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The discursive construction of online identities and communities by brands during the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup

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Submitted in full fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Linguistics at the University of the Witwatersrand

April 2021



Supervisor: Dr Gilles Baro

Plagiarism declaration

I, Brendan Francis, hereby declare the enclosed work is all my own original intellectual property. It does not contain any work that has been submitted previously for examination and all ideas not my own have been clearly marked and referenced. I hereby submit this thesis in its entirety for the degree of Master of Arts in Linguistics at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Signed and dated 27 April 2021



_____

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Johannesburg, South Africa

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Introduction

The 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup had the highest average viewership for any Women's World Cup since the start of the event in 1991. Megan Rapinoe was one of the stand-out stars, as acting captain and striker for the United States she received two player of the match awards for round of 16 and the quarterfinals. She was also awarded the Golden Ball for top scorer and the Golden ball for best player at the tournament. On the day of the final, 7 July 2019, Nike posted an image of Megan Rapinoe celebrating her team's victory in the finals against the Netherlands. The post was met with harassment and anger, with individuals calling Rapinoe a "lesbian bitch" and a "sheman" stating she did not deserve to win anything.

The strong response to Rapinoe was not only due to her team's victory, but because she did not stand for the United States national anthem and instead chose to take a knee. Her act of defiance resulted in many online users reacting with anger towards her for her actions, insulting her and using various slurs to mock her in the comments section. While the world has come a long way since the first wave of feminism in the early 1900s, we still have a long way to go. The Women's World Cup is meant to showcase the incredible women athletes within the world of football[1]. It is meant to show the best teams in the world competing for first place, instead many individuals do not see it this way. Comments on the Instagram posts says things such as "who cares? They're women" or "no one watches women football".

Despite moving towards a society of gender equality, and gender roles are still a point of concern. The Women's World Cup is no exception, with the gendered nature of the event being a useful platform to address and highlight social issues. This is

[1] The term 'football' will be used opposed to soccer due to the term 'football' being more globally recognised

what the sponsors of the event attempted to do through social media and sportswomen representation. The present thesis seeks to analyse how the brands who sponsored the event attempt to rectify and address the various issues facing women athletes in today's society. Brands used the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup partly due to the exposure and global scale of the event, and partly due to the fact that challenging gender norms has become a trending topic within society. The first chapter will explore and introduce the literature surrounding the topic of gender and sport, with relation to branding and branding in the age of social media. Next the analytic framework and methodology for the thesis will be presented and discussed, drawing from various theories of critical discourse analysis and gender to form the theoretical basis for the present study. Finally the last chapter will critique and analyse the Instagram posts as well as the comments by the brands.

Some of the comments that have been presented in relation to the athletes at the Women's World Cup highlight dated and sexist notions of gender roles in society. We claim to be a changed society, striving for equality and fairness for all. Yet women are still subjected to notions of inferiority, facing criticism and harassment if they do not meet societal norms. This thesis seeks to analyse how these discourses are created and discussed within the framework of social media and gender theories, and examine how the brands that sponsored the event make use of various discourses within society to construct gendered identities and communities on social media and in society.

Research questions

The primary research question seeks to ask how brands, using the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup and its athletes, construct, mediate and negotiate online identities and communities on social media. This question can be discussed in two separate parts. The first is the notion of online identity and the second online communities. Brands construct an online identity that becomes synonymous with the brand, similarly brands are able to initiate discussions on various topics and social issues by constructing a specific community within a targeted discourse on social media.

Looking at online identities on social media, firstly why Instagram? The nature of Instagram makes it unique in the era of social media. Instagram is designed to be visually focused, with users posting pictures and videos that can vary in length. Accompanying each post is a caption, of any length and word count with no limit. As a result individuals and brands use Instagram to not only post pictures, but to discuss and present various ideologies using the caption. Brands by extension use social media to present themselves in the public space, to construct a social identity. This identity relies on social context, where the picture and caption describes not just the brand but also informs the consumers of the brands beliefs and ideologies. Thus how do brands use this platform of expression as a means of identity construction? Specifically how did brands construct identities online in relation to the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup and the athletes involved in the event?

Secondly we consider the notion of online communities. Nothing on social media is isolated; users share, comment and engage with posts daily. As a result, when a brand posts something it immediately becomes a site for discourse construction,

replication and dispersal. So how do brands construct specific online communities in relation to given topics and events on social media?

By extension how then do users react and respond to this community. Brands do not create the community, the community already exists in the virtual space (Chi, 2011). Brands create a community that aligns with the global community but is ultimately stilled centred on the brand. The brands did not create the universal discourse of sports and gender, rather they construct an identity and community that aligns with the discourse present in society.

As a result the thesis question can be furthered expanded, by adopting some of the above points. What techniques and language do brands make use of to construct branded identities and communities online with relation to the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup? And as a result of this identity and community construct, how do consumers react and interact with the brand and other users through identity performance?

Chapter 1

Literature review

This section seeks to unpack and discuss the vast library of literature on brands, identity, social media and sports. The first section will begin with brands and the emergence of branding, brand identity, brand community and brand positioning. Following this section the development of media and modern media, the rapid rise of the information society and the transition from the physical to the virtual self will be discussed before expanding on the notion of the virtual and virtual world. The next section will look at brands and branding online with relation to modern media, how brands construct communities online and create and mediate branded identities in the virtual space. The penultimate section will discuss sports and the sporting world, language usage in sports will be presented and discussed with relation to athletes and athlete gender representation in the modern age, before addressing the nature of gender in our current society. The final section will end off by looking at the 'social media effect', in which the role that social media has played in sports and athletes development in recent years will be discussed while relating this to the rise of athlete activism and activism discourse creation through social media.

1.1 Brands and branding

Brands and what constitutes a brand in modern society emerged largely from the world of advertising, when there was a distinct shift in the mid-1950s about what corporations choose to focus on. While the brand itself was still very much production based the ideology of the brand name as the brand 'identity' began to take root thanks largely to multinational corporations and conglomerates (Aaker,

2012; Clifton, 2009; Klein, 2009). By the late 1970s and early 1980s corporations start to focus more on brand image where the brand name, logo and slogan become synonymous with the notion of the brand itself. Logos are easily attributed to specific brands as well as brand ideologies and identity (Bastos & Levy, 2012). Until this point, branding was largely associated with mass production and mass communication, corporations focused on advertising the differences in quality and function of their products in comparison to their competitors (Bastos & Levy, 2012).

It was during this era that an important concept of branding was proposed, namely brand positioning, and brand positioning within a section of society designed to influence consumers (Aaker, 1996; Aaker, 2012; Bastos & Levy, 2012). What this meant was that brands were now beginning to shift their focus from ‘what’ they were and instead began to market ‘who’ they were. This change took hold in the early 1990s where relationship branding and the brand image were constructed through ideology and beliefs more than product and service (Aaker, 2012). It is during this time that large-scale branding efforts by brands such as Nike and Adidas started; athletes began signing lucrative deals and increasily larger brands were starting to sponsor sports teams and events (Eitzen, 2012). Branding, and brand identity, exploded with the advent of digital media (Chu, 2011; Clifton, 2009).

Digital media allowed corporations to integrate the brand identity into the fabric of the company, corporations shifted further away from focal points of products and service and more towards constructing the brand as an intrinsic ideology ingrained in the heart of the company (Klein, 2009). Brands were able to construct brand ideologies rooted in social beliefs and values, and corporations embodied these values through the use of branded association (Klein, 2009; Nandan, 2005). The branded ideology sought to infuse within the corporate world a deep and meaningful message behind

the company. This distinct shift from product-based corporations came in the early 2000s where the logo itself becomes one of the main focal points for the brand and the brand image (Klein, 2009). While branding and branded content still existed as an entity tied to the ideology of the corporation we do not yet see a focus on the production of branded content. Companies still sought to sponsor and host public events tied to current socio-economic and political affairs, but we did not the widespread reach of the brands we experience in today's global economy (Clifton, 2009; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014).

By sponsoring and hosting events, especially events that garnered widespread media attention, brands were able to construct brand images that aligned with the beliefs and inherent values of the event itself. An example is the sponsorship of youth events which were often seen as dedicated to empowering youth and paving the way for the future (Hartmann, 2003). This use of social and public events furthered the concept of brand image and identity as key factors in a brand's financial and economic success (Aaker, 2007). Brands constructed a dominant global discourse of brand identity, whereby the brand and corporation itself were recognised more through social engagement and interaction than product or service (Hartmann, 2003; Klein, 2009).

This reliance on branding and brand image is influenced by individuals who are progressively becoming consumers of information, and rather than selling a product corporations are in part selling themselves (Bastos & Levy, 2012; Dacin & Brown, 2006; Klein, 2009). Consumer culture has long existed in advertising and media narratives, however this transition to a global consumerist society that is focused on the consumption of information and entertainment is firmly rooted in the widespread availability of digital media (Cotter, 2008). Brands became a focal point for social

discussions whereby any wrong step viewed as racist, sexist, biased or stereotypical could mean death for a brand not capable of salvaging its brand image (Klein, 2009). The broader society saw brands as more than their products, but as key contributors and sites of reproduction for globally recognised discourses of social injustice (Hughey & Daniels, 2013; Mauro, 2020; Zappavigna, 2012). A prime example is Nike, which has become known for supporting athletes during period of injustice as well as funding and running grassroots initiatives.

Corporations recognised this and sought to not only sell the product but to the sell the brand as an extension of the company. The brand itself became a tool for the dissemination and reproduction of social issues aligned within a branded framework, in the late 1990s Nike sought to promote and sponsor athletes who had overcome great obstacles to get where they were (Aaker, 2012; Grow, 2008; Holt, 2016). By doing so, Nike were not selling a product but an ideology, that they were committed to overcoming obstacles. The trademark slogan “Just do it” was introduced in late 1989 and became synonymous with breaking barriers and challenging social norms, the slogan would be directly associated with the beliefs and values of Nike as a company (Klein, 2009; Waymer & Logan, 2021).

Social media and the emergence of instant transmission allowed brands to take this brand identity and reproduce it on a mass media scale. Social media is constantly shifting, identities are able to be manipulated and reconstructed through the use of language (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). On social media we are able to refer to ourselves in specific and deliberate ways, allowing online users to construct and mediate negotiable identities. These identities on social media are thus defined in much the same way that brands are able to constantly reproduce and reconstruct branded identities by adjusting the brands focus (Cook & Hasmath, 2014; Seargeant

& Tagg, 2014). The primary distinction for brands is that their online identities mediated by the social community in which they find themselves. While brands are selling a brand identity this identity is still connected to the broader societal beliefs, due to this that brands make use of precise language to construct deliberate notions of brand identity linked to various socio-economic or political issues (Grow, 2008; Jackson-Brown, 2020; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014).

Corporations and brands make use of social media as a tool for marketing, brand growth and expansion. An extension of this are the endorsements and sponsorships of prolific athletes, which is are communicated on social media not only to attract attention to the endorsements but also to the athlete and the brand (Teixiera, 2013) Brands accomplish this by developing online narratives and communities with the purpose of creating trust with their consumers (Habibi et al., 2014; McAlexander et al., 2002). Social media has proven to be one of the greatest marketing opportunities for recent years, the reason for this is that the cost is virtually nothing, it allows companies to interact with users directly and address issues.

Wirtz et al., (2013) note that on social media, specifically with relation to brands and consumers, there are three primary forms of communication: brand-related, social and functional. The term ‘brand-related’ refers to comments and interaction relating to the brand itself; ‘social’ refers to interactions between users and occasionally interactions with the brand, and ‘functional’ refers to the use of comments and interactions as means of information distribution as opposed to a platform for performativity (Wirtz et al., 2013). Brands typically make use of global events and news in a brand-relation context, in order to expand and shift their brand image; a prime example is that of sports and sporting events (Smith & Smith, 2012). Users primarily interact in terms of social identity, and align with either the “in-group” or the

“out-group”, and this distinction greatly influences how they will interact and react to other online users (Smith & Smith, 2012).

The ideology of the in-group and out-group greatly affects not an only individuals participation but brands engagement on social media (Dessart, 2015; Smith & Smith, 2012). Brands align with a specific group and inherently embody the “in-group” because they create the discourse, while all who oppose it are the out-group, individuals who then engage on social media use this structure of the community to engage in ways that either do or do not agree with the branded ideology (Dessart, 2015; Fiedler & Sarstedt, 2014). The brand started the conversation on the topic, therefore all those who align with the brand are aligned with the “in-group”, sharing its ideological views and beliefs. How individuals react and engage is dependent on the community design Communities can be positioned to allow user feedback or designed to entertain and inform within the context of a global society. (Cotter, 2008; Raney & Bryant, 2009). Brand identity theory is influenced largely by the social context, with community design and positioning being a key factor in how a branded community is represented and discussed on social media (Berntson et al., 2006; Chi, 2011; Duffy & Pruchniewska, 2017).

1.2 Language and the media

Language and the media have has historically played a key role in the indexing of online and virtual identities (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). Individuals make use of language on social media today more as a performance, however this is a shift from what language usage in the media was primarily used for. Early forms of media language and the media itself were used as a tool for the transmission of information to as wide an audience as possible with no interaction or engagement (Tagliamonte,

2014). Johnson and Ensslin (2007) note with media evolving at such a rapid rate and the sudden shift from information to a more interactive world users are able to question, query and critique everything in the media. How we represent language, how language is perceived, how we as language users identify and perceive both ourselves and others through their use of language, and more so how all of these factors interact with each other (Johnson & Ensslin, 2007; O'Brien, 2011).

While language in the media exists in a given space the concepts and ideologies present exist as a facet of metalanguage and communication in the broader society (Johnson & Ensslin, 2007). Metalanguage in itself is not a static concept, with theories of discourse, pragmatics, communication and semiotics all playing a role in how language in the media is used to effectively represent and index various social actors or events (Johnson & Ensslin, 2007; Waymer & Logan, 2021). These sites of linguistics representation are observable in a number of different ways as noted by Schieffelin, Woolard and Kroskrity (1998), namely discursive practice, metadiscursive practice and implicit megapragmatics. The first two concepts centre around the use of language itself, discursive practice looks at what individuals do with language while metadiscursive practice looks at what people say about language and the views of language.

These concepts are firmly rooted in the belief that language in the media is constructed by society, stating the way we make use of language in the media stems from how we use language in broader society. While this ideology holds true for a number of situations, the theory of megapragmatics deals directly with the concepts of language usage by means of preconceived knowledge of language and language acts. This use of language based on social cues attributed to specific language

connotations gives us the first indications of language construction and reconstruction through social and digital media (Johnson & Ensslin, 2007).

Our daily lives in modern society are often firmly embedded in the consumption and production of digital media narratives, or the use of social media to engage and consume information through various outlets. We tend to overlook how important the media and social media in particular is for the presentation and representation of language and language ideologies. Language is inherently social, no word is able to exist in isolation, there will always be socially imposed and implicit meaning attributed to words and word usage in a world of language (Schieffelin et al., 1998). Even as individuals perform and construct identity in the real world so too do they construct and produce online and virtual identities which are constructed through specific language usage online (Chi, 2011; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). This notion of what is termed “hyper social” situations presents the concept of language not only as constructed through society but as being capable of constructing various meanings in society as well (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014).

We cannot understand language in the media without first understanding that language at its core is social. While language is still mediated by society, we as individuals are able to shift and change what it is language symbolises and becomes. The example of “Just do it” from Nike embodies this concept, the phrase in isolation means nothing but when applied to a society where Nike has built a brand and social identity around “Just do it” the language connotation is being constructed by the brand itself and not society.

In order to constitute social relation and interaction Fuchs (2021) citing sociologist Max Weber, notes that language must have a meaningful and symbolic relation to

the very concept within which it exists. Language on social media is capable of adapting and changing already intrinsic notions of belief found in language, and the use of social media as a platform for challenging various aspects of society only exists because of the relative ease of access to information (Fuchs, 2021; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). Through language specific discourses can be created online, by creating and facilitating discussions regarding set topics and ideas these online discourses prove vital for online communities to engage and interact and also for businesses to capitalise on the growing market and trend of social media (Dessart, 2015; Yan, 2011). By posting on social media brands are able to create a specific brand image and identity, with the purpose of connecting with users who add value by commenting on these posts (Carroll & Romano, 2011; Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2014).

In recent years, the use of language online has become more focused on online personas, with our online personalities being a significant influence on social identity and online community affiliation (Buckingham, 2007; Duffy & Hund, 2015; Valentini, Romenti & Kruckeberg, 2016). Language online has become a marker for identity indexing; in other words by referencing key events or phrases we are able to construct very specific identities online. The use of “Kween” over the last 15 years being an example of sexuality representation through linguistic shift (Leap, 2019). Only in recent years has the adoption of the word “Kween” among homosexual communities become a focus for a number of brands and corporation, making use of the uniqueness of the word to develop identities of sexual acceptance and recognition. The use of language in the media to construct negotiable identities is a feature that is largely unique to social media as a whole (Cook & Hasmath, 2014; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014).

1.3 Online identities: Representation of the virtual self

Identity and identity theory are difficult concepts to quantify. What is identity? If you were to ask a hundred people this question you would get those who refer to their gender, occupation, ethnic background, race or nationality, while others would discuss their personality, or talents and skills. The question of what is your identity or more broadly what is identity is not an easy one to answer, because there exists in this world a multitude of different identities co-existing and engaging in an era of interconnectedness like never before. Through globalisation and the ever-expanding capabilities of the human population "identity" becomes more than a question of how you identify and more a question of who you are at the core of your person (Marwick, 2013a).

For the most part and individual's identity will fall into one specific category of identification. This can either be subjective, meaning how we see ourselves, it can be representational, meaning how different aspects of the self are constructed in different social situations and cultural settings as well as in the media, or it can be self-presentation, how we choose to present ourselves to others (Buckingham, 2007; Marwick, 2013a). Identity is a complex and ever-changing concept, and there is no one description capable of quantifying all that identity is capable of encompassing. The notion of identity became even more complex with the introduction of the internet and social media, with individuals being able to leave their physical self behind and create a virtual self, an online "you" so to speak. (Cover, 2012; Turkle, 2005).

An important aspect of identity in relation to social media is the idea of subject positioning, that we as social actors are positioned, both consciously and

unconsciously, in situations that define or impose specific identities on us (Talbot, 2010). Talbot (2010) discusses a very interesting example of this, whereby women labourers are often excluded from certain jobs that require vast amounts of physical labour yet they are expected to carry around heavy children and do whatever work is considered necessary to sustain the family. There is a distinct subject position in both situations, one excuses women due to physical constraints while the other demands physical work regardless of the ability to do so (Talbot, 2010). Before expanding on this notion of positioning and the virtual identity we first need to briefly look at what different theories of identity exist regarding oneself in the physical world.

Stone (1996) discussed identity as a single crucial personality tied to an individual. She argued that our identity remained constant and we chose what parts of our identity we wished to portray. Stone (1996) further argued that the rise of digital communications allowed individuals to select and choose what aspects of their self they wished to portray, but more than this they were now capable of changing and reconstructing their persona as they saw fit. This forms the basis of how theories of identity will play a large role in the thesis to come, although I would argue we are more capable of fluidity in terms of identity and identity construction rather than remaining static (Cook & Hasmath, 2014; Marwick, 2013a; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014).

The idea that we are able to select specific and calculated aspects of ourselves as our virtual self is fascinating. In the physical world we are regulated and mediated by social norms, so as a person who identifies as a man I would not leave the house wearing make-up for example. I would not do this because I have been taught that as a ‘man’ I’m not supposed to be the person wearing make-up.. This is due to masculine norms of society and because of the social pressure to follow and

maintain these norms. This is just one example whereby the physical world presents a number of limitations and restrictions. Stone (1996) discusses the notion of the "virtual crossdresser"; individuals who are able to modify and re-construct an online identity that is not aligned with their own gender identity. This is possible because the virtual space is just that, virtual, it is a space that exists symbolically more than it does physically. We are able to construct and mediate our virtual self with little to no influence from social constraints surrounding identities (Cook & Hasmath, 2014; Marwick, 2013a; Stone, 1996). We can change how we talk, dress, act and behave in order to tailor our identity to fit the social setting (Brandtzaeg & Chaparro-Domínguez, 2020; Marwick, 2013a).

This leads us to the first notion of identity, namely assumed identities, which refers to identities that we as individuals are able to assume through adaption of the self. These are identities that are accepted by the individual and will remain as such, and examples of this could be nationality or race (Bock & Mheta, 2013; Brandtzaeg & Chaparro-Domínguez, 2020; Buckingham, 2007). The second notion is imposed identities, which are identities that are imposed on an individual through preconceived identity ideologies of society. An example of this type of identity is the notion that criminals are individuals who are poor and from lower class households; society does not often shape the higher class as criminals and instead confines this classification to those in the lower classes (Ferrell & Sanders, 1995). Ferrell and Sanders (1995) further discuss the notion that crime and social identities such as class, race and socio-economic status are interconnected, these identities that are imposed on individuals before they are able to speak for themselves.

The third notion is negotiable identities, whereby identities are able to be discussed, re-constructed and changed. These are identities that are contested by the

individual; at its most basic it is an identity we choose to assume and must negotiate constantly within society (Bock & Mheta, 2013). However, at a broader level, these identities are identities which are challenges to the social norms of society, for example feminism and feminist identity (Alcoff, 1988; Baer, 2016; Dixon, 2014). While in more modern society being termed a feminist is not frowned upon, the historically negotiated identity of “feminist” has a long and pained history, of fighting against social injustice and inequality to be able to feel comfortable to identify as a feminist, without feeling subjected to social ostracism (Alcoff, 1988; Baer, 2016). There are identities that are globally contested and debated, which in more recent years have included transgender and queer identities as well as various aspects of sexuality such as homosexuality, bisexuality and pansexuality to name a few (Altman, 2004; Foucault, 1990; Grewal & Kaplan, 2001). The final notion is performativity, whereby the focus is not the performance itself but how different identities are performed, constructed and consumed within a larger social context (Butler, 2002; Hough, 2010).

What then is a virtual identity and how is it constructed, negotiated and discussed in an online society. Grewal and Kaplan (2001) discuss the concept of global identities focusing on studies of sexuality whereby they argue that sexuality, while being deeply personal, is also part of a larger transnational culture and identity shared across the globe. The LGBTQI+ community, a global identity shared by millions of people existing in a digital world that allows for individuals to be connected and to share in a sense of community. Virtual identity then is a social construct, much like the identity assumed in the physical world however the virtual self is marked by spaces of hyper socialisation. Virtual identity is constructed in a social context characterised by widespread and instant communication and transmission of

information, the virtual identity exists in a space far larger and more abundant than anything we are capable of finding in our daily lives.

Furthermore we are able to discern that the virtual self is not static, and is capable of being made and re-made in any way the individual sees fit. However this identity is still mediated by the community in which they find themselves (Brandtzaeg & Chaparro-Domínguez, 2020; Marwick, 2013a). So while online identities are able to be re-constructed depending on what the individual wishes to present to society, identity and self-presentation vary across social media platforms and cultures. The very term “virtual identity” or “online identity” implies that an individual online is different to that same person offline, so too can this been seen across social media platforms (Bagozzi, Dholakia & Pearo, 2007; Duffy & Hund, 2019; Marwick, 2013). Online identities are constructed by the individuals and mediated and moderated by the online social community in which they find themselves.

With reference to the notion of feminism and what constitutes “being feminist” is often highly debated (Baer, 2016; Dixon, 2014). Some scholars argue that feminism discusses how women should be viewed and treated and looks at positions of moral justice, while other scholars argue that feminism looks at how women are constantly underrepresented and excluded from systems of justice (Dixon, 2014). Neither argument is invalid nor untrue; rather the defining factor is belief. How we talk, view and discuss women in society centres our social and personal beliefs concerning women. If you are a feminist you would discuss gender and the workspace differently to an individual who is not, this is simply human nature (Baer, 2016; Eitzen, 2012). Our personal beliefs will influence how we discuss various topics, and this ideology holds true also for online identities and communities. How we talk about and discuss

various identities is moderated by the dominant beliefs of society, but this is not to say that one is not able to challenge these dominant discourses.

Similarly brands thrive on constructing identities and communities that seek to challenge the norms of society; Holt (2016) looked at an advertisement by Under Armour in which Gisele Bundchen, known for her time as a model, can be seen hitting a punching bag. The advert was designed to challenge the socially imposed identities Bundchen faced, with the back wall being covered in social media posts ranging from “Stick to modelling sweetie” and “Gisele is soooo fake” all the way to “BRAVO! Gisele can do anything” and “goddess”. Vastly different ideological responses to the same person based primarily on personal beliefs. Under Armour is challenging the concept of what it means to identify as a model, stating that being a model is more than good looks and glamour and also requires commitment and dedication. Brands are capable of capitalising on how identities are discussed online to construct a branded identity of their own, as well as act as sites for identity construction (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

1.4 Branded identity and community: Identity construction and the future of advertising

A brands identity is an essential element of the cultural and social perception in the broader context of society (da Silveira, Lages & Simoes, 2013). Given the consumerist nature of modern society and the ever-expanding global reach of brands, the need to differentiate and be recognisable has become more important than ever (Aaker, 2007). As a result brand identities have shifted from a focus on the product to a focus on the brand. Consumers think of brands more than ever, they

think of the brands ideological positions in society as well the values and beliefs associated with the brand as a whole (Clifton, 2009; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

As the individual visualises and represents the self according to identity possibilities and situations within society, brands construct identities focused and centred as a dominant ideology or belief which, during a specific period of time, embodies the branded ideologies and values associated with the brand and the company by extension (da Silveira et al., 2013; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). There is also a distinction drawn between the core and extended identity, whereby the core identity is the constant ideology and essence of the brand itself while the extended identity looks at numerous aspects of the brand that extends beyond the core self and creates a more complete and complex notion of branded identity (Aaker, 1996; Schroeder & Morling, 2006).

A brand cannot have one single identity, while the core identity will influence and guide brand engagement and interactions the various facets of branded identity will differ based on the contextualised setting and the social environment (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). In its early years of branding, Nike sought to capitalise on feminist narratives to further brand identity and culture, however these were not entirely effective as because Nike was simultaneously running advertisements that sought to highlight men athletes, effectively overshadowing the intended discussions surrounding feminism and gender equality (Grow, 2008). This has changed due to the advent of social media, with brands being able to highlight women and achievement. The sponsorship of the FIFA World Cup being an example, with large multinational corporations becoming known for sporting events; Adidas, Hyundai and Visa all sponsored the 2015 and 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup.

In order for a company to create a brand identity that is successful it needs to have an understanding of the social context as well as the social interactions surrounding the chosen topic (Schroeder & Morling, 2006). Brands need to not only maintain a strong internal framework of values and beliefs but this core identity constructed by the brand needs to embody all that the brand does, for example Nike has set up a number of programmes designed to help young girls who do not have access to resources and also has programmes to help people of colour who are also discriminated against in the world of sport (Eitzen, 2012; Waymer & Logan, 2021). At the core of this belief, Nike discusses the ideology of social justice, not for one specific group but for all mistreated minorities and groups that have been subjected to social bias and stereotyping (Waymer & Logan, 2021).

The core ideology is constant, a fight against social injustice, yet the extended identities constructed by the brand embody two different ideologies in society. Brand identity is heavily influenced by human identity and often closely mirrors various aspects of society, and in the case of Nike we can see how they are able to utilise both the core and extended identities to construct a multifaceted identity that does not rely on one single belief to construct the values associated with the brand. The self-identity is inseparable from the collective social identity, because regardless of what aspects of identity you embody you will always share commonalities with various groups in society (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). This notion is true for brand identity, which is inseparable from the broader collective global identity in which the brand is positioning itself.

For brands creating a branded identity is only one part of the process to create a unique distinct brand, the second part is community construction and interaction. Online communities are not permanent, due to the fluid nature of social media, so

online communities appear and disappear regularly, being strongly influenced by current social context and real world events (McAlexander et al., 2002). These communities extend to the online space, while much research has been done regarding communities in sport there is little in the discussion on online communities and how they have evolved in today's society (McAlexander et al., 2002; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). This thesis seeks to address the role of online communities in branded identity construction as well as the impact of social media on an individual's identity portrayal on social media.

What happens in the world determines what the most relevant and spoken about topic will be on social media and mass media in general, with companies making use of these events to expand their network of users and individuals who identify with the brand and the brands message (Fiedler & Sarstedt, 2014). Brands make use of already established communities as a means to supplement themselves into the dominant discourses present in society, and for some brands this is easier than others (Habibi et al., 2014; Leyton Escobar et al., 2014). Looking again at Nike, it is able to engage openly in the world of socially inequality and injustice because over the decades it has constructed a branded identity that challenges social injustice, and when Nike discusses gender inequality it is often met with positive acclaim, often but not always (Waymer & Logan, 2021).

The success of branded communities further relies on brand trust and authenticity (Habibi et al., 2014). When discussing authenticity it is not how "real" the brand is but rather how much social power has been attributed to the brand by the consumer, and this is done through consumption (Clifton, 2009; Schroeder & Morling, 2006). Consumption is not limited to buying products from the brand but is rather engagement and interaction with the brand, when users like, comment, share and

engagement with brands online this consumption provides authenticity and validity to the brand with relation to given communities in society (Clifton, 2009; da Silveira et al., 2013).

By generating engagement brands are able to constructed brand identities and communities that are more visible in a society that is saturated with all manner of subcultures and niches of individuals (Holt, 2016). Continuing to strive towards a branded community that is seen as authentic to the brand will further expand the social power possessed by the brand. This notion of consumption is largely symbolic, signifying neoliberal elements that at its core relates to the intensifying and vast power that multinational corporations now possess in our global society due to the nature of consumerism (Fotopoulou, 2017).

Brands are able to utilise this consumerist nature to their advantage by aligning with specific aspects of cultural branding that relate to a social issue that provides brands with the opportunity to ingrain themselves in the very fabric of a discourse (Clifton, 2009; Jackson-Brown, 2020). While the user develops notions of symbolic consumption through repeated interactions with the brand and exposure to mass media, not all individuals who engage will do so for the same reason (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). This discrepancy within social settings highlights the main concern surrounding brand identity and communities, it is not concrete (da Silveira et al., 2013). The uneasy and volatile nature of brand identity means that there are often blurred lines when addressing concept of brand identity, brand position and brand image.

Brands make use of dominant social discourses surrounding trending topics in society that are designed to further a brand identity focused on a single aspect of

human culture (Clifton, 2009). This aspect can be anything ranging from race and gender to age, nationality or even sports team preferences (Eitzen, 2012),. Brands construct identities and communities that rely on these aspects to remain relevant and necessary (Aaker, 1996, 2007). As brands construct identities they align themselves with the various aspects of the social beliefs, and these aspects become entrenched in the brand identity and all subsequent communities constructed using this notion of branded identity at this given period of time (Schroeder & Morling, 2006). As a result brand identity is able to be re-shaped and modelled as the brand sees fit, by doing so brands are able to embody ideologies of equality and social justice. One such ideology in recent years has become more of a focus due to further research is the notion of gender and gender equality, and how this is further represented in society (Cook & Hasmath, 2014; Grow, 2008).

1.5 Gendered brands: The gendered language of advertising

Gender and gendered identities have been at the forefront of many advertising campaigns, with the marketing of “sex sells” being a prime example of this (Barthel, 1989). Barthel (1989) notes that as early as the 1960s brands were making use of woman as sexual symbols to sell products; the book itself focused on feminine beauty products and noted that connotations of sex and sexuality, desire, deception and provocation were all used to effectively sell and advertise products. Before we are able to explore the realm of gendered brands we should briefly look at how language and gender became so interconnected in our modern society, and how brands over time utilised this for their own purposes.

A key element of gender and gendered language is the idea of discourse, the role of discourses in modern society is firmly rooted in the history of our society as a whole.

The notion of discourse is ever changing, with scholars such as van Dijk (2008, 2011) viewing discourse as language in context, and language as it is used and manipulated in social contexts. While others such as Cotter (2008) view discourse as more of an idealised view of the use of linguistics forms and techniques in a broader context of discourse theory. While both theories present ideas that form a basis of discourse analysis neither is capable of entirely encompassing what we know as discourse. Sunderland (2004) notes that discourse is a reproduction of already present ideological and philosophical views ingrained in a society, Sunderland (2004) presents an argument by Foucault in early discourse analysis that discourse often revolves around the notion of subject positioning due to culturally and historically specific ideas of knowledge. Individuals, groups and organisations are 'subject positioned' in discourses to perpetuate a long-standing societal belief or social teaching, and what we presume to be an innate belief in our society has been built on the history of that knowledge and belief. As a simple example the common understanding we have today that the Earth revolves around the Sun was built on the shoulders of astronomers and scientists who fought against the beliefs of their time. This way of organising and categorising knowledge was not common place, and it challenged the norms of the society in which it was presented.

There is not any one theory which applies to all ideologies of discourse (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2008). For the purposes of this section gendered discourse will be discussed from two standpoints. The first is discourse as culture and the second is discourse as text. On discourse as culture Mary Bucholz in Holmes and Meyerhoff (2008) notes that discourse is informed, shaped and negotiated through cultural and social interactions concerning a given subject. Discourses are informed by the culture of society as much as they are informed by each other. No discourse or

culture is able to exist in isolation, with the advent of the internet nothing is able to exist in a setting outside of the norms of society, and discourses surrounding gender and gendered identity are informed by a culturally specific view of gender norms (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2008).

These views in turn affect and shape the language of the discourse through social interaction. While scholars argue that society shapes language, how individuals make use of language and how they choose to express and perform various identities will in turn shape societal notions surrounding their identity. Society is still able to shape language and language users are not passive observers in this system, rather they actively engage in their own performance of gender and gender identity (Fotopoulou, 2017; Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2008; Talbot, 2010). However this active role in gender discourses however is not always positive; while there are those who engage with the discourse from a viewpoint of acceptance and support there are others who engage for nefarious purposes, to bolster and maintain dated ideologies of gender oppression surrounding women in the society (Talbot, 2010). As a result gendered language takes on one of two core ideologies, either a challenge to the norms of social interaction surrounding gender or an agreement with the gendered norms present (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2008).

The discourse as text, refers to both spoken and written information conveying an ideological viewpoint of gender in society (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2008). By examining discourse as both spoken and written we are able to infer broader connotations of social beliefs, and what this does is allow stylistic choices, word delivery and contextual setting to have more of an influence in how we understand gendered discourses and discourse as a whole (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2008). For a large part of our societal history women's language has been seen as inherently different to

that of men, whether it be with reference to how often the individual talks or the content of the language , gender and the notion of gender have informed and constructed various ideologies of language (Barthel, 1989; Butler, 2002; Talbot, 2010).

Social actors are capable of challenging these norms but there are various aspects that make this difficult to accomplish, with the first being the idea of society itself. While we argue that society has become more modernised over the years, we cannot ignore the fact that we still exist in a society designed to continue patriarchal advantages (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2008; Talbot, 2010). Society still positions women in such a way that they must behave 'feminine' fashion that conforms to society's ideals. Beauty products often target features considered to be either unfeminine or considered to be unattractive such as being overweight, wrinkles, stretch marks and cellulite to name a few (Stuart & Donaghue, 2012).

While there are challenges to these notion of gender there are still brands and individuals that ascribe to and believe in these ideals. Unfortunately, this may never change, not because we as a society do not strive for change but rather because brands seek to make individuals imitate beauty standards. The language in these adverts focus on unwanted features and will often highlight them multiple times by including them in the textual and verbal elements of the advert (Stuart & Donaghue, 2012). According to Talbot (2010) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), we should address this issue in a simpler way, by asking three questions in any discourse surrounding gender: How is it being spoken about? Why is it being spoken about? Are there alternative ways to speak about it?

These ideologies are often informed and mediated by subcultures in society. As Holt (2016) notes what previously was seen as being outside the norm has slowly begun to inform and influence society in extremely noticeable ways. The outcasts groups present in social settings will often be the most influential when attempting to constructs subcultures within a social discourse, individuals who adhere to an ideology not commonly associated with social norms and beliefs (Holt, 2016). This can, partly, describe and indicate how feminism became a focal point in society. The notion of gender equality was at one time an entirely foreign concept in “civilised” society (Alcoff, 1988; Baer, 2016). Where the roles of a woman as a mother, carer and housekeeper were assumed to be the only “standard” gendered identity that woman should ascribe to. While feminism and the notion of gender equality have existed far longer than the idea of the “working man”, with feminist literature existing as early as the late 1800s, we still need to view the discourse from a lens of patriarchal dominance. The reason for this is because while feminism existed in society it was not the norm, it was accepted and it was not a topic of discussion open to all (Alcoff, 1988). Talbot (2010) furthers this notion with reference to appearance, noting that women are often seen as needing to look a certain way, again a reference to the branded advertising seeking to impose desirable physical traits. Any ideology evolves as a result of its social environment, which leads us to ask how do brands and branded identities exists within this complex matrix of gendered ideologies?

The first notion is that brand identities exist in relation to masculinities within society, meaning that brands are predominantly masculine and rather than presenting an ideology of femininity they instead harness the power of a masculinity that supports femininity and feminism. Rather than completely re-position the brand as feminine it

retains these gendered ideals surrounding masculinity and instead positions the brand identity as masculinity that is ambiguous and feminised (Ulrich & Tissier-Desbordes, 2018). The dominant brand identity is masculinity, yet these masculinities are fluid and constantly changing; some may be resistant masculinities that reject notions of gender equality while others incorporate gender equality but never truly embrace the concept of a feminine brand (Spielmann et al., 2020).

Brands and products are often assigned a gender that can be seen in the visual nature of the products, pink for girls and blue for boys (Kacen, 2000; Oakenfull, 2015). These gendered identities that the brands embody directly affect brand engagement and social perception of the brand, and for a gendered brand identity to exist in a salient way it relies on global perceptions of the brand to be somewhat congruent (Kacen, 2000).

A gendered brand cannot be constructed as both overtly masculine and feminine at the same time, rather the branded identity seeks to engage with a social discourse that will create awareness and visibility within the broader society (Ulrich & Tissier-Desbordes, 2018). In their study of brand gender perceptions Ulrich and Tissier-Desbordes (2018) found that men were less likely to buy and interact with brands that were inherently seen as feminine, because they held onto their beliefs that masculine men would not engage with feminine brands. This ideology has begun to shift drastically, with feminine brands and feminine branded products being a focus for many brands in contemporary society (Berntson et al., 2006; Oakenfull, 2015; Spielmann et al., 2020; Torelli et al., 2011; Ulrich & Tissier-Desbordes, 2018).

A key focus for many branded identities when addressing gender inequality is sports and sporting events, because brands are able to construct an identity congruent with

the event they are engaging with and sponsoring (Aitchison, 2007; Clifton, 2009; Toffoletti, 2017). In recent years we have seen international women's sports becoming increasingly mainstream because of branded involvement. For instance tennis players Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova have received international acclaim for their sporting performances from brands (Mauro, 2020). Brands are able to utilise the sports and sports stars to promote the brand identity in much the same way that athletes are able to self-represent using social media (Jackson-Brown, 2020; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018b).

One such factor is the FIFA Women's World Cup, which has become the fastest growing women's sporting event in the world in recent years, with Women's World Cup matches drawing a higher average attendance at matches than the Men's World Cup (Dunn, 2016). Duncan (2006) noted that women in sport often faced numerous challenges before becoming star athletes, due to the oppositional view of gender in society so when a woman athlete achieves something she is seen as a challenge to the gender norms of society.

There has been an increase in popularity in women's sports such as tennis, professional women's basketball league and the fan support received by women athletes from the 1996 Olympic Games (Duncan, 2006). Everything would suggest uniform advancement towards a common goal, namely equality and fairness within the sporting world, yet this is not the case or else this thesis would not exist. So how then do sports and the language of sports influence brands and branded identity, and why do brands use sports to construct gendered identities?

1.6 Language and sport: The modernised language of sports and gender identities

Sport exists in a unique position in society, at its core sport gives us something to identify with that is larger than ourselves, and it gives us the opportunity to be part of something greater (Eitzen, 2012). But can this always be seen as a good thing? English football fans are among the most violent in the world, with individuals being killed and severely injured during riots and stampedes by football fans (Eitzen, 2012). While sport allows us to be embraced by a larger community it also comes with a unique set of struggles depending on social context, for example a Liverpool supporter in Manchester during a game is a terrifying thought, but why is this? We need to understand that sport and the role of sport in society has existed as a means of socialisation and identity construction for decades (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Trolan, 2013).

We are socialised into gender roles from education and school to same-sex peer group, where even the hobbies or recreation activities we choose to take part in will have an impact on how we develop in terms of not only identity but gender roles within society (Aitchison, 2007). Gender has become an innate part of our daily lives, so much so that we assume it is inherent in all aspects of society (Lorber, 2018). This notion is extended into the realms of sport, where from a young age we are subjected to the fact that boys are taught to go outside and play while girls are told to stay inside and play. These two seemingly mundane acts within our society only serves to reinforce the ideology that sport is meant for men (Trolan, 2013). By being encouraged to play sports young boys will begin to associate sports with dominant theories of masculinity present in society, and this belief often persists well into adulthood where men are often resistant to the notion of women athletes because

they have been socialised to see sport as masculine (Fink, 2015; Lorber, 2018; Trolan, 2013). These ideologies are present in broader society in settings such as South Africa, Engh (2010) notes that between 2004 and 2008 the South African Women's National Team received little support from their organisation as they lacked permanent and dedicated coaches as well as access to training resources. This treatment is not new, with many athletes experiencing such treatment with within the sporting world (Duncan, 2006; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002).

Sports are perceived as masculine, embodying the physical ability often associated with the identity of masculinity (Duncan, 2006). As a result of this inherently hyper masculine environment, women and women in sport are positioned as "the other gender" (Scraton & Flintoff, 2002). Christopherson, Janning and McConnell (2002) in their content analysis of the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup found that one third of magazine articles contained contradictions, often attributing the success of the event and the athletes to historically feminised characteristics such as "The women out there, even with their all-American good looks, highly trained muscles and 100-watt smiles, could be us…". Furthermore Christopherson et al., (2002) found that 46% of magazines referred to women in masculine terms such as "determined" or "warrior mentality". Magazines attempted to generate popularity by using language designed to challenge dominant roles of women in society, by referring to the athletes in terms of masculine roles, thus seeking to construct a specific gendered ideology of empowerment in relation to the event (Christopherson et al., 2002).

The idea of gendered sports and differences in sport is gradually residing. While more accepting ideologies of gender and gender equality have affected this, need to look at the notion of sports feminism and the role of liberal and neoliberal feminism in significantly changing the face of language in sports (Baer, 2016; Scraton & Flintoff,

2013; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a). While ever-changing gender ideologies shape and construct the nature of sports in society the emergence of early feminist sports stars shifted the narrative of “biological difference” to “socially imposed gender ideologies” (Scraton & Flintoff, 2013). Christopherson et al., (2002) focuses on how the event is discussed as well as digital media and the nature of widespread communication in the modern space. While women athletes are being heralded as leading the next generation into the future by challenging gender norms there is still the lack of access and opportunity as well as the notion of unequal funding (Scraton & Flintoff, 2013). While great strides are being made towards equal representation in sport, we still see a disparity in the access to finances and opportunities within sporting society.

The gendered ideals portrayed by sportswomen highlight social inequality and injustice, by focusing on accomplishments and attempting to do away with the notion of “feminised sports” (Trolan, 2013). Athletes seek to be viewed as athletes first, and shrug off the constant sexualised nature of sports and language that exists in terms of gendered ideologies of women and sexuality (Fink et al., 2014; Scraton & Flintoff, 2013; Wickman, 2008). Before 2010, women were often trivialised and underrepresented in the media, with minimal commentary on their performance and more focus on their physical appearance and attractiveness (Christopherson et al., 2002; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002, 2013).

Since 2010, the sexualised notions of women athletes has waned, with emphasis shifting to their athletic ability, and simultaneously the dominant viewpoint from brands and corporations relating to women athletes has become one of consumption (Dunn, 2016; Toffoletti, 2017). Each FIFA Women’s World Cup reached higher propagation through society than its previous iteration, with the 2011 and 2015 FIFA

Women's World Cups being the biggest in the history of the event at its time (Dunn, 2016). The event was becoming a site for the construction and spread of gendered ideologies surrounding women athletes, and as the event itself grew so too did the implications for women and their participation in sports (Duncan, 2006).

Women athletes were becoming symbols campaigning against gendered inequality, and as the athletes began to perform, brands, corporations and individuals started to focus on the athlete as a sporting star rather than the gendered ideology, and the role of athletes in society began to shift (Fink et al., 2014). Athletes were choosing more and more how they wanted to be seen, heard and portrayed in both the media and on social media platforms. Athletes began to construct ideologies of empowerment, of overcoming obstacles and challenges and sought to present themselves as more than women, but as committed, dedicated and determined to incite change in their chosen sporting fields (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a). The shift in the global discourse surrounding gendered sports meant two things: firstly, for brands and corporations involved, it was a shift from sexualised notions of athletes and to a focus on ability and skill (Hazari, 2018; Waymer & Logan, 2021). Second was the emergence of social media narratives of empowered and capable women athletes (Fink, 2015; Mauro, 2020; Smith, 2019).

These notions of empowerment paved the way for feminised notions of athletes in a society dominated by masculine ideals, with athlete activism becoming a cornerstone of athletes language usage on social media when referring to issues of gender, race, class, nationality and culture (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020; Smith, 2019). The language of sports in the modern era is greatly influenced by the speed at which individuals consume information surrounding events, in a culture focused on living virtually, the 'virtual self' is able to carry more influence and power than the people they represent

(Cooky & Antunovic, 2020; Litchfield et al., 2016; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b). How do athletes contribute to shaping gendered brand identities in connection with sporting events, and how is this done regarding sports athletes and their interactions with the brands?

1.7 The new age of athletes: The social media effect and gendered activism

The movement “BlackLivesMatter” started as a hashtag in 2013, in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, who had murdered Trayvon Martin as he walked home from the shop having bought iced tea and skittles (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020). According to Zimmerman, he fired in self-defence despite there being absolutely no evidence to support this statement, and he walked away from the incident with no jail time or consequences.

The above statement is one of many surrounding the BlackLivesMatter movement, which fundamentally seeks to draw attention to the various injustices perpetuated against both individuals who identify as black and the black community not only in the United States but globally (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020). Yet while the movement received widespread coverage and was a global point of discussion it was not until late 2014 that came into the spotlight when athlete Ariyana Smith laid on the basketball court before a match for four and a half minutes, as a tribute to Michael Brown, who had laid in the street for four and a half hours after being shot by police for stealing cigars from a corner store (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020). Smith was one of the first athlete activists to gain widespread coverage from media outlets for her protests both on and off the court, and since then athletes and athletes championing social reform became a more prevalent topic of discussion in social spheres across the globe. Yet it was marked by a specific focus, men.

While sportswomen were the catalyst that served to ignite the modern era of athlete activism as it exists today, and women were on “the frontline” of social movements aimed at gender and racial injustice, their voices are often rendered invisible in narratives surrounding athlete activism (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020; Fotopoulou, 2017; McNeal, 2018). Instead the focus is on the perspective of men, with Colin Kaepernick becoming the face of the “new” athlete activist despite the fact that he was not one of the founders of the cause, he was simply the most prolific athlete due to media representations of him as “committed to undoing racial injustice” (Fotopoulou, 2017).

Despite the evidence that women athletes were at the forefront of a number of social movements aimed at challenging societal norms, they are often omitted from the discussion (Baer, 2016). While men have access to high-paying careers in sport we see that women do not. For example the highest salaries for some of the top basketball players in the NBA reaches almost 20 million dollars, with the closest salary for women just shy of one hundred thousand dollars (Eitzen, 2012). While men are able to create a career out of sport women are often not afforded this luxury, with sportswomen such as Billy Jean King and Venus Williams being incredibly outspoken regarding the notion of gender equality, yet these challenges to social norms are discussed in reference to men and the “opportunities” afforded to women by others in society rather than their own hard work and determination (Eitzen, 2012).

The discussion surrounding the social issue of gender inequality is championed by sportswomen, yet when there is a leap forward in terms of gender equality it is most often credited to men, corporations run by men or masculine influence (Baer, 2016; Eitzen, 2012). The introduction of social media into this debate further expands what

we conceive as being possible regarding gender activism in society. Women struggled for decades against social barriers designed to hinder their progress into the masculine dominated world of sport as well as other aspects of gender inequality such as domestic violence and the wage gap, however with the introduction of digital media this coverage grew exponentially (Fotopoulou, 2017; Linabary et al., 2020).

Athletes now had a platform whereby they were free to choose their own means of representation. Even though whatever was said or spoken about was still mediated by society it gave athletes more agency and choice over what they spoke about and discussed (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b). While this platform allowed athletes to extend their reach, it also had negative consequences, such as public shaming and online harassment (Antunovic, 2019; MacPherson & Kerr, 2021). How then does athlete representation come into play surrounding these notions of gendered activism and what role do brands have in this community discourse surrounding gendered ideologies?

Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018b) discussed the self-presentation of athletes on social media, focusing on how athletes not only chose to present themselves but also how they were moderated by the community they were in. What they found was that athletes were able to present a successful feminine subjectivity centred on personal choice and agency, self-empowerment and creating a story that generated feminised personas in order to garner likes and engagement on social media. The athletic celebrity in modern society is a brand, and with the level of exposure given to women athletes they have become a brand in their own right (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018b).

While athletes branded themselves as empowered yet feminine, individuals still sought to attack the athletes by men, stating often that they were inferior to men due

to biological or mental differences that made them unsuitable to be assigned the same level of authority, power and status as men athletes (Antunovic, 2019; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018b). It is this point that we see branded content begin to inform and influence social engagement and interaction, so while society is quick to criticise sportswomen for expressing and constructing notions of gender equality we see that brands are often celebrated for this, and are portrayed as “brand leaders” who seek to correct social injustices through promotion and discussions surrounding gender inequality (Grow, 2008; Smith & Smith, 2012).

Kunkel and Biscaia (2020) note that while the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup served to promote Megan Rapinoe as a brand, which in turn extended her influence not only to the United States Women’s National Team (USWNT) but also her local team Reign FC. The notion of gender equality was also challenged, because while she positioned women as equal what she also did is highlight the gender disparity in terms of wages and salaries for professional football players, for which she is then attacked and harassed (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020).

While Rapinoe is subject to negative backlash for her portrayal of gender inequality, brands like Adidas are celebrated for addressing the same pay gap that Rapinoe brought into discussion (Bogage, 2019). *The Washington Post* described Adidas’ announcement as “ground-breaking” in terms of women football, so why then was the athlete at the centre of the controversy not given the same level of reverence surrounding similar notions of gender equality?

This is again due to the nature of women and women in sport where we see women, even those who have achieved great feats in their careers, being side-lined and underrepresented (Antunovic, 2019; Cooky & Antunovic, 2020) while brands and the

notion of branded athletes are championed as being a new wave of equality for all athletes (Jackson-Brown, 2020; Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). Athletes who present themselves entirely on their sporting ability often do not receive the same level of engagement as those who use their femininity and leverage the sexualised nature of the woman body (Fink et al., 2014).

When given the choice sportswomen explain that they would choose to be seen as an athlete first, with over 50% preferring representations focused on their ability, however the level of engagement from these posts are substantially less than those focused on sexualising the athlete (Fink et al., 2014; MacPherson & Kerr, 2021; Smith, 2019). What these social movements suggest is a challenge to social conventions, which are often not well received when they are being presented by the group being oppressed, and sportswomen have routinely highlighted the disparity in pay compared to the men (Eitzen, 2012; McNeal, 2018; Scraton & Flintoff, 2013; Trolan, 2013).

The answer stems from who has the power to make the change in the first place. While athletes are able to articulate their experiences and struggles with social barriers, the power to incite true change in society is the hands of corporation and brands that manage the sporting events and the athletes themselves (Baer, 2016; Eitzen, 2012; Haile, 2020; McDonagh & Pappano, 2007). Society has given the power to invoke change to corporations and brands, with athletes acting as a branded content for the purpose of constructing branded ideology and identity with the social movement as its core (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020; Locke et al., 2018). Athletes represent themselves in ways that receive positive acclaim and highlight social barriers present in society as seen in Fink et al (2014) and Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018a), and what the athlete is capable of saying or doing is mediated and

controlled not only by society but by their own organisation and sporting council/board. Social media has made this easier than ever before, with the instantaneous spread of information, so athletes are able to spread a message faster and likewise are subjected to criticism faster. As means to challenge these notions of online harassment brands make use of the athletes as a means of constructing communities of resistance, whereby the athletes ideologies serves as the basis of the branded community while still maintaining a branded presence (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020; Wickman, 2008).

The gendered ideology of athlete activism is heavily influenced by presences on social media, and how and when athletes interact are determined by the nature of the social setting they find themselves in and the goal of the athlete. While social media allows further discussions on social inequalities, it also reinforces them by facilitating what can and cannot be said and by whom, with athletes undergoing skewed experiences surrounding gender equality engagement compared to brands (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020; MacPherson & Kerr, 2021; Wickman, 2008).

Social media is both a gift and a curse, allowing athlete's voices a greater platform but also stifling their voices when necessary. Social media greatly affects athletes and how they present themselves, brands and activism suffer differently especially in relation to gender. With activism often being embodied by men even if they did not contribute, and brands being champions of social movement even if they did nothing to further the narrative of the movement(Baer, 2016; Fotopoulou, 2017; Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020; McNeal, 2018). While social media grants athletes a space to express themselves it also contains inherently faulty ideologies, social media is merely a reflection of our society, possessing the same inequalities and disparities that

athletes are fighting against, which in turn greatly affect athletes and brands who use, engage with and participate on social media (Fuchs, 2021; Locke et al., 2018).

The above section sought to expand the understanding of brands and branding regarding social media in a today's connected age. As individuals we have access to ideologies and beliefs in abundance thanks to the instantaneous transmission of information. Users are able to interact and engage with each other, construct virtual identities through language and use these identities online without being mediated and restricted by societal conventions of gender roles. While users are able to do this so too are brands able to build an identity that is aligned to the dominant social views at the time, as seen above brands do not rely on a concrete image and instead seek to remain fluid and ever-changing. With the introduction of digital media in the last few decades brands now have a platform to engage and distribute their message across a larger audience than ever. While we are exposed to so much information we often miss details and nuances that seek to perpetuate and preserve ideologies surrounding race, class, sex, gender and ethnicity.

While discussing brands we also introduced and discussed the notion of sports literature, specifically sports literature by brands. Although not a core theory of this thesis we need to briefly mention that society today has become more totalitarian, with companies holding more power and influence over society than many governments and leaders. Through this influence we see how sporting events, sports stars and indeed the very sports themselves are influenced and affected by brands. Discussed above is the rise of athletes and sports and the role social media has played in this, however it would be remiss to not take into account how brands are able to catapult individuals to stardom through sponsorships, branding and endorsements. While athletes have social influence and sway, they are still mediated

by society, and brands have some leverage over how athletes are represented on social media.

Finally, the role of activism on social media was briefly discussed in which athletes are reclaiming and taking back much of the agency that was removed by brands through media representation. Athletes are using social media as a platform to voice the need for societies to change and reform, highlighting the various injustices perpetrated against minority groups and disadvantaged individuals. While the literature serves to broaden our understanding of our society in its present state concerning the role of brands, gender and sports as well as sports stars, it does not yet provide enough theoretical basis for this thesis. The subsequent chapter seeks to present the analytical basis by discussing and contextualising the role of critical discourse analysis (CDA) regarding brands and gender forming the core theory of the thesis, as well as presenting the methodological framework and data collection.

Chapter 2

Analytical and methodological framework

While we have discussed and addressed discourse briefly, with discourse being contextualised as social practice and constructed through societal interactions around a chosen topic, we have not yet examined CDA and the nature of CDA within a modern social media context. In this chapter, we will discuss the literature and theory surrounding the notions of CDA. This chapter will also explore critical discourse analysis with relation to post-structural theory and the emergence of multimodality in modern society. It will introduce and analyse theories of gender, gender identity, and the use of CDA to study gender in a connected world where the concept of gender and what society recognises as gender have changed considerably over the last few decades. Finally, this chapter will review the methods of data collection used to acquire the posts and comments appearing in this thesis

2.1 Critical discourse analysis

2.1.1 Critical discourse analysis and post-structuralism

The study of social identity has its roots in the early 1970's when social psychologist proposed the idea of social identity to explain the interplay between individuals of various social groups. It suggests that individuals make use of language and language terms in specific ways to perform an identity, allowing researchers to study the effects of language usage on the portrayal and indexing of a user's identity (Hyland, 2005). CDA looks at identity not only as social practice but as being socially imposed through specific and targeted language usage (van Dijk, 1993).

Scholars such as van Dijk (1993; 2011) and Fairclough (2001) suggest that language and discourse are more than a social practice, and consider the ideas of power, dominance and inequality being inherent in discourse. van Dijk (2011) explains that CDA seeks to understand how language serves as an element in social processes relating to power and inequality. CDA also analyses text and interactions from the viewpoint of a specific social issue relating to sexuality, gender, race or any other inequality.

The first aspect van Dijk (2011) discusses is the critical nature of CDA, which seeks to determine the connection between language and aspects of social life and practice, and for the purpose of this research that social aspect is the performance of identity and online communities. For the most part, critical awareness of language is a widespread notion, not as CDA but rather as a general critique of language, where individuals criticise advertising and marketing text that is sexist or racist; this forms a fundamental aspect of human nature – to be critical of what we hear, see and read (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; van Dijk, 1993).

This view of language and language critique stems from the theory of post-structuralist language study, but before we delve into post-structuralism we must briefly touch on the structuralist view of language. Structuralism proposes that language functions under a series of rules, these rules are the determiner whereby we understand society as a whole (Norton & Morgan, 2013). Structuralism proposes that everything is understood in relation to each other, where language and language in society is interconnected through a signifier and a signified (Carter, 2013; Norton & Morgan, 2013). These theories emerged primarily from Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in the latter part of the 1910's, who argued that the study of language is a complex and connected system of signs and signifiers and he further propose

distinction between daily language and idealised language (Matthews, 2001). Saussurean structuralism thus relies on a relationship between meaning and expression; proposing that language was informed by social context, where a sign can only be understood within the context of other signs and signifiers (Matthews, 2001).

Post-structuralism challenged this viewpoint by proposing that language was not built on rules and social structure, but rather that language was a performance of expression (Alcoff, 1988). Post-structuralist theory emerged during a period of change within linguistic theory, when there was a gradual shift away from objects of knowledge towards a focus on processes of knowledge (Carter, 2013). Linguists began to adopt and adapt various theories of social practice from other disciplines such as the social sciences and philosophy, where scholars were already moving away from structuralist theories (Tredinnick, 2007). Structuralist theory for the most part focused on signs and their relations in social space. We see the beginning of semiotic analysis and cultural theory emerge in the early writings of structuralist theorists (Tredinnick, 2007). In contrast, notable scholars such as Butler (2002) and Foucault (1990) explored the idea of language as having an effect beyond its structure, with language serving as a representation of identity and ideology. Additionally, the societal assumptions and norms that were imposed onto individuals through language reflected dominant gender roles in society during this time period (Beasley, 2005; Talbot, 2010).

CDA seeks to uncover this underlying linguistic inequality and understand how language use seeks to reproduce and reinforce stereotypes of inequality and power imbalances present in today's society (Carvalho, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Interestingly van Dijk (2011) proposes the idea that these power imbalances are a

result of consent rather than coercion, where society as a whole is socialised and taught to innately preserve these inequalities without much thought on our part. This forms the basis for what CDA is designed to do, namely critique the innate inequalities present in performative language usage (van Dijk, 2011). van Dijk in Schiffrin et al. (2008) notes that CDA is not a specialisation or school of thought as many other approaches of discourse analysis, it is rather a different perspective designed to view the same data and same society through a new mode of interpretation.

CDA argues that discourse and narratives are influenced by social structure, combining this with a post-structuralist viewpoint of language theory we can surmise that CDA with relation to post-structuralism argues that while we as individuals shape society and language we are also responsible for shaping discourses and constructing narratives in society (Schiffrin et al., 2008; van Dijk, 2011). In relation to mass media, this notion is easier to understand than ever before, as individuals rely on digital media in their daily lives to engage, interact and create, thus actively and subconsciously influencing and affecting the dominant socially constructed discourses surrounding various subjects and themes in society (van Dijk, 2011; Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

Butler (2002) in her work on gender and gender identity building on the work of performative utterances pioneered by John Austin, introduced the concept of performativity and the first conceptualisation of the nature of gender performance (Meyerhoff, 2014). Austin was noted for his works on speech acts in which he discussed the idea that we use language to *do* something, his work challenged the idea that language was informed by concrete meaning and instead noted that all language was in essence the act of manipulating speech to illicit specific meanings

and connotations (Meyerhoff, 2014; Searle, 1985). Searle (1985) writing on the speech acts further explored the theory of performative utterances, expanding on notions of expression through language. A performative utterance referred to the performance of a speech act, the speech act itself need not be truth and instead was focused on the construction of a certain action or event through the use of language to derive meaning (Searle, 1985). From this notion of performance and performative utterances Butler (2002) proposes the idea that language is a tool to represent ourselves and our identities through performance, with language usage being the key to our interpretation and representation of ourselves in a social setting.

Notably a distinction needs to be made between performance and performativity. In studying the performance of gendered identities by drag queens Butler (2002) notes that performativity is not a literal performance of one's identity and gender. Instead it is the idea that our identity and gender are expressed through gendered behaviour and gendered language. Butler (2002) conceptualised the idea that gender and the gender we index is not always aligned to our biological sex, and that rather we as language users and individuals make use of language as a method of performing our identity and gender. The same can be said for language in society; language is not always a direct representation of our ideologies, values and beliefs but is rather an expression of these factors. It relies not on the overt meaning but rather on the performative nature of language used by language users in society to construct various ideologies and beliefs.

2.1.2 Critical discourse and multimodality

While van Dijk (1993) touches briefly on the idea of semiosis, he does not expand on it until his later works (van Dijk, 2011, p. 229) where the idea of semiosis is

presented as “meaning-making through body language, visual images, or any other way of signifying”. An example van Dijk (2011) presents is that of a newspaper; given the competition for readers newspaper are often willing to employ cover pages and headlines which imply sexist, racist or misogynistic ideologies to attract or maintain readership, such as a British newspaper slandering Britain’s partners in the European Union as a means to appeal to specific readers. Wodak and Meyer (2015) note that critical discourse analysis focuses primarily on textual elements of discourse, and tends to downplay the significance of visual imagery and other signs which enable the inequalities and imbalances in the discourse to be represented non-linguistically. Signs and imagery play an increasingly large part in our daily lives, with advertisers relying on eye-catching imagery to purposefully invoke specific reactions and engagement from individuals (Wodak, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

The nature of society has shifted tremendously over the past three decades since Judith Butler published *Gender Trouble* and incited a revolution surrounding gendered notions of identity and feminist gender theory. The world we live in today is structured to be visual, with social media apps such as Instagram and Facebook thriving on the visual elements of their respective applications. While others like Twitter rely more on text and language we see that images, videos and GIFs still form a key part of the framework of social media. To not address the multimodal aspect would effectively negate a large portion of what makes social media so appealing, as individuals are able to scroll for hours spending mere seconds on each post (Bagozzi et al., 2007; Chu, 2011). Chu (2011) notes that our attentions are finite, more so now than ever, in today’s society we are positioned to want instant gratification and the high content, low input nature of social media allows us to do this. As a result, posts need to be bright, vibrant and exciting. Yet, while this is

important, it is essential to note each post is still a form of advertising, and while it is not a billboard or magazine it is an image that will be seen by hundreds of thousands if not millions of individuals (Sajid, 2016).

Marefat and Marzban (2014) when analysing gender identity and representation of gender in English teaching textbooks make use of multimodal analysis with relation to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). They note that multimodal discourse attempts to take some or all of the semiotic aspects of an image and along with textual data they work together to create one unified meaning. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) state that visual language is not a universally understood concept, with rules and regulations of written and spoken language not applying directly to the concept of visual imagery.

This is made more problematic by the fact that writing and imagery are in an unstable relationship with associations being able to change and shift. What fundamentally governs visual analysis is that it does not separate semantics, syntax or pragmatics in the realm of visual communication, but instead it looks at how all of these factors come together to realise the same meaning and message of the textual elements. However, all mediums have their own possibilities and limitations for interpretation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Liu, 2013; Marefat & Marzban, 2014). While the text itself is able to present a precise ideology the visual element does not always align the words can convey ideologies of strength while the visual elements position the social actors in ways that suggest weakness (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) have suggested three aspects to examine the interactive meaning of images: contact, social distance and attitude, while the

compositional meaning of images is realised through: information value, salience, and framing. The notion of attitude is the only one of the three that applies in the context of social media imagery. Attitude looks at power and representation of power as well as equality in visual imagery, and this applies directly to the idea of social media posts during the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup representing a specific power and equality with relation to individuals who identify as women and women athletes. However these concepts are not direct relations between the image and meaning but are meaning potentials. In other words they are the possible meanings that viewers will have when they view the image (Liu, 2013). While Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) published their theory before the invention and introduction of social media the concept itself applies directly to what social media is intended to do, which is to be visually appealing while simultaneously stimulating the interaction and engagement of individuals within a social network positioned in a specific contextual environment (Liu, 2013; Sajid, 2016).

Multimodal elements contribute to the overall meaning being represented by the textual elements, where meaning can only be truly understood by taking into account both elements of language visual and textual (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). A social media site whose primary function is the sharing of imagery holds a level of importance when attempting to analyse the meaning of a post. However due to the multimodal nature of social media visual imagery is only one aspect. The second is the text; the captions and hashtags, the language used, and how these textual elements contribute to the overall construction of discourses surrounding the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup.

2.2 Gender and identity theories

Gender is an ever-changing expanding concept that is not only challenging to conceptualise but also difficult to understand. While gender and gender identity has long existed in society, the study and theoretical framework utilised by many scholars in gender studies today emerged only over the last few decades (Beasley, 2005). This section seeks to further the understanding of gender and gender identity in modern society, looking at the online construction of gender identity as well as expanding on the concept of performativity introduced previously. Gender theories will be discussed and explored as well as gender identities and the nature of performativity within the framework of sociolinguistic research. The second section will explore how gender interacts with critical discourse analysis in modern society before briefly introducing various studies that have sought to study gender from a critical discourse perspective.

2.2.1 Gender theory, gender identity and performativity expanded

Individuals make use of language to perform identity, specific language usage shapes and constructs a social identity which is taken on by the language user, but it also allows language users to portray specific identities which they choose (Carter, 2013). Western society has historically referred to gender as a binary division, where there existed the notion of men and women as the two possible “identities” this division gave rise to the notion of oppositional gender construction whereby one is only able to exist with relation to the other (Bamman et al., 2014; Beasley, 2005; Collinson, 2006). These gender theories are no longer sufficient for the complexities found in society as a whole, gender no longer refers to a binary division between two focal points of identity, instead gender and gender identity exists as a spectrum

whereby gender is performed (Butler, 2002; Marwick, 2013a, 2013b). This notion of gender as being performed, constructed through countless individual actions rather than inherently programmed into men and women paves the way for post-structural and feminist critiques of gender and gender theory as it allows language uses to construct and perform any identity they wish to express (Butler, 2002). This use of language, as a tool to construct our realities offers language users the opportunity to create, mediate and perform any identity they choose without any restrictions imposed by a binary system of gender and gender identity. Language users are able to consciously shift and play with various aspects of gender construction and performance in a way that had previously never existed. Gendered identities became more focused on removing the binary assumption of gender in society and allowing fluid expression of gender and sexuality in the social space (Collinson, 2006; Marwick, 2013a, 2013b).

However Butler (2002) proposes the idea of intelligibility, with the notion that gendered identities can be considered either “intelligible” or “unintelligible”. Any identity that upholds the dominant societal norms, rules and regulations is considered to be “intelligible” as it perpetuates the societal dominance which is one of heterosexuality and men (Butler, 2002). Any identity seen as opposing social norms is then considered “unintelligible”. Butler (2002) also proposes that life is only considered “liveable” by society if an individual follows the identity that society imposes on them. Hough (2010) states that if one falls outside the “matrix of normativity” individuals are faced with the idea that they do not matter as they do not fit the norms that society seeks to impose on them. These notions of performativity and by extension performative utterances do not describe any previous or existing conditions but rather function in the present by as an active performance of gender

and gender identity (Butler, 2002; Norton & Morgan, 2013; Searle, 1985). Gender is essentially an effect of what we as language users do with language. By extension of this fact identity is an inherently social construct and practice, so while we may perform our gender and identity we rely on the social world as a platform for this performance (Alcoff, 1988; Norton & Morgan, 2013).

A relatively new concept within the framework of sociolinguistic research is that of Community of Practice (CofP), this theory relates directly to the performance of identity within a specific community (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999). The term itself CofP suggests that the community does not statically impose identity on all members and rather involves learning and utilising the appropriate performance of identity within the community itself. CofP emphasises a focus on what members do, how they behave and make use of specific language and discourses to show that they belong to the community and do what extent they belong (Jones, 2014).

While CofP emphasises a focus on actions within a community and presents theories of interaction based on mutual engagement and shared belief it does neglect to some extent the role of outgroups in identity construction and performance. While social identity theory takes into account both an individual's role in a community as well as their perceived relationships to both in and outgroups, CofP focuses more on the in-groups (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999). Within the context of social media brands and brand pages are essentially CofP, where individuals with mutual interests engage in conversation within each other and the brand. The theory presented by Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999) focuses on these in-groups, social media users who align with the brand, they do not however discuss in-depth the role of out-groups in community engagement.

While aligning with branded ideologies is one notion of online identity another is not aligning or being “non-conforming” (Jones, 2014), This is not to say aligning with gender equality is conforming, rather any individual who does agree with brand practice will be assigned “non-conforming” for the purposes of thesis. Individuals use non-conformance as a performance of identity as much as aligning with branded ideologies. By openly showing disagreement with branded ideologies it constructs a social identity that is opposed to the CofP discourses and beliefs. Within the context of the FIFA Women’s World Cup the online social identities constructed will be aligned to one gendered ideology or another, as a result the CofP presented in this thesis is inherently gendered, and the individuals who in turn interact with the brand perform and reproduce specific gendered ideologies within the broader social context of women and women in sport.

2.2.2 Critical discourse analysis and gender

Talbot (2010) discusses the notion of CDA as examining how language contributes both to social reproduction as well as social change; however gender must first be understood as being socially constructed. Gender is a social practice, with individuals being normalised into their gender by the society they grow up in (Butler, 2002), and therefore various factors determine which genders are acceptable and which are not in that social space.

However, gender is not a given, but a constant state of fluidity with gender and gendered identities being actively performed by individuals (Talbot, 2010). While we may not be constantly aware of it, we actively perform our gender and as such we are able to shift and change as we see fit, with differing contexts and situations requiring a different notion of gender (Hough, 2010). Through this ability we are able

to socially construct and reconstruct our gender, being able to make use of specific and targeted language, body language, appearance and mannerisms to portray and perform any number of genders and identities (Butler, 2002; Hough, 2010). While this does not mean we change the gendered identity that we embody it means we are able, in given social contexts, to perform a gender more aligned within the social setting (Hough, 2010). An example of this is the classroom, where behaviour will differ greatly to behaviour on the playground, additionally this behaviour differs depending on the gendered identity of the individual, where boys were seen as being louder and more disruptive in the classroom (Leap, 2019).

Yet there is still a power dynamic at play, with certain genders and identities being viewed as inferior, and the further our identities and genders stray from what we know as the "norm" the more unliveable our lives will become (Butler, 2002). Discourses and CofP contribute to this idea of power and control, by shaping our identities and giving powers to some but not to others and praising specific kinds of identities (Jones, 2014; Talbot, 2010). CDA seeks to examine these inherent gender inequalities as a social practice, where the power imbalances draw upon not only the here and now but also on intertextual elements (Talbot, 2010). These elements can refer to other discourses of gender and inequality being used to rationalise the present debate, or a specific genre and idea that seeks to justify the dichotomy of power present in the discourse.

CDA seeks not only to analyse the discourse at present, but also the discourses that are drawn upon and discussed as a means of validation for gender stereotypes and separation of power between genders. We know that gender at its core is positioned as different and is constructed as "inherently oppositional" (Duncan, 2006). The use of CDA seeks to analyse and make visible discourses surrounding gendered

identities and inequalities against women and women athletes in society. The notion of gender difference within sport begins from an early age whereby we are socialised into our given gender roles (Trolan, 2013). These roles then play an important part in the discursive construction of gender identity with relation to sport, and due to these ideologies of "difference" women are subjected to lower pay, less resources, less coverage, less support and less recognition (Caudwell, 2003; Cooky & Antunovic, 2020; Duncan, 2006; McDonagh & Pappano, 2007; Trolan, 2013).

For the better part of a century language has been gendered with an inherent belief that men are superior to women, with men as the "producer" and women as the "consumer" (Kacen, 2000). Wolf (2000) found that men, when engaging with members of the opposite gender, express more emotion rather than suppress it both positively and negatively, showing agreement and kindness as well as disdain and anger. One of the newsgroups that were studied was sports related, or more specifically football related, it revealed that men had a tendency to act as an "expert. They sought to teach women members of the chat group about football. The language used, while performative, was analysed by Wolf (2000) using a more structuralist approach and her study highlights that individuals make use of their language as a tool to maintain and perform gender stereotypes. With the men believing innately that they knew more about football than the women, which may not be the reality in the situation.

The study further highlights and discusses notions of social inequalities surrounding gender, while unconscious or conscious we see that there is a leaning in society towards gender notions of inferiority while simultaneously "othering" women in the process. In their analysis of gender and text messages Newman, Groom, Handelman and Pennebaker (2008) noted that men were more likely to offer advice

and their own personal opinion, women were more likely to write more in terms of mean length of sentence, however the authors do note that context and specific social setting can alter and have an effect on the individuals language usage and may cause slight variation. Additionally the authors found that while men offered advice or personal guidance it was not always accurate, instead it was based off the notion of “masculine superiority” in which the men believed they knew more on the topic.

2.3 Consumerism and media: Gender and branding

Brands are everywhere vying for consumers’ attention and loyalty. They are on our phones, TVs and billboards. We see them in our homes, in the malls and corner stores, and on the roads shaping our society into one of consumer driven culture. They shape our perceptions, our moods and our desires and have become an intrinsic part in many individuals’ daily lives. This section will briefly discuss the emergence of new forms of media as well as how brands are able to utilise these channels to construct gender identities using online resources and methods of interaction and communication.

2.3.1 Consumers and modern media: A new age of advertising

In recent years advertising has deviated from more standard forms of media, with online media and more recently social media contributing to a near endless stream of commercial advertising (Hasyim, 2017). We have become a consumer society, where individuals, rather than portray themselves as individuals can market and engage as “objects of consumption” (Hasyim, 2017). What this means is that individuals are not only seen as individuals, but also as “subjects” that companies can display to market certain lifestyles and ideologies (Hasyim, 2017). The act of

doing this can be broadly defined as the process of making the uncommon common, meaning that by showing individuals using products, services or specific items, the use of said items becomes “natural” and “common” (Chi, 2011; Hasyim, 2017).

Brands thus construct an intended reality of the product, showing it being used in everyday life, or as being a naturally occurring part of daily routines (Chi, 2011). An example is that of Gillette, which portrays shaving as integral to the grooming process. In the adverts, an individual is shown shaving either before or after showering thus promoting the idea that shaving is a naturally occurring part of daily routines. This is then shown repeatedly on multiple media platforms, by doing so a constructed and intended reality is built around the product (Hasyim, 2017). This same process can be done using a large-scale media event, to create systems of ideologies within a society by relating “event” to “brand” (Chi, 2011). This provides exposure for both the event as well as the brand advertising the event; this is seen often in the form of sponsorship deals with individuals as well as events, with sponsorships making up the majority of capital costs for large scale events (Hasyim, 2017). However by sponsoring an event, at a certain cost to company, companies are able to associate their brand and brand image with a certain event, expanding the social influence of the brand as well as seeking to generate higher revenue due to this association (Hasyim, 2017). This is done through the use of language, with language being able to express and create a “constructed reality”, by relating brands to specific events and in turn promoting the products or services of the brand (Hess & Doe, 2013).

Talbot (2010) notes that consumerism has been for the most part feminine, with a typical role of wives and mothers being the act of shopping for groceries, introducing the idea of consumer femininity. Talbot (2010) describes consumer femininity as the

act of feminising one's self particularly in the clothes and items that women buy. Women's magazines in the mid 1900's published images relating to the latest Paris fashion trends not purely for consumption but offering the readers the opportunity to emulate the fashion seen in the magazine (Talbot, 2010). The second point discussed by the author is the notion of sexuality as consumption, with sex and sexuality being used to sell products and items. Women's magazines make frequent use of the "sex sells" debate by featuring headlines such as "'I pay men for sex' – Ten women explain why" (Talbot, 2010). Through this language ideologies of femininity and sexuality are being exploited as a means to promote user consumption.

A recent example of media advertising and marketing designed for user consumption is the idea of sports and sporting events, with sports integrating into mainstream culture and commercialism in the early 1980's (Pegoraro et al., 2010). Media, more importantly television, had the power to turn athletes into international celebrities through systematic and targeted advertising and promotion, which turned "spectator sport" into a recurring element of mainstream culture (Pegoraro et al., 2010). Spectator sport refers to a sport or sporting event that individuals find entertaining or enjoyable to watch (Pegoraro et al., 2010).

Sponsors capitalised on the idea of "sports as consumption" by signing prolific athletes, promoting large-scale sporting events and acting as corporate sponsors on national and international stages (Pegoraro et al., 2010). Newer forms of media have allowed brands to control the flow of consumerism by controlling what the brand allows users to see regarding specific sporting events and athletes in relation to the brand itself, this will then construct an "idealised reality", where in a perfect system

the brand becomes synonymous with the sport/athlete in a bid to increase sales and revenue (Hess & Doe, 2013; Pegoraro et al., 2010).

The present study will focus on this phenomenon of constructed reality in relation to the 2019 Women's World Cup and its sponsors, by looking at how brands have utilised sponsorship and athletes to promote the Women's World Cup while simultaneously promoting the brand. Brands make use of specific targeted language, using sports related terms as well as gendered terms, given the nature of the sport being promoted, to construct an idea that the brand is promoting, encouraging and highlighting women in sport.

Rather than sustain the idea of a binary system the study will view gender as complex and multifaceted, by looking at what masculine or feminine discourse is created rather than focusing on the binary distinction between the two. The primary focus will be on posts by brands and the use of language both in the post itself as well as in the captions and hashtags (Page, 2012; Page et al., 2014). The performance of identity and gender will be from a post-structural viewpoint where identity is not a fixed binary variable, with brand identity and user identity being uniquely crafted by the individual or the brand. In recent literature in the study of social media and branding, real life is essentially replaced by a "virtual self" which can be easily changed or reinvented (Kacen, 2000). An important point in the argument is that brands are able to shift and change their identity as they see fit, so that they may extend and expand the brand and its range of influence.

2.3.2 Branded gender identities and social media

With the introduction of social media and the ability for individuals to engage with each other and information more rapidly, representation and performance of identity

is what allows companies and brands to construct and shift their online identities and ideologies to align with specific branded identities (Bamman, Eisenstein, & Schnoebelen, 2014; Norton & Morgan, 2013).

Foucault (1990) focused on the interplay between power and discourse, with a specific discourse embodying a sense of power and shaping and controlling what members of the discourse are able to say. This idea of the interplay between brand and user, or producer and consumer, is what allows brands and companies to make use of specific online communities and discourses to build brand identity and ideology online. By establishing themselves as the primary power they are able to direct discourse and narratives towards a designated topic (Wirtz et al., 2013). This same interaction can be seen in user comments and interactions, with individuals commenting on other users posts and allowing individuals to draw meaning and identity from other users' comments, a similar idea to that of hypertext on the Web (Tredinnick, 2007).

In her discussion of the performative nature of gender Butler (2002) stated that "unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions". The notion of performativity therefore does not function as strict rules, instead representing a basis for the understanding of identity construction. While individuals construct their genders within social settings through countless acts over time, so too do brands, constantly shaping and changing the face of the brand and realigning it to various gender identities across discourses of representation. Perhaps the most crucial to branded identity construction through performative action is the construction of women as being stable and coherent in social contexts (Butler, 2002).

While this thesis does not rely on feminist theory ,it is informed by it and we cannot discuss notions of gender without suggestions of feminist theory (Butler, 2002; Ingraham, 1994). To construct a static identity of femininity and what a woman should be goes against the principles of gender study in post-structural viewpoints, due to the underlying belief of gender and identity as being fluid (Butler, 2002). Brands then do not seek to construct a definitive definition of gender or gender identity, instead they attempt to construct a virtual branded identity that aligns with the culturally and globally relevant issues of social inequality within given periods of time. This can be seen in the branding of celebrities whereby the affiliation is not concrete, but rather constrained to a specific time period (Centeno & Wang, 2017; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Brands then do not seek to re-write gender identity, instead they seek to reshape brand identity as the need arises to align this branded notion of gender with the discourse.

2.4 Data

This section will introduce and discuss the process followed for the collection of data from Instagram. It will discuss how specific posts were chosen and also present data constraints and the selection of brands to be studied. In addition it will discuss the secondary method of collection after all posts were chosen for the purpose of the study.

2.4.1 Primary method:

Primary data collection will study the official Instagram pages of a number of companies that both sponsored and actively participated in the online discourse of the Women's World Cup, only brands that are verified or "blue ticked" will be included. These brands are Nike, Adidas, VISA, Hyundai and Qatar Airways. Kia motors and Coca-Cola were also listed as sponsors and affiliates of the Women's World Cup, however upon observation of their social media pages there were no posts relating to the Women's World Cup by Kia, and only one by Coca-Cola, for this reason these brands will not be looked at.

Additionally, there were a number of local businesses that acted as sponsors, however, these all have their official social media pages in French; for the purposes of this study, the posts will be in English only. All of the mentioned brands are radically different in their products and services, yet each was a prolific and active participant in the ongoing discourse of the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup. VISA had only one officially recognised page that posted regarding the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup; this was the VISA UK page. There is no VISA Worldwide social media page, which is the case with Hyundai, and for this reason the VISA UK page will be the page discussed in this research.

From each brand four posts were chosen that were posted during the period of time two months prior to, during and one month after the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup from: 7 April 2019 to 7 August 2019. The reason for this time period is the nature of the brands themselves and posts are meant to brand and advertise, this started several months prior to the start 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup as a means to advertise the event while building brand identity. The timeline has been selected in order to acquire data from both the pre, during and post portions of the event.

While posts were chosen at random from the four-month period, all the brands had posted a minimum of four posts each regarding the world cup with Qatar Airways only posting four. As a result four posts were chosen in order to maintain a standardised level of data for each brand. Upon further inspection of the VISA UK posts it was noted that they formed a story. Each post contained a small piece or fraction of a whole larger video that was posted first on 4 May 2019. All six posts were chosen for this purpose, the story formed and narrative itself referenced the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup as well as the brand.

The data set includes four posts for Nike, Adidas, Hyundai and Qatar Airways while containing six for VISA UK. Each post by VISA UK is a repetition of a segment of the original video posted, with no new data being added to each or any changes in word choice and structuring, each post is represented in the data merely as an indicator of the narrative structure chosen by VISA UK. Each post was analysed through a critical discourse analysis framework, focused on specific linguistics marker and language use in the construction of identity as well as gender norms in society. Secondly Figure 1.3 as well as Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.4 contain videos posted by the brand. These videos are not subtitled but rather narrated or contain

conversations between individuals, due to this these videos were not considered in the textual or visual element of the posts analysis.

Figure 2.2 and all by VISA UK (Figures 5.1 - 5.6) contain textual elements in the form of written words across the screen, for the purpose of this study the focus is on the textual and visual elements utilised by the brands in the construction of gendered norms and identities within subcultures of society. As a result the auditory elements of the three videos posted were not utilised in this aspect due to the lack of text accompanying the video. All Instagram posts that contained videos were screenshotted and captured when the video reached the point of the thumbnail, due to the nature of Instagram's settings videos auto play when opened, as a result the thumbnail is visible when the video is closed or when scrolling through the brands Instagram page. When data was captured to be analysed the still image was taken when the same image appeared in the video as the one of the thumbnail, which is what a user would see of the video before opening it.

The purpose of the data is to uncover hidden discourses and narratives surrounding gender and gendered norms in society with relation to brands as well as women in sport. The primary method for this is the textual element in the form of captions and hashtags, with a secondary focus on visual elements of the posts. Additionally text appearing in the advert was used when the text appeared on the screen. The purpose was not a corpus of language and literature designed to investigate constructions of gender, it is a qualitative approach focusing on data that was meaningful with regards to the construction of branded identities with relation to social norms of gender and gender representation. For this reason the selected posts for this thesis were chosen to critically analyse the language usage by the brand during the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup. Language exists within social

context, it cannot exist in isolation. The posts were analysed for representations of gender and sport, specific and targeted language usage as well as visual elements were the primary methods used to do this.

2.4.2 Secondary method

While the posts and captions show what gendered identity the corporation is constructing regarding the brand, the sporting event and the athletes what it cannot do is tell us what affect the post had on the community it is positioned in. As a result we need to look at the comments and interactions from the users.

The originally intended purpose was to select key comments from each post to be analysed however this proved impossible for Hyundai, Qatar Airways and VISA UK. The reason for this is that these three brands did not have enough comments on each post, additionally when the comments were numerous but still limited as seen with Qatar Airways they did not in any way address the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup or the branded identity itself. Instead the comments predominantly refer to poor quality of airline service offered by Qatar Airways or refer to good quality of service. There is no interaction between users in the comments section as well as no reference to sport, gender or brand identity.

Due to this the comments on posts by Nike and Adidas were collected and analysed with relation to identity, gender stereotypes, social norms and bias surrounding women athletes and overall engagement within the sporting community constructed by the brand. All the comments were looked at with any that discussed the athletes, sport, the sporting event, gendered stereotypes and social norms concerning gender being selected for the data. After collection of data there are a total of 267 comments for Nike and 168 for Adidas. Nike posts contained more comments on average per

post compared to Adidas, with over half (91) of the comments for Adidas appearing on Figure 2.1. These comments were then analysed using CDA in the same way as the posts looking at perpetuation of gender norms and stereotypes, construction of identities, engagement with the brand and fellow users, discussions surrounding the sport and 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup and idealised notions of gender constructed by the users.

2.4.3 Analysis

Gender and sports are intrinsically linked in modern society because, as Eitzen argues (2012); sport is a reflection of societal values which include gender ideologies as well as ones on race and culture. Sport and sporting events becomes a site for gender identity construction and reproduction when they challenge dominant gender norms. This leads us to ask: How do brands, using this idea of challenging gender roles, construct online identities in relation to both the brand and the athletes?

The thesis seeks to utilise critical discourse analysis with a primary focus on the lexical and written elements of each Instagram post and caption by the brands in connection with the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup. The main focal aspects that will be analysed are the lexical decisions made by brands such as the word choice in the captions as well as written words and sentences appearing in the posts video feed. Language and word choice that relate to gender, identity, the FIFA Women's World Cup, sport, sportswoman or the brand itself will be studied through the lens of critical discourse analysis to determine and uncover the discourse constructed through this language usage.

The lexical items are the primary focus; the second focus is on imagery and the use of multimodality which play a key aspect on social media, especially Instagram. Due

to this the images will also be analysed with focuses on social actors, positioning, gaze, backgrounding and foregrounding of social actors present, and subject position in relation to the other social actors involved. Through these two components of critical discourse analysis the posts will be studied to uncover and present the discourses constructed by the brands involved as well as the discourse present within the branded community on social media.

Chapter 3

Data analysis

3.1 The gendered athlete

In the modern age, sporting events and women's sporting events in particular have become more widely viewed than any previous era in history with record attendance and viewership in 2015 (Dunn, 2016; Thorpe et al., 2017), thanks to the ever expanding field of women's sport athletes became global sensations. What must be considered is the catalyst for this expansion, in other words, what created the recent surge of popularity in women's sports? Until a few decades ago women athletes were still viewed as being inferior at least that is until brands and corporations began to sponsor and fund women athletes and sporting events. The athlete's advocate for change but the corporations and brands are the primary decision-makers and catalysts for social change especially surrounding issues of feminisation and masculinisation of athletes in the media (Dunn, 2016; Schwarz, 2017).

While athletes control what they show to the world, it is still greatly mediated by multi-national corporations and brands that are responsible for extremely lucrative sponsorship deals, access to better kit and overall further exposure through branding (Jackson-Brown, 2020). So while large-scale brands control and mediate an athlete expression's to an extent, there is still freedom to express any belief and ideology with specific ideologies and discourses being accepted and reciprocated in society (Jackson-Brown, 2020). While brands are the mediators of others they too are mediated by the public and public opinion (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014), which leads us to ask what techniques do these multi-national brands use to construct a gendered discourse surrounding women athletes while simultaneously representing the brand itself?

3.1.1 Linguistic barriers and sportswomen

Women have been in sport as early as the 1960s, with women's sports beginning to receive more coverage due to the second wave of feminism during this time period (Scraton & Flintoff, 2002, 2013). Coverage and discussion began in the late 1990s with the advent of women's basketball, the emergence of magazines focusing on sportswomen, the growth of women's tennis and the self-proclaimed "Olympics of the Women" (the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games) (Duncan, 2006). Much of the media coverage and representation before this period made distinct references to the lack of ability of women athletes in comparison to male athletes (Duncan, 2006). Various scholars argue that the tide began to change in western culture with the introduction of Title IX in the United States of America, a federal law which prohibits sexual discrimination in any school or education programme including sports programmes (Messner et al., 1993; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). While the passing of Title IX marked a change in federal and legal policy, it did not signify an immediate change in societal beliefs and practices, with much of the sporting world remaining segregated along preconceived gender lines enforced by society at the time (McDonagh & Pappano, 2007).

McDonagh and Pappano (2007) present the notion of invented barriers, and what they suggest is that individuals create and mediate various barriers throughout the sporting world by constructing specific and targeted discourses surrounding teams, athletes, coaches and cities of origin. As an example English football team fans remain loyally devoted to their teams and clubs, with many disliking supporters of rivals club due to their club affiliation (Guilianotti, 2013). This distinction in the

sporting world, as siding with a team or ideology, also encompasses issues of race, class, culture, gender, religion and sexuality (McDonagh & Pappano, 2007; Thorpe et al., 2017). While these distinctions are not as prevalent in a modern society determined to challenge inequality there are still a number of social issues that exist in our society to separate and marginalise specific groups of individuals based on gender.

The first notable concept to take into account is “gender marking” (Fink, 2015; Messner et al., 1993), which refers to the use of corporations, individuals and society to inherently gender mark women’s sports by including the phrase “women”. This is not limited to the name of the sport, with certain activities being marked as feminine through language use such as “exquisite” or “beautiful” when referring to women, and “skilled” or “incredible” when referring to men (Messner et al., 1993). Gender marking can be seen in the naming of football events as well as basketball and golf (Fink, 2015). The events all contain the word “Women” in the title. With reference to the 2019 World Cup this can be seen in the name of the event, the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup, as well as the hashtag #FIFAWWC used by brands to promote and discuss the event itself. By making use of the word “women” in these events it is specifying a group of individuals who are outside the norm, in this instance the norm is being portrayed as “masculine” (Fink, 2015).

The men’s event does not contain the word “men” in the title, instead it is simply the FIFA World Cup, a pattern that exists across a multitude of sports including basketball and golf. This presents the men’s event as the standard, while the women’s event is specifically portrayed as the “other” (Fink, 2015). While retaining an inherent masculine default thanks to the inclusion of gender marking in the name, the hashtag itself is slightly different given the symbolism of hashtags on digital and

social media platforms. Ruth (2012) argues that hashtags function as a symbol rather than a concrete definition, with hashtags being able to adapt over time to assume different meanings and connotations.

Hashtags are used as a means to identify and reach a specific audience online while aligning with either an ideology, online identity or social discourse (Linabary, Corple & Cooky, 2020; Smith & Smith, 2012). The use of #FIFAWWC by the brands involved in the event served to identify a discourse of gender and gendered sport through the use of linguistics markers present within the hashtag itself. The #FIFAWWC symbolises the sports discourse surrounding the event, while not overtly stating that the event is gendered.

The first notable example of gender marking is seen by in Figure 4.1 with the caption: “Fara Williams (@fara44) England’s most-capped[2] *female* footballer”. The caption is interesting because while it is factually correct, the linguistic marker of “female” implies that there is a man who has more caps than Williams, but this is not the case. At the time of writing Williams has 172 England national team caps, while the closest man, Peter Shilton, has only 125 caps to his name. The statement is true with or without including the gender marker in the text itself, yet it has been placed in this context to “other” women athletes. The making use of “female” with reference to Williams implies that women athletes are other while men are positioned as the default or the norm (Fink, 2015; Toffoletti, 2017). This reinforces the gendered discourse and belief that women, despite being capable of performing better than men, are viewed as inferior based on the notion that men are the default. If the caption had read “most-capped footballer” this would still have been true, because

[2] A cap refers to the number of matches played. A common practice in football, cricket and rugby is to be awarded a cap for each appearance for a national side.

Williams is the most capped English football player, but the ideology of men being the default implies that “most-capped footballer” must be referring to a man. The brand has gender marked the caption to effectively “other” the woman athlete in terms of athletic accomplishment and ability by disregarding the achievement (McDonagh & Pappano, 2007; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018b).

This same language is used by Qatar Airways in Figure 4.2 where the caption reads “The journey of a young aspiring female footballer”, present in this post is the repeated use of “female” by the brand in instances where it is not necessary. The caption would have the same meaning with or without the inclusion of a gender identifier in the caption, and once again this is being done to “other” the woman athlete by positioning her in relation to her gender more than her aspiration and goals. While the caption reads “young aspiring” the inclusion of “female” immediately gender marks the text (Fink, 2015). This limits the available representational options for the athlete as she has have now been gender marked, which in turn comes with connotations surrounding the ideology of being a woman athlete. Some of these connotations can be; needing to be feminine while also being an athlete, or being viewed as a woman first before your abilities and skills are considered (Fink et al., 2014; Meân & Kassing, 2008).

Qatar Airways purposefully gender marked the captions to “other” the women athletes in relation to sports and sports athletes, and by including the gender marker they position men as the default while women are seen as inferior to the men. This is done in the representation of Williams, where her accomplishment of being the most capped English football player is gender marked and therefore undermines her achievement by implying there is a man with more caps than her, even though there is not. It creates a sense of division, by separating the athletes into “men” and

“women” and identifying accomplishments only within this small frame of reference as opposed to looking at the achievements as a whole (McDonagh & Pappano, 2007).

McDonagh and Pappano (2007) make note of similar instances of achievement diminishment in local sports teams and professional representation, where women athletes achievements take second position to the achievements of men. Even if the women achieved more or were equal they are still effectively removed and “othered” through gender marking and division creation using linguistics aspects present in the text. This othering not only hinders women athletes but simultaneously position men as the superior and dominant group, perpetuating the notion of hegemonic masculine control in the world of sports (Duncan, 2006; Fink, 2015).

The second example in the corpus is Nike, where an Instagram post was marked by the official hashtag when referencing the FIFA Women’s World Cup. Instead Nike used the brand-specific hashtag #justdoit, with “Just do it” being the iconic Nike slogan. While the Instagram captions lack the use of the hashtag the brands attempts to position and create a gendered discourse by using the same terminology seen in Qatar Airways, “female”, it is used in Figure 1.1 by Nike but in a different context.

> “Ji-So Yun’s dream isn’t to be one of the best *female* football players in the world.
>
> “Ji dreams of becoming one of the best players in the world, period.”

Nike is attempting to address this “othering” of women athlete’s by purposefully bringing attention to the gender marker, and subsequently removing it in an effort to

position the athletes as equal, regardless of gender. While this does appear effective initially, addressing gender inequality by making reference to the inequality itself is extremely effective for generating conversation and discussion surrounding a specific topic (Meân & Kassing, 2008; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). Nike has also made use of a second aspect of "othering" discussed by Fink (2014) and Toffoletti (2017) in which women athletes are "infantilised". What this refers to is the use of the athletes first name in the caption, while men are typically and more often referred to by their last names, as a way of signifying social status and prestige (Fink, 2015; Messner et al., 1993; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018).

Women are disproportionately referred to by their first names as a means of "othering" the athletes by using language that is designed to be more casual and informal, as opposed to the status bestowed upon men by commentators, brands and fans alike (Messner et al., 1993; Toffoletti, 2017). The first mention of the athlete in Figure 1.1 starts "Ji So-Yun's", the second mention is simply "Ji". The brand has omitted her surname and only used the athlete's first name. This use of the athlete's first name serves to "other" her from the men and to set a divide whereby she is seen as inferior. While the caption is attempting to address this gendered discrepancy and unfairness present in the sport, Nike has made use of a technique designed to other women athletes, only serving to reinforce the notions of gender stereotypes present in the world of sport.

Nike has also made use of a third technique designed to position women as inferior to their masculine counterparts, by portraying women athletes as being emotionally driven. Eastman and Billings (1999) and Messner et al. (1993) first discuss this notion of being emotionally driven as a distinction between being driven by

commitment and physical effort. In Figure 1.3 by Nike use a quote from Fran Kirby, the England striker:

"Find your joy and make sure you give 100 percent in everything you do."

The focal point of this quote is on the phrase "joy". The caption also uses references to love: "she fell out of love with football" and "she rediscovered her love". The words focus on the emotional experience of the athlete rather than discussing her hard work or commitment to reach the level she has. The use of emotional language to frame women athletes attributes their accomplishments more to emotion than to skill, which is the case with sportsmen (Eastman & Billings, 1999; Fink, 2015). The quote by Fran Kirby carries with it very different connotations as well, containing elements of deontic modality by expressing an instruction: "make sure" (Machin & Mayr, 2012). This use of an instruction as opposed to an expression of ability suggests that Kirby herself is talking from a point of experience. Furthermore the use of "give 100 percent" as another element of instruction suggests not only emotional but also physical and mental commitment. The caption presented by the brand chooses to focus on the emotional aspects, "fell out of love", while the athlete herself is expressing a drive that is more than emotion and derives from a commitment to be the best by working and giving everything you are capable of giving.

The use of "love" here is also intriguing, because the post is referring to a period of time early in her career when Kirby "retired" following the passing of her mother. She states she lost her love for the sport while grieving the loss of someone very close to her and chose to leave football as a means of coping with the loss (Barker, 2021), but this was not the only reason. In an article by Barker (2021) for *The Sun UK,* a daily news publication, Kirby notes she only returned to football after playing a

Sunday league game and not having that same pressure she felt on the England team, not having to perform and constantly push herself to be better allowed her to again enjoy the sport. Shortly before the FIFA Women's World Cup she suffered severe ankle and knee injuries which required 12 months of daunting and incredibly difficult physiotherapy and recovery in order for her to play in the English team in 2019 (Baker, 2021).

The story told by the athlete of her experiences is far more than "rediscovering her love"; instead it is hard work and commitment to be one of the best in the game as well as being met with overwhelming demands to constantly push her limits as a woman in a sport dominated by men (McDonagh & Pappano, 2007). The brand however has chosen to focus on the athletes "love" for the sport, effectively "othering" the athlete and her experiences and the struggles she has faced to reach the point she has as a woman. Her accomplishment as an athlete is diminished and undervalued by attributing her rise and success to emotional aspects rather than skill and ability. There is little focus on her athletic ability, something contrasted in representations by brands like VISA.

In Figures 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, and 5.5, VISA uses the following wording in its caption:

"One pass can change the game" – Figure 5.2

"One gift can change the game" – Figure 5.3

"One coach can change the game" – Figure 5.4

"One match can change the game" – Figure 5.5

Each of these is used in the first video posted by the brand in Figure 5.1. The series of sentences flash onto the screen briefly enough to be read while maintaining a

steady pace that follows the accompanying story, each a unique take on the word itself. Below is the sequence of events and corresponding imagery for Figure 5.1 by VISA, the words appearing in bold are highlighted as such in the video:

“It could be that one **gift**” – A young girl buying a pair of boots with her dad.

“Or one **kick**” – A young girl scoring a goal while playing with friends.

“That one **pass**” – A slightly older woman, in her late teens, receives a pass from another player while playing with friends.

“One **this is my team**” – A group of young girls playing football on a rooftop.

“The one **who believed**” – A women coach and player are shown talking during a match.

“One **moment** can change the game” – A player scoring a goal during a world cup match, we are not able to see which team has scored as there are no definite markings, badges or emblems.

While discussing women athletes in relation to emotion and emotional decisions (as seen in “*this is my team*”), VISA makes references to feelings of acceptance, joy, happiness or any number of positive emotions that can be associated with a feeling of being part of a sports team, with sports providing us with a means of being a part of something larger than ourselves (Eitzen, 2012). There is also the use of “kick”, “pass” and “who believed”. ”Who believed” is used with a coach focusing on teaching and inspiring a young women woman in her team. Additionally, “kick” and “pass” are the only instances in the corpus where language highlights the physical action of playing the sport to focus on the physicality of the game. By showing the women

athletes playing with men, the brand is constructing a gendered discourse of equality as well as skill and ability.

These attributes play a key role in how sports and sportswomen are referred to compared to their men counterparts, with many discourses presenting a dominant masculine focus with women seen as inferior and often presented as weaker, with their accomplishments attributed to luck or having a strong masculine influence to guide them (Eastman & Billings, 1999; Eitzen, 2012; George, Hartley & Paris, 2001; McDonagh & Pappano, 2007; Messner, 2002). VISA has chosen to deviate from societal conventions surrounding women athletes and to present them as capable and skilled. The notion of reshaping and rethinking gender identity and ideology in sport is used by brands to conform or align with the dominant societal beliefs and values that are present in terms of visibility and exposure (Aitchison, 2007).

3.1.2 Sport and #DareTo

While sports exist in circumstances driven by external societal factors such as class, race and gender, discussions on the gendered nature of sports reflect the dominant social norms present in broader society (Eitzen, 2012). While gender ideology exists in a state of flux so too does the notion of femininity within the sporting world, where femininity is always represented in ways that are socially specific to the era in which they are produced (Aitchison, 2007; Eitzen, 2012). In the modern era women athletes are positioned in relation to men, which we unpacked in the previous section to demonstrate a construction of societal barriers to highlight the notion of women athletes as “other”. This can be done in multiple ways, for example in the previous section women are presented in situations where skill and ability are backgrounded, while their gendered identity and emotional are foregrounded. This draws a clear

distinction with men who are often show as strong, skilled and driven (Duncan, 2006; Eastman & Billings, 1999). In their posts, Adidas and Hyundai make repeated use of the hashtag #DareTo, while it initially seems to be a positive motive regarding the future of younger women footballers it assigns an interesting ideology to being a women athlete in the modern age.

By making use of the verb “dare” the brands focus on an existential process, not motivated by agency or active work but rather a passive recipient of a system of societal injustice (Machin & Mayr, 2012). ”Dare” means to have courage to do something or to challenge something, the use of #DareTo by the brands implies a challenge, and positions this ideology as a challenge to societal norms of gender inequality, in which women are positioned as “other” with relation to men (Fink, 2015; Fink et al., 2014). The repetition of “dare” seeks to reinforce and create a discourse of overcoming social prejudice, by framing women athletes as daring to challenge a system that has historically presented them as inferior.

While the hashtag is meant to create this discourse of overcoming obstacles, what it does is also present a situation where there is no agency on the part of the athlete. While we are presented the ideology of ‘daring’ and challenging society we are dared to ‘create’ and ‘dream’, both existential processes lacking a sense of agency whereby athletes acts as catalysts for this challenge of societal injustice. While the hashtag appears to position sportswomen as a challenge to society, it also highlights an inherent difference between women and men athletes, men are positioned as daring to be ’legends’ (McDonagh & Pappano, 2007) while women are dreamers not entirely devoted to a cause.

Femininity is embodied by the phrases #DareToDream and #DareToCreate not as a positive but as a reminder that for a woman athlete being the best, or attempting to be better than the men, is daring to challenge what society has determined is acceptable for her (McDonagh & Pappano, 2007). This same ideology is reflected in the use of “female” by Qatar Airways in their caption referring to Fara Williams where she is described as “England’s most-capped female footballer”. The notion of women being better than men is a challenge to what society believes women athletes are capable of, and while the hashtag has attempted to embody a discourse of courage and strength to challenge these notions, it also serves as a focal point for passivity and stagnation.

”Dare” implies to the world that being a women athlete takes belief and the courage to dare, as opposed to men who are presented as having worked to achieve their skill and strength (Eastman & Billings, 1999). The woman athlete is again othered in this instance, where the verb usage serve only to further identify a growing discourse of difference surrounding the gendered notion of sports and sporting barriers constructed by society (McDonagh & Pappano, 2007). Women are positioned as needing to challenge social inequality and are presented in a preconceived ideology of different, that being a good athlete as a woman requires daring and courage to face a system that underrepresents and mistreats women athletes (Antunovic, 2019; Meân & Kassing, 2008). The hashtag carries with it connotations of inherent gender difference, whereby women are subjected to harassment and mistreatment and need to ‘dare’ to be better, while men are shown in positions of strength and praise for achievements similar to that of their women counterparts (Antunovic, 2019; Cooky & Antunovic, 2020).

Rather than being presented as having agency and control, women athletes are depicted as passive within a dominant societal discourse of hegemonic masculinity, where women athletes wanting to be treated with the same respect as men are having to challenge social norms. While the hashtags attempts to embody a positive positioning of this challenge the use of verb processes lacking an active agent in their presentation has done the opposite, and reinforced the struggles and inequality faced by women athletes who seek to reach the top tier of their sport.

3.1.3 Women athletes and societal pressures of femininity

Women athletes are faced with a social dilemma not often experienced or recognised by men athletes of the same calibre, namely the socially imposed conventions of femininity (Aitchison, 2007; Toffoletti, 2017). While being represented as athletes and attempting to be viewed as athletes, women have the added challenge of being judged not only for their skill but also for their looks, appearance, feminine representation and ability to be an athlete while also remaining feminine (Antunovic, 2019; Fink, 2015; Fink et al., 2014).

Men do not have the added challenge of being judged for appearing un-masculine, I have used the word un-masculine instead of feminine for a very specific reason, the imposed femininity does not critique women athletes for appearing masculine but rather for lacking feminine qualities that are associated with and imposed on the woman's body (Caudwell, 2003). Women athletes face societal opposition and harassment when they are presented in ways that are not entirely masculine but rather un-feminine. When athletes challenge the dominant discourse of femininity they are harassed, ridiculed or threatened because they are not conforming to

societal norms of femininity (Antunovic, 2019; Fotopoulou, 2017; Lameiras & Rodríguez-Castro, 2020).

While feminism and the fight for equal rights has been a constant battleground for decades, the notion of femininity is itself informed by positioning in society (Antunovic, 2019; Cooky & Antunovic, 2020; Thorpe et al., 2017). How individuals discuss and refer to feminism will alter and affect how they are portrayed and understood by society (Antunovic, 2019). Feminism being informed by dominant patriarchal beliefs perpetuates the ideology of what it means to be a woman and be "feminine" in sport (Eitzen, 2012; McDonagh & Pappano, 2007; Toffoletti, 2016). This dominant ideological discourse presents itself in two key instances in the corpus by brands Nike and Adidas, in Figure 1.1 and Figures 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 respectively. The focus here is not entirely on the posts by the brands but rather on the comments left by Instagram users on the posts in question.

Both posts contain similarities in terms of presentation, they are close-up shots with the actor involved looking directly at the camera, both images are an "offer" image in which the observer is not expected to engage directly but is rather offered information regarding the image and athlete in question (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The information offered in Figures 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 is highlighted by the medals and the caption stating "Game on, world", and through this combined visual and textual representation the women athletes are being portrayed as champions. Figure 1.1 does much of the same but rather than being portrayed as a champion the athlete is shown as being "one of the best players in the world" and Nike does this by making use of the language of the caption in conjunction with the image. While this is what the brands are attempting to portray regarding these athletes the response from the sporting community is the focus of the discussion.

In the comments of Post 1 (as seen in Appendix B), the ideology of the women athlete as being as capable as the men is diminished by the societal notion that women athletes are feminine first and athletic second (Trolan, 2013). A large number of comments focus on the idea of what women are supposed to be seen as in order to be seen as women. This ideology is very much a white-centric ideology where features attributed to historically white individuals are seen as the default for what is considered beautiful or feminine in society (Stuart & Donaghue, 2012). The comments take a specific stance and thematic tone when referencing the Korean athlete as seen in Appendix B, Post 1:

1.5. Gotta be a man

1.16. I thoght she was male

1.17. Man or woman?

1.18. Issa [it's a] man

1.28. Totally a dude

1.32. Really thought this was a guy

1.33. Guy or grl?

1.36. She's hardly a woman

1.44. Who else thought this was a dude

1.54. Who the fk is this dude?

1.56. Either he's 17 or 45 (The use of *he* by the individual)

1.62. Lmao thoght it's a man

1.66. Is that a man or a woman

1.67. I sincerely thought that was a man…

The above comments rely on specific aspects of the athlete's appearance, such as shorter hair and typically un-feminine features to target the fact she does not conform to the standards of Western beauty that we are exposed to in our society today (Meân & Kassing, 2008; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012). The comments seek to

highlight this, stating that she is clearly not “feminine” enough, therefore rather than focusing on her ability and skill the comments objectify the athlete as being “different” to societal views of women athletes (Fink et al., 2014). However this does not occur in isolation and is informed by a patriarchal society of sexualisation. Women athletes who are seen as more conventionally attractive are favoured and often subject to sexualised manners of representation for the purpose of media consumption, often accompanied by little focus on athletic ability (Fink, 2015; Fink et al., 2014; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018b). In the above we can see almost the opposite occurs, because of “normalised” beauty conventions the athlete is “othered” not in terms of being compared to men but rather othered compared to women athletes. The comments specifically attempt to exclude So-Yun from representations of women athletes because she does not conform to the historically Western connotations of beauty that are influenced by a system that favours “looks” over “talent” (Trolan, 2013).

Fink et al., (2014) found that when athletes presented themselves in sexualised manners they received more engagement, i.e likes, shares and comments. This was specifically due to the sexual nature of the post and not the athlete’s portrayal of ability, which can be seen clearly in the above where the social influence and constant pressures of what it means to be a woman in a society dominated by men truly means (Caudwell, 2003; Fink et al., 2014; McDonagh & Pappano, 2007; Trolan, 2013). It means that while the woman athlete must remain an athlete, perform under pressure and always work harder than any man to achieve greatness, she must do so while still maintaining an air of femininity and attraction, women athletes are often represented in situations conducive to this belief where there is a focus on beauty more than ability (Fink, 2015; Fink et al., 2014; Lameiras & Rodríguez-Castro, 2020).

Figure 1.1 sought to highlight the athlete's skills and attempted to break away from the gender norm where women are not seen as equal to men. According to the reaction from the sporting community,some showed an acknowledgement of her while skill many did not. The comments discussed indicates that there is an ideological belief that a woman athlete's ability is considered only if she conforms to ideals of Western beauty standards (Fink et al., 2014; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012).

The comments for figures 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 in Appendix C solidify the above belief surrounding women athletes. Both women are from the United States Women's National Team (USWNT), both are white, blonde haired and blue-eyed, a near perfect example for what is considered "beautiful" in a society historically influenced by Western culture (Stuart & Donaghue, 2012). The few comments which make reference to physical attributes further expand the notion of femininity in sports, as seen in the comments below from Appendix C, Post 3:

3.1. Oh so pretty, beautiful face

3.2. You picture very beautiful

3.3. So inspiring! Pretty and fit boss babe

3.6. Nice photo, there is no need for more words, I just wanted tosay 😍👌 stunning performance ladies

3.7. Love the pics girls!!! 💓💝💓 show em how it's done

3.21. Gorgeous girls 🔥 🔥

It is evident that the above comments focus on appearance and

attractiveness, while there is not much if any focus on the fact that they had just become the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup champions. The references to this are not all positive as seen in comment 3.10 "Lmao why do the women have medals?" and comment 3.12 "They won what? Lol". The achievements of the women athletes are diminished and disregarded however their physical appearance and similarities with conventional Western beauty standards are praised. This advances the notion that while women athletes are seen as athletes their accomplishments and abilities and are secondary to their femininity and the constant societal pressure to remain feminine even while being an athlete (Fink et al., 2014; Trolan, 2013).

Athletes who do not conform to standard models of Western beauty are often harassed and ridiculed online for factors relating to this non-conformity. Furthemore athletes that do not present and embrace a sense of femininity in line with historically Western ideals do not receive the same attention and exposure as those who do (Antunovic, 2019; Caudwell, 2003; Fink et al., 2014). While rewarding athletes for performance and skill, the sporting community is still very much informed and mediated by ideologies of what is and is not "feminine" concerning women athletes and representations in the media of women athletes.

Hyundai challenges this reputation by using visuals and imagery. Hyundai has made use of action shots, images where the athletes are presented as athletes without needing to take into account the "beauty" aspect that is often required from social media posts and images of women athletes (Fink et al., 2014; Toffoletti, 2016; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018b). Hyundai presents the women in situations where their athleticism and skill are the forefront of the conversation as opposed to the gender association with the sport.

3.2 Athlete activism: Feminist articulations through sport

Activism in the digital age has become an intrinsically connected community by design. Therole of digital networks is to connect people and to expand a central message and allow individuals the opportunity to engage with the ideology of activism in a way that is far less formal than previously seen. Anyone anywhere at any given time is able to comment and engage with content that has been positioned on a digital network or social media platform. However it also allows individuals or corporations to claim certain activist discourses as being related to them as individuals or brands. It provides a platform whereby there is an element of recognition and status that is bestowed upon those who publicly and openly take up the mantle of activists and challenge various forms of social injustice and inequality present in modern society (Fotopoulou, 2017). For example, brands actively engage with and post during women's month, making references to various challenges that women face.

This allows brands to relate to the ideology surrounding women's month and to take a stand against injustices to be attributed to the brand as well. Digital networks offer the opportunity for practically instantaneous transmission of messages that advocate for socio-economic or political change through the use of activist rhetoric and language. By re-framing and re-conceptualising what is seen as being activism in these networks seek to create a sense of 'networked activism' in the digital space (Fotopoulou, 2017). Sports provides a platform for further expression, and due to the nature of sport in society, sport reflects dominant social ideologies that brands are able to utilise to construct targeted identities and communities. The Women's World Cup is no exception with brands using the Women's World Cup to represent

ideologies that challenge social norms, often relating this to athlete's activism and the fight against inequality (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020; Dunn, 2016).

The core basis of neoliberalism is the ideology of individualism, free-market trade, and most importantly for this research a drastic shift of power from governments to multinational corporations (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020). Fotopoulou's (2017) argument states that there are four sets of discourses that guide digital media practices surrounding activism: dominant framings of digital engagement and inclusions; dominant framings of digital lifestyles as productive and progressive; cyber feminism; and utopian cyber-libertarian narratives. Two of these are of interest for the current study.

The first is dominant framings of digital engagement and inclusion. By utilising the ideology of activism brands are able to choose who is and is not included in discussions surrounding various feminist ideologies. This relates partly to the notion of the in-group and out-group proposed by Bagozzi et al. (2007) whereby certain individuals are meant to be excluded.

The second is termed cyber feminism, which highlights the link between what we know as contemporary modern feminism and cyberspace. What is feminist is always informed by current social and political events. For instance, the struggle for the right to vote during the first wave of feminism in the early 1900s could be considered feminist activism challenging a dominant societal belief that women should not be granted equal rights to men. What is considered or framed as feminist today is determined not only by individuals in society who choose to be vocal about gender inequalities and discrimination, but also by large corporations who hijack the discourse by controlling what we see in the mass media and on social media. By

doing so, they also control the visibility of specific feminist discourses as seen during the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020).

3.2.1 Equal pay for equal play

The subheading for this section comes directly from the caption used by Adidas in an announcement stating that they will pay athletes in the winning team at the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup the same performance bonus as the men (see Figure 2.1). Before unpacking and discussing the language that Adidas used, it is important to contextualise when it made this announcement. On 8 March 2019 the USWNT filed a gender discrimination lawsuit to challenge the discrimination faced by women athletes who received vastly lower wages compared to the men. The following day, Adidas announced that it would be paying all winning athletes the same performance bonus. There was no prior indication that Adidas would do this nor was any reason given as to why.

The timeframe in which Adidas made this announcement sits far too closely to the filing of a lawsuit that is attempting to fight the exact same societal issue. The lawsuit was constructed and argued in such a way that the dominant narrative was one of merit (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020), whereby women athletes deserved to be paid the same because they performed just as well if not better. Cooky and Antunovic (2020) note that in 2014 the men's team received in excess of US $5 million for losing in the round of 16, while a year later the USNWT received only US $1.75 million for winning the tournament. Adidas has not published an exact figure of athletes' performance bonuses.

The first line of the announcement opens with three verbs designed to indicate assertiveness, namely "We believe in inspiring and enabling". By using *believe*,

inspiring and *enabling.g* Adidas is framing itself as assertive and as possessing enough power to inspire and enable athletes. What this does for the reader is make it appear more truthful and sincere, and by using assertives the brand is able to appear more genuine in its statement. It makes us believe that they are inspiring and enabling athlete's rather than making us question the validity of the statement. The use of believe is the driving factor behind the opening statement of sincerity. Belief is a powerful tool used to indicate commitment to faith, morals, values and ideologies. By opening their statement with this sentence Adidas are re-framing themselves as committed to their belief and committed to inciting change. Adidas is reframing its commitment to its belief and to inciting change. Through this language use, Adidas has made this discourse visible and salient in its online community, specifically by making use of a discourse of empowerment.

"Enabling" leads the reader to envision an individual who was previously unable to achieve something, but now has been given this ability, being empowered. Baer (2016) notes that this discourse of empowerment is intended to enrich and grow the digital aspect of feminism and highlight specific aspects of inequality, but it also constructs feminism as being less important.

Adidas plan to achieve this empowerment by "breaking barriers". The use of the word "barrier" is important because it gives us a symbolic representation of the inequalities in society. It symbolises and constructs a reality where the notion of gender equality is obstructed by a "barrier", one that needs to be broken and torn down and Adidas again commits itself to doing so. While the language is designed to empower, specifically Adidas rather than the athletes, it also draws away from the context of the problem facing society.

The USWNT filed a lawsuit and went to court against their federation to allow them equal pay yet Adidas simply announced' it, and the use of this verb suggests a more neutral framing, it did not proclaim or declare but simply 'announced'. The inclusion of the sentence "Adidas athletes on the winning 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup team" suggests that only athletes who win and perform to the standards set by Adidas will be entitled to receive a bonus equivalent to that received by the men.

While the primary frame of reference for the announcement is to state they will be paying women as much as the men, enticing us to view it as feminist discourse and as a form of digital activism by challenging the dominant societal view of how much women are paid, there are conditions. The first is that 'you must win' in order to receive a bonus on a level equal to men; the idea of winning suggests that they need to prove themselves. A number of Adidas athletes most likely did not win yet also participated in the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup. We see this idea that athletes need to prove they deserve to be treated equally, and this can only be done through winning. The act of being a professional athlete is in and of itself challenging, as Adidas states it is committed to 'breaking barriers' and in this specific instance they have chosen the financial barrier. It is committed to abolishing the pay gap in terms of its own athletes, but only if these athletes prove they deserve it and win the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup.

By doing this Adidas has positioned feminist activism as secondary and in part unnecessary. Indeed, Adidas has not combatted inequality but rather contributed to it. Only winning athletes and only athletes during the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup qualify, and there is no mention of subsequent World Cups – only 2019. Adidas has stated it is committed to 'inspiring' and 'enabling', but this empowerment and ability will only be given if athletes show they are deserving of it by winning. So, while

Adidas has made this aspect of inequality visible by mentioning the pay gap, and introduced this notion of feminist activism to its digital presence, Adidas has also done so with set conditions that must be fulfilled. There is a lack of agency on the part of the brand – it does not take responsibility for the inequality but rather assigns the responsibility to the athletes themselves, the brand constructs an identity of empowerment lacking brand agency.

By removing this sense of agency the brand has not only made use of the feminist activism discourse but also constructed it in a specific and controlled way in order to establish itself as the power behind the decisions but not the responsible party when the outcome is not what the athletes desire (Bacchi, 2005; Fotopoulou, 2017). While sports presents an opportunity for all individuals to succeed and prosper often those who do are not the most skilled or most hard working, but rather the wealthiest (Eitzen, 2012). Adidas recognise this and instead choose to shift the focus from the discrepancy among class and socioeconomic status and instead focus on skill and ability.

This discourse of ability and skill, as well as needing to 'earn' bonuses is echoed in the comments section of the post. Words such as 'skill' and 'athleticism' are used to argue that women do not deserve equal pay as their level of skill is not the same as those of men. While some use skill as a means to argue against the decision, others still use skill as a means to justify why the women do deserve equal pay but there is one aspect that is used extensively, and this is the U15[3] Dallas FC boys' team. While the boys' team has been mentioned previously it again arises here, where individuals argue that because the USWNT lost their match

[3] U15 refers to the boy's league whose players are 15 years of age or under.

to the U15 side they do not deserve equal pay, it is typically phrased as “lost to U15 Dallas” or “beaten by”. Below are some examples taken from Appendix C, Posts 1, 2 and 3:

1.18 U15 Dallas FC FTW!!!

2.6 Even though the Dallas fc 15u team beat them in a scrimmage

2.12 U15 fc Dallas boys beat them 5-2

3.11 EPIC! Now they might be able to beat that U15 FC Dallas boys team!!

3.19 U15 Dallas. Good luck ladies

The arguments by this out-group are that while the women are good, they will still not be as good as the men. The match in question was a 5-2 loss for the USWNT, however the match was also a training exercise for the U15 Dallas team. It was not meant to be competitive but rather to allow the boys to learn from the USWNT. CBS Sports[4] as well as the *DailyMail UK*[5] called it an “informal” match and as “half-hearted practice” for the USWNT in preparation for their upcoming match against Russia (Gonzales, 2017; Griffee, 2017). Yet this aspect is absent from all of the arguments seen here, as Antunovic (2019) states when the intent becomes argumentative there is distortion of events, as a means of justification for ideologies that reproduce gender stereotypes.

The arguments presented rely on the notion of ability and skill, the USWNT is the best in the world and the likelihood of them being beaten by an U15 side is marginal,

[4] An American news website that comments and writes on sports and sports news, they are a subsidiary of CBS.

[5] A British daily news publication and website, currently the most circulated daily newspaper in the United Kingdom.

yet individuals argue that this match was a decisive victory and the USWNT should not receive more money because of this. Present again is a type of resistant masculinity to the notions of change, where men actively resist change to the dominant norms of society (Ulrich & Tissier-Desbordes, 2018). The ideology is that women athletes should not be paid more due to a lack of skill and ability, yet the argument used to substantiate this belief is not valid or applicable, but is rather a tool to further a biased belief.

Additionally present in the discourse is a similar argument to that found in Cooky and Antunovic (2020) and Antunovic (2019), i.e. ‘viewership’ and on several occasions ‘attendance’ are the secondary arguments against equal pay. What is present is the belief that because viewership is not as high, the FIFA Women’s World Cup teams should not be paid equally to the men. While average viewership per game was ultimately higher, the overall attendance to the FIFA Women’s World Cup exceeded that of the men in both 2019 (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020) and 2015 (Dunn, 2016), while the total revenue may not have been the same with the men making considerably more, the idea that women are not entertaining and this means individuals do not attend matches is not true. The argument however is not entirely focused on attendance, but again on skill and ability. Individuals not attending matches implies that the players are not as good, as stated by several individuals in the comments, therefore using ‘attendance’ as a means to justify unequal pay is not entirely true. It is rather individuals using attendance to justify poor performance and ability which in turns justifies unequal pay.

The argument presented contains one underlying point of contact, whether or not the women deserve to be paid the same, with many arguing that they do and many arguing they do not, the underlying ideology presented by each side is centred on

the societal expectation regarding skill and gender, an argument that has long existed regarding societies views of sport and sportswoman (Trolan, 2013). Western media has a history of underrepresentation of women in sport especially with regard to skill and ability (Trolan, 2013), in much the same way that gender and gender norms are repetition of socially constructed and mediated acts of gender through time (Butler, 2002) so too is the representation of women in sport. By continuing to perpetuate a discourse of skill and ability, or lack thereof, it constructs a reality in which the default assumption is one of inferiority when referencing women athletes.

3.2.2 Sports as mediation and a platform for activism

As sports and sporting events are often stylised repetitions of gender norms and stereotypes perpetuated by society, where women receive less coverage, lower pay and ultimately lower pay-outs and revenue, so too are they capable of being platforms of social mediation and intervention whereby sport plays a key role in identifying and challenging the inequality present in much of the sporting world (Eitzen, 2012). Eitzen (2012) argues that this is because sport acts as a mirror for society, by containing within it the basics elements of bureaucratisation, commercialisation, racism, sexism and homophobia. At the same time sports entices us because it gives an individual the opportunity to identify with something greater than ourselves. What it also does is provide an opportunity to influence and address various aspects and notions of inequality present in society.

The first instance where sport is used to address social injustice is the caption of Figure 2.4.1 where Adidas discusses a programme that is designed to equip athletes with skills and abilities they would not typically have access to due to various “barriers.” Figures 2.4.1 to 2.4.6 are all images of women athletes engaging and

taking part in the programme being discussed by Adidas. As in Figure 2.1 Adidas is uses the word “barriers”; the repetition of this word seeks not only to highlight the various limitations that are present in the world of sport but also to make visible a specific feminist discourse. The discourse being constructed is one of inequality as a barrier that is influenced and reproduced through various societal factors. In the context of the caption by Adidas two elements have been used to further construct a barrier, namely financial and cultural limitations.

Cultural oppression and systematic bias exist in sports globally, limiting what sports women can and cannot play through various societal means, such as school sports programmes that promote one sport for boys and a different and more feminine sport for girls, such as football for boys and netball for girls (Eitzen, 2012; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002). Adidas has now taken the concept of a barrier, and provided more tangible procedures as to why this barrier exists in the first place, stating that equality is blocked by a “barrier” is simple enough, now we have been told that financial and cultural constraints are barriers for women athletes. This becomes increasingly important as we continue to progress through the caption.

Also present in the text is the use of the verb phrase “equipping them”, echoing the sentiments expressed earlier which seek to empower and enable women by providing them with opportunities to overcome or destroy the various barriers that are blocking them. In addition, Adidas uses the term “feeling empowered”, where the brand is creating a discourse of feminism that positions Adidas as the power driving the change by giving women athletes access to money and skills that they would not usually have access to. Eitzen (2012) notes that sports both unites and divides, while we are brought together by the spirit of tolerance, co-operation and acceptance of differences it is these same factors that lead to growing intolerance and exclusionary

practices. In the caption Adidas make use of verbs designed to make visible a discourse of empowering and enabling women, but they also make a distinction between who is responsible and who is not.

This can be seen in the use of “equipping *them*”, “so that *they* can return feeling empowered”, and “level the playing field *themselves*” (see Figure 2.4.1). We know that in order for there to be a “them/they” there must in turn be an us (Fairclough, 2001; Machin & Mayr, 2012), and in this situation it is an “us” that has provided “them” with the skills needed to start fighting against various avenues of oppression and gender inequality, but what is most important is the final statement “level the playing field themselves”. This suggests that while Adidas (which identifies as “us”)provided the necessary skills and money which, as it states, is not readily available for many young women and the sole responsibility for creating a “level playing field” falls on “them”. Eitzen (2012) notes that while sports can unite, it can also be inherently divisive, with pitches and fields acting as symbolic battlegrounds between “us” and “them”.

While the “us” is never mentioned the “them” and “they” are presented to us quite readily, the young athletes who are taking part in the various workshops and training sessions are “them”. As seen earlier Adidas has placed itself in a position of power, as being capable to drive change, and capable of creating opportunities and experiences which can and in many instances do address a number of societal inequalities and injustices against women. However, Adidas does not take agency over the consequences and outcomes; “level the playing field” suggests that it needs correcting, a notion shared and expressed by Adidas yet the agent of this action is not the brand, but the athlete. While the brand has provided the necessary skills, it

removes all agency tied to the outcome, and if the athletes are not able to level the playing field then the responsibility for this lies with them and not the brand itself.

Adidas attempts to create a visible discourse of empowerment and solidarity against a “barrier” of cultural and financial exclusion, and align this challenge of social norms with the brand identity. Positioning itself as being able to bring about change but when this change begins to take fruition. Adidasno longer assumes any agency over it, while the brand strives to cultivate various opportunities for women it also places the blame for this continued repetition of societal inequality on the athletes themselves. If they are unable to achieve equality Adidas has already done its part by providing them with the skills, while “they” (the athletes) are then responsible for making use of these skills given to them by the brand.

What we also see here is the use of one brand to build a separate brand’s image through the context of sports (Jackson-Brown, 2020); the programme does not belong to Adidas but to the Equal Playing Field Initiative (EPFI), a non-profit organisation that dedicates its time and energy to empowering young athletes through courses and workshops, free of charge. Jackson-Brown (2020) noted that after the success of the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup coverage, brands and organisations began advocating to bring marginalised athletes into the mainstream media. While the intention was to change the perception of women athletes in mainstream media, it also acted as a tool to not only collaborate with but also borrow other brands in order to create a new brand that contained aspects of both. What this does is it allows individuals who are previously marginalised to be given more mainstream appeal and visibility, thereby creating more exposure to address a range of social injustices and inequalities.

Yet in the context of these posts (see Figures 2.4.1 – 2.4.6), we see the brand is able to attribute the role of change not only to the EPFI, but also to Adidas. The final words of the caption highlight this, “Head to @AdidasWoman to see more”, rather than directing the user to EPFI’s social media page the user is directed to Adidas, albeit a different Adidas page to the one the user is currently seeing. This simple act allows Adidas to attribute the programme to itself more so than EPFI by being the trusted source of information if you would like to know more.

3.2.3 Informed collectivism and exclusion

Sport exists in all cultures across the globe, with many cultures having and practicing their own unique sports. Eitzen (2012) proposed that sport was able to unite and divide, and also to produce a sense of unity that is not present in many other aspects of society. This is done by allowing individuals the opportunity to express fealty to a team, athlete or organisation and create a sense of shared community through mutual interest and agreement. These groups of “tribes” as he termed them form the basis of sporting involvement from fans, with all individuals who interact ascribing themselves to a “tribe” of some sort. Yet by willingly and purposefully identifying with one specific tribe it in turn will exclude and remove the individual from the opposing side.

Informed collectivism relates to the ideology that individuals who would not typically form a community have been purposefully positioned to become members of a specific discourse, despite not having shared attributes with regard to the context of this collectivism (Brown, 2006; Eitzen, 2012). This is done for the purpose of forming a shared belief or beliefs which will allow the mediators and moderators of the discourse the opportunity to reach a larger audience by constructing this sense of

informed community. This can be seen often in the sporting world; individuals with vastly different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds share a community because of their support of a specific team or athlete. These individuals would normally never interact, but through the shared discourse of sports they are part of the same global community. Informed collectivism also allows brands to purposefully exclude specific individuals, but there is only one instance of this occurring which will be addressed later.

The first instance of informed collectivism can be seen in Figure 1.2 in which members of the French national team are in a group huddle following their victory in their first match of the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup. The caption itself contains two instances of informed collectivism: "whatever happens, we're a *team*" and "Amandine Henry and her *teammates*"; the use of the words team and teammates along with making use of the captain's name and statements symbolises that while each individual is playing for their own reasons and beliefs they also identify not as individuals but as a team. While they seek to showcase their own ability they also form part of the larger collective that is the team itself. By making use of a specific individualised instance as well as notions of collectiveness the brand is able to highlight that while women athletes are strong as individuals they are stronger as a team. In this image the women are all dressed in the French teams kit, while this may appear to be a specific individualised representation of the French team what it symbolises is more a generic representation of women athletes made through clothing and appearance (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

We are not able to discern the individuals involved in the huddle, nor can we see any real distinguishing features of any of the athletes. However what we are able to see clearly is the French team, all dressed the same and all sharing in their victory not as

individuals but as a team. This image shows that in order to achieve and succeed the notion of informed collectiveness and unity plays an important factor, and Hyundai seek to align this ideology with their brand identity and image.

Continuing with Nike there is one further distinct notion of informed collectiveness in their posts in Figure 1.4. While highlighting collectivism, there is a sense of individualisation, with the athlete Megan Rapinoe in focus and celebrating her victory with her team. While this post appears similar to the aforementioned it does have one distinct difference, i.e. the social actor is clearly visible with the caption “Few make history, Fewer change it.” Prior to her appearance at the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup Megan Rapinoe, the social actor in the post, was a well-known and outspoken advocate for equal treatment amongst women athletes and sportswomen. The idea of changing the world while being attributed to the team as a whole falls primarily on her, by being specifically represented as the main focal point of the picture. While we still see this generic notion of informed collectivism, again all wearing the same uniform, the gaze is naturally drawn to the individual who has been placed in focus.

Machin and Mayr (2012) noted that while individualisation is done primarily to exaggerate features often associated with negative connotations, instead Nike has done the opposite, by using Megan Rapinoe to create a visible discourse of athlete activism. The meaning of “fewer change it”, suggests that Nike is committed to constructing a discourse of change and empowerment, as Adidas, albeit in fewer words. Nike has taken the same notion of power and ability and placed it in the hands of the athletes, removing the sense of agency that the brand possesses with reference to social change and the capacity to generate and drive social change.

In Figures 3.2.1, 3.3.1 and 3.4.1. Hyundai have employed a similar strategy to create brand identity. In their captions Hyundai has made extensive use of the hashtag TruePassion which relates to its initiative to highlight and showcase the lives and journeys of various sportswomen for the duration of the FIFA Women's World Cup, by beginning each post with #TruePassion. In Figure 3.2.1 there is a picture of Megan Rapinoe, with the caption reading "#TruePassion makes the mark. Twice", a reference to the two penalties scored by Rapinoe to secure her team's victory. Again present is the ideology of change and changing history in a more subdued sense to that seen by Nike, "makes the mark" specifically while referencing the penalties scored also relates to the mark left by Rapinoe on not only sports and media but on the ideology of feminist activism as a whole.

Additionally, the caption mentions "defending champs us [USA] through to the quarter finals"; while there is a sense of individualisation there is also again this sense of informed collectivism. Rapinoe is not going through to the quarter finals but her team is and she has been instrumental in making this happen. While the individual has been represented as the focal point in the visual imagery the underlying ideology is one again of empower, to make your mark and achieve greatness for your team. This sense of collectivism and unity forms one of the foundations for sports and sporting events (Aitchison, 2007; Eitzen, 2012; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002).

Yet again, Hyundai has advanced this notion of empowerment, but rather than remove any agency it uses #TruePassion at the start of every post, with #TruePassion being a direct link to the brand itself. While Nike and Adidas attempt to remove this sense of agency, Hyundai has chosen to remain as a focal point and does not attempt to attribute the ideology of change to athletes alone, but places

much of that agency on itself by never referring to the athletes and instead relying entirely on the hashtag #TruePassion. What this does is not only make use of the athletes as a symbol of feminist activism, it also seeks to position Hyundai as more than a brand driven to empower athletes, instead it is positioned as a brand driven to empower athletes while also recognising what role it plays in this process, constructing a brand identity of change through ownership.

In Figure 3.4.1 there is a similar image to that used by Nike, with the USWNT in a huddle. However there is one minor difference; the United States team is kneeling. The ideology surrounding kneeling at a sporting event has become very much rooted in American sporting culture with the act of kneeling being an immediately recognisable symbol of challenging oppression and injustice not only in sport but society as a whole, often termed the “Kaepernick effect” (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020; McNeal, 2018; Smith, 2019). This refers to Colin Kaepernick, who chose not to stand for the anthem during the 2016 American Football season and instead kneeled to highlight racial injustice and oppression in the United States of America. It is worth noting that this show of activism occurred a full two years after Ariyana Smith chose to lay on the basketball court before her match, to protest the same injustices that Kaepernick was protesting, however, she was a college basketball player as opposed to a professional league player with more exposure and reach (McNeal, 2018; Smith, 2019).

While this image of the kneeling athletes alone signifies a cry of injustice the caption alongside reads “#TruePassion unites”, this one single verb carries with it the weight of what it is that the sporting world is attempting to do. While kneeling has been viewed both positively and negatively by various high profile individuals in society one cannot deny that is has the desired effect to evoke a response in the wider

society that would often not be involved in sports or sporting events (Antunovic, 2019; Smith, 2019).

By posting this image of a group of kneeling athletes with the single word “unites” the post carries connotations of activism far more than any paragraph would have. The sportswomen are presented as one, united in a shared belief and ideology of social change and dedicated as one to driving and bringing about change. While this is good it is important to note that the very idea of the “Kaepernick effect” is built on the ideology of masculinity, while it is a symbol of racial inequality in an unjust system it is also informed, mediated and constructed through the lens of masculinity and sport.

The final instance to be discussed regarding informed collectivism is the concept of exclusion and how specific individuals or groups are excluded. This is done by one brand in particular, Qatar Airways. In Figure 4.3 the caption reads “A round of applause as we congratulate the @uswnt, the FIFA Women’s World Cup France 2019 champions”, and it is interesting to note here is that the caption essentially mentions the USWNT twice. Firstly, it is done by tagging them directly which is the more overt and visible; secondly it states “the FIFA Women’s World Cup France 2019 champions”, and by stating “congratulations” we already know that the USWNT has won as this would be the only cause for celebration, Qatar Airways is purposefully highlighting here what it is the women have managed to achieve.

The most important aspect of Figure 4.3 is the image. There are six women all dressed in the same uniform holding a trophy, yet these women are not members of the USWNT but air hostesses of Qatar Airways. The post served as a congratulatory message to the USWNT, but instead of being represented visually, they are only mentioned in the caption. Qatar Airways has purposefully excluded the USWNT from

the visual aspect and instead replaced it with their own employees; this is in contrast to the brands that previouslyattempted to build an ideology of collectiveness centred on the athletes – while Qatar Airways is attempting to do the same but instead centring on itself as the brand.

3.3 Innovation

Today, logos and slogans dominate the world of brands and branding. As consumers we associate a logo with a brand and brand image more than ever (Klein, 2009). With the exponential growth and expansion of digital and social media networks the notion of branding has become an incredibly important part of a brands identity in both digital media and broader society (Wirtz et al., 2013). While brands may be able to maintain relevance through products and services the vast majority of what makes a brand relevant lies within the branding effort undertaken by the company to maintain a level of status (Holt, 2016; Wirtz et al., 2013; Yan, 2011). In order to do this brands will constantly keep track of new trends within their community as well as various social, economic and political discussions emerging from society that can be adapted for the brand to utilise in their strategy to maintain significance (Aaker, 2007; Holt, 2016).

All companies, and brands by extension, have a formula that when applied and recycled will continue to develop brand image and consumer satisfaction within a brands specific market or target audience (Klein, 2009). In much the same way big brands and corporations seek to distance themselves from the factories and production lines of their respective products, to shift attention away from past indiscretions and discriminations committed by these brands. Brands need to remain new in order to stay relevant, thus the idea of “innovation” is a strong influence for the production of branded content and engagement (D. Aaker, 2007). We see social media give rise to the idea of “differentiation”, in which brands attempt to shift the focus from being new to being “new, different and better” (Aaker, 2007; Beverland et al., 2010; Holt, 2016).

Torelli, Chiu, Keh and Amaral (2011) looked at how men-symbolic brands and products were viewed as being more “American” simply because the brands always foregrounded men as being the ideal “American” while woman were routinely side-lined. The brands and products were marketed primarily to men, with advertising reflecting this in their representation of women. There is a constant focus on this “gender differences” discourse (Sunderland, 2004) within a large portion of branding where woman are more sexualised than men and represented as inferior when women and men are shown together (Eastman & Billings, 1999; Fink, 2015).This gendered parity has often been a key aspect of branding in the modern era, where brands are making conscious decisions to attempt to align themselves with ideologies of equality and draw in more customers and consumers to the brand itself (Holt, 2016; Lieb, 2018; Yan, 2011).

This ideology of gendered branding will then extend to the engagement efforts made by the brand to communicate with fans; brand identity will not remain anchored to the brand if the values are not reiterated through brand communications and advertising (Berntson et al., 2006). Within the context of the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup the brands have aligned themselves within a specific gendered discourse. Gender further extends into the realms of innovation, in which the achievement of new feats in terms of gender equality is seen as a major driving factor for a number of brands and brand positions both on social media and in the broader context of consumer society (Berntson, Jarnemo, Philipson, 2006; Holt, 2016). Brands will always strive to innovate, with the idea of “innovation” being at the forefront of many brands slogan and mission statements, yet whether these brands truly innovate in not guaranteed (Aaker, 2007).

Throughout branding history there has been a key focus on specific aspects of the brand and how to build brand identity. The emergence of cultural branding over the last two decades has allowed brands to diverge and begin advertising in niches and subcultures that they would not often find themselves in (Holt, 2016). How then have the brands included in this thesis made use of cultural branding and innovation to create a gendered ideology of innovations that seeks to address the same social inequality yet remain relevant and new? What aspects of innovation have the brands chosen to focus on? How have they linked this focus to the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup and has this innovation achieved a discourse of challenging and pushing back against the social injustice perpetuated against women athletes? Or is it simply a marketing strategy utilising the women athletes as a means to build a brand culture of gender equality that does not truly innovate or contribute to gender equality at all?

3.3.1 #TruePassion #LikeNeverBefore: Constructing branded realities

Before we move forward with the analysis of its portrayal of innovation, Hyundai requires context with regard to what it "created". Hyundai has taken the fundamentals of Aaker (2007) and crafted not only an identity of innovation but also an initiative focused on innovating and innovating in terms of women athletes. This can be seen in all Hyundai's posts(see figures 3.1.1 to 3.4.2). The initiative was launched shortly before the Women's World Cup, and was intended to discuss various issues surrounding sportswomen by showing the journey of ten athletes. Additionally Hyundai provided transport for the event, and the initiative "True Passion", is described below:

> [True Passion] refers to female athletes' inner strength for overcoming various social barriers and challenges, the company has created diverse initiatives to

involve and inspire fans, paying tribute to exemplary female footballers along the way.

> The programs include digital contents illuminating the life histories of ten players from Olympique Lyon FC and Chelsea FC; a supply of 96 popular Hyundai vehicles including [..] for FIFA officials' transportation and logistics; and special marketing programs -- "Match Predictor presented by Hyundai" and "Hyundai Goal of the Tournament" -- which allow fans, respectively, to predict match results and stats as well as vote on the competition's best goal on the FIFA website and digital app ('Hyundai Blog', 2019)

The initiative serves the purpose of highlighting the struggles of women in sport, as well as providing Hyundai with a considerable amount of branding and identity building by appearing to be "new" and forward thinking, by embracing women in sport the brand becomes a symbol of innovation and gender inclusions. The language used from the website does this fairly well with the words "illuminating" and "paying tribute" both carrying with connotations of truth and discovery. When something is illuminated, it must first have been in the dark, similarly a tribute will often highlight the best moments but also the struggles that have not been seen by the public. Hyundai has done this to appear as a leader of innovation and gender equality, and to position the brand as non-biased and against discrimination.

Holt (2016) found that brands succeed when they are able to break through in terms of culture, specifically societal culture surrounding the brand, product or event. Holt (2016) referred to this as crowd culture. This changes the way that companies are able to brand on social media. Through crowd culture individuals are able to say what does and what does not work in terms of branding, companies therefore will all

begin to present similar ways of branding and marketing as, using crowd culture, this is what they know works or has been proven to work. Crowd culture also acts as a mediator between the brand and the socially acceptable ideologies presented by the brands themselves. While crowd culture is informed by its specific niche in society and on social media, the crowd culture discourse is still subject to stereotypes and biased notions of what gender should be (Aitchison, 2007; Holt, 2016).

The first mention of True Passion is in the caption of Figures 3.1.1 to 3.1.4, where English forward Ellen White celebrates her second goal of the game. The words “next level” have been used to refer to and address the initiative, however in the caption “True Passion” is referred to as the object, as the one being taken to the next level rather than the one doing the taking. The full sentence of the caption reads “Taking True Passion to the next level”. The social actor, who is positioned as doing the “taking”, is the athlete. The captions continues “A win against 2011 winners Japan sees England through top of their group”, thus directly influencing perceptions of the first line of the caption as we now have an actor that is imposed onto the ideology of true passion. Through their win the England team and the athletes involved have taken True Passion to the next level. The brand is acting as the intermediary between perceived innovation and social equality and the actors responsible. This notion of being new and being driven to achieve new levels is further exemplified in the personification of #TruePassion by Hyundai.

The use of personification can be seen in Figure 3.2.1 “True Passion makes the mark. Twice from the same spot”. Chen, Lin, Choi and Hahm (2015) noted that by using personification within their target market global companies and brands are able to generate more interaction and engagement with the brand, and the result is the same whether this personification is represented visually or linguistically. The

initiative itself cannot make nor do anything yet it has been attributed in this instance to a specific match-winning goal scored by Megan Rapinoe, co-captain of the American team at the Women's World Cup. The True Passion initiative has taken on this human quality with the purpose of embodying not only innovation but the brand, to encourage users to interact with the brand from a standpoint of innovation and gender. Through all its posts, Hyundai uses True Passion as a marker of its identity, specifically in the use of the hashtag #TruePassion being present on all the brand's posts.

The visual nature of the post contributes substantially to the gender-centric ideology being presented by the brand, the imagery itself acting as a symbol for the dominant discourse of the post (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In Figure 3.2.1 the accompanying image is of Megan Rapinoe as she takes one of the two penalties. The imagery and semiotic choice represents the social actor while she is excluded from the text and replaced by a personified ideology of #TruePassion being the social actor at the forefront of the post. By aligning Hyundai with True Passion the brand aligns itself with notions of innovation and challenging social inequalities regarding women in sport, this attribute positions the brand as a leader within the field of gender innovation with relation to women athletes and women's sports.

The brand uses the athlete, in this case Megan Rapinoe, as more than just a symbol of #TruePassion, the lexical absence from the caption suggests that #TruePassion is why the team won and not entirely because of the athlete. While the athlete in question is responsible for the penalties, the choice by the brand to present #TruePassion as the actor responsible for sending the USWNT through to the quarter-finals further serves to personify and construct a reality whereby #TruePassion is also a responsible party, rather than just the athlete. While

removing a sense of agency from the athlete this furthers the brand-leader status that Hyundai is attempting to construct within the sports community, and specifically the women's sports community.

Brands strive to innovate as a means to further their digital reach; with the advent of social media marketing, advertising and branding has become a mass of information where only those who stand out will be successful (Barthel, 1989; Holt, 2016). Presented in Figure 3.3.1 are the words: "#TruePassion leads by example". Initially the use of the word "leads" implies that Hyundai is attempting to establish itself not only as a competitor in the field but a leader. The accompanying image of Figure is 3.3.1 is Amandine Henry, captain of the French team, attempting to take the ball from Andressa Alves, the Brazilian forward. Hyundai is constructing a brand positioned as global leader, and the athlete chosen for the post is the leader of the winning team.

The substitution of the actor occurs as a means to align the brand with notions of leadership and innovation, with the brand setting the precedent as being leaders more than the athlete. This use of social actors as a means to further the brand ideology while promoting the athlete and the sport diminishes the accomplishments of the athlete by excluding them from the textual elements of the post. Again there is an example of "othering" as seen in section 3.1, where athletes are distanced from their achievements as a means to build brand identity and construct communities within a crowd culture of gender stereotypes and social inequality (Barthel, 1989; Fink, 2015; Holt, 2016).

Hyundai has attempted to create a sense of unity in its post, with the use of #TruePassion in Figure 3.4.1 again substituting social actors and acting as a symbol

of activism and unity against social oppression and injustice (McNeal, 2018). This caption contains only two words which is in contrast to the other captions written by the brand, the caption states “#TruePassion unites”. The single verb is ambiguous in its representation while it can exist as a material process, namely the act of uniting, it can also act as a mental process whereby millions are capable of “uniting” behind a common goal (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The goal is not presented linguistically and relies more on the use of a symbolic representation of social challenge through the imagery, there is a sense of collectiveness created by the brand that stems from the ideology of gender equality through sports. By extension the brand itself embodies these ideologies due to the brands involvement in the sponsoring and funding of the event, as well as the extended use of personified qualities of its initiative (Chen et al., 2015; Dessart , 2015; Nandan, 2005).

While seeking to construct and present the FIFA Women’s World Cup as being equal to the men there is still the branded ideology surrounding the dominant gendered discourse being portrayed to the consumer, while suggesting unity and collectiveness as well as gender forward thinking the brand simultaneously diminishes the accomplishments of the athletes by excluding them from the textual element of the post. The brand is attempting to use crowd culture ideology and gendered beliefs in society to construct an identity of innovative and gender pioneers but this occurs partially at the expense of the athlete who is not presented as being an active social actor in their own sporting achievements.

Qatar Airways has similarly presented itself as an innovator of sports by making use of #LikeNeverBefore in the captions of Figures 4.1, 4.3 and 4.4 as well as “an adventure like never before” in Figure 4.2. The phrase “like never before” suggests something that is meant to be new, the brand attempts to present not the athletes as

new but rather the brand itself. The brand makes use of the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup to further ideologies of the brand as leaders in innovation more so than gender. As seen previously Qatar Airways make use of language that serves to "other" women athletes through gender marking and diminishing the accomplishment of the athletes. The athletes are underrepresented both linguistically and visually, with the linguistics aspects focusing more on the innovation of the brand than the athlete. In the sentence of "sits down in our #Qsuite", the use of the pound symbol is an attempt to draw a focus to what is being innovated and draws more attention to this phrase. The athlete is not presented as being the innovator the innovator is Qatar Airways and their Q-Suite available in its planes. Similarly in Figure 4.2 the "adventure" of flying with Qatar Airways and going to France from Brazil is what is innovative, not the experience the athlete will be having by going to the FIFA Women's World Cup but rather the process that took her there.

This is continued in Figure 4.4 where the caption reads that Londoners are "testing their football skills" as a means to win tickets to any Qatar Airways destination by scoring a goal. Initially this does appear to support the event as a sponsor with references to the 2019 FIFA Women's World cup in the use of the hashtag #FIFAWWC and Qatar Airways showing the logo for the World Cup prior to the start of the video. What is interesting though is that the logo is shown for a second before cutting to the video, and the equipment being used on the day in London has no branding for the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup anywhere on it. Instead there is a focus on the corporation of Qatar Airways as providing flights to anywhere in the world if you could complete the challenge, again the brand focuses on Qatar Airways more than the Women's World Cup. The brand identity is centred on Qatar as innovators, not the athletes. There is little indication of any link to the FIFA World

Cup and instead a focus on what the corporation offers in the way of flights and destinations.

The use of a discourse of innovation has reduced the athletes to their accomplishments and ability to influence societal changes. The brands makes use of the gender stereotypes to advance their brand identities and construct a community that is designed to interact and exist alongside crowd culture ideologies focused on gender and equality, hence the brand is not presenting itself as a gender innovator but rather as attempting to market their innovation to a crowd culture in society that has become a global focus due to the historical inferiority and underrepresentation of women athletes in the media (Eitzen, 2012; Fink, 2015; Holt, 2016; Trolan, 2013).

Qatar Airways consistently positions itself as the social actor responsible for the innovation being presented, which serves to further "other" the women athletes and diminish their experiences and roles in being innovators of sport and sporting culture. While the brands have not attempted to align with sporting culture and gender norms they make use of the gender norms present in society to construct a brand community centred on the idea of innovation, innovation by the brand as a corporation and not a sponsor of the event (Barthel, 1989).

3.3.2 Breaking barriers through innovation

Adidas' use of social barriers and societal resistance can be seen in its portrayal of women athletes as well as its use of financial power and resources to challenge gendered stereotypes surrounding women in sport. While brands such as Hyundai and Adidas present similar means of innovation there is a distinct difference in how the brands do this, Hyundai is discussing and presenting the athletes journeys as a means to highlight social inequality while Adidas is "fixing" an existing social issue by

paying athletes more. Adidas appear to be doing something that is more tangible for the athletes in question by addressing a social issue regarding the wage gap, however as discussed previously the announcement has stipulations.

While the phrase “breaking barriers” in Figure 2.1 symbolises ideologies of feminist activism and challenges notions of inferiority, it also suggests being new by doing something that is against the norm of the society. This is advanced in the use of the words “next generation”. By inspiring the next generation Adidas is able to innovate further and forward, by positioning itself as an innovator in terms of women athletes. The brand has been positioned as an innovator but also as a “leader and creator” (Holt, 2016). The announcement constructs the brand as a symbol of empowerment, through innovation. By directly challenging social norms the brand is positioned as being a leader and a component in the change being driven in society. Adidas has made use of this subculture and inequality regarding the wage gap between professional athletes because of gender, and constructed an ideology of empowerment and innovation by breaking social barriers. The “equal pay for equal play” caption serves to promote ideologies of activism, but activism through innovation, by presenting the brand as the social actor capable of provoking change and bringing about societal reform, yet the brand never addresses why it paid the women less and why this needed to be corrected.

While appearing to challenge norms and break barriers it fails to note that Adidas are is one responsible for the athletes pay. Adidas could have chosen to pay them equally at any time during its history of sponsoring athletes yet it chose to do so a few hours after the USWNT announced they were suing their organisation. This contextual evidence is important in the overt construction of the brand identity being championed by Adidas. As the USWNT gained media coverage for the act Adidas

added its own voice and proclaimed to be an innovator in its field by challenging and breaking the gender barrier that persists in society (Bogage, 2019). Yet we are still left to ask why this was never done until that point? Adidas is the sole organisation responsible for how much its pays the athletes and it stands to reason it could have been done sooner, with women athletes contesting the discrepancy in professional athletes' wages for decades (Eitzen, 2012; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002). Sponsorships comprise a large percentage of an athlete's income. Adidas positions itself as a leader and innovator by paying women athletes the same as men, but it omits that the cause of this difference in wages is partly due to how much brands choose to pay athletes. The wage gap present in society is reflected in the ideologies of sport and this includes gendered notions of how much athletes deserve to be paid (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020; Eitzen, 2012).

Those who decided to pay the athletes more are also the ones who continued to pay them less, but Adidas does not acknowledge this in its post. Instead it focuses only on the end result, i.e. on all women athletes being paid the same, while completely removing any mention of how this problem arose in the first place. Gendered discrimination and unequal pay in sport has a long history that cannot be attributed to any one single company, brand or individual and the blame lies within the societal structure as a whole (Mean & Halone, 2010); in the modern age sports mirrors and influences society greatly on various social issues and concerns.

Adidas presents similar ideological beliefs in Figure 2.4.1 where the brands references the 'Festival of Football', a programme offered by the non-profit organisation Equal Playing Field. Adidas have used a brand to build a brand identity and ideology focused on providing resources to those who are disadvantaged or not capable, the use of a brand by another brand to further ideologies, beliefs and values

occurs often in sport due to the consumerist nature of modern sports, where sports themselves are commodities of consumption where the sport is symbolic of a larger community that exceeds the brand itself (Jackson-Brown, 2020). However what this does is raise the question as to why Adidas would need to rely on the financial ability of another brand to organise and form the initiative as opposed to being the organisers of the event themselves? While Adidas are entirely capable of organising such an event what they have achieved by using the brand identity of Equal Playing Field, that of a non-profit committed to bettering the athletes of the future, is further construct an ideology of innovation in the field of gender and sport.

By relying on another organisations influence it serves to further the brand image of Adidas as well as highlight various social barriers faced by women athletes, the primary focus being on the absent nature of resources due to societal notions of gender in sport namely “financial and cultural barriers” as highlighted by the brand. The notion of Adidas as leaders in innovation is again reiterated in the use of “Equipping them with skills is one part of driving change” in Figure 4.1.1 where the skills being taught are meant to drive change and innovation in terms of sports. Again the social actor who will do this is omitted from the sentence, the sentence starts with the verb “equipping”. By doing so it creates an ambiguous nature to the sentence, the organisation doing the equipping is Equal Playing Field but the brand that is posting this and discussing it is Adidas. Adidas have done this to associate this notion of change and opposition to social barriers as being aligned with their brand identity by making use of Equal Playing Fields initiative.

3.3.3 Nike and VISA: Changing the world

While the brands above chose a specific hashtag or focal point to create and present a brand identity of innovation this has been done slightly differently by both Nike and VISA. To call it unique is not true, because while the brands will attempt to showcase innovation in a way never seen before, the discourse will always be informed by society and not just the brand (Eitzen, 2012). Beverland et al. (2010) suggested brands make use of different branding strategies that are dependent on their role in their chosen target markets.

For the most part, this does not apply to the above examples or brands, however, Nike exists in a space that is unique, because it has historically been a global brand leader in terms of challenging injustices in society (Aitchison, 2007; Klein, 2009; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002). For example, Nike's *Participation* campaign in the early 1990s focused on empowerment and letting women participate in sports, with adverts showing girls on a playground discussing playing sports (Grow & Wolburg, 2006). While Adidas is a large sporting brand and Hyundai in its own way is a market leader, Nike has maintained a cultural foothold on society for decades due to the fact that it has regularly made use of sporting stars and athletes not only as a means of branded content but also to tell stories (Holt, 2016). Nike succeeded in telling the story of athletes who had overcome social barriers and obstacles on their path to success; this formula still exists today as seen in the post centred on Ji So-Yun in which there is direct resistance to the ideology of gender inferiority, a challenge that Ji So-Yun will experience throughout her career and life, not because she is not the best but because she is a woman.

In its posts Nike consistently uses the hashtag #justdoit. These three words have become the universal slogan for Nike since the early 1990s as an advertising slogan that slowly began to symbolise more than the brand, but what the brand stood for in terms of gender advancement and progress in the sporting industry (J. M. Grow, 2008; Klein, 2009). While Nike is representing innovation, specifically innovation in relation to gender and sport, it does this by using its own slogan and the phrase, “Don’t change your dream. Change the world”. These words carry powerful connotations of progressiveness and innovation to change the world and shape the future, and instead of combining these with a new hashtag or catchphrase designed to generate engagement, Nike uses its own slogan #justdoit.

Over the years, this slogan has become synonymous with progressiveness and resistance to all forms of societal injustice not only limited to gender but also encompassing race, class, culture and religion (Waymer & Logan, 2021). Nike positions itself as an innovation leader and as capable of changing the world, and by using its own slogan as a battle cry against inequality, it further strengthens the ideology of Nike as a brand leader and trendsetter in not only its target market but also in the world of gendered sports. Despite this there is still a lack of a social actor in the statement, a recurring theme found in various aspects of the posts made by the larger brands, namely Nike and Adidas. While Nike is attempting to construct a discourse of innovation dedicated to change, there is still a lack of agency and authenticity in the statement. By never fully attributing this notion of change to either the athletes or the brand, it lacks the authority needed to construct a discourse of transformation and revolution.

VISA has made use of a similar linguistic marker in the word “change”, however, it specifies “change the game”. The constant use of “change” across multiple social

media posts constructs a brand identity of gender empowerment. There is a focus on what will be changed – the “game”, i.e. football. This constructs a gendered discourse of empowerment centred on a concrete notion of innovation, further reproducing discourses of empowerment by aligning the brand and brand identity with empowerment and women athletes.

Changing the world is unrealistic, however, the financial and influential requirements needed to do this are not present within either brand. While brands today hold more power than some governments due to the power given to them by society they are not able to change the world alone (Eitzen, 2012; Klein, 2009). VISA attributes innovation and change to an attainable goal, to change the sport itself and change it in such a way that women athletes are positively impacted. Like Nike, there is little focus on the role of the brand and agency of the brand or athlete in doing this. “One kick”, “one pass”, “one gift”, these are not social actors but rather material and mental processes and possessions. We do not see a sense of agency from the brand in its posts and captions when discussing notions of empowerment or innovation.

Discussion

The brands discussed, analysed and presented within this thesis have made use of various linguistic conventions and language markers to construct brand identities aligned with various discourses, both gendered and non-gendered. Given the frequency of its occurrence, the most prevalent of these is the notion of innovation.

Each brand has positioned itself within the discourse of innovation using different strategies and techniques to construct a branded identity that aligns not only with innovation but also with the ideologies of the brand and the branded community they construct. The first is Nike, which has used the slogan “just do it”, appearing as a hashtag, as a means of aligning the brand and innovation, the social context of the slogan itself being the carrier of the branded ideology and identity. For decades Nike has remained at the forefront of innovation in the sporting world (Waymer & Logan, 2021) and has used this preconceived societal notion of innovation to further expand the brand identity and align it with innovation and the 2019 FIFA Woman’s World Cup.

VISA UK presents innovation using the repetition of the word “change” through all of the brands posts and captions on social media, repeating and reproducing a branded identity focused on change, and change within sport. With the idea of change and being involved in change being a key factor in the construction of VISA UK’s branded identity, the brand aligns itself with innovation through change. Qatar Airways similarly constructs innovation using the hashtag “like never before”, indicating an ideology of change. In its posts and captions, Qatar Airways focuses more on the brand Qatar than the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup; the branded identity does not prominently align with gender ideologies in society, it aligns more with innovation

from a branded perspective in which Qatar Airways constructs an ideology of change within the brand, not change within the sport.

Adidas and Hyundai represent branded identities of innovation using similar methods, in particular the use of initiatives designed to empower woman. Both brands make use of discourses of empowerment and activism as a means to construct and portray identities of innovation centred on empowering sportswoman and changing the sport. Through the “Equal playing field” initiative, Adidas constructs an identity of innovation, but innovation through challenging social norms. The first being the empowering of young sportswoman within football through programmes such as the above, and the second is paying the winning athletes the same bonus as the men. Hyundai through True Passion, both the initiative name and the hashtag used by Hyundai, similarly align the branded identity with notions of change and innovation, improving the football world for women in the sport. Adidas and Hyundai additionally align with athlete activism within football, addressing social issues within the sport through their posts. Adidas utilises equal pay as a branded identity committed to change, innovation and activism while Hyundai use True Passion and word usage such as “unites” and the symbolic gesture of kneeling, which has become synonymous with the ideology of activism.

Brands use change and the idea of change to construct branded identities aligned with changing the footballing world, brand identities which are constructed as gendered. Through the linguistic components found within the brands’ captions and written text in each post, the discourses speak about empowering women, and innovating within this gendered aspect of sport. The branded identities are gendered while also portraying innovation and empowerment as ideologies adopted by the brands. Moreover, the hashtags serve as key points of Instagram, with users often

being able to search via and follow hashtags; this social media tool has been used by the brands to construct identities as well as branded communities within the sporting context.

The brands were constructing identities of innovation and activism in an inherently gendered community discourse. The FIFA Women's World Cup is itself a gendered event, and much of the media surrounding the event served to further reflect and reproduce gendered ideologies of the event and in this case of the brands and members of the branded community. In their portrayal of women athletes, the brands "other" the athletes from their achievements through gender marking, such as Qatar Airways' use of "female", and through infantilisation such as Nike using the athlete's first name. These construct a gendered community where the athlete is empowered but also othered. This can also be seen in the ideologies of beauty within the community, where beauty becomes a focus more than athletic performance.

Some users who engaged with Nike post 1 serve as an example of this notion of othering the athlete from her achievement, because the users focus more on her looks and appearance than her accomplishments, making comments relating to how she does not fit Western ideals of beauty. While brands constructed identities aligned with change and empowerment centred on innovation within the footballing world, the branded communities contain ideologies of othering and reproducing assorted barriers within the footballing world. One such barrier is the preconceived notion that athletes need to be feminine or fit certain standards that society connotes as being a "woman". A second barrier reproduced by users within the branded community is that of comparison, comparing women athletes to men, whether this is comparing achievements or physical skill. The branded identities encompass change, empowering women, and recognising achievements and accomplishments.

The branded community similarly aligns with the brand identities, agreeing with the notions of innovation and empowerment within sport and praising athlete activism. Yet other users within the branded community do not align with these ideologies, and instead reproduce the notions of othering present in the branded identities due to the brands' language usage and the linguistic elements in each of the posts.

Conclusion

Throughout the construction by brands of gendered discourses and the interaction of the online community, women athletes are effectively othered from their accomplishments and their achievements are diminished by comparing them to male athletes. Furthermore, the identity of women athletes in the social space is influenced by the Western media's portrayal of beauty, resulting in those who don't fit the idea of beauty being subjected to ridicule and mockery. This online harassment targeted at athletes who do not meet Western beauty standards (see Figure 1.1) is in contrast to those who do meet these standards and, as a result, are praised for their looks as much as their talent (see Figure 2.3.1 and 2.3.2).

Additionally, we see a discourse of empowerment where brands such as Nike and Adidas present themselves as the ones who hold the power, constructing brand identities of social change aligned with the brand yet also represent notions of change and empowerment which lack a sense of agency. The brands remove this sense of agency through their captions and language usage when referencing women athletes and the world cup. Hyundai constructs a brand identity of empowerment with more sense of agency through the inclusion of #TruePassion, a branded initiative to showcase and assist women in sport.

A second emerging theme from the data is athlete activism. Activism serves as a tool to reproduce and discuss discourses of collectivism and unity in sport and among athletes, fans, supporters and brands. Adidas uses a branded initiative to align the brand and unity, showing its active role in the community surrounding gender and sports and this creates a brand identity of unity and collectivism. Additionally, the

initiative is not run or owned by Adidas, advancing the notion of branded unity by including this “borrowed” content.

This then leads us directly into the idea of innovation. Each brand involved in this thesis posted for the purposes of innovation to stay relevant and engaged in the social setting. Innovation is not limited to new ideas, products or services but also encompasses how the brands refer to and discuss athletes and sporting events. All the brands attempt to innovate in some way or another and present themselves as innovators in their field: Nike by discussing and challenging social issues; Adidas by paying athletes more and discussing an initiative to help women athletes; Hyundai by providing transport and showcasing athletes’ stories; VISA UK through its short story highlighting women athletes; and Qatar Airways in the features and services available from the brand.

The brands rely on the notion of change to drive innovation, discussing the idea that they as a brand can change the sporting world and are dedicated to challenging social injustice. Yet, as seen in the data analysis, the response to the branded identity by social media users is not always aligned with the ideologies the brand is trying to construct and communicate in its posts and captions. Within the discourse of sport and gender, while brands are catalysts for discussion, the concepts of the in-group and out-group greatly influence community engagement. The branded identities are focused on innovation and empowerment, sentiments echoed by many community members, but also opposed by many.

The thesis sought to examine how brands constructed identities and communities online during the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup. The brands in question make use of discourses of empowerment, activism and innovation; these three discourses form

the basis of the Instagram posts by the brands. Within the discourse of empowerment, there are notions of change and changing the future; within activism there are representations of unity and collectivism as well as exclusion; and within innovation there are ideologies of brand leadership and being a brand leader and a driving factor for change.

The brands have used a number of discourses present in society in an effort to construct online identities and communities; these discourses are still mediated by society and this is seen in a number of responses to the brand. Individuals in the comments of each post routinely include or exclude themselves from various ideologies based on their responses, and this then builds a brand community with the brand at the centre and the community embodying the brand's ideologies. So while brands construct a gender identity of equality, they still contain notions of inferiority and othering, as seen in the language and imagery used in the posts.

However, this thesis is not without its limitations; while the data itself focuses on sportswomen and their representation on social media, there are no posts by the athletes themselves. Continuing within this field of study it would be insightful to study the posts and captions used by athletes in the same way. Do they too present themselves as empowered within the footballing community? And how would athletes construct online identities tied to personal beliefs and ideologies during the FIFA Women's World Cup?

Additionally, aspects such as sexuality and sexual identity were not addressed in this thesis, but did appear in comments made by internet users about Megan Rapinoe. This would be an intriguing field to further explore concerning women's football and

how fans, brands and the community as a whole respond to and engage with individuals based on their sexuality or sexual preference.

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Appendix A : Instagram Posts

Nike

Figure 1.1

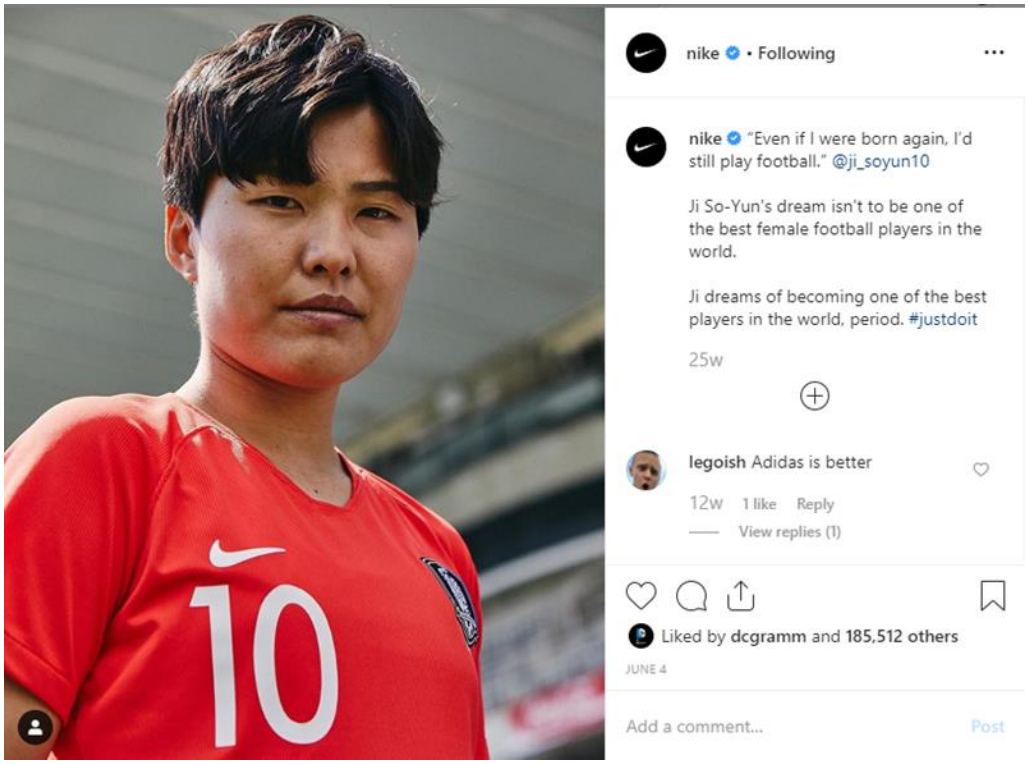


Figure 1.2

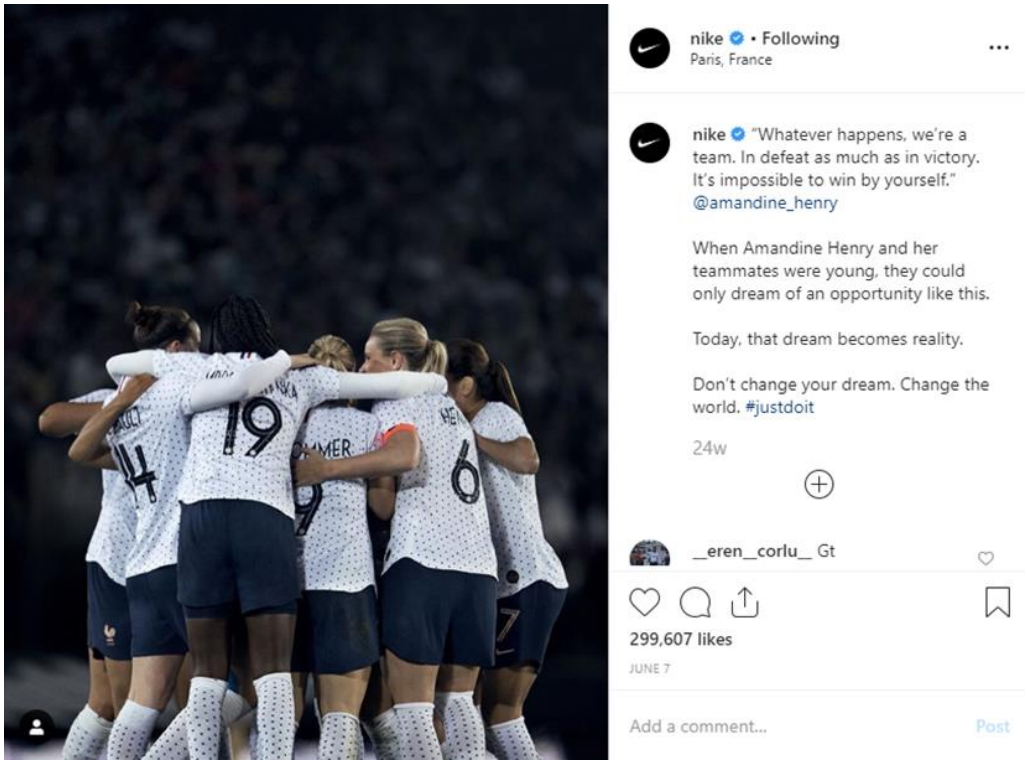


Figure 1.3



Figure 1.4



Adidas

Figure 2.1

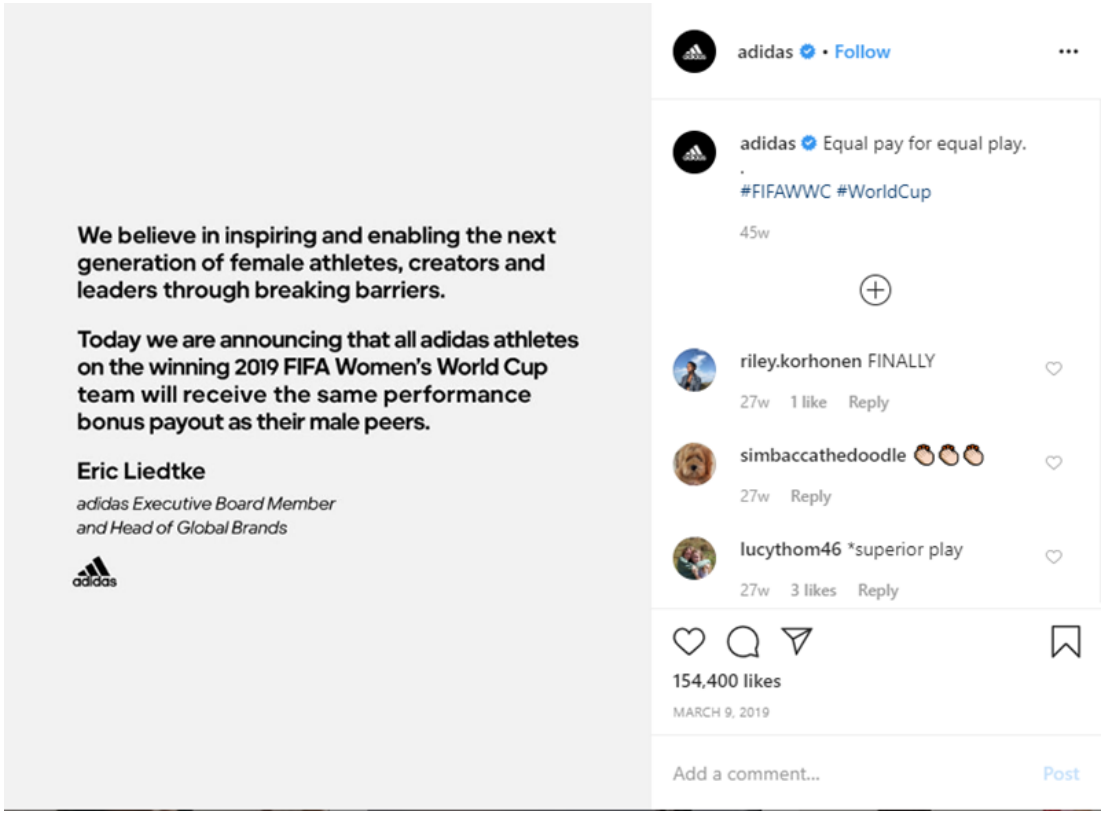


Figure 2.2



Figure 2.3.1



Figure 2.3.2



Figure 2.4.1

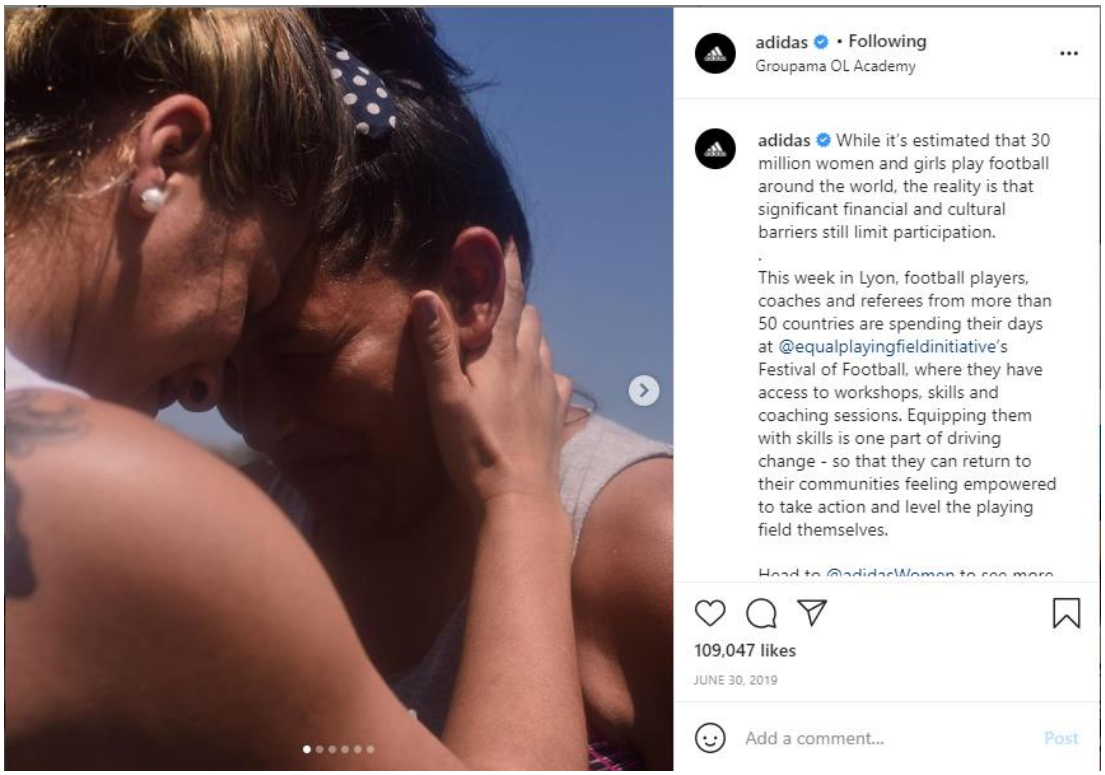


Figure 2.4.2



Figure 2.4.3



Figure 2.4.4



Figure 2.4.5

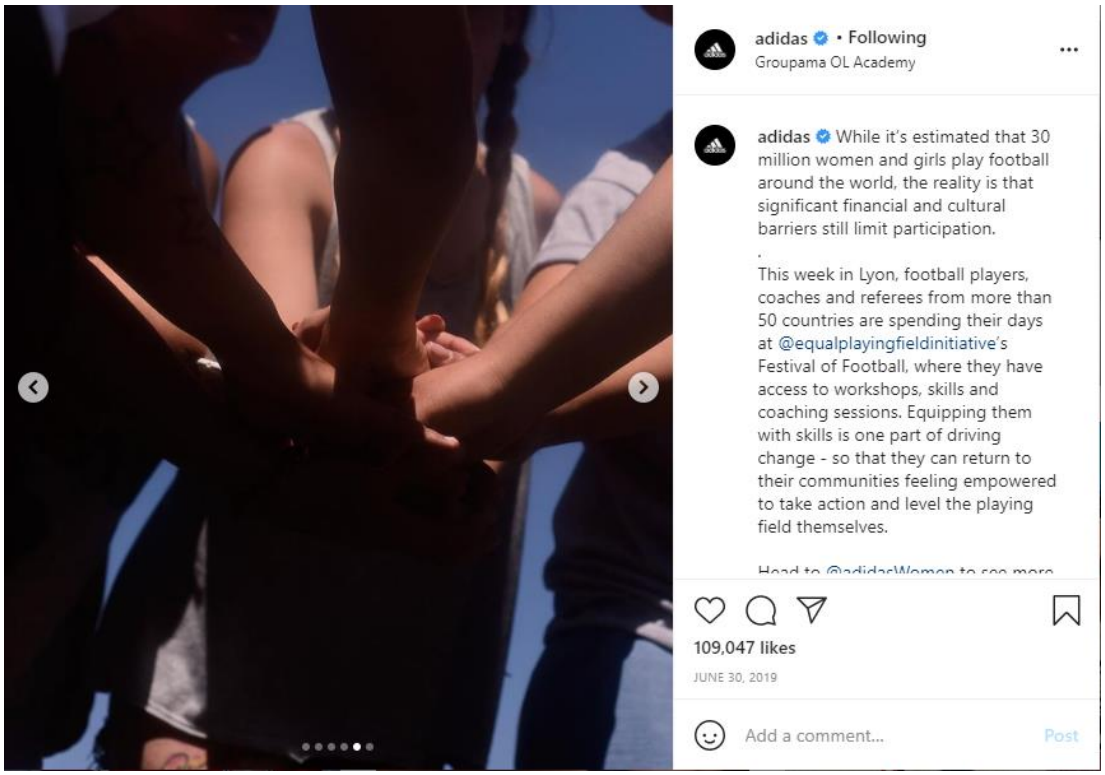


Figure 2.4.6



Hyundai

Figure 3.1.1



Figure 3.1.2



Figure 3.1.3



Figure 3.1.4



Figure 3.2.1

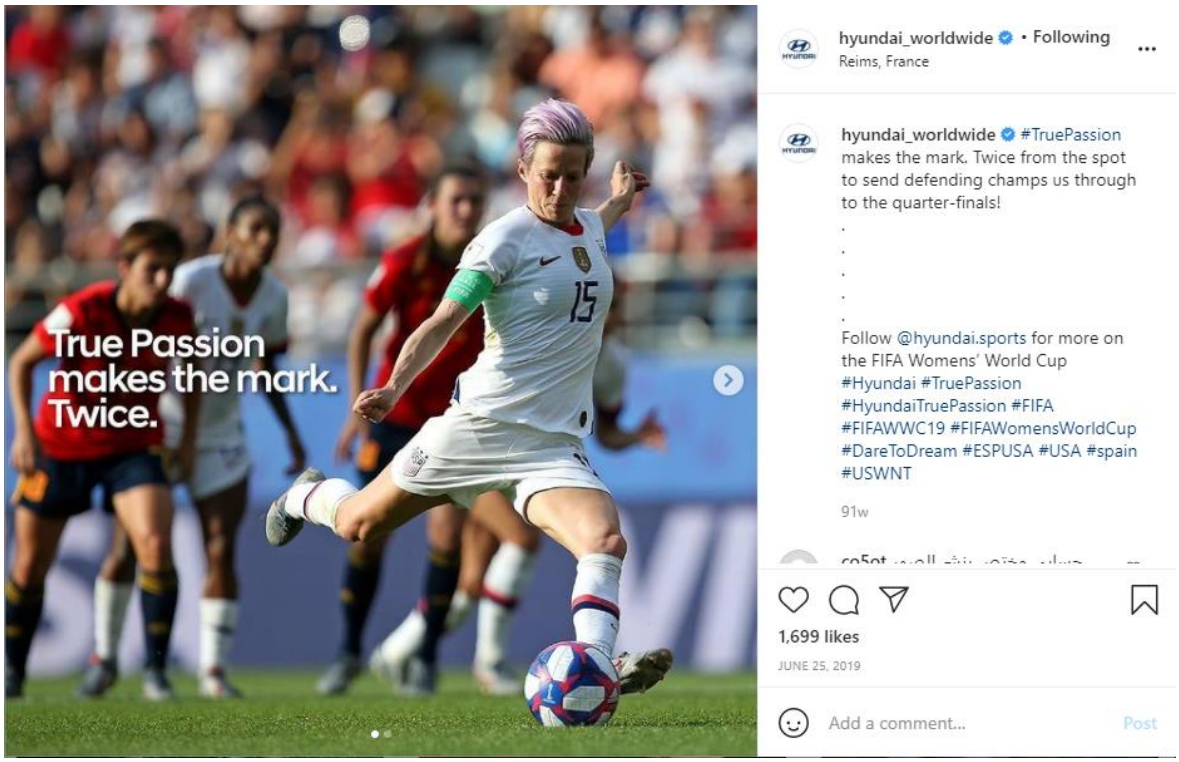


Figure 3.2.2



Figure 3.3.1



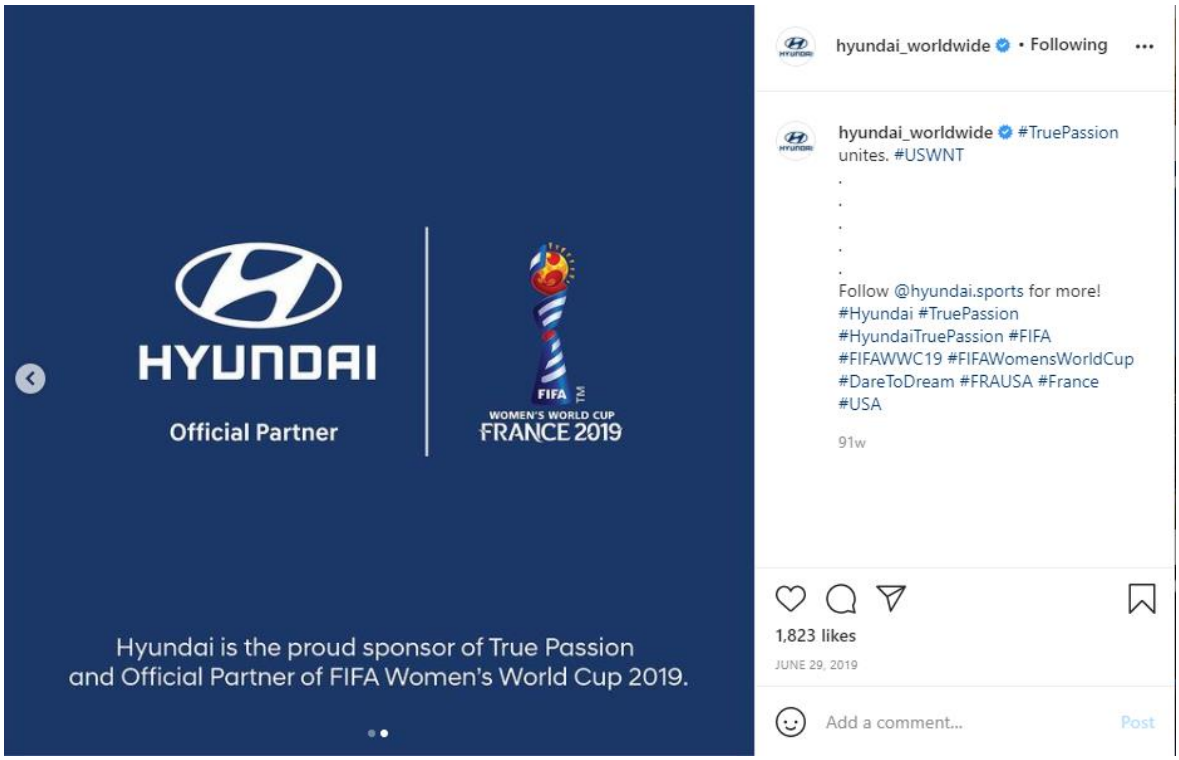
Figure 3.3.2



Figure 3.4.1



Figure 3.4.2



Qatar Airways

Figure 4.1

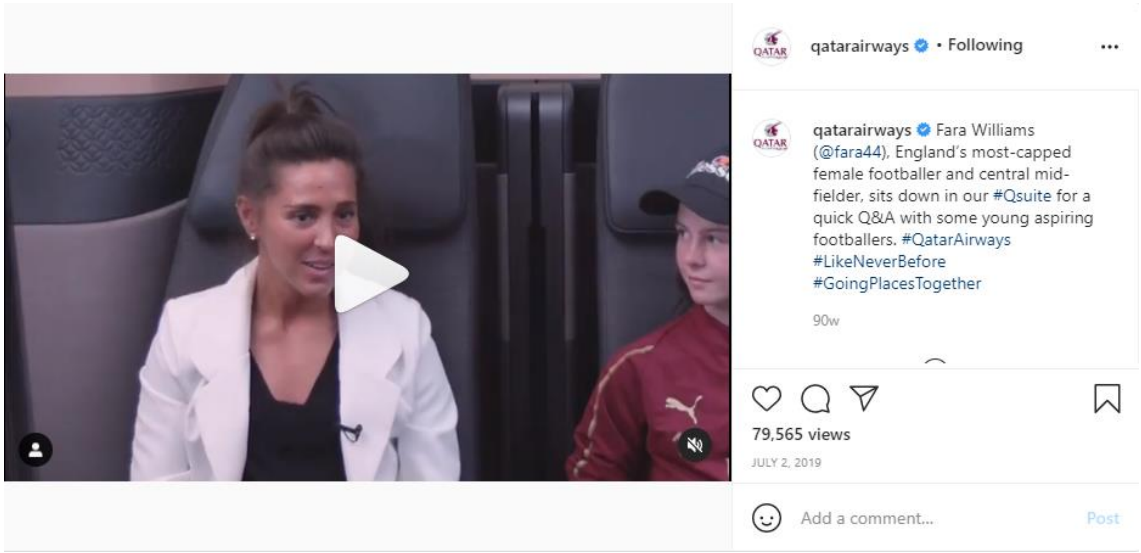


Figure 4.2

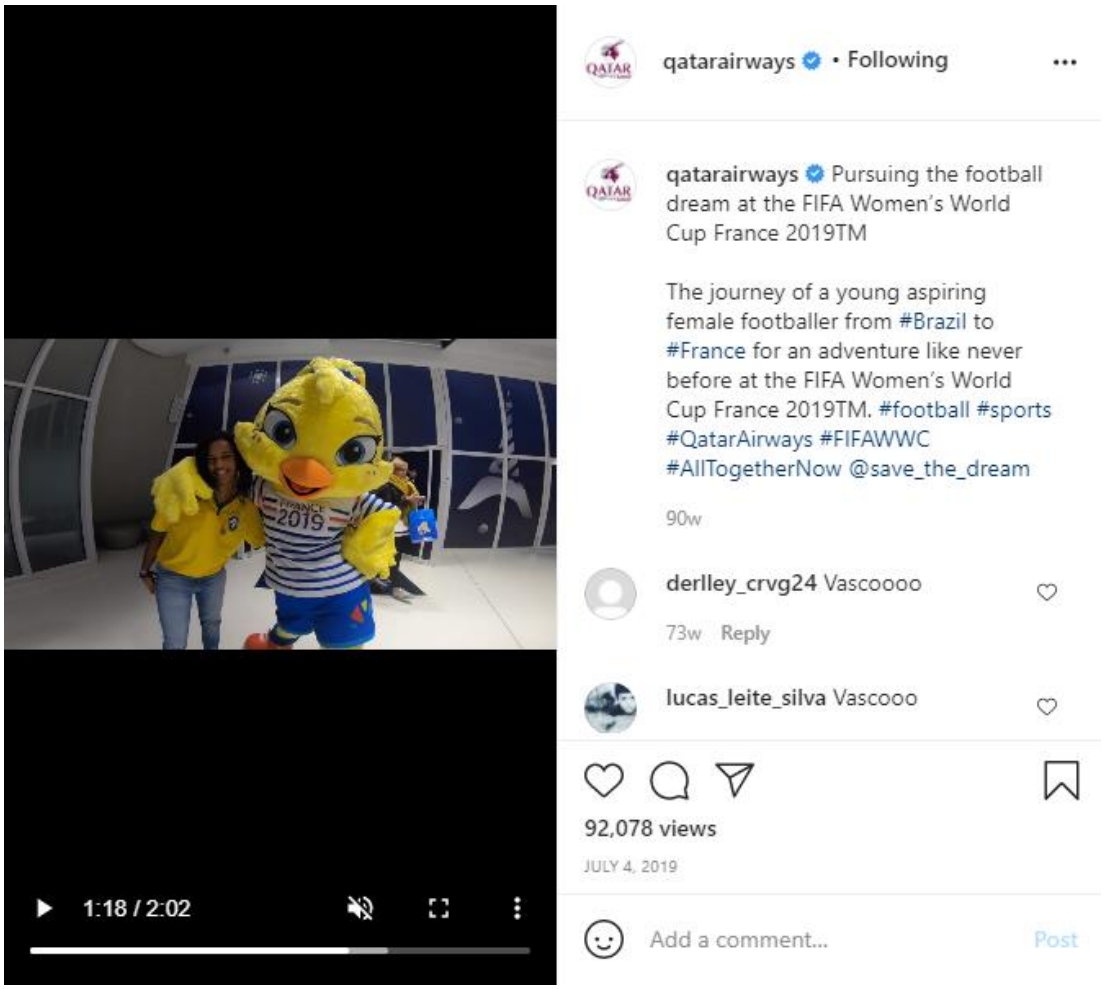


Figure 4.3

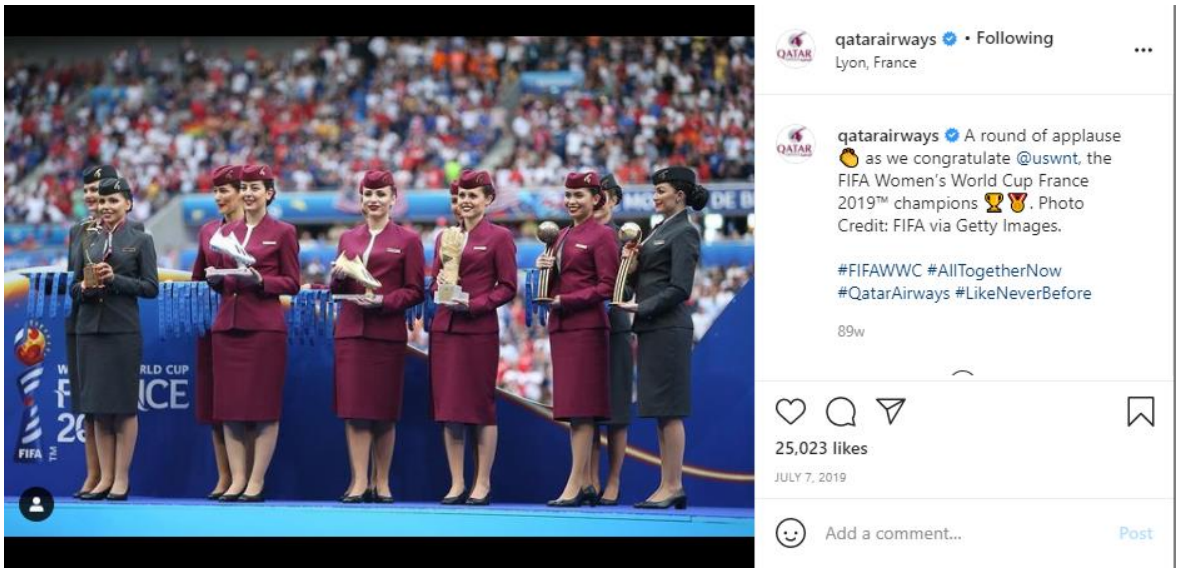


Figure 4.4



VISA UK

Figure 5.1

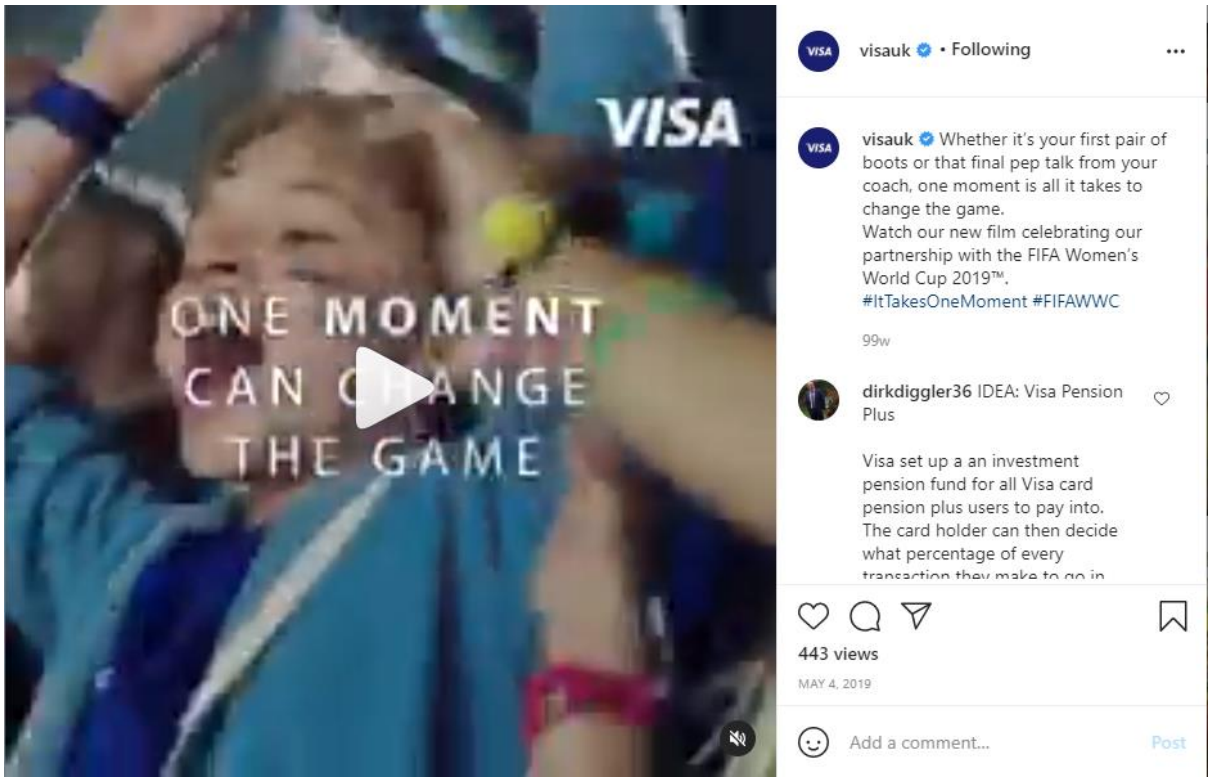


Figure 5.2



Figure 5.3

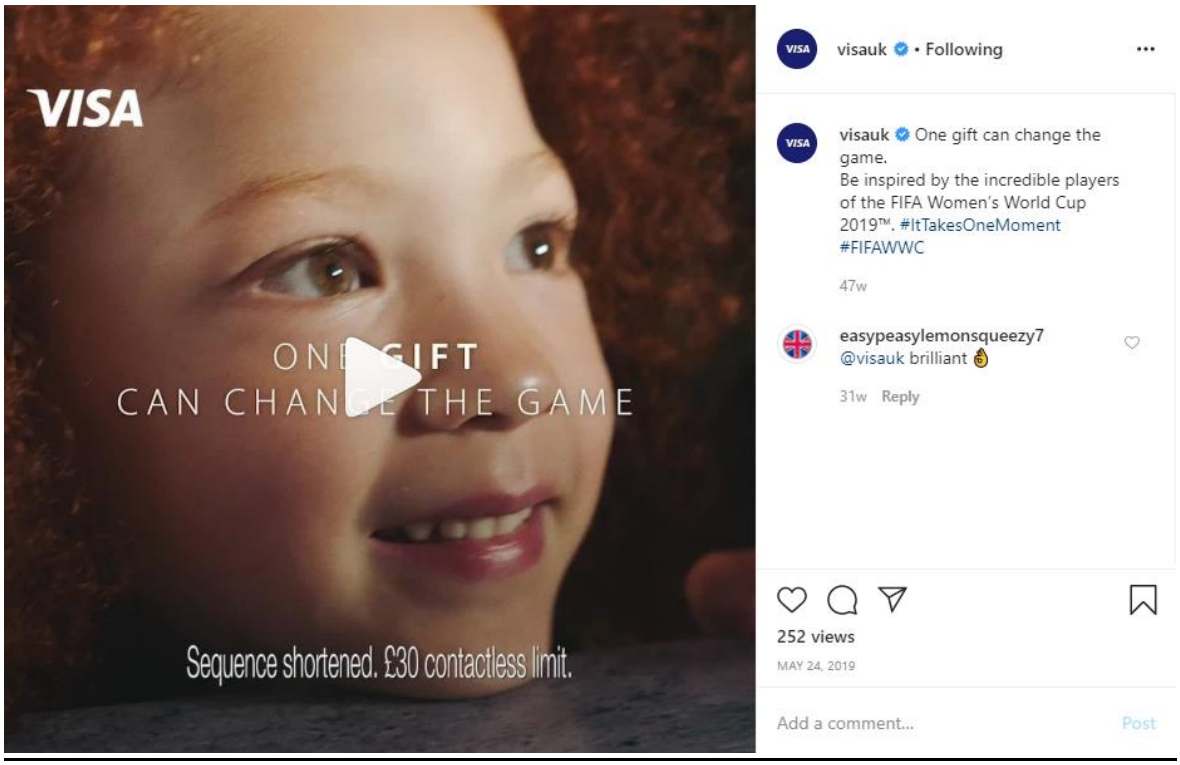


Figure 5.4



Figure 5.5

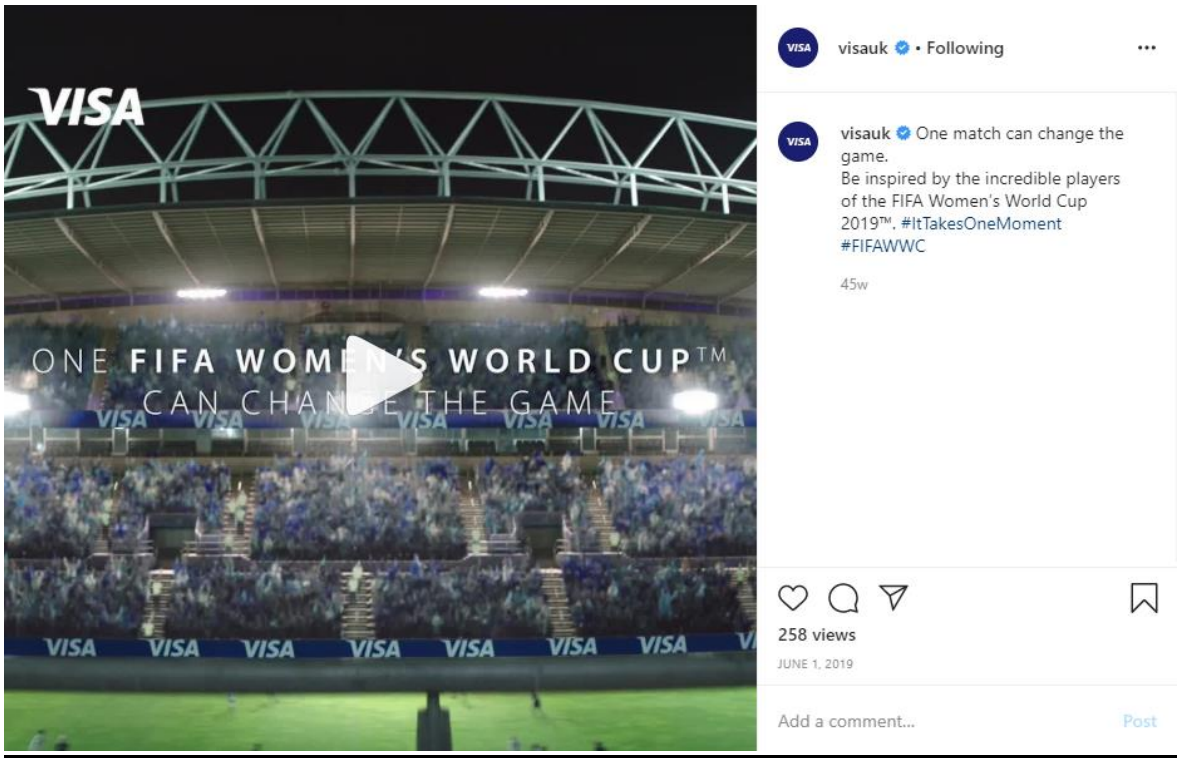


Figure 5.6



Appendix B: Nike comments

Post 1

1.1 Worldclass🔥

1.2 Chinese

1.2.1 Korean

1.3 Love She!

1.4 Born an athlete

1.5 Gotta be a man

1.6 We love a workout queen 👑

1.7 She's a korean ⚡

1.8 I have used Nike and I know there is no other brand like this

1.9 I hate

1.10 She looks very tough

1.11 Be the best, very best player you can be. I believe in you just like Nike.

1.12 Great post !!!

1.13 Made in china lol

1.13.1 Actually shes Korean

1.14 Live your life!!

1.15 Exactly, just need to want it ❤ #womenhood #strenght #womenrule

1.16 I thoght she was male

1.17 Man or woman?

1.18 Issa man

1.19 Whats with all the women posts Nike??

1.20 This is amazing!

1.21 Nike doesn't care about women getting equal right because they make there clothes in sweat shops there doing it because it's a trend.

1.22 Thank you for your spot about woman… its amazing

1.23 So do yall not sponsor men anymore. You haven't posted a man on here for a while

1.23.1 They sponsor a lot of athletes men and women

1.23.2 I only see women

1.24 Don't eat dog

1.25 Leave sport to the men

1.26 Yes can she cook though???

1.27 Champ life. Wow.

1.28 Totally a dude

1.29 You will be! And yes you can play football 💪

1.30 Guy or dude ?

1.31 Strong image! We love it❤😎

1.32 Really thought this was a guy

1.33 Guy or grl?

1.34 Sad truth, she never be as such

1.35 She is good in math

1.36 She's hardly a woman

1.36.1 Have some respect

1.36.2 Youre hardly a decent human, show her some respect

1.36.3 She's hardly much a woman, just like you're very much a pathetic troll

1.37 Nobody watches women soccer over mens

1.38 The worst brand ever. WST.

1.39 So she think that she's better than Ronaldo, Messi, Mbappe and Hazard I'm not sure about that.

1.39.1 Uh if you can read its her dream to be among one of the best

1.40 Nike Ugh! When are you going to stop #SJW's backlash soon

1.41 One of the best players in the world not one of the best female players. This dream is legit🔥🔥

1.42 She can hardly be one of the best because men are simply better suited for sport. Dream but dream without ignorance.

1.43 Well good luck but I'm taking anybody in La Liga over her One dream one passion

1.44 Who else thought this was a dude

1.45 Aint gonna happen

1.46 some of y'all act like you haven't seen a woman with short hair before. Smh

1.47 Girl, who is this even??

1.48 Wanna be the best gotta play with the best lmao. Good luck in the mens league

1.49 Who even watch women sport?

1.49.1 Don't be a troll

1.49.2 More than watch men's sports

1.50 In a world where men players consist of Cristiano and Messi, you need to keep on dreaming

1.51 Should be playing with men

1. 52. Wow Nike. Selling out, only post woman. Never buying Nike again

1.53 Lol wat even is this?

1.54 Who the fk this dude?

1.55 @(c): @(a) @(b) well that's not going to happen is it boys

1. 55.1.@(b): good luck lol

1.56 @(a): Either he's 17 or 45

1. 56.1 @(b): @(a) *she

1. 57 Wonder when Nike is actually just going to do it

1.58 @Nike needs to stick w just selling its merchandise and stop trying to pull this leftist bullsh!t

1.58.1 Someone is triggered, it's just a picture

1. 59 Nike just sponsor woman now. smh

1.60 Burn in Hell Nike

1.61 Powerful image

1.62 Lmao thoght it's a man 😂 😂

1.63 Men are simply better at sport, sorry not gonna happen

1.64 Karateee😂

1.64.1 Well that was racist AF

1.65 We get it you're a company that only cares about women now

1.66 Is that a man or a woman

1.66 I sincerely thought that was a man...

1.68 I can feel her vibes even without reading the caption and just looking at this picture made me wanna play football. More power to your girl!

Post 2

2.1 I sure hope none of these women become pregnant while sponsored by Nike.

2.2 I hope they lose the finals.... they don't represent the UNITED STATES

2.3 Nike is made in China

2.4 I am actually cheering for any other team. Disgusted in our athletes who cannot show proper respect

2.5 @(a): How come your last 10 posts are all females? I thought that this is "Nike" not "Nike women".

> 2.5.1 Idk if youre joking or not but the womens world cup starts today
>
> 2.5.2 And what is wrong with you think all sport is for men
>
> 2.5.3 @(a) I don't it just every single recent picture is female
>
> 2.5.4 @(a) its just a photos calm down troll
>
> 2.5.5 @(a) why not
>
> 2.5.6 @(a) because its a future for Nike. For them when girls are doing sport its amazing, but when mens are doing same its like „ok, its normal, nothing special". What would you expect
>
> 2.5.7 Yeah this social justice bs is going so far the other way now
>
> 2.5.8 ask yourself why. Try to find an anwser. Its a little clue for you: How many people watching mens football and same question but change mens for womans
>
> 2.5.9 @(b): @(a) now you know how it feels when the last ten posts were all about males, do you also complain about that? It goes both ways dude!
>
> 2.5.10 @(b): also it's the womens world cup so its gonna be everywhere for the next few weeks. Buckle up. You get your turn when it's the mens.
>
> 2.5.11 imagine being this touched @ women playing sports
>
> 2.5.12 Maybe because you were born by a stone. Respect them dude.
>
> 2.5.13 Because it's the world female cup
>
> 2.5.14 Someones mad @(a)
>
> 2.5.15 @(a) would you comment if last 10 posts were men? ☺

2.6 I dig the fact that Nike is giving some attention to these girls coz it is certainly showing support✨✨🙃

2.7 Only the strong will survive. More girls

2.8 Pay them equally @Nike

2.9 Beautiful, good luck in the game girls

2.10 When will you change the world? Pay your athletes the same and don't penalizing them for wanting to start a family. Just Do better for the next generation of athletes.

2.11 Imagine losing 5-2 to a high school men's team

2.12 How about you DON'T DROP THEIR PAY IS THEY DECIDE TO HAVE A BABY. #justdoTHAT

2.13 Thank you for representing larger bodies with your new mannequins ❤

2.14 Womens soccer is slow and boring. Sorry ladies

2.15 @Nike love your New mannequins.

2.16 Good luck girls

2.17 🖐powerful motivation to me

2.18 Who's the dude complaining that the comments are made by women.. this is a women's World Cup fool!!!!😂😂😂 #TeamUSA #WomensSports #Nike

2.19 If you actually want to empower women stop treating their pregnancies like injuries

2.20 Sisterhood. I like it.

2.21 Never beat the men

2.22 I thought this was Nike men lol

2.23 I hope they r making sandwiches in dressing room

> 2.23.1 F*** off. go make your own sandwich

2.24 Cute uniform btw

2.25 Too bad nobody cares about women’s soccer until it’s the final of the Olympics or fifa

2.26 Hey no discriminate woman is strong and intelligent. The same like a man

2.27 Win as a team lose as a team lol sorry ladies

2.28 I'm not a woman buutt "Women Power💪❤" i hope for all womans a great day and have fun with ur life

2.29 Yo I can smell this picture

2.30 I'm gonna laugh if when the NFL football season starts Nike posts women's football instead. It wouldn't suprise me

2.31 Best woman’s team

2.32 Only women. That's not right.
🤦‍♀️❌

2.33 No one watches women football

2.34 Bunch of girls

2.35 It's impossible to win by yourself but it's also impossible to win when your sponsor starts paying you when you decide to start a family

2.36 #strongwoman

2.37 @(a): Pay them their due! Lets make it back to back champs

> 2.37.1 @(b): @(a) you do know it is the French team in this pic right?
>
> 2.37.2 @(a): @(b) two things: women athletes are paid way less than males in just about every country; France could be back to back champs with the men winning last year and the women winning this year....
>
> 2.37.3 @(c): @(a) They are paid proportionally to how much money their team and franchise makes...do you really need somebody to tell you that women's sports aren't as popular or as large an industry as men's?

2.38 Unless you’re Ronaldo

2.39 @(a): I only watch women football.😍😍😍😍

> 2.39.1 @(a) ok
>
> 2.39.2 @(a): ok
>
> 2.39.3 @(a): enjoy watching football of mens amateurs then
>
> 2.39.4 @(a): wow. Really?
>
> 2.39.5 @(a): Than u should start watching God of the game and the champ of the sport @leomessi @cristiano
>
> 2.39.6 @(a): lol you are missing out big time lmao, woman will never be better
>
> 2.39.7 @(a): same here
>
> 2.39.8 @(a): ok then.

2.40 Men are simply better

2.41 Your dreams are valid girls

Post 3

3.1 @(a): One if not the best striker in the world

3.1.1 @(a) ever heard of Ronaldo?

3.2 Needs to be thought over

3.3 You are sooo though, and very hot

3.4 Hard to find joy when your sponsor gets in the way of allowing you to live your life the way you want and start your family when you want

3.5 Yes find your joy...until you realize as a female Nike sponsored athlete your health and baby are not protected by Nike. In other words you're not considers an athlete or even a person.

3.6 Womans time I guess

3.7 @(a) women playing football?! Whatever next…..

3.8 @(a) stop the world…..

3.9 No one cares about female soccer

3.9.1 W H O A chill man

3.10 you know why women get married in white.....domestic appliances come in white 👆

3.11 Women soccer whatever next

3.12 That's a weird looking kitchen👀

3.13 Awesome player

3.14 How about find paid maternity leave for athletes

3.15 What to be just like her ☺

3.16 What are you talking about??

3.17 Women are amazing, except when they're pregnant! Right @Nike?!

3.18 The wild girls in football

3.19 Find your joy... which can include being an elite athlete and being a mother. Get your act together Nike. Translate what you put in ads to how you treat your female athletes

3.20 Girl@power gives me goosebumps

3.21 The videos Nike has been doing lately have been 🔥. Love how they are showing more inclusion

3.22 Soooo, Nike doesn't make stuff for men anymore?

3.23 @(a): Just as long as her joy doesn't including wanting to start a family. Nike, Will you cut her pay too? #dreammaternity #nytimes

3.23.1 @(b) : @(a) if your on the national team it's you country that's suppose to support you not your sponsors....

3.32.2 @(a): @(b) correct. And it's your sponsors job (Nike) to support their athletes and they are not supporting their female athletes who choose to start a family. Nike needs to change the way it supports its female athlete so they can do the awesome things they are

3.23.3 @(b): @(a) that's not how it works. If I get a sponsorship by any brand they not supposed to give more money I get a girl pregnant. they usually send like Pampers or baby formula or cover the cost of labor not extra money to raise your child.🤔....what sport do you compete in by the way.

3.23.4 @(a): @(b) I'm not sure you have knowledge of how athletes are actual paid so this is a challenging conversation to have. Athletes are paid by their sponsor. Nike is cutting pay of female athletes when they get pregnant. This isn't about formula or labor costs. By the way I was a collegiate runner

3.23.5 @(b): @(a) we're you on a national team or competed internationally....🤔

3.23.6 @(c): @(a) I'm not really following this issue but I don't think sponsors have any obligation to pay for personal life expenses of their athletes. If an athlete, who's team is sponsored by Nike, breaks their leg, does Nike have to cover their medical bill? Wouldn't that either be the team's or individual player's responsibility?

3.24 Less ads on how feminist you are and more action with helping female athletes with reproductive rights

3.25 Look at the tens of fans in the crowd

3.26 @(a): Can you adequately compensate female athletes? Thanks

3.26.1 @(b) : @(a) Why?

3.27 Stop trying to paint your brand as liberal and feminist, give the women athletes maternity rights maybe that'll do a better job of brand image☺

3.28 Thank you Nike!! This is a great example for young girls

3.29 … and what if they get pregnant @Nike?

3.30 Lets be real I don't care unless it's men's football

3.31 Another disappointing story in the #nyt about mothers not being treated properly by #Nike

3.31.1 WTF? So?

3.32 Get back in the kitchen

3.33 No one watches girl football 😂😂

3.33.1 issa lie

3.34 @(a): Future is Female!

3.34.1 @(a) you wish

3.34.2 @(a) hellll noooo

3.34.3 @(a) lol that's why no one watches Womens World Cup

3.34.4 @(a) definitely not no one watch girl soccer

3.34.5 @(a) future is all of us

Post 4:

4.1 Unpatriotic swine

4.2 Nike = UnAmerican

4.3 I thought you guys didn't support American?

> 4. 3.1 People that think differently or disagree with your feelings doesn't mean they hate the U.S.

4.4 When you get beat by a team of u15 boys

4.5 Nike hates America

4.6 Rapinoe = biatch

> 4.6.1 You = *clown emoji*

4.7 I love how people think trump cares that she's not going to the white house

4.8 Who is this man in the picture

4.9 Change the world??...You playing football… At a very low standard

4.10 I would of loved to have backed up the women's soccer team if it wasn't for that lil dude they got playing for them.

4.11 My "givafuk" is broken sorry

4.12 LADIES, don't be fooled. They don't care about us at all, they just care about our wallets

4.13 Congrats @uswnt ! But for real, yall are clowns

4.14 Says the company that craps all over its own country and listens to crybabies

4.15 I love how he did nothing 😂

4.16 Empowering woman empower the world

4.17 Stay away from politics and stick to sport. Or better yet the kitchen

4.18 Still got beat by schoolboys lol

4.19 Lost to a 15u team

4.20 Their behaviour is a stain on women's sports

4.21 Actually so good at football wow, well done girls

4.22 Has that angry dude been tested to prove he is a actual "female"?

4.23 I hate that communist, Megan Rapinoe. You need a slap in the face, missy. You don't go dropping a flag that millions died for. But oh, suddenly you're better than those young lives lost? You make me sick to my stomach.

4.24 You chose people to represent your company that have done NOTHING. A crappy quarterback and some sheman that kicks a ball into a net. I suggest you choose a real hero....someone that's truly sacrificed for our country. Besides, you should also be thankful your company is in AMERICA....a FREE COUNTRY

4.25 Stay in the kitchen!

4.26 @Nike we prefer @adidas because they don't get involved in politics!

4.27 No one cares

4.28 Queens & CHAMPIONS!!

4.29 How about learning history so we don't repeat it! #KeepAmericaGreat #Trump2020

4.30 I thought I told them to get back in the kitchen @(a)

> 4.30.1 @(a) : Lol

4.31 @(a): Does anyone think Nike supports equal pay? Lebron James' estimated lifetime Nike contract of $1 billion is far more than Nike has EVER paid WNBA players combined. Prove me wrong Nike. You're not going to hear much from the Swoosh on this issue because they'd be drowning in hypocrisy.

> 4.31.1 @(b): @(a) does the WNBA make as much as the NBA?
>
> 4.31.2 @(c): @(a) does the women's world cup make as much as the men's world cup?

4.32 Hmm wow post something Americans and celebrate them stepping on our flag

4.33 Women for the win. Sometimes

4.34 Most powerful women

4.34.1 Plus a few men in there

4.35 Generate as much revenue as men's soccer worldwide and then you'll get paid more. They can't pay you magic money when you're not pulling in as much money in the overall women's sport. Women's overall World Cup revenue was something like 300 mil, men's pulled in 3 billion.

4.36 Nike is UNAMERICAN!!

4.37 Will never buy another Nike product supporting this

43.8 I HATE THE WOMAN'S SOCCER TEAM. THEY DROPPED THE AMERICAN FLAG

4.39 Losing to the FC Dallas under 15 boys team doesn't grant you equal pay as the men's league... Get f#@ked

4.40 You want equal pay? Then create equal revenue. Its simple.

4.41 Why are they all embracing this white woman?? Just another sign of systematic racism indicating that the white race is superior. You disgust me Nike, how dare you

4.42 Bunch of babies is all they are

4.43 Ohh - sorry Nike that red offends me because the color red existed during a time of racism. #boycottNike

4.44 That lesbian doesn't deserve to win anything in her life. patehtic

4.45 Shut it, @Nike, you have no backbone. You go with whatever is trending and contradict yourself left and right.

4.46 She doesn't deserve it, Lesbian bitch

4.47 Who cares? They're woman

4.48 Congrats ladies. You deserve as much as the men. Period.

4.49 Glad they won but they need to start showing some respect to the man who runs our country

4.50 Rapinoe the winner?? Lesbian bitch

4.51 I LOVE ❤ MEGAN RAPINOE

4.52 No one cares, bunch of girls. Especially whey they disrespect the president.

4.53 @Nike Love the caption. I'd like to know if you pay equal endorsements for @uswnt as you do @usmnt.

4.54 *angry USA citizens have entered chat to protect their country* how sweet :)

4.55 I want to watch a game between our women's team and our men's team!! I am 100% sure our women's team would whoop 'em! :-D

4.55.1 Couldn't beat a group of u15 boys. Men will destroy them

4.56 Go make me a sandwich

4.57 Congrats to the USA women soccer team strong women are talented

4.57.1 fag

4.58 If we are winning now we will be unstoppable when all of our transgenders come and play

4.59 True. Now these woman just need a raise

4.60 @Nike every get tired of picking anti-american sheman as your poster child?

4.61 Rapinoe has gotta calm down. What happened to "thanks to great teammates" "happy for the opportunity". Taking on politics and stomping the flag makes me puke and Nike is writing it checks. Crazy

4.62 Disgrace to her country and woman

Appendix C: Adidas comments

Post 1

1.1 Okay for all the males who are saying this is bs for equal pay. If the men are "statistically" more athletic and strong than women, then the women have to work 1,000,000 times harder just to reach to their level of athleticism. So we put in more work than the guys. I wanna see you give birth to children and then go back to being a world champion and professional athlete.

1.2 @(a): pay should be attributed to viewership!!! the woman should be making DOUBLE what the men make. stupid double standard.

1.2.1 @(b): @(a) if only the women had more viewers

1.2.2 @(a): @(b) the usa womans team does in America. I'm not talking ab other sports

1.2.3 @(c): @(a) the mens world cup brought in $6bn while the women's brought in $130m

1.2.4 @(a): @(c) I'm not talking globally, I'm talking in the USA duh

1.2.5 @(c): @(a) Fifa is an international organization that deals with each team through separate organizations with separate collective-bargaining agreements. The basis of which rely on international viewership/revenue instead of stateside viewership/revenue. Duh

1.2.6 @(a): @(c) but it should rely on stateside viewership instead to deal out fairer payments to teams. Duh

1.2.7 @(c): @(a) it doesn't because fifa is an international organization that earns its revenue through global interactions and doesn't (nor should it) negotiate wages based on a single countries audience participation. Duh

1.2.8 @(d): @(a) are you dumb or are you dumb?? Men's soccer gets a lot more views than women's soccer thus they get paid more. Compare men's World Cup numbers with women's World Cup numbers then get back to me in the United States and in the world.

1.3 FIFA finna go broke I don't know if the viewership would make up for it

1.4 Equal pay for equal play and viewership/market. Don't ask for the wnba to be paid equally when they don't have nearly as many fans or viewers on tv. They just simply do not produce as good of a product on the court as their male counterparts. It's not hard to understand that the money just isn't there for the wnba. Want to do your part? Watch a game. I guarantee you'll shut it off before halftime because the product is mostly garbage. It's a business at the end of the day. It's like asking a mom and pop shop to pay their employees a six figure salary. It just doesn't work.

1.5 @(a): Meanwhile Chiles Women's team had to cancel matches in 2016 cause they couldn't afford to schedule them or pay their players

1.5.1 @(b) : Not like it matters

1.5.2 @(a) : @(b) so you don't care?

1.6 @(a): Women's team is Better than the mens ✕ only soccer tho

1.6.1 @(b) : @(a) are u dumb. The women's team lost to a 15 year old league

1.6.2 @(a) : @(b) r u dumb do you not understand sarcasm

1.6.3 @(c) : @(a) who won the world cup 2 times in a row and who can't even qualify

1.6.4 @(b) : @(c) that doesn't make the women's team better than the men's team. The men would crush them. The women are good for their gender

1.6.5 @(b) : @(c) and again, the women's USA team lost to a 15 year old boys team so like...

1.6.6 @(a) : @(b) bruh, deadass they get the same amount of views they aren't as good but they r great for their gender they get paid good becuz of their views

1.6.7 @(c) : @(b) and you think they were trying…

1.6.8 @(c) : @(b) just be respectful they are really good

1.6.9 @(b): @(c) it doesn't matter if they were trying or not. They should have beaten them with a blindfold. They are 15.

1.6.10 @(c): @(b) ur right cuz they still lost and if they weren't trying then what was the point of playing them

1.6.11 @(c): @(b) they should be paid by quality of work not gender. And in modelling you get paid by job not by gender

1.6.12 @(b): @(c) exactly and women do not produce high quality so they don't get paid more. They are worse so they don't get paid more. I don't know what's so hard for u to understand

1.6.13 @(b) : @(c) the USA women's team is better than all the other women's team but not any of the men's teams. Are u dumb?

1.6.14 @(a) : @(b) @(c) bruh literally the men get paid more cuz of more views the woman's sports aren't as popular and that has nothing to do with hard work or talent

1.6.15 @(c) : @(a) why do u think more people watch men's. Cuz they are just better

1.7 The fact that this needed to be announced because your practice of bonus payout, regardless of gender, wasn't already a fair and equal is appalling. Thanks for finally getting your principles and practices in order @adidas

1.8 @(a) : U15 U15 FC

1.8.1 @(b) : @(a) fax, the u15 team should get paid too smh

1.9 @(a: This makes no sense lmfao, sports is a business industry, and it has supply and demand like every other business, there's a low demand for women's sports. No one wants to watch women play when there are the men

1.9.1 @(b) : @(a) u like genuinely hate women or what? It's already segregated so that it's girls playing against other girls and guys against other guys both are equally popular and womens in America is actually more popular so why in the hell would men be getting payed more?

1.9.2 @(c) : @(b) U15 Dallas. All im sayin

1.9.3 @(b): @(c) the women obviously weren't trying their hardest to beat a couple 15 year olds, and this was over 2 years ago now.. and the guys can't even get out of the first round. And since it's a nationally owned team and not a privately owned company both teams should be getting payed the same for the same amount of work

1.10 Men's soccer just makes more then girl's soccer. Simple.

1.11 Hahahaha is this a prank? Can't be serious

1.12 @(a) : Why female athletes? How bout just athletes in general. Gender shouldn't matter, your talent should

1.12.1 @(b) : @(a) because 1. the amount of female athletes compared to other genders is a lot more substantial (not discriminating, just stating bare facts) and 2. They have had the

lengthiest and largest discrepancy when it comes to equal pay comparison to men.

1.12.2 @(c) : @(a) because no offence no one watch girls sports unless it's your parents or the national soccer team

1.13 U15 Dallas FC

1.14 The majority of sports fans are guys and statistically speaking men are more athletic than women which makes it better to watch that's y men get paid more.

1.15 Imagine being so stupid that you believe it's "gEnDeR diCriMinATiOn". Nobody really cares about women's soccer so they get less revenue and they HAVE to pay their players less. Come on people

1.16 I think Adidas beat Nike to the punch somewhat

1.17 @(a) : They bring in less they make less it's basic economics

1.17.1 @(b) : @(a) they have more talent and are more valuable, so they should get more money

1.17.2 @(a) : @(b) did you read anything i said, the amount of revenue in total that the usmnt brought in is so much more then the uswnt, not saying these women don't have talent bc they are the best team for that gender but when they are losing to a u15 team in dallas they can not be paid more or the equal amount to the men

1.18 U15 Dallas FTW!!

1.19 @(a) : reminder though that it is in fact not equal pay because our women's soccer team dominates the world and has been for years, our men's team couldn't even qualify ...

1.19.1 @(b) : @(a) yeah but have you seen the men's competition

1.19.2 @(a) : @(b) have you seen the women's? it's worldwide best of the best, the US women are basically the best.

1.19.3 @(b) : @(a) oh really they're the best? i'd love to see them beat the male french, portuguese, and brazilian national teams.

1.19.4 @(a) : @(b) is it so hard for you to say the women are incredibly talented and above average and deserve adequate appreciation

1.19.5 @(b) : @(a) never said they weren't. all i was doing was pointing out the differences in competition. putting down the men's team will in no way shape or form help the men's achieve success.

1.20 People saying that the level of competition is different are making an invalid argument. Their levels of competition are the same and relative to their gender.

1.21 Better pay for better play

1.21.1 they lost to an U15 men team lady

1.22 This is dope but y'all mean equal pay for better play. Right?

1.22.1 It's not better they lost to a U15 boys team…"better play" bs

1.23 @(a) : I hope their bonuses are BIGGER than the USMNT seeing as they are WORLD CHAMPIONS.

1.23.1 @(b) : @(a) well it looks like the World Champions aren't as good as a U15 boys team...

1.23.2 @(a) : @(b) well the USMNT has had some trouble competing against their peers and qualifying for the WC in the past — hopefully the U15s can help !

1.23.3 @(b) : @(a) smh the men are playing the worlds best soccer players...its a completely different

scale.Wouldn't it be interesting to watch the US men play the Women?

1.23.4 @(a) : @(b) the US men are not qualifying to play the world's best male soccer players . they qualify for the world best females. Who are equally as skilled

1.24 Listen!!!! This is what change looks like! #FeminismForTheWin

1.25 It's about damn time. Hope this applies to ALL female athletes, talent and content creators you hire

1.26 This isnt equality, why on earth would you pay the best player and the worst player the same? Makes no sense.

1.27 Better than Nike

1.28 Y'all know ain't nobody watching no FIFA women world cup...

1.29 Theres still a long journey ahead based on the comments

1.30 Women are getting more rights than men, where are male specific rights. Getting paid the same for bringing in a fraction of the revenue is ridiculous.

1.31 I mean, do you know anybody that watches women's soccer consistently? Just not the same level of skill

1.32 Remember that one time a professional women's soccer team got slammed by a group of fifteen year old Dallas soccer boys? Try again Adidas, I love the brand but get that outta here.

1.33 Im switching my cleats and tennis from Nike to @adidas..

1.34 Yeah but no one watches women's sports so no wonder they didn't get as big of a bonus.

1.35 soon as the woman have the same level of skil

1.36 Men attract more viewership. If it was a bikini contest then they woman would get more viewers. It's simple.

1.37 😂😂😂 What the actual f!!?k No equal play at all

1.38 This doesn't make sense. Men are physically stronger and more entertaining to watch than women.

1.39 so boys and girls should do the exact sport at school too. With the exact same conditions. No separating anymore?

1.40 This is ridiculous those sporting companies are gonna go broke ahaha. women don't perform like the men, facts.

1.41 That's bs, girls in a lot of countries aren't even allowed to play.

1.42 Wow @adidas you just got bullied through public media. Way to fall in line even though we all know the numbers and quality of play aren't equal. #dumb

1.43 Wtf y would u do something so horrendous? #menaresuperior

1.44 This is just a publicity stunt for adidas to get one over Nike.

1.45 Why is that? anyone watch the women world cup? No? lol

1.46 Nike couldn't do that

1.47 Women do not gather even a fraction of money that the men's world. Cup does. this is dum

1.48 Remember when the Australian Woman's national team lost 7-0 against a team of 14 year old boys? This just proves that men's soccer is more entertaining, which attracts more viewers, which is why men were paid more.

1.49 This is stupid. It's simple, more people watch men, they're more entertaining

Post 2

2.1 I’m uncomfortable

2.2 Awesome picture. Looks great

2.3 Women sports are mostly garbage apart from tennis and golf

2.4 @Nike >>>>

2.5 @(a) : The thumbnail/cover for this video is screaming it for the caption ‘WRONG HOLE’ lol

> 2.5.1 @(b) : @(a) You are a disgusting human being
>
> 2.5.2 @(a) : @(b) could have picked a prettier picture

2.6 Even though the Dallas fc 15u team beat them in a scrimmage

2.7 But a u15 boys team could of won

2.8 Adidas > Nike

2.9 Who even watches girl sports

2.10 @(a) : Only women’s team in any sport the deserves equal pay to their male counterparts.

> 2.10.1 @(b) : @(a) nah there not good enough
>
> 2.10.2 @(a) : @(b) better than the men’s
>
> 2.10.3 @(b) : @(a) nah men are stronger and faster
>
> 2.10.4 @(c) : @(a) if they played the men’s team, would they win? Hmm?
>
> 2.10.5 @(a) : @(c) probably would

2.11 The men's USA bench alone would destroy this team.

2.12 U15 fc Dallas boys beat them 5-2

Post 3

3.1 Oh so pretty smile, beautiful face

3.2 You picture very beautiful ❤🌹❤ 😍👫😍🙌🙌✌😳

3.3 So inspiring! Pretty and fit boss babe

3.4 I just saw your recent photos. It looks like your photos are getting more and more woman 🤌

3.5 I just want you to know that your business has provided me with the worst customer service experience of my life. Cant even outdo @Nike

3.6 Nice photo, there is no need for more words, I just wanted tosay 😍🤌 stunning performance ladies

3.7 Love the pics girls!!! 💜💝💚 show em how it's done

3.7.1 Show who? The men? As if

3.8 Please follow our fanpage of the king Lionel Messi!

3.9 Almost 4 hours in you online "waiting room". Such a scam. I will NEVER buy adidas again. Strictly Nike

3.10 @(a) : Lmao why do the women have medals?

3.10.1 @(b) : @(a) was wondering the same

3.10.2 @(c) : @(a) because they're champions unlike you

3.10.3 @(a) : @(c) why did the champions get beat by a u15 team lmao

3.10.4 @(c) : @(a) that's not relevant.. you're just using that as a lame excuse to hate on the team. If you don't like women's football don't watch

3.10.5 @(a) : @(c) I won't watch it, lmao they are women after all

3.11 EPIC! Now they might be able to beat that U15 FC Dallas boys team!!

3.12 They won what? Lol

3.13 Now versus the Dallas U15 team

3.14 Busted eye and all. True grit, true champion. 🏆

3.15 Nobody cares about girl sport

3.16 There should now be a match between Frances men's national and US women's team cuz they are both the current World Cup champions 🔥😂

3.16.1 30 – 0 to France easy

3.17 Did she get bukakked before this shoot?

3.18 Who are they? No one cares

3.19 U15 Dallas. Good luck ladies.

3.20 USNWT lost 5-2 to a U-15 boys club from TX.

3.21 Gorgeous girls 🔥 🔥

Post 4

4.1 When Are You Going To Cover Women Who Play Football Like The NFL? We Win Championships And All!! Men Are Recognized!!

4.2 I'm really sorry but the problem is that , no one really watches woman's football like everyone watches men's football , Woman even watch Mens football , it's just tradition and more entertainment

4.3 Very few people watch women's sports. It's still interesting but more watch men's. That's why financing is low

4.4 U need fans for money that's why stop making it any thing else no fans no tv money etc

4.5 Unfollowed,, why you only helping girls??🥊

4.6 No one wants to know

4.7 With all due respect but if woman are able to play on the same level as man i don't see a problem. But since that's not the case woman shouldn't worry about the money and just enjoy their job and stop being ungrateful

4.8 I love the way they included a hajibi girl in it makes me feel inspired that anyone could do anything

4.9 @(a) : The reason why women dont get paid enough is because not as many people watch womens soccer compared to mens. Its not rocket science. The reason why people dont watch womens soccer that much is because we simply dont enjoy it. Women say its discrimination but its not. Watch Ben Shapiro explain it. He literally explains the exact reason why women dont get paid as much as the men.

> 4.9.1 @(b) : @(a) not liking women and the stuff they do because they're women is actually discrimination. Of course, someone dumb enough to listen to Ben Shapiro's whining probably can't make sense of that simple concept.

> 4.9.2 All these women thinking they're strong, lmao good luck against a man

4.10 @(a) : No one cares

> 4.10.1 @(b) : @(a) 61k likes so people obviously care

> 4.10.2 @(a) other posts get 150000 likes. When its not women

4.11 This is a great. The more people that can enjoy the game the better.

4.12 @(a) : Why are they wearing a headscarpet when every man hab see her body moving.

> 4.12.1 @(b) : @(a) It's not for men or what they think moron

> 4.12.2 @(c) : Hijab* and her arms are probably the rest of her body are clearly covered. It's apart of her religion that's all.

> 4.12.3 @(a) : @(c) ah sorry for misunderstanding I have a lot to learn about the religion. As long as she feels comfortable and safe that's all that matters.

4.13 @(a) : Noone cares, unfollowed

> 4.13.1 @(b) : @(a) feeling a little touched are we

> 4.13.2 @(a) : @(b) so u follow a brands instagram acc to see some random political bs to promote their stuff?

> 4.13.3 @(c) : @(a) why is it always that little white boys have problems, go cry to your mother and let her know how you feel about women

> 4.13.4 @(d) : @(a) you are so white. Literally lol

4.14 Now this is better than pride month

4.15 Something Nike can never give ! Love you @adidas

4.16 The main reason for finance is that not many people watch women's sports there is a reason why in America that mems soccer teams make that much money compared to other countries its cause they dont watch the sport u cant expect more money if u cant make it in the first place it's not about equality it's about yall not promoting ur sport more and finance

4.16.1 Finally, someome said it

4.16.2 AGREED

4.16.3 Yes thank you

4.16.4 agreed

4.16.5 the females just cant accept the fact

4.16.6 way too true mahn