



Master's degree thesis

IDR950 Sport Management

Insta-brand: The rise of an athlete brand on Instagram

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Preface

This master's research project is the culmination of a lifelong dream in pursuing a degree in Sport Management. The journey has been long, difficult at times and definitely rewarding. What began as an interesting exam topic has grown into a research topic that makes an attempt to shed some light on the phenomena of the athlete brand and how this brand is built using social media. Combining these two personal interests for this research project has been an interesting experience with a lot of new learnings that will serve me well.

The goal of this thesis is to identify how football players build their personal brand, and how Instagram allows them to do so. By using a developed theoretical model of the athlete brand image, this research aims to test the model on their social media profiles and offer recommendations for extension of the model.

I would like to thank my supervisor Harald Dolles for his constant guidance and support throughout the project. His knowledge of the industry and marketing/branding domain has been of great assistance in structuring this research. It is also important to mention Dr. Petros Parganas, whose seminar on Social Media Marketing in sport was the main inspiration for this particular topic.

I would also like to thank my friends and family for their support and encouragement which kept me going. Special mention to Per Andre Fenne, colleague and fellow student, who helped with his insights and discussions on this particular topic. It definitely helped to have someone to bounce ideas off and gain different perspectives.

Last but not the least, I am grateful to the department of sport management at Molde University for this opportunity, as they have been supportive since day one in the university. Especially with unforeseen changes owing to the COVID pandemic and adapting to a virtual study environment. As a foreign student in Molde, their support has been nothing short of amazing in my time here.

Summary

Modern technology has given birth to social media platforms, which are so ingrained into our daily lives. What started as a simple tool to network and connect with friends has grown into arguably one of the biggest resources in the world of marketing and branding. Anyone with access to social media, has the potential to build their own brand and this is not restricted to just celebrities and other famous personalities. Instagram is one such platform that is used by individuals and organizations to build and promote their own brands.

The aim of this research is to analyze the Instagram accounts of two football players, Cristiano Ronaldo (Juventus and Portugal) and Marcus Rashford (Manchester United and England), and determine their alignment with the dimensions of the Model of Athlete Brand Image (MABI) developed by Arai, Ko and Ross (2014). This model divides an athlete brand into three main dimensions namely; Athletic performance, Attractive appearance and Marketable lifestyle. Each dimension has their own sub dimensions and these together, make up the components of an athlete brand. Through a codification system developed using the theoretical model, their posts were categorized and analyzed in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What dimensions of the MABI model are present in the social media profile of an athlete's brand?

Research Question 2: Are there any differences between the athletes when it comes to contextual factors?

The analysis of the two athletes shows that the dimensions of the MABI are present on the social media profiles of both athletes and they do differ for both athletes due to contextual factors such as the stage of their career and the country they play in.

The results indicate a possibility of extending the existing dimensions of the MABI to include athlete brands that exist as a separate entity, but still find their origins as an athlete brand. In addition to this, the comparison of an established brand like Ronaldo against a new brand like Rashford, gives brand managers a frame of reference to work with when developing an athlete brand.

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1.0 Introduction

In the 2019 list of the 40 most valuable sports brands published by Forbes (Ozanian 2019), an athlete's brand value is calculated based on their non-sport related earning minus the average income of the top 10 athletes in the same sport. The top 2 athletes on the list belong to individual sports such as tennis (Roger Federer, \$62 million) and golf (Tiger Woods, \$33 million). Other athletes taking part in team sports such as football (Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi), cricket (Virat Kohli) and basketball (Stephen Curry and LeBron James) also feature in this list.

Owing to advancements in digitalization, an athlete's social media profile is an inseparable part of their brand and allows them to construct their brand with minimal financial investment (Su, et al. 2020). Many, if not all, athletes use their social media channels to promote their brand to their followers. Social media is popular and a powerful tool that can be used to communicate with fans and in turn, build their brand (Anagnostopoulos, et al. 2018). Considering the ease of access to these channels, all athletes have the same opportunity to promote their brand. Yet only few athletes are able to leverage the use of these channels to enhance their brand.

The purpose of this research will be to analyze and compare the social media posts of athletes on their social media platform by applying the dimensions of the Model of Athlete Brand Image conceptualized by Arai, Ko and Ross (2014). This conceptual model of athlete brand image provides three dimensions; athletic performance, attractive appearance and marketable lifestyle. These dimensions are further divided into ten sub dimensions which provide sport marketers with factors that play a key role in developing a strong athlete brand, and develop strategies accordingly. By identifying elements of these dimensions in the social media posts of the athlete, the aim of the study is to examine the role of social media in building an athlete's personal brand. The study will also consider the influence of contextual factors around the selected athletes and the influence they have on the dimensions of the MABI model put forth by Arai, Ko and Ross (2014). Depending on the athletes and social media platforms chosen for this study, additional variables regarding the context will also be considered. For example, the cultural background of the athletes and the possible influence that could have on the development of the athlete brand.

1.1 Research question

The research questions will be as follows:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What dimensions of the MABI model are present in the social media profile of an athlete's brand?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Are there any differences between the athletes when it comes to contextual factors?

1.2 Research Outline

This research is presented through six main chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the thesis topic and provides an outline of the main topic of research. This chapter will also put forth the two research questions. The second chapter provides background and literature on the theoretical framework that provides the foundation for this research topic. The third chapter discusses the methodology that was used to collect the data and how this data was analyzed to answer the research question. Chapter four illustrates the findings from the data with a brief explanation, before moving on to a detailed discussion on the findings and their relation to theory in chapter five. Last but not least, chapter six will summarize the discussion and answer the research questions, before providing a short summary on the implications, limitations and future suggestions for similar research.

2.0 Theoretical Framework for Research: Model of Athlete Brand Image (MABI)

This chapter discusses the theoretical Model of Athlete Brand Image (MABI) along with an explanation and example of each dimension and subdimension. Following which there is a development of the contextual factors that could influence an athlete brand, namely; stages of the athlete's career and adapting to a different culture in a new country and sports league. These contextual factors are explained with examples before providing a background on social media, branding and the concept of an athlete brand.

2.1 Model of Athlete Brand Image (MABI)

The theoretical framework that is used for this research was developed in order to understand different dimensions of an athlete how it can play a role in creating an athlete brand. The dimensions put forth allow us to examine the aspects of an athlete's career and lifestyle which form the core identity of their brand. An athlete is recognized as one of the elite practitioners of the sport they specialize in and thus it is common for fans to consider them as a measure of success and quality. These values are imbibed by the brand they create so as to create a similar association between their brand and the potential consumers of this athlete brand.

The MABI model conceptualized by Arai, Ko and Ross (2014) shows the dimensions of an athlete's brand image that could potentially impact the formation of consumer brand equity towards the athlete brand. The authors developed this model through a comprehensive literature review of studies exploring the factors to be an effective endorser and branding studies exploring the dimensions of sports team brand associations. The model of athlete brand image conceptualized here is primarily based on Keller's (1993) classification of brand attributes into product and non-product related attributes.

The MABI model is particularly useful in this master thesis research project as the model provides readers with an understanding of how the athlete is developed as a brand. The dimensions put forth in theoretical development of the Model of Athlete Brand Image (Arai, Ko and Ross 2014), help understand the different aspects of an athlete's persona that go a long way in developing themselves as a brand. Take for example, David Beckham who retired from professional football in 2013 (BBC 2013). He has been able to leverage

his lifestyle as a fashion icon in addition to his athletic ability on the football pitch. By doing so, him and his family have been able to utilize their marketable lifestyle to continue to generate revenue, long after his retirement from the sport (Sports Financial Literacy Academy 2019). As will be explained in this research, the Marketable Lifestyle is one of the brand image dimensions put forth by Arai, Ko and Ross (2014). This is just one example of how these dimensions can be capitalized by professional athletes and establish themselves as a brand, in order to reap the rewards well after they retire from their sport. Football players tend to reach the peak of their career in their mid 20s, between the ages of 25 and 27 (Dendir 2016). When considering the demographic information provided by the Professional Footballer's Association (PFA N.D), the average career length of a footballer is 8 years. So, it becomes even more important for them to make the most of their career in order to financially secure their future long after their playing career has ended.

Dimension	Definition	Sub-dimension	Definition
Athletic performance	An athlete's sport performance related features	Athletic expertise	An athlete's individual achievement and athletic capability (winning, skills, proficiency in their sport)
		Competition style	An athlete's specific characteristics of his/her performance in a competition
		Sportsmanship	An athlete's virtuous behavior that people have determined is appropriate (fair play, respect for the game, integrity)
Attractive appearance	An athlete's attractive external appearance	Rivalry	An athlete's competitive relationship with other athletes
		Physical attractiveness	An athlete's physical qualities and characteristics that spectators find esthetically pleasing
		Symbol	An athlete's attractive personal style and trademark
Marketable lifestyle	An athlete's off-field marketable features	Body fitness	An athlete's body fitness in his/her sport
		Life story	An appealing, interesting off-field life story that includes a message and reflects the athlete's personal value
		Role model	An athlete's ethical behavior that society has determined is worth emulating
		Relationship effort	An athlete's positive attitude toward interaction with fans, spectators, sponsors and media

(Arai, Ko and Ross, Branding athletes: Exploration and conceptualization of athlete brand image 2014, page 101)

As seen in the table above, the MABI model is broadly divided into three dimensions which are Athletic Performance, Attractive Appearance and Marketable Lifestyle. Each of these dimensions are further divided into sub categories adopted from endorsement and sports team brand association research. The methodology used to identify the element of Athletic Expertise, along with the other dimensions of the MABI model will be elaborated on in the methods section of this thesis.

- **Athletic Performance:** In this model, the athletic performance is defined as the associations related to an athlete's sports performance. A star player of a team is a key factor in the development of brand equity. Through a combination of certain star player qualities, athletes are often brands of their own that are capable of transferring value from their personal identity. A star player that possesses strong on field characteristics and are able to combine this with off field characteristics, raises the recognition for the team amongst consumers (Pifer, et al. 2015). These on field characteristics that are identifiable to fans, classified as Athletic Performance are further made up of four sub dimensions in the MABI model:
 - **Athletic Expertise:** Athletic expertise put simply, refers to an athlete's capabilities that play a role in them being proficient in their sport. As a sport fan, it is natural to be drawn towards an athlete who exhibits competence and skills that make them the best in their sport. Arai, Ko and Ross (2014) highlights the importance of developing an athlete brand that is independent of winning factor. No matter how long the winning run continues, the possibility of an eventual loss is unavoidable. Rafael Nadal is a prominent name in the sport of Tennis and one immediately associates his name with success and athletic expertise. Indeed, this can be highlighted in the 81-game win streak on the clay court, which is considered his expertise. Between 2005 and 2007, Nadal had won 81 games until he faced Roger Federer on a clay court but finished on the losing side, inevitably ending his win streak (ATP Tour 2020). This is a good example of how success is a valuable factor in creating brand associations and equity. Such extraordinary records that highlight the expertise of the athlete in their sport, goes a long way in creating the association of the competitiveness of their brand.
 - **Competition Style:** This refers to specific traits or a playing style that is unique to a particular athlete. In football, when you say fancy tricks or flicks, your mind immediately relates those traits to Ronaldinho who was known for his skillful style of play. Michael Jordan and his signature fade jump shot that is easily recognizable to anyone who follows the NBA. In fact, Jordan is an excellent example of a unique, identifiable competition

style that is a key element of his branding. Known for his legendary slam dunk where he seemed to defy gravity, his 'hang-time', gave him a godlike reputation amongst his fans. By tuning into this mythology, Nike developed a product line of Air Jordan sports shoes (Kellner 2001) which brought in a revenue of 3.1 billion dollars at end of the 2019 fiscal year (Badenhausen 2020). A sense of identification to a clear, unique style of play leads to the development of loyalty to that particular team/athlete, and this is seen in the valuation of the Air Jordan brand.

- Sportsmanship: Sportsmanship refers to a tendency towards respecting the sport environment, the rules and its participants (coaches, teammates, referees, officials and opponents), while avoiding a negative 'win at all costs' approach to the competition (Vallerand, Pelletier and Brière 1996). In their conceptualization of an athlete brand image, Arai, Ko and Ross (2014) refer to sportsmanship as virtuous behavior exhibited by an athlete that is deemed appropriate by people who follow the sport. Fair play is something that is promoted in all sport and the International Fair Play Committee put forth certain fundamental values, namely; Fair competition, respect, friendship, team spirit, equality, sport without doping, respect for written and unwritten rules such as integrity, solidarity, tolerance, care, excellence and joy (International Fair Play Committee). These values in sport are capable of giving hope, pride and identity which in turn unites people. Such values can contribute towards building a trustworthy athlete brand and attract consumer trust. In 2012, Lazio lost 3-0 to Napoli but the limelight was on German player Miroslav Klose who scored early on in the game. After scoring, he went to the referee and admitted that he had used his hand in scoring the goal, which of course is against the rules of football, and thus the goal was reversed (Gautam 2015). This behavior of sportsmanship earned him plaudits from fans and other athletes alike, with then FIFA president Sepp Blatter praising him on social media.
- Rivalry: Put simply, rivalry refers to an athlete's competitive relationship with other athletes. For an athlete brand, rivalry allows fans to develop a clear understanding of the identity of the athlete and their brand. Rivalry

between athletes and teams can affect a fan's consumption of the sporting event in terms of attending a live game, willingness to spend on tickets and perception of branded merchandise (Havard and Dalakas 2017). Anyone who remotely follows football, is aware of the rivalry between Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo. It could be argued that this rivalry is a creation of the media, but both players have commented in interviews on how the other motivates them to perform better. This rivalry is well received by fans of both sides as they could possibly witness a heightened level of performance by both players.

- **Attractive Appearance:** This dimension refers to an athlete's attractive external appearance, defined by physical attractiveness, symbol and body fitness (Arai, Ko and Ross 2014). Seiler and Kucza (2017) found that attractiveness positively influences a brand when choosing a celebrity endorser. This dimension acts as a trademark for athlete brands as attractiveness is a distinctive feature of the athlete that the public can recognize or appreciate. When thinking of popular brands, consumers immediately associate that brand with a symbol or a color that represents the brand and its products. Sports brands are a good example of this trademark representation; Nike with its signature 'swoosh' mark or Adidas with their signature three stripes. Similarly, when considering an athlete as a brand there are certain identifying trademarks that form an association in the mind of the consumer. For example, Cristiano Ronaldo is an athlete known for his incredible physique and fitness levels which he often shows off on social media while promoting his personal brand. The attractive appearance is further divided into three factors that work as a 'trademark' for athlete brands.
 - **Physical Attractiveness:** The concept of physical attractiveness is subjective when considering the common phrase, 'Beauty lies in the eye of the beholder'. While most research on physical attractiveness concentrates on facial cues, it is not the only determinant of a person's physical attractiveness (Joseph 1982). This works in favor of athletes as a large chunk of their appeal is owing to their physical fitness which is a result of the sport they play. This will further be discussed under the body fitness sub-dimension. However, physical attractiveness does play a role in the

branding of athlete's as seen in the case of David Beckham, who is probably a prime example of this dimension. While there may be debates on just how successful he was as a footballer, there is no doubt that he is an athlete who has capitalized on his persona as an English, tall, lean, skillful athlete to develop himself into a brand (Vincent, Hill and Lee 2009) or multitude of brands that continue to bring in earnings long after his retirement from the sport.

- **Symbol:** This refers to an athlete's personal style, fashion or unique feature that expresses their personality or character. On the pitch, athletes represent their team in the team kit. Even here some of them tend to express their individuality in minor fashion. Maybe a wrist band or personalized boots. Hairstyle and tattoos are the most prominent way and athlete expresses their individuality/personality. Paul Pogba of Manchester United is known for his extravagant hairstyles; David Beckham, throughout his career was known for his fashion sense outside the pitch and various hairstyles; not to mention his body covered in tattoos, each of which represent something to him. These elements set them apart from the team and their teammates and make them easily identifiable outside of the sport, which could go a long way in leveraging that identification and symbol to grow their brand.

- **Body Fitness:** This attribute refers to the physical fitness of an athlete. As mentioned under the physical attractiveness attribute, an individual's attractiveness is not entirely dependent on facial cues. As an athlete, a large portion of their appeal is down to their physical fitness as this could symbolize the relationship between body image and self-esteem. W.C.Lau, W.L.Cheung and B.Ransdell (2008) found that appearance and strength do have a direct effect on self-concept (descriptors an individual attaches to themselves related to physical attributes). As mentioned earlier, Cristiano Ronaldo is an athlete known for his incredible physique and this is something that is prominent on his social media posts when promoting his personal brand. An association with this brand could be seen as a symbol or desire to possess a body image perceived as positive by society.

- **Marketable Lifestyle:** This dimension pertains to the athlete's life off the pitch. Many athletes have certain aspects of their life away from their sport that appeal to the fans. With the reach of modern media, an athlete's lifestyle outside of sport is accessible to nearly everyone and often marketed more than their performance on the pitch. Often stories of their humble beginnings are highlighted and the role they have in their community as a result of their fame are scrutinized by the media. This could be because people are able to better relate with everyday actions better than extraordinary performances on the pitch. The right management of these actions can lead to creating a respectable image and developing the athlete as a role model for the public (Constantinescu 2016). Once again, David Beckham's lifestyle away from the pitch is an example of how this is a factor in his global stardom. (Vincent, Hill and Lee 2009). This is prominently portrayed on social media, a loving father and adoring husband to former Spice Girls music star, Victoria 'Posh Spice' Beckham, individualistic fashion sense and so on. While other athletes may not have a similar lifestyle, most athletes have a very recognizable lifestyle off the pitch that are further divided into the attributes: life story, role model and relationship effort.
 - **Life Story:** This refers to an interesting off-field life story of an athlete that was possibly a defining moment in their life. It is not uncommon to hear the rags to riches stories of athletes, who made their way to the top while battling obstacles many of us could not fathom. Take Sadio Mane of Liverpool for example. His family had to sell their produce from the farms to be able to afford to send him to the nearest town. Even then he went to trials with worn out boots and shorts. Despite the criticism and setbacks, he put his head down and worked to get to the level he is at now. By leveraging his earnings and fame, he constantly gives back to his community and spends his time in the off season contributing towards the development of his community back in Senegal. Stories such as this provide consumers with a connection to the athletes and this connection is a critical association for athlete brands (Arai, Ko and Ross 2014).
 - **Role Model:** This refers to an athlete's ethical behavior related to their participation and contribution to society, that the society deems to be worth

emulating (Arai, Ko and Ross 2014). In recent times, the most prominent example of an athlete being a role model is Marcus Rashford of Manchester United. When the UK went into lockdown due to the COVID pandemic, it also meant the cancellation of free school meals for children from low-income backgrounds among other things. Drawing on his own experiences and struggles from childhood, he sent multiple letters to the government as well as using his social media presence to draw attention to the issue; eventually resulting in the decision being reversed. He has continued to work towards ensuring no child goes hungry and as he so rightfully says, “When you come from a place of struggle and pain, it becomes your drive and motivation” (Varley 2020). Actions such as this lend credibility to the athlete and their status as a role model allows for a bigger, more impactful reach to their audience.

- Relationship Effort: This refers to an athlete’s interactions with their fans. By developing this aspect, athletes can develop fan attachment which could play a lasting role when it comes to consumer loyalty towards the athlete brand. With the growing reach of social media, athletes often take the time out of their personal lives to reach out to fans for a conversation. Social media is full heartwarming videos of athlete’s surprising fans via video conferencing software like Zoom, or even something as simple as replying to a comment or request posted by fans on the platform. Considering the lockdown during the COVID pandemic, more clubs and athletes have used these platforms and software to stay connected with their fans through competitions and giveaways.

2.2 Development of contextual factors

The dimensions elaborated on above, theoretically form the base to build any athlete brand. However, other contextual factors could possibly influence the growth and success/failure of these brands. Athletes need to leverage these contextual factors when building their brand so as maximize the potential returns, which could serve them well long after their career has ended.

People belong to different groups based on multiple factors such as nationality, ethnicity, age, income level and many such factors which comprises of a culture. This culture differs from country to country and any business selling to consumers from different cultural backgrounds need to understand these differences. By doing so, it allows them to gain a competitive advantage by altering their products and services to operate more efficiently (Daniels, Radebaugh and Sullivan 2013). An athlete who builds their brand in the country where they ply their trade is also subject to these cultural factors, as it is essentially a business with a product; the product being the marketability of the athlete. Thus, it becomes important for the athlete brand to take into account these cultural factors when promoting their brand in the country where they play. Ronaldo has played for clubs in four different countries, each with their own cultural differences and this is something he would have considered when promoting his personal brand in these countries. For example, any posts relating to his current team (Juventus, Italy) would play to cultural ethos of the Italians. It could be something as simple as writing out a caption accompanying the post, in Italian rather than another language. To create a brand strategy given the diversity of these cultures, it becomes complicated to create the link between brand identification and image as most cultural patterns and segments may not be immediately visible to an outsider. While these patterns may appear as barriers to the strategy of the brand, they also provide a new set of marketing segments and opportunities for the brand (Krueger and Nandan 2008). By capitalizing on his already existing fame, Ronaldo has already made moves to develop his brand identity in Italy through a partnership with Lapo Elkann Eyewear (an Italian brand) to create a collection of sunglasses under his world famous CR7 brand (BeSoccer 2020). By doing so, he is ‘piggybacking’ on an established Italian brand in order to open up the CR7 brand for the Italian market, thus securing a new market in which to further develop his brand identity.

When discussing athletes who move abroad to develop their professional careers, there are numerous other factors that influence their performances in the new country/league. Often athletes are leaving behind everything they are familiar with such as the way of life, family, friends etc. in order to adapt to a new country and culture when they make these moves. This is particularly challenging when the athlete in question is young and moving to join a foreign club at the academy level. As discussed earlier, a successful playing career is an important factor when it comes to establishing a successful brand. When taking into account the contextual factor of adapting to a new culture and environment as a

result of a move, it is not uncommon for an athlete(s) to struggle to adapt to this new culture. This could impact their performances and thus be detrimental to the value of their athlete brand. Egilsson and Dolles (2017) found that while players face a culture shock when moving to a new environment, they do not receive the same level of support for non-athletic dimensions (psychosocial and psychological) as they do for their athletic dimensions (physical condition and technical ability). The development of a young players requires a holistic balance of physical, technical and psychological aspects which is key throughout their career as they make moves to different leagues and countries to develop into a better player. These players were found to rely heavily on coping mechanisms and social support from friends and family back in their home country as their primary source of support and these coping strategies enable the successful transition for young athletes who make different moves throughout their career.

Right at the start of any young athlete's career i.e., the foundation stage (6-12 years) they transition through multiple stages; football academy (12-16 years), post academy (16-19 years), A-Team (>19 years) and finally other professional clubs. Many athletes often choose to move abroad as early as possible and this could be due to multiple reason such as, availability of better facilities and infrastructure or the possibility of getting more playing time for the team. These athletes need to cope with the different mental demands of making such moves and this is often harder on the younger athletes. Only if the transition between each stage is successful, can the athlete hope to have a successful career, which in turn provides them with the foundation to build a successful athlete brand. Thus, when looking into the athlete brand, it is important to consider these contextual factors (stages of career and country they move to) that show how the athlete has successfully adapted to a new country and culture.

In order for an athlete to develop their brand value to the stage that it can give them financial support at the end of their career, there needs to be groundwork laid out. An athlete who is just starting their career, earning more money per week than most people make in a year, needs to manage their finances efficiently. In 2019, Jadon Sancho (19) of Borussia Dortmund was the highest paid teenager in world football, making 190000 pounds per week (90 min 2019). What is interesting is that Sancho, who is an English national has risen to this level of fame by playing for Borussia Dortmund in Germany. He has been able to build his personal brand by being one of the key players in a German

team, while also being highly regarded in his home country. Sancho left England for Germany in search of more playing time and has made the most of the opportunity provided by Dortmund. It is a sign that he has managed to cope well with the mental demands of making this move, either through the support of the club, or his personal network or a mix of both. If and when he does choose to return to England, he will likely find it easier to establish his brand owing to his English roots and the fact that he has an already established identity and standard in a different country. This would allow him to brand himself across multiple countries and cultures should he move to a different country later on in his career, much like other big names such as Beckham, Ronaldo etc. This is clear sign of how money has changed football and youngsters nowadays are making more money at a young age than, prime players did towards the peak of their careers; say 30 years ago. Thus, it becomes even more important for them to make the right decisions financially so that they do not struggle financially when their careers reach the end.

This illustrates the globalization of sport and football in particular where leagues attract players from all over the world and the impact these players can have on the team and league (Kunkel, et al. 2020). Athletes, much like sport teams and brands, have to adapt and modify their brands as they do not have an existing loyal fan base in the country they move to. It is important for them to understand what fans expect and use this information to promote long term relationships with them. By doing so, they will be able to develop a strong brand which is well positioned for long term sustainable growth (Daniels, Kunkel and Karg 2019).

Keeping these contextual factors in mind, this research will study the brand of athletes who are in different stages of their career. One who is approaching the end of his career and has played in different countries and leagues, adapting successfully to each league. The other is at the start of his career, and has never played in a different league but continues to represent his boyhood club where he has transitioned from the foundation stage to the A-team.

2.3 Social media and branding

The internet is a vast source of content for us as consumers. The constant evolution of technology means that nearly everyone on the planet has access to the content available on the internet. The use of the internet has moved from mere consumption of content to more diverse options of sharing, modifying and discussing said content. This is referred to as the social media phenomenon. This phenomenon is not limited to individuals and has expanded to include organizations from multiple industries as well. The level of exposure of social media, presents these organizations and individuals with the opportunity to leverage this phenomenon in enhancing their reputation (Kietzmann, et al. 2011)

With the rise in social media, corporate communication has been democratized in the sense that the communication about brands happens with or without the permission of the firms/brands. This phenomenon is not limited to individuals and has expanded to include organizations from multiple industries as well. The level of exposure of social media, presents these organizations and individuals with the opportunity to leverage this phenomenon in enhancing their reputation.

Social media has grown to become a key component of our daily lives such that nearly everyone has an online presence. Considering this development, more businesses and brands have taken the initiative in using social media to communicate with the consumers and generate revenue through online tools (Filo, Lock and Karg 2015).

There is a diverse ecology of social media sites which vary in terms of scope and functionality. Facebook for the general masses, LinkedIn for professional networks. Media sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr to share videos and photos. Blogs have also risen in popularity due to the ease in creating and maintaining them. It is a very important source of public opinion and allows users to discuss and share their opinions with others (Kietzmann, et al. 2011)

With the evolution of the sport industry into a business of its own, it is quite common to see most, if not all, sport teams and organizations with a social media presence of their own. This presence allows them to expand their club as a brand in a global market.

However, many teams join social networks without a clear strategy which could result in failure.

Appropriately using these social networks as a marketing tool can allow the teams to improve their brand image and build customer loyalty (Miranda, et al. 2014). While it is more or less certain that fans will not change their allegiances, clubs need to find the right balance between the core brand values expected by domestic fans and the financial benefits of social media branding (Parganas, Anagnostopoulos and Chadwick 2015).

Brand associations imply what the brand means to a consumer and one of the categories of this association are the brand attributes, which can be defined as descriptive features that characterize a product or a service (Keller 1993). These attributes are divided into product related and non-product related. Product related attributes are those attributes that play a key role in performing the primary product or service of the organization, whereas non-product related attributes are those which are external aspects relating to the purchase and consumption of the product (Keller 1993). In the context of a football club, the primary product is the actual game of football that is played on the pitch. Viewing these games in the stadium or on television or other media sources is the product that is purchased by the consumer, i.e., the fans. Non-product related attributes could be other aspects of the club such as the logo of the team, the jersey, stadium, management of the team and so on.

Many professional athletes achieve individual celebrity status among fans due to which they evolve into human brands, and improve the sales of products associated with their names. Once a consumer identifies themselves with an athlete, they are more likely to develop an emotional attachment to the athlete and thereby more inclined to purchase merchandise related to that particular athlete and their team. This presents sport marketers and teams with the opportunity to develop strategies to promote products related to well recognized athletes within their teams; and perhaps even increase team related spectatorship (Carlson and Donavan 2013).

Martinus and Chaniago (2017) found that users choose to use Instagram to form a brand image because they can communicate publicly and directly, thus making it an ideal platform to connect with consumers and target consumers. Instagram's biggest attraction is casual simplicity, which allows users to communicate via images. This is a powerful form

of communication as it leaves these images open to interpretation by the viewers (Verma 2017). The interpretation of the meaning behind these images can be based on individual perspective and there needs to be a balance between the image posted and the caption that accompanies it. As such, athletes posting images on Instagram can also choose to write a caption accompanying the image which may convey the true nature or intent of the message. This may also provide more context or add subtext to the message being shared. Yet, the fact is that the image is the primary form of communication on this platform. Anagnostopoulos, et al. (2018) found that Instagram, and social media in general, is an important tool through which brands can be built and accentuated. The use of images and the opportunity to initiate dialogues is a way to build customer engagement and enliven the brand.

2.4 Athlete brand

Using athletes in marketing is a relatively newer form of advertising when compared to traditional ways. Athlete endorsements have changed in various ways but they still have the same objectives. Linking a brand to a particular athlete allows the product to bask in the halo effect of the endorser, much like the ‘BIRG’-ing (Basking In Reflected Glory) of a sports fan

This link between the athlete and the brand could be descriptive words that describe the product, the company founder's family name or the geographic origin of the product. Numerical marks also may be descriptive if they describe product attributes or performance (Petty 2008).

Cristiano Ronaldo's iconic brand ‘CR7’, a combination of his initials and his jersey number is a good example of this. Consumers associate CR7 with the quality and performance of Cristiano who is arguably the best football player on the planet. This implicitly asserts that such individuals are no longer just “on-field” performers, they are also valuable “off-field” commodities (Green 2016).

By using the reach of social media, athletes can capitalize and increase the visibility of their personal brands. Ronaldo has in excess of 2400 posts and Beckham has around 1000 (and counting) on Instagram. This frequent posting and sharing on the social media

platform ensure that their personal brand is at the forefront of the public's mind (Brizzo 2019).

Combined with the modern media culture, it is not only what athletes produce in terms of winning or losing, but how they package this winning or losing as a complete brand. Strategic branding based on marketing theory is now truly needed for athletes, and the conceptual model used in this study will help to provide an understanding of what factors make strong athlete brands, and help sport marketers to further understand strategies in branding athletes.

3.0 Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology used in the research. There is a discussion and reasoning behind the selection of a qualitative content analysis and detailed steps on how the data was collected in the context of both on and off season. There is a justification provided for the social media platform used (Instagram) and the athletes selected (Cristiano Ronaldo and Marcus Rashford) for this research. The chapter ends with the explanation on what qualifies an Instagram post to be classified under a particular dimension of the Model of Athlete Brand Image (MABI).

3.1 Research approach

The study will adopt an approach similar to the social media branding study conducted by Parganas, Anagnostopoulos and Chadwick (2015). Through a qualitative content analysis of the athlete's social media posts, each post will be classified under the various attributes presented in the MABI model. Qualitative content analysis examines the relationship between the text and its likely audience meaning, recognizing that media texts are polysemic (Macnamara 2005) – i.e., open to multiple different meanings to different readers – and tries to determine the likely meaning of texts to audiences. It pays attention to audience, media and contextual factors – not simply the text.

Content analysis is defined as making replicable and valid texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use (Krippendorff 2004). These texts are not necessarily restricting content analysis to written material as other meaningful matter indicates that works of art, images, sounds, signs etc. can be considered as texts as long as they convey

meaning about a phenomenon, outside of what can be sense or observed. This text/meaningful matter means something to the person who has created it with the intention of conveying that message to an outsider, and this meaning cannot be ignored. An athlete's social media account is a channel for these texts which are created by the athlete, to convey a message to their followers, fans, teams, sponsors etc. These texts contain information that allows the reader to narrow the range of possible interpretations and by analyzing them, it is possible to infer an answer to the research question through a systematic, informed method of content analysis.

This research specifically employs a deductive category application form of content analysis wherein, there is a prior formulated, theoretical framework developed to which the text being analyzed is coded. Each category is defined with examples and codes which determines the circumstances under which a piece of text can be put under a specific category (Mayring 2000). Mayring also provides a step model of the steps involved in deductive category application which will be applied to this particular research. The steps involve the formulation of a research question at the beginning, which is what the researcher is attempting to answer via a deductive category application. This is followed by a theoretical definition of the main 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 text. Once the text in the same is coded into the relevant categories and a completion of coding reliability checks, the results are interpreted to draw conclusions which will provide an answer to the research question.

As the sample for this research will be the Instagram posts of football players, this approach is well suited for the analysis of these posts. By analyzing the content of the text and coding them into the theoretically developed framework of the Model of Athlete Brand Image, the research aims to interpret the meaning behind the texts and classify them in the most appropriate category of the framework.

The information was collected in an excel sheet. The link to each post was added to the first column, with subsequent information regarding the post added to other columns under the following headers:

- Description: What the post shows or contains
- Date: When it was uploaded
- Type of content: Whether it is an image or a video
- MABI Sub Dimension: Which of the 10 sub dimensions the post could be classified into
- MABI Dimension: Which of the 3 main dimensions does the selected sub dimension fall under
- Likes: How many people have liked the post
- Brand Partnership: Whether the post shows a partnership with a brand/product

3.2 Choice of social media platform

Smith and Sanderson (2015) found that athletes chose to use Instagram to portray their personal lives in a visual manner, in addition to their corporate relationships, training and commitment levels. While it is possible that these posts are strategically showcased while adhering to social media policies imposed by coaches, team owners etc. it is unclear whether their Instagram feeds are completely aimed at self-presentation or if there is an element of brand management involved. Here, the argument could be made that the athletes are brands themselves, because of which even self-representation on Instagram can be considered a form of brand management.

Instagram was chosen as the platform to collect social media data for the athletes, owing to its growing popularity among all other social media platforms. Instagram is a social media platform that allows users to share images, videos online as well as like, comment and share media uploaded by other users (Frommer 2010). It has grown into a multi-faceted tool that provides users with the resources to build and promote their brand just through their phones. Being a visual and simple mobile application, it attracts more of the newer generations, when compared to other social media platforms. There are over a billion monthly active users on this mobile platform and despite the engagement level of 84 percent coming second to Facebook, Instagram holds a significant advantage over Facebook despite having lesser users. Facebook's newsfeed algorithm makes it complicated for brands and advertisers (10 million) to be seen and are often lost among countless other posts, whereas Instagram has a greater scope of visibility with lesser

competition (2 million). Instagram also has a far greater user engagement rate (59 percent) than any other platform despite having fewer users and their referral traffic results in an average order value of 65 dollars when compared to Facebook, which is the next highest at 58.95 dollars (Sharma N.D.). Most organizations have an account on Instagram and sport teams and athletes are no exception. Sport teams primarily use Instagram to share eye catching media such videos and images, depicting their teams, players, coaches etc. to their many followers. It is also used to showcase the branding of the team. Instagram has also been used by the researcher who has experienced first-hand, the branding of athletes on this platform.

These statistics clearly highlight the advantage Instagram holds over other social media platforms as a tool for advertising and promoting a brand, thus making it the perfect platform to analyze the data for an athlete brand.

3.3 Choice of athletes for data gathering

Athletes are some of the most followed individuals on Instagram. Ronaldo is the most followed athlete on Instagram with over 270 million followers. While the platform has helped them build a relationship with fans, Instagram provides these athletes with a platform to promote their preferred brands to this audience. This in turn allows them to capitalize on their fame and ability and use Instagram to build their personal brand and increase its value. To provide some context to this statement, in June 2019 the average media value of one post by Cristiano Ronaldo was a little over 700000 euros (Tankovska 2021) and his average net worth stands at approximately 422 million euros (Schuller 2020).

Two weeks before Cristiano Ronaldo signed for Juventus in 2018, the club had increased the cost of their season tickets by an average of 30%. This was met by the displeasure of the fans. However, after the signing of Ronaldo, the club sold all 29300 season tickets despite the 30% hike; an increase of 50% in comparison to the previous season. There was also a projected achievable target of 98 million euros in matchday ticket sales for 3 different competitions which was a 40% increase from the previous season (Indianregista 2018).

For a high-profile athlete like Ronaldo to influence revenues in this manner just by moving from Real Madrid (Spain) to Juventus (Italy), it shows the level of support he has from his fans. This also leads to creation of new fans who follow the team that he has joined.

Considering he is a Portuguese national, to have played in Portugal, England, Madrid and now Italy, it is safe to assume that as his career has gone from country to country; strength to strength, he has also acquired new fans in each of these countries as well. At the time of his move to Italy, he gained 2 million new followers within a fortnight of the transfer being made official. As for the impact it had on Juventus, they gained more than 400000 followers on Twitter, 400000 followers on Facebook and in excess of 1.4 million followers on Instagram (ESPN 2018). These instances clearly highlight the off-field impact that an athlete of Ronaldo's stature can have.

Cristiano Ronaldo's brand was valued at 24.5 million euros in 2011, which rose to 55 million by 2015 (As.com 2017). According to Forbes (2020), he earned close to 88.7 million euros in 2019/20 through a combination of his salary and endorsements. It is evident that Ronaldo has expanded his brand in recent years, as he approaches the end of his career as a football player. From CR7 branded clothing lines, fragrances, and hotels to partnerships for gyms and hair transplant clinics (Schuller 2020); these earnings continue to grow while he continues to deliver on the pitch. As of 2021, his net worth stands at almost 420 million euros (Western 2021). A commercial career such as this might not always be accessible for every athlete and depends on the strength of their brand equity prior to the end of their career. By investing in brand building during the course of their career, an athlete can prolong the life cycle of their brand and thus have the opportunity to generate more commercial revenues so as to secure their future after their retirement (Schweizer and Dietl 2015). At the age of 36, Ronaldo is nearing the end of his career and thus it makes sense to diversify his investments and brand value so as to secure the financial future of him and his family when he eventually decides to call it a day.

Marcus Rashford, a player likened to Ronaldo by fans of Manchester United owing to similar playing styles, has a little over 9.9 million followers on Instagram (Socialinsider 2021). At the age of 23, Rashford is estimated to be worth approximately 65 million euros (McMahon 2021). Rashford has also been very methodical in terms of cultivating and building his brand image as seen by his forays into the American market. He is a young athlete earning a large wage by playing football, and could be forgiven for having his head

turned by money. Instead, he has chosen to simultaneously invest in multiple avenues so as to secure the financial future of his family. A good example of this is his investment in real estate in England. Considering the early stage of his career and the fact that he has had access to the platform much before it became a social media powerhouse, there is every possibility that Rashford could come close or maybe even surpass Ronaldo by the time he reaches the twilight of his career.

In a time where Manchester United have been struggling to replicate the success of their past, Rashford has managed to elevate his brand without the on-pitch success that others are reliant on. While his performances have been far from poor, he has discovered a purpose beyond football, by leveraging his status as a footballer to help the local community. By drawing on his experiences of food poverty as a child, Rashford has positioned himself around this purpose and reignited the connection between the club and the community. He has found a place in the hearts of the nation by aligning his purpose with his national identity and a relevant issue to create an impact. So much so that he has the backing of local business where the government has refused to back down. He has even managed to unite the public without resorting to driving an argument with the government, but rather calling on the public to keep their political affiliations aside and focus on the true need; helping the kids. It has enabled a huge increase in the awareness of his brand and creating positive associations by addressing a relevant need in the community. This is a sign of things to come as it is a purpose that can shape the direction and drive the growth of his brand in the future (Sangha 2020).

Owing to his growing popularity, Rashford has recently had partnerships with Burberry as a part of their campaign to support youth initiatives and underprivileged kids in addition to partnerships with Nike, Gucci, Cool Caps and so on (Bretland 2021). By leveraging the positivity associated with his brand, Rashford has also registered his name as a brand in the United States through a partnership with New York based agency, Roc Nation. This is seen as a first step in what could be a future brand for production sportswear, streetwear, body care, cosmetics etc. Considering his recent work with Nike and Burberry, the possibilities are endless (NSS Sports 2020).

Similarities have been drawn by the fans, between Rashford and Ronaldo in terms of their playing style and their importance to Manchester United. While Rashford has begun his branding efforts, it remains to be seen if he can reach the levels of Cristiano Ronaldo.

Through a balanced approach to branding and partnerships, while keeping the focus on his main goal of campaigning for underprivileged kids, Rashford has set himself up to be a role model for the next generation in the years to come. An English national, his efforts to help his local community are at the forefront of any action he takes, making him a national icon. However, he has been recognized for these efforts all over the world and this could be an opportunity for him to expand his campaign to similar causes in other regions by establishing partnerships (like Roc Nation in USA), should he choose to play his football in another country.

For the purpose of this research, the Instagram feed for Cristiano Ronaldo (Juventus and Portugal) and Marcus Rashford (Manchester United and England) will be analyzed and interpreted by using the MABI model. Each post in the sample will be assigned to one of the subdimensions in the model. Considering the fact that Rashford and Ronaldo are at different stages of their career, it will be interesting to see if there are any differences in terms of the Athlete Brand Image dimensions present on their social media platforms. As already mentioned above, Ronaldo has expanded his brand into multiple products and services whereas, Rashford is not quite at that level, commercially. This could be a consequence of the different stages they are at in their playing career.

3.4 Data collection

Data for this research will consist of Instagram posts, uploaded on the pages of Marcus Rashford (@marcusrashford) and Cristiano Ronaldo (@cristiano). These posts will be from date range of the ongoing 2020-2021 football season along with one month of off season, prior to the start of the 2020-21 season. In order to observe any potential differences between social media activity in the context of on season and off season, the sample size will consist of the following:

- 4 months' worth of posts during the on season for both Rashford and Ronaldo
- 1 months' worth of posts during the off season for both Rashford and Ronaldo

A regular season of football, especially most domestic European leagues, begin in August with an end sometime in May. However, in 2020 these timelines were extended and altered to account for the forced break due to lockdowns in March 2020.

Juventus played their last game of the 2019-20 season on August 7th, 2020. A second leg against Olympique Lyonnais (France) in the round of 16 of the UEFA Champions League. This was their last competitive game of the season as they did not qualify for the next stage of the competition. This was followed by a short break in the season, before they began the new season on September 20th, 2020. The sample for Ronaldo's post during the off season will be collected from August 8th, 2020 to September 8th 2020.

Manchester United played their last game of the 2019-20 season on August 16th, 2020. A Europa League semifinal against Spanish side, Sevilla FC. This was their last competitive game of the season as they did not qualify for the final. There was a short break before the new season began on 19th September, 2020. The sample for Rashford's post during the off season will be collected from August 17th, 2020 to September 17th 2020.

For samples during the on season, posts from Ronaldo and Rashford's accounts will be collected from December 1st, 2020 to March 31st, 2021. By this time, they will have approached the mid-season mark and be in the thick of multiple competitions and matches in the new season.

During the data collection process, there was a bit of overlap in the time period during the end of the off season and the beginning of the new season. This is attributed to the fact that end of the 2019-20 season was delayed due to the COVID pandemic and the lockdowns in these countries.

3.5 Codification system and examples

This section will describe the reasoning and decision-making process involved in categorizing the posts into the sub dimensions of the MABI model.

The reason and criteria behind how each post is classified into sub dimensions of the MABI model are explained below.

Firstly, the contents of the image/video that is uploaded will be analyzed and matched to the closest related dimension. Attention is paid to the content of the image/video while interpreting the meaning of the caption posted along with it, to provide a more holistic interpretation of the intent behind the post. Considering Ronaldo plays in Italy and represents Portugal, during the international fixtures, captions for the posts are in English, Italian and Portuguese. Wherever applicable, google translate has been used to translate the caption to English to provide context in this research.

3.5.1 Athletic performance

Content that describes or represents an athlete's sport performance related features with the sub dimensions, athletic expertise, competition style, sportsmanship and rivalry.

Athletic expertise: Though this dimension refers to the individual expertise and achievements of the athlete, posts regarding the results of a team such celebrating a victory or rallying the team to perform better in the next game will be classified here. This is owing to the role the athlete has played in the result secured by the team. Posts celebrating trophies and individual awards also fall under this sub dimension.



Figure 1: Example of Athletic Expertise (Source: @cristiano)

Competition Style: These are specific characteristics such as a recognizable feature of the athlete, whether it is their playing style, training efforts etc., that make them the player that they are. Keeping this in mind, posts showing the athletes in training are categorized under competition style. The reasoning behind this is that, the training ground is where the athletes develop and hone their skills which lead to their specific playing style during an actual game.



Figure 2: Example of Competition Style (Source @cristiano)

Sportsmanship: These refer to the behavior of the athlete in relation to their sport, which is deemed virtuous or a sign of integrity, respect for the game. Posts which refer to respect for opponents, officials, competition etc., will fall under this sub dimension.

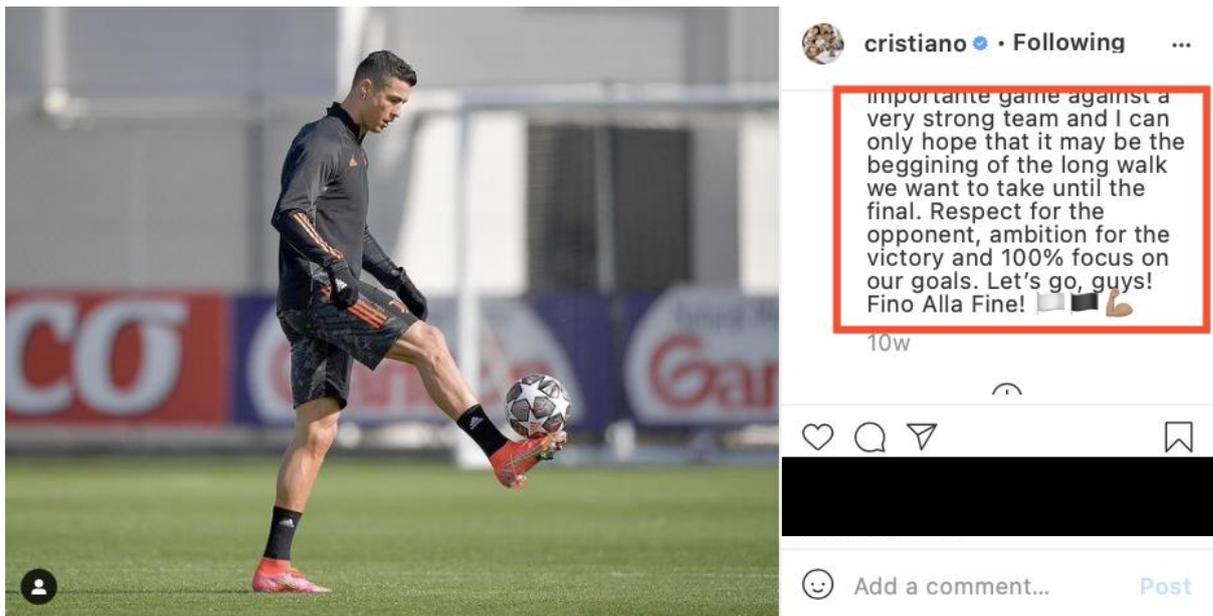


Figure 3: Example of Sportsmanship (Source: @cristiano)

Rivalry: This is any reference to an athlete’s competitive relationship with other athletes. The Messi vs Ronaldo rivalry is of course the most popular story in football and a good example of this dimension. Images/videos that recognize this and other similar rivalries will be categorized under this sub dimension. This dimension was nonexistent in the selected sample size and thus the example below is a visual representation of what a ‘rivalry’ related post could look like.



Figure 4: Example of Ronaldo vs Messi rivalry

(Source: "File: Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi - Portugal vs Argentina, 9th February 2011.jpg" by Fanny Schertzer is licensed with CC BY 3.0. To view a copy of this license, visit - <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>)

3.5.2 Attractive appearance

Content that displays an athlete's attractive external appearance. This is a challenging dimension owing to the fact that an attractive appearance is a subjective concept, however the posts have been categorized as per the sub dimensions to find the most appropriate match.

Physical Attractiveness: Any physical qualities and characteristics that a viewer finds esthetically pleasing. This is particularly challenging as most posts by the athlete often contain images of themselves and could be considered as an example of physical attractiveness. However, for the purpose of this research, posts along with their captions which make specific references to the concept of attractive appearances have been classified under this sub dimension.



Figure 5: Example of Physical attractiveness (Source: @cristiano)

Symbol: Attractive personal style or trademark that is signature to the athlete. Posts which refer to an easy recognizable style component or trademark that identifies an athlete are categorized under this sub dimension.

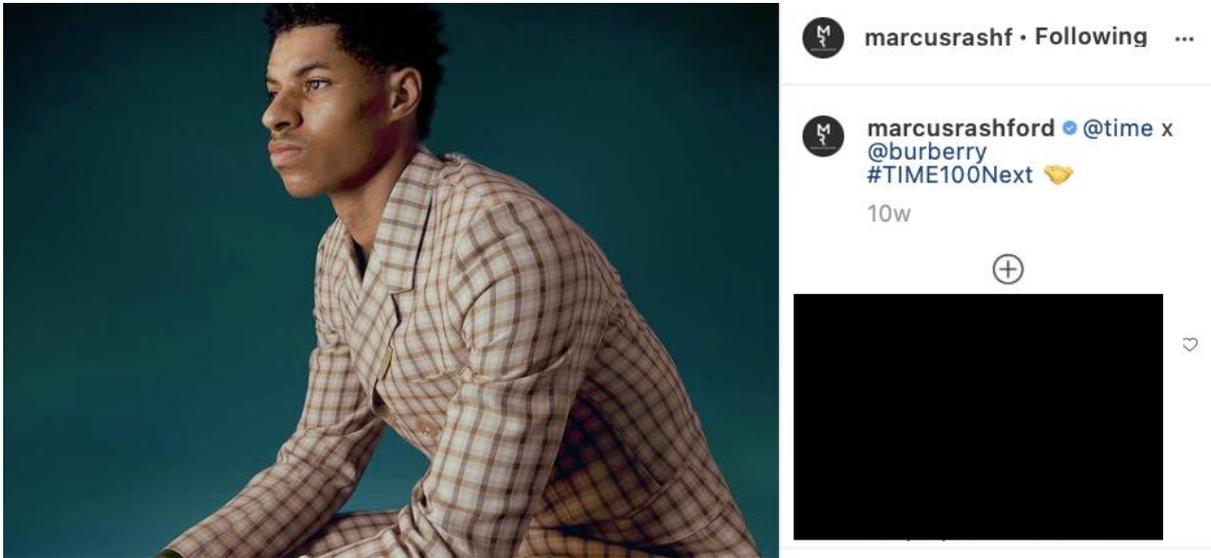


Figure 6: Example of Symbol (Source: @marcusrashford)

Body Fitness: Arguably the most important sub dimension of an athlete's attractiveness. Any elite athlete playing at the top level is assumed to be in good physical shape and possessing a physique that is often idolized by fans. Posts that refer specifically to maintaining physical fitness or achieving an 'idealistic' physique are categorized under this sub dimension.

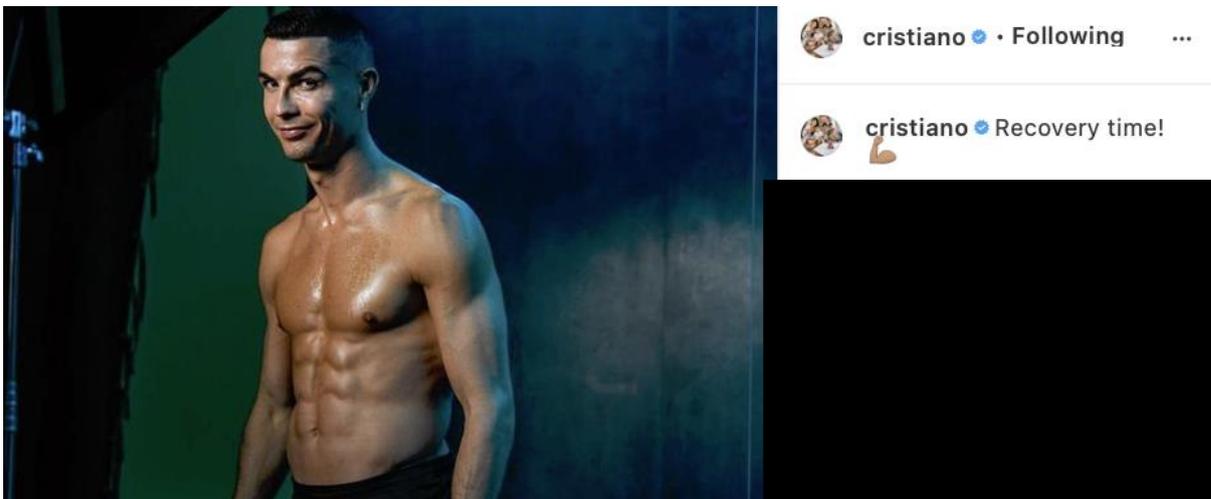


Figure 7: Example of Body fitness (Source: @cristiano)

3.5.3 Marketable lifestyle

Any content that alludes to the athlete's life away from the sport, such as relationship with family, friends, sponsors, fans etc. fall under this dimension. Many athletes put up images or videos showing their journey through life, their friends and family who have supported their career. All these aspects of their lifestyle shape their life story and values, and it is these marketable features that help the athletes develop a story to their brand.

Life Story: A life story of the athlete that reflects values and define their ethos. It is not uncommon for athletes have a rag to riches story, or individual(s) in their lives who have played an important role in getting them to where they are today. Sharing this on social media is common among athletes and such posts are classified under this sub dimension.



Figure 8: Example of Life story (Source: @marcusrashford)

Role Model: In society, athletes are looked upon as role models by their fans and spectators. As such, their actions are heavily scrutinized and this sub dimension covers ethical behavior in society that is deemed to be worth emulating. This could be an image/video of the athlete contributing to society in terms of supporting local organizations/communities and being recognized for it.



Figure 9: Example of Role model (Source: @marcusrashford)

Relationship effort: The effort and positive attitude adopted by an athlete when interacting with external stakeholders of the sport; such as fans, media, sponsors etc. Images/videos talking positively about a brand they endorse or attempting to initiate a discussion with fans could be categorized under this sub dimension. Even something as simple as putting up an image and asking fans to come up with creative captions about it can be interpreted as a relationship effort.



Figure 10: Example of Relationship effort (Source: @cristiano)

3.6 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 codes is applied to the data is a measure of the validity of the methodology and demonstrates the extent to which there is an agreement of the codes and 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 the methodology provided earlier. Considering the relatively smaller 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 reliability was 10 percent of the posts from each athlete, both on and off season. A total of 15 posts was analyzed and there was an agreement of 86.67 percent, on the categorization into the dimensions of the MABI model.

3.7 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: 393322) was registered on 1st March, 2021 and an approval was provided by the NSD on 13th April, 2021. 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.

4.0 Findings

This chapter illustrates the findings from the data sample. The findings show the number of posts under each dimension for both athletes. These numbers are illustrated in the charts for on and off season. There is also an illustration of the posts under each subdimension as well for both athletes, on and off season.

Figure 1. shows the number of posts for both athletes during the on season, broadly divided into the three main dimensions of the MABI model. What is evident is that Cristiano Ronaldo has many more posts on his Instagram profile for the selected timeframe, easily outnumbering the posts shared by Marcus Rashford.

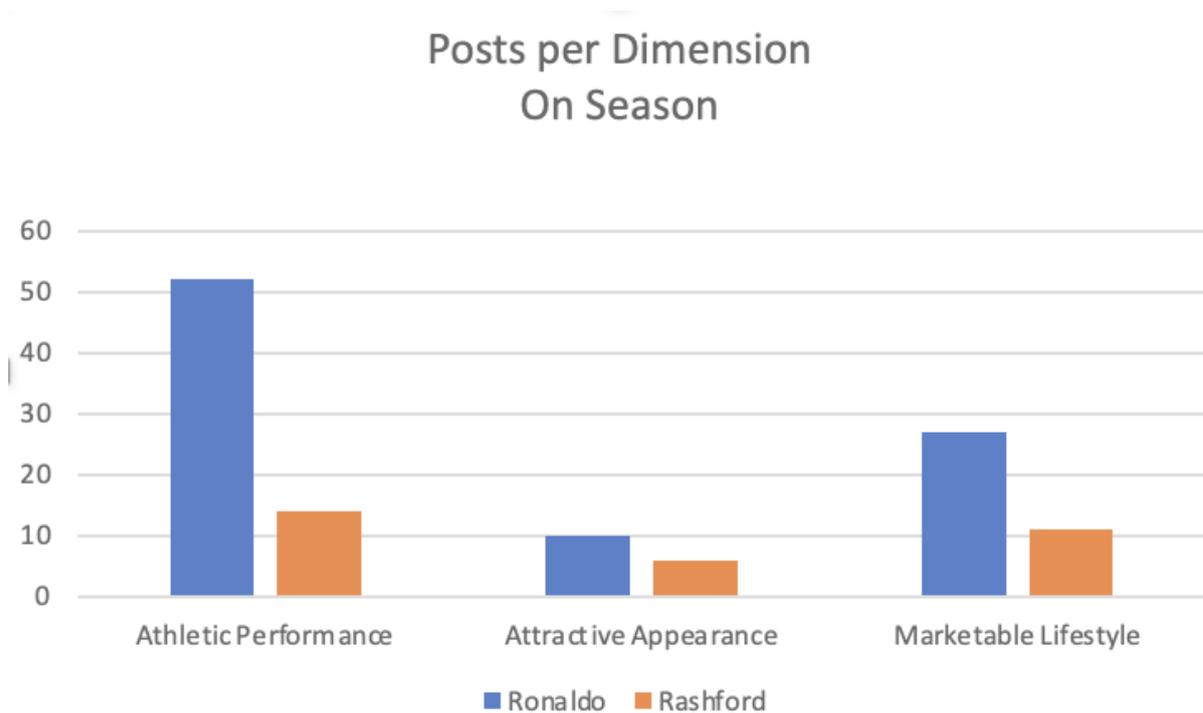


Figure 1: Number of posts per dimension (On Season)

During the on season, it is observed that majority of the sample contains posts with reference to their athletic performance and its subsequent dimension. A large majority of Ronaldo's posts fall under this dimension (52 out of 89). Similarly, Rashford's profile also contain a slightly larger number of posts under athletic expertise (14 out of 31). A noticeable difference is how there seems to be a more balanced approach to each dimension for Rashford, when compared to Ronaldo. Posts relating to athletic performance

and marketable lifestyle are significantly higher than posts relating to attractive appearance. This could be because that while there are posts showing the athlete's attractive appearance, these are more appropriate for one of the other dimensions owing to the intent behind the post. It was also observed that Ronaldo posts on his Instagram account more frequently than Rashford.

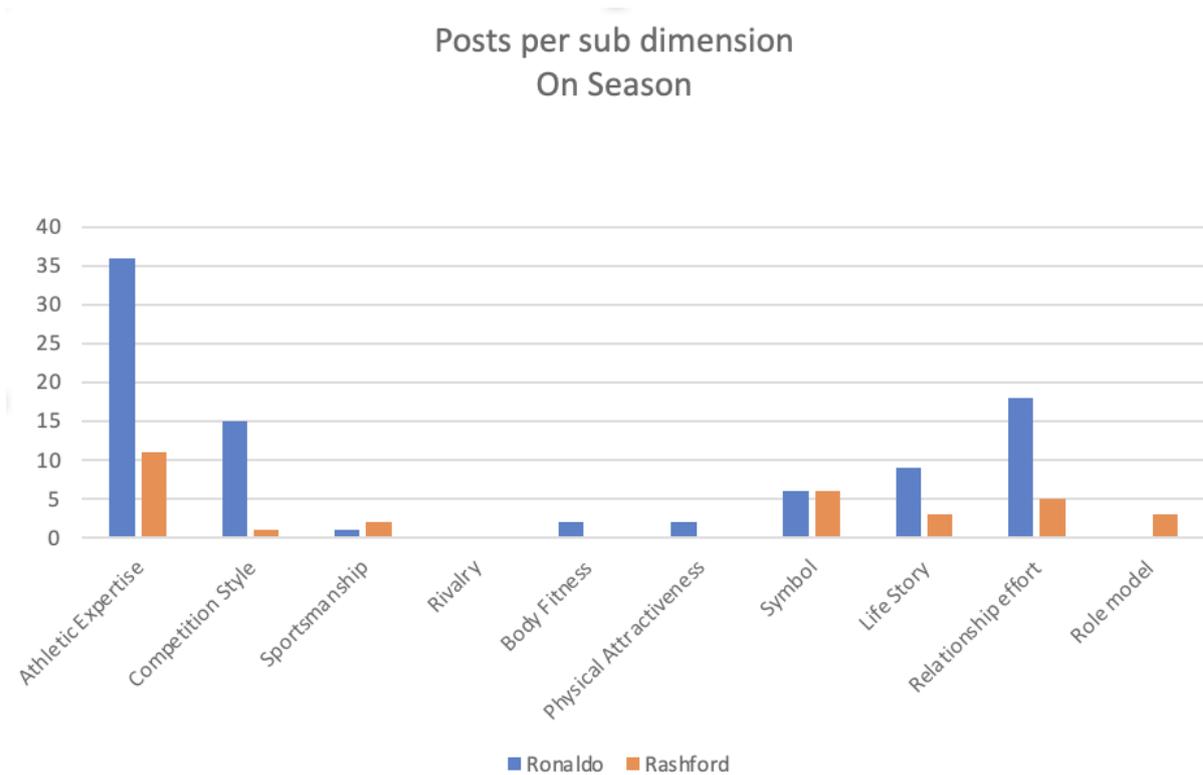


Figure 2: Number of posts per sub dimension (On Season)

When diving deeper into the sub dimensions (Figure 2) of the MABI model, the primary focus of both athletes is portraying their athletic expertise (36 for Ronaldo and 11 for Rashford). This could be due to the fact that nearly every athlete takes to social media to post a couple of pictures of their most recent game to celebrate a win, or rally the troops if the result has not gone their way. It is also observed that an effort in building positive relationships with fans, sponsors etc. are important to them and this is one of the most used (18 for Ronaldo and 5 for Rashford) dimensions.

Both athletes have not used the rivalry sub dimension and Ronaldo has not used the role model sub dimension.

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of posts during the off season for both athletes. What stands out here is the absolute lack of athletic performance related posts by Rashford during the off season, and the higher focus on the marketable lifestyle dimension. This could be attributed to the international games that took place during this off season. While both players represented their countries, Ronaldo chose to put up training images and other images showing awards and accolades he had won that previous season. Rashford on the other hand has used only posts under the marketable lifestyle and attractive appearance dimension such as his relationship effort with fans and sponsors, throwback to childhood and campaigns with Burberry.

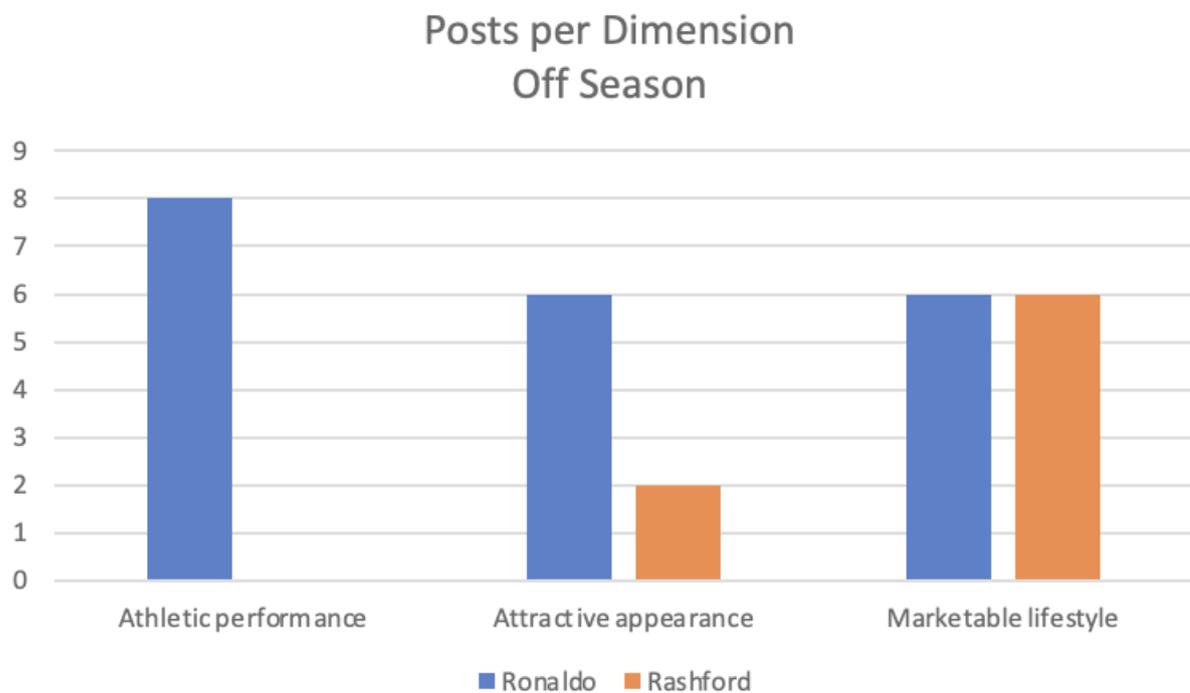


Figure 3: Number of posts per dimension (Off Season)

Figure 4 shows the further classification of these posts into the sub dimensions of the MABI model. As already highlighted above, Rashford has no posts relating to the sporting side of his life with his focus more on relationship efforts with the fans and sponsors. Ronaldo continues to have a balance between nearly all sub dimensions except for rivalry, sportsmanship and role model which are not present. Considering it is the off season, this could explain the lack of posts under sportsmanship and rivalry, though rivalry was still not utilized by either athlete during the on season as well. The role model sub dimension continues to be absent in the sample for Ronaldo.

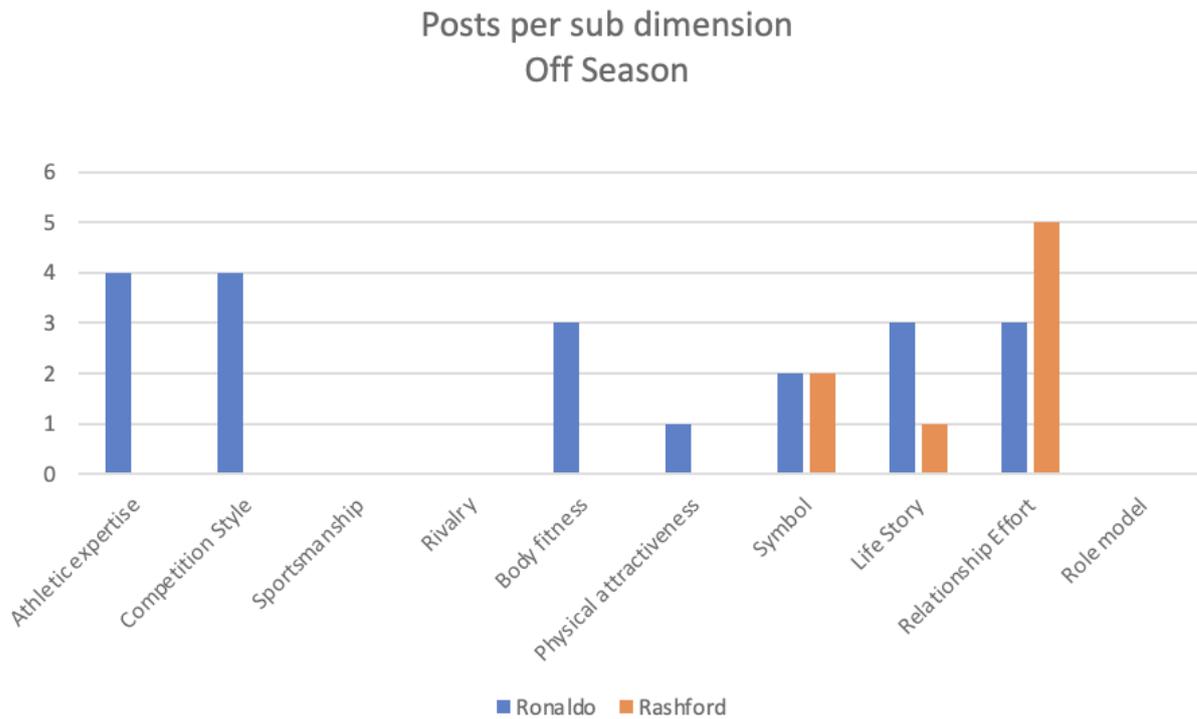


Figure 4: Number of posts per sub dimension (Off Season)

When analysing the selected sample for the athletes on their Instagram accounts, it was observed that Ronaldo has a separate account on Instagram specifically for his brand, CR7 (@cr7cristianoronaldo). This account while run by his social media team and is primarily for advertising/promoting the products made by his brand, did not come close to his following. The brand account has a little over 4.2 million followers, whereas his personal account has more than 281 million followers; a staggering difference. Rashford was not found to have a similar, separate account. However, his follower count (almost 10 million) is more than twice the follower count for Ronaldo’s brand account.

Considering the CR7 brand account is in fact an extension of the athlete brand that is Ronaldo, this account was analyzed with a similar methodology to observe any differences. The most significant difference noted was the absence of the athletic performance dimension of the MABI model. Another significant observation is that the 39 out of the 60 posts (on season) and 14 out 23 posts (off season) cannot be classified into any of the dimensions put forth in the MABI model. These were posts promoting various clothing and accessories made by the CR7 brand and they were temporarily classified into a general ‘Non sport Product’ dimension under the sub dimension, ‘style/fashion’.

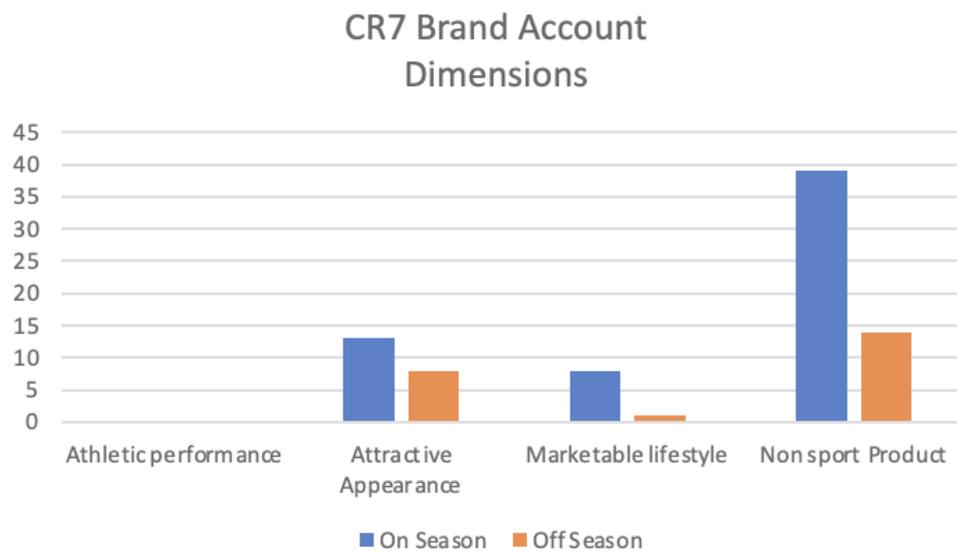


Figure 5: Number of posts on CR7 Brand account on Instagram (Primary Dimensions)

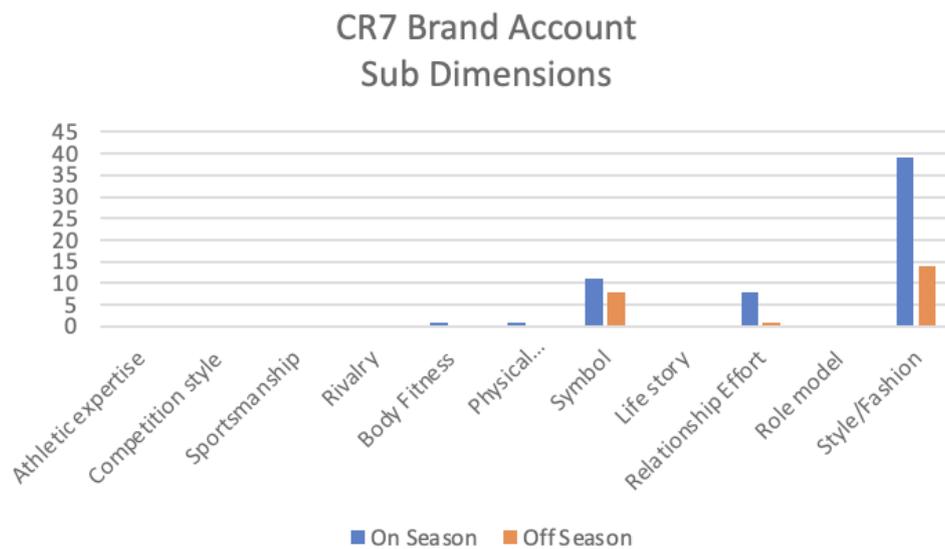


Figure 6: Number of posts on CR7 Brand account on Instagram (Sub Dimensions)

5.0 Analysis and Discussion

In the selected sample, the athletes have shared posts that represent each of the three major dimensions of the MABI model. Some sub dimensions were not present in the sample for either or both of the athletes. The most noticeable was the sub dimension for rivalry. To answer the first research question, both athletes had posts that could be classified under the three main dimensions. There is some difference in terms of the sub dimension categorization but there exists a general pattern where the posts relate to the main dimension of the MABI model; athletic performance, attractive appearance and marketable lifestyle.

5.1 MABI dimensions

An athlete's brand is an extension of their athletic capabilities on the pitch and translates to equity for their personal brand, thus it is no surprise that the athletic performance dimension is the most prominent for both athlete profiles. The primary subdimensions in use were athletic expertise. This makes sense as athletes are primarily known by their expertise in their sport and a signature style of play that makes them unique. Ronaldo has grown from a young skillful dribbler to a 'goal scoring machine'. Rashford, though in the early stage, is also known for his skillful dribbling and while not as lethal in front of goal as Ronaldo, comparisons are drawn between the two by media and fans alike. These qualities and athletic abilities are the focal points of their identity which means something to their fans, because of which they choose to associate themselves with these players. Sharing these posts allows them to build a following and base of potential customers for their brand.

Some differences between Ronaldo and Rashford are primarily in the attractiveness dimension. While both of them have the same number of posts (6) showing their sense of style (Symbol), Ronaldo has utilized the other 2 sub dimensions (Physical attractiveness and body fitness), where Rashford has not. Seiler and Kucza (2017) found that attractiveness plays a positive role when choosing a celebrity to endorse a brand. Ronaldo is known for his incredible physique that he has honed and trained over the course of his career, and is still going strong at the age of 36. Portraying this physique could possibly be

a way of showing his followers he still has what it takes to continue to perform at the elite level. Rashford is no slouch when it comes to fitness and physique, but based on the findings in this research, it would appear that this is not a priority when connecting with fans on social media.

Both athletes also make an effort to build positive relationships with their fans, sponsors often through campaigns or posts encouraging fans to provide captions. In addition to this, they also post little tidbits that give us an insight into their personal lives. An athlete is in the public eye primarily for their athletic abilities and performance during games. Away from the pitch, they choose to spend time with their family and friends when not involved in any commercial or team related activities. These posts are quite prominent as well with images wishing their parents, partners and friends for special occasions; as well as holiday greetings from their family to the followers. As discussed earlier, players moving to different countries and cultures for their career rely on coping mechanisms which involve social support from friends and family Egilsson and Dolles (2017). Ronaldo has moved to different countries throughout his career and thus there are signs of this social support on his Instagram profile.

Rashford on the other hand, does not have as many posts; barring a few throwback images to his schooldays. This could imply that Rashford's need for this social support is not as extensive considering he has never had to move to a new country or culture. Instead, his posts mainly recognize his mother's influence in becoming the children's rights campaigner he is today.

An interesting point in these findings are the absence of certain dimensions for both athletes. Ronaldo has no posts in the sample that relate to him as a role model. Both athletes have not used the rivalry sub dimension and Ronaldo has not used the role model sub dimension.

Both athletes play for top clubs and are constantly involved in highly competitive games. At a club level they do face rivalry in the form of local derbies. When it comes to individual rivalries, their competitive relationship with another athlete could be a driving force behind the performances; in the need to one up the other. The fact that there is no reference to any such rivalry, especially since the rivalry between Messi and Ronaldo has

been a decade long affair in the football world, shows that the athletes primary focus is on their achievements and career. It could be argued that these rivalries are created and developed by the media but there is no doubt this provides an additional source of motivation for the athletes to perform.

As Arai, Ko and Ross (2014) have put forth in their paper, rivalry is an important factor in developing individual athlete brands as this provides fans with a clear understanding of the athlete's identity. The rivalry of Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer has been provided as an example of how rivalry between athletes adds meaning to their brands and creates an anticipation for exciting games. The absence of this sub dimension for Ronaldo and Rashford, who are both team sports athletes (football), raises the question as to exactly how efficient this dimension could be in building their brand. There is no doubt that the Ronaldo versus Messi rivalry has created hype around matches played by their team, but at the end of the day any individual performance is overshadowed by the result secured by their respective teams and how that affects their position in the competition.

The popularity of a sporting hero goes hand in hand with the intense competition and the commercialization of these athletes. Sport provides an outlet for dreams and fantasies, suspense and sensation, victories and success and commitment. This fulfils youngsters' longing for excitement and they choose to identify with these athletes and look up to them as role models (Biskup and Pfister 1999). In recent times, Rashford has been a role model for youngsters in England and perhaps the world due to his campaign to help underprivileged kids. When analysing his Instagram account, references to this are far more prominent than Ronaldo. For example, images of him receiving recognition from organizations such as BBC and Time Magazine. A large part of Rashford's identity is his dedication to his local community and his desire to help children overcome obstacles that he faced growing up. However, this does not mean Ronaldo is any less of a role model. While he has not posted any references to him being a role model on his Instagram account, he has continued to be a role model both on and off the pitch. Stories of him taking the time out to greet fans outside a stadium or supporting causes and trying to help people in the local community are quite popular in the media. Ronaldo instead chooses to use his Instagram account to give followers an insight into his thoughts about a game they've played, training or his family which surpass any other dimension in the MABI model.

Although the conceptualization of this model does not account for missing dimensions, the scale development and model test of the MABI by Arai, Ko and Kaplanidou (2013) found that there was a higher correlation between the role model and relationship effort sub dimensions when interviewing graduate sport management students about athletes they were familiar with. This level of correlation is valid as these sub dimensions represent the same main dimension i.e., Marketable lifestyle. This could explain the absence of the role model sub dimension on Ronaldo's Instagram profile as other subdimensions under the marketable lifestyle are present on his Instagram account. This could also be an opportunity for him to work with his brand manager in better portraying his actions as a role model on Instagram.

5.2 Impact of contextual factors

Rashford is far less active on Instagram when compared to Ronaldo. In the timeframe used for the sample, Ronaldo had 89 posts over 4 months while Rashford had 31 over the same time, during the on season. Rashford has been very active in the community in terms of contributing and running campaigns for underprivileged kids. Apart from this he is focused on training and performing for Manchester United. This difference in levels of social media activity when examined from the context of their career stage, provides a possible explanation as to why Ronaldo is more active than Rashford. At the age of 36, Ronaldo is almost at the end of his career. This means he loses out on a huge chunk his net income once he steps away from the game. Thus, without the weekly wage he would receive as an active player, his only source of income would be his investments and earnings from his brand. By capitalizing on his status as one of the greats in the sport, Ronaldo appears to squeezing the maximum possible brand equity from his exploits on the football pitch as he edges closer to a life of retirement.

Instagram was launched in October, 2010 (Blystone 2020) and acquired by Facebook in less than 2 years. At this time, Ronaldo was playing for Real Madrid in Spain and Rashford was in the Manchester United academy as a 13-year-old. When you consider this context of the different stages of their careers, one would assume that the younger generation is more accustomed and in tune to social media platforms such as Instagram. However, the analysis of their accounts in this study reveals that Ronaldo has a well-

crafted and structured approach to posting on Instagram. It makes sense that their primary focus during the season is on the games they play and spending time with family and friends when possible. When looking at the data for the off season, Ronaldo appears to have an almost equal distribution of posts across the three major dimension. This strategic approach to branding himself on Instagram has certainly paid dividends as seen by his vast earnings. Rashford is still a young player and has a long way to go in his career on the pitch; and developing his image further, off the pitch. Rashford could take a leaf out of Ronaldo's book if he wishes to build a brand so strong that it can continue to bring in revenue when he does eventually retire. The signs of this strategic brand building are visible on Rashford's account as he creates an identity as a social campaigner. In addition to these social causes, his partnership with Roc Nation in the United States is also a sign that he is thinking ahead in terms of establishing and growing his own brand. Whether he will be able to grow this brand as well as Ronaldo, is yet to be seen; but the beginnings of a strong athlete brand are definitely present.

Ronaldo for the most part, continues to maintain a balanced distribution of posts between the 3 main dimension during the on and off season. There is a slight variation in the sub dimensions of the athletic performance, with an increase in posts related to competition style (Training images) and a reduction in posts related to athletic expertise (awards, matches etc.), during the off season. Especially in the off season, we see Ronaldo utilizing the dimensions of body fitness significantly more than during the on season. Rashford on the other hand has no references to his athletic performance during the off season with more emphasis on the marketable lifestyle. This can be attributed to the social campaigns Rashford has been a part of and he has channeled his efforts into those avenues during time away from his career as a professional footballer.

When considering the context of the stage of their career, Ronaldo's Instagram activity shows a better structure across the dimensions with a lot of emphasis on upholding the standards he has set for himself and by extension, his brand. Frequent posts, multiple partnerships with other big brands and promotion of his own brand; all imply that Ronaldo is leveraging his social media channels to deepen the attachment a fan has to his brand. He has garnered a large number of followers to the extent that he is the most followed person on Instagram. Through these numbers and his success in each of the countries he has played in, it can be said that Ronaldo has adapted well to the various contextual factors of

countries and cultures, across the different stages of his career. This success has been leveraged through Instagram to build his athlete brand from its foundations to where it is today.

Rashford has successfully transitioned from the academy to A-team at Manchester United, but does not have the global presence of Ronaldo; possibly as he has never played for a club outside of England. Theoretically, Rashford has all the attributes to build a brand to compete with Ronaldo's CR7. He has the athletic ability; he is recognized an attractive individual with a signature style and symbol (Burberry campaign among others) and his lifestyle outside the pitch is admired by many owing to his life story and social campaigns. However, he has not yet faced the challenge of adapting to a different country or culture. His partnership with Roc Nation in the USA is so far, the only sign expanding his brand name beyond England and outside of football.

5.3 Exception to Model of Athlete Brand Image (MABI)

Ronaldo's strategic approach to branding himself has led to him setting up a separate page (@cr7cristianoronaldo) specifically for his brand, CR7. While this particular account was not one of the samples of this research, there are some observations that could perhaps contribute to the extension of the MABI model for an athlete brand. Firstly, the posts on this brand account are mostly product related and advertises products made and sold by the CR7 brand. There is no reference to Ronaldo's athletic performance dimension, despite it being his personal brand. The brand appears to function like any other brand, marketing and selling its products as a Nike or Adidas would. Measuring the posts of this account against the MABI model reveals that more than half their posts do not fit into any of the developed dimensions; 39 out of 60 during the on season and 14 out of 50 during the on season.

CR7 which is still an athlete brand, does not match these dimensions and thus cannot be analyzed in the same way as an athlete brand. These posts we put under a non-sport product dimension, with a sub dimension named style/fashion; as they were primarily clothes, shoes, sunglasses and fragrances. Interestingly, this brand account had far fewer followers (4238375) when compared to Ronaldo's personal account (281047475) and the

engagement on the account did not come close to his personal account either. To put this into context, for the sample collected during the on season, the average number of likes for posts on his brand account was a little over 37000. Whereas the average number of likes for posts on his personal account was over 6 million. Of course, these numbers do not represent the actual level of engagement considering the vast difference in the number of followers for both his accounts. However, the interesting observation on his brand account was the significant jump in the number of likes when a post featured Cristiano Ronaldo himself, promoting a product. Out of the 60 posts analyzed, 4 such posts were found and each of these 4 posts had in excess of 100000 likes, whereas the remaining posts averaged a little over 29000. Based on these figures, Ronaldo does not really need to set up a separate account for his brand as the reach he has without it, is far superior.

The findings in this study highlight the presence of the dimensions of the MABI model in an athlete's social media profile. This shows the branding power of social media and the reach that an athlete brand can have through these platforms. Through social media, any individual can build their own brand but would need to identify dimensions relevant to their identity. The dimensions of the MABI model provide a solid foundation for any athlete looking to build their brand and by developing a strategy along these dimensions, athletes can build a sustainable brand that is capable of creating revenue. Ronaldo is the most common example of such an athlete, which is why he was chosen for this research. Rashford on the other hand, is an example of a younger athlete who has all the necessary resources to follow the same path, should he choose to. This research also highlights the importance of presenting the athlete themselves in an athlete brand, as seen by the difference in responses to Ronaldo's brand account. As the athlete is the brand themselves, they don't necessarily need to make their brand a separate entity. However, it is likely that this is done so that the management of that brand can be outsourced. In which case, it is important that the brand does not get too detached from the athlete as they are the key identifier of the brand.

It must be emphasized that social media is not the only channel for developing and promoting an athlete brand, but merely one of the most easily accessible and easy to use channels. Social media is not without challenges of its own. From technical issues to ethical issues, there could be temporary or permanent setbacks that affect branding activities on social media. The most recent social boycott that took place in England where

football clubs, players, and a number of sporting bodies (Premier league, Rugby union, Cricket and Rugby league) took part in a 4-day boycott of social media as a show of solidarity against online abuse (BBC 2021). Such actions are becoming more commonplace in society due to the growing issues that are prominent on social media platforms. While social media comes with its own benefits, there are instances of misuse under the guise of freedom of speech.

A social media boycott such as this could possibly impact the value of the athlete brand, due to inactivity. However, the bigger issue here is how negative press could impact the value of the athlete. Particularly if the athlete themselves is involved in such an issue or accused of inappropriate behavior. These external factors also need to be considered, as any hit to the athlete's reputation can have adverse effects on their brand.

6.0 Conclusion

This research provides an insight into the field of athlete branding on social media and provides the answer to the first research question (RQ1); What dimensions of the MABI model are present in the social media profile of an athlete's brand? All three main dimensions of the MABI model can be identified on the social media profile of the athletes selected for this research. There is some variation in terms of the sub dimension, but for the most part, the three main dimensions of athletic performance, attractive appearance and marketable lifestyle are present on the social media profile of an athlete's brand.

The second research question (RQ2) concerning differences between the athletes when considering contextual factors has also been answered. As explained earlier, the contextual factors for the selected athletes are the stages of their career and their activity during the on/off season. Ronaldo being older and more experienced than Rashford, has a significantly different approach to social media branding. There is a more structured approach that consistently covers all three dimensions both during the on and off season. Rashford on the other hand is not so consistent in his approach and the notable difference was the absence of the athletic performance dimension during the off season. This is explained by their priorities when considering the stages of their career; Ronaldo close to retirement and Rashford at the start of his career. Thus, there are significant differences between the athletes when considering the contextual factors.

The findings above show that perhaps the MABI model could be extended to include the athlete brand that exists independent of the athlete, once they have reached a self-sustaining phase. More athletes are choosing to establish an athlete brand as a stand-alone brand offering a multitude of products, especially fashion. These athletes use a catchy name or logo that acts as a reference to their athletic identity, much like CR7 which is a combination of his initials and jersey number. Rio Ferdinand's FIVE or Mesut Özil's M10 Streetwear (Pagano 2021) are some examples of such athlete brands. Thus, it is possible for there to be some extensions to the MABI model, particularly when analysing the athlete brand in the context of a stand-alone brand. These proposed extensions to the MABI model could be the base of future research and contribute to development of the model, or creation of an entirely new model in athlete brand literature.

The research also provides practical implication for an athlete or brand manager wanting to develop the brand. Athlete's need to stay connected with their fans on Instagram if they are to build a positive brand association with their followers/fans. They can do so by structuring the content on their profile in accordance with the dimensions of the MABI model so as to convey all aspects of their life and personality. They can work with their brand managers to identify the dimensions that are their strengths and play to those strengths when posting on Instagram. While the MABI may not be the one-shot way to building a successful brand, it provides a young athlete with the foundation to build his Instagram profile through a structured, targeted approach; thus, making it easier to add on and develop the brand further as they transition through the different stages of their career.

This research while providing some insight into the social media branding strategies of football players at different stages of their career, is not without its limitations. A larger sample size and more comprehensive deep dive into their social media accounts could provide a better understanding of their social media strategies. There is also an opportunity to examine additional athletes in various contexts to provide a more all-round perspective of building an athlete brand via social media.

Some possible suggestions for additional research in this framework could be to analyze the social media content for individual sport athletes and comparing the differences observed when comparing them to a team sport athlete.

Formula 1 could be an interesting setting for a similar research as it is unique in the sense that the two teammates/drivers in a team are also rivals to each other despite the fact that they represent the same team and drive the same car. This could provide an insight into how their relationship dynamics with each other and the team, could possibly influence their individual brands. Lewis Hamilton is a world-famous F1 racer, while his teammate Valtteri Bottas is not as well-known away from the sport. They both represent Mercedes Racing and Hamilton arguably has the bigger brand presence. This dynamic could be further explored and provide insight into the differences in athlete branding strategies in F1.

In football, comparisons could be made between active athletes and retired athletes. Why is it that David Beckham, a player who retired nearly ten years ago, has a stronger brand

presence than a currently active player such as James Milner for example? They both have accounts on Instagram and both have represented the English national team, in addition to top clubs in the English Premier League. This comparison could provide an insight into how and why certain players have been able to leverage the branding power of social media and why others choose not to. This could also provide additional insight or guidance for younger athletes at the academy level, on how to establish their brand and build on it from an earlier stage. In the event they are not able to transition from the academy level to the A team, they can fall back on their established brand and still have a successful career away from the game.

A final recommendation in footballers developing athlete brands could be to gauge the viability of developing a brand for a retired player who is a late adopter of social media. Paul Scholes and Roy Keane are some examples of players who have recently joined Instagram. Would they be able to build their personal brand the way David Beckham (a teammate of both, during the same era) has done, or is it too late for them to capitalize on their reputations as talented footballers?

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8.0 Appendix



NSD's assessment

Project title

Athlete Branding

Reference number

393322

Registered

01.03.2021 av Kumar Vishnu Krishna - vishnu.k.kumar@stud.himolde.no

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

Vishnu K Kumar, vishnu114@gmail.com, tlf: 4791268847

Project period

08.03.2021 - 30.06.2021

Status

13.04.2021 - Assessed

Assessment (1)

13.04.2021 - Assessed

Our assessment is that the processing of personal data in this project 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 13.04.2021. Everything is in place for the processing to begin.

NOTIFY CHANGES

If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project it may be necessary to notify NSD. 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.

TYPE OF DATA AND DURATION

The project will be processing general categories of personal data until 30.06.2021.

LEGAL BASIS

The purpose of this research will be to analyze and compare the social media posts of athletes on their social media platform by applying the dimensions of the MABI model conceptualized by Arai et al (2014). This conceptual model of athlete brand image provides three dimensions; athletic performance, attractive appearance and marketable lifestyle. These dimensions are further divided into ten sub dimensions which provide sport marketers with factors that play a key role in developing a strong athlete brand, and develop strategies accordingly.

The data subjects are well-known athletes such as David Beckham or Cristiano Ronaldo, with public profiles with millions of followers. The analysis will focus on their public profiles, and not on personal issues. As public figures, it is expected that this will be of public interest. The duration of the processing is short, and access is limited to student and supervisor. The disadvantage for the data subjects is thus considered to be small.

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

NSD finds 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), in that the 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

The data subjects are well-known athletes, who must expect that their public figures may be of interest for research. It would be difficult to ensure that information reaches the data subjects, as their contact information is not publically available. It is thus our assessment that the provision of information to the data subjects would involve a disproportionate effort, cf. the General Data Protection Regulation art. 14.5 b).

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).

Please note that 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

NSD 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.

In order to ensure that these requirements are met, you must follow your institution's internal guidelines and/or consult with your institution.

FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT

NSD 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.

Good luck with the project!

Contact person at NSD: Lasse Raa

Data Protection Services for Research: +47 55 58 21 17 (press 1)