Brand personality of sports brands on Instagram and TikTok

A mixed-method approach examining the relationship between brand personality on social media and the consumer perception

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ABSTRACT

By presenting a certain brand personality, brands attempt to attract their intended audience. However, this intended brand personality can differ from the way in which consumers perceive the brand. Therefore, the present study aims to study to what extent a brand's intended brand personality is in line with their perceived brand personality, according to consumers. By focusing on two sports brands that have been acknowledged for their big social media presence, the NBA and NFL, this research employed the Brand Personality Framework developed by Aaker (1997) to compare how brands present themselves on their social media channels to the consumer perception of their brand personality. To answer the main research question, three sub-questions were developed. The first sub-question dealt with how the sports brands presented themselves on their Instagram and TikTok channels in terms of brand personality and was answered through a thematic analysis. In addition, the second sub-question aimed to measure the perceived brand personality of the sports brands, according to consumers. This sub-question employed a survey to measure the concept, in which consumers were asked about their perception of a brand's brand personality. Moreover, the third sub-question consisted of a comparative analysis of the findings obtained from the first and second sub-questions. By comparing the results of the thematic analysis and survey data, this question checked the alignment of the intended and perceived brand personality of the two sports brands. The results of this research showed a good alignment of several brand personality dimensions (Excitement and Sophistication) of Aaker's (1997) framework, while clear differences could be observed in other dimensions (Sincerity, Competence, and Ruggedness). The findings of this study have several theoretical and managerial implications. First, this research contributes to the existing literature on brand personality by comparing the intended brand personality to consumer

perception using Aaker's Brand Personality Framework. In addition, due to the lack of literature on the relationship between social media, and intended and perceived brand personality, the findings contribute to academic research on this topic. Additionally, the findings have managerial implications for brand managers in the decision-making process of communicating a brand personality on social media. Finally, this research adds to the lack of literature on the relationship between brand personality, sports brands, and social media by investigating the presence of the brand personality dimensions developed by Aaker (1997). Additionally, by measuring the fit of Aaker's Brand Personality Framework with sports brands, the present study checked whether this framework can adequately be applied to these brands.

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1.   Introduction

Social media platforms have greatly influenced the way in which humans communicate with each other (Majchrzak et al., 2013; Subramanian, 2017). This is not only the case for everyday interpersonal interactions, but certainly also for consumer-brand interactions. As Qualman (2012) describes, social media have become an important communication channel through which consumers learn about, share information on, and interact with brands. The growth of these social media platforms has led to a change in consumer behavior, where online channels are used as information portals and where the opinions and decisions of consumers are often influenced by their online interactions with friends and with brands (Chappuis et al., 2011). As a result, brands have started adapting their marketing strategies to reach these consumers on social media platforms (Chappuis et al., 2011).

The importance of reaching the right audience on social networking sites has been described by Hudson et al. (2016), who found that consumers build stronger relationships with brands when they interact with them on social media compared to when no interaction takes place. In addition, they found evidence that anthropomorphizing brands may influence consumer-brand engagement on social media (Hudson et al., 2016). This process, in which human attributes are attributed to non-human things, has been studied thoroughly in branding research (Plummer, 1985; Kim & McGill, 2011). Anthropomorphism can be related to the concept of brand equity, and, more specifically, brand personality. When brands communicate a brand personality, they focus on the human characteristics and traits that can be attributed to themselves (Aaker, 1997). Showcasing a brand personality is one of the ways in which brands can communicate with consumers on social media and has been shown to lead to brand attachment and higher visibility of the brand (Chung & Ahn, 2013; Kim & Lehto, 2013).

However, the development and implementation of a brand personality does not come without challenges. The perception of a brand's brand personality can differ between the brand itself and its consumers. To distinguish these two views, the present study refers to the way in which the brand attempts to communicate their brand personality as a brand's 'intended brand personality', while the term 'perceived brand personality' will be used to refer to the consumer perception. Aligning these two concepts can lead to positive outcomes for brands, such as more brand loyalty and market share (Malär et al., 2012).

The present study focuses on sports brands to study the relationship between intended and perceived brand personality. The sports industry consists of many sports organizations and athletes that have been employing social networking sites to communicate with their audience (Abeza, O'Reilly & Reid, 2013). Sports teams have benefited from their social media engagement and have unfolded themselves as true celebrities, much like their star athletes (Holt, 2016). Therefore, due to the rising popularity of these sports brands, they can offer interesting insights into brand personality research.

The alignment of intended and perceived brand personality will be studied through two US sports brands: NBA and NFL. These two sports brands have proven to be successful on social media platforms. In 2020, for example, Forbes reported how the NBA managed to 'crack the code' when it comes to TikTok, the current leading destination for short-form mobile videos (Badenhausen, 2020; Tidy & Galer, 2020). As Badenhausen (2020) describes, this is part of the brand strategy developed by the NBA. The presence of the brand on the social media platform may come as a surprise for some people, since the average viewer of televised NBA games is 43 years old, while the user base of TikTok consists largely of teenagers (Badenhausen, 2020; Clement, 2020). However, the NBA has managed to connect well with its target audience on the platform and has managed to reach an entirely new demographic. (Badenhausen, 2020).

In addition, with 6 million followers on the social media platform, the NFL is another sports brand hopping on the TikTok 'trend'. After signing a contract for a two-year partnership with the social media platform in 2019, the sports brand has been uploading content on the platform of TikTok regularly (Badenhausen, 2020). Similar to the NBA, the average NFL viewer is significantly older than the average user of the TikTok platform at 51 years old (RBR-TVBR, 2017). This allows the sports brand to reach a whole new audience on the social media platform.

In contrast to the relative novelty of TikTok, the platform of Instagram has been used by these brands regularly for a long time. With a user base that mainly consists of young adolescents in their twenties (Clement, 2020), Instagram also manages to reach a different audience than the televised league games of the two sports brands. However, there seem to exist other differences besides the demographical ones, such as the affordances the platform offers. TikTok offers many creative tools for users to create fun content, while Instagram seems to lack these tools (Stokel-Walker, 2020). Moreover, TikTok has been praised for its algorithm compared to older social media platforms (De Leon, 2020).

These differences between the social media platforms offer interesting research opportunities, since it can be theorized that (sports) brands will have to adapt their social media strategy to fit the interests and needs of the platform's user base. In addition, it could be expected that brands communicate a different brand personality on the two platforms to reach their intended audience. Therefore, this study aims to explore the way in which the sports brands attempt to communicate with their audience in terms of brand personality on the platforms of Instagram and TikTok. Furthermore, the present study aims to discover the way in which consumers perceive the brand personality of the sports brands NBA and NFL and to which extent it relates to the brand personality the sports brands attempt to present.

1.1 Research question(s)

The following research question has been developed for the present study: 'To what extent is the way in which sports brands communicate their brand personality on Instagram and TikTok in line with their perceived brand personality?'. To help answer the main research question, three sub-questions have been developed: (1) How do sports brands present and communicate their brand personality on Instagram and TikTok? (2) What is the perceived brand personality of sports brands according to consumers? (3) What similarities and differences exist between the intended and perceived brand personality of sports brands?

To answer the first sub-question, a qualitative content (thematic) analysis will be conducted on the two social media channels, Instagram and TikTok, of two sports brands: NFL and NBA. Furthermore, the second will be answered by data that will be collected through a survey. The third question will compare the qualitative with the quantitative data.

1.2 Scientific relevance

This study aims to contribute to academic literature in the fields of branding and social media research. Furthermore, studying the social media presence of sports brands adds to the literature of digital branding in the sports industry. In addition, the present study is academically relevant since it looks into a literature gap that exists in the relationship between intended brand personality and the consumer perception.

Some studies have investigated the way in which brands present themselves on social media platforms and how they communicate with their audience. However, there seems to be a

lack of academic studies on specific social media platforms. Existing literature on Instagram, for example, has mainly focused on the user motives and needs of individual users on the platform (Winston, 2013; Altuna, 2014; Al-Kandari et al., 2016). In addition, there is a clear lack of research on TikTok as a platform. Similarly to Instagram, academic studies tend to focus on the individual user motives instead of looking into brands (Qiyang & Jung, 2019; Omar & Dequan, 2020). Therefore, the present study will contribute to literature on this topic by investigating the way in which brands present themselves and communicate with their audience on the two social media platforms.

Similar to branding research, this study will contribute to the existing literature on sports brands. Most of the literature on this topic has focused on brand identity building in the sports industry (Richelieu, 2004; Parent & Séguin, 2008). Furthermore, while the concept of brand personality has been studied thoroughly (Braunstein & Ross, 2010; Heere, 2010), none of these studies have investigated the relationship between the brand personality of sports brands and social media. Therefore, this study will address the literature gap that exists in the research on the brand personality of sports brands.

Moreover, this research will make an academic and societal contribution to brand personality research. While the difference between the intended and perceived brand personality of brands has been researched multiple times (e.g., Heere, 2010; Kim & Lehto, 2013), this concept has not been applied to social media research successfully. With the growing importance of having a social media presence as a brand, this topic is becoming increasingly relevant. Kim and Lehto (2013) discovered that consistency in branding can help with aligning the perceptions of brand personality between the brand and consumers. In addition, Malär et al. (2012) stated that alignment between the intended and perceived brand personality can affect brand loyalty and market share. Therefore, this research will also have societal and managerial implications for brand managers.

Finally, the societal and managerial relevance of this study can be linked to branding on social media. By studying two popular social media platforms, this research investigates whether it is wise for brands to adapt their marketing strategy to a singular social media platform or whether brands should communicate one strategy on every social networking site. Since social media platforms can differ in user base and motives (Altuna, 2014; Alkandari et al., 2016), it could be theorized that brands should adapt their strategy to the social media platform they are

active on. However, there is a significant lack of research on this topic. By investigating to what extent brands employ different strategies on Instagram and TikTok, this research aims to address this research gap.

1.3 Chapter outline

In this section, the structure of this study will be elaborated upon. To investigate the research question, which aims to discover to which extent the intended and perceived brand personalities of sports brands are in line with each other, the present study will consist of five chapters. Firstly, the first chapter will introduce the topic of the present study. by providing a short background on the topic and the concepts in the study, discussing the societal and scientific relevance, and presenting the research question(s). Afterwards, the second chapter will elaborate on the existing theories and literature on the concepts of the study. This chapter will discuss the history of brand personality research, the development of a framework, and the relationship with social media and sports brands.

The third chapter will discuss the methods used to answer the research question(s). The first sub-question will be answered through a thematic analysis of the social media pages of two sports brands, while the second will be answered using survey data. Finally, the third question will compare the results of the thematic analysis and the survey. Then, the results of the analyses will be described in the fourth chapter. This chapter will also include an interpretation of the qualitative results. Lastly, the fifth and final chapter will focus on answering the main research question by drawing upon the results of the sub-questions. Additionally, this chapter will discuss the theoretical implications of these results as well as the limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the main concepts of the study will be introduced and elaborated upon. Firstly, a short overview of the existing definitions on the concept of brand personality will be provided. Afterwards, the analytical model that will be employed in the results chapter will be introduced and described in detail. Moreover, the evolution of the concept of brand personality will be described, as well as how brand personality functions when applied to social media. Finally, the way brand personality can be applied to sports brands will be described. To finish up this chapter, the researcher will address the existing research gap and how this thesis aims to fill it.

2.1 Brand personality

In the age of Web 2.0 and social media, it can be difficult for brands to stand out. The overload of information that can be found on social media makes it complicated for brands to be completely unique (Anesbury, Winchester & Kennedy, 2017). In the past, researchers have discussed how a brand can stand out from direct competitors by focusing on segmentation, targeting, and positioning (Aaker & Shansby, 1982). However, Anesbury, Winchester and Kennedy (2017) found that, on social media, brands rarely differ from their competitors in terms of brand profiles. Additionally, brand profiles tend to stay relatively stable over time. As a result, brands can lose their competitive edge by not standing out from the competition.

Therefore, brands should look for different angles at which they can differentiate themselves from their competitors. One of the ways in which this can be achieved is by creating 'intangibles' (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004). Intangibles can be used by brands to create more value for their products and services, which is also referred to as brand equity. Aaker (1996) described ten sets of brand equity measures that can create commercial value, divided into five categories: loyalty, leadership, differentiation, awareness, and market behavior. As described by Aaker (1996), brands can create emotional links to their customers and differentiate themselves through associations. This measure of brand equity, called brand personality, can serve as a basis for consumer-brand relationships (Aaker, 1996). Therefore, the development of a brand personality has become a popular practice for brands to connect with potential customers, due to this ability for brands to differentiate themselves and stand out from the rest (Chang, 2014).

The concept of brand personality has been around for a while and can be defined in different ways. One of the first studies on this topic defined brand personality as 'the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to possess various human characteristics or traits' (Alt & Griggs, 1998, p. 9). Furthermore, Aaker (1997) describes the concept as the human characteristics that can be associated with a certain brand. While the first definition focuses on the consumer perspective, the second does not specify who is associating the characteristics to a brand. However, neither of the definitions specify what these associations are based on and how they are created. A study that does address the origin of the associations is the study by Aaker and Fournier (1995), who describe brand personality as 'the specific set of meanings which describe the 'inner' characteristics of a brand'. Similar to Ailawadi and Keller's (2004) definition, the researchers indicate that consumers are the ones who construct the meaning of a brand personality. However, this definition also points out what these constructed meanings are based on. As they describe, when creating meanings, the consumer looks at behavior exhibited by a personified brand or by a brand character (Aaker & Fournier, 1995).

However, the present study makes a distinction between the brand personality as intended by the brand and perceived brand personality. The latter of the two corresponds with the way consumers perceive a brand's personality. Therefore, the definition of brand personality that best suits the present study is the one formulated by Aaker (1997, p. 347) that refers to the concept as 'the human characteristics associated with a certain brand'.

To fully grasp the concept of brand personality, it is important to differentiate between human and brand personality traits. While the two share certain aspects, they can differ in terms of formation (Aaker, 1997). As described by Aaker (1997), human personality traits are perceived through inferences based on a person's behavior, characteristics, and beliefs, while brand personality traits are perceived through any direct or indirect contact a person has with a brand (Plummer, 1985; Park, 1986). One of the best-known ways for a brand to show their brand personality is by showing a brand doing something in an advertisement, e.g. by portraying a brand as a character in a narration (Aaker & Fournier, 1995). This would be an example of indirectly showing a brand's personality, whereas a direct approach would be to show one of the people associated with the brand, such as a CEO or an endorser (Aaker, 1997).

2.2 Intended and perceived brand personality

This section will elaborate on a measurement for brand personality, developed by Heere (2010). This method distinguishes between the brand personality as described by brand managers and the brand personality according to consumers. As Heere (2010) describes, a brand can be attributed traits by consumers which mainly come from the marketing strategy developed by brand managers of a company. This is echoed by Kim and Lehto (2013), who explain that while a brand may intend to communicate a certain brand personality through its marketing strategy, consumers may perceive interpret these messages in a different way. This could lead to a contrasting perception of a brand's personality between the brand and its consumers. Therefore, it is necessary to keep this distinction in mind when we talk about brand personality.

Different terminologies exist for the two concepts. Heere (2010) speaks of the intention behind the brand personality to describe the brand manager perspective, while Kim and Lehto (2013) use the term 'projected brand personality'. Additionally, both studies refer to the consumer perspective on brand personality as the 'perceived brand personality', a term that is also used in the study of Xu et al. (2016). Moreover, Malär et al. (2012) draws on the work of Mitzberg (1978), who distinguished intended and realized marketing strategies, to describe the difference between the concepts. Therefore, this research makes a distinction between the brand personality as intended by the brand itself and the consumer perception of a brand personality.

To clearly distinguish between the two concepts, the present study employs the term 'intended brand personality' to refer to the brand personality that is designed and communicated by brand managers, while the term 'perceived brand personality' is used to refer to the consumer perception of a brand's personality. A good congruence between the intended and perceived brand personality of a brand can have positive implications As Malär et al. (2012) describes, a good fit between the two can lead to a better performance of the brand in terms of brand loyalty and market share. In addition, Kim and Lehto (2013) explain how a good and consistent brand personality communicated by a brand through marketing strategies can align the intended and perceived brand personality.

2.3 The development of a Brand Personality Framework

To develop a measure for the concept of brand personality, Aaker and Fournier (1995) developed a brand personality inventory (BPI). This inventory used psychology and marketing

literature to discover personality traits that could measure brand personality. They came up with fifteen factors that could capture brand personality, referred to as 'The Little Fifteen' (Aaker & Fournier, 1995). The personality traits in these factors eventually resulted in the brand personality inventory, consisting of 45 items.

However, the traits that made up the BPI were human personality traits that were not tested for brands. Therefore, Aaker (1997) developed a theoretical framework to measure the concept of brand personality. For this, she drew on the research conducted on 'The Big Five' of human personality traits: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism (Goldberg, 1993). After running analyses for many brands with these characteristics, a brand personality framework consisting of five dimensions was developed. These dimensions were the following: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness (Aaker, 1997). Some of these dimensions could potentially correspond to human personality traits ('The Big Five'). For example, the Sincerity dimension of brand personality shares similarities with the human personality trait Agreeableness, since they both measure acceptance and warmth (Aaker, 1997). Other dimensions that can be seen as similar are the Excitement dimension (brand personality) and Extroversion, and the dimension of Competence (brand personality) and Conscientiousness. However, there seemed to be no overlap between the remaining two dimensions (Briggs, 1992; Aaker, 1997). This suggests that there are differences between human personality traits and brand personality traits.

As stated before, the developed Brand Personality Framework of Aaker (1997) consisted of five dimensions. These five dimensions were made up of 42 brand personality traits, which are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Dimensions and traits of brand personality (Aaker 1997, p. 354)

Dimension	Traits
Sincerity	Down-to-earth, Family-oriented, Small town, Honest, Sincere, Real, Wholesome, Original, Cheerful, Sentimental, Friendly
Excitement	Daring, Trendy, Exciting, Spirited, Cool, Young, Imaginative, Unique, Up-to-date, Independent, Contemporary
Competence	Reliable, Hard working, Secure, Intelligent, Technical, Corporate, Successful, Leader, Confident
Sophistication	Upper class, Glamorous, Good looking, Charming, Feminine, Smooth
Ruggedness	Outdoorsy, Masculine, Western, Tough, Rugged

The Brand Personality Framework has become one of the best-known ways to measure the concept of brand personality and has been tested and applied often. Even though the measure seems to be a reliable construct to measure brand personality, it has faced some criticism. A study by Caprara, Barbaranelli and Guido (2001) that aimed to test Aaker's framework with different brands could not exactly replicate the framework. They found significant results for two dimensions of brand personality traits, one consisting of 'The Big Five' of human personality traits Agreeableness and Emotional Stability and the other of Extraversion and Openness (Caprara et al., 2001). However, the researchers agreed with Aaker's theory on how human personality traits could not fully encompass brand personality traits and acknowledged the importance of the Brand Personality Framework. Additionally, Austin, Siguaw, and Mattila (2003) criticized the lack of generalizability of the framework since the fields in which it should be used were never clearly explained. Since Aaker measured many different brands across different product categories when developing her framework, it was not tested to work on a specific product category and, therefore, its applicability to individual brands could not be guaranteed (Austin et al., 2003).

However, several studies that later applied Aaker's framework to a singular product category and/or a singular brand have found significant results. Rojas-Méndez, Erenchun-Podlech, and Silva-Olave (2004), for example, applied the framework to the brand Ford in Chile and found consistent results for almost all the personality traits, except for the Ruggedness

dimension. The researchers note that cultural differences may play a moderator role in this finding (Rojas-Méndez et al., 2004). However, a study conducted on the applicability of the framework across different cultures showed a good consistency of the framework for an East Asian culture (Japan) and a Latin culture (Spain) (Aaker, Benet-Martínez, & Garolera, 2001). As the researchers described, the findings of the study correspond with the theory that commercial brands can be relatively consistent across cultures, even though they can be culturally specific, at times (Aaker et al., 2001).

Additionally, Ekinci and Hosany (2006) aimed to discover if Aaker's brand personality could be applied to branding places, such as tourist destinations. They found that tourists often assign (human) personality characteristics to destinations and, more interestingly, that these characteristics were relatively consistent with the Brand Personality Framework developed by Aaker (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). This finding was shared by Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri, and Kurtulus (2010), who, among others, measured the applicability of Aaker's to city branding.

It can be observed that many studies have successfully managed to test and replicate the Brand Personality Framework in different contexts and research areas. Therefore, Aaker's framework continues to be acknowledged as an important tool when measuring the symbolic meaning of brands (Braunstein & Ross, 2010). However, there is a lack of studies that use the Brand Personality Framework to measure both a brand's intended and perceived brand personality. For this reason, the present study aims to fill this gap in literature by employing Aaker's framework to measure to what extent alignment exists between the intended and perceived brand personality of two brands.

2.4 Brand personality on social media

Aaker's Brand Personality Framework was developed in 1997, before the rise of Web 2.0. Therefore, it could not consider how brands create meaning on social media through a brand personality. However, several studies have focused on the way in which Aaker's framework could be applied to social media marketing and channels. One of the first who examined online brand personalities was Moon (2000), who argued that an individual's attraction to interact online could be influenced by self-disclosure and reciprocity of the computer. This could imply that an online brand personality would be able to attract consumers, which in turn, would make it more interesting for brands to create an online brand personality.

Later, several studies aimed to discover whether offline and online brand personalities could co-exist and whether similarities between the two existed. Chung and Ahn (2007) studied people's behaviors to web sites structures and found that people were more likely to respond and interact when computers presented human personality traits and characteristics than when the website had a linear structure. This finding is in line with the theory of Moon (2000) and could suggest that brands can develop more personal relationships with their target audience through the use of personality traits.

Subsequently, Müller and Chandon (2003) found that visiting the website of a brand could influence the perception consumers have of that brand's online personality. They found that consumers perceived a brand as younger and more modern if they had a positive attitude towards the website (Müller & Chandon, 2003). However, they did not check if similar findings occurred for Aaker's Brand Personality Framework. Therefore, to test if this framework would remain consistent on websites, Okazaki (2006) conducted a content analysis on the web sites of 64 brands. He found that the framework's dimensions were clearly traceable and found consistent results for three out of the five brand personality dimensions: Excitement, Sophistication, and Competence (Okazaki, 2006). Even though the Sincerity and Ruggedness did not significantly appear in the findings of this study, it still shows that the majority of Aaker's brand personality traits could be traced online, on websites.

The findings of the above-mentioned studies offer interesting information for brands when they decide to focus on their online brand personality. The online development of a brand has become of increasing importance during the last decade through the rise of several social networking sites (SNS), such as Twitter, Instagram, and, more recently, TikTok. The way in which a brand positions itself on these social networking sites can greatly influence its image. According to Walsh, Clavio, Lovell, and Blazka (2013), social media can play an essential role in conveying brand personality due to the possibility to interact and open up a dialogue with consumers. This was echoed by Chung and Ahn (2013), who stated that this dialogue can be seen as a form of bidirectional communication, which allows brands to adapt the information they provide to the request of their consumers. Herein lies one of the biggest differences between a traditional, offline brand profile and personality and its online counterpart: the ability to directly interact with a target audience (Chung & Ahn, 2013).

Moreover, building an online brand personality can have several advantages. Besides being more visible to consumers on both social media and in more traditional ways, e.g. in-store advertisements, it can 'humanify' the brand (Chung & Ahn, 2013). When consumers communicate with a brand that employs a unique online brand personality, they will often evaluate the brand through the humanlike characteristics it shows rather than the hardware they are communicating through (Chung & Ahn, 2013). This, in turn, can increase the attachment people feel towards a brand. As Kim and Lehto (2013) state, the brand attachment consumers feel when a brand humanifies itself can be similar to the way in which people relate to and interact with each other. Since the studies mentioned previously mention advantages of communicating a brand personality through social media (Walsh et al., 2013), this research area is worth looking into further. This research aims to investigate brand personalities on social media in further detail by focusing on two social networking sites. Furthermore, since online brand personalities can influence brand attachment (Kim & Lehto, 2013), this study contributes to marketing research by looking into how the intended and perceived brand personality of two brands are aligned on social media.

2.5 Brand personality across online platforms

After brands decide to create an online brand personality to represent the brand and communicate with potential consumers, there are several things they must consider. Brands are often active on many online platforms simultaneously instead of just one. This allows them to communicate with various target audiences across the preferred social media platforms of consumers. Additionally, this can allow them to co-create their brand personality with consumers. Considering that the attitude of consumers towards websites has been argued to affect brand personality (Müller & Chandon, 2003) and that the personality of consumers can have an effect on brand personality and behaviors (Chung & Ahn, 2013), brands should make a careful consideration of how they present themselves on platforms.

The most straightforward and easy choice for a brand would be to represent themselves in the same way on every online platform they are active on. However, the option of a uniform brand personality may not always be the most effective one. When developing their online brand personality, brands should realize that target audiences can vary across platforms. If we look at the demographical data of social media platforms, there seem to exist some big differences. On

Instagram, for example, users in their twenties dominate the platform with approximately one third of users, while the user base of TikTok mainly consists of teenagers (Clement, 2020; Clement, 2020).

Besides demographical differences between the platforms, there could also be differences in consumer needs. Altuna (2014) investigated the brand personality characteristics of three social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. She found that, while they all shared 'social' as primary brand personality characteristics, the secondary characteristics differed between the platforms (Altuna, 2014). Facebook was discovered to be viewed as 'clever', Twitter was seen as 'up-to-date' and Instagram was characterized as 'vivid' (Altuna, 2014). This could imply that the platform of Twitter is mostly used to stay up to date on news, while the platform of Instagram is popular for its imagery.

These findings are in line with those of a study conducted by Al-Kandari, Melkote, and Sharif (2016), who investigated the needs and motivates of Instagram users. They found that the most popular motives for Instagram usage were linked to self-expression and the need for social interaction (Al-Kandari et al., 2016). Additionally, Winston (2013) discovered that individuals, in a photo-sharing context such as Instagram, often express themselves in the way they view themselves instead of as who they are. However, the majority of the Instagram user base does not consist of brands. Therefore, Ginsberg (2015) studied the way food brands represented themselves on Instagram in terms of brand personality. She found that brands tend to use personalized profiles on Instagram to show their multidimensional brand personality to an intended audience (Ginsberg, 2015). In addition, it was discovered that the buying behavior and brand loyalty of consumers could ultimately be influenced through these brand profiles (Ginsberg, 2015).

In contrast to image-based platforms like Instagram, less research has been conducted on video-based platforms such as TikTok. This can largely be explained by the fact that the platform has not existed for a long time (it was launched in 2017). However, the research that has been done on the platform shows interesting results. Qiyang and Jung (2019), for example, found that some of the main motives for using TikTok are social interaction and knowledge-related activities. However, this study only looked at active users on the platform and did not include the passive user base. Another study by Omar and Dequan (2020) found similar results with the

social interaction motive of TikTok users. Furthermore, they discovered several other motives of platform users, such as self-expression and escaping from reality (Omar & Dequan, 2020).

The above-mentioned studies show similarities in the user needs and motives of the platforms Instagram and TikTok, such as self-expression and social interaction. However, there is a lack of research on brand advertising and brand personality on TikTok, which makes it difficult to compare the way in which brands represent themselves and advertise on the platform to Instagram. Therefore, the present study aims to discover whether there are differences or similarities in how brand personalities are communicated on Instagram and TikTok. Since it has been discovered that brands can stand out through their brand personality (Aaker, 1996; Ailawadi & Keller, 2004), the results of this study can help with differentiating themselves from other brands. Furthermore, this research will contribute to research on the consistency of brand personalities across social media platforms.

Since both demographical and user motives differences exist between social media platforms, brands must decide whether to stick to their uniform brand personality or whether to represent themselves differently across platforms. There is a lack of research on this topic and on the platforms of Instagram and TikTok. However, a study by Zhang (2017) study looked into communication styles on Twitter and the way in which this can influence how consumers perceive brand personality. She suggested that brand could employ different styles of communication on platforms to convey their brand personality. As Zhang (2017) describes, this could influence the consumer's attitude towards the brand and their behavioral intentions due to how they perceive the brand personality. This finding seems to suggest that brands can adapt their brand personality across platforms to match their intended audience. However, as mentioned before, more research on this topic is necessary to explore this relationship and before such claims can be made. By studying and comparing the way in which brands present their brand personality on two social media platforms, this study will offer new insights into whether brands should adapt their brand personality on social media platforms to reach their audience.

2.6 Brand personality and sports brands

The concept of brand personality has been researched across different cultures and fields (Aaker et al., 2001; Rojas-Méndez et al., 2004; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006), and the field of sports brands is no exception. As Braunstein and Ross (2010) mention, brand personality theory has

been researched thoroughly in sports management over the past couple of decades. As early as 1999, researchers that looked into the success of sports teams emphasized the need for a long-term branding strategy instead of a short-term approach (Gladden & Milne, 1999). As they describe, a focus on strategic brand management can create and improve brand equity, another brand 'intangible' that includes brand awareness and brand loyalty. In the end, brands that developed and improved their brand equity in the long run realized more positive marketplace consequences, e.g. merchandise sales, than brands that focused on short-term successes (Gladden & Milne, 1999).

However, once brand equity has been reached by a brand, it can be difficult to maintain. A sports brand is unpredictable, since the performance of a brand can vary day by day and can be difficult to control (Gladden & Funk, 2002). For major sports leagues, such as the NFL and NBA, this means that they are dependent on the sports teams in their league and their star players to be successful. If any of the teams have an 'off-day', it can greatly influence their brand. Therefore, several studies on sports team management have emphasized the importance of brand identity building (Richelieu, 2004; Parent & Séguin, 2008). As Richelieu (2004) indicates, a clear brand identity, i.e. brand personality, could lead to more relevant marketing and branding actions of a sports brand or organization and could aid in the creation of brand equity. Therefore, it might be advantageous for sports brands to focus on creating a brand personality if they wish to create brand equity, such as brand loyalty. This point of view is shared by Giroux, Pons, and Maltese (2017), who discovered that a good fit between a brand personality and the promotional activities of a sports brand can have a positive influence on brand equity.

However, several studies have suggested that Aaker's Brand Personality Framework could not be applied to sports brands. Heere (2010), for example, decided to disregard the framework in his study on sports brands due to his opinion of it being impossible for a brand to possess personality traits. Instead, he proposed a new measurement in which brand managers come up with brand-related characteristics that would later be evaluated by consumers of the brand (Heere, 2010). This approach was also used by Walsh et al. (2013), who investigated the way in which social media usage influenced the perception of a sports event personality and found positive results for Heere's (2010) measurement. Additionally, the researchers suggested that a brand personality is unique for each brand and should be measured as such (Walsh et al, 2013).

Nonetheless, multiple other studies have found significant positive results when applying Aaker's framework to sports brands (Smith, Graetz, & Westerbeek, 2006; Walsh & Ross, 2007; Braunstein & Ross, 2010). Firstly, Braunstein and Ross (2010) investigated the relationship between sports brands and brand personality and found significant results for the Sophistication and Sincerity dimensions. However, the Ruggedness and Excitement dimension proved to be unreliable (Braunstein & Ross, 2010). They explained that this could be due to the response bias, since respondents were told that the items were compromised of personality traits, rather than specifying they were brand personality traits. As Braunstein and Ross (2010) suggest, this wording may have humanified the context of the items, which could explain the unreliable results. However, they argue that Aaker's Brand Personality Framework could be a good measurement tool for sports brands if more research is conducted on the topic (Braunstein & Ross, 2010). Additionally, Smith et al. (2006) tested the brand personality of an Australian sports organization. After they applied Aaker's Brand Personality Framework, results showed significant associations with two dimensions (Competence and Sincerity) and moderate associations with two others (Excitement and Sophistication) (Smith et al., 2006).

Similar results were found by Walsh and Ross (2007), who investigated the relationship between sports teams and their sponsorship brands to determine brand personality. When they applied Aaker's framework, they discovered promising results for the following: Competence, Excitement and Ruggedness (Walsh & Ross, 2007). Additionally, they suggested that the reason for incongruent results on certain dimensions could be due to the dislike of sports brands of being associated with certain dimensions, such as Sophistication. Therefore, it could be suggested that the two sports brands that this research looks into will not present themselves often on their social media channels in terms of sophistication. Additionally, it could be theorized that the consumer perception of the sports brands will show that the Sophistication dimension is not often associated with the brands.

On top of that, Carlson, Donavan, and Cumiskey (2009) argue that sports brands are often multidimensional which could explain why Aaker's dimensions may not directly apply. After creating new dimensions based on and representative of Aaker's framework, they discovered that consumers could see sports brands as a unique personality with higher identification with the brand as a result (Carlson et al., 2009). Additionally, Carlson and Donovan (2013) found that these personality attributes could affect the consumer's ability to

identify with a human brand. Interestingly, the study also discovered that a consumer's identification with a brand decreases when the identification with a specific athlete increases (Carlson & Donovan, 2013). This might imply that the brand personality of a team could be influenced by the way in which their athletes are perceived individually. However, these results do offer important insights into Aaker's framework.

It should still be noted that some studies either modified Aaker's framework by adding an extra dimension (Smith et al., 2006) or by slightly changing the names of the dimensions (Carlson et al., 2009; Carlson, 2013), or they studied the framework alongside other measurement scales (Braunstein & Ross, 2010). In addition, the studies that reported significant findings when applying Aaker's Brand Personality Framework to sports brands suggested that further research was necessary. Therefore, the present study aims to study the applicability of the Brand Personality Framework on sports brands.

The aforementioned studies show several literature gaps that need to be addressed. This section will elaborate on these gaps in research and how the present study aims to contribute to filling them. First, this research contributes to literature on online brand personalities by studying two social media platforms that have not yet been studied thoroughly in regard to this concept. Additionally, by studying the platforms of TikTok and Instagram, this study aims to discover differences and similarities in intended and perceived brand personality. Moreover, this study contributes to research on the relationship between sports brands and brand personality by applying Aaker's (1997) framework to the social media channels of two sports brands

The present study aims to measure how the intended brand personality of two sports brands on social media is aligned with the consumer perception of their brand personality. The research will employ Aaker's Brand Personality Framework that consists of five dimensions to study this relationship. Since a good fit between intended and perceived brand personality has been discovered to influence brand loyalty and market share (Malär et al., 2012), the findings of the research could help brands discover how they should present themselves on social media.

3.   Method

This chapter outlines the methods used to answer the research question of this thesis. First, it focuses on the chosen methods and explains why these are the most appropriate methods to use. Furthermore, it elaborates on the qualitative and quantitative method employed to answer the research questions. Finally, the way in which validity and reliability were ensured in the thesis will be discussed.

3.1 Research design

The aim of this study is to discover whether the intended brand personality of sports brands is in line with the perception of consumers. To be able to compare this intended and perceived brand personality, it is necessary to collect two types of data: quantitative and qualitative. Qualitative data allows the researcher to describe the indented brand personality of a certain brand, while quantitative data will be able to measure the perceived brand personality through the consumer perspective. Therefore, a mixed-method approach was deemed the most appropriate way to conduct the present study, as it draws upon both qualitative and quantitative data, which was necessary to answer the research question. When using a mixed-method approach, the researcher collects and analyzes collected data, creates integrated findings, and makes inferences from both qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). This method can provide the depth or breadth in a study that cannot be achieved with a single approach (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009). More specifically, this research employed a triangulation design, in which qualitative and quantitative data are gathered simultaneously (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009). This design was the best fit with the present research, as the study aimed to compare the qualitative and quantitative findings to generate general conclusions about the topic (Creswell et al., 2003).

In a mixed-methods approach with a triangulation design, data can be transformed. This means that quantitative data can be turned into qualitative data, such as themes (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009). The present study aimed to do achieve this by conducting an analysis on the quantitative data that was collected to check whether Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale can be applied to sports brands. This process will be explained more later in this section. Furthermore, qualitative data can be turned into numbers by accounting for frequencies or

occurrences (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009). This was achieved in the present study by quantifying part of the qualitative data that will be gathered through a qualitative content analysis.

For the first sub-question of the study, which aimed to explore how sports brands (NBA and NFL) present and communicate their brand personality on two social media platforms, a qualitative method was used. This method is appropriate to employ to answer research questions about exploration and the understanding of specific phenomena (Snape & Spencer, 2003; Neuman, 2011). Furthermore, qualitative research aims to produce and interpret an in-depth understanding of the social world (Ritchie et al., 2013). Additionally, a qualitative method allows the researcher to describe a certain phenomenon by interpreting implicit and explicit constructions derived from data (Schreier, 2013). The qualitative method employed for this part of the study is a qualitative content analysis, as it allows for a systematic description of qualitative data and a reduction of the number of materials (Schreier, 2013). Therefore, this method was well-suited to answer the first sub-question of the thesis.

Additionally, to answer the second sub-question of this study that aimed to discover the perception consumers have of the brand personalities of the NBA and NFL, a quantitative method was used. This method is often used in research where the data is analyzed through the use of statistical methods (Peat, 2013). This question was explored using a survey, which allows for gathering factual data as well as an individual's opinions and attitudes towards a phenomenon (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Furthermore, the aim of a survey is to draw one or multiple general conclusions about certain phenomena (Sarstedt et al, 2018), which this study also aims to do. Additionally, as Punch (2003) described, quantitative research aims to discover how the world works through theory-driven research. As the aim of this sub-question was to draw theory-driven conclusions from data, the researcher decided that a quantitative (survey) method was preferred over a qualitative method, such as interviews. This decision was made due to the subjective understanding of the world that qualitative research aims to explore (Lawrence, 2014), which is different from the present study that aimed to test a pre-existing theoretical framework.

Furthermore, the third and final sub-question aimed to compare the results from the first and second sub-question to discover how the intended brand personality relates to the perceived brand personality. By drawing upon the qualitative and quantitative results, a comparison was made between the brand personality of the sports brands NBA and NFL.

3.2 Qualitative research method

3.2.1 Sampling

The first sub-question, which investigates how sports brands communicate their brand personality on social media platforms, was explored through the use of a qualitative content analysis. For this part of the study, two well-known US sports brands and leagues were selected: the NBA and the NFL. These two brands were selected, since they have been acknowledged for their social media strategy and, more recently, for their early adaption to TikTok as an advertising platform for brands (Badenhausen, 2020; Simpson, 2020). In addition, these brands are two of the most successful US sports brands, which is why they were selected for this research. Since the applicability of Aaker's Brand Personality Framework across product categories has led to varying levels of success (Austin et al., 2003; Rojas-Méndez et al., 2004), it was decided to focus on one brand category: sports brands.

A short description of the two brands will be provided now. Firstly, the National Basketball Association (NBA) is a professional basketball league comprised of 30 teams across North America (NBA, n.d.). Furthermore, the National Football League (NFL) is a professional league comprised of 32 teams across the United States (Gough, 2021). The official logos of the two brands can be found in Figure 1 and 2.

Figure 1.   *Official logo of the brand NBA (NBA, 2017)*

Figure 2.   *Official logo of the brand NFL (NFL, 2017)*

Furthermore, two social media platforms were selected for the qualitative content analysis: Instagram and TikTok.

3.2.2 Sample

Following the guidelines for a qualitative content analysis of social media posts, the sample consisted of 80 Instagram posts (Methodological Guidelines Thesis Research, September 2019-2020). Since these guidelines did not include information on the social media platform at the time of writing this thesis, it was decided that the researcher would collect data on this platform until a saturation point was reached. After taking into account the format of posts created on this platform, which were all video-based, and the length of these videos (up to 60 seconds per video), the researcher reached this saturation point at 25 TikTok posts per brand, which means that, in total, 50 TikTok posts were analyzed. The data collection took place in April 2021. It was decided to select data from the social media pages of the two brands posted during the last six months, which means they had to be posted between 01/10/2020 and 01/04/2021 to get a spread of posts across a time frame of six months. Furthermore, it was determined to collect an even number of posts per month. The researcher made this decision since both sports brands have an 'off-season', in which no matches are played. This could lead to a lack of posts of the brands during these months. In total, this amounted to 40 Instagram posts and 25 TikTok posts that were collected per brand. The analysis was solely focused on the pictures and/or videos in the posts, which meant the captions were left out. In addition, the researcher initially chose to study only picture-based Instagram posts. However, during the data collection it was discovered that the Instagram pages of the sports brands included a significant number of video-based posts. To fully understand the present brand personality of the brands on Instagram, the researcher then decided to include these in the analysis. Nevertheless, the decision was made to leave out Instagram posts that included videos longer than 60 seconds from the analysis, since this is the maximum time frame TikTok allows for its video-based posts. Therefore, the video-based posts of Instagram and TikTok in the data sample followed the same maximum time frame.

The criteria that the selected data had to follow to be part of the data sample was determined before the data collection. To be part of the sample, the data either had to showcase and/or foreground the brand personality of the brand. However, to achieve this, it was necessary for the researcher to select the social media posts themselves. Therefore, the sampling method used for the qualitative content analysis was judgement sampling. If this method is used, the researcher selects a sample that would be most productive to answer the questions in their study

(Marshall, 1996). The researcher chose this method over random sampling due to the criteria mentioned earlier. As Marshall (1996) states, qualitative research recognizes that some data will be more likely to provide the necessary insights the researcher needs. Therefore, the researcher made the choice to select the units of analysis for the sample themselves by using a judgement sample.

3.2.3 Data analysis

To explore the way in which the NBA and NFL represent themselves in terms of brand personality on Instagram and TikTok, a qualitative content analysis was conducted. However, before the analysis could be conducted, some issues had to be addressed. The researcher of the present study, who would be performing the analysis, could be classified as a consumer instead of a person that knows exactly what the two brands are intending to convey on their social media accounts. This could lead to validity issues and could influence the results of the present study.

Therefore, the researcher aimed to resolve this issue at least partially by conducting two small case studies on the social media strategies of the two sports brands before carrying out the qualitative content analysis. These case studies consisted mostly of data published as recent as possible to the time of conducting the analysis to fully grasp the strategies of the two brands. The researcher attempted to get as close to the intended brand personalities of the two sports brands NBA and NFL by looking at the information the two brands provided on their own websites as well as written reports and interviews. For the brand NBA, an interview conducted by Strategy + Business with Adam Silver, NBA Commissioner, was analyzed (Vollmer & Gross, 2018). In addition, the NFL Brand Identity Guides (2010) were analyzed in detail to discover how the NFL attempts to present itself in terms of brand identity and personality.

The qualitative method that was selected for the analysis was a thematic analysis, as it allows the researcher to extract meaning from a set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The qualitative data analysis followed a deductive approach. Therefore, the analysis of the social media posts was based on Aaker's theoretical framework. This meant that, for the first part of the analysis, the researcher conducted an analysis where data was coded using a theory-driven approach (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

The key concept in the thematic analysis, brand personality, was explored through Aaker's Brand Personality Framework. This scale consists of five dimensions comprised of 42 brand personality traits. An overview of the Brand Personality Scale can be found in Table 1.

To conduct the data analysis of the social media posts, the six-step approach to thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2012) was followed. The first step in this approach included familiarizing yourself with the data, while the second step included systematically analyzing the data through coding. These codes identify the relevant aspects of the data that could be used to answer the research question, either at a descriptive or interpretive level (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Throughout the initial coding process, the researcher also focused on modifying and recoding codes that were already identified at an earlier stage.

Furthermore, the third phase consisted of identifying themes from the identified codes using Aaker's framework. In line with Braun and Clarke (2012), this step focused on reviewing the codes so that similarities and overlap between the data and codes can be found. Furthermore, during this phase, the researcher started to explore the relationship between the identified themes and the overall story the data tells (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Moreover, the fourth phase of the analysis consists of reviewing the themes that were identified in the previous phase by conducting a quality check. This was done by conducting a final review of all the data in the sample to check the themes. As Braun and Clarke (2012) describe, during this phase, additional themes could be identified, and existing themes could be adapted or removed.

After the quality check was finished, it was time to define and name the identified themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), good themes ideally have a singular focus, are not repetitive, and address the research question. The process of naming the themes also followed a deductive approach, as it employed Aaker's brand personality framework to help name the themes. The final phase of the analysis consists of reporting the results of the thematic analysis in a report.

3.3 Survey

3.3.1 Sampling

As stated before, the second sub-question was answered using a survey. Before the distribution of this survey, the desired sample frame and size was determined. As the aim of the survey was to measure the opinion of consumers, the sample frame would preferably be as diverse as possible in terms of age, gender, and educational level. Furthermore, participants needed to be familiar with the NBA or NFL brand to correctly give their perception of these brands. Therefore, it was decided to ask a question in the survey on how familiar they were with the sports brands. In line with the criteria set by Xu et al. (2016), participants who were not familiar with the brands were excluded from the study and analysis.

It was then decided that, to gather a representative sample for the survey, a minimum of 150 participants were expected to be recruited, based on the guidelines (Thesis Research, September 2019-2020). The researcher decided that participants would be allowed to fill in the survey for both sports brands, similar to previous research (Aaker, 1997; Xu et al., 2016). The order in which the brands themselves and the brand personality traits were presented was randomized to control for primary and recency effects (Aaker, 1997), which is why it was expected that response bias would not play a role when respondents filled out the survey for both brands. Furthermore, it was determined that participants would be recruited both through the researcher's network (convenience sampling) and from online crowdsourcing websites, such as Amazon's Mechanical Turk. By using this method, the sample would partially be gathered at random and partially selected by the researcher. Moreover, to ensure that all groups would be sufficiently represented, additional attention was paid to the demographical data of respondents (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

In total, the sample consisted of 160 participants, of which 86 were male (54%) and 74 were women (46%). The average age of the sample was 33 years old, with an age range from 18 to 67. Furthermore, the majority of the participants were from the following countries: USA (59%), the Netherlands (27%), and India (10%). Other countries in the sample included Brazil (2%), Bulgaria (1%), EUA (1%), Norway (1%), and Singapore (1%). Additionally, when asked about the highest level of education they had completed, most participants indicated that they had finished a Bachelor's degree (59%), followed by a Master's degree (21%) and secondary

education / high school (8%). Moreover, some participants finished a University of Applied Sciences degree (6%), Vocational education (5%), and a PhD or other equivalent (1%).

3.3.2 Pretest and procedure

Before the survey was distributed, a small pretest with four participants was conducted. Participants were recruited by the researcher and were asked to fill in the survey to confirm that all concepts were clearly defined. This pretest also checked for any technical errors that could have occurred in the lay-out of the survey. All four participants indicated that the concepts were clearly defined and reported no issues filling in the survey. However, one participant remarked that they found that some of the brand personality traits used difficult terms, which made it harder for her to fully grasp this characteristic. After conducting the pretest, the researcher did a final check of all 42 characteristics with two more respondents to ensure the terms were not too difficult to understand. In the end, it was decided to keep the original terms for the brand personality characteristics as described in Aaker (1997) without changes so that all characteristics could be tested properly.

After the pretest was finished, the survey was distributed. As determined before the data collection for the survey, participants were first recruited at convenience from the researcher's own network. All participants were approached on social network sites. During this part of the data collection, no special attention was paid to demographics. Participants were kindly asked to participate in the survey but were not given a monetary reward or other incentive.

After the survey was distributed across the network, the number of participants and their demographical data was checked. Then, the survey was distributed using Amazon's Mechanical Turk. During this part of the data collection, special attention was paid to age and gender to ensure a diverse group of participants that would represent the consumer perspective adequately. Furthermore, if participants filled in the survey through this online crowdsourcing platform, they were given a small monetary reward of $0.15.

On average, the survey took 5-10 minutes to fill in. The first page of the survey gave information on the topic of the research. Furthermore, it thanked respondents for participating and gave further instructions. It also mentioned that participants were always allowed to omit a question or stop participation in the survey. Additionally, this page stated that, by continuing onto the next part of the survey, respondents automatically gave consent for their data to be used

in the analysis of the research. The sections of the survey pertaining to the brands NFL and NBA started off with a small description of the brands and their official logo, followed by questions about brand familiarity and perceived brand personality. Afterwards, respondents were asked to fill in their demographical information. The last page of the survey included a thank you note from the researcher for partaking in the study. The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

3.3.3 Operationalization of key concepts

As stated before, the present study employed the use of a survey to answer one of the three sub-questions. The complete survey consisted of nine questions. The variables measured on the survey will be described in a more detailed manner in this section.

3.3.3.1 Brand familiarity

Following the structure of previous studies, the survey asked respondents to assess their familiarity with both the NBA and NFL brand to determine whether they were familiar enough with the brands to describe their perception of the brand personalities (Aaker, 1997; Xu et al., 2016). Therefore, the question inquiring about brand familiarity was a control question used in the survey. To measure this variable, the survey included a question on brand familiarity for both the NBA and NFL brand. This variable was measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from '(1) Not familiar at all' to '(5) Extremely familiar'.

In line with previous studies (e.g. Malär et al (2012)), it was decided not to use the data of participants that were not familiar at all with the brand. The research made this decision was since it cannot be assessed how reliable the perception of a brand is if participants do not have a good familiarity with that brand. Therefore, the data of 10 (6%) participants was removed before the data analysis for the brand NFL was conducted. Out of these participants, 9 indicated that they were not familiar with the brand. The other participant did not fill in the question which led to a missing value. Therefore, the final analysis of the NFL data was conducted using data of 150 participants. The descriptives for the NFL familiarity question were as followed: ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.09$). Moreover, in the case of the brand NBA, the data of 6 participants (4%) was not used during the data analysis, since they indicated they were not familiar with the brand. The descriptives were as followed: ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.01$).

3.3.3.2 Perceived brand personality

The concept of perceived brand personality refers to the way in which brands are perceived in people's minds (Xu et al., 2016). To measure this concept, the survey included several questions about the perceived brand personality of the NBA and NFL brands. The variable was measured using 42 items, corresponding to the brand personality characteristics developed by Aaker (1997) (see Table 1). All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, adapted from previous studies, ranging from '(1) not at all descriptive' to '(5) extremely descriptive' (Aaker, 1997; Malär et al., 2012; Xu et al., 2016).

A small summary of what perceived brand personality entails was provided to participants before they were asked to fill in the items measuring this variable. The text, adapted from the study conducted by Malär et al (2012) on implementing brand personality, was shown to give participants an idea of what to consider when describing their perception of a certain brand. The outcome of these characteristics will be described in the results section.

3.3.3.3 Demographics

Lastly, to gather information about the sample gathered through the survey, several demographical questions were asked. These questions inquired about the age, gender, level of education, and the country respondents were currently living in. An open-ended question was asked for the demographical items inquiring about age and country, while the others were measured using scales. For the question inquiring about gender, the answer options were as following: male, female, non-binary / third gender, and prefer not to say. Furthermore, for the question inquiring about the highest level of education the respondents had completed, they could select one of the following options: primary school, secondary school / high school, vocational education, University of Applied Sciences degree, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, PhD or other equivalent, or other (with a write-in option).

3.3.4 Data processing

To discover how consumers perceived the brands NFL and NBA in terms of their brand personality, statistical treatment was used to discover which dimensions the sports brands

recorded the highest scores on. Furthermore, to test the Brand Personality Framework developed by Aaker (1997), a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted.

3.4 Validity and reliability

The present study employs a mixed-method approach to study a certain topic. This method is often able to produce a more accurate and comprehensive representation of the research topic (Silverman, 2015). This is due to the use of various sources of data related to a single issue, also referred to as 'triangulation'. When a study includes a comparison of data relating to the same phenomenon but derived from different sources, it can increase the internal validity of the study (Burns, 2009). However, there are several issues that can affect the validity of a mixed-method study. Threats to the validity might come up during the data collection and analysis due to different sampling methods for the qualitative and quantitative data or the use of an inadequate procedure for data transformation (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009). These issues can, however, be minimized by carefully constructing the study in terms of design and data analysis (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009). As this research employs a well-known framework to measure brand personality, the framework developed by Aaker (1997), as well as a carefully designed method of data collection and analysis, the validity issues could be minimized.

Additionally, issues may arise with the sampling strategies for the data collection. For the qualitative data of this research, a judgement sample was used, in which the researcher selects the sample themselves. Even though the researcher aims to select the most productive sample to answer the research questions, the subjectivity of this method should be addressed. However, as Marshall (1996) describes the use of a probability sample for qualitative data collection may not lead to a desired and productive sample and may lead to an inability to answer the questions of the study. Therefore, this method was selected for the qualitative data collection of the present study.

Furthermore, the quantitative data gathering should be addressed. This data was partially gathered using a convenience sampling method, which can threaten the external validity of the study (Sarstedt et al., 2018). On top of that, this method is often criticized for its inability to provide generalizable results (Sarstedt et al., 2018). Therefore, to improve the validity, the majority of the quantitative data of this study was gathered through an online crowdsourcing platform. The selected platform, Amazon's Mechanical Turk, has been praised for its ability to

gather a diverse sample (Neuman, 2011; Xu et al., 2016). However, the limitation of such platforms is the lack of control the researcher has over the representativity of the gathered sample. The researcher aimed to solve this issue by ensuring a diverse sample was gathered, for example, through only allowing participants within a certain age group to participate if that group was underrepresented in the sample.

Furthermore, the researcher should address their own subjectivity in the research process, specifically, when conducting the thematic analysis. As Braun and Clarke (2012) state, a researcher can never remain completely unbiased and objective. Therefore, the researcher should have a clear perspective of their own position in every part of the data analysis process and be able to justify why certain decisions and choices were made (Braun & Clarke, 2012). By keeping this subjectivity issue in mind, the researcher should aim to remain as transparent as possible when conducting the thematic analysis. This subjectivity also plays a role in the thematic analysis the researcher conducted in this study. There is a challenge to subjectivity, as the researcher can be classified as a consumer themselves. This was attempted to be resolved through two case studies on the brands in the thematic analysis, but still remains an important issue to be addressed.

Finally, an important aspect of the research to consider is the (internal) reliability. To ensure this reliability, the present research employed already existing frameworks and methods to carry out the study. The main concept of the research is Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Framework. This framework has been tested many times across different research areas and is seen as a reliable framework to measure brand personality. Therefore, the characteristics developed by Aaker have been used for the data collection and analysis of the study. Additionally, the scales developed by this study have also been adapted to fit this research.

4.   Results

In this section, the findings from the present study, which aimed to measure the alignment between the intended and perceived brand personality of the sports brands NBA and NFL, will be described. First, the results of the thematic analysis that was conducted to answer the first sub-question will be presented. This first sub-question aimed to discover how the sports brands NBA and NFL convey their brand personality on social media platforms. Afterwards, the second question, which aimed to discover how consumers perceive the brand personality of the sports brands NBA and NFL, was investigated through a survey, will be answered through statistical analyses. Finally, the third sub-question consisted of a comparison between the NBA and NFL's intended and perceived brand personality.

4.1 Intended brand personality

As previously mentioned, a deductive thematic analysis was employed to answer the first sub-question of the present study: *how do sports brands present and communicate their brand personality on Instagram and TikTok?* The emerging themes will be further elaborated upon in this section. Furthermore, the results will be interpreted in relation to the sub-question and the presented literature. An overview of the findings of the thematic analysis can be found in Table 2. Overview of the findings. The first theme, social responsibility, is centered around brand activism. As the name suggests, this theme refers to the way in which the NBA and NFL intend to represent themselves in a socially conscious way on their social media channels. Furthermore, the second theme relates to the way in which the brands use their social media platforms to reach their audience by focusing on trends. Subsequently, the third theme is centered around the unique aspects of each brand and the way in which they communicate this through their brand personality. Finally, the fourth theme deals with the differences that exist between the two social media channels of the sports brands in terms of brand personality.

Table 2. Overview of the findings

Social responsibility	Funny content	#OnlyHere	Incongruencies between platforms
Bringing awareness to societal issues	Being 'relatable'	Showing of the uniqueness of the brand(s)	
Inspiring consumers to take action	Keeping up with trends	Highlighting team and player achievements	

4.1.1 Social responsibility

The analyses of the social media channels of the NBA and NFL revealed that the brands often try to present themselves as conscious brands that are aware of the societal discussions that are happening in the US and the rest of the world. It is not new phenomenon that brands are taking part in discussions on societal issues through brand activism. Nike, one of the best-known 'activist' brands, for example, showcased their stance on the Colin Kaepernick situation by publicly supporting him when the NFL chose to refrain from doing so (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

The thematic analysis of the NBA and NFL's Instagram posts has shown that the brands take a stance on several social (and sometimes sensitive) issues, such as the 2020 US Election, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the celebration of women's achievements (e.g. International Women's Day). Out of all analyzed NFL Instagram posts, for example, 10% (N = 4) were related to the topic of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Through the organization of the codes related to the social responsibility theme, two sub-themes were identified. The following sections now elaborate on these sub-themes.

4.1.1.1 Bringing awareness to societal issues

The first sub-theme that arose regards the awareness the sports brands aim to bring to social issues that are playing in the world. The brands are informing and educating their audience in multiple ways. Firstly, real-life stories are used to make consumers conscious about what is happening in their country. This category was discovered in several NFL Instagram posts, and

included the hashtag #SayTheirStories (Figure 3.1 and 3.2). The Instagram posts, that only featured black and white colors, included a photo, information about the life of the individuals in the posts as well as the date they passed away.

   The posts in this category show a more serious side of the brand personality the NFL communicates through their Instagram channel. Therefore, it can be argued that several brand personality traits in the Sincerity dimension are present in the posts. First of all, the brand aims to come across as honest and sincere by not dedicating full posts on their Instagram channel to people who lost their lives due to police brutality. By communicating real-life stories of individuals that passed away, the brand also aims to be viewed as real by their audience. Lastly, the posts deal with a sensitive topic that has been happening in the world for a long time. By actively sharing the stories of these people, the brand shows a more sentimental side of themselves. The presence of four individual brand personality traits in the Sincerity dimension of Aaker's (1997) framework (see Table 1) indicates that the brand wanted to communicate their sincerity through these Instagram posts.

Figure 3.1. Post retrieved from @NFL (Instagram)

Figure 3.2. Post retrieved from @NFL (Instagram)

Furthermore, the analysis showed that the Instagram pages both sports brands provided information to their audience on voting in the 2020 US Election. This information ranged from creating a voter plan (Figure 3.3), to voter registration and voting do's and don'ts (Figure 3.4). However, no information on the US election was provided on the TikTok pages of the sports brands. This could be due to the difference in the type of brand personality the brands aim to present on the platform compared to their Instagram pages.

It can be observed that the traits that are present in Figure 3.3 and 3.4 share similarities with the posts discussed earlier on in the analysis (Figure 3.1 and 3.2), which is why it can be viewed that the brands aimed to present a honest, sincere, and real brand personality, related to the Sincerity dimension of Aaker's (1997) framework (see Table 1). Additionally, by communicating the knowledge they have on the US election process and steps, the brand intends to communicate a reliable and intelligent brand personality. Furthermore, the posts show off a more technical side of the NBA and NFL's brand personality. These traits belong to the Competence dimension of Aaker's Brand Personality Framework (Table 1). Therefore, it can be argued that the brands aimed to communicate a sincere yet competent brand personality through these Instagram posts.

Figure 3.3. Post retrieved from @NFL (Instagram)

Figure 3.4. Post retrieved from @NBA (Instagram)

4.1.1.2 Inspiring consumers to take action

Besides providing their audience with information about important societal issues, the thematic analysis revealed that the sports brands are also actively using their platform to inspire people to take action. To be seen as authentic in their brand activism practices, brands have to go beyond mere messages and commit to changes in their corporate practices (Vredenburg et al.,

2020). The sports brands in this analysis both try to achieve this by going further than simply informing their audience of societal issues. On their Instagram accounts, they advocate for change in several ways. The NFL employs the hashtag #InspireChange to ask their audience to join the 'fight for equity' (Figure 3.5). Additionally, the NBA decided to use a prominent athlete in their league to advocate for voting in the 2020 US Election (Figure 3.6). Both of these posts intend to show a sense of community by using terminology such as 'our fight for equity' and 'our votes matter'.

It can be argued that the sports brands intend to present themselves as leaders in inspiring their audience to take action. This relates to one of the brand personality traits in the Competence dimension of the Brand Personality Framework (Aaker, 1997). Furthermore, the brands go beyond only creating posts on their social media channels by providing further links and information on their own websites on the issues (Figure 3.5 and 3.6). This could lead to the audience perceiving them as more authentic and sincere (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Therefore, the two posts can be viewed to communicate an honest and sincere brand personality, two traits in the Sincerity dimension (Aaker, 1997).

Figure 3.5. Post retrieved from @NFL (Instagram)

Figure 3.6. Post retrieved from @NBA (Instagram)

To sum up, the two sports brands communicate a serious brand personality through the aforementioned posts. By advocating for several human rights and societal issues that are spoken about a lot in the world now, they show their reliability and competence. Additionally, the two brands attempt to persuade their audience to take action and inspire change on their Instagram pages. The examples shown in this sub-section clearly attempt to communicate a sincere brand personality. All in all, the two dimensions of the Brand Personality that can be viewed in this theme are the Sincerity and Competence dimensions (see Table 1).

4.1.2 Funny content

The second theme that was identified through the thematic analysis is centered around the way in which the sports brands used humor in their social media posts. This type of content was mostly visible on the platform TikTok, but the NFL also employed humor as a strategy in their Instagram posts. This section will describe two different categories of 'funny content' that the brands employed to convey their brand personality.

4.1.2.1 Being 'relatable'

The first identified category relates to the social media posts in which the sports brands try to present themselves as 'relatable'. Undoubtedly, the definition of relatability and what people view as relatable differs between persons. Therefore, the word 'relatable' is written in brackets. A common dominator in the social media posts presented in this section is the attempt of the sports brands to be viewed as just another regular person instead of a major US sports brand. As Van Dijck (2013) describes, relatability is often used as a form of self-branding. Often this relatability is combined with humor to express everyday struggles (Ask & Abidin, 2018).

This strategy becomes evident, for, example, in the NFL Instagram post where the brand shows a video of a NFL athlete celebrating and laughing during a match with the caption 'When they bring out that pumpkin pie' (Figure 3.7). Even though the athlete was clearly celebrating because of something else, the brand was trying to come across as relatable by posting the video with a funny caption. Additionally, as can be observed in Figure 3.8, the NFL tries to engage their audience while at the same time creating relatable videos. This TikTok post features an NFL team participating in a 'prank war', as one of the hashtags suggests, where one player hands another an unscrewed water bottle on purpose so that the water spills all over them. The video is interactive through the caption 'Tag someone you would do this to', that is included in the video.

Another NFL TikTok post that aimed to position the brand as 'relatable' can be viewed in Figure 3.9.1 and 3.9.2. This post first shows a black screen with the caption following caption: 'How am I supposed to feel attractive when my crush would rather spend all weekend with someone who looks like this?'. Then, it is revealed that this person's crush spends their weekend watching NFL matches. This post can be regarded as relatable from two perspectives. Firstly, the post can be viewed as relatable because of the crush this person has on someone that would rather spend time with someone else. Subsequently, the other perspective of relatability could come from someone that has a certain type of relationship, e.g. romantic, with a person that would rather spend their weekends watching NFL matches than by spending time with them. This is described by Ask and Abidin (2018), who state that memes and relatable humor can be used to out frustrations and sadness. This example is related to what Kanai (2017) refers to as 'affective practice', in which emotions are used to convert personal experiences into funny, relatable moments. Often people will exaggerate ugly feelings, such as jealousy, into comedic moments to relieve their frustration (Kanai, 2017). Through the post shown in Figure 3.9.1 and

3.9.2., the NFL plays into the possible frustrations a person could have with their partner, since they would rather watch a football match than spend time with them.

All of the previously described posts in this section intend to communicate similar brand personality traits. The use of 'relatable' content has been popularized on social media platforms for a while, but can still be classified as young and up-to-date. Additionally, some of the posts (Figure 3.9.1 and 3.9.2) clearly show that the sports brands have been keeping up with the trends on the social media platforms. Moreover, the brands showcase their imagination by utilizing and create unique captions on their videos, such as in Figure 3.7 and 3.8. These aspects all relate to the brand personality traits in the Excitement dimension of the Brand Personality Framework (Aaker, 1997). By communicating an excited brand personality, the sports brands can differentiate themselves and show their unique personality (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004). Additionally, 'exciting' brands are often seen as attractive and worthy of attention, which can help the sports brands when they attempt to build a relationship with their audience on a social media platform (Aaker et al., 2004)

However, this is not the only brand personality dimension that becomes visible through the posts mentioned in this section. The positive and happy context of the posts relate to the cheerfulness the sports leagues try to show on their social media channels. Additionally, these posts showcase another side of the sports teams and its players by showing sincere and real content. Therefore, this content can also be classified as wholesome, which together with the afore-mentioned traits sincere and real belong to the Sincerity dimension of the Brand Personality Framework (Aaker, 1997). Through communicating their sincerity, brands attempt to create relationship advantages (Aaker et al., 2004). Since sincere brands are seen as trustworthy, they can lead to a growth in customer-brand relationships (Moorman et al., 1993). Therefore, it can be argued that, by creating 'relatable' content, the sports leagues intend to communicate a sincere and excited brand personality.
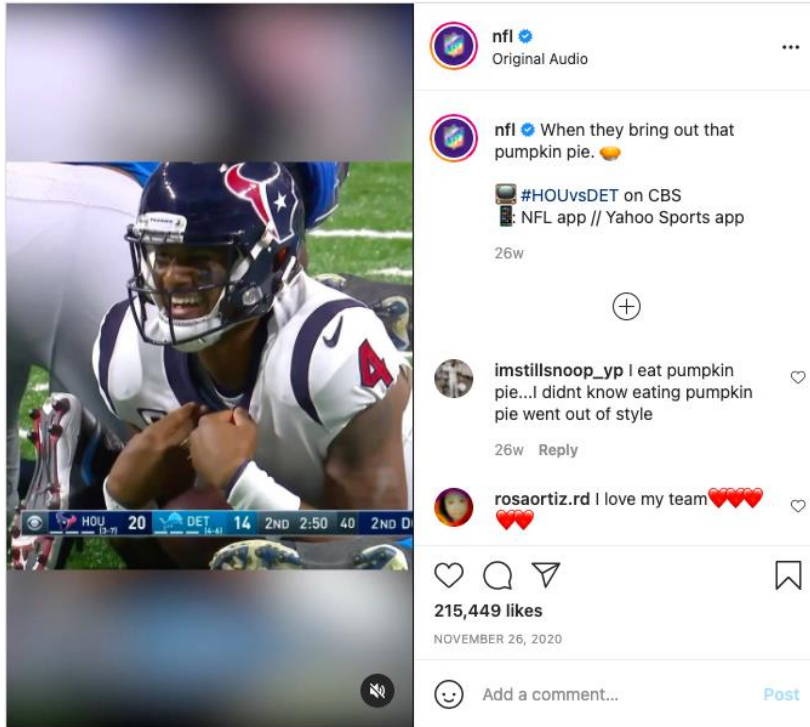
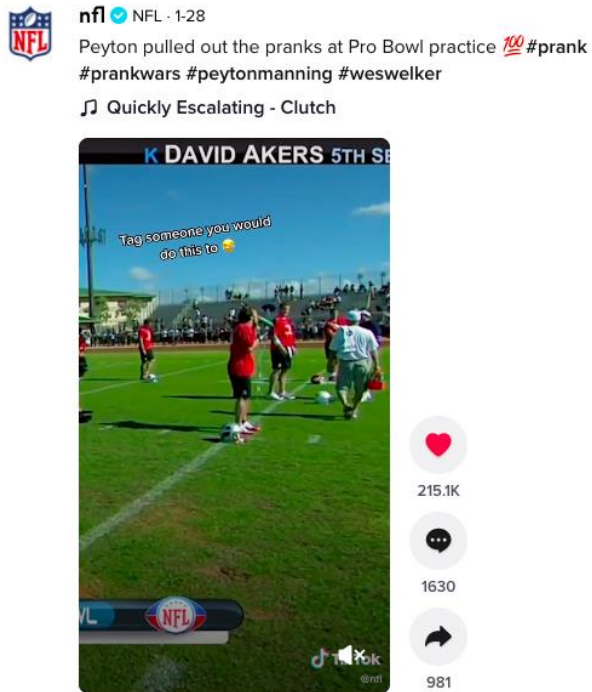Figure 3.7. Post retrieved from @NFL (Instagram)
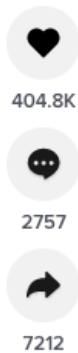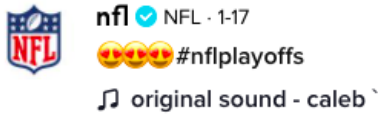

Figure 3.8. Post retrieved from @NFL (TikTok)

Figure 3.9.1 Post retrieved from @NFL (TikTok)   Figure 3.9.2 Post retrieved from @NFL (TikTok)

4.1.2.2 Keeping up with trends

The other category that is visible in this theme is centered around the way in which the sports brands attempt to keep up with social media trends on their channels. This category, which is directly related to the Excitement dimension of the Brand Personality framework (see Table 1), can be observed through several aspects of the social media posts. The sports brands can, for example, use a viral TikTok audio fragment in their post to make it 'trendy' or follow a certain video style that has become popular on the platform. The following section will give examples of both types of keeping up with the trends.

Firstly, as previously mentioned, TikTok offers the possibility to add an audio fragment to a post. This audio can completely change the context of a TikTok post, which can be seen in the NFL post shown in Figure 3.10. This video features clips of Tom Brady, famous NFL athlete, looking less than happy with the caption 'Tom Brady when people said he'd never make it to another Super Bowl'. However, the audio is what classifies this post as 'trendy'. In early 2021,

the song that the audio was composed of was trending on the platform and included the following lyrics in a lighthearted manner: 'Stop spreading those rumors around. Stop spreading the lies.' Due to the audio, the context of the post changes from a rather serious tone to a funnier one.
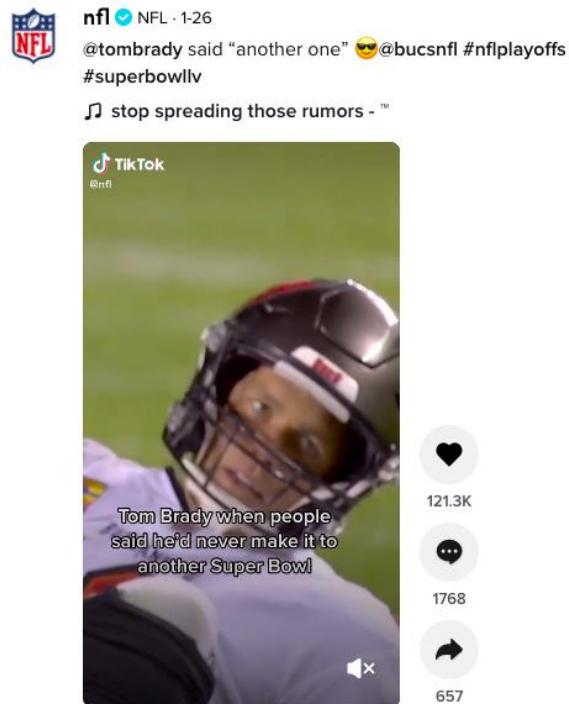

Figure 3.10. Post retrieved from @NFL (Instagram)

In addition, the sports brands can communicate their brand personality through 'trendy' content by following popular videos styles on their social media channels. This tactic was used by the NBA in a TikTok post where they follow a trend on the platform where people show two sides of themselves, which are often very different from one another (Figure 3.11.1 and 3.11.2). With the captions 'When you wanna be' and 'But you also wanna be', the NBA showed the mascots of several NBA teams throughout the video.

As the name of this category suggests, the main brand personality trait that is communicated through these type of social media posts is 'trendy'. However, due to the use of several emojis in the posts (Figure 3.11.1 and 1.11.2), the NBA also shows their young and cool side. Yao, Chen, and Xu (2015) found that the NBA and NFL can improve brand attachment through the communication of these brand personality traits in the Excitement dimension (Table 1), if used consistently.

Furthermore, it can be suggested that the brand is up-to-date with trends on the platform, since they actively use them on their own channels. These traits (trendy, young, cool, and up-to-date) are all part of the Excitement dimension of Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Framework, which is why it can be suggested that the sports brands aimed to convey excitement through these social media posts.
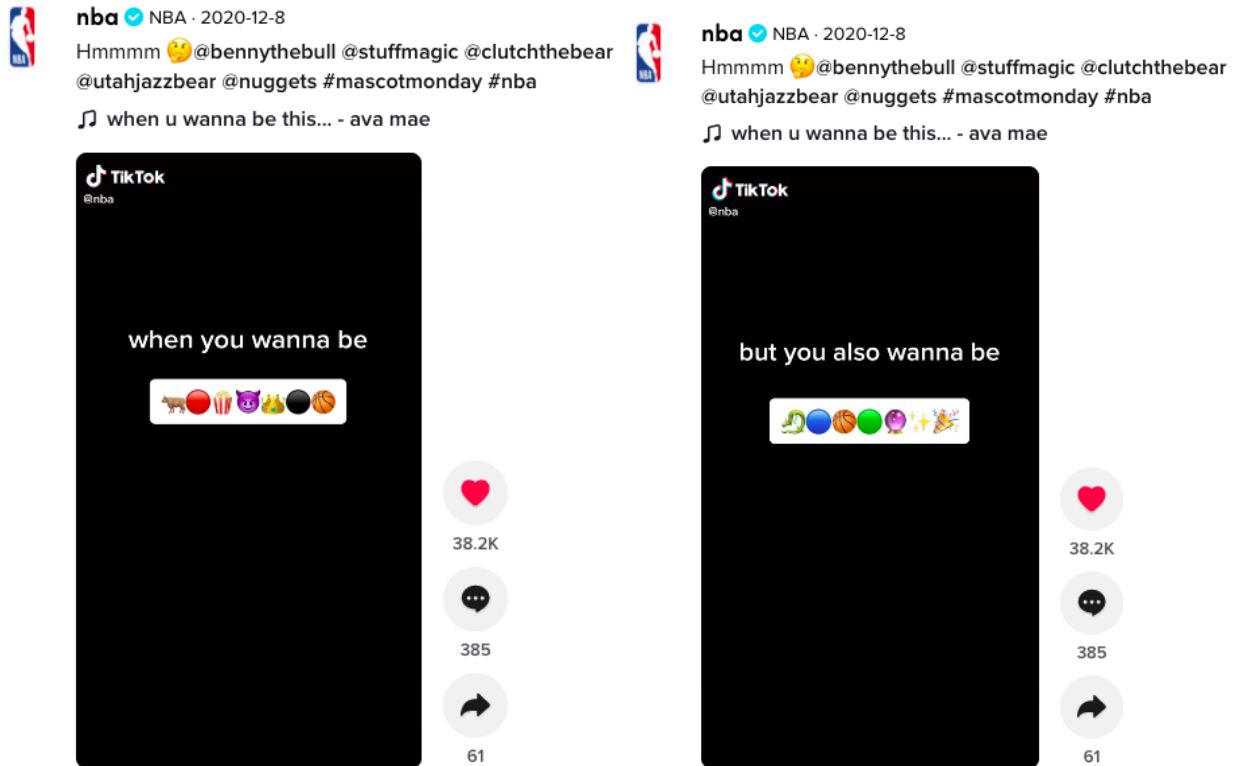

Figure 3.11.1. Post retrieved from @NBA (TikTok)   Figure 3.11.2. Post retrieved from @NBA (TikTok)

4.1.3 #OnlyHere

The third theme that was identified in the thematic analysis is related to the way in which the sports brands show the unique aspects of their brand on their Instagram and TikTok channels. The brands aim to achieve this in varying ways. The NBA, for example, decided to use a hashtag in their social media posts that highlights the uniqueness of the brand: #OnlyHere (Figure 3.13). Additionally, the brands highlighted their unique aspects by creating posts that featured the achievements of the teams that play in their leagues and their players. These two categories will be further elaborated on in the following sections.

4.1.3.1 Showing off the uniqueness of the brand(s)

As previously mentioned, the brands can showcase their unique brand personality in many ways. The individual brand personality trait 'unique' is part of the Excitement dimension of the Brand Personality Framework (Aaker, 1997). Therefore, it is no surprise that this is not the only brand personality trait of this dimension that can be observed through these posts. If we take a look at Figure 3.12, which shows an NFL Instagram post promoting the Super Bowl, it shows two NFL athletes staring into the camera with a serious expression on their face. Additionally, the caption is focused on the uniqueness of this year's Super Bowl match. Therefore, this post can be regarded as showcasing a spirited and daring brand personality. Additionally, due to the serious expression and caption, this post shows off a tough and masculine brand personality. These individual traits belong to the Ruggedness dimension of the Brand Personality Framework (Aaker, 1997).

Figure 3.12. Post retrieved from @NFL (Instagram)

Besides highlighting the uniqueness of a single match in the league, like the Super Bowl, the brands also demonstrate the uniqueness of their entire league and brand. As previously mentioned, the NBA does this by adding a specific hashtag to every post that promotes this

aspect of the brand. This relates to a study by Ingenhoff and Fuhrer (2010), who state that showing off uniqueness can be achieved through advertising a brand's vision and/or mission. This can be seen in Figure 3.13, for example, which features a video where NBA fans illustrate the exclusive aspects of the brand that cannot be found anywhere else with the following terminology: 'Where else …?'. Apart from the brand personality traits related to the Excitement dimension that are visible in the post, the brand also aimed to communicate their competence through these types of posts. This brand personality dimension features several traits that can be observed in the post, such as successful and leader, since the unique aspects of the NBA league cannot be found anywhere else. Furthermore, this post clearly showcases how confident the NBA is in its uniqueness. Therefore, it can be argued that the posts in this category aim to communicate an excited, rugged, and competent brand personality, related to the dimensions developed by Aaker (1997).

Figure 3.13. Post retrieved from @NBA (Instagram)

4.1.3.2 Highlighting team and player achievements

Another approach to showing off the uniqueness of their brand that the sports brands have been using is centered around the teams and players in their respective leagues. The rise of social media has turned the majority of NFL and NBA athletes into celebrities that each have

their own platforms. With millions of followers across their social media channels, these players can certainly help the promotions of the sports brands. Therefore, the sports brands have chosen to showcase the athletes in their leagues on their social media channels and in their brand personality. The use of star athletes on social media pages can prove to be a smart strategy by the brands, as Seimiene and Kamarauskaite (2014) discovered that the use of celebrities in advertising is very popular under young people. Since the user base of Instagram and TikTok mainly consists of teenagers and young adults (Clement, 2020), this may lead to higher engagement on the platforms. In addition, Pringle and Binet (2005) found that advertisements that feature celebrities matches both the consumer's and brand's personality, which can increase engagement and sales. This point of view is shared by Carlson and Donovan (2013), who state that consumer-athlete identification leads to attachment to the athlete, which in turn can lead to higher attachment with the brand.

This strategy of highlighting athletes can clearly be observed through several Instagram posts of the sports brands (Figure 3.14 and 3.15). Instead of directly promoting a match in their league, for example, the NBA opted to showcase the star players of a team that would be playing in that particular match (Figure 3.14). By doing so, they could potentially attract an audience that would not necessarily have watched the match if these three players had not been used in the advertisement. Similarly, the NFL decided to promote a particular match that would be taking place by foregrounding the star player ('legend') that would be playing in that game instead of directly promoting the match (Figure 3.15).

These two posts correspond well to several traits in the Competence dimension of Aaker's Brand Personality Framework (see Table 1). Through the use of the star athletes of their brand, the NBA and NFL present themselves as a successful brand that is the leader in their field. In addition, the serious expressions on the players' faces show their confidence. This seriousness also correlates well to several brand personality traits in the Ruggedness dimension (Aaker, 1997), such as masculine, tough, and rugged. Therefore, it can be observed that the sports brands attempt to showcase a diverse brand personality in these types of social media posts that correspond to multiple brand personality dimensions in Aaker's framework.

Figure 3.14. Post retrieved from @NBA (Instagram)

Figure 3.15. Post retrieved from @NFL (Instagram)

4.1.4 Incongruencies between platforms

The fourth and final theme identified through the thematic analysis is centered around the incongruencies that exist between the social media platforms in terms of the brand personality that is presented and communicated. An overview of the brand personality traits that the NBA and NFL intended to present and communicate on their Instagram and TikTok channels can be found in Table 3 and Table 4.

There are clear differences in the number of times a certain brand personality dimension is present in the social media posts of the NBA. The biggest incongruency can be observed in the Sincerity dimension, which is present in only 8% of the Instagram posts but in almost one-third of all TikTok posts (33%). Other discrepancies can be viewed in the Competence dimension (32% for Instagram and 21% for TikTok) and the Ruggedness dimension (24% for Instagram and 15% for TikTok). On the contrary, if we take a look at the presence of the brand personality dimensions in NFL social media posts (Table 4), there seem to be less incongruencies between Instagram and TikTok. Therefore, it seems that the NFL may have chosen to showcase one brand personality on all their social media channels instead of adapting it per platform. However, it can still be observed that there are differences in the Excitement dimension (26% for Instagram and 35% for TikTok) and the Competence dimension (31% for Instagram and 14% for TikTok).

As explained in Section 2.5 of this study, there could be several reasons for why the sports brands decided to communicate certain brand personality traits on the social media platforms. This could be due to a difference in demographics regarding the user base of the two platforms. As Clement (2020) reported, TikTok was discovered to have a relatively big teenage user base, while the user base of Instagram was found to mainly consist of young adolescents in their twenties. Therefore, to reach their intended target audience on the social media platforms, the NBA and NFL could have decided to adapt their brand personality to fit this audience.

Another potential explanation could be the differing user needs and motives of the platforms. Instagram has been found to be a popular platform for self-expression and social interaction (Ginsberg, 2015; Al-Kandari et al., 2016). Additionally, Winston (2013) argued that individuals often attempt to show the version that best represents them on the platform. This could explain why the Competence dimension is often present on this platform (32% for the NBA and 31% for the NFL), since the traits in this dimension can be linked to the way in which the sports brands communicate their uniqueness, as described in section

4.1.3 #OnlyHere).

Additionally, Omar and Dequan (2020) found that TikTok users often use the platform as an escape from reality. If the sports brands decided to adapt their content based on this finding, it could potentially explain why the Excitement dimension was found to be present often in the thematic analysis for TikTok (28% vs 35%). The traits in this dimension are often observed in

the funny and relatable content the brands have been found to post on their TikTok platform, as described in section 4.1.2 of the present study.

Interestingly, the incongruencies between the platforms seem to differ between the two sports brands. While the NBA reports clear differences in the Sincerity dimension, the two social media platforms report similar results on this dimension for the NFL. Subsequently, while the findings for the Excitement dimension showed clear similarities between the two social media platforms for the NBA, this was not the case for the NFL. The only dimension that remained relatively consistent between the two social media platforms for both sports brands was the Sophistication dimension, which was also discovered to be the least frequently occurring dimension in the thematic analysis. This finding is shared by some studied that were previously mentioned (Smith et al., 2006; Walsh & Ross, 2007). The latter of the two explains that, since sports brands often do not want to be associated with sophisticated personality traits, they do not show this part of their brand personality on their social media channels (Walsh & Ross, 2007).

Table 3. Brand personality traits in NBA social media posts

	Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication	Ruggedness
Instagram	8%	29%	32%	7%	24%
TikTok	33%	28%	21%	3%	15%

Table 4. Brand personality traits in NFL social media posts

	Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication	Ruggedness
Instagram	28%	26%	31%	4%	11%
TikTok	30%	35%	14%	5%	16%

The thematic analysis showed four clear themes of the NBA's and NFL's brand personality on social media platforms: social responsibility, funny content, unique traits, and differences between platforms. While clear differences can be found between the two brands in terms of the presentation of their brand personality on both social media platforms (see Table 3 and Table 4), there are also similarities in the content they share, such as the clear presence of the Excitement dimension across the brands and platforms.

4.2 Quantitative results

The second sub-question of this study aimed to investigate the perceived brand personality of the brands NBA and NFL according to consumers. This sub-question will be answered through an analysis of the descriptive statistics which were obtained through SPSS. The first part of this section will focus on the brand NBA, while the second section will focus on the brand NFL. In addition, the fit of the Brand Personality Framework with the two sports brands will be assessed.

4.2.1 NBA

For this analysis, respondents were asked to indicate how they perceived the brand personality of the brand NBA. A summary of the descriptive statistics and the reliability of each dimension is presented in *Table 5*. It can be observed that the mean scores of the dimensions do not differ greatly from each other. On a 1-5 point scale, the Competence dimension recorded the highest scores with a mean score of 3.81. Further analyses showed that the traits with the highest mean scores in this dimension were the following: hard-working ($M = 3.92$, $SD = .93$) , successful ($M = 4.06$, $SD = .85$), leader ($M = 3.99$, $SD = .885$), and confident ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .92$).

On the contrary, Sophistication indicated the lowest mean scores of all the dimensions ($M = 3.46$). After observing the mean scores of each individual brand personality trait in this dimension, two traits with low mean scores were discovered: feminine ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.39$) and smooth ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.03$). Other mean scores that were relatively low in comparison to the dimension average were 'down-to-earth' ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.06$) and 'small-town' ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.36$) in the Sincerity dimension and 'outdoorsy' ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.27$) in the Ruggedness dimension. Moreover, the mean score for the individual trait 'exciting' ($M = 3.97$, $SD = .89$) in the Excitement dimension recorded a relative high score compared to the dimension average. An overview of the mean scores and standard deviations of each individual brand personality trait can be found in Appendix B (Table 7).

Table 5. Perceived brand personality of the brand NBA with mean scores *(M)* and standard deviations
   (SD)

Dimensions of brand personality	*M*	*SD*	N
Sincerity	3.50	.76	149
Excitement	3.76	.63	149
Competence	3.81	.63	147
Sophistication	3.46	.80	154
Ruggedness	3.67	.73	152

Means and SD, 1-5 scale

4.2.2 NFL

Similarly, to the previous section, the survey inquired participants about the way they perceive the brand NFL in terms of brand personality. The table that includes the descriptive statistics for each dimension as well as the reliability analysis can be viewed below (*Table 6*). The dimension with the highest average mean score is Ruggedness ($M = 3.93$). The traits in this brand personality dimension with the highest mean scores were: masculine ($M = 4.11$, $SD = .89$), tough ($M = 4.01$, $SD = .84$), and rugged ($M = 3.97$, $SD = .99$). Moreover, the dimension with the lowest average score was Sophistication, with an average mean score of 3.34. The trait with the lowest mean score in this dimension was 'feminine' ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.38$). Furthermore, an outlier with a higher score in this dimension is the individual trait 'good-looking' with a mean score of 3.65 ($SD = 1.07$). In addition, several individual traits recorded mean scores that differed from the average mean score of its dimension. Firstly, the individual traits 'down-to-earth '($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.08$) and 'small-town' ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.35$) were found to have a lower mean score than the Sincerity dimension's average. Additionally, in the Excitement dimension, the individual trait 'exciting' ($M = 4.02$, $SD = .92$) recorded a higher score than the dimension average, as was the case for the following individual traits in the Competence dimension: 'corporate' ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.00$), 'successful' ($M = 4.10$, $SD = .79$), 'leader' ($M = 3.96$, $SD = .89$), and 'confident' ($M = 4.07$, $SD = .79$). All mean scores and standard deviations of the individual brand personality traits can be found in Appendix C (Table 8).

Table 6. Perceived brand personality of the brand NFL with mean scores *(M)* and standard deviations *(SD)*

Dimensions of brand personality	*M*	*SD*	N
Sincerity	3.47	.75	143
Excitement	3.65	.63	143
Competence	3.83	.56	147
Sophistication	3.34	.90	147
Ruggedness	3.93	.65	147

Means and SD, 1-5 scale

4.2.3. Confirmatory factor analysis

Furthermore, to assess the extent to which Aaker's Brand Personality Framework can be applied to the sports brands NBA and NFL, two confirmatory factor analyses were conducted. These results of these two analyses will be described in the following sections. Before conducting the analyses, the researcher decided which fit measures would be used to assess fit in the results section. Following the research of Jackson, Gillaspy, and Purc-Stephenson (2009), who investigated the most often occurring reporting practices of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) research, the decision was made to employ the three most used fit measures to assess whether the framework would be a good fit for a brand. Therefore, this section will report on the three following fit measures of CFA research: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker Lewis Index (TLI).

To check the applicability of Aaker's Brand Personality Framework on the sports brand NBA, AMOS 26 was employed to model the structural relationships as developed by Aaker (1997) (see Table 1). After conducting a confirmatory factor analysis, it was found that the measures of overall fit did not meet the conventional standards of modelling (χ^2 (809) = 1791.19, RMSEA = .09, CFI = .72, and TLI = .69). This suggests that the model does not fit the data well based on the cutoff criteria for fit developed by Hu and Bentler (1999). Additionally, the structural model of the Brand Personality Framework was found to have a poor fit with the data collected for the brand NFL (χ^2 (809) = 1594.90, RMSEA = .08, CFI = .74, and TLI = .71). Therefore, the overall fit did not meet the conventional standards of the structural equation model (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Cabrera-Nguyen, 2010).

4.3 Intended and perceived brand personality

This section will focus on comparing the data from the thematic analysis with the survey data to answer the following sub-question: *What similarities and differences exist between the intended and perceived brand personality of sports brands?* First, several similarities will be discussed, after which differences between the intended brand personality and consumer perception will be discussed.

Firstly, one of the biggest similarities between the findings of the thematic analysis and the survey results is the low association of the sports brands with the Sophistication dimension (Aaker, 1997). As can be observed in Table 5 and Table 6, consumers do not perceive the NFL and NBA as very sophisticated brands, since they recorded the lowest scores of all dimensions. Similarly, the Sophistication dimension was not often observed in the thematic analysis of the two brands' social media pages (Table 3 and Table 4). This was at least partially be explained by Walsh and Ross (2007), who stated that sports brands often do not want to be associated with personality traits in the Sophistication dimension, e.g., good-looking or glamorous, as this does not fit the desired image. Additionally, Smith et al. (2006) shared this point of view and found only a moderate association of sports brands with the Sophistication of Aaker's Brand Personality Framework (see Table 1).

In addition, several similarities can be found between the intended and perceived brand personalities of the sports brands in terms of the Excitement dimensions. This dimension emerged from multiple themes in the thematic analysis, such as the funny content and social responsibility themes, and was also shown to record high scores for the perceived brand personality. The frequent presence of an excited brand personality may be explained by its ability to differentiate a brand from competitors and its attractive and attention-grabbing look (Aaker et al., 2004). Moreover, the Competence dimension was also frequently observed in the thematic analysis and recorded high scores for both brands in the survey.

However, several differences can also be observed between the intended and perceived brand personalities of the sports brands. While consumers often perceive the NFL and NBA brand as rugged (Table 3 and Table 4), this brand personality dimension did not appear often in the thematic analysis. Even though this finding may be surprising, previous research also did not manage to find significant results for the Ruggedness dimension of the Brand Personality Framework (Smith et al., 2006; Braunstein & Ross, 2010). In contrast to the Ruggedness

dimension, Sincerity emerged from multiple themes, but recorded low scores for the perceived brand personalities of both brands. This finding contradicts previous studies, such as Smith et al. (2006), that have found good results when applying the Sincerity dimension to sports brands

The results showcase clear similarities differences between the intended and perceived brand personalities of the brands. While the Sophistication and Excitement dimensions yielded similar results between the brand personality as intended by the brand and the consumer perception, the same results were not found for the Sincerity and Ruggedness dimensions of Aaker's Brand Personality Framework.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how sports brands communicate their brand personality on social media and to what extent this corresponds to the way consumers perceive their brand. To answer the main research question, a thematic analysis was conducted of the Instagram and TikTok pages of two sports brands. Furthermore, the perceived brand personality of these sports brands was analyzed through a survey. Later, a comparison of the survey data and thematic analysis was made. In this section, the research question will be answered by concluding the results of the study. Additionally, the theoretical and societal implications of these conclusions will be discussed, as well as the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

5.1 Main findings

To answer the main research question, three sub-questions were developed and examined. The first sub-question looked into how sports brand present and communicate their brand personality on the social media platforms Instagram and TikTok. The thematic analysis that was conducted to answer this sub-question identified the following four themes through which the brands attempted to communicate their intended brand personality: social responsibility, funny content, uniqueness, and incongruencies between platforms. If we take a look at the overall presence of Aaker's Brand Personality Framework dimensions (see Table 3 and Table 4), it can be observed that there is a frequent presence of the Sincerity, Excitement, and Competence dimensions in both sports brands. In contrast, the Sophistication and Ruggedness dimensions appeared less often in the thematic analysis. As for the two social media platforms, TikTok and Instagram, differences could be observed in the Sincerity dimension for the brand NBA (Table 3). Meanwhile, these differences did not exist in the brand personality of the NFL across the social media platforms, but there were differences in the frequency of the Competence dimension for this brand (Table 4).

Additionally, the second sub-question aimed to measure the perceived brand personality of sports brands through a survey. After running statistical analyses, the survey data showed which dimensions of Aaker's Brand Personality Framework were most often associated with the sports brands, according to consumers. For the brand NBA, the Excitement and Competence dimensions recorded the highest scores, while the personality traits in the Sincerity and

Sophistication dimensions were the least often associated with the sports brand (Table 5). In addition, the respondents associated the brand personality traits in the Ruggedness and Competence dimension most often with the brand NFL, while the Sincerity and Sophistication dimensions again recorded the lowest scores Table 6). Moreover, the model fit of Aaker's Brand Personality Framework was checked for both sports brands. However, the results of this analysis showed that that the framework could not significantly be applied to the sports brands NBA and NFL.

Finally, the third and final sub-question used the findings of the first two sub-questions to compare the intended and perceived brand personality of sports brands. The comparison showed various interesting similarities and differences between how the sports brands presented themselves on social media and the consumer perception. It was discovered that the sports brands do not present a sophisticated brand personality on their social media channels, which is in line with their perceived brand personality. In contrast, it was discovered that consumers often view the brand personality of the sports brands as 'excited', which aligned with their intended brand personality. Nonetheless, the findings of the comparison of the intended and perceived brand personality showed clear differences between the other Brand Personality Framework dimensions. One of the most interesting findings showed that the brands did not communicate a rugged brand personality, while this Ruggedness dimension was often associated with the sports brands, according to consumers. In addition, the Sincerity dimension was not often associated with the sports brands by consumers but appeared many times in the social media platform analysis.

To conclude, this research aimed to measure to what extent the way in which sports brands present and communicate their brand personality on social media is in line with the consumer perception of their brand personality. Through the results of the three sub-questions, this research has shown that the intended and perceived brand personalities of sports brands are aligned for several dimensions of Aaker's Brand Personality Framework but differ for others. Therefore, the intended and perceived brand personalities of the sports brands NBA and NFL are partially aligned, but also show clear differences between what was intended by the brands and the consumer perception.

5.2 Theoretical and managerial implications

This research has contributed to branding and social media research and has several theoretical and managerial implications. First, the present study contributed to literature on the relationship between intended and perceived brand personality, since research on this topic was lacking. While several studies studied this brand personality through Aaker's Brand Personality Framework and applied it to cross-cultural research (Aaker et al., 2001; Rojas-Méndez et al., 2004) and to destination brands and/or branding (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Kaplan et al., 2010), none of these studies compared the intended and perceived brand personality. Therefore, the present study adds to the existing literature on this topic by investigating the relationship between intended and perceived brand personality through Aaker's framework. Brands can employ the findings of this research during the decision-making process on whether they should attempt to align their intended brand personality with the consumer perception of the brand. Since a fit between the two concepts can lead to higher brand loyalty and market share (Malär et al., 2012), this contribution can have important managerial implications as well.

In addition, this research adds to the existing literature on the relationship between brand personality and social media platforms in two ways. The first contribution consists of the way in which brands should approach the presentation of their brand personality on social media platforms. A lack of literature exists on this topic, which is why this study contributes to brand personality research on singular social media platforms. Research that has been conducted on the social media platforms has mainly focused on user needs and motives of Instagram users (Altuna, 2014; Ginsberg, 2015; Al-Kandari et al., 2016) and the user base of TikTok (Qiyang & Jung, 2019; Omar & Dequan, 2020). Therefore, the findings of this research add to literature on how (sports) brands present themselves on Instagram (Table 3) and TikTok (Table 4). Besides research on singular platforms, this study also adds to research on whether brands should align their brand personality on all their social media channels or whether they can differentiate between platforms. While a study by Zhang (2017) showed that a discrepancy between intended brand personality on social media platforms could influence consumer attitude and behavioral intentions, this research was conducted on the platform of Twitter. Therefore, the present study contributes to the literature by describing how (sports) brands present their brand personality on two different social media platforms (see Table 3 and Table 4). The findings of this research can

also have managerial implications for brands, by aiding in the decision-making process to either align or differentiate their brand personality across social media platforms.

Moreover, the findings of the present study have theoretical implications for the existing literature on sports brands and their brand personality. Previous studies on this topic have found conflicting results, which is why this research could have important theoretical implications for the literature. While several studies found significant results for some of the dimensions of Aaker's framework (Smith et al., 2006; Walsh & Ross, 2007; Braunstein & Ross, 2010), other studies could not directly apply the dimensions (Carlson et al., 2009; Heere, 2010; Carlson & Donovan, 2013). Therefore, the findings of this study contribute to the applicability of Aaker's dimensions to sports brands by studying how these sports brands present themselves on their social media channels (Table 3 and Table 4), and how consumers perceive their brand personality (Table 5 and Table 6).

Additionally, another important theoretical implication of this research deals with the applicability of Aaker's model to sports brands. As previously mentioned, the model fit of Aaker's Brand Personality Framework to the sports brands NBA and NFL was poor. This suggests that the Brand Personality Framework may not be applicable to sports brands. Heere (2010) found similar results and developed a new measurement for the brand personality of sports brands. Additionally, studies have suggested that a brand personality is unique for each sports brand and should, therefore, be measured according to the brand (Heere, 2010; Walsh et al., 2013). This would suggest that the perceived and intended brand personality of sports brands should employ a different measurement scale or framework. Therefore, this research contributes to literature on the development of a brand personality measurement specifically created for sports brands.

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Even though the present study has gathered some interesting results, there has some limitations that should be discussed. Therefore, this section will elaborate on these limitations by discussing them in detail and giving out recommendations for future research.

Firstly, the findings of the present study could be influenced by the researcher's own subjectivity. As Braun and Clarke (2012) describe, it is impossible for a researcher to be completely unbiased and objective. This could have influenced the outcome of the thematic

analysis that was carried out by the researcher themselves. Additionally, it should be noted that the researcher can never be completely certain of the brand personality the two brands attempt to communicate on their social media channels. The only way in which this could be achieved is by interviewing brand managers of the two sports brands, which was beyond the scope of this study. Even though the researcher attempted to predict the intended brand personality of the NBA and NFL as accurately as possible by conducting two small case studies on the sports brands, it should be noted that the researcher can be viewed as a consumer as well. This makes it difficult to be certain of the intended brand personality.

In addition, there are several limitations in the survey (design) that should be addressed. Based on previous research on this topic (Malär et al., 2012; Xu et al., 2016), participants were asked to fill out the survey for both brands in the study. However, this could have led to a response bias in their answers, since participants could have compared their response to one brand to the other (Braunstein & Ross, 2010). Additionally, the sample size could be regarded as relatively small. After removing respondents that did not show any familiarity with a sports brand (see section 3.3.3.1), the sample was just big enough to gather a representative sample, based on the Methodological Guidelines (September 2019-2020). This relatively small sample could have influenced the findings of the data analysis.

This leads to the first suggestion for future research, which deals with the applicability of Aaker's Brand Personality Framework. As stated before, the sample size of this research was relatively limited. Therefore, future studies with a bigger sample size than gathered in this study could explore the model fit of Aaker's Brand Personality Framework through both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. In this strategy, half of the data would be used to explore the data to see which dimensions of brand personality can be observed. Afterwards, the other half of the data would be used to carry out a confirmatory factor analysis through SPSS AMOS to check the model fit of the dimensions found in the exploratory factor analysis. It was not possible to carry out this type of analysis in the present study, since the sample size was too limited to split in half and still yield significant results. However, this method has been employed by several other studies (Braunstein & Ross, 2010; Malär et al., 2012) and has been able to gather interesting and significant findings on perceived brand personality research.

Moreover, as was addressed in the limitations, cultural differences could have affected the findings of this study. Therefore, future research on the way in which different cultures

perceive a brand's brand personality could offer interesting insights. Even though Aaker's Brand Personality Framework has been discovered to be applicable across cultures (Aaker et al., 2001; Rojas-Méndez et al., 2004), these studies were conducted a long time ago. Therefore, future research should focus on discovering if the framework can still be applied cross culturally or whether some of the dimensions are cultural-specific.

Finally, the researcher proposes that future research should focus on exploring TikTok as a platform for brands. Due to TikTok being a relatively new platform, there is a clear lack of research on the way in which brand present themselves on the platform. Most of the research conducted on the platform has focused on individual user motives and needs (Qiyang & Jung, 2019; Omar & Dequan, 2020). Future research could investigate brand personality on TikTok by looking at other brands that are doing well on the platform or by comparing the way in which these brands present themselves on TikTok compared to other social media platforms, like the present study aimed to do.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Welcome and thank you for participating in this questionnaire. This research is conducted by a student of the master's program Media & Business at the Erasmus University Rotterdam with the purpose of getting a greater understanding of how consumers perceive the way brands represent themselves in terms of personality.

This questionnaire consists of 8 questions and will take approximately 5 minutes to answer. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Please note that you are always free to omit a question. Furthermore, your personal information will be kept strictly confidential. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. There are no correct or incorrect answers to the questions of this questionnaire. By clicking 'next', you agree with the aforementioned terms. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Manon Derks at 577626md@student.eur.nl

Please beware that it is best to fill in this questinnaire on a desktop or tablet. If you choose to fill in the questionnaire on your mobile phone, it is recommended to turn your phone sideways.

Q15 The following questions will be related to the brand NFL. In case of a multiple-choice question, please tick one box that corresponds best with your opinion.

The National Football League (NFL) is a major sports organization for gridiron football (also referred to as 'American football') founded in the United States in 1920. Every year, 32 teams participate in the NFL. At the end of the season, a 14-team playoff tournament takes place, with the Super Bowl championship game as ending highlight of the season (Britannica, n.d.). Below, the official logo of the NFL can be found.

Q12 How familiar are you with the brand NFL?

○ Not familiar at all

○ Slightly familiar

○ Moderately familiar

○ Very familiar

○ Extremely familiar

Q9 We would like you to think of the brand NFL as if it were a person. This may sound unusual, but think of the set of human characteristics associated with the brand. We're interested in

finding out which personality traits or human characteristics come to your mind when you think of the NFL.

	Not at all descriptive	Slightly descriptive	Moderately descriptive	Very descriptive	Extremely descriptive
down-to-earth	○	○	○	○	○
family-oriented	○	○	○	○	○
small-town	○	○	○	○	○
honest	○	○	○	○	○
sincere	○	○	○	○	○
real	○	○	○	○	○
wholesome	○	○	○	○	○
original	○	○	○	○	○
cheerful	○	○	○	○	○

sentimental	○	○	○	○	○
friendly	○	○	○	○	○
daring	○	○	○	○	○
trendy	○	○	○	○	○
exciting	○	○	○	○	○
spirited	○	○	○	○	○
cool	○	○	○	○	○
young	○	○	○	○	○
imaginative	○	○	○	○	○
unique	○	○	○	○	○

up-to-date	○	○	○	○	○
independent	○	○	○	○	○
contemporary	○	○	○	○	○
reliable	○	○	○	○	○
hard working	○	○	○	○	○
secure	○	○	○	○	○
intelligent	○	○	○	○	○
technical	○	○	○	○	○
corporate	○	○	○	○	○
successful	○	○	○	○	○

leader	○	○	○	○	○
confident	○	○	○	○	○
uper class	○	○	○	○	○
glamorous	○	○	○	○	○
good looking	○	○	○	○	○
charming	○	○	○	○	○
feminine	○	○	○	○	○
smooth	○	○	○	○	○
outdoorsy	○	○	○	○	○
masculine	○	○	○	○	○

Western	○	○	○	○	○
tough	○	○	○	○	○
rugged	○	○	○	○	○

Q23 The following questions will be related to the brand NBA. In case of a multiple-choice question, please tick one box that corresponds best with your opinion.

The National Basketball Association (NBA) is a professional basketball league formed in the United States in 1949. Every season, 30 teams compete for the championship and, at the end of each season, the top-ranking teams participate in a lay-off to determine the NBA champion (Britannica, n.d.). Below, the official logo of the NBA can be found.

Q19 How familiar are you with the brand NBA?

○ Not familiar at all

○ Slightly familiar

○ Moderately familiar

○ Very familiar

○ Extremely familiar

Q20 We would like you to think of the brand NBA as if it were a person. This may sound unusual, but think of the set of human characteristics associated with the brand. We're interested in finding out which personality traits or human characteristics come to your mind when you

think of the NBA. Please indicate to what extent the following characteristics are descriptive of the brand:

	Not descriptive at all	Slightly descriptive	Moderately descriptive	Very descriptive	Extremely descriptive
down-to-earth	○	○	○	○	○
family-oriented	○	○	○	○	○
small-town	○	○	○	○	○
honest	○	○	○	○	○
sincere	○	○	○	○	○
real	○	○	○	○	○
wholesome	○	○	○	○	○
original	○	○	○	○	○
cheerful	○	○	○	○	○

sentimental   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

friendly   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

daring   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

trendy   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

exciting   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

spirited   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

cool   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

young   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

imaginative   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

unique   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

up-to-date   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

independent   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

contemporary   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

reliable   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

hard-working   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

secure   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

intelligent   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

technical   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

corporate   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

successful   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

leader   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

confident   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

upper-class   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

glamorous   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

good-looking   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

charming   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

feminine   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

smooth   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

outdoorsy   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

masculine   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

Western	○	○	○	○	○
tough	○	○	○	○	○
rugged	○	○	○	○	○

Q11 The following questions will regard your demographical information. In case of a multiple-choice question, please tick one box that corresponds best with your opinion or fill in your answers in the comment box in one of the open questions.

Q4 What gender do you identify with?

○ Male

○ Female

○ Non-binary / third gender

○ Prefer not to say

Q5 What is your age?

_____

Q6 What country are you currently living in?

_____

Q7 What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

○ Elementary school

○ Secondary school

○ Vocational education

○ Bachelor degree

○ Master degree

○ PhD or other equivalent

○ Other _____

Q24

You have reached the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for participating in this research!

Please continue onto the next page to save your results.

Appendix B: NBA Perceived Brand Personality

Table 7. Mean scores *(M)* and standard deviations *(SD)* for NBA brand personality traits

Brand Personality Dimension	Brand Personality Trait	*M*	*SD*	N
Sincerity	Down-to-earth	3.22	1.06	154
	Family-oriented	3.61	1.01	154
	Small-town	2.91	1.36	154
	Honest	3.51	1.08	153
	Sincere	3.58	1.07	153
	Real	3.82	.93	154
	Wholesome	3.51	1.08	153
	Original	3.65	.96	153
	Cheerful	3.75	1.01	153
	Sentimental	3.45	1.09	152
	Friendly	3.55	.98	152
Excitement	Daring	3.71	1.05	153
	Trendy	3.85	.99	153
	Exciting	3.97	.89	152
	Spirited	3.76	.91	154
	Cool	3.82	.93	154
	Young	3.80	.93	153
	Imaginative	3.61	.98	153
	Unique	3.62	1.05	154
	Up-to-date	3.83	.93	154
	Independent	3.74	.992	153

	Contemporary	3.54	.85	154
Competence	Reliable	3.58	.89	153
	Hard-working	3.92	.93	153
	Secure	3.75	.93	153
	Intelligent	3.52	1.06	154
	Technical	3.68	1.10	152
	Corporate	3.80	1.04	153
	Successful	4.06	.85	154
	Leader	3.99	.89	153
	Confident	3.95	.92	152
Sophistication	Upper-class	3.62	1.13	154
	Glamorous	3.60	1.11	154
	Good-looking	3.66	.99	154
	Charming	3.69	1.11	154
	Feminine	2.81	1.39	154
	Smooth	3.42	1.03	154
Ruggedness	Outdoorsy	3.25	1.27	153
	Masculine	3.89	.87	154
	Western	3.63	1.14	154
	Tough	3.81	.90	153
	Rugged	3.71	1.06	154

Appendix C: NFL Perceived Brand Personality

Table 8. Mean scores *(M)* and standard deviations *(SD)* for NFL brand personality traits

Brand Personality Dimension	Brand Personality Trait	*M*	*SD*	N
Sincerity	Down-to-earth	3.07	1.08	149
	Family-oriented	3.67	.96	148
	Small-town	2.99	1.35	149
	Honest	3.45	1.13	147
	Sincere	3.32	1.12	149
	Real	3.81	.88	149
	Wholesome	3.46	1.18	149
	Original	3.61	.92	149
	Cheerful	3.80	.97	149
	Sentimental	3.56	1.07	149
	Friendly	3.61	1.00	148
Excitement	Daring	3.71	.97	147
	Trendy	3.80	1.09	147
	Exciting	4.02	.92	149
	Spirited	3.70	.98	150
	Cool	3.71	.95	150
	Young	3.62	1.03	149
	Imaginative	3.38	1.14	149
	Unique	3.53	1.0	148
	Up-to-date	3.56	.96	148

	Independent	3.62	.97	149
	Contemporary	3.49	.94	148
Competence	Reliable	3.62	.92	148
	Hard-working	3.91	.87	148
	Secure	3.67	.89	148
	Intelligent	3.50	1.11	148
	Technical	3.59	1.00	147
	Corporate	3.99	1.00	148
	Successful	4.10	.79	149
	Leader	3.96	.89	149
	Confident	4.07	.79	149
Sophistication	Upper-class	3.49	1.03	148
	Glamorous	3.55	1.13	149
	Good-looking	3.65	1.07	149
	Charming	3.46	1.10	149
	Feminine	2.71	1.38	150
	Smooth	3.26	1.22	148
Ruggedness	Outdoorsy	3.78	1.06	149
	Masculine	4.11	.89	150
	Western	3.79	1.03	150
	Tough	4.01	.84	149
	Rugged	3.97	.99	149