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Brand-image Communication through TikTok – The Case of Viking FK

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Preface

A fruitful endeavour is one borne out of passion, an affinity towards a particular practice, phenomenon, aspect of life. Sport has been an integral part of my life, and what it has given me, in terms of experience, enjoyment, and life-learnings, is not little, and therefore unquantifiable. And when one has a respect, admiration, and love for a certain thing, one naturally tries to do best by it, as I have attempted to do so in the course of my studies. This Master's thesis is a showing of a part of my endeavours, and the journey has been short, excitable, and filled with adventure and friendship. I have many thanks to give, and much gratitude to expose.

My ambition with this thesis was to study the phenomenon of branding through the medium of social-media. I considered a particular football team operating on a particular social-media platform: namely Viking FK and their presence on the social-media application TikTok. I wished to consider what brand-attributes are imparted through the posts published on the club's account, and to decipher whether there is a need to address a social-media analysis framework to better amend its use with respect to a particular social-media platform: TikTok, in this case.

My parents have given me everything, and continue to do so in life, therefore, my gratitude to them is paramount and first. It is through them I come to exercise myself as I do, and I would like to express my thanks to them from the bottom of my heart, for allowing me to become who I see myself becoming. Great gratitude to my thesis supervisor Professor Harald Dolles, for his guidance, friendship, and amicable insights throughout the journey. Working with him has been as fruitful an exercise in pleasant human company as it has been in academic study.

My classmates – who have made my life richer by virtue of their presence in it, and who met me to some wonderful people to walk this planet. With them I learnt, and had fun, and their support and encouragement throughout was not little as to contributing towards my standing as an individual as I am today. Thank you to all who held my hand and nurtured me on this journey. You have my deep and eternal gratitude.

And to the people working in the Sport Management department at Molde University College – a wonderful group of people, who offered me not just warmth by way of their welcoming me to the country and on the premises of the university, but who are friends and allies who make this academic journey such a fantastic one. I inhabit a great deal of admiration, respect, and express my gratitude to all you for doing such a wonderful job with us students. You truly make life at the institute, and occasionally beyond, entirely worthwhile!

The people at my internship at SK Traeff– my supervisor, my colleagues, thank you for giving me a home to call in my time in Molde. I learnt a great deal from and with you, and enjoyed my time greatly. And I shall cheer you on from wherever life may take me, and wish you all all the very best!

Summary

Social-media has become a widely-adopted tool by organizations around the world when it comes to exercising strength in branding, and broadly, marketing endeavours. The ease of access to technology has contributed to this phenomenon, with clubs in all arenas, tiers, and strata of sport coming to use this tool as they deem to best fit their resources, ambitions, and vision with respect to the concept of brand-management. TikTok is a popular social-media application, now gaining further popularity within the field of sport as a platform on which clubs and athletes can hope to establish an excitable, prominent presence as a means of engaging with a community.

The aim of this research is to analyze the social-media activity of the Norwegian football club, Viking FK, on the application TikTok. This will be done by adopting the use of a framework first conceptualized by Keller in 1993, a variation on this framework offered then by Gladden and Funk in 2002, and then by Parganas et.al in 2015. The model came to be known as the Sport Team Branding Model, and utilized of two broad categories: Product-related and Non-product related, as a means of classifying posts as belonging to either of these two respective classifications, with each main category holding below it further sub-classifications based on specific 'brand-attributes'. By employing of this framework, posts on the club's social-media account were analyzed and classified thus, adhering to the basic framework of the model, eventually it being found the need to add to it a further level of specificity.

The research questions read as follows:

Research question 1: What product and non-product related attributes are professional sport teams communicating through TikTok?

Research question 2: How do TikTok followers of sport teams respond and react to these brand attributes?

The analysis provided answers to both these questions, it eventually arising through the analysis that there was a need to include a separate brand-attribute namely titled as 'Entertainment', under the main category of Non-product related posts.

Therefore, the results painted a picture of the branding efforts of Viking FK, whilst also suggesting of an improvement to be undertaken with respect to the Sport Team Branding Model.

Contents

1.0 Introduction

The art of managing one's brand has gained significant traction, and importance, over the turn of the century, with the emergence of the internet as a tool easily accessible by most. An arm of the internet developed in the form of social-media; an entity that has allowed us to communicate with the world in a manner of our choosing, and thus establish a bond in the virtual realm, of which may translate into the affairs of the world outside it. Across the sporting landscape, teams competing in a professionalized environment must tackle various elements of strategy, as to ensure a cohesive onwards progression, both in terms of results on the pitch, and off it. Off it, growing, maintaining, and managing one's brand has become a matter towards which increasing amount of attention and resources are being devoted, such is the happenstance nature of it, and vitality. What a brand delivers to an outfit far exceeds that which may be measured. The complexities of brand management differ in varying shades for separate entities. What unites all branding endeavours, however, is that they are built on the premise of promotion; advertising. The advertising of one's product, services or image.

Social media, in its emergence and development as a tool that offers individuals and organization a voice, has served to act as an important medium through which entities expand upon their advertising endeavours. It has, in many cases, become the essence of marketing, or at the very least, a foundational pillar of it.

In the sporting landscape, social media is used widely by outfits, ranging from the 'amateur' level, up to the highest levels of the sport. Teams incorporate a social media strategy, and even have qualified personnel dedicated towards the management of the same, it no longer being sufficient to have someone with a broad, 'general' knowledge, when it comes to understanding advertising and marketing. It is revealing, of just how imperative social media is considered in the marketing realms, with a large number of an outfits consumers more likely to be involved in some way on some social media platform, and thus expecting to be 'talked to' by their favourite enterprises in some way, and vice versa, the organizations themselves having their fan-base within arm's reach (Ballouli and Hutchinson, 2010). This distance between sport club and fans has therefore further

decreased, with such a prevalent means of communication now having established itself. It may be understood, then, that sports teams are utilizing social-media not only to maintain and nurture two-way communication with their fans (Hambrick et al., 2010; Hambrick and Kang, 2015, Parganas and Anagnostopoulos, 2015), but also to obtain information about those consumers' preferences and habits (Browning and Sanderson, 2012), to increase brand awareness (Eagleman, 2013) and to promote and attract sponsors (Eagleman and Krohn, 2012; Parganas and Anagnostopoulos, 2015).

Of the major social media platforms that sporting outfits are leveraging to connect to their audiences, TikTok has emerged as a popular choice for organizations to invest their attentions and resources towards, given its rising popularity in the social media arena. Studies of mobile video prototypes suggest that viewing episodes on mobile devices should be short to sustain the attention of viewers. (O. Hara, Mitchell, & Vorbau, 2007). This led to the introduction of Tiktok, known as Douyin in China, in 2016 by a Beijing based company – Bytedance. In a report published by Team Whistle, a global media company who use analytics and proprietary research to deliver entertaining content to consumers, TikTok is second only to YouTube, in terms of its popularity to Gen Z audiences *(Whistle, 2020)*. As of September 2021, the platform had over 14.3 million daily active users via Android devices worldwide, and 30.8 million daily active users via iOS devices (Statista, 2021). The application allows users to register an account for free, and then share video footage in a short format. Users are then able to also view content from other users, all of this appearing in a seemingly random trend on the user's homepage. A user may also 'Follow' their favourite content creators, channels, and, relevant to this study, their favourite sport teams. Usually, the content posted on the application may largely be said to be 'fun', 'engaging', and 'entertaining'. Sporting outfits often post videos from match-days – goals scored, celebrations, skills and tricks etc, whilst also on occasion posting more intimate content such as interviews with players, staff, behind-the-scenes footage from the training ground etc. It is a fun way for them to engage their fans, and vice versa, for fans to follow their teams in a more light-hearted, engaging manner. The visual nature of the application is said to merit the phenomenon of fan engagement (Clavio, 2013; Hambrick et al., 2010). Sport teams can share specific facets of the team's image in order to increase the involvement of fans (Ferrand & Pages, 1999).

Within the context of professional football in Norway, of the 15 clubs playing in the top most division of football – the Eliteserien, of them all barring two teams hold TikTok accounts to their name.

There have been studies that have considered the implications of brand-management in the sporting landscape with regards to social-media platforms like Facebook (Wallace, Wilson, & Milloch, 2011), Twitter (Parganas, Anagnostopoulos, & Chadwick, 2015), Instagram (Anagnostopoulos et al. 2018; Kim & Hull, 2017; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Smith and Sanderson, 2015; Kumar, 2021), Pinterest (Hambrick & Kang, 2015), and Youtube (Zimmerman, Claudio, & Lim, 2011). However, there appears to be a lacking in research devoted to gauging the implications of brand-management with regards to TikTok in the sport landscape.

Several scholars have called for additional empirical research across different social media platforms (cf., Frederick, Lim, Clavio, Pedersen, & Burch, 2014; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2014; Pedersen, 2014; Pronschinske et al. 2012; Rowe, 2014), particularly towards investigating social media consumer behaviour (Ratchford, 2015).

The present study is a resultant attempt to answer those calls. By using TikTok as a fulcrum, I will attempt to examine its implications on the phenomenon of brand-management within the context of Norwegian sport – in particular, professional football, by conducting a case study on one of football clubs playing in the top most tier of Norwegian football (Eliteserien): Viking FK.

1.1   Research question:

RQ1: What product and non-product related attributes are professional sport teams communicating through TikTok?

To provide context to the findings:

RQ2: How do TikTok followers of sport teams respond and react to these brand attributes?

By undertaking an analysis of one particular professional club playing in the top-most division in Norway, this study shall, firstly, provide insights into the implications of TikTok in the realm of brand-management in general, and, secondly, provide a contextual understanding of the workings of a Norwegian football club, in the context of social-media.

1.2 Research outline

This research is presented through a discourse of seven main chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the topic, outlines the trajectory of the research process, highlighting its principles and laying the foundations for what is to follow, and puts forth the research questions to be addressed through the means of this study. The second chapter provides an overview of literature which provides the inspiration for the contextual and analytical frameworks of this study, leaning on the findings of fellow authors in previous studies and building upon these following. The third chapter illustrates of the origins, conceptual understanding, and working of the Sport Team Branding Model, thereafter going on to justify of the research approach, and the choice of the social-media application as proposed to address the scope of this study. Data collection policy is discussed, and the coding process is depicted illustratively. There is also a sub-section touching upon the aspect of inter-coder reliability. The fourth chapter draws on the method, sample selection, and quantitative data collection process. The fifth chapter presents the findings, whilst the sixth goes on to analyze and discuss the interpretations of it, and its ensuing implications. A conclusion is presented in the seventh chapter.

2.0   Literature review

The phenomenon of social-media is widespread. The number of social media users reached around 3.78 billion during 2021, and is predicted to reach 4.41 billion by 2025 (Statista, 2021).

For organizations, social media provides a direct communication link to consumers which enables them to communicate a specific brand-image (Wallace et al., 2011) and shape brand associations (Yan, 2011). Therefore, social media serves as a crucial medium of connection between consumer and organizational entity, in terms of building appropriate perceptions and attitudes in a consumer's mind, which is necessary for building a strong brand (Keller, 2009; Schvinski & Dabrowski, 2015). This aspect of customer engagement, which is a customer's level of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural investment in specific brand interactions (Hollebeek, 2011), explicitly accounts for consumers brand related dynamics (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilcic, 2011). 'Interaction' is a part of the social media experience; it thereby being the exchange between consumer and entity, and thus leading to some form of stimulus. Accessing this element of 'interaction' available to them, sport teams have embraced social media as being a tool that enables two-way communication between the outfit and their fans (Hambrick et al., 2010; Hambrick & Kang, 2015; Parganas and Anagnostopoulos, 2015), and which thus, simultaneously, allows them to obtain information about their consumers' preferences and habits (Browning & Sanderson, 20212), increase brand awareness (Eagleman, 2013), and help in promoting and attracting sponsors (Eagleman & Krohn, 2012; Parganas & Anagnostopoulos, 2015). Understanding these behaviours allows sports clubs the opportunity to expand their fan base (Clavio & Walsh, 2014).

The association between consumers and sporting outfits within the context of social-media branding has been a phenomenon towards which a fair amount of research has been devoted. The aspect of brand-equity is a topic discussed within this literature; brand equity being the perceived value a brand possesses in the eyes of a consumer. When consumers are familiar with a brand and perceive some positive associations towards it, brand equity is said to exist (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993).

One of the foundational discussions associated around the concept of brand-equity, and as a result involved in the development of various scales down the line with a view to understanding the particular phenomenon, Keller's (1993) study is of particular note. In his study, Keller conceptualized of a model of brand-equity, as seen from the eyes of the individual consumer.

Gladden and Funk (2002) were the first to identify the brand associations fans might have for their favourite sport team. Building upon Keller's theoretical framework of consumer-based brand equity, they proposed the Team Association Model (TAM) in which they identified 16 dimensions with respect to Keller's categorization of brand associations, namely: 'Attribute' – (success, head coach, star player, management, stadium, logo design, product delivery, and tradition), 'Benefit' – (identification, nostalgia, pride in place, escape, and peer group acceptance), and 'Attitude' – (importance, knowledge and affect). In his study (1993), Keller described 'Attributes' as "those descriptive features that characterize a product or service – what a consumer thinks the product or service is or has and what is involved with its purchase or consumption. He went on to further distinguish between two types of attributes: product-related and non-product-related. The former were deemed to be components necessary for performing the functions expected by consumers – which, in this setting represent those factors that contribute to the performance of the team. Bauer et al. (2008) provided a modified version of the TAM, including product-related attributes (success, star player, head coach, team performance), non-product related attributes (management, logo, stadium, history and tradition, club culture and values, fans, sponsor, regional provenance), benefits (pride, fan identification, nostalgia, escape, socializing, emotions, entertainment, peer group acceptance), and attitudes (or affect). They tested this model in the context of German professional football and found that product-related and non-product related attributes have a strong impact on fan loyalty and behaviour.

Building on the previous models offered by Gladden and Funk (2002), and Bauer et al. (2008), authors Parganas et al. (2015) developed a sport team branding model and applied it to a professional football club in the context of Twitter. Their model consisted primarily of two broad categories: product-related attributes and non-product related attributes.

Table 1.

Brand attributes	Gladden and Funk (2002)	Bauer et al (2008)	In this manuscript
Product related	Success	Team Success	Team Success
	—	Team Performance	—
	Star player	Star player	Star Player
	Head coach	Head Coach	Head Coach
Non-product related	Logo design	Logo and club colors	Brand Mark
	Tradition	Club's History and Tradition	Club's History and Tradition
	—	Regional provenance	—
	—	Club's Culture and Values	Club's Culture and Values
	Management	Management	Management
	Stadium	Stadium	Stadium
	Product delivery	—	—
	—	Fans	Fans
	—	Sponsor or Owner	Sponsor
	—	—	Event's Image

(Parganas et al. 'You'll Never Tweet Alone': Managing sports brands through social media, 2015)

Their study showed that brand associations communication can be transferred in the social media context, with varying degrees of fan interaction, as their findings suggested that fans respond more often to product-related attributes than to non-product related attributes. Anagnostopoulos, Parganas, Chadwick and Fenton conducted a study on the Instagram activity of two football clubs in the English Premier League, namely Liverpool FC and Manchester United FC, employing of a sport-team branding model of their own devising, inspired by previous versions offered by authors Gladden and Funk (2002), Bauer et.al (2008), and Parganas et.al (2015). The revised model they used is depicted below.

Table 2.

	Brand attribute	Description	Example Instagram post
Product-related	Team Success	Success of the team, quality/style of play of the team	The team in action or celebrating a goal
	Star Player(s)	High quality and/or highly recognisable players	The player in action during the match or in training
	Head Coach	Successful, charismatic or iconic head coach	Coach giving orders during the match or at the training
Non-product-related	Brand Mark	The logo, mascot, colours and uniforms of the team	The logo or the shirt of the club
	Management	The executive management of the club	Pictures or announcements of executive management
	Club's History and Tradition	Winning records, past success, tragedies, legendary matches, past players and coaches	Pictures of past players, coaches or matches
	Club's Culture and Values	Values/culture of the team, its role in the community	The players visiting a hospital or a charitable event
	Event's Image	The image of a particular competition or the opponent (rivalry)	Announcement of the next match
	Sponsor	The image of the main sponsor, its association with the club	Usually information about a contest organised by the teams' main sponsor
	Fans	Not just customers, essential part of a unique product	Pictures of fans in various occasions such as celebrating, in front of the stadium etc.
	Stadium	The arena, facilities, concessions at the stadium	Views of the stadium

(Anagnostopoulos et al. Branding in pictures: using Instagram as a brand management tool in professional team sport organizations, 2018)

Their findings categorized the responses of fans in connection with the social media posts they analyzed, by grouping them as belonging into either of these four categories: *aspiring*, *belonging*, *criticizing,* and *loving*. By virtue of this method of analysis, the authors were able to sort posts as to falling under these two respective main categories, whilst sorting them further by classifying them according to the brand-attributes visible above in the table.

In terms of studies having incorporated an analysis of the application TikTok – given its relatively recent emergence – there appear to be few of these. Authors Bahiyah Omar and Wang Dequan published a study titled 'Watch, Share, or Create: The Influence of Personality Traits and User Motivation on TikTok Mobile Video Usage', in the year 2020 (Omar and Dequan, 2020). The study attempted to gauge the reasons/motivations behind consumers usage of the application, contributing to both the theoretical and empirical understanding of media use in a user-generated media (UGM) context. Such is the scarcity of literature devoted to understanding the applications function in a sporting context, that one must divert to studies devoted to understanding various other disciplines, such as the study devoted to understanding the applications significance in the political landscape, conducted by authors Juan Carlos Medina Serrano, Orestis Papakyriakopoulos, and Simon Hegelich (2020). The one study that does provide an insight into its application in the

sporting context, is one authored by Yiran Su, Bradley Baker, Jason Doyle, and Meimei Yan, namely titled 'Fan Engagement in 15 Seconds: Athletes' Relationship Marketing During a Pandemic via TikTok', which examined the aspect of brand management from the perspective of an athlete (Su et al., 2020).

3.1 Theoretical Framework for Research: Brand Attributes Model / Sport Team Branding Model

This chapter discusses the theoretical Sport Team Branding Model along with an explanation and example of each dimension and sub-dimension. A contextual analysis is provided by illustrating of examples, which justify the categorization of social media post in the discussion below.

3.2   Sport Team Branding Model

The theoretical framework which is employed of in this research was developed initially by Parganas et al. (2015) and applied to a professional football club in the context of Twitter. Their model consisted of two broader categories: product-related attributes – of which being those that contributed directly to the product (the actual game), and non-product related attributes – relevant to the consumption of the product and influencing the perceptions of fans towards the team. Their study showed that brand associations' communication can be transferred in the social media context, with varying degrees of fan interaction, as fans tended to respond more often to product-related attributes than to non-product related attributes.

Building on this model, Anagnostopoulos et al. (2018) devised a revised version of the Sport Team Branding model, applying it to a pair of professional football clubs in the context of Instagram. This is the model depicted as Table 2 in this study, and one which I shall be utilizing henceforth for the purpose of my own analysis. During their analysis, posts on the social-media platform were categorized based on the brand-attributes of the adopted branding model (Table 2) by virtue of analyzing its specific emphasis. To aid discussion, in order to facilitate comparison between product-related attributes and non-product related attributes, posts were deemed to qualify for only one brand attribute type (either product-related or non-product related). In the instance where a picture could not be clearly assigned to any single brand-attribute type, it was assigned to a category labelled '*Other*'. Within each category there exist several brand-attributes, towards which a picture is eligible to qualify based on the interpretative stance employed of those visuals by the authors. For instance, a photo showing the head coach analyzing the next opponent could

either be regarded as product-related (filed under the brand-attribute of *Head Coach,* courtesy on emphasis placed on *who* is talking), or non-product related (filed under the brand-attribute Event Image, courtesy an emphasis placed on *what* is being discussed). In addition, within the brand-attribute category, photos could be assigned to more than one brand-attribute. For example, a picture of fans (non-product related brand attribute *Fans)* in front of one's home team stadium (non-product related brand attribute *Stadium).* By sifting through posts in this manner, it allowed the authors to attempt to form a co-relation between the responses recorded under each post, and the category under which they were later filed by the authors, thus helping establish a causal manner of relationship.

As is illustrated in the table, under the two broad categories, - namely *Product-related* and *Non-product related* -, there lie several brand-attributes under which a post is eligible to classify towards.

Product-related attributes being those which impact or concern directly the performance of the team, and Non-product related attributes being those which concern conceptual factors such as the consumption of the product by consumers, or managing the perceptions of fans towards the team's brand (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018)

Corresponding to Product-related category, there lie the brand attributes of *Team Success*, *Star Player(s)*, and *Head Coach.*

- *Team Success*: Team Success in this model is defined as those posts which highlight the performance aspect of a team, most likely on-the pitch, in competitive matches. Posts depicting a team scoring a goal, celebrating a goal or a goal-line clearance; simply put, a team in action.

- *Star Player(s)*: The team's 'star' players in action. Most recognizable names, those most popular with fans. Post showcasing these players in different kinds of activity: training, in action during a game, or simply a promotional post with their faces on it, are eligible to fall under this brand-attribute category.

- *Head Coach*: Posts showcasing a team's head coach amidst different kinds of activity: such as relaying instructions during a game, conducting training, or involved in a press-conference.

Corresponding to the Non-product related category, associated along with are brand attributes of *Brand Mark*, *Management*, *Club's History and Tradition*, *Club's Culture and Values*, *Event's* Image, *Sponsor*, *Fans*, and *Stadium*.

- *Brand Mark*: Posts displaying of the team's brand image, such as the logo, mascot, colours, or the apparel of the team.

- *Management*: Posts depicting of the executive management of the club.

- *Club's History and Tradition*: Posts depicting of a team's past successes, memorable moments, former players, iconic pictures etc.

- *Club's Culture and Values*: Post depicting of a team's involvement in the community beyond the domain of sport. Example: A team visiting the local hospital, participating in a charity event etc.

- *Event's Image*: Posts depicting of a team's upcoming or past match, such as an announcement, confirmation of result, or indicating a change in schedule of a particular fixture.

- *Sponsor*: Posts showing of the sponsors of the club. For instance, contests announced by the sponsors, or information about new sponsorship deal agreements etc.

- *Fans*: Posts depicting the fans of a club in action, such as celebrating a goal, ruing a missed opportunity etc.

- *Stadium*: Posts showing of the team's stadium.

The model fits well the objectives of this study as it steers the reader towards better understanding the relationship between the nature of social-media posts and their consumers. The particular brand-attributes present in the model illustrate particularly well the purpose of certain social-media posts – adequate in their filings and enabling one to sort and assign them in the appropriate category.

3.3 Research Approach

This study will take from the approach employed by authors Anagnostopoulos, Parganas, Chadwick, and Fenton (2018). By referring to their analyses of data, I will alter slightly my approach given the medium of delivery with respect to content differs in these applications of Instagram and TikTok respectively. To tailor the model to suit better a video format of media, a segmented analysis of each clip will be undertaken, viewed both from a broad, as well as a focal perspective, after which, a subjective qualitative analysis of the content shall be undertaken. Clips being of a limited, specific duration, it is pertinent

to then undertake of a second-by-second analysis of the content, deeming the particular trait/characteristic/player that dominates most within the limited timeframe, as to be the 'focal point' of the clip. For instance, a 15 second clip with the camera panned on a particular team's star player in training for 10 seconds, would deem eligible the post to be filed under the product-related brand attribute category, brand-attribute *Star Player*, as opposed to being classified as non-product related, brand attribute *Event's Image* or *Stadium*. This shall be the analytical metric employed for the purposes of this study. Conversely, my analysis will be aided by the captions provided by the teams TikTok account itself, which feature beneath the post, thus shedding light on the nature of the post as it is intended to come across by the organization itself.

Qualitative content analysis examines the relationship between the text and its likely audience meaning, recognizing that media texts are polysemic (Macnamara, 2015). The implication of this statement lends strength to the notion of their being a contextual element present in the analysis, and not solely a hard and fast reading of the text. Particularly, this study shall employ of a deductive approach with respect to the content analysis – content analysis being defined as making replicable and valid texts to the context of their use (Krippendorff, 2004). The implication of there being present a deductive approach to this study being that there exists a prior formulated, theoretical framework developed, leaning against which the text being analyzed is coded. The approach is consistent with the formulation of a research question/s in the beginning, which is what the researcher is attempting to answer via the deductive approach to the study. This is proceeded by an explanation of the categories and sub-categories of the model used for the analysis. These categories, once defined and illustrated with examples, are then assigned coding rules that provide the basis for classifying pieces of the text. Once the texts are coded to these lines, and a coding reliability check completed, the results are interpreted towards the cause of drawing conclusions as a means to answering the research question/s.

The information was collected in an excel sheet. Data was assorted under the following
Description: What the post shows or contains
Category: What main category of the model the post falls under (Product related or Non-product related)
Sub category: The sub-category beneath the main category the post falls under.

Likes: How many people have liked the post.

Comments: How many comments feature under the post.

Shares: How many times the post has been shared.

Brand-attribute: The sub-classification of these posts under their respective constituent broader categories, with each post assigned a singular value.

3.4 Choice of social media platform

Whilst studies reflecting of analyses to do with the social-media activity of professional sports teams have been undertaken in the past, there remained the scope for one to be undertaken with respect to undertaking the analysis of a professional outfit's TikTok account activity. The added caveat to this being that these analyses were more or less confined to a still-visual format of media, i.e., images, and not moving-media. This presented to me the scope to undertake such an analysis by incorporating the findings of a moving-images data analysis study and applying it to this context (Knoblauch, 2012). Along with, I was guided in my analytical endeavours by an illustration provided by a platform called Repucom, which showcased of their methodology with respect to tracking and evaluating brand exposure in broadcast (Repucom, n/a).

As has been highlighted in earlier sections, the growing popularity of the application was one of the primary reasons behind having chosen it as a fulcrum to base my research ambitions around. And what makes the choice all the more interesting, to me, is that particularly in the context of Norwegian sport, professional outfits have yet to embrace it fully – meaning, that there remains vast scope to analyze its implications and present my findings so as to fill a gap in the understanding of social-media literature as in confined within these geographic limits. Viking FK themselves are relatively new to the application, and only adopted its use roughly three years ago. Norwegian football clubs in particular, as can be gleaned from the table provided in the appendix illustrative of the number of followers football clubs playing in the Eliterserien have on the application, can be considered as still not having fully embraced the platform as opposed to their presence on other popular social-media applications such as Instagram or Twitter . The team with the highest number of followers on the application are Mjøndalen IF Fotball, who have 27.3k

followers on their TikTok account. In comparison, Viking FK have around 5100 followers on their handle.

Keeping these factors in mind, and my experience and familiarity with the app with respect to following sports teams on the application, I thought it a worthwhile endeavour to undertake such a scope of examination with regards to it, and contribute if ever so slightly to what is a growing body of literature, as a whole, to do with understanding social-media in a sporting context.

3.5 Data collection

Data for this research will consist of TikTok posts uploaded on the TikTok account of Viking FK (@vikingfotball). Viking FK began uploading on the social media platform midway through the 2020/21 season, and therefore, my analysis shall include half a season's worth of on-season posts for the playing year 2020/21, a month's worth of off-season posts starting from April till the first game of the 2021/22 season, and on-seasons posts for the entirety of the 2021/22 season. The analysis shall depict thus more or less the entire constituent size of data on Viking FK's TikTok account.

A regular season of football, especially in most domestic leagues, begin in August with an end sometime in May. With regards to the Eliteserien (the topmost tier of professional football in Norway), a regular season usually begins sometime in April, with an end to it scheduled usually sometime in November. However, due to the influence of the COVID pandemic, the season timelines were altered in both the seasons being examined in this study. The 2020/21 season, which had been scheduled to begin on April 4 and conclude on the 29th of November, after postponements to the start eventually commenced on the 16th of June. It was a similarly the case in the 2021/22 season, with the season having been scheduled to begin on the 5th of April and conclude on the 27th of November.

Viking FK played their first competitive game in the 2020/21 season on the 16th of June and their final one on the 19th of December. In the 2021/22 season, they played their first competitive game on the 9th of May, and their final one on the 12th of December.

To help portray a further accurate picture of my proposed research goals, it was discerned by me that an analysis of both on-season and off-season posts would help me pursue my research ambitions better. Since an analysis of the entire TikTok account of Viking FK was a feasible endeavour since the beginning of this project, it made sense to me to

include, for the sake of research clarity as well as relative analytical capability of the data, off-season posts into the domain of my analytical endeavour.

In the realms of social-media, engagement is often measured by virtue of the engagement tools provided by the application one is active on, this very phenomenon being of engagement being referred to by Paine (2011) as the consumer 'taking some action beyond viewing or reading'. Depending on the social-media tool, this may include 'liking' a brand's post, or commenting on it. The assessment of engagement for this study, thus, was measured as a result of three primary type of activities offered by TikTok, namely *Like*, *Comment*, and *Share*. A subset of these engagement metrics, namely derivative, was the ability of the viewer to discern how many views a post has accumulated, which metric I also included in my analytical endeavours. TikTok users can click on the heart symbol, thus expressing in an active manner their engagement with the respective post, this phenomenon constituting as a user 'liking' the post. A textual variation of this engagement is possible by engaging with the comment function provided by the app, thus allowing a user to express through symbols or words their thoughts to a post. Thus, a *Comment* is seen as a higher level of engagement because it requires more effort by the users to directly respond to organizational messages, while offering them the opportunity to participate in ongoing dialogues with other commenting users (Anagnostopoulos et al, 2018). Also, if a user were to wish to share this post with another user, either on the application itself or by providing a link to the post via a different application, the *Share* feature available on the application would allow them to do so. During the period of study, the data collection process included the quantitative collection of the responses (frequency of occurrence) of each post in terms of *Like*, *Comment*, and *Share*.

3.6 Codification system and examples

This section will describe the reasoning and decision-making process involved in categorizing the posts into the sub-categories of the Sport Team Branding Model. Firstly, the content included in the videos uploaded by the TikTok account of Viking FK will be analyzed and matched to the relevant category of 'Product-related' or 'Non-product related'. Attention is paid to the content of the video while interpreting the meaning of the caption posted along with it, to provide a further holistic interpretation of the intent behind the post. Predominantly, most of the captions included in the sample size of posts are

published in the Norwegian language, with the occasional post consisting of an English caption. Wherever applicable, the auto-translate feature on the TikTok application, in addition to Google Translate, have been used to translate captions in order to provide context in this research.

3.6.1 Product-related

Content that pertains directly to the team's performance/success, in the context of sport, with it being eligible to fall under the sub-categories of Team Success, Star Player/s, and Head Coach.

Team Success: Posts featuring the team in action on the pitch – celebrating a goal, ruing a missed chance, players in action, or the head-coach giving instructions to the team during the game.
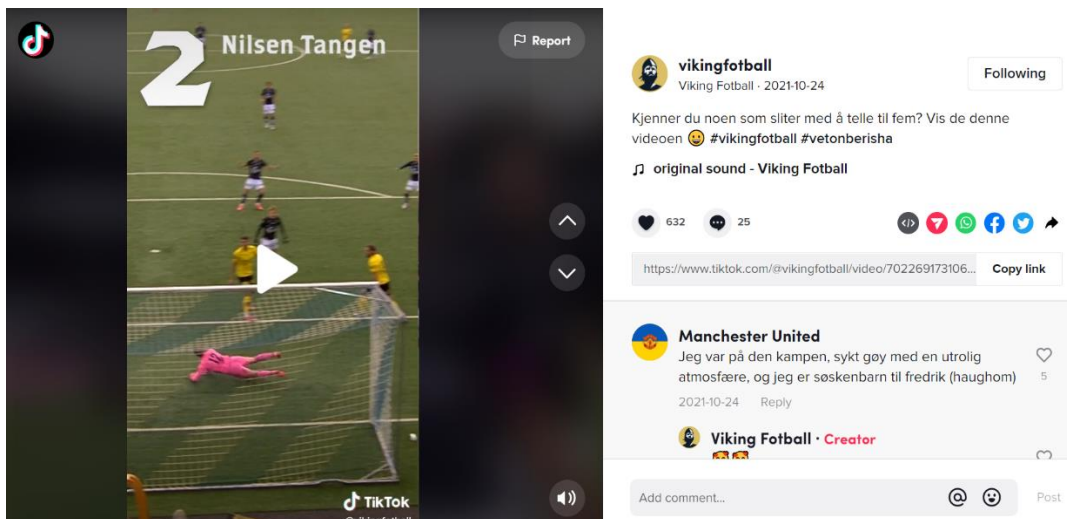

Figure 1: Example of post falling under the Team Success sub-category (Source: @vikingfotball).

Star Player/s: Posts depicting the team's star player in action during a game or in training.
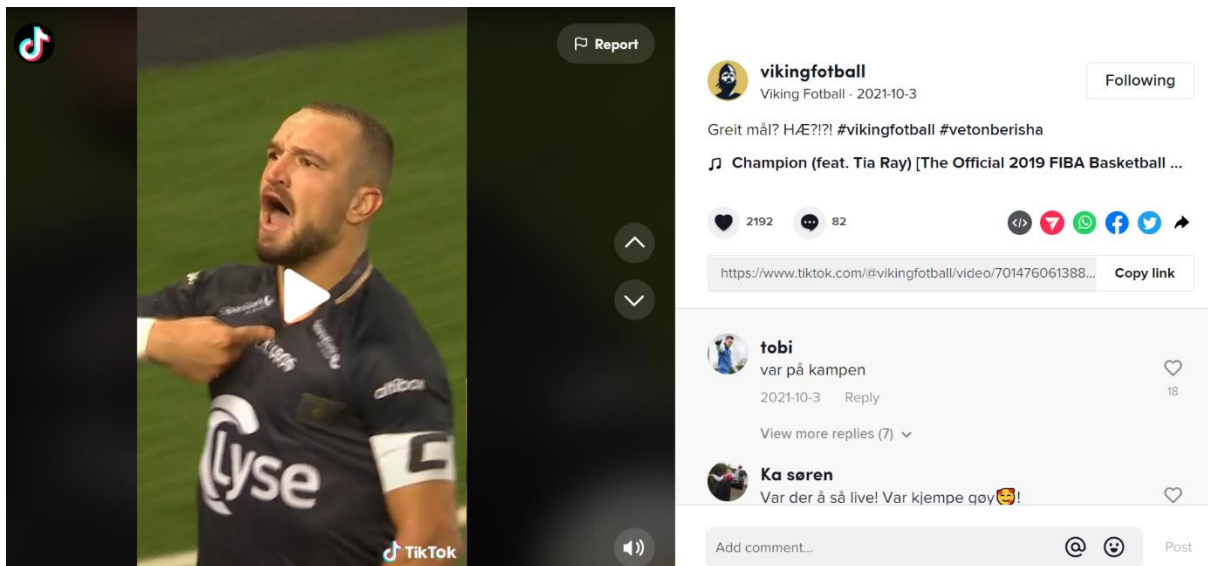
Figure 2: Example of post falling under the Star Player/s sub-category (Source: @vikingfotball).

Head Coach: Posts depicting the team's head coach in action, either on the pitch, or off it, during events such as a press conference or a pre or post-match interview.
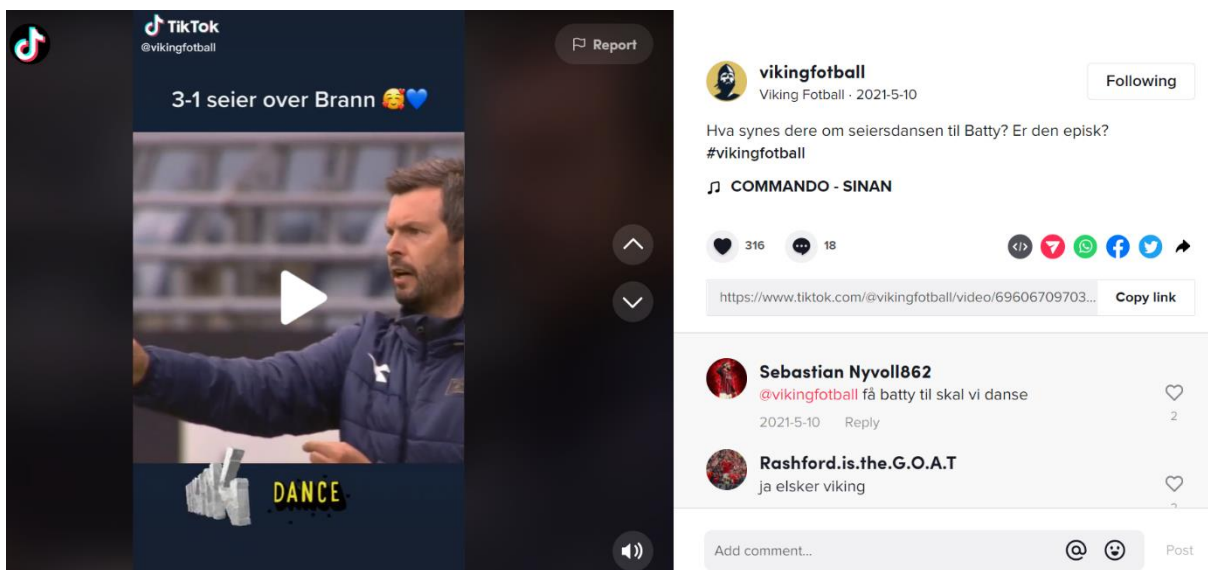

Figure 3: Example of post falling under the Head Coach sub-category (Source: @vikingfotball).

3.7.2 Non-product related

Content not directly pertaining to the team's performance on the pitch, but nonetheless contributing in other ways to a certain degree of it. Posts under this category are eligible to

be further classified under the sub-categories of Brand Mark, Management, Club's History and Tradition, Club's Culture and Values, Event's Image, Sponsor, Fans, and Stadium.

Brand Mark: Posts depicting of the team's brand mark, logo, colours, and/or uniform.
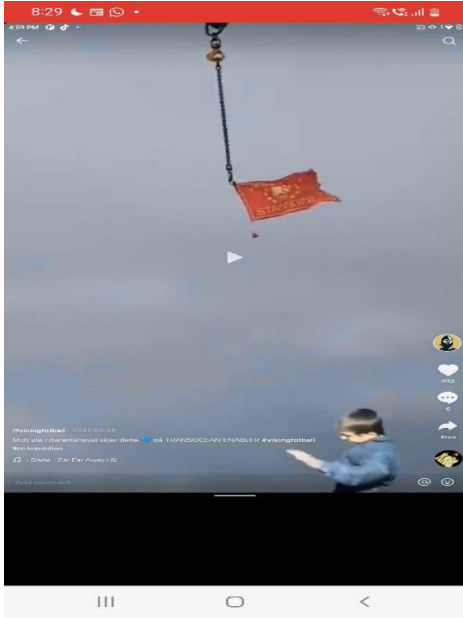

Figure 4. Example of post falling under the Brand Mark sub-category (Source: @vikingfotball).

Club's Culture and Values: Posts depicting of a team's values, role in a community, and/or activities undertaken to abide by the ethos of the club.
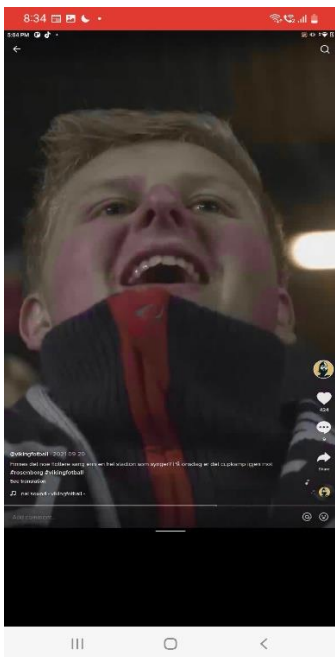
Figure 5. Example of post falling under the Club's Culture and Values sub-category
(Source: @vikingfotball)

Event's Image: Posts depicting of a team's involvement in a particular competition /
game, and/or announcements of the same.

Figure 6. Example of post falling under the Event's Image sub-category (Source:
@vikingfotball).

Fans: Posts depicting fans in various occasions such as celebrating, heading to the
stadium, and/or cheering the team on from home.

Figure 7. Example of post falling under the Fans sub-category (Source: @vikingfotball)

Stadium: Posts featuring views of the stadium.

Figure 8. Example of post falling under the Stadium sub-category (Source: @vikingfotball).

3.8 Inter-coder reliability

Inter-coder reliability is a measure of agreement between multiple coders of the data that is analyzed. This agreement of how the code is applied to the data is the measure of the validity of the methodology and demonstrates the extent to which there is an agreement of the codes are themes that are used for the research (Kurasaki, 2000). For this research, the inter-coder reliability was determined by having a fellow student analyze a certain number of posts according to the methodology provided earlier. Considering the relatively small sample size, a percentage agreement was used to measure the inter-coder reliability. Percentage agreement is simple to use and focuses on the number of codes that have been considered right for the individual coders through a transparent communication of the

methodology used (Nili, Tate, and Barros, 2017). The sample size for the inter-coder was 10 percent of the posts from both the on and off-season. A total of 12 posts were analyzed, and there was an agreement of 75%, on the categorization of posts into the Sport Team Branding Model.

3.9 Research ethics

The data collected for this research has been done so after securing the approval from the NSD (Norsk senter for forskningsdata). The notification form on their website was completed by providing the aim of this research and a short summary of the project, along with examples of the type of data to be collected; which in this scenario are Instagram posts of the selected athletes. The application (reference number: 758255) was registered on 14th of April, 2022 and an approval was provided by the NSD on 12th of May, 2022. The NSD have confirmed that the data collection for this research complies with the data protection legislation and upon receiving this confirmation (see Appendix), the data collection process began

4.1 Method

The study was exploratory in nature and used a qualitative content analysis to address its research purpose. Content analysis is a systematic and replicable method for analyzing written and/or visual content (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005) and has been shown to be an appropriate method to examine social media in sport settings (Gibbs, O'Reilly, & Brunette, 2014; Hambrick and Kang, 2015; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Ozsoy, 2011; Parganas et al., 2015; Pegoraro, 2010).

4.2 Sample Selection

The study undertook a case study approach by basing it on the TikTok activity of Viking FK – a professional football club in Norway playing in the top most division of the country. The Norwegian sporting landscape was marked for study, owing to the lack of research devoted with respect to its context, in particular to do with the social media activity of sport organizations in the country. Football is the most popular sport in Norway, in terms of active membership. This helped me narrow down my focus to basing my study around a particular team in this sport, in this case, Viking FK. The relatively recent emergence of TikTok in the social media landscape means that its application has yet to fully seep in. This is highlighted in the table attached in the appendix, which illustrates the number of followers each of the clubs playing in the top tier in the 2021-22 season had. Viking FK, at the time of writing this, have 5083 followers on their TikTok channel – the fifth highest number of the 15 teams in the division. Their recent run of good form, after gaining promotion back into the top division in 2019, illustrates of a change in fortunes. Their previous league finish positions over the past three seasons have been to fifth, sixth, and third, in the years of 2019, 2020, and, most recently, in 2021 respectively. Which makes them an interesting case study, in terms of their rise from relegation, and how they are managing this period of transition so as to leverage success both on and off the pitch. My personal familiarity with the team from a historical perspective, combined with a semiotic understanding of Norwegian football, helped make interpretation of the sample data a further enriching endeavour. Although my study is based on one particular team, I feel it necessary to highlight that the unit of measurement with respect to this study, its analysis and interpretations, is TikTok content, and not the organization it derives from.

4.3 Quantitative Data Collection

The TikTok account of Viking FK was followed, the analysis beginning from the very first post the club posted on their account on the social-media application. This debut post by the club was posted in the middle of the playing 20/21 season, thus marking the period from where the scope for this research's analysis began. The analysis was deliberately chosen to include the off-season period, given firstly the relatively small amount of data within the whole sample size (as to constitute a broader picture of the brand-communication strategy as undertaken by the club with respect to this particular social-media application), and also for purposes of comparison as to how data within the off-season period might differ from the on-season period, allowing me to add a further layer of intricacy to my findings. In particular, given the contextually 'entertaining' nature of the social-media application, perhaps further pertinent in the domain of this application as opposed to its brethren, media posted on the account would perhaps mesh well with sort of a 'fun image' to be portrayed by the club, this being entirely possible to achieve even in the off-season period. Certainly, as was deciphered in the findings, posts with an inherent 'entertainment' value were found to by and large surpass those occupying other brand-attributes from the model used in this study: thus justifying the choice to also include the off-season period in the scope of this analysis. Therefore, there remains the scope to devote the entirety of a study to a particular period in the season, so as to home in further on specific brand-image strategies that might be discernable courtesy such a study being undertaken within a constrained time-frame.

5.0 Findings

This chapter illustrates the findings from the data sample. The findings show the number of posts under each main category, as well as the sub-categories under which these posts were classified by the author of this study. This depiction has been illustrated in the form of charts.

Figure 1. depicts of the overall number of posts as sorted separately as those falling under the on-season period of the analysis, and the off-season period.
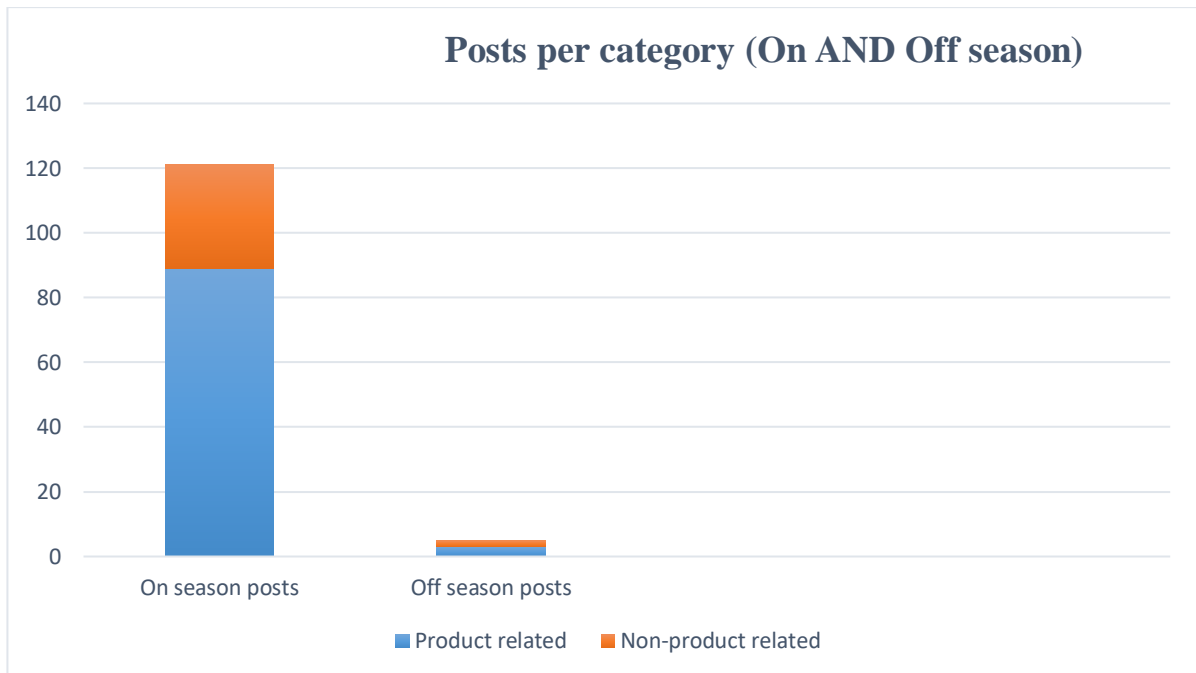

Figure 1. Number of posts falling under the on-season period, and the off-season period of the analysis.

As is evident, the posting schedule of Viking FK on the social-media application was further active during the on-season period, with a total of 121 posts featuring under this period, as compared to during the off-season period, in which a comparatively shorter amount of 6 posts were published.

Upon further observation, it is discernable also that product-related posts far outweighed posts as being assigned a non-product related value, during the on-season period. 89 posts of the 121 were sorted as falling under the product-related category, whilst the remaining 32 fell under the non-product related category.

Conversely, during the off-season period, of the 6 posts published under the time-frame, 4 of them were assigned the value of falling under the product-related category, the remaining 2 as to falling under the non-product related category.

Therefore, it is evident across both sections of analysis, that an emphasis was placed further on product-related content as opposed to non-product related content by the club. Such a finding is in line with those observable in other studies of similar nature, it being deemed natural that a club will focus more on providing fans with more product-related content, as compared to choosing to place an emphasis on providing them with non-product related content. It may be, as will be gleaned in specific statistics below, that posts of these nature acquire higher amount of 'engagement' from users and thus are the ones the club choose to post on their account more frequently.

Figure 2 depicts of the sub-categories the product-related posts fall under during the on-season period of the analysis.
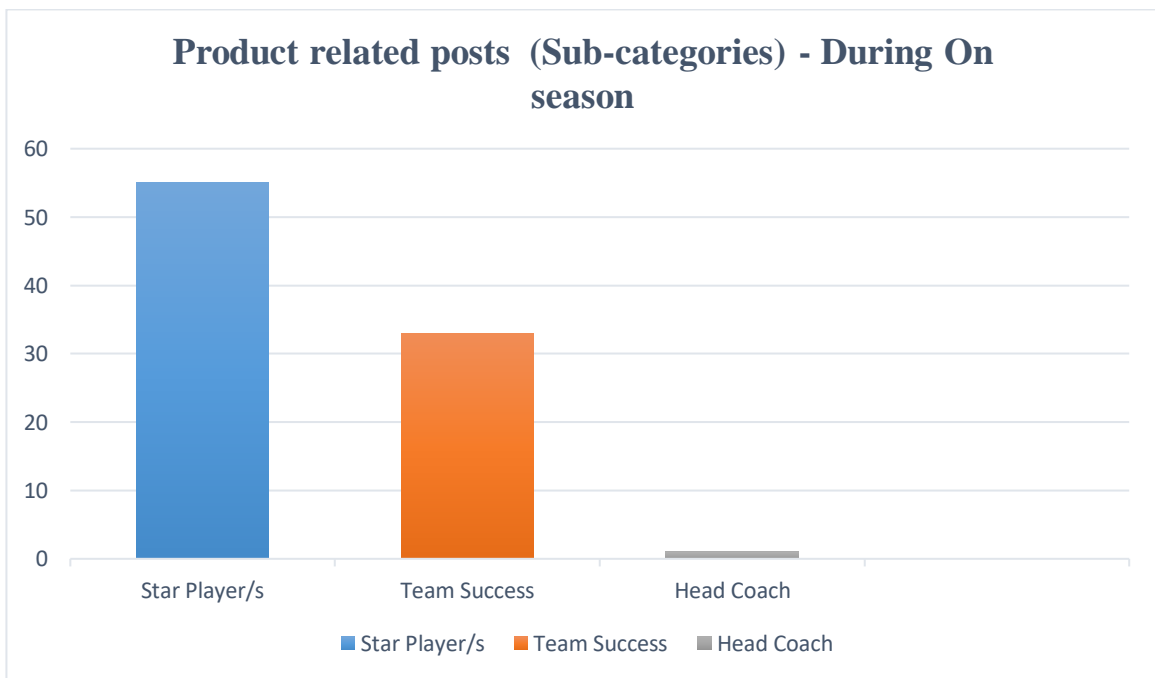

Figure 2. Sub-categories the product-related posts fall under during the on-season period of the analysis.

As is evident in the chart, posts tagged under the *Star Player/s* sub-category by and large outweigh those falling under the sub-categories of *Team Success*, and *Head Coach*. A total number of 55 posts, of the constituent sub-sample size of 89, fell under this sub-category.

Posts tagged under the sub-category *Team Success* amounted to 33, and those falling under the sub-category *Head Coach* amounted to the singular 1.

A popular player at the club, Veton Berisha was the player who featured most in the posts falling under the *Star Player/s* sub-category, these posts receiving considerable amount of engagement and interaction from fans, thus prompting the club to provide them with more content to do with one of the fan's favourite players. Various other players featured too under this sub-category, but it was Veton Berisha who dominated a majority of these posts. Content to do with a team's performance on the pitch was considerable in size too, with fans engaging greater when clips showing a team scoring a goal, defending a goal, or the goalkeeper saving a penalty featuring as the basis of the footage.

Conversely, there weren't many posts depicting the club's head coach, and perhaps a contextual factor worth taking into account here is the recent arrival of head coaches Bjarte Lunde Aarsheim and Morten Jensen. They understandably would need time to establish a certain connection with the clubs fanbase, and therefore content featuring either or both was unlikely to be high, as is gleaned from the analysis.

Figure 3 depicts of the sub-categories the product-related posts fall under during the off-season period of the analysis

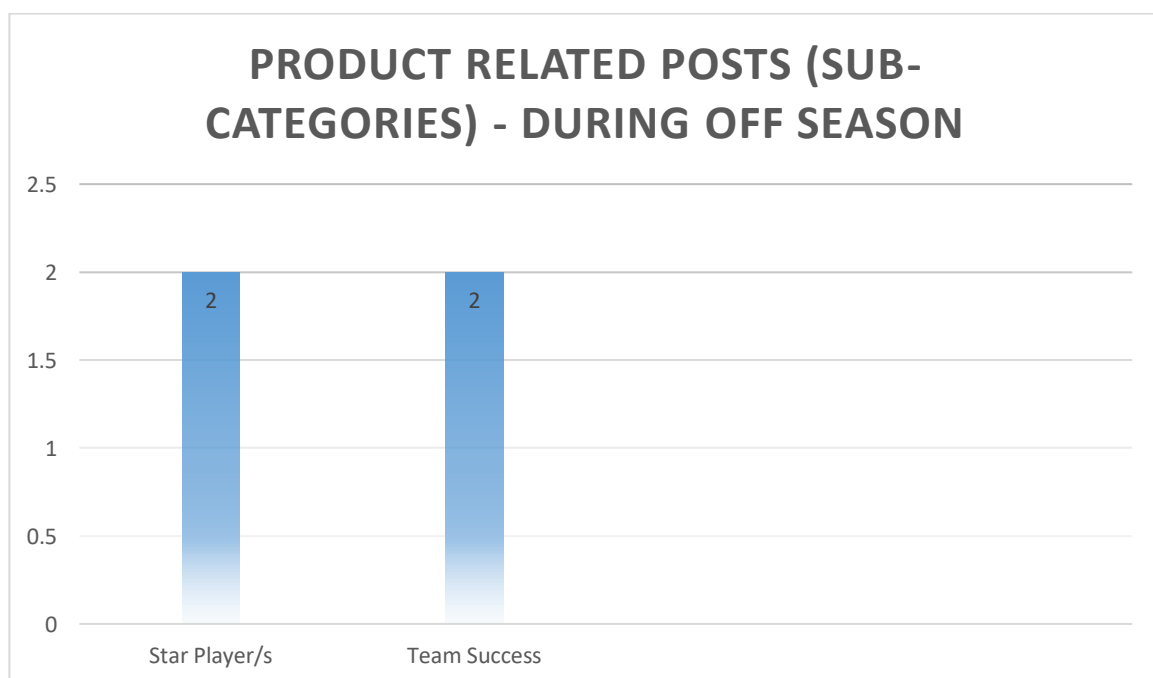PRODUCT RELATED POSTS (SUB-CATEGORIES) - DURING OFF SEASON

Figure 3. Sub-categories the Product-related posts fall under during the off-season period of the analysis.

Posts were divided equally as to falling under the *Star Player/s* and *Team Success* sub-categories during the off-season period of the analysis. There were no posts filed under the *Head Coach* sub-category during this same period.

Figure 4 depicts of the sub-categories the Non-product related posts fall under during the on-season period of the analysis.
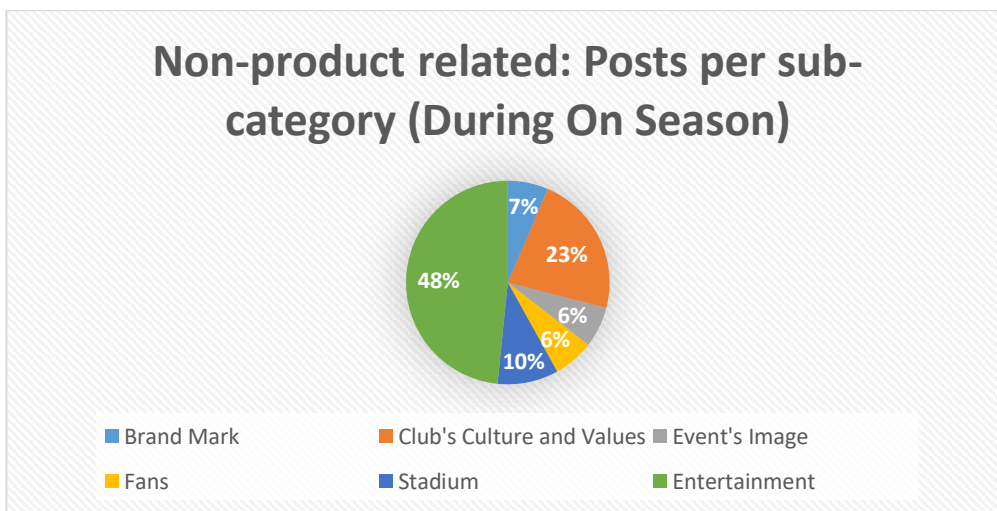

Non-product related: Posts per sub-category (During On Season)

7%
23%
6%
6%
10%
48%

■ Brand Mark ■ Club's Culture and Values ■ Event's Image
■ Fans ■ Stadium ■ Entertainment

Figure 4. Sub-categories the Non-product related posts fall under during the on-season period of the analysis

Key Finding:

I find it pertinent to mention during the course of this particular discussion, that during the course of my analysis of the data, I found the need and the scope to have arisen to make an addition to the model employed for the purposes of the study. As I have touched upon the 'entertainment' core value-offering of the application TikTok, there were posts which were crafted, in the eyes of the researcher, solely for this particular purpose, and these posts, which I filed under a sub-category labelled *Entertainment*, constituted 48%, almost half, of the posts in this sub-data set which belonged to the Non-product related category of posts published during the on-season. These posts inadvertently featured content such as players participating in challenges, fans sending in personal videos of them undertaking such similar endeavours (kicking a football through a basketball net and then celebrating upon the success of this attempt) – and the nature of this media was of the kind that it merited

itself a separate sub-category, it not being eligible to assuredly fall under any sub-category as exist withing the current model. This finding, I believe, was to be one of my major contributions by means of having undertaken this research, thus lending to the notion that the model may be adapted to suit better a video-format of data, in particular on applications with their primary value offering being that of entertainment. Certainly, applications such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, which have been the subject of such similar studies, although may be seen as social-connection tools cannot be entirely said to feature the kind of 'vibe' TikTok offers its users – meaning, with the latter, there is an emphasis on creating content solely for the sake of going beyond social-connection, i.e. to say, to entertain a user of the application. This is what has made the application so popular – the ability to be entertained at the tips of your fingers. Therefore, users creating for the application are, or will be, mindful of what the core synthetic nature of the application is, thus helping them establish a fanbase on the platform by creating the kind of content likely to be a hit with users active in this particular medium. Viking FK followed suit along the lines of these principles which I have outlined – recognizing the kind of content to suit better the platform and providing it to their fans.

Following, it was the sub-category *Club's Culture and Values* which featured the most number of posts of the constituent sub-sample size. There were a total of 31 Non-product related posts which were published on the club's account during the on-season period of the analysis. 23% of these posts were filed as to belonging to this sub-category. Followed the brand-attributes of *Stadium*, *Brand Mark*, *Event's Image*, and *Fans*. Notable was the lack of posts to fall under the *Management*, *Club's History and Tradition*, and *Sponsor*. During the entirety of the analysis, there were no posts, both during the on-season and off-season period of the analysis, to feature under these sub-categories. Having alluded to the nature of the application, it is perhaps surprising to not have found any posts under the sub-category of *Sponsors* in particular, given how it is not uncommon to find on the sporting scene sponsors find unique ways (such as competitions, games, offering prizes) to supporters of a team, by engaging in sponsorship activation practices, and such may also include promotional content as advertised by the club on their social-media channel reflecting of their partnership with particular sponsors. It is perhaps understandable that the club's management did not feature heavily in the content posted on the application, given, again, the kind of content that is likely to be popular with fans, and being also a video-format application, there being lesser scope of including the club's management in it as

opposed in the form of occasional pictures as may be found on other social-media platforms the club is active on. The aspect of moving-images, to be utilized primarily for the purposes of entertainment, is an interpretation that helps make sense of this finding. Perhaps also similarly surprising is the lack of posts to feature under the *Club's History and Tradition* sub-category.

Figure 5 depicts of the sub-categories the Non-product related posts fall under during the off-season period of the analysis.
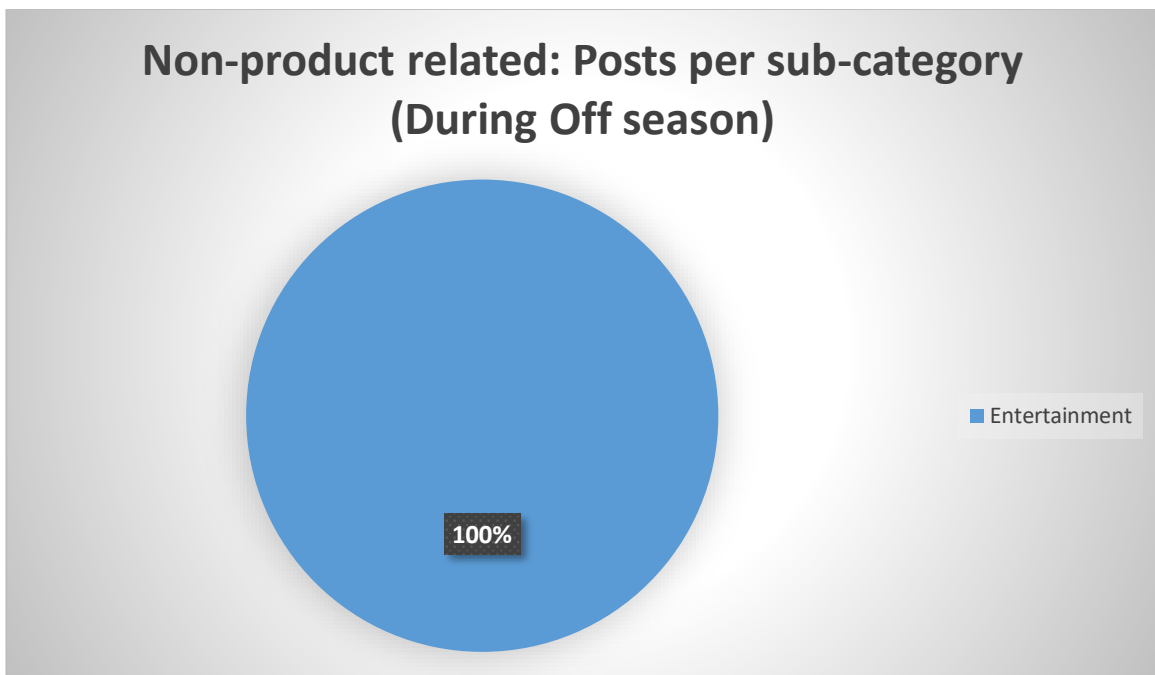

Figure 5. Sub-categories the Non-product related posts fall under during the off-season period of the analysis

An overwhelming entirety of the posts, namely 2, belonged to the *Entertainment* sub-category. Given the absence of games during this period, and coupled with the nature of the application, it is not surprising to find that the club, in the scarce posts they did publish during this period, chose to offer the kind of content that fans perhaps most sought – which was content created solely for the purposes of entertainment.

6.0 Analysis and Discussion

In the selected sample, there featured on Viking FK's TikTok account pre-dominantly more Product related posts, as opposed to Non-product related. The off-season period was particularly under-utilized in terms of posting frequency, and is a matter towards which due concern might be appropriate to pay heed to.

Of the sub-categories withing the two main categories, when it came to Product-related posts, the brand-attributes of *Team Success* and *Star Player/s* dominated, whereas *Head Coach* was a sub-category which remained under-utilized.

Under the Non-product related posts category, there was observed the scope to incorporate a separate sub-category within the structure of the existing framework, namely, including the sub-category *Entertainment*. This was deemed appropriate for during the course of analysis, there appeared to be a host of data which could have been said to fit further appropriately under this sub-heading, not particularly fitting under any of the other sub-categories as provided by the Sport Team Branding Model framework. There was noticeable the absence of the sub-categories *Sponsor*, *Management*, and *Club's History and Tradition*.

6.1 Sport Team Branding Model – Examination

Different social-media provide users different value propositions, and the inherent nature of these applications may play a role in our understanding of branding endeavours as proposed to be undertaken by sports organizations.

Firstly, it is no surprise that given the nature of the field of sport, star players, and the team's performance itself are bound to be the kind of content at the centre of any discussion when it comes to engaging with fans. As the model explains, these are entities directly impacting the 'product', and therefore are further viable to feature as primary contenders with respect to a club's branding endeavours on a social-media platform. In particular, when a particular player is as vital to the team as, in Viking FK's case, Veton Berisha is, for he has been the top-score at the club for the past two seasons running, it

appears a fathomable instance that this player feature pre-dominantly on the club's social-media channels given his importance to the club and the affinity the fans have towards him. In this case, Veton Berisha was by and far the player to feature most on the club's social-media, followed by other important players on the team. Thus, for the club, it makes sense to build upon the pulling-capacity of these players so as to drive more traffic to their social-media channels, and create further engaging content, which is, in the domain of social-media, an important metric by which to judge the 'success' of a post. Fans are more likely to engage with posts they feel a closer connection with, and this appears to rationalize the occurrence of the findings in this particular study.

Whilst some sports outfits may have at the helm iconic head-coaches, or at least personnel who have been in charge for long periods of time, in the instance of Viking FK, their head-coaches have arrived recently, and may not be said as being 'iconic' or 'legendary' figures at the club, which makes their absence from the club's social-media activity, to an extent, understandable. However, given the importance a head-coach has over a team's performance, and how he is an integral part of the product, it is nevertheless an area the club would do well to address, particularly looking to build at least a connection between the management and the club's supporters, by virtue of affording them a larger presence on the club's channel. It can be said that the building of a connection between personnel of a club and its supporters can be built in this way, vice-versa too, with the inculcation of such figures into the 'conversation' surrounding the team seeming to make it likelier that there begins to develop a certain connect between those outside the club, and those within it. Thus, social-media is not only a picture-portraying entity of existing conditions, but can also be seen as a developmental entity, when it comes to forging connections between two parties – in this case supporters of the club and the coaching management.

When it comes to TikTok, the Sport Team Branding Model lacks of a dimension to fit further appropriately the 'entertaining' aspect the application aspires to provide its users. Entertainment, being one of the primary driving reasons of traffic to the application, is what users seek when they follow their favourite accounts on the platform. This addition to the framework shall be particularly relevant in aiding future researchers in their endeavours to undertake similar brand-analysis studies, devoted to the application of TikTok in particular.

Some sporting outfits are further 'historically richer' than their counterparts, and whilst a rich history isn't a precursor to trying to build a conversation around a club's past, it seems an avenue which further attention may be devoted to when it comes to incorporating an element of it in a club's social-media strategy. Viking FK certainly have an illustrative past behind them, being founded in the year 1899. They have plenty to contribute by way of shedding light on some of the club's past achievements, and also being able to connect past players with the club's current supporters. Many sporting outfits utilize a rich past to build on their existing brand-image, laying the foundations of the image which may conjure in the minds of an individual when one thinks about the club. Liverpool FC, for instance, playing in the top division of England, are said to be a 'historically rich' club, and they incorporate this element of history into building upon their current brand-image, thus inspiring a certain sense of closeness and connect with their supporters, and being wholly proud of their identity as a football club. This doesn't necessarily have to be the case with each sporting outfit, but I wager that Viking FK have scope to build on this suggestion, and include more content associated with the club's history on their TikTok channel. It would also seem that it play into the 'entertainment' factor of the conversation, with interviews with past players and management, engaging in fun competitions with them, or simply lending a 'throwback' to times gone by, by posting footage from previous years being such types of content that may play well into the dynamics of the value-proposition of this particular social-media application.

The absence of sponsors from the club's content on the platform perhaps is an area worth addressing too. Particularly given the highly commercialized nature of sport today, establishing a connection with one's sponsors in the public domain remains an activity that organizations set out to address, not least since some sponsorship agreements particularly require them to do so. Also, sponsorship agreements tend to involve, at least in the space of media, engaging activities designed to connect the club, the sponsoring party, and the users ultimately together. Examples include competitions announced beckoning forth an individual to participate in an event or, advertisements filmed around the main value-offerings of the sponsor, or social activities undertaken by a collaboration between the sponsor and sponsee (the sporting outfit in this instance), all of these being potential content-creation avenues.

The Sport Team Branding Model, by and large, thus fits appropriately withing the parameters of this study and discussion, albeit it being found that there needs an alteration to it if it is to be adapted for future employment with respect to this particular social-media application.

6.2 Contextual Factors, Further Discourse, and Suggestions

That TikTok remains to fully have immersed itself into the branding endeavours of Norwegian football clubs remains a point of discussion, when taking into consideration the findings from this study. Other social-media applications, such as Instagram and Twitter, remain comparatively further popular in this arena, with only in recent years TikTok having seen further wide-spread adoption by teams operating in the sporting landscape in this particular geography.

Viking FK themselves are relatively new to the application, having first established a presence on it somewhere in the middle of the 2020/21 season. Thus lending a contextual hue to the findings given their relatively short time spent on the application. Therefore, it may not be an appropriate time to pass a judgment, as a whole, on the club's branding endeavours, given the lack of overall data available, albeit it being the right moment to see the direction in which the club's marketing strategy as a whole is headed, and to provide insights to aid them in their journey.

In particular, suggestions would imply devoting further attention to publishing posts more frequently during the off-season period, and also incorporating further of the sub-categories found missing in the analysis as the basis of their posts. In particular, remaining steadfast with posting 'entertaining' content, and shifting their ambitions with respect to this particular social-media platform being different as those which they may have from other platforms. It is hard to deny the inherently variant nature of TikTok, as compared to Instagram or Twitter, where the focus is not as much on pure entertainment, as it may be on other contextual factors associated with those applications. Whilst the off-season keeps the team away from the action, thus making it challenging to deliver more Product-related content, it is an opportunity nonetheless to balance the disparity which exists between the two main categories, as is gleaned from the distribution of posts during the off-season period. Whilst players and management are away, it could be the time to deliver content

such as 'highlights from the season' – individual or to do with the team as whole, or a 'goals package', 'saves package', or an 'assists package'. This will help maintain the flow between Product related content and Non-product related content on the club's channel.

Another suggestion would be to build upon the popularity of posts featuring the team in action, or the team's star players in action – these kinds of posts being comparatively more popular with users as opposed to those featuring content of variant nature. The application lends itself splendidly in order to enable the club doing so, with more match highlights, individual highlights, and training highlights sure to cater to the fans desire to see more of their beloved team and players in action, on the application.

7.0 Conclusion

This research provides insights on brand-communication via the means of social-media, taking into consideration the case of a single football club plying their trade in Norway's top-most division of football, namely Viking FK. It provides an answer to the first research question (RQ1); What product and non-product related attributes are professional sport teams communicating through TikTok? By virtue of the findings, it showcases the brand-attributes visible in the posts on Viking FK's TikTok channel, further going into depth revelatory of those particular brand-attributes popular with followers of the club on the application, and those brand-attributes which are less-utilized, and in some cases entirely absent from the data set studied. Namely, it was found that with respect to Product related posts, the brand-attributes of *Star Player/s* and *Team Success* were extensively found to feature in the nature of the posts, as opposed to the diminished presence of the brand-attribute *Head Coach*. With respect to Non-product related posts, it was observed that a need to include a new brand-attribute, namely '*Entertainment*', was found to suit better the video-format of the application and thus help make the analysis a further fruitful endeavour with respect to contributing to existing literature to do with branding and social-media in the context of sport. This newly formulated brand-attribute was found to feature pre-dominantly in the share of Non-product related posts published on the application, therefore meriting its inclusion into the existing Sport Team Branding Model, as deemed by the study's researcher. Also, namely the brand-attributes of *Sponsor*, *Management*, and *Club's History and Tradition* were found to be entirely missing from the data set.

The study also answers the second research question (RQ2); How do TikTok followers of sport teams respond and react to these brand attributes? With respect to Product-related posts, followers responded, or engaged, the most with posts to feature the brand-attributes of *Star Player*, and *Team Success*. A reason behind the occurrence of this phenomena being that given the visual and 'entertainment' focused element of the application, content featuring match highlights or individual highlights are bound to be popular with the audience, fitting well with the nature of the application which endeavours to offer users entertainment via the means of moving images. Therefore, it was also learned that with respect to Non-product related posts, posts classified under the brand-attribute *Entertainment* were by and large more popular amongst the audience as opposed to other brand-attributes falling under this main category of posts.

The findings above make a case for the Sport Team Branding Model to be extended as to including the brand-attribute *Entertainment* fit under the main category of Non-product related posts. This addition is likely to aid future researchers in their research endeavours to do with brand-image communication on social-media platforms, in particular those involving the application TikTok– the nature of the application meriting the need to adapt thus the model to fit better its parameters. Entertainment remains the primary reason users flock to the application, with the platform a place for creators to create and publish all manner of appealing content for their followers on the application. This core value proposition that TikTok aims to deliver to its users is different from those offered by its peers, namely Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook – all these platforms certainly boding well towards creating engaging content, but none with as much an emphasis on providing 'entertainment' to their users. Thus, these proposed additions to the framework could warrant further studies into the exploration of branding endeavours undertaken by sports clubs on the application.

The research has practical implications for the social-media / branding team working at a sports-club, who could use these findings to help establish a stronger foothold on the application. As clubs across the sporting landscape compete on the pitch to secure the best results they may hope to achieve, similarly, off the pitch clubs are vying to attract new supporters and retain old ones too. A dialogue in this conversation definitely ought to incorporate looking into the use of social-media as a means of achieving this, with success off the pitch contributing in different ways to the club's success on it. By attracting a larger audience on these social-media applications, clubs can hope to build upon other aspects of their overall growth strategy, looking eventually to incorporate a revenue-growth strategy into the mix alongside marketing endeavours, to establishing a stronger connect with the supporter base through the use of effective social-media communication, or simply to use social-media as a means of imparting a certain brand-image. By understanding the nature of different social-media applications, clubs may hope to have further clarity with respect to what kind of content is popular on different platforms, and tailor their content-creations strategies to suit better these respective applications. Whilst the Sport Team Branding Model is but one offering when it comes to helping understand these branding initiatives on different social-media platforms, it certainly has its place in this domain as a framework which provides a basic, holistic understanding of the nuances of data found on these applications.

Whilst the scope of this study was understandably singular from the start, nevertheless, it is pertinent to highlight some limitations with regards to it so as to suggest where might research in this area of study be improved, and where might it be directed. A larger sample size certainly would have helped make better sense of the findings. Also, since the study employed of a case-study approach, these findings were illustrative of one particular sporting outfit's branding endeavours, in one particular sport. Future studies could propose to identify whether there exist any differences when the sport is changed, for instance how might the findings differ if taken under the context of individual sports? Also, such a study might also be implemented with respect to the application YouTube – the video-format of the application lending well to employing of a similar framework as was adopted in this study, to better understand the scope and use of the application with respect to brand-communication strategies of sports clubs. As sporting outfits across the sporting landscape are incorporating the use of YouTube in their branding strategies, and as the platform has a similar 'entertainment offering' value proposition to its users, it makes sense to explore research in this area too. Clubs are now looking to use the platform as a means of lending their supporters further entertainment value, with 'Q&As', training challenges, community activities, and teammate challenges the kind of content which may be found on a club's YouTube channel. It would certainly be interesting to compare findings of a sports club operating on this platform, against the findings as may be derived from this same club's use of TikTok, for instance.

Also, might clubs operating in different geographic locales have different contextual uses of these applications? Might a case-study of two clubs from contrasting geographic locales, for instance a comparison of the use of these social-media applications by a club based in Norway and a club based in South America, have a greater contextual value to academic research? Do these findings differ with geography, or does the primary nature of findings consistently remain the same as one shifts from one distinct locale to another? All these could be interesting areas of research with respect to the brand-communication strategies of sports clubs and the understanding of social-media as a branding tool in the future.

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9.0 Appendix

NSD NORSK SENTER FOR FORSKNINGSDATA

Assessment

Reference number

758255

Project title

Master's thesis. Project title: 'Brand Image Communication through TikTok - The Case of Viking FK

Data controller (institution responsible for the project)

Høgskolen i Molde – Vitenskapelig Høgskole i Logistikk / Avdeling for økonomi og samfunnsvitenskap

Project leader (academic employee/supervisor or PhD candidate)

Harald Klaus Dolles, harald.k.dolles@himolde.no, tlf: +4771214085

Type of project

Student project, Master's thesis

Contact information, student

Abhishek Hemant Todmal, abhi789todmal@gmail.com, tlf: +919921320673

Project period

01.01.2022 - 13.06.2022

Assessment (1)

12.05.2022 - Assessed

Data Protection Services has carried out an assessment of the processing of personal data in this project. Our assessment is that the processing will comply with data protection legislation, so long as it is carried out in accordance with what is documented in the Notification Form and attachments, dated 12 May 2022, as well as in our message correspondence.

TYPE OF DATA AND DURATION
The project will be processing general categories of personal data until 13 June 2022.

LEGAL BASIS
Our assessment is that the processing meets the requirement of scientific research, and therefore constitutes a task in the public interest.

The project will process general categories of personal data on the legal basis that processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest, cf. the General Data Protection Regulation art. 6.1 e), and for scientific research purposes, cf. art. 6.3 b), cf. the Personal Data Act § 8.

The processing is in accordance with appropriate safeguards for the rights and freedoms of the data subject,

cf. art. 89.1.

PRINCIPLES RELATING TO PROCESSING PERSONAL DATA
We find that the planned processing of personal data will be in accordance with the principles under the General Data Protection Regulation regarding:

- lawfulness, fairness and transparency (art. 5.1 a), and that processing is in accordance with appropriate safeguards
- purpose limitation (art. 5.1 b), in that personal data will be collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes, and will not be processed for new, incompatible purposes
- data minimisation (art. 5.1 c), in that only personal data which are adequate, relevant and necessary for the purpose of the project will be processed
- storage limitation (art. 5.1 e), in that personal data will not be stored for longer than is necessary to fulfil the project's purpose

THE RIGHTS OF DATA SUBJECTS

Data subjects will have the following rights in this project: access (art. 15), rectification (art. 16), erasure (art. 17), restriction of processing (art. 18), notification (art. 19) and protest (art. 21).
These rights apply so long as the data subject can be identified in the collected data.

The project will analyse the social-media activity of a Norwegian professional football club on the platform Tik Tok. Material (pictures, videos) will be collected manually and might contain information about players and officials of the club. However, the project's focus is on the club's social media strategy, not the individuals who might appear in the material. The Tik Tok posts do not contain particularly private personal data and have a high degree of expected publicness. Moreover, the duration of processing is very short.

On these grounds, we find that an exemption from the data subject's right to information can be made, cf. art. 14 nr. 5 b).

We remind you that if a data subject contacts you about their rights, the data controller has a duty to reply within a month.

FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES
Our assessment presupposes that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data.

To ensure that these requirements are met you must follow your institution's internal guidelines and/or consult with your institution (i.e. the institution responsible for the project).

NOTIFY CHANGES
If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project it may be necessary to notify us. This is done by updating the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified. Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes.

FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT
We will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Contact person: Simon Gogl
Good luck with the project!

44

Number of followers for football clubs playing in the Eliterserien on the application TikTok (2021-22)

Club	TikTok account
Bodo/Glimt	3712 followers (New account made in 2021)
Molde FK	-
Viking	5083 followers
Lillestrom	1565 followers
Rosenborg	16.9k followers
Valarenga	2266 followers
Sarpsborg	1774 followers
Stromsgodset	4612 followers
Sandefjord	5644 followers
Haugesund	-
Tromso	4039 followers
Odds	8129 followers
Brann	5636 followers
Stabaek	632 followers
Mjondalen	27.3k followers