchmarking thoroughly and give a general understanding of what benchmarking is. The company is at its starting point with the new service and they don't have anything to improve yet. The company already has their own vision about personal branding for a professional football player but they need the knowledge of how to carry out the branding in an efficient and profitable way. This knowledge is gained through benchmarking some of the professional football players that have built a strong brand image for themselves via social media. See the process of benchmarking in the Figure 1.
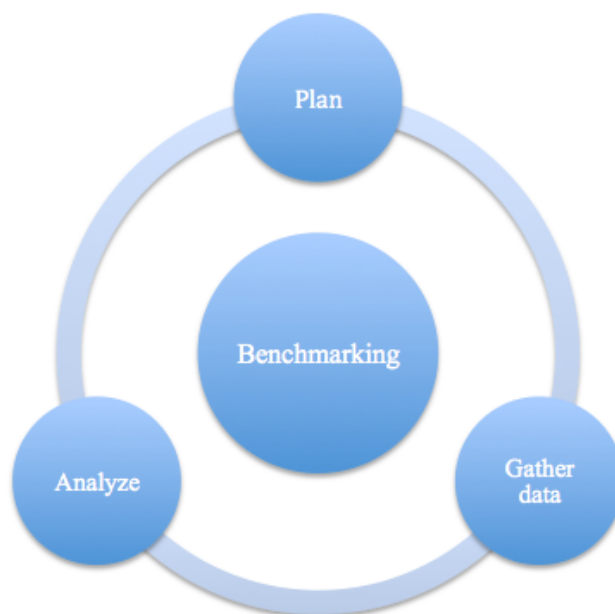

FIGURE 1. Benchmarking process (Olson 2014)

3.1   Methods used for benchmarking

In this case benchmarking is done by analyzing those football players who have been successful in personal branding and analyzing how they have achieved their brand image. The reason why benchmarking is the chosen research method, is because it enables analysis of real life examples and observation of personal branding in practice. The data is up to date as the research is done by analyzing the recent social media updates and webpage content. The time frame is an extremely important factor because social media is constantly changing.

The type of benchmarking used is external benchmarking, effectively understood as analyzing similar companies' best practices, the companies in question being those that are successful in the industry (Types of benchmarking). In this case the targets analyzed are some of most successful footballers in personal branding.

Benchmarking the successful football players shows what the best practices are when creating a personal brand for a professional football player. Following and analyzing successful football players' social media and webpage content provides the required knowledge of how to achieve the best results in branding through social media. In turn this shows which are the most important channels, what kind of content is appealing and how to increase the follower base. By utilizing benchmarking, it is possible to outline a strategy of how to build a strong brand image by using social media. The benchmarking targets are Neymar da Silva Santos Junior, David Luiz Moreira Marinho and Gerard Piqué Bernabeu.

The different social media channels that are analyzed are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram. The reasoning used to elect the chosen social media channels is the fact that they are dominating the world of social media and are therefore of high importance when creating a personal brand. All of the benchmarking objects have at least three of the aforesaid social media tools.

One of the main goals of benchmarking is to observe the footballers behavior in social media, in other words what kind of content they choose, create, engage in and reveal. In addition, there will be focus on the content that gets the most visibility and engagement

among the followers. Also analyzing their personal webpage and what kind of information they have gathered there.

4   IMPLEMENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE BENCHMARKING RE-SEARCH

As stated in the proceeding chapter three outstanding elite football players are benchmarked. These three professional footballers are known all around the world. They have successfully built strong personal brands for themselves using not only social media but also each of them has their personal webpage. The benchmarking research is implemented by following the three footballers' social media accounts: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram, and analyzing what results in them being successful in their social media management. The goal is to find out the best practices that can be applied for personal branding in social media today therefore content from the past calendar month (30 days) is be analyzed.

The first part of this chapter introduces the benchmarking targets. The second part is a comparative analysis of the benchmarking objects' different elements of their social media behavior in different channels with the players' webpages analyzed separately. The analysis is based on the research results, yet it combines the concepts from theoretical framework. It utilizes figures that help to visualize the different numbers and furthermore it includes pictures from the footballers personal social media channels.

4.1   Benchmarking targets

The three footballers used in the benchmarking analysis are Neymar da Silva Santos Junior, David Luiz Moreira Marinho and Gerard Piqué Bernabeu. The following chapters include brief introductions of the players; their current teams, private life and numerical facts about their social media channels.

4.1.1   Neymar da Silva Santos Junior

Neymar da Silva Santos Junior, commonly known as Neymar Jr., is a Brazilian football player born in 1992. He is currently playing for FC Barcelona and his position is forward (FC Barcelona 2015). Neymar Jr. has a son but is no longer together with the son's mother and instead is dating Brazilian athlete Gabriella Lenzi. He is known to be

highly skilled on the football pitch and outside of it he is considered to be a young dad passionate about fashion with amazing sense of humor. (Alexander 2014.)

Neymar has almost over 53.7 million followers on Facebook (da Silva Santos 2015a), 265.603 subscribers on YouTube (da Silva Santos 2015b), 19.9 million followers on Twitter (da Silva Santos 2015c) and 32 million followers on Instagram (da Silva Santos 2015d).

4.1.2   David Luiz Moreira Marinho

David Luiz Moreira Marinho, commonly known as David Luiz, is a Brazilian football player born in 1987. He is currently playing for Paris Saint-Germain as a defender (Paris Saint-Germain 2015) and is engaged to a Portuguese woman called Sara Madeira. On top of being known as a greatly skilled football player he is also considered to be extremely religious and funny person with a good heart. (Jain 2012.)

This 28 year old footballer has over 26.4 million followers on his official Facebook page (Luiz 2015a), 7.45 million followers on Twitter (Luiz 2015b) and 9.8 million followers on Instagram (Luiz 2015c). David Luiz doesn't yet have an official YouTube channel.

4.1.3   Gerard Piqué Bernabeu

Gerard Piqué Bernabeu also known as Gerard Piqué is a Spanish football player born in 1987. At the moment he is playing for FC Barcelona as a defender (FC Barcelona 2015) and is currently married to Colombian singer Shakira, with whom he has two children (Gerrard Piqué Biography 2014).

Gerard Piqué has over 17.6 million followers on his official Facebook page (Piqué 2015a), 1.468 subscribers on YouTube (Piqué 2015b), 11.2 million followers on his official Twitter page (Piqué 2015c) and 5.6 million followers on his Instagram page (Piqué 2015d).

4.2 Comparative analysis

This chapter is divided into four main subject matters; social media followers, frequency of updating, profile and content as well as analysis of webpages. As mentioned before, the research is conducted by benchmarking the social media behavior of the three footballers and the time frame of the benchmarked content is one month, 18.09-18.10.15. Theoretical framework is of high importance regarding the analysis as it refers greatly to the different findings of theories and concepts. Thus, the analysis is a combination of the practical perspective and theoretical point of view.

Firstly the analysis focuses on the amount of followers, secondly on the presentation of profiles, thirdly on the frequency of updates and fourthly on content generation. The reason why YouTube is excluded from the analysis is because none of the football players update their YouTube accounts on a regular basis nor have many followers. Hereby it can be concluded that having a personal YouTube channel is not of high importance among the footballers. However it must be understood that there are a great amount of YouTube videos of the footballers but oftentimes they are posted by other users, and not personally by the footballer himself.

4.2.1 Followers

The forthcoming chapters analyze the players' Facebook, Twitter and Instagram follower base. Firstly it presents the different channels separately and lastly it states a conclusion.

Facebook

The amount of Facebook followers that the players have varies greatly from one to another. As said Neymar Jr. has 53.7 million, David Luiz has 26.4 million and Gerard Piqué 17.6 million respectively on their personal pages. Based on the numbers it can be detected that Neymar Jr. has the most followers out of these three, David Luiz the second most and Gerard Piqué the least.

Twitter

When comparing the amount of Twitter followers that the players have, it can be noticed that Neymar Jr. has the largest amount of followers (19.9 million), Gerard Piqué has the second largest amount totaling 11.2 million and David Luiz has the lowest number sitting at 7.45 million. In comparing the amounts of Twitter followers against Facebook followers it can observed that the amounts on Facebook are actually a lot larger.

Instagram

The quantity of Instagram followers that the footballers have differs even more greatly than on Facebook. Neymar Jr. is again leading with 34 million followers, David Luiz is second with 9.8 million and Gerard Piqué brings up the rear with 5.6 million. Neymar Jr. has three times more followers than David Luiz and around six times more than Piqué.

Conclusion

Based on the quantities of followers in each social media, it can be concluded that Facebook is dominating the world of social media. This fact is also mentioned in the theoretical framework chapter 2.3.1. According to the proceeding chapter (2.3.1) about Twitter, Instagram is the third largest social media after Facebook and Twitter. Yet, taking into account the amounts of Twitter and Instagram followers that the footballers have proves otherwise. Both Neymar Jr. and David Luiz have a larger quantity of followers on Instagram than on Twitter. Refer to Figure 4 to view the amounts of followers each footballer has on each social media platform. It can be seen that Neymar Jr. is dominating all of the different social media channels as he has the most followers in each.
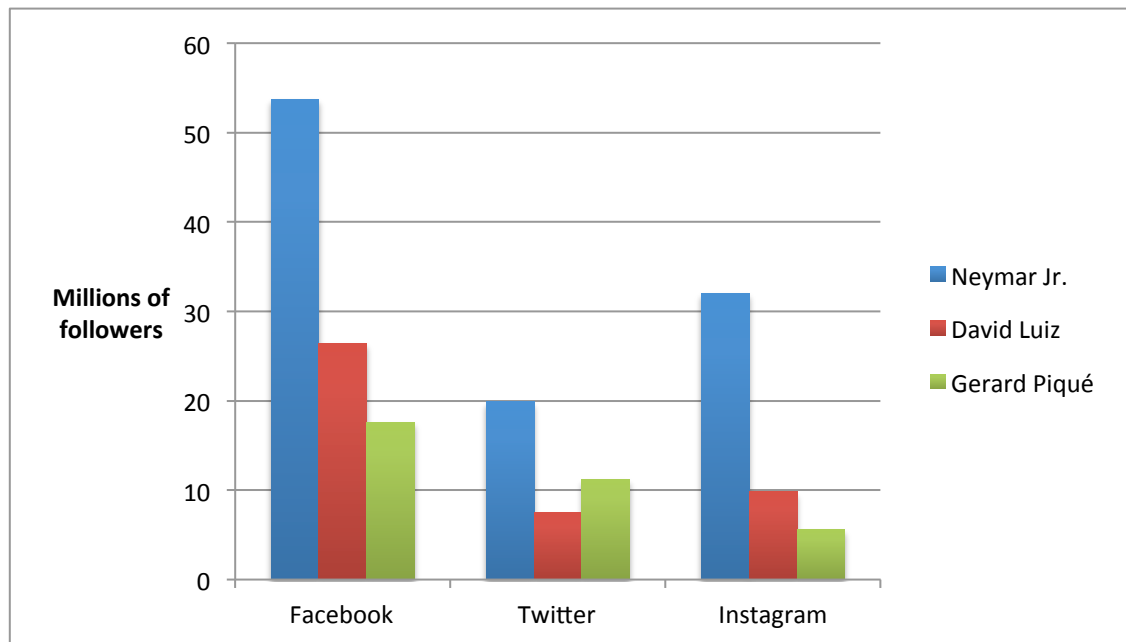
FIGURE 4. Amount (in million) of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram followers of Neymar Jr. David Luiz and Gerard Piqué

4.2.2 Frequency of updating

This chapter analyzes how often the footballers update their different social media channels. First it focuses on the different channels separately and finally it presents conclusions on the findings. The number of posts are obtained by counting together the posts on the players' Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages during the research period.

Facebook

When the amount of published content of the past month is taken into consideration it can be concluded that Neymar Jr. and David Luiz update their Facebook most frequently as they have posted 17 times in one month. This is in comparison to Gerard Piqué totaling only 9 times.

Referring to the theoretical framework chapter 2.3.1, in order to maintain public interest and get new followers it is essential to update their page on a regular basis. This fact

applies to all of the different social medias and plays an integral role in the success of the social media channels.

Twitter

When counting together the amount of Tweets from the past month, it can be noticed that Gerard Piqué updates his Twitter most often. He has updated it 19 times during the past month with Neymar Jr. Tweeting on average 18 times a month, being the second most active on Twitter out of the three. David Luiz on the other hand has tweeted 13 times during the past month making him the least active user.

Likewise in other social media channels it is also extremely fundamental to update Twitter regularly. As mentioned in chapter 2.3.2 frequent updating enables the maintenance of the existing follower base and at the same time increases the attraction of new followers.

Instagram

Looking into the players' personal Instagram accounts and summing up the times of posted updates, it can be stated that Neymar Jr. is the most active user on Instagram. He has posted 44 times in one month, which makes it more than one post a day. David Luiz has updated his Instagram 25 times during the research month and Gerard Piqué only three times. Neymar Jr. updates the most and consequently has the most followers whereas Gerard Piqué has only updated couple of times in one month and has the least followers.

Conclusion

As mentioned in chapter 2.3.2 about social media, content disappearing from social media for a long time should be avoided. The frequency of updating and also the regularity play an integral role in running a successful social media account. As the time frame of the research is not particularly broad, some of the numerical facts can vary if taking into consideration a different period of time, or if the period of time is of a different length. However for all intents and purposes, using a calendar month as a time frame discloses

a general idea of how often the footballers update their social media platforms. When looking at Figure 5, the huge differences in aforementioned frequency can be visualized and it can be seen that each player prefers different channels over others. Neymar Jr. and David Luiz clearly favor Instagram as they post more there when compared to other social media channels whereas Gerard Piqué is the most active on Twitter, showing his preference.
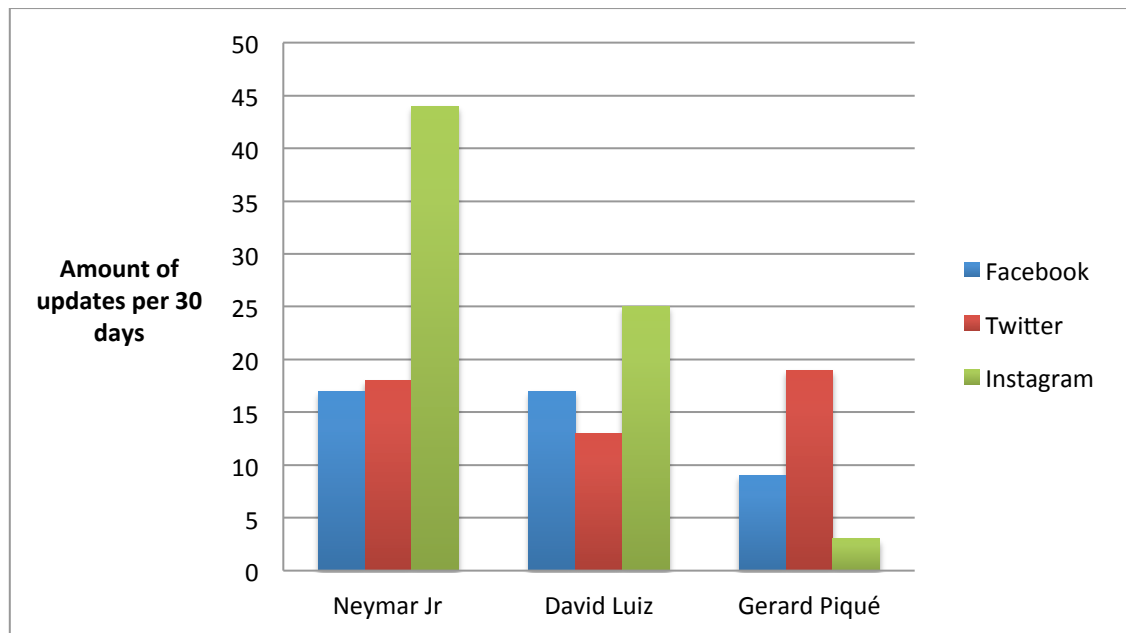

FIGURE 5. Amount of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram updates of Neymar Jr., David Luiz and Gerard Piqué during the research period

4.2.3   Social media profiles

The football players' usernames usually include their names or nicknames. From Facebook they can be found as Neymar Jr., David Luiz and Gerard Piqué. Both from Twitter and Instagram they are found by neymajr, davidluiz_4 and 3gerardpique. The numbers that David Luiz and Gerard Piqué have in their usernames refer to their squad numbers, by this they refer to their current or national teams.

When looking at the profile –and cover pictures that can be set to Facebook and Twitter, Neymar Jr. and Gerard Piqué have football related pictures. And in fact the pictures are the same both on Facebook and Twitter. David Luiz's cover picture is related to his

team but the profile picture is a close-up picture of him wearing a normal shirt. Gerard Piqué and David Luiz have the same profile picture on Instagram as in other social media channels while Neymar Jr. has a FC Barcelona related profile picture. As a conclusion the players all aim to keep the profiles of all their social media channels similar.

The information found from the players' social media channels are mostly linked to their other social media channels as well as to their websites. On Facebook Neymar Jr. has written all of his awards, his birthday and his parents' names. David Luiz has only included his birthday in the information section. Gerard Piqué only introduces his birthday and that he plays for FC Barcelona. On Twitter Neymar Jr. has written, "Son of the God, a dad, happy and brave!", David Luiz has written, "Enjoy life!" and Gerard Piqué has stated that he is a player for FC Barcelona. On Instagram Neymar Jr. has a Brazilian flag in his bio and also a text stating; "For who has a strong power of will, the impossible becomes just an opinion." David Luiz has written to his bio, "God bless you!" whereas Gerard Piqué only tells that this is his official page. The texts the players have in their biographies say something about them with Neymar Jr.'s having his mottos written in it, David Luiz's targets his audience and Gerard Piqué's has factual information

4.2.4   Content

The content of posts of each football player is broken down separately and their respective content sub-analyzed by separately focusing on each social media channel. Lastly all the findings are concluded. Based on the social media content that the players have posted, the posts can be divided into five different categories. The different categories are; the footballers' current teams, football in general, private life, personal sponsorships or charity. The first category encloses the updates that are related to the players' present teams. The second category is related to football in general, it can be for instance posts about football news. The third category encompasses the updates in relation to the footballer's private life, for example their family. The fourth category links with the players' personal sponsorships, for example pictures where they promote their sponsors' products. The fifth and final category covers updates connected to charity, for instance some posts of charity campaigns they have taken part in. The content analysis

gives a general idea of what kind of content the footballers post the most and what kind of content engages the followers most.

Facebook

Neymar Jr.

Neymar Jr. updated his Facebook 17 times during the research period. Out of the 17 updates, 58% of the Facebook content that Neymar Jr. has posted is related to football, either directly to his team FC Barcelona (23%) or to football in general (35%). Further-more, 24% of the content is related to his sponsors, 12% to his private life and 6% to charity. See Figure 6 about the division of Neymar Jr.'s Facebook content in different categories.
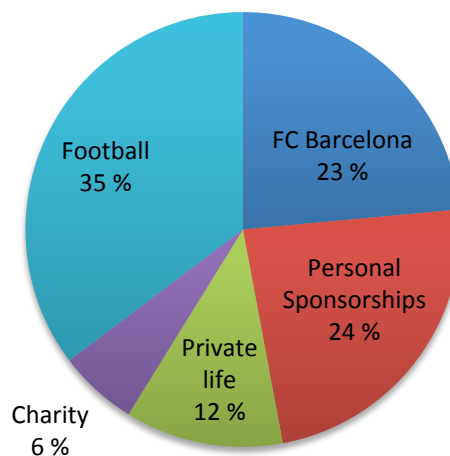
FIGURE 6 Facebook content of Neymar Jr. divided into five different categories

An example of an FC Barcelona related post is a picture of him on the pitch after the team has won the match. He has written: "All the honor and glory is for you Sir." He is obviously thanking God for the victory as he clearly wants to tell the audience that he is a religious person. An example of football related content is his own project *Instituto Neymar Jr.,* which is a social organization promoting positive values via football (da Silva Santos 2015f). A post related to his personal sponsorships is a Facebook share of an advertisement of sunglasses, where he is the face of the advertisement campaign. An example of content related to his private life is one of the many 'selfies' he has taken

with friends while he has also previously shared a video posted by UNICEF, clearly a post related to charity.

The posts that have the most engagement (likes, shares and comments) are distinctly the posts related to FC Barcelona and those related to his private life, with the post with the most likes thus far a picture of him on the pitch. The picture has 722.000 likes, 5.200 shares and over 7.000 comments. The second most popular post is a 'selfie' of him and his friend with has 653.000 likes, 2.400 shares and around 6.600 comments. The posts with the least engagement are those related to personal sponsorship. See Picture 1, the post that has the most engagement.
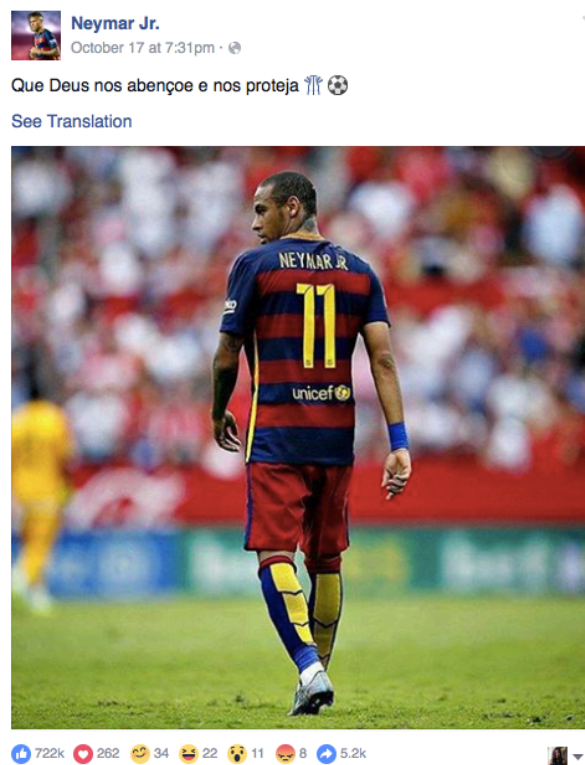
PICTURE 1 The most successful Facebook post of Neymar Jr. during the research period (da Silva Santos 2015a)

David Luiz

David Luiz updated his Facebook page 17 during the research period and these posts can be divided in to 4 different categories; content related to his team Paris Saint-Germain, to football in general and to his private life. These are split according to the

Figure 7 with 65% of the content related to his team, 18% related to his private life and 17% to football in general. See Figure 7.
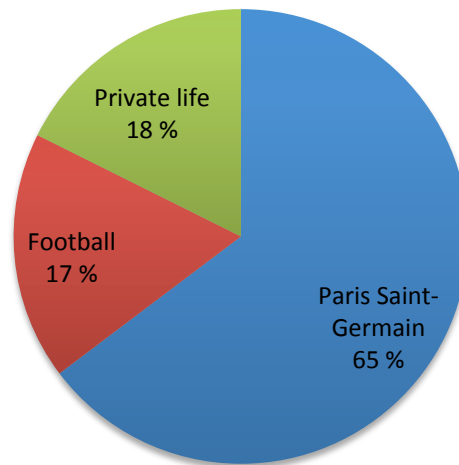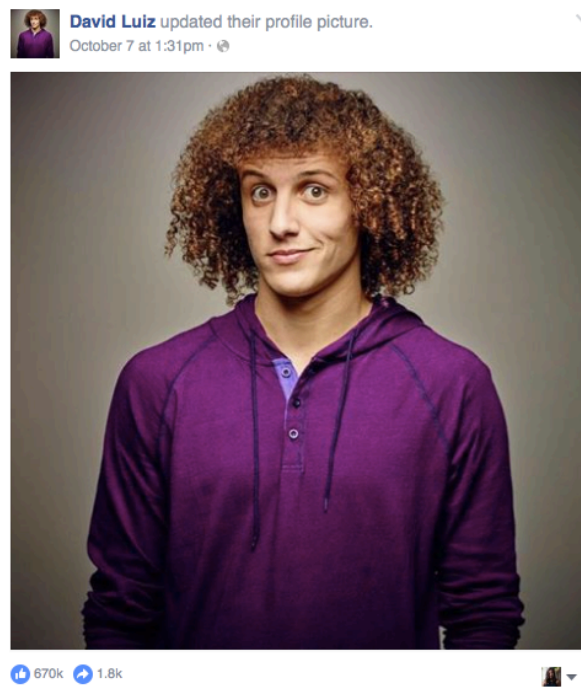

FIGURE 7 Facebook content of David Luiz divided into three categories

An example of content related to his team is a picture of him from the pitch after a match saying, "Well done boys!" Content related to football in general can be understood as pictures such as those of him wearing Brazilian national football team uniform. Finally, to give an example of content related to his private life it is possible to find non-sponsored close-up pictures of him as well as posts similar to those of Neymar Jr., where he refers to God.

The most successful pictures in terms of audience engagement are non-sponsored pictures of him; those related to his private life. One of such pictures has 670.000 likes, 1.800 shares and 5.800 comments with another having 274.000 likes, 1.300 shares and 2.800 comments. Generally the content with least engagement is that related to his team. See Picture 2 the post that has most likes.

PICTURE 2 The most successful Facebook post of David Luiz during the research period (Luiz 2015a)

Gerard Piqué

Gerard Piqué updated his Facebook page 9 times during the research period. This content can be divided into four different categories; FC Barcelona (11%), personal sponsorships (45%), charity (11%) and private life (33%). Refer to Figure 8.
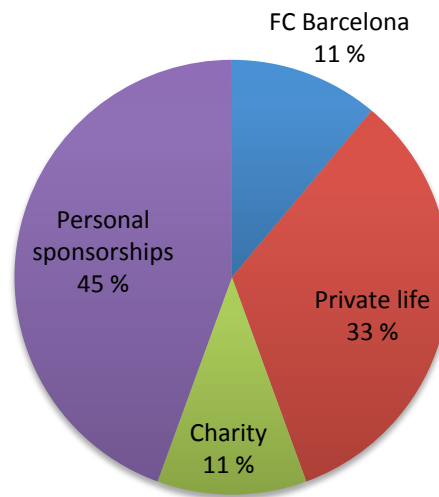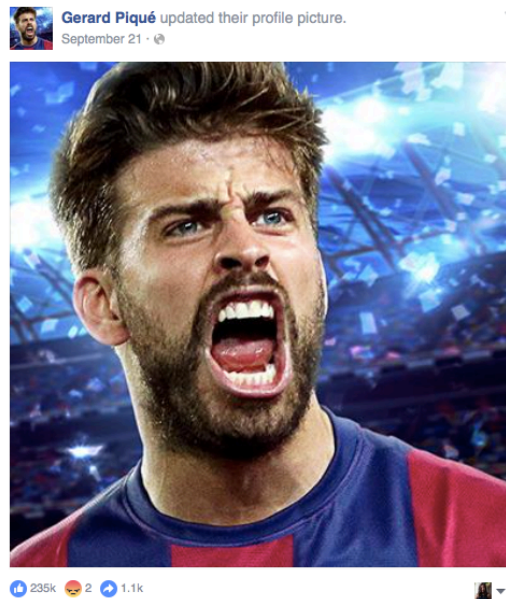
FIGURE 8 Facebook content of Gerard Piqué divided into five categories

An example of content related to his team FC Barcelona is a close-up picture of him wearing the team uniform shirt. An example of content related to his private life is a picture of his family at the Catalonian elections. Content related to his personal sponsorships is for instance an advertisement of an application. And lastly an example of content related to charity is a picture linked with Red Cross.

The posts that have the most likes are those related to his team and a picture related to his private life. The above-mentioned picture of him wearing his team's uniform shirt has 235.000 likes, 1.100 shares and around 2.400 comments. The second most favored post is a picture of his family at the Catalonian elections and it has 51.000 likes, 546.000 shares and 1.200 comments. See Picture 3, the most successful post.

PICTURE 3 The most successful Facebook post of Gerard Piqué during the research period (Piqué 2015a)

Twitter

Neymar Jr.

Neymar Jr. updated his Twitter account 18 times during the research period. Based on the posts the content can be divided into four different categories; FC Barcelona (22%), football in general (17%), private life (28%) and personal sponsorships (33%). Refer to Figure 9.
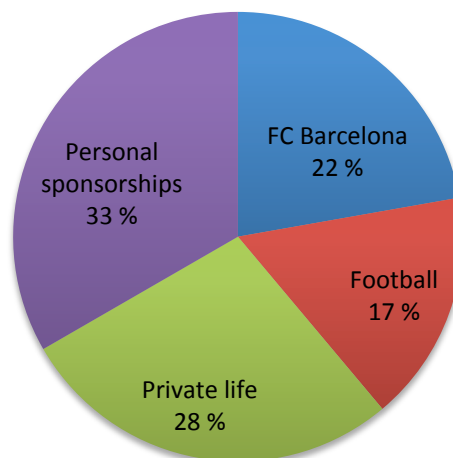

FIGURE 9 Twitter content of Neymar Jr. divided into four categories

As said the Twitter content of Neymar Jr. is divided into four different categories. The biggest proportion is content related to his personal sponsorships, such as his Retweet of a Volkswagen Brazil marketing campaign post. The second biggest proportion is related to his private life, shown by his posting of a picture where he is playing online poker. The third largest percentage is content related to FC Barcelona such as a picture of him on the pitch after a victory. The smallest percentage is content related generally to football, to give an example he has retweeted a post from his already mentioned project *Neymar Jr. Instituto.*

The most successful Tweets that Neymar Jr. has posted are related to FC Barcelona, in this instance shown by a picture of him and Leo Messi after Messi hurt his leg. The previously mentioned picture has 9 thousand Retweets and 13 thousand favorites, and it is the most successful Tweet during the month in question. The second most successful post is a picture of him on the pitch, it has been retweeted 5.8 thousand times and it has 11 thousand favorites. Content related to his sponsorships has gained the least attention. See Picture 4, the most successful Tweet.

PICTURE 4 The most successful Tweet of Neymar Jr. during the research period (da Silva Santos 2015c)

David Luiz

David Luiz posted 13 times on Twitter during the research period. This content can on be divided into two different categories; his team or football in general. 85% of the content is related to his team Paris Saint-Germain and 15% is related generally to football. In conclusion 100% of the content is related to football. See the figure 10 of the content breakdown.
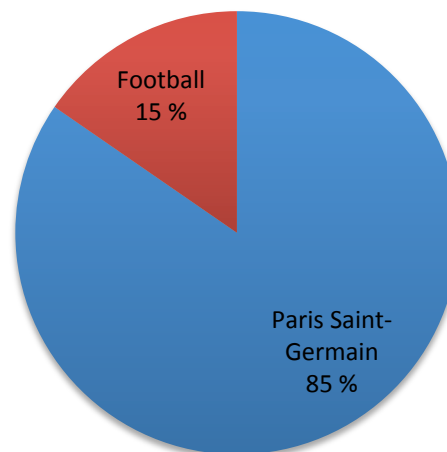

FIGURE 10 Twitter content of David Luiz divided into two categories

David Luiz has posted only two types of content on Twitter during the one month. For instance the content related to his team is mostly advertisement pictures of the coming matches. An example of the content related generally to football is also an advertisement picture of a match, Chile vs. Brazil. The post that has gained the most Retweets and favorites is a picture of him and his teammate where he wishes happy birthday him. This post has 1.100 Retweets and 2.100 favorites. The second most successful Tweet is a 'selfie' with him and his teammate on their way to a match, it has 649 Retweets and 1.600 favorites. See Picture 5, the most successful Tweet.

PICTURE 5 The most successful Tweet of David Luiz during the research period (Luiz 2015b)

Gerard Piqué

Gerard Piqué posted 19 times on Twitter during the research period. This content consist of five different categories; his team FC Barcelona, football in general, his private life, personal sponsorships and charity. The biggest percentage (39%) is related to sponsorships, the second biggest percentage (33%) is related to his private life, the third biggest percentage (11%) is related to charity and football in general, and the least big percentage is related to FC Barcelona. See Figure 11.
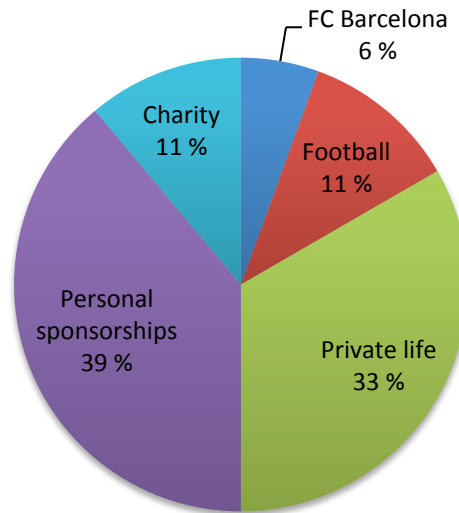
FIGURE 11 Twitter content of Gerard Piqué divided into five categories

Gerard Piqué has quite a versatile Twitter content, as it can be divided into five different categories. An example of content related to sponsorships is a Retweet of his sponsor's Tweet. An example of private life content is a Retweet of his wife Shakira's Tweet. Football related content is for instance a video of an old football game. Content related to charity is a picture of a Red Cross charity campaign. Content related to FC Barcelona is for instance a Retweet of FC Barcelona's tweet.

The most engaging post is one related to his private life where he tweets "Popcorn and Coca-Cola", it has been retweeted 2.600 times and it has 2.900 favorites. The second most engaging post is a video of an old football game, it has been retweeted 2.000 times and it has 2.200 favorites. See Picture 6, the best Tweet of the research period.

PICTURE 6 The most successful Tweet of Gerard Piqué during the research period (Piqué 2015c)

Instagram

Neymar Jr.

Neymar Jr. updated his Instagram 44 times during the research period. This content can be divided into five different categories; FC Barcelona, private life, football in general, personal sponsorships and charity. Over half of the content he has posted to Instagram is related to his private life, 56% to be exact. 33% of the content is related to his team, 5% generally to football and 3% both to personal sponsorships and charity. See the figure 12.
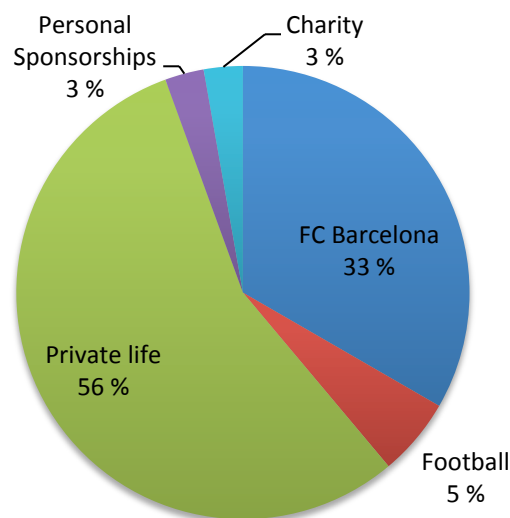

FIGURE 12 Instagram content of Neymar Jr. divided into five categories

An example of Neymar Jr.'s private life post is a picture of him and his son sleeping. FC Barcelona related content is for instance a picture of him and his Brazilian team-mates. A football related post is a collage picture of all of his football professors. A picture related to personal sponsorships is for example a picture of him on a Segway, and a picture related to charity is for instance him and a boy who has cancer, and he wishes all the good for him.

On Instagram the pictures that have gained the most likes are those related to his private life as well as those related to FC Barcelona. The picture with the most likes is one of him with his new car, it has over one million likes and 66.500 comments, this post is one related to his private life. The second most engaging post is a picture of him and his

teammates at training, it has some 851.000 likes and 76.000 comments and it is related to FC Barcelona. See the Picture 7, most liked picture. Also the pictures where his son shows are very popular in terms of likes and comments. All in all the different categories have gained quite an equal amount of engagement.

PICTURE 7 The most successful Instagram post of Neymar Jr. during the research period (da Silva Santos 2015d)

David Luiz

David Luiz posted 25 times on Instagram during the research period. According to the posts the content can be divided into four different categories; his team, football in general, private life and personal sponsorships. 48% of the content is related to his team, 24% both in private life and football in general and 4% to personal sponsorships. See Figure 13.
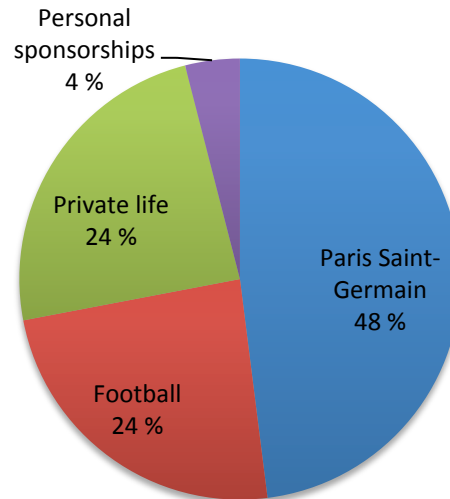
FIGURE 13 Instagram content of David Luiz divided into four different categories

An example of Paris Saint-Germain related Instagram post is a video of him cycling at team training. An example of a general football post is an advertisement picture of Chile vs. Brazil. An example of a private life post is a picture of him with a friend wishing him happy birthday. An example of personal sponsorship content is a picture of clothes that his sponsor has given him.

The pictures related to football have the most likes and comments with the picture with most likes being one where he is wearing the uniform of the national team of Brazil. It has a total of 201 thousand likes and three thousand comments. A picture of him on his way to a football match is the second most popular with 197.000 likes and 2.600 comments. See Picture 8, the most successful Instagram post.

PICTURE 8 The most successful Instagram post of David Luiz during the research period (Luiz 2015c)

Gerard Piqué

Gerard Piqué has only posted three times during the past month. One picture is a 'selfie' of him wearing sunglasses supporting fight against breast cancer, which belongs to the category of charity. The aforementioned post has 183.000 likes and 1.800 comments. He has also posted a video of a videogame which he is a character in. This post belongs to the category of personal sponsorships and has 86.400 likes and 557 comments. In addition, he has posted a picture of an application, which goes into the group of personal sponsorships, and it has 103.000 likes and 3.400 comments. See Picture 9, the post with the most likes out of the three posts.

PICTURE 9 The most successful Instagram post of Gerard Piqué during the research period (Piqué 2015d)

Conclusion

The content analysis is concluded by counting each player's Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts together and dividing them into the five aforementioned different categories. When taking into account all three social media channels, the total amount of posts the players posted during the research period is 156. Out of these, 36% are related to their current teams, 29% are related to their private lives, 16% are related to the players' personal sponsorships, 15% are related to football in general and 4% to charity. Refer to Figure 14.
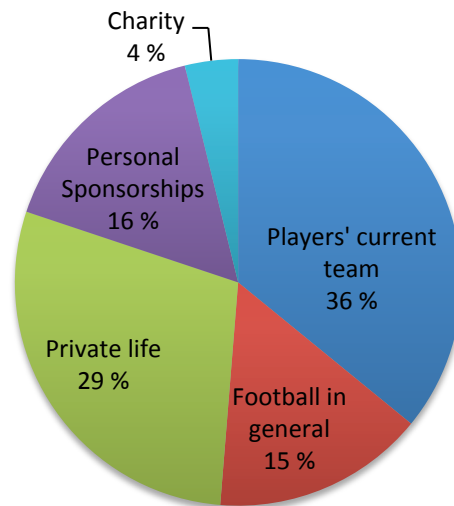
FIGURE 14 All of the players' Facebook, Twitter and Instagram content divided into five different categories

Figure 14 shows that the players' focus is on football as 51% of the content being related to football, 15% to football in general and 36% to their current teams. Football related content is the topic that generates the most engagement in general. Around one third of the content relates to their private life, which is also an important type of content as it tells the audience who is behind the social media account. The players have shown appreciation towards their sponsors by revealing sponsor related content (16%) and also a small percentage (4%) is related to charity. It can be concluded that the content is quite versatile and it is targeted to all the different types of audience.

As said in chapter 2.3.2, content generation plays an integral role when running social media channels. It is highly essential to create exclusive, high-quality and authentic content in order to make the most out of the possible benefits of social media. The content has to be appealing to the audience and therefore it is important to take into account all of the different kinds of audience when creating the content. The content needs to be given by using the language that the person speaks and his or her communication style has to be used. The footballers social media content can be divided into different categories, which discloses the fact that their aim is to attract all the different types of audience. The players mostly use their native language, the language that is spoken in their country of residence or English. In conclusion, all the languages that they use, they are also capable of speaking. This adds a genuine touch to their social media behavior.

According to Malhotra et al. (2012), a picture draws one's attention more likely than a text as every picture has a story behind it, and people can use their imagination when interpreting a picture. Essentially, a great majority of the updates the footballers have posted include a picture. On Instagram it is all about pictures but for instance on Twitter it is about writing a short text. However a lot of times the players have posted a picture to Twitter as well.

According to Calzada (2013, 52-55), media presence should achieve the following goals; attract supporters, influence the decisions of sponsors and opinion leaders etc., publicize the sport property's B2C products, and lastly promote and strengthen positioning. These goals can be applied to the players' presence in their personal social media channels. The content should be versatile and posted on regular basis in order to meet the previously mentioned goals. As said the benchmarking targets all have quite diverse content in their social media channels, which probably attracts both sponsors and opinion leaders, yet also interest individuals.

The type of content the benchmarked footballers have published is mostly football related which is the most intriguing for the audience regarding chapter 2.1.4. Sport related content is probably the most valuable content to be generated, especially the content related directly to their teams as it gains a lot of attention, both in the possible sponsors, future teams as well as the individual followers.

Referring to chapter 2.3.2, content has to be topical, for instance a post that is related to holidays, festivals or other important events. The footballers have shown to precisely post content that is up to the date and chronologically relevant. For instance content related to important matches is something that interests every type of audience. It is important to keep the audience up to date with what is going on, this creates a feeling of belonging in the audience.

Neymar Jr. and Gerard Piqué have notably revealed more about their private lives than David Luiz. David Luiz mostly focuses on posting content that is somehow related to his career as a footballer. This is in comparison to Gerard Piqué, who has mostly posted about his private life and personal sponsorships, and Neymar Jr., who has posted content related to all of the mentioned categories quite equally.

Based on the research, a lot of times a private life post has gained the most likes and comments. According to Calzada (2013, 52-55), it is essential to add private life activities to the media content as it makes the presence certainly more appealing and interesting. Content regarding private life requires carefulness in order to avoid possible negative presence. The content related to private life that Gerard Piqué and Neymar Jr. have posted nearly always includes their family and friends consequently making it quite personal and exclusive, inadvertently attracting the audience. Without having any content related to private life the audience wouldn't feel as connected to the person and they wouldn't know the real person behind the social media channel.

According to chapter 2.1.4, it is extremely important to share content related to the sponsors as it is a way of showing appreciation towards them. All of the benchmarked footballers have shown appreciation towards the sponsors by posting sponsor related content. It must be said however that sometimes it is difficult to draw a line between a private life post and sponsored post, as the footballers might for instance wear the sponsor's clothes during their free time.

The content related to charity lets the audience know the person's values and creates a kind-hearted image about the person. The footballers have used their power for a good cause, which outputs a caring and genuine image of them.

4.2.5   Webpage

All of the benchmarked footballers have their own personal webpages. Though it must be stated that, unfortunately there is not much to be analyzed as both Neymar Jr.'s and David Luiz's webpages are under construction. Both websites have a text: "Coming soon!". Neymar Jr.'s website has his logo, social media channels linked, as well as logos of his main sponsors and David Luiz's webpage doesn't have any information. Gerard Pique's webpage is extremely simple featuring a close-up of him and links to his social media channels. (Neymar 2015e;Piqué 2015e;Luiz 2015d.) See Picture 10 of Neymar Jr.'s logo and Picture 11 of Gerard Piqué's webpage.

PICTURE 10 Logo of Neymar Jr. (da Silva Santos 2015e)
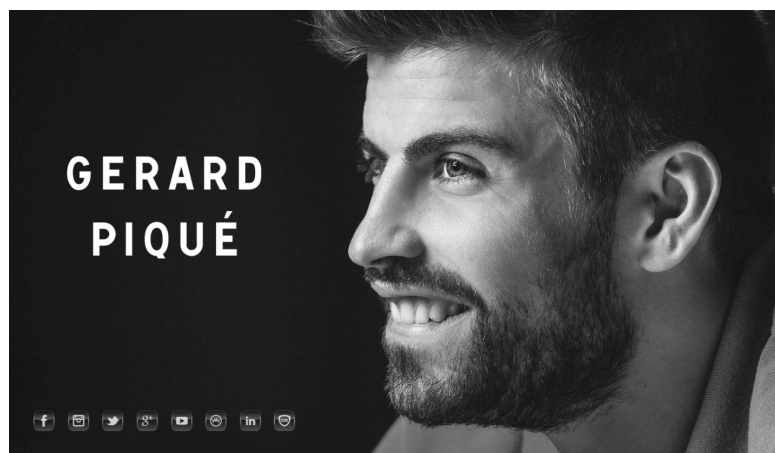
PICTURE 11 Gerard Pique´s webpage (Piqué 2015e)

According to chapter 2.3.3, it is vital to have a webpage so that the information about the sport property is easily available for the consumers. Also the webpage has to be designed according to the sport property's brand image, as the brand needs to be recognized immediately. All the footballers' webpages have a picture of the player as a background, which makes it easy for the viewer to recognize the person. The chapter also highlights the fact that the webpage must be found without putting much effort into searching. All of the footballers have the webpage address according to their names, which again makes it easy for the people find them.

According to chapter 2.3.3, the layout of the webpage must be professional and interesting, yet it has to be simple, clear and quick to use. As said, Gerard Piqué's webpage is very simple, which allows the viewer see the essential information in the blink of an eye. The chapter also states that a webpage has to link all the social media platforms the property has and they need to be easily located in the webpage. Both Neymar Jr. and

Gerard Piqué have done this. They have located the social media icons in the bottom of the page being easily found. Refer to the picture 11 of Gerard Piqué's webpage.

Chapter 2.3.3 also states that the story behind the sport property needs to be interpreted through the webpage therefore it is essential to have useful information about the property. None of the benchmarked footballers have any information about themselves on their webpages. However it should be noted that a great amount of information about the players can be found from their teams' websites. As the footballers are playing for world famous teams and at this point they are already quite known, there are a lot of existing sources for information.

5   MAIN FINDINGS

This is the conclusion section of the study and it will answer the main questions based on the main findings; namely, how to do personal branding in social media and how to run a social media channel successfully and profitably. Also the benefits of personal branding for an elite footballer are explained briefly. The forthcoming findings are based on the benchmarked footballers who have created such a strong and positive personal brand in social media. The findings are linked with the main observations in the theoretical framework.

Miletsky and Smith (2009) state, "A brand is the relationship a customer has with a company and / or its products and services. It's more than just a logo; it's the total experience that acts as the emotional trigger." The previous sentence can be adapted also to a personal brand. The benchmarking research has focused strongly on the content that the footballers have generated, as it is the most essential personal branding component in social media. The benchmarked footballers build their brand image through revealing diverse content, which creates a certain kind of image of the person, concurrently generating emotions in the follower.

As concluded in chapter 4.2.4 and based on the one-month research, the footballers distribute generally quite versatile content as it can be divided into between two and five different categories. The content's aim is to build a full image of the person; therefore the footballers reveal not only professional aspects of their lives but personal and private aspects as well. The overall content that the footballers post is therefore appealing both to individuals as well as sponsors and other influencers.

According to chapter 2.2.5, a powerful personal brand has identified the key characteristics of itself, processed them into the most important qualities and most importantly chosen the dominant attribute that operates as an anchor of the brand. The footballers have succeeded in this. Based on the one-month research the different characteristics and dominant attributes of the footballers can be defined. Based on chapter 2.2.2 personality plays an integral role in branding a person and the personality is to be highlighted and defined.

According to Malmi (2014, 27) "…a brand forms a bridge between the business and its customers potentially leading to long-term and mutually beneficial relationships." This saying can be applied to personal branding of footballer as the personal brand should build a bridge between an individual, a sponsor or a positive influencer and the footballer. Consequently, the footballers have focused on generating content related to private life and let the people know who is behind the personal brand. The content being up to date and informative makes the audience feel that they benefit from it.

When looking at the different sponsor related posts, it can be seen that the kind of sponsors the footballers have also determines their brand image. The sponsors influence the kind of public image the footballers will inevitably have, therefore it is essential for a footballer to choose his sponsors correctly. Following from this sponsor related posts are essential even though they don't generate as much engagement in the audience as the other types of content.

According to chapter 2.3.2 content should also include 'bad news' due to the fact that the audience is interested in both good and bad news, and no matter what they will hear the bad news from somewhere else anyway. During the research period none of the footballers shared content related to bad news due to the fact that there might not have been any bad news occurring during this short period of time. However, it must be said that sharing the bad news is also an important factor when creating content.

Neymar Jr. and David Luiz have in a way linked their private life to the posts related to football, as they have written about God. They are seemingly aiming to bring out their religion, which is an integral part of their personal attributes. As mentioned in chapter 2.2.5, a strong brand should have at least three different attributes that are clear to the people who are familiar with the brand. Attributes as well as characteristics are an essential part of building a personal brand as they give a clear sense of what makes a brand exclusive. Therefore the social media and webpage content should be built around the key attributes and characteristics of the person.

For instance according to Neymar Jr.'s social media content, the three attributes can be easily concluded. Neymar Jr. is a professional footballer, a young and fashionable father and a religious person. Out of the three footballers, Neymar Jr. has the strongest personal brand. The reasoning behind this view is that he shares a lot of content related to both

his private life and his current team. When following Neymar Jr.'s social media chan-
nels one can obtain a clear and full image of him, both from the professional and per-
sonal perspectives.

The different components of a brand such as name, logo, slogan, nickname and design
also have to be created when branding a football player. The components have to be
placed throughout the social media accounts and on the webpage, where they should be
easily found and recognizable. (Calzada 2013, 38.) When summing up the footballer's
profile and cover pictures as well as usernames they are all similar across each social
media channel. As the profiles and usernames are identical, or at least similar in each
social media channel, the audience instantly recognizes the players regardless of what
social media channel is in question. The profiles are football related and in the blink of
an eye tell the story behind the user; that they are professional football players. The
presentation of the social media channels and webpage is part of the brand design. The
players have their own nicknames, which are the names they are known by among the
audience.

Each benchmarked footballer has their own webpage, which is vital according to chap-
ter 2.3.3. Both Neymar Jr. and Gerard Piqué have linked their social media channels to
the webpages, and in fact this is the only information found from their websites. How-
ever as already mentioned, a lot of information about the players can be found from
other sources, as they are extremely famous around the world. The footballers clearly
use their webpages as a tool of linking all of their social media channels to one source.

The theoretical framework already explained the benefits in general, but now the bene-
fits for an elite footballer are clarified. According to Montoya (2002, 23-24) through
personal branding a person obtains recognition and as a consequence gets credit and
opportunities. One of the main benefits of carefully executed personal branding is that
the player is identified among the positive influencers in the industry of football. The
opportunities that personal branding can create for a professional football player are
new and better contracts with different football teams and creation of new sponsorship
deals. Chapter 2.2.6 states that personal branding boosts potential value as it increases
visibility and gives actions more weight. The footballer has a better chance of having
their voice heard and their opinions valued.

As mentioned at the outset, the most important aim when branding a football player is to improve his brand awareness and visibility among the sponsors, which leads to new sponsorship deals and as a consequence increases the player's income and overall value. Without the brand people are not aware of him or don't recognize him. For instance if sponsors are looking for new potential sponsees, naturally they will only consider the players whose information is easily available. By going through a player's social media channels and webpage, they get an image of the player and perhaps offer a sponsorship deal. Also this applies to the football teams, if the player is easily found and has a clear brand image, new contracts with other teams are more likely to be achieved.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the obtained results this chapter states some recommendations for building a strong personal brand in social media for an elite football player. The recommendations are based on both the theoretical framework and the benchmarking research. The forthcoming suggestions are for a professional footballer who is at the starting point of his career and not yet well-known. The recommendations are divided into two different parts; building a strong personal brand for an elite football player and personal branding by running different social media channels.

6.1 Building a strong personal brand for an elite football player

When beginning the process of building a personal brand it is important to do it carefully from the outset. Before creating any social media channels or webpages, it is essential to create a clear strategy. It is important to define what kind of outcomes are expected and what the goals of the personal brand are, and specifically what kind of message the personal brand should deliver. In order to be able to create a strong personal brand the groundwork must be done effectively and in detail, as a brand can only be influential in it's network if it's both strong and positive while having a clear mission and identity.

First a brand must be easily recognized and as a minimum needs at least a logo, a nickname, a slogan and design. The logo should be designed according to the footballer's name and perhaps be related to football. The logo should also be quite simple, and importantly be easy to remember and recognize. The nickname should be strongly related to the player's real name, perhaps a shorter version of it. The slogan is something that should be placed in each social media channel and website and be a brief and informative text about the player's mission that catches the audience's attention. The design covers the design of the webpage as well as the presentation of the social media channels.

In order to create a powerful personal brand, the brand needs to be able to convey the key characteristics, qualities and attributes. These need to be decided and planned be-

fore the actual personal branding in social media, because they define what kind of profiles and content need to be established. It is recommended to focus on demarcating the main positive characteristics and qualities of the player and choosing the main attributes related to his football career. These should be brought out through social media and a website. For example if the player is religious, it is an important issue to tell the audience. Or if the person is for instance funny in character, he should introduce himself as a person with a good sense of humor through creating comical content. The main attribute should be related to football perhaps bringing out the exclusive skills the player has. It is essential for the audience to be able to see a coherent and full picture of the player; what he is interested in, what kind of person he is and what makes him good at football. Personal branding is about standing out from the crowd and making the person unique. Therefore the characteristics, values and attributes should tell something special about the person.

6.2   Personal branding by running different social media channels

The different social media channels the player should have are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram. Although YouTube is not of high importance based on the benchmarking research, it is important for an unknown footballer as there might be no one else generating content about him. All the different channels should have similar usernames and the outlook should be as similar as possible. The possible profile and cover pictures must be the same as well as the biography and other information. Furthermore it is essential to link all the social media channels with each other. The profile and cover pictures should be somehow related to football, not to mention they should be professional and of high quality. Finally, the languages used should be languages that the player is able to speak.

The website should be very simple, succinct and informative. It should have a picture of the player as a background image and the logo visible in all sub-tabs. As there might not be sources of information about the player, it is vital to include all the relevant information on the website. Relevant information includes contact details, personal and professional introduction, current team introduction if available and a news and updates section. The different social media channels should also be linked to the website and the icons should be located in such a way that they are easily found.

Running social media channels and webpages profitably and successfully is one of the most important tasks when creating a brand image and increasing brand awareness. The frequency of updating and the content generation play an integral role in operating an influential and profitable social media. It is recommended that each social media channel would be updated at least once a day, perhaps even around the same time. Naturally, if important news arises this must be posted to any and all social media platforms representing by the player.

The social media content should be divided into different categories that make it versatile and appealing to everyone. It is recommended to divide the content at least into three different categories: football, personal sponsorships and private life. The main focus should be on football related content, perhaps half of the content should be football related. Around 30% of the content should be in relation to private life events and 20% to the possible personal sponsorships with *all* the content being truthful and trustworthy.

As the aim at the outset is to be identified in the field of football as well as in the eyes of sponsors, it is fundamental to focus on the football related content. The football related content should reveal the footballer's skills and passion for football. It does not necessarily have to be directly about the player himself and it can also be generally about football. The footballer has to deliver a message that he has great knowledge of football and is extremely passionate about it.

Around one third of the content should be related to the player's private life. The player should for instance share something about his family and friends, education, background or hobbies. The audience is interested in the person's private life and knowing who the person is behind the brand and behind the social media account. Sharing versatile content through social media, the player is able to build a credible brand image, both positive and seemingly genuine. If the player has existing sponsors, he should show appreciation towards them and share content where the sponsor can be identified. This also shows any potential future sponsors that the player is valuable and trustworthy, which might lead to new sponsorship deals.

It is important to understand that all the content does not necessarily have to be generated by the footballer or the person managing the social media account. But the content can also include sharing relevant and interesting articles, pictures or videos. It is advisable to share content of the professionals in the area of football, it shows that the player is actually focusing on the news and updates within the industry.

In conclusion, three main concepts have to be taken into consideration: mission, vision and values. Firstly, the player needs to define his mission, which is gaining more visibility and consequently new sponsorship deals. Secondly, he needs to determine his values by including his private life to his brand image. Lastly, the player has to have a clear vision of how to present the specified unique qualities through social media.

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