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FOOTBALL PLAYERS AS BRAND AMBASSADORS:

THEIR INFLUENCE ON CONSUMERS IN RELATION TO KIT SUPPLIERS' BRAND IMAGE

Focus on the Western European men's football industry in the third millennium

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

Nowadays, the Western European men's football industry is in constant evolution. It embraces increasingly heterogeneous perspectives and interests, both inside and outside the green field, going beyond the ninety minutes.

In football sportswear market, branding is the principal source of competitive advantage for companies. Thus, top level football endorsers, employed as marketing and branding vehicles, can lead to positive brand image and improve brand equity. Indeed, through endorser's image and personality, consumers- fans tighten up an emotional tie and associations in their mind with the endorsed brands, as potential point of differentiation and source of competitive advantage for the companies.

Following a branding perspective, this thesis explores and describes three main research questions, by offering underlying up- to- date managerial implications and insights. Speaking of which, sportswear brands' decisions behind football endorser's selection and implementation as well as narrowed focuses on sponsorship and football boots launch are developed, by comparing the current situation with the '90s and emerged contrasts in terms of image in- and out- pitch.

Having assumed "interpretivism" as research philosophy, this research holds "subjectivism" as ontology. Consistently, research project purpose is principally exploratory and then, descriptive.

Theoretical framework is mainly based on Keller's customer- based- brand- equity (1993) and Aaker's brand personality (1997). They stand for research theoretical basis and roots, since they allow to fulfil what the three research questions request, in line with research philosophy and purposes. These utilised theories contribute to better address and accomplish the research questions and objectives. Nonetheless, several other studies and theories are assessed as functional to the execution of the three research questions. Additionally, secondary data and trends are inserted.

The researcher carries out one electronic questionnaire, as quantitative technique, and four semi- structured interviews, as qualitative techniques, with top heterogeneous figures within the analysed context. The qualitative analysis is executed through thematic and cross- case analysis.

Nike and adidas, the two football sportswear leading brands, are deepened through Business Canvas Model. Besides, three football celebrities are defined through the accomplishment of TEARS and No TEARS model

(Shimp, 2003): David Beckham, Ricardo Kakà and Cristiano Ronaldo. As Nike and adidas, they serve as both vehicle and benchmark for data collection and analysis in relation to the three research questions.

The electronic questionnaire primarily aims at satisfying what TEARS and No TEARS model asks. At the same time, it is the basis and starting point for the next qualitative research techniques. In particular, the third research question takes benefit from this quantitative technique. On the contrary, the four interviews are the highest source for data collection and analysis regarding the three research questions and objectives.

On the whole, fit dimension is essential in every consideration and finding highlighted throughout the thesis. Furthermore, kit supplier brands might adapt their image and personality over time coherently with different consumer's needs and wants, by choosing a consistent and efficient football endorser.

Nowadays, football player's image is considered more in a holistic and global way, where assessment process is more complicated and exceeds national boundaries. Besides, money receives increasingly more centrality. Additionally, the football endorser now holds a role model and he is a projection space of people's dream and personality, especially teenagers.

Touchpoints, based on the first two research questions, have deeply modified relationships between consumers, endorsers and brands. In this case, social media revolution is the best example and it is the melting point for both consumer and footballer's variations from the '90s.

In every research question emerges that inside the green field strikers first, and then creatives, are the most influential ones, since the more visible and famous, the better it is for the sportswear brands. Regarding out-pitch footballer's features instead, having a good looking endorser is added strength for the brand, but it is not always necessary. Overall, in- pitch image counts more than out- pitch one. In fact, the image inside the green field is the starting point for sportswear brand's assessment of football player as brand ambassador.

Consumers now are brand advocates and co- creators of products and values. However, at the same time, they try to call- out the same idolised football endorsers. Consistently, for instance adidas now is more individual as Nike and it is based on irreverence.

At the present time, sponsoring sportswear brands might go beyond footballer's club and playing skills: thus, they are looking for visible, famous, communicative and globally- oriented endorsers. Sponsorship activation is changed: here, storytelling deserves more attention.

Focusing on football boots launch, currently sportswear brands might pay more attention towards both user- and usage- imagery and rising product personalization possibilities. Teenagers in their high school period are the main target by sportswear brands. They tend to appreciate more a bad boy, rather than a serious football endorser. Lastly, football boots are a crucial self- extension tool.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Motivation

The motivation for this thesis takes the shape of the deep researcher's curiosity regarding top level football players as brand ambassadors, in the Western European men's football industry in the third millennium. Speaking of which, from a branding perspective, not only they have influence on consumer's choice, but also on kit supplier brands' image. Besides, football is also researcher's true passion and sportswear industry is his work ambition. Therefore, underlying effort in this thesis is further.

Consistently, thanks to researcher's job position during thesis development, top level figures in the Western European men's football industry offered their expertise. They comprehend both professional football player and top managers within sportswear and football businesses. Their point of views are true added value and uniqueness of this study.

1.2 The Western European men's football industry

The Western European men's football industry keeps continuously progressing, involving heterogeneous interests, both in- and out- pitch. It goes beyond its primary role of entertainment. It increasingly envelops several perspectives and objectives in terms of sport, branding, marketing and business administration.

Football has vital role in affecting and cementing senses of identity throughout the world. Hence, talking about football is the fastest way of entering into most cultures worldwide (Armstrong et al., 1999).

1.2.1 Kit supplier and brand relevance

Kit supplier manufacturers belong to the product category of sportswear, which is defined as products bought to be used in active sport (Newbery, 2009).

Globally, sportswear market is highly competitive and it is a branded market segment in the whole apparel business landscape. It is dominated by Nike and adidas (Tong and Hawley, 2009). More in depth, Appendix 1 allows to understand their supremacy, offering global sportswear market shares in 2013- 2014.

This research considers the two market leaders as benchmark as well as vehicle for data collection and analysis. Moreover, both will be deepened through Business Canvas Model.

In this market, branding is the largest source of competitive advantages: with deep awareness, sportswear brands strive for having a strong and memorable brand identity, consistently perceived with their brand image and related brand associations, in order to attract consumer's attention and build/ enhance brand awareness and loyalty (*ibid.*).

On this purpose, endorsement and sponsorship by football athletes takes a considerable portion of marketing strategy and expenses of major sportswear companies. To shed light on, in 2012, Nike reportedly invested US\$909 million just on endorsement contracts. Indeed, the most successful sportspeople nowadays earn more from endorsements than from their sport itself (Euromonitor, 2014).

1.2.2 Top level footballer's influence

Nowadays, football athletes hold a crucial role in the sport industry and society. They are employed as brand ambassador for football clubs they play for. In fact, for the majority of people passionate about football, top level athletes serve as arbiters of taste and public opinion, thus impacting on consumer- fan's choice (Euromonitor, 2014).

They are hired as testimonial by companies also operating in sportswear field, above all kit supplier ones, which can differ from the same ones collaborating with their football club as technical sponsor (e.g. Messi and FC Barcelona). As adidas and Nike, kit supplier brands strive for hiring the best and fittest athletes. Indeed, football players have noticeable influence on football club's brand image they play for and all companies they are sponsored by.

Football celebrities' capacity to attract preference to a sportswear brand, although they cannot guarantee final purchase preference, has been established by several studies (Sandhu et al., 2014).

If built up consistently, football endorsements give *credibility* (Shimp, 2003) to the kit supplier brand. Moreover, they allow to stimulate brand awareness and enhance brand image (Keller, 1993).

As long as the footballer fits, he contributes to raise credibility to a brand and influence the way it is perceived, especially in the case of kit supplier brands, due to their evidence and visibility, both in- and out-

pitch. Thus, it is commonly acknowledged that many consumers believe that if a product is good enough for a football star, it is good enough for them (Euromonitor, 2014).

1.2.3 Footballer as brand

In terms of celebrity, a footballer can be defined in many ways according to his function towards public opinion and consumer's influence (Euromonitor, 2014). However, this paper uses terms such as *brand ambassador*, *testimonial* and *endorser* attributing them same values and goals. Now, football endorser is used also as communication channel (Andersson and Ekman, 2009).

Top level footballer considered as celebrity is increasingly becoming brand in his own right, with a distinct brand personality, using his status to build personal empire (e.g. Cristiano Ronaldo and Beckham). "The World's Highest- Paid Celebrities" (Forbes, 2015) highlights impressive footballers' annual earnings thanks to endorsements. In fact, in 2015 Beckham got US\$42 million from commercial endorsements.

Being a footballer- brand includes many different activities all impacting on footballer's brand image. These significantly contribute to the brand image and personality of kit supplier sponsoring them. Hence, consumer-fan is influenced by all these stimuli, particularly in terms of brand preference and associations in mind and then, consumption choice.

However, there is a "double edged sword" effect: kit suppliers risk damaging their image when they establish a connection with a football star who is protagonist of negative publicity (e.g. Maradona with doping). Shimp's model (2003) will deepen this issue.

In addition, sportswear and football shoes above all, reflect particular footballer's style and values, both in- and out- pitch (Euromonitor, 2014).

With global sporting events (e.g. FIFA World Cup) becoming more popular than ever and new social media trends, footballers are increasingly valuable assets to sports brands (Euromonitor, 2014).

1.2.4 Football brand association

The usage of recognised footballer allows consumers to achieve an emotional tie and several associations with the endorsed brand, giving the brand a point of differentiation and a source of competitive advantage. As a result, football player can lead to a positive brand image and equity.

Besides, the endorsement must be authentic and create interest. The athlete has to be connected cohesively with the target, through symbolic meanings and related transfers. Therefore, the brand/ product is in condition for stimulating higher awareness (Keller, 1993).

1.3 Problem identification and statement

This paragraph highlights three main inadequacies that have persuaded the researcher to carry out this thesis.

First, this context highlights the need to further investigate its dynamics and better delineate the differences with the past. Besides, sport marketing as academic discipline demonstrates further research is needed, due to difficulties of finding supporting theories and studies.

Next, football endorser, his relationships with consumers as well as their personality implications, deserve more and up- to- date study. Then, it is important to deepen what is relevant regarding his image in- and out- pitch.

Third, having a better recall through the use of celebrity does not convert directly into increased sales (Euromonitor, 2014). Consistently, market giants do not perfectly match consumer's needs and wants in relation to the most suitable football endorser. Then, room for further study is evident.

The thesis deepens important themes and controversial issues, from a branding perspective. It covers branding decisions behind selection and implementation of the endorser, narrowed focuses on sponsorship activity and football boots launch, always keeping the football endorser as protagonist. Moreover, in each aspect, a comparison between the '90s and the current situation is developed. Besides, contrast in terms of image in- and out- pitch is crucial.

Although worldwide importance of football and increasing influence of footballers in marketing activities, there is an overall academic deficiency regarding this topic. The researcher will offer up- to- date and relevant information within this landscape, by focusing on three research questions.

This study will not offer a new theory or framework. Instead, it will be based mainly on two frameworks, as research roots, to execute the research questions.

1.4 Academic relevance

This paper will develop football endorser's influence on consumer's choice, kit supplier's brand image as well as their sponsorship and football boots launch activities.

This study highlights the qualitative correlations between footballer, consumer- fan's choice, kit supplier's brand image. Here, footballer's image and personality influence both consumers and sportswear companies at the same time, driving the consequential relationships between the other two actors. This is emphasised if they are in position to transcend football and appeal to a wide ranging demographic.

Footballer's image is considered both in- and out- pitch. This allows the researcher to better delineate the academic context with a different perspective. This is enhanced through top heterogeneous figures interviewed.

Thanks to this paper, what is innovative stems from the implicit dynamics and relationships in the football sportswear industry, deepened and discussed by top heterogeneous figures within the analysed context. It allows to further explore and describe (research purpose) this branding landscape, with the acknowledgement of structural lacks, although the socio- cultural and economic importance worldwide of football.

1.5 Delimitation

This thesis covers neither financial aspects not calculations. This choice is consistent with study program as well as research objectives, philosophy and techniques carried out. However, when appropriate, data and figures are inserted to better comprehend the topic.

Moreover, within Business Canvas Model, description of Nike and adidas will be supported by financial results and data. In fact, the paper is based predominantly on these two international leader brands.

Next, three top level celebrities are academically outlined and described through the execution of TEARS and No TEARS model (Shimp, 2003), thanks to an initial quantitative data collection and analysis, carried out through a questionnaire: David Beckham, Ricardo Kakà and Cristiano Ronaldo. This order reflects their different peak of fame and performance from the end of the '90s to 2016.

They serve as both vehicle and benchmark for data collection and analysis (both questionnaire and interviews) based on three research questions, where *exploration* and *description* drive their execution.

Despite the fact football industry recently shows growth of feminine sector (www.uefa.org), men's side, protagonist of this thesis, is still the most attractive one.

Last, football increased its presence worldwide. At the same time, 77% of the English Premier League's sponsorship revenues come from companies outside UK (Repucom, 2014). However, the Western European context is overall more advanced and then, it will be analysed. The sponsorship income of top five national European championships is about €2.1BN (Repucom, 2014).

Top leagues take place in the following four countries: Spain, Germany, England and Italy. These nations will be benchmark of the paper considerations, since they are the elite of European football (www.uefa.com).

A main limitation might be anticipated here. Although this topic looks at the third millennium and changes from the '90s, the thesis does not give a good measure of relevance and increasing impact of digitalization and social media.

In fact, the research questions do not take into initial account these issues. Rather, they arise through the qualitative research carried out.

1.6 Three research questions

The research questions are consistent with problem identification and statement.

The researcher collected data on his own as part the research project. He used both rational and creative thinking and techniques, suitable to his characteristics. Then, while refining research ideas, the researcher carried out a *preliminary study* (Saunders et al., 2009) and discussed with experts about research questions.

By following key aspects such as *capability* and *appropriateness* (*ibid.*), research topic and questions are linked to "Theoretical framework". Each question has passed the *SMART* test (*ibid.*). Namely, the objectives are *specific*, *measurable* and *achievable*. Also, the research questions are *realistic* and *timely*, since the researcher managed the available time in order to develop the research. Thus, results are considered as *symmetrical* (*ibid.*).

Each research question is composed by sub- questions, in order to be better explored, described and analysed.

I. Footballer's image

- a) What is the importance of footballer's performance for a sportswear brand?
- b) What are the main changes from the '90s?
- c) What are footballer's main characteristics in- pitch and out- pitch?
- d) Do sportswear brands emphasise more footballer's image in- or out- pitch?

Based primarily on Keller (1993) and Aaker (1997) (these will drive the next two research questions as well), the goal is to study the key role of top level footballers as influential factor of sportswear's brand image. A comparison between the current football situation and the end of '90s is therefore offered, together with the most important footballer's image traits and characteristics in- and out- pitch.

II. New football sponsorship

- a) What has been changed in the relationship kit supplier brand- consumer from the past?
- b) Do sportswear brands make different decisions to reach customers compared to the past?
- c) Starting from the sub- question above, are their goals the same as in the '90s?

Here the focus is narrowed towards sponsorship, as the best marketing activity concerning this analysed landscape. Then, an entire paragraph will be dedicated to discrepancy between sportswear brand of the footballer and his team. The objective consists in exploring and describing key dynamics and decisions specific to sportswear brand's sponsorship around footballer's image. Even here, the current situation is compared with the end of the '90s.

III. Football boots launch

- a) Which football endorser's characteristics are more important?
- b) What are the main changes in the last three decades?
- c) Is there a main targeted segment?

A theoretical paragraph will be dedicated to product life cycle theory in order to better execute the research question. This research question is different to the previous two. It is addressed towards a unique marketing situation: football boots launch, where football endorser's image and personality are crucial. The research objective aims at studying this marketing activity, on the basis of all what is said previously, as specific attempt to explore and describe main dynamics and issues.

2. Theoretical framework

This section helps to generate and refine research questions and objectives. Then, it allows to discover recommendations for further research and gain insights.

Consistently with research objectives and philosophy, theoretical framework is narrowed within primarily Keller's customer- based- brand- equity (from now on, "*CBBE*", 1993) and secondarily, Aaker's brand personality (1997) for two key reasons.

First, author desires to combine what he studied with this research topic. Namely, unifying core academic frameworks with an interesting topic.

Second, *CBBE* is the most significant argument and it is consistent with key branding concepts and research goals. Secondarily, Aaker (1997) supports *CBBE* and gives further theoretical basis to the thesis.

They represent the two frameworks and relevant roots for the entire research, how to address the research questions as well as methodology development.

To shed light on, all other studies below reported will be considered as useful and contributory, but not the core basis for the research questions.

2.1 Brand against product

Central terms such as brand ambassador, image, association and personality are all based on *brand*, namely: "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Kotler, 1991; p. 442).

Moreover, brands have a further and underlying life, with meanings that go beyond (Berthon et al., 2007). Brand can be football team *AC Milan*, sportswear giant *adidas*, championship *La Liga* and *Nike Tiempo* as

boots. Brand names can be also based on places, images and people's names (e.g. *CR7 and ADP10*¹) (Keller, 2013).

On the contrary, "a product is anything we can offer to a market for attention, acquisition, use, or consumption that might satisfy a need or want" (*ibid.*). Then, a product is a physical good or a service.

The differences between brand and product allow the brand to satisfy consumer's needs. These variances may be rational and tangible or more symbolic, emotional and intangible (what the brand means and embodies) (e.g. Brazuca: ball for the World Cup Final in 2014).

2.2 Customer- based- brand- equity

2.2.1 Brand equity and brand association

Keller conceptualized *brand equity* from the consumer's point of view by this definition of *CBBE*: "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" (Keller, 1993, p. 2), where the most valuable asset for company's productivity improvement is the knowledge created in consumers' mind from previous firm's marketing programs.

Differential effect refers to consumer's response to marketing of a brand in comparison with the same one of a fictitiously named or an unnamed version of the same product. Also, *consumer response to marketing* is determined by consumers' perceptions and behaviours stimulated and caused by marketing mix activities. Therefore, "a brand is said to have positive (negative) customer- based brand equity if consumers react more (less) favourably to the product, price, promotion, or distribution of the brand than they do to the same marketing mix element when it is attributed to a fictitiously named or unnamed version of the product or service" (*ibid.*, p. 8).

CBBE happens when consumer (e.g. high school student) has familiarity with the brand (e.g. adidas) and holds favourable, strong and unique brand associations in his/ her memory. Having a positive *CBBE* favourites higher revenues, lower costs, greater profits. Also, high brand awareness and positive brand image raise probability of brand choice and loyalty, being less vulnerable to competitive marketing initiatives.

¹ Del Piero's brand, showing his past way of celebrating goals (www.alessandrodelpiero.com).

In particular, one of the main advantages is that high levels of awareness and positive brand image most likely support marketing communications effectiveness and success (e.g. sponsorship activities). In this case, choosing a footballer as endorser leads to branding consequences, either positive or negative. They influence consumer's choice as well as sportswear's brand image.

Due to the crucial role of emotions and associations embedded in the brand, emotional associations related to a sense of security, social approval and self-respect are linked to the brand, as key sources of brand equity (Keller, 2013).

2.2.2 Brand knowledge

Brand knowledge is structured in two parts: *brand awareness* and *brand image* (to shed light on, "*Dimensions of Brand Knowledge*" - Appendix 2). On the whole, brand awareness and brand image discern brand knowledge and then, have influence on consumers' response. Comprehension of brand knowledge is crucial: it is impactful when a consumer thinks about a brand (e.g. Nike). In this case, it is vital to highlight the relationship between knowledge and memory in consumer's decision making process.

From the studies of Raaijmakers and Shiffrin (1981) and Ratcliff and McKoon (1988), where memory and knowledge are represented in the brain as a complex set of intersected nodes and links. Nodes are stored information connected by links. Furthermore, links have different strength. When memory is retrieved, from a node to another a spreading activation process starts. Consequently, brand knowledge is analysed as brand nodes in memory to which a variety of associations are linked (Keller, 1993).

Brand awareness

Brand awareness is defined in terms of customer's brand *recall* and brand *recognition*. The strength of brand nodes in memory, namely how a consumer can identify the brand in different situations, outlines brand awareness (Rossiter and Percy, 1987). Brand awareness might be executed as brand recognition or recall or both. Nonetheless, the link between category need (e.g. football sportswear) and the brand (e.g. adidas) is what brand awareness is all about (Percy and Rosenbaum-Elliott, 2012).

In consumer decision making process, brand awareness holds a focal role, explained in the next three motivations. First, stimulating brand awareness increases the probability that the brand will be placed in consumer's consideration set. Next, it influences decisions about the brands in consumer's decision set. Finally, brand awareness affects formation and strength of brand associations in the brand image. Here, a node is created previously in memory.

The first side of brand awareness is brand recognition, which "relates to consumers' ability to confirm prior exposure to the brand when given the brand as a cue" (Keller, 1993, p. 3), which can be linked to footballer's image. Secondly, brand recall "relates to consumers' ability to retrieve the brand when given the product category, the needs fulfilled by the category, or some other type of probe as a cue. [...] Brand recall requires that consumers correctly generate the brand from the memory" (*ibid.*, p. 3).

Brand image

Brand image is defined as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory" (*ibid.*, p. 3). Then, brand associations are informational nodes linked to the brand node in consumer's memory and containing consumer's meaning of the brand. The pieces of information consumers hold regarding a particular brand comprehend product- related or non- product related attributes; functional, experiential, or symbolic benefits; and overall brand attitudes (*ibid.*).

For this aim, kit suppliers and its sponsorship activities aim to improve brand image primarily by providing links to specific brand benefits and attributes (Grohs et al., 2004; Gwinner and Eaton, 1999), where footballers play a crucial influential role.

Favourability, strength and *uniqueness* of brand associations in consumer's mind are the dimensions which affect brand equity. Yet, first, types of brand associations are described. These varies according to attributes, benefits and attitudes concerning the same brand association.

1) *Attributes*, as descriptive features of the brand, are divided into *product- related* and *non- product- related*, such as price, packaging, user (e.g. amateur player) and usage imagery. (e.g. Sunday afternoon match). In this case, the latter two impact on *brand personality* attributes.

2) *Benefits* are personal values addressed to the brand and what consumers think the brand can do for them. There are three kinds of benefit: *functional* (intrinsic advantages of consumption, related to performances); *experiential* (what using the product/ brand means): whether it is more based on comfort, design, compactness and so on; *symbolic* (underlying needs for social approval or personal expression and self-esteem).

Concerning this, nowadays a person considers him/ herself (and is) assessed by others, as studied by McCracken (1989), Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), Cova and Cova (2002). Through football boots (e.g. Nike Tiempo), consumers personify the football player, communicating at the same time to others their taste and way- of- playing by embracing brands' image and personality. They show their personality as well. In the green field, a player wearing adidas World Cup differs from a footballer with an orange pair of Nike Mercurial. They represent a different football style with a different personality, as explained by Aaker (1997).

3) *Attitudes* are overall consumer's evaluations of the brand and basis for brand choice. Brand attitudes are function of the associated attributes and benefits considered as salient for the brand (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). For this purpose, brand attitudes can be correlated to beliefs regarding product- related attributes and functional and experiential benefits (Rossiter and Percy, 1987). Besides, brand attitudes are linked to beliefs concerning both non- product- related attributes and symbolic benefits.

Each of these three brand associations depends on:

1) *Favourability*: "associations differ according to how favourably they are evaluated" (Keller, 1993, p. 5). Hence, there is a positive brand attitude when people think the brand has attributes and benefits able to satisfy their needs.

2) *Strength* refers to different strengths of connection to the brand node. It varies throughout the sequential process of *encoding- storage* of information entered in consumer's memory. Quality and quantity affect the strength of information.

The more the number of cues linked to information, the greater the likelihood that the information is recalled. However, contexts and involvement impact on the particular association of the brand in consumers' mind (Keller, 1993). The better the footballer, the better and more cues can be linked to.

3) *Uniqueness*: having a strong and favourable association in consumer's mind, which is then unique to the brand, is crucial for company's success. This concept is related to brand positioning and source of competitive advantage. Nonetheless, a product category can also be described by a set of associations that consist of specific beliefs regarding any member in the category, along with overall attitudes towards all the competitors in the same product category, as in the case of kit supplier industry.

Consumers probably expect football boots to give them comfort and speed. Hence, they probably believe that Nike best embodies a football shoe, rather than Puma.

However, brands might take into account that competitive overlap in customer's mind is a potential drawback, which can lead to negative associations. A controversial issue, for example, occurs when a football player (e.g. Messi) is sponsored by adidas, although he plays for a football club (e.g. Barcelona), that has Nike as technical sponsor.

Consequently, characteristics of brand associations interact reciprocally. Their degree of abstraction and qualitative nature affect their strength, favourability and uniqueness. Moreover, brand attitudes are stored and then recovered in memory distinctly from underlying attribute information. Further, brand attitudes are consistently considered as brand associations, since both differ in strength (e.g. reaction time needed).

Fit among brand associations is crucial and determines the cohesiveness of brand image: associations might consistently share meanings. On the one hand, consistent information with brand associations is easier learned and remembered. On the other hand, if the brand image is not cohesive, just a part of all the retrievable brand associations can be recalled. For instance, it would be not good using Balotelli, considered a bad boy, as testimonial targeting serious people.

Lastly, brand associations can be changed by competitors' marketing activities and still, consumers can negatively confuse the meanings of the brands, which leads to weaker and less favourable brand associations.

Building a familiar brand characterized by favourable, strong and unique brand associations starts also through the decision of its brand identities such as brand name, logo, symbol together with the integration of the brand identities into a consistent marketing program.

Marketing programs aim at fortifying brand awareness and creating favourable, strong and unique brand associations in consumer's (e.g. "Just do it" by Nike). Here, brand awareness is linked to the brand familiarity: the number of product- related experiences accumulated by the consumer (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987).

Thus, the more familiarity, the more consumer's likelihood in brand recall and recognition: sponsorship and football endorser are potential causes for consumer's experience. Moreover, these stimulate the creation of user and usage imagery attributes in consumers' mind.

All that counts are favourability, strength and uniqueness of brand associations, together with brand awareness. Besides, there is no distinction between sources of brand beliefs, whether they are directly or indirectly created.

Furthermore, potentially successful indirect or secondary associations stem from primary attribute associations concerning in particular football celebrity endorser and football event. These are important for this paper. In fact, consumers have images of celebrity endorsers in their minds as a result of observing the celebrities in their own field or as a result of media coverage.

A footballer holds personality attribute associations and product- related attribute associations that become linked to the brand. Equally, a brand is linked with a particular sport event (e.g. Heineken and adidas with UEFA Champions League).

However, consistent transfer process from primary to secondary associations to brand is complicated, especially due to the significant fact that brand images change over time and new/ different degrees of associations may not be positive for the brand.

2.2.3 Measuring customer- based- brand equity

Measuring *CBBE* is made by two different approaches: direct and indirect. Appendix 3 reports constructs, measures and purposes of measurement, for both brand awareness and brand image.

This thesis does not aim to measure each brand knowledge constructs. However, how to measure them and related purposes are taken into account in order to better carry out both research techniques.

2.3 Kotler & Keller and brand image transfer

Kotler and Keller (2012) and Smith (2004) further highlight the relevance of football endorsers in terms of brand image and consumer's choice, where *fit* remains a chief concept.

Moreover, sponsorship associations, especially with brand personality, experiential and symbolic benefits, are important theoretical bases for data analysis.

The choice of a football celebrity as endorser can be a great point of differentiation and competitive advantage. However, they have short career and many chances to damage their image. The footballer might have high recognition, positive affect and fit with the product (e.g. Pirlo with Nike Tiempo) and the company's brand as well. Former footballer Gascoigne has high recognition, but negative affect among many consumer groups. The celebrity can lose popularity or be caught in a scandals (e.g. Maradona with doping) (Kotler and Keller, 2012).

Top level footballers play a deeply strategic role for their brands: not only they endorse a brand/ product, but also they are able to design, position and sell merchandise and services (e.g. running app). Nike often brings its sport endorsers in designing products (e.g. Neymar and Nike) (*ibid.*). The company can obtain a rich set of brand associations with consumers thanks to its endorsements as for Nike (*ibid.*) and adidas.

Next, consumers get confused when they face complex and multiple sponsorships around the same sport, events, football club and footballer. It is source of drawbacks.

Furthermore, the more powerful the sponsored brand image, the greater its potential for the process of "brand image transfer" ("*BIT*") (Smith, 2004).

To shed light on, through Keller's study (1993), there are six generic types of sponsorship association that may constitute brands image in terms of fit. Due to the topic, the most relevant is *brand personality*. Namely, for example, brands are seen as being similarly combative (e.g. Under Armour and Memphis Depay). They might have the same brand personality and consistent brand images.

The other five are: *product attribute*; *user imagery*; *functional experiential benefits* (e.g. Everton with Thai beer Chang); *symbolic benefits* (e.g. Hublot's with Chelsea FC).

Coherently, the greater the perceived fit between the brand associations of the sponsor and that being sponsored, the greater the transfer potential of those associations (Smith, 2004). Additionally, the degree of consumer's 'expertise'² affects fit.

Finally, the greater sponsorship's capability in empowering sponsoring brands to vary their brand associations and reposition them, the greater the commercial value of sponsorship (*ibid.*). The quality of a relationship affects consumer's brand loyalty and it can change the nature of brand- consumer relationships.

2.4 Brand personality

Brand personality "refers to the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Brand personality enables consumers to express their own self (Belk, 1988). This is a key way to differentiate a brand within a product category and to drive consumer' preference and usage, since "brand personality relates to a consumer's personality and thereby influences consumer preference" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Therefore, Nike and adidas have their own brand personality. Same as AC Milan and Real Madrid. Same as Beckham, Kakà, CR7.

Besides, brand personality has a symbolic or self- expressive function (Keller, 1993), due to consumers often imbue brands with human personality traits: "consumers easily can think about brands as if they were celebrities" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Anthropomorphization, personification and the creation of user- imagery allow to associate personality traits with a brand, as a point of enduring differentiation. Footballers are symbols, icons and people tend to behave like them, be inspired by them. They are brand as well.

Coherently with *fit* (Keller, 1993) "the greater the congruity between the human characteristics [...], the greater the preference for the brand" (Aaker, 1997, p. 348).

Direct and indirect contacts consumer- brand form and influence perceptions of brand personality traits (Plummer, 1985). Here, branded product's endorser is a crucial example. Then, people's personality traits associated with the brand are directly transferred to the brand (McCracken, 1989). All this drives a consumer to purchase adidas rather than Nike for example. Indirectly, product- related attributes, product category associations, brand name and many other more allow this association with a brand. Even gender, sex and class (demographics) are able to do so (Levy, 1959).

² The greater the level of expertise, the greater the ability to notice incongruences between sponsor and the sponsored property (Spence and Brucks, 1997).

As in the case of adidas Predator, both product- related attributes and not- related to the product ones (e.g. user imagery and footballer endorser) shapes brand personality.

Then, sportswear companies spread a desired brand personality to the target audience, through the emotions and feelings evoked to people as well as convey benefits (e.g. prestige) that are intrinsic to football (symbolic benefits; Keller, 1993).

In this case, footballer as brand ambassador is a vehicle with his brand personality and *fit* of both image and personality between company, product, footballer and marketing campaign are crucial. In fact, brand personality dimensions are perceived in consumer's mind and influence consumer's usage preference, emotions, loyalty and trust, where centrality of self and context are important.

Coherently with this thesis, endorsement involves the transfer of the cultural meanings of the football celebrity into the endorsed brand. The kit supplier (e.g. Nike), depending on associations desired for its brand, selects a football celebrity (e.g. CR7) who is endowed with these desired meanings. Selecting a bad boy as Balotelli rather than a serious one as Pirlo leads to completely different brand image and associations.

Persistently, football stars come into contact with objects, people and contexts that transfer meanings and build associations for the same athlete. In terms of McCracken's theories (1986; 1989) a football celebrity and his endorsement is a special illustration of *meaning transfer model* (Appendixes 4 and 5).

Footballers and sportswear brands have further increased product symbolism and meanings. For instance, wearing a Barcelona uniform is a powerful tool for identification given that it also embraces social and political matters.

At the same time, Cova and Cova's (2002, p. 614) assertion that "the link is more important than the thing" illustrates how a person belongs at the same time to different (implicitly or not) communities, within the sport category as well.

2.4.1 Limitations

First, Aaker's framework (1997) is based only on the American consumer's perception of brands across symbolic and utilitarian categories. Moreover, it excluded negative factors and cultural specificity, including items that are not personality traits (Sung and Kim, 2010).

Second, brand personality is not human- consumer personality, which is not robust and homogeneous across cultures. Thus, individualist culture's perceptions are different to and vary from collectivist culture's ones (Aaker, 1997).

Third, brand personality perceptions may vary from one product category to another one as well as specific brand personality dimension is associated differently with particular product category (Cui et al., 2008; Arora and Stoner, 2009; Chien et al., 2011).

2.5 Football sponsorship

This paper considers football sponsorship as the best marketing activity for exploration and description of football endorser's image in relation to consumer and kit supplier's brand image.

Sponsorship is not merely advertising. They differ in the subtler effects generated by the acceptance that money invested in sponsorship produces positive benefits for a sport, individual and the community (Jones and Dearsley, 1989). The link between brand and need must be clear as well as the key benefit communicated (Percy and Rosenbaum- Elliott, 2012). By sponsorship, brand is present in a favourable environment where it can take benefit from, due to already existing positive consumer's attitude towards the sponsored activity.

The key for a successful sponsorship is the *fit* between sponsored individual (e.g. CR7), brand (e.g. Nike) and product (e.g. Vapor). In fact, in firm assessments of the effectiveness of sponsorship, brand image improvement is a key achievement. Consequently, sponsorships for athletes in football industry, capture a weighty part of marketing budgets (Grohs and Reisinger, 2014).

Sponsorships are mostly effective in altering or strengthening consumers' perceptions and company's brand image due to their *credibility*: the capacity to stimulate goodwill towards the sponsoring company (*ibid.*). Based on Parasuraman and Grewal's study (2000), Beckham, Kakà and CR7 are valuable examples of sponsorship importance, especially in terms of brand image and related influence on consumers.

This paragraph takes inspiration from Aaker (1997) and Keller (1993). In fact, human personality traits, both of consumer and footballer, might be lined with brand personality.

The second research question is addressed towards sponsorship. Both quantitative and qualitative research techniques will deepen it. Through product quality (e.g. Nike Tiempo's textile), shopping experience (e.g. Nike Town) and sponsorship, consumers assess Nike as "innovative" (personality trait), where football endorsement and sponsorship influence these brand associations and perceptions (Arora and Stoner, 2009).

Lastly, the importance of *fit* between sponsoring company and footballer is critical for changes in brand image (Woisetschläger and Michaelis, 2012).

Since brand images changes over time, the researcher analyses three different football players. Each of them reached the peak in different decades.

2.6 Product life cycle

Introduction is the first stage of the product life cycle model (from now on, “*PLC*”). This phase is followed by *growth*, *maturity* and *decline*. From a theoretical point of view, throughout *PLC*, in particular at the beginning, sportswear companies must adopt their positioning and differentiation strategy according to product, market and competitors.

In this situation, brand image and personality of the employed endorser are crucial as well as his *fit* with company product and target (Kotler and Keller, 2012).

At the same time, all these change over the *PLC*. In *introduction*, market pioneer gains the greatest advantage such as Nike and adidas. These firms take benefit from the fact that early users tend to better and easier recall and recognise brand name (*ibid.*). Pioneers can invest in marketing activities more effectively and enjoy higher rates of repeat purchases.

Lastly, in the *introduction*, advertising, events and endorsement have the highest cost- effectiveness (*ibid.*).

The third research question is based on *introduction* and football boots launch.

Football boots launch is further relevant because it emphasises and deepens the key concepts above explained through Keller (1993) and Aaker (1997).

Coherently, both quantitative and qualitative research techniques will investigate it.

3. Literature review

3.1 Customer- based- brand- equity

This thesis is narrowed primarily on branding issues, rather than wider marketing ones. Besides, *CBBE* is adapted to the analysed context. It is considered as primary framework in order to explore and describe the research questions.

Within *CBBE*, according to topic, research questions and goals, brand image is protagonist of this framework, rather than brand knowledge and awareness. This does not mean they are not considered throughout data analysis.

Brand image is assessed together with key concepts as brand ambassador, association and personality, *fit* and *credibility*. All these will be central for tackling the research questions, since they strongly gather around the studies of brand image and its applicability in the analysed industry.

Consistently, footballer and his associations highlight that “branding is all about creating differences” (Keller, 2013, p. 57). Then, there are different goals behind a type of endorser for boots launch for instance.

These variances and feelings impact on company’s brand image and equity differently. Here, footballers can be a powerful vehicle for brand image and subsequent brand associations. Coherently, a key point concerns primary brand associations with specific person/ endorser or event, for both user and usage situation attributes. This is the case, by Rossiter and Percy (1987), when the ad forms an association between celebrity endorser and brand (e.g. CR7 and Nike).

Consequently, other associations from the endorser can be easily expanded into ones related to the brand. This matter will be investigated in both research techniques.

Besides, brand attitudes are linked to non- product- related attributes and symbolic benefits, that hold importance due to research philosophy and approach.

To shed light on branding and symbolic- interpretive applications of *CBBE*, a key example is here offered by Moisander and Valtonen (2012).

Nike has leadership mainly due to its cultural icon and meaningful position. Indeed, the company invoked powerful cultural and meaningful myths in the past (e.g. Michael Jordan), stimulating shared meanings (e.g.

“Just do it”). Besides, Nike succeeded by providing a powerful motivation- metaphor for anxieties Americans had in the past.

Nike perfectly exploited their emotional situation and proposed itself as problem- solver brand (Holt and Cameron, 2010). Nike became the most important sports brand when it delivered expressions so compelling, thanks to its endorsers, that people believed that Nike, based on its personality and image, performed better.

3.2 Brand personality

This framework is adapted to the analysed context. It will be considered as secondary framework in order to explore and describe the topic following the research questions, by supporting *CBBE*.

Moreover, brand personality will be based on a specific product category, where Nike and adidas are leaders as well as Beckham, Kakà and CR7 the main endorsers.

The choice of using it for accomplish research questions and objectives is supported as follows. Then, both quantitative and qualitative research techniques will study Aaker’s branding concepts.

Consumers do associate brand personality dimensions with sportswear brands (Tong and Su, 2014). In fact, in the sportswear market brand image and personality in consumer’s mind are decisive. Therefore, footballers as brand ambassador can be source of competitive advantage and point of differentiation.

Second, consumer is not able to easily discern brands according to physical attributes and functionality. Thus, brand personality influences consumer’s perception and information process, being vehicle for product differentiation (Tong and Su, 2014; Keller, 2013).

Third, brand personality fortifies the effectiveness of marketing communication, where football endorsers play a crucial role, even out- pitch (Arora and Stoner, 2009).

Lastly, consumers gain comfort when interacting with products that they have anthropomorphized. Indeed, by attributing human features to products (Tong and Su, 2014), for example evaluating a pair of football shoes as “aggressive”, they reduce their insecurity. Here, CR7 is a great testimonial for Nike’s products given the *fit* between brand/ boots’ image and footballer’s image and personality.

Concerning this issue, the theory of “extended- self” argues that “possessions are a major contributor to and reflection of our identities” (Belk, 1988, p. 139).

Moreover, brand personality empowers customers to identify themselves with a brand, in order to express their own personality through the brand, as individuals tend to ponder possession to be part of their own self (Belk, 1988).

Then, people tend to choose brands that are coherent with their own self, image and personality. Through football boots, consumers identify and extend themselves, represent the brand and personify the football endorser.

Therefore, brand personality is focal point in driving consumer’s preference towards a brand (Biel, 1993): both sportswear and football player as well as their *fit*.

Top level footballers have their own brand image, personality and associations that are influenced by both what they do in- and out- pitch.

This will influence *fit* dimension and brand associations with kit suppliers and football clubs, involving their brand image and brand equity, especially in situations of endorsement, sponsorship and football boots launch.

4. Additional data and trends

By this section, secondary data and trends are offered to further support research questions development.

4.1 Footballer's importance for sportswear brand

In order to better understand footballer's importance for a sportswear brand, a first example is reported. Adidas made an incredible investment to convince "Red Devils" to abandon Nike and move to its first competitor (Repucom, 2015). Then, adidas' financial effort, has been rewarded immediately, "making it the fastest value generating football kit launch campaign ever, for the sports apparel giant." (*ibid.*). However, "Rooney has risked the wrath of the sponsors by posting a picture of himself wearing a Nike training top on the day adidas took over as Manchester United's kit suppliers. Rooney, personally endorsed by Nike, posted an image on Facebook wishing Bastian Schweinsteiger a happy birthday. However, the United duo were wearing their old club training shirts": Nike. (www.express.co.uk).

4.2 Sponsorship discrepancy

CalcioeFinanza (2015) stressed the discrepancy between Barcelona's technical sponsor Nike and Messi's one, adidas. To clarify, adidas is also technical sponsor of Argentina team, where Messi is captain. From a survey by Radio Catalunya, 70% of respondents associated Messi with Nike, rather than adidas. As a consequence, adidas is looking for a football team, sponsored by the German giant, able to sign Messi. In that case, adidas would help the operation, which is estimated around €639M (www.calcioefinanza.it).

4.3 Why CR7

CR7 tops the list of world's most marketable football players. Focusing on his overall marketability, it is largely driven by his global fame (83% of people know who he is). Globally, 85% of all men and 80% of all women have heard about him (Repucom, 2015). Although Messi won more trophies than Cristiano Ronaldo, CR7's annual endorsement earning is about \$22.5M, whereas the Argentinian's is \$21.25M (Repucom, 2014). This figures justify the choice of deepening CR7 rather than Messi, considering CR7 as the best football endorser now.

In fact, brands might not just look at the most famous players, rather at how perceptions change between countries demographics (Repucom, 2015).

5. Business Canvas Model

Business Canvas Model is a strategic framework for Nike and adidas business models exploration, composed by nine key elements. This section aims at better describe them in relation to research objectives, due to their benchmark role throughout the research techniques.

5.1 Introduction

Nike and adidas nowadays are the dominant kit suppliers. By their leadership and budget, adidas and Nike pay the highest sponsorship fees. Regarding total revenues developed from kit supplier deals, the amount made by the 98 clubs of the top 5 European leagues in 2013/ 14 is €423M: increased about 60% over the past seven years. Nike and adidas, in 2014, headed the ranking endorsing 77% of footballers by €108M (Repucom, 2014). Key and overall company facts, both for adidas and Nike, are in Appendix 6 and 7 respectively.

5.2 adidas

I. Key partners

Consistently with the thesis, key partners mainly regard promotion and sport partnerships with athletes, teams, leagues, events and federations. These strongly contribute to brand positioning and image. Here, adidas strives for equipping all its teams and athletes to get what seems impossible (“Impossible is nothing”) (www.adidas-group.com).

The Group is focused on sponsorship agreements with all the most followed and important sport events worldwide. Besides, it deals with high- profile different sport teams and national teams (e.g. Spain and Argentina; Real Madrid and Manchester United). Currently adidas’ brand ambassadors include four- time Ballon d’Or winner Messi, Bale and Pogba, among more than 800 endorsees in European men’s football, Rose (NBA), Wozniacki (tennis) and many others (Euromonitor, 2015).

Last, adidas collaborates with top designers and creative personalities (e.g. Yohji Yamamoto, Stella McCartney and Pharrell Williams) (www.adidas-group.com).

II. Key activities

Portfolio comprehends sports footwear and clothing, accessories such as bags, watches, eyewear and other sports- related goods and equipment. It is mainly composed by: adidas- performance in *competitive sports*; Reebok and Reebok classics in *active sports & casual sports*; adidas originals, adidas Fun, Rockport in *sports fashion* (annual report 2014).

The brand adidas is the group's number one brand by value sales, generating 79% of reported total sales (Euromonitor, 2015). The relationship with its employees (around 53,000) is vital: its consumers' brand love is based on employees' passion for a sporting lifestyle (www.adidas-group.com; annual report 2014).

III. Value propositions

The company wants to lead the market through innovation and through a multicultural team grounded in sport heritage, claiming for pursuing sustainability and creating long- terms shareholder value. Moreover, adidas wants to anticipate and respond to customers' needs through innovation and creativity. Then, adidas strives for being close to people.

The mission is: "we strive to be the global leader in the sporting goods industry with brands built on a passion for sports and a sporting lifestyle" (www.adidas-group.com). adidas acknowledges that only with comprehension of consumer's motivations and experiences, there will be product co- creation, brand value achievement and brand loyalty.

Multi- brand portfolio, maintaining a culture of innovation through improvements of products, services and processes, investments on the highest- potential markets, distinct channel approach, employees' sport-orientation and passion, supply chain closer to consumers and their needs, sustainability towards environment, people and products: all these are crucial value goals (annual report 2014).

IV. Customer relationship

Customers are co- creators of value and future: they are the biggest source of expenses and investments. Besides, adidas involves primarily athletes and partners as well. Moreover, adidas strives to help people perform at their best: their success is adidas' ambition. Then, the Group wants to engage with people in a long- lasting relationship (www.adidas-group.com). Customer relationship is a crucial aspect since it is customer- oriented and people are the key for company's success. Customer relationship management is outsourced.

The company made all its products available through capillary and efficient exclusive stores (franchise model) and co- branded stores worldwide (annual report 2014).

V. Customer segments

The vision- mission- values embraces everybody, with no difference of age, sex and other demographics (www.adidas-group.com). Nonetheless, the overall segmentation is based on demographic, psychographic and behavioural factors: the segmentation adopts heterogeneous and complementary approaches. In fact, the Group has four brands in its strong portfolio – Reebok, adidas, Rockport & Taylormade which are meant for different segment groups.

On the whole, the majority of its customers are of 15- 30 years of age who hail from upper- middle class. Moreover, user- and benefit- based positioning are the strategies adidas carries out to create distinctive brand image. The Western Europe was traditionally the stronghold.

VI. Key resources

Overall, company's key resources refer to sponsorships and endorsements activities, human capital, products, factory management, researchers and innovation technology. However, the key resource is brand equity, as point of differentiation and competitive advantage. Endorsement activities keep contributing on this. As potentiality, adidas adopted omni- channel managerial approach and extended it to all sales channels: everything concerns the final consumer. Distribution channels drive company's value since global operation has adopted a go- to- market process (annual report 2014).

Consistency across every touchpoint, both digital and physical, is key resource as well.

VII. Channels

On the whole, adidas' channels are: website, app, social media, brand stores and other sport- stores like Foot Locker. adidas' entire process starts with subcontractors and suppliers.

The supply chain is global and multi- layered (www.adidas-group.com).

Production and assembly are in America, Canada and Germany (annual report 2014). The whole apparel is made by third party contractors, principally in Asia Pacific. Vietnam is the main source of footwear, by 39% of volumes in 2014 (Euromonitor, 2015). Appendix 8 illustrates both footwear and apparel production by region in FY 2014, where Asia is the most employed zone.

adidas' retail business is now more focused on impactful brand activations, consistently throughout the portfolio (e.g. HomeCourt) (*ibid.*).

VIII. Cost structure

adidas' cost structure depends on: sponsorships and endorsements, advertising campaigns, buildings, staff, distribution and marketing research.

In 2013, the average fee paid by adidas to its seven partner clubs amounts to €16.6M (Repucom, 2014). It is assumed that since the Group belongs to consumer goods, the highest investments and expenditures come from the marketing function, which tends to be variable cost. Indeed, sponsorship, partnership, promotion, advertising and all other marketing activities stay at the basis for the success. The Group benefits from economies of scale and its cost structure is defined as cost driven, since it is focused on minimizing all costs. In the last FY, marketing working budget has been €1,548M, which corresponds to 25% of operating expenses and to 11% of total revenues, namely €14,5M. In FY 2014, cost of sales³ increased (annual report 2014).

IX. Revenue streams

The Group reached €14,5M of net sales in FY 2014 (+ 2,3% from 2013), with EBITDA of €1,283M and operating profit of €981M (annual report 2014). Appendix 9 shows total revenue and net income from 2009 to 2014 at group level: a constant growth except for the FY 2013.

Instead, Appendix 10 highlights the great incidence of adidas brand on total sales in FY 2014, rather than Reebok and other brands of the Group. From Euromonitor (2015) and annual report FY 2014 emerged that net sales by region underlines the dominance of the Western Europe, due to its 28%.

Wholesale remained the company's primary business, since it generates 65% of 2014 net sales in FY 2014 of both Reebok and adidas brands. Appendix 11 better explains total revenue by wholesale (by 65%) and retail in 2014.

The Group held a 2% share of the global apparel and footwear market (2014). Its main business is sportswear, in which it held an 11% share and ranked behind Nike. North America is the key market, where Nike is leader. Men's footwear is the core business thanks to its 31% of 2014 values, giving it a 7% share of the global men's footwear market. However, women's products are emerging, driven by fitness and running trends.

³ By cost of sales, it means the amount adidas pays to third parties for producing and delivering its products.

5.3 Nike

I. Key partners

As adidas, importance is credited to partnerships and advertising activities with sport icons, teams, tournaments, events and federations. In fact, they are able to enhance Nike's positioning and image.

Nike has sponsorship agreements with all the most important sport events worldwide (e.g. Olympic Games of Rio 2016). Besides, it counts on deals with high-level club and national teams (e.g. Brazil and the Netherlands, Barcelona and PSG). Nike's portfolio includes top deals with CR7, Neymar, Ibrahimović and Rooney (football), Bryant, LeBron, Ginobili (NBA), Federer (tennis) and other sport icons (www.nike.com), with great success in terms of brand image and associations, since the life-deal signed with MJ in the '80s.

II. Key activities

Nike's business consists in the following activities: design, development, worldwide marketing and selling of athletic footwear, apparel, equipment, accessories and services.

Central facets of its competitive landscape are: product quality and innovation, reliability, consumer price/value; consumer connection with brands and products through marketing and promotion; identification with influential top sport figures and organizations who endorse Nike's brands; active engagement through sponsored events; effective distribution of products as well as attractive merchandising and retail, both in store and online.

Nike's brands compete in eight strategic categories: running, basketball, football, men's training, women's training, action sports, sportswear and golf (Euromonitor, 2015).

Besides, it sells bags, socks, sport balls, eyewear, timepieces, digital devices, bats, gloves, protective equipment, golf clubs and other sport equipment (annual report 2014).

III. Value propositions

By a culture of invention, Nike aims to create products, services and experiences for athletes as well as solve problems for next generations, since it is the global repository for the science of human performance.

Diversity and inclusion drive innovation, as source of competitive advantage. Nike wants products and services that deliver maximum performance for individuals with minimal impact on the environment. Nike

strives to help kids get active, so they can have healthier lives. Nike stimulates its employees to amplify this impact (www.nike.com).

Examples of value proposition translated in business initiatives are: Nike iD, Nike Fuel and Nike Grind.

IV. Customer relationship

Nike's brand recognition is very high worldwide. This is largely underpinned by sports event sponsorships and various endorsements, thanks to also its significant portfolio of brand ambassadors. Nike is positioned as high performing and innovative. Regular product launches reinforce this, and social media (together with apps and websites) keep consumer awareness of brand development very high (Euromonitor, 2015). Crucial is detecting a consumer base that responds to innovation and is relatively price insensitive (*ibid.*). However, price sensitivity is not good for Nike that responds to changes in consumer preferences by adjusting mix of existing product offerings, developing new products, influencing sports and fitness inclinations.

Examples of customer relationship translated in business activities are: Nike iD, running community, online shopping help, live chat, Nike membership and product launch calendar.

V. Customer segments

Nike's operating segments evidence how the company is structured: North America, the Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, Greater China, Japan and Emerging markets. Converse is also a reportable segment. Beyond the internal segmentation, customer's segmentation adopts heterogeneous approaches (www.nike.com). It includes demographic, behavioural, psychographic and geographical segmentation processes. "Just do it" suggests the way in which the company strives to reach consumer's brand associations, with no net demographical distinctions.

Analysing behavioural segmentation, Nike utilises both benefits and purchase occasions. Third, psychographic segmentation: a customer can be either sport- centric or product- centric; looking for either motivational/ emotional connection or utility/ value offerings. Lastly, geographic segmentation occurs through website versions.

Overall, Nike primarily targets consumers who are between 16 and 40 years old. Furthermore, the goal is to equip teens under the age of 20 with athletic apparel, especially in sports like football and basketball.

Nike targets households and teens characterized by a particular wish to look both athletic and fashionable.

VI. Key resources

Overall, Nike's key resources are: sponsorships and endorsements, human capital, products, factory management, researchers and innovation technology. A particular resource is Explore Team sport research lab (www.nike.com). Then, employees (56,000) and sustainability are considered as key resources (annual report 2014). Brand equity is the strongest key resource.

VII. Channels

Mainly, Nike's channels are: website, app, social media, Nike brand stores, other sport- stores like Foot Locker. Going beyond, the majority of footwear and clothing is produced by third party contractors outside the US (in 2014, Vietnam produced 43% of Nike footwear). Nike holds 5 distribution centres in Tennessee and 16 outside the US. Nike is supplied by around 150 footwear factories in 14 countries. All footwear and apparel products are produced outside the US, while equipment products are produced both in the US and abroad.

Nike sells products to retail accounts, both in store and online, through its direct- to- consumer operations, and through a mix of independent distributors, licensees, and sales representatives. In FY 2014, adidas operated 2,913 stores, compared to Nike's 858 (Euromonitor, 2015; annual report 2014).

VIII. Cost structure

Overall, Nike's cost structure depends on: sponsorships and endorsements, advertising campaigns, buildings, staff, distribution and marketing research.

The Group outsources the majority of its production in order to minimise production costs. In 2014, it spent \$3,031M in demand creation expenses, comparable to the previous MWB of adidas. Since \$27,799M of revenues, the ratio carries out among the two giants is similar. There is a 10% increase year- on- year that was principally driven by marketing supports for global events (annual report 2014). A huge part of marketing costs is spent towards endorsement for the "swoosh". In 2013, average fee paid by Nike slightly less than adidas: €15.8M (Repucom, 2014).

The main goal is driving consumers' choice in relation to product development and justify premium price. Moreover, the company showed rising investments in digital brand and sport marketing and lower advertising expenditure since product launches timing (annual report 2014).

Last, the highest investments and expenditures come from the marketing function, which generally are variable costs. Sponsorship, advertising and all types of marketing decisions are crucial for company success. Nike carries out economies of scale and its cost structure is mainly cost driven.

IX. Revenue streams

From Euromonitor (2015) and annual report of FY 2014 resulted as follows.

Much of its global marketing is based around US sports (NBA). Football is crucial in expanding global sales.

At company level, apparel and footwear sales are almost 100% sportswear. Furthermore, in the global apparel and footwear market, women's products considerably sell more than men's, but Nike made 47% of 2014 sales with men's products against 32% for women's. Appendix 12 offers a comparison between sportswear and total apparel and footwear forecast growth FY 2014- 2019.

Nike Inc. total revenue (FY 2014) is \$27,799M with gross margin of 44,8%. Appendix 13 compares net revenues and net income 2009- 2014. Nike is number one brand, since it creates 94% of 2014 sales. Nike brand wholesale equivalent revenues by gender 2012- 2014 is directly reported in Appendix 14.

Customers purchase and pay premium price thanks to Nike's brand equity and associations.

5.4 Comparison

In order to efficiently conclude this analysis, last price in stock market exchange is a suitable comparative tool. Table 1 compares last stock price of both Nike and adidas from 2000 to 2016 (www.investorwords.com). At group level, Nike's last price increased by 1131,8%; adidas, by 618,9%. Appendix 15 explains values and calculations made. This financial result is related to Nike's growth worldwide and its decision to become the leader in the Western Europe football industry, which was adidas' fortress.

Additionally, Appendix 16 compares sales of adidas and Nike in the Western European market in FY 2009 and 2014. It sanctions the expansion of Nike and the lost leadership of adidas, although both grew up considerably.

Not only Nike has bigger dimensions than adidas, but also it grew up more in that period.

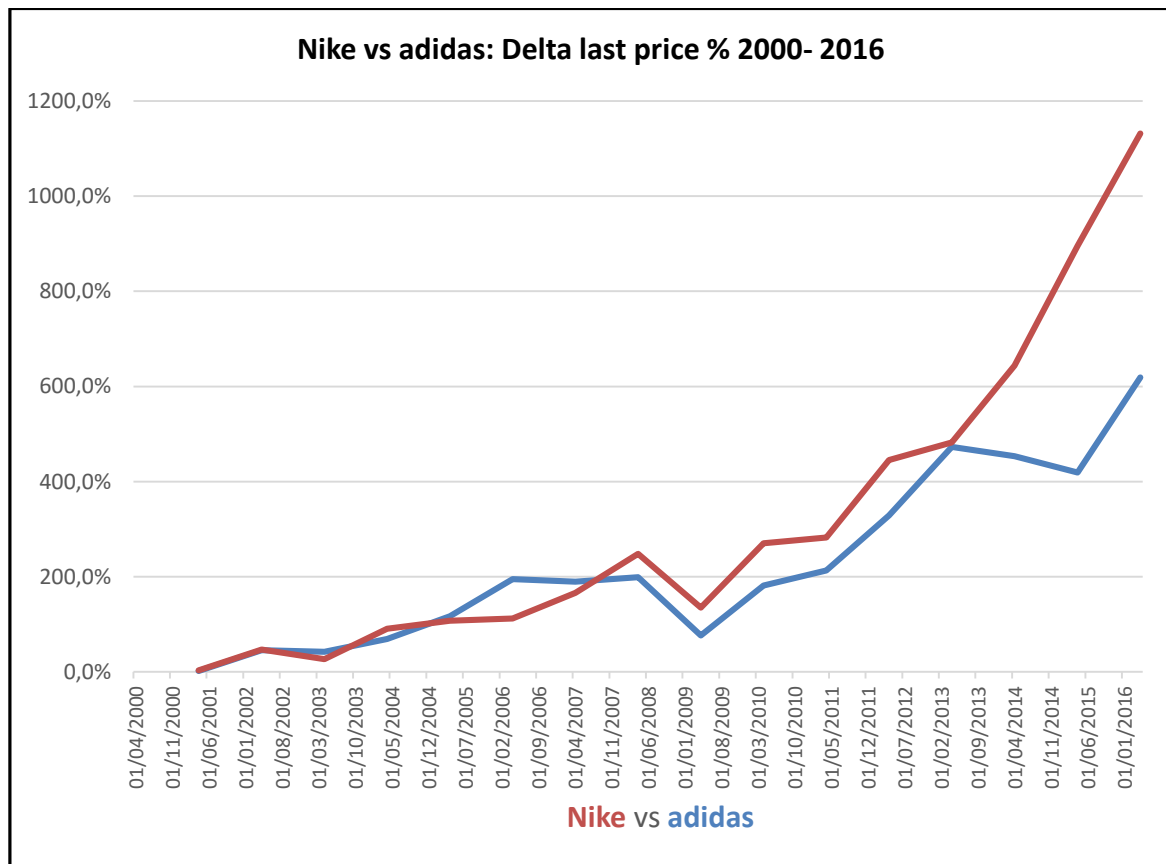


Table 1: Nike vs adidas: Delta last price % 2000- 2016

6. TEARS and No TEARS model

This section aims to explore and describe three iconic profiles within the analysed context, from the oldest to the youngest one: David Beckham, Ricardo Kakà and Cristiano Ronaldo. They had their distinct peak in the same order they are analysed, from the middle of the '90s to 2016. They are vehicle and benchmark for a better execution of the research techniques.

TEARS and No TEARS model (Shimp, 2003) is adopted in order to portray their characteristics as celebrity endorsers. In order to accomplish what this model asks, a questionnaire is carried out, from which data are collected and analysed (section 9.1).

TEARS model is composed by five discrete attributes, briefly described as follows.

T) *Trustworthiness* means celebrity's integrity and believability. Trustworthiness is highly influenced by and depends on consumers' perception of endorsement motivations. Expertise and trustworthiness are not mutually exclusive, but a celebrity can be often perceived as trustworthy, but not expert.

E) *Expertise* is endorser's experience, knowledge and skills associated to kit supplier's brand. Endorsers who are perceived as expert are stronger for changing people's opinions in their area of expertise.

A) Regarding *physical attractiveness* (the "form"), persuasion occurs when consumer- fan discovers something in the endorser as attractive. Shimp argued that physically attractive endorsers produce more favourable evaluations of brands than do less attractive ones.

R) *Respect* is the quality of being admired/ esteemed due to footballer's personal qualities and actions.

S) *Similarity* demonstrates the positive outcomes when an endorser is coherent with the endorsement relationship and he is suitable with consumer- fan's. Thus, similarity is significant due to people tend to better appreciate a fitting and consistent endorser.

By No TEARS, marketers would be sure that there are literally "no tears" with endorser's selection. It is composed by:

1) *Celebrity/ audience match- up*: football endorser must match- up well with the endorsed sportswear brand's target market. "Will consumers/ fans positively relate to this endorser?" Do footballers match good with young teenage audience who aspire to be good player one day?

- 2) *Celebrity/ brand match- up*: the celebrity's behaviour, values and image may be consistent with the image desired for the kit supplier's brand.
- 3) *Celebrity credibility* is a primary reason for selecting a celebrity. Football players who are trustworthy and perceived as expert about the product category are more suitable and efficient.
- 4) *Celebrity attractiveness* refers to the general label attractiveness. This is subordinated to both *credibility* and endorser's *match- up* with *audience* and *brand*.
- 5) *Cost considerations*: a cost/ benefit analysis to determine whether a football celebrity can achieve a greater ROI is crucial.
- 6) *Working ease/ difficult factor*: some football celebrities are easy to collaborate with and others could be difficult, unmanageable and so on.
- 7) *Saturation factor*: if a football player is overexposed his perceived credibility probably decreases (*ibid.*). Do respondents agree on this?
- 8) *The trouble factor*: the potential that a celebrity may get into trouble is a key and controversial matter.

7. Methodology

7.1 Research philosophy

Research philosophy as over- arching term is related to development and the nature of knowledge. It highlights how this paper progresses knowledge by investigating the role of footballer as brand ambassador in the analysed football context according to the research questions.

The adopted research philosophy holds key assumptions that underpin research strategy and methods. At the same time, research questions do not fall clearly into only one philosophical domain: flexibility about research approach and methodology is therefore requested.

In relation to research questions, this paper consistently adopts “*feeling researcher*” position, since feelings and attitudes of respondents are more significant to achieve goals.

As epistemology, this research will adopt “*interpretivism*”. This is the most suitable and relevant one. Thus, what constitutes acceptable knowledge are subjective meanings and social phenomena. Details of situation, reality behind these details and subjective meaning motivating actions are crucial (Saunders et al., 2009). The heritage of *interpretivism* comes from phenomenology and symbolic interactionism.

Regarding ontology, namely researcher’s view of the nature of reality, given *interpretivism*, this research embraces “*subjectivism*”. In fact, understanding the meanings that consumers- fans attach to social phenomena is vital for this paper. Consistently, *subjectivism* is supported by all studies in “Theoretical framework”, in which reality is socially constructed and consumer- fan, as social actor, has different interpretations of personal experiences. It is a continual process where, through social interaction, social phenomena are revised recurrently. Then, it is crucial to comprehend differences between human beings in their several roles of dynamic social actors. Speaking of which, people interpret social roles, experiences and facts in accordance with their own set of complex, dynamic and variable meanings.

Axiology refers to the study judgements about value, as process of social enquiry. In line with *interpretivism*, researcher’s view of values in the research is subjective.

Coherently, data collection and analysis come largely from four semi-structured interviews. One questionnaire, as quantitative technique, is carried out as initial technique and starting point. However, it mainly aims at the execution of TEARS and No TEARS model.

Research paradigm is “a way of examining social phenomena from which particular understanding of these phenomena can be gained and explanations attempted” (*ibid.*). According to research questions goals and *interpretivism*, this paper carries out an “interpretive” research paradigm. It is the union between subjectivist and regulation (*ibid.*, pp. 120- 121). It works on how humans try to make sense of the world around and discovering irrationalities as well as understand what is going on.

7.2 Research approach and purpose

A dynamic combination of deduction and induction is the most consistent research approach. Indeed, “not only is it perfectly possible to combine deduction and induction within the same piece of research, but also [...] it is often advantageous to do so” (*ibid.*, p. 127).

Inductive approach is adopted since it may be more appropriate to work by generating data and reflecting upon what theoretical themes the data signify. Then, the researcher aimed at gaining an understanding of the meanings people attach to events, underlining a close comprehension of the research context. Last, the majority of data analysis stem interviews: coherently, induction emphasises the collection of qualitative data. On the contrary, deductive approach allows to explain relationship between variables, it is suitable with quantitative methodology (questionnaire) together with the necessity to select satisfactory size of sample.

7.3 Research strategy

The research project purpose is mainly *exploratory* and then, *descriptive*, starting from *interpretivism*.

By exploratory studies, the researcher aims at finding out what is happening, seeking new insights, asking questions and assessing phenomena in a new light. It is relevant since the paper is focused on the study of football branding dynamics. Consistently, the researcher conducted the exploratory research carrying out a search of the literature and then interviewing experts in the subject (*ibid.*).

Second, descriptive research is suitable since it allows to depict accurately different football branding situations, together with profiles of Nike and Adidas as sportswear leaders and Beckham, Kakà, CR7 as top football endorsers.

According to research questions and methodology, this is an extension of the exploratory research, drawing conclusions and insights from data.

Based on principles of flexibility and absence of mutual exclusivity between different research strategies and techniques (*ibid.*), including explanatory studies, one electronic questionnaire and four semi-structured interviews are carried out.

Consistently with the partial adoption of deductive approach, questionnaire is employed and it is suitable for exploratory and descriptive research as well. It allows to analyse quantitatively using descriptive and inferential statistics as well as to suggest reasons for a specific relationship between variables (*ibid.*). Unfortunately, even due to time issue, data collected is not wide-ranging.

7.4 Data collection techniques

In order to successfully execute the research questions, both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques are carried out. This process allows triangulation of data.

Quantitatively, one electronic questionnaire is carried out; qualitatively instead, one face-to-face and three internet-mediated interviews.

Therefore, this paper uses “*multiple methods*” as research choice (*ibid.*) and it follows a “*mixed-model research*”. It “combines quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analysis procedures as well as combining quantitative and qualitative approaches at other phases of the research” (*ibid.*, p. 153).

It reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings and it increases validity and reliability of the research. Then, different methods are used for different objectives. This research choice is selected in order to offer better chances to answer the research questions and assess the extent to which research outcomes can be trusted and inferences made from them.

However, the researcher is aware that both data techniques have their own strengths and weaknesses. Then, obtained results are influenced by techniques and procedures carried out.

The electronic questionnaire is carried out in order to primarily accomplish what TEARS and No TEARS model requested in the analysis of football celebrity. Secondly, through the same technique, data for the research questions are collected. The questionnaire is the starting point of the research, since it allows affine interesting points of investigation. Indeed, it suggests to execute mainly qualitative techniques in order to better tackle the research questions, consistently with Keller (1993) and Aaker's (1997) key concepts.

On the whole, the researcher acknowledged ethics of data access and collection as a crucial aspect for the conduct of research. Then, he considered *feasibility* as relevant determinant of what he decided to research and how to undertake the research (*ibid.*).

7.5 Time horizons

Since this research is not focused on observing directly people or events over time, this research adopts "*cross- sectional*" studies as time horizons. The purpose is studying particular phenomena at a particular time, even due to time constraints. Moreover, cross- sectional studies are in line with both interviews carried out over a short period of time (as in this case) and survey strategy (*ibid.*).

8. Quantitative technique

8.1 Electronic questionnaire

Questionnaire is "a general term to include all technique of data collection in which each person is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order" (*ibid.*, p. 360). It allows to get efficient responses collection prior to data analysis.

A *self- administered questionnaire* is adopted and then completed by the respondents. This is electronically administered, namely *Internet- mediated questionnaire*, posted to respondents through Facebook (majority) and through their mail addresses. Responses are returned after completion through the same vehicle utilized for sending. Complete questionnaire, including cover letter and closing, with questions and answers, is placed in Appendixes 17 and 18.

219 answers are collected and then, analysed. Finally, the response rate obtained is 29%.

Given the usage of Facebook, mail addresses and software Google Form, there are no financial implications for data collection and entry as well as any external help. For the electronic questionnaire, data entry, collection and analysis are made at the *design* stage (*ibid.*).

The researcher is conscious about pros and cons of the questionnaire. Consistently, this research technique is chosen only after having evaluated all other possible research techniques. Then, it is the most appropriate one, based on research philosophy, strategy, questions, goals and respondents' characteristics.

8.2 Research objectives

This research technique aims at satisfying the descriptive and quantitative side of the thesis, by enabling to recognise and describe variability of different phenomena. Starting from the adopted *mixed- model* research, the questionnaire is complementary, functional to and the basis for the interviews. Indeed, this technique lets better comprehend which aspects might be more investigated and which questions may be more or less central in the following qualitative research.

However, the main objective of the questionnaire is the execution of TEARS and No TEARS model and what it asks. Indeed, the questionnaire is mainly focused on three top level football players: Beckham, Kakà and CR7, by regularly comparing them.

Same criterion is applied throughout the questionnaire when listing them as answers to question. Placing CR7 as third answer does not mean that he is the least important. Beckham is the oldest and had his peak at the end of the '90s, whilst Kakà won the Ballon d'Or in 2007. CR7 won the most important award in 2008, 2013 and 2014.

Questions are standardized in order to let both researcher and respondents be confident in interpretation.

8.3 Typology and structure of questions

Concerning the number of questions to ask, priority goes to TEARS and No TEARS and, secondarily, to research questions. Through *interpretivism*, questions from **Q.15** to **Q.30** can give also data and insights for the first two research questions; from **Q.22** to **Q.26** are only for the third one.

Each typology of question has its own features, applicability, pros and cons (*ibid.*).

19 questions are *self- anchoring rating scale*, the most utilized typology, since it is a useful technique to collect data quantitatively. Then, numbers reflect respondents' feeling on a 10- point scale.

Second, 16 are *category questions*. These allow respondents to outlook all possible responses, avoiding overlap and that each respondent's answer fits one category.

Coherently with *interpretivism* and exploratory studies, 11 out of 46 are open questions, due to uncertainty of the responses and researcher's intention to find out what is uppermost in the respondent's mind.

As the majority of questionnaires, even this one includes a combination of open- ended and closed questions. In the last section of the questionnaire, from **Q.39** to **Q.46**, the researcher looks for respondents' demographics (e.g. sex, age), behaviours and preferences.

The questionnaire does not include matrix or grid questions, although the presence of similar questions both concerning Shimp's model and research questions. They could be further barriers to response, as well as potential obstacle to discern differences between questions.

This technique uses three different types of variables: *opinion*, *behavioural* and *attribute*. They vary according to goal of the questions.

8.4 Validity and reliability

"The internal validity and reliability of the data you collect and the response rate you achieve depend, to a large extent, on the design of your questions, the structure of your questionnaire, and the rigour of your pilot testing" (*ibid.*, p. 371).

The *design* of each question is determined by data needed to collect. There is no need of adopt and adapt questions of other questionnaires, indeed the researcher does not aim at replicating/ comparing findings with another study.

The *design* of the questionnaire affects response rate, reliability and internal validity of the data collected. Response rates, validity and reliability are maximized by applying a clear and pleasing layout. Several precautions are made in order to avoid uninformed responses and socially desirable responses.

A positive attribute of this research technique is the low likelihood of contamination and distortion of respondents' answers (*ibid.*).

In every question, *wording* is crucial in order to receive valid and reliable responses and totally avoid any threats. Therefore, by taking into consideration respondents' knowledge, ambiguity, jargon and any source of offensive expressions are avoided (*ibid.*). The questionnaire uses terminology likely to be familiar and easy to respondents, in order to improve validity. When a more complex terminology is asked, the researcher explains every potential difficult term and places these terms at the beginning, when respondents could be more reactive.

A controversial issue occurs in terms of translation from English (as first applied) to Italian. Indeed, the majority of respondents (those who prudently evaluated as reliable and suitable) is Italian. After having invited respondents worldwide through English language, next the questionnaire used Italian. The reason is related to overall Italians' lack in speaking English well. At the same time, the researcher judiciously chooses a part of Italian respondents able to speak English by far better than average Italian citizen. Thus (they are a noticeable minority), those Italians first make the questionnaire in English, with the same version as other nationalities, with no misunderstandings. Deep attention to key concepts such as *lexical*, *idiomatic* and *experiential meaning* is paid (*ibid.*). In fact, the aim is to offer same questions and answers to all respondents, having same meanings and objectives, avoiding any potential bias. Then, "direct translation approach", from *source* questionnaire to *target* questionnaire, is used (*ibid.*, pp. 383- 385).

The research technique is laid out in order to facilitate ease of fulfilment, reading and comprehension, without any potential source of bias, even graphically. Besides, the purposes are explained (e.g. covering letter and introduction - Appendix 17), an efficient *pilot test* is executed beforehand (e.g. clarity of questions) and administration is cautiously planned and executed (*ibid.*).

Internal validity in this case refers to *content validity* (*ibid.*, pp. 372- 374). Moreover, the researcher reviewed carefully the literature and discussed with colleagues.

Besides, *reliability* aims to consistency and consistent findings. For this purpose, a *test re- test approach* to assess reliability is carried out (*ibid.*), involving 5 Italian respondents, asking them to first answer to the English version, then to the Italian one. It was no possible to involve other people since only few respondents are able to equally speak both languages and it is difficult to convince respondents to answer twice.

Secondarily, *internal consistency* is applied, especially about Shimp's *similarity* (e.g. from **Q.15** to **Q.20**) as well as *alternative form*, in order to raise reliability (*ibid.*).

Lastly, order, content, type and flow of the questions are planned in advance, consistently with participants' characteristics and researcher's goals (*ibid.*), since researcher cannot explore and prompt issue further, which is instead possible with interviews.

For *question coding* (*ibid.*, pp. 385- 386), if possible, closed questions are pre- coded in order to help data input and consequent analysis. What is time consuming regards pre- coding, coding and decoding of open questions and answers. Second, order and flow of questions are built up as helpful. Third, respondents are asked answer individually, in order to better comprehend real interest to do it, increasing response rate.

In order to successfully accomplish the online questionnaire, *data* a six- step- process *requirements table* is created (*ibid.*, pp. 368- 371).

Investigative questions (*ibid.*, p. 370) are executed to meet objectives. When relevant, questions are subdivided into more detailed ones (e.g. from **Q.15** to **Q.20**).

8.5 Sampling size

Due to the impossibility to collect all the data available owing to restrictions of time, money and access, *sampling technique* is adopted. Then, *non- probability sampling*, or “*non- random sampling*” is executed, since the selection of samples based on researcher’s subjective judgement, in order to get an information-rich study where exploring the research questions and gaining theoretical insights. Next, since the purpose of the research is mainly explorative, “*self- selection sampling*” (*ibid.*) is selected. Namely, people are asked to take part one by one and then data are collected from those who respond.

Furthermore, since the nature and landscape of the research, there is no need to involve people older than 65 and younger than 13 years old. It is assumed that they could not have suitable and efficient knowledge and/ or access to Facebook or mail address to be reached.

The size of the sample is geographically dispersed. The most frequent nationality is *Italian* by 78%; country of residence is still *Italy* with 71%.

8.6 Demographics

Given the goal of collecting consistent, reliable and valid data, the questionnaire is sent to people assessed as interested in the topic, with positive degrees of experience and passion about football and sport endorsement. In fact, (**Q.46**) 64% of respondents plays or played football semi/ professionally.

The researcher has tried to cover as much as possible both men and women respondents. However, (**Q.39**) due to topic’s nature, the majority is 86% men (188 respondents out of 219), whereas 14% women (31). It is assumed that finding a person interested about the analysed context is easier with men. On the other hand, the researcher did his best to include as many women as possible. In fact, from researcher’s point of view, women sector can lead to interesting managerial implications.

Concerning age of respondents (**Q.40**), the most common one is “22 – 29” (Table 2). Having obtained data in that range of age is particularly interesting. In fact, they are not too childish anymore, they are able to offer reliable and fresh judgements and they can compare the ‘90s with 2016 with intriguing perspectives.

Moreover, not too many years ago, they were at *high school*: this school period could be crucial from sportswear brands' perspective. This aspect will be deepened by the interviews. "14 – 21" years old is the second range. A continuum of different point of views can be drawn, offering further chances to explore the topic. Lastly, other two remaining options allow to extent validity and reliability of the survey.

AGE	PERCENTAGE
14 - 21	32%
22 – 29	48%
30 - 40	11%
41 - 55	9%

Table 2: Q.40

Moreover, the great majority plays football at least once a month. In fact, through **Q.44**, "*Do you play football at least once a month?*", 57% says "Yes" (43% says "No"). This question can confirm respondents' passion and knowledge of football. Therefore, each selected respondent is assessed as able to offer interesting and reliable data. Additionally, (**Q.45** – Appendix 18) "*Is football your favourite sport?*", 79% said "Yes".

Italian is by far the most frequent answer for both nationality and country of residence, as below (Table 3). Geographical dispersion of respondents can be a plus, rather than a drawback.

Italy as football culture and trophies won, is one of the best nations in the world. Then, what Italians think gains even more importance. At the same time, having a representation of Germany, Spain and France is positive: they are at the core of football history as well. Denmark and Thailand (Appendix 18) further highlight the international dimension of the assessed context. Consistently, globalization and digitalization valorise these data obtained, since the researcher is able to offer partially multicultural views.

NATIONALITY	<- NATION ->	COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE
78%	Italy	71%
4%	Germany	4%
4%	Spain	3%
3%	France	2%
3%	Denmark	12%

Table 3: Q.41 & Q.42

Last, about occupation (**Q.43**), in line with *age*, the majority is “*student*” (29%), followed by “*student & worker*” and “*employee*”: both reached 24%. This is consistent with the most answered range of age (22 – 29).

8.7 Limitations

Data analysis is influenced by respondents’ demographics. In particular, age, sex and nationality.

First, the main range is “22 – 29”, due to a cost- benefit analysis of respondents’ reachability and availability from researcher’s perspective. Therefore, their previous football experiences and preferences it is assumed have influenced their answers, in line with two theoretical frameworks adopted.

Second, for instance, defining CR7 as “*good looking*” by a woman is different to man’s judgement. Third, 78% of participants is Italian: responses can be influenced by culture and public opinion of Italian population. For instance, Kakà is still loved by AC Milan supporters and still holds positive image throughout Italy.

Moreover, *Ringo* as brand linked to Kakà (**Q.17- 18**) depends on investments in advertising by that brand for many years in Italy, where Kakà was the testimonial.

Last, the study is affected by the resources available, in particular time disposal.

9. Data analysis of the questionnaire

According to research goals, data will be analysed separately as follows: first TEARS and No TEARS model; second, the research questions. Graphs and statistics help to study relationships of these data (Appendix 18).

Before starting the questionnaire, the researcher understood that through the four interviews data collection for the third research question could not be enough. Therefore, questions from **Q.22** to **Q.26** regard only football boots launch, in order to integrate and better delineate qualitative data collection and analysis.

On the whole, in line with *interpretivism*, questions from **Q.15** to **Q.21** and from **Q.27** to **Q.30** offer further clues and data for interviews’ execution in order to answer the research questions.

The questionnaire comprehends both categorical and numerical data. Categorical data offer descriptive (nominal) data, since “it is impossible to define the category numerically or to rank it” (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 418), and ranked (ordinal) data. Numerical data are quantifiable and allow a wider range of statistics.

Microsoft Excel is used for data analysis. Each column represents a separate variable for which he obtained data. Each row, instead, contains the data from the survey form. Processes of coding (missing data as well), entering data and checking for errors are executed. In the following paragraphs, key results are reported and then analysed, where *interpretivism* is taken into strong account.

9.1 TEARS and No TEARS model

For each of the 5 discrete attributes of TEARS, consistent data collected are located and analysed, discerning the three footballers. With the aim to describe, explore and compare them as celebrity endorsers, mode and mean are offered.

In order to offer a more efficient and relevant comparison, all questions are made by self-anchoring rating scale (from 1 to 10) questions, except for *similarity*, which requests open questions, to notice potential incongruences.

Appropriate coding and interpretation of the answers (especially **Q.27- 28- 29**) is done, as justified in Appendix 18. More in depth, an interesting view of the responses is given by discerning sex of respondents.

- **David Beckham**

7) Trustworthiness – Q.1: mode: 8 out of 10 (33% of respondents); mean: 8,1.

Focusing on women (14% of total respondents, namely 31 in total), the only respondents who answered 0 and 3 (out of 10) are women. Moreover, both sexes' mode is 8.

E) Expertise – Q.4: mode: 10 out of 10 (37%), followed by 9 (by 36%); mean: 8,9.

Focusing on women, the lowest score given by a woman is 7 out of 10 and women's mode is 9 (15 out of 31 answers). Instead, men's mode is 10 (70 answers out of 181).

A) Attractiveness - physical aspect – Q.8: mode: 9 out of 10 (37%); mean: 8,7.

Focusing on women, the lowest score given by a woman is 7 out of 10 (6 of them) and women's mode is 9 (10 out of 31 answers). Men's mode is 9 (71 answers out of 181), but only men ranked Beckham's attractiveness as low as 1, 2, and 4.

R) Respect – Q.12: mode: 9 out of 10 (32%); mean: 8,4.

The lowest score given by women is 2 (1 only) and their mode is 8 (10 out of 31). Instead, men's mode is 9 (65 out of 181).

S) Similarity – Q.15: by 33%, "*adidas*" is the brand that respondents would link to Beckham (the first one recalled) with the most *similarity* to his image, from Shimp's definition (2003). "*Armani*" (19%) is the second one, followed by "*Calvin Klein*" (by 5%). 9% said "*I do not know*" and 5% wrongly linked Beckham with "*Nike*".

Women's mode is both "*adidas*" and "*Armani*" (7 answers). Men's mode is *adidas* (66 answers out of 188), although they linked Beckham with "*Nike*" 10 times.

More in detail, by **Q.16**, the first brand who comes in respondents' mind, the first one they recall, endorser by Beckham as football endorser is by far "*adidas*", by 52%, followed by "*Armani*" and "*H&M*" (both by 13%). 3% answered "*Calvin Klein*" and "*Pepsi*", whereas 9% of answers have been grouped under "*I do not know*" by the researcher, since respondents could not offer any explicit and/ or valid answer.

- **Ricardo Kakà**

7) Trustworthiness – Q.2: mode: 9 and 10 (both by 30% of respondents); mean: 8,6.

The lowest score given by a woman is 5 out of 10 and women's mode is 9 (11 out of 31 answers). Instead, men's mode is 10 (56 out of 181), followed by 9 (55).

E) Expertise – Q.5: mode: 7 (31%); mean: 6,9.

The lowest score given by a woman is 4 (2 of them) and women's mode is 7 (12 out of 31 answers), same as men's (55 out of 181).

A) Attractiveness (physical aspect) – Q.9: mode: 8 (29%) followed by 7 (28%); mean: 6,9.

The lowest score given by a woman are 4 and 5 out of 10 (1 person each) and women's mode is 8 (10 out of 31). Instead, men's mode is 9 and 10 (both have 53 out of 181), but only men ranked Kakà's attractiveness as 1, 2, and 3.

R) Respect – Q.13: mode: 8 and 9 (both by 28%); mean: 8,4.

The lowest score given by a woman is 6 out of 10 (by 2 women) and women's mode is 8 (9 out of 31). Instead, men's mode is 9 (54 out of 181), followed by 8 (53).

S) Similarity – Q.17: by 43%, "*adidas*" is the brand that respondents would link to Kakà (the first recalled) with the most *similarity* to his image. "*Ringo*" (14%) is the second one, followed by "*Save the children*" (by 6%). 12% said "*I do not know*" and 4% wrongly linked Kakà with "*Nike*".

More in detail, by **Q.18**, the first brand who comes in respondents' mind, the first one they recall, endorser by Kakà as football endorser is by far "*adidas*", by 58%, followed by "*Ringo*" (by 26%). 3% answered wrongly "*Nike*", whereas 7% of answers have been grouped under "*I do not know*".

- **Cristiano Ronaldo**

7) Trustworthiness – Q.3: mode: 7 and 8 (26% and then 24% of respondents); mean: 7,4.

Focusing on women, the lowest score given by a woman is 4 and women's mode is 7 (9 out of 31 answers), same as men's (49 out of 181).

E) Expertise – Q.6: mode: 10 (39%) followed by 9 (36%); mean: 9.

Focusing on women, the lowest score given by a woman is 6 (1 of them) and women's mode is 10 (12 out of 31 answers), followed by 9 (11). Instead, men's mode is 10 (74 out of 181).

A) Attractiveness (physical aspect) – Q.10: mode: 10 (by 34%); mean: 8,7.

The lowest score given by a woman is 5 out of 10 (1 person only) and women's mode is 10 (13 out of 31), same as men's (62 out of 181), but only men ranked CR7's attractiveness as 1, 2, 3 and 4.

R) Respect – Q.14: mode: 8 (26%) followed by 7 (by 24%); mean: 7,8.

The lowest score given by a woman is 5 out of 10 (3 respondents) and women's mode is 7 (10 out of 31), men's mode is 8 (52 out of 181), but only men ranked CR7's attractiveness as 2 and 4, namely the lowest scores overall.

S) Similarity – Q.19: by 49%, "*Nike*" is the brand that respondents would link to CR7 (the first one recalled) with the most *similarity* to his image. "*CR7*" as his own brand obtained (3%). The second one is "*Armani*", by only 9%. 13% said "*I do not know*". Those who did not link CR7 to Nike (51% of respondents), 58% are 22 - 29 years old.

More in detail, by **Q.20**, the first brand who comes in respondents' mind, the first one they recall, endorser by CR7 as football endorser is by far "*Nike*", by 69%, followed by "*Armani*" (by 9%), whereas 6% of answers have been grouped under "*I do not know*".

On the whole, evaluating them all together (**Q.7**), 26% of respondents state that an attractive endorser is better: mode and mean are both 8. Therefore, using CR7, as attractive endorser, is better than Tevez, as the example already made.

Second, concerning *respect*, in **Q.11**, overall, the most respected footballer is Beckham (by 44%), followed by Kakà (39%) and CR7 (only 17%). However, in **Q.12- 13**, Kakà and Beckham have the same mean. More in depth, Kakà is the most respected among women (16 out of 31 answers); Beckham instead, among men (87 out of 181). In both sexes, CR7 got the lowest percentage.

To sum up, comparing Beckham, Kakà and CR7 out of 219 respondents, the most trustworthy is Kakà, by 8,6 of mean out of 10. Second, the most expert is CR7, by 9 of mean out of 10. CR7 and Beckham are equally the most attractive ones (8,7). Fourth, Beckham and Kakà, by both 8,4, are the most respected. Last, *adidas* is the most similar brand (from **Q.15** to **Q.20**) to both Beckham and Kakà, whilst *Nike*, for CR7.

For each attribute, there is no considerable gap between men and women's responses. The only difference regards the lowest score they attribute (from 1 to 10), although their mode is equal or similar. Here, in line with their sex, men tend to give the lowest scores to the three footballers in *attractiveness*.

Moving towards No TEARS model, *celebrity/ audience match- up* (Q.21) is investigated through a “Yes or No” question, in order to assess whether Shimp’s thought is shared by respondents. Consistently, 95% answered “Yes”. As a result, football endorsers match very good with an audience composed by teens who aspire to be good player in the future.

“*Celebrity/ brand match- up*” (Q.27- 28- 29) is carried out by asking to respondents the most representative attribute to describe each footballer’s image as endorser, where his behaviour, values and image may fit with (sponsoring) brand’s image.

As a result, overall Beckham is identified as “*good looking*” by 36% of respondents (it is men’s mode by far), followed by “*professional*” (21%), “*elegant & stylish*” (16%) and “*charismatic & talented*” (10%). Women’s mode is both “*good looking*” and “*professional*” (by 9 answers).

Second, Kakà is overall considered as “*generous & intelligent*” by 42% (mode for both men and women), followed by “*professional*” (19%). Besides, he is portrayed also as “*religious*” (10%), “*good looking*” (8%) and even “*inferior*” (3%).

Last, CR7 is judged as “*good looking*” (21%; women’s mode) and “*arrogant & selfish*” (19%; men’s mode), followed by 14% of both “*hard worker & combative*” and “*professional*”; “*charismatic & talented*” by 10%. 6% of respondents consider him as “*bad boy*” and “*metrosexual and narcissist*”.

To shed light on, concerning overall “*good looking*” as answer in Q.27- 28- 29, among all respondents who used this attribute, Beckham obtained 56%; CR7, 33%; Kakà, 11%. Then, Beckham is the *best looking* one.

The researcher evaluated as not reliable and efficient investigating *cost considerations* and *working ease/ difficult factor* through an online questionnaire in relation to respondents’ background. Nonetheless, he treats these issues through the interviews.

Celebrity credibility and *attractiveness* can be referred to “T” and “A” above analysed.

Regarding, *saturation factor*, through Q.30, 57% of respondents said “Yes”. As a result, if a football endorser is over- exposed they state that his perceived *credibility* probably decreases. By Q.31- 32- 33, the most over- exposed footballer is CR7 (his mode is 8 out of 10, by 21%) more than Beckham and Kakà, the least one. In fact, Kakà’s over- exposure mode and mean are respectively 1 and 3,8. *Becks*, instead, got 6 and 5,8. CR7, reached 8 and 7,2.

This comparative outcome is consistently confirmed by Q.34: excluding “*No, never*”, the majority (23%) said have confused CR7 and adidas, more than Beckham and Kakà with Nike respectively. Furthermore, the

majority who made these mistakes was in front of the “tv” (25%). However, Real Madrid is adidas, brand worn by CR7 since 2009. This could influence the answers. Moreover, 13% of respondents (Q.19) could not write a brand to recall/ link, with the most similarity to his image, through “*I do not know*”. That is the highest percentage obtained from Q.17 to Q.20.

Lastly, with *trouble factor* (Q.36), the mean of responses is 5,3 out of 10; the mode is 8. Therefore, a negative episode influences negatively brand images. Here, women’s mode (3) and values are lower than men’s (8). Then, women are less influenced by negative factors. Regarding Suarez (Q.37) and Maradona (Q.38), the modes are respectively 3 & 5 (equal) and 1, while the means are 5,4 and 5,2.

9.2 Research questions 1 & 2

Since the questionnaire is the initial point of the research, the researcher did not separate clearly first and second research questions yet.

All data showed in this paragraph are taken into account as basis for a better execution of the interviews as well as in order to offer further data for answering the first two research questions. Then, questions from Q.27 to Q.29 are vital, given what the first two research questions ask.

First, given what emerges from Q.7, for sportswear brands and their marketing decisions, having an attractive football endorser is really better. Both men and women agree on this; both Beckham and CR7 obtained the highest value (8,7). However, consistently with their sex, men tend to give the lowest scores in *attractiveness*.

Second, by Q.21 (95% said “Yes”) it can be stated that *match- up* between celebrity endorser and his audience as well as brand is very important (this can be related to fit dimension of Keller, 1993). This result is indirectly related to *similarity* between football endorser and his first recalled/ linked brand. Correctly, Beckham, Kakà and CR7 were dominantly associated with their historical and right kit supplier brands (*adidas* and *Nike*). Curiously, 0 respondents linked Kakà with Mizuno, his current sportswear brand.

Q.26 is directly about the third question. It is an open question, but the clear domain of CR7 as best endorser to choose (by 55%), from overall respondents’ perspective, drives to deeper analyse how respondents portrayed his (brand) personality.

The majority, both men and women, considered CR7 as “*good looking*” (21% in **Q.29**; women’s mode), followed by “*arrogant & selfish*” (14%; men’s mode). Then, he is also “*professional*” and “*hard worker & combative*” (both 14%).

Therefore, he communicates professionalism, which fits his success with Real Madrid. Probably, he reached his sport success thanks also to his working hard and people recognized it. Nonetheless, the same respondents agree on his best personality and image as endorser. At the same time, what counts more for CR7 are his body and look. As a result, what impressed more the respondents, is being “*good looking*”, related to *attractiveness* (leadership, with Beckham).

What is interesting stems from the analysis of brand recalled/ linked, in order, to the football celebrity (from **Q.15** to **Q.20**) together with how people perceive, in order, his image and personality (**Q.27- 28- 29**). Beckham is depicted as “*good looking*” (clearly men’s mode), “*professional*”, “*elegant & stylish*”, “*charismatic & talented*”. Overall, he is linked with *adidas*, *Armani*, *H&M*.

All these brands sell clothes to different targets. Being good looking and stylish at the same time, can be consistent with these brands’ images, associations and personalities. Being professional, charismatic and talented is assumed to be influenced by image and personality he had in- pitch.

Kakà is portrayed as “*generous & intelligent*” (men and women’s mode), “*professional*” and “*religious*”. Then, he is linked with *adidas*, *Ringo* and *Save the Children*. The most evident congruency is between *Save the Children* and being identified by generosity and religiosity.

CR7 is seen as “*good looking*”, “*arrogant & selfish*”, “*hard worker & combative*”, “*professional*” and “*charismatic & talented*”. He is linked with *Nike*, *Armani*, *Clear* and *D&G*.

It is assumed that being arrogant and selfish as well as hard worker and combative fits with *Nike*’s image and personality. In fact, he is the best football endorser for the company and people highly link/ recall them together. Moreover, being good looking and all previous attributes including “*metrosexual & narcissist*” (6%; **Q.29**), allows him to be employed by and associated with *Armani*, *D&G* and *Clear*. Namely, top brands in the fashion and personal care industry, although they not seem the classiest and most prestigious ones, consistently with CR7’s overall image and personality.

This leads to argue that sportswear brands should go beyond footballer’s performance in their marketing and sponsorship decisions, congruently invest on footballer’s image and work on his personality traits, both in- and out- pitch, since it is crucial. Indeed, physical aspect is very important in customer’s overall evaluation of the endorser. Here, “*good looking*” is a very influential component.

Interviews as well as “Discussion” and “Conclusions” will test and deepen this key issue.

9.3 Research question 3

By comparing behaviour and attitude of football endorsers, in- and out- pitch in relation to football boots launch, (Q.22) respondents as target, would prefer a “*serious, 360’ professional*” endorser (by 36%).

Second, they opted for just “*professional*” (23%). The difference with all remaining options and combinations of them is noticeable. A “*bad boy*” is chosen only by 3%.

Deepening “*serious, 360’ professional*”, 69% of respondents is 22 – 29 years old (more than overall result in Q.40). Moreover, 64% plays football at least once a month (more than overall result in Q.44).

Perhaps, since they are not teens anymore, the majority of respondents looks for a more mature, comprehensive and integral endorser’s image to be associated with. Probably, if the majority of respondents were under 20- year- old, “*bad boy*” would be chosen as the most significant endorser’s behaviour- attitude for football boots launch.

Next, analysing physical aspect and look (Q.23), again, the chief concept is “*good looking*”. In fact, only “*good looking*” obtained 29% of responses and the solution with both “*good looking*” and “*extreme/ unusual look*” got 28%. Both men and women’s modes support this outcome. Even the third answer (19%) included the “*good looking*” component. About “*good looking*” (29%), its 68% is 22 – 29 years old (more than overall result). No women chose “*ugly*”, “*normal, on average, ugly*” and “*normal, on average, extreme or unusual look*”. These three outcomes are the lowest ones even for men.

Therefore, being ugly and having normal look are not suggested from the respondents.

Moving towards football teams and nationalities (Q.24), respondents showed their clear preference for a football endorser “*playing for a successful football team, although it is not your favourite one*”. This answer reached 62%.

Then, it is better than having the same consumers’ nationality and/ or playing in their favourite team.

In Q.25, focusing on role and sport performance, the most appreciate figure is “*goleador, creative player*”, by 23%, followed by “*goleador, combative player*” (16%) and “*creative player*”, by 15%.

Consequently, being striker/ offensive player is better for a football endorser. Next, creativity is important.

Lastly, (Q.26) as already analysed, respondents would choose as endorser CR7 (55%), followed by Beckham (20%). All other players got less than 8%.

However, responses are probably influenced given that in the previous questions these two players have been protagonists and, together with Kakà, they are directly proposed as answers in this question.

Key concepts of brand image, personality and associations as well as the importance of fit are emerged during this research questions analysis. They will be explored throughout the interviews and finally in “Discussion” and “Conclusion”.

10. Qualitative technique

10.1 Semi- structured interview

In line with *interpretivism*, the main technique carried out in this research is *semi- structured one- to- one interview*. It allows to gather valid and reliable qualitative data that are relevant to the research questions and objectives. Semi- structured interview is not standardized and it is often referred as “qualitative research interview”.

On the whole, one face- to- face interview as well as three internet- mediated interviews through Skype software, as video calls are carried out. Internet- mediated interviews are a positive alternative to face- to- face ones when geographical boundaries and financial limitations are obstacles to execution. Besides, semi- structured interview is also used to deepen results and information emerged from the electronic questionnaire previously analysed (Saunders et al., 2009).

The nature of these interviews aim to provide qualitative data, namely precious insights and deeper understanding of issues and trends, based on the research questions. Interviewees’ heterogeneity is perfect for this goal.

A list of themes and questions are covered following the research questions. These partially vary from interviewee to interviewee, according to their profiles within the analysed context. The order of questions depends on flow of conversation and additional questions are required to further explore the research questions. It allows flexibility in exploring the complexity of the topic (*ibid.*).

This qualitative technique is coherent with the purpose of the research. In fact, first, these data are used to find out what happens, seek new insights and describe general patterns. It enables to probe answers. This is

important for understanding the meanings that carefully selected respondents ascribe to various questions. Second, the significance of establishing personal contact with interviewees is crucial, since top level footballers and “managers are more likely to agree to be interviewed, rather than complete a questionnaire, especially where the interview topic is seen to be interesting and relevant to their current work” (*ibid.*, p. 324). Third, the nature of data collection calls for this research technique, since questions are complex. Besides, consistently with *interpretivism*, very often open questions are applied, which let interviewees further define their answers. This is designed in order to obtain extensive answers. Probing questions instead, aim to explore responses significant to the research topic and to seek further explanations.

Interviewees’ anonymity is not accepted, since their profiles are the added value and strength of this research. Who they are and what they do is a plus which make this research further interesting and relevant. Instead of interviewing a remarkable number of average and random people as consumer- fan, this research takes benefit from four key heterogeneous figures within the analysed context.

10.1.1 Preparatory stage

The researcher has planned precisely how to demonstrate his credibility and how to obtain interviewees’ confidence. This includes also efforts made to reach these figures in the football industry. The researcher has demonstrated to all interviewees his personal interest and research objectives. Through a series of mails and calls, the researcher obtains agreement with the interviewees in order to proceed. They received relevant information before as well as objectives and length of the interview.

Overall, location for every interview is strategically selected, in order to make every interviewee feel comfortable, due to quality issue of the audio recording as well. Moreover, the researcher adopts a similar style of dress to all the interviewees.

Given the importance of opening comments, the interviewee personally shapes the start of the discussion, adapted from interviewee to interviewee, explaining again the research objectives and checking their consent.

10.1.2 Execution stage

There are several areas where researcher- interviewer needs to demonstrate his competence such as opening the interview, using appropriate language, questioning and listening, testing and summarising understanding (Saunders et al., 2009).

Approach to questioning is carried out in order to reduce bias during the interview and increase the reliability of the obtained information. Therefore, questions are phrased clearly, with a neutral tone of voice. Open questions and appropriately worded probing questions are successfully applied. Besides, too many theoretical concepts and jargon are avoided in respect of the heterogeneous interviewees. Having the same understanding is crucial (*ibid.*).

Attention is paid also to interviewer and interviewees' behaviour during the interviews: comments, non-verbal behaviour such as gestures indicating any bias. Even posture (e.g. avoiding folded arms) and tone of voice could encourage or inhibit flow and efficiency of the interview. Additionally, demonstration of attentive listening skills is noteworthy: it is necessary to probe explanations as well as give them reasonable time to develop their responses (*ibid.*).

Due to different cultures and nationalities, researcher considers these issues as potential sources of bias. No problem and potential misunderstandings occurred.

What participants say and how they say it is important. Therefore, the interviewer audio records all the interviews. All interviewees authorise to be audio recorded. Audio recording permits to take notes and better evaluate interviewee's body language, expressions and other non- verbal communication cues. Then, the researcher is better concentrate on questioning and listening, he can also re- listen to the interview. On the whole, the interviewer does not manage any difficult situation such as status issue and sensitive topic. No technical problems occurred and the audio recorder worked always good.

Style of questioning follows an *open- ended approach* combined with *laddering* technique, namely "an interviewing process that seeks to get to the heart of the reasons [...] that allows the interviewer to gain insight into the subject's personal reasons" (Wansink, 2000, p. 30).

The interviewer tries always to avoid *leading questions* (King & Horrocks, 2010) and to investigate deeper into what is relevant for the research questions. As to make the interviewee more prone to self- disclosure, the interviewer uses *probing* techniques, mostly *elaboration* and *clarification* (*ibid.*).

However, the lack of standardization can lead to concerns about *reliability*, in particular both interviewer and response bias. Therefore, in every single interview, comments, tone and non- verbal behaviours are treated carefully. Moreover, everything is done in order to raise credibility and trust of the interviewee, since the first contact with them before the interview.

High level of *validity* is possible since interviews are conducted judiciously and strategically: questions being able to be clarified, meanings of responses probed and topics discussed from a variety of angles.

10.2 Interviewee's profile

This paragraph includes interviewees' background and role in the analysed context. Interviewing them is a source of pride and added value.

Their profiles are listed based on chronological order of the interviews.

Appendixes from 19 to 22 offer a full verbatim transcript for each one.

10.2.1 Face- to- face interview

- **Marketing manager at adidas headquarter: Mr. Marco Tagliariol.** After the experience in adidas Italy in Sports Marketing department, he works within **Global Marketing Planning & Implementation department in Herzogenaurach.**

He is a football addict, he played as a professional footballer for one sport season, he is crazy about football boots. The researcher believes he is a relevant source of fresh data since he sums up the three sides of this thesis to different degrees: footballer, consumer- fan and adidas' employee.

As in all the others, the interview is composed by three sections reflecting the research questions.

However, in line with the essence of face- to- face interview, the order and the nature of the questions is flexible.

Although both are native Italian speakers, the interview is carried out in English, in order to avoid potential data damage during the transcription. Both hold full professional proficiency in English.

The interview takes place in a quiet, physically and psychologically comfortable environment: inside a closed restaurant, on the 26th of March 2016, in Pordenone (Italy), at 4pm. The interviewee has agreed immediately on place and modality. Overall, the interview takes around 50' minutes.

10.2.2 Internet- mediated interview

- **Professional footballer: Mr. Kingsley Boateng, half Ghanaian and half Italian.** He is regularly in the starting eleven of Italy Under- 21 national team, one of most prestigious team in youth sector. After the experience in Serie A with AC Milan, he played also in the Netherlands with NAC Breda. Now, he is a key player of FC Bari 1908, in Serie B, namely one the most followed football club in Italy. He is a fast striker, active in charity and anti- racism campaigns.

Given that both interviewer and interviewee are native Italian speakers, the interview is carried out in Italian. Next, the interviewer prudently executes translation and transcript activity the same day.

The interview takes place in a quiet, comfortable and private place. The interviewer is in his bedroom. Same for the interviewee, who makes the interview after a practice. The interview happens on the 5th of April 2016, at around 6pm. Previously, the interviewee agreed on place, date and modality. It takes around 35'.

- **Senior manager consulting at Repucom: Mr. Tommaso Mattei** deals with strategic guidance and operations management of Repucom consultancy, which offers support to sport brands and right- holders in strategy and performance measurement in the sport industry. Repucom is already used as source for secondary data and trends throughout this thesis. Therefore, being able to deepen the research questions directly with this professional figure is considered as added value for the thesis.

Since both interviewer and interviewee are native Italian speakers, the interview is carried out in Italian. Next, carefully translation and transcript are executed the same day. The interview takes place in a quiet and comfortable environment for both. The interview occurs on the 15th of April 2016, at around 6pm. Overall, the interview takes around 60'.

- **Managing director at adidas Group South Europe: Mr. Andreas Gellner.** His expertise about sportswear brands and European football industry is incredible and gathering data from him is added value.

The interview's structure is based on his profile and requests, in order to avoid any problem with company's data- privacy regulations. Since the interviewee is German, the interview is carried out in English. Both people hold full professional proficiency in English. Carefully transcript is carried out the same day.

The interview takes place in a quiet, private and comfortable place. The interviewer is in his bedroom; the interviewee in his office. The interview occurs on the 26th of April 2016, at around 6pm. It takes around 35'.

11. Data analysis of the interviews

11.1 Thematic analysis

Qualitative data are approached mainly by using the inductive approach. Namely, relationships between data are identified and then, theories emerge from the analysis. However, a combination of both deductive and inductive approach is accomplished (Saunders et al., 2009).

This analysis follows a *basic scheme* within a *thematic analysis* (King & Horrocks, 2010). To shed light on, *themes* are “recurrent and distinctive features of participants’ accounts, characterising particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question” (*ibid.*, p. 150).

A *cross- case* analysis is executed, looking at the four interviews as a whole, discerning *over- arching themes* from *interpreting* and *descriptive coding*, as hierarchical relationships and with diagram representation.

In order to strategically fulfil what research questions request, every over- arching theme corresponds to a research question; the majority of the interpreting codes generally reflect research sub- questions. The whole *semi- structure* of each interview, composed by three main dynamic sections replicating the three research questions, consistently sustains this procedural decision.

Descriptive codes are grouped together by interpretive codes as well as they represent the dominant points, emerged from all the interviews, for answering each research question.

While transcribing and translating qualitative data, attention is paid to data cleaning process with accuracy and correction of any errors. Auditability of analysis is an important criterion taken into account throughout the process (King & Horrocks, 2010).

This analysis requested choices about what to include or not: repetitions and not relevant data are not further investigated. On the contrary, recurrent and relevant themes, based on research questions, deserve further analysis. The multi- stage process of the thematic analysis is reported in Appendix 23.

11.2 Research question 1

Footballer's image (Appendix 24) is the first over-arching theme. It is composed by five interpretive codes to answer the sub-questions.

Sport performance as first interpretive code is crucial. By assessing football endorser's image, it is considered as *very important* and *starting point* for sportswear brand's evaluations. Speaking of which, "sport performance [...] is the first impression and starting point for a football endorser's evaluation" (Mattei). From Repucom, it counts for 65% of the overall footballer's evaluation, although "it depends from player to player".

Analysing changes from the '90s, due to their own relevance, consumer differs from footballer. *Consumer's changes* (interpretive code) highlights that now they are portrayed as *brand advocates*. Thus, the consumers hold centrality as before, but now they are "brand advocate, more than ever", where dialogue brand-consumers is fundamental and searched by the company (Gellner).

Consistently, now consumer is *co-creator* of products (Mattei). Indeed, as in Canvas Model, adidas now emphasises consumer's centrality for brand value and loyalty: these can be obtained through dialogue and co-creation/ collaboration with consumers. Besides, footballers are not purely "idol" (Mattei) as in the past. Now, consumers- fans "challenge and *call-out* the same footballers, with less respect and more irreverence" (Mattei). There is new consumer's approach and relationship with football endorsers as well as with sportswear brands, in line with new consumer's needs and wants.

Reasonably, "adidas now is irreverent" and its new "campaign is based on *irreverence*, standing above others" (Tagliariol): sportswear brands as adidas takes inspiration from this issue and change campaign goals and slogan consistently over time, according to brand image and personality. Therefore, different, but always consistent endorsers are requested. Indeed, now adidas "changed campaigns: they are more aggressive" (Mattei). Coherently, "Impossible is nothing" is replaced by "Boss everyone".

Social media revolution (descriptive code) is the main variation within the relationship consumer- footballer- sportswear brand. It is shared between *consumer* and *footballer's changes*. Their relationship and ratio now are totally different compared to the '90s and brands have taken benefit and inspiration from this new approach and dynamics. To shed light on, "the biggest change stems from the number and the type of touchpoints". Here, social media revolution "is the main case in point" (Tagliariol) and Mr. Mattei agrees on this. Moreover, "the quantity and quality of social media followers" drive the value of company's assets as well (Gellner). More in detail, now the customer can follow all day where the footballer is and "even what he

eats for lunch". Indeed, now marketing communication "is largely extended, going beyond" (Tagliariol). Besides, social media tactics and tools "lead to a more impactful, efficient, easier- to- remember initiative, campaign or claim" (Mattei).

By the third interpretive code, now football endorser's approach and assessment is transformed. Starting from social media characteristics and recent trends, now brands and consumers look at the footballer in a more *holistic & global* approach. In fact, "it was more about a very one- dimensional building of a brand association [...]. Now everything is wider, with a more holistic approach" (Gellner). Therefore, both what happens in- and out- pitch is significant. Footballer's private and social life is more central and involving than ever and, at the same time, easier to monitor and take part in, consistently with *social media revolution*. Additionally, concerning footballer's image, "until the end of the '90s, the assessment process was shorter. Sportswear brands were more focused on sport performances [...] because there were less chances to interact with footballers" (Mattei).

Global approach and appeal is a key point in assessing footballer's image and it differs from the past. Companies look for "players that have the potential to appeal to a broad audience across the continents", beyond home country (Gellner).

Then, "now the footballer's image and figure as a whole is more important" (Gellner). Indeed, the footballer now is a *role model* and *projection space* of people's dream and hope, especially teenagers, where personification and user- imagery let personality traits be linked to brand, since footballers are symbols and people are inspired by them.

The last relevant difference is offered by Mr. Boateng: "the excess of money within sport industry and football in particular is the biggest difference". He is the only interviewee who stresses directly this issue, but since he is very certain, *money* got own descriptive code. Thus, "money is crucial" (Mattei).

Sync & fit (descriptive code) unifies both *in- pitch* and *out- pitch* interpretive codes. As a result, in line with *holistic & global* descriptive code, although sport performance itself is the basis, both what regards footballer's image *in-* and *out- pitch* impacts on brands and consumers' evaluations. In every case, there must be *fit*, equilibrium and *sync* (Gellner) between his image *in- pitch* and *out- pitch*. Then, "every single brand looks for the most consistent player in line with their brand image, personality and goals. Both inside and outside the pitch" (Mattei).

For instance, new adidas' endorser Pogba fits with the slogan "Boss everyone". Indeed, "Pogba fits with the claim and the new decisions and directions taken by adidas" (Mattei).

Focusing on *in- pitch*, the essential feature refers to the role. *Strikers* “are the most important ones by far”: they score, thus they are more attractive than defenders and receive “first page of magazines” (Tagliariol). Moreover, “the goal is the most important and viewed moment in the entire match. A goal can change consumer- fan’s life” (Mattei). The second most relevant feature is creativity, which “gives emotion to fans” (Tagliariol). Creative is “who is able to make [...] creative trick” (Tagliariol), since footballer’s emotional potential is “very important” (Mattei). Regarding the *creatives*, “unique skills”, “unexpected games” (Gellner) and “dribbling” (Boateng) are crucial traits that make a footballer a better endorser. Consequently, emotions are assessed as important in influencing footballer’s image as well as consumer’s choice. Finally, it is interpreted that *in- pitch* tend to be more important than *out- pitch*, since all interviewees tend to link *in- pitch* with *sport performance*. However, both *in* and *out* aim at catching customer’s attention and preference.

Analysing *out- pitch* (interpretive code), beyond *sync & fit*, *good looking* and *visibility & communication* are the two descriptive codes extracted.

Having a *good looking* football endorser is “added strength” (Gellner), “more valuable” and “easier to use” (Tagliariol). However, “it is important, but not necessary. Even here, it depends on the consistency with the campaign goals and brand image” (Tagliariol) and “as already mentioned before, it all starts with the footballer’s performance” (Gellner). For instance, “Messi is not good looking [...] but he is extremely strong” (Tagliariol). Overall, all the interviews agree on this.

Visibility & communication emphasises the importance of having a famous, well- known and visible endorser (“the only [...] prerequisite is footballer’s visibility. He must be famous”, Tagliariol). This is shared by the interviewees. Besides, “notoriety is a crucial factor for having a commercial potentiality and it depends on sport performance” (Mattei). “Impact and presence on media and public opinion” (Tagliariol) refer to *visibility* as well. The football endorser may be not only visible and famous, but also communicative.

Thus, “emotional and communicative potential” is crucial (Mattei). *Communication* means engagement with consumer- fan in social media and offline, communicative skills and potential. These are determining factors in creating footballer’s image out- pitch. This is linked with both *social media revolution* and *co- creation* as descriptive codes above explained.

11.3 Research question 2

New football sponsorship (Appendix 25) is the second over-arching theme. It is composed by four interpretive codes to answer the sub-questions.

Adidas is interpretive code due to brand's relevance throughout all the interviews and its constant sponsorship comparisons with Nike. This code aims at answering the three sub-questions at the same time. Nowadays, adidas is portrayed as *more individual as Nike* (Nike "is always focused on the single individual", Mattei), due to different consumer's needs and wants.

This confirms that adidas' image and personality are changing over time. Now, in the analysed context Nike is sponsoring and performing better than adidas (showed in Canvas Model), "in line with what people need and want: individuality, risk, irreverence" (Mattei) and people make better brand association and link easier their personality to Nike.

Thus, adidas in 2016 is not the same: "four years ago adidas was based on hard work, sacrifice, determination". On the contrary, now it "is based on irreverence, standing above others". Consequently, "adidas now is *irreverent*" (descriptive code, Tagliariol). Hence, different messages ask for different testimonials.

Next, since brands want "hot players, at their best" (Tagliariol), adidas, for instance, moved *from Kakà to Pogba* (descriptive code). In fact, "Pogba fits with the claim and the new decisions [...] and football player must be consistent with" (Mattei). Efficiently, his personality traits refer to "he is stylish, he is social. He has a strong personality and he is *irreverent*" (Tagliariol). On the other hand, Kakà now is a Mizuno's endorser "and he is not at the peak anymore" (Tagliariol).

Sport performance described as *very important*, together with *irreverence & call-out*, *role model & projection space*, *sync & fit*: all these descriptive codes (above studied) indirectly support *Adidas'* analysis: the brand is different now and then, there are different goals and decisions as well as new approach and relationship with customers within football sponsorship activities.

Footballer is the second interpretive code. *Fit & subjectivity* is crucial. Again, players must fit sponsoring brand, products, target and goals. However, the code stresses also that "the way you choose your athlete is subjective" and "it is all about your campaign's objectives" (Tagliariol). Indeed, "even my image and my personality change day by day" (Boateng).

Next, sportswear brands avoid sponsoring "mediocre and *low-quality*" footballers (Tagliariol) (incidence of *sport performance* is evident). Rather, brands look for endorser's "impact and presence on media and public

opinion". In fact, they "hope that the footballer can be a reference point for both his performance and his style, his appeal" (Tagliariol). This refers to *visibility & global appeal* (descriptive code) since in sponsorship as well the issue of having a global approach to the endorser is central. Mr. Gellner explicitly agrees on this. He also adds that in the '90s, football club and playing skills were the most important assessment criteria for sponsoring a footballer. Now instead, customers have more expectations and brands look for also footballer's origin, style and personality.

Moreover, the sponsored endorser might be *good looking*: all the considerations and quotes above placed (first research question) contribute to outlook this descriptive code in the same measure.

Finally, the footballer is assessed as *vehicle for brand and product* (descriptive code), namely a "vehicle of message transmission and diffusion" and now sportswear brands "are investing in different testimonials, for a different message, for a different campaign" (Tagliariol).

Moreover, "they are an incredible vehicle even between their colleagues" (Tagliariol). Indeed, sportswear brands can "differentiate each other thanks to different footballers and their associated skills or characteristics" (Boateng). For this am, adidas tends to "choose players with slightly different criteria, with the result of being more coherent than Nike" (Gellner).

The third interpretive code is *sponsorship changes*. Two descriptive codes are formulated as in the first over-arching theme: *social media revolution* and *money*. Although the questions were addressed towards sponsorship rather than footballer's image, the biggest changes from the '90s stem again from these two codes. All considerations made for the first over-arching theme can be replied. To shed light on, even here money relevance is stressed by Mr. Boateng, who adds that money can be also more important than fit for both brands and endorsers: "integrity and consistency are important, but money has the priority in these days". Moreover, he states that there is a running after which is related to more chances and types of sponsorship than the '90s.

Lastly, sportswear brands' "approach to sponsorship is always the same", where "engagement, reachability and spread potentiality are crucial". However, what differs from the past is sponsorship activation (Mattei).

Storytelling has its own interpretive code since it is extensively discussed by both Mr. Gellner and Mr. Mattei. It embraces sportswear brands' changes in the relationship with consumer, different decisions and goals. It is "more than a simple activation technique" (Mattei) and "the most powerful way to work and activate assets" for a sportswear brand, always pursuing fit (Gellner). All starts from the fact that "the secret is to be able to communicate a message, better if with a story behind [...] consistent with the image that is already in

consumer's mind" (Tagliariol). Indeed, storytelling is able to fortify endorser's image and communicate associations and personality of the underlying sportswear brand (Mattei).

The best example is *Dare to Zlatan* (descriptive code), where Nike started from Ibrahimović's performance and then, thanks to his communicative appeal and charisma, built around him a slogan consistent with his image and personality. The campaign aims at "people through emotions, influencing them to do something different, strong" (Mattei).

According to Repucom, although Zlatan won neither CL nor Ballon d'Or, he is very attractive and influential. *Dare to Zlatan* campaign in fact, "got the most efficient impact and outcomes" (Mattei).

This has been possible through the *holistic & global* approach adopted by Nike. What this descriptive code means is already showed in the first over- arching theme. Thus, merchandising and online initiatives are related each other and addressed towards the same goals and endorser. In fact, "his biography was published in line with Nike's campaign, creating a mutual support and fortifying their impact on consumers" (Mattei). Besides, every sponsorship activity and campaign might fit globally "due to cultural and social differences worldwide", also considering that brand image and personality change over time and vary from customer to customer.

Last, *identification & personification* as descriptive code refers to the effects that storytelling as well as sponsorship activities have on customer's choice and preference.

Through storytelling, "the follower is more participant, more active". As a result, this fosters self- extension and personification through/ to brand and endorser, who maintains here his *role model & projection space* (as in the first over- arching theme).

11.4 Research question 3

Football boots launch (Appendix 26) is the third over- arching theme. It is composed by three interpretive codes to answer the sub- questions.

Type of football endorser (the first interpretive code) refers directly to the first sub- question. It includes also the *product*, in line with brand image and personality of both *brand* and *endorser*. Indeed, "there must be fit and consistency between brand image and personality of both the endorser and the sportswear brand" (Tagliariol).

Next, product has the priority: "design of the product comes first"; then, "we can consider the footballer" (Boateng). Coherently, overall brands choose boots for their football endorsers: "usually, it is the brand that

decides for the footballer". When it is the player who selects instead, "it might be an influential and powerful footballer and there must be a common agreement" (Gellner).

Overall, in this marketing situation interviewees agree on the fact that, since product is central, "everything concerns sport performance and behaviours inside the green field tend to have more incidence" than out-pitch (Tagliariol) and "footballer's characteristics inside the green field are more influential than those outside" (Gellner). As a result, *in- pitch* is clearly *more* important *than out- pitch*.

Brands link endorser's image and personality with those of the football boots. On the whole, all interviewees share this thought. Mr. Boateng says his sponsor adidas "makes a section just for offensive players, another one for midfielders, another one for only defenders and, lastly, goalkeepers" (they never score). Then, "Nike gives Vapor to strikers because they are those who make goals and usually they are fast".

Mr. Gellner and Mr. Mattei emphasise an additional issue: not only *strikers* (as in first over- arching theme), but also who runs a lot and well, consistently with his playing style, should be assessed as ideal type of endorser. In fact, "a footballer is used also for endorsing products that are not exclusively football related... For instance, *running* and leisure time". Then, "brands go beyond [...] within the footballer" (Gellner).

Changes (the second interpretive code) directly aims at the second sub- question. Nowadays, there is emphasis towards *more user- and usage- imagery* and situations, rather than around the product itself (Mattei). In fact, now sportswear brands "suggest you how to use it and how to personify it" (Mattei). Therefore, there is a change from the '90s which refers to *from product to personalization* as descriptive code. About this, Mr. Boateng states that looking at football boots, now shape and colours "are the most important features" that allow to be closer to consumer's preference and boots are "more attention-grabbing compared to the past".

Additionally, there is a continuum change of product, brand and endorser's *image and personality over time*, "faster than ever". As a result, "every campaign is different and even image and personality of all actors change over time" (Mattei). Indeed, "although colour and type change very often, more or less the essence is always the same" within a football boots model (Boateng).

High school (the third and last interpretive code) satisfies the third sub- question: this is the main targeted segment by sportswear brands concerning football boots. In fact, "the most profitable segment in this market refers to the high school period, namely from 14 to 18" years old (Tagliariol). All the interviewees agree on this.

The first descriptive code is *dream & self- extension*. High school students use football boots as self- extension tool, in order to "be cool or accepted in a group", given that these "within a football team are very

important". In fact, football boots "let you express who [...] you are" (Boateng). Moreover, through this product, people identify and express themselves, personifying the same endorser as well as being linked to product's personality ("personification and self- extension are important", Mattei).

For this aim, even a pro footballer as Mr. Boateng is still influenced by this issue. Then, he states: "I am closer to adidas; my personality is more adidas than Nike".

Besides, teens have more free time, enthusiasm and hope, all towards their willing "to become as what they dream: affirmed and successful players" (Boateng). Here, Mr. Mattei shares this thought and the footballer still is *role model & projection space* as in the first over- arching theme. It regards also the descriptive code below analysed as follows.

Reasonably, teenagers are *easily influenced* due to their age. Indeed, they are "driven towards the directions we want" and, importantly, they represent "future brand loyalty" for brands (Gellner). Overall, other interviewees agree on this. Thus, this supports why Mr. Boateng is adidas now and he was crazy about Zidane (adidas' endorser) as well: "his way of playing and dribbling impressed me. I think I was influenced by him in choosing adidas" he says.

Consistently with the psychological implications of the first two descriptive codes, "teenagers do not dream of being the next Paolo Maldini" (Tagliariol). On the contrary, as Balotelli, "teenager likes more the footballer with tattoos and beautiful women. Therefore, bad boys are more followed". *Bad boy* is "very influential and famous, a sort of symbol for the youngest" (Tagliariol). However, although he could be a better endorser for football boots launch, fit is always requested. Previous descriptive codes such as *social media revolution*, *irreverent* and *visibility & communication* further emphasise the controversial figure of bad boy as football endorser.

However, only if the bad boy is good in- pitch, then his appeal increases out- pitch (Boateng; Mattei). Again, *sport performance* is the *starting point*.

12. Discussion

In this section, what resulted from the starting questionnaire is linked, when applicable, to interviews outcomes.

Next, when relevant topics and results (with no distinction between research questions) have their clear theoretical foundations and implications, key theories and studies developed in “Theoretical framework” will drive and deepen this discussion, based on exploration and description as research purposes and *interpretivism* as implemented research philosophy.

As main examples, mostly descriptive codes from the qualitative analyses are applied. They are already examined: therefore, their meanings and implications are in sections 11.2; 11.3; 11.4.

12.1 Questionnaire and interviews

From the questionnaire, answers from **Q.15** to **Q.30**, especially from **Q.27** to **Q.29**, serve as functional and executive basis for the three research questions, where interviews remain the main source of data collection and analysis. More in detail, data from **Q.22** to **Q.26** are directly addressed towards the third research question. Underlying reasons for this choice are already explained in section 9.

Therefore, this paragraph discusses and links obtained results in the questionnaire that are directly purposeful and significant to those developed in the four interviews. Consistently, the focus is on the third research question.

Concerning *football boots launch* (the third research question), choosing an endorser perceived as *bad boy* got only 3% (**Q.22**). Rather, the most selected option is *serious, 360° professional*. It is interpreted as the opposite one. However, as before said, if the majority of respondents were under 20- year- old, *bad boy* probably would be chosen as the most significant endorser’s trait for a boots launch.

This issue confirms what highlighted in the interviews overall: a *bad boy* is an efficient endorser only if, after having evaluated fit between brand, endorser, product and campaign goal, he is still consistently able to obtain consumer’s attention and preference. Moreover, people *from 22 to 29* years old (dominant age in the questionnaire) do not prefer a *bad boy*, differently from teenagers, given considerations and reasons before explained.

Having a *good looking* endorser, both in questionnaire (Q.23) and interviews, can be finally valued as added strength and important, although not necessary. Indeed, it got 29% of responses; the answer with both *good looking* and *extreme/ unusual look* got 28%. Both sexes' modes sustain this result. At the same time, being *ugly* and having *normal look* is certainly not suggested.

Moreover, *good looking* is the most evident attribute to describe both Beckham and CR7's images as football endorsers (Q.27; Q.29). The issue of *good looking* embraces also the first two research questions, as already demonstrated by the thematic analyses.

Regarding endorser's team and nationality (Q.24), there is supremacy for endorser *playing for a successful football team, although it is not your favourite one* (62%). The least chosen answers are *playing in your favourite football team* (6%) and *same your nationality* (5%). Going beyond *favourite football team* (usually it plays in consumer's home country) and *own nationality* is coherent with what occurred in the interviews: descriptive codes such as *visibility & communication*, *holistic & global* and *visibility & global appeal* are worthy examples, thanks to what they describe and mean (before analysed).

Last, focusing on role (Q.25), the two most appreciate in- pitch characteristics are *goleador* and *creative*. Since *goleador* corresponds to *striker*, what respondents say in the questionnaire is confirmed by the four interviews.

Football endorser's role and in- pitch characteristics, thus *strikers* and *creatives*, are crucial also for the first two research questions, as revealed by thematic analysis of the interviews.

12.2 Theoretical discussion

12.2.1 Fit and brand associations

From the qualitative analysis, centrality of *fit* dimension instantly emerges throughout three research questions, as developed primarily by Keller (1993) and Aaker (1997).

Although *fit* has different denominations in several descriptive codes, the theoretical foundation is always the same and refers to what is important for the thesis, as follows.

Then, the discussion here below is extended to all the three research questions and it is the basis for the paragraphs next analysed.

Within the analysed context, *fit* among brand associations is vital and impacts on brand image of sportswear brands, football endorsers and branded products in relation to consumer's choice. In fact, only consistent information with brand associations is easier learned and stored by consumers (Keller, 1993). Then, if brand associations are weak/ wrong, competitors can take benefit from and consumers can confuse brand's meanings, with weaker and less favourable brand associations (*ibid.*).

All the considered and analysed brand images, brand personalities and their brand associations (both sportswear brands, football endorsers and football boots) change over time (e.g. descriptive code *image and personality over time*), but there must be always fit from both company and consumer's perspectives (*ibid.*; Aaker, 1997). Therefore, sportswear brands need different, but always consistent football endorsers over time. As a result, "every campaign is different and even image and personality of all actors change over time" (Mattei). Not only *sync & fit* and *fit product- brand- endorser* (within the third research question), but also *from Kakà to Pogba*, as descriptive codes are good instances.

In fact, as highlighted by Kotler and Keller (2012), the football endorser (e.g. Pirlo) must have high recognition, positive affect and fit with both the product (e.g. Nike Tiempo) and the sportswear brand (e.g. Nike) as well. Brand personality is crucial because it influences consumer's usage preference, loyalty and emotions (Aaker, 1997). Besides, focusing only sponsorship, the greater the perceived fit between brand associations of sponsored footballer and sponsoring brand, the greater the transfer potential of those associations (Smith, 2004). In fact, through sponsorship activities as well, consumers evaluate and perceive Nike or adidas with different personality traits (Arora and Stoner, 2009), where fit with the endorser and campaign goals are imperative. This regards and involves also *storytelling*, as best different marketing and sponsorship activation activity.

12.2.2 Followers and brand equity

Mr. Gellner says that social media followers contribute to the value of company's assets. This issue can be theoretically linked to how Keller (1993) defined brand equity from the consumer's point of view. In fact, knowledge already created in consumers' mind is the most valuable asset for the company.

Moreover, consumer's importance for brand equity can be linked to the new role of *brand advocate & co-creator*, as summed up by that descriptive code in the first research question.

12.2.3 Holistic & global together with CR7

Holistic & global (in the first two research questions), emphasised in the qualitative analysis, supports the choice of CR7 rather than Messi as best current endorser. In fact, he is the world's most marketable footballer and now brands do not just look at the most famous players, but also at how consumer's perceptions change worldwide (Repucom, 2015).

Consistently, starting from its qualitative analysis, even the descriptive code *Dare to Zlatan* is a good example here ("he is able to communicate incredibly, with his behaviours and attitude", Mattei).

12.2.4 From footballer's image to self- extension

Now, footballer's image is more important than ever. Thus, through their figures and images, top level football players as brand ambassadors are portrayed as *role model & projection space* of people's dreams, in particular in the *high school* period (key interpretive code). Meaning transfer model (McCracken, 1989) and extended- self (Belk, 1988) are exhaustive supporting studies. In fact, people's personality traits associated to a brand are transferred to the brand and to the footballer's brand image and personality. Thus, people link themselves with sportswear brand and endorser as well, expressing their personality through the brand/ product. Then, consumers see possession, as football boots used and endorsed by the footballer, to be part of their own self. How they see it, depends also on footballer's image, personality and associations.

Storytelling can be interpreted as source of *identification & personification*, then it is related to the theory of self- extension.

Besides, this also refers to Aaker's brand personality (1997): personification of footballer and/ or sportswear brand as well as user- imagery (e.g. *more user- and usage- imagery* - descriptive code) let personality traits be linked to brand, since footballers are symbols and inspire people. In fact, sportswear and footballers'

brand personalities have symbolic and self- expressive function (Keller, 1993). Given that consumers tend to attribute human personality traits to brands, personification and user- imagery around a sportswear brand, as well as a footballer, allow to associate personality traits with a brand as a point of differentiation. As a consequence, sportswear brands try to offer a consistent image and personality to the target through the emotions consumers feel (*ibid.*). Different slogans and different football endorsers over time, from adidas' perspective, are in line with these theoretical foundations. Here, footballer's image as vehicle is crucial. *Social media revolution* is one of the strongest causes and examples as well.

The footballer- vehicle is better if he is *good looking* and has *visibility*. Speaking of which, these are two key concepts within the descriptive coding. Nonetheless, *sport performance* is the *starting point* for considering footballer a great vehicle.

12.2.5 Emotions

The role of emotions deserves particular theoretical attention. Given the role of emotions and associations embedded in the brand, these can be source of brand equity (Keller, 1993).

In fact, as discussed above, sportswear brands offer a desired brand personality to the target through the emotions evoked to customers (*ibid.*). The role of emotions between people and brands can be further emphasised by Cova and Cova's thought (2002), where the link is more important than the object itself.

To shed light on, two descriptive codes are strongly related to branding role of emotions and serve as good examples as well: *strikers & creatives* and *no low- quality*. What they consistently mean, their motivations and outcomes are already explained during the qualitative data analyses.

In conclusion, emotions influence footballer's image as well as consumer's choice. Through a footballer's image and personality, consumers achieve emotional tie and brand associations with the endorsed brand, giving it potential point of differentiation and competitive advantage (*ibid.*).

12.2.6 Footballer as vehicle

As described by the code *vehicle for brand and product*, now the footballer is "vehicle of message transmission and diffusion" (Tagliariol). In relation to fit and the fact that brand image and personality change over time, sportswear brands use different endorsers consistent with "a different message, for a different

campaign” (Tagliariol). This is a point of differentiation (Keller, 2013) thanks to different football endorsers and their perceived and linked characteristics, in- and out- pitch.

From the theory, the footballer is also seen as vehicle for meaning transfer (McCracken, 1989), for brand image, personality and their associations (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1997).

12.2.7 Money

The incidence of *money* (descriptive code) and its new increasing trends has been already anticipated through the data in “Introduction” and “Additional data and trends” sections. Both support this statement, due to the growing heterogeneous interests towards football endorsement and sponsorship activities.

13. Conclusions

Starting from the purposes of *exploration* and *description* together with *interpretivism* as research philosophy, this section summarises main results for each research question and related sub- questions.

At the same time, these outcomes offer underlying managerial implications which are based on the goals of each research question.

To shed light on, the first research question is the widest one and it is composed by four sub- questions (one more than the other two research questions).

Moreover, conclusions about sponsorship take into account and start from the key point emerged through the first research question. Then, intriguing conclusions are drawn by trying to avoid redundancy.

13.1 Research question 1

a) Thanks to the thematic analysis, footballer's *performance* is assessed as the *starting point* for sportswear brand's evaluation of football player's image, including both in- and out- pitch. More in depth, according to Repucom's assessment criteria, it corresponds to 65% of total football endorser's evaluation.

b) Concerning footballer's image, as analysed by qualitative analyses, this thesis discerns *consumer* and *footballer's changes*.

Firstly, consumers now are considered by companies as *brand advocates* more than ever. At the same time, (e.g. adidas) they are *co- creators* of products and values. They impact considerably on company's brand equity and then, brand image.

Secondly, consumers do not consider footballers as just icons to be idolised anymore. Rather, they try to *call-out* them. This confirms new weight intrinsic in the new relationships between brands and their consumers. Consequently, even market leaders as adidas change their slogan (from "Impossible is nothing" to "Boss everyone") in line with new trends and consumer's needs and wants. Consistently, they move to other, more *irreverent*, endorsers (e.g. *from Kakà to Pogba*) since they aim at different images, personalities and associations in consumer's mind.

Social media revolution (e.g. by Facebook and Instagram) is the best example regarding new and deeper touchpoints. These have radically changed roles, expectations and relationships between consumers and celebrities and brands. Social media are the melting point for both consumer and footballer's changes: now

fans easily know even footballer's lunch for instance. As a result, sportswear brands might take advantage from this new approaches and utilise social media as marketing tactic and tool.

Next, consistently with main consumer's changes above, now footballer's image is pondered in a more *holistic, global* and integrated way. In fact, consumers as well as companies look at what happens in- and out- pitch. Thus, footballer's private and social life is more central than ever and, thanks to social media revolution, it is easier to follow and take part in. However, this can be also a double edged sword effect for sportswear brands. Also, footballer's image assessment process now is deeper: he is considered at 360°, beyond national boundaries.

Moreover, nowadays footballer's image is more important: the footballer now is a *role model*, especially for teenagers, and *projection space* of not only people's dream and hope, but also their identity and personality. In fact, personification and user- imagery let personality traits be linked to brand, since footballers are symbols and people are inspired by them.

Lastly, Mr. Boateng emphasises new increasing *money* centrality.

c) Focusing on *in- pitch*, the most important issue concerning footballer's image concerns his role in the green field. *Striker* ("goleador" in the questionnaire) is the most influential role, since it has *visibility* around the key moment: the goal. The more visible and famous, the better it is: thus, they have more chances to express their and brand's image, personality and associations. In fact, full- backs and goal keepers should rarely appear in advertising.

Next, *creativity* is the second most relevant attribute: even here, emotions are vital. By creatives, people appreciate for instance their technical skills, surprising choices and ease of dribbling.

Fit dimension (Keller, 1993; Aaker 1997) between image in- and out- pitch is necessary in any case. Brands and consumers take into strong account even footballer's life out- pitch. Therefore, what happens both inside and outside impact of their brand images, personalities and associations.

In fact, new adidas' endorser Pogba is consistent with "Boss everyone" and what adidas wants to communicate. Thus, the image that the French player has inside the green field fits the one outside (e.g. extravagant hairstyle combined with grit playing style).

Regarding *out- pitch* footballer's features, through both qualitative and quantitative analyses, having a *good looking* endorser is easier to use and added strength for the brand. However, brand and product positioning, campaign goals and fit dimension remain crucial in these considerations. Therefore, having a good looking endorser for a sportswear brand is suggested, but not necessary.

In line with the new approach to footballer's image, it is better if the endorser holds *visibility* and positive *communicative* skills and potential as well as *global* appeal (e.g. Ibrahimović and CR7). It involves media presence, public opinion and followers' quality and quantity as well as their engagement.

d) On the whole, although the importance of social media and attention to footballers' life out- pitch, qualitative analyses show that *in- pitch* image can be assessed as more important than *out- pitch*.

Still, both in- and out- aim at customer's attention and preference. All the considerations made above, in line with what thematic analyses have emphasised, support this statement.

13.2 Research question 2

a) Different consumer's needs and wants lead, as main instance, adidas to *be more individual as Nike* in sponsorship activities. In fact, now it is based on *irreverence*, stimulating associations in consumer's mind of standing above others. Next, sponsoring sportswear brands, as already said above, look for *visible*, famous, *communicative* and *globally-* oriented endorsers.

Social media revolution and *money*, same as before analysed and discussed, are the two biggest changes even concerning sponsorship relations between brand and consumer. At the same time, sponsorship *activation* is different. Here, *storytelling* (e.g. *Dare to Zlatan*) is a successful example (section 11.3).

b) & c) As above, footballer is utilised as *vehicle* in sportswear brands' sponsoring activities, since consistent messages and related brand associations are protagonist and crucial for sportswear brands' goals accomplishment. *Social media revolution*, increasing *money* and different sponsorship *activation* are the most relevant different decisions made by sportswear brands in order to reach consumer and achieve their current marketing and branding goals. Here, *storytelling* deserves more attention.

Storytelling is crucial since it is able to link both consumer and footballer's changes (as above explained) within the same marketing activity. It recognises that consumers- followers are now more active and central than ever as well as now they look for *identification* and self- extension with/ through brand, product and endorser as well. Therefore, *storytelling* works on images and associations in consumer's mind, then it allows brands to reach their marketing goals.

The best example made is "*Dare to Zlatan*" which has been successfully carried out by Nike. Additional *storytelling* characteristics are showed in section 11.3.

Last, in order to reach consumers, now sportswear brands in their sponsorship activities go beyond footballer's club and playing skills. Communicative potential, appeal, overall style and origin are important,

even for marketing goals achievement. All these considerations and features are supported by consistent descriptive codes analysed within the thematic analyses.

13.3 Research question 3

a) First of all, there must be *fit* even in this narrowed marketing situations and football endorser is a *vehicle* that comes after *product*, which remains protagonist. Thus, in line with conclusions made for footballers' image above (questionnaire included), beyond being *good looking*, he might be primarily a *striker* and alternatively a *creative* football player.

Moreover, based on product positioning and campaign goals, footballers- runners gain more importance, if the launched product refers to *running* business or leisure time. Therefore, football players can be employed efficiently as brand ambassadors even beyond football boundaries and business. However, there must be always overall consistency.

Even here, *in- pitch* image and component counts more than *out- pitch*.

b) Nowadays, sportswear brands instead of being fully and primarily focused on football boots, might pay more attention towards *user- and usage- imagery*, in line with new consumer- fan's role and their changes above explained. This issue is supported by the growing occasions of boots *personalization*. People want to personify the football endorser and wear brand's personality, extending their own self.

However, *fit* is central, even *over time*.

c) Teenagers in their *high school period* are the main target by sportswear brands. As in section 11.4, they are more *easily influenced*, thanks to their *dreams* and passion, and future basis of brand loyalty.

Teens' football boots are a crucial *self- extension* tool: group dynamics are dramatically important here and might be taken into account in every marketing and managerial decision.

This also explains why, together with *social media revolution*, teenagers tend to appreciate more the controversial figure of the *bad boy* (e.g. Mario Balotelli) rather than a serious and professional football player as brand ambassador.

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15. Appendix

Appendix overview

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Appendix 1 – Global Sportswear Market Shares by GBO 2013-2014

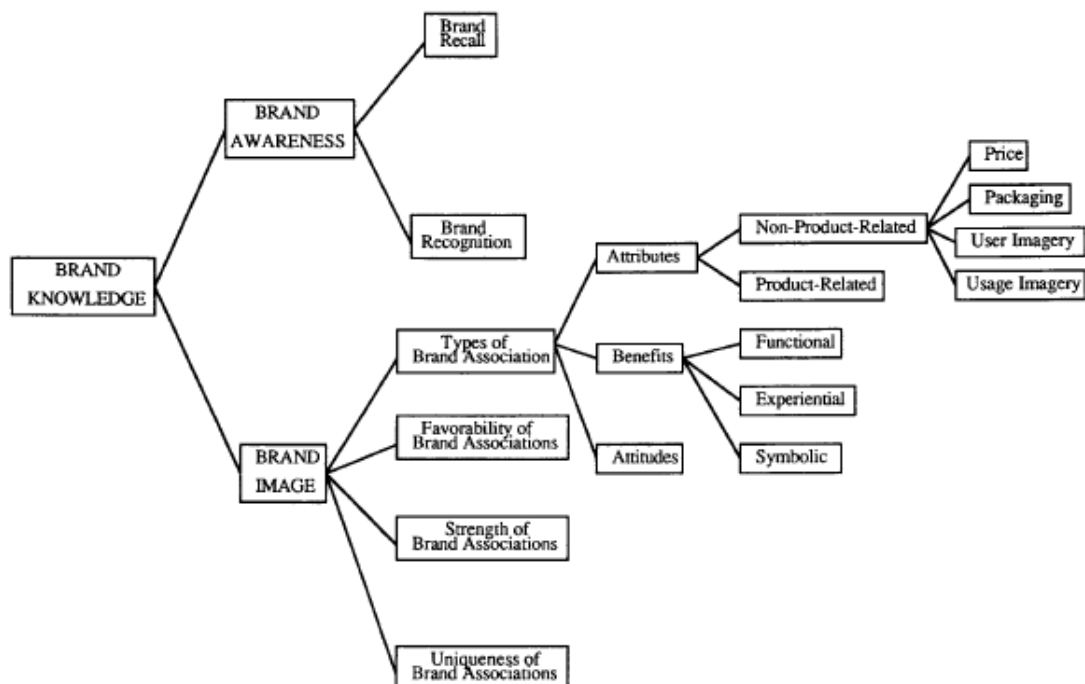
Euromonitor report (2015), “Adidas Group in apparel and footwear (world)” (July 2015)

Global Sportswear Market Shares by GBO
2013-2014

Company	% value 2013	% value 2014
Nike Inc	15.0	15.9
adidas Group	10.7	10.5
VF Corp	3.3	3.5
Kering SA	2.0	2.0
Asics Corp	1.7	1.7
Under Armour Inc	1.3	1.6
Columbia Sportswear Co	1.2	1.3
Skechers USA Inc	1.1	1.3
New Balance Athletic Shoe Inc	1.1	1.2
Anta (China) Co Ltd	0.7	0.8

Appendix 2 - Dimensions of Brand Knowledge

Keller (1993)



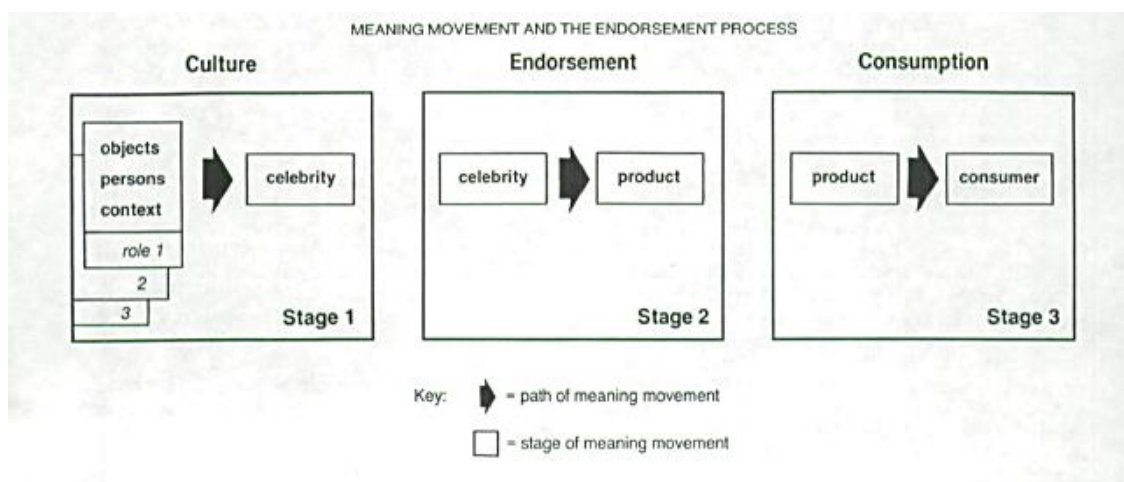
Appendix 3 - Measurement of Brand Knowledge Constructs Related to Customer- Based Brand Equity

Keller (1993)

Construct	Measure(s)	Purpose of Measure(s)
Brand Awareness		
Recall	Correct identification of brand given product category or some other type of probe as cue	Capture "top-of-mind" accessibility of brand in memory
Recognition	Correct discrimination of brand as having been previously seen or heard	Capture potential retrievability or availability of brand in memory
Brand Image		
<i>Characteristics of brand associations</i>		
Type	Free association tasks, projective techniques, depth interviews	Provide insight into nature of brand associations
Favorability	Ratings of evaluations of associations	Assess key dimension producing differential consumer response
Strength	Ratings of beliefs of association	Assess key dimension producing differential consumer response
<i>Relationships among brand associations</i>		
Uniqueness	Compare characteristics of associations with those of competitors (indirect measure) Ask consumers what they consider to be the unique aspects of the brand (direct measure)	Provide insight into the extent to which brand associations are not shared with other brands; assess key dimension producing differential consumer response
Congruence	Compare patterns of associations across consumers (indirect measure) Ask consumers conditional expectations about associations (direct measure)	Provide insight into the extent to which brand associations are shared, affecting their favorability, strength, or uniqueness
Leverage	Compare characteristics of secondary associations with those for a primary brand association (indirect measure) Ask consumers directly what inferences they would make about the brand based on the primary brand association (direct measure)	Provide insight into the extent to which brand associations to a particular person, place, event, company, product class, etc. are linked to other associations, producing secondary associations for the brand

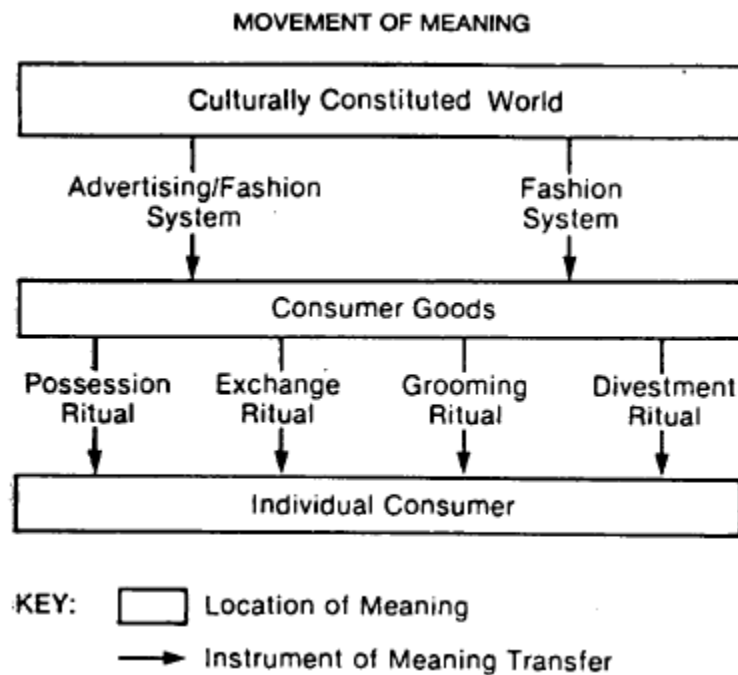
Appendix 4 - Meaning Movement and the Endorsement Process

McCracken (1989)



Appendix 5 - Movement of Meaning

McCracken (1986)



Appendix 6 – adidas Group: Key company facts

Euromonitor report (2015), "Adidas Group in apparel and footwear (world)" (July 2015)

adidas Group	
Headquarters:	Herzogenaurach, Germany
Regional involvement:	Global
Category involvement:	Sportswear
World apparel and footwear value share (rank) 2013:	1.6% (Second)
World apparel and footwear value growth 2013-2014:	6.1%

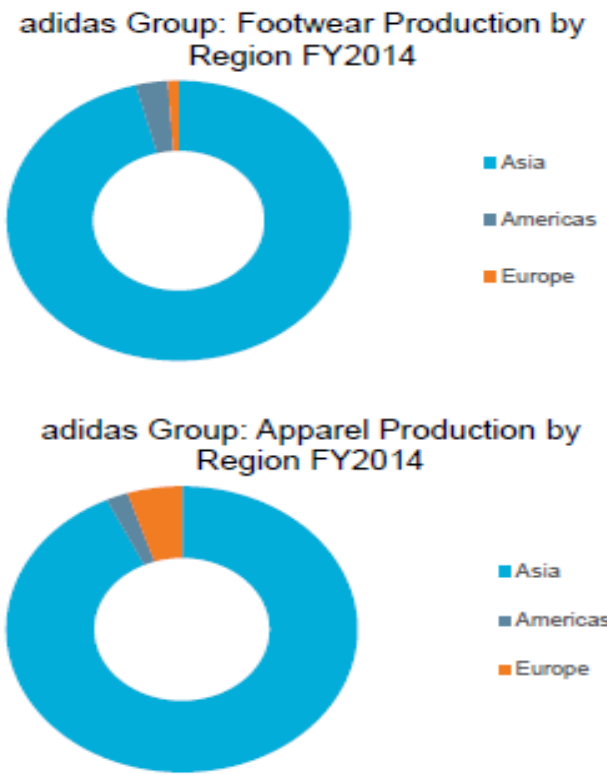
Appendix 7 – Nike Inc.: Key company facts

Source: Euromonitor report (2015), “Nike Inc. in apparel and footwear (world)” (June 2015)

Nike Inc	
Headquarters:	Beaverton, Oregon, USA
Regional involvement:	Asia Pacific, Australasia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, Middle East and Africa, North America, Western Europe
Category involvement:	Sportswear
World apparel and footwear value share (rank) 2014:	2.4% (1 st)
World apparel and footwear value growth	12.9% (2013-2014) 8.5% CAGR (2009-2014) (at US\$ fixed exchange rates)

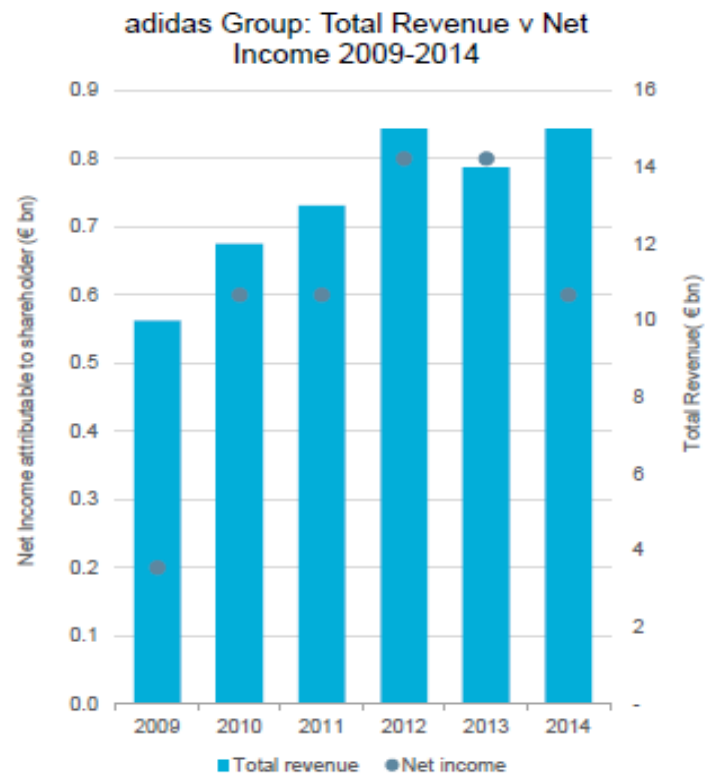
Appendix 8 – adidas Group: Footwear and Apparel Production by Region FY 2014

Euromonitor report (2015), “Adidas Group in apparel and footwear (world)” (July 2015)



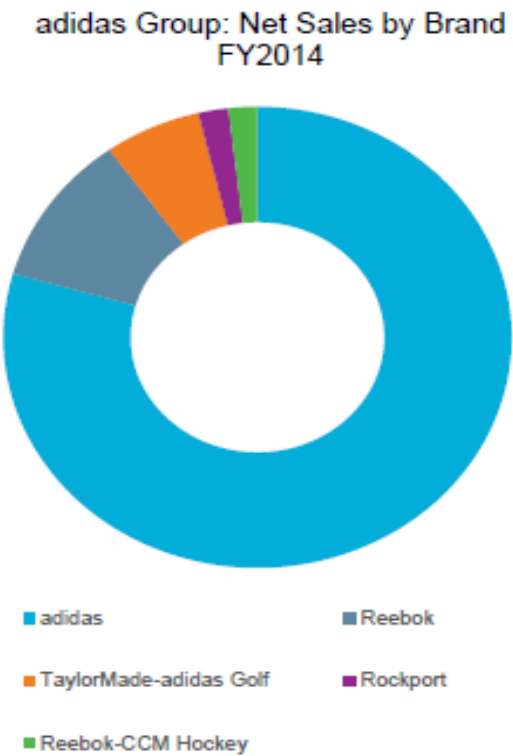
Appendix 9 – adidas Group: Net Revenues and Net Income 2009- 2014

Euromonitor report (2015), “Adidas Group in apparel and footwear (world)” (July 2015)



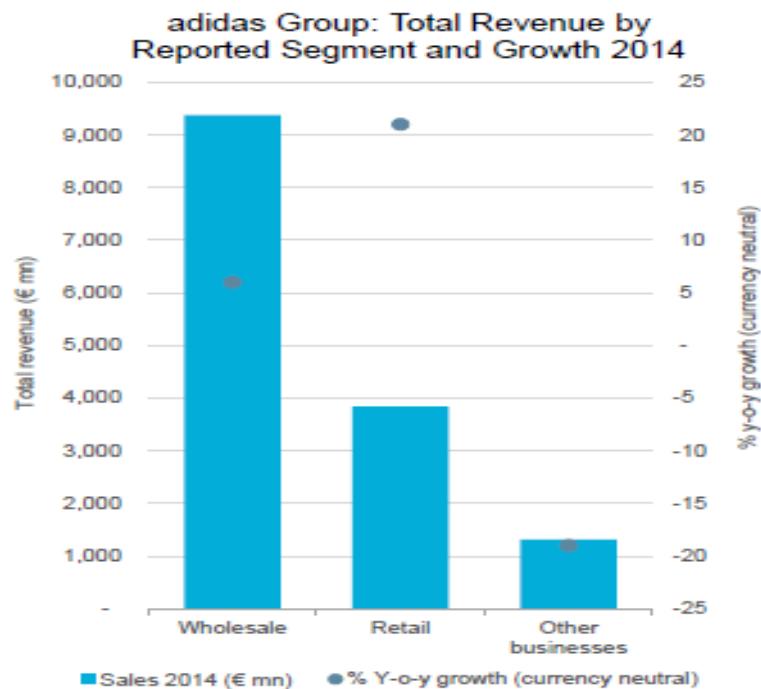
Appendix 10 – adidas Group: Net Sales by Brand FY 2014

Euromonitor report (2015), “Adidas Group in apparel and footwear (world)” (July 2015)



Appendix 11 – adidas Group: Total Revenue by Reported Segment and Growth 2014

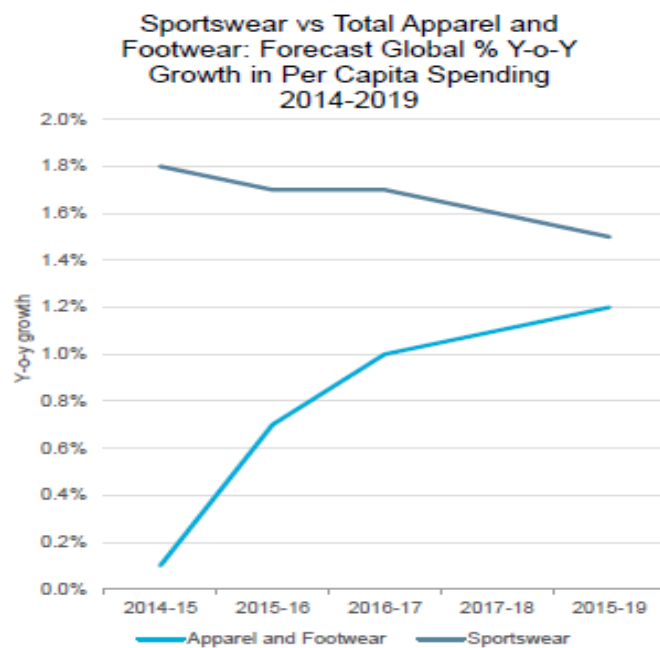
Euromonitor report (2015), “Adidas Group in apparel and footwear (world)” (July 2015)



Appendix 12 – Sportswear vs Total Apparel and Footwear

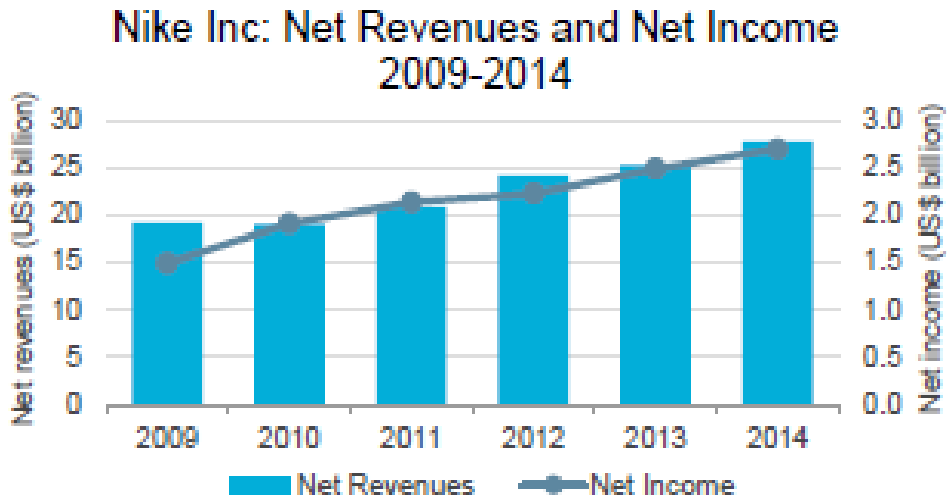
Forecast Global % Y-o-Y Growth in Per Capita Spending 2014- 2019

Source: Euromonitor report (2015), “Nike Inc. in apparel and footwear (world)” (June 2015)



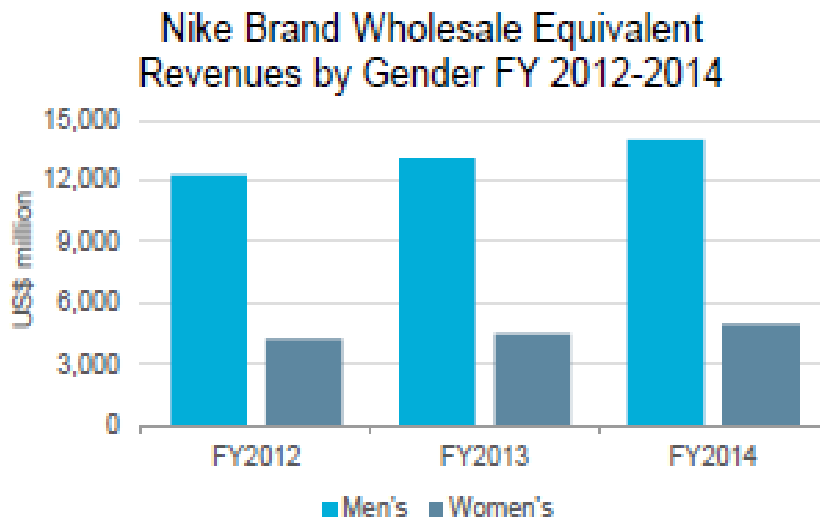
Appendix 13 – Nike Inc.: Net Revenues and Net Income 2009- 2014

Source: Euromonitor report (2015), “Nike Inc. in apparel and footwear (world)” (June 2015)



Appendix 14 – Nike Brand: Wholesale Equivalent Revenues by Gender FY 2012- 2014

Source: Euromonitor report (2015), “Nike Inc. in apparel and footwear (world)” (June 2015)



Source: Nike Annual Report 2014

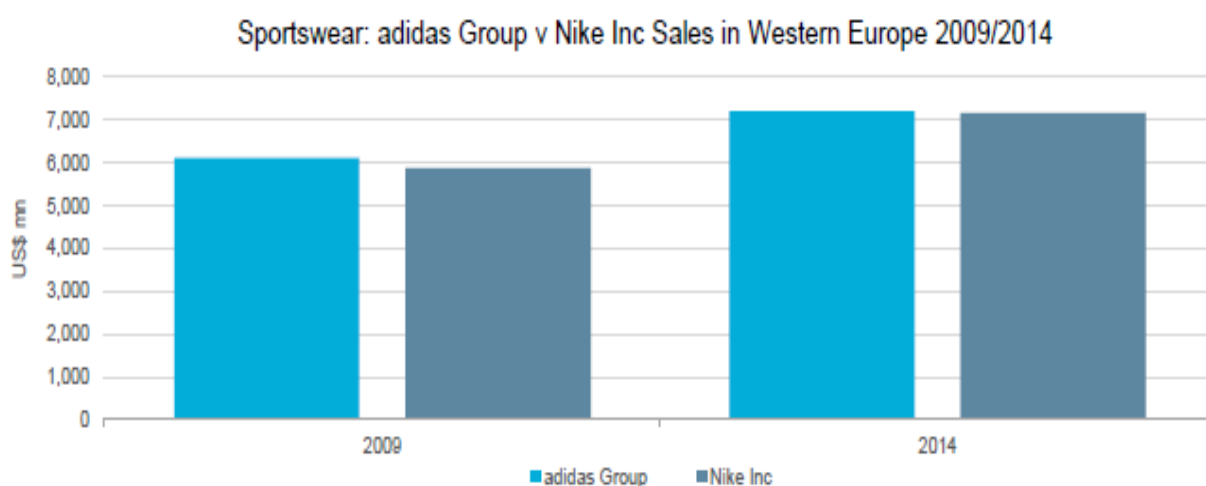
Appendix 15 – Nike vs adidas at group level

Delta last stock price from 2000 to 2016

Date	adidas			Nike		
	Last price	Delta year/year	Delta FY 2000-2016	Last price	Delta year/year	Delta FY 2000-2016
01/04/2016	102,45	38,6%	618,9%	61,59	23,7%	1131,8%
01/04/2015	73,93	-6,3%	418,8%	49,775	33,8%	895,5%
01/04/2014	78,86	-3,4%	453,4%	37,195	27,7%	643,9%
02/04/2013	81,61	33,5%	472,7%	29,13	6,9%	482,6%
02/04/2012	61,11	36,9%	328,8%	27,255	42,5%	445,1%
01/04/2011	44,645	11,2%	213,3%	19,1325	3,4%	282,7%
01/04/2010	40,14	59,7%	181,7%	18,5025	57,5%	270,1%
01/04/2009	25,14	-41,1%	76,4%	11,75	-32,4%	135,0%
01/04/2008	42,65	3,4%	199,3%	17,3925	30,7%	247,9%
02/04/2007	41,25	-1,8%	189,5%	13,3038	25,3%	166,1%
03/04/2006	42,02	35,7%	194,9%	10,6138	2,3%	112,3%
01/04/2005	30,955	28,4%	117,2%	10,375	8,7%	107,5%
01/04/2004	24,112	18,7%	69,2%	9,5487	50,4%	91,0%
01/04/2003	20,305	-2,0%	42,5%	6,35	-13,5%	27,0%
02/04/2002	20,712	42,6%	45,3%	7,3425	42,6%	46,9%
02/04/2001	14,525	1,9%	1,9%	5,1487	3,0%	3,0%
03/04/2000	14,25			5		

Appendix 16 – Sportswear: adidas Group v Nike Inc Sales in Western Europe 2009/ 2014

Euromonitor report (2015), “Adidas Group in apparel and footwear (world)” (July 2015)



Appendix 17 - Electronic questionnaire - Cover letter and introduction

Since I asked your help and part of your precious time, it means I am sure you are perfectly suitable and able to answer all the questions. This electronic questionnaire will take you about 15 minutes.

Probably, you love and/ or follow football; you played or play regularly; you wear sport apparel, both for physical activity and during the day, why not, as casual outfit. Perhaps, we played together and/ or in opposite teams. At the same time, you have surely some ideas and personal opinions concerning the role of endorsers and testimonials in football marketing activities (for instance sponsorship, advertising, product launch and many others).

Moreover, I believe and hope you know who David Beckham, Ricardo Kakà and Cristiano Ronaldo (CR7) are. I deem you have perceptions, feelings, mental associations about them: this is very important to me and I would like to discover them together.

Please, remember that here there are no right or wrong answers. The only wrong answer is the one you miss or the non- honest one. You are a delicious resource for my master's thesis development. Be honest, be yourself. That is what I need, what I am looking for.

Beckham, Kakà and CR7: top level footballers utilized as testimonial and brand ambassador by many companies, in particular kit supplier and sportswear brands. What are their influence on consumer's choice? What are their influence on sponsoring brand image?

By "brand image", I mean the way the company is externally seen, considered and perceived by customers. Here, the focus is on kit supplier and sportswear brands such as Nike, adidas, Puma, Under Armour, Asics, Mizuno and so on.

I know it could be a waste of time for you. Then, I tried to make this questionnaire the least boring possible. If you notice anything wrong and/ or not enough clear, please do not hesitate: contact me and feel free to ask me anything you want at my mail address (matteozardini@alice.it).

Kindly, keep in mind that my master's thesis title is:

"Footballers as brand ambassadors: their influence on consumer's choice and kit supplier's brand image. A focus on the western European male football industry in the third millennium".

If you are already here, the worst is already over.

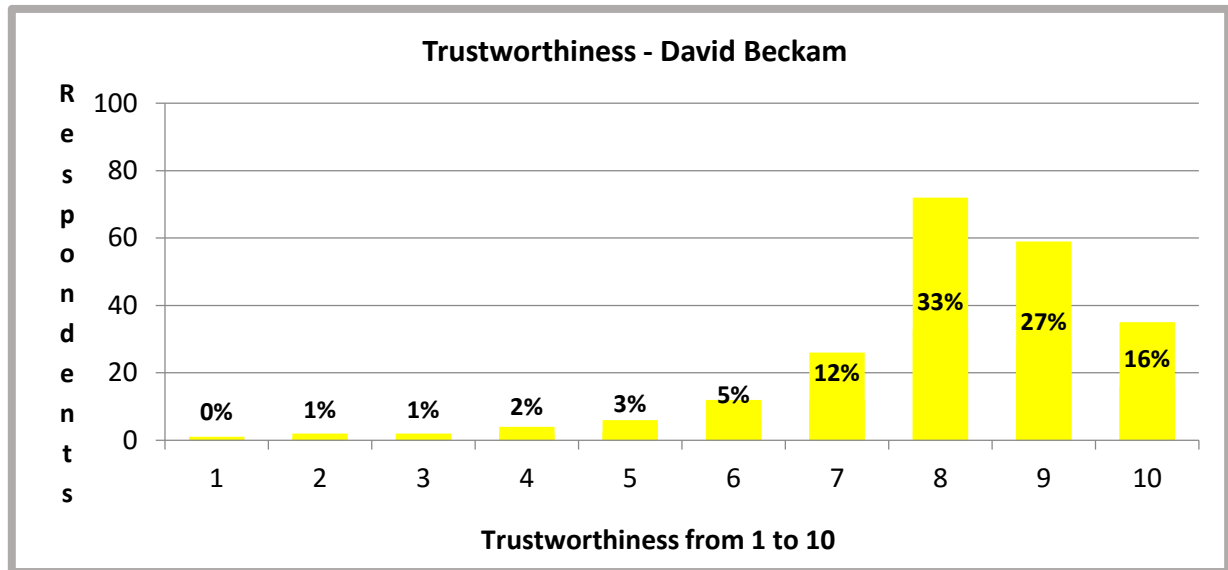
You are the right person, at the right moment, for the right research. I am 100% sure. Again, you are important to me and thanks so much for your active participation.

Ready, steady, go!

Appendix 18 - Electronic questionnaire – Questions and answers

Q.1: “*Trustworthiness*” refers to celebrity and football endorser’s honesty, integrity and believability, from customer’s perspective. Footballer’s trustworthiness is highly influenced and depends on consumers’ perception of his endorsement motivations. From 1 to 10, in your opinion, how much *trustworthy* is *David Beckham* as football endorser?

Self-anchoring rating scale question ⁴

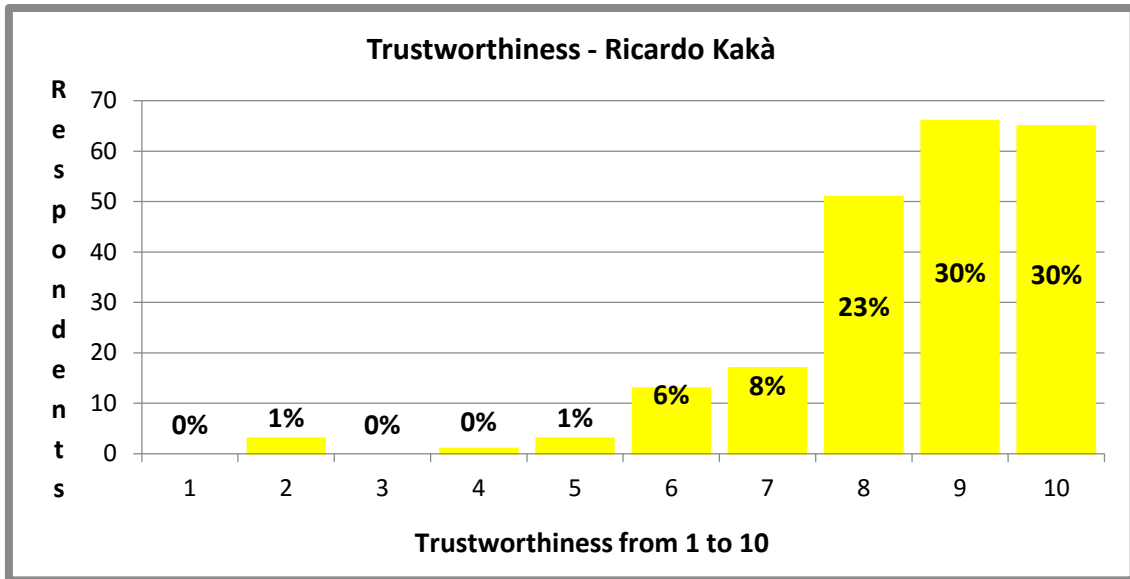


⁴ All the following graphs represent the resulted value in percentage, based on the total 219 respondents of the questionnaire.

For example, in Q.1, the 33% of the overall 219 respondents answered “8” for the assessment of Beckham’s trustworthiness.

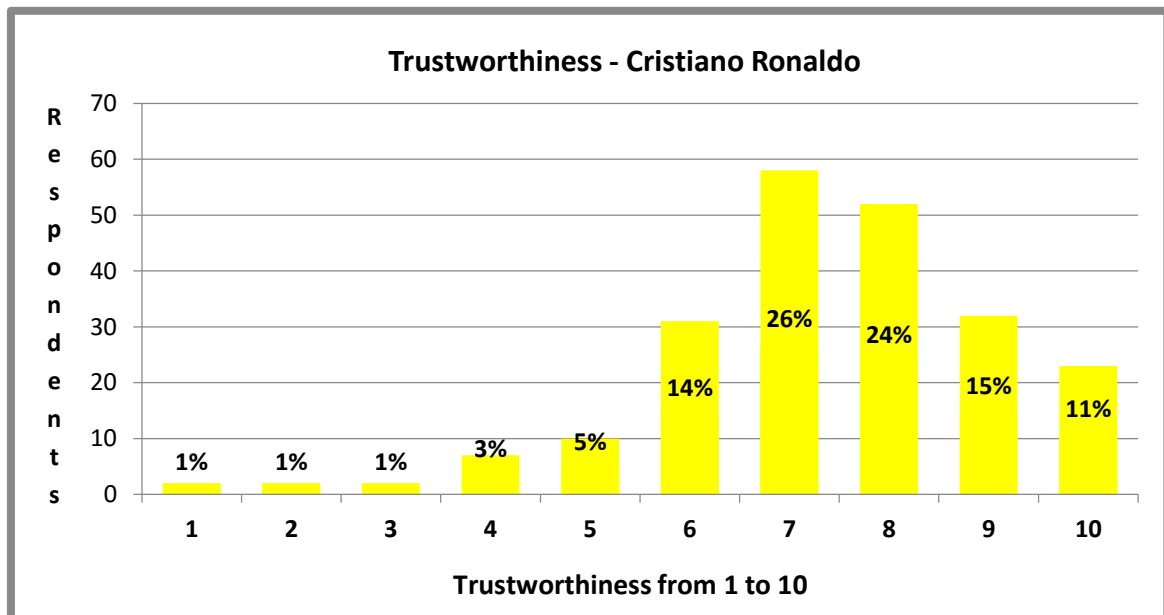
Q.2: From 1 to 10, in your opinion, how much *trustworthy* is *Ricardo Kakà* as football endorser?

Self-anchoring rating scale question



Q.3: From 1 to 10, in your opinion, how much *trustworthy* is *Cristiano Ronaldo* as football endorser?

Self-anchoring rating scale question

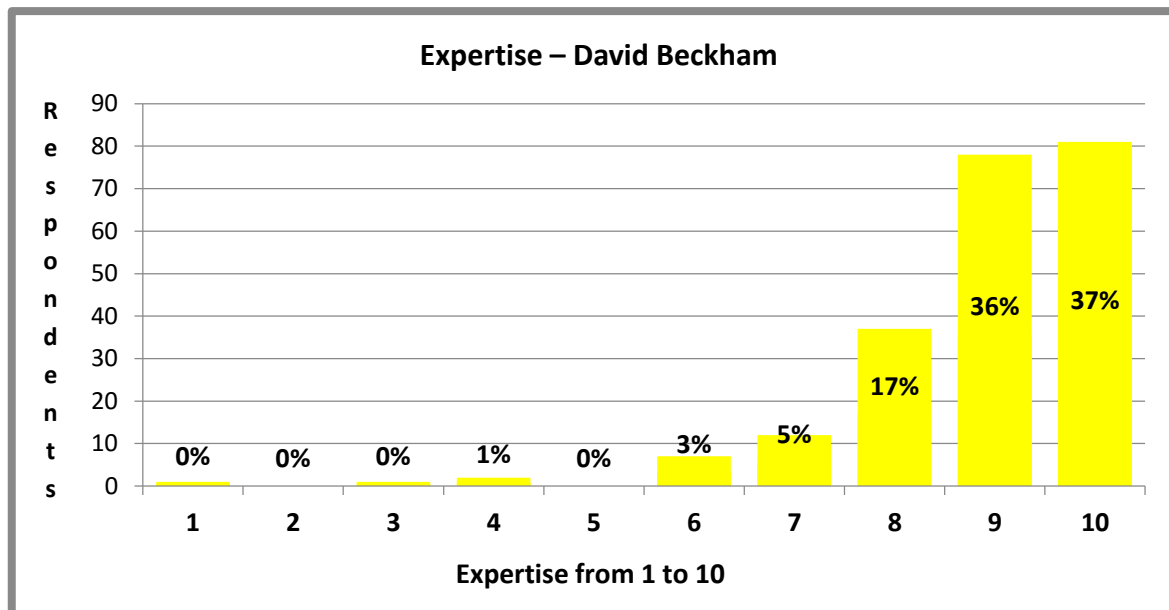


Q.4: Football endorser's experience, knowledge and skills are associated and related to the endorsed kit supplier's brand (e.g. Asics, Nike, Lotto, Puma, adidas and so on). How the consumer/ fan perceives the endorser is very important.

Endorsers who are perceived as expert are stronger and abler to changing people's opinions concerning their area of expertise (e.g. football, athletic performance and so on).

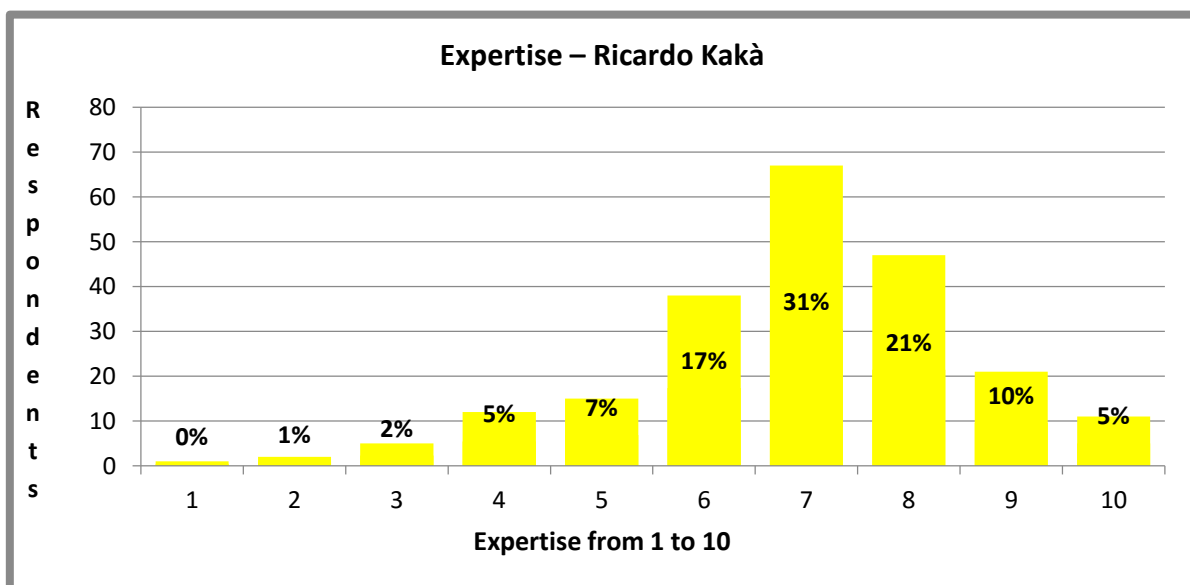
From 1 to 10, in your opinion, how much *expert* is *Beckham* in endorsing sportswear?

Self-anchoring rating scale question



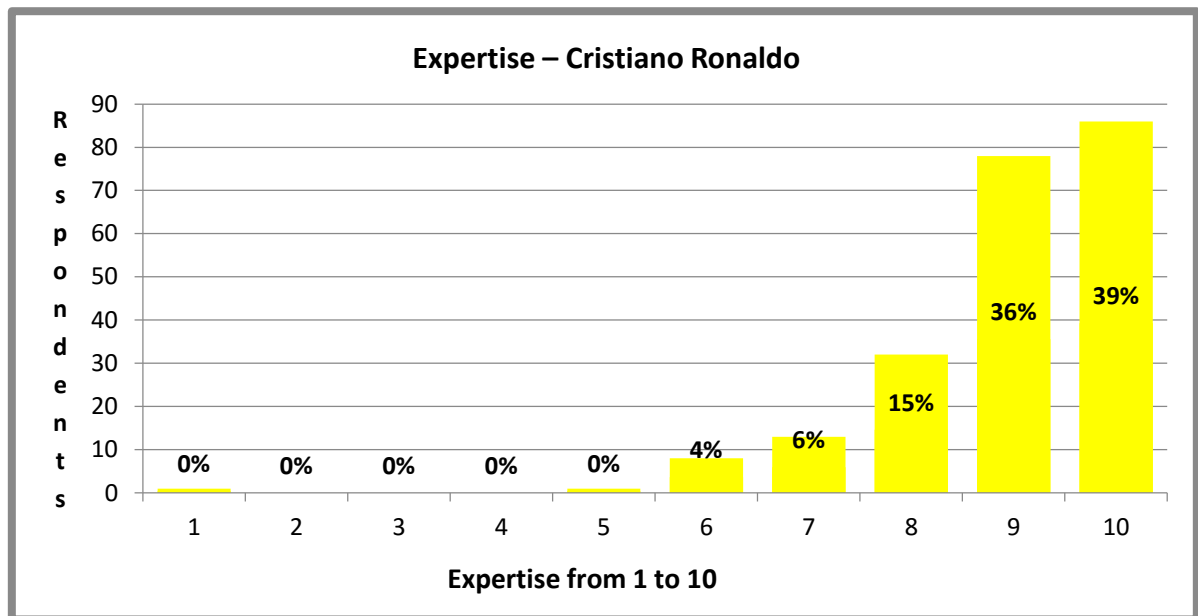
Q.5: From 1 to 10, in your opinion, how much *expert* is *Kakà* in endorsing sportswear?

Self-anchoring rating scale question



Q.6: From 1 to 10, in your opinion, how much *expert* is CR7 in endorsing sportswear?

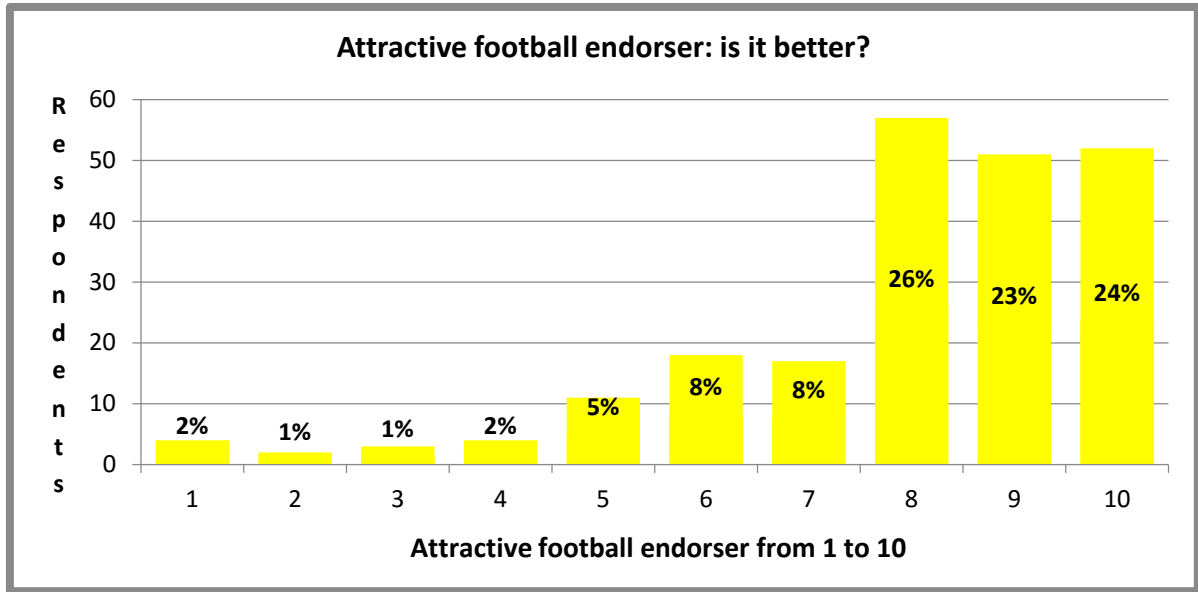
Self-anchoring rating scale question



Q.7: “*Attractiveness*”: when consumers- fans discover something in the endorser considered as attractive, they identify themselves with the football endorser. Then they more probably will accept, adopt and associate player’s attitudes, behaviours, interest, preferences. There is belief that attractive football endorsers produce more favourable evaluations of kit supplier’s brands than do less attractive football communicators. *Attractiveness as physical aspect.*

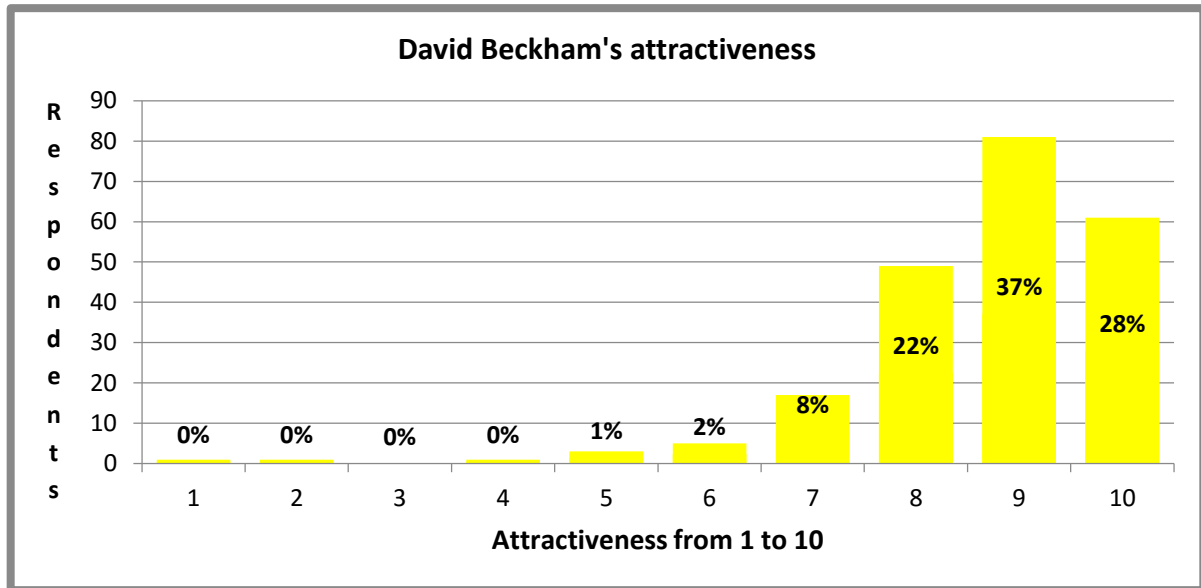
Do you think that an *attractive* football endorser (CR7 and Beckham rather than Franck Ribery and Carlitos Tevez) is able to lead to a better sponsoring brand’s evaluation? From 1 to 10?

Self-anchoring rating scale question



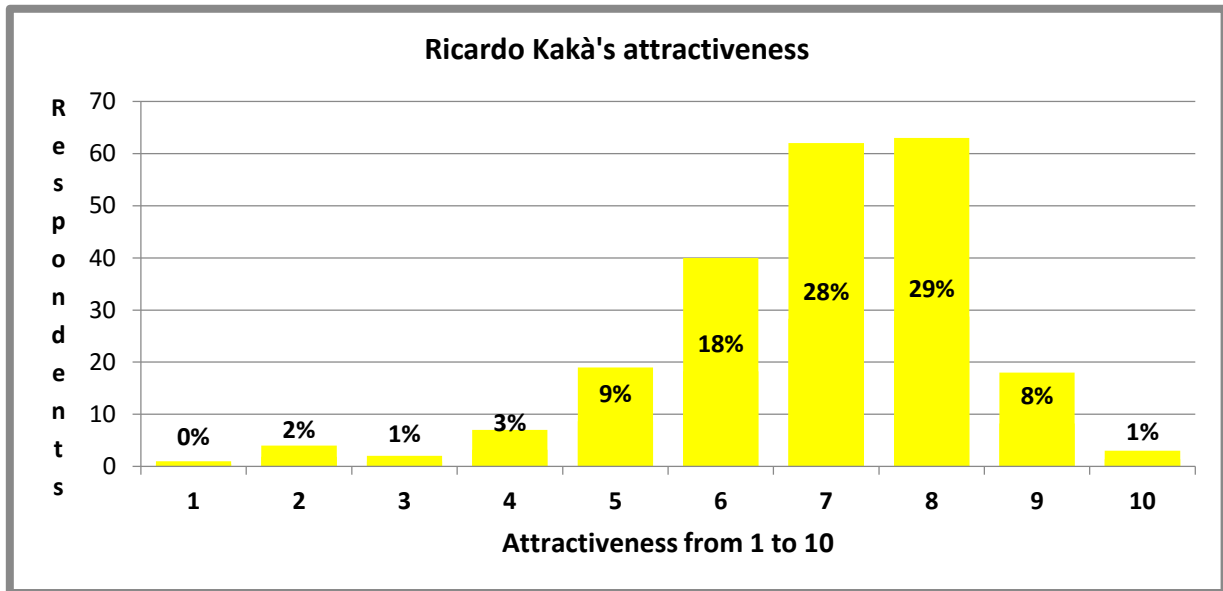
Q.8: From 1 to 10, how much *Beckham*, as football endorser, is considered as *attractive* in endorsing sportswear brands? He is good looking, right? What do you think, as consumer, about his attractiveness? Is he attractive for you? Please consider his physical aspect and what transmits to you.

Self-anchoring rating scale question



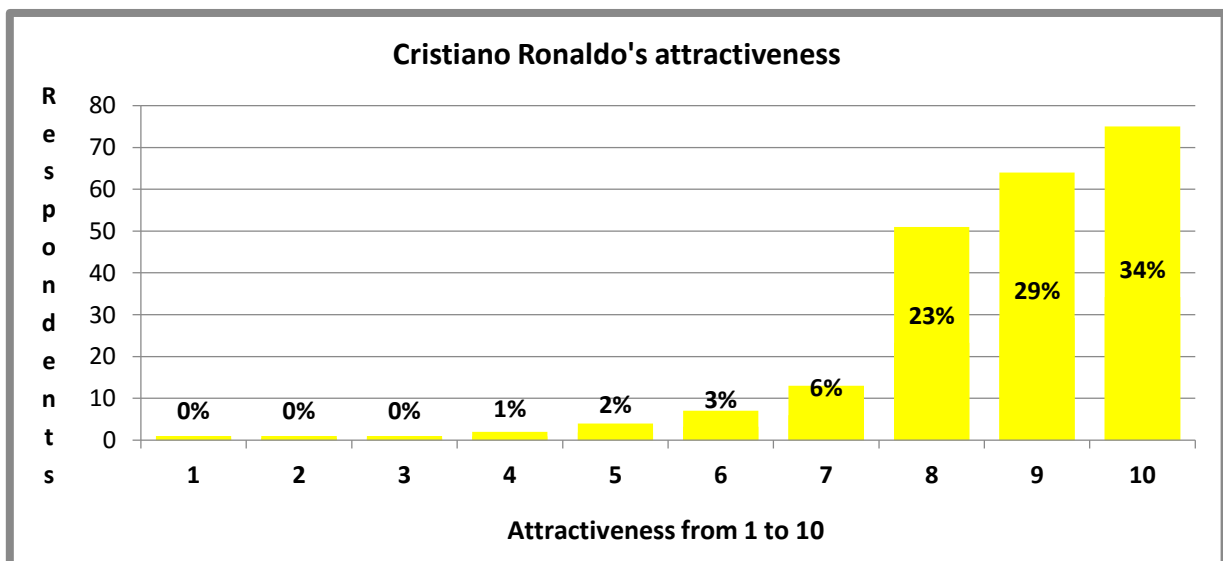
Q.9: From 1 to 10, how much *Kakà*, as football endorser, is considered as *attractive* in endorsing sportswear brands? He is good looking, right? What do you think, as consumer, about his attractiveness? Is he attractive for you? Please consider his physical aspect and what transmits to you.

Self-anchoring rating scale question



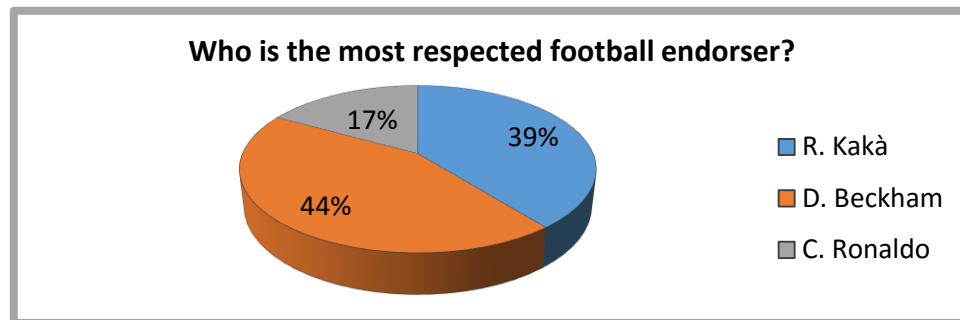
Q.10: From 1 to 10, how much *Cristiano Ronaldo*, as football endorser, is considered as *attractive* in endorsing sportswear brands? He is good looking, right? What do you think, as consumer, about his attractiveness? Is he attractive for you? Please consider his physical aspect and what transmits to you.

Self-anchoring rating scale question



Q.11: “Respect” symbolizes the quality of being admired and even esteemed due to footballer’s personal qualities and actions, athletic power, political statements, charity and donation initiatives and personality. Which is *the most respected* footballer?

Category question

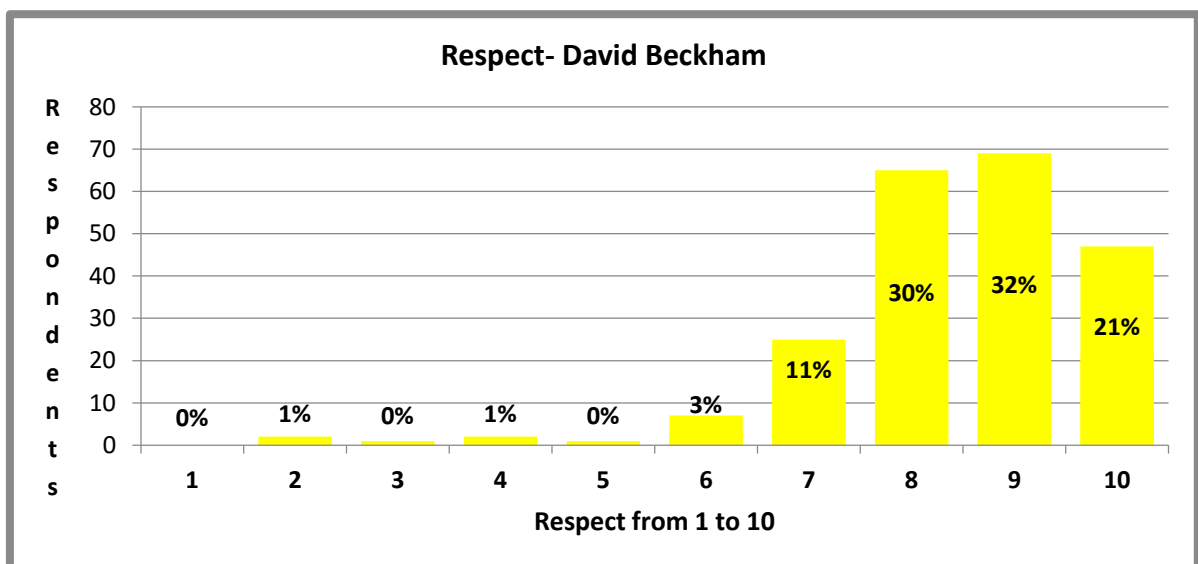


Possible answers:

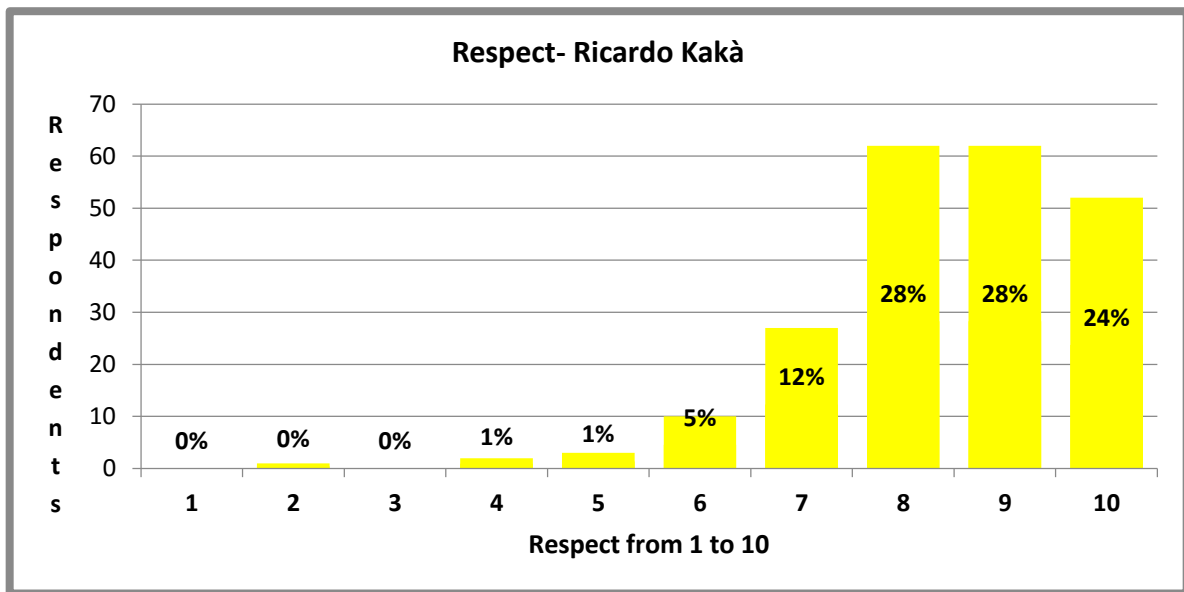
- a) David Beckham
- b) Ricardo Kakà
- c) Cristiano Ronaldo

Q.12: From 1 to 10, in your opinion, is *Beckham*, as celebrity- football endorser, *respected*? How much?

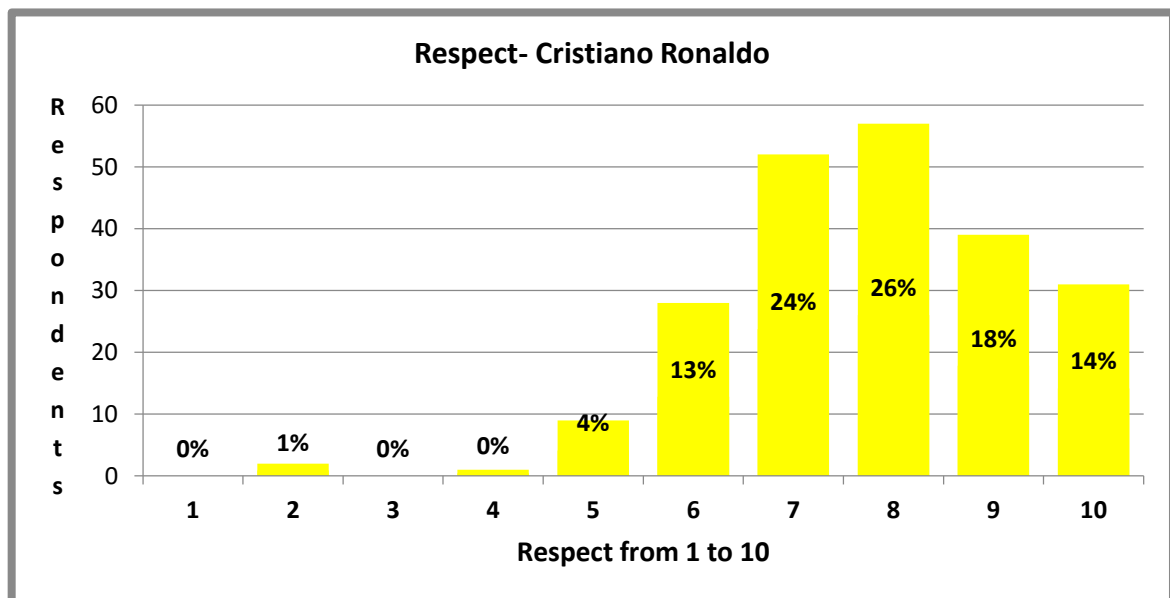
Self-anchoring rating scale question



Q.13: From 1 to 10, in your opinion, is *Kakà*, as celebrity- football endorser, *respected*? How much?
Self- anchoring rating scale question

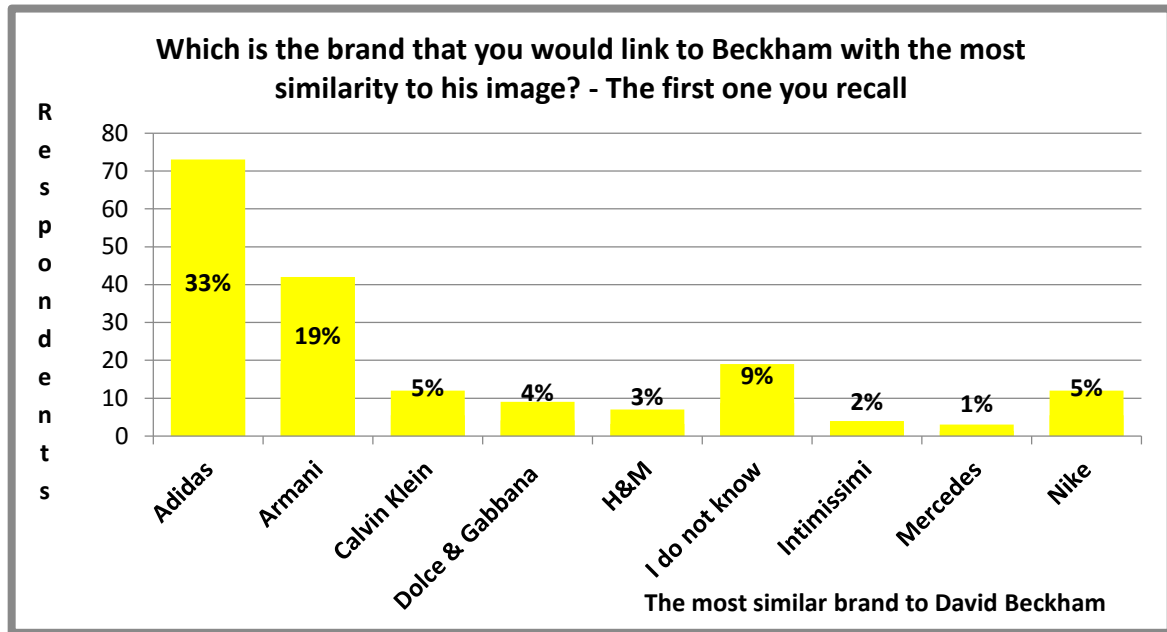


Q.14: From 1 to 10, in your opinion, is *CR7*, as celebrity- football endorser, *respected*? How much?
Self- anchoring rating scale question



Q.15: “*Similarity*” occurs when an endorser is coherent with the endorsement relationship and he is suitable with consumers/ fans’ features. Starting from his consistent association and adaptability to target audience, which is the brand that you would *link to Beckham* with the most *similarity* to his *image*? (Not only sport brands, the first one you think about)

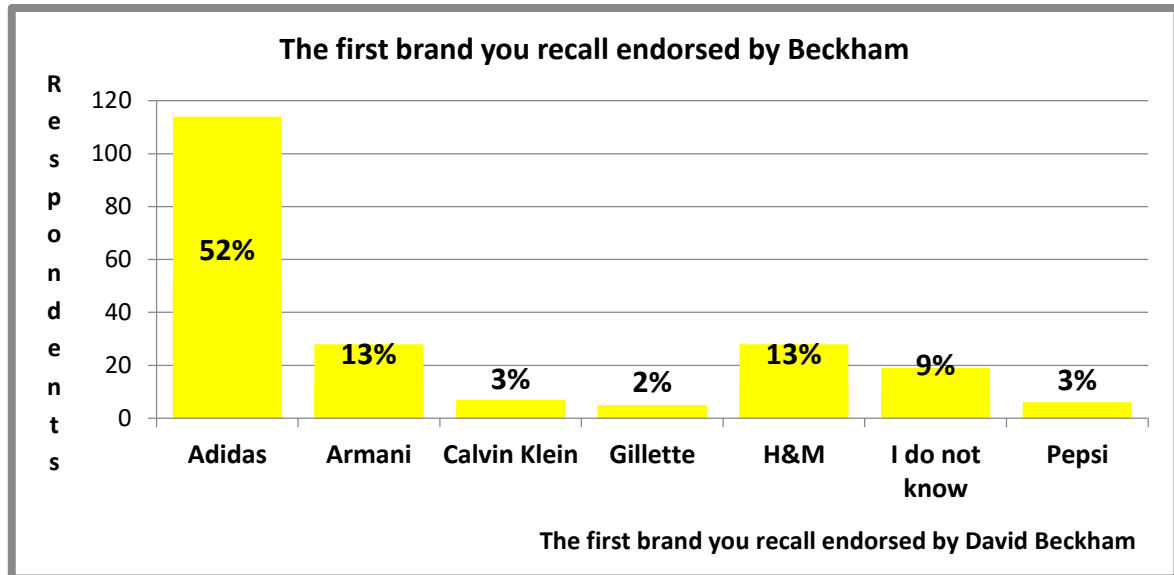
Open question



Here, only the responses with the highest percentage are inserted in the graph above: all other answers obtained less than 1% (except “*Mercedes*”) are not considered in the graph.

Q.16: Could you please list the first brand (The first one which comes in your mind, the first one you recall) endorsed by *Beckham*, as football endorser?

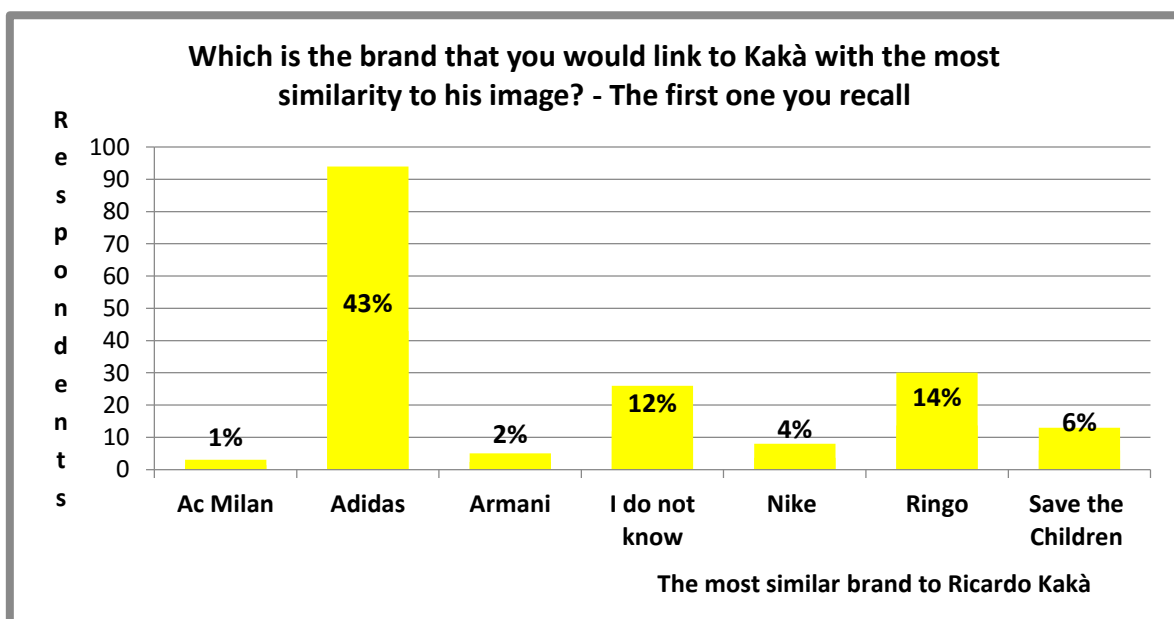
Open question



Here, only the responses with the highest percentage are inserted in the graph above: all other answers obtained less than 1% are not considered in the graph.

Q.17: Starting from his consistent association and adaptability to target audience, which is the brand that you would *link* to *Kakà* with the most *similarity* to his *image*? (Not only sport brands, the first one you think about)

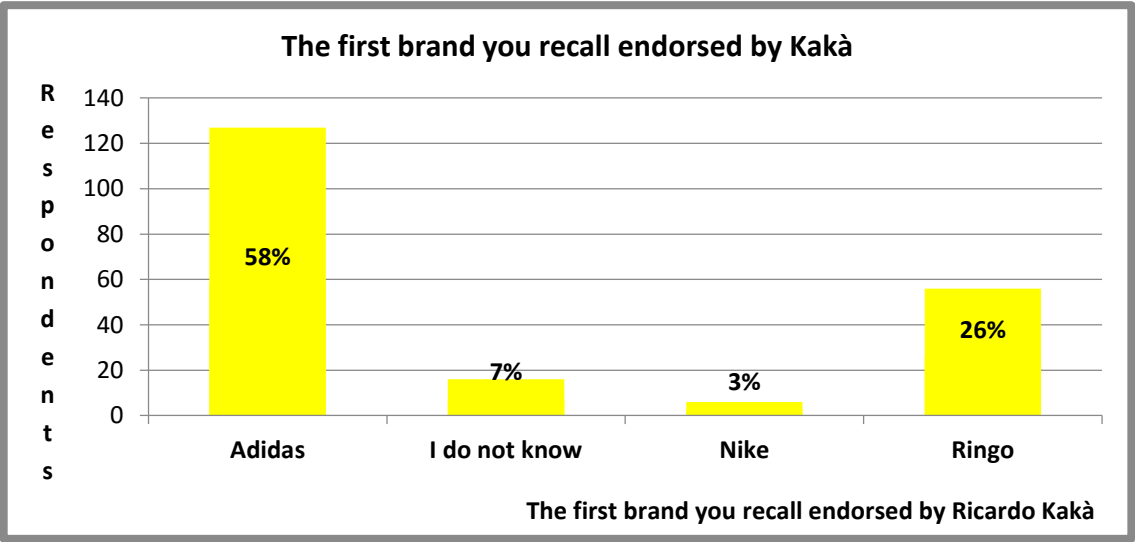
Open question



Here, only the responses with the highest percentage are inserted in the graph above: all other answers obtained less than 1% are not considered in the graph.

Q.18: Could you please list the first brand (Not only sport brands, the first one which comes in your mind, the first one you recall) endorsed by *Kakà*, as football endorser?

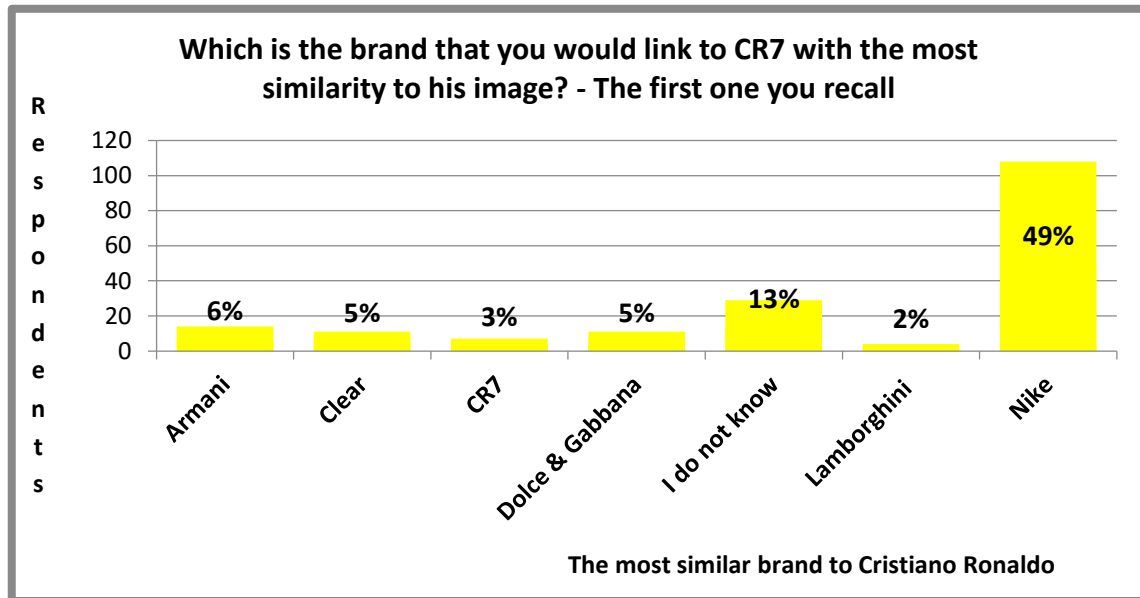
Open question



Here, only the responses with the highest percentage are inserted in the graph above: all other answers obtained less than 1% are not considered in the graph.

Q.19: Starting from his consistent association and adaptability to target audience, which is the brand that you would *link* to CR7 with the most *similarity* to his *image*? (Not only sport brands, the first one you think about)

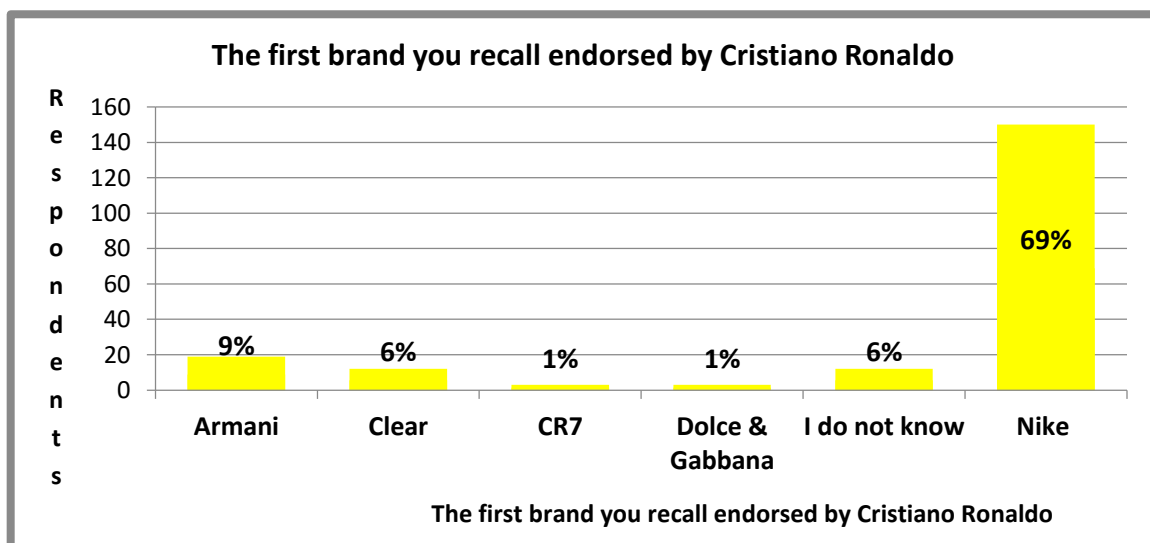
Open question



Here, only the responses with the highest percentage are inserted in the graph above: all other answers obtained less than 1% are not considered in the graph.

Q.20: Could you please list the first brand (Not only sport brands, the first one which comes in your mind, the first one you recall) endorsed by CR7, as football endorser?

Open question



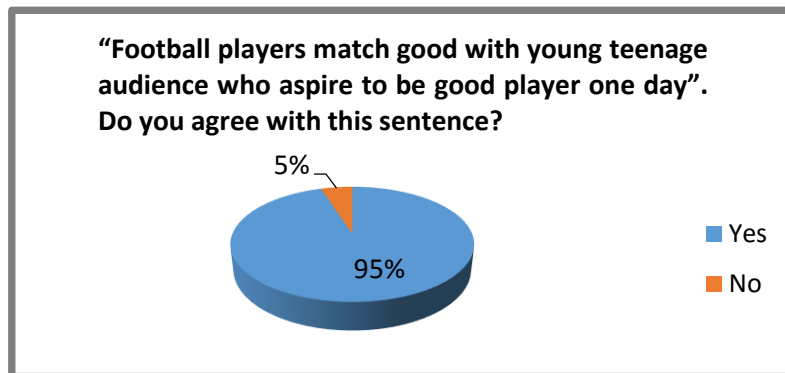
Here, only the responses with the highest percentage are inserted in the graph above: all other answers obtained less than 1% are not considered in the graph.

Q.21: Football- sportswear brands in their marketing activities have to deal with several factors, especially when they choose the footballer to use as testimonial/ endorser/ brand ambassador.

A crucial one is called “*celebrity/ audience match- up*”. The football player has to meet, match up, be suitable with the target market of the sport brand that he represents/ advertises.

“*Football players match good with young teenage audience who aspire to be good player one day*”. Do you agree with this sentence?

Category question

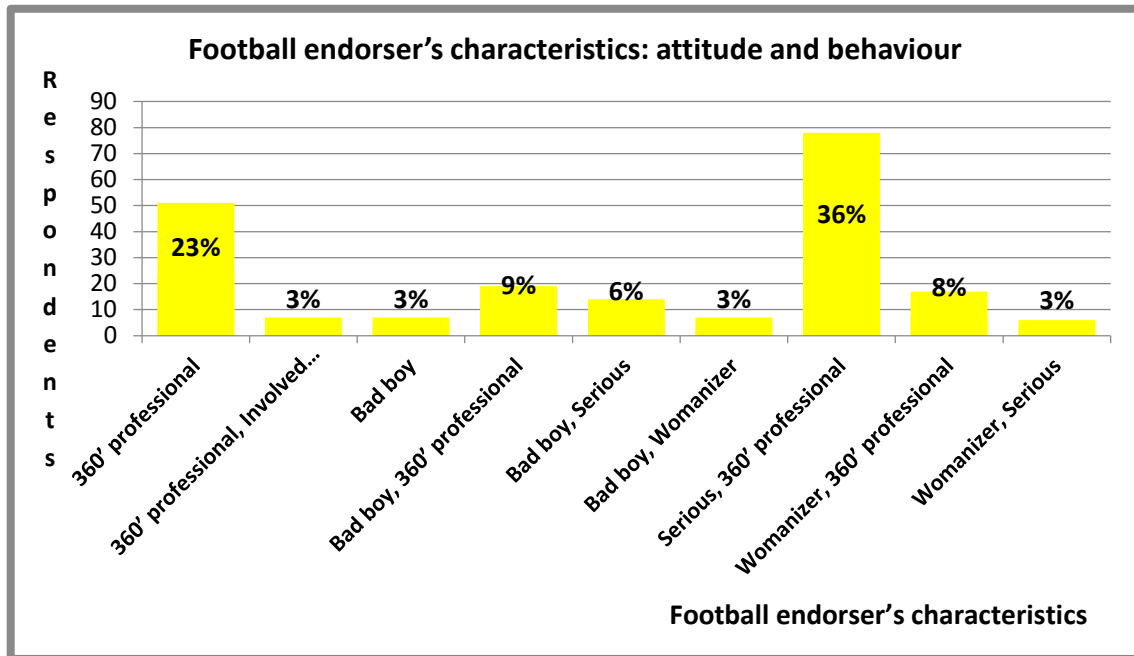


Possible answers:

- a) Yes
- b) No

Q.22: Nike and adidas are ready to launch a new pair of football boots. The two companies will use a footballer as testimonial. You are their target. In your opinion, is it better to employ a football player who is perceived and considered as...

Category question



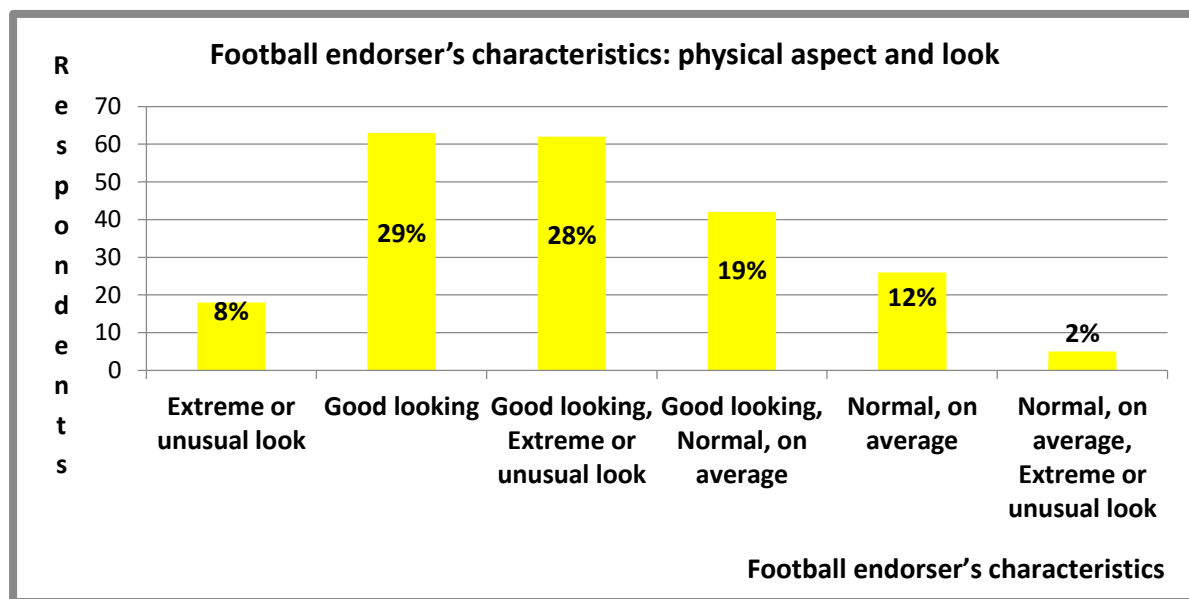
Possible answers: *

- a) 360' professional
- b) Bad boy
- c) Womanizer
- d) Involved and engaged in religion and/ or politics
- e) Serious
- f) 360' professional, Involved and engaged in religion and/ or politics
- g) Bad boy, 360' professional
- h) Bad boy, Serious
- i) Bad boy, Womanizer
- j) Bad boy, Involved and engaged in religion and/ or politics
- k) Serious, Involved and engaged in religion and/ or politics
- l) Serious, 360' professional
- m) Womanizer, Involved and engaged in religion and/ or politics
- n) Womanizer, 360' professional
- o) Womanizer, Serious

* Respondents could choose minimum 1 and maximum 2 answers between those proposed. These represented above are the most answered and chosen by the respondents. All other answers and combinations of them did not reach a considerable result, then they are not inserted in the graph.

Q.23: Nike and adidas are ready to launch a new pair of football shoes. The two companies will use a footballer as testimonial. You are their target. In your opinion, is it better to employ a football player who is as...

Category question



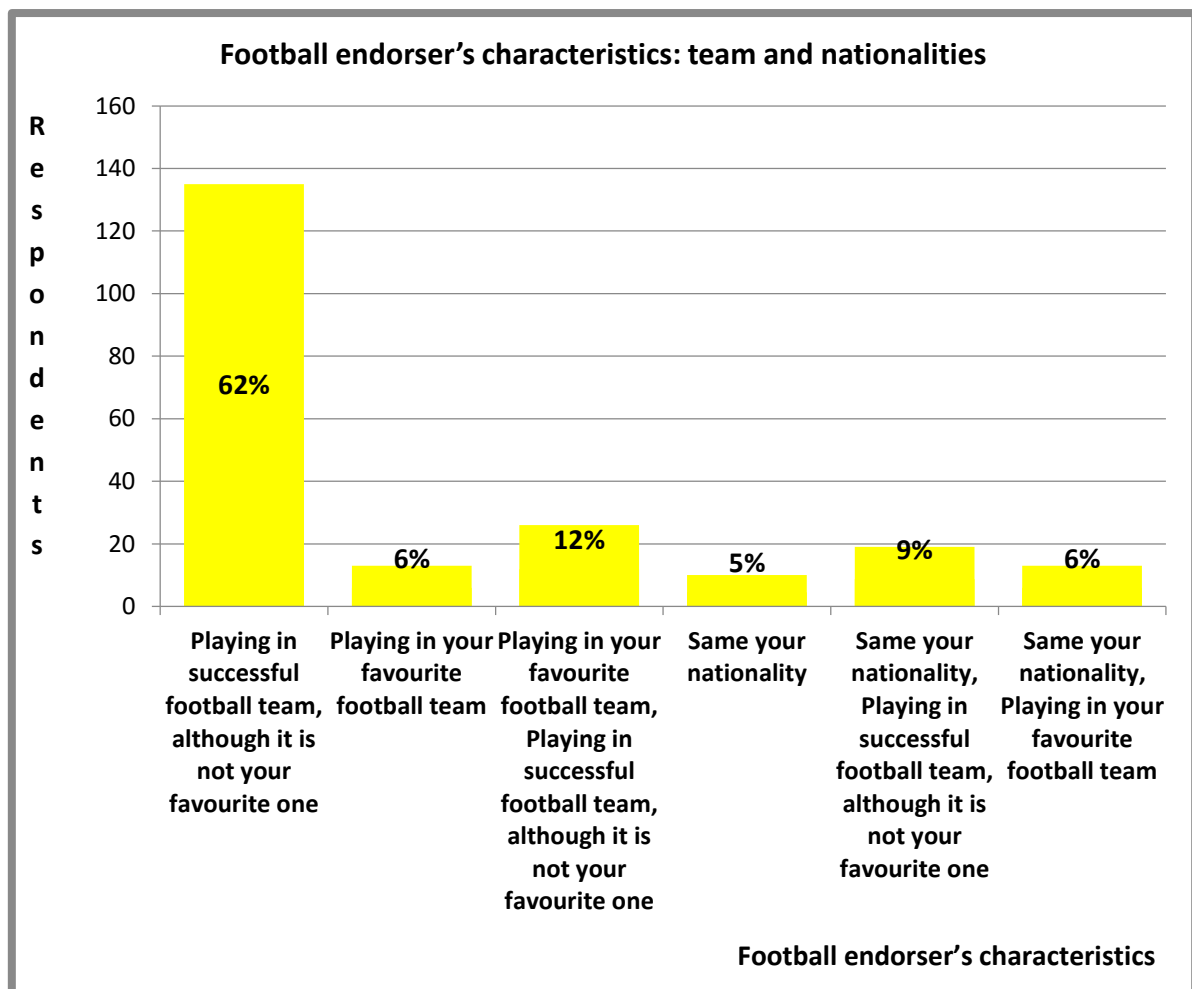
Possible answers: *

- a) Extreme or unusual look
- b) Good looking
- c) Normal, on average
- d) Ugly
- e) Good looking, Extreme or unusual look
- f) Good looking, Normal, on average
- g) Normal, on average, Extreme or unusual look
- h) Ugly, Good looking
- i) Ugly, Extreme or unusual look
- j) Ugly, Normal, on average

* Respondents could choose minimum 1 and maximum 2 answers between those proposed. These represented above are the most answered and chosen by the respondents. All other answers and combinations of them did not reach a considerable result, then they are not inserted in the graph.

Q.24: Nike and adidas are ready to launch a new pair of football boots. The two companies will use a footballer as testimonial. You are their target. In your opinion, is it better to employ a football player who is considered and portrayed as...

Category question



Possible answers: *

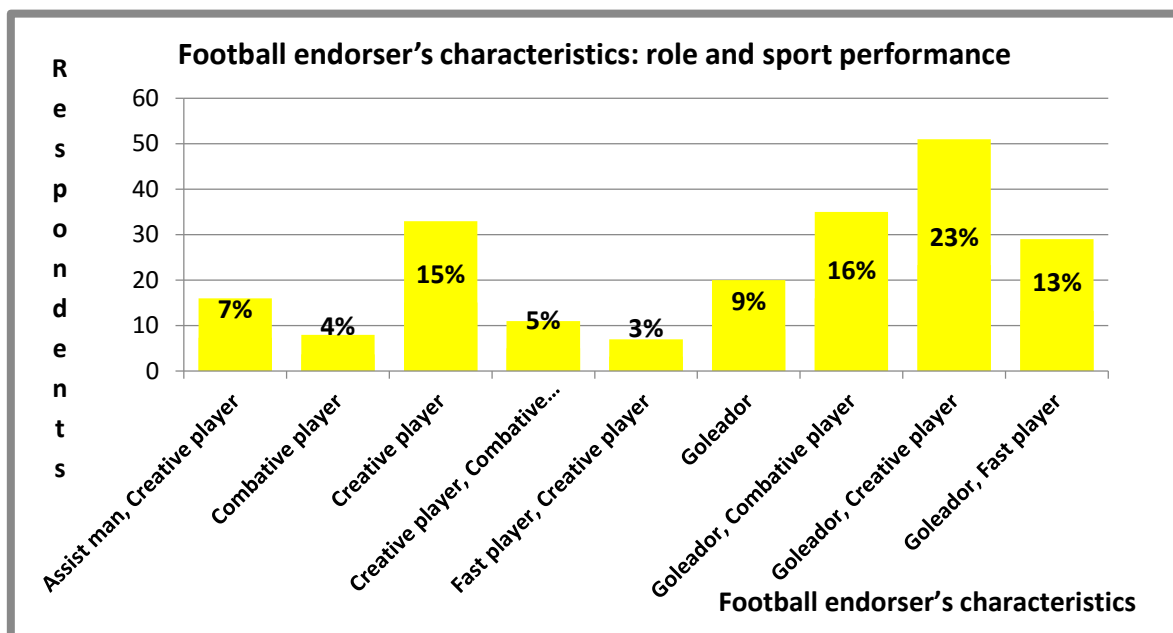
- a) Playing in successful football team, although it is not your favourite one
- b) Playing in your favourite football team
- c) Playing in your favourite football team, Playing in successful football team, although it is not your favourite one
- d) Same your nationality

- e) Same your nationality, Playing in successful football team, although it is not your favourite one
- f) Same your nationality, Playing in your favourite football team

* Respondents could choose minimum 1 and maximum 2 answers between those proposed. These represented above are the most answered and chosen by the respondents. All other answers and combinations of them did not reach a considerable result, then they are not inserted in the graph.

Q.25: ... A new pair of football boots: you are the target. In this crucial marketing situation, which footballer would you choose, from company's perspective?

Category question



Possible answers: *

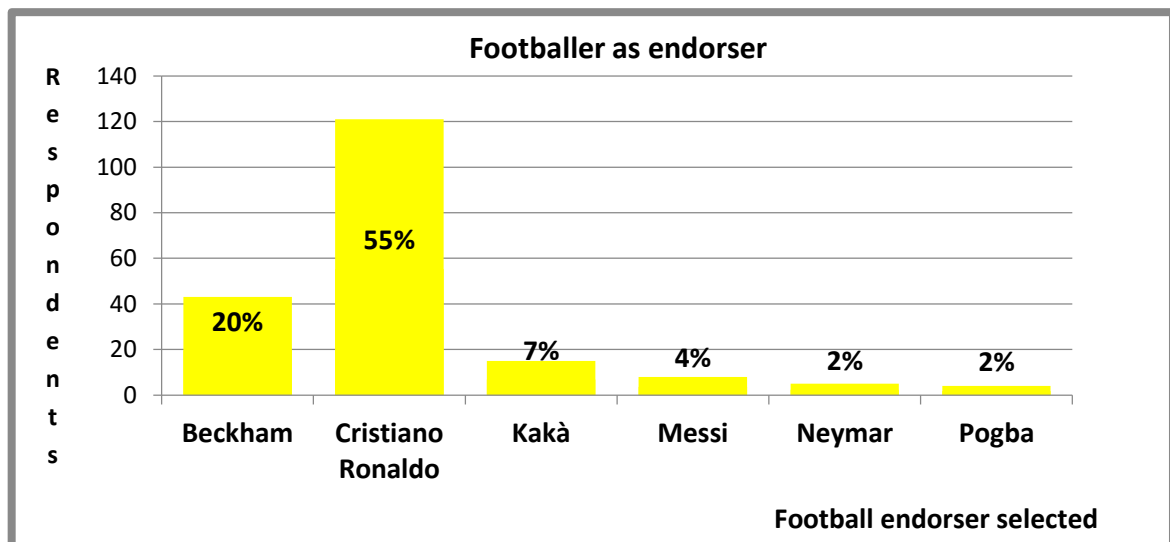
- a) Goleador
- b) Assist man
- c) Creative player
- d) Combative player
- e) Fast player
- f) Assist man, Creative player
- g) Assist man, Combative player
- h) Assist man, Fast player
- i) Creative player, Combative player
- j) Fast player, Creative player

- k) Fast player, Combative player
- l) Goleador, Assist man
- m) Goleador, Combative player
- n) Goleador, Creative player
- o) Goleador, Fast player

* Respondents could choose minimum 1 and maximum 2 answers between those proposed. These represented above are the most answered and chosen by the respondents. All other answers and combinations of them did not reach a considerable result, then they are not inserted in the graph.

Q.26: Football boots launch: you are the target. Which footballer would you choose as celebrity- endorser?

Category question



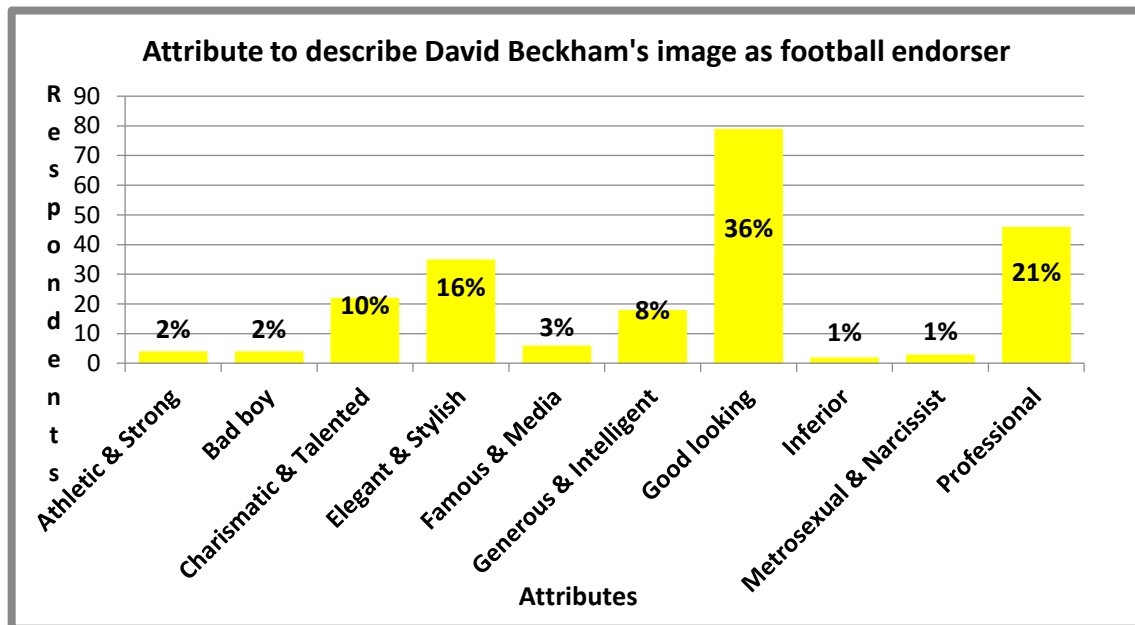
Possible answers: *

- a) David Beckham
- b) Ricardo Kakà
- c) Cristiano Ronaldo
- d) Other (specify)

* These represented above are the most answered and chosen by the respondents. All other answers that did not reach a considerable result are not inserted in the graph. In fact, Messi, Neymar and Pogba obtained more votes than, for instance, Griezmann and Depay. They did not reach 1%, so they are excluded from the graphical representation.

Q.27: Football celebrity's behaviour, values and image may be compatible and consistent with the image desired for the advertised kit supplier's brand. Here, their it is a necessity. Can you please choose 1 attribute in order to describe *David Beckham's* image, as football endorser? It should be the most representative attribute, in your opinion.

Open question



Due to the open- ended questions and the total number of respondents (219), the researcher grouped and coded all the different answers obtained.

The researcher made assumptions and drawn conclusions, based on the nature and the social applicability of every single attribute and the context of study and analysis. Finally, he considered also the different languages of the respondents, in order to better carry out grouping and coding.

This analysis and technique has been applied even for the next two questions: Q.28 (for Ricardo Kakà) and Q.29 (for Cristiano Ronaldo).

To shed light on, these below are the attributes grouped for each final answer placed in the graph above. Each of these attributes constitutes a respondent's answer in the electronic questionnaire.

Good looking

- Attractive
- Awesome
- Beautiful
- Fascinating
- Good looking

- Handsome
- Model
- Sexy

Elegant & Stylish

- British

- Charming
- Classy
- Cool
- Elegant
- Polite
- Respected
- Stylish

Professional

- Family man
- Focused
- Professional
- Reliable
- Respectful
- Serious

Charismatic & Talented

- Charismatic
- Comforting
- Creative
- Determined
- Expert
- Genius
- Innovative
- Leader
- Reassuring
- Successful
- Superstar
- Talented
- Winner

Athletic & Strong

- Athletic
- Good shape
- Masculine
- Powerful

- Skilful
- Strong

Generous & Intelligent

- Altruist
- Clean
- Coherent
- Correct
- Generous
- Generous
- Genuine
- Good
- Honest
- Humble
- Intelligent
- Kind
- Loyal
- Pure
- Simple
- Sober

Inferior

- Inferior
- Shy
- Weak

Bad boy

- Bad boy
- Disrespectful
- Party lover
- Provocative
- Rebel
- Womanizer

Friendly

- Exotic
- Friendly
- Smiling
- Sociable

Arrogant & Selfish

- Aggressive
- Arrogant
- Childish
- Egocentric
- Protagonist
- Rude
- Selfish
- Superficial
- Rich

- Superior
- Too self- confident
- Vain

Metrosexual & Narcissist

- Capricious
- Conceited
- Metrosexual
- Narcissist

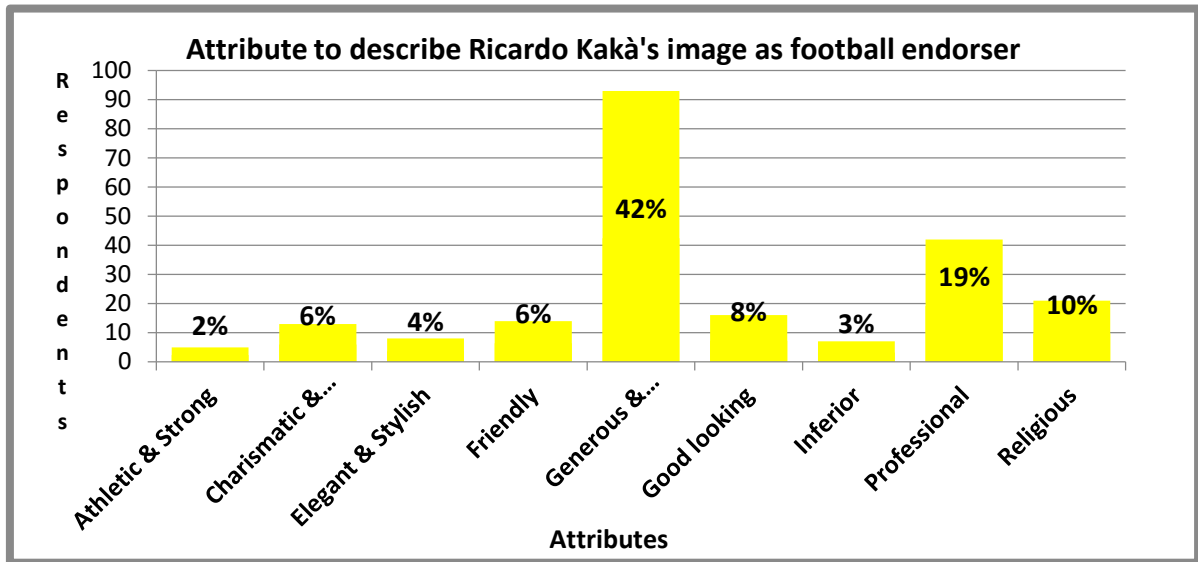
Famous & Goleador

- Famous
- Goleador
- Media

Q.28: Football celebrity's behaviour, values and image may be compatible and consistent with the image desired for the advertised kit supplier's brand.

Can you please choose 1 attribute in order to describe *Ricardo Kakà's* image, as football endorser? It should be the most representative attribute, in your opinion.

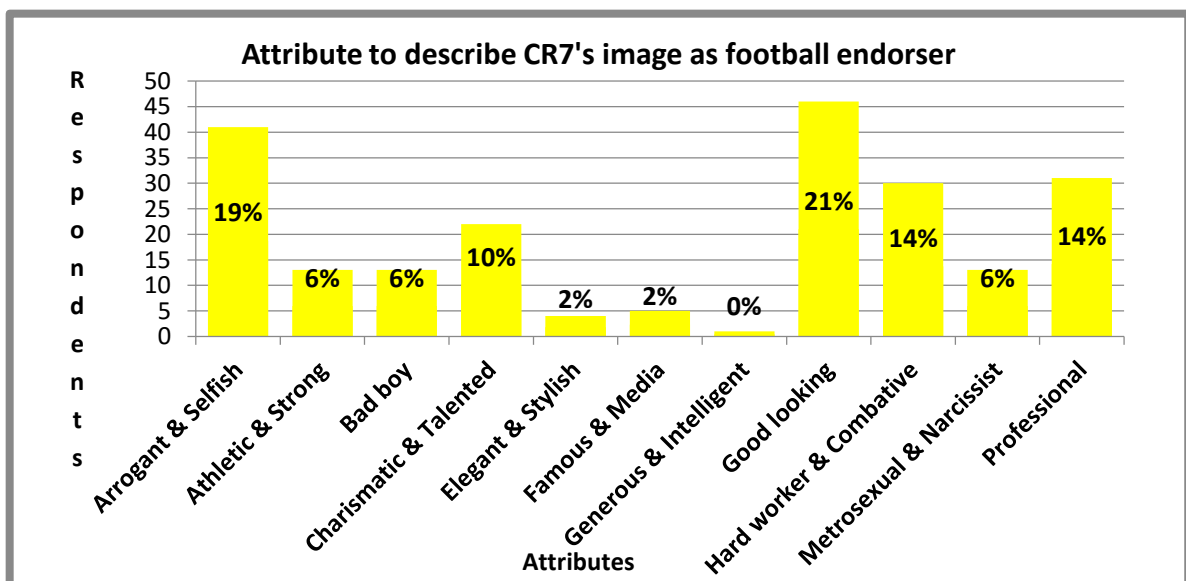
Open question



Q.29: Football celebrity's behaviour, values and image may be compatible and consistent with the image desired for the advertised kit supplier's brand.

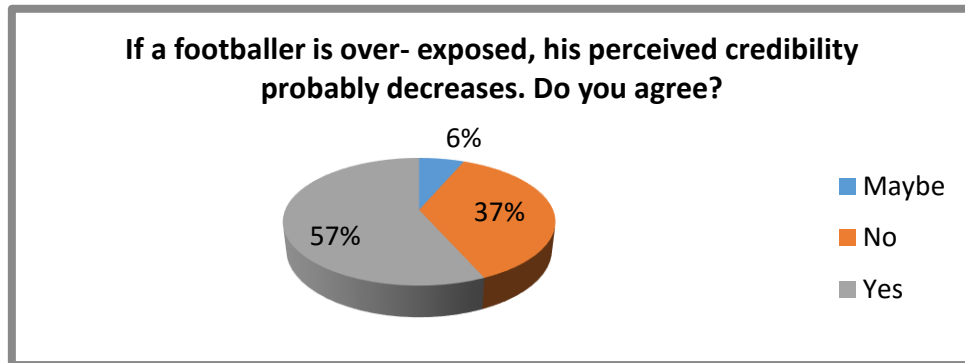
Can you please choose 1 attribute in order to describe *CR7's* image, as football endorser? It should be the most representative attribute, in your opinion.

Open question



Q.30: *Over- exposed:* concerning advertising, sponsorship, role of testimonial and endorser, if a footballer is *over- exposed* (too much exposed from people's point of view), his perceived credibility probably decreases. According to your point of view and personal experience, do you agree?

Category question

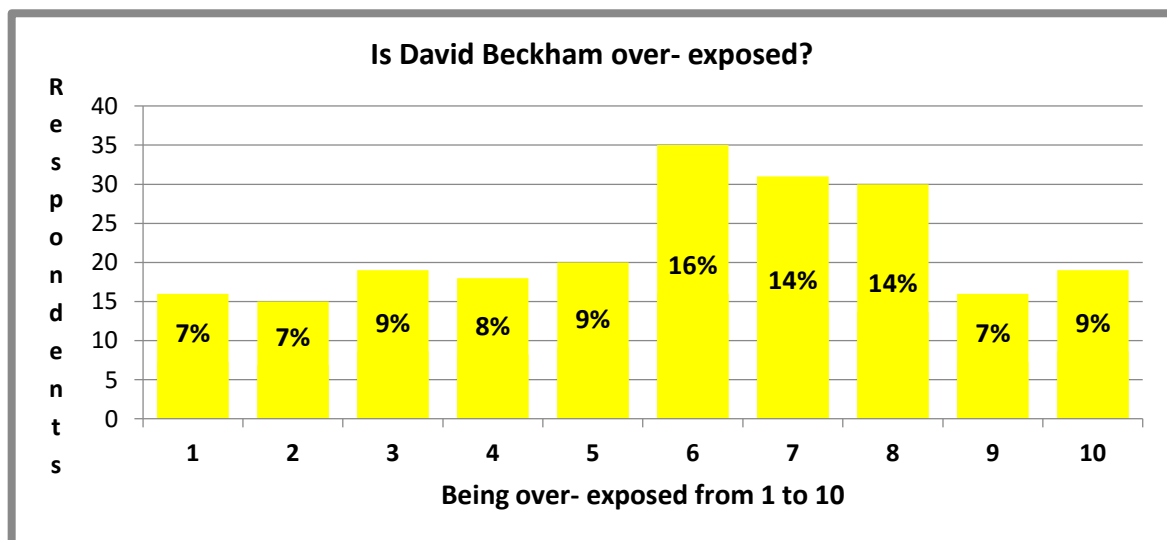


Possible answers:

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Maybe

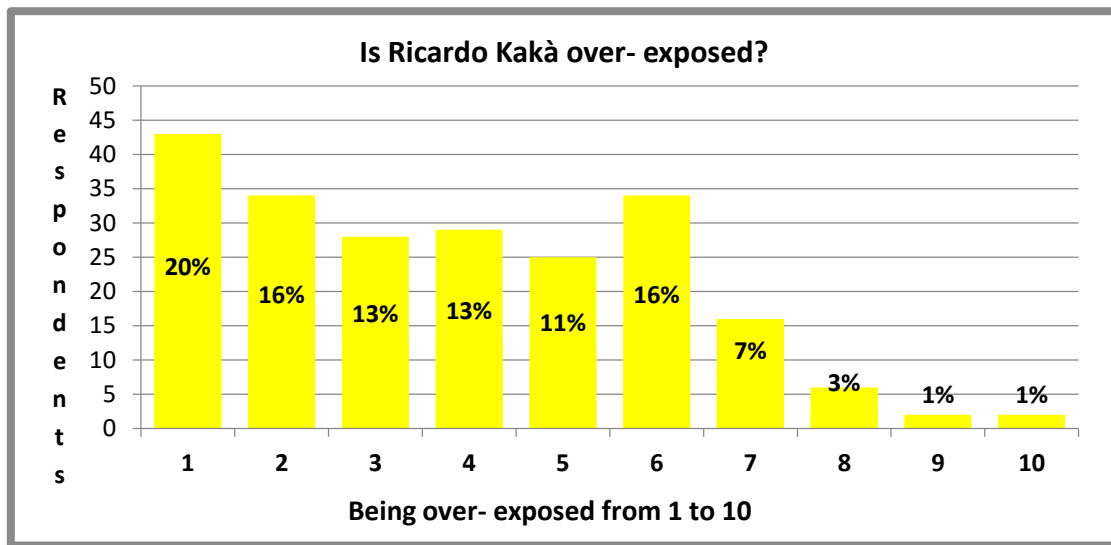
Q.31: From 1 to 10, do you think *Beckham*, as football endorser, is *over- exposed*?

Self- anchoring rating scale question



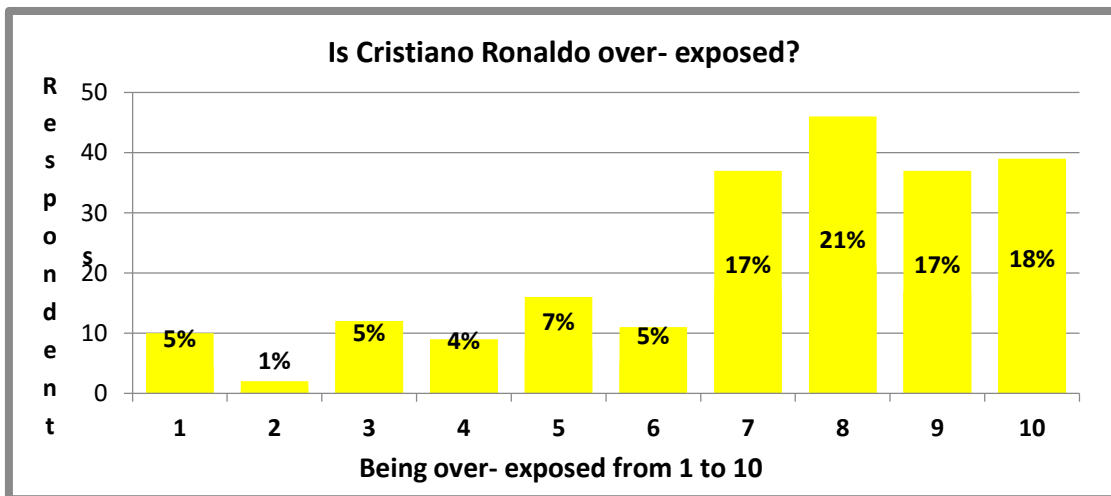
Q.32: From 1 to 10, do you think *Kakà*, as football endorser, is *over- exposed*?

Self- anchoring rating scale question



Q.33: From 1 to 10, do you think *CR7*, as football endorser, is *over- exposed*?

Self- anchoring rating scale question

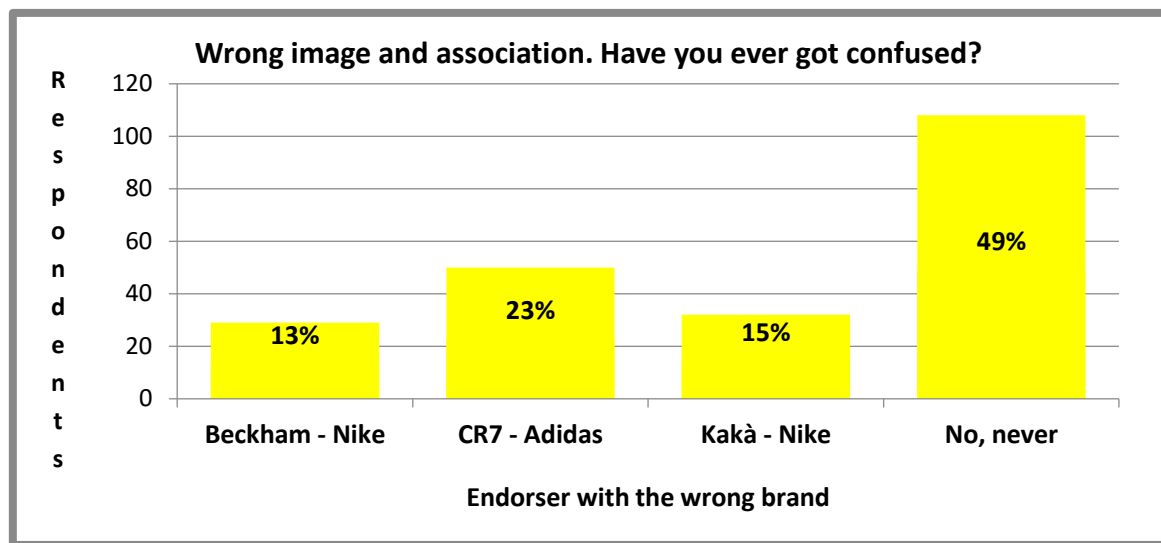


Q.34: Beckham is adidas' brand ambassador. Kakà has been the key endorser for adidas before moving to Mizuno's football shoes. CR7 is Nike's brand ambassador. Nonetheless, they played/ play in football teams (both clubs and national teams) that had/ have different sponsoring kit supplier (for instance, CR7 is Nike, but he plays for Real Madrid, which is adidas).

Probably, aware or not, you made wrong associations in your life. From Nike and adidas' perspective, this is a controversial and very complex situation.

Have you ever got confused about which of these footballers? With Nike or adidas?

Category question

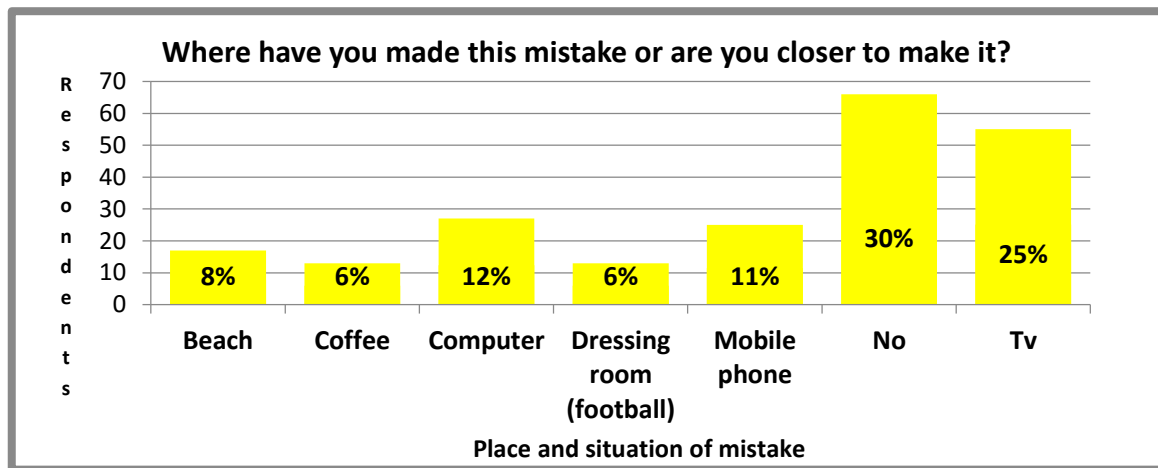


Possible answers:

- a) Beckham – Nike
- b) CR7 – adidas
- c) Kakà – Nike
- d) No, never

Q.35: Where have you made this mistake or are you closer to make it?

Category question



Possible answers:

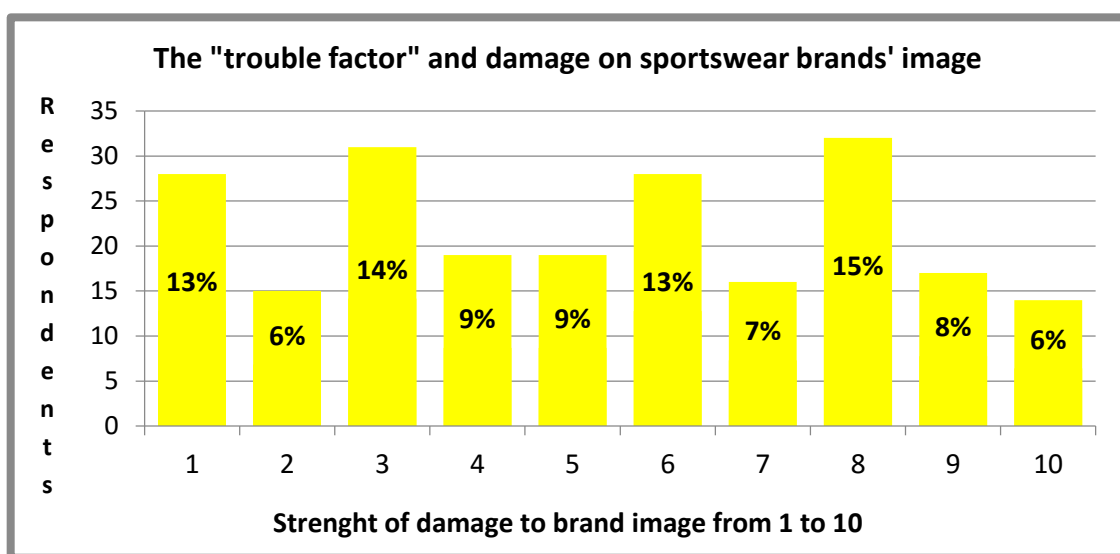
- a) Beach
- b) Coffee
- c) Computer
- d) Dressing room (football)
- e) Dressing room (gym) *
- f) Mobile phone
- g) No
- h) Tv

* Due to only 2% of total responses, "*Dressing room (gym)*" is not inserted in the graph, in order to give more importance to other, more relevant, responses.

Q.36: The “trouble factor”: Oscar Pistorius with girlfriend’s homicide; Diego Armando Maradona with doping, cocaine and not accepted fatherhood; Luiz Suarez (Uruguayan footballer – do you remember the bite to Italian Giorgio Chiellini in FIFA World Cup 2014?) with his bites and racism episodes (e.g. Patrice Evra during Liverpool vs Manchester United). Besides, episodes of rape, threats and many other negative situations where athletes can be involved. Each of these athlete has a technical sponsor.

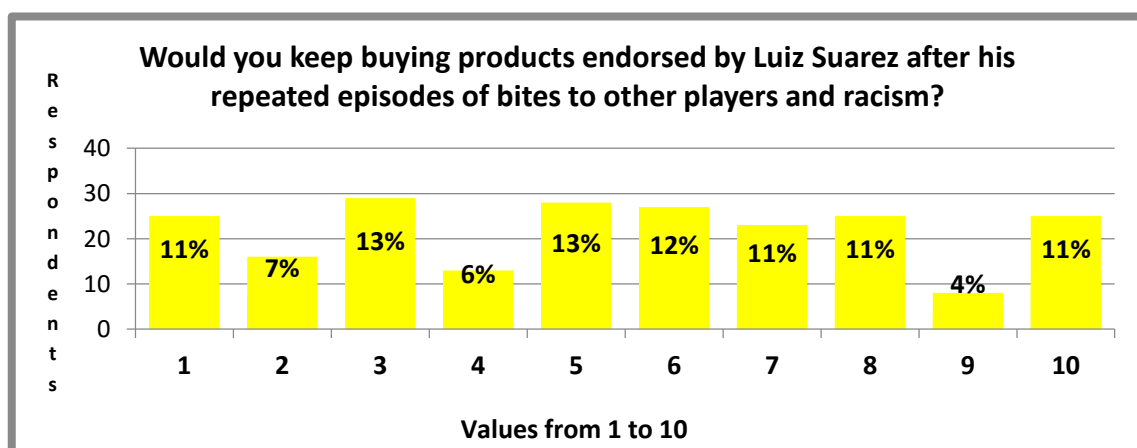
Please, consider that Nike and adidas are very strong brand, but not all other brands are like them. Do you think that these episodes are able to damage brand image and reputation of brands such as Nike, adidas, Puma, Under Armour, Asics and so on? From 1 to 10?

Self-anchoring rating scale question



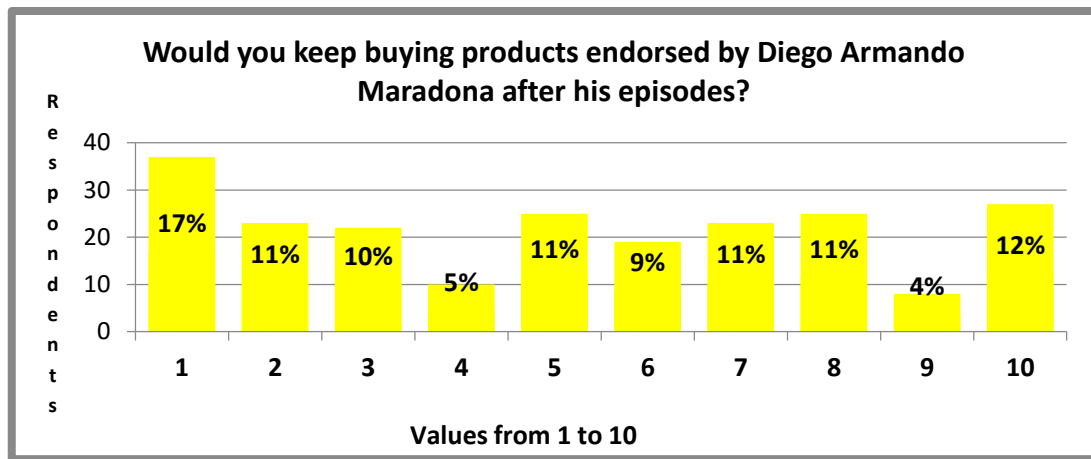
Q.37: The “trouble factor”: would you keep buying products endorsed by Luiz Suarez after his repeated episodes of bites to other players and racism towards Patrice Evra? From 1 to 10?

Self-anchoring rating scale question



Q.38: The “*trouble factor*”: would you keep buying products endorsed by Maradona after his episodes of doping, cocaine and not accepted fatherhood? From 1 to 10?

Self-anchoring rating scale question

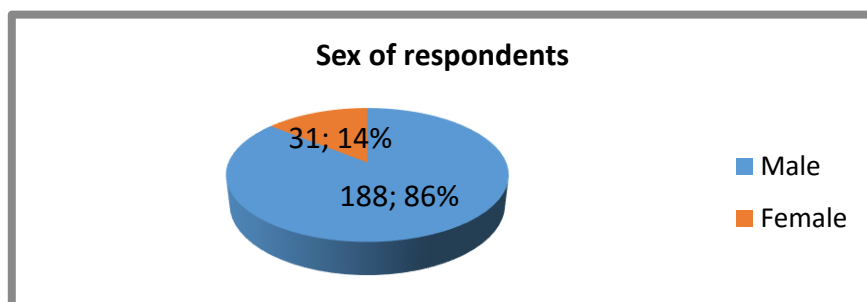


Last effort: who are you? Do not worry

You have played better than them, surely...

Q.39: I am sorry, but I need to collect some additional personal information ... Sex?

Category question

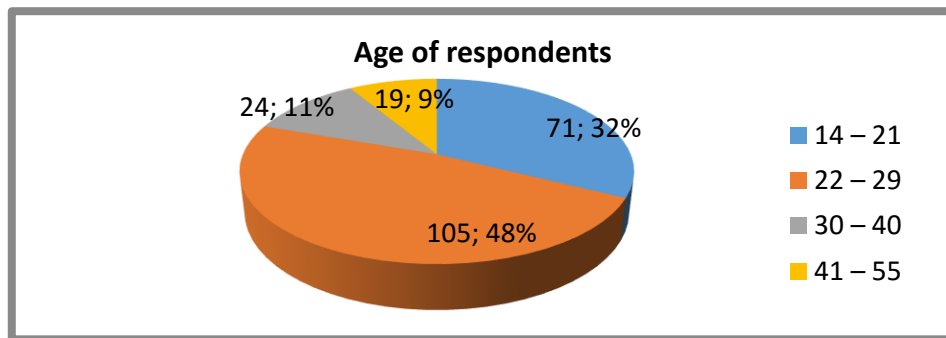


Possible answers:

- a) Male
- b) Female

Q.40: ... Age?

Category question

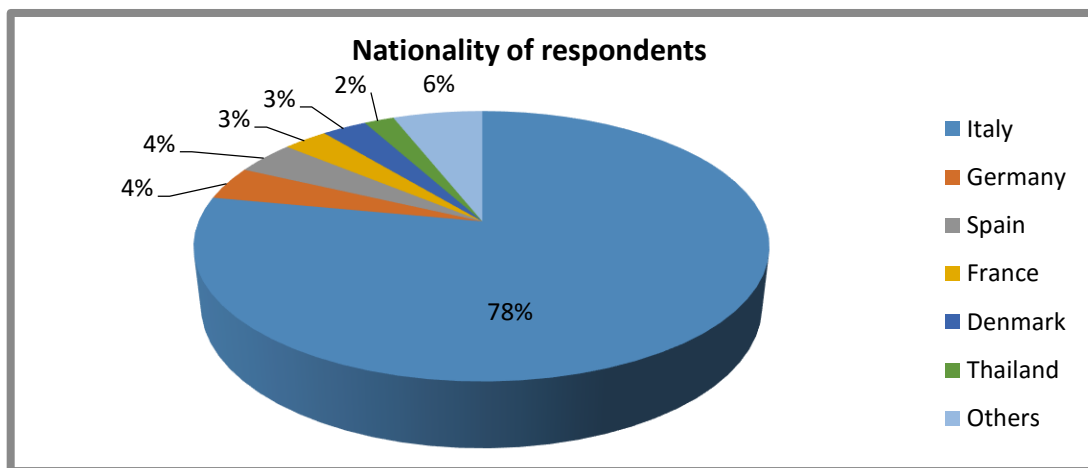


Possible answers:

- a) 14 - 21
- b) 22 – 29
- c) 30 – 40
- d) 41 - 55

Q.41: Nationality

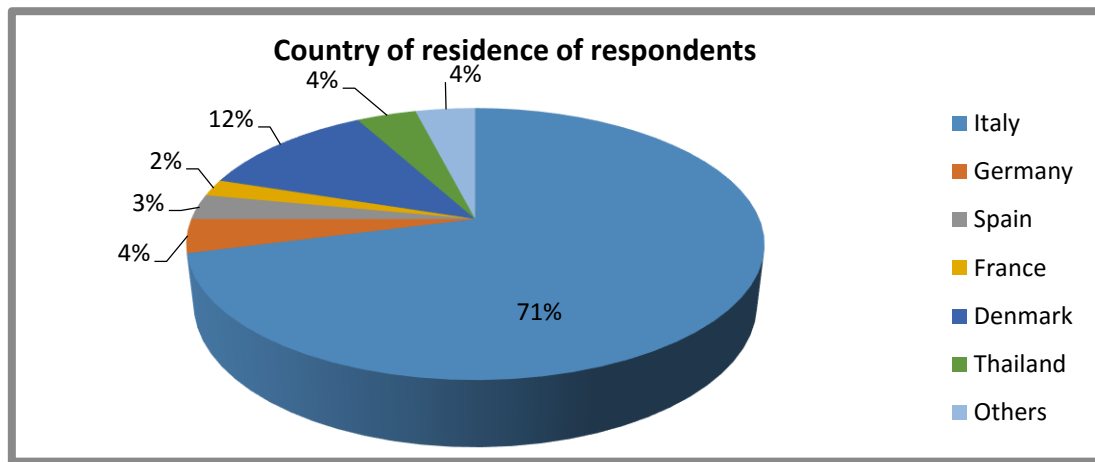
Open question



Here, only the responses with the highest percentage are inserted in the graph above: all other answers obtained less than 1% are not considered in the graph.

Q.42: Country of residence (Where do you live now? Please I need the name of the State, no the city)

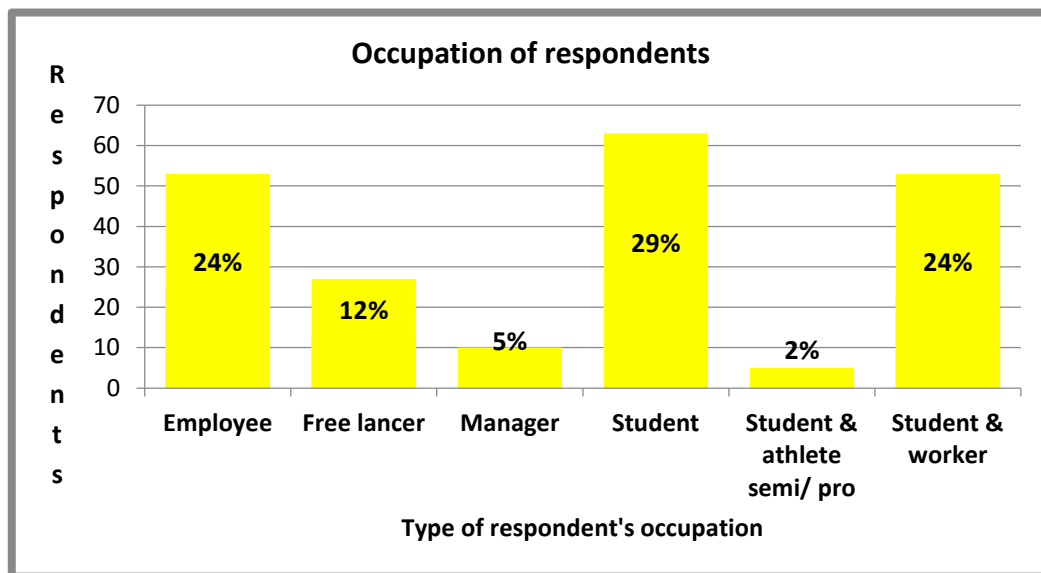
Open question



Here, only the responses with the highest percentage are inserted in the graph above: all other answers obtained less than 1% are not considered in the graph.

Q.43: Occupation

Category question



Possible answers:

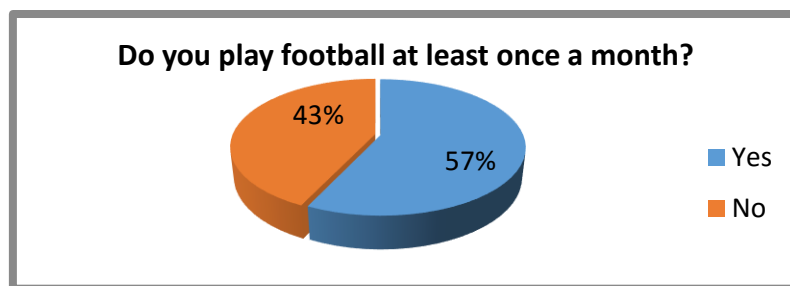
- a) Employee
- b) Free lancer
- c) Manager

- d) Student
- e) Student & athlete semi pro/ pro
- f) Student & worker
- g) Athlete professional
- h) Employer
- i) Journalist
- j) Professor

Here, only the responses with the highest percentage are inserted in the graph above: all other answers obtained less than 1% are not considered in the graph.

Q.44: Do you play football at least once a month?

Category question

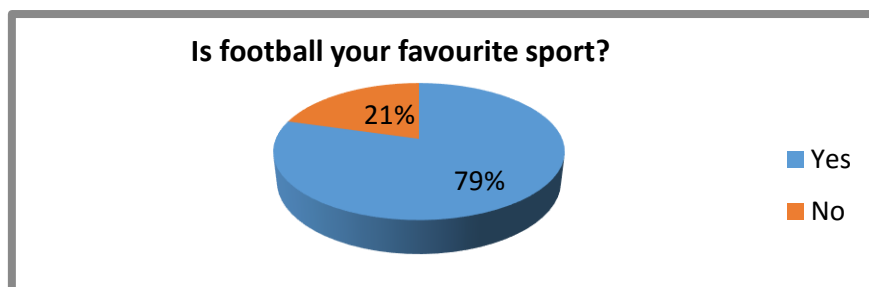


Possible answers:

- a) Yes
- b) No

Q.45: Is football your favourite sport?

Category question

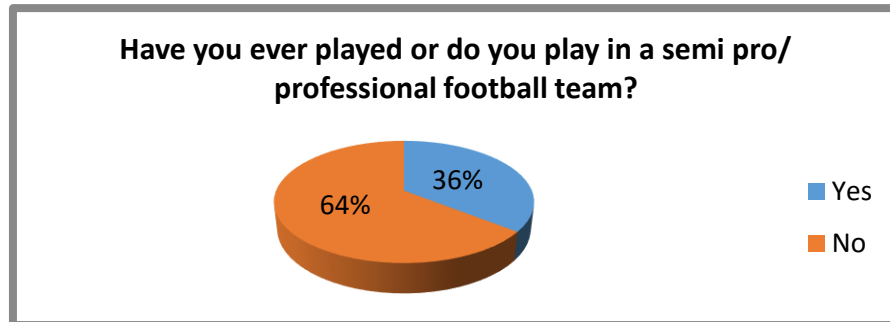


Possible answers:

- a) Yes
- b) No

Q.46: Have you ever played or do you play in a semi pro/ professional football team?

Category question



Possible answers:

- a) Yes
- b) No

Thanks for your time and participation!

Your answers will be safely recorded, only for data collection and analysis for my master's thesis.

Again, thank you so much.

If you have any doubt, feel free to ask and write me at any time.

Yours faithfully,

Matteo Zardini

Appendix 19 – Interview 1: Mr. Marco Tagliariol

Matteo Zardini: Sportswear brands such as Nike, adidas, Puma, Asics, are now evaluating and then deciding which footballer select as testimonial, endorser and brand ambassador for their marketing activities. The context here is and will be for the entire interview, as follows: the western Europe; the four main national men's championships, in the third millennium.

From a sportswear brand's perspective, what is the importance and the weight of footballer's sport performances compared to his figure and image outside the green field? What is more important? Inside or outside the green field? Why?

Let's consider the footballer during his 90 minutes and then, compare his private and weekly life, outside the game.

M. Tagliariol: Footballer's performance is very important. However, it is not the only crucial component in the whole assessment from a sportswear's point of view. There are some other factors, for instance the public image of a footballer, his presence and relevance at media level... that probably are more important than what a footballer does and did inside the pitch.

At the same time, the performance of a footballer depends on a several influential factors: coach's choices, injuries, ...

Matteo Zardini: *Then, by performance do you mean only the ninety minutes during the important match on Sunday? Can you add something more?*

M. Tagliariol: A footballer's performance can be limited by coach who does not want to make him play... maybe the footballer is injured or just not in good shape.

Yet, there are some other factors that are more under control, that remain the same even after the ninety minutes. Then, it is easier to check, assess, monitor and address them. So, a company like adidas and Nike have more control I would say...

Matteo Zardini: Ok, thanks! *Next, do kit supplier brands emphasise more top level footballer's image inside or outside the green field? You as Nike or adidas, where would you put more emphasis? Where would you insist?*

M. Tagliariol: Surely, performance is the starting point: everything is based on the performance. But after that you realize, obviously, that you, as a company, do not want to build up a sponsorship activity and project around and dedicated to a mediocre and low- quality football player... Impact on consumer's choice and preference, impact and presence on media and public opinion: these are the following considerations to be made. Companies hope that the footballer can be a reference point for both his performance and his style, his appeal.

Matteo Zardini: *What are footballer's impactful and efficient characteristics, first inside, then outside the green pitch? What is their ratio and relationship?*

M. Tagliariol: It varies from footballer to footballer. Every analysis is made individually and separately. Clearly, as sportswear brand, strikers are the most important ones by far I would say... Yes... Because they are more under media's attention and pressure. They are those you watch the most when match highlights are on the screen. They have more visibility. Second, I would say that a footballer who is able to make spectacular and creative trick is important... The one who gives emotion to fans... Then, the creatives!

[He takes a break, thinking] Then... If I had to exclude them, I would say the winners. Those who win. Trophies. No matter what is the role: he has to be a winner. Better if he is both winner and striker [He smiles].

Matteo Zardini: *And now... what about outside the green pitch?*

M. Tagliariol: It depends from customer to customer. On the whole, the main goal of having a footballer as endorser, testimonial, brand ambassador is catching customer's attention and preference. Then, if you want to impress and influence teenagers who love rules, authority, respect and so on, you will take a footballer who represents a model of behaviour, who behaves properly outside the pitch. It can be Kakà. Sorry, it was Kakà, since now he is Mizuno, not adidas anymore, he plays in a minor league and he is not at the peak anymore...

On the contrary, for young rebels, those who want to amaze, both inside and outside the pitch, for their mentality and not ordinary style... [He coughs] Then you will be focused on those players that are, as Neymar, above the lines.

Matteo Zardini: Taking the year 2000 as turning point, what happened before and after until nowadays... *from sportswear brands' perspective, do companies aim at the same objectives? What are the main changes in terms of football player's image in the last three decades?*

M. Tagliariol: The biggest change stems from the number and the type of touchpoints, namely how and where customers and fans can get in touch and interact with football players. Advertising, both inside and outside the pitch. Thanks to social media revolution, which is the main case in point here... now you can have great contact with the footballer that has no comparison. It is totally new and it has dramatically changed the entire relationship between company, club, athlete and fans. The customer can be able to check all day, all week, where the footballer is, how he is, even what he eats for lunch today.

Before, marketing communication was only based around the single sport event itself. Now it is largely extended, going beyond. Frequency and intensity are bigger now.

Matteo Zardini: From customer's perspective, a sportswear company such as Nike and adidas choose a brand ambassador. *What is the customer's reaction? For example, two friends are talking in a coffee, they open the newspaper and they read that Kakà has moved from adidas to Mizuno.*

M. Tagliariol: Ok. Let's start from the fact that a company chooses a brand ambassador according to those that are more suitable to their marketing strategy of one precise campaign.

For example, adidas in 2012 and adidas in 2016. Messages are different, vehicles are different. Four years ago adidas was based on hard work, sacrifice, determination, humility, dedication, then it selected footballers like that... That were able to be consistent with and representative of the campaign.

On the other hand, now adidas' campaign is based on irreverence, standing above others. Therefore, now different message calls for different testimonials.

Matteo Zardini: *Based on what you have just said, do not you think that there is a lack of fit, consistency and coherence between what adidas was and communicated and what adidas is now and what it is communicating now? How could you move from "impossible is nothing" ...? [Interviewee interrupts]*

M. Tagliariol: The passage is gradual and of course entirely well- managed. We are talking about a step by step process, in four years, in four different sport seasons. It is enough.

Matteo Zardini: *How and to what extent does a footballer help and contribute to this passage?*

M. Tagliariol: Footballer is only one way, one aspect, one vehicle of message transmission and diffusion. Since adidas and Nike are market leaders and giants, they are able to utilize different testimonials for different campaigns.

For instance, differently from 2012, footballer x and y are not at the top anymore. You need to use another two. Overall, Nike and adidas can afford it, thanks to their dimension, budget and reputation. It is easier for them to change testimonial and to pick the best one suitable for that precise campaign.

You are not changing your identity. You are just using different vehicles in order to deliver the message. Footballers x and y remain as vehicle for that campaign, for that message. Now you are investing in different testimonials, for a different message, for a different campaign.

Matteo Zardini: *Are there some rigid classifications, parameters for selecting the footballer as testimonial? Considering both inside and outside the pitch... How could you decide if this player is not suitable and relevant anymore?*

M. Tagliariol: It depends on the goal. It depends on the marketing campaign. I can make a marketing campaign aimed at the launch of new football shoes. Alternatively, I can make a marketing campaign addressed towards promoting brand image. Let me better explain...

For instance, when you launch a new Nike Mercurial, you can use already employed footballer as testimonial, in order to convince customers to buy this new shoes using your already present footballer.

Or, you can make a long advertising, like those before FIFA World Cup and Euro, that take two minutes for example... where all players are involved. There, they are not selling any product. They just say "hey you! there is a huge sport event, we will be there with this and this footballers". They want to communicate the core message of the brand, not a particular product.

The way you choose your athlete is subjective, variable, it depends by many factors. Also because there are not rigid assessment criteria and parameters even for inside the pitch performances, style, attractiveness. It is all about your campaign's objectives.

Matteo Zardini: *from France '98 ahead, taking into account Nike first, and then, adidas... Who have been their most important and relevant football endorsers?*

M. Tagliariol: I am going to tell you three for Nike first, then I will tell you the fourth one for the future. Ronaldo... [Interviewer interrupts]

Matteo Zardini: Luis Nazario da Lima...

M. Tagliariol: Yes, exactly. The true one [He smiles] From the end of the nineties to the beginning of the new millennium. Here, for the first time ever in football, Nike created a pair of football shoes just for him, inspired by him. Mercurial and Vapor models were created from image and characteristics of Luis Nazario da Lima Ronaldo.

Next, around 2004 and 2005, I would say Ronaldinho. He was also the key figure in the glorious campaign of Nike, "Joga Bonito". He was the image of Nike.

Now, everything is based on Cristiano Ronaldo, CR7. It is very easy to notice and see it. But, the next and coming one will be Neymar. It is all about historical phases.

Matteo Zardini: These are always offensive and creative footballers...

M. Tagliariol: Always them, exactly. This is in line with what I have just told you. Strikers make goals, strikers are more attractive than defenders. Striker receives first page of magazines. Children and teenagers do not dream of being the next Paolo Maldini. Fortunately, or unfortunately... [He smiles] they would like to be the next Neymar. Everyone wants to be the man of the match, under media attention and in all the newspaper.

Matteo Zardini: They all have played or play for Real Madrid and Barcelona...

M. Tagliariol: These are the biggest clubs, those who are better able to reach more and more fans. They are the highest likelihood to arrive at the end of every international and national competition. The biggest players play for the biggest teams.

Matteo Zardini: Ok, thanks. Let's now move the attention towards adidas...

M. Tagliariol: Ok, then... If I had to compare CR7 and Ronaldo with an adidas' player, I would tell you only David Beckham. He is still a brand ambassador even though he is retired. He was enormous from the end of nineties. He will be adidas' brand ambassador even in the future. He represents too much for the brand adidas.

The difference between Nike and adidas starts from the fact that adidas has set up its communication less on a single footballer in his history. This is different to Nike.

In the same period, adidas had Beckham and Zidane. Then, there were Kakà and then others followed.

Matteo Zardini: Now, there is Lionel Messi...

M. Tagliariol: Yes, of course. It is the first time that, probably, adidas gives attention and importance to a footballer as Nike does with Cristiano Ronaldo. Maybe, it has never happened before. Everything is around Messi. The difference now is that adidas used to manage several athletes without placing any of them particularly higher than the others. Instead, now adidas is closer to Nike from this perspective.

Matteo Zardini: *Is this a free initiative of adidas? Or is it a direct reaction from Nike's success and choice? adidas against Nike and Messi against Cristiano Ronaldo...*

M. Tagliariol: Surely, we are in this situation. The two biggest brands in the market, represented by the two strongest players in the world.

What I can add, it is the fact that, within football industry, especially in western Europe, Nike was not that strong as now. This previously allowed adidas to manage its footballers and advertise its product differently to Nike. Nike had to grow up from the middle of nineties. And it did so through football icons, individually. adidas instead, thanks to its previous leadership in Europe, had a wider number of players as endorsers.

Matteo Zardini: *Does relationship between kit supplier brands and consumers- fans differ from the past? To what extent? What are the main changes? Are they on the same level?*

M. Tagliariol: As in all industries, equilibrium changes over time. I have previously mentioned the importance and the evolution of touchpoints within football and sport industry in general. Concerning more companies and their history, Nike at the end of nineties was a brand just entering in the European football market. Nowadays, instead, it is almost leader everywhere. Brands such as Puma now have by far less market share, differently from the past. Brands that years ago were not existent such as Under Armour and New Balance, are conquering market share increasingly. Finally, you have the extreme case of all those Italian brands, such as Lotto and Diadora, that now are failed or very very little in the market, since they lost all they prestige and relevance in the market. Lotto maybe now is sponsoring only the 5% of the all footballers in Europe.

Matteo Zardini: *Nowadays, how kit supplier companies play in order to stimulate and work on brand associations in consumer- fan's mind? Thinking also on advertising, product launch, ...*

M. Tagliariol: Everything depends from customer to customers. However, in any case, the secret is to be able to communicate a message, better if with a story behind... that is coherent and consistent with the image that is already in consumer's mind and how you want to work with/ on it. Consequently, if you are adidas,

you are historically as “Impossible is nothing”. Then, it is correct that you invest on Lionel Messi. He had enormous problems with hormones, his physical growth. You want to communicate a message to consumers. Here, it is perfect: you are buying Messi’s shoes. Ok, well. Fifteen years ago Messi has been rejected by Como, Italian football club not that important and prestigious, due to his physical situation. He was too little. Now he did it. He is the best. Because “Impossible in nothing”.

Let’s think about Nike... Nike is “Just do it”. When I think about Nike’s campaign before FIFA World Cup in Brazil, I think about random children and teenagers playing in a dirty football pitch in the street. Randomly, they become professional and top level footballers: even Hulk! [He laughs] It is the spirit. It is just to do it. They arrive at the dirty pitch. They want to play. Ok, let’s do it. I am this, you are that player. The secret stays in planning the message and how to execute it. Either extremely coherent or extremely different, which can grab customer’s attention and make they think “Am I wrong? What’s happened?” Putting pressure on the way the customer associates the brands to the new campaign and message, is often effective and positive. For instance, adidas has been always “Impossible is nothing”, highlighting the hard working, in a sort of polite and respectful way. Yet, by 2016, the message now is “Boss everyone”. Without respect. Just showing them that you are the best one.

Matteo Zardini: *As a result, adidas is not polite anymore... Can we say this?*

M. Tagliariol: adidas is not polite anymore, yes. Ok.

Matteo Zardini: Indeed, it does not have Kakà anymore...

M. Tagliariol: adidas now is irreverent. It is better to say this.

Matteo Zardini: *Did adidas leave Kakà for this reason?*

M. Tagliariol: As all footballers, even Kakà has done his career. He is not at his peak anymore as I said... A company wants hot players, at their best. adidas still has Beckham, but just because he is an icon worldwide. Even Nike with Ronaldinho: by far less investment and visibility...

Matteo Zardini: The analysed context is always the same: current western European men’s football and its main four nations. Throughout this research, sponsorship is considered as the chief marketing activity, the

most central one for a sportswear brands, in order to influence consumer's choice and fortify its brand image. Consistently, the role of the footballer as endorser, testimonial and brand ambassador is central.

Then... [He takes a breath] *What are the most important choices in terms of sponsorship that companies as Nike, adidas, Puma, Asics, make in order to attract and conquer consumer, nowadays?*

Keep considering sportswear brands and their relationship with consumer- fans, what has been changed in their relationship in the last twenty years? Any difference? What do you think about it?

M. Tagliariol: Compared to twenty or fifteen years ago, sportswear brands realized that there are more and more opportunities to interact with consumers, both inside and outside the pitch, going beyond the ninety minutes. This means that in the past the priority was to sign the contract with the hero, the best player inside the pitch. Not outside. Now, instead, it is different. Your endorser is in touch with the consumer even when he is having dinner with his girlfriend during the week at the restaurant. Indeed, he will probably post a picture on Instagram as well. And people see it.

The biggest difference is now, is the interaction as well as the chances to see and follow him.

Therefore, now, the ideal endorser is someone very close and in contact with the consumers, both inside and outside the pitch. Then, you can have footballers that at performance level they are not excellent. Let's think about Mario Balotelli. Outside the pitch he is incredible... [He laughs]

Matteo Zardini: Let's think about the example of Memphis Depay of Manchester United: he is tattooed, fast, he loves dribbling, he uses a lot social networks, ...

M. Tagliariol: Rather than Depay, I would insist really on Mario Balotelli. He is offering very poor performances in the last three years. Very poor. However, he signed an incredible contract with Puma. Why? Because he is very active on Facebook, on Instagram... it does not matter whether he plays, he is always on magazines. Therefore, yes, he has thousands of followers. And companies know it and then they want to take advantage from this trend and situation.

Matteo Zardini: But Nike let him go away years ago...

M. Tagliariol: Yes, they did. But you should also consider the incredible amount of money Puma spends for Balotelli. With that money, Nike can take better players, more suitable for its brand image. Same issue for adidas: it recently officialised Paul Pogba as new endorser and brand ambassador. I think it is a very positive and profitable investment and choice. Not only because he is and he will be more a football star in the future,

but also because he is stylish, he is social. He has a strong personality and he is irreverent. He matches the direction taken by adidas. If it makes sense and it is consistent, I could also abandon Beckham in order to give more space and emphasis to Pogba. Difficult, but why not? Pros and cons. And brand image changes over time, for every actor in the market.

Matteo Zardini: *What is the main prerequisite first for Nike, then for adidas, in selecting a football endorser? What are their main changes between the end of the nineties and now? What are their main changes in terms of sponsorship in the last three decades?*

M. Tagliariol: This is a very controversial issue, according to both my fan's perspective and my working's one. In the past it was easier: ok, let's bet and invest on the winner... Now, there are some aspects beyond the sport performance and beyond the ninety minutes. As I made the example of Balotelli before... Balotelli signed his latest contract with Puma one year ago, nonetheless he was a disaster on the pitch. As a result, the only component and prerequisite is footballer's visibility. He must be famous.

Matteo Zardini: *Could we say that it is better to have twenty- two on average adidas' players rather than only one adidas' player who is instead, the excellent one?*

M. Tagliariol: In my opinion, it depends on the goal. Consumers as I was and I am... I used to buy Kakà's shoes. I did not buy shoes of Empoli's players for example... I bought the shoes of the best player... I was crazy about Ronaldinho's advertising too for example...

Matteo Zardini: *What did you look for in Kakà's shoes? Why Kakà?*

M. Tagliariol: Because, when he was at his peak, he represented how I used to love and play football. Overall, I considered who Kakà was inside the pitch. After having said this, times are changed. Surely, there is who buys CR7's shoes just because he thinks what Ronaldo is outside the pitch. I am sure about it. CR7 is very cool, stylish, important, famous outside the pitch... Then, people buy that product.

Matteo Zardini: *Then, Cristiano Ronaldo is good looking, he is cool and stylish outside the pitch. Can we say that physical attraction counts more than technical skills and sport performances? As a consequence, Beckham and CR7 are better than Franck Ribery and Carlitos Tevez. Do you agree?*

M. Tagliariol: Overall, who is good looking is more appreciated and more valuable. However, I would say that it is important, but not necessary. Even here, it depends on the consistency with the campaign goals and brand image. Having an extremely fun, smiling, friendly football endorser could be better in some marketing circumstances. There are some factors that go beyond the pure beauty. They can balance other factors. Messi is not good looking for instance, but he is extremely strong. The good looking one is easier to use, to be honest... anyway.

Matteo Zardini: Footballer often is a brand himself. However, his brand personality differs from brand image and vision- mission- values of the company. *How Nike and adidas as market leader can take advantage from this issue in the sponsorship activities?*

M. Tagliariol: There is no doubt that, in one way or another, according to some perspective, the footballer as endorser must be in line with what the sportswear brand is and wants. Then there could be unusual choices, ok... but everything is made in order to succeed in the market and in respect of the precise marketing and campaign goals.

One thing more just to clarify: as a company, it would be great if my athletes, my endorsers, were able and sincerely open to say "I love the brand I wear and I use" or "Try it! It's very good". They are an incredible vehicle even between their colleagues. As a result, adidas or Nike will have more strength and more appeal to both consumers and other athletes. Again, Balotelli is not the best footballer. Balotelli is not able to be reliable, neither inside nor outside the pitch. I would like to hear Messi or Ronaldo saying that what they wear is amazing. Not Balotelli.

Matteo Zardini: No matter if the product is totally new or it is just a new version or a limited edition of a previous model. *Concerning the launch of a pair of football shoes, what is the main target for adidas and Nike? Do they base their decision more on one market segment? Does it exist this decision?*

M. Tagliariol: After several years of marketing researchers, this is commonly shared and known in all sportswear brands, the most profitable segment in this market refers to the high school period, namely from 14 to 18.

Matteo Zardini: *Could you please tell me why?*

M. Tagliariol: Because in that period of life, they play with dream, passion, enthusiasm. It is the period where they are more open to sacrifice their free time to football and where they grow their ambition and hope. This

happened not only in Italy, but everywhere. They want the best product in the market and they are the first future customers as well!

Matteo Zardini: *Could we say that this is the period in which they form their own personality?*

M. Tagliariol: Absolutely yes. It is a crucial psychological and branding issue. Of course, companies know it and play on it. It is correlated with what I mentioned before. And these are the years where they are willing to pay a lot of money in order to have the best and the last pair of football shoes. Even though... parents' money! [He laughs]

Personification, extension of self, desire of communication who you are or who you want to be. Everything counts crucially.

Matteo Zardini: Last issue and last question of the interview. *Could you please tell me your thoughts about the use of a bad boy for a football shoes product launch?*

Bad boy is better for product launch rather than the serious and 360' professional footballer. At the same time, Mario Balotelli and Paul Gascoigne are better than Javier Zanetti and Xavi Hernandez. Any comments?

M. Tagliariol: First of all, it depends on the quality... and the nature, the essence of the product... secondly, the type of consumer that you want to conquer and reach.

Let's make it clearer... Nike has two main football shoes: Nike Mercurial and Nike Tiempo.

Tiempo Legend is the shoe that is always given to football players that are always considered as classy, intelligent, those who construct and drive the game.

Mercurial, instead, is attributed to rapid, fast, creative, "hot head" players. Those that are able to suddenly change a match. Therefore, CR7 is better of Mercurial, not for Tiempo. Vice versa, same issue with Andrea Pirlo. There must be fit and consistency between brand image and personality of both the endorser and the sportswear brand. However, here probably everything concerns sport performance and behaviours inside the green field tend to have more incidence than what happens outside... just to move up a key point that could seem important in your interview... [He laughs]

Matteo Zardini: Ok thanks! Doing this we have just saved one question [He smiles] *Then, what is the main motivation for using a bad boy as endorser?*

M. Tagliariol: Simply and first of all, he is able to stimulate and raise discussion, debate. A bad boy is someone who offers very often something to talk about. He is the one who does not respect the rules. And nowadays, he is very influential and famous, a sort of symbol for the youngest.

Even here, there must be consistency between a teenager... who wants to affirm and express himself through a product and through an endorser... and the product launched.

Fit and consistency are crucial. Does it take advantage using a bad boy? Yes, or no? It depends.

Matteo Zardini: Ok. You have been very exhaustive, clear and kind. Thanks a lot for the time dedicated to me and the knowledge you shared. I do not have questions anymore. Thanks again.

M. Tagliariol: Thanks to you. It has been a personal pleasure. Good luck with your research!

Appendix 20 – Interview 2: Mr. Kingsley Boateng

Matteo Zardini: Sportswear brands such as Nike, adidas, Puma, Asics, are now evaluating and then deciding which footballer select as testimonial, endorser and brand ambassador for their marketing activities. The context here is and will be for the entire interview, as follows: the western Europe; the four main national men's championships, in the third millennium.

From a sportswear brand's perspective, what is the importance and the weight of footballer's sport performances compared to his figure and image outside the green field? What is more important? Inside or outside the green field? Why?

Let's consider the footballer during his 90 minutes and then, compare his private and weekly life, outside the game.

Kingsley Boateng: In my opinion, sport performance, namely what happens inside the match, is very important. It the basis for football player's career and what everybody thinks about him. It counts a lot because through footballer's performance during the ninety minutes, brands can come closer to consumers and convince them to purchase their products. Moreover, the more winning image you have, the better... From customer's side, they see footballers as idols then they go to buy products endorsed by them during the match...

Matteo Zardini: *From your perspective, is it more important footballer's image inside or outside the green field?* Let me clarify that by "image", I mean the idea in consumer's mind and eyes...

Kingsley Boateng: I think inside the pitch is more important.

Matteo Zardini: *Inside?*

Kingsley Boateng: Yes

Matteo Zardini: *Ok... and what about Mario Balotelli then? How can you judge him?*

Kingsley Boateng: [He smiles] Ehm... Balotelli... When he was at the peak of his sponsorship opportunities, inside the pitch he was great. It is correlated. Outside instead, his negative and irregular life was secondary and less important, thanks to what he was able to do inside, again... during the match, I would say... Anyway,

inside the pitch he scored, he played well and in fact it is thanks to what he did in the past that now is well-paid.

Now that he is playing less and worse, his behaviour outside catches more attention because there is nothing more to talk about him... And it results negatively inside and outside the match. But if you are good inside and then bad outside... the teenager thinks "Oh Balotelli anyway is good inside, he plays good, so it is okay in any case".

If you are bad both inside and outside instead, the teenager does not go to buy his endorsed products, because there is no motivation in doing that...

Matteo Zardini: *Why do you always talk about "the teenager"?*

Kingsley Boateng: Because... the market of the [sportswear] brands aim at youngers, at boys... at teenagers that want to become as what they dream: affirmed and successful players. Then, I think that the guy is the one that is more open to buy. In fact, he sees the champions and he wants to imitate them.

Moreover, it is more difficult to persuade and convince a thirty- year- old man rather than a high school student, for example...

Matteo Zardini: Ok thanks. *What about the characteristics inside and outside the green pitch: which ones are the most impactful and efficient for a sportswear brand?*

Kingsley Boateng: [He takes a breath before answering] I think that inside the pitch... it is the dribbling. If someone jumps the defender and easily he goes over... It is very good and emotional athletic gesture. You can say: "Wow! How could he do it?". Outside the match, instead, I would say his way of living... If he has a beautiful car or woman. Then a person says: "Hi there! Look at him! He is very rich...". Alternatively, "Have you seen Cristiano Ronaldo's girlfriend?". After many times... after a while, this issue makes the difference in people's evaluation and considerations. Of course, companies take into account this.

Matteo Zardini: Let's take in comparison the end of the nineties and now, 2016. *Which are the biggest changes concerning footballer's image?* Feel free to express your opinion freely, both as professional footballer and as previous football dreamer, both inside and outside the green pitch...

Kingsley Boateng: [He starts talking immediately, almost interrupting the interviewee] I would say that in the last twenty years, the excess of money within sport industry and football in particular is the biggest difference. When a footballer has too much money he thinks to be more free to do what he wants. It is not

like that anyway. It is wrong. It should have been different. But when you have everything, you think you are able to do whatever you want. For instance, ... [He stops and thinks silently] Balotelli: having all, he considers himself as special, different... a privileged life.

Matteo Zardini: *What has changed regarding the relationship between consumer- fan and footballer?*

Kingsley Boateng: We can say that there are many more opportunities to be inspired by a footballer now. Easily a fan can reach the practice field of his favourite footballer in the morning, he can buy the jersey and receive footballer's signature on it just after the practice. Supporters can watch and follow them continuously. They wear their jerseys and they start thinking to be invincible. They love it and it is an unforgettable experience. Rather, for the footballer is quite ordinary and on average. Technology and the internet has changed the relationship, then... compared to the past.

Matteo Zardini: *On what type of consumer- fan are you more influential and impactful?*

Kingsley Boateng: I would say I am more influential to the fan that plays or loves to play in my same way and role. I am fast, I run a lot. I am a wing. They might love me thanks to my speed and ability of changing my speed.

Matteo Zardini: *You are sponsored by adidas. Right?*

Kingsley Boateng: Yes, I am adidas since I was 16 and I was AC Milan's player.

Matteo Zardini: Regarding all the decisions in terms of sponsorship and endorsement... *What is the importance and the weight of the footballer against the sportswear brand? Does sportswear brand decide everything about you and your colleagues?*

Kingsley Boateng: Ok well... [He thinks] I would say that adidas cannot decide everything. It mainly depends on what you do during the match. Through your performances, you are able to have more importance towards them, with contracts and agreements as well, of course.

They propose me something: if I am very strong and in a very good moment, I can reject or I can ask strongly for something more or different. Otherwise, there are many other sportswear brands ready to catch me in the market.

If adidas is interested to me and I am playing well, they have to listen to me. It depends on my sport results, always. Even here, it is the starting point.

Matteo Zardini: *Which is the most important football endorser for adidas in the last twenty years according to you? And why?*

Kingsley Boateng: I believe he is Beckham... because... [Interviewer interrupted him]

Matteo Zardini: *Did it depend more on what he did inside or outside the pitch?*

Kingsley Boateng: I think priority should be given to what Beckham did inside the match, firstly. He was at his peak, at the top... However, he is absolutely good looking and this has helped him so much. He emerged thanks to his physical aspect and to what adidas has been able to build around him. He took benefit from adidas. What he received from adidas and then from all other sponsoring brands is enormous.

Matteo Zardini: *And who is this for Nike?*

Kingsley Boateng: Ronaldo... the true one... The “Fenomeno”!

Matteo Zardini: *... more than Ronaldinho, CR7 and Neymar?*

Kingsley Boateng: Ehm... No okay... Maybe Ronaldinho, let me correct my answer. But just because when I was younger, I dreamt to be like them. I used to play inspired by them.

Matteo Zardini: *No problem [He laughs]. Nike against adidas. Do they aim at the same marketing objectives within the analysed football landscape?*

Kingsley Boateng: I think no. It depends on football endorser’s characteristics. Because Nike aims at more powerful and faster players. On the contrary, adidas is perceived and considered as more elegant and technique. They are brands at the same levels. Yet, I would say that they differentiate each other thanks to different footballers and their associated skills or characteristics.

Matteo Zardini: *In choosing their testimonial, which is their main distinctive prerequisite?*

Kingsley Boateng: Nike could call a potential endorser given that fact that he is aggressive when he scores, in that precise moment. Extremely competitive and aggressive in this attitudes.

adidas instead, can contact a player that is elegant in his movements. adidas is seen as classy and elegant brand to me. Rather, Nike is explosion and power. They differentiate each other and succeed, walking on the same path. Their products are quite similar. It is different how they offer and communicate them, I would say...

Matteo Zardini: The analysed context is always the same: current western European men's football and its main four nations. Throughout this research, sponsorship is considered as the chief marketing activity, the most central one for a sportswear brands, in order to influence consumer's choice and fortify its brand image. Consistently, the role of the footballer as endorser, testimonial and brand ambassador is central.

Then... [He takes a breath] *What are the most important choices in terms of sponsorship that companies as Nike, adidas, Puma, Asics, make in order to attract and conquer consumer, nowadays?*

Keep considering sportswear brands and their relationship with consumer- fans, what has been changed in their relationship in the last twenty years?

Kingsley Boateng: The amount of money invested and available for these investments, absolutely. Because, as time goes by, if a footballer obtains great sport results, as a consequence, figures go up considerably.

Matteo Zardini: *Why are the figures increased?*

Kingsley Boateng: Because if you do not pay me enough, there is immediately another sportswear brand that can give me that amount of money, investing on me and relying on me for my future.

Matteo Zardini: *Therefore, it is a continuous running after. Right?*

Kingsley Boateng: Yes, it is. Moreover, it has changed also the choices and the range of sponsorship. The topic now is deeper and wider. More companies, more businesses, more opportunities for footballers and many different ways to deal with footballers as well. Lots of footballers, even though they are not at the top, or at their peak... they have more than one sponsor.

Matteo Zardini: *When you are sponsored adidas, and another company comes to you... I mean not another sportswear brand, but another commodity sector I would say... Do you, as professional footballer, care about*

your personal fit and consistency between your different sponsors and between yourself and all your sponsors?

Kingsley Boateng: Good question! [He smiles] It depends on the personality and the education of the single footballer. It depends also by the money offered. Money makes the difference, nowadays. Sometimes, it is very difficult to say “no” to a brand when it offers you that amount of money... integrity and consistency are important, but money has the priority in these days!

Matteo Zardini: *When you are used as endorser by a company or even for a charity manifestation, what is the incidence and the importance of your sport performances inside the green pitch regarding this issue? At the same time, outside the pitch you are considered as polite, respectful, open minded, whereas inside the pitch you are very aggressive and combative...*

Kingsley Boateng: I believe that image outside counts equally to sport performances. All brands consider both. They have to manage my personality traits according to their needs. Of course, the better you are, the more money... Brands consider everything about you and then, they make choices for their interests, according to their perspectives and goals. Besides, it depends on what kind of brand is, what kind of prestige and image it has. Then, a car brand can be more or less suitable to my image and to my personality. It varies from footballer to footballer... from period to period. Even my image and my personality change day by day.

Matteo Zardini: *Could we say that physical aspect is very important? For example, CR7 against Franck Ribery, Beckham against Carlitos Tevez... In fact, there is an incredible difference in terms of sponsorship and visibility between who is good looking and who is not. Do you agree?*

Kingsley Boateng: Appearance... The first impression and being good looking makes the difference currently... if you are good looking, for sure, you have more business and sponsorship opportunities.

Matteo Zardini: *Is it better either an ugly, but strong footballer, or a good looking, but weak footballer?*

Kingsley Boateng: [He laughs] If I were a girl, I would say good looking and weak. If I had to aim at results, I would rather go for ugly and strong... even here then, it depends from footballer to footballer and it is based on what brands look for.

Matteo Zardini: *The beard, your hairstyle and all your physical aspect, including your style... Is there anyone who decides for you?*

Kingsley Boateng: In my case, I decide everything on my own. However, as for Luiz Nazairo Ronaldo in FIFA World Cup in 2002, it can often be that for important events or sport manifestations, the top level footballer makes an agreement with Nike for example, in order to combine football boots and his hairstyle, making the product cooler or more noticeable in one way or another. It depends of course, on the level that... the power that footballer has both inside the match and outside, when he has to deal with brands. Brands can also ask you to cut definitely your hair as I mentioned before...

Matteo Zardini: Ok thanks. Next, I consider you, professional footballer, as a brand, with your own personality and image. You are brand of yourself.

When footballer's brand personality and image differs and is different to the sportswear brand image, how can adidas take benefit from? For example, according to what you have just said before, your teammate is slow, but he is Nike. Another one is really disrespectful, but he uses adidas...

Kingsley Boateng: In football, overall, it depends on gained results. I can say that footballer is not powerful and explosive, but he scores a lot. Nike accepts it of course! Then, we come back to the importance of results and sport performance in general. If you play well, newspapers and magazines talk good about you and this is very important for the brand, in particular adidas or Nike or whatever, since you wear and use them. Everything is relative anyway...

Matteo Zardini: Let's take in consideration the launch of football boots, no matter if it is a new pair or a limited edition. *In your opinion, as footballer and as previous child and dream chaser, what are the more important footballer's characteristics from customer- fan perspective in this marketing situation?*

Kingsley Boateng: I would say that design of the product comes first, above all. If a football boot is shit, nobody wants it and endorser is not relevant. After, we can consider the footballer. When you get in the shop or you are just seeing them on the website... the shape and the colours: these are the most important features. In fact, now football boots are more brilliant, more colourful... more attention- grabbing compared to the past.

Matteo Zardini: *What about the football endorser instead? What are his characteristics in order to make this launch successful?*

Kingsley Boateng: I believe that ball- control and speed are the two most significant characteristics inside the match. I am not talking about his physical aspect and image outside in this case, sorry...

Matteo Zardini: No problem. Every pair of shoes is associated and given to a consistent football player. For instance, Andre Pirlo with Nike Tiempo and Cristiano Ronaldo with Mercurial. Tiempo are for calm, wise and skilled footballers who usually play in the middle.

Every pair of shoes has a personality. Every footballer and every sportswear brand have it, at the same time. Is the company that decides the pair of shoes for the professional footballer or is the professional footballer that ask that pair?

Kingsley Boateng: The professional footballer asks that precise pair of shoes just if he has the power and the position for doing that. Instead, usually, it is the brand that decides for the footballer. In fact, adidas makes a section just for offensive players, another one for midfielders, another one for only defenders and, lastly, goalkeepers. These last are the least important. They never score.

[He takes a breath and then he restarts talking on his own] On average, Nike gives Vapor to strikers because they are those who make goals and usually they are fast. As you can see, there is always a search for match up and consistency.

Matteo Zardini: *What is your football shoes model now?*

Kingsley Boateng: I change football shoes every two weeks, Matteo [He laughs]. adidas decides for me and I just have to pick them up when they arrive. Anyway, now I wear adidas Ace 16. It is the latest one.

Matteo Zardini: *Do you recognize yourself in the football shoes you wear?*

Kingsley Boateng: Ehm... [He takes a long breath] yes, overall I would say yes. I recognize myself with them. Why? Because, although colour and type change very often, more or less the essence is always the same. I mean, I started using adidas when I was around 15. I always use models and versions that are more or less very close to the previous ones.

At the beginning, when I had to choose between Nike and adidas, I chose adidas and models are just changing partially, gradually.

Matteo Zardini: *Does the fact that you have chosen adidas rather than Nike years ago depend on that you were playing for AC Milan?*

Kingsley Boateng: No... No... They asked me whether I wanted Nike or adidas and I immediately picked adidas ones up. I am closer to adidas; my personality is more adidas than Nike.

Moreover, when I was younger I was crazy also for Zinedine Zidane. He was and he is still adidas. His way of playing and dribbling impressed me. I think I was influenced by him in choosing adidas...

Matteo Zardini: *Since you have adidas as your personal technical sponsor, whereas Nike is the technical sponsor of your football club, are there some pressures from Nike to you or to the club in order to make you change sportswear brand? How is the situation? Is there anyone who influences you now?*

Kingsley Boateng: Nobody influences me for changing sponsor and things like these. Perhaps, if you are playing very well, Nike eventually, since it is sponsoring Bari, can first ask to Bari to talk to me at the end of the season. We can say that maybe they have a sort of priority, nothing else.

Matteo Zardini: *When you were a child, who was the most influential person for your football shoes preferences and choices?*

Kingsley Boateng: At that period, my teammates! We used to talk a lot about football boots in the dressing room and even in our leisure time... and you know... in order to be cool or accepted in a group, you have to follow some implicit rules and dynamics.

Football shoes within a football team are very important. They let you express who and how you are. I was influenced by what other people thought about it and I wanted to be as cool as them. I desired to be one of them, sharing the same, I would say... now I am older instead... [He smiles]

Matteo Zardini: *And now who does influence you?*

Kingsley Boateng: Now... me! [He laughs a bit] Because I am older and I am under adidas in any case. If I did not have any other brand, I would be influenced by more expert colleagues and by the strongest footballers in the world... maybe.

Matteo Zardini: Ok thanks. *Let's now discern the bad boy to the serious and fully professional footballer. For example, night life, tattoos, fast and expensive cars on one side; charity, humility and so on, on the other side. In your opinion, who has more advantages in terms of sponsorship? Who is more well- paid? The first or the second one?*

Kingsley Boateng: I still think, as before, that what you did and do inside the green field counts more. It is the starting point.

Then, you can talk about teenager's imitation of a bad boy outside the game. It is secondary and comes after. Probably, teenager likes more the footballer with tattoos and beautiful women. Therefore, bad boys are more followed. But not more important or more paid. Sportswear brands are not stupid.

Matteo Zardini: *On this purpose, thanks to your personal and family history, you are very close and active in anti- racism campaigns and charity initiatives. Did and do this influence your position in relation to adidas and other sponsors? Do they care about these your initiatives and your origins?*

Kingsley Boateng: No. adidas never talked to me about it. They never pushed me in any direction. Neither AC Milan. Nobody. It all depends on myself, my willing. It can happen that a person in the football environment suggests me something, in order to help me and address me. Nothing else.

Matteo Zardini: Ok thanks for your transparency and sincerity. I have really appreciated your point of view and ideas throughout the interview. I do wish you the best, inside and outside the green pitch. You deserve it.

Kingsley Boateng: I liked this interview and time passed very fast during that! Thanks to you, Matteo. Have a nice day and good luck with your thesis.

Appendix 21 – Interview 3: Mr. Tommaso Mattei

Matteo Zardini: Sportswear brands such as Nike, adidas, Puma, Asics, are now evaluating and then deciding which footballer select as testimonial, endorser and brand ambassador for their marketing activities. The context here is and will be for the entire interview, as follows: the western Europe; the four main national men's championships, in the third millennium.

From a sportswear brand's perspective, what is the importance and the weight of footballer's sport performances compared to his figure and image outside the green field? What is more important? Inside or outside the green field? Why?

Let's consider the footballer during his 90 minutes and then, compare his private and weekly life, outside the game.

T. Mattei: On the whole, I would take into account and start from data and trends that the company I am working for, Repucom, gave you three weeks ago, regarding European kit supplier and football jersey businesses, their trends and figures.

Then, Repucom developed an algorithm and next, "DBi" as index in order to assess and structure the commercial impact of a top level footballer.

Regarding DBi, it is composed by different components and sub- indexes. However, answering to your question, sport performance, the one inside the green field, is the first impression and starting point for a football endorser's evaluation.

You are a footballer: the first reason why you are in the magazines is thanks to your sport performance. Then, notoriety is a crucial factor for having a commercial potentiality and depends on sport performance as well. Repucom is focused on 7/8 qualitative main variables in order to assess the commercial value and potential of an athlete. Notoriety means the 60% of the overall evaluation. Therefore, we can link the incidence of sport performance to notoriety.

All the other qualitative variables contribute to personal branding and personal brand image of the football player. These regard what he is and what he does outside the field, during the week. This gives a more complicated and deep image of the footballer. Therefore, it is more difficult to link it nowadays, with consistency and fit, to a sportswear brand image. Most likely, these components tend to mainly influence what he did or does negatively.

I can sum up by saying that sport performance is the first impression, what happens outside can confirm it or not.

Matteo Zardini: Ok, thanks! *Is there a proportion and percentage regarding sport performance? Or does it depend from football player to football player?*

T. Mattei: It depends from player to player, yes. However, what Repucom does is trying to assess and give precise percentages and weights to every factors and components.

We have to go and deal with adidas and many other companies: they need data, always.

Concerning the weight of sport performance, I would state 60- 70%. Outside, instead, 30- 40%. [He takes a break for thinking silently] No... wait... let's make it 65% and 35% then! [He smiles]

Matteo Zardini: Ok perfect, thanks so much. *What are footballer's impactful and efficient characteristics, first inside, then outside the green pitch, that make a footballer a better endorser? What is their ratio and relationship?*

T. Mattei: Here, it depends on brand positioning and product positioning. Different players have different characteristics and satisfy different needs, in line with different a positioning.

A more skilled player, like Iniesta, is totally different to the power of Ibrahimović. And the power of Zlatan is also different to Cristiano Ronaldo's power. Same concept, seen by different angles, according to positioning and marketing objectives.

To shed light on, Nike highlighted the power of Zlatan together with his ball control and technique. In fact, Nike wanted to do something precise with and through Ibrahimović.

There is no unique answer. It depends by case. I think that every single brand looks for the most consistent player in line with their brand image, personality and goals. Both inside and outside the pitch.

Once they have selected the goals, they look for the endorser. Inside and outside the pitch, percentages vary from case to case. Starting from sport performance, they consider the "outside" component. Deepening what is assessed outside, appeal, trustworthy, charisma, ... these are key components. And all companies take into strong account these qualitative factors.

Overall, they consider very important the emotional and communicative potential of the footballer.

Being irreverent and being able to risk everything is a marketing campaign: then, the sportswear brand wants players that have this attitude and behaviour first, ...

Matteo Zardini: *Is it a coincidence, in your opinion, that adidas has fired Kakà and then hired Pogba? Just when they stopped using "Impossible is nothing" in order to leave space to "Boss everyone" ...*

Can you comment this episode and decision? What do you think and why?

T. Mattei: In general, we should say that there is something more to consider: contracts and their variables and characteristics. These all influence the start and the end of every deal. Money is crucial.

Successively, in terms of constraints of choices, Kakà is not at his peak anymore, in contrast with Pogba.

Paul Pogba fits with the claim and the new decisions and directions taken by adidas. Of course, behind a claim and a marketing campaign, there are huge investments and football player must be consistent with.

I would say, first the footballer, then, the claim. But the claim itself is at company level and is supported by the football player as endorser and testimonial.

Matteo Zardini: *From France '98, the end of the '90s until now: what has been changed in the evaluation and assessment of football player's image?*

From company's perspective, please, and how the consumer is influenced by footballer's image... What do you think about these issues? Can you comment these correlations?

T. Mattei: I believe that until the end of the '90s, the assessment process was shorter. Sportswear brands were more focused on sport performances. Why? Because there were less chances to interact with footballers. Of course, digitalization, social media and all these and other touchpoints developed in the last fifteen years changed the relationship between company, club, athlete and finally, consumer.

Social media are a very big and powerful vehicle, but they have to be managed carefully.

Matteo Zardini: *What does consumer- fan look for more now, compared to twenty years ago, related to football player as endorser? Are values, features and associations always the same? Please, try to discern inside and outside the pitch, as usual... What is the main change between inside and outside the green pitch?*

T. Mattei: In the past, football player was somebody to take inspiration and inspire to. An idol I would say. And it was more based on the beautiful gesture, the great shoot and so on.

On the contrary, now, sportswear brands are focused on football endorser's media impact and presence, his attitude and skill to create and improve engagement with consumers and fans.

For instance, social networks: creating dialogue and interactions with people is crucial for sportswear brands. Moreover, now companies are more focuses on teenagers, since they are more open and able to interact and be influences by.

However, we moved from inspiration to willingness to challenge and call- out the same footballers, with less respect and more irreverence.

Therefore, adidas now changed campaigns: they are more aggressive, more challenge- oriented.

Matteo Zardini: *Are these new decisions causes or consequences? Who did push for this change? The consumer or the company?*

T. Mattei: I consider that it is more adidas' initiative. However, later, Nike has done better. adidas was the first one who invested on social media and all those channels, both with football clubs and with through its own profiles.

Matteo Zardini: *Concerning this issue, if any, what is the involvement, the incidence, the participation, of a sportswear brand, in football market decision? Footballers and their transfers ...*

To clarify, 70% of respondents to Radio Catalunya's survey, said that they identify Messi with Nike and not with adidas. Therefore, adidas is trying to move Messi to another club, clearly an adidas one.

T. Mattei: I think that what sportswear brands can do in this market landscape is limited and less influential than expected. There are many actors involved, chairman, manager, player, agent and many others more.

I would say that adidas may use better their football endorsers, in particular Messi.

Matteo Zardini: *Do you think that Messi's big tattoo in his arm is a personal choice? What about adidas behind this new decision?*

T. Mattei: I only think it is a personal choice... a horrible one anyway [He laughs].

We do not have concrete examples of sportswear brands able to get in the footballer's private life and change in that way his physical aspect.

Matteo Zardini: *from France '98 ahead, taking into account Nike first, and then, adidas... Who have been their most important and relevant football endorsers?*

Of course, what is relevant is their influence on consumer's choice and preference as well as sportswear's brand image.

T. Mattei: I would say that Nike did something very influential and effective with the marketing campaign "Dare to Zlatan" with Ibrahimović. Although he is not able to finally win the Champions League, he is able to communicate incredibly, with his behaviours and attitude. He can combine geniality, charisma and technique in a unique and positive way. The campaign influenced people through emotions, influencing them to do something different, strong, irreverent. At the same time, merchandising and online initiatives were all correlated and addressed towards the same objectives.

Ibrahimović, recently, got the most efficient impact and outcomes, according to our indexed results. Just to add, his biography was published in line with Nike's campaign, creating a mutual support and fortifying their impact on consumers' preference and choice.

And even here, football performance is the starting point. Then, what is added is the image, the personality and what Zlatan is able to communicate.

Concerning adidas, instead, I believe that Ricardo Kakà has been the greatest player, especially when he won the Ballon d'Or and then he moved to Real Madrid.

If I had to compare now with the past, I would firstly say that now there are different channels and vehicles. In fact, adidas is changing gradually.

Nike remains the leader in terms of communication. The American leader is always focused on the single individual and aims at the single consumer. Instead, adidas' choices are more integrated and corporate-oriented, I would say.

Matteo Zardini: *Brand association... do you academically know what it is?*

T. Mattei: Yes, I know it.

Matteo Zardini: Ok, well. *Then, adidas and Nike stimulate these brand associations in consumer-fan's mind. How? What do you think about it?*

T. Mattei: What is crucial nowadays is the story behind all actors involved: the history and the patch of the company, the football club, the football player. Who they are, who they were and who they will be is incredibly communicative and powerful. All these allow to better influence and persuade the consumers, creating a common line to walk on, where they can better express themselves. Personification is a chief concept here.

Storytelling is able to fortify the figure of the footballer, giving and communicating him the values of the underlying sportswear brand. As in the case of Zlatan before mentioned.

Matteo Zardini: Ok, thanks so much. Then, now there is an old scale. *I would like to know how you can distribute the weight, in both sides, of the relationship between sportswear brand and consumer-fan. Who is more or less important now? Who has gained more importance now...*

T. Mattei: The objective is always the same: revenues and selling. However, all sportswear brands extended their ranges and lines of products, going beyond the single sport activity. This aspect is influenced by new consumer's needs and wants, being closer to fashion industry.

Let me tell you one thing more... adidas now makes market researches in several ways. Nowadays, however, they are more focused on the importance of brand image, even in their survey, since consumer is crucial and adidas wants to embrace all people in an integrate way, through co-creation with the consumers and enhancing the dialogue with them. In fact, they can create and improve the offering...

Matteo Zardini: The analysed context is always the same: current western European men's football and its main four nations. Throughout this research, sponsorship is considered as the chief marketing activity, the most central one for a sportswear brands, in order to influence consumer's choice and fortify its brand image. Consistently, the role of the footballer as endorser, testimonial and brand ambassador is central.

So, the question now is... [He takes a breath] *What are the most important choices in terms of sponsorship that sportswear brands make in order to attract and get consumer, currently? What are the changes compared to twenty years ago? Any difference? What do you think about it? Feel free to explain and deep all you want...*

T. Mattei: The company's approach to sponsorship is always the same. Engagement, reachability and spread potentiality are crucial in these evaluations. Brand image to communicate is the protagonist, since the centrality of brand associations and the importance of consistency along all players involved in the process. How to activate the sponsorship is the main difference. Particular mention is addressed then towards storytelling, which is more than a simple activation technique and tool. Sportswear brands such as Nike and adidas, but also Asics, Under Armour and so on... They realized not too many years ago that they need to create a story behind every single product, brand, endorse, campaign... The, they must adapt it to every single nation, due to cultural and social differences worldwide, where globalization is not enough to let companies homologue their content and ways of communication. This is the real challenge! And even here, a footballer can have more impact in one country rather than another... Moreover, one footballer is less skilled, but more media, then he is more suitable for that sponsorship, in that country and/ or in that moment. Doing this, the consumer and the follower is more participant, more active, more involved and all this enhance identification and personification through and to the brand as well as the endorser.

Additionally, adidas aimed for first at team sponsorship, for instance Real Madrid and AC Milan as key teams. There the brand gained a competitive advantage. However, then Nike reached adidas and performed better.

What is relevant here, is the cultural and social attitude and mentality behind the two companies: Nike is American and adidas is German. Americans know best how to make a show, to communicate and how to celebrate an event. American is individualistic. Germans have other skills in contrast: making system and organization.

Probably, Nike is performing better now in line with what people need and want: individuality, risk, irreverence. Moreover, people tend to recall and recognize easier and better Nike's campaigns rather than adidas' ones.

Matteo Zardini: *What is the main prerequisite first for Nike, then for adidas, in selecting a football endorser? What are their main changes between the end of the nineties and now? What are their main changes in terms of sponsorship in the last three decades?*

T. Mattei: It can be or not. We have never received these feedbacks in terms on selection, including both Nike and adidas. Neither Italy nor other countries.

What counts more is the competitive strategy: they do not want to take a too extreme position, since they do not want to assume too deep risks that can be a competitor's advantage.

Matteo Zardini: *Could we say that it is better to have twenty- two on average adidas' players rather than only one adidas' player who is instead, the excellent one?*

T. Mattei: adidas, in line with his corporate- way- of- doing, is opener to this choice, rather than Nike. In fact, as already said, Nike is more individual- oriented as his own brand personality. And consumers recognize it, in both cases.

Matteo Zardini: *Then, Cristiano Ronaldo is good looking, he is cool and stylish outside the pitch. Can we say that physical attraction counts more than technical skills and sport performances? As a consequence, Beckham and CR7 are better than Franck Ribery and Carlitos Tevez. Do you agree?*

T. Mattei: It is very important, but not the only one necessary and the unique one. It depends on goals and target groups. Especially for Nike and adidas, that have several segments and many footballers, they can manage them, according to objectives and what they want to express and let people perceive.

Matteo Zardini: Footballer often is a brand himself. However, his brand personality differs from brand image and vision- mission- values of the company. *How Nike and adidas as market leader can take advantage from this issue in the sponsorship activities?*

T. Mattei: This is a very difficult question and case. It regards crisis management and there are departments dedicated to it in all multinational companies. What I can say is that for sure Puma is not happy about Balotelli's sport performances. They could accept being a bad boy by Balotelli, but only if he was good inside the pitch. Now, I do not think Puma will renew the contract with Balotelli: he is bad inside and outside the green field. Besides, he is well- paid [He smiles].

On the whole, anyway, companies take precautions about negative episodes with their endorsers. All contracts are made including and regulating these issues.

Matteo Zardini: No matter if the product is totally new or it is just a new version or a limited edition of a previous model. *Concerning the launch of a pair of football shoes, what is the main target for adidas and Nike? Do they base their decision more on one market segment? Does this decision exist? Secondly, what are the best footballer's features, inside and outside the green field, in this marketing situation?*

T. Mattei: As before mentioned, teenagers: easier to reach and persuade. More involved in football and footballers. Again, personification and self- extension are important.

However, in football boots launch, the choice of the endorser is more important and difficult: companies cannot make mistake. They can repair something that lasts, not something that is unique and brief, I would say...

Companies classify products, sports, endorsers, marketing and firm's goals. There must be consistency and reciprocal support. Every campaign is different and even image and personality of all actors change over time, faster than ever. Regarding inside the field, of course, strikers and goal- makers are better than defensive and goalkeepers: the goal is the most important and viewed moment in the entire match. A goal can change consumer- fan's life as well as the history of a club and the career of a football player. Instead, who is less spectacular and who break the offensive initiatives has less attraction and appeal. It is subjective, but there is extensively an agreement on that.

At the same time, who runs a lot, can be better than a striker for other segments of the company, for example running and/ or leisure time. Do not underestimate this!

However, concerning what happens outside, charisma, appeal, communication and what I have already said before is relevant even here, in this case. However, since it is a product considered as in- pitch, I would like to give more importance to what regards inside the game, not outside...

Matteo Zardini: Ok! thanks for this final clarification! *Compared to twenty years ago, what are the changes in terms of product launch, from a sportswear brand's perspective?*

T. Mattei: When I was younger... [He stops and thinks] I cannot remember precisely football claims. I can remember some Nike's spots. But nothing precisely. Of course, there are exceptions, but overall it is very difficult to remember something in detail. Especially in terms of football boots launch.

Previously, advertising was focused more on the product itself, which was the protagonist of the ad.

Now, companies suggest you how to use it and how to personify it: user and usage- imagery are emphasised. Secondly, in these days, hashtags, claims, social media, many and deeper touchpoints: all these are related strategically and reciprocally. They lead to a more impactful, efficient, easier- to- remember initiative, campaign or claim. Also because all of these ask and receive consumer's help and participation. It allows to enlarge reachability and effectiveness.

Matteo Zardini: The celebrity's behaviour, values and image may be compatible and consistent with the image desired for the advertised kit supplier's brand. *Is there a basis or a prerequisite that adidas or Nike hold in order to select and implement a football endorser according to this match- up need?*

T. Mattei: They carried out several researches, based on representative and then not- representative samples. The last one is based on their digital platforms and sides, for example. Then, the followers and the overall engagement. First, they apply demographics, then behavioural segmentations. We could say that the "match- up" is a filter or a way to assess them throughout sportswear companies' data collection and analysis.

Matteo Zardini: Ok. You have been very exhaustive, clear and kind. Thanks a lot for the time dedicated to me and the knowledge you shared. I do not have questions anymore. Thanks again.

T. Mattei: Thanks to you, Matteo. You asked me very intriguing questions! Good luck with your research and your master's thesis! Keep in touch!

Appendix 22 – Interview 4: Mr. Andreas Gellner

Matteo Zardini: Sportswear brands such as Nike, adidas, Puma, Asics, are now evaluating and then deciding which footballer select as testimonial, endorser and brand ambassador for their marketing activities. The context here is and will be for the entire interview, as follows: the western Europe; the four main national men's championships, in the third millennium.

From a sportswear brand's perspective, what is the importance and the weight of footballer's sport performances compared to his figure and image outside the green field? What is more important? Inside or outside the green field? Why?

Let's consider the footballer during his 90 minutes and then, compare his private and weekly life, outside the game.

A. Gellner: Today, I believe that the performance on the field is still the key and starting point. Without performance there is simply no interest. However, while decades ago the private life was kept aside, today it is very much a part of the imagination of the fans. Therefore, there has to be a good balance in on- field performance as well as off- pitch interest and lifestyle.

Matteo Zardini: Ok thanks so much for this good start! Then... *From sportswear brand's perspective, in order to guide and influence consumer's preferences and choices, is the image inside the green field more important than the image outside? During the ninety minutes or not?*

A. Gellner: We sell both performance as well as leisure products. For the first, there is a clear purchase intent for young players depending on what their preferred star is playing on field. However, there is also quite some influence on the fans of what their followed player is doing and wearing during his leisure time. Important is, and that is what makes a player very powerful as a marketer, if his on- field character is in sync with his off- field values and behaviours.

Matteo Zardini: *Which are the technical- physical characteristics that make a footballer a better endorser for a sportswear brand, in their marketing activities?*

A. Gellner: Differentiation, unique skills, unexpected games, overall looks, ability to communicate ...

Matteo Zardini: *Which are, instead, the characteristics, traits and features outside the green field that allow a footballer to be considered as a better endorser for sportswear brand's marketing activities?*

A. Gellner: Variety of interests, good social behaviour, communication skills, visibility, ...

Matteo Zardini: *With the third millennium, from the end of the '90s to 2016, what are the biggest changes regarding the evaluation of footballer's image? What's the most important element and issue now? Why? What have been the main causes?*

A. Gellner: I would say directly social life! it has become more important as a holistic package as the media landscape has changed and everything is more visible, instantly...

Secondly, but not less important, the quantity and quality of social media followers: today the value of an asset is also driven by how many followers he has and to what degree he is communicating with them.

Thirdly, global appeal: today one is looking for players that have the potential to appeal to a broad audience across the continents, not only in the home country.

Matteo Zardini: *What is more and then, less important and central now compared to the '90s? Moreover, what does a consumer- fan look for and want mainly from a footballer as endorser now?*

A. Gellner: I can state that now the footballer's image and figure as a whole is more important, thanks to what I have just explained before. Very often the footballer is considered as a role model, as a projection space for your own desires and dreams.

Matteo Zardini: *concerning Nike, which is the most relevant and efficient footballer as endorser in the last twenty years for Nike? And could you please tell me why?*

A. Gellner: Ronaldo Luís Nazário de Lima, because of his skills, the teams he played in club football in Europe and the universal appeal of the Brazilian national team.

Matteo Zardini: *Who is now the most relevant and efficient? Why?*

A. Gellner: Ronaldo (from Portugal), because of his outstanding skills, the top team he plays, the good looks and the very flamboyant personal life as well. They all contribute to his image and personality worldwide.

Matteo Zardini: *What is the difference between others?*

A. Gellner: The overall package and the consistency over many years.

Matteo Zardini: *Why? What is the importance of his image outside the game?*

A. Gellner: All the mechanism around Cristiano Ronaldo created great interest and dreams for the young fans, efficiently.

Matteo Zardini: *What is the importance of his image inside the green pitch, instead?*

A. Gellner: Matteo, you might keep in mind that footballers are powerful if both is in sync regarding them and I personally agree with this sentence that I have already highlighted above.

Matteo Zardini: Let's now talk a bit about adidas... *Which is the most relevant and efficient football endorser in the last twenty years for adidas? Why?*

A. Gellner: Zinedine Zidane might be a good call for this question. [He took a breath] Indeed, he was and elegant footballer, with great skills and personality, playing at the highest level and winning to FIFA World Cup in '98 with France.

Matteo Zardini: *Who is now the most relevant and efficient? Why?*

A. Gellner: Messi. By far the best footballer of the last eight years at least, characterized by outstanding skills and goal scoring performances, in the dream team of Barcelona. In fact, he clearly is the 4- time Golden Ball winner!

Matteo Zardini: *What is the difference between others?*

A. Gellner: He simply plays in a different class, and all other know and accept it...

Matteo Zardini: *Why? What is the importance of his image outside the game?*

A. Gellner: Lionel Messi plays a smaller role, as he keeps his life more private than others.

Matteo Zardini: *What is the importance of his image inside the green pitch, instead?*

A. Gellner: That's his real strength! [He laughs a bit]

Matteo Zardini: Nowadays, working on, insisting on, influencing and modifying brand associations in consumer- fan's mind is getting always more important, a source of potential competitive advantage and a point of differentiation. Obviously, the sportswear players are fully aware of this marketing issue.

How do sportswear brands stimulate and work on brand associations in consumer- fan's mind?

An also, could you please tell me what is the most important element to insist on, now? Which are the key aspects and considerations to influence both preferences and choices? About this, what is the leverage? Why?

A. Gellner: I believe that today the most powerful way to work and activate assets if one created 360 degrees storytelling around assets that incorporate all elements... From product, his characteristics, sports marketing activation and social media and in- store experiences. These stories need to be consistent and authentic though.

Matteo Zardini: *What is the difference between now and the '90s?*

A. Gellner: Before, it was more about a very one- dimensional building of a brand association... Only in- store or through imagery in media or only on- field. Now everything is wider, with a more holistic approach.

Matteo Zardini: *Regarding always brand associations, do sportswear brands work more on what the footballer as endorser is/ does inside the pitch or on outside the pitch?*

A. Gellner: Both, but the focus is clearly more on the in- pitch characteristics, that remain the starting point and a key issue.

Matteo Zardini: *Now I would like to deep the relationship between sportswear brand (Nike, adidas, Lotto, Puma, ...) and consumer in the last twenty years: what has been changed in the last twenty years concerning marketing activities? Is importance and role of the consumer always the same? Does he have always the same centrality? Why?*

A. Gellner: Yes, the consumer has the same centrality as before. However, the situation is evolved. In fact, today we are looking for dialogues, rather than one- side messaging. Furthermore, today the consumer has obtained totally the power to be a brand advocate, more than ever I would say.

Matteo Zardini: The analysed context is always the same: current western European men's football and its main four nations. Throughout this research, sponsorship is considered as the chief marketing activity, the most central one for a sportswear brands, in order to influence consumer's choice and fortify its brand image. Consistently, the role of the footballer as endorser, testimonial and brand ambassador is central.

Then... [He takes a breath] *What are the most important choices in terms of sponsorship that companies as Nike, adidas, Puma, Asics, make in order to attract and conquer consumer, nowadays?*

A. Gellner: Personality, skills, playing position and style, origin, global appeal

Matteo Zardini: *Why? What is the difference with the '90s?*

A. Gellner: The club and the playing skills were by far the two most important criteria

Matteo Zardini: *What did bring to this changes?*

A. Gellner: The consumer that is expecting more from their idols together with a proliferation of content, that forces brands to differentiate themselves...

Matteo Zardini: *Nike vs adidas: do they aim the same objectives within the sponsorship field? Where and how do they differentiate each other?*

A. Gellner: I believe that we, as adidas, tend to overlap largely in our strategy, but we also tend to choose players with slightly different criteria, with the result of being more coherent than Nike.

Matteo Zardini: Physical attraction is more important than technical skills and sport performances. As a consequence, David Beckham and CR7 are better endorser than Franck Ribery and Carlitos Tevez. *Do you agree? Why?*

A. Gellner: I don't agree! In fact, as already mentioned before, it all starts with the footballer's performance, and then being good looking can be an added strength. Anyway, it is definitely a great advantage... Yes... to be honest.

Matteo Zardini: *In which situations and occasions, according to which objectives, might adidas select a football player as Franck Ribery rather than a "good looking" one? Why?*

A. Gellner: Again, the looks are not the starting point of any evaluation. So if the other criteria are matching we sign, disregards of the looks... Have you understood Matteo? [He laughs slightly]

Matteo Zardini: Yes, Mr. Gellner... I got it! [He smiles] Moving ahead ... The top level footballer, in these days, is a brand on his own. Therefore, he has his own brand image, brand personality and consumers have their brand associations regarding him.

However, often it happens that footballer's brand personality and brand images differ from the sponsoring sportswear's brand image, vision- mission- values.

For instance, a football player that is disrespectful, not- friendly, not well- skilled, with a no sober look, wears football boots that, instead, would have communicated and expressed the opposite (Copa Mundial for example, since they have their unique history and positive values). The damage can be assessed in terms of lack of fit, inconsistency, incongruence, since the consumer does not recognize image and valued of the sportswear brands and of the product, due to the same footballer as chosen endorser.

How could sportswear brands take benefit from this discrepancy of personality, image and values in their sponsorship activities?

A. Gellner: Sportswear brands such as Nike and adidas as in this case try to avoid upfront signing a player that doesn't match their values... Additionally, for unethical behaviour which is harmful for the brand's image there are clauses in contract that allow to terminate the collaboration.

Matteo Zardini: *What are the best marketing activities and choices that are able to reduce or exploit these controversial situations?*

A. Gellner: You can incorporate some of these elements in a respectful way in your communication to also take the momentum out. For example, let's take the striker Luiz Suarez and adidas. In this case, a joint marketing positioning and campaign can mitigate and correct image of a player after an incident...

Matteo Zardini: Ok thanks so much for your perspective. Now, there is the last section of the interview. Starting from the latest question above, when a footballer is different, not suitable to image, values, personality of both the sportswear brand (adidas or Nike for instance) and its products (Predator o Copa Mundial; Tiempo o Mercurial), *how can, if possible, sportswear brands take advantages from this discordance in terms of personality, image and values in their football shoes- product launch?*
Are there some advantages and/ or underlying opportunities?

A. Gellner: I would say that this is not advisable at all and it might be avoided anyway...

Matteo Zardini: Football boots, no matter if they are a new model, a new version, a limited or special edition. *Which is the market segment as benchmark and/ or main target in sportswear brands' marketing decisions and goals?*
Is there any segment that hold more importance and relevance?

A. Gellner: Every brand has a different core target definition, but large companies look for the trend setting teenager because they are more easily influenced and driven towards the directions we want... And the future brand loyalty starts from them... Which is very important as I hope you already know...? [He smiles] for the entire company.

Matteo Zardini: Thanks so much! Then... *Do sportswear brands want to highlight more footballer's image inside or outside the green field in these analysed marketing situations and activities?*

A. Gellner: Here footballer's characteristics inside the green field are more influential than those outside I would state... Yes...

Matteo Zardini: *What are the most important and followed characteristics for a footballer inside the green field to use for football boots launch?*

A. Gellner: Beyond the striker overall, I would choose the footballer's playing style that matches the function of the product, which comes first, since consistency is very important. In fact, a footballer is used also for endorsing products that are not exclusively football related... For instance, running and leisure time... Casual... Then, brands go beyond and consider other things and features within the footballer...

Matteo Zardini: *Is the footballer who asks for using that model of shoes?*

A. Gellner: Sometimes yes, but not very often I would say!

Matteo Zardini: *Is the company that decides the type of football boots for the footballer?*

A. Gellner: Most of times, yes! Absolutely... Seldom, the footballer asks for a certain pair of boots and the company agrees. In that case, it might be an influential and powerful footballer and there must be a common agreement.

Matteo Zardini: *Are there always the same evaluations carried out, compared to the '90s, in terms of endorser in this marketing situation?*

A. Gellner: The methodology at one point of time is the reference point. Yet, of course, it is adapted over time, since image, personalities and everything around change over time. Their shades and their mutations are crucial and must be monitored carefully. By this I involve all the actors: brand, product, endorser and customer... of course... Therefore, consistency must be addressed over the different sport seasons.

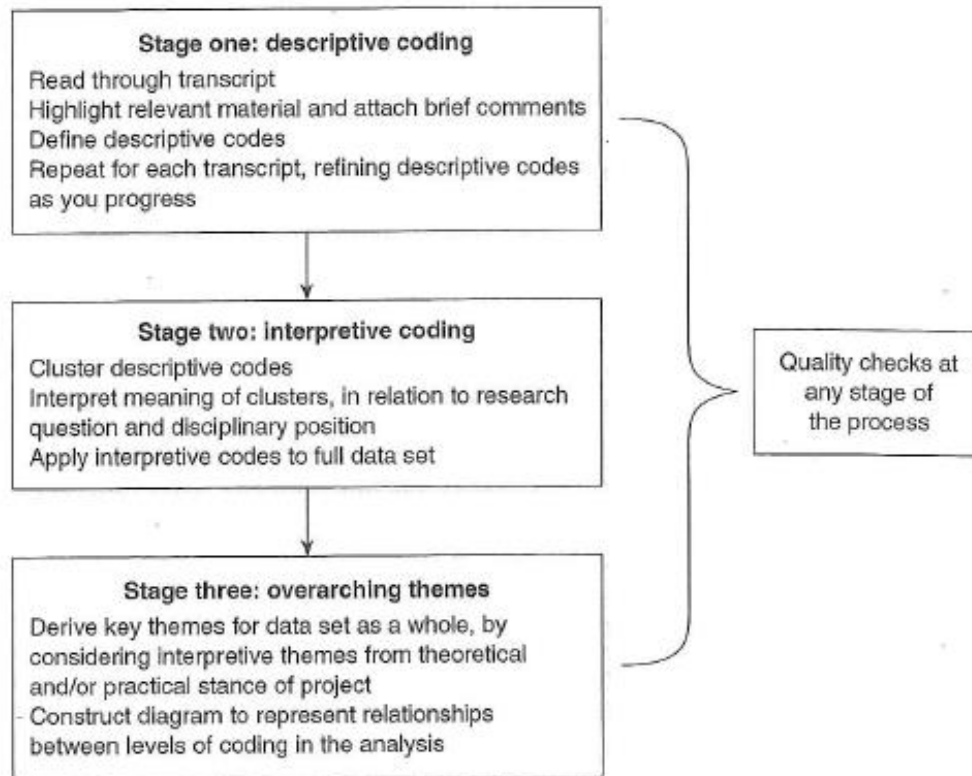
Matteo Zardini: The interview is finished. Thanks so much Mr. Gellner for everything you did for me. I have really appreciated your information and your ideas regarding my questions and my master's thesis. Thanks again.

A. Gellner: Thanks to you Matteo! Good luck with your personal goals. To clarify, I gave all the answers from my personal point of view, not as adidas' manager, ok?

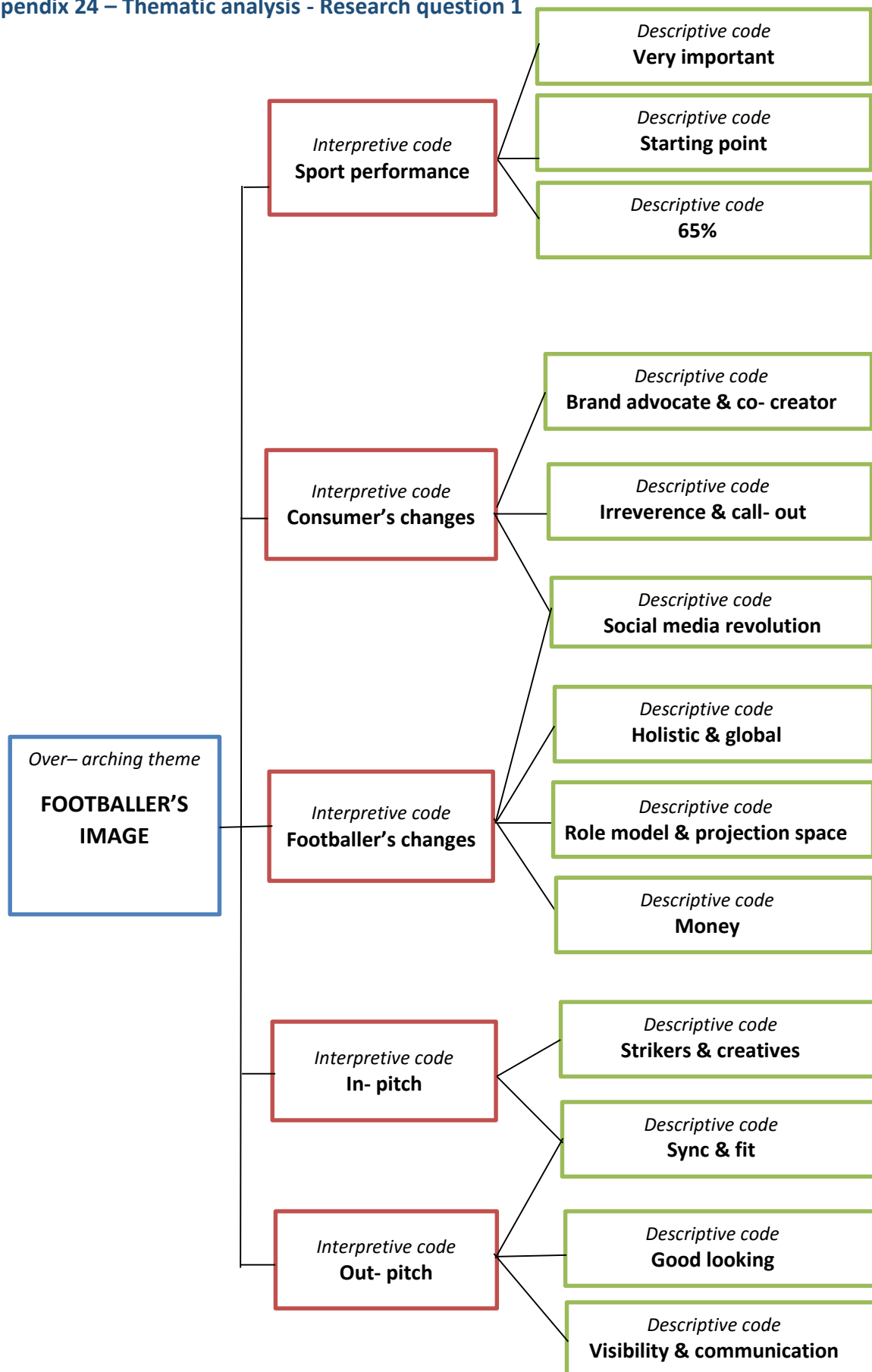
Matteo Zardini: No problem at all, thanks again! Have a nice day!

Appendix 23 - The multi- stage process of the thematic analysis

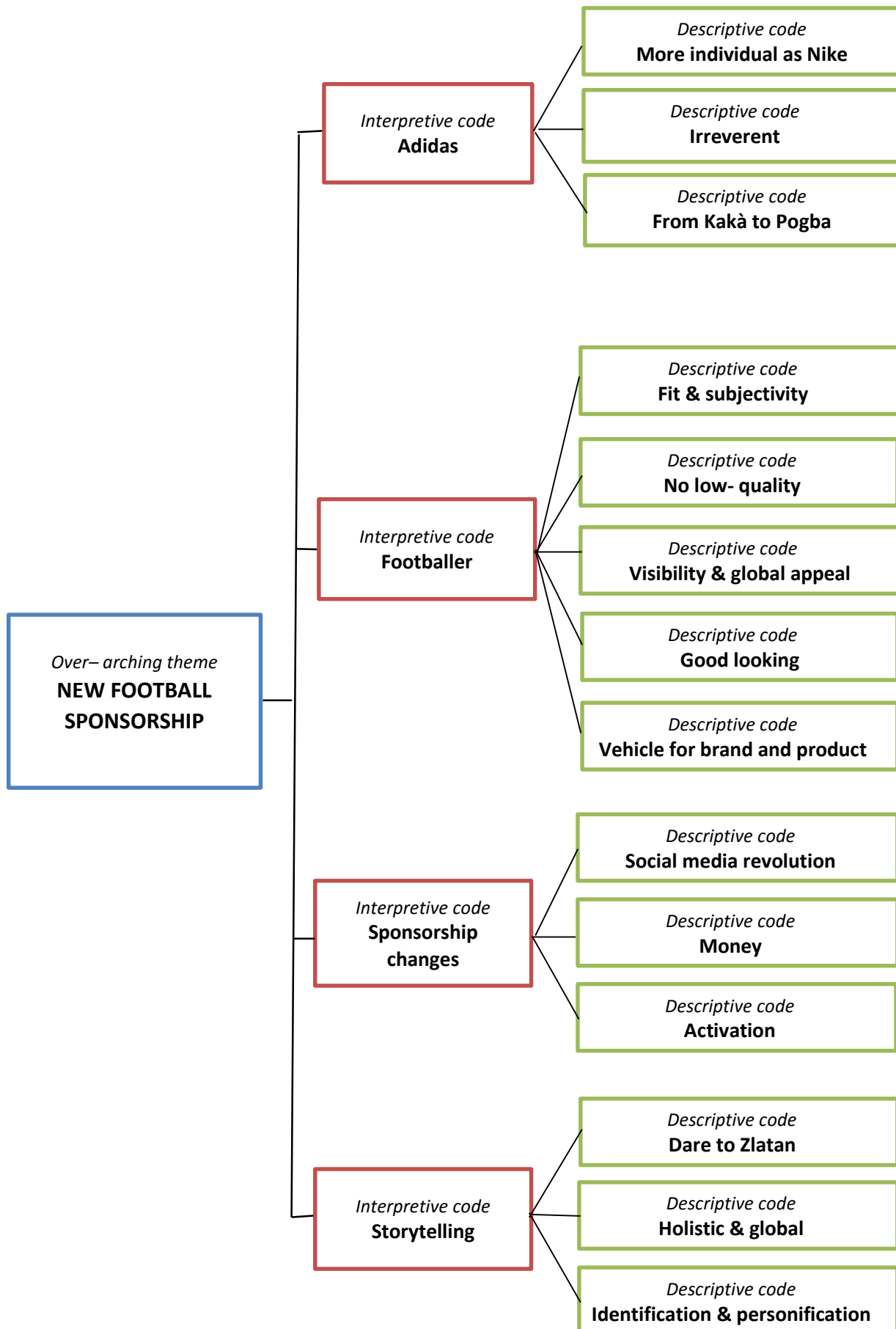
King and Horrocks (2010)



Appendix 24 – Thematic analysis - Research question 1



Appendix 25 – Thematic analysis - Research question 2



Appendix 26 – Thematic analysis - Research question 3

