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**Abstract**

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

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

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Communicating the Athlete as a Brand: A case study of LPGA Star Suzann Pettersen

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

Arai, Ko, and Ross (2014) define an athlete brand as any athlete who has established value in the marketplace through the use of his/her name, likeness, or other brand elements. As such, personal branding among athletes is becoming commonplace. The branding process allows athletes and their stakeholders—the various individuals, groups and organizations (e.g., league, team, sponsors) that are impacted by the athlete's actions (Phillips, Freeman, & Wicks, 2003)—to utilize communication strategies to attach meaning to the athlete in the minds' of consumers. Sport organizations and their corporate partners spend millions of dollars each year creating and reinforcing this sense of meaning and attachment between athletes and consumers (Thomson, 2006). The differential effect of the attachment and meanings (i.e., brand knowledge, brand associations) consumers hold for an athlete brand is considered brand equity (Keller, 1993).

Sport management scholars have begun to examine how the concept of brand equity is created for athletes. A body of research is emerging as it relates to conceptualizing athlete brand equity (Williams, Walsh, & Rhenwick, 2015) and examining athlete brand image (Arai, Ko, & Kaplanidou, 2013; Arai et al., 2014). However, research is limited as it relates to how athletes and their constituents employ branding constructs in the creation, management

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and evaluation of athlete brand equity. Drawing from brand equity theories, this paper examines will add to literature by presenting one female case study.

**Brief Overview of LPGA Star Suzann Pettersen**

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

Over the course of her career, her personal life details have been kept very private. She has always been totally devoted to golf, and it has paid off. When it comes to earnings and endorsements, Pettersen is ranked no. 7 on the career earnings list amassing \$ 11.6 million (Dorish, 2013). According to the LPGA's official sites she has earned \$12.6 million since her rookie year in 2003 (LPGA, 2014). However, this list only reflects what she has made on the LPGA tour (see Table 1). Pettersen currently has seven wins on the Ladies European Tour (Dorish, 2013). In addition, she has endorsements with Nike, Dow, BMW, Liquid Nutrition, Visitnorway and NGF.

During the time of data collection, Pettersen was regarded as the top Norwegian Olympic hopeful for the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio. Since December 2013, her training has been supervised by the Norwegian Top Olympic Center, which represents the

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best knowledge and support in order to achieve her goal. They will follow her closely in the years to come, and representatives will visit her regularly in Orlando, Florida. Due to being a medal hopeful, she is also the source of increased media attention which will be the topic of her upcoming reality television show. In addition to a Norwegian version, there are also plans of making American and Asian versions of the show by including their best golfers on and off the golf course with Pettersen.

[\*\*\* Include Table 1 near here\*\*\*]

**Literature Review**

A brand consists of tangible and intangible elements that are used in concert to add value to an organization, product, or in this context—an athlete. In addition, branding enables a company or person to attach meaning to a product or his/herself, respectively (Aaker, 1991). For instance, it may be beneficial to attach the intangible associations (e.g., thoughts, feelings and attitudes) people have with an athlete to tangible items such as mantras, symbols and colors. Central to the process of attaching meaning and value is the concept of brand equity. Brand equity is the assets and liabilities linked to a brand that add or subtract from the brand's value in the minds' of consumers (Keller, 1993). In today's competitive landscape, creating and managing of brand equity is of paramount importance for sport entities at the league, franchise, event and player levels (Foster, Greyser, & Walsh, 2005). Sport teams have been the subject of most of the branding equity research done in a sport context.(Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008; Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998; Ross, 2006). These studies have to some degree modified and applied the seminal work of Keller (1993).

Keller's (1993) consumer-based brand equity theory (CBBE) focuses on the relative psychological and behavioral values of a brand name. Moreover, Keller postulated that consumers control the creation of brand equity, thus brand equity should be examined from a consumer's perspective. Keller's CBBE proposed attitudinal based dimensions to measure

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brand equity, and suggested that consumer based brand equity is derived from the effect of brand knowledge (e.g., brand awareness and brand association) on consumers' reaction to the marketing and communication of the brand. Utilizing CBBE as its theoretical framework, Arai et al. (2014) proposed a conceptual Model of Athlete Brand Image (MABI). The MABI is comprised of three brand association dimensions for athletes: athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle. Arai and colleagues (2013) found the proposed dimensions to be significant for professional athletes.

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

[\*\*\*Figure 1 near here\*\*\*]

Unlike the previous models, the organization-induced antecedents of athlete brand equity proposed by Williams and colleagues (2015) takes into consideration how marketing communication strategies developed by an organization affiliated with the athlete outside of sport competition may affect consumer perceptions. The market-induced antecedent category considers the use of electronic word-of-mouth by the media and sport consumers to produce uncontrollable marketing messages about the athlete. Put another way, the athlete and his/her stakeholders have no control over comments made by fans and/or members of the media made via social media. However, these comments made affect the way the athlete is perceived

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by the public. Finally, an athlete-induced antecedent category reflects the marketing communications efforts created and disseminated by the athlete. Furthermore, in the same vein as Gladden et al. (1998) and Ross (2006), Williams and colleagues propose consequences of brand equity for athletes, which include but are not limited to athlete-brand loyalty, brand extensions, licensing, and endorsement opportunities. Moreover, through a continual feedback loop the consequences foster the creation of more perceptions in the marketplace that add to the value of the brand (Gladden et al., 1998).

As previously mentioned, the ABE framework is derived from the consumer-based approach to brand equity as proposed by Keller (1993), meaning that athlete brand equity is comprised of brand awareness and brand associations. From a consumer-based perspective, therefore, brand associations are the thoughts held in the minds' of consumer in regard to the brand (Aaker, 1991). However, for the purposes of this study brand associations are examined from an organizational/firm perspective. This approach to examining brand equity is referred to as identity-based brand equity (Aaker, 1996; DeChernatony, 1999 Kapherer, 2012). Proponents of this perspective suggest that brand identity precedes and is the fundamental basis for brand image (i.e., consumer-based brand associations) (Burmam, Jost-Benz, & Riley, 2009; Kapherer). Specifically, brand identity refers to how the organization/firm wants consumers to perceive the brand (DeChernatony). Therefore, in the context of this study, brand associations refer to the associations that originate from the sport organization in an effort create, alter, strengthen or differentiate the brand (Nandan, 2004).

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

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

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

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

**Method**

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

In addition, Pettersen was also chosen due to her popularity in her home country of Norway. Moreover, during the time of our data collection she was ranked as high as the number two golfer in the world and as low as the number six. It is noted that the analysis of a single athlete limits generalizations and applicability of this study. Therefore, this case may be labeled an *intrinsic* case study, as it provides understanding into the branding of this particular



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of Norwegian golfer (Stake, 2005). Despite these limitations, we believe this case provides valuable branding and communications insights for athletes and their stakeholders.

**Data Collection**

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

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

Following the interviews with Pettersen and her management team, secondary data were gathered, which included Pettersen's brand guide, business plan, and media kit. This was done to assess whether or not the themes that emerged from the interviews were reinforced in the brand guide, and to provide additional information about the brand strategy not captured in the interviews. The analysis of secondary data to provide support for preliminary findings

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and to uncover additional insights is consistent with previous sport branding (e.g., Richelieu & Pons, 2006) and case study design (e.g., Yin, 2013) research.

**Data Analysis**

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and data were analysed through content analysis and pattern matching (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2013). The coding was conducted in two stages. First, the interview transcripts were coded. The main themes from each interview were extracted through the coding process. Next, all interview themes were compared in order to reveal any similarities and differences about the brand strategy, its implementation and how it is communicated. Next, the themes uncovered in the interviews were compared to the information located in the secondary data sources. After the initial data analysis—and in order to build trust with the interview participants (Guba, 1985), Pettersen and her management team were sent a summary of our findings. They were instructed to comment on the degree to which the analyses were concordant with their own interpretations. We believe this procedure would be more effective than requesting feedback on the transcripts alone (e.g., Holt & Hogg, 2002). The information provided supported our analysis and necessary changes were made. This procedure, along with the use of multiple sources of evidence, increased the trustworthiness of the findings (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). The themes were then compared with the Athlete Brand Equity model (ABE) to verify the use of theory in the brand development and management process.

**Results**

The brand strategy of Suzann Pettersen was examined by using the primary data obtained via semi-structured interviews, and secondary data from our document analyses. In particular, Suzann's brand strategy was analyzed, as it relates to the communication of her

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brand by the organization. The most significant findings from the analyses of the data collected are discussed in the ensuing sections and are summarized in Figure 2.

[\*\*\*Figure 2 near here\*\*\*]

**Utilizing Organization-Induced Antecedents to Create Brand Awareness**

According to Ross (2006), organization-induced antecedents are forms of brand communications that are directly produced and controlled by the sport organization—in this case SP Management. Moreover, Williams et al. (2015) proposed that they have a direct effect on athlete brand equity. However, due to an athlete’s potential to have various managerial stakeholders (e.g., league, team, agent, sponsors) it must be noted that organization-induced communications may be inconsistent in nature based on their origin and intended purpose (Williams et al.). Therefore, in regard to research question one, we examined how her management company (i.e., SP Management) utilized organization-induced brand communication strategies to foster brand awareness in the minds’ of the public. Pettersen herself pointed out that the goal of organization-induced brand communications is to increase her brand awareness. This stems from her lack of visibility in her target market area – Norway. Additionally, golf is a secondary sport in Norway and she has been living in the United States for over a decade. The goal of the organizational marketing efforts is to make her “more visible in order to become more popular.” As she commented herself:

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

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

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

According to management, since they have implemented this organizational induced marketing strategy her exposure in Norway has increased. “She has received more exposure in Norway this past year. In a few years she will most likely return, and we are preparing now for that to happen.” Moreover, the goal is to not only increase her brand awareness for the 2016 Olympics, but build her brand awareness in order to leverage its equity after her competitive golf career is complete.

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

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

### **Utilizing Organization-Induced Antecedents to Create Brand Identity**

The objective of the organizational brand communication strategy is not solely based on the amount of visibility, but rather managing how the athlete is perceived by the public (Williams et al., 2015). Therefore, to examine research question two, we examined how her

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management company utilized organization-induced brand communication strategies to create their desired brand identity (e.g., organizational brand associations) in the minds' of the public. For instance, her management company contends that the public perceives her as being a serious competitor— "Pettersen exude concentration and self-regulation." Pettersen's management, however, would like to deemphasize the "serious competitor" brand association that Pettersen currently has in favor of what they consider to be a "well-rounded" athlete that is approachable and competitive. However, altering Pettersen's image has proved to be challenging given the media's use of photos that reinforce the "serious competitor" association in their editorial piece. Her CEO stated:

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

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

She needs to do well, when I create the activities I always think of her position as top, she is of no interest [to the public] if she is number 15 in the world. Next, we make a strategy over her media performances – and how she wants to frame herself in the media. She understands and is working hard to implement this strategy, but it always takes some time to "anchor" this with the consumer. Therefore, she cannot afford to be

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grumpy and arrogant as the biathletes sometimes have appeared [some of the most popular athletes in Norway]; however, they can repair their relationship with the media the next weekend due to their frequent exposure. Suzann has limited access to the media, she needs to be charming whenever they approach her. As a Nike athlete she also needs to behave and follow guidelines. Tiger once left a tournament mad without talking to the media. He had to apologize—because you are a part of something bigger than yourself.

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

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

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

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charity, and it is not hard for me to focus on those qualities in her personality, which are depicted in the brand guide.

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

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

**Desired Outcomes from Brand Communication Efforts**

The desired outcomes for Pettersen’s as a brand is twofold; 1) secure and create new corporate endorsements, and 2) develop SP Management in to a viable and profitable brand extension that will ensure Pettersen’s financial stability after her career. At the time of our interview Pettersen was 32-years old, and believes it is time for her to focus on something other than her golf performance. To this end, she stated:

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

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

The first thing I did when I started the process of branding SP Management, was follow the usual menu of creating a strategy – for Suzann and the company. They depend on each, so the first thing I needed to do was create and implement for Suzann—because she *is* the brand. First, we discussed her brand, created a profile and strategy, and determined the consequences for her. She had to agree with the guidelines we set, become the person we were framing her as. For example, be more smiley and friendly with the media. She has come to realize that she is more than just an athlete. Furthermore, when she is in Norway (2-3 times every year), she needs to accept that it will be busy and demanding. She has to realize that this is the way branding works and what needs to be done in order to increase her commercial value—we have a strategy and we are sticking to it [CEO].

Pettersen's brand strategy is made evident in the brand guide (see Image 1), where her core brand associations are outlined (i.e., power, precision and determination in an easy going, generous and charming manner) (*Brand guide*, 2014). The CEO believes that these associations should carry over to SP Management but stated that in order to do so she has to be more conscious of her own framing in the media.

[\*\*\*Include Image 1 “brand experience” here \*\*\*]

To create a brand is not an easy or fast process, you need to be professional and it takes time as success depends on the strategy and having long term-goals. The management company underlined the need to constantly create “*footprints*, so the big companies would



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like to work with us.” Furthermore, “we do not expect to make money in the first few years (CEO)”, was also mentioned in the interviews. The role of the CEO is also supposed to change from a sole focus on Pettersen to pursuing other athletes. In this process, no decision is made without Pettersen’s involvement, as the CEO underlined: “I constantly involve her in what is going on, the strategy need to be implemented in what she does and anchored in her values.”

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

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

In regard to targeting corporations, Pettersen and her team believes that her brand will appeal to major Norwegian companies, as opposed to US based companies since professional female golfers are novel in Norway (see Image 2):

We are aiming at major companies as they might have something to learn from her. But it must be the right timing, it has to be developed, make her more interesting product to sell, and then adapt it for the companies in question. For example she might help a company with getting their employees in better shape as she has knowledge of how much work is needed in order to achieve fitness goals. She has to take part in

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cooperate days, this is what we work for, but we are not there yet. Such work requires time and we understand that this is not done in 1-2 years, but we are heading in the right direction. First, we need to build the brand, make her attractive. In order to do that she has to be more visible in the media. The more people see you on TV, the more attractive you are.

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

[\*\*\*Include Image 2 "a high profile endorser" here \*\*\*]

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Drawing on insights from previous branding literatures, the present investigation aimed at examining how Pettersen and SP Management created and managed her personal brand equity. The strategy is visible in the Pettersen brand guide which has been presented and elaborated upon above. Furthermore, the Pettersen case fits neatly into previously proposed consumer-based brand equity frameworks (e.g., Keller, 1993; Ross, 2006; Williams et al., 2015).

The results of our case analysis support previous conceptualizations for how brand equity is built, managed and measured. First, Pettersen's management is utilizing organization-induced antecedents by way of their marketing and promotional endeavors to expose Pettersen to her target audience as a brand – with the goal of creating strong and unique associations in the target audience's minds. This is a fundamental and crucial element in building brand equity. Ross (2006) stated that organization induced antecedents allow the brand's stakeholders to create and control the information about the brand communicated to

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consumers. In regard to athletes, this is of chief importance since the predominate source of information about an athlete is controlled and produced by the media—and therefore uncontrolled by the athlete and his/her stakeholders. Not only does the use of organization-induced antecedents allow Pettersen and her management company control the information about her brand presented to consumers, it provides them with an opportunity to create and/or reinforce her image in the minds' of consumers. For instance, Pettersen's management is strategically attempting to alter the brand perception that Pettersen is just a "serious competitor" by controlling the images of her used in their marketing pieces and being vigilant of the images of her used in the media. Her management team has created and produced a brand guide that they distribute to members of the media. In this guide the management team presents Pettersen's desired brand associations as powerful, dedicated, enthusiastic, outgoing and compassionate (*Brand guide*, 2014). The brand guide is an illustration of how management firms can utilize organization-induced antecedents to create and manage athlete brand associations and ultimately brand equity (see Image 3).

[\*\*\*Include Image 3 "foreside" here \*\*\*]

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

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For Pettersen, the fact that she is rarely in Norway creates accessibility issues in regard to her ability to gain top-of-mind brand awareness in the minds' of her target audience. Her few visits in Norway become very intense, and the continuity in her branding efforts is lost when she does not win. Being an individual athlete and not a team also makes it harder for fans to identify with an athlete, allowing the athlete to become part of fans' lives (Richelieu & Pons, 2006). In the same vein, Keller also argued decades ago: "Brand equity exists when the consumer is familiar with the brand and hold some favorable, strong and unique brand associations in memory" (Keller, 1993, p. 2). The memory part is the problematic one, as underlined in the model, for successful brand equity. Hence, "no matter how hard they try, their global growth will remain limited" (Richelieu & Pons, p. 244). Put another way, because golf coverage is extremely limited in Norway, there exist an inherent disadvantage for building strong associations in the minds' of consumers.

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

Sport managers seeking to employ the tenets of the ABE model should be cautious when focusing branding effort on single associations such as winning. Winning in particular seems to be an easy brand association to promote because it resonates with consumers.

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However, overemphasizing winning could be a detriment to the athletes' brand, because the brand's equity would be based entirely on the athlete's performance. This may place false expectations in the minds' of consumers, resulting in decreases in brand equity and morale when the athlete does not perform up to the set expectations (Williams et al., 2015). For the athlete this could also become a factor leading to negative results as in order to win, the focus of the athlete and the management company should not be on winning but on the tasks the players have to complete in order to place themselves in the position to be successful (Kristiansen & Roberts, 2011).

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

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the creation awareness, associations and loyalty. Properly managing the aforementioned branding constructs offers a host of opportunities for athletes during and after their athletic careers.

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## Case-Study Questions

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