

Personal brand and personal branding in sports: An analysis on Google Doodle

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ABSTRACT

The new world order, shaped by the impact of global competition, differentiates the position of people in their private and business lives. In today's world, it is possible to say that every person acts to be successful, to be recognized, and to prove their difference, regardless of their sector. This study, prompted by the interest in the concept and practices of personal branding, aims to analyze personal brand image through the lens of Google Doodle (GDoodle) examples in the field of sports. In this scope, all GDoodles published between 2017 and 2021 were examined, and GDoodles related to sports and centering an individual were determined. The identified individual-themed GDoodles were grouped into various categories and analyzed to create a profile of personal branding. The details of the findings were reflected in the conclusion of the study, and inferences were made regarding personal branding. The most basic finding obtained through the conducted content analysis is that the concept and practice of personal branding are quite common in the field of sports globally. The research findings indicate that sports-themed GDoodles generally highlight male athletes and that athlete-themed GDoodles tend to commemorate deceased athletes. Furthermore, it is observed that the majority of GDoodles feature birthday and commemoration themes and focus on local athletes in the country of publication. In this context, this study is expected to contribute to the literature regarding personal branding and digitalization in sports.

KEYWORDS

Personal brand, new media, personal athlete brand, GDoodle.

Kişisel marka ve sporda kişisel markalaşma: Google Doodle üzerine bir analiz

ÖZET

Küresel rekabetin etkisiyle şekillenen yeni dünya düzeni, insanların özel ve iş hayatlarındaki konumlarını farklılaştırmaktadır. Günümüz dünyasında, hangi sektörde olursa olsun, tüm bireylerin, başarılı olmak, tanınmak, farkını kanıtlamak için hareket etmekte olduğunu ifade etmek mümkündür. Kişisel marka kavramı ve uygulamalarına olan ilgiden yola çıkan bu çalışma, kişisel marka imajını, spor alanı üzerinden Google Doodle (GDoodle) örneğinde analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu kapsamda, 2017-2021 yılları arasında yayınlanan tüm GDoodle'lar incelenmiştir ve spor alanında ve bireyi merkeze alan GDoodle'lar belirlenmiştir. Belirlenen birey temalı GDoodle'lar çeşitli kategorilere göre gruplandırılarak analiz edilmiştir. Kişisel marka üzerine elde edilen bulguların detayları çalışmanın sonucuna yansıtılarak kişisel markalamaya ilişkin çıkarımlarda bulunulmuştur. İçerik analizi ile gerçekleştirilen çalışmada, ulaşılan en temel sonuç ve bulgu, kişisel marka kavramı ve uygulamasının spor alanındaki uluslararası alanyazında oldukça yaygın olduğudur. Araştırma sonuçları, spor temalı GDoodle'ların genellikle erkek sporcuları öne çıkardığını ve atlet temalı GDoodle'ların özellikle ölen sporcuları anma eğiliminde olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca, GDoodle'ların çoğunun doğum günü ve anma temalarına sahip olduğu ve yayınlandığı ülkenin yerel sporculara odaklandığı görülmektedir. Bu bağlamda çalışmanın sporda kişisel markalaşma ve dijitalleşme ile ilgili literatüre katkı sağlaması beklenmektedir.

ANAHTAR KELİMELER

Kişisel marka, yeni medya, kişisel sporcu markası, GDoodle.

Introduction

Personal branding is a relatively recent concept and field of application in the literature. Personal branding or Personal brand was first brought to the agenda by Tom Peters (Thomas J. Peters) in 1999. The basic assumption of the concept of personal branding is that people can be branded as products or services. People who are known and distinguished from similar people in fields such as science, art, sports, and politics within the scope of the historical process can be considered as proof of the basic assumptions of the personal brand.

The concept of personal brand can be examined from various perspectives. In this sense, it can be said that this concept goes through various stages in the process. The final appearance of the personal brand concept is ultimately shaped by new media. New communication technologies and the internet offer an effective environment for personal branding. In this study, the concept of the personal brand is discussed in the context of sports and analyzed through the example of Gdoodle. The study is important in terms of revealing the connection between the personal brand, sports, and new media.

Conceptual framework

Personal branding and personal branding in sports

In the simplest terms, a 'brand' is the set of features that a product, service, institution, or person possesses and that distinguishes it from others. The word brand has strong etymological roots. The word 'brand/brond' means "fire, flame, destruction by fire, burning wood, or torch" in Old English (Harper, 2022). Historically, stamps on animals in the past have evolved into a brand concept in today's world. The stamps, which were used to distinguish the animals of one herd from the animals of other herds, have been the predecessors of the brands that are used to distinguish the products and services from others.

In its most general sense, a brand is a label that covers many things related to an object to give information about it and create associations (Babur Tosun, 2010). The American Marketing Association (AMA) (2022) defines a brand as a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or services as distinct from those of other sellers.

With the beginning of the production of packaged products in parallel with the industrialization process, manufacturers began to feel the need to use symbols on their products that express their own identity (Briciu & Briciu, 2016, p. 137). Thus, manufacturers had the chance to distinguish their products from those of other manufacturers and to promote their products. Branding has come a long way since its first appearance and has become an important discipline.

Branding, in the simplest terms, means assigning a brand name to a product or service (Gulsoy, 1999). In a broader sense, branding is the management of all brand-related activities with a holistic and strategic perception. In the branding process, there are some features that a brand should have. In this context, it is crucial for the brand to be 'original', 'unique', and 'interesting'. The deep-rooted history of the brand can be associated with the ethical and virtuous stance of the manufacturer. In the branding process, the internalization of the brand by the consumer is as important as the qualities it possesses (Rifon vd. 2004, p. 31).

The branding process is carried out by the coordinated management of many strategies. The current intensification of competition in the marketplace and the rapid development in information and communication technologies require the adoption of a consumer-oriented marketing approach in the context of branding and the creation of effective strategies (Taşkın & Akat, 2012). In the historical development of branding, it is possible to highlight the existence of many strategies involved in this process. If the branding process is managed well and effectively, it offers great returns to both the producer and the consumer (Ailawadi vd. 2003).

It is possible to underline the existence of many types of brands in parallel with the importance and prevalence of branding. The personal brand is one of the relatively newest conceptualizations of all brand types. Personal branding, in the simplest terms, is the branding of the person. In broader terms, a personal brand can be defined as the sum of a person's distinctive qualities (Redondo, 2015).

Peters (1999), who introduced the concept of the personal brand to the literature, states that every professional owns their own company; in other words, their brand. According to him, every professional needs to put into practice what distinguishes them from their colleagues and competitors. In parallel, Roffer (2000) draws attention to the importance of creating a personal brand strategy. An effective strategy is needed in the personal branding process, which is formed by the combination of the talents, career goals, and image of the person.

Purkiss and Royston-Lee (2014) define a personal brand as other people's thoughts and comments about a person in environments where the person is not present. In this sense, a personal brand represents a person's value, consistency, trust, emotion, sincerity, and expectations. The purpose of personal branding is to establish images of individuals who are perceived as unique and professional, thereby benefiting the sector they are in. Personal branding, which means positioning the person in the minds of other people, can be considered as a personal strategy that goes beyond marketing (Ortega, 2008).

There are many tools and methods for personal branding. Considering today's conditions, new media offers an effective environment for personal branding efforts. Based on the literature, it is possible to draw attention to the positive results of associating the concept of personal brand with technological transformation and the use of new media (Shepherd, 2005; Taskiran, 2017; Kaya, Uğurhan & Bayçu, 2019).

A personal brand is a concept that indicates 'who a person is', 'what they stand for', 'what makes them unique', 'why they are in demand', and 'why they should be chosen' in their personal and business life. Personal branding can be applied in all business areas as it is linked to professional life and career. Therefore, Alonso (2014) draws attention to the fact that personal branding practices are frequently carried out by actors, singers, professional athletes, and models.

Due to the intense interest of the masses, sports can be considered as a convenient tool for personal branding applications. Branding in sports can be carried out through sports events, sports teams, and athletes. Athletes present a profile suitable for their personal brand because of their talent, popularity, reputation, and supporters.

In the simplest terms, a personal brand in sports is a brand based on the values and characteristics of an athlete. A personal athlete brand is a concept based on an athlete's life story, charisma, authenticity, reliability, and sports skills. In the global world, athletes need to position themselves as a personal brand (Carter, 2010).

Arai et al. (2014) define an athlete brand as an athlete's importance in the sports market, personal meaning and value, name, physical appearance, and public personality created by using another brand's image. The fact that the personal athlete brand is not like any brand type results in a competitive advantage in the market (Keller, 2013).

Personal branding has found an application area in sports relatively recently. In 1960, Mark McCormack, who established the International Management Group, the first international sports management company in the sports industry, and drew attention to the commercial potential of golf players, brought the concept of the personal athlete brand to the agenda (Cater, 2010).

Another major milestone in conceptualizing the personal athlete brand is the panel of sports marketing practitioners created by the MIT Sloan School of Management. A data pool containing the thoughts and discussions about the concept of the personal athlete brand was created through this panel. The thoughts gathered on the subject and the practice of these ideas show that personal sports branding benefits from classical brand concepts and practices.

The personal sports brand, which is based on the subjective feelings and thoughts of athletes, is subject to positive or negative changes, which can be instinctive and determined by personal actions. Especially in individual sports, the process of branding the performance of an athlete on the field can be transformed from an athletic breakthrough to the maturity of stardom and the end of their sports career (Foong & Yazdanifard, 2014).

The personal athlete brand is built on the athlete's sports talent and success, as well as on a consistent character. Athletes can be positioned as a personal brand during their sports life, or they can create a personal brand of athletes after their active sports careers end. Being known and perceived as a reputable and consistent person plays an effective role in building and maintaining the personal brands of athletes.

According to a study conducted by Heinonen (2019), a significant number of athletes earn a large income from sponsorships. In this context, it is possible to state that personally, athletes tend to attract more sponsors compared to a sports team, but also, they have much more responsibility compared to a sports team. Jensen (2012) draws attention to the fact that athletes have opportunities not only to earn from sponsorships, but also to increase the sales of products positioned on their personal brands through the right sponsorships.

The personal athlete brand promises profit and reputation not only for the athletes themselves, but also for the sports club to which they are affiliated. There are sports clubs trying to gain global recognition and reputation by using the image and reputation created by personal sports branding for their athletes. In this context, David Beckham can be shown as an effective example (Gurel & Muter, 2015). It was thought that Beckham's transfer to Real Madrid would provide him with a suitable environment to showcase his talents and, simultaneously, contribute to the sales of licensed products. Indeed, Beckham's personal brand quickly helped Real Madrid's jersey sales revenue rise from 1 million dollars to 3 million dollars. It is possible to state that one of the main reasons for this increase was the switch in support of approximately 5 million Asian fans of Beckham from Manchester United to Real Madrid as a result of his transfer (Temporal, 2011).

A personal athlete brand means returns not only for athletes and sports clubs, but also for brands and companies. Another exemplary athlete brand in this context is Usain Bolt. Bolt, who has a reputation as the fastest and best athlete in the world, is known for his success and performance in the field of sports, as well as for his energetic and unique personality. Bolt not only made people aware of his existence with his strong personal brand, but also developed his career by making many sponsorship deals. Especially after his world-record-breaking performances, important and big companies such as Puma, Gatorade, and Visa have actively used Usain Bolt's personal brand to create new products and for advertising purposes (Badenhausen, 2016).

Although the creation process of an athlete's personal brand is parallel to the general personal branding process, it can differ in terms of its foundational narrative. The foundation of each athlete's personal brand is built upon unique narratives. While some athletes build their personal brands around their success in sports, others leverage their lifestyles for personal branding. However, regardless of the approach, it is critical for athletes to create their personal brands. This is because when athletes establish an effective personal brand, they can benefit from their personal brands not only during their sports career but also during their retirement (Arai, Ko & Ross, 2014).

A personal sports brand is closely linked to communication tools and techniques. Although athletes' main areas of existence are sports events, most personal athlete brands are built off the field (Milligan, 2009). An athlete's ability to strategically exploit market opportunities results in financial gain. Material and moral gain is achieved through communication and media dominance.

Andrews and Jackson (2001) state that the increased use of television in the 1950s played an important role in the development of the personal athlete brand. Television increased the support for athletes such as Muhammad Ali and Joe DiMaggio, who were popular at the time.

The placement of sportspersons in the programs broadcast on television had an impact on the audience. The media ensures that the public is informed about who the athlete is, what he/she does, and how he/she differs from other athletes (Andrews, 2004).

Today, new media has replaced mainstream media. New communication technologies and new media play a vital role in creating and maintaining the athlete's personal brand. Recent research on personal branding reveals that new media is an effective medium in terms of its qualities and returns. Personal athlete brands have the opportunity to communicate and interact more with sports audiences and fans via new media (Andrews, 2004).

The interest and support of the fans on social media make the athlete brand more valuable for the sponsors. This is because more followers mean more income (Green, 2016). The widespread use of social media in today's world makes it possible for everyone to create a brand. In particular, athletes leverage social media to showcase their unique features, present themselves as a personal brand, develop their personal brands, communicate with a global audience, and thereby increase their income (Doyle, Su & Kunkel, 2020; Na, Kunkel & Doyle, 2020).

Kim and Kim (2020) draw attention to the fact that social media has become the personal platform of athletes. In this context, social media helps athletes and fans to integrate more and engage in social interaction. However, while traditional media ignores and trivializes athletes, the potential power of social media makes it possible to reach information about the true personality of an athlete (McClearen & Fischer, 2021).

Methodology

Objectives

In addition to being the most frequently used search engine in the world, Google is a brand that tries to improve its relations with its users and followers. Within the scope of this study, it is aimed to analyze personal branding in sports in the example of GDoodle.

The objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of personal branding within the realm of sports by particularly focusing on the case study of GDoodle. This research aims to shed light on the multifaceted dimensions of athlete branding in the contemporary sports environment by examining the subtleties of GDoodle's personal branding strategies and their impact. Through this analysis, this study seeks to uncover the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the success of athlete branding efforts. Ultimately, this study aspires to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in sports management and marketing, offering valuable insights into the significance of personal branding for athletes and its implications for their career trajectory, sponsorships, and overall marketability in the digital age.

Research questions of the study are as follows:

1. Is GDoodle considered an essential tool for personal branding?
2. How can the concept of personal brand in sports be analyzed, and how does this analysis clarify the concept of "*athlete personal brand*"?

Data gathering

The study was designed using a descriptive approach within the qualitative research paradigm. In descriptive analysis, data that do not require in-depth analysis are processed, and the data set is presented to the reader without comment, leaving out opinions and comments while describing (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, p. 86).

The population of the study consists of all GDoodle designs. On the other hand, the sample of the study consists of athlete-related GDoodle designs published between 2017 and 2021. The sample type of the research is the criterion sample. In the criterion sampling method, the aim is to study and review all the cases that meet some predetermined criteria. These criteria can be

prepared by the researcher or can be prepared in advance (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, p. 86). The selection criteria determined within the scope of this research were as follows: 'to be in the Google Doodle Archive', 'to be published between 2017 and 2021', and 'to be the subject of an athlete'.

This study examines personal branding in sports through the example of GDoodle. The research utilizes five years of data, covering the period from January 01, 2017 to December 31, 2021. The data of the research were collected from the official Google Doodles Archive in May 2022. The reason for choosing the data of the last five years is the saturation of the data. Accordingly, the primary limitation of this research is the exclusion of data from the Google Doodle Archive outside of these dates.

Results

For the analysis of the data related to athletes' personal brands, the categories developed by Gürel and Arslan (2021) were used. These categories are 'name-surname', 'gender', 'date of birth-death', 'branch', 'country-nationality', 'date of publication of GDoodle', 'reason for publication of GDoodle', and 'region where GDoodle was published'. The findings reached within the scope of the research are presented in Table 1 in chronological order.

Table 1 Athlete-Themed GDoodle information for the years 2017-2021

| Name-Surname | Gender | Birth-Death Date | Branch | Country-Nationality | Publication Date of GDoodle | Publication Reason For GDoodle | GDoodle Publication Region |
|----------------------|--------|------------------|-------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Sarah Durack | Female | 1889-1956 | Swimming | Australia | 12/07/2017 | Remembrance | Australia |
| Stephen Keshi | Male | 1962-2016 | Football | Nigeria | 23/01/2018 | Birthday | Nigeria |
| Fanny Blankers-Koen | Female | 1918-2004 | Athleticism | Netherlands | 26/04/2018 | Birthday | Netherlands, USA, Canada, Iceland, United Kingdom, Greece, Israel, Australia, New Zealand |
| Tom Longboat | Male | 1887-1949 | Athleticism | Canada | 04/06/2018 | Birthday | Canada, USA |
| Gino Bartali | Male | 1914-2000 | Cycling | Italia | 18/07/2018 | Birthday | Italy, Greece, Serbia, Australia, New Zealand |
| Lyudmila Rudenko | Female | 1904-1986 | Chess | Ukraine | 27/07/2018 | Birthday | Russia, Canada, USA, Belarus, France, Serbia, Iceland, Ireland, UK, Argentina, Croatia, Australia, New Zealand |
| Dilip Sardesai | Male | 1940 - 2007 | Cricket | India | 08/08/2018 | Birthday | India |
| Ebenezer Cobb Morley | Male | 1831 - 1924 | Football | UK | 16/08/2018 | Birthday | United Kingdom, Cuba, Peru, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, France, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Croatia, Hungary, Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, Greece, China, India, Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand |
| Sir Donald George | Male | 1908-2001 | Cricket | Australia | 27/08/2018 | Birthday | Australia, Cuba, Greece, Ireland, United Kingdom, India, China, Japan |

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|---------------------|--------|-----------|---------------|----------------|------------|-------------|--|
| Roberto Clemente | Male | 1934-1972 | Baseball | Puerto Rico | 12/10/2018 | Remembrance | USA |
| Hanif Mohammad | Male | 1934-2016 | Cricket | India | 21/12/2018 | Birthday | Pakistan |
| Abdul Hafeez Kardar | Male | 1925-1996 | Cricket | Pakistan | 17/01/2019 | Birthday | Pakistan |
| Jacques Plante | Male | 1929-1986 | Ice Hockey | Canada | 12/02/2019 | Celebration | Canada, Sweden, Vietnam |
| Eddie Aikau | Male | 1946-1978 | Surf | USA | 04/05/2019 | Birthday | USA, UK, Iceland, Sweden, Estonia, Croatia, Israel, Japan |
| Minarni Soedarjanto | Female | 1944-2003 | Badminton | Indonesia | 10/05/2019 | Birthday | Indonesia |
| Samuel Okwaraji | Male | 1964-1989 | Football | Nigeria | 19/05/2019 | Birthday | Nigeria |
| Harry Jerome | Male | 1940-1982 | Athleticism | Canada | 30/09/2019 | Birthday | Canada |
| Anatoly Tarasov | Male | 1918-1995 | Ice Hockey | Russia | 10/12/2019 | Birthday | Russia |
| Hashim Khan | Male | 1914-2014 | Squash | Pakistan | 04/04/2020 | Remembrance | Pakistan |
| Vicki Draves | Female | 1924-2010 | Diving | USA | 03/08/2020 | Remembrance | USA, Philippines |
| Terry Fox | Male | 1958-1981 | Athleticism | Canada | 13/09/2020 | Remembrance | USA, Canada, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, Iceland, United Kingdom, Germany, Czechia, Italy, Croatia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Greece, Vietnam, New Zealand |
| Eliška Junková | Female | 1900-1994 | Motorcycling | Czech Republic | 16/11/2020 | Birthday | Czechia, Canada, Italy, Germany, Greece, Slovakia |
| Dr. James Naismith | Male | 1861-1939 | Basketball | Canada | 15/01/2021 | Remembrance | Canada, USA, Iceland, Chile, Peru, Argentina, France, Italy, Netherlands, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Latvia, Finland, Norway, Israel, India, Thailand, New Zealand |
| Fredy Hirsch | Male | 1916-1944 | Athleticism | Germany | 11/02/2021 | Birthday | Germany, Czechia, Israel |
| Masako Katsura | Female | 1913-1995 | Billiards | Japan | 07/03/2021 | Remembrance | Japan, USA, UK, Italy |
| Clive Sullivan | Male | 1943-1985 | Rugby | UK | 09/04/2021 | Birthday | UK |
| Frank Soo | Male | 1914-1991 | Football | UK | 09/05/2021 | Remembrance | UK |
| Tamio Kono | Male | 1930-2016 | Weightlifting | USA | 27/06/2021 | Birthday | USA |
| Mina Wylie | Female | 1891-1984 | Swimming | Australia | 27/06/2021 | Birthday | Australia |
| Soraya Jiménez | Female | 1977-2013 | Weightlifting | Mexico | 05/08/2021 | Birthday | Mexico |
| Ivan Piddubny | Male | 1871-1949 | Wrestling | Ukraine | 08/10/2021 | Birthday | Ukraine |
| Kanō Jigorō | Male | 1860-1938 | Judo | Japan | 28/10/2021 | Birthday | Japan, Canada, Peru, Argentina, Chile, Iceland, Estonia, Lithuania, Spain, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Croatia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Israel, India, |

| | | | | | | | |
|-------------|------|---------------|--------|-----------|------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| | | | | | | | Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand |
| Lionel Rose | Male | 1948- 2011 | Boxing | Australia | 10/12/2021 | Remembrance | Australia |

The results of the research revealed that GDoodles were published for a total of 33 athletes in the world and in Türkiye between the dates of 2017 and 2021. When the data were evaluated by year, it was seen that GDoodles were published for 1 athlete in 2017, 10 in 2018, 7 in 2019, 4 in 2020, and 11 in 2021. This increasing trend is evaluated as an indication that the concept of personal athlete brand continues to become more widespread and has become more visible in recent years.

Considering the research findings in terms of the 'gender' category, it was determined that 24 male and 9 female athletes were presented with the GDoodle designs. This distribution coincides with the fact that men are more visible and represented than women in the context of sport. In parallel with this study, Bandy (2013) explains that sports studies based on gender representation encourage a more interdisciplinary and transnational focus. This perspective contributes to the study of issues such as language, power, narrative, and representation, and helps shape the scientific analysis of sport.

When the research findings were examined in the context of the 'birth-death date' category, it was seen that all the athlete-themed GDoodles published between 2017 and 2021 were about people who had lost their lives. It is clear that these people who have achieved success in the field of sports and left their mark on the history of sports were remembered and appreciated through GDoodles. Among the findings, the earliest-born athlete is the English football player and sports manager Ebenezer Cobb Morley, who was born in 1831. The athlete whose date of birth is closest to today is the Mexican weightlifter Soraya Jiménez, who was born in 1977. The athlete with the oldest death date (1924) is Ebenezer Cobb Morley. On the other hand, the athlete whose death date is closest to the present day is Japanese-American weightlifter Tamio Kono, who died in 2016.

One of the most remarkable athletes in terms of dates of birth (1831) and death (1924) is Ebenezer Cobb Morley, who lived for 93 years. He is a significant historical contributor to the institutionalization of football as a player and sports manager. Morley took part in the establishment of the Football Association (FA), the first football organization in the world, and served as its president. He also played an effective role in determining the basic rules of football (Clayton, 2015, p. 153).

When the research findings were analyzed according to the category of 'sports branches', it was seen that all sports branches that were the subject of the athlete-themed GDoodles published between the dates of 2017 and 2021 were recognized by the International Olympic Committee. One exception was cricket. Cricket is the only sport to have appeared in the Olympics just once, at the 1900 Summer Games, and is currently not part of the Olympic program.

The sports branches identified within the scope of the findings were athletics, football, cricket, ice hockey, weightlifting, swimming, badminton, basketball, baseball, billiards, cycling, boxing, wrestling, judo, diving, motor cycling, chess, surfing, squash, paralympics, and rugby. The most frequently repeated sports branches within the scope of the sample were athletics, football, and cricket.

In athletics, five athletes were identified as Fanny Blankers-Koen, Tom Longboat, Harry Jerome, Terry Fox, and Fredy Hirsch. Four individuals associated with football were mentioned: Stephen Keshi, Ebenezer Cobb Morley, Samuel Okwaraji, and Frank Soo. In the sport of cricket, Dilip Sardesai, Sir Donald George, Hanif Mohammad, and Abdul Hafeez Kardar have been featured by GDoodles.

Ice hockey, weightlifting, and swimming were the sports branches that were determined within the category and had medium-intensity visibility. In this context, two athletes from ice hockey (Jacques Plante and Anatoly Tarasov), two athletes from weightlifting (Tamio Kono and Soraya

Jiménez), and two athletes from swimming (Sarah Durack and Mina Wylie) were the subject of GDoodle. It was determined that each of the other sports branches (badminton, basketball, baseball, billiards, cycling, boxing, wrestling, judo, diving, motor cycling, chess, surfing, squash, and rugby) were represented by one athlete.

When the research findings were examined in the context of the 'country/nationality' category, it was seen that the people who were the subject of GDoodle were citizens of 21 countries. This finding is consistent with the fact that Google is a global company and its users are spread all over the world. In the detailed examination of the findings within the scope of this category, it was determined that Canadian athletes were in the relative majority. Accordingly, five athletes were Canadian citizens. Within the scope of the findings, it was determined that four athletes were from Australia. Canada and Australia are followed by the United States and England with three athletes each. India, Japan, Nigeria, Pakistan and Ukraine were represented by two athletes each, and Germany, Czechia, Indonesia, Netherlands, Italy, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Russia were represented by one athlete each.

It is seen that there are three different sub-categories of the 'GDoodle publication reason': birthday, commemoration, and celebration. When considered in the context of the 'GDoodle publication reason' category, it was observed that the birthday theme had the most shares with 23 GDoodles. The birthday theme serves the purpose of celebrating the birthdays of the pioneering athletes and innovators in the field of sports. The commemoration was another publication reason used in 9 GDoodles. The theme of the commemoration consists of sharing about the athletes who are known for their achievements and have made the history of sports, even if they are no longer alive. Within the scope of the research, one GDoodle belonging to the theme of celebration was identified. The aforementioned GDoodle belonged to February 12, 2019, and it was prepared for Jacques Plante, who had records in the field of ice hockey. Jacques Plante is a famous athlete who is ranked 13th on The Top 100 NHL Players of All Time list prepared by the National Hockey League (NHL).

When the research findings were evaluated in the context of the 'GDoodle shared region' category, GDoodles published in one country, two countries, and more than two countries were determined. In this context, 18 GDoodles were published in one country, 15 GDoodles in two countries, and 11 GDoodles in more than two countries. Within the scope of the finding, it can be seen that athletes with local, regional, and global reputations were the subject of GDoodle. However, contrary to the general expectation, locally famous athletes were relatively more than globally famous athletes.

Discussion and conclusion

Today's consumption-centric world is shaped around the marketing discipline and the brand-customer relationship. In the global context, all human-centered forms of communication develop within the framework of marketing and branding studies. Consequently, personal brand is a winning concept that gains importance in this context. According to Gürel and Arslan (2020), a personal brand is a brand that puts the individual into its subject and action. Personal brand offers a convenient application area for today's people who like to be visible and believe that they exist as much as they appear.

GDoodle is a temporary change in the logo of the world-famous Google Company to commemorate, celebrate, and appreciate many historical and current personalities from scientists to artists, leaders to thinkers, activists to athletes. GDoodle, which draws attention as a very original and innovative method for the awareness and reputation of the Google brand, can be described as a very convenient channel for personal branding and branding activities.

The people selected for GDoodle possess a level of success and reputation that aligns with their personal brand concept. Personal brands of athletes are frequently encountered in GDoodle

applications. The global nature of sports, its supranational and social structure, and the sector's level of development contribute to the proliferation of athletes' personal brands.

It has been observed that the findings obtained in the general evaluation of the research findings are largely consistent with the existing literature and the research carried out by Gürel and Arslan (2021), which is the predecessor research in this field. In this context, literature information and research findings are similar on the basis of issues such as the definition, scope, and interdisciplinary nature of personal branding. The concept of personal brand is located at the intersection of many disciplines. It is not possible to exclude sport from the interdisciplinary dimension of personal branding. Sports, which is closely related to disciplines such as communication, marketing, management, psychology, and sociology, is a highly suitable field for examining the concept of personal brand.

A significant finding of the research is related to gender. In the GDoodles containing athletes, it was observed that men are quantitatively more. This finding is consistent with the judgment that men are represented more than women in the field of sports.

Another important finding reached in the research is related to the birth-death dates of the athletes who are the subject of GDoodle. In this context, it was determined that the athlete-themed GDoodles commemorated the lives of athletes who were no longer alive. Furthermore, another finding obtained within the scope of the category is that these commemorated athletes' personal brands generally lived in the 20th and 21st centuries. This time period coincides with the spread of the concepts of sports and athletes in parallel with the widespread use of communication and media techniques and tools.

Another finding reached in the research is related to the country/nationality category. Within the scope of the study, it was determined that the athletes who were the subject of GDoodle were citizens of Germany, United States of America, Austria, Australia, United Kingdom, Czechia, Indonesia, India, Netherlands, Italy, Japan, Canada, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Puerto Rico, Russia, and Ukraine. The diversity of these athletes, representing countries from various geographies of the world, can be explained by the fact that Google is a global company and has users from various countries of the world. Among the countries mentioned, Canada has the highest representation. Consistent with the fact that personal branding is a Western-centered concept, it is seen that the data mostly consists of athletes from America and Europe. Another finding within the scope of the category is the absence of GDoodle sharing about Türkiye and Turkish athletes.

The review of the research findings by sports branches revealed that all sports branches mentioned in GDoodles about athletes were recognized by the International Olympic Committee, except cricket, which took place only in the 1900 Summer Olympics. In this context, the results of the study showed that the most frequently used sports branches in GDoodles were athletics, football, and cricket, respectively.

Within the scope of the research, it was determined that GDoodles were published for three different reasons: birthday, commemoration, and celebration. The most intense frequency of sharing belongs to the birthday theme, followed by commemoration. In this framework, only one celebration-themed GDoodle was detected.

When the research findings were evaluated according to the publication region, it was observed that there were GDoodles published in one country, two countries, and more than two countries. It has been determined that the GDoodles published in a single country are in the majority numerically, and this suggests that athletes with local reputation are more frequently mentioned in GDoodles due to their personal brands.

Analyzing GDoodle in terms of the research questions as a concept of personal branding in sports involves examining how athletes utilize it to enhance their personal brand. The concept of an *"athlete personal brand"* refers to the unique image, values, and reputation that an athlete cultivates to distinguish themselves both on and off the field.

GDoodle can be a valuable tool for athletes to establish and strengthen their personal brand in several ways:

Visibility and Exposure: Athletes can leverage GDoodle to showcase their personality, interests, and activities beyond their athletic performance. By sharing their experiences, training routines, and insights on GDoodle, athletes can foster engagement with fans and followers, thereby significantly increasing their visibility and exposure.

Content Creation: GDoodle provides athletes with a platform to create and share various forms of content, such as photos, videos, and written posts. Athletes can use this opportunity to craft a narrative around their personal brand, highlighting their values, achievements, and aspirations.

Authenticity and Connection: GDoodle allows athletes to connect with their audience on a more personal level by sharing authentic and genuine content. By showcasing their personal lives, challenges, and triumphs, athletes can build a stronger emotional connection with fans, and in this way, they can foster loyalty and support.

Brand Partnerships and Sponsorships: A strong personal brand can attract brand partnerships and sponsorships, providing athletes with additional income opportunities. Specifically, GDoodle can serve as a platform for athletes to promote their sponsors and effectively endorse products/services that align with their personal brand values.

In summary, GDoodle plays a significant role in shaping and promoting the personal brand of athletes by enhancing their visibility, enabling content creation, fostering authenticity and connection with fans, and facilitating brand partnerships and sponsorships. As a result, this study focuses on personal branding and personal branding in sports. Google Doodle, which is the sample of the research, offers a wide range of investigations on the concept of the personal brand. The concept of personal brand in sports and the concept of athlete personal brand are relatively new. Therefore, this study is thought to be one of the limited examples in the literature. In this context, it is expected that the study will contribute to the literature in relation to personal branding and digitalization in sports.

Author contribution rates

The authors contributed to the study as follows: 1st Author: 33.3%, 2nd Author: 33.3%, 3rd Author: 33.3%.

Conflict of interest declaration

Our article titled 'Personal Brand and Personal Branding in Sports: An Analysis on Google Doodle' has no financial conflict of interest with any institution, organization, or individual. There is also no conflict of interest among the authors.

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