



Annika Sörenstam – a hybrid personal sports brand

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Sörenstam

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to investigate sports branding at the personal level by focusing on the evolution, growth and sustainability of the ANNIKA BRAND – an extension of Annika Sörenstam's success on golf courses worldwide.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative case study method inspired by “symbolic interactionist” aspects and focusing on Annika Sörenstam's commercial success with personal sports branding and its interdependence with sports branding at the product and corporate levels. Data collection was conducted in accordance with interpretative research traditions and hence based on qualitative semi-structured research interviews.

Findings – The “hybrid” nature of sports brands draws highly on “emotional capital” and “social currency”. Personal sports branding acts as a “hybrid”, which facilitates “hybrid” branding relationships between personal sports brands and sports brands at the product and corporate levels – often underlining good ROIs for all involved parties if the sports branding process is executed well strategically. This article presents personal sports branding as a hybrid phenomenon, which is dynamic by heart and part of a well-coordinated process engaging several partners.

Practical implications – The practices and activities of the ANNIKA BRAND is a showcase for sports branding practitioners thinking about sustainable business models.

Originality/value – This paper is unique in offering a roadmap for how personal sport stars may approach brand development and growth while discussing key points of the interdependence between sports brands at the personal, product and corporate levels.

Keywords Personal branding, Sports branding, Annika Sörenstam, Corporate social responsibility, Sponsorship

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This paper investigates the development, growth, maturity and sustainability of personal sports brands while also touching key points of a personal sports brand's interdependence (“hybrid” relationship) with sports brands at the product and corporate levels. The conclusions and empirical data collection draws heavily upon the experiences of world famous women's golfer Annika Sörenstam.

Adjouri and Stastny (2006, pp. 45-50) indirectly describe and explain elements of personal sports branding in ways highly aligned with the empirical data collection for this paper. Specifically, this paper deals with the interdependence between sports branding at various levels, i.e. the personal, product and corporate levels. Thereby, this paper will also clarify why personal sports branding acts as a “hybrid” created and enhanced by sports brands at various levels. There are many examples of personal sports brands on a global scale, e.g. US basketball star Michael Jordan, who “made clear how closely athletic success is associated with the sales of sports products, especially the brand of Nike. So saying, Michael Jordan became a brand himself” (Adjouri and Stastny, 2006, p. 48).



Research methodology

The empirical element of this case study (Maaløe, 2002) centred on Annika Sörenstam's personal sports brand. It is of an interpretative nature and based on qualitative semi-structured research interviews with Annika Sörenstam and her brand manager Mike McGee to unfold the meaning of their experiences with building a personal sports brands (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009; Botan *et al.*, 2000; Chen and Pearce, 1995; Hamel, 1993; Stake, 1994). Moreover, one-day observations at Sörenstam's golf academy (ANNIKA Academy) in Orlando, Florida and at Sörenstam's ANNIKA Experience Event in Fiddler's Elbow, New Jersey were applied. A key element in this research methodology was to design a methodology capable of investigating contemporary empirical factors central in the brand building and brand management processes of Annika Sörenstam's personal sports brand for what reason the qualitative case study approach proved to be relevant. To study human behaviour and actions, qualitative observations and semi-structured interviews were chosen to disclose what these behaviours and actions regarding personal sports branding mean for Sörenstam and her personal brand building process. Applying such data collection methods underscores intimacy, empathy and presence as integrated tools in the methods to understand human behaviours and actions and (Maaløe, 2002; Denzin, 1970). The case-study approach is like an expedition in terms of gaining access to open "a closed world". Sörenstam provided that opportunity qua her openness, which forms a dual way to transform implicit issues into explicit explanations related to personal sports branding through an inductive[1] method aiming at creating understanding (Schön, 1983).

Via qualitative semi-structured face-2-face interviews with Sörenstam and McGee, data collection was designed to concentrate on qualitative discussions and understanding as set forth in research pervaded by symbolic interactionism (Mead and Morris, 1934; Blumer, 1986) and aspects of hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2004) where respondents' human experiences are central when deriving meaning from the interpretation of these experiences (Clark and Fast, 2008). To understand, to derive meaning and to develop theories linked to the processes and phenomena in personal sports branding requires depth, concrete experiences and qualities associated with cultural, daily and situated facets of human learning, thoughts, knowledge, actions and self-understanding gained from qualitative interviews (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009). The meaning and theoretical conclusions presented in the following parts of this paper is thus derived from analysis based on grounded theory (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and transcriptions and coding of the qualitative data from Sörenstam and McGee to be able to define and reflect "actions and experiences mentioned by the respondents" (Charmaz, 2005; Gibbs, 2007). Coding and interpretation of meaning is founded upon theoretical concepts and knowledge integrated in the knowledge generating process, which is closely tied to contextualising and re-contextualising in relation to the convergence between sport and branding (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009). The validity of the inductive generalisations is a critical discussion point in terms of scientific validity. Readers must keep in mind that according to the dominant interpretative paradigm, phenomena are unique and have their own structures and logics. Thus, in this case study, the generated and historically and socially contextualised knowledge portrays and is relevant for actors in personal sports branding (Stake, 1995).

On top of the methodological body mentioned, this work is theoretically built on inspiration from classic branding literature (Aaker, 1991, 2002; Aaker and

Joachimsthaler, 2000; Keller, 2003; de Chernatony, 2006) and traditional sports branding literature regarding brand management and brand building, cf. the sports branding process (awareness, image, equity and loyalty) applied by Shank (2009) and Miloch (2010). Thereby, this research asks for a disclosure of the linkage between classic branding, personal branding and sports branding to clarify where personal sports brands are positioned in a conceptual branding universe.

Often, theoretical focus is developed from simple pragmatic examples and illustrations of an athlete's actions (Carter and Rovell, 2003). This work seeks to challenge this norm by offering insights and knowledge established on the grounds of well-structured qualitative analysis from Sörenstam and McGee revealing their personal experiences with building and managing Sörenstam's personal brand. Throughout the paper, these experiences are discussed and analysed in the contextual perspective of the researcher's knowledge of other personal sports brands. The methodology applied forms a scientific basis for an inductive (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009) approach to determine and discuss brand influencers, revenue streams and "hybrid" characteristics in the brand building process of personal sports brands. Finally, quantitative data from literature review are integrated to prove some qualitative points.

What is personal sports branding?

Talking about personal sports branding, it is essential to acknowledge that the inspiration related to development of the concept originates from classic branding theory (Aaker, 1991, 2002; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Keller, 2003; de Chernatony, 2006; McCracken, 1993). According to this, brands have a core identity but should also encompass room for extended identity aspects providing new power and brand strength. Notions taken from here add the fact that a brand is capable of devoting meaning to a product, service or person. In classic branding theory, brands are developed to meet demand or attract specific target groups whereas personal sports brands are often built on existing values and characteristics of an athlete. This places the athlete "as the main influence on the core identity of the brand" but also as a risk factor depending on the athlete's actions. MIT Sloan School of Management (2011) gathered a pool of data from a panel of sport marketing practitioners discussing personal sports branding. This supports that personal sports branding apply fundamentals from classic branding theory. Consistency is important but given the personal feelings and thoughts of athletes, a personal sports brand is subject to instinct positive or negative changes caused by personal actions. Additionally, in personal sports branding the athlete's performances on the field are changing over time from the athletic breakthrough, over maturity as a star, and towards the end of the athletic career. Therefore, it is important for athletes to build consistent character sides on top of the capabilities on the sports side. In that sense, athletes themselves have a strong role in helping out when pursuing to build their personal sports brands as brands being profitable long after their active athletic careers. The Sörenstam case is well chosen in presenting this process. Miloch (2010) touches upon the challenges of sports branding by mentioning the ever-changing and dynamic facets of sport. The pool of data from MIT Sloan School of Management (2011) in alignment with the interviews and observations conducted regarding Annika Sörenstam's brand building experiences reflect that personal sports brands are "hybrid" and hence dependent on various brand influencers mentioned later in this work.

Carter (2010) defines a personal brand as a brand "composed of people's perceptions about a particular individual" and adds that it is what differentiates one person from

another in terms of personality, reputation and character. Montoya (2002) highlights that the concept entails what values, proficiencies, ideas, personality and actions a person communicates for the purpose of stimulating consistent and meaningful perceptions. Personal sports branding on the other hand is a concept, which is relative undefined in academic terms; rather something to be found in “how to do it” literature. Though, features from personal branding are also integrated in personal sports branding. Andrews and Jackson (2001) argues for the fact that personal sports branding speeded up due to the increased number of television sets in use in the 1950s. This allowed fans to root for idols such as Muhammad Ali and Joe DiMaggio – two athletes capable of differentiating themselves and creating entertainment. Another scenario saw reality when Mark McCormack established International Management Group (IMG), the world’s first international sports management firm in 1960 while representing and managing golf icons Gary Player, Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer (Carter, 2010; Carter and Rovell, 2003). That formed a kick start for what we know as “personal sports branding” – a concept underlining the commercial potential of popular athletes and capable of rising above international borders, cultures, languages and even sports itself. Lusted (1991) notes that “personalities are central to the institution of television” for what reason Andrews and Jackson (2001) placed personalities as a focal point for the institution and era of televised sport. Designing a personal sports brand involves the influence of other persons’ perceptions of the athlete, which implies that the general public talks about who the athlete is, what he/she does and how he/she is different from other athletes (Montoya, 2002; Holmberg and Essevad, 2006). To define personal sports branding, Carter (2010) emphasises the positioning of athletes as personal brands to convey life stories, values, charisma, authenticity, believability and athletic prowess into significant revenue. Adjouri and Stastny (2006) supplement this notion by emphasising that a personal sports brand is synonymous with receiving massive amounts of positive public spotlight. Richelieu (2003) attaches the significance of “winning” when attracting followers and building loyalty in sports[2]. According to personal branding research, (Chadwick and Burton, 2008, p. 307; Montoya, 2002; Gobé, 2007; Carter, 2010; Adjouri and Stastny, 2006; Temporal, 2010, p. 170; Shepherd, 2005; Crawford, 2004; Hamlin *et al.*, 2006; Carter and Rovell, 2003; MIT Sloan School of Management, 2011; Holmberg and Essevad, 2006), there has been a rising development in the area of personal sports branding in the past decades – also facilitated with influx of new technology and hence more communication and branding platforms (Andrews, 2004).

Companies seeking to take advantage of the image transfer derived from these personal sports brands in terms of winning global exposure and recognition lift endorsement deals of individual athletes (Temporal, 2010, p. 170; McCracken, 1989; Braunstein and Ross, 2010; Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; Musante *et al.*, 1999; Gladden and Funk, 2002; Gladden and Milne, 1999; Carter and Rovell, 2003). Though, not all personal sports brands are equally successful and they do not all possess the same strength in terms of building a successful business around themselves at a critical point of intersection, i.e. when the playing years are over or when the athlete has won a major title or is high in popularity (Elberse and Golod, 2010; Elberse and McCall, 2010).

Hamlin *et al.* (2006) mentions the linkage between personal branding and high visibility as significant in personal brand building, i.e. strong personal brands are characterised by their differentiation points and their “high visibility capabilities” in terms of creating awareness and attention around their actions. This is in alignment with Carter’s (2010) definition of a personal brand. Terms like “fame, star, celebrity, and

icon” are often associated with highly visible persons (O’Reilly and Braedley, 2008). In that sense, personal sports branding and other forms of personal branding spheres such as personal branding of movie stars or musicians tied to “stardom” are unique given that there are many identifiable stars to be found in these areas of personal branding. Personal sports branding is a vehicle of personification given the awareness and attention around star athletes and the same can be said in other creative industries like music and movies (Nicholson, 2007; Hamlin *et al.*, 2006). Holmberg and Essevad (2006) argues that personal sports branding is associated with athletes seeking to monetise on their names. Personal sports branding is thus linked to an athlete strategically monetising on his/her market opportunities during but also after his/her athletic career via media communication and transfer of values and associations (e.g. with products, services, fans and business partners) into market opportunities connected to and transcending the athlete’s physical sports venue and athletic performances.

Why is personal sports branding of interest?

Carter (2010) argues for the roles of IMG and founder Mark McCormack in establishing personal sports branding’s vital position in today’s “celebrity-oriented culture and is backed by other researchers” (Hoye *et al.*, 2006; Boyle and Haynes, 2000; Nicholson, 2007; Carter and Rovell, 2003; Burton, 2004; O’Reilly and Braedley, 2008). Certainly, one can argue that the business of sports branding in general has to do with “gambling on athletes” and their potential for driving business accomplishments. That goes for sports branding at various levels, i.e. the corporate, product and/or personal levels. The unpredictability of sport products and personalities is linked to risks of declining revenue streams when “on the field performances” are weak or “off the field performances” are misplaced or inappropriate for what reason sport entities have started to place even greater emphasis on recruiting and retaining loyal followers through effective brand building (Miloch, 2010). There is a “hybrid relationship” or interdependence between brand levels initiated by sport stars, who are “popular”, which is due to the fascination of great athletes as “living brands[3]” (Horn, 2004; Gorman and Calhoun, 1994; Silk, 2004; Crawford, 2004; Coakley, 1994; Smart, 2004; Horne, 2006; Rein *et al.*, 2006). Take the example of Nike and the influence of Michael Jordan in building a sports brand at the corporate level that is well known in the ears of most people globally – an example that can also be turned around by looking into what Nike has meant for Michael Jordan as a personal brand and what it has meant for the sales of sport brands at the product level, i.e. “Air Jordan’s bestselling” shoes (Currid-Halkett, 2010). This type of interdependence has had great meaning for athletes and hence personal sports brands (Carter and Rovell, 2003; Gladden and Milne, 1999; Boone *et al.*, 1995), which is also illustrated by other examples, e.g. Annika Sörenstam’s partnership with Cutter & Buck (design of golf wear), David Beckham’s partnership with Adidas, John Madden’s (NFL “Hall of Fame” member) partnership with Electronic Arts, Danish tennis player Caroline Wozniacki’s partnership with Adidas and Stella McCartney, and the US Women’s Soccer’s success exemplified in collaboration with players like Brandi Chastain, Tiffeny Milbrett and Mia Hamm.

Personal sports branding – illustrating a “hybrid” phenomenon

When extending the endorsement agreement with star tennis player Venus Williams in 2000, chief marketing officer of Reebok, Angel Martinez said that “there’s no better

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athlete, no better individual in the world who is better suited to represent our brand. Our goal is not to show Venus as a tennis player but Venus as a lifestyle icon, someone inspiring with the power of her presence” (Temporal, 2010, pp. 170-1). Those words clearly indicate the strategic considerations (Fisher Buttinger and Wallaster, 2008) behind a “hybrid” branding connection where successful sports brands at various levels “engage in a marriage”, which goes beyond the tennis competencies of Venus Williams. Instead, it draws upon her personal characteristics, beliefs and attitudes and hence creates an overlap between her and various values associated with Reebok’s products and the corporation but also with whatever Venus Williams is perceived to stand for. This is a form of brand positioning, which may affect her business orientations and – plans positively or negatively (depending on the strategic direction). Ergo, if Venus Williams does not act in ways aligned with her communicated values, it will hurt the strategic opportunity to positively transfer her personal sports brand to a product or corporate level. The empirical data shows that Sörenstam managed to overcome this risk of branding failure due to her high level of authenticity, integrity, consistency, persistence, distinctiveness and goodwill associated with her personal sports brand (Rampersad, 2009, p. 17). Sörenstam mentions that “when we talk about the brand, I need to deliver to what we call the promise [...]”. This knowledge and understanding of “brand promise delivery” is an important management competency for personal sports branding practitioners given the high visibility of professional athletes where the risk of brand failure from a ROI-perspective is likely to happen if the athlete is “caught up” by improper behaviour (Hamlin *et al.*, 2006).

Annika Sörenstam is responsible for most of her own success given the fact that she sat the tone on golf courses world wide as the greatest ambassador of the game the women’s golf has ever seen (International Golf Federation, 2011). Nevertheless, the success of Annika Sörenstam off the golf course, even after her playing career and frequent participation in the LPGA circus, which is expressed via her ANNIKA brand (ANNIKA Business Guide)[4], is not only a product of her individual efforts. At the same time, the ANNIKA brand’s development, growth and sustainability has been characterised and shaped by some of the factors that also characterise and shape other personal sports brands (cf. list below).

Brand influencers for personal sports brands:

- media exposure (visibility and PR)[5];
- career wins (athletic performances)[6];
- endorsement deals[7];
- fan interest (fan culture and followers)[8];
- junction of sports and entertainment[9];
- corporate social responsibility (CSR values)[10];
- personality (positive vs negative)[11];
- extraordinary activities (positive vs negative)[12];
- timing[13];
- consumption patterns[14];
- brand development and innovation[15];
- strategy planning and collaboration[16];

- availability, work ethic and integrity[17];
- passion[18];
- brand execution and communication[19]; and
- → all these brand influencers point out “the hybrid nature of personal sports brands”.

To illustrate the meaning of the above-mentioned brand influencers, winning major tournaments has also been beneficial for the ANNIKA brand while the people surrounding the ANNIKA brand also have had a huge impact in terms of determining where the ANNIKA brand is today. The latter refers to “what it took Annika Sörenstam and the ANNIKA brand to get to where they are today” and that includes the people involved in this process. Finally, another exemplification of Annika Sörenstam’s utilisation of brand influencers emphasises the meaning of endorsement deals. Her success and its combination with the “corporate appeal” (sponsorship money) of golf in mind generate significant media coverage; that is something that is also the case for successful tennis players.

In the following, it will be clarified how developmental elements from the sports branding process (Shank, 2009; Miloch, 2010) like “awareness”, “image”, “equity” and “loyalty” is related to the sports branding process of Annika Sörenstam and the ANNIKA brand of businesses.

Awareness

Currid-Halkett (2010, p. 21; Boone *et al.*, 1995; Miloch, 2010; O’Reilly and Braedley, 2008; Greyser, 2011) underscores the importance of media exposure in building, developing, growing and maintaining a personal sports brand but also indirectly reveals what it means in relation to securing a sustainable business model for personal sports brands (Horn, 2004, p. 20; Nicholson, 2007, p. 168). That means that media exposure may be a good agent to drive business in terms of creating awareness and starting the sports branding process (Hamlin *et al.*, 2006). Annika Sörenstam has been very competent in reaching positive exposure via various media outlets. Recently, she was featured on *ABC’s Good Morning America* promoting her ANNIKA Foundation and active and healthy lifestyles and thus adding additional value to her personal brand and society by integrating these elements of CSR in an authentic way (*ABC Good Morning America*, 2010). Her differentiated way of applying elements of CSR authentically and strategically (McElhaney, 2008), which is a rare phenomenon in the arena of professional athletes, has proved to drive valuable media exposure and business success for Sörenstam.

A recent survey measuring media coverage in 2010 (in foreign newspapers for Danes)[20] indicates that athletes receive the most publicity of all groups – the tennis player Caroline Wozniacki being a clear number one with her name being mentioned in more than 16,000 papers (Nordjyske, 2010). In top 12 in the same survey, only two persons were not athletes, which tunes to how sport appeals to the masses (Carter, 2010). First step in the sports branding process is to create awareness about your “brand”. In that regard, it helps that sport is a very popular topic in society and in all media (Greyser, 2011; Carter, 2010; Andrews and Jackson, 2001; Smart, 2004; O’Reilly and Braedley, 2008) – something that Annika Sörenstam has taken advantage of through headlines in Sweden and later on abroad due to her unique golf talent. According to research, arguments reveal that sport and sports stars were not always

attached with the same chic or fashionable stickers as in today's contemporary media and brand pervasive culture (Rowe, 1995). Now, athletes are included in the popular culture domain and media's portrayal of "celebrity lifestyles" – where the strongest brands act as "branded commodities" with diversified and differentiated identities (Smart, 2004; Horne, 2006; Gorman and Calhoun, 1994; Crawford, 2004).

Due to media impact from a growing number of media outlets, top athletes are performing on a very visible stage. From a commercial perspective, the lives of athletes have changed as well over the years. Turner (2007, p. 197) acknowledges the potential for athletes to see expanded ROIs related to more than what goes on within the frames of the playing field by stating that "celebrity can spin-off into many related sub-industries through endorsements, merchandising and so on. Individuals can become brands in their own right, with enormous commercial potential". Today's professional athletes and sport stars experience "solid opportunities" to capitalise on their "talents and sports brands" and hence names on and off the playing fields. The latter requires that the athlete is capable of expanding his/her sports brand to activities off the field (later stages of the sports branding process). The celebration and exploitation of athletes have many faces, and may cause positive and negative branding effects, which is hidden in Whannel's interpretation of the lives of professional athletes (cf. citation below):

It is their labour and performance that is minutely scrutinized and whose skills are bought and sold in the sporting marketplace, their bodies which are punished, manipulated and invaded in the quest for greater efficiency, and their images moulded and displayed to sell and promote goods and services (Whannel, 2002, p. 113).

It can be argued that building and sustaining a rock-hard fan base comes natural for professional athletes (personal sports brands) in media intensive sports performing at the best venues globally and that this profitable groundwork can be transformed into a sustainable business model securing direct revenue streams[21]. As seen in Whannel's citation, personal sports branding and sports branding implies "hard work" and is very "commercial and business-oriented" in a professional sports environment. This has been the case for Annika Sörenstam. Fans of Sörenstam and hence the ANNIKA brand generate revenues via their purchases of ANNIKA merchandise (autographed books, flags, ANNIKA fragrances, ANNIKA academy visors, etc.), golf experiences at ANNIKA Academy or via ANNIKA course design, donations to ANNIKA Foundation, consumption of Annika's TV-appearances (which also adds value and recognition to her brand by offering sponsors unique opportunities for exposure), love for ANNIKA wine, or need for financial advice from an athlete that has succeeded in "taking her sports brand to the next level financially". This is supported by empirical evidence implying that there is a "changing fan and/or consumption culture surrounding personal sports brands" linking the athletes with significant income prospects if the sports branding process is managed well from a professional and strategic viewpoint – but as goes for sports; there is also room for a degree of unpredictability serving as the emotional charm of sports. To exemplify this, Mike McGee, brand manager for the ANNIKA brands states that all the side activities and different entities of the ANNIKA brands combine and make up the personality of the overall ANNIKA brand. He says that "it is not just who she is anymore, it is all these projects and what we do that is the ANNIKA brand so that is everything". Thus personal sports branding becomes a "never ending story" dependent on what the athlete thinks, says and does – also reflecting the dynamic feature of the concept. McGee's statement reveals that the

ANNIKA brand found room for extensions of the core identity of Annika Sörenstam, which shows evidence that personal sports branding as a discipline somehow traces back to classic branding as discussed earlier.

Research backs up the empirical evidence when recognising that although sports brands saw difficulties cultivating “passive” sports fans and consumers into “active” seekers/purchasers of experiences related to their favourite sports brands, good monetising opportunities exist for brands like Sörenstam capable of creating ROIs via “brand audience building” (Hamlin *et al.*, 2006, p. 103). Sörenstam’s ability to convert stakeholder interests into revenue is the main reason for her monetising success (*Forbes*, 2010)[22]. Mike McGee adds to this by mentioning that “companies see value in her being a spokesperson”. Additionally, McGee admits that “companies are not going to give just to give, they are not going to sponsor just to sponsor, they want to know that their dollars are going to work in a positive manner”. The latter is reality when Annika Sörenstam adds the elements of CSR and giving back in her sports branding process to secure ROIs for all involved parties. By converting people into active buyers of her products and by keeping an “active link” to sponsorship income, Sörenstam has managed to retain a good revenue stream even after her retirement from the professional tour. On top of integrating CSR-based aspects in her strategic rhetorical processes and into her personal sports brand, but also into her sports brands at the product and corporate level, Sörenstam has some “investment-worthy” sports brands possessing great potential for synergetic effects. Around Annika Sörenstam’s personal sports brand, ANNIKA Inc. has built a life-style related “brand umbrella”, which relies on a sustainable business model. The following list lists the revenue stream potential for the personal sports brand, Annika Sörenstam.

Revenue streams for personal sports brands[23]:

- prize money;
- appearance money;
- endorsement deals;
- gate money; and
- products (tangible and intangible).

As a long time “winner” and the “all-time” most dominant player in women’s golf, Annika Sörenstam expresses her personal brand by way of various channels. One of these channels is the ANNIKA Experience, an event under the ANNIKA Foundation[24], which is to be found under the overall ANNIKA brand (ANNIKA Foundation, 2011). The ANNIKA Experience[25] is an event teaching and preaching the core of what the ANNIKA Foundation and Annika Sörenstam in particular stands for on top of being a unique golfer; the event as well as Annika symbolises the essentiality of having an active and healthy lifestyle filled with the joy of sports. Through this event, Sörenstam signals authenticity, legitimacy and trustworthiness around her personal brand, which acts as a driver for her other brands. Hamlin *et al.* (2006, p. 16) write that “to be marketed successfully, individuals need to obtain control of their images and make decisions based on a thorough understanding of the high visibility industry”. By letting her actions reflect her personality and vice versa, she exemplifies an international sports star with an understanding of the high visibility industry of professional sports – that operates as a positive reinforcing circle for the ANNIKA brands. Shaping an athlete’s image and brand comes through performances

on and off the playing fields. Control is a critical element in managing the sports branding process (Whannel, 2002; Nicholson, 2007) but one way to show that you have control is by turning to the revenue generation, which has served Sörenstam well. In his work titled “The Economy of Celebrity”, Graeme Turner states that “McDonald and Andrews report that one year after signing Michael Jordan for Gatorade’s ‘Be like Mike’ promotion, Gatorade’s annual revenues had increased from \$681 million to over \$1 billion” (Turner, 2007, p. 197; originally from Andrews and McDonald, 2001, p. 20). The statement proves “the hybrid essence” of personal sports brands but also that engaging in the right processes and being able to manage them can lead to increased ROIs for all involved “branded properties”. Schultz (2005) refers to the latter when underlining the meaning of Sörenstam’s participation in 2003 in “battle of the sexes” as the first woman to play on the PGA Tour for 58 years (*Golf Today*, 2011) – an event displaying the opportunities for another positive reinforcing circle for the ANNIKA brands.

Image

CSR may act as a constituent working to create awareness. Though, if done properly, it takes the “awareness” factor of the sports branding process to the next step (Shank, 2009, pp. 210-11; Greyser, 2011), i.e. CSR may help to build a positive image (Skinner, 2010). Acknowledging that image is vital to the branding success of organisations, products and persons (Edwards and Usher, 2010; Benoit, 1997), Annika Sörenstam and the brands surrounding her personality at all branding levels have not suffered from any major offensive acts for which she has been held responsible. That sort of situation is good news for any sports brand since it does not leave room for any need for image restoration (Edwards and Usher, 2010, p. 128). Ergo, the right awareness constructed via good media exposure is important in order to create a sound and positive image for what reason sport stars like Sörenstam should always consider the meaning of their interactions.

In the branding process, it matters to recognise that brands do not stand alone but rather that they are “dynamic creatures[26]” surrounded by life and victims of recurring interactions with this world around them. Gobé (2007, p. 3) utilises the phrase “jazz up” to indicate the importance of initiating branding processes through the use of an emotional language, which appeals to the senses and inspires the emotional side of people. Gobé (2007, p. 6) takes things a bit further by linking power to the state of brands and branding and hence signifying that the strength of “jazzing up” in a branding process brings the brand to a new position where its truth ultimately goes beyond the brand. It refers back to Annika Sörenstam’s personality and thereby hold the characteristics of a “lifestyle brand”. For Annika Sörenstam, it becomes true that the sum total of all meanings is present in her ANNIKA brands, which are no longer just commodities but rather brands portraying an experience like the ANNIKA Experience or displaying a lifestyle like the ANNIKA Foundation and the notion of “giving back”. That exemplifies when a personal sports brand transforms into a lifestyle brand, e.g. when the ANNIKA brands possess the power to turn consumption into reflections of people’s lifestyles – a power leading to higher ROI potential. This power of being a trendsetter reveals the definition of a personal sports brand as being capable of turning the qualities and values of the athlete into substantial revenue, cf. earlier section of this work. A personal sports brand given Sörenstam’s athletic status holds the power to shape behavioural patterns, actions and trends so that stakeholders absorb these “celebrity and lifestyle based” personal sports brands and brands

associated with these (Kornberger, 2010). Putting that into perspective, it corresponds well with the empirical data pointing towards the new position of the ANNIKA brands. Whether focus is on Annika Sörenstam as a person or on her corporate endeavours and the products under that umbrella, there has been a slight perceptual shift. Today, when people's eyes fall on Annika Sörenstam they do not only recall her admirable and remarkable performances on the golf course. She has started her approach of turning into a successful "lifestyle brand" – a reflection that in harmony with the discussion about the definition of personal sports branding displays what it means for athletes to monetise on their personal brands on and off the fields and during and after their active athletic careers:

Consider American boxing: Cassius Clay was a talented boxer among many striving to survive and thrive within a cutthroat world of brutes. In Cassius's time, boxing was based on raw force and destruction. The likes of Sonny Liston, Joe Frazier, and Larry Holmes inspired interest the way a car wreck inspires rubber-necking. You look, you can't help but notice, but frankly you don't like what you see. Then came "Ali". Muhammad Ali, the greatest boxer of all time, changed the whole game. He took the world of brute violence, absorbed its rules, but also rose above them. He took this world of cruel beatings – what you might consider raw commodities measured by punches, muscles, and knockouts – and "redesigned" its meaning with purpose and inspiration (Gobé, 2007, p. 6).

Muhammad Ali understood what it takes to turn a professional athlete into a successful[27] lifestyle brand only many years after his athletic retirement – an understanding he gained when forming Muhammad Ali Enterprises after earlier periods with many less successful capitalisation efforts (*Fox News*, 2011). Thereby, Ali proves Gobé's point that any generic person, product, organisation and/or the image(s) of these can be converted into mythos and more so into powerful and uniquely inspiring expressions of modernity. Lifestyles are trends and tendencies but Annika also signals a new era. Like Ali at his time, Sörenstam has begun a great journey toward lifestyle branding, but without shameful crashes. For the ANNIKA brands, much of the great work is still tied to golf. But adding a sense of CSR and retaining the strategic fit with golf is a good direction (McElhaney, 2008; Ferrand *et al.*, 2007; Carter, 2010, p. 91). According to the ANNIKA brands, those branches under Annika's governance, which do not link directly to golf, indirectly link to golf. This is exemplified by Annika's passion for food – it is about lifestyle in the way that she enjoys and loves food – but indirectly it ties to her serious attitude as a golfer where a well-balanced life and nutrition are brought into play along the lines of CSR in terms of promoting the essence of living a healthy and active life. Growing a positive image and building a brand requires support, which is also underlined by the empirical data as reflected in Annika Sörenstam's comment that "we need some support and I have been with some of my sponsors for 16 years and now it is a lot more than just playing". Annika Sörenstam and the ANNIKA brands have seen the financial trust of sponsors for years – some of these sponsors have been with Sörenstam for nearly a couple of decades now. The expression "more than just playing" is natural given Sörenstam's retirement from the LPGA[28] so instead the importance of "lifestyle" and a "dialogical-based process" (Cortsen, 2010; Howell, 1983; Carter, 2010, p. 92) of creating mutual sponsorship ROIs for all parties dominate the way of working. Lexus[29] buys into Sörenstam's food- and wine-related brands given their wish to add appeal to targets not solely reached via Sörenstam's competitions on the court. Cutter & Buck[30] also buys into Sörenstam's consumer-focused brand section when drawing on Annika's playing experience to design functional golf wear with supporting enhanced playability.

The strategic fit is evidently visual in all parts of these partnerships – it is not only about Annika Sörenstam, the golfer, but about “how sharing the same goals about different things may bring the ANNIKA brands and present and potential partners together” on the journey of lifting common initiatives. Callaway[31] is also one of the sponsors, which has been with Sörenstam for years. They are still there Sörenstam recalls but today they are just working in a different direction – not on Sörenstam’s own game but using her expertise to test clubs and hence ultimately to reinforce the playing experiences of Callaway consumers positively.

The real meaning in the exemplifications above is to link the image building process of a personal sports brand to its characteristic as a “dynamic creature” and in the end to the importance of a brand’s “interactionist nature” (Kornberger, 2010; Atkin, 2004; Pedersen *et al.*, 2007; Aaker, 1991; Whannel, 2002). Sahnoun (1986) perceives sponsorship as a discursive communication tool enabling sponsors to link their brand(s) to an athlete, who appeals to given audiences. Moreover, sponsorship is a communication discipline aiming at shaping consumer associations (also evident for sports branding, cf. Shank, 2009, pp. 210-11) to the sponsor’s brand via the spirit of a sporting event (Piquet, 1985, p. 15). So it seems natural for Sörenstam’s sponsors given their markets that they want to take advantage of Sörenstam’s strong image and brand within the sport of golf and they want to exploit golf’s corporate appeal – something that works well for luxury brands such as Lexus and Rolex (Ferrand *et al.*, 2007[32]; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). Sörenstam’s strategic partnerships with different sponsors reflect a “two-way process”, which is mutually beneficial for all parties. The process illustrates the “dynamic creature” of a sports brand and thus the “interactionist nature” of the ANNIKA brand given the fact that the partnerships have evolved and changed over time – for instance when Sörenstam retired. Although, Sörenstam retired from the professional tour, Sörenstam and the sponsors found a way in this “two-way process” to retain a valuable strategic relationship and that is what matters in sports branding. That tells a story of the power of the ANNIKA brands and displays the importance of image transfers around a strong personal sports brand.

Equity

When dealing with personal sports branding, it is interesting and highly relevant to investigate the convergence, intersection and multidisciplinary character that exists and is constantly constructed in and around personal sports brands. For instance, Annika Sörenstam’s personal brand has shown positive spillover effects directed from her personality and personal brand towards her overall corporate brand and the product brands hereunder – something that is strongly evidenced by the empirical data material. Mike McGee adds to this by mentioning that “she has world class partners that are the best in their space and she has been with for a long time and the fact that they have renewed or signed or even started in some places with her after she stopped playing shows what a great ambassador she is for a brand”. This condition leaves the ANNIKA brands with the label of “hybrid” sports brands – sports brands affected by the convergence between the athlete’s strong personal sports brand and hence underlying or surrounding sports brands at the product and corporate levels. For years, athletes have merged athletic excellence with commercial partnerships to achieve better brand equities worth millions of dollars (O’Reilly and Braedley, 2008; Burton, 2004). This is exemplified via the ANNIKA Foundation and it serves the understanding of sports branding to ask if the ANNIKA Foundation would exist without Annika Sörenstam’s athletic abilities and common and authentic interest in

helping to promote healthy living and active lifestyles? She has a passion and she applies her passion to transform management and business in the sports sector and that is typical for lifestyle brands (Kornberger, 2010). The brand equity for Annika Sörenstam is the value that her personal brand and that her partners' brands adds to the ANNIKA brands in the marketplace[33] – in financial terms, this notion refers to the difference in value between the ANNIKA brands and their generic counterparts[34] (Shank, 2009, p. 211). An imperative point here is Shank's (2009) belief that stakeholders, who believe that a sports brand has a high level of brand equity, are often satisfied with that sports brand for what reason these stakeholders are likely to become brand-loyal followers – reflected through Sörenstam's long-term partnerships.

Loyalty

Keep in mind that Sörenstam's sponsors have been loyal for years. Does that tell us that Sörenstam and her ANNIKA brands have a high level of brand equity? Or does it tell us that Sörenstam and her ANNIKA brands give sponsors a high and unique value for money that is tough to find elsewhere in professional sports – something derived from a high level of awareness of Annika Sörenstam, the golfer, which has been turned into a positive image for Sörenstam and hence her related ANNIKA brands, i.e. image transfer?:

"[...] An inability to fully feature one's athletic prowess can undermine the ability to establish and extend a personal brand." (Carter, 2010, p. 85) Sörenstam distances herself from that problem. She has played at the best venues in the world, at the highest level in the world and won competitions at that level, not only once but again and again. This process has created a perfect "footing" for building, maintaining and further developing a great personal sports brand with associated and closely related brands.

Sörenstam has understood the "message-direct world" (Carter, 2010) in which she lives. Benefitting from communicating the depth and breadth of her passionate endeavours in life through the slogan "Share my Passion" gives her stakeholders an understanding of a well-rounded, sound and serious athlete who stands for much more than good golf performances – an athlete who knows the importance of supporting themes and causes that the world is already trying to battle and which therefore has a strong position on the public agenda. Drawing on this knowledge and understanding has given Sörenstam a cutting-edge personal branding advantage that shines through in extending her potential for brand-ROIs well beyond her playing years – her way of leading the "brand life" has produced significant corporate appeal although she has already retired as a pro-golfer. It adds extra value that Sörenstam has always held a professional responsibility towards her stakeholders in terms of "staying out of trouble".

"Hybrid" sports branding – a revised model

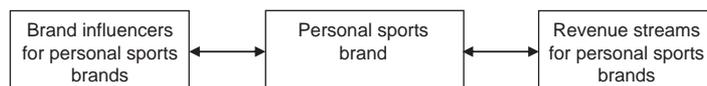
The evolution regarding the World Wide Web and social media has created new platforms leading as a new "kick starting foundation" for driving personal sports brands (Carter, 2010; Adjouri and Stastny, 2006, p. 49). Merskin (2009, p. 142) mentions a phenomenon where persons "perceived to be larger than life" plays a large role in branding processes and specifically in branding physical products. There are elements from this phenomenon, which can be transferred to personal sports branding processes and personal sports branding's interrelationship with sports branding at the product and corporate levels. Mike McGee points to the fact that Annika Sörenstam has done what is significant for a female athlete due to her success with establishing a brand of

businesses, which have been successful under her first name, i.e. ANNIKA. According to Mike McGee, that process is also linked to creating exceptional experiences for fans and other followers on and off the golf course. Following Annika Sörenstam around during the ANNIKA Experience, a golf event staged to promote the ANNIKA Foundation and the importance of leading an active and healthy lifestyle, shows what it means when great athletes are “perceived to be larger than life”: The ANNIKA Experience, which is centered on Sörenstam’s personality, is a good practical example showing what it means for golf enthusiasts to be able to engage with Sörenstam. Given her athletic prowess, she already positioned herself positively in the minds of these stakeholders but linking her personality with sound and popular opinions (active and healthy lifestyle) and displaying this in a face2face event add credibility, authenticity and trustworthiness to her personality as well as her overall “brand umbrella” – Sörenstam’s relationship with her stakeholders is placed at the heart of this brand experience. Holt (2004) conducted an ethnographic case study on ESPN and found that brand loyalty generation was a product of stakeholder interactions. This plays well with the concept of “hybrid” sports brands, i.e. Sörenstam’s personal sports brand management showed appropriate management of relationships across different stakeholder groups. This has led to the creation of the following developmental framework to consider when building a personal sports brand (cf. Figure 1).

Stakeholders’ symbolisation of and associations with Sörenstam had the power to add value to everything related to the ANNIKA brands given the fact that expectations of Sörenstam’s greatness were positively reinforced by her way of acting on the golf course but also off the course – a process leading to increased brand equity and loyalty capable of spreading good “buzz” about Sörenstam’s business-oriented endeavours (Ind, 2007, p. 22)[35]. Ind also talks about “a brand life” with a high relevance and consistency and that is supplemented by Knapp’s (2008, p. 36) suggestion that a brand should treat stakeholders better than they expect – both factors are something, which Sörenstam has interpreted in superior manner. Fans, sponsors and other followers of a sports brand like ANNIKA carefully watch how they spend their money and Mike McGee adds the perspective that in order to secure a sustainable business model for personal sports brands “you have to over-deliver, you have to give more, you have to work harder – I would never say lower the prices because we have such high-end things, high-end sponsors, high-end products so it is not about lowering the prices for us but about making it such an exceptional experience that people realise that it was worth the money[36]”. Personal sports branding is hard work and athletes must realise that they must give so much more than work on the field alone to build successful top-notch personal brands in sport.

This simplistic “hybrid” input/output framework for building a personal sports brand shows that personal sports brands are affected by various brand influencers (cf. defined and discussed throughout the paper) and vice versa. The same is true for a personal sports brand’s relationship with different revenue streams, i.e. a strong

Figure 1.
“Hybrid” framework
for building a personal
sports brand



personal sports brand produces different revenue streams and these revenue streams form a strong basis for further development of the personal sports brand. An example of a brand influencer for a personal sports brand is “superior athletic performances and/or abilities”, which work as “a living example” of a powerful brand asset for a personal sports brand. This asset can generate different revenue streams, e.g. endorsement deals. This reflects the “interactionist” and “hybrid” nature of a personal sports brand given the interplay between different factors in building and determining the strength of the personal sports brand.

Social media act as a supporting tool to enhance the “buzz” when good words are spread about Sörenstam’s personality, athletic or business performances and hence it serves as a method to build brand power via improved brand equity and loyalty. At the same time, it portrays how it is possible to link the personal sports branding level to sports branding at the product and corporate levels. Indirectly, Leonard (2010, p. 166) touches upon this theoretical statement when discussing Michael Jordan’s retirement from the NBA and whether there would be someone to fill his Air Jordan shoes on the field and what that question would mean to the marketing of the league / NBA. The role of sports and sports branding and personal sports celebrities in popular contemporary culture is significant (Dyer, 1986, p. 18; Gitlin, 1998, p. 81; Bell and Campbell, 1999, p. 22; Marshall, 1997; Andrews and Jackson, 2001; Andrews and McDonald, 2001, p. 20; Friedman, 1999, p. 3; *Oprah Winfrey Show*, 1997[37]; Cole and Andrews, 2001; Carlin, 1999, p. 29; Archetti, 2001, p. 151) and history proved this when LeBron James filled the shoes and shined through as one of the biggest stars in the history of the NBA (Elberse and McCall, 2010). In July 1997, Oprah Winfrey added to this scenario when using Tiger Woods as a social marker for a more racially diverse USA following Woods’ victory in the Masters Championship (Uchacz, 2009). History has proved the same brand strength of personal sports brands in regards to Sörenstam’s income potential and business success even after her retirement from the tour circus of women’s professional golf (*Forbes*, 2010)[38]. As illustrated in the LeBron James and Sörenstam exemplifications, social media is a proficient agent in terms of leveraging social interactions between personal sports brands and consumers and between personal sports brands and other sports brands, cf. at the personal, product and corporate levels. Social media also allow and enhance personal sports brands’ “viral lives” while keeping niche marketing and relationship marketing at the core of building and commercialising personal sports brands at a global level (Santomier, 2008; Smith, 2008; Bei *et al.*, 2004; Porter, 2001; King, 2004). Paul (2007) supplements by acknowledging that via the inclusion of Twitter and Facebook, which are applied by many personal sports brands, it becomes easier for personal sports brands to create relationships and to produce or reproduce the “reality” of these sport stars online and thus supporting sports branding processes.

Sörenstam’s legacy is still very much alive leading her to obtain ROIs based on her personal sports brand and related brands (*Forbes*, 2010; Friedman, 1999) while leaving and retaining a “vital footprint” of personalisation on her brands via events such as the ANNIKA Experience (Gerzema and Lebar, 2008, pp. 97-101). The ANNIKA Experience seems as a perfect example of an event competent enough to promote and personalise Sörenstam’s passions as well as the essence of the ANNIKA Foundation and the significance of fun brand experiences. This is exemplified via the ANNIKA Experience when “breathing and consuming the vibes of Annika Sörenstam and her related brands” and it works as another way of communicating and exercising brand building focused on generating ROIs while acknowledging that “social media is a cocktail party” or that a “cocktail party atmosphere” may generate the buzz needed from social

media to add positively to brand building (Scott, 2010). Social media possess the handiness to customise and target sports branding messages to specific stakeholder groups and hence “frame” the sports branding process in a desired way (Brown, 2003). A lot of “buzz” and “vibe” are created around personal sports brands in the new social media landscape. By engaging in this process, a personal sports brand maintain some level of control concerning the “framing” of stakeholders’ perceptions of the brand (Pedersen *et al.*, 2007; Yang *et al.*, 2003; Filo and Funk, 2005). This is also evidenced in the fact that many professional sport stars engage with stakeholders through personal blogs, e.g. Annika Sörenstam’s blog (Annika Sörenstam Blog, 2011) or Caroline Wozniacki’s blog via TV2 Denmark (*TV2 Denmark*, 2011). Today, millions of sports fans and consumers do not rely solely on traditional mass media but have moved to the commercial and interactive communication tools facilitated by the World Wide Web (Stafford *et al.*, 2004; Pedersen *et al.*, 2007). Sörenstam has understood to take advantage of social media by acknowledging their importance of being more than a public relations tool (Brown, 1998, 2003). Social media supports revenue generation (Migala, 2004) for the ANNIKA brands, i.e. Migala argues that successful commercial web sites may generate revenue from advertising, ticket sales and other sources – the latter may include data collection about stakeholders for b2b and b2c purposes.

Featherstone’s (2007, p. 86) proposal[39] where he divides people into classes in terms of sports consumption does not appeal highly to golf given the change surrounding the sport of golf. This change has taken the sport from a pure “high-class” sport “towards a more mainstream image” affordable and accessible for every layer of society (Paulsen, 2007, p. 12). Observations and data have proved that Sörenstam appeals to a larger audience ranging from kids through senior citizens, from blue-collar to white-collar workers, from private golfers to large corporations – Sörenstam covers a lot of ground in terms of market reach and potential. The team behind the ANNIKA brands are very cognitive about that process as evidenced by Mike McGee stating that “with the road to all different entities being important” it serves a key strategic purpose in the sports branding process to recognise that focus should not be entirely on the overall ANNIKA brand nor on one of the underlying brands but rather on the interrelationships between all the ANNIKA brands as one big family.

Concluding remarks and limitations

One thing comes to mind after reviewing this research process. For personal sports brands to succeed financially by monetising on a person’s name, athletic potential and talent, a vital requirement is a “large stage” and a product and/or brand with wide appeal.

Some essential conclusions of this paper include:

- (1) The meaning of “hybrid” in terms of personal sports branding, i.e. personal sports brands are not only personal but also affected by the product and organisational branding levels. Of course that affects the commercialisation process in that personal sports brands cannot stand alone when seeking to optimise ROIs.
- (2) The emphasis on brand influencers and revenue streams for personal sports brands indicate the “hybrid” nature of these sports brands. Specifically, Annika Sörenstam would not have been taken to the same strong brand level only due to her performances on the playing fields.

- (3) The fact that without factors like media exposure, a great team around her, successful corporate sponsors, powerful CSR-initiatives and fan interest, the case of the ANNIKA brand of businesses would not have entailed the same value as a best practice example for sports branding practitioners. Thus, it serves personal sports brands well to add value to their product(s) and organisation(s) by linking for instance CSR or other brand influencers to this intertwined process that sports branding becomes when athletes drags their successful experiences from the field into highly branded properties on several scales, i.e. by adding extra brand equity and loyalty to their personal sports brands and making that rub off on related product and corporate brands. Everything (all the initiatives under the ANNIKA brand of businesses and related actions) add to the table in terms of having built Annika Sörenstam's personal sports brand as it is to be perceived today. Athletic ability at the superior level was just the start as Mike McGee and Annika Sörenstam recall it.
- (4) The influence of brand evolvement for Sörenstam's personal sports brand. That process has been very dynamic and creating good "hybrid" connections have caused her brand to become very powerful even after her active career. The findings present that "athletes only go a certain distance" regarding the power of their personal sports brands due to athletic abilities. To optimise the power of a personal sports brand, athletes must "engage in hybrid relationships", be strategic about this engagement and thus rely on these actions to "brand themselves" via relationships outside the athletic field to gain higher ROIs than what is constituted only from athletic abilities.
- (5) The fact that Annika Sörenstam's personality and her brand have melted together and adds some "legitimacy, authenticity and trustworthiness".
- (6) A fine balance between brand influencers, revenue streams, Annika Sörenstam's personal brand and the related ANNIKA brand of businesses displays the brand strength of Sörenstam's "hybrid" personal brand and its "interactionist nature" (as evidenced in the input/output framework in Figure 1) The "lifestyle" type of brand extension has more to say for itself than simply "endorsing equipment" (although still important) after the peak of an athlete's career. Annika's iconic status and the characteristic of golf consumers attach meaning to this and partly explains why Annika has been successful in driving positive revenue streams even after her active career (other explanations can be found via the brand influencers). Golf is different than many other sports. Given that Sörenstam is not part of a sports team (e.g. soccer, volleyball, etc.), she has a high level of control over her brand management process. Additionally, golf is a popular sport for people of all ages, even for senior citizens. That means that there will be a lot of people playing golf in 30 years from now and Annika has positioned herself well in their minds. That extends the potential for future revenue streams since these people will remain "active consumers". She shapes. behavioural patterns.
- (7) A consistent brand promise delivery and brand strategy alignment has been significant for Annika Sörenstam, also in terms of linking her personal brand to positive revenue streams after her active career.

Discussing and analysing the "hybrid" character of Sörenstam's personal sports brand reveals the "ambiguity" often associated with personal sports brands. While being

linked to “high-end” products and sponsors, i.e. Lexus and Rolex, Annika Sörenstam her personality in CSR-related endeavours and in building the sports-business related sub-brands. Brand critics may argue that these actions cannot go hand in hand and will add indistinctness to the ANNIKA brand of businesses while others may state that it reveals “perfect staging” of Sörenstam’s personal sports brand in terms of giving the brand “wider appeal” and combining successful organisations’s and Sörenstam’s wishes to give back to less fortunate people or aspiring golf players (strategic fit). Nevertheless, it displays a “hybrid” character of personal sports brands where “ambiguity” becomes a factor that must be carefully managed to reach a status like Sörenstam.

This case study on Annika Sörenstam is unique based on her relative sovereignty as an athlete for what reason it may be hard to draw direct generalisations to other athletes at different levels. Additionally, it serves a purpose to mention that the sport of a particular athlete and its popularity also may influence the outcome of personal sports branding processes. Finally, a different methodology would have led to different conclusions but it was important to seek availability to “go behind the curtains” and collect a firsthand impression of the experiences of the athlete and her team in terms of their branding processes. The latter focuses on whether or not this case study is applicable in the real world? To answer that question, it is essential to mention that: this research presents a bridge between scientific knowledge and practical applicability in a field short of in-depth academic and empirical research; this research provides a relevant contextual framework for understanding the gaps, overlaps and differences between various levels of sports branding, i.e. organisational, product and personal levels; this research defines and discusses key brand influencers to be applied in the development, management and capitalisation phases of personal sports branding while taking into considerations content from classic branding and personal branding theory; this research has generated scientific knowledge and practical applicability in relation to strategic initiatives in various sports organisations; this research displays that McGee and Sörenstam both emphasise the importance of “delivering”, a metaphor building a bridge between sports and business where “perfect delivery” is essential to survive as a brand; this research shows evidence based on the qualitative observations and interviews that answers from Sörenstam and McGee were (of course different in wording but) highly aligned in meaning in terms of placing Sörenstam’s personality and passions as a central focal point when providing stakeholders with exceptional “brand interaction experiences”. Concerning the latter, the research presents facts that the ANNIKA brand of businesses make use of some brand values, which tend to be “generic” (risk factor), i.e. honesty and integrity. That is true for other personal sports brands as well and if personal sports brands seek to capitalise on “generic brand values”, they must be true to these values in their actions, exemplified by Sörenstam. Sörenstam revealed that she understands the importance of creating synergy between her personality and all related brands. Her personal brand must be in cohesion with and complement related brands and live up to the brand promises, which is where other personal sports brands have met difficulties in terms of running their businesses.

Notes

1. Although keeping in mind that deduction is implicitly applied in case studies based on grounded theory (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008).
2. Though, there are exemptions in that regard, e.g. Anna Kournikova.
3. Fans want to act and be like them, inspired by Crawford (2004) and Smart (2004).

4. Annika Sörenstam retired from professional golf in 2009 to focus on the ANNIKA brand of businesses. Under the overall ANNIKA brand, you find other branded properties such as ANNIKA Academy, ANNIKA Financial Group, ANNIKA Foundation, ANNIKA Experience, numerous golf course design projects around the world, the ANNIKA collection of apparel with Cutter & Buck, an Annika wine label with Wente Vineyards, and a fragrance with SA Fragrances.
5. Intensified via the application of new media, e.g. Facebook and Twitter.
6. Being the world's number one for many years adds positively to Annika Sörenstam's personal sports brand.
7. Annika Sörenstam & Callaway or Michael Jordan & Nike. These endorsement deals has affected the involved parties positively.
8. Fan interest is a great driver for ROIs linked to personal sports brands. Look at the amount of soccer shirts associated with David Beckham's career but also with soccer stars like Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Wayne Rooney. The corporate appeal of golf links Annika Sörenstam with great ROIs from high-end sponsors and indirectly end-consumers around the world.
9. David Beckham is a great example when highlighting his effect on popular culture and vice versa, i.e. the movie "Bend it like Beckham" or look at the entertainment created by Annika Sörenstam via her ANNIKA Experience where she invited famous chefs like Ming Tsai to promote the importance of good and healthy food for active lifestyles.
10. Annika Sörenstam inspires healthy kids through her ANNIKA Foundation and featured on *ABC's Good Morning America* in October 2010 to highlight the importance of such CSR initiatives in sport.
11. The drive and energy of Annika Sörenstam causing her to continue to make a difference in the world of sports via her ANNIKA brands, e.g. the ANNIKA Foundation, ANNIKA Academy or ANNIKA Experience emphasises a positive sports personality (she is a real genuine athlete never caught in harmful discrediting actions). Edgy sports personalities caught in bar fights, infidelity or alcohol abuse reflect negative sports personalities. There is a fine balance between positive and negative sports personalities since some edgy sports personalities with controversial behaviours on and off the playing fields may seem appealing to sports fans (Dennis Rodman and John McEnroe illustrate this phenomenon).
12. The ANNIKA Foundation or Andre Agassi's College Preparatory Academy underscores positive extraordinary activities whereas a famous athlete caught in a doping scandal illustrates the negative angle.
13. Timing is important when looking to monetise from a strong personal sports brand. Annika Sörenstam's great off the course work has created a good platform for ROIs. Maria Sharapova and IMG coined some good endorsement deals after her 2004 Wimbledon title.
14. Personal sports brands compete with upcoming stars, i.e. Lionel Messi passed Diego Maradona given his current popularity and performances. The popularity of a specific sport also plays a role in determining or driving the strength of a personal sports brand, i.e. the popularity of World Wrestling Federation and especially Hulk Hogan in the 1980s and 1990s.
15. Annika Sörenstam has been capable of developing her ANNIKA brand of businesses and this continuous development has formed a positive reinforcing circle due to extra publicity and branding circles leading to enhanced brand strength.
16. For personal sports brands to reach their optimal branding potential, it requires a strong team and good strategic collaborative partners portrayed via the strong team and sponsors around the ANNIKA brands. Sörenstam sets new goals when current goals are reached – a process succeeding through team effort, network and winning mentality.

17. Annika Sörenstam has applied the important practical task of making herself available to key audiences such as the press, vital stakeholders like sponsors, fan groups or non-profit organizations. That adds integrity and authenticity to her branding processes. She seems like a “modern super woman” capable of managing multiple tasks successfully and that blends well with expectations of modern stakeholders.
18. The passion of Annika Sörenstam when involving herself in the ANNIKA brand of businesses adds trustworthiness and authenticity to her endeavours – to all underlying brands under the ANNIKA umbrella as well as to endorsers’ brands. It illustrates the essence of having a well-orchestrated brand architecture guided by passion of all key decision makers.
19. “Share my Passion” reveals a slogan pointing to the strategic direction of the ANNIKA brands of businesses and demonstrate the strength of Annika Sörenstam’s own personal involvement in the branding processes.
20. According to Nordjyske (2010), athletes are highly exposed personalities compared to other personality groups. The survey is based on a collaborative survey from the news database Outside24.dk and the analytical group Kaas & Mulvad. Every week, they monitor what 1,700 newspapers from 94 countries write about Denmark and Danes.
21. Look at David Beckham’s stints with Real Madrid and LA Galaxy and how that impacted the sales of soccer shirts with the “Beckham name” (Wahl, 2009).
22. The “money list” from *Forbes* (2010) covers income figures from June 2009 through June 2010, including endorsements, prize money, exhibitions and appearance fees. The list is dominated by female tennis players and golfers, totally accounting for eight out of ten spots.
23. “The athlete, with a strong brand backing him, can potentially garner off-the-field earning opportunities like speaking engagements, youth camps, memorabilia sales, and coaching. These additional income opportunities also have the potential to continue after their playing days are over” (Craft, 2008, p. 7). The revenue streams mentioned here are integrated into the factors mentioned in list above.
24. The ANNIKA Foundation’s purpose is to teach children the vitality of living a healthy, active lifestyle via fitness and nutrition and offers aspiring junior golfers opportunities to follow their dreams (ANNIKA Foundation, 2011).
25. The ANNIKA Experience is an event under the ANNIKA Foundation aiming at fundraising for the ANNIKA Foundation. The event also aims at preaching the purpose of THE ANNIKA Foundation by engaging children, sponsors and other key stakeholders in what the Foundation and other ANNIKA brands is all about (ANNIKA Foundation, 2011).
26. The notion “dynamic creatures” supports the hybrid nature of sports brands. Behind the personal brand Annika Sörenstam stands an organization. The interview with Annika Sörenstam reflects that Annika perceives the sports branding process for the ANNIKA brands as a team process. She refers to “my team” and “we” when talking about the future opportunities for her ANNIKA brands.
27. From a commercial perspective and measured in \$.
28. LPGA is the Ladies Professional Golf Association.
29. Lexus is a high-end car brand.
30. Cutter & Buck is a producer of high-end golf-inspired apparel for men and women with a preference for innovative, high-quality sportswear.
31. Callaway is a global producer of golf clubs, golf balls, golf equipment and innovative golf technology.
32. Rolex used golf sponsorships to “upmarket” its watches.

33. This stems from an interpretation of Shank's (2009, p. 211) explanation of brand equity in a sporting context.
34. Sörenstam's personal brand has a higher value for sponsors than that of other women's golfers given her brand strength associated with being number 1 in the world for years and holding a sound commercial rationale due to her serious and positive mindset.
35. Keeping in mind that the creation and consumption of brands stems from the stakeholders around the brand(s) (Ind, 2007, p. 22).
36. Strategic fit is implicitly contained in this process.
37. After winning the 1997 Masters Championship, Tiger Woods appeared on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" on 29 July and during the hour-long interview, Oprah referred to Tiger Woods as "America's Son" several times, an indication of a sport star's powerful position in popular culture (Uchacz, 2009).
38. This development has also been evidenced via the massive portrayal of LeBron James' career path and what some people labeled "a new era of sports branding" (Esquire, 2008) as well as through the development of other stars, e.g. Maria Sharapova (Elberse and Golod, 2010; HBO, 2006).
39. Although he admits that reality is more complex and varied (Featherstone, 2007, p. 86).

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