



Investigating Egyptian Athletes Visual Self-Presentation

Strategies on Instagram

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Publications and Conferences

An Analysis of Middle Eastern Female Athletes Visual Self-Presentation Strategies on Instagram during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

J El-Bous, D Mundy – The International Journal of Sport and Society - 2025

A Gendered Analysis of Egyptian Athletes' Visual Self-Presentation Strategies on Instagram. J El-Bous, D Mundy of 8th International Conference on Modern Research in Social Sciences (ICRMSS) - 2024 Athens, Greece.

Guest Speaker on Sport Communication trending topics within the FIFA/CIES International Programme in Sport Management at Nelson Mandela University in South Africa - April 2023.

Social Media Content and its effect on Egyptian Football Fans' Engagement and Loyalty
Social Media Content and its effect on Egyptian Football Fans' Engagement and Loyalty. J El-Bous - 9th International conference On Interdisciplinary Social Science Studies (ICISSS) - 2018 - University of Cambridge, UK.

Abstract

The study of visual self-presentation strategies on social media has captivated the attention of numerous academics and scholars, particularly those who specialise in the disciplines of sports communication and self-image branding among professional athletes. This investigation aims to examine the visual self-presentation strategies implemented by Egyptian male and female athletes on Instagram to effectively display their image to their fans and sports stakeholders. The analysis of self-presentation strategies involves the examination of the online tactics employed, the utilisation of pictures in the strategy, and a comparison of the online usage of Egyptian male and female athletes. To investigate the visual self-presentation strategy on Instagram, the study implemented mixed research methods. This involved conducting a visual content analysis of 1,000 images from 10 Instagram accounts of professional Egyptian athletes, of which five were male and five were female. The second method entailed interviews with three experts from Egypt's sports digital marketing agencies and six professional athletes, who were divided into three males and three females.

The findings demonstrated the significance of Egyptian athletes' utilisation of images to effectively position themselves, contingent upon the content they post. The findings indicate that Egyptian athletes recognise the importance of their visual self-presentation, despite the apparent disparities in online utilisation between male and female athletes, which are a result of cultural issues and the predominant role of men in the Egyptian sports industry. Nevertheless, they are unable to effectively employ online strategies due to a lack of resources and knowledge. The practical implications of this study highlight the significance of athletes developing a customised online strategy that aligns with their specific online objectives and the desired image they intend to project to their fans. This strategy should be tailored to the individual athlete's current performance status and the stage of their sports career. It is imperative to strike a balance in the content shared, encompassing both on-field and off-field images, while considering the type of content that resonates most effectively with fans.

Moreover, it is essential to address the unique challenges faced by female Egyptian athletes in establishing a strong online presence, considering the cultural constraints that may hinder their progress. By creating a common ground and fostering an environment that supports the growth of female athletes' online personas, a robust online presence can be achieved without compromising cultural sensitivities.

Furthermore, it is crucial for Egyptian sports federations, teams, and athletes to recognise and emphasise the significance of cultivating a positive image and maintaining a strong online presence. This recognition should extend to all stakeholders involved in the sporting setting, including sponsors, media outlets, and fans. By collectively acknowledging the importance of online branding and presence, athletes can enhance their marketability, attract sponsorship opportunities, and engage with a wider fan base.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The primary goal of this chapter is to provide an outline for examining how Egyptian athletes present themselves visually on Instagram in relation to this Thesis. The chapter introduces the reader with the study topic, explains the research questions and their underlying objectives, showcases the primary methodological techniques, and offers an overview of the theoretical and practical contributions. Subsequently, the study delves into the researcher's role and responsibilities inside the study context. Finally, in order to enhance the readability of the Thesis, the final section of the chapter outlines the structure of the Thesis.

1.1 Research Background

Brands are generally described by some characteristics that are associated with any product or service (Keller, 1993), while associations with a specific person describe a person's brand. In the context of sports settings, a person's brand is called an "athlete brand" (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012). A person's brand has distinctive and unique characteristics that can't be repeated (Chadwick & Burton, 2008), and according to Arai et al. (2014), an "athlete brand" is defined as "a public persona of an individual athlete who has established their symbolic meaning and value using their name, face, or other brand elements in the market."

The main brand associations of an athlete that were proposed by them consist of these dimensions: athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle. It was also defined as "the practice of strategically constructing and managing how the self is perceived by others in social groups" (Rampersad, 2008; Resnick et al., 2016).

Initially, studies used to focus on the personal branding of individuals who had huge media exposure or networks like TV anchors (Gandini, 2016), famous athletes (Arai et al., 2013), and celebrities (Maguire, 2015). After the increase in social media usage, an individual's network or media exposure became bigger and richer, which consequently increased fans' engagement in

the personal branding of these well-known athletes. Personal branding behaviours online force fans to react and engage with their favourite athletes (Wang, 2020).

Athletes use personal branding behaviours on their online platforms to spread awareness and share self-portrayal posts about their sports or business lives (Wang, 2020). Therefore, an athlete's image is one of the most important elements besides their athletic performance in any sports setting. This image plays different roles regarding the branding of athletes, and building a strong image for athletes requires a lot of work in terms of marketing tools and best practices, especially in the digital era (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2015).

As of January 2024, the global number of internet users reached 5.35 billion, representing about 66.2% of the entire global population (Kemp, 2024). The number of active social media users is 5.04 billion, representing 62.3% of the global population. In January 2022, Instagram had a user base of 1.4 billion, securing its position as one of the top three social media platforms alongside Facebook and YouTube (Kemp, 2022). By January 2024, Instagram was acknowledged as the foremost preferred social media platform, with WhatsApp and Facebook ranking second and third, respectively (Kemp, 2024).

The number of internet users in Egypt was recorded at 82.01 million in January 2024, accounting for 72.2% of the country's total population. The number of social media users in Egypt is 45.40 million, accounting for 40.0% of the country's total population. Instagram ranks third foremost preferred social media platform among Egyptians, behind Facebook and WhatsApp (Kemp, 2024).

The above numbers demonstrate the significance of internet usage and the widespread transition to digital platforms, including people, corporations, and notable people in sports. The online presence and reach of athletes are amplified as their follower count continues to grow. This phenomenon is driven by the algorithms used by online platforms (Cappelletti & Sastry, 2012; Constine, 2018).

Furthermore, the previously mentioned data indicate that Instagram is among the most favoured social media platforms in Egypt, which is a primary rationale for its selection in the study. Furthermore, Instagram is the most visually orientated platform compared to others, owing to its features and user-friendliness (Meta, 2023). Instagram's distinctive visual emphasis, centred on image sharing and hashtags, differentiates it from other social media platforms and influences user interactions (Burgess, 2006; Caliandro & Graham, 2020). Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter facilitate image sharing and sharing; yet, these functionalities are secondary rather than central. In contrast, Instagram is fundamentally a visual platform, entirely reliant on imagery.

This accumulative effect is called "The Matthew effect" in the literature that meaning (i.e., "the rich get richer at a rate that makes the poor become relatively poorer," Merton, 1968, p. 62). This means that the pre-existing number of the athletes' followers before their online presence impact the number of the followers that will come afterwards being present online (Cunningham et al., 2019).

Therefore, if an athlete already has a high number of followers that will more likely influence others to follow them and attract endorsers and make less-known athletes with less followers and less endorsers (Cunningham et al., 2019).

Maintaining of athletes' image on social media platforms has become crucial owing to its significance in expanding their fan base and obtaining sponsors. In order to attract fans and sponsors, athletes must carefully choose the most suitable content for their audience. This is reflected in the messages they communicate to the public, which may be either connected to sports or related to their personal lives. Prior to haphazardly handling their online platforms, it is vital for individuals to comprehend the athlete's self-presentation messaging and the most effective methods to develop successful online strategies.

1.2 Research Problem

Social media platforms provide sport stakeholders, particularly athletes, with means to advertise, promote, and shape their image, so enabling them to cultivate a fan base and establish a favourable reputation (Grimmer and Horky, 2018). Undoubtedly, the perception of fans towards their beloved athlete or team plays a crucial part in establishing their brand image and attracting endorsers. The notion of self-presentation has gained significant traction in the field of sport management and communication, particularly in the area of social media research (Marshall, 2010; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012).

Several studies examined online accounts and the content posted by various football teams, such as Liverpool Football Club, on Twitter. The findings indicate that the athletes, particularly the star players, accounted for 40% of the total material, with Instagram representing 35% of this content. These statistics highlight the players' dependence on their influence over their fans (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018). Moreover, it is important for any athlete embarking on a professional career in any sport to cultivate a robust sense of self-perception. Social media platforms provide athletes a unique chance to directly contact and engage with their fans and other individuals within the sports business, apart from relying only on traditional media outlets (Liu & Baumeister, 2016).

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the visual self-presentation strategies used by Egyptian male and female athletes on Instagram to effectively showcase their image to their fans and sports stakeholders.

To examine this topic, this research aims to accomplish the following **objectives**:

- To explore the differences between Egyptian male & female athletes' online visual self-presentation.
- To identify the best social media strategies to be employed by Egyptian athletes.
- To examine how athletes online visual self-presentation could increase fans engagement.

And to accomplish these objectives the study will answer the following **research questions:**

RQ1.1 What strategies do Egyptian athletes employ for their visual self-presentation online practices?

RQ1.2 How do athletes represent their online self-image via photographs?

RQ2. What differences exist between the visual self-presentation tactics used by Egyptian male and female athletes on Instagram?

RQ3. What impact did the athlete visual self-portrayal have on fans engagement?

The research objectives and questions were formulated through a comprehensive review of existing literature, which helped identify gaps in the current body of knowledge. This process highlighted areas that required further exploration, particularly in relation to the unique dynamics and challenges within the Egyptian context.

1.3 Research Methodology

Chapter three offers a comprehensive explanation of the research approach used in this Thesis. The study utilises exploratory research, employing mixed methods that include visual content analysis and interviews. Qualitative content analysis (QCA) is used to categorise the data qualitatively, while the analysis of data frequencies is conducted quantitatively, as described by Mayring (2019). The approach is further described in Section 3.2 of the chapter, where the comprehensive mixed methodology adopted is explained in detail, highlighting how the usage of both methodologies may enhance the Thesis by providing additional knowledge, comprehension, and value.

The visual content analysis examines photographs to get insights and observations on how athletes use visuals as a component of their online strategy. The visual analysis depended on coding dimensions for the photographs, which were modified according to previous research

and the preliminary study. The second approach was carrying out semi-structured interviews with experts and professional athletes. This method is essential for acquiring useful insights from both sides, allowing a thorough analysis and a deeper understanding of the online methods adopted by experts in athlete management, as well as the athletes themselves. In addition, the use of mixed methods will enable the examination of the self-presentation theory within the specific context of sports communication in Egypt and its practical implementation.

Ultimately, the use of the research approaches will aid in addressing the constructed research questions, and Chapter Three of this Thesis will provide greater detail on the sampling and coding processes. The next section outlines the research contribution from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

1.4 Research Contribution

1.4.1 Theoretical Contribution

This study provides valuable academic contributions to scholars in this field, particularly in the Egyptian setting where there is a noticeable lack of information. This research will provide more insights into Middle Eastern athletes, particularly Egyptian athletes, in the literature on how athletes express themselves visually. It will also contribute to the understanding of their cultural perspectives. This research aims to investigate self-presentation theory, providing a thorough comprehension of how athletes portray themselves on online platforms and the successful strategies that should be used. Furthermore, this research aims to enhance the existing body of knowledge on fan engagement and loyalty, specifically exploring the potential association and reinforcement between these factors and athletes' visual online self-representation.

1.4.2 Practical Contribution

The practical contribution of this study is to provide guidance to Egyptian practitioners working in the fields of sports communication and advertising. Several sports management companies in Egypt are responsible for overseeing and managing the affairs of athletes and sports teams.

This research aims to assist these agencies in developing a solid social media strategy for both well-known and lesser-known athletes, using the principles of self-presentation theory. Furthermore, these techniques will be tailored to align with the specific objectives of each athlete, aiming to create captivating and advantageous social media profiles for their followers and sponsors.

Furthermore, alongside the online tactics, every athlete will be provided with a customised content strategy plan that corresponds with their professional and personal endeavours, both inside and outside of their sports career. This will not just benefit advertising companies, but also sports federations with internal communication teams that need a structured approach to managing their internet channels. Ultimately, it has the potential to enhance athletes' ability to effectively showcase themselves on the online platforms.

The following section outlines the researcher's position in investigating and analysing the visual self-presentation theory used by Egyptian athletes on Instagram and its impact on sports stakeholders.

1.5 The Researcher Position

The researcher's position and role within the Thesis are influenced by several aspects, such as the study field, research responsibilities, expertise, qualifications, challenges, and impact. In the next sections, these aspects will be emphasised in relation to the research area.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the visual self-presentation techniques employed by Egyptian male and female athletes on Instagram to effectively display their image to their fans and sports stakeholders. It is the researcher's duty to fulfil this objective and thoroughly investigate it. The next section will give a summary on the expertise and qualifications of the researcher.

The most important trait that drew the researcher along this PhD journey was solely passion.

Since childhood, the researcher has had a strong enthusiasm for sports. Over the last eight years, she has held a position as an academic staff member, teaching courses in media management

courses. Throughout the master's dissertation, the researcher ensured the selection of a subject that pertained to the intersection of sports and media. In 2020, the researcher achieved the 'FIFA/CIES International Certificate in Sport Management Diploma', and her team was awarded the top project at a national level. Following a year, the researcher started teaching the 'Sport Communication' Module within the 'FIFA/CIES International Certificate in Sport Management Diploma' programme at Cairo University and earned the role of Module Head. In 2023, the researcher was asked to give a seminar on trending topics in sports communication, specifically focusing on digital media. The session aimed to explore topics including social media and the influence of sports on soft power. The session was held at Nelson Mandela University in South Africa. The researcher was offered the role of Commercial Director by a prominent Egyptian sports marketing agency, starting in December 2023. The CEO of this agency was among the experts interviewed by the researcher for the Thesis. The CEO believed that the researcher has the necessary knowledge and competence required by the agency.

It became inevitable to stay on the same path in the PhD and continue the journey with the same passion. The next section will clarify the responsibilities of the researcher.

The researcher began the PhD investigation by examining the areas of interest and identifying the gaps in knowledge, with significant guidance from the PhD supervisor during this first phase. Once the primary research area was determined, the researcher proceeded to organise the literature review according to the study's context and develop research methodologies that were suitable for the issue. Initially, the research methodology was intended to solely employ visual content analysis. However, upon reviewing existing studies and formulating research questions and objectives, it became evident that incorporating another method, namely interviews with experts and athletes, was crucial. The purpose of this decision was to broaden the scope of the research and enhance the value and knowledge contributed to the Thesis.

Implementing a mixed approach for the study posed challenges in several ways. Initially, the process of gathering and examining the data from 1,000 photographs was found to be both

fatiguing and requiring a significant amount of time. In the interview analysis, the researcher had to acquire further knowledge about NVIVO software in order to use it for analysis. The University already offers instructional sessions using the software, which is specifically designed to facilitate the learning process. The ultimate objective after the examination and discussion of the findings is to ultimately address the research questions of the Thesis, contribute to, and have an influence on this particular area of study, as elaborated in Section 1.4, which will also be thoroughly discussed in Chapter 7.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The Thesis will be structured into seven main chapters, outlined as follows:

- 1) Chapter One: Introduction: This chapter will provide the contextual details regarding the research area. Additionally, it will include a comprehensive depiction of the research problem, objectives, questions, and contribution, both in terms of academic and practical significance, and the researcher position.
- 2) Chapter Two – Literature Review: This chapter presents a comprehensive summary of prior research investigations on self-presentation theory, social media, and the online portrayal of athletes. The chapter starts by offering more elucidation on self-presentation on social media sites. The following parts will focus on the online profiles of athletes and their tactics for visual presentation on Instagram. Additionally, the study will examine the disparities in online practices between male and female athletes on Instagram, with a special emphasis on the Egyptian setting.
- 3) Chapter Three – Research Methodology: This chapter explains the design methodologies, approaches for data gathering and analysis, and processes for sampling.
- 4) Chapter Four – Visual Analysis: This chapter will showcase the outcomes of the visual content analysis conducted on the 1,000 photographs gathered from the athletes' public Instagram accounts.
- 5) Chapter Five – Interview Analysis: This chapter will show the outcomes of the interviews using thematic analysis.

- 6) Chapter Six – Discussion: This chapter will look at the Thesis' results with respect to the research questions.
- 7) Chapter Seven – Conclusion: The final chapter will provide a concise overview of the main discoveries and the research inquiries that have been addressed. The significance of these discoveries will be emphasised. Next, this study discusses its contribution in detail and acknowledges any shortcomings. Ultimately, prospective possibilities for further study are developed.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as a comprehensive overview of previous research studies that have explored the intersection of self-presentation theory, social media, and the online presence of athletes. It initiates by providing a detailed explanation of self-presentation theory and its application in the realm of social media platforms. By analysing the online profiles of athletes and their need for online presence, the subsequent sections delve into their deliberate strategies for visual presentation, examining the ways they shape their digital personas and engage with their audience. Moreover, the study investigates the difference in online behavior between male and female athletes on various social media platforms, specifically focusing on Instagram and what constructs an image. By emphasising the unique challenges and opportunities faced by athletes in this digital landscape, the research aims to shed light on the gender dynamics prevalent in their online presence. Lastly, the chapter concludes by offering valuable insights into the visual self-presentation strategies employed by Egyptian athletes specifically on Instagram, providing a culturally nuanced perspective on how athletes from this particular context utilise the platform for self-expression and engagement with their followers.

2.2 The Self and Self-Presentation on Social Media Platforms

Communication between individuals is the sharing of information between persons, either about themselves or a particular situation. Others often want to gain knowledge about others they are associated with. They will be interested in their overall socio-economic situation, self-perception, attitude towards themselves, competency, trustworthiness, etc. (Goffman, 1959).

Goffman (1959) argues that information of this kind aids in comprehending situations and anticipating the behaviour of the individual with whom one is interacting. Gathering information about an individual's conduct, appearance, or self-disclosure may be quite straightforward. However, it is important to note that this information may not always be accurate since mere talks or social events may not provide enough information about the true nature of an individual.

Over time, individuals make an effort to regulate their self-presentation to create a favourable and lasting impression or to project a certain image they want to communicate (Goffman, 1959).

Erving Goffman (1959) developed a theory in which he posited that individuals behave as actors, employing both verbal and non-verbal communication to convey their identity. They do so by constructing desired self-images in public and navigating different roles and performances to enhance their likability to others (p. 49). In 1969, Goffman used theatrical terminology such as "frontstage" and "backstage" to explain the dynamics of individuals' everyday social interactions. He noticed that the attitude of waiters is distinct in the dining room compared to their behaviour in the kitchen. This revelation led him to recognise that individuals also engage in similar behaviour, where they safeguard their "self" more cautiously publicly.

Self-presentation theory, as defined by Baumeister and Hutton (1987), refers to how a person attempts to portray themselves via the use of certain messages or pictures.

Goffman's (1959) theory, as discussed by Khedher (2015), highlights personal branding as a form of impression management, where individuals consciously shape their image to influence audience perceptions. Impression management can be strategic or unintentional. Strategic impression management involves deliberate efforts to create a favorable impression, such as athletes and influencers carefully curating their online presence to enhance their brand. In contrast, unintentional impression management occurs when individuals shape perceptions through their natural behaviors and interactions, often without conscious effort (Goffman, 1959). Ultimately, self-presentation relies on an audience, as it cannot exist in isolation (Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2018). While impression management suggests a level of performance, modern audiences crave authenticity. Athletes who find the right balance between curated content (e.g., professional and promotional posts) and authenticity (e.g., behind-the-scenes insights, personal struggles) tend to build stronger, more relatable brands (Urbanová & Slind, 2016; (Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2018). Cristiano Ronaldo & LeBron James as examples, both Perfectly crafted brand images with a mix of personal life, training, philanthropy,

and endorsements. And Naomi Osaka & Simone Biles: built Strong advocacy for mental health and social issues, leveraging authenticity while maintaining sponsorship obligations (Smith and Sanderson, 2015; Geurin-Eagleman and Burch, 2016). However this could contradict with Goffman's (1959) theatrical explanation that people behave like actors on a stage. According to Goffman's theory, the notion refers to the situation when the performer is not on stage and returns to behaving as their true self (Urbanová & Slind, 2016).

Arkin (1981) observed that the act of "front stage" self-presentation is not commonly employed. Instead, it is primarily utilised in three specific scenarios: when individuals are uncertain about maintaining their positive image and wish to avoid potential negative outcomes; when they become aware that their positive image is being challenged; and when their self-esteem is low, and they fear being compared to others.

Traditionally, self-presentation is described as the process of presenting oneself in in-person interactions or conversations when an individual intentionally portrays themselves as someone who is physically fit and leads a healthy lifestyle (Goffman, 1959). However, others may have doubts or question the validity of this claim.

Goffman's self-presentation theory has been criticized for its overly theatrical view of social interaction, which assumes that individuals are constantly engaged in strategic impression management rather than acting authentically. Critics argue that his dramaturgical approach downplays internal identity formation and the role of emotion, spontaneity, and unconscious behavior in social life (Burns, 1992). Additionally, structuralist and feminist scholars critique Goffman for failing to account for power dynamics, social hierarchies, and cultural constraints, which significantly shape how individuals present themselves. His framework also tends to focus on micro-level interactions while neglecting the broader institutional and societal forces that influence identity and behavior (Jenkins, 2008).

Nevertheless, as the digital and internet era progresses, individuals are gaining more autonomy in shaping their self-presentation and exerting virtual control over impression management (Smith & Sanderson, 2015).

The emergence of social media platforms has prompted numerous scholars to investigate the self-presentation theory among online users of various networking sites such as Facebook (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011), Twitter (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012), LinkedIn (Chiang & Suen, 2015), and Instagram (Jackson & Lunchner, 2018; Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015).

The notion of self-presentation has gained significant attention in the field of sports management and communication, particularly in the area of social media research (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Marshall, 2010). An athlete's self-presentation on social media categorises content into two distinct types: frontstage messages and backstage messages. Goffman's theory (1959) illustrates that athletes possess a comprehension of the factors that capture the interest of fans, namely by means of sharing posts related to their sports settings, competitions, business partnerships, and achievements (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2015). Conversely, backstage content include aspects of an athlete's life outside their professional sports career, such as family and personal experiences. This form of content reveals the athlete's genuineness and sincerity (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2015).

Sanderson (2011) believed that social media platforms enable users to take control over and shape their online personas, a concept Goffman referred to as the "Front stage" performance. But advancements in social media platforms have made it challenging for users to maintain control over the image they wish to present to the public. This is because other users can comment directly and share photographs, limiting the control users have over the online behaviour of others (Ramirez & Walther, 2009). The authenticity of some persons online may be complicated due to the fact that their authenticity is largely evaluated by the audience, which in turn complicates the process of impression management online (Hearn, 2017). The criteria for authenticity might vary from person to person.

Goffman's theoretical perspective remains highly relevant in analyzing contemporary social interactions. His concept of the interaction order, which he defines as face-to-face interaction, serves as a foundational framework in his microsociology. Goffman argues that meaningful social interactions occur through physical co-presence, where individuals influence one another using bodily cues, emotions, and expressions (Kien, 2015). However, with the advancement of communication technologies, scholars have debated whether mediated interactions—such as phone calls, video chats, and social media—can replicate the dynamics of face-to-face engagement (Kien, 2015).

Research by Jenkins (2010) and Rettie (2009) suggests that synchronous digital interactions share key features of traditional interaction, enabling a sense of mediated co-presence despite physical separation. For instance, phone conversations can create an impression of being "face-to-face," even in the absence of visual cues. This shift has led to an evolving "digitized interaction order", in which time-based co-presence complements physical presence in shaping social relationships. Goffman's distinction between the self-as-character (the performed self) and the self-as-performer (the individual with inherent desires and emotions) has also been transformed by digital communication. In the digital age, individuals must learn new expressive techniques, such as crafting online personas and managing social media profiles, to present themselves effectively. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn have become integral to self-presentation, expanding the "stages" on which individuals perform.

Crucially, the socialized self is now constructed across multiple interaction domains—physical, telephonic, and digital—requiring individuals to tailor their self-presentation for different audiences. The performed self is thus multi-faceted, adapting to the norms and expectations of each medium. Research by Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons (2002) further supports this idea, showing that many individuals feel more comfortable expressing their "true selves" online than in face-to-face interactions.

Ultimately, while Goffman's dramaturgical model remains influential, the rise of digital communication necessitates an expanded understanding of social interaction—one that

acknowledges the fluid, multi-contextual nature of self-presentation in the modern era (Kien, 2015).

Goffman's self-presentation theory (1959) has been extensively used to analyse how athletes present themselves online (Xu et al., 2022). By applying Goffman's self-presentation theory, researchers can gain insights into how athletes leverage social media to manage their public image, navigate the front stage-backstage dynamic, and strategically present an idealised version of themselves to their audience.

2.3 Athletes, Social Media, and Profiles

The sports industry has a significant influence on society and culture, which in turn influences the economic strength of organisations and nations. This kind of economic influence expands not just inside the sports industry, but also encompasses additional benefits such as investing in online media content, establishing a loyal fan base, earning broadcasting rights, and negotiating commercial agreements (Gonkek & Gencer, 2023). These elements, particularly the performance of sports teams and players, play a pivotal role in shaping athletes' personal self-presentation, which is at the heart of the research. Athletes, as public figures, must constantly navigate the balance between their athletic identity and the persona they craft for themselves in both traditional and digital media. Success on the field often boosts their public image, offering opportunities for endorsements, media attention, and fan admiration, which in turn enhances their ability to curate a positive self-presentation. Conversely, poor performance can challenge an athlete's brand, forcing them to adapt their image, manage public perceptions, and emphasize qualities like resilience or humility. These fluctuations in performance and perception require athletes to strategically manage their personal narrative across platforms, ensuring that their self-presentation remains appealing to sponsors, fans, and other stakeholders, regardless of on-field outcomes (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012; Gonkek & Gencer, 2023).

Parganas, Anagnostopoulos, and Chadwick (2015) conducted a study that focused on analysing tweets related to Liverpool FC. Initially, the researchers provided several definitions of social

media as proposed by academics and industry experts. Social media is defined as the tools, platforms, and applications that allow consumers to connect, communicate, and collaborate with others. According to Williams and Chinn (2010, p. 422), it involves sharing information, experiences, and perspectives on community-oriented websites, as stated by Weinberg (2009, p. 1). Nevertheless, scholars and experts both acknowledge that social media comprises a set of instruments that facilitate interactive and reciprocal communication among users, enabling them to participate, communicate, and exchange content related to organisations and brands (Parganas et al., 2015).

Social media platforms provide sports stakeholders, especially athletes, with an effective tool for promoting, marketing, and cultivating a compelling and unique personal brand (Li et al., 2021). This enables them to attract a large fan base and present themselves in an appealing way (Grimmer and Horky, 2018), in contrast with traditional media outlets, which provide them with limited control (Emmons and Mocarski 2014; Geurin-Eagleman and Burch 2015; Birnholtz & Macapagal, 2021). The rapid growth of the digital age has elevated social media to the foremost platform for sports news and media, as well as for athletes who strongly depend on it to cultivate their online image and brand (Swarm, 2018; Guo et al., 2023). Social media has provided athletes with a platform to freely generate and share content of their choosing. Each social media platform provides a range of tools that allow athletes to shape their desired image via strategic self-presentation (Ning et al., 2024). Despite the growing use and recognition of social media by sports organisations, players, and fans, the impact of social media branding tools on the sports industry remains poorly understood (Parganas et al., 2015).

Sports stakeholders have extensively incorporated various social media platforms. Twitter hashtags are often used by fans to identify sports-related discussions (Reichert Smith & Smith, 2012). Additionally, some fans use it as a tool to direct negative messages towards athletes (Kassing & Sanderson, 2015). Sports teams use social media platforms to promote their teams and other marketing opportunities inside their organisations (Pronschinske, Groza, & Walker, 2012; Walsh, Clavio, Lovell, & Blaszk, 2013). According to Karg & Lock (2014), social media

platforms facilitate interaction and fan involvement, but they do not necessarily contribute to the revenue generation of sports teams. However, it will assist these sports organisations in generating more fan engagement, which will ultimately result in the purchase of the teams' products and enhanced awareness for the clubs.

The primary responsibility of professional athletes is to excel in their performance on the field, where they represent their sports club and professional leagues. Additionally, they serve as ambassadors for their own brand image (Babiak et al., 2012). Sports fans carefully track these athletes in many settings to get a deeper understanding of them beyond their athletic ability. Professional athletes often strategically shape their public image by adhering to socially and culturally approved behaviours, aiming to influence how others perceive them (Gonkek & Gencer, 2023).

Athletes' public image has emerged as a vital element of their sports careers. The impression that fans have over their favourite athlete or team plays an essential role in developing their brand image and attracting sponsors (Smith, 2015). The term "athlete brand" was defined by (Arai, et al., 2014) as "a public persona of an individual athlete who has established their own symbolic meaning and value using their name, face or other brand elements in the market."

Athletes' brand image plays a key part in distinguishing one athlete from another. This is why prominent athletes enjoy greater visibility, attention, business partnerships, and financial support (Taniyev and Gordon, 2019). A strong brand image, particularly online in this digital era, strengthens the bond between athletes and their fans, resulting in reputational benefits (Parmentier and Fischer, 2012). These benefits can have a lasting impact on sports teams and athletes, extending beyond their athletic careers into retirement (Arai et al., 2014; Hasaan et al., 2018; Taniyev and Gordon, 2019). By giving athletes the ability to shape their image or persona, they may foster a genuine connection with fans (Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012, p. 88) since traditional media outlets have the potential to distort the public's perception of athletes. Athletes who can create an attractive and impactful personal brand online are more likely to successfully turn fans into loyal consumers.

In line with the study conducted by Pegoraro & Jinnah (2012), when an athlete is in the negotiation period of renewing their contract with the club and is maybe the most loyal player, if the media channels attempt to portray them as selfish, it is quite probable that the fans would accept these opinions. Therefore, it is essential for athletes to have an online presence to showcase themselves (Smith, 2015). Seattle Seahawks wide receiver Joey Galloway had this identical situation with a new contract before to the 1999 NFL season. The media portrayed him as a greedy and self-centered player, rather than emphasising his collective goals (Bishop, 2005). Parmentier and Fischer (2012) found that despite the lack of coverage in mainstream media, athletes can establish a strong professional online brand image by using social media platforms to construct their digital personas. Yet to have a strong online brand image, athletes and sports entities must be prepared to invest considerable time and effort into implementing successful branding strategies (Thompson et al., 2014).

2.4 Online Self Presentation Strategies by Athletes

Social media enables athletes to directly communicate and interact with their fans and other persons in the sports industry, alongside traditional media outlets (Li et al., 2017). Furthermore, social media empowers athletes to challenge the portrayal of themselves in traditional media by using their online platforms to choose and share content of their choosing (Sanderson, 2011). When analysing social media postings through the lens of the self-presentation theory, they are categorised into two primary types: frontstage and backstage posts. Frontstage posts consist of content on pitch, during competitions and posts of interacting with fans and material that promotes athletes and their brands. Backstage postings consist of reposts from various internet platforms, demonstrating empathy for other athletes and teams (Lebel and Danylchuk, 2012). Furthermore, Frederick and Clavio (2015) discovered that athletes mostly use personal material, such as details about their family or their daily routine, in their backstage postings.

Goffman (1978) argues that individuals shape their identities in accordance with societal expectations. Similarly, athletes conform to the expectations of the sports industry and other stakeholders when presenting themselves online. Their online presence has a significant impact

on the followers who seek insights into their professional and personal lives through platforms like Instagram. Consequently, strategic planning for their online image becomes crucial (Gonkek & Gencer, 2023).

Prior studies on impression management and self-presentation on social media have proposed two strategies (Kim & Lee, 2011; Niu et al., 2015; Gao et al., 2023). The first strategy is positive self-presentation, which entails reducing negative impressions from online followers by carefully choosing and projecting an ideal online persona. This may be accomplished by disseminating postings that exhibit happy moments and only positive content (Kim & Lee, 2011). The second strategy is honest self-presentation, in which individuals post non-selectively without censoring their content. This includes expressing positive and negative events and feelings (Yang & Brown, 2016; Yang et al., 2017; Gao et al., 2023).

Online self-presentation strategies enable athletes to create the content they want to share freely; however, some factors must be considered because it's not personal.

Each athlete's goals, fans, and sports career are key factors that influence their overall online strategy for self-presentation. Schlenker & Pontari (2000) and Ning et al. (2024) have discussed these factors in detail. Athletes also need to strike a balance between their online objectives and the fans' expectations, which are unavoidably shaped by social and cultural norms in addition to the athletes' backgrounds (Xu & Armstrong, 2019; Johnson et al., 2023).

Uski and Lampinen (2016) examined the use of 'profile work' as a self-presentation strategy employed by athletes to portray themselves. This approach encompasses a range of social and psychological elements that might prompt users to modify their information, whether by deleting, excluding, or disclosing it, with the aim of managing how they are portrayed and perceived. To ensure that their online behaviours are seen in a certain manner by their fans.

In a study conducted by Ning, Miao, and Wang (2024) revealed that Chinese Olympic athletes recognised the importance and potential of strategically using social media platforms to improve their brand image and they adopted self-presentation strategies online.

Lately, there has been a significant increase in the use of short videos by athletes. This trend allows them to effectively convey their own identity and actively interact with their fan base (Marwick & Boyd, 2011b; Clavio et al., 2013; Ning et al., 2024). In their study, Ning, Miao, and Wang (2024) examined the utilisation of short videos on “Douyin”, the Chinese TikTok the by Chinese athletes.

Their findings revealed that these athletes use videos to share snippets of competitions, training sessions, and personal moments. Contrary to Chinese athletes, Western athletes prefer to provide more behind-the-scenes information that reflects their personal life (Xu et al., 2023). Chinese athletes, on the other hand, prioritise their sporting setting and business aspects.

The research conducted by Ning, Miao, and Wang (2024) explores the financial challenges experienced by retired Chinese athletes, including Shangwu Zhang and Dongmei Ai.

The study highlights the many debates surrounding this topic. In addition, Ning et al. (2024) found that Chinese athletes who do not do well in their sports or attain athletic success tend to limit their online self-presentation owing to a lack of excitement. In several Western countries, lesser-known athletes use social media as a crucial means to shape their public image (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018).

The realm of social media provide fans with the opportunity to get a glimpse of their favourite athletes, allowing them to communicate and engage with them, as well as gain insight into their personal lives (Pegoraro, 2010). Twitter has been adopted by various athletes, including Shaquille O’Neal, Dwight Howard, Paul Pierce, Andy Roddick, Stewart Cink, Lance Armstrong, Chad Ochocinco, and Larry Fitzgerald. These athletes, along with many others, used Twitter to provide their fans with an inside look into their lives and to connect with their sports idols (Pegoraro, 2010).

Through Twitter, fans were able to appreciate the talents, dedication, and daily activities of these athletes (Kassing & Sanderson, 2012; Sanderson, 2008). In a study conducted by Lebel & Danylchuk (2014), Twitter accounts of athletes were examined, and it appeared that their

personal branding is more effective when their profile picture is related to a sport setting context of the athlete himself/herself.

Researchers, including Burch et al. (2014), Hambrick et al. (2010), Lebel and Danylchuk (2012), and Pegoraro (2010), have done studies on the use of self-presentation theory by athletes on Twitter. Their findings indicate that athletes mostly employ backstage messaging in their tweets. In a related study, Sanderson (2013) examined the utilisation of Twitter by rookie athletes in major sports leagues such as MLB, NBA, NFL, and NHL. The study focused on how these athletes strategically portray a distinct persona on social media that goes beyond their on-field performance. This involves tweeting about various subjects such as cultural preferences and personal stories.

Logan Morrison, a Major League Baseball (MLB) player, used self-presentation strategies on Twitter, as outlined also by Sanderson (2014). Morrison portrayed a self-image characterised by offensiveness and sarcasm, which contributed to his significant online popularity, with a following exceeding 120,000 individuals. This incited resentment within his squad at the time and resulted in clashes between coaches, executives, and players. These tensions need the athlete to contemplate their self-presentation and exert more control and management over the projected image (Ning et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, Pate, Hardin, and Ruihley (2014) discovered that athletes often blur the distinction between sport setting related content and personal content on social media. This is because they view social media not only as a means of sharing their personal lives with fans, but also as a promotional tool for themselves, their teams, and their sponsors. Geurin-Eagleman & Clavio (2015) also provided evidence to support the same idea in their research on athletes, which mostly focused on the Twitter and Facebook platforms. The results indicated that athletes who get little media coverage heavily depend on promotional endeavours, such as front stage postings. Conversely, athletes that consistently gain media attention tend to provide personal stuff and actively participate in private conversations behind the scenes. The use of both front

and backstage postings by athletes played a crucial role in the development of their professional online brand image (Shreffler et al., 2016).

Hambrick and Kang (2014) performed empirical research on backstage messages and discovered a positive correlation between the frequency of personal-related content and an increase in fan engagement. This increase in engagement was measured by high interactivity via likes and comments. The postings made by the athletes in this research often demonstrate significant levels of fan engagement. Additional study indicates that Western athletes tend to share more posts about their family and personal interests in private settings, as opposed to their public postings pertaining to their sport, contests, and commercial matters (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Smith & Sanderson, 2015). Western athletes, who are not adequately acknowledged by conventional media, use this social media strategy by sharing personal content to enhance their bond with their fan base (Geurin-Eagleman & Clavio, 2015).

This particular digital strategy cultivates a distinct perception, evokes emotional responses, and attracts substantial online support from fans (Salim et al., 2017). An online strategy involves using nonverbal tactics on Facebook profiles, such as including images of male and female athletes and enhancing their self-presentation material by adding background music or songs. This approach aims to captivate fans in a unique manner (Kiss & Linnell, 2020).

The prior research reveal athletes' online involvement on various platforms such as Facebook and Twitter; however, this study concentrates on Instagram as a visually-centric platform.

The previously cited data in the introduction chapter highlight Instagram as one of the most popular social media platforms in Egypt, serving as a key justification for its selection in this study. Additionally, Instagram stands out as the most visually driven platform compared to others, thanks to its user-friendly features and design (Meta, 2023). Its distinct focus on visual content, primarily through image sharing and hashtags, sets it apart from other social media platforms and shapes user engagement (Burgess, 2006; Caliandro & Graham, 2020). While platforms like Facebook and Twitter also support image sharing, these features play a

supplementary rather than a central role. Conversely, Instagram is inherently a visual platform, relying entirely on imagery as its core mode of interaction.

2.5 Images meaning in online visual communication

Online strategies necessitate the creation of content that can be presented in a manner that is facilitated by camera phones and platforms that prioritise visual content. This has made it effortless to capture and share photos online, resulting in the increasing popularity and significance of images (Liu et al., 2020).

Visual content has the power to captivate audiences, convey messages, and evoke emotions more effectively than plain text alone. It allows brands, businesses, and individuals to tell compelling stories, showcase products, and engage with their target audience in a more immersive and memorable way. With just a few taps on a screen, users can capture and share their experiences, instantly connecting with others around the world. In today's digital landscape, online strategies have to adapt to the preferences and behaviors of users who prioritise visual experiences (Liu et al., 2020). This shift has given rise to the immense popularity and significance of images in online platforms.

The rise of image-centric platforms like Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat has further fuelled the demand for visually appealing content. These platforms have built their success around the idea of sharing and discovering captivating images. As a result, businesses and content creators have recognised the need to optimise their online strategies by incorporating visually striking visuals that resonate with their target audience (Johnson et al., 2024).

Furthermore, research by Liu et al. (2020) highlights the profound impact of visual content on online engagement and conversion rates. Images have been found to enhance user experiences, increase website traffic, and boost customer engagement. In the age of social media, where attention spans are shorter than ever, captivating visuals have become essential for grabbing and retaining the interest of users scrolling through their feeds.

To leverage the power of visual content, online strategies now involve creating and curating visually appealing images that are easily shareable and optimised for various platforms. Marketers employ techniques like professional photography, graphic design, and visual storytelling to create a cohesive and visually stunning brand image. This includes using high-quality images that resonate with the brand's identity and message, as well as utilising visually engaging formats such as infographics, videos, and animated GIFs (Johnson et al., 2024).

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) propose a framework for identifying narratives or storytelling content in images, and according to their definition, images are either conceptual or narrative. Conceptual images generally represent static, timeless subjects, while narrative images present action with a “transaction” between two or more subjects of an image (p. 76).

Communication researchers have used Kress and van Leeuwen's visual framework to comprehend the meaning conveyed by pictures disseminated via various media platforms. For instance, several academics have examined the impact of narrative or storytelling visuals on enhancing user engagement on social media platforms (Romney & Johnson, 2020). Images without narrative themes exhibit reduced levels of engagement (Romney & Johnson, 2020b; Dhanesh et al., 2022).

Scholars studied imagery in sports to understand why images draw fans, evoke strong memories, and remain in people's minds (Stones & Bygate, 2009).

A study undertaken by Johnson, Romney, and John (2024) examined the engagement of sports photographers on Instagram with sports network photos. The researchers primarily relied on Kress and van Leewen's (2006) characterisation of visual narratives in their analysis. Quoting from Johnson, Romney, and John (2024) “the current study differs from previous studies that show that stronger narrative images increase levels of Instagram engagement. These themes of image content only mattered in respect to likes, showing no significant difference in comments or shares—the deeper measures of engagement”. In their study, the researchers categorise the photographs to understand the process of recalling narrative visuals via information processing

(Kosicki & McCleod, 1990) and its connection to memorable social media content (Johnson et al., 2024).

Prior research has shown that images enhance the user's cognitive capacity to comprehend and retain information (Gaweesh & Daher, 2023). In 2023, the Golden Knights Hockey Club achieved its first victory in the Stanley Cup Final against the Florida Panthers. Following this triumph, all the players enthusiastically celebrated beside one of the goals. Abbie Parr, a photographer employed by the Associated Press, positioned a camera in the rafters before the start of the game (Johnson et al., 2024). The camera recorded an aerial view of the huddle, capturing the moment when the Golden Knights players formed a heart shape while celebrating. Forward Jonathan Marchessault, who was part of the club from the beginning, gazed above. This image sent an emotional message to the city, symbolising its role as a source of healing for its collective emotions. The picture would be included in AP's annual compilation of the best photographs of the year (Johnson et al., 2024).

The images collected by photographers like Abbie Parr exemplify the strong relationship between sports, fans, storytelling, and visual representation (Huggins, 2008; Kidd, 2013; Johnson et al., 2024). Haynes et al. (2017) see emotional pictures in sports as an essential part of how sports have changed in the modern day. Regrettably, sports photographers are now encountering obstacles in gaining access to venues during competitions, hindering their ability to provide innovative content for the media.

The primitive sports photographs were static and focused on more social aspects of photography, but now, with the advent of technology, photographers can capture many images in motion (O'Mahony, 2019) using GPS, drones, smartphones, or GoPros, allowing more lively photos from the fans to interact with online (Thorpe, 2017). Yet, images with professional compositions attract the attention of sports networks and most social media channels (Li & Xie, 2020). Furthermore, not only does technology affect image capture, but it also influences the nature of sports competitions with winners and losers, which contributes to the image format and composition (Stauff, 2018).

The emergence of visual-centric platforms has transformed the online landscape, making the creation and sharing of visual content in sports an integral part of effective online strategies. One cannot overstate the importance of images in capturing attention, conveying messages, and driving engagement. As online audiences continue to prioritise visual experiences, businesses and content creators must embrace this trend and harness the power of visually compelling content to stand out in the digital realm among athletes, fans, and other sports stakeholders.

2.6 Instagram: Athletes Visual Self Presentation Strategies

Recently, there has been a significant amount of study conducted on the topic of Instagram and its utilisation by sports organisations and athletes. This research has been carried out by several researchers, including Anagnostopoulos et al. (2018), Baena (2019), Santomier et al. (2016), Siguencia et al. (2017), and Toffoletti et al. (2021).

Siguencia et al. (2017) analyzed the effectiveness of Instagram in promoting sports events and engaging fans. It highlighted the importance of visual content in capturing audience attention and the role of Instagram in disseminating real-time updates and interactive content to enhance fan experience. Also, Anagnostopoulos et al. (2018) their study explored how professional team sport organizations use Instagram as a brand management tool. The researchers analyzed the visual content shared by these organizations to understand branding strategies and fan engagement. They found that Instagram serves as a platform for teams to showcase their brand identity, engage with fans, and promote team values.

Additionally the study by Baena (2019) supports the same as the previous researcher as the study investigated the use of Instagram as a marketing tool by professional basketball clubs. The study examined how these clubs utilize Instagram to connect with fans, promote events, and enhance their brand presence. The findings suggest that effective use of Instagram can lead to increased fan engagement and brand loyalty. This further highlights the platform's role in

fostering deeper connections between athletes, sports organizations and their fans through interactive and visually driven content.

As social media continues to evolve, platforms like Instagram have redefined how individuals and organizations communicate and engage with their audiences. Instagram is primarily a visual platform aimed at encouraging engagement with followers via various forms of content such as text, photos, videos, voice notes, and polls (Meta, 2023). Instagram's distinctive nature as a platform is characterised by its use of picture sharing and hash tagging, which sets it apart from other communication platforms. This reflects a certain style and approach to utilising Instagram (Burgess, 2006; Caliandro & Graham, 2020).

Instagram, along with other social media platforms, continues to exhibit a significant growth in followers. This has been attributed to its features that enable users to participate in interpersonal and intercultural interactions (Gonkek & Gencer, 2023).

Celebrities, including athletes, are also active on social media platforms. They use these platforms to engage with their fans and share photos of their daily lives, helping to maintain a connection with them. In the sports world, it is common for organizations to post stories and updates for their fans on social media (Laurell & Söderman, 2018).

In recent times, professional athletes have begun using Instagram as a platform for creating a carefully chosen representation of themselves, interact with their followers, and enhance their own brand image (Gonkek & Gencer, 2023). Instagram is used by both individuals as well as organisations to present a certain image of themselves in a professional and organised manner (Zhou, 2017).

A significant number of athletes in the present-day use Instagram as a platform for worldwide communication with sports stakeholders. They often share professional sports setting content and personal life experiences (Hipke & Hachtmann, 2014). On this platform, several online trends emerge daily, and athletes make a deliberate effort to use and share them to cultivate a harmonious connection with their fans and enhance their significance to them (Korzynski &

Paniagua, 2016). A study by Sadeghi & Leng (2020) on the self-presentation of Iranian football players on Instagram during the 2018 World Cup indicates that the players actively share both personal and professional content, with their posts adapting to the timing of significant events. Additionally The nature of content evolves throughout time, especially in relation to major events such as the World Cup.

Instagram's features provide an environment for renowned athletes to showcase their athletic abilities, attractive appearance, and many aspects of their lives. These visual elements provide them with a competitive edge (Green, 2016).

In their research, Smith and Sanderson (2015) examined how athletes present themselves on Instagram, which emphasises visual content rather than text-based communication. The researchers thoroughly analysed 1,352 images and captions of 31 athletes participating in basketball, football, tennis, track, golf, swimming, baseball, and softball. The findings indicated that 73% of the photographs depicted athletes in their sporting environment, while 7% captured personal moments, and 20% showcased landscapes or meals. 39% of the photographs depicted athletes in group settings, while another 39% showed athletes alone. The findings of this study also indicated that the picture composition mostly featured athletes captured from a considerable distance, whereas selfies were not frequently used (Smith and Sanderson, 2015). In contrast, a survey by Burk and Grimmer (2018) on athletes' self-presentation on Instagram revealed that they display a balance between professional and personal experiences managed by agencies, which are the front and backstage messages. Several studies have examined the photos and content shared by athletes, focusing on how they manoeuvre between front and backstage messages, as previously discussed.

In their research, Song et al. (2018) noted that Instagram users share pictures depicting their personal lives and social circles. Conversely, Gonkek and Gencer (2023) discovered that professional athletes on Instagram predominantly share content linked to their professional endeavours and personal experiences. Notably, these posts tend to receive a higher number of likes and comments compared to other types of content. The athletes see themselves as a brand,

acknowledging the significance of their commercial worth in addition to their performance (Gonkek & Gencer, 2023). The study conducted by Song et al. (2018) demonstrates the athletes' proficiency in handling their Instagram accounts.

Shoda, Antolin, and Vaquilar (2023) conducted a research using content analysis on a sample of 63 professional and 50 recreational Japanese female tennis players. The results revealed significant disparities in the use of self-presentation strategies on Instagram among active and retired tennis professionals, specifically for the subject matter of the photograph, the players' visibility, the composition of the shot, and their facial expressions. Additionally, it's noteworthy that the majority of common shots featured a wider, full-body composition, while selfies were less popular due to their inability to fully capture athletic performance and skills (Shoda et al., 2023). Utilising self-presentation strategies assists in preserving the connection between athletes and their fans, as well as their relationships with other stakeholders in the sports industry (Hambrick & Kang, 2014). The strategic approach to managing athletes' online image allows them to increase their number of followers, which in turn attracts sponsors and opens up prospective commercial opportunities. This may have long-term financial implications for athletes even after they retire (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2015; Ning et al., 2024).

Notably, the study conducted by Gonkek and Gencer (2023) found that the athletes shared very few posts about their fans. These posts were carefully chosen and limited in number. This behaviour aligns with Goffman's (1978) theory that individuals who realise that their self-image does not meet societal expectations typically hide those aspects. This becomes evident when an athlete competes for many teams that have a significant number of loyal fans. In such cases, the athlete tends to refrain from sharing content that is directly relevant to their fans, even if such content plays a crucial role in the expansion of their own brand. On top of that, the professional athletes' decision to share non-sports-related images on Instagram indicates their intention to present aspects of themselves that are not often seen by their followers. Fans are familiar with seeing these athletes in action on the pitch and during competitions, but Instagram provides

them with a distinct platform to display other aspects of their lives, offering a unique glimpse into their personal lives (Gonkek & Gencer, 2023). This study by Gonkek & Gencer (2023) also highlights that athletes carefully manage their visual aesthetic, ensuring that their Instagram feeds are visually cohesive and aligned with their desired brand identity. This involves choosing specific filters, color schemes, and visual themes to create a distinctive style. Additionally, captions are used strategically to shape narratives, express personality, and promote values or causes important to the athlete. They also emphasize that visual self-presentation on Instagram is a deliberate and strategic process, where athletes aim to balance professionalism with relatability. This dual approach helps athletes cultivate a strong personal brand, enhance their marketability, and build meaningful relationships with fans and sponsors. The study underscores the growing importance of visual platforms in shaping modern athletes' public personas and influencing their career opportunities both within and beyond sport.

2.7 Differences between Male & Female Athletes' Online Self Presentation

The mass media asserted that sport is mostly seen as a domain for males, where professional male athletes symbolise the values and accomplishments of the athletic world (Wensing & Bruce, 2003). Despite the increase in female athlete participation in sports since the implementation of Title IX in 1972 in the United States, women's sports and female athletes continue to receive minimal media coverage, with the majority of media attention being directed towards male athletes especially during sports events (Kian et al., 2011; Smith & Wrynn, 2013; Cooky et al., 2021). Gender categorisation encompasses two contrasting forms of masculinity and femininity, which have prevailed in the majority of societies (Rosenblum, 2000). Each gender form has several distinct attributes. Masculinity is often linked to traits such as competitiveness, aggressiveness, determination, and risk-taking, while femininity is often connected with qualities like compliance, vulnerability, and reliance (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Observers frequently view female athletes as passive, displaying nonathletic poses such as standing or sitting still. This perception is frequently bolstered by highlighting non-athletic dimensions, such as personal characteristics or familial roles (Pronterotto, 2014).

Nevertheless, some forms of media have the ability to depict female athletes as both pretty and powerful, in a manner that enhances their athletic abilities while embodying the concept of ideal femininity (Bruce, 2016). However, regardless of existing gender stereotypes, there is a noticeable disparity in how the media portrays the power of male and female athletes, as explained by Musto et al. (2017).

Worldwide sports media reinforced the concept of hegemonic masculinity by continually categorising female athletes as inferior to their male counterparts (Bruce, 2016). According to Geurin-Eagleman & Burch (2015), female athletes participate in sports globally at a rate of about 40%, but only about 8% of media coverage focuses on their participation.

Ahmad (2019) reports that women's sports and athletes accounted for a mere 4% of media content in 2019, with women contributing only 12% to sports media. Previous research confirms the inadequate representation of female athletes, likely due to insufficient media attention, prevailing patriarchal systems, and male dominance in certain cultural settings.

UNESCO has emphasised the importance of ensuring that female athletes receive equitable media coverage and attention relative to their male counterparts. UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay has stated that promoting gender equality is a key focus of their work (Nassif and El-Khoury, 2023).

Ponterotto (2014) conducted a corpus-assisted study to investigate the media portrayal of tennis player Maria Sharapova in Italian and English newspapers. The investigation uncovered two obvious media depiction strategies: sexualising Maria Sharapova's body by highlighting her sexual appeal and desirability and presenting her as an innocent little girl rather than an exceptional athlete. Media coverage of female athletes tends to use language that evokes emotions, whereas coverage of male athletes focuses more on their athleticism rather than their physical or personal qualities (Wolter, 2015).

The online brand-building process for athletes is crucial, as explicitly mentioned in the preceding sections. Presenting a genuine sense of self (Hasaan et al., 2018) via visual content, particularly on Instagram, may pose challenges, but it ultimately yields positive results (Li et al., 2021; Doyle et al., 2022).

The subject of how female athletes portray their brand online compared to traditional media coverage has drawn significant interest among researchers (Xu et al., 2024). However, only a few studies have explored athletes' self-presentation on Instagram with regard to gender differences (Smith & Sanderson, 2015; Geurin & Burch, 2015; Gainor, 2017). Therefore, self-presentation is vital to female athletes.

According to Gonkek and Gencer's (2023) research, there has been a recent decline in male dominance in sports, coinciding with an increase in media coverage of female participation in traditionally male-dominated sports. The problem lies in the fact that female sports do not generate the same amount of media attention or interest from fans as those of males (Valenti et al., 2018; Doyle et al., 2021). The level of emphasis placed on female sports differs throughout various nations as a result of the culture and norms prevalent in their communities (Sadeghi et al., 2018). A study conducted by Lobpries et al. (2017), Li et al. (2021), and Doyle et al. (2022) examined the brand identification of female athletes on social media, with a particular emphasis on various online platforms, such as Instagram. Instagram enables female athletes an effective way to connect with a vast number of fans and interact with them on more personal levels compared to traditional media channels (Turková et al., 2021).

Previous study has shown the obstacles and challenges those female athletes have when trying to establish their brand identity, as seen by Lobpries et al. (2018) and Peetz (2019). With the ongoing evolution of social media, athletes are increasingly using self-presentation to effectively manage frontstage and backstage message. Nevertheless, female athletes are more inclined to participate in backstage messages where they reveal a greater extent of their personal lives (Geurin and Burch, 2015).

Both Burch et al. (2014) and Geurin-Eagleman and Clavio (2015) concluded that there were no noticeable gender disparities in self-presentation strategies. Geurin-Eagleman and Clavio (2015) conducted a study to analyse the Facebook posts of male and female athletes. Their findings did not uncover any notable gender discrepancies in how the athletes portrayed themselves online. Nevertheless, several other studies have shown the existence of gender differences in athletes' self-presentation.

Lebel and Danylchuk (2012) examined female and male tennis athletes participating in the US Open tournament by using Goffman's theory. A study revealed that male players directed their attention onto on-pitch performance, whilst females prioritised personal moments to provide a favourable picture of themselves. When analysing the online activities of golfers on Twitter at the Masters, Hull (2014) used a similar methodology. The content analysis examined 895 tweets from a sample of 39 golfers, categorising them based on various aspects of their strategy, both on the frontstage and backstage messages. Shreffler et al. (2016) also conducted a study on the self-presentation of female athletes on Twitter. The study revealed that these athletes mostly share tweets related to sports settings, specifically focusing on their athletic achievements.

In their study, Bae et al. (2023) examined the social media behaviour of six Korean LPGA golfers in relation to how they present themselves. The researchers discovered that photographs showcasing the athletes' everyday life and personal experiences garnered more comments and likes compared to photos related to sports and business.

Xu and Armstrong (2019) conducted a study where they examined the self-presentation of Chinese and US athletes on social media. They discovered that female Chinese players tend to share fewer posts linked to sports settings compared to their male counterparts. An investigation looked at Chinese athletes' self-representation on Sina Weibo, a popular Chinese platform. The results revealed that female athletes typically exhibit more reserved behaviour in their photographs (Ni and Liu, 2020), aligning with the findings of Emmons and Maharski's 2014 Facebook research.

Recently, the study conducted by Gonkek and Gencer (2023) corroborated the research of Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2015), indicating that female athletes tend to share more about their personal lives on Instagram compared to their male counterparts. One possible explanation, as clarified by Sun (2008), is that women get pleasure from undertaking many roles in their everyday lives, such as being a mother and pursuing a professional job, and they take pride in demonstrating their ability to successfully manage these diverse responsibilities. Gonkek and Gencer (2023) found that male athletes are more inclined to share content that highlights their athletic appearance. In addition, Kane et al. (2013) discovered that female athletes want more emphasis on their athletic accomplishments rather than their femininity from both their fans and the sports media. These findings are consistent with research conducted in 2015 by Smith and Sanderson. The study analysed the Instagram posts of 27 elite athletes and compared them to male athletes who tend to focus on showcasing their muscles or chests and prefer more revealing clothing. The results suggest that male athletes demonstrate their masculinity by intentionally showcasing their bodies as a genuine means of self-expression (Smith and Sanderson, 2015; Ni and Liu, 2020). Female athletes are less likely to share sexually suggestive content about their athletic looks due to the effect of social norms and cultural background on how females present themselves (Gonkek and Gencer, 2023).

The research conducted by Shoda, Antolin, and Vaquilar (2023) reveals noteworthy results indicating that female tennis players, whether professional or recreational, like to share sport-setting photographs on social media platforms. These photos mostly convey front-stage messages rather than backstage ones. In addition, Aria et al. (2014) argue that featuring postings in a sports environment is crucial for establishing a powerful brand. The research conducted by Shoda, Antolin, and Vaquilar (2023) indicates that female athletes are enhancing their online self-presentation strategies. Moreover, they have greater control over social media platforms, projecting an image filled with power and resilience. Female athletes prioritise their athletic performance over being sexualised or objectified. They aim to be recognised primarily as

athletes, with their gender being of secondary importance (Kane, LaVoi, and Fink 2013; Smallwood, Brown, and Billings 2014; Santarossa et al. 2019; Shoda et al., 2024).

Another aspect unrelated to gender differences in self-presentation methods online is the impact of major sports events such as the Olympic Games (Ning et al., 2024). The research conducted by Ning, Miao, and Wang (2024) investigated the online behaviour of Western athletes during the Olympic games. The findings revealed that these athletes tend to project a favourable image when their results are good. Nevertheless, Chinese athletes who do not achieve success take a more proactive approach to cultivating online fan engagement. Furthermore, the results of this research suggest that winning a gold medal result in a significant increase in the frequency of video posting, and there was no significant gender disparity in this regard.

One of the examples of prominent female athletes that people have acknowledged is Megan Rapinoe, a participant in the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup, as an exemplary and self-assured woman who serves as a role model. She is known for advocating for her beliefs and ensuring their representation on the internet (Turtiainen, 2022). Rapione portrays herself on Instagram as someone with a strong sense of self-worth and self-acceptance. She encourages her followers to express their thoughts with confidence and assertiveness. Her intention to challenge conventional gender norms is evident in her choice of purple short hair, which defies societal expectations of femininity across many cultural contexts (Turtiainen, 2022). Rapione effectively portrays herself on Instagram by striking a harmonious balance between originality and authenticity. She deliberately shares materials that is relevant to her sporting career while also offering glimpses into her personal life (Turtiainen, 2022). Megan Rapinoe's case serves as evidence that the portrayal of female athletes in the media has improved in the past five years, particularly during the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup in France. Female athletes reshaped public perception during this event, garnering media and press attention for their remarkable athletic achievements (Turtiainen, 2022).

In Arab nations, including Middle Eastern countries, female athletes can feel inferior to male athletes in media coverage as much as in Western countries (Joudah, 2022; Koa & Issa, 2023). Research on Muslim women has examined how societal limitations hinder the development of their brand (Sadeghi et al., 2018; Hussain and Cunningham, 2022). These limitations include their clothes, including the hijab (Cox et al., 2017; Hamzeh, 2017; Mostafa, 2023), and the burkini (Sykioti and Stavrou, 2019). These limitations impact how they show themselves and how the media portrays them (Pfister, 2010; Samie and Sehlkoglou, 2015). It is crucial for sports stakeholders, such as the media, fans, and sponsors, to comprehend these cultural obstacles to understand the challenges faced by female athletes and effectively build on their experiences (Toffoletti and Palmer, 2017). Nevertheless, the exploration of these societal obstacles and branding potential has been inadequately addressed, indicating the need for more investigation (Koa & Issa, 2023). Islam supports participation in sports from a religious perspective due to its positive impact on physical well-being. Therefore, the challenges faced by female athletes mostly stem from societal factors. Arab female athletes have persistent cultural obstacles, irrespective of their religious affiliation, which may provide a problem when developing brand-building strategies, both visually and digitally (Ziaee et al., 2023).

Given that media coverage plays a crucial role in sports and athletes' presentations (Frederick & Clavio, 2015), Arab female athletes are increasingly leveraging social media for promotion. They aim to counterbalance the lack of attention they receive from mainstream media due to their gender and nationality (Koa & Issa, 2023). Additionally, most media producers or broadcasters portray female athletes' bodies as sex objects and commodities (Joudah, 2022), and this has become a dominant interpretation surrounding female athletes and their sports (Koa & Issa, 2023). Female athletes in the MENA region use social media as a means of empowerment, where they can create more professional meanings for their self-image and overcome any obstacle they might face in their sports path (Koa & Issa, 2023). Since social media platforms now have a large number of followers, communicating through them can be a good step for Arab female athletes, specifically those in the MENA region, to obtain the appropriate

representation in the media (Koa & Issa, 2023). In the study by Koa and Issa (2023), it appeared that Arab female athletes' self-presentation focuses more on displaying their personality characteristics, family, and social lives, whereas male athletes focus more on nationalist content. Furthermore, Arab females were more active than males, with 12% of their captions on events, parties, and occasions compared to 7% of males. However, in the above study, Arab female athletes did not succeed in empowering themselves through online content, and this failure might be due to cultural aspects.

In the study conducted by Ahmad and Thrope (2020), it was observed that Muslim and Arab female athletes actively share personal content online, make efforts to maintain a strong online presence, employ online branding techniques while considering potential challenges they may encounter (Toffoletti and Palmer, 2017; Hussain and Cunningham, 2022), and take caution in deciding what to post due to religious and cultural considerations, as well as the risk of online abuse and bullying from their followers. Based on the prior studies by the researchers that were presented, it is evident that there is a gender disparity in the way athletes express themselves visually. Most studies indicate that female athletes are more likely to share personal moments with family and friends on social media, whereas male players prefer to share more photographs linked to sports settings. While gender disparities may vary among countries, competitions, and cultural contexts, gender remains a significant factor in determining the content athletes choose to share on their online platforms (Ahmad and Thrope, 2020). The preceding paragraphs illustrated a variety of disparities in male and female self-presentation online, particularly within Western and Chinese contexts. The circumstances in Egypt closely resemble those of Arab and Muslim women; yet, this has not been thoroughly studied, making this study both timely and significant. The subsequent section will give insights into Egyptian culture and the differences in male and female online self-presentation, corroborated by expert statements.

2.8 Egyptian Athletes Visual Self-Presentation on Instagram

Recently, the sports industry in Egypt has experienced significant growth, with numerous major sporting events being hosted in the country. Additionally, Egypt will have a record-breaking number of 141 athletes participating in the 2024 Paris Olympics, marking the highest participation rate in the country's history (egyptianolympics, 2024). Only well-known players like Mohamed Salah who play for international teams widely reflect the growth of this phenomenon in Egypt in their self-presentations; otherwise, it is not apparent. The online self-presentation of athletes compounds some challenges and issues, including the ongoing gender inequality in academia (Xu et al., 2024). Unfortunately, the researcher faced constraints in locating prior works within the Egyptian context of this particular research area.

During a discussion with Marwan Hesham, the Sports Marketing Manager of a well-known sports club in Egypt and the Middle East, who formerly served as the Sport Marketing Manager at Red Bull. Marwan emphasised the significance of brand image for athletes, regardless of their on-field performance or the number of medals they have achieved. He further highlighted the crucial role of a robust online brand image and the significant changes due to the flourishing sports business in Egypt over the last five years. The Egyptian athletes now realise the significance of their brand image and its substantial exposure, but they fail to see its relevance in marketing and commercial aspects. Certain Egyptian athletes need guidance due to their lack of expertise and financial resources. The significance of athletes' brand image extends beyond their sports performance, influencing consumer behavior and brand partnerships. According to Lu (2023), athletes' achievements make them national symbols, and their personal style and image can establish a brand image in consumers' eyes, impacting consumer behavior and brand associations.

Marwan highlighted that in Egypt, team sport athletes have more media exposure and endorsement opportunities compared to individual sports. This is attributed to the massive fan base and viewership of team sports. Managing the brand image of individual athletes is

comparatively simpler. Recently, several Egyptian athletes engaging in individual sports have been excelling, particularly in the Olympic games.

Finally, he addressed the gender difference between Egyptian male and female athletes in image portrayal online. While working for Red Bull, he interacted with athletes of both genders and saw that male athletes are more receptive to the concept of showcasing their online persona, in contrast to their female counterparts. Despite facing cultural constraints and limitations, Egyptian female athletes can actively shape their brand image. They may maintain a strong presence by embracing their real selves, even in the face of societal expectations and cultural standards. Additionally, Naber's (2023) research indicates that women in conservative countries often conceal aspects of their identity online to protect their privacy, which can reduce interaction and affect their online brand image. But also utilising social media enables women to constructively challenge and question cultural and societal preconceptions and biases (Ahmad and Thorpe 2020; Kavasoglu and Koca 2022). Marwan's previous statements are consistent with the conclusions of Ning et al. (2024). According to their research, social media offers female athletes' notable benefits, allowing them to gain the recognition they deserve and have control over how they are portrayed. They can emphasise their athletic abilities and femininity, in contrast to how the sports media typically depicts them.

Having a strong online presence and interactivity depends on how athletes will deal with the society limitations and the challenges. At the end of the day, the athlete's personality and character plays a big role in their brand and all they need to do is to make it a habit in their day-to-day routine which is to have a unique online presence and engage with the fan to maintain a strong long-term connection.

2.9 Gap of Knowledge in the Egyptian Sports Context

Expanding on the existing context, the exploration of online brand image of athletes using imagery has gained significant attention in academic research. However, there is a lack of comprehensive investigation in various contexts, particularly in the Arab world and the Middle

East region. This knowledge gap presents an opportunity for further exploration and understanding.

While several studies have examined the use of social media in sports, it is noteworthy that the Thesis focus has primarily been limited to the Egyptian context. Therefore, One of the key methodological approaches employed in this study is interviews, which were conducted with a representative from each of the three leading sporting agencies in Egypt. These interviews aimed to provide in-depth insights into industry practices related to sports and digital marketing for Egyptian professional athletes. It is important to highlight that only three major firms dominate the sports and digital marketing sector in Egypt, serving as the primary intermediaries between professional athletes and sponsorship or branding opportunities. As a result, engaging with representatives from these firms ensured that the study captured a comprehensive and authoritative perspective on the industry, reflecting the realities of athlete representation, brand management, and digital engagement within the Egyptian sports landscape.

This narrow scope highlights the need for broader research encompassing other countries in the Arab world and the Middle East. By doing so, a more comprehensive understanding of the online brand image of athletes in this region can be obtained.

During a discussion between the researcher and Hussein Zakzouk, the CEO of a prominent sports marketing agency in Egypt, it became apparent that there is a continuous need for exploration and improvement in digital media practices and online strategies. Hussein emphasised that agencies, athletes, and sports clubs in Egypt still face challenges in effectively utilising these approaches due to a limited understanding and expertise in the domain. Hussein further explained that while the job of implementing digital practices is not inherently difficult, it requires a nuanced comprehension of the distinctive features of sports in Egypt, the characteristics of the fans, and the overall Egyptian culture. This understanding is crucial for developing effective online brand image strategies that resonate with the target audience.

In addition to the existing research gap, there is also a practical gap that needs to be addressed. This practical gap signifies an opportunity for academic research to contribute to the

development of the field and enhance the digital practices of Egyptian athletes, whether they operate independently or through sports marketing agencies. Bridging this practical gap can lead to better utilisation of online platforms, increased engagement with fans, and improved brand image for athletes in the Egyptian sporting landscape.

In conclusion, while some research has explored the online brand image of athletes using imagery, there remains a significant gap in understanding in the Arab world and the Middle East region, especially in the Egyptian context. The insights shared by Hussein Zakzouk highlight the need for further research and practical advancements in digital media practices and online strategies. By addressing these gaps, academics and professionals can collaboratively enhance the digital presence and brand image of Egyptian athletes, contributing to the growth of the sports industry in the region.

2.10 Other Communication research areas excluded from this Thesis

Athletes' visual representation has been the subject of numerous prior studies from a variety of perspectives, which this Thesis did not present. Studies have investigated how media outlets frame athletes, their portrayal, and how this interpretation influences fans' perceptions of them. The media consistently serves as the primary platform for presenting anything or anyone, and emotions and propaganda significantly influence this. This Thesis, however, does not focus on how the media frames the athletes, but rather on how the athletes use their online platforms to position and portray their online image.

Visual presentation via pictures was sometimes analysed using semiotics to comprehend the compositions and the construction and imagery used, which is very significant. Although recognising the significance of this aspect, it diverts attention from the main purpose of this research, which is to create a social media strategy including specific goals and a customised content plan for each athlete.

Lastly, previous research has examined the sexualisation of the pictures shared by athletes and their clothing, but this was excluded from the analysis within this study since the Egyptian athletes are grounded in cultural and religious norms that won't make this aspect relevant.

2.11 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of prior research on Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory and its significance in developing online strategies for athletes' brand image on social media. Previous research has examined the use of self-presentation methods on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. However, these studies have also highlighted the importance of using Instagram, as it enables athletes to enhance their online image via visual content and its distinctive attributes. Furthermore, the research revealed the disparities in self-presentation between male and female athletes based on gender. While a number of research studies did not find any significant differences between genders, the bulk of investigations demonstrated the large disparities that exist between them, both in Western and non-Western nations. Ultimately, this chapter ends by examining the Egyptian context and the importance of self-presentation methods among athletes. The next chapter will outline the research methodology used to investigate the visual self-presentation strategies used by Egyptian athletes on Instagram.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methods of research employed in this Thesis, as well as the analytical approaches utilised to examine how Egyptian male and female athletes employ visual self-presentation strategies on Instagram to effectively showcase their image to their fans and sports stakeholders. This chapter offers a thorough description of the research method and the chosen sample size for this investigation. Moreover, it clarifies the many stages of data collecting and development, closing with an examination of the ethical considerations associated with the study methods.

For smooth reading, the researcher starts by presenting a summary of the study design, subsequently accompanied by a figure (figure 3.1) illustrating the different phases of data collection. Following that, the author examines each data gathering method, first with visual content analysis, which encompasses details on the size of the sample, coding processes, and afterwards, the process of analysing interviews. Finally, the chapter concludes with a comprehensive explanation of ethical issues.

3.2 Research Design

The research methodology employed in this Thesis is exploratory research, utilising mixed methods research that includes visual content analysis and semi-structured interviews where qualitative content analysis (QCA) is used to categorise the data in a qualitative manner, while the analysis of data frequencies is conducted quantitatively as described by Mayring (2019). Exploratory research design typically involve delving into the phenomenon (Mayring, 2019). Marketing areas utilise exploratory research designs to gain a deeper understanding of a topic and generate additional insights, to collect information rather than data as it is (Aithal and Aithal, 2023). The primary focus is on the examination, comparison, assessment, and interpretation of existing knowledge rather than the generation of new knowledge. Its purpose

is to facilitate improved decision-making by providing newly formulated suggestions and recommendations (Aithal and Aithal, 2023).

This study employed mixed-methods research, utilising two core approaches to gather data and analyse the visual self-presentation strategies utilised by Egyptian male and female athletes on Instagram to effectively convey their images to fans and sports stakeholders.

Mixed-methods research seeks to maintain a balance between diverse methodologies, to enhance the strengths of each methodology simultaneously. Mixed methods research is formally defined as “the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The objective of integrating several methodologies is not primarily focused on verification, but rather on enhancing comprehension in a more profound and meaningful manner (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004).

Content analysis can determine the frequency of a photograph's usage, but it yields only the count of occurrences. Hence, researchers propose that restricting their studies to a singular methodology would result in a lack of significance in some findings (Geurin, 2017).

Qualitative research is a prevalent study approach in the field of social sciences (Saldaña, 2011). Data can comprise several types of information, such as textual materials, e.g., interviews, papers, and fieldnotes or visual materials, including images, videos, and Internet content (Saldaña, 2011). According to Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005), content analysis is a systematic and replicable method for analysing content, both written and visual. Visual content analysis is considered a subtle method as it involves consuming and studying photographs after they have been taken and posted online (Riffe, Lacy, and Fico, 2005). Although there has been extensive research on the representation of athletes through textual self-presentation, the research focused on better understanding visual self-presentation is limited (e.g., Lebel and Danylchuk, 2012). The study analyses photographs posted on Instagram by ten professional Egyptian athletes, divided equally between males and females—100 images per athlete, resulting in 1,000 photographs. This is the analysis of the image content. As for the interviews, nine semi-

structured interviews were conducted with three Egyptian experts and six professional athletes, evenly divided between males and females. The three Egyptian professionals are the only representatives of sports and digital marketing agencies in Egypt.

A previous study similar to this Thesis by Green (2016) employed semi-structured interviews with ten international rugby union players for the primary data. These interviews focused on how the players use social media to shape their personal brands. The secondary data triangulated interview findings with an analysis of 1,034 social media posts from the players' Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts. The research design effectively combined qualitative interviews with social media content analysis, using both thematic and grounded theory methods to analyse how athletes strategically build their brands online.

The forthcoming section 3.3 will provide a comprehensive explanation of the data collecting phases, demonstrating the precise execution of the study methodology.

3.3 Data Collection Phases

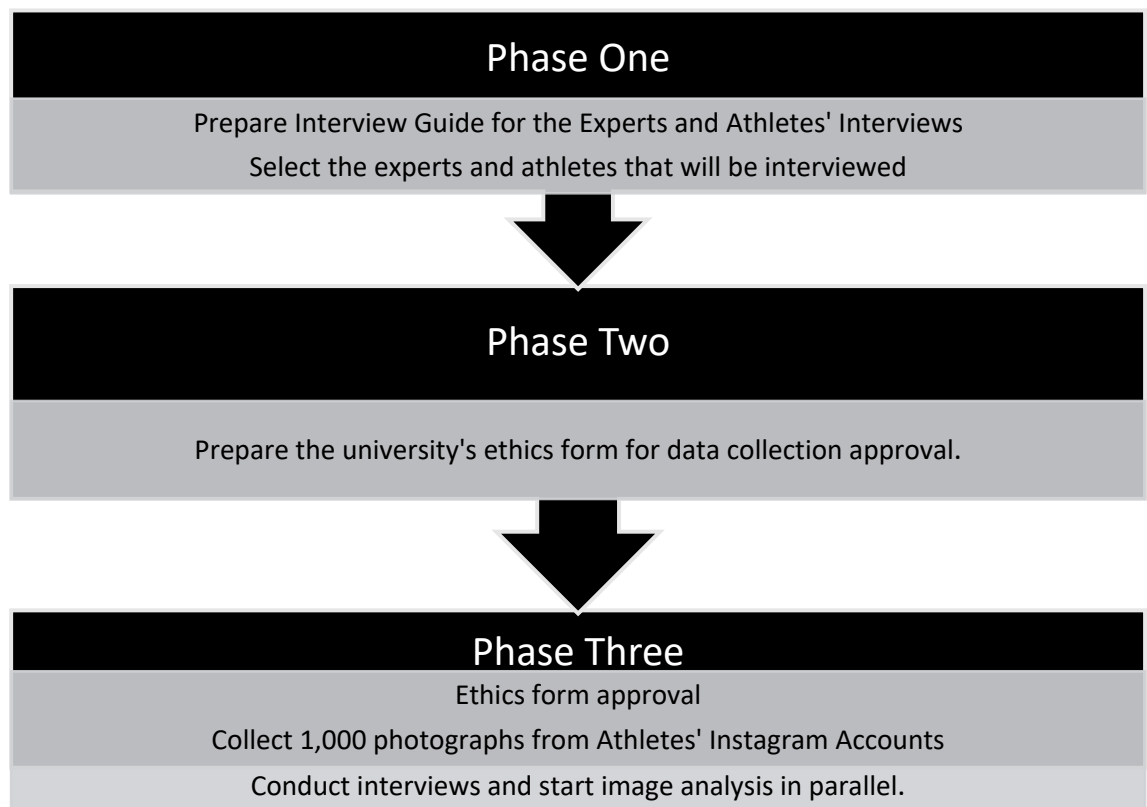


Figure 3.1 – Data Collection Phases

3.3.1 Phase One

The first phase started with the creation of questions for the interview guide to conduct the semi-structured interviews with experts and athletes. The procedure began with an in-depth review of previous qualitative studies in the same study area. Following that, the research objectives and questions were developed. In addition to the prior review of comparable studies, the creation of the interview questions was based on the coding scheme for the visual content analysis of the images, grounded in the self-presentation theory by Goffman (1959) and its application on social media, detailed in section 3.5.2, which aided in creating of the questions for the semi-structured interviews.

The next phase entailed selecting the candidates for the interview. Accessing and interviewing experts relied on the only renowned sports and digital marketing agency in Egypt, only three agencies that manage elite players and sports teams in the country.

Regarding professional athletes, The process of selecting for professional athletes was long due to frequent alterations in their strict game schedules and availability. Six professional athletes, evenly divided by gender, were interviewed.

3.3.2 Phase Two

The second phase started by drafting the ethics form, which was required by the university as a prerequisite for starting the data-gathering procedure. Consequently, the researcher had to make further adjustments to the form based on the directions provided by the PhD supervisor and the ethics committee. Section 3.7 below elaborates on and expands the ethical considerations and risks.

3.3.3 Phase Three

The third phase started with the ethics form approval by the university, this enabled the commencement of the data collection process by gathering 1,000 images from the Instagram accounts of professional athletes. The researcher evenly distributed the 1,000 photos, allocating

500 to males and 500 to females. The selection of the athletes was based on the highest number of followers and the popularity of the sport in Egypt. The process took a period of time in order to amass this substantial quantity of images. The selection of photographs was not limited to a specific timeframe or event. Instead, all images were collected in April 2023, with the goal of obtaining 100 images per athlete. To ensure consistency, the photographs were gathered on a single day for each athlete.

The interviews were done simultaneously with the collection of the photographs. Subsequently, the analysis of the photographs proceeded immediately, while the interviews were still ongoing. In the upcoming section 3.3, there will be a concise summary of the methods for collecting data and analysis utilised in this study. This will be followed by sections 3.4 and 3.5, which will provide detailed explanations of each method and analysis used.

3.4 Summary of Data Collection Methods and Analysis Employed

The first method in the mixed methods approach involves conducting visual content analysis by examining photographs to collect insights and findings on how athletes employ visuals as an element of their online strategy. The image analysis relied on coding dimensions for the photos, which were adjusted based on prior research and the preliminary study. The second method involved conducting semi-structured interviews with experts and professional athletes. This method is crucial for obtaining valuable information from both parties, allowing for an in-depth examination and a more profound comprehension of the online strategies employed by experts in managing athletes, as well as the athletes themselves. By examining the self-presentation theory in the context of sports communication in Egypt, one may achieve a thorough comprehension of its application.

3.5 Image Analysis

3.5.1 Sample Size

The most closely related prior studies to the work in this Thesis which utilised visual content analytics analysed a sample size of 100 photographs, involving 8 athletes, resulting in a total

of 800 images. The selection of athletes was based on their biggest number of followers, as demonstrated by Geurin-Eagleman & Burch (2015) and Clavio & Eagleman (2011).

This study used a purposive sampling method to choose a sample of ten athletes (five males and five females) from various sports who possess the largest Instagram following and according to the most popular and most viewed sports in Egypt which includes both team and individual sports.

Purposive Sampling (also called judgmental sampling) involves the intentional selection of participants based on specific characteristics that align with the study's objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). Researchers use their judgment to choose individuals who best provide relevant information for the research topic.

The study involved collecting and categorising one hundred photos from each participant, resulting in a cumulative total of 1,000 images among the 10 athletes. The selection period for the photographs was not restricted to a particular timeframe or event; all images were

Table 3.1 Sport represented in the Image Content Analysis

Male Athletes No.	Sport	No. of followers	Female Athletes No.	Sport	No. of followers
1	Football	64.5 M	1	Swimming	244 K
2	Football	9.6 M	2	Squash	237 K
3	Handball	445 K	3	Table Tennis	147 K
4	Handball	169 K	4	Basketball	130 K
5	Squash	2.1 M	5	Karate	54.3 K

gathered in April 2023, with the aim of obtaining 100 images per athlete, all collected on a single day to maintain consistency.

The athletes in this research represent a total of seven sports, consisting of three team sports and four individual sports. The sports illustrated in Table 3.1 features both male and female athletes.

3.5.2 Coding Procedures

The protocol for the coding procedure was developed based on the adaptation of the coding schemes for image content of Goffman's (1976) content analytic investigations of visual media (Clavio & Geurin-Eagleman, 2011), athletes' online visual self-presentations (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Pegoraro, 2010), and Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2016).

For this presented project the coding protocol, as shown in Table 3.2, involves six phases. The first of which is categorising the main content of the photo, represented in the posted photograph, examining the elements of composition within the shot, and ultimately communicating the emotions that the posted photographs want to express about this athlete. Furthermore, the code contained essential details such as a photo caption, the compatibility of the caption with the photographs, user tags, and a hashtag. Significantly, a dimension was only included in the primary content coding for females since it was highly noticeable and absent in the photographs of male athletes. This dimension relates to material associated with supporting causes and engaging in charitable activities.

Table 3.2 below includes the details of the coding scheme

Main Content of the photo (6 items)	Classification
Relating to athlete personal life	Any photo that refers to their personal life: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• daily routines• weather• party reference• charity work• family life
Relating to athlete business life	Any photo that relates to their business life: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• training• traveling• game preparations

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting products
Relating to athlete sport	<p>Any photo directly relates to their sport but not directly related to them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • other games in their league • college or minor-league games of the same sport • equipment • large events that take place in this sport and do not include the athlete
Other sport or athlete	<p>Any photograph that refers to another sport or athlete. Aside from athletes, any references to coaches, general managers, owners, or broadcasters from other sports are applicable to this category.</p>
Reposting photo/content originally posted by fans	<p>Any posts to comments their fans or non-fans have sent them, plus responses to spouses or family members and sports journalists.</p>
Pop culture/ Landmark focused photo/ Internet Meme	<p>Any photos on pop culture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV show • movie • musician or group • actor or actress • politician • famous landmark
Photograph Components (8 items)	Classification
Sizes of athletes in photos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • single photo <p>the picture in which the athlete is depicted in the usual or regular size.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bigger than others <p>The more exaggerated picture depicts the athlete attracting particular attention because of their unusual and striking appearance or behaviour.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • as big as others <p>the picture in which the athlete appears as big as other individuals captured.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller than others <p>the picture in which the athlete appears further from perspective.</p>
Clothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniform • No uniform
Posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal <p>the picture depicts the athlete in a normal stance, not arched or sitting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cause knee/body arched <p>the picture depicts the athlete in a stance whose body is arched or whose knee is posed.</p>
Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive • neutral • negative • no face in view

Photo types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selfie <p>A picture of an athlete in which the athlete and photographer are the same. Signs of a selfie consist of arms extended to hold on the device in front of the athlete's face, a close-up picture of the face, or a mirror's reflection of the athlete carrying a camera.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headshot <p>A photograph that features the athlete's head.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Half body <p>A photograph features the athlete's body parts, such as the torso and thighs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full body <p>A photograph that features the athlete's entire body.</p>
The focus of photos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athlete in focus <p>The image that focuses on the athlete mainly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athlete not in focus <p>The photo focuses on a person rather than the athlete, such as a family member or a friend.</p>
Text in Photo	Availability of any texts, graphics design in the photographs.

The researcher employed quantitative analysis to code photographs, examining the frequency of each given picture as part of the process. In chapter four, a detailed presentation of the outcomes of the analysis of the image coding frequencies, expressed as numerical values and percentages, will be discussed in greater details.

3.6 Interviews Analysis

3.6.1 Sample Size

Existing qualitative research studies utilised semi-structured interviews with a sample size ranging from six to eight interviews conducted with athletes (Gökmen et.al, 2024). One study examined the perspectives of elite female athletes about their use of new media. The study involved conducting six athletes and stopped after a saturation point was reached (Geurin, 2017). A Saturation occurs when redundancy is observed in responses, meaning that new interviews or data sources yield little to no novel information (Mason, 2010). It is an essential criterion for ensuring that data collection is sufficient and that the study findings are robust and comprehensive. This concept is widely used to determine the adequacy of sample sizes in qualitative studies, particularly in interview-based research (Guest et.al, 2006).

According to Gratton and Jones (2004), small samples can yield abundant data with significant insights and conclusions, but big samples may encounter drawbacks when they approach a saturation threshold.

It was also noted by Wimmer and Dominick (2006) that studies that utilise in-depth interviews employ small samples, which enables researchers to obtain more profound insights and data on the interviewee's experiences, perspectives, and emotions.

The researcher employed purposive sampling and conducted nine semi-structured interviews in this study. Experts from sports marketing agencies specialising in sports digital marketing practices were interviewed for half of the interviews, while the other half involved six professional athletes, with an equal distribution between males and females.

The experts represent the only three sports marketing companies responsible for managing the branding of professional athletes in Egypt. The interviews with the six athletes represent four team sports: football, handball, basketball and volleyball. The sports practiced by both male and female athletes interviewed are illustrated in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Sport represented in the athletes Interviews.

Male Athletes No.	Sport	Female Athletes No.	Sport
Interview One	Football	Interview One	Football
Interview Two	Handball	Interview Two	Basketball
Interview Three	Basketball	Interview Three	Volleyball

A semi-structured interview guide was created by the researcher prior to the interviews (this is included in the appendix (1) considering the gaps in the literature about athletes' visual self-presentation on Instagram and Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory. This is among the primary studies to examine how Egyptian professional athletes portray themselves visually on Instagram. Initially, a series of general questions were asked to gather information on how athletes use social media in their daily lives. This was followed by specific questions about their social media strategy, goals, and the visual content they post.

The interviews with athletes covered the insights regarding their visual self-presentation online and on Instagram specifically, the athletes represented team sports only as is reflected in table 3.3 above. Insights and findings cannot be generalised to individual sports as well with this limitation of the study being acknowledged. However, the findings will be beneficial in contributing to the effective use of self-presentation theory as it relates to sport communication and digital practices in Egypt and the MENA region and also will provide a deeper understanding to the literature relating to the visual content created by the athletes. It was noted by Auerback and Silverstein (2003) that qualitative research frequently serves as the initial stage in constructing knowledge associated with phenomena.

3.6.2 Thematic Analysis

The obtained data was thematically analysed. NVivo software was used to qualitatively code and analyse the data. Thematic analysis is a “method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 79). This approach is efficient in facilitating a more profound comprehension of narratives and differences within qualitative data approaches, such as interviews, focus groups, and open-ended questions (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

The thematic analysis process is displayed Figure 3.2.

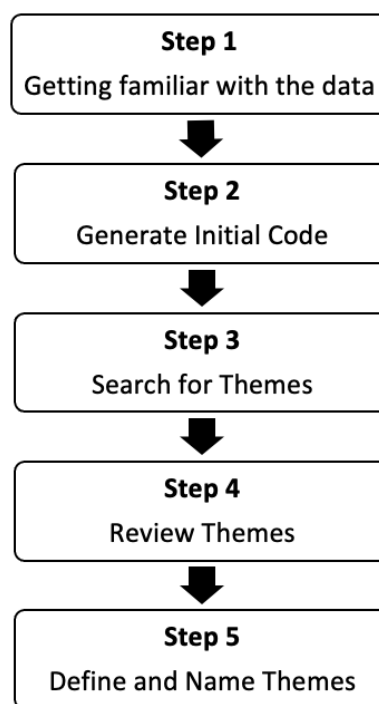


Figure 3.2 – Thematic Analysis Process (Braun & Clarke, 2008)

The thematic analysis started with transcribing the interviews into a Microsoft Word document to gain familiarity with the data. Subsequently, these transcribed files were imported into NVivo for coding and categorisation into identifiable patterns. In this coding cycle, the aim is to create initial codes that may be used to identify specific areas in the transcripts of experts and athletes. These sections should be relevant to the research questions of the study (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The following step is reviewing and categorising the codes into more specific themes. Ultimately, these themes are identified

and labelled to facilitate their comprehensive utilisation in the interview analysis conducted in Chapter 5.

3.7 Ethical Concerns

All studies must address ethical issues, particularly when examining social media practices involving known professional athletes. During the data collection phases as mentioned in section 3.3, researchers are mandated by the faculty to complete an ethical form and have it evaluated by the ethics committee. Townsend and Wallace (2017) discuss the first ethical concern in this study on the privacy of data provided online and the degree to which publicly shared online data is seen as private or public, specifically in the context of social media research. The main argument posits that every individual who utilises social media platforms must consent to a certain set of terms and conditions for each online platform they establish an account on. The terms and conditions include sections that allow third parties, such as researchers to access the user's data (Townsend and Wallace, 2017). In figure 3.3 a Social media Ethics framework used to guide research ethics in this research is displayed.

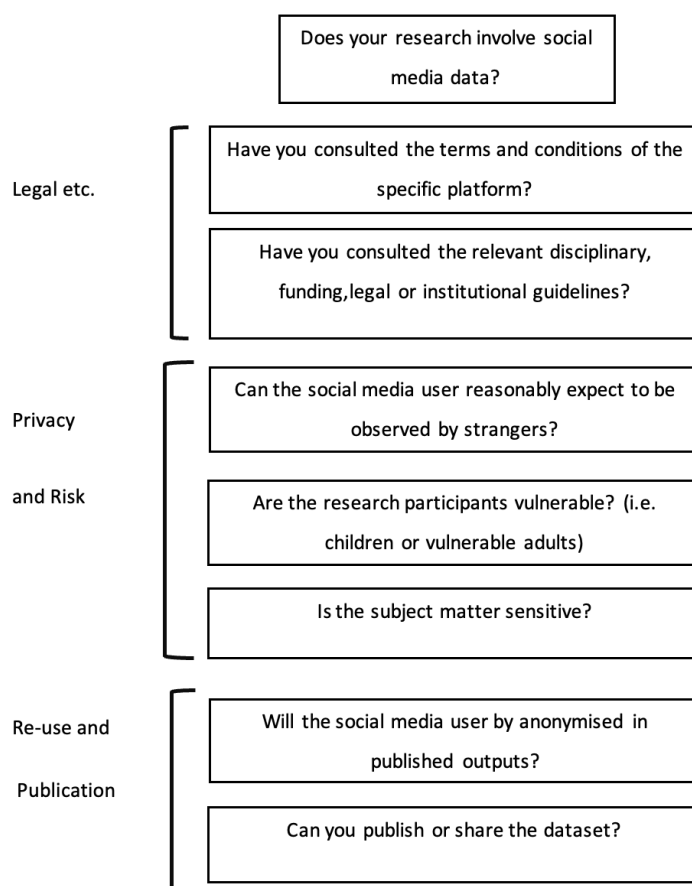


Figure 3.3 – Social Media Ethics Framework (Townsend and Wallace, 2017)

In chapter four, the visual content analysis includes photographs where the athletes' visual identities remain anonymous and their faces are hidden, despite their accounts being public. This is done to eliminate any ethical risk, as most of these athletes are well-known in Egypt and globally. The ethics committee at the faculty granted approval for the online collection of data from athletes' Instagram profiles, since these accounts are already publicly accessible and open for viewing and utilisation by all.

The Thesis extensively addressed multiple issues outlined in the Social Media Ethics Framework by Braun & Clarke (2008), as shown in the mentioned questions. Initially, this paradigm offered a comprehensive comprehension of the challenges and ethical issues that may arise in social media research and directed the researcher on how to address any ethical obstacles.

Another ethical issue must be addressed in qualitative research. Prior to conducting the interviews, it is imperative that every expert and athlete participating in this study give their informed consent. By endorsing the informed consent, both the experts and the professional athletes consent to the research requirements and their involvement in the study, while also reserving the choice of withdrawing their participation and guaranteeing confidentiality (Hendl, 2005). The faculty ethics committee approved this ethical concern, ensuring the non-disclosure of participants' names and identities, particularly due to their prominent status in the sports sector in Egypt and beyond. The research consent form utilised in this study is enclosed in the appendix.

Finally, cyberbullying and negative comments directed towards athletes by their fans are significant ethical concerns, particularly due to the psychological impact they have on the athletes who are exposed to such comments. These comments appear more on Egyptian female athletes, which is considered body shaming or just bullying them for practicing sports. This ethical concern takes place online in any industry, not just sports, and there's nothing much that can be done to prevent its occurrence.

3.8 Summary

In this research, Chapter Three provides an overview of the methodologies and processes used, emphasising the significance of choosing suitable methods to answer the research questions. The research employed a mixed research methodology, using two data gathering methods: visual content analysis of professional athletes' Instagram accounts and semi-structured interviews with experts and professional athletes. Furthermore, the chapter included a comprehensive explanation of the sample selection for both research methodologies, as well as the procedures for data collection and analysis for each respective approach. The forthcoming chapters, namely four and five, will present the analysis of the data to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the collected materials. This analysis will be further discussed in chapter six, where the findings will be linked to the research objectives and objectives.

Chapter 4 Visual Content Analysis of Athlete Self-Presentation on Instagram

4.1 Introduction

As outlined in Chapter Three, the data collection strategy included visual content analysis of athlete photographs posted on Instagram to gain an understanding of approaches taken to self-presentation on social media platforms. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the key findings of the photographic analysis of online data collected through Instagram. Visual content analysis was performed according to the coding scheme which was developed based on previous studies as stated in Chapter Three, focused on the content analytic investigations of visual media (Clavio & Geurin-Eagleman, 2011) and athletes' online visual self-presentation (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Pegoraro, 2010). The coding scheme was based on the photographic content of Goffman (1976) and approaches of previous research by Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2016).

The coding classification used for visual content analysis of the photographs was divided into eight main coding dimensions as follows: General Information, Main Photograph Content, Clothing, Photo Composition, Posture, Photo Types, Focus of Photos, Emotions. Drawing on the above and for smooth reading of this chapter, Sections 4.2, and 4.3 show the development of the coding scheme and the preliminary study challenges. Sections 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6, then move on to consider the outcomes of the visual content analysis of 1,000 photographs, including a total of 500 photos for the five selected male athletes and 500 photos for the five selected female athletes, equating to 100 photos per athlete with all photos extracted from the athletes Instagram accounts.

When the results from this Chapter are combined with the results from the semi-structured interviews with experts from sports digital marketing agencies and professional athletes (across genders) to be outlined in Chapter 5, this will provide for a discussion of strategy regarding intention, practice and difference towards the end of the Thesis in Chapter 6.

4.2 Preliminary Study

In order to gain an understanding of whether the coding scheme would provide an appropriate tool to answer the research questions within this Thesis, a decision was taken to apply the scheme to a preliminary study with comparable objectives. The preliminary study was designed to explore the self-presentation strategies of female Middle Eastern athletes competing in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Sixteen athletes (from Egypt, Morocco, Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait, Jordan and Alegria) with active Instagram accounts were selected for the preliminary study. Ten sports were represented in the photographs, nine individual sports and one team sport as follows: boxing, golf, swimming, shooting, weightlifting, taekwondo, badminton, karate, tennis, and finally synchronised swimming. The photographs used for this study were limited to a timeframe connected to the timing of the Olympic games, this included one week prior to the pre-launch of the games on July 16th, during the games period (the Tokyo 2020 Olympics commenced on July 23, 2021, and concluded on August 8, 2021), and one week after the Olympic games on August 15th.

The image analysis was completed through a two-stage process with the Thesis researcher and the PhD supervisor coding the collected images separately according to the provided coding framework. Once completed the Thesis researcher and PhD supervisor discussed their coded results, reflections on the framework and the main findings from the study. The findings from this preliminary study are discussed in a separate paper to be published (tandfonline, 2024), but the main observations regarding the coding process and the impact of these on coding images within this Thesis are discussed in the next section.

4.3 Preliminary Study Challenges

It should be noted that the sample size of the preliminary study was relatively small compared to previous research, being 191 photographs across the sixteen athletes. The selection of athletes was also purposive with the athletes identified being the only Arab female Middle Eastern athletes with active Instagram accounts during the Tokyo Olympic games. In previous

studies visual content analytic research, the sample size was 100 photographs for each of eight athletes, resulting in a total of 800 photographs, and the choice of the athletes was based on the highest number of followers (Burch, 2012; Clavio & Eagleman, 2011). The photographs analysed within the preliminary study were a complete collection of all posted images by the selected athletes during the time period selected, so were fully representative of the Olympic Games period, but as a result were a relatively limited total number of images. This limitation is attributed to the restricted online presence and online posts of these female athletes on Instagram, as well as the brief duration of the tournament. In the wider Thesis study, it is recognised that the sample size would need to be larger and that there would be a clear need to think through balance between the athletes and the images collected (e.g. so all athletes are represented by an equal number of images). Accordingly, in the wider study, the sample size is 1,000 photographs of 10 athletes, as stated in Chapter 3.

Furthermore, the preliminary study did not include videos. Whilst videos are used by athletes as a component of their brand, they require a level of difference in terms of the coding framework used. Videos can involve a significant period of engagement with the athlete, can be professionally curated, or items such as moments captured in an event. Whilst these do contribute to the overall brand of the athlete, the Thesis researcher in discussion with their supervisor took the decision not to include video analysis, either in the preliminary study or in the main Thesis approach, primarily given the level of difference in the analysis approach required. On Instagram none of the athletes included in either the preliminary investigation or in the main study utilise video content as their main posted content on the platform.

As a result of the preliminary study there were a number of reflections made on both the coding framework and the choices made over code selection between the two coders.

The coding dimension covering emotions and emotional expression was complicated due to the timing of the games, where pandemic restrictions were still applied, due to the location in Tokyo. Across a range of photographs, face masks worn by athletes limited the potential to be able to more easily read athlete visual signifiers of emotions (e.g. smiles and other facial expressions).

The two coders discussed this issue across the photographs impacted and any potential impact on the wider study taking place at a time and in locations where face masks were less likely to be present, but there could still be some residual evidence of use in the final sample selected. For the wider Thesis study, face masks were worn to some extent, despite the lifting of pandemic restrictions. Certain athletes continued to wear masks, particularly during competition trips outside Egypt when mask-wearing was mandatory. Nevertheless, the majority of the individuals depicted in the final selection of photographs used were not wearing masks, allowing the identification of the athletes' emotions based on their facial expressions, whether they were positive, neutral, or negative. The photographs of athletes wearing masks were coded as 'neutral' due to the lack of obvious or identifiable facial expressions.

Several photographic criteria were excluded from the coding of the analysis of this Thesis.

One of these criteria is 'Breasts/Buttocks' which refers to the photograph in which the breast / genitals/buttocks of the athlete is the main focus or not in the photograph. Another criterion is 'touch' which refers to the action of an athlete using their fingers or hands to trace an item or lightly touch its surface, and this includes the athlete touching their face, hair, or clothing.

These criteria were excluded because they provided limited information of relevance to the main topic under discussion. Although items were included in the preliminary study after discussion of the importance of these items on the research questions and the complexity of the items a decision was made by the researcher to exclude them from the study.

The dual coding process used within the preliminary study was primarily a mechanism of developing the understanding of both coders of the challenges involved in better understanding the self-presentation strategies of athletes through Instagram photographs, it enabled discussion and dialogue regarding differences between the coders and enabled critical reflection on the dimensions explored and their potential to provide a contribution to answering the research questions posed in this Thesis study. For the wider Thesis study, the approach would change to a single coder (by the Thesis author) and a verification of coding decisions (by the Thesis supervisor) through discussion, rather than a dual coding process.

Coming out of the preliminary study was an observation that two additional items could be added to the original coding framework – primarily because whilst present within the preliminary study coding sample they were not originally well captured by the framework. These items were ‘text in photographs’ where the athletes used text and graphic designs within the photo itself and ‘Support of a Cause’, where the photographs indicated that the athletes tended to support different charity or human causes.

Based on the preliminary study findings and the changes that occurred, the researcher adapted the visual analysis to the current study. The following sections include overarching insights drawn from the wider PhD study and outcomes of the visual content analysis of male and female athletes separately.

4.4 General Observation on the visual content analysis

There are some number of general observations regarding the visual content analysis of the 1,000 photographs in the main data sample which are worth making prior to presentation of the detailed results. Some of these observations will be discussed further in Chapter 6 where connections may be made with the results observed from the interviews.

The first observation is that the male athletes within the sample show consistency in their online usage as there is no long-time gap between one post and another, unlike the selected female athletes, who lack online consistency. In addition, unlike female athletes, male athletes make limited use of hashtags connected to their posts.

In conversation with ‘Adel Koriam’ – AFC Media Manager, a second general observation is that for male athletes in Egypt, team sports create fan engagement more than individual sports, especially when it comes to the Egyptian national team. On the other hand, female athletes who play in an individual sport attract more fans, and the reason behind this is that team sports in Egypt, such as football, handball, basketball, and volleyball for males, have greater support from media and federations than female team sports.

It is also very clear that playing for a well-known team creates large differences in the number of followers and fan engagement between athletes. Differences also exist when comparing

athletes who play football to another sport, especially in Egypt, where the most popular sport is football. These observations when combined are one of the reasons which limit the amount of fan engagement and total number of followers that female athletes in Egypt obtain.

The next two sections 4.5 and 4.6, will display the breakdown of the visual content analysis outcomes.

4.5 Outcomes from Instagram Online Photographs - Male Athletes Outcomes

The following tables will demonstrate the outcomes derived from the analysis of 500 photographs of five Egyptian professional male athletes. The results are presented as percentages derived from the photographs of 500 male athletes. Following each section on specific criteria, relevant observations will be provided to explain the meaning behind the significant percentages.

Table 4.1. General Information within the Photographs

Criteria	MA1	MA2	MA3	MA4	MA5	Total	Percentage %
General Information							
Presence of Hashtags	16	1	0	20	55	92	18.4%
Presence of User tags	15	0	3	20	65	103	20.6 %
Presence of Captions	95	70	37	96	100	398	79.6%

Match of	75	52	34	68	96	325	65%
Captions with photos							

Table 4.1 presents the general information regarding the 500 photographs of male athletes, including both the total numbers and percentages. The vast majority of the captions corresponding to the photographs were precise matches for the photographs. However, it is worth noting that 'MA3' had a significantly lower number of recorded captions, with only 37, in contrast to the other four male athletes. This is likely due to the athlete's significant popularity in Egypt and worldwide. It has been observed that such athletes often choose not to include captions, as they believe that posting a photo of themselves alone is sufficient.

In regard to the inclusion of hashtags and user tags, only a minority of male athletes utilise hashtags. They selectively tag other users based on the particular event and the individuals featured in the photograph. Photographs 4.1 feature several examples.



Photographs 4.1 display use of hashtags and user tags by male athletes

The red circles reflect the presence of 'User tags and use of 'Hashtags'

Table 4.2: Main Categories of Photographs

Criteria	MA1	MA2	MA3	MA4	MA5	Total	Percentage %
Main Categories of Photographs							
Personal	15	13	11	12	19	70	14%
Business	9	2	6	5	18	40	8%
Athlete Sport	30	56	36	37	40	199	39.8%
Physical Appearance	2	5	9	1	1	18	3.6%
Other athletes/Sport	15	9	14	11	4	53	10.6%
Reposting Content	0	0	0	1	0	1	0.2%
Landmarks	3	2	7	3	5	20	4%
Athlete Victory	32	10	13	24	18	97	19.4%
Nationalism	7	2	13	3	21	46	9.2%

Table 4.2 presents the main photograph content, categorised into photographs about personal, business, sports settings, physical appearance, other athletes, reposted content, landmarks, victories, and finally photographs about nationalism.

Male athletes commonly post content within their sport-setting context, which may include training, matches, tournaments, and camps. These athletes also post nationalism photographs, which may include holding their national flag, wearing the national team uniform, and winning

championships with the national team, ranking as the second-highest content. Also coming in third in most posted content are photographs that include victories and celebrations that drive large traffic and increase engagement. The type of content that follows the top three items is personal content. Four athletes shared photographs featuring their families, consisting of their parents and children, only ‘MA4’ differed from this with personal content which revolved around personal trips or friends, primarily due to their young age. Reposted photographs from other accounts, landmark scenes, and business content that may include media and sponsor deals are the least posted content. Photographs 4.2 feature some examples.



Photographs 4.2 display Main Photo Content posted by Male Athletes

Table 4.3: Photographs Composition

Criteria	MA1	MA2	MA3	MA4	MA5	Total	Percentage %
Photo Composition							
Single Photo	61	75	69	63	76	344	68.8%

Bigger than others	8	4	3	29	5	49	9.8%
As big as others	17	8	18	3	14	60	12%
Smaller than others	11	5	6	1	5	28	5.6%
Posture							
Normal	29	28	16	29	23	125	25%
Active	38	53	46	46	41	224	44.8%
Passive	28	15	35	22	36	136	19.8%
Head positioned tilted	12	3	11	17	6	49	9.8%
Body position upright	56	53	63	57	64	293	58.6%
Cause knee/Body arched	14	35	24	22	27	122	24.4
Photo Types							
Selfie	11	1	8	2	2	24	4.8%
Headshot	1	5	2	2	2	12	2.4%
Half body	54	23	50	52	40	219	43.8%
Full Body	28	66	37	41	56	228	45.6%
Focus of Photos							
Athlete in Focus	65	85	80	91	84	405	81%

Not in Focus	28	15	20	9	16	88	19%
Clothing							
Uniform	56	85	61	80	73	355	71%
Not in Uniform	42	15	35	20	27	139	29%

Table 4.3 presents the coding related to Photo Composition as categorised into posture, photo types, focus, and the clothing worn within the photograph.

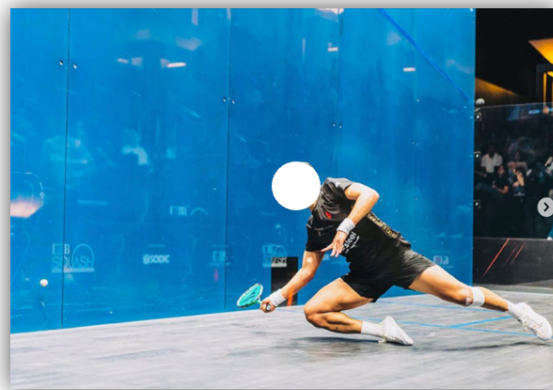
The first observation is that many of the male athletes shared individual photographs of themselves. Male athletes were also less keen on posting photographs where they were not the most prominent individual in the photograph as demonstrated by the 'Smaller than others' coded content. It is important to point out that one of the dimensions of the picture compositions, which is 'bigger than the others', had a much greater number for 'MA4' compared to the others. This finding might be attributed to the athlete's personality and tendency to display himself differently from other items in the photograph, where he tries to attract particular attention because of his unusual and striking appearance or behavior.

Furthermore, a significant proportion of athletes tend to share photographs in which they are captured in an active position while engaging in their respective sports, and in certain instances, their body alignment is upright. When it comes to various types of photos, athletes often have two options: half-body shots, or full-body photographs. Among male athletes, the least common poses are selfies and headshots.

Moreover, most athletes consistently and equally utilised two photo types, namely 'full body' and 'half body'. Among the five athletes, only 'MA2' exhibited a lower utilisation of the 'half body' photo type. This can be attributed to his participation in football, as most of his posted photos capture him in motion or during a match. Consequently, opting for a 'half body' photo composition would not adequately showcase his skills and movement.

Also, 'MA1' displayed a decreased utilisation of the 'full body' photo type due to his involvement in handball, a sport in which goals are achieved by moving the arms and wrists.

Finally, most of the photographs posted by male athletes showed them wearing their sporting uniform. Photographs 4.3 feature some examples.



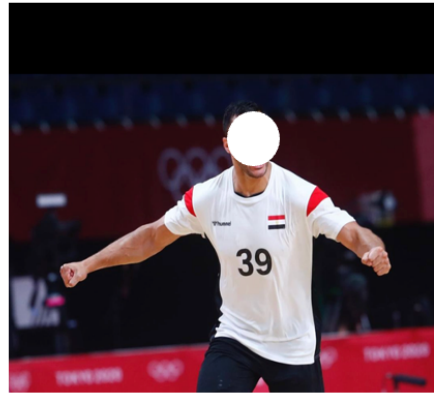
Photographs 4.3 display examples of Photo Composition posted by Male Athletes

Table 4.4: Emotions within Photographs

Criteria	MA1	MA2	MA3	MA4	MA5	Total	Percentage %
Emotions							
Positive	64	35	62	29	46	236	47.2%
Neutral	22	39	16	25	26	128	25.6%
Negative	1	6	7	15	18	47	9.4%
No face in view	6	16	12	27	10	71	14.2%
Text in photograph	10	3	0	8	1	22	4.4%

Table 4.4 presents the division of emotions expressed on the athletes' faces into positive, neutral, and negative emotions. The most expressed emotions on the male athletes' faces are positive emotions, and the least are negative emotions. Male athletes posted 14.2% of photos without the appearance of their faces within the picture.

The last dimension of the photo criteria is the text within the photograph. The percentage is very low among the five male athletes, as they tend to post photographs without any added text or graphic designs. Photographs 4.4 feature some examples.



Photographs 4.4 display emotions and 'no face' photographs by Male Athletes

4.6 Outcomes from Instagram Online Photographs - Female Athletes Results

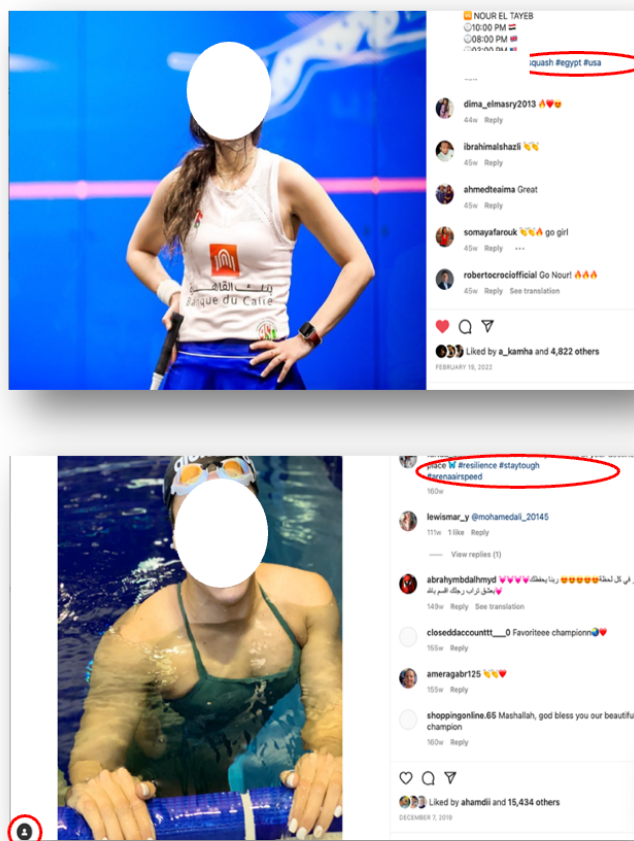
The following tables will demonstrate the outcomes derived from the analysis of 500 photographs of five Egyptian professional female athletes.

Table 4.5: General Information within the Photographs

Criteria	FA1	FA2	FA3	FA4	FA5	Total	Percentage %
General Information							
Presence of Hashtags	90	4	78	0	2	174	34.8%
Presence of User tags	40	10	77	67	29	223	44.6%
Presence of Captions	95	88	100	100	100	483	96.6%
Match of Captions with photos	92	78	99	100	98	467	93.4%

For the female athletes there was less consistency across the criteria in Table 4.5. Two of the female athletes use hashtags regularly as a means of traffic generation. The majority of the female athletes used User tags but again there was a large variation between the athletes.

The majority of the photos analysed had captions and captions which were well-matched with the photos with the percentage of photos being above 90%. Photographs 4.5 reflect some examples.



Photographs 4.5 display use of hashtags and user tags by Female Athletes

The red circles reflect the presence of ‘User tags and use of ‘Hashtags’

Table 4.6: Main Categories of Photographs

Criteria						Total	Percentage
	FA1	FA2	FA3	FA4	FA5		%

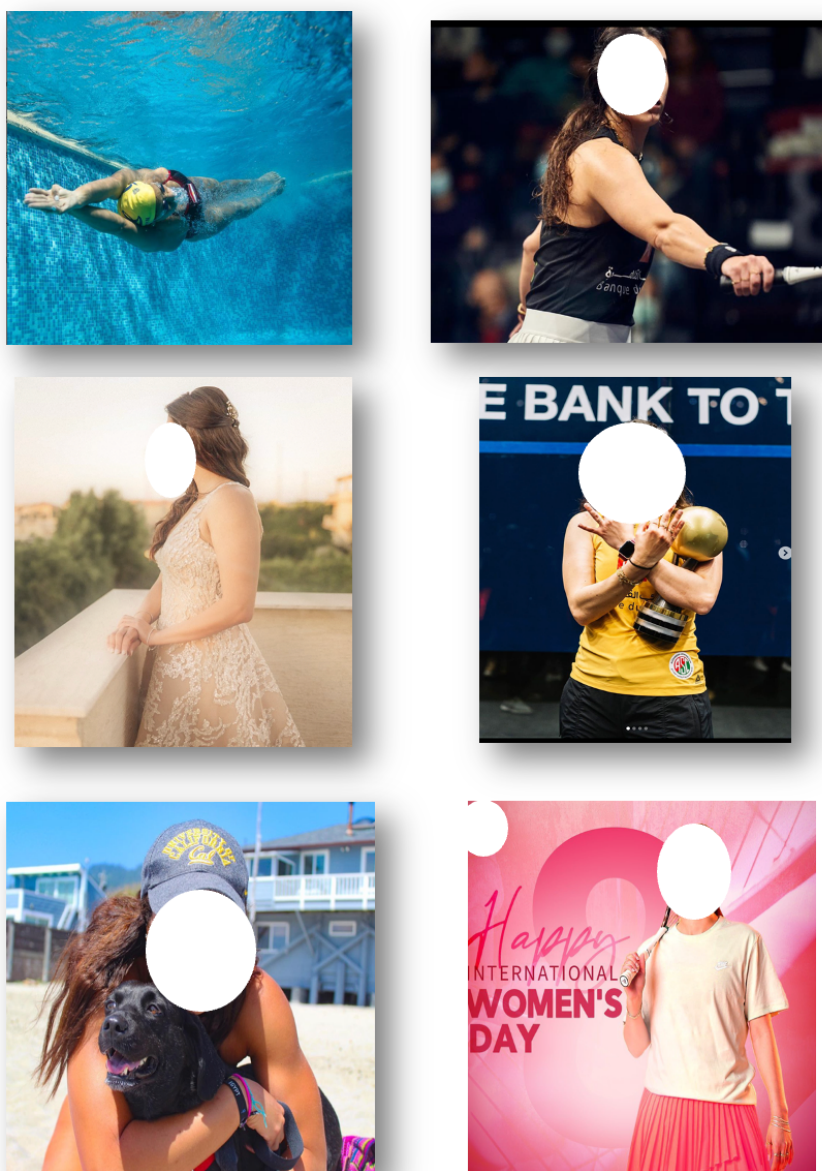
Main Categories of Photographs							
Personal	10	9	32	26	47	124	24.8%
Business	8	4	14	9	5	40	8%
Athlete Sport	60	57	39	28	14	198	39.6
Physical Appearance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Other athletes/Sport	6	1	6	10	2	25	5%
Reposting Content	2	0	0	0	0	2	0.4%
Landmarks	2	8	10	6	5	31	6.2%
Cause Support	4	1	6	1	3	15	3%
Athlete Victory	16	20	4	29	29	98	19.6%
Nationalism	2	6	9	9	5	25	5%

Table 4.6 presents the main photograph content, categorised into photographs about personal, business, sports settings, physical appearance, other athletes, reposted content, landmarks, victories, and finally photographs about nationalism.

The majority of the female athletes sampled frequently post content within the context of their sport, encompassing activities such as training, competitions, tournaments, and camps. The sampled female athletes also post personal photographs, which may feature their family, friends, and special occasions, making it the second most prevalent type of posted content. Photographs depicting wins and celebrations rank third in terms of the amount of content

shared, with four of the five female athletes frequently posting such materials, with this helping to generate traffic, and fostering higher levels of engagement with their followers.

Female athletes tend to refrain from posting certain photographs, namely those that showcase their physical appearance and figure. The least often shared content consists of reposted photos sourced from other accounts, iconic locations, photographs featuring other athletes or sports, content about nationalism, and advocacy for charity causes. It is crucial to highlight that the inclusion of 'cause support' content in the female analysis is based on the discovery of its presence on female athletes' accounts, in contrast to male athletes where it was not present. Photographs 4.6 feature some examples of main categories of photographs.



Photographs 4.6 display Main Photo Content posted by Female Athletes

Table 4.7: Photographs Composition

Photo Composition							
Criteria	FA1	FA2	FA3	FA4	FA5	Total	Percentage %
Single Photo	82	83	89	82	92	428	85.6%
Bigger than others	5	10	4	1	4	24	4.8%
As big as others	1	4	1	2	2	10	2%
Smaller than others	1	3	2	11	1	18	3.6%
Posture							
Normal	11	16	16	16	16	75	15%
Active	26	53	32	20	35	155	31%
Passive	53	30	49	62	47	241	48.2%
Head positioned tilted	17	7	21	12	18	75	15%
Body position upright	59	68	72	84	76	359	71.8%

Cause knee/Body arched	13	32	13	7	16	81	16.2%
Photo Types							
Selfie	0	3	2	10	2	17	3.4%
Headshot	3	3	11	2	0	19	3.8%
Half Body	65	52	46	60	60	283	56.6%
Full Body	21	40	38	26	35	124	24.8%
Focus of Photos							
Athlete in Focus	86	96	92	93	97	464	92.8%
Not in Focus	14	4	8	7	3	36	7.2%
Clothing							
Uniform	87	83	58	68	48	344	68.8%
Not in Uniform	13	17	39	31	52	155	31.2%

Table 4.7 divides photo composition into posture, photo types, and focus, and the clothing.

Initially, over 80% of the photos posted by female athletes were individual photographs of themselves, and the least common kind of composition was ‘as big as others’ indicating that the athlete's size in the photo is comparable to other components featured.

Furthermore, a significant proportion of female athletes commonly post exhibiting an upright stance and static photographs where no movement occurs in their respective sports. Regarding photo types, more than 50% of athletes’ photographs are half-body, with the posture utilised least by female athletes being selfies and headshots. Furthermore, almost half of the athletes

are the main focus of the posted images. Finally, most photographs posted by female athletes depicted them wearing their sporting uniform. Photographs 4.7 feature some examples.



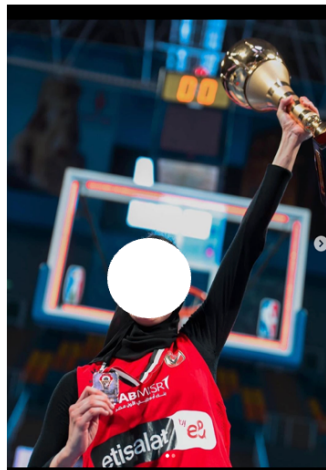
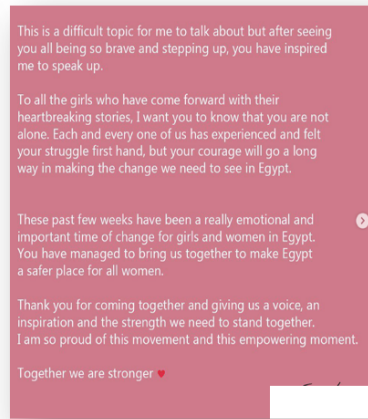
Photographs 4.7 display Photo Composition posted by Female Athletes

Table 4.8: Emotions within Photographs

Emotions							
Criteria	FA1	FA2	FA3	FA4	FA5	Total	Percentage %
Positive	32	47	71	79	85	314	62.8%
Neutral	50	34	12	12	4	112	22.4%
Negative	3	6	1	1	3	24	4.8%
No face in view	5	11	12	5	5	38	7.6%
Text in Photograph	34	5	5	5	1	50	10%

Table 4.8 presents the athletes' facial expressions, categorising them into positive, neutral, and negative emotions. The highest expressed emotions on the female athletes' faces are positive emotions, and the least are negative emotions. Female athletes had 7.6% of photos without the appearance of their faces within the picture.

The last dimension of the photo criteria is the text within the photograph. Four of the female athletes had a small number of texts within the photograph. Only 'FA1' had a significantly higher utilisation compared to the others. The rationale for this is that 'FA1' holds the title of a world champion in squash, and her digital management agency advises her to incorporate this theme into her visual content. Consequently, the majority of her posts focus on match fixtures, with the expectation that they will attract a larger audience. Photographs 4.8 feature some examples.



Photographs 4.8 display emotions and 'text in photos' posted by Female Athletes

4.7 Summary

The above Chapter has presented the results derived from the visual content analysis of the sample of 1000 pictures of selected Egyptian athletes posted on Instagram. The visual analysis of the photos reveals how these 10 players utilise their Instagram profiles to establish their own image and engage with sports stakeholders, across eight coding criteria.

The starting point of the analysis comprises data about the general use of hashtags, user tagging, and captions on athletes' Instagram accounts. It is observed that both male and female athletes engage in these practices, although females exhibit a significantly higher frequency, with their usage being twice as much as that of male athletes. It is also observed that across both male and female athletes there are individual athletes who make substantially more use of tagging within their posts, particularly the use of hashtags.

In addition, the analysis of the main photograph content reveals that the predominant content shared by male and female athletes consists of two categories: images depicting the sport they engage in on the field, and images showcasing their triumphs. These findings are presented in Table 4.3. Finally, emotions are the last coding aspect of photographs. Both male and female athletes had predominantly positive expressions in the photos, which represented their strongest feelings. However, female athletes had a 20% greater proportion of images with positive expressions compared to male athletes, as seen in Table 4.4.

Chapter Five will include an analysis of the findings derived from interviews conducted with experts and professional athletes.

Chapter 5 Analysis of Interviews with Athletes and Agency Sport Marketing Managers

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings and analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted in this study. Two sets of interviews resulting in nine interviews were conducted as discussed in Chapter Three. Firstly, three interviews were conducted with experts employed in agencies within the sport digital marketing field, all of whom have a responsibility regarding athlete branding. Secondly, six interviews were conducted with Egyptian professional male and female athletes. Section 3.6 of Chapter Three discusses the detailed procedure of both sets of interviews, followed by an introduction to and analysis of the qualitative coding techniques employed in the analysis using NVIVO. This chapter focuses on the outcomes of the interviews conducted through a discussion of the extracted themes. For smooth reading, the researcher starts with the interview process and limitations, moving on to present the outcomes from the interviews with the sports marketing experts and then the outcomes from the athlete interviews, prior to concluding the chapter.

5.2 Interview Process

The interview timeline took place between the period January 2023 to April 2023 with all nine interviews being completed within this time. The interviews with the experts were all completed online via Zoom. Two of the athletes had physical face-to-face interviews, with the other four occurring online via Zoom. Each of the interviews followed a clear process of establishing the reason for the interview, providing a summary of the study undertaken to the interviewee, and then obtaining their agreement to be interviewed, beginning the recording of the interview, and asking the questions prepared in the interview guide.

After all interviews were completed, transcription began so that the scripts could be incorporated in NVIVO software to begin the coding process and, eventually, the analysis was completed where the themes emerged, this analysis will be presented in the sections below.

5.3 Interview Limitations

The interviews conducted with the experts and athletes were subject to a number of limitations. These limitations are discussed below, commencing with a discussion regarding the overall sample size.

Chapter 3 has outlined the research approach followed in this study. The researcher has followed a mixed methods pathway to answer the research questions of the PhD, and in so doing, determined that the analysis of the self-presentation practice followed by athletes through visual content analysis of Instagram image posts, coupled with the analysis of athlete or brand manager intentions and self-presentation challenges were crucial to explore.

Therefore, the Thesis has needed to present a balance in data sample size between both the image analysis and the interview analysis, in order for the data collection period to remain controlled. For the interviews a decision was taken to gain data from both digital marketing experts and athletes in Egypt. Therefore, an interview was organised with a specialist representative from each of the three major sporting agencies in Egypt. Noting that there are just three major sport management firms that primarily conduct business with Egyptian professional athletes.

Regarding the athlete interviews, related previous studies had a sample size ranging from eight to sixteen individuals. Given the agency experts represent a number of professional athletes and the difficulty in reaching professional athletes within Egypt, the researcher determined that an equal balance between the representatives, and male and female athletes would provide a good data set for analysis within this study. Therefore, the study covered interviews with three male athletes and three female athletes all of whom were distributed between Egypt's two largest cities, Cairo, and Alexandria. In Egypt, there exist professional and prominent athletes in other major cities such as Ismailia and Port Said. Interviews with athletes in these cities were discounted given challenges in terms of accessibility and researcher security. In line with the research questions, the researcher also chose to limit the interviews to athletes based in the Middle East, rather than to include Egyptian athletes based outside of Egypt.

The athletes had distinct demographic characteristics, with their ages spanning from 23 to 40 years old. The athletes also represented different levels of athletic career status. The six athletes were categorised into three categories according to their current stage in their sporting careers: those in the early stages, those at the peak, and those nearing retirement. These differences play a role in the answers given by the athletes regarding the distinct goals for their self-presentation online.

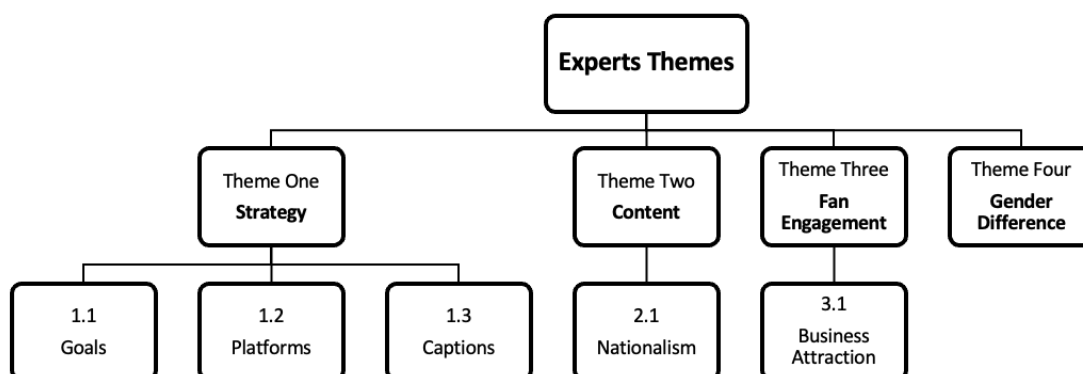
In addition, all of the interviewed athletes were involved in team sports, which restricted their perspectives on athletes engaged in individual sports.

Finally, the last limitation pertains to the individual's personality traits, which significantly influence the manner in which they present themselves online. Certain athletes exhibit extroverted and social tendencies, while others display introverted characteristics, resulting in distinct variations in their online behavior, particularly in their utilisation of photographs.

5.4 Outcomes of the Interviews with experts from sport marketing field

To provide for smooth reading, this section will begin by giving a concise summary of the themes drawn from the experts. Subsequently, each theme will be introduced with a corresponding explanation and further strengthened by supporting quotes.

Four key themes were developed from the experts' interview data, based on patterns of coding as depicted in Diagram 5.1.



Experts Themes – Diagram 5.1

The first theme focused on the necessity of formulating a digital strategy for athletes. The first theme is reinforced by subthemes including goals in social media, the selection of social media platforms, and the inclusion of captions. The second theme refers to the content posted by athletes, under the guidance of professionals, which encompasses on-field photographs, their triumphs, contests, and personal aspects. This theme is further reinforced by a sub-theme centred around nationalism. The third theme explores the extent to which fans are engaged in the interaction with athletes and proposes strategies to further improve this involvement. The fourth theme examines the differences in gender that arise when professionals or organisations oversee the online profiles of male and female athletes on platforms such as Instagram or other online platforms.

Experts Theme One: *Strategy*

Experts recognise the need to create a strategy for social media platforms to be able to have a strong and effective online presence. Nevertheless, not all professional athletes possess a clear understanding, which is why they require guidance and online account management.

The prominence of creating an effective social media strategy was recognised in the response of the interviewees.

‘A social media strategy is very crucial for any athlete, or anyone that wants to have a strong presence’ (Expert One)

The experts stressed the importance of athletes having a say in their online strategies and a clear understanding of their desired online image. This vision will be executed by the experts using the necessary tools and expertise. However, many athletes underestimate the necessity of having a strategy and don't devote sufficient time to its creation.

‘A strategy must be driven by the athletes but guided by us... the experts’ (Expert Two)

‘Egyptian athletes don’t want to invest in social media platforms, and they think it is easy to just post any picture without any strategy’ (Expert One)

They also stated that while developing an online strategy, they must consider the athlete's sporting career status because it guides the entire approach.

'First of all, let me divide this into three parts; is the athlete a rookie, or are they a rising talent, or have they already surpassed the superstar level? For each category of athlete there's a different strategy' (Expert Three)

Experts Sub-theme 1.1: Goals

Experts recognised the importance of a well-designed strategy and developing a successful one requires identifying the online objectives for each athlete, because goals give a framework for guiding both experts and athletes and directing efforts in the proper direction. In addition, after goals have been established, it is critical to choose the platforms and develop suitable content with relevant textual captions.

'Basically, we can start the 1st objective with awareness about this player, 2nd objective is to make fans engage with the posts by liking, sharing, or commenting. My third objective is how to monetise or use the brand value of the player to attract money streams' (Expert Two)

The experts emphasised that athletes' personalities have a significant effect in the direction of strategy and content creation. The athlete's personality must be consistent with the goals and content generated for them; otherwise, this athlete will be untrustworthy to fans, if their positionality is inconsistent with the goals and online presence that experts cooperate with the athlete to offer.

'If we will talk about international athletes; Mbappe is not the same as Messi. One athlete is in his beginning and the other one is finishing his career, so the strategy is mainly based on how I want the athlete to be positioned. I could position a player that all he does is charity work, or I want to show his personal life more, of course aside from the basic content or posts regarding the matches and their goals, etc.' (Expert One)

Experts Sub-theme 1.2: *Platforms*

One of the main pillars the experts pointed out in designing the strategy was the choice of the social media platforms. The three interviewees agreed that Instagram is very important right now, but that it is also very necessary to be available on all platforms because each one has its own audience and its own features.

‘Each social media platform has its own benefits, and each platform has its own target audience, so any sport athlete needs to have an account on all platforms’ (Expert One)

They addressed the fact that platform selection is determined by the features of each, implying that some platforms are mostly used for statistics and updates throughout the game, while others are primarily used for visual media. So, it all depends. That is why it is critical to define the features required and whether they are appropriate for the content that will be provided.

‘Depends on his/her fan base, Also, depends on the features of each platform in terms of football, twitter for football community used for coverage and stats of the game and who scored, more coverage, but Instagram is more personalised. As for Facebook, it’s more for a generic type of audience’ (Expert Two)

Additionally, a noteworthy point made by the experts is that the choice of platforms is influenced by the personalities of the athletes. For example, TikTok serves as a platform for individuals to engage in lip-syncing activities and share entertaining videos accompanied by musical compositions. It should be noted that not all athletes possess the ability to effectively portray themselves in a natural manner in front of the camera.

‘Depends on what the athlete is capable of creating, meaning, there are different personalities, for example an athlete like Abdullah Al Said, no matter how much you try to integrate him into TikTok he wouldn’t succeed there’ (Expert Three)

Experts Sub-theme 1.3: *Captions*

Finally, to effectively implement the designed strategy and to develop a content plan, it is essential to carefully evaluate the placement of captions and their alignment with the photographs. The experts in the interview expressed a consensus about the significance of captions, but with a sense of caution. They emphasised that a photograph loses its intended meaning if it lacks an engaging, straightforward, and genuine caption.

‘They do give more meaning. I want the caption to be as natural as possible, I want it to be as engaging as much as possible’ (Expert Three)

The potential risks associated with the captions were also acknowledged by the experts. A lack of captions may provide a potential concern when photographs require interpretation or when the context around the photographs is unclear. The inclusion of captions without proper consideration may have negative consequences on the athlete's public image.

‘Sometimes captions are important and sometimes not, but it’s very risky when it comes to big prominent athletes, but the shorter the better’ (Expert One)

Furthermore, they added that hashtags within the captions are necessary to drive more traffic to the account, but the importance of the captions lies with the industry itself, because the sports industry requires telling stories and human situations, which must be communicated in text as well to provide more meaning and clarity.

‘Captions on Instagram are the latest important element, but hashtags help spread the reach and drive huge traffic. If using captions is necessary then it must be short and catchy, [if it is a] witty caption it will go viral... it must be smart and adding some insights... Football is about storytelling’ (Expert Two)

Experts Theme Two: Content

Experts emphasise the importance of designing and implementing a content plan after creation of the social media strategy and after drawing the main guidelines for each athlete.

The likelihood of engaging fans on social media is influenced by a balanced combination of sport-related and personal photo content. However, the online objectives of each athlete also play a crucial role in defining this balance.

The development of a content plan is a crucial step in strategy creation. Visual content requires long-term planning, especially in sports, where everything is time-bonded and connected to well-known figures. The interviewees underlined the process of developing the visual content plan and it was initially by identifying the athletes' online objectives, which was addressed in theme one, in the strategy formulation. According to the athletes' online objectives, the content is decided and created, and it is important to have a balance between sports setting photos and personal photos aligned with the objectives.

'Content has to be equal weight regardless of the athlete's performance, there's a triangle diagram that I draw up, it's called the Reality Triangle; Family – Community – and the Club, this is the Reality Triangle, how we are loyal to the community, you have to show it' (Expert three)

'Based on the strategy we set at first, identifying objectives, at the end of the day it's about the popularity of the athlete, I won't try to balance between all type of content, it's all about the objectives. Photos on the pitch, but of course it must be during a special moment and has a reason behind for posting it like Afsha, when he scored against Zamalek in an important match, this went viral. It depends more on the occasion' (Expert One)

According to the experts, fans have a stronger attraction towards photographs that portray the personal lives of athletes, as well as photographs capturing moments of victory and championship successes.

'Mainly what's more attractive are personal lives with their family, fans always wait for these content and cultural images during world cup. And photos of milestones, or victories kind of photos of course, also training photos before matches are appealing and serves as motivation for them before the match' (Expert Two)

Experts Sub-theme 2.1: *Nationalism*

Experts have demonstrated how online usage for athletes changes frequently during competitions with the national team, where patriotic content plays a significant role.

‘Content would be more geared depending on representation, if they are competing representing the national team then it must be about the country in how we represent the country, so all of my content would be driven towards that’ (Expert Three)

‘It’s much easier to work within national team because we all support Egypt. And I will make sure to express patriotism in all shared content because it’s an honor for any player to represent their country and to deliver a clear message to the whole Egyptian nation about unity’ (Expert One)

They explained that content in this area is very sensitive because Egyptians are very emotional people, and content should reflect the nation more than individuals.

‘National teams spirit brings different content especially between teammates, in the training camps with their roommates. Because they focus more on the bonding and the Nation Like for example if the national team loses, a player could post an image motivating his teammates to raise their morale’ (Expert Two)

Experts Theme Three: *Fan Engagement*

Experts have noted earlier in themes one & two that implementing a well-defined online strategy, setting clear goals, and creating a comprehensive content plan can effectively improve traffic to athletes' online accounts. As a result, fan engagement and the number of followers will also grow, which in turn will attract potential sponsors.

Interviewees expressed the importance of fan engagement because it is an indicator of an athlete’s online presence and effectiveness. Fan engagement and an increase in followers are derived by exerting huge effort in designing content that is prepared solely for the athlete.

Conducting research and assessing different practices helps to recognise the most appropriate content that will drive online traffic for athletes' accounts.

'Personal photos create more engagement. Engagement is somehow connected with followers if I increased followers, engagement would increase not necessarily but it will eventually happen'

(Expert Two)

Moreover, the experts have recognised that photographs portraying the athlete in a compassionate way have the potential to attract a larger audience and enhance fan engagement. The careful study of the composition of images is of great significance, since close-up shots capturing athletes with joyful expressions and vibrant personalities tend to captivate fans, resulting in enhancing their engagement with the photographs posted.

'Well, something that reflects the spirit of the athlete, also, if it was a normal shoot for the athlete with their family then I would want them to look warm, work with the other subjects and all such details. Post-game material, first and foremost, followed by the personal material during feasts, holidays and public holidays' (Expert Three)

*'Closeups, happy facial expressions drive more traffic like Mohamed salah
And of course, photos on the pitch'* (Expert One)

Experts Sub-theme 3.1: Business Attraction

Additionally, the experts pointed out that fan engagement and followers helped in attracting sponsors and business deals for athletes. The experts provided an explanation that highlights the need of a large fan base for athletes to attract sponsors. This is demonstrated by the number of followers that an athlete has, as it signifies a high level of visibility and accessibility to a broad audience, without considering the engagement rate. This is a reason for why it is important for athletes to have a structured content plan that would work in achieving a high engagement rate with a number of sponsors in parallel because this helps in shaping and positioning the athlete's brand image.

'For example, if a player has 500 K follower like Sanad and another one has 200 K, if I want to convince someone to sign a campaign with a player of course I will choose the one with the higher number of followers which is the 500 K, even if the engagement is low if am talking from a business perspective and what's attractive for sponsors' (Expert One)

Experts Theme Four: Gender Difference

Experts are attentive to gender disparities and online discriminatory practices in the Egyptian sports industry, which arise from cultural factors affecting the online portrayal and engagement of male and female athletes.

According to experts, the issue of differences in gender among male and female athletes is attributed to cultural factors and they are quite knowledgeable about it. The cultural issue manifests itself in the form of financial support from federations, media attention, and the support of Egyptian citizens, all of which are evident on the athletes' online presences.

'I think the problem is the culture, it's a cultural thing, they get harassed.

And females yeah could find some difficulty in posting and online presence.

And in Egypt it's all about football, male players, Ahly & Zamalek, that's it' (Expert One)

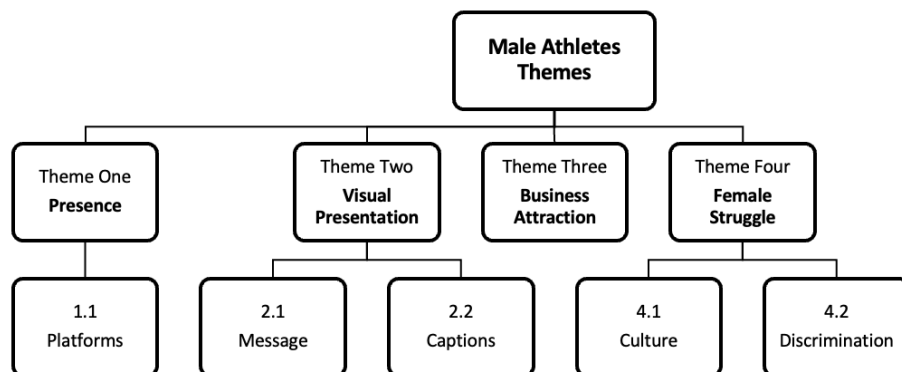
The importance of taking caution when female athletes in Egypt share photographs of themselves wearing their sport's outfit was underscored, since it was observed that regardless of the content, a number of Egyptian individuals tend to engage in online bullying. Consequently, these female athletes are constrained in their ability to express their authentic selves and share photographs of their choosing.

'Meanwhile for example when you look at Nour Al Sherbini and how she is wearing short shorts for example, or how she is hugging her husband in a picture, or how the picture she uploaded looked like, who was it? Ranim maybe? Oh, yes, Ranim and Tarek Mo'men, I remember that picture, people were angry with them. Nobody would be able to talk, this is a public thing, and this is our situation in Egypt' (Expert Three)

5.5 Outcomes of the Interviews with Athletes

To provide a smooth reading, this section will begin by providing a concise summary of the themes drawn from analysis of the male athlete interviews first and then this will be followed by a similar summary of themes from the female athlete interviews. Subsequently, each theme will be introduced with a corresponding explanation and be further strengthened by supporting quotes.

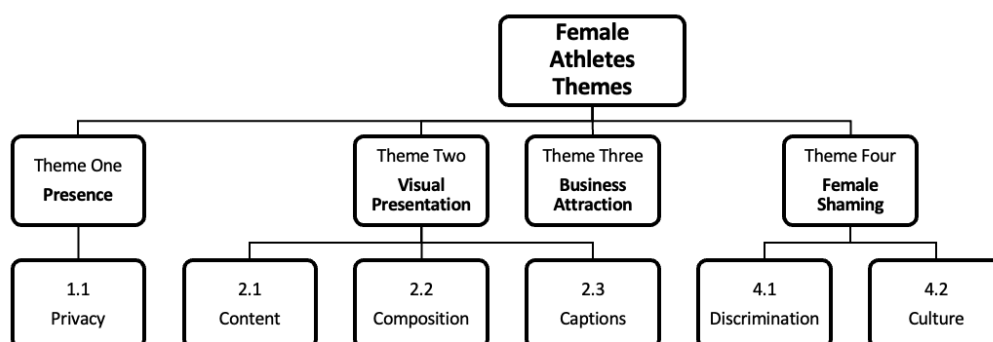
The male athletes' themes were as follows: The first theme addressed athletes' online presence. The first theme is supported by one subtheme that includes the choice of online platforms. The focus of the second theme is on how athletes on Instagram visually present themselves, this is supported by sub-themes that include the message and the presence of captions. The third theme discusses the attraction of sponsors by athletes to build a strong brand image. Finally, the fourth theme discusses female athletes' struggles online and is supported by sub-themes that include gender discrimination and cultural factors. The four themes are depicted in Diagram 5.2.



Male Athletes Themes – Diagram 5.2

The female athletes' themes begin with a first theme addressing athletes' online presence. The first theme is supported by one subtheme that includes exploring privacy issues. The second theme addresses the visual presentation by athletes on Instagram and is supported by sub-

themes that include the content, photo composition, angle of shots, and finally the presence of captions. The third theme discusses the attraction of sponsors by athletes to build a strong brand image. Finally, the fourth theme discusses female shaming online and is supported by sub-themes that include gender discrimination and cultural factors. The four themes are depicted in Diagram 5.3.



Female Athletes Themes – Diagram 5.3

5.5.1 Outcomes of the Interviews with Male Athletes

Male Athletes Theme One: *Presence*

Male athletes demonstrated the significance and high frequency of their online presence, where they have an image to connect with many sport stakeholders, and the importance of having a voice online on various social media platforms.

Male athletes highlighted the regular and significant utilisation of social media in their daily lives, dedicating a substantial amount of time to different social media platforms

‘Social media is very important to me, I use it per day, between four to six or maybe even seven hours’ (Male Athlete Two)

‘Social media presence? I use it 24hr’ (Male Athlete Three)

They also stressed on the importance of maintaining an online presence, as it enables them to communicate with their fan base and exhibit various aspects of their personality via the use of photographs and visuals. This, in turn, fosters interaction and engagement with a wide range of individuals involved in the world of sports.

‘Instagram for me is for the audience to reflect on the other aspect of my personality I’m trying to have a positive influence over the people, I view being a prominent athlete as more of a responsibility than a luxury to enjoy and post pictures for people to like and just say to them whatever they wish to hear’ (Male Athlete One)

‘I have an image now so I have to be cautious, there should be specific content where people see me and expect from me, and I have to appear in that frame to them’ (Male Athlete Two)

Male Athletes Sub-theme 1.1: Platforms

Male athletes have a strong presence on top social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. They appear to favor Instagram owing to its features.

‘I use the three platforms Facebook, Tiktok and Instagram to complete the triangle, each of them had its purpose, Twitter was for covering and responding to news and for me to make comments, Facebook is to put an end to all the fake accounts and Instagram because I didn’t wish to upload just any shallow pictures, but instead wanted something of a more personal nature and slightly unrelated to football’ (Male Athlete one)

‘I use Instagram more, because as soon as I wake up, I go on Instagram, before I fall asleep, I go on Instagram’ (Male Athlete Three)

Also, most of the male athletes are considering having a private account, while they are selective in their posting of intimate images on the public account.

‘I don’t really feel like completely free to be myself on Instagram, so I was forced to create a personal account for the people who are extremely close to me like my girlfriend so that I could have my normal life as well’ (Male Athlete Three)

Male Athletes Theme Two: *Visual Presentation*

Male athletes demonstrate a desire to employ visual presentation, such as Instagram photographs, to convey a certain image of themselves as professional athletes.

Male athletes frequently upload photos on Instagram. Most of the content on their Instagram accounts is linked to sports settings, such as training, matches, gyms, championships, and wins. They prefer to emphasise sporting training within the context of the team and are very selective when posting personal photographs with their families.

'Life on the court for sure, about 70%, and being on the court doesn't mean only the action, it could be me at the gym, or me eating my meals, or me doing rehabilitation treatment, this is also all part of the job. my nutrition and how I train, all such things, this is the image I'm trying to appear with' (Male Athlete Two)

'To be honest, on the public account I'm more interested in the trophies or when we win a championship or something, I mainly only post during championship or the big games that we win, or an upcoming championship or something. maybe one post from the Gym or this or that, but mostly it's posts from championships, but we don't really win a lot of championships' (Male Athlete Three)

They also mentioned that photos that portray emotions, rather than merely static photographs, add more value to the post. It is also vital to provide photographs that inspire people.

'After we won against Zamalek I posted my picture with Shennawi when he was hugging me and carrying me, I felt that it was a genuine picture it was pure emotions, not just a posed picture for a camera, I like the pictures to include my friends and my family, I don't like uploading pictures of myself alone unless it's has a story' (Male Athlete One)

Male Athletes Sub-theme 2.1: *Message*

Male athletes noted that they do not pay much attention to photo composition; they are more concerned with the significance behind each snapshot shared, what this photograph means to the followers, and the message behind it.

'Photo composition? Not really, no, I feel that it's important for the picture to carry a message enough' (Male Athlete One)

'No, I put more thought into the message behind the picture, it's not a matter of how I am posing in a picture as much as it is what content the picture shows' (Male Athlete Two)

Another point was made that athletes care about exhibiting their personalities to their followers online and how they express their sentiments of pleasure or sadness in sports through photographs.

'I put a lot of thought into everything to be honest, I like for the picture to demonstrate my personality a little bit, even in victories or losses, my features are of a very expressive nature, and I know well how to express how I feel, so I like for the pictures to carry a meaning or something' (Male Athlete Three)

Male Athletes Sub-theme 2.2: *Captions*

Male athletes highlighted the importance of captions' presence within the post because it gives more meaning and resonance to the photograph posted, or it might also deliver a certain message that does not necessarily explain the photo.

'It is very important. I pay a lot of attention to the captions, and I feel that for a picture to succeed there must be a good caption to help it achieve that' (Male Athlete Three)

'Very important Yes, not linked to the photo necessarily but it's important' (Male Athlete Three)

Athletes also stated that captions should be motivating because they serve as role models for many followers and must motivate them.

'For me, it must be, not really to explain the picture, but, I try to make sure that it is something that is slightly motivational, has a wisdom somehow behind the words' (Male Athlete Two)

Male Athletes Theme Three: *Business Attraction*

Male athletes express the importance of endorsers and that they should work on their online image constantly to keep attracting them

Male athletes demonstrate the need for endorsers, and they work to enhance their online image and increase the followers. They expressed that attracting different businesses are attainable, but they must have a constant and powerful online presence, but most importantly their sport career must be prospering and filled with victories and championships.

'I certainly do think about how I would attract a sponsor to me, but it all really depends and comes down to my performance' (Male Athlete Three)

'There's Al Ahly Club and championships and all that is attractive to sponsors, and people want me to give a speech so as businesswise, it's good. The personal image I would increase that with time after having a certain number of fans or followers who engage with your posts' (Male Athlete Two)

They also revealed that they occasionally share certain photographs that they know would attract firms interested in collaborating with them.

'Gym photos, I like to use it as a marketing tool that might attract sponsors, because I am nearly 40 years old, so for people, people are not used to seeing an athlete who is almost 40 and is still in a good shape' (Male Athlete One)

Male Athletes Theme Four: *Females Struggle*

Male athletes pointed out that there's quite a difference between them and female athletes in the online usage of social media. The online usage might increase or decrease depending on each athlete, but male athletes outlined that professional female athletes struggle because of Middle Eastern and Egyptian culture.

Male athletes explained the female struggle in the Egyptian sports industry, where it's hard for female athletes to express themselves freely on Instagram. The three male athletes agreed that there is a difference between them and their female counterparts. This difference does not necessarily mean that female athletes do not use social media or Instagram, but they might need to use it even more than the males to attract more followers to them.

Male Athletes Sub-theme 4.1: *Culture*

Male athletes recognised that a core component of the difficulty for female athletes in making excellent use of social media platforms is driven by cultural norms and expectations.

'A million percent culture is the reason, you aren't battling against the society here, you are battling against a culture, it's a culture and for the culture to change it would take years, many years' (Male Athlete One)

The male athletes also recognised that one of the challenges for female athletes is the presence of bullying in online contexts particularly targeted based on gender, where individuals may post harmful content online for playing any sport or posting photographs wearing any sport outfit.

'I feel that it depends from one female athlete to the other, but no, there are people in Egypt that are like this, they keep bullying female athletes... it's culture' (Male Athlete Three)

Male Athletes Sub-theme 4.2: *Discrimination*

Female athletes try to have an online presence, even if it is minimal, the male athletes confirmed that female athletes face additional obstacles, in addition to the cultural challenges above. For instance, male athletes recognise that there are significant financial and media coverage challenges linked to female sports.

‘There are differences between the men and women in Egypt, we are quite racist in that regard’ (Male Athlete One)

‘There certainly is a difference, you could even see that within the focus itself, not many people know that there are female Handball players to begin with, because of how much the association itself are not giving them enough support, not showcasing them and demonstrating them like they do with us, so, it’s normal that there would be a difference on social media as well, definitely’ (Male Athlete Three)

5.5.2 Outcomes of the Interviews with Female Athletes

Female Athletes Theme One: *Presence*

Female athletes demonstrated that they are highly active online and use it on a regular basis, but their online usage is not always used publicly because they take their privacy matter seriously

Female athletes tend to use social media platforms especially Instagram and Facebook. They expressed the importance of social media to them, however, not everything is posted and shared on their public accounts. Each of the female athletes interviewed has two accounts one public for fans, and one is private for family and friends.

‘I moved on from Facebook to Instagram, so, my usage now on Facebook is mainly scrolling and checking around and so on, but Instagram is where I do my posts, it feels more real to me,

even if just a picture or a message where I want something from the people or want to say something to the people' (Female Athlete One)

'If I'm awake for about 10 hours, then maybe I spend about six or seven hours on social media, I'm very active on social media and I use Facebook and Instagram mainly' (Female Athlete Two)

Female Athletes Sub-theme 1.1: Privacy

Females were keen about having two Instagram accounts: one public for fans and one private for family and friends. They justified their actions by claiming that they did not feel the freedom they should have on Instagram or the support they expected from their fans. Additionally, they perceive that they do not receive a fair amount of support and motivation from the Egyptian public like the support they receive from their closest connections, so they chose privacy.

'Honestly, I do not find support and encouragement in the normal Egyptian public day to day in the street, this is the reason why I created a private account' (Female Athlete One)

Also, one of the athletes raised a point about the privacy she needs, as she has another working life aside from sports, and she does not want both worlds to interfere together.

'Having two accounts was always the right thing to do, in addition to sports I also work in a corporate environment. I have a corporate life in the morning and sports in the evenings, I always like to separate between the two worlds I always prefer to keep a private aspect of myself' (Female Athlete Three)

Generally, these female athletes expressed that having one public account will not be comforting for them, especially after receiving so many offensive comments whenever they post anything related to their life partners.

'When people started to know me more and follow me, not everyone would judge my pictures and posts the same way, for example a picture with my fiancée back then, and till now as he

became my husband, no matter what, what kind of picture, I don't want to hear a comment that upsets me' (Female Athlete Two)

Female Athletes Theme Two: *Visual Presentation*

Visual presentation for the female athletes is very vital for their online image but they noted that they must be cautious especially when posting photographs, and choose the best angle and the appropriate caption

Female athletes mentioned that they need to express themselves online through photographs in order to connect with their fans and other stakeholders and boost their viewability in the sports sector as compared to male athletes.

'I like posting photos but not taken by me, have somebody else take them, like an external perspective, and yes, I post them, especially if related to my sport. Seeing a girl playing football, perhaps they would be very excited to see action and something happening' (Female Athlete One)

'I'm not a blogger, I play basketball, but when I upload pictures of myself, they must always be related to Basketball, during a game or something, this is for most pictures' (Female Athlete Two)

Female Athletes Sub-theme 2.1: *Content*

Female athletes demonstrated that the content they post is mostly related to their sport, which includes photographs of training camps, tournaments, and victories.

'I would post from my gameplay, during the matches. some posts have the purpose as a team captain to motivate my team, so, I post something that includes the team and something to inspire such as: It wouldn't matter if we lost the next game, we are already up 3 points'(Female Athlete One)

'Most pictures I post are after a Basketball game where I performed well, I share a picture asking the people to wish me luck as I would compete later in a championship for example or games, so, mostly it's about games that I will play or an event or something' (Female Athlete Two)

They also underlined the importance of the timing of the post, which is an indicator for them when deciding which photographs should be posted and shared online with their fans.

'It depends on the timing, I think it's smart that if you are going through a championship, to post from inside the court, for sure. I always want to share about a certain tournament then I would go with pictures of the cups I've earned, while we are at the training camp. it depends'

(Female Athlete Three)

Female Athletes Sub-theme 2.2: *Composition*

A photograph composition is a big deal for female athletes in the MENA region and in Egypt, specifically. The female athletes emphasised that they cannot post any photograph unless they make sure the angle and composition are not revealing anything about their bodies that could be used to bully them online. Also, they added that the quality of the photo is very important for their account image.

'I wouldn't post a picture from an angle that isn't flattering or nice to me, because people after all are judgmental, I hear from a lot of people that tell me about many overweight female athletes, so, I focus that whatever is shared looks decent, doesn't have to be perfect but at least looks decent' (Female Athlete One)

'Definitely, definitely composition is very important and the angle. I must select what to post and what not to post, girls must be very picky about what pictures they upload. Especially that we are playing a sport and sportswear usually could be shorts or could be something, and this is the outfit of the sport itself' (Female Athlete Three)

Female Athletes Sub-theme 2.3: *Captions*

Female athletes use captions in most of their photographs, but they explained that the captions must be related to the photo posted; if not, there is no need for them. The caption must be

simple and give more meaning to the photo. Also, they emphasised that the presence of captions is important because they use it as a form of motivation for other girls to pursue the same career and follow their dreams.

'I don't like writing a caption that is completely irrelevant. I don't really understand it when people do that, to me it's better to post a picture with no caption than writing up an irrelevant caption' (Female Athlete One)

'I believe that it's important if you are sharing news or if you are discussing something specific or if you are talking about a today's big win for example, or how we got qualified for this, and we need that' (Female Athlete Three)

Female Athletes Theme Three: *Business Attraction*

Attracting businesses and sponsors is not easy for female athletes as long as they do not play for a well-known club that has both many winning championships and a large fan base

Female athletes explained the importance of attracting businesses and endorsers to their personal image as athletes, but they also clarified how hard it is for any female athlete as long as she does not play for the two big clubs in Egypt: Al Ahly SC and Zamalek SC, regardless of the type of sport. Playing for top-tier clubs will help them to be positioned in a certain way because being a female athlete already makes this hard to do.

'It has certain rules, it depends on the club that you represent, the club you represent is what you will play for, so, some clubs are very easy to get sponsors for things like Al Ahly, like Al Zamalek, Sporting Club for example is very good at my sport and is very well known I would actually need to work more on having a sponsor than someone who is playing for Ahly or Zamalek or other clubs that has other sports making them popular' (Female Athlete Three)

Also, they highlighted that playing within a team is harder than playing in an individual sport, where it's easier to attract sponsors. Still, they stated that they also need to improve their online

presence more to make it attractive enough by increasing their followers and engaging them more.

'My aim to be a little more business oriented then I would need to do much more to create that level of attraction for sponsors that would find win – win situations for them I need to increase my followers and have more people know me and more people talk, so people would know me and I would end up doing what I want to do as well' (Female Athlete One)

'I still need to work more on having more people know me and have them be interested in something else aside from football, and the fact that I am a woman, when people get interested in something it should be something other than football, because it is the most popular sport in Egypt, and they would also be interested in a woman' (Female Athlete Two)

Female Athletes Theme Four: Female Shaming

Female athletes in Egypt encounter several challenges in their efforts to be their own version of themselves among their fans online. The primary cause of their difficulties is cultural and gender discrimination between them and male athletes.

Female athletes expressed that they face shaming acts online by the fans due to their sports participation for many reasons, and that make them not exert much effort on their online platforms, because they know that they will fail to achieve what male athletes achieve online. They underlined that they also don't have the financial resources for this, unlike male athletes.

'You would always experience the discrimination, you would always feel that people are more interested in the men's sports, so, you would then feel that you are putting in so much effort and it fades because people don't understand how much you have sacrificed' (Female Athlete Two)

Female athletes voiced their dissatisfaction with cyberbullying directed against their bodies and what they wear while participating in sports. The Egyptian followers constantly make them feel

embarrassed of their bodies, as if they are doing something wrong and do not have the right to participate in sports.

'There would be a big part of that related to body-shaming that explodes right at us, so, when you do that in sports, you get body-shaming in addition to the official outfit itself, like, I am dressed in the outfit I wear through the game, then you end up with people coming up saying: 'No, you shouldn't wear shorts and run around', so, there are some basic things that we are still responding to before talking about anything else' (Female Athlete One)

They further added that if they played for a club in a European nation, in their perception they would not receive any of these harsh comments, unlike here in Egypt or other Arab country.

'Some certain shots taken during gameplay can't be shared unlike abroad, abroad it's fine, my professional athlete friends post everything, and nothing happens, but no, we have to, we have to always be cautious about this' (Female Athlete Two)

Female Athletes Sub-theme 4.1: Discrimination

Female athletes stressed the huge amount of discrimination they face in Egypt in the streets or online. Gender discrimination and differentiating between females and males is a never-ending story, and it's not only related to gender; the type of sport plays a big role. Football is the most popular sport in Egypt, and nothing else gains more spotlight than this sport.

'You would always experience the discrimination, you would always feel that people are more interested in the men's sports, so, you would then feel that you are putting in so much effort and it fades because people don't understand how much you have sacrificed' (Female Athlete Two)

'For the men athletes, with minimum effort, they take a picture, write up a caption and that's it, meanwhile girls are very picky and do this and that with the story, I feel that for the men it's much easier, they could even post a picture without a caption and include the club logo and that's it' (Female Athlete Three)

Female Athletes Sub-theme 4.2: *Culture*

Female athletes articulated that the main reason behind the gender discrimination is primarily a cultural dimension that was expressed by people in Egypt and the Arab world that females should not play sports, or wear sports outfits, and that they will never make it to the same level as the males.

'Culture and mentality in Egypt would be perhaps more focused on the men, despite how you would be putting in much more effort than they are, but it doesn't show' (Female Athlete

Three)

'I'm not trying to do the impossible, so, this is an issue, the stereotypes that society imposes on football specifically as well as the women athletes' (Female Athlete One)

Additionally, females feel that they must defend themselves all the time as women and that their sport and game deserve to be seen and heard.

'The stereotypes around us keep affirming that: "You shouldn't play football", "Why are you playing football?", and other phrases such as: "Return to the kitchen", and all such things, they all impact how we view ourselves, so, whenever we post it feels like we are putting in double the effort to just show the people that: "This is happening", Guys, we too play sports", this is the message I want to convey' (Female Athlete One)

5.6 Summary

Chapter Five has examined the results of the interviews with digital marketing experts and male and female athletes, exploring the recurring patterns that arose from the answers to the question posed. Quotations have been used throughout the results to demonstrate support for these patterns. Regarding the four themes identified in the experts' interviews, the thematic analysis highlights the significance of developing an online strategy for athletes. This strategy should encompass clearly defined objectives that aid in selecting suitable content and platforms. A well-crafted approach will eventually enhance fan engagement and entice businesses to invest in the athlete's online persona. The final theme that arose from the experts' interviews was the

gender difference between male and female athletes in Egypt and the significance of this inequality, particularly in terms of its negative effect on female athletes' sports careers.

As regards the themes that emerged from the athletes' interviews, both males and females.

The examination of the male athletes' interviews highlights the significance of their online presence on popular sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. The analysis highlights the importance of visual presentation for male athletes, the crucial messages they convey through photographs, and the consistency of their visual presentation, which may result in valuable business opportunities and sponsorships. Male athletes also highlighted the plight of Egyptian female athletes who face challenges in a predominantly male-dominated society, primarily owing to cultural norms and evident societal inequalities.

The analysis of the female athletes' interviews reveals that the themes that were developed highlight the female athletes' recognition of the significance of their online presence and their need for personal privacy. Hence, they ensure that their presence on public online platforms enables engagement with followers, while also maintaining private accounts. Additionally, they emphasised the importance of a compelling visual presentation, urging cautiousness in the selection of images. It is crucial to carefully evaluate photo angles and composition to minimise the risk of cyberbullying. Furthermore, they conveyed the challenge of securing endorsers for their athletic persona, citing concerns such as their gender, and the lack of involvement in a widely recognised sport or prominent club. In the final theme, the athletes demonstrated their experience of being subjected to sexism in the Egyptian sports industry and within the Arab nations at large. Both male and female athletes believe that cultural and gender discrimination significantly contribute to their challenges.

Chapter Six will bring together the outcomes of the image analysis in Chapter 4 and the outcomes of interviews in Chapter Five and discuss these in the context of the research questions posed in this Thesis.

Chapter 6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

'Photos are means to express stories without using words or explanations; a picture tells it all.

A mean for any athlete to self-present their own brand in the simplest but most effective manner with a single shot' (Expert One)

Endorsing photos as part of an athlete's online self-presentation strategy has become crucial for shaping their personal image among sports stakeholders, as shown by the opening quotation.

The management of Egyptian athletes' online personas is inconsistent, and not all athletes possess a clear understanding; nonetheless, they do recognise its significance.

This chapter will examine each data source used to answer the research questions in this Thesis, based on the visual content analysis and interview analysis outlined in Chapters 4 and 5.

This chapter will discuss the findings of this Thesis and examine how they align with prior studies and will further explore the online strategies used on Instagram, as well as the visual content that they provide and their impact on fan engagement.

For smooth reading, this chapter is structured as follows: it begins with a concise overview of the research objectives and questions presented in Table 6.1, which were introduced in Chapter 1 of the Thesis. This is followed by the key findings from the visual content analysis and interview analysis. Finally, the findings are interpreted in relation to the research questions, with a comparison to previous research.

6.2 Overview of Research Objectives and Questions

The research objectives and questions were developed after reviewing existing research and identifying a knowledge gap in the field of study, with a specific focus on the Egyptian context.

This study focuses on examining how Egyptian male and female athletes use visual self-presentation strategies on Instagram to effectively showcase their image to their fans and sports stakeholders. The research aims to achieve the following objectives by addressing the research questions outlined in the Thesis.

Table 6.1 A concise overview of the research's objectives and questions.

No.	Research Objectives	Research Questions
1	To identify the best social media strategies to be employed by Egyptian athletes.	<p>1.1 What strategies do Egyptian athletes employ for their visual self-presentation online practices?</p> <p>1.2 How do athletes present their online self-image via photographs?</p>
2	To explore the differences between Egyptian male & female athletes' online visual selfpresentation.	2. What differences exist between the visual self-presentation tactics used by Egyptian male and female athletes on Instagram?
3	To examine how athletes online visual self-presentation could increase fans engagement.	3. What impact did the athlete visual self-portrayal have on fans engagement?

Upon evaluating the research questions after the completion of the visual analysis and interviews, and upon reaching the stage of discussing the findings, it is evident that no modifications were made to the questions. However, when it comes to research question three, which focuses on fan engagement, there may be some challenges. According to the experts and athletes interviewed, the measures used to assess fan engagement mostly relied on online interactivity, such as athletes using hashtags, shares, comments, likes or the reach of images shared. Nevertheless, a quantitative review of the engagement metrics between fans and athletes was not conducted in the visual content analysis.

6.3 Key areas of discussion of the Visual Content Analysis and Interviews

This Thesis employed a mixed methods approach to analyse the data, effectively integrating two methods. The visual content and interview thematic analysis provide a more comprehensive and in-depth interpretation of the main findings, as previously elaborated in Chapter 3.

The key areas of discussion regarding both methods indicate that both male and female athletes want to maximise their use of social media; however, this does not always mean that they are doing it strategically.

The findings suggest that athletes strive to achieve an optimal balance between the front-stage and back-stage messages conveyed in the idea of self-presentation, as previously explained in Chapters 1 and 2. The balance between several factors may not be consistent, particularly for female athletes from Egypt, as shown in the interviews conducted with experts and female athletes, and as evident from the analysis of the photographs. The following sections will present a concise discussion for each method, first with the visual content analysis and then followed by the interview thematic analysis.

6.3.1 Key areas of discussion of the Visual Content Analysis

The researcher conducted a visual content analysis on 1,000 photographs collected evenly from ten Egyptian male and female athletes' Instagram accounts. The outcomes of visual content analysis reveal how these 10 athletes utilise their Instagram profiles to establish their own image and engage with sports stakeholders where this was presented thoroughly in chapter four.

The visual content analysis reveals that male athletes strive to maintain a balance between frontstage and backstage messages, with a greater emphasis on pictures related to matches, training, victories, and nationalism content. They showcase their personal life by sharing photographs including their partners, children, and parents. Most of the photographs depict them engaged in dynamic movement and actively participating in their respective sport. The

emotions expressed in the photos were balanced between positive, neutral and no face sometimes.

Regarding female athletes, the analysis of visual content reveals that, similar to males, they strive to maintain a balance between frontstage and backstage messaging. However, this contradicts what the female athletes expressed in the interviews, which will be further discussed in the next sections. Additionally, females often engage in the sharing of pictures and information that align with a particular cause, such as 'International Women's Day' or charitable efforts. In addition, they share pictures with specific angles and are carefully composed. The bulk of the pictures exhibited positive emotions. The five female athletes made considerable use of hashtags, with a proportion over 90%. Females are aware that using these can generate more traffic to their profile, as they are less well renowned than male athletes.

6.3.2 Key areas of discussion of the Interviews Analysis

The researcher conducted a total of nine interviews, divided equally among Egyptian experts in sport digital marketing, male and female athletes. The outcomes and analysis of these interviews were described thoroughly in chapter five.

The key findings of the interviews with the experts show that athletes should follow a strategy that combines both frontstage messages and backstage messages, and strategies should be built based on the performance and path of each athlete. The experts further explained that there exists a disparity in the online behaviour of Egyptian male and female athletes on Instagram. The disparity primarily stems from cultural factors, as females are consistently subjected to online harassment and criticism for their involvement in sports. Society tends to stereotype and discourage female athletes, suggesting that they should pursue professions other than sports. The interviews with male athletes reveal that they effectively distribute their attention between frontstage and backstage messages, maintaining a balanced weight. Male athletes acknowledge that there is gender segregation between them and female athletes, as females do not receive the same support males receive from federations. Furthermore, the amount of cyberbullying

that female athletes face online prevents them from acting in the same way that male athletes do.

The interviews with female athletes reveal that they often post content related to the sports setting that includes images of their training and competitions. This contradicts the results of the visual content analysis discussed in the preceding section 6.3.1. They avoid posting any personal photographs; Photo composition is very important for female athletes because the photograph angle determines how their body looks, and this helps to reduce bullying comments. Female athletes have significant gender segregation in comparison to their male athletes, resulting in a lack of equal attention, media exposure, and financial support. The Egyptian culture poses an obstacle to behaving in a typical manner online, similar to other athletes, without considering gender.

6.4 Interpretation of the Findings

The following sections will establish connections between the study's findings and the existing body of research discussed in Chapter Two, the literature review. By drawing comparisons and identifying consistencies or discrepancies with previous studies, this analysis will provide a deeper understanding of how the current findings contribute to, support, or challenge established theories and perspectives in the field.

6.4.1 Research Question One:

What strategies do Egyptian athletes employ for their visual self-presentation online practices? - How do athletes present their online self-image via photographs?

The first research question aimed at exploring the presence of Goffman's self-presentation theory (1959) by athletes on their online platforms and the online practices employed, as some interpretations are made in the context of the front and backstage messages of the photos posted. The first research question extends to exploring how athletes brand their self-image using photographs, and to be able to do so, it's important to identify the best social media

strategies. The way the fans evaluate the athletes online makes the athletes think more strategically when managing their online self-presentation (Rui et al., 2013).

Multiple research have shown that Instagram's visual dimension is more significant than other social media platforms, and it effectively evokes users' emotions (Blight, Ruppel, & Schoenbauer, 2017; Watkins & Lee, 2016). Previous studies have shown that athletes frequently use Instagram to share a variety of messages. These messages include sports-related photos, training content, and business-related posts, as well as personal and lifestyle posts. Athletes find Instagram to serve as an effective tool for self-promotion online (Burch & Zimmerman, 2019; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016). Burk and Grimmer (2018) carried out a survey on the self-presentation of athletes on Instagram. Instagram allows athletes to blend content from their personal and professional lives by sharing images as a form of visual storytelling (Jones, 2013).

The results of the visual content analysis and interviews in this Thesis indicate that Egyptian athletes prefer utilising Instagram for personal branding. Instagram offers a more user-friendly platform for showcasing their brand image through photographs compared to other platforms. Research question one also seeks to investigate how athletes use visual elements to shape their online self-image strategically. In research conducted by Smith and Sanderson (2015), a total of 1,352 photographs and captions posted by 31 athletes across eight sports (basketball, football, tennis, track, golf, swimming, baseball, and softball) were evaluated using content analysis. The focus of the study was to investigate how these athletes presented themselves on Instagram. The results indicated that 73% of the photographs featured athletes in sports-related settings, while 7% were dedicated to friends and family. This contradicts previous social media studies that showcased athletes tend to share more of their private lives online rather than sport-setting content or competitions (Sanderson, 2013). Furthermore, more studies done on both male and female Olympian athletes corroborated this conclusion, revealing that personal photographs were the predominant kind of content posted by athletes, surpassing other types of photos (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016).

The findings of the visual content analysis demonstrate that both male and female Egyptian athletes place considerable significance on photographs that portray training on the pitch, wins, and victories. Both male and female athletes share personal photos that highlight their families and other occasions. However, this particular piece of content lacks the same level of importance to the athletes as content that pertains to their on-field performance or within the setting of sports. This study aligns with Smith and Sanderson's (2015) study, as it shows that athletes in both studies strategically adapt their content when posting and sharing photos.

In contrast, the interviews conducted with the male and female athletes revealed little disparities when compared to the study of visual content analysis. During the interviews, male athletes explained that they frequently share photos of their training sessions and on-field activities. Nevertheless, their inclination to distribute family-oriented content while capturing behind-the-scenes moments corresponds with the conclusions reached from the visual analysis. Female athletes place a high level of importance on protecting their online privacy and mostly concentrate on uploading photographs related to sports, championships, triumphs, and accomplishments. The experts confirmed the findings of the visual content analysis and the statements made by male athletes, emphasising the need of maintaining a balanced focus on both on-field and off-field content.

In the same study conducted by Smith and Sanderson (2015), it was found that most athletes tend to post photos that display their full bodies, whereas selfies were very uncommon. This finding contrasts with prior research that indicated a widespread usage of selfies. In this Thesis the athletes also did not mostly utilise selfies. According to the experts' statements during the interviews, athletes need instruction and embrace social media platforms as a regular part of their routine, instead of relying on professional photographers to capture images during training or matches. Athletes often do not generate their own material or demonstrate proactive behaviour.

In this Thesis's visual content analysis, both genders appeared to share photos of their half- and full-bodied bodies, with male athletes sharing more pictures in an active manner than female

athletes. During the interviews, male athletes emphasised the importance of capturing half-body shots, as well as the quality of the picture. However, female athletes prioritise their online privacy with great seriousness. For this reason, they devote significant care to the composition and angles of the photographs before they are ready for posting. While Egyptian fans find close-up and happy-faced shots highly attractive, as noted by the experts' statements in the interviews, the visual content analysis revealed that athletes did not post them widely.

An interesting observation from the examination of the males' visual content analysis is that they place high importance on nationalism. The photographs exhibit nationalistic characteristics when an athlete raises the flag of their country in international tournaments, wears the national team uniform, or captures a moment during the national anthem. The nationalistic type of content was added to the visual analysis coding protocol when the images were analysed due to how prominent these nationalist images are.

These visual forms depict the athlete's profound love and sense of affiliation with their nation while carrying out the duties of representing his or her country (Yoedtadi & Sandy, 2021).

Adriani (2019) investigated the effect of nationalist content online since that social media is considered an ideal virtual place for emotionally driven content as he argues. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritise the inclusion of nationalist content in order to effectively cultivate a profound and robust sense of nationalism by athletes among fans and the society as a whole (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2021; Chen & Chiang, 2023).

Based on previous studies, it appears that highlighting nationalistic online content is not the same in each country around the world. As it relies on the nature of this nation, collectivism societies are more likely to express online nationalism by their athletes, unlike those who live in individualistic societies like the U.S. (Hofstede, 1984; Xu et al., 2021). This is comparable to Egypt as it's considered a collectivism society too and it was obvious from the visual content analysis of the Egyptian athletes and also during the interviews, the experts and athletes emphasised the significance of promoting the national team online. However, they also highlighted the sensitivity of posting during national competitions.

Xu, Kim, and Guo (2024) conducted research in which they evaluated 1,800 photographs that were posted by 278 Chinese Olympian athletes during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Their analysis revealed that out of the 1,800 pictures, 189 (10.50%) posted nationalist content. However, Chinese male athletes expressed even more nationalistic tendency than the female athletes a distinction that was not seen among athletes from the United States or South Korea, as noted by the researchers.

According to the experts, athletes from the Arab area have a cultural tendency to avoid posting on social media after a defeat, in contrast to athletes from Western countries. Arabs see this approach as indifferent and unfeeling since they are inherently emotional societies. Male athletes in this study are seen in their tendency to post a large number of photos while they are engaged in activities with the national team.

Nevertheless, the visual analysis of the female athletes lacked a comparable level of nationalistic content. This discrepancy may be attributed to several factors, such as the sport's popularity or the novelty of having a national women's football team, for instance. The perception of sport as a male-dominated activity, symbolising achievements, and values in the sports world, could potentially influence male athletes' nationalism content more than females' (Wensing & Bruce, 2003). Male athletes receive the majority of media attention, especially during mega-sports events, while female athletes receive minimal coverage (Kian et al., 2011; Smith & Wrynn, 2013; Cooky et al., 2021).

As for the endorsers and business content, it has significant importance for the athlete. Keeping an attractive profile with a large and engaged audience is a priority for athletes. Research carried by Yaşar (2017) reveals that athletes on Instagram have a lower inclination to share business-related photographs. Consequently, some athletes fail to leverage on many possibilities to establish a thriving brand and are unable to use visual self-presentation to its full potential. This implies that positioning the athlete as an appealing brand requires a certain level of competence, and some athletes may not possess the necessary knowledge and qualifications to do this alone.

Arguably, another study conducted on South Korean Olympian athletes of both genders found that females tend to post fewer business-related photos compared to male athletes, though they both had similar business opportunities. It appears that male athletes have shown a greater inclination towards engaging in and promoting business activities on social media (Xu, et al., 2024). Additionally, it was clarified that the gender disparity may be attributed to the view of sports as a mostly male industry (Bruce, 2016; Xu et al., 2024), and that involvement in entrepreneurial business is similarly seen as a masculine activity (Ogbor, 2000; Xu et al., 2024). In the visual content analysis, all athletes of both genders gave an equal weight to business-related photos. Egyptian athletes do pay attention to this type of content, although the percentage was low compared to other posted content. The reason behind it is that it depends solely on the athlete's popularity, sport, and number of followers. This aligns with the consensus of experts and athletes of both genders, as expressed in the interviews, that strategically shaping their online brand image might enhance their appeal to potential sponsors. For experts, managing an athlete online is mostly focused on achieving this specific purpose. This suggests that effectively promoting the athlete as an appealing brand requires a certain degree of proficiency of use of social media platforms.

The significance of implementing a social media strategy that encompasses the online goals for each athlete and a well-crafted content plan was demonstrated in the findings of the interviews. This social media plan will outline the key areas of concentration for the athlete's online presence, including the pillars they should prioritise, the platforms they should use, and the specific sort of content they ought to post, namely in the form of photographs.

Regrettably, based on interviews with experts and athletes, as well as visual content analysis, this study's findings indicate that athletes acknowledge the significance of having a social media strategy, but it is not obligatory that they possess the knowledge and ability to execute it independently. Additionally, several athletes acknowledge the significance of managing their online accounts but are unwilling to allocate resources towards collaborating with an agency for

this purpose. The interviewees emphasised the necessity of integrating each photograph they have shot and shared with a meaningful message, ensuring that it serves a purpose.

Lastly, the online strategy and content plan should incorporate the captions and ensure their compatibility with the photos. The importance of captions varies depending on the snapshot; some photographs may be self-explanatory and not need any more explanation, whilst others may benefit from the inclusion of description to provide further context.

In the visual content analysis, it was seen that athletes of both genders made extensive use of captions. However, it was noted that females used captions to an even greater extent. The underlying concept stems from the statements made by the female athletes during the interviews. They expressed the belief that every photograph should be accompanied with a commentary to provide context, and they also emphasised their responsibility to inspire and encourage other women to pursue their goals. Male athletes have stated a desire to use captions, although they believe that the picture could alone convey a message without any additional elements, unless they are deemed necessary. According to the experts, captions are considered to be very important, yet they might also possess potential harm to the athletes if used inappropriately. In previous research, captions were examined using text analysis. However, this Thesis takes a different approach by investigating the presence of captions, compatibility with the photographs and analysing their use and significance.

Research question one explored various factors that significantly impact the research field of this Thesis. It highlighted the athletes' use of visual self-presentation theory, particularly on Instagram. This social media platform is known for its visual nature, which allows athletes to showcase their genuine selves through photographs. In addition, the first research question looked into the variety of content that athletes share online and the strategies they use to create a strong visual presence. The next section will discuss research question two and how it relates to findings of this study.

6.4.2 Research Question Two:

What differences exist between the visual self-presentation tactics used by Egyptian male and female athletes on Instagram?

The second research question sought to explore the difference in visual self-presentation on Instagram between Egyptian male and female athletes, as well as the potential variations in online strategies.

Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2016) conducted a study on a sample of eight Olympic athletes from the U.S., UK, Australia, and Jamaica. The study revealed that female athletes exhibited a higher frequency of personal-related photographs in comparison to other types of content, as opposed to the male athletes. In addition, there was another study conducted on Chinese athletes of both genders during the Rio Olympics where female athletes also posted personal-related photos more than the males (Xu & Armstrong, 2019).

Both male and female athletes in the interviews recognised the significance of a well-designed online strategy that attempts to enhance their online image, as described in research question one. During the visual content analysis, it was seen that both individuals posted similar content. They mostly posted sport-setting-related photographs and highlighted their victories and achievements in various tournaments. Nevertheless, there were inconsistencies observed between the findings obtained from the visual content analysis and the interviews.

Firstly, the analysis of visual content revealed that female athletes share a much higher number of personal-related photos compared to male athletes, with a ratio of twice as many. However, the primary factor contributing to the rise in the proportion of females was mostly due to the presence of an athlete who was born and raised in the U.S. Consequently, their upbringing and cultural background varied from those of individuals residing in Egypt. Moreover, the quantity of personal photographs shared by female athletes in this Thesis is lower compared to the quantity of personal photographs shared by female athletes in earlier research conducted by Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2016) and Xu and Armstrong (2019), for example.

The visual analysis findings directly contradict the statements made by the female athletes during the interviews regarding the posting of personal-content photographs. Despite their claims in the interviews that they do not post personal photos and maintain separate public and private accounts, the visual content analysis clearly shows that they do post personal photos, regardless of the quantity.

The primary limitation is the explicit differentiation between genders in sports participation, with the activity being exclusively reserved for males (Bruce, 2016; Xu et al., 2024).

Geurin-Eagleman and Clavio (2015) conducted a study on athletes' Facebook pages and found that athletes who receive less media coverage tend to rely more on their own efforts, such as using social media, to gain attention. In contrast, athletes who already have regular media coverage do not prioritise this strategy. This aligns with the statements made by experts during interviews, highlighting that in Egypt, the media predominantly focuses on male athletes and footballers, given the sport's massive popularity in the country. Female athletes see limitations in their ability to behave similarly to male athletes online, as explained during interviews and corroborated by experts and male athletes.

The female athletes during the interviews expressed their desire to maintain two separate Instagram accounts, one public account for their followers and a private one for their family and friends. This is because they feel restricted from posting personal photographs on their public accounts. Female athletes acknowledge the significance of maintaining an active online presence and achieving a well-balanced balance between online frontstage and back-stage messages. However, they face limitations in freely expressing themselves online, unlike the male athletes.

The cultural factor was identified as a major constraint by experts and athletes of both genders. In Egyptian society, women are often assigned particular roles and participating in sports is not one of them. Female athletes often encounter criticism, particularly on social media, where they are subjected to opposition for their involvement in sports or subjected to body shaming for their sports uniform. During the interviews, female athletes expressed their intent to post

photos with a particular arrangement that hides their body and sports uniform, preventing followers from engaging in cyberbullying and providing negative feedback that could harm their emotional well-being. The presence of a masculine social environment compels female athletes to exercise caution while posting sports-related photographs online, prompting them to avoid exposing clothing or photographs taken from certain angles (Cranmer et al., 2014).

The problem of reinforcing hegemonic masculinity in sports media is not exclusive to Egypt or Arab nations, but rather a global one. This is seen in how female athletes are consistently portrayed as inferior to their male counterparts by the international sports media (Bruce, 2016). In research conducted by Gonkek and Gencer (2023), the visual self-presentation tactics of athletes from several European nations, such as Spain, Portugal, and Belgium, were analysed. It was observed that female sports do not elicit the same level of media coverage or audience interest as male sports. The degree of importance given to women's sports may fluctuate throughout countries due to the cultural and societal standards that exist within their communities (Sadeghi et al., 2018). Hence, Egyptian female athletes carefully use online platforms to develop a prominent presence. Nevertheless, they encounter several constraints that restrict their freedom to act as they choose.

Research question two explores the disparities in visual self-presentation tactics used by male and female athletes in Egypt and examines the impact of these tactics on their online brand image. It supports the first research question, which examines the online strategies used by athletes and the substantial impact of cultural norms and societal judgements on their decision-making, especially for female athletes. This gender disparity is seen not just in the Arab world but also in numerous Western cultures. The following part will analyse the research question three and its correlation with the results of this study.

6.4.3 Research Question Three:

What impact did the athlete visual self-portrayal have on fans engagement?

The third research question aimed at examining the impact of the athlete's visual self-presentation on increasing fan engagement. Athletes want to have a strong online presence to

attract and build a fan base among other sports stakeholders. This Thesis did not fully quantify fan engagement using interactivity metrics. However, the researcher explored fan engagement solely through the number of likes on the photographs posted by the athletes, supported by the statements from the interviews.

As stated in research question one, keeping a balanced content strategy that includes both front-stage and back-stage photos is beneficial for athletes in establishing a strong online presence.

A strong online presence assists in increasing the interaction the athletes get from fans assists and enhances it, since the bigger variety of photos shared, the higher the level of engagement (Yasar, 2017). Furthermore, the success of athletes whether achieved individually or with their club, is directly correlated with the number of followers and level of engagement they have (Abuín-Penas et al., 2019). Researchers such as Burch et al. (2014), Hambrick et al. (2010), Katie and Danylchuk (2012), and Pegoraro (2010) have investigated the behaviour of athletes who aim to create an appealing online presence. They have found that these athletes tend to share backstage photos that feature their family, friends, and lifestyle. The level of engagement with these specific types of photos surpasses that of any other category (Hambrick, et al., 2010; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012).

The visual content analysis revealed that photos depicting victories and family received the most likes. Moreover, athletes affiliated with widely known clubs such as Al Ahly or El Zamalek have a significant appeal to a vast audience due to their fame, particularly when these clubs have achieved championship victories. During the interviews, the experts supported the findings of the visual content analysis that photographs containing victories and family moments are the most engaging content, in addition to photos with a positive facial close-up view.

In the study on Spanish winter Olympic athletes, by Abuín-Penas, Martínez-Patiño, and Míguez-González (2019) they highlighted that a higher number of followers typically correlates with increased engagement in the form of likes, comments, and shares. However, athletes who possess a substantial following, can have a higher proportion of passive followers who do not actively engage or interact.

The experts during the interviews, asserted that businesses and sponsors are attracted to athletes based on their follower count; a substantial number of followers makes them attractive. However, this does not mean that the engagement rate is high, the numbers yet convey a message to sponsors. Athletes should actively engage with their fans by sharing and posting a diverse range of content that combines sports-related and personal content. It is crucial to maintain a consistent online presence and remain active, as advised by the experts.

Research question three examined the influence of athletes' visual self-presentation on fan engagement, using prior research and analyses within this Thesis. The Thesis showed that fans generally like certain sorts of content, and that a wider range of pictures results in higher levels of interactivity and engagement. In addition, establishing a powerful online presence is not exclusively dependent on the number of followers. Athletes, experts, and endorsers must also take into account other elements such as reach and engagement. Research questions three, similar to research questions one and two, emphasise the significance of a well-designed online strategy. This approach includes creating visual content by considering the goals and career path of each athlete, while also considering what would attract the attention of fans and other sports stakeholders.

6.5 Summary

This chapter has provided a summary of the research questions and objectives, as well as the main topics discussed in the findings obtained from both the analysis of visual content and the interviews. Interpretations of the findings analysed the research questions and their connection to the findings of this Thesis, as well as the significant debates between this study and previous research conducted in the same field. The forthcoming concluding chapter of this Thesis will encompass all aspects of this research, including research contributions, limitations, future plans, and ultimately, reflections on this study.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This study examines the visual self-presentation strategies used by Egyptian athletes on Instagram to effectively portray their self-image. This Thesis used Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory to explore the online activity of Egyptian athletes, both male and female, on Instagram. The research included analysing visual images and conducting interviews in order to comprehend the strategies employed by these athletes. The aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive summary of the research conducted in this Thesis, including its theoretical and practical contributions, limitations, future research plans, and the researcher's reflections on what has been accomplished and the challenges encountered.

7.2 Research Contribution

This Thesis makes significant contributions to sports communication, social media, athlete brand image, and self-presentation both in terms of theory and practical application.

This study's theoretical contribution expands on various aspects related to the self-presentation theory in the context of the Middle Eastern World, particularly Egypt. While previous scholars have examined Goffman's (1959) theory, this study offers unique insights by applying it specifically to the Egyptian sports industry. Despite the growing interest in this area, limited comprehensive research has been conducted thus far. Initially, studies primarily focused on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, but recently, Instagram has gained more attention due to its widespread use and visual nature, making it particularly appealing for researchers exploring visual content, as emphasised in this Thesis.

Previous research has utilised the self-presentation theory to analyse athletes' brand image; however, they have not thoroughly investigated it from a strategic perspective. It is crucial for athletes to have a clear and effective online strategy in order to successfully implement the self-presentation theory. This strategy should prioritise various types of content, with a particular emphasis on photos, which hold significant potential for conveying desired self-presentation.

Furthermore, this research sheds light on the disparities in online behavior between male and female Egyptian athletes, examining the impact of cultural norms and cyberbullying on the online self-presentation of female athletes. Cultural norms play a pivotal role in shaping the online behavior of athletes, and understanding these dynamics is vital for effectively managing one's online presence. Female athletes, in particular, face unique challenges and pressures in their online self-presentation, including the prevalence of cyberbullying and societal expectations. By investigating these factors, this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of female athletes in the Egyptian sports industry.

Overall, this study contributes to the existing literature by offering a contextualised analysis of the self-presentation theory in the Egyptian sports industry, exploring the strategic implementation of the theory, and examining the gender-specific dynamics in online self-presentation. The findings of this research have implications for athletes, sports organisations, and scholars seeking to enhance their understanding of self-presentation strategies and the influence of cultural factors on athletes' online behavior.

This research holds significant practical implications for athletes and experts in the fields of digital media and athlete branding. It aims to empower athletes with valuable insights and skills necessary to cultivate a strong and distinctive online presence, enabling them to engage effectively with fans, endorsers, and various stakeholders. In a highly competitive industry, such as sports, where personal branding plays a crucial role, there is a scarcity of specialised sports marketing agencies in Egypt. These agencies must possess the necessary expertise and resources to assist athletes in developing an authentic and compelling online presence that sets them apart from other individuals or entities.

The practical implications of this research are multi-fold. Firstly, it offers athletes practical guidance on developing a clear and effective online strategy that aligns with their personal brand and objectives. It emphasises the importance of prioritising different forms of content, particularly photos, to convey the desired self-presentation and engage with the target audience effectively.

Secondly, this research highlights the significance of understanding and navigating the cultural norms and expectations specific to the Middle Eastern context, particularly Egypt. Athletes need to be aware of the cultural sensitivities and adapt their online behavior accordingly to maintain a positive and respectful image.

Thirdly, the findings shed light on the challenges and risks faced by female athletes in terms of cyberbullying and societal pressures. This knowledge can inform the development of support systems and strategies to mitigate these challenges and foster a safer and more inclusive online environment for female athletes.

Furthermore, this research underscores the importance of collaboration between athletes and sports marketing agencies. Athletes can leverage the expertise and resources of these agencies to enhance their digital presence, reach a wider audience, and secure endorsement opportunities. The insights from this study can guide agencies in tailoring their services to meet the specific needs of athletes in the Egyptian sports industry.

In summary, the practical implications of this research are far-reaching. Athletes can utilise the knowledge and insights gained from this study to build a strong and distinctive online presence, sports marketing agencies can refine their strategies and offerings, and both athletes and agencies can foster a more inclusive and supportive digital environment for athletes, particularly female athletes in Egypt.

7.3 Practical Implications

In the 2022 Olympics held in Tokyo, a total of 138 Egyptian athletes competed. Egypt's football scene has also gained significant recognition, with some shining stars, such as Mohamed Salah at Liverpool football club and Mohamed El Neny at Arsenal, participating in prominent leagues. The responsibility of the federation's leaders to prioritise sports marketing and communication is essential since the reputation of an Egyptian athlete reflects onto the whole nation. Sports federations would gain advantages from the findings on the significance of an athlete's online image and its potential influence on many elements and choices made by other stakeholders.

Regarding the athletes, most of them demonstrate limited knowledge on how to effectively handle their social media platforms or understand the significance of their self-presentation image. They acknowledge the need to have an online presence, but not all of them possess sufficient knowledge about brand image. Additionally, if they decide to engage the services of an agency for online management, it is crucial to possess a clear and specific understanding of the intended purpose and objectives of the online strategy and content plan tailored to their needs.

Ultimately, it is essential for sports federations and athletes to actively contribute towards enhancing the media exposure and financial backing of female athletes by sports entities or sponsors. They can also assist in launching initiatives to promote female involvement in sports, try to eliminate the challenges faced by female athletes in dealing with online cyberbullying, and alter the view of Egyptian society towards female athletes. The following parts will provide a comprehensive analysis of the practical implications of this Thesis. These implications will enable the translation of theoretical knowledge into practical insights, facilitating informed decision-making across various fields.

- The Need of a Social Media Strategy

In the Egyptian sports sector, there is a lack of expertise and an absence of strategic planning, not just in sports but generally. Sports stakeholders and athletes may find it challenging to recognise the significance of developing a strategy, since many activities, including branding, lack proper planning and function in a disorganised and haphazard manner, failing several goals. Upon analysing the visual content and the statements provided by experts and athletes during the interviews, it is evident that creating and implementing an effective online strategy is of utmost importance. The objective of this strategy is to serve as a comprehensive plan for the athlete's online use. A social media strategy includes well-defined online objectives, an in-depth market study, and particular content that needs to be executed and posted. Experts believe that it is important to balance all platforms and not to focus on only one platform. Each platform has a target audience and features. The social media strategy's value rests in its distinctiveness, since

it is customised, to align with the individual athlete's career path, level of fame, personal characteristics, and goals.

- **Balance Weight Between Frontstage & Backstage Content**

The social media strategy includes the development of a content plan. The content strategy defines the athlete's intended portrayal or presentation to the public. The content encompasses several forms, such as text, images, or videos. Athletes choose the content according to their strategic objectives as well as their preferences for the platform. This research examines the use of images on Instagram and emphasises the need of strategic planning when selecting the type of images to post. Based on the analysis of this research and the prior discussions in other studies, it is essential to maintain a balance between images taken in a sport setting and personal photos. Athletes who neglect to preserve such a balance and only focus on capturing images of themselves throughout their performances limit their followers' capacity to perceive them as regular people. On the other hand, athletes who only disclose personal moments and daily life information do not effectively communicate to their followers the main reason for following them, which is their athletic performance and victories. Hence, maintaining a smart balance between both categories of content is crucial, not only to achieve balance but also to ensure a steady frequency of sharing and maintaining a constant online presence.

- **Agencies & Athletes Brand Management**

This Thesis has demonstrated the need of implementing a social media strategy, while also highlighting the deficiency in guidance and understanding among Egyptian athletes in managing their online accounts, as indicated in the interviews. The number of Egyptian sports marketing companies is steadily growing each year as a result of the market need, particularly in the areas of sports digital media and marketing. Within the Egyptian sports industry, both executives and athletes see the need to establish an online presence and cultivate a strong athlete brand image. However, they face challenges in implementing these techniques successfully and suitably. The primary cause for this is twofold: the insufficient education in this specific domain among athletes and sports stakeholders in Egypt, coupled with their inadequate understanding of it.

Furthermore, athletes are unable to allocate sufficient time and exert the necessary efforts to formulate a plan and effectively oversee their online platforms. Thus, engaging the services of a specialised firm that focuses on plan development and content implementation is the optimal answer for them. Although the number of sports agencies in Egypt is growing, there is a lack of qualified professionals with a strong portfolio. The experts or a specialised firm will assist Egyptian athletes in effectively and attractively positioning their brand image. Their responsibility is to comprehend the goals of athletes in both their professional and personal lives, as well as their intended public perception. Using these insights, the firm formulates and executes a plan and content that corresponds with the athlete's objectives, seeks to expand its online following, and captures the attention of other individuals involved in sports.

- **Residence of Athletes in Different Countries**

One of the notable observations in this study is that the residence or place where athletes were born and raised determines how they will present their image online. Growing up in a Middle Eastern country with a religious background and cultural norms is significantly different from growing up in a Western country with its societal values.

This insight is especially significant to Egyptian female athletes who were born and nurtured in places other than Egypt. These female athletes were able to express themselves without any limitations since their communities did not evaluate them based on their clothes or everyday routines. Contrary to other Egyptian female athletes who were born, raised, and competed for Egyptian teams, the distinction resides in their manner of projecting their image.

Individuals residing outside of Egypt often tend to openly express their aspirations, present their genuine identities on social media, and maintain a harmonious balance on and off the field, as previously explained. Their uniqueness doesn't warrant criticism, but fans must acknowledge and embrace their unique upbringing. Meanwhile, those in the sports marketing and media sectors should encourage Egyptian-raised female athletes to establish their distinct online personas.

- **Online Gender Disparity Between Male & Female Athletes is a Global Issue**

Based on visual content analysis and earlier research undertaken in Arab and Western nations, there was a significant online gender disparity among athletes. Past studies have shown that sport is often seen as a male-dominated activity, which suggests that this perception extends beyond the Arab country and has a worldwide reach. It is well recognised by all participants in the Egyptian sports sector that female athletes do not get equal support from the public and media compared to their male counterparts. This disparity is attributed to a cultural problem rooted in the belief that women should not be active in sports and should instead focus on other areas of life. This research provides significant insights into the problem, urging both the federation and athletes to proactively support and enable women participating in sports to express themselves without constraints. Female athletes in Egypt need to be more daring and confident in expressing themselves online. They should not hesitate to emphasise their presence on these platforms to distinguish themselves from male athletes and showcase their competitiveness, femininity, and other societal duties, such as becoming moms.

In addition to the previous part, the gender differences in cyberbullying may be seen via the online behaviours of fans targeting female athletes on their social media profiles. Egyptian female athletes face criticism and abuse when they share pictures of themselves in their sporting clothing. As a result, they feel compelled to limit their posts, carefully choose the angles and compositions of their images, and they often manage two different social media accounts - one for the public and one for private use. Online stereotypes include more than just remarks about appearance or clothing choices; individuals are singled out based on their body and the assumption that they are more suited for domestic tasks in the kitchen. Furthermore, they encounter criticism for engaging in sports. Agencies recruited by female athletes should customise a plan to ensure that they feel at ease while displaying their on-field endeavours, including practices and game footage, as well as their personal life including their family and friends. It is essential to acknowledge the fact that public figures will inevitably receive criticism

due to their prominent position. Consistently keeping an online presence may greatly improve their brand image among different sports stakeholders.

- **The Impact the Egyptian Culture has on Athletes Selection of Online Strategies**

The Egyptian culture significantly influences the behaviour of prominent personalities both online and offline. The sports industry is of utmost importance, especially for Egyptian athletes, who must conform to cultural and social norms. Currently, the sports business is seeing remarkable achievements across many sports and with a wide array of players. Athletes must use wisdom while devising their online strategy and selecting content to share, particularly during challenging periods. Throughout the interviews, both professionals in sports marketing field and athletes emphasised that achieving victory in a game or championship effectively eliminates any public discontent towards the teams. This suggests that, regardless of the many challenges faced by the team, a triumph serves to divert the attention of their supporters from these issues. Nevertheless, in the case of a defeat, teams and athletes should exercise great care, especially while engaging in online communication. The reason for this is that Egyptians are unable to accept the notion that these athletes, after a loss, may engage in social activities or participate in celebratory events like weddings, thereby limiting their capacity to convey emotions other than sorrow and mourning. This is a result of the highly emotive characteristics of Egyptian culture. This enables the rigorous formulation of the online approach, considering all the norms and values prevalent in Egyptian culture, to guarantee that athletes conform to them and continually garner their support.

7.4 Study Limitations

Like any research study, this study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the focus of this Thesis is primarily on the Egyptian context, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other Middle Eastern countries. Egypt can be seen to be less restrictive than some Middle Eastern nations, where the challenges faced by both Male and Female athletes may be more significant, in particular for Female athletes who may have additional levels of

restriction on how they can engage on visual platforms. While variations in online visual self-presentation across different countries in the region are plausible, the researcher's nationality and access to data from the Egyptian sports industry were the main factors behind this specific focus.

Another limitation is the exclusive emphasis on Instagram as the primary medium for examining visual self-presentation. Although Instagram is a prominent visual platform and previous research has extensively studied Facebook and Twitter, visual media on other platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok were not investigated in this research. YouTube and TikTok, with their video-centric nature, were not the central subjects of this study and thus were not included in the analysis.

Furthermore, while the study considered the presence of captions accompanying the athletes' photographs, the textual analysis of these captions was not conducted. The researcher chose to prioritise the visual content and did not delve into the analysis of captions in contrast to previous research. This decision was made to maintain focus on the study's main emphasis on athletes' visual self-presentation.

Additionally, the interviews conducted in this study were limited to athletes involved in team sports. This choice was influenced by the greater availability of team sport athletes compared to individual sport athletes, who often travel and compete outside of Egypt. While the interviews provided valuable insights, incorporating perspectives from athletes engaged in individual sports could have enhanced the understanding of their online visual self-presentation strategies, considering their role as primary representatives of both their team and the sport. This limitation presents opportunities for future research to explore and delve deeper into the online visual self-presentation strategies of individual sport athletes in Middle Eastern contexts, in a form which would build on the pilot study focused on the Olympic Games completed within this Thesis.

In conclusion, while this study provides valuable insights into the online visual self-presentation of Egyptian athletes using Instagram, it is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in

the research design. Future studies can build upon these limitations to expand the understanding of online self-presentation in different cultural contexts, explore other social media platforms, and include a diverse range of athletes from various sports backgrounds.

7.5 Recommendations for further study

The limitations outlined in the previous section provide opportunities for several further studies. First, the self-presentation theory may be used across many settings and cultures to make parallels with the Egyptian sports sector, therefore enhancing the grasp of this theory in a complete and detailed manner. Given the lack of study in the field of sports communication utilising images in the Arab world, this theory presents several opportunities. In addition to the significant cultural influence on Egyptian female athletes, it's crucial to investigate the impact of various cultures across other Middle Eastern nations on female and male athletes as well.

Secondly, a key topic to investigate is the Egyptian athletes residing abroad and participating in sports for teams that are not based in Egypt. These athletes possess distinct attitudes and strategies for managing their online platforms, as well as for projecting their self-image. An interesting aspect of this, is analysing Egyptian fan engagement with these athletes, are the differences in the ways in which Egyptian nationals perceive these athletes and do the athletes attract different levels of abuse than individuals based in Egypt, or does the cultural context impact the same.

Third, this research has analysed the pictures posted by athletes from a content perspective, allowing for a look into the semiotics of the images and the composition of the photos in the future. An integration of self-presentation theory and image semiotics, together with an analysis of the conveyed meaning of the picture, would greatly enhance several study areas.

Fourth, currently, TikTok and viral videos have gained considerable popularity, especially in the realm of sports media and communication, making them one of the most popular online platforms among fans. A comparative analysis could be undertaken to examine the usage of videos by athletes on both Instagram and TikTok, considering that both platforms facilitate video sharing and posting.

Fifth, one of the images of the content that was analysed in this study was the nationalistic type of photos posted by the athletes. The statements from the interviews confirmed the high level of engagement in photos featuring the national team. Previous studies also discussed how national team games and victories could help lift the image of an athlete and his or her own identity. Exploring this research area would be intriguing, particularly for nations such as Egypt, due to their tendency for sentimentality and emotionalism. This Thesis did not thoroughly investigate the perspective of the national team in international competitions, since it was not the primary focus. This Thesis only focused on the analysis of nationalistic material as a predominant category of photo-related content shared by athletes.

Finally, fans constitute the paramount component of any team or sports equation. The sustained utilisation of any form of media relies heavily on the fan base's viewership and engagement. Despite previous studies in this field, this Thesis did not fully utilise specific metrics to measure fan engagement and interactivity. Nevertheless, conducting a thorough analysis of online fan engagement and its impact on athletes' online conduct offers a noteworthy prospect for additional investigation, especially considering the pivotal role fans play in the game.

7.6 Study Reflections

This section will reflect on the researcher's process of conducting the study, encompassing challenges, encounters, and learning outcomes.

Completing this Thesis necessitated a substantial investment of time and effort throughout the years of study, as it explored a research field that captivated the researcher's personal, academic, and practical interests. The study commenced by examining gaps in the research domains of sports communication and social media, particularly within the Egyptian context. The key strategy was to engage in extensive reading to expand one's knowledge and gain valuable perspectives on which path to pursue. The researcher derived pleasure from reading, although they felt somewhat pressed for time when selecting a specific field or subject. Nevertheless, with the assistance of the PhD supervisor, the researcher deliberately decelerated and prolonged the reading procedure, resulting in valuable benefits.

After selecting the primary research topic, the researcher and PhD supervisor collaborated on a research paper that served as a preliminary study for this Thesis. This collaboration significantly greatly assisted in understanding the challenges associated with this topic and the direction of optimal methods. The researcher initiated the process of gathering visual content from 10 athletes, resulting in a total of 1,000 images. Subsequently, nine interviews were conducted simultaneously, following the completion of the Thesis structure and finalisation of the research methodology approaches.

The time, number of efforts, and months required for data collection and analysis reflected the challenges encountered. The researcher faced challenges in analysing the interviews due to her lack of familiarity with the NVIVO software, despite having received instruction on its use through multiple university tutorials. The researcher thoroughly enjoyed this part because the findings were clear to her, and the study was becoming increasingly interesting. The challenge was to continue writing and maintain motivation throughout the process until reaching the very end stages of the Thesis.

Simultaneously with conducting the preliminary study and Thesis, the researcher successfully finished three core modules at the University: Modern Researcher 1, Modern Researcher 2, and Negotiation and Learning. These three modules greatly improved the researcher's abilities, specifically in the areas of conducting research, writing research papers, and presenting themselves, among other aspects. This facilitated the researcher in submitting a research paper to an international journal (tandfonline, 2024), as well as presenting a part of their Thesis at an international conference in April 2024 in Athens (Icmrss, 2024).

Finally, the impact this Thesis has on the researcher is just as important as the research area or the contribution it makes to scholars and practitioners. The researcher has been positively influenced on multiple levels, including academic, practical, and psychological, as a result of this journey. Through years of research, the researcher has gained extensive knowledge and understanding, recognising that the pursuit of a PhD goes beyond the acquisition of a degree.

Instead, it encompasses the entirety of the learning process, which has a profound and enduring effect on her life.

7.7 Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to provide concrete advantages to Egyptian athletes and the sports industry in Egypt that could be effectively implemented in real-world scenarios. The aim was to elevate the online brand image of athletes among key stakeholders in the sports industry. Through the visual content analysis of the 10 Egyptian athletes, this research not only generated valuable academic insights but also shed light on the strategies and visual presentation employed in their online image through the use of diverse content.

The results derived from the visual content analysis were further strengthened by the statements obtained from experts and athletes during interviews. These statements underscored the significance of online visual self-presentation for shaping both on-field and off-field image. It was emphasised that maintaining an appealing and engaging image is crucial, even in cases where individuals may lack the necessary knowledge or face challenges in this regard. This aspect is particularly relevant for female athletes, who often encounter unique hurdles and societal expectations.

This study has successfully demonstrated the importance of self-presentation, a concept widely acknowledged by experts and athletes alike. However, athletes often lack the guidance and support necessary to establish their personal brand, determine the appropriate content to share, and maintain consistency in their presentation. Nonetheless, all participants in the study recognised that upholding an appealing brand image is vital for maintaining a strong position among fans and endorsers, as well as fostering long-lasting relationships that can secure their future, even after retirement.

By addressing these challenges and providing practical insights and recommendations, this study equips athletes with the tools necessary to navigate the complex world of online self-presentation and personal branding. It empowers them to strategically manage their online presence, cultivate a positive image, and establish meaningful connections with their target

audience and stakeholders. Moreover, it highlights the long-term benefits of maintaining a strong brand image in terms of career sustainability and post-retirement opportunities.

Overall, this research not only contributes to academic understanding but also offers practical implications for athletes, sports organisations, and industry professionals in Egypt. It serves as a valuable resource for athletes seeking to enhance their online presence and reputation, while also providing guidance for stakeholders in the sports industry to effectively engage with athletes in the digital realm.

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Appendix 1 Interview Guide

Part A: Experts

- 1) What social media goals do you have for your athletes?
- 2) Do you allow athletes to interfere when designing their online strategy?
- 3) On what basis you choose which platform to use online?
- 4) What images do you rely more on? Are captions important too and why?
- 5) Which images create more engagement?
- 6) What takes more weight in your strategy increasing no. of followers or increase fan engagement?
- 7) Attracting sponsors and improving their online image is achievable online?
- 8) How is it different in the online visual images posted by male & female athletes?
- 9) Does athletes' online usage change in competitions especially with the national team? How?

Part B: Athletes

- 1) How often do you use social media?
- 2) Which social media platform you use most? And why?
- 3) Do you have personal account or only the public one? Why?
- 4) Who manages your online accounts? If it's an agency why not you?
Probing question: if it's an agency, how much interference you have over their strategy and content creation?
- 5) Do you love taking pictures of yourself to post online and why?
- 6) What kind of photos do you usually take?
- 7) Do you put much thought about the composition of the image itself before posting it? Your posture? Your facial expressions?
- 8) Is the caption important to you and linked to the photo or it doesn't matter?
- 9) What kind of photos that get more likes and more engagement?
- 10) What do you avoid sharing or posting on your account?

- 11) Does your online usage change in competitions especially with the national team? How?
- 12) How do you see the differences between you & your female athletes in the same sport regarding their online presence?
- 13) How do you think your fans perceive you as a public figure?
- 14) What's your online objectives on social media platforms?
- 15) Do you think you have what it takes to attract sponsors to you as a personal brand or you're still developing? Please explain more
- 16) How did your online usage changed or evolved by years and what's the reason behind it?

Appendix 2 Interview Transcriptions

Part A: Experts Interviews

Expert One

- 1) What social media goals do you have for your athletes?

It depends on their career status, short term strategy and long term, and this strategy depends on what exactly is their career status, for example if we will talk about international athletes; Mpebbe is not the same as Messi. One athlete is in his beginning and the other one is finishing his career, so the strategy is mainly based on how I want the athlete to be positioned. I could position a player that all he does is charity work, or I want to show his personal life more, of course aside from the basic content or posts regarding the matches and their goals, etc. And also, it's very important to know what the player wants to do when they retire. For example, Egyptian players like Ahmed Fathy, Ahmed Fathy has a bold personality, very straightforward and has high morals and when he retires, he will surely become a manager, so I will build my online strategy on this. So, based on their character and their career status I will build their online positioning according to this using social media platforms.

- 2) Do you allow athletes to interfere when designing their online strategy?

Very minor interference. Of course, there are some basics we agree upon in the beginning like setting up the goals, because the main reason why agents or agencies exist is to make the player put all their focus inside the pitch, that's all. Because especially here in Egypt athletes don't want to invest in social media platforms, and they think is it easy to just post any picture without any strategy.

- 3) On what basis you choose which platform to use online?

In my opinion, each social media platform has its own benefits, and each platform has its own target audience so any sport athlete needs to have an account on all platforms, sometimes yes, I can prefer or make a platform the main channel for the athlete but for example TikTok is now very important and in gulf area they use snapchat as well, and here in Egypt Facebook Instagram and Tiktok are the main ones.

- 4) What images do you rely more on? Are captions important too and why?

Based on the strategy we set at first, identifying objectives, let's say I want to position my player as the funniest like Saad Samir for example, so, I will focus on his sense of humor and make it apparent in the pictures, because this will increase his popularity, at the end of the day it's about the popularity of the athlete, Abdallah Said is very talented, Mohamed Salah is an international icon, it depends on what is very significant about this player, this is what attracts fans to them, so, I will have to highlight such aspects in the content posted.

Second of all, their lifestyle; if someone is a family-oriented individual, which is an objective so I will show it, or even endorsement so I will work on this type of content according to the objectives. I won't try to balance between all type of content, it's all about the objectives. Sometimes captions are important and sometimes not, but it's very risky when it comes to big prominent athletes, but the shorter the better. Because nowadays people could turn someone

into a thing which isn't true because something was written incorrectly on social media. It's risky because it might send indirect messages and backfire against a player, especially someone like Salah with Liverpool new contract.

5) Which images create more engagement?

Closeups, happy facial expressions drive more traffic like Mohamed Salah

And of course, photos on the pitch, but of course it must be during a special moment and has a reason behind for posting it.

Like Afsha, when he scored against Zamalek in an important match, this went viral. It depends more on the occasion.

6) What takes more weight in your strategy increasing no. of followers or increase fan engagement?

Number of followers, because at the end, I will sell my player's personal brand by their no. of followers. For example, if a player has 500 K follower like Sanad and another one has 200 K, if I want to convince someone to sign a campaign with a player of course I will choose the one with the higher number of followers which is the 500 K, even if the engagement is low. Though the engagement rate is much important than the followers but am talking from a business perspective and what's attractive for sponsors.

7) Attracting sponsors and improving their online image is achievable online?

It's a very irrelevant example but take "Fifi Abdo" an actress that was far away from any work and suddenly she's fully present on social media and now she's trending and having many campaigns and appearing in many commercials, and sport is the same as this, but unfortunately, social media has overheads and if someone not willing to pay or invest why would I run or manage their account.

So yes, I can attract sponsors online, but the thing is some players don't see how this is very important to be a brand ambassador or to have a package or the service am providing for the player themselves, their online image is not even attractive enough.

And yes, its embedded within the strategy but it's not easy.

8) How is it different in the online visual images posted by male & female athletes?

Honestly, I don't see any difference, and it's not gender biased it depends on the person themselves, character based. I think the problem is the culture, it's a cultural thing, they get harassed. And females yeah could find some difficulty in posting and online presence. And in Egypt it's all about football, male players, Ahly & Zamalek, that's it.

9) Does athletes' online usage change in competitions especially with the national team? How?

It's much easier to work within national team, because we all support Egypt unless the team losses and timing of the post of course, especially in big competitions.

One goal everyone working towards it. And timing is important because if a team loses, and a player posts a photo where they are smiling then this would be very provocative for the fans. And I will make sure to express patriotism in all shared content because it's an honor for any player to represent their country and to deliver a clear message to the whole Egyptian nation about unity.

Expert Two

1) What social media goals do you have for your athletes?

Basically, we can start with awareness about this player, for example if they don't have an Arabic account so I will spread awareness about this, this is my first level in the objectives, 2nd objective is to make fans engage with the posts by liking, sharing, or commenting. Like a two-way conversation with the fans and with other brands or sponsors, any kind of conversation that could drive engagement. My third objective is how to monetize or use the brand value of the player to attract money streams more could be through merchandise and the campaigns and this objective specifically became very important lately.

2) Do you allow athletes to interfere when designing their online strategy?

Most of the time there is interference from athletes but at the end of the day there are specific basics we need to agree upon from the start.

3) On what basis you choose which platform to use online?

Depends on his/her fan base, for example of this player main fan base in gulf region this means you need to have twitter account like KSA & UAE fans are more active there than Instagram. And if you want to target younger generation you will go for Tiktok. Also, objectives are very important. Secondly, depends on the features of each platform in terms of football, twitter for football community used for coverage and stats of the game and who scored. more coverage but Instagram is more personalized. As for Facebook, it's more for a generic type of audience. And usually I recommend using three accounts: Facebook, Instagram and Tiktok.

4) What images do you rely more on? Are captions important too and why?

Mainly what's more attractive are personal lives with their family, fans always wait for this content. And cultural images during world cup. Fans always expect more photos and behind scenes images. And photos of milestones, or victories kind of photos of course, also training photos before matches are appealing and serves as motivation for them before the match. Captions on Instagram are the latest important, but hashtags the spread the reach and drive huge traffic. Strategically we think about what will deliver my post faster, would an emoji be more reflective on the photo but at the end of the day if using captions is necessary then it must be short and catchy, and wanted to go viral and a witty caption... it must be smart and adding some insights. Football is about storytelling.

5) Which images create more engagement?

Personal photos create more engagement

6) What takes more weight in your strategy increasing no. of followers or increase fan engagement?

Engagement is somehow connected with followers if I increased followers, engagement would increase not necessarily but it will eventually Happen. We rely on fan base more, but again it depends on the goals and each player and how his online platforms are performing.

7) Attracting sponsors and improving their online image is achievable online?

Yes, achievable again depending on fan base and depending on where this player stands according to his performance and career.

- 8) How is it different in the online visual images posted by male & female athletes?

What I observed that females are more active with fans and engaged more but again depends on the personality of each player.

- 9) Does athletes' online usage change in competitions especially with the national team?

Yes, national teams spirit brings different content especially between teammates, in the training camps with their roommates. Because they focus more on the bonding and the Nation. Like for example if the national team loses, a player could post an image motivating his teammates to rise their morals.

Expert Three

- 1) What social media goals do you have for your athletes?

First of all, let me divide this into three parts; is the athlete a rookie, or are they a rising talent, or have they already surpassed the super star level? For each category of athlete there's a different strategy, but all of their strategies convey three main things: 1- There's more affinity to their respective fanbase, and fanbase here is not limited to the audience from the athlete's sporting club or home country. The second thing; it helps increase the total fanbase of the athlete, because this eventually brings in funding so it requires sponsors, the third thing: to make it clear and natural, it has to be natural, it has to be reflecting the athlete themselves.

It doesn't have to be forced in terms of graphics or content, and in that regard we have two examples: There's the example of Karim Benzema and Mohammed Salah, in Benzema's case; he is managed by a very strong agency and they issue high production videos and he is a holly wood super star, meanwhile in Salah's case; he is only doing basic effort, a few posts and no captions and that's all, so, both situations exist, you could hire the agency true, but you can see how one agency preforms compared to the other.

- 2) Do you allow athletes to interfere when designing their online strategy?

They most certainly must interfere with their strategy, initially; the strategy must be driven by them, and so, in reference to cases I have worked on before as well as other cases I am currently working on but unfortunately, it's not something I could talk about publicly, there are some Emirati athletes and I had signed a few NDAs, but when I sat with those athletes, I asked them: "What is it you wish to do?" "How far do you want to go?" "What do you want to do?"

So, there are athletes who are from the Emirates here for example who have a Scottish mother or a Tanzanian mother or a Brazilian mother but the father would be Emirati, and they wish to enter into an entirely different narrative, and approach the younger audience and create Tiktok content and jokes and such things, meanwhile some other athletes are a different story, they wish to remain presentable and keep their content aligned with a purpose and value while at the same time be able to generate income through it, so, it has to be driven by them, I can't approach the athlete with a model and claim to them that this model should work well for them.

- 3) On what basis you choose which platform to use online?

On two factors, one is the friendly factor, and the other is the professional factor. The friendly factor is about what the athlete is capable of creating, meaning, there are different personalities, for example an athlete like Abdullah Al Said, no matter how much you try to integrate him into Tiktok he wouldn't succeed there, compared to how well Wael Goma is performing there for example or other athletes that are prominent, their content went on Tiktok due to simpler partnership conditions unlike the other lesser known athletes who go and attempt to create something on Tiktok and keep trying to only not be able to do anything worthwhile, so, the main factor is the friendly factor.

The professional factor depends on how much funding is the athlete investing, and it will also take time and effort, also how much funding, and for the athlete to know when and where to spend their efforts, there's a third factor which is very important and it is the professional meaning; the fanbase, their nationality and their audience, where are they based, for example, let me use Abdel Kader once more as an example, Abdel Kader with his fanbase and with what he creates, it's very easy for him to perform well on Tiktok, meanwhile that's not the case for Mohammed Sherif, for Mohammed Sherif for example; he only uses Instagram and Twitter, that's it, so, you must narrow down a little bit depending on the athlete's qualifications themselves and ...

(Q: One application for the athletes in Egypt who wouldn't care, which one would they choose?)

Twitter or Tiktok, one or the other, they wouldn't care about which one, they would either use Twitter or Tiktok, for them, the most important one is Instagram, followed by Facebook, those are the two most important for them, after that it's not important. And for them; if the platform they go on does not support verification of Athlete profiles then they don't want it, I believe this somehow became an unwritten rule amongst them, before they sign up with any agent or go to anyone to manage their accounts they ask first: "Would there be verification? Ok, good".

4) What images do you rely more on? Are captions important too and why?

Has to be equal weight regardless of the athlete's performance, there's a triangle diagram that I draw up, it's called the Reality Triangle; Family – Community – and the Club, this is the Reality Triangle, how we are loyal to the community, you have to show it, how is it that you help people, so you go into the social responsibility activations, and how to do decent things, and once again, it's entirely up to the athlete whether they want to do good things or not, in such cases more and more, and that's good.

But there are activities they do with their club for example, a certain athlete who attended some initiative for example to help retired athletes whose homes were damaged and this initiative was documented and filmed by the club, I would use a part of that footage and upload it, it's already filmed, but if they go to help people distribute food packages in Ramadan just as a good deed, then that's good for you, god be with you and I can't help you there, this is one level of it. Loyalty to the family, in terms of how they behave around their friends, relatives and such people, as a normal person and loyal to their club, it's clear, and so this is the reality triangle on which content is categorized.

Captions, They do give more meaning, there's this exercise that I do that is very nice, for the first month I let the athlete come up with their own captions, I don't come up with captions, I let them do their captions while I create an external sheet on the side where I list down their most commonly used terminologies and words, because I their genuine self, I want the account to represent them, so, how is it that they write? Come up with your captions and I will fix up what

you came up with, I'll edit your errors or grammar mistakes, the Arabic typing format, the emojis format, I don't want them to have a line in traditional Arabic and another line underneath it in Formal English, I want both lines to be normal, no spaces between them and some mess here and there, I want the caption to be as natural as possible, I want it to be as engaging as much as possible.

I want it to reflect the athlete's nature which in fact had caused us a problem with an athlete who said to us: "You are not coming up with any content for me, I will end this contract", I replied to him: "I don't have an issue coming up with content for you through the coming month, but I want you to see for yourself the difference in the engagement rates" and that's how things went, so, it's better to get them to express themselves genuinely, unless it's the type of athlete who isn't really interested and would say: "Hey, I paid you money to take care of things".

5) Which images create more engagement? And most appealing composition?

We do pay attention to details, during the production stage I capture as much as I possibly can, just so that I wouldn't later regret not capturing something or a specific shot, while during the publication stage is when I do most of the intricate details.

For the athlete, on their platform in regards to the photoshoot, did I understand you correctly? Well, something that reflects the spirit of the athlete, for example: Ben Sharki has the spirit of the cool dude, the rough rugged young man personality, and when you look at Gezira sporting club, it was reflective of all that, unlike Thanasi for example who is the captain of his squad, coming in as the new athlete, so his composition should be more on the light side, to reflect all of that, so, it's a simple thing I call: Light vs. Dark, the composition could go either way, but this is the foundation I build upon.

Colors, angles and all such details are determined according to what the shoot itself is about, if the shoot is for a fashion brand or something like that then I need to take as many beauty shots as I can, if it was a normal shoot for the athlete with their family then I would want them to look warm, work with the other subjects and all such details, and if it is just a shoot for them, a normal one, then why is it that they are doing it in the first place? This is my question to them; how would this bring in income? Are you someone who even needs income? Not really.

Post-game material, first and foremost, followed by the personal material during feasts, holidays and public holidays, and after that would be any material related to the action happening within their community, whether positive or negative, for example, the ... club won the World Cup then you have to ... (Tweet?), also in other scenarios like the unfortunate train accident in Upper Egypt, you react to it, so they ..., and they engage, unless the athlete is very good, in terms of material and content so they reduce their own content, like for example you see with Chelsea athletes, there's a video editor who is called ... from Canada, that video editor is handling them, creates montages for them, highlights showcasing good performance or updates of signing new contracts, ... works with e-sports and all that, so, they publish such content as showcasing themselves and ... engage and ... but this is very niche and in Egypt or the Arab world it still hasn't made it across, but it would relatively soon.

6) What takes more weight in your strategy increasing no. of followers or increase fan engagement?

Increasing the number of followers, only that, I increase the number of followers through the followers, because through followers the athlete would definitely have engagement, and I don't

want 100,000 likes that only bring me 100 new followers, I want to get 100 followers who give me 50 likes per day, this way engagement rates increase.

7) Attracting sponsors and improving their online image is achievable online?

Yes, yes, yes, definitely, this is all about how influencers started to surface in our lives, they started because they do activities and things online so they attracted brands and now this is what they do, so, in relation to the digital ... of the athletes, I ask: "What brands do you wish to sign up with and which brands do you not wish to work with?", and based on that I plan the content ideas for the athletes to perform related to their specific vision, some athletes are adamant about not wanting to work with restaurant or Cafés, or ... or ..., but for example they request a real estate developer or for example anybody with ... coins and all that, they have no issues with that, so that's it, we start building their content plan according to that, it's very difficult, however in truth, those sponsors are ..., they ..., they have high viewability, high follower base, high reachability, so that does it.

8) How is it different in the online visual images posted by male & female athletes?

Oh, most certainly, people are very judgmental and they roast any female athlete whenever one posts content on her social media platforms, so female athletes are more afraid, but I highly respect Badria and ... Concept regarding her work for the female athletes, ... football women federation and she works with them and all that because I think she has the capability and the experience after working with other athletes on such a matter, to be able to transform the situation for the girls to a whole other improved level, it would take time and perhaps literally knocking it into some people's minds however sooner or later these taboos shall break down.

(Q: Do you think the female athletes are scared or is it...?)

They are scared of being judged, scared of getting judged. The media is ready to consume their content, but just as much as the media is ready for, it is ready for it both positively and negatively, so, this reflects on the female athlete making her more concerned and more conservative about starting to share creative content, so a female athlete like ... Effendi or Farrah ..., they broke these taboos in Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arabia for the past three years have been investing in Saudi football, and in Egypt there's Menna Tariq and all the other up and coming girls who are trying to break all these taboos, will all succeed in doing so, also in Emirates there's that girl, I can't recall her name, she appeared in the Adidas advertisement with Zidane, she is also breaking those taboos, so, it's good, it will just take time but we will get there.

(Q: What about the prominent female athletes who already have presence, do you think they too are limited?)

Yes, they are scared, one step forward two steps backwards, this is all I can say, and also through my personal interactions, also with the Squash community and everyone in it, the way they talk about the girls definitely makes them think a thousand times before uploading a post about winning the Championship, so, the community itself is negative so it makes the people scared, but they are trying to use their presence as much as they can for social and for communicating with people and they are doing it in a nice way but exactly just as is, enough to cover it. Meanwhile for example when you look at Nour Al Sherbini and how she is wearing short shorts for example or how she is hugging her husband in a picture or how the picture she uploaded looked like, who was it? Ranim maybe? Oh, yes, Ranim and Tarek Mo'men, I remember that picture, people were angry with them, Farida Othman for example; people kept making fun of

her for appearing in the commercial, the community began to change, since 2016 until now; the community is changing a lot but there's still ways to go and for this to break, then everyone must do it all at once, so they won't be able to keep up or know who to roast first. As you said, there are six or seven names of female athletes in Egyptian sports who are creating this content, so when they ... nobody would be able to talk, this is a public thing, and this is our situation in Egypt.

(Q: Then what is the difference between Egypt and KSA in regards to how KSA is an Islamist nation or more conservative, why were they able to achieve this?)

For two reasons, one of them is political, if I talk about it then I would be in trouble, but that's one of the factors, for the difference between Saudi and Egypt, the second difference is that, how do I say it?

The coming generation in Saudi Arabia, the generation that is our age, and a little older than us, all of them received their education abroad, no exceptions, the least educated person I talk to in Saudi Arabia who are at least in leadership positions are individuals who received Harvard education or in Michigan or studied in London, no, it's a different story, meanwhile in Egypt, it's not similar, they originally were athletes but couldn't find employment and so ended up doing this work, that's all, so, it's the difference in education qualifications.

- 9) Does athletes' online usage change in competitions especially with the national team? How?

It would be more geared depending on representation, if they are competing representing the national team then it must be about the country in how we represent the country, so all of my content would be driven towards that, for example with athletes like Al Ahmar's profile, one of the top superstars, he wants to only focus on the Championship, but after they are finished with the game they want to upload content and have fun and all that, we have to be very reactive, you also should listen to everything, know what you would say and know what you would do. However athletes who are from a smaller tier, whether in football, Basketball, handball or anything else, such athletes don't know what they want to do so you must ..., so, it's two tiers, an athlete who is a superstar with whom you have to be ready to react with them and tell them this and that and the other thing as long as you don't get in their heads before the game, because from my experience; their egos would be high then and they would want to focus entirely on the game and don't wish to hear about any of that, unless they were the ones to approach you then you come up with stuff.

(Q: But the frequency of posting, is it much higher? For example, do you prepare in case one of your athletes is playing for the national team or in a major championship, even for example of Al Ahly in the championship)

Yes, it would be higher because unfortunately, let me just say that we have a habit in Egypt where we focus on social media and not focus on the field, this is the habit of the entire country, the focus and thought process of the entire community, ... Unlike how it is in England or Saudi Arabia or any other country for example, we wait for the athlete to post, well, sure, post twice a day, it doesn't bother us, this is the difference, however I believe that there should be big competitions and the content frequency should be somehow consistent and just increase very slightly, just add a story or an extra post, but not exceed the usual rate so that ...Exactly, I know that you are working on the Egyptian society so you must reflect on it.

Part B: Athletes Interviews

Male Athlete One – Interview

- 1) How often do you use social media?

Social Media, I'm not really a fan of social media at all in the sense that I'm not obsessed with it, instead I utilise it as a tool not as something that is part of my daily routine. Meaning; I like to use it rather than have it entertain me, whenever I want to post something or comment on something, because originally the main reason for my creating my twitter was just for the sake of not having to respond to any claim or allegation or have to do phone interventions with people for comments or comments and responses on some particular news.

I mainly created it to have it be a window for me through which I could say whatever I want to say, Instagram for me is for the audience to reflect on the other aspect of my personality, that's all, I don't like posting any nonsense for the sake of it.

2) Which social media platform you use most? And why?

Twitter, meanwhile, Facebook for me is something I use to complete the triangle, each of them had its purpose, Twitter was for covering and responding to news and for me to make comments, Instagram because I didn't wish to upload just any shallow pictures but instead wanted something of a more personal nature and slightly unrelated to football, and Facebook is to put an end to all the fake accounts.

(Q: What are your goals for social media?)

Twitter; each athlete has a target for their social media platforms, if you were able to carry out an analysis of the athletes' accounts you would get the sense that most of them mainly use it to increase their follower base, by any means possible, they would do things that people relate to, or would take a picture with someone who suffers from, I don't know, I don't wish to delve deeper into this because it could upset some people, but I feel that it's just mainly something that they use as a tool to bring themselves closer to their audience.

However, for me, I don't treat it like that at all, I view it as something through which I could, for example in the case of Twitter, I'm saying to you that I'm trying to have a positive influence over the people, I view being a prominent athlete as more of a responsibility than a luxury to enjoy and post pictures for people to like and just say to them whatever they wish to hear, no, on Twitter I try to say what people are supposed to hear, not what they want to hear, considering as to how this is my work and my field.

And how people are all in a comatose state, people are all in a comatose state because of us, but it's relative, the athletes cause a percentage and the media causes a percentage but in the end all the people have reached a point where you could see for yourself how they are extreme to a terrifying extent, there are many facts that are lost to many people versus some beliefs that people think to be the facts while they all are nothing but very big lies, there are many things and many slogans that are being repeated to the public day to day to the extent that it had become inherent within the people so you can't really change it anymore, while in reality it's not at all like that. If you want an example, I would list for you, but this is why the gap now between you and the global industry around the whole world is increasing to a terrifying extent.

(Q: Does this mean that some athletes' accounts could increase extremism?)

No, not increase extremism, but there may be some posts that are irresponsible, and due to how much people like such irresponsible posts, they began to increase in frequency which led to an increase in extremism.

3) Do you have personal account or only the public one? Why?

No, I had an old one but I deleted it, because I don't want to consume too much time on it, and for me; what I share on the personal within the friends' group is the same I would post to the public, I don't really like exposure or much interference with my personal life, I still feel that the more you give to social media the more it would take away from your real physical quality time you spend with your family, this is why I have in my bios in my profiles on both Twitter and Instagram: "R S M" and the emoji of a virus, abbreviating: "Resist Social Media virus"

- 4) Who manages your online accounts? If it's an agency why not you?

Yes, because there's a part of my personality that is a little bit of a control freak, I would interfere sure yes but I also have trust issues, it's not that I don't trust others, but I'm more comfortable and like it more to be hands-on, meaning, the content, timing and everything else is something under my control, I don't like leaving that to somebody else, because I don't have a purpose with it, I don't have the purpose of increasing my follower base, nor do I wish to utilise it as a business tool, instead, I utilise it as a tool to spread awareness.

- 5) Do you love taking pictures of yourself to post online and why?

But not really that much, not at all, I post the picture that I like, the picture that I feel is not cliched and the picture that I feel has something, it's not that I haven't posted in a while so I should post, no, when I feel that the picture carries a certain value or captures a certain moment that I want to share, I share it then.

- 6) What kind of photos do you usually take?

I don't post pictures after each match or after each win, I don't post that, after we won against Zamalek I posted my picture with Shennawi when he was hugging me and carrying me, I felt that the picture was, not really expressing a message as much as it was a genuine picture, exactly, emotional and it was pure emotions, not just a posed picture for a camera, because unfortunately; because social media captures many moments around the pitch, this motivated many players to fake many moments, so, the pictures are terrifyingly fake and what's even more odd to me is that people fall for it, and such pictures end up going viral. I like the pictures to include my friends and my family, I don't like uploading pictures of myself alone unless it's a story with a specific exercise or gym exercise, Gym is a main thing for me, I'm at the Gym every day and even if I have sessions at the club, I would still go exercise at the gym, I don't take a picture of the moment I arrive at the gym, so I wouldn't really post a daily picture from the gym, no, that is the first reason, the second reason is that I like to use it as a marketing tool, because I am nearly 40 years old, so for people, people are not used to seeing an athlete who is almost 40 and is still in a good shape.

- 7) Do you put much thought about the composition of the image itself before posting it? Your posture? Your facial expressions?

Not really, no, just as soon as I feel that the picture is enough, because keep in mind that sports, sports highly impact the overall general mood of the individual, there are a lot of endorphins that are secreted after working out and I am one of the people who are crazy about those endorphins, so, for me, to the extent that my wife says to me: "You are someone that is ...", it's

a difficult thing, even when taking time off, I don't rest, I would not be able to stand on my feet but I still go to the gym because I enjoy the post – workout feeling, that's it, so, for me that's all, so, when I feel that I had just finished an excellent workout, and feeling myself in shape and form, especially that I pay a lot of attention to my food and nutrition, so, when I feel that I had achieved a certain target, combined with a terrible metabolic rate because I am now 39 years old, this causes me to feel a sense of accomplishment, this is why, it's not that I want to share it with the people as much as I want to express how committed I am.

- 8) Is the caption important to you and linked to the photo or it doesn't matter?

Very important Yes, not linked to the photo necessarily but, I don't know if you noticed the, no, it's important

- 9) What kind of photos that get more likes and more engagement?

The personal pictures.

- 10) What do you avoid sharing or posting on your account?

The things that I don't like to post? For now, any pictures that are related to football. Football generally, perhaps I would as a story, but not as a post, at first I used to post that, but I felt that; initially I wanted to use it to deliver a certain message, especially after the Pyramids situation, which is that: "I'm still the same person, I'm working and I'm training and am enjoying any success", but for me; as more time goes by the more football deteriorates and I started to feel that the value of football began to decrease immensely, in comparison to the many other issues we are suffering from in Egypt, related to issues of culture and issues of awareness of the public and everything, and the way they treat each other and the extremism, whenever I go through social media I see the rate of depression that had overcome the people and the suicide cases, you have to keep in mind that I am a bit lost, my mind takes me on journeys, and I delved into paths related to psychology and the relationship...

And I feel that there are things that are much more valuable, there was a time when I wanted to post a tweet to the people whose main and only concern was that Sherif, Ramadan and all the others transferred to Pyramids, I wanted to say to all of them: "Guys, if any of you follow me here and are waiting for me to say such things then just unfollow me, Egypt has much bigger issues than this", or basically; grow up a little bit, that's all.

(Q: So, you avoid posting anything related to performance or training because you think that there's a perspective that people are waiting for...)

No, now for me there are things that are keeping me occupied so I don't post, yes, sure, it's my work but what's new there? I'm a football player, everyone knows that I am a football player, I do my training every day, what's new there? That's all, unless I want to send across a certain message like how I told you about the gym, but when I don't play, tradition goes: "Oh, that player isn't playing so this means that he's making troubles here and there", no, guys, there's a parallel culture, one where there are professional players who are not playing but are still training very well and are waiting, I am satisfied and I have conviction too, I have conviction that in football there are no guarantees and ...

- 11) Does your online usage change in competitions especially with the national team? How?

No.

- 12) How do you see the differences between you & your female athletes in the same sport regarding their online presence?

There are differences, of course

Well, I can't really give you a valid opinion at all because I'm not really following closely what's happening, you would laugh if I tell you that I use my phone more to play games, I play games more than I would follow what's happening and see the news day to day, sometimes I don't even check, and if you even go on my account to check it, it's very boring, in explore you would only see Gym, paddle, and that's it, you would see male or female athletes doing gym exercises, paddle, and that's it. No, in online usage, I don't know, but are there differences between the men and women in Egypt, this is a question with a much broader background. A million percent, we are quite racist in that regard, and still, but you aren't battling against the society here, you are battling against a culture, it's a culture and for the culture to change it would take years, many years.

- 13) How do you think your fans perceive you as a public figure?

How do they perceive me, look, the most invalid thing in our field is when the fans perceive you only in the moment you are in, meaning, some athlete is playing for a certain club, so I support them with extremism, regardless of whether that is right or wrong, the only thing that I'm happy about in this field, is that I have reached a point where I did not get evaluated based on love or hatred, I am instead being evaluated based on respect, you may not like me as a goal keeper or like me, or you may be Al Ahly fan or Zamalek fan, but I believe that I am respected by the majority, aside from personal opinions: "I like him", "I see him as an excellent goalie", "No, I think he is a bad goalie", "He made history", "No, he didn't make history", all of this to me is not necessarily worthless, but I know full well what I had achieved, but what's even more important is that you may like me for today but suddenly I could do something that makes you hate me, but if you respect me, it's very difficult to change that unless I commit a disaster, because this respect is something that is in my hands, I control it with my words and actions, but the ball is not in my hands.

- 14) What's your online objectives on social media platforms?

feel that it's important for the to carry a message, plus sometimes, I don't know if I should be sharing something like this with you or not, I am someone who isn't concerned about people's opinions, at all, not in a negative way, I respect all people and everything, but their opinions are the least of my concerns, and I do only what I believe in, so, when I feel that there's some sort of a drop or an attack or a wave or whatever else, sometimes I am deliberate about posting a picture, just to express that I'm not really concerned, which is true, because if I really pay attention to other people's opinions I don't think I would have made it to ...

- 15) Do you think you have what it takes to attract sponsors to you as a personal brand or you're still developing? Please explain more

Perhaps, but if there's a brand it should be something that isn't traditional, the brands now, if you look into all the major corporations, what is it that they want? They want something that's already had grabbed the people's attention, a song that went viral so we use it as a call tone, or someone who is now trending, like Al Khalil comedy for example, if everyone is watching Khalil Comedy now,

or Mohammed who sells Koshari, all corporations eventually headhunt the people that are most trending at the time, but no, this is not my school.

Well, I would certainly need to develop, because after all, the main thing they look at is the number of followers, how many followers do you have.

(Q: But you said that you don't care)

Exactly, I'm just telling you what it is that they think about, not what I want.

(Q: Would you work on increasing your followers?)

No, not at all, it's absolutely my last concern to do any efforts to increase my social media following, not at all, again, I told you that in my bio I have "Resist Social Media Virus".

(Q: How long have you been on social media for?)

Since long ago.

16) How did your online usage changed or evolved by years and what's the reason behind it?

I think if you or anyone scrolled down and further down all the way to the first post, you wouldn't really find much difference, even with twitter, it's the same thing, my first ever tweet is in the same direction, I never mentioned someone's name in my tweets and I never had a tweet where you could say is "Uncalculated" that I had to delete, and thank god; I never deleted anything I had posted since the day I created my Twitter account.

(Q: On average; how much do you use social media per day?)

Social media or my phone? About half an hour. Some days less, if I open it for you right now, exactly, I would open up Twitter here, one moment.

(Q: You don't check the comments)

No, no, never. So, eventually, I only see the people that I follow, nothing important, I then do this and see it, that's all, half a minute.

Male Athlete Two – Interview

1) How often do you use social media?

Per day, between four to six or maybe even seven hours, I often use it, I use social media a lot.

2) Which social media platform you use most? And why?

Instagram, because its content are things related to my sports, there are motivational posts and specific drills and exercises that I learn about, also highlights of the teams that I follow, I don't find any of that on any other platform.

(Q: So, it's related to the sport you play?)

Exactly, Facebook, Tiktok and Snapchat, I don't use any of them as much as I use Instagram because it is more related to my life.

3) Do you have personal account or only the public one? Why?

No, no, but I am thinking about doing that, because I want to use the other aspect of social media where I want to post about my personal life but I can't really post about everything because there is an audience and all that and I don't really wish for all people to know everything

about my life, so, I am thinking of doing that but I am a little bit embarrassed by it, like: “Ahmed Mohieb Official”, I really want to create one, especially after I got verified, I have an image now so I have to be cautious, I can’t really share a post of me sitting at home, no, now there should be specific content where people see me and expect from me and I have to appear in that frame to them.

(Q: Why not post personal content but it’s content that you have selected in a specific way?)

This is already what I’m doing, but there are other things like for example if I was at a wedding party and want to post something from that but I have a game the following day, I can’t really post it to the fans and audience and people, but there are things I choose like when I’m training or how I’m training or the pre-game preparation and all such things, I focus on those.

- 4) Who manages your online accounts? If it’s an agency why not you?

No, I manage it, but I’m looking for someone to manage it, because this is something that takes time and I want to deliver the message in a good and professional way, and not just do it for the sake of doing it.

(Q: if it’s an agency, how much interference you have over their strategy and content creation?)

How much as in how much what? No, no, I will tell them exactly what it is that I want or the purpose behind having them manage the account and it’s their job, I’m sure they would be more professional than I am.

- 5) Do you love taking pictures of yourself to post online and why?

Only when I’m on the court, but not sitting by the beach with my hand on my cheek like that, no, perhaps I would post that in the account I would create later on, but the picture I post even if I’m on my own in this account now, they would be when I’m on the court or sitting on the bench or watching a game, it’s like that.

- 6) What kind of photos do you usually take?

Life on the court for sure, about 70%, and being on the court doesn’t mean only the action, it could be me at the gym or me eating my meals or me doing rehabilitation treatment, this is also all part of the job. my nutrition and how I train, all such things, this is the image I’m trying to appear with

- 7) Do you put much thought about the composition of the image itself before posting it? Your posture? Your facial expressions?

No, I put more thought into the message behind the picture, during some period for example we would be winning, so, I would think that the picture I would post or the post I would share whatever it is, it should be something with a medal or a cup or a certain celebration or during a time when we were winning something, it’s not a matter of how I am posing in a picture as much as it is what content the picture shows.

No, not at all.

- 8) Is the caption important to you and linked to the photo or it doesn’t matter?

For me, as Ahmed Mohieb, it’s not important no, but it must be used to ..., exactly. It must be, not really to explain the picture, but, just a caption, exactly, exactly, and I try to make sure that it is something that is slightly motivational, has a wisdom somehow behind the words.

9) What kind of photos that get more likes and more engagement?

In Championships, victories, mainly, yes, or trophies if I'm on my own, if I received the MVP award or something, this is the most pictures

And the personal, if it's me and my wife or me and my daughter, but recently I no longer post much of that because this is not what I want, this is not what I want from that, now I would just post a story to close friends, I don't share a post just like that.

10) What do you avoid sharing or posting on your account?

Cheat meal

Let me tell you one thing, the issue with social media is that people talk too much, meaning, right now, I have a game tomorrow, and I had a cheat meal last night, and I didn't play too well which is possible, in our lives not every day is the same, so people would claim that Mohieb played bad because he had a McDonald's burger two nights ago, so, the problem is that people judge that which they see, and this is the bad thing about the audience, all of them, this is a problem, you are limited, truly, after I moved to Al Ahly there are so many things that I now have to pay attention to that I never did in the past, I can't for example post a story at night after 12 am. It shows, for example, if I saw a colleague of mine go through that situation then it would be my turn at some point, so I would then be forced to also follow suit, so I pay attention, if I'm staying up late at night, so I don't want to post or do reposts, so such things I must pay attention to, but for me, the most thing as Mohieb is the cheat meal, yesterday I was at Farag Abu Khaled and today we have the game against Etihad and for example it coincides that I'm injured, but people wouldn't know that I'm injured, so if I don't play they would assume and claim that it's because I went to Farag Abu Khaled restaurant last night so today I'm suffering from diarrhea and this is why I didn't play, so, stuff like that are things that I pay a lot of attention to.

(Q: And if you are also staying up late or if you lost a game)

Exactly, and this happened to a football player, I can't remember who, but they had lost and Mido even spoke about this, as a player you have to be considerate of people's feelings, I can't be someone who had just lost, I mean sure, you have your personal life, but you also have an image, so you must work on preserving that image, you can't be someone who had just lost and then post a picture of you going out on a date with your wife, or on some celebration of some kind, sure, you are still human but still you are now in a certain position that you must respect that position you are in.

(Q: Do you think this is something that is related to the culture in Egypt?)

It certainly is related to the culture in Egypt.

(Q: Even if you were playing abroad, do you still have to respect something like that?)

It has its own culture, if I'm abroad then it would relatively be different, but it would mainly be the same in a way, you can't be an NBA player who had just lost, LeBron for example losing the NBA, he can't be posting himself on his Boat celebrating and drinking living the life, well, perhaps here the culture is extremely different and they would judge that he is drinking and so on, but no, abroad that's fine, he's free to drink, but the main idea that he is celebrating despite his loss, in a different way it still remains as a main thing, so, in a way you could say that it is similar, the evolution of players, in accordance with cultural differences.

11) Does your online usage change in competitions especially with the national team? How?

In a Championship, after each match, and mainly after the quarter finals for example, something like: "Two more to Cup" for example and updates about the phase we are in during the championship and I also post things related to the competition I'm currently competing in, for example I would be in Kuwait and we would have an Arab Championship, I wouldn't post an old picture of me training at Al Ahly Club, it wouldn't be real and people would not relate to it. With the national team; in other countries I like to post information about the culture of each country, for example we went to Africa so post about the people dancing for example, or the food, their food is different from ours, mainly the habits and traditions of the places.

(Q: Do you also focus on posts related to the national team? Patriotic content for example)

No, no, regular things, we are not playing football, we aren't really going to war

(So, it's more valid with football?)

Yes, definitely, it's more valid with football, but not with basketball, it's different.

(Q: So, you mean to say that it is different from one game to another in that regard?)

Yes, definitely, it's different, of course, now for example I know that tomorrow I would be playing the Africa Finals, would that to me feel as much as how Salah thinks about Africa Finals for him if he plays it and how many millions it would bring happiness to?

(Q: Why don't you see it as you try to achieve something and do something for Egypt and grab people's attention?)

Perhaps, perhaps, you are right, but I don't see it that way, the game itself is what keeps us thinking like that, how many championships did we win compared to football, in the rookie groups we win African Championships and we receive the MVP awards in Africa, and even with the professional groups we also often win African Championships, what return do we see from the country for all that? I remember very well winning the African championship in 2010, I received 2,500 Egyptian pounds and the very same year; the football rookie team, 18-year-old youth, they won the same championship, but the difference was: We received 2,500 per player while they received 100,000 Egyptian pounds per player, so, this is just the financial reward, that aside from the emotional reward, what have we received compared to what they received? So, as you grow you find yourself confined to this.

12) How do you see the differences between you & your female athletes in the same sport regarding their online presence?

Girls are a little bit coquettish; they rather approach it from a, not really emotional, more personal yes aspect. Soraya and I for example could be posting the same picture in the same championship and everything, and we have the same follower base, but just because she is Soraya so she becomes Cleopatra and people become more

(This is not coquettish behavior)

Well, yes, I didn't say anything about that

(It's not like she is doing this on purpose, others are making their claims)

I don't mean it that way. The reactions to the posts girls post, or what the girls receive in terms of reactions far exceeds what the men receive, because of the nature of ... in middle eastern societies) (*Claps Hands*) Yes, this is it, this is the truth, because people interact more, exactly, what is that! Wow Doctor! So, perhaps this is related to the people, they are the ones making their claims.

(Q: You were talking about people's reactions, I'm talking about her usage, do you see that they post just as much as the male athletes, or is their usage less than yours, or are they reserved about showing themselves more?)

No, now there's also an image for the girls, so they pay attention to that, they know that there are people who follow them and who are interested in their updates, so they post normally now, on the contrary, they post much more than we do. In Basketball I see this, perhaps Basketball and Volleyball are the two most prominent, I see that the girls post much more than we do, especially lately. This is due to the nature of the people, the people react more with their posts and they feel the interest and they post again, they could post once a day, old pictures, and people would still be happy and congratulate them, it's normal.

13) How do you think your fans perceive you as a public figure?

As Mohieb? Myself, from people's opinions; I'm someone who is committed to the role I receive from my coach, whether it was a big one or a small one, I perform it to the best of my ability, I have been playing for a long time so the emotional matters between the coach and the athletes are not something I struggle with, for me the situation is entirely professional whether I end up playing for one minute or ten minutes, I give out the same performance that I do and they feel that I'm entirely cold because since the first year I started playing I scored a critical point against Zamalek in the final second which won us the game, that game they claim was like a knockout hit, and the thing with that game was that I didn't play for long but the coach subbed me in despite how I hadn't warmed up and wasn't in the mood but just because I was focused until the final second I was able to make a difference, and also the national tournament finals last year, same thing, the team needed me, so, when the team needs me they find me as someone who is committed, I believe that people see me in that way, this is the positive side, the negative side, just so that I would say it all, people feel that I am too confident in my skills so I may be a bit lazy, some think that I am spoiled, some people see it that way, but they don't see everything else, what do they see? This doesn't mean that they are right or wrong, and so this is something that is bad, people view you or place you someplace where you may be in the wrong, or perhaps you are not really derelict in a certain regard, but people believe that you are, so you keep trying to fix something people believe and it's not really true.

For example, they believe that I'm someone who doesn't train often enough, why? Because many matches I would sub in and they would feel that I'm not at my best shape, they don't look at the fact that I had not played for two or three games, it's unrelated to how much you train and pressure yourself, your game sense is something entirely different from training drills, so, they don't know something like that, they don't pay attention to the other things, they only look at what is in front of them, "Oh, Treka came in and whiffed the ball, he must have stopped training", no, they don't know that his daughter for example might have been ill, or he was sick two nights ago and he still pushed himself and went to play the game, there are things that people are not aware of.

(Q: Do you think you should post such things?)

No, not at all, because if I will keep justifying everything that happens with reasons then I wouldn't have any time left to work, the results are what responds to people.

14) What's your online objectives on social media platforms?

My objective is that I want to let the people know how to have persistence for something you are aiming towards, what does such persistence require from you and what do you sacrifice to reach what it is you wish to reach, so mainly, and also as a message to young children, who now want everything to be easy, but there's no such thing as easy, some people I see ask: "How did you not win that championship?" Well, to win a championship you must lose 10 to 15 championships, you must suffer and get benched and experience some difficult situations in your life, it's not easy and life is not fair, you must see that too, and I do post the failure more than our successes. Exactly, and this is also important, life is not just about victory, I said to you that part of the job is for us to be injured, we are not always well, so, people should know about this, so what my aim is or what I'm trying to deliver across is that: in order to reach such success there are things that you must do such as exercise drills and sleep cycles as well as the lifestyle you lead, nutrition and we also inspire others, young children, sometimes I feel that young children like to express, when I look around, not in comments, I don't pay attention to those as much as when I see someone, a young child commenting saying: "I love you so much, I shoot just like you do", or: "I like to train the way you do", or "I wear your jersey with your numbers", or: "You were wearing a type of sneakers that I looked for and got just because of you", such things are the best things for me that I would ever hear from someone, so, feeling that you inspire someone, this is the best thing.

- 15) Do you think you have what it takes to attract sponsors to you as a personal brand or you're still developing? Please explain more

This is a whole other story, yes, of course, this is why the subject of verification was very important for me because with it you could have the image for things that people want to have sponsored, whether it's a clothing line or supplements or even an Academy you want to start – up after retiring, so you try to attract the people who want to do the same as you or want to train with you, so, when you launch such an Academy people would want to come in, this is businesswise, the other thing is that afterwards, this makes all the difference. And it began with receiving the verification as soon as I became verified.

After I became verified, I started receiving many giveaways, but I don't post about all of them as much as I choose the content which I would post, so, this is very important, of course.

I receive them, yes, I do, last Thursday someone from Cairo University reached out to me, they have a project about something, they invited someone from each field to inspire the public, and they believe that my profile is verified and this and that, could I have some water?

And people see that my profile is active and there's Al Ahly Club and championships and all that, they want me to go and give a speech to the people as to how I had made it to where I am and what they should do and so on, so, no, as businesswise, it's good.

(Q: Do you think you have what it takes to keep attracting or do you think the personal brand or personal image requires to be more developed, and how so?)

You have to handle both simultaneously, the personal image I would increase that with time, such things after having a certain number of fans or followers who engage with your posts, you must keep it up constantly.

(Q: What do you think you should begin working on?)

The posting quality must be different, this is why I want to bring in an Agent, my posts must improve, some people know how to do it, I don't, Akram used to tell me: "you would learn, before you begin training just set up the phone and do this", I told him: "I wouldn't know how

to do that, I'm going to train, I can't focus on doing that", but, if I was going to train and someone from the agency came to film me while I train and they were in charge of filming the videos and everything then it would be easier, this is why I want to do this, and I am seriously looking into taking care of this.

- 16) How did your online usage changed or evolved by years and what's the reason behind it?

Filtering, I now filter the things that I change and post, in the post, if you scroll down to the early beginning, you will find some very odd posts, I have a picture of a Shrimp Pasta dish that I shared, what is this? What value am I adding to this platform with this post?

I filter content more.

And in the past, I wasn't like that, as time goes by you get placed in places where you weren't in the past, now people recognise me and people take pictures with me, so, there's an image I must appear with, so, there are things that aren't necessary to post about.

(Q: What about victories and successes and how you have achieved things and the movement towards Ahly, all of that)

All of that definitely changed my life, entirely, in Sporting, perhaps, as a social club not a public club, I have won two times or three times over what I had won with Ahly, but winning one championship in a public club like Al Ahly, when you walk around the street people point at you and take pictures with you, you could no longer go out to certain places because you wouldn't be happy as every now and then somebody would come to talk to you, I mean, we are not Abo Treka or other football players, but people today because of social media and how everything is now broadcasted publicly, people now are familiar with everything, they are familiar with who those are and especially our game now is getting broadcasted, so it's not because we are incredible, it's just because of social media, this spread the knowledge among all the people, and so all the people now are familiar, this makes a huge difference.

Male Athlete Three – Interview

- 1) How often do you use social media?

Twenty-four hours per day.

- 2) Which social media platform you use most? And why?

Instagram, because as soon as I wake up, I go on Instagram, before I fall asleep, I go on Instagram, I don't know. I don't know, perhaps for me it's because I have more followers on Instagram and it's where I'm most active in terms of sharing posts and stories. Also, I'm not really interested in checking on Facebook to look at News and other things, I'm more interested in my life.

- 3) Do you have personal account or only the public one? Why?

I do, I have a personal account.

Because to be honest, I feel that the public account is more for the people, more for the audience and so on, so I don't really feel like free to be myself on there, so I was forced to create a personal account for the people who are extremely close to me so that I could have my normal life as well.

- 4) Who manages your online accounts? If it's an agency why not, you?

No, an Agency manages it, they are called “On-Track” for social media.

Probing question: if it’s an agency, how much interference you have over their strategy and content creation?

No, I certainly interfere, I interfere to be honest especially my public account on Instagram, I’m very interested in it and I like for everything on it to be perfect, I have them manage it but to be honest anything that is uploaded or shared has to be run by me first.

5) Do you love taking pictures of yourself to post online and why?

Yes, I’m interested in this to be honest, I like to post a lot of pictures, and I like to have a lot of pictures taken of me, but I don’t share as much because I feel that when something is often frequent it loses its value.

6) What kind of photos do you usually take?

To be honest, on the public account I’m more interested in the trophies or when we win a championship or something, I mainly only post during championship or the big games that we win, or an upcoming championship or something, but I don’t post all the time, maybe one post from the Gym or this or that, but mostly it’s posts from championships, but we don’t really win a lot of championships.

7) Do you put much thought about the composition of the image itself before posting it? Your posture? Your facial expressions?

I put a lot of thought into everything to be honest, for me for example, I don’t do selfies to be honest, I feel that a normal picture showing my full body or just with a slight focus on my face to my chest, it depends, but I mostly focus on the pictures that are ...

(Q: Why don’t you like selfies?)

I don’t know, I never really cared for them.

(Q: Do you feel that they are unprofessional?)

I used to feel that I feel that, well, rarely would I ever feel that I want to post a selfie, maybe a selfie story but I feel that the picture itself isn’t really much.

(Q: Facial expressions, do you try to show something specific about your personality, or a smile or a laugh or it doesn’t matter how the picture would come out looking?)

No, it matters to me, I like for the picture to demonstrate my personality a little bit, or to show my personality through the pictures, even in victories or losses, my features are of a very expressive nature, and I know well how to express how I feel, so I like for the pictures to carry a meaning or something.

8) Is the caption important to you and linked to the photo or it doesn’t matter?

It is very important. Yes, more so, yes, I pay a lot of attention to the captions and I feel that for a picture to succeed there must be a good caption to help it achieve that.

9) What kind of photos that get more likes and more engagement?

For us, whenever we win a championship or something like that, for example; when we won the national league 3 days ago, this was one of the most times where my account received

traffic and engagement, I posted a picture and I did not even think about it, even when I was walking out of the game, I could not imagine it, I had no idea what was waiting there outside, but after I finished the game I only opened up Instagram and posted the picture and walked out, I went out and celebrated and after I came back I was shocked.

10) What do you avoid sharing or posting on your account?

For example, anything related to my personal life, I would never post anything, never, because I had an issue, to be honest; I used to often lose, my issue was that I didn't get many wins, so, if anything is posted people hold it against me and roast me for it, unlike how things would be if we had won or if we were in normal times, people would accept anything. I focus a lot on this honestly because I feel that it affects me, if there's something related to my girlfriend or something like that, she would suffer a lot with me if it's during a time I'm suffering some kind of attack, it's unnecessary.

(Q: This concept of not posting anything personal because of losses or such things, does that still exist for athletes abroad or is it only limited to Egypt?)

No, of course not, I played professionally for six months in the Netherlands in Europe, whenever I would lose things were fine, I even shared stories about my loss and things were fine, this concept here to be honest, well, perhaps it's because we are Egyptians, but here I feel that it's what's normal and expected, it's not normal if I play for a national team and the audience are all upset, even I too am upset then I go and post things and be provocative. But athletes abroad a bit provocative too, or life for them is a little bit simpler than it is for us.

11) Does your online usage change in competitions especially with the national team? How?

What I discovered recently is that; when I was in the last World cup playing for the national team, I had thought that playing at the national team is the biggest thing, like for example playing at a world level event or Olympics or such an event would be the most attractive factor in terms of reach, but I discovered that Al Ahly vs. Al Zamalek matches surpass anything else, I swear, sure yes, I was at the World Cup with the national team and the account was receiving engagement, but not like an Al Ahly vs. Al Zamalek game followed by a win, this is the most extreme case I had ever witnessed, one post got me 20,000 likes and hundreds of comments, and I was just posting a picture and didn't think twice about it.

(Q: Does participating in such events impact the frequency of your posts?)

Yes, I post all the time, I post more than the Club itself, during championships I like to post frequently and be active on social media.

12) How do you see the differences between you & your female athletes in the same sport regarding their online presence?

I experience that, of course, perhaps it's due to the quality, the thing is that; for our game; I'm specifically talking about Hand Ball, so, for male Hand Ball players the game is a huge success, in terms of teams and clubs, players and pro – players, I feel that it is already far from any other game, not just about male athletes and female athletes, because in Hand Ball we are categorized as one of the top five national teams around the world. And the thing for the female Hand Ball players is that; they had spent some time far from the teams and they didn't

even have a national team and with the association nothing was coordinated, so, there certainly is a difference, you could even see that within the focus itself, not many people know that there are female Hand Ball players to begin with, because of how much the association itself are not giving them enough support, not showcasing them and demonstrating them, so, it's normal that there would be a difference on Social Media as well, definitely.

(Q: If not just about Hand Ball, other games too, are the female athletes more reserved or concerned about their posts compared to the male athletes in Egypt? Like, they wouldn't be too comfortable)

With some female athletes I feel that everything is fine, that's in Hand Ball, Volleyball, and Women's Basketball too, some female athletes are experienced at this, they do very good marketing for themselves and take pictures, they know how to take their pictures and post, no, I feel that it depends from one female athlete to the other, but no, there are people in Egypt that are like this.

13) How do you think your fans perceive you as a public figure?

Well, it's not just about Al Ahly fans, any fans anywhere depending on the state of the player and the position of the player, it depends, one day they may view me as the best goalie in history, and the following day they may look at me and think that I know nothing about the game, it really depends on what you have achieved and where your level stands.

(Q: You feel that it is based on performance and not the personality you try to express)

Of course, there are some people among the fans, or when you have some credit that the people hold for you and the people are fond of you personally as an individual, in addition to your gameplay, regardless of whether your performance isn't at its peak during a certain period or something, the credit runs out and people turn on you. I believe that it's more related to performance, and how good I play determines how the people view me.

14) What's your online objectives on social media platforms?

I started with the agency from scratch, when I first sat down with them I only had 10,000 followers, I have been with this agency since 2019, our first target was getting the account verified, this was the first initial target, we managed to get it done quickly, after that I became a pro-player and became distant from the agency, because I used to be available to them here around Cairo and would see them and they would come visit or attend my games and so on, but we always focused on having me active on Instagram and that whenever I had a game I should post a story or something saying that I am playing a game today, and each game I should post saying that I played or post a picture from the game itself, and after the game I should post saying that I had won also in a story or any such thing. Also, if during a period when there are no games, a preparation period or training period I should also post the drills and show the people how I train around the court and in the Gym and so on. To remain active, exactly, if there's another sport with another national playing, men's volleyball for example, and I'm known to always support them and so on.

15) Do you think you have what it takes to attract sponsors to you as a personal brand or you're still developing? Please explain more

Everything you had just said is something that is already on my mind, I certainly do think about how I would attract a sponsor to me, but it all really depends and comes down to my performance as I said earlier, exactly, it depends on how I perform and this will ensure that everyone views me in the same way, not just the fans, and this is something that doesn't require a specific action, it requires a period of dedication, to embed this concept in people's minds, and have them see me as the best player or something else, this is when I would attract a sponsor.

16) How did your online usage changed or evolved by years and what's the reason behind it?

I'll tell you, there was a period after 2019 which had started earlier the same year, that Agency approached me and I received advertising work with Etisalat right after the Rising Stars World Cup, I was extremely confused, and because I was extremely unfamiliar with social media I lost that ad, I ended up not doing it and someone else did it instead, the following day the same agency approached me again and I was not interested and didn't know much at all, so I did not respond to them for at least three more months. They approached me once more and at that time I had space for them, had I known around the World Cup time the value behind this whole thing I would have definitely answered them then, but I didn't think about it much and didn't know much about it, but three months later I started with them and we did the work, but you know, to me; Social media is very beneficial at certain times but the most important time is when you are at a distance from your usual performance or during a period when you are injured or something that is beyond your control, it helps keep you present and have the people see you and remember you at least, it helps a lot until you recover and recuperate once more and return to your original performance levels.

(Q: Were you not interested in the ad that you lost or such things because you did not know about the importance of social media? Were you not really into it back then or what was your reason?)

I wasn't really interested in it and didn't know that people did not see me and didn't know that this is such a big deal and that it's a very important thing, I had known about it but I wasn't really interested in it and didn't really understand much about it, that's all.

(Q: In your club, do they encourage you to pay more attention to your social media presence, do they tell you to pay attention to your accounts and so on or is it not something important to them?)

In the club, for them; the best thing is to not have the player interested in Social Media because no matter what, as the Club itself whether as trainers or anything else, in their minds they believe that the players are highly impacted by social media and if anything gets posted it could either have the player be overly confident or something negative that could distract them from playing and keeping their heads in the game, so, it's the opposite for them, but if it is a good player who maintains a very good mentality and understands well how to not let Social Media get to them, then it's a very good thing, something balanced, I feel that it's a very good thing for the athlete.

Female Athlete One – Interview

1) How often do you use social media?

Use social media, or use it for research? If you ask.

Look, a big part of my life involved writing, so I used to write and was a blogger and such work, after that I stopped for a while and moved to Facebook, but lately Facebook's reach collapsed entirely, so I moved on from Facebook to Instagram, so, my usage now on Facebook is mainly scrolling and checking around and so on, but Instagram is where I do my posts, even if just a picture or a message where I want something from the people or want to say something to the people.

- 2) Which social media platform you use most? And why?

For some reason, I don't know what it is but perhaps it could be technical, Facebook no longer generates the reach for me that I want, for example now on Instagram I ask people for help with some things or certain things, when I post on Facebook, I get nothing in return, it felt that I was talking to no one there, so I moved to a different platform.

- 3) Do you have personal account or only the public one? Why?

One and a personal one.

- 4) Who manages your online accounts? If it's an agency why not, you?

To be honest it never crossed my mind, for me at some point I thought about creating a page, I don't know if this is ok to talk about here, but I wanted to create a page that was Football related for myself as an athlete and Sports for development Consultant, this is another side hustle that would be related to sports, but I felt that now was not the right time to manage that and invest time and effort into it so I skipped it, and I started managing my own account and currently I don't really have any thoughts about bringing in somebody to manage the account for me.

- 5) Do you love taking pictures of yourself to post online and why?

Not taken by me, have somebody else take them, like an external perspective, and yes, I post them, especially if related to sports. For me, the people who follow me have much smaller social circles, and so, to them seeing a girl playing football, perhaps I would be the only girl they have in their circles that plays football, regardless of the other female athletes in the field of course, and so, they would be very excited to see action and something happening, so, honestly, I find support and encouragement that I would not find in the normal Egyptian public day to day street, this is the reason why.

- 6) What kind of photos do you usually take?

This is something that is indeed recent, our team has a page or an account on Instagram and they are active, before the matches they upload banners of when the game would be, perhaps they don't post about the game results after, but still, they share posts, pictures and other information. Lately, we started hiring a Cameraperson to film these games and take pictures, so now, I actually have content that I would be able to post from my gameplay, during the matches.

There are posts that are personal, where I post a picture where I'm alone and playing, and some posts have the purpose as a team captain to motivate my team, so, I post something that includes the team and something to inspire such as: "It wouldn't matter if we lost the next game, we are already up 3 points", and such things that help with morale in a way, either that or personal of me playing. Definitely, the moments that I feel that I'm comfortable about sharing them with the public

are fine, sometimes there are some pictures that I feel are too special to be shared, generally, people don't have to know about everything, but there are some things where it's like a concert or a nice outing or something, and in the end you get to send a message across to those people tagged with you in the picture about how special that event was to me, so it counts as my way to show appreciation. Currently, I'm more focused on sports' posts.

- 7) Do you put much thought about the composition of the image itself before posting it? Your posture? Your facial expressions?

Yes, yes, I do, do you want to know why?

I wouldn't post a picture of myself where I look like a mess, or look bad, or injured or suffering from something, but I still wouldn't post something with a full make-up face, after all I play football and I get beat up and thrown around, but I wouldn't post a picture from an angle that isn't flattering or nice to me, because people after all are judgmental, I hear from a lot of people that tell me about many overweight female athletes, so, they talk to me a lot about this concept, so, I focus that whatever is shared looks decent, doesn't have to be perfect but at least looks decent. In football, the final outcome after all is the same, I'm wearing shorts on long socks, soccer boots and a T-shirt, it's still the same in all cases, whether during training drills or during a game, but it's mainly about the angle with which the picture was captured, does it look nice and good or not.

- 8) Is the caption important to you and linked to the photo or it doesn't matter?

Yes, I don't like writing a caption that is completely irrelevant, like a picture and then a quote underneath it that is entirely unrelated to anything, I don't really understand it when people do that, to me it's better to post a picture with no caption than writing up an irrelevant caption, so, no, I do dedicate a lot of focus to make sure it's something that is relevant.

(Q: You mentioned that you like to share posts related to the sport because within your circle; you're the girl that plays football and want to fix that stereotype, is that prevalent in other sports too? This perception in Egypt towards female athletes, is it inclusive of all sports or is it only limited to football, like in Squash or Basketball would it be different?)

In football specifically there's a little extra something to it: "Oh wow, is there a women's football league?", there's a stereotype that I'm trying to break to show the people that there are national tournaments and there are brackets and elimination and games, so, I try through my social media account to deliver a message to everyone around me, or at least my community, that there's a women's football, we play just fine and it's not just a men's sport, regarding other sports; the people would be supportive of the girl but their approach would not be: "Oh wow, is there a woman's league?", so, whenever I introduce myself anywhere people respond to me saying: "Oh, you play, does that mean that there's a league?", so they ask the very basic questions and I answer: "Oh sure, yes, there is, we do this and that", so, I feel that in my personal vision of this: I have a message and a beacon with which I can send across that message.

- 9) What kind of photos that get more likes and more engagement?

If you ask me as a visual person about what pictures that work well with the people, if I think about them visually now, they are mostly pictures where I'm playing football and I look pleased, like after a win or a goal, or pictures where I look like I am really into the match and very focused.

Yes, on the pitch.

- 10) What do you avoid sharing or posting on your account?

It never happened, but if I was in the position where we had just lost 1 – 7, I wouldn't post it on my account, but it never happened where there was something that I was very ashamed of to that extent, maybe I would have concerns about posting if we were in a different scenario and we were doomed to lose, I wouldn't post overall, but I was never in a situation where there was something I was ashamed of, on the contrary, when we lose now I share posts normally, as something to improve the team morale as I mentioned earlier; "What's coming is better", "We can do more and focus", and so on, because I send certain messages on what's app and then I reflect the same message on Instagram and tag the people and tell them the same message.

(Q: You said that there are some things that are very private I would never share; would that be something you avoid sharing or posting?)

Look, losses and such things are not private as much as they are, um, if there's a message I'm trying to send across I try not to put too much emphasis on the negative aspects, like for example if there was rioting during one game or a game where we lose, or a picture that doesn't look professional or suitable for football generally, there are many things that happen among the audience regardless of where they are seated, if I want to send a message in that manner, even if it was positive, I still wouldn't want it to come out in that way.

11) Does your online usage change in competitions especially with the national team? How?

Yes, if there's something where I need, um, not need, but it's open to the public, we need fans or we just need the people to wish us luck, or if we need someone to cover the event in a specific way, if I have the need to direct attention towards something, I could post before the event and throughout the event if it was a longer event, and after the event is over to showcase what has been achieved, regardless of the outcome. As long as I start with it, it will happen. This happened in the past but back then I was a coach, I don't know if this is relevant to you or not, but I was coaching the Special needs' Egyptian women's football national team and we had an international championship coming up and we hosted some teams from abroad because we were playing here in Egypt, back in January 2020, I was covering everything, starting with the press conference for the players, the sites, the drills, the games, the results, the interviews and the victories, we earned first place and so there were awards and medals and so on, I posted through all of it, many people did not even know that this was a thing that happens, that people with special needs play football and have their own national team and so on, so, for me this was all nice, to let the people know about it.

12) How do you see the differences between you & your male athletes in the same sport regarding their online presence?

In online usage or in sports? Look, if we are talking about the general differences between genders in sports, and if I'm to talk specifically about football because it is a very controversial sport, the stereotypes that are prevalent among the society impact the athletes playing the sport, as women, the stereotypes around us keep affirming that: "You shouldn't play football", "Why are you playing football?", and other phrases such as: "Return to the kitchen", and all such things, they all impact how we view ourselves, so, whenever we post it feels like we are putting in double the effort to just show the people that: "This is happening", so, I put in effort to deliver across the message saying: "Guys, we too play sports", this is the message I want to convey, I'm not trying to do the impossible, so, this is an issue, the stereotypes that society imposes on football specifically as well as the

women athletes. When it comes to the online usage, I don't know, but this is a personal opinion; I don't think the male athletes who are yet to make pro-level, which is slightly pre-professional, maybe they would be as interested in their social media as much as the women athletes on their same level, I'm not talking about an Al Ahly player for example, because Al Ahly player would have an agency responsible for his accounts and they post everything, but I am talking about someone who plays in the first tier basketball team, maybe this player would not be much interested in posting in a certain way and at certain timing.

(Q: Sure, this is strategy-wise, but as you said, you think more than once before posting something, do the men or male athletes have similar concerns like you?)

I don't think so, because when we talk about females in general there would be a big part of that related to body-shaming that explodes right at us, so, when you do that in sports, you get body-shaming in addition to the official outfit itself, like, I am dressed in the outfit I wear through the game, then you end up with people coming up saying: "No, you shouldn't wear shorts and run around", so, there are some basic things that we are still responding to before talking about anything else, so, for male athletes, I don't think they struggle with an issue of someone saying to them: "Oh, you wear shorts, what is that!?", and I don't think that Camera angles if they had gained a little weight or lost a little weight would cause someone to come up to them and talk to them about it, but on the other hand, for some reason, people give themselves authority to dissect pictures posted by girls, discuss their opinions while they sit on their chairs.

13) How do you think your fans perceive you as a public figure?

They perceive, well, most of the people I know tell me bluntly how proud they are that I play such a sport that is not well received or well known, in addition to that, with my age, I don't mean that I'm that old, but just at 30 years old I have a job, a full time job and with that I still manage to go and practice 3 days per week, play a game and show up and eat well and sleep well and skip on outings and so on, so, I think that they respect the lifestyle that I have, perhaps my close friends would be angry with me sometimes because this impacts them in a way, but still, when I post a picture or do something they respond with supportive comments, shares and likes and all that, so, I know that they are proud but sometimes it impacts my relationship with them.

14) What's your online objectives on social media platforms?

I would answer that on a personal level first before the agency, personal level, usually when I go onto any platform, I do that out of trend because this now had become a thing, so, I create an account to check it out, there are some things where I created accounts but I'm not really interested in them, for example Tiktok, I can't keep up with it, so, I went to something that I'm comfortable with which is for now Instagram and then Facebook and then Twitter, in this specific order. If we talk about the Agency and me turning this into an open account or page and so on, well, it would still be aligned with the same vision but perhaps on a bigger scale, the vision is that: "I'm a woman playing football in a society that needs to allow football to exist", but in addition to that, there's a message to younger girls: "I have been in your place, people stood in my way and did this and that and the other thing and told me that there's no place for me, I say to you, ask me, here are the places, here are the steps, and here is what you should do, and bring in your parents so that I would talk to them and convince them for you on your behalf to express that this is a normal sport", this is the message where if I am to publicly announce something one day, this is what I want to deliver across.

- 15) Do you think you have what it takes to attract sponsors to you as a personal brand or you're still developing? Please explain more

If you mean attraction and sponsors in a business kind of way, no, because my goals currently have nothing to do with business and/ or profits, even with wanting the girls to play, it no problem to create an academy for the girls that can't afford to train, just to be able to train them to play football. However, if I am to change my aim to be a little more business oriented then I would need to do much more to create that level of attraction for sponsors that would find win – win situations for them and I would end up doing what I want to do as well.

- 16) How did your online usage changed or evolved by years and what's the reason behind it?

On the level I work at now, my work is on a personal level, covering my close community, this is the level at which I want to deliver that message, if I want to grow bigger then I would need to communicate with people that I don't know, so, my language would need to become, well, I wouldn't say simpler but it should be more general and cohesive, just being brief really, because when things become public you could no longer control what happens to it 100%, you post something and overnight that post could turn the whole world against you, and it could go 100% viral in a positive direction and you receive people's approval, so, you have to be really cautious about what you post, where and when as well as how you post it, because it no longer is just your life, you can see this in the lives of artists, I wouldn't say athletes even though athletes still experience that, but whenever artists post something you would see the differences between the segments of society in the comments, someone would say: "How are you letting your daughter do this", while another would say: "Wow, good job!", and another and another, so, all the different cultures clash up in the comment section. Again, if we talk about it on that level then we would have to address the dilemma of what you view as ok, and would you post it anyway, or would you consider all the other people and the people they talk to, the language used and the content that would be posted as well, a very clear and obvious example for this is Salah, when he posts something now about Christmas people would go up in arms. So, for me, I think about it like this; are you trying to align with the foreign audience now? Or are you trying to align with Arabs and Egyptians? Or what are you doing? How are you able to keep up? But in the end you would find him posting something to balance between both worlds, he's not taking one side over the other, in Ramadan we post, in Christmas we also post.

If I'm awake for about 10 hours, then maybe I spend about six or seven hours on social media, I'm very active on social media.

Female Athlete Two – Interview

- 1) How often do you use social media?

If I'm awake for about 10 hours, then maybe I spend about six or seven hours on social media, I'm very active on social media.

- 2) Which social media platform you use most? And why?

The platform I use the most. Maybe Facebook, mainly because, well, Facebook and Instagram most of all, but mainly Facebook because there are more posts and it doesn't only depend on pictures, it could have posts and things that are funny or things about TV shows, it's a much broader platform compared to Instagram.

3) Do you have personal account or only the public one? Why?

Yes, I have private accounts on both Instagram and Facebook.

Because, mainly in the beginning I only had the private accounts and I didn't have the fan pages on either Instagram or Facebook, but when people started to know about me more and follow me, not everyone would judge my pictures and posts the same way, for example a picture with my fiancée back then and till now as he became my husband, no matter what, what kind of picture, I don't want to hear a comment that upsets me, so I was very cautious about the new profiles I would create either on Instagram or on Facebook to pay more attention to my posts because people don't judge the same way and most of the time I have to post and some certain times I have to make sure that I post then, so, I did not want to deal with all that on my personal accounts, I found people from different nationalities and people who are not just from Egypt but from many other countries following me, so, I didn't want people to interfere with my private life, perhaps my target is my sports life, but there are aspects of my social life that people don't need to know about, the people don't need to know where I went out with my friends or where I went out with my husband, so, this is my personal life and I could post things there about Basket and so on, but basket posts on the other profile would be related to the Easter Holidays or Ramadan, a Friday or a Basketball day of some kind, it depends only on that.

4) Who manages your online accounts? If it's an agency why not you?

Not an agency, it was a friend of mine who worked in an advertising and marketing agency, perhaps she did work for an agency but after everything she was my friend, and I still keep all the passwords of all the apps she is handling and both of us can post.

Probing question: if it's an agency, how much interference you have over their strategy and content creation?

Yes, of course, mainly I am the one who posts more, she is the one who interferes with my strategy, she tells me to post at certain times and do this and that at certain times, because initially I was not really familiar with what time periods are when people are most active, I told you earlier that my followers are not just from Egypt, so, I didn't know which time is best time to get likes and followers, so, she always provided guidance to me but it's always been mainly me who uploads most pictures, so, both of us and perhaps more on my side provide interference about the content to be shared.

5) Do you love taking pictures of yourself to post online and why?

Look, I'm not a blogger, I play basketball, but when I upload pictures of myself. they must always be related to Basketball, during a game or something, this is for most pictures, perhaps a picture that I share that would be odd compared to other pictures I share would be a: "Happy Friday" picture, a normal picture, but most pictures I post are after a Basketball game where I performed.

6) What kind if photos do you usually take?

Well, I share a picture asking the people to wish me luck as I would compete later in a championship for example or games, so, mostly it's about games that I will play or an event or something. Why is it that I post? It's because I play for Al Ahly team, so, the followers and fans of Al Ahly always look for ways to check on the state of their athletes and how far they have

gotten, if they have a game today so let's go and encourage them, if they played well in their match today, we would go and congratulate them and tell them that they were good, and so on.

- 7) Do you put much thought about the composition of the image itself before posting it? Your posture? Your facial expressions?

No, honestly, I don't think about this too much, the most important thing to me which is what I focus on the most; is that of the picture's quality, to ensure that it is good, whether it was a basketball picture or just an external picture, but what matters most is the quality of the picture, to make sure that the account doesn't come across as poor, or, well, this is unrelated to whether I spent money on it or not, but just to make sure that the account doesn't come across as poor.

- 8) Is the caption important to you and linked to the photo or it doesn't matter?

No, not necessarily related to the picture, it's unimportant, and this was even a point of argument between the girl who handled my page and myself, she always wanted a lot of hashtags included, I don't like a lot of hashtags, like #alahly, #basketball, #sports, #femalesports, I don't like the many hashtags, this was a point of argument between us, the captions for me as Soraya and if you notice on my posts, I always write up my captions and they are usually just emojis, I don't write stuff like: "Nothing is impossible" and so on, not at all, I'm not interested in all that, and even if I am, it would be one or two words and not an entire paragraph, it's usually something simple and that's all.

- 9) What kind of photos that get more likes and more engagement?

Since I have a lot of my followers who come from Al Ahly fanbase, it's usually pictures that are related to seeing the audience cheering for me, supporting me, these are the things that bring in more followers and more likes, they also impact how loyal people are towards me, my followers become more loyal to me, not just following me and that's it, if I post something later they would engage it, so, I honestly believe that choosing the time of when to upload the picture; if there's an event for example or an incident, like for example at the time when many died from the audience in port said, if I had posted anything back then, depending on the event of course, choosing the appropriate timing of when to post a picture, this would generate more followers and likes.

- 10) What do you avoid sharing or posting on your account?

No, it's just the private social life, I wouldn't post much about that, perhaps an outfit for example, if there's a picture where I'm jumping or something and the T-shirt would be lifted up a bit and skin is showing, I would definitely avoid posting such a picture, even if the picture's quality is top quality, I still wouldn't post it out of fear from the comments I would receive, not everybody would understand, many would say: "She's a woman, she plays sports, how is that", I won't keep on deleting all the comments, this is something that I notice most of all, the outfits, I pay attention to that because not everyone sees things the same way.

- 11) Does your online usage change in competitions especially with the national team? How?

Perhaps yes, it changes a little bit, it requires me to share a post before the tournament asking people to wish me luck, a post after the victory too, so, yes, it requires more posts from me to be shared, yes, certainly, it depends on the event I'm competing in and how prominent it is, it requires me to have more social media presence and be more active.

- 12) How do you see the differences between you & your male athletes in the same sport regarding their online presence?

Well, perhaps in the past this was more about how in terms of sports for people, they were more focused on football, and after we got over that people were still more focused on men's sports and the women on the other hand would only receive insulting comments such as: "Women belong in the kitchen", and most comments would be like that, so you would always experience the discrimination, you would always feel that people are more interested in the men's sports, so, you would then feel that you are putting in so much effort and it fades because people don't understand how much you have sacrificed, so, no, as Soraya I feel that, well, it's not the same as it used to be before, people are now more interested in women's sports and how women can do many things now, but still, they still go on to say that women belong in the kitchen and other truly hurtful comments, and they would be more interested in the men's sports. It's not that the association is more interested in the men's sports, no, to be honest there's some fairness between the men and women, we travel just as much as they do, but maybe the social media itself is more focused. Culture and mentality in Egypt would be perhaps more focused on the men, despite how you would be putting in much more effort than they are, but it doesn't show.

- 13) How do you think your fans perceive you as a public figure?

My relationship with my fans is something that I like to maintain and preserve at all times and keep it on good terms, so, I feel that the way they perceive me according to the comments I get and also on Facebook and when someone writes up a post about me I go through the comments, as to be honest I am guilty of spending a lot of time reading comments, so, for me the comments represent the reference, for me, these comments indicate whether I'm doing well or not or a game I didn't play well at or something, so, for me; these comments are the number one reference indicating that they perceive me as something good.

(Q: It doesn't impact you negatively?)

Sometimes, when I find comments that upset me to be honest, so I avoid that by not checking social media at all, not open them, read them and be ok, no, I say to myself that I won't even open the notification to read it and upset myself.

- 14) What's your online objectives on social media platforms?

To be honest, I'm not saying that my objectives are money or brands or something else, but for example if I end up getting sponsors and so on, this is a good thing, if I got a commercial deal for example, I'm not really interested in receiving gifts and perfumes and such things, it doesn't matter to me to be honest because I am not a blogger, I won't share a post or a story saying: "Guys, today I received this and that", no, this is not me and I won't be creating such content since it's not really me, it's not my field, but within my field; I could get a sponsor like Nike for example, so these are all good things where I could become the image of these things and this will help me a lot and benefit me a lot, so, when I sat down and talked with her she explained about the increasing of followers and how people would all become familiar with me, especially that I am a veiled girl, if I receive a sponsor deal to wear a Nike Hijab for example or Adidas Hijab, all these

things add to my value, so, perhaps it's about sponsors and commercials, all the things that any athlete is looking for generally speaking.

- 15) Do you think you have what it takes to attract sponsors to you as a personal brand or you're still developing? Please explain more

Both, I am already there but I still need to work more on having more people know me and have them be interested in something else aside from football, and also the fact that I am a woman, when people get interested in something it should be something other than football, because it is the most popular sport in Egypt, and they would also be interested in a woman, when my account became verified it wasn't me doing that in Egypt or that friend of mine did it for me, no, the international Basket association helped me get my account verified, so such perks I am unable to even receive from here, so I do need to improve, perhaps here it works when they see a lot of followers and loyal followers, in such case I need to increase my followers and have more people know me and more people talk, so people would know me and get to know me and then I would get sponsors, so, not yet, I'm still developing.

- 16) How did your online usage changed or evolved by years and what's the reason behind it?

I needed a public account because as I told you, people were following me on my private account and it was my private account with private settings, and the number of people requesting to follow me was incredible and I wouldn't go in to accept each and every one of them, there were more than 10,000 follow requests, so I wanted then to create a new public account for everyone where they can see my posts, and not only have the private account, and as I said to you, the private one had pictures which might have been considered bad, they weren't bad pictures of anything bad but it's just my personal private social life, and I didn't want everyone becoming involved with that especially that I don't know how people would think or judge, so, the main reason that had me create another account was that I wanted to share myself yes as long as it is within the context of my sport and not my social life, this is what made me create another account.

(Q: Was this your decision personally? Does the club encourage athletes to do this?)

The club doesn't interfere with your accounts on any platform, they don't have the authority to tell you to create or not create accounts, not at all, on the contrary, when you create an account and the club finds that you have amassed a large following then this would be a good thing for them, it will be beneficial in the sense that you are famous now and you are called in for commercials and backed by sponsors, all of that reflects positively on the club.

Female Athlete Three – Interview

- 1) How often do you use social media?

I think that for my work I don't spend that much time per day but for an average I would check my phone once or twice per hour or three times and each time I would spend about ten ...:Not really though, it depends whether it's weekends or weekdays, but I think I scroll a lot on Social Media.

- 2) Which social media platform you use most? And why?

Instagram, followed by Facebook, but Instagram more.

I don't know, I feel that the content is more related, I don't know if it is the algorithm or what is it but I always see on Instagram things that I'm more interested in, and in terms of social media with my friends I feel that Instagram is closer, so it feels more real to me, on Facebook I have so many people on there, they wouldn't be as close, especially because of Volleyball, I could have coaches and Volley colleagues from other teams and so on, so I feel that when I want to go beyond all that and see news and other things then I would be on Facebook, otherwise Instagram is more of my day to day.

3) Do you have personal account or only the public one? Why?

This was always the right thing to do, I always should have had a public account, but in addition to sports I also work in a corporate, I have a corporate life in the morning and sports in the evenings, it's challenging but it's balanced 50 – 50, so, I always like to separate between the two worlds, and I don't know, I don't like the idea of being regarded at work as too much into sports, and I don't like and in sports I have my other ways to improve my reputation in sports, in the Volley world, but in regards to the Corporate side; it's not the only reason, but usually I'm a private person and I'm not the person who would go posting all the time about doing this or doing that, I let the social media to do that on its own, I don't do that, so, I always prefer to keep a private aspect of myself, but I did in fact think about it. And another reason I want to tell you about is that back when I started becoming more professional at sports and so on, social media did not have the same weight as it does now, and my sport itself, Volleyball, wasn't really as familiar to the people as it is now, and so, because I didn't do it from the beginning I would be a little less comfortable despite how every athlete now in my sport are using it and are doing really well with it, yes, and I like what they are doing but this is all due to spreading knowledge about Volleyball, it's more broadcasted now, more covered in news and so on.

(Q: You noted that you have two jobs, do male athletes share the same perception as you do? What makes you have to do a second job and does the male volleyball players struggle with the same situation or?)

Whether they can do both? No, most people struggling with such a situation are mostly women to be honest, but there are women in other clubs who could only do sports, it's not a condition, but for me, excuse me.

I feel that in Egypt generally there are certain sports that women won't be able to stay in for long, and this is not just limited to Egypt, I feel that if you compete in an individual sport you have more chances to continue competing and play for longer, but when it's a team sport or something that would require constant lifelong physical effort, no, we retire earlier than the men, because our lives are not the same as foreign athletes who can dedicate themselves fully to sports alone, I mean I do have friends who are professional athletes abroad, but I mean that life has many other things in to keep us from being able to depend fully 100% on Volleyball, so, I don't feel that I could continue like this for my whole life or that I would be able to compete in sports for my whole life, that's why I like to establish a career somewhere else, meanwhile for men, it's different, they can indeed do this because the nature of their contracts and an athlete could start a family just from being an athlete, but not for women athletes, not the same, and to be honest, recently over the past 3 or 4 years, the aspect of women athletes going pro has improved a lot, now there are many people that I know personally who can depend on Volley alone for a living, but personally for me, I can't picture myself because I know that there's a certain point in time when I would have to stop, and I don't want to reach a point where I'm competing despite not performing well but I have to because this is my career.

4) Who manages your online accounts? If it's an agency why not you?

Not at first, at first I would do it on my own but I would actually learn something, I would get a consultant to help with that, I would ask about what is out there, but I don't think I would have somebody else controlling my account, because in the beginning I would create it only for people whom I know and who know me, but it's just something at first with a simple goal, not aiming to get sponsors from the start, no, it's more about sport awareness, I want to create it in a way where I'm delivering a message more than I am doing something that is of personal interest.

And again, this is because back when I still wasn't at my peak or before I started going and working and all that, Social media was yet to have this factor, our sport is very tight, if I was in a national team or something then different coaches would actually know me, and this would be helpful if I wanted to go abroad or wanted to go play professionally somewhere, yes, perhaps in that case I would need someone or an agency to manage this for me, but at first, I would do it myself.

(Q: Message behind the account?)

This is because as I told you earlier, for men this is very much their career, so their objective behind it is to become more popular and be seen and have other clubs ask for me, we also like this too, but personally and throughout all those past few years I have gotten told a lot to go public and I didn't, so that means that I probably don't need much in that regard, not showing off because this is normal for any athlete to want to share and discuss their club and all that, but it's not really in my nature, so, if I ever go in that direction I would probably want to have a reason, not because I would want to be more popular with the people.

Probing question: if it's an agency, how much interference you have over their strategy and content creation?

5) Do you love taking pictures of yourself to post online and why?

Sports or generally? Of course, this is something they do and it could be on daily basis, if we are competing in a championship now then as soon as I finish the game I would post about the game with my picture and the results and what's coming next and so on, I take advantage of how the club does that for us, they do that, but if I had a public account I would do it, definitely.

6) What kind of photos do you usually take?

It depends on the timing, I think it's smart that if you are going through a championship then you should post from inside the court, for sure, and it also depends on the content, perhaps it's because I like marketing a little bit so I could perhaps be a little bit picky when it comes to this, but for example some athletes after losses, in a game they had just lost, they would rather post a team picture, to support, and it usually addresses reality, if it's something after a win or something, if there's a nice picture that was captured of you shooting or doing something would be something good as a picture of you and a picture generally, so it generates a lot of traffic, if you want to share about a certain tournament then you would go with pictures of the cups you've earned, it depends, other athletes like to do something else which is not posting but publishing stories showing match preparations, post-game recovery, there would be content of some kind but not a post, stories and so on, it's as if the audience are walking through the day with them; and the club handles that, in the morning while we are at the training camp they film us, getting ready and such things, to keep people posted, so it depends.

(Q: And do women athlete like to share the personal aspect too?)

I'll tell you something that perhaps I shouldn't be saying, but anybody from my friends who went public on Instagram for example or Facebook to do their own thing, they do have a private account where they post on it, so, I could tell the difference, I could tell the difference between the posts on either of the accounts, even in pictures that may not be related to pictures, so, no, they do post personal pictures for sure, but mostly the pictures posted are related to sports.

- 7) Do you put much thought about the composition of the image itself before posting it? Your posture? Your facial expressions?

Definitely, definitely, and this is one of the things that keep me from wanting to go public despite how I could still select what to post and what not to post, but girls have to be very picky about what pictures they upload. Especially that we are playing a sport and sportswear usually could be shorts or could be something, and this is the outfit of the sport itself, so, some certain shots taken during gameplay can't be shared of course, you have to take care, unlike abroad, abroad it's fine, my professional athlete friends post everything and nothing happens, but no, we have to, we have to always be cautious about this. I'm saying that this is something that is very clear, we can see it and we can tell from the comments, there's bullying that happens which I rarely see on people's personal accounts to be honest, but if there's a certain platform that posted about the team there would be someone cyber bullying.

(Q: Importance of composition?)

Sure, but it depends on the context as well, for example if we had just lost a game and someone is posting a picture after the game, it wouldn't be all smiles but there would be pictures that are focused, no, it depends, you would find that the content or caption or whatever that is posted is always related to the situation the team is in right now and related to the situation the individual is in right now, so, no, it's not a coincidence, it's done deliberately.

- 8) Is the caption important to you and linked to the photo or it doesn't matter?

Yes, I believe that it's important if you are sharing news or if you are discussing something specific or if you are talking about a today's big win for example or how we got qualified for this and we need that. But every now and then there would be that certain motivational post where the caption is that certain success quote and all that, but I don't read it, for me it's not really something, but keep in mind that we have some of our players and this is something that is spreading among women athletes in Volleyball, some women now are getting picked to be ambassadors for things, I have one of my friends who is currently a Red bull Ambassador, and I could put you in touch with her and she would help provide you with a lot of insight because she is public and is one of the people who delved deeply into social media, perhaps she is younger than me but she is very familiar with all this and she has a large follower base and she uses this to her advantage, she is one of the people who choose a certain caption because a certain sponsor told her to use, for example, so the captions are not always under control but most women in volley and even the men, no, they write their own captions and nobody tells them to do it, unless there is a sponsorship of some kind.

- 9) What kind of photos that get more likes and more engagement?

Unfortunately, I feel for the women that, well, certainly professional photos of course, but I also feel that the pictures where the athlete looks nice and so on, that's what generates engagement.

(Q: Nice or revealing?)

Well, especially in Volley and generally for women in sports in Egypt, they are very smart, they know what they are doing, they know what they can post and what can't be posted, so, on the contrary, even if someone is used to posting revealing content on their private account, I take notice that they take care when it comes to public because you know how it is here, we have the Ultras and Cyber-bullying generally and people download the pictures and edit them, no, the athletes take care, I know that in other countries they do this intentionally in a modelling context or something because this adds to their value, but here for us it could backfire, no, it's not something she would do, but if she ends up doing that, she would generate much more traffic.

(Q: What content is more appealing? Things related more to personal life or things related to the games and sport?)

I can't really estimate this exactly, but after you have created your sports fan base, the following fan base related to sports, after that you can include the personal content, it would be more appealing to the people, and it depends, if someone is only posting about their personal life all the time then sports content would be what generates more engagement, but if it's one personal thing in the middle of a lot of sports content then there would be curiosity and interaction and this depends on how often that person posts about that.

10) What do you avoid sharing or posting on your account?

What I would avoid sharing, as I mentioned earlier, always, anything related to my personal life, if I have a public account for example it would be public for sports, I wouldn't post about my corporate life, I wouldn't post that I work doing this and that, I wouldn't post about that, I also wouldn't really post about my family and friends, perhaps one time every once in a while, especially that my sister plays with me in the team, this could already be a good thing, but I wouldn't post about my personal life and I wouldn't post stories about where I am today, I don't know why, I mean in Volley it's not like we get recognised when we walk in the street, it's not like that at all, but it's something in me, even Facebook itself, although everyone I have on Facebook are people I know personally, but because I know that I am more picky about who I accept on Instagram then on Facebook I would be more generic and discuss more sports, but on Instagram it's more private, I know it's not related to who is focused on what, but I wouldn't go very private with public account, I would only post about sports.

11) Does your online usage change in competitions especially with the national team? How?

For me, if I have my agent then it's perfect, but if you don't have an agency to handle your posting and all that, it would be very distracting, it would be very distracting and very unhealthy, for me, if you are competing in a championship and you go on social media to check around, this is one of the most unhealthy things an athlete could experience, so, if an athlete has someone else handling the posting for them, then it's fine, but if you handle it by yourself then I feel that it's more effective for people to find out about your news, so, if you are talking about how effective it is, then yes, it is effective and there are people when I watch football or Volleyball during a world cup or something and there are players whom I admire a lot and they lost a game, I would usually want to go and check in on them and see what they are doing. So, to have someone handling someone's account, this is very beneficial and it's very good to have people know about your news and how you are going through something or recovery or even after a victory, but if you are competing in a championship, I wouldn't recommend for the athlete themselves to go on social media, it's distracting.

- 12) How do you see the differences between you & your male athletes in the same sport regarding their online presence?

I feel that for the men athletes, with minimum effort, they take a picture, write up a caption and that's it, meanwhile girls are very picky and do this and that with the story, I feel that for the men it's much easier, they could even post a picture without a caption and include the club logo and that's it.

(Q: Pressures by society and culture on women athletes?)

On Social media? Definitely, for example, if I'm a man athlete and on the sports day off we go to the beach I would post a picture from the beach and it's fine, but the girls can't do that, even if she wouldn't post a revealing picture, it's just the concept that you are hanging out somewhere or doing something, no, if a male athlete thinks twice before they post something, a female athlete thinks ten times or fifteen times about it.

- 13) How do you think your fans perceive you as a public figure?

I don't really know how to answer this, I'll just talk about the people who are around me, but my team and I like that we inspire the young ones, and this is something that makes me very happy, it makes me happy when a mother comes and tells me that she wants to talk to me, it's not that I enjoy the attention, but this relates to the point of why would I go public, I want to have this kind of influence over someone, and I know that the easiest way to have influence is through social media, but I like how I feel in real life, they see us as the big team that makes achievements but still remains humble and inspires the little ones and always have them sit around and so on, so, I see that they perceive us in that way, as inspiring, like: "Look how they are still playing despite how they are grownups now", this is one thing, the other thing is one of the things that I know isn't easy and may not be accepted by everybody, but it is basically just the concept that I have both a private personal life and my sports life, this is what I try to deliver across all the time, because in Egypt that's it, you won't be able to ... So, I try to demonstrate that if you'd like to do both, you can, so, when I feel that someone with me tells me that I encouraged them to go work and encouraged them to succeed in doing two things, this is one of the things that makes me very happy and one of the things I would like for people to see, so, it's not me, but it's more about being able to help someone do something better.

- 14) What's your online objectives on social media platforms?

If you had asked me this a few years ago I would have said that yes I have objectives, maybe it could have helped me become a pro player if I was thinking about that, it could have helped with many things, but as I said earlier, the good thing about Volley is that it's tight, so, even if I still don't do that but still worked hard and put in the effort and play at a certain level or with the national team, I would still get the exposure, but it could have helped me more with something like being an ambassador for something and so on, it could have helped, but I could have not really imagined it, what I'm trying to say is that even back when we were still students which wasn't long ago, it was not like this at all, it's not like it was there but I decided not to, it was never on my radar, maybe yes one person from the entire team would have a public account and there wouldn't be that many followers.

- 15) Do you think you have what it takes to attract sponsors to you as a personal brand or you're still developing? Please explain more

Currently I would need to develop, not for anything, but it's just that by default it has certain rules, it depends on the club that you represent, meaning if there is something that would benefit me, that would be the national team, but again, the national team is a seasonal thing, you would have the national team championship every while but the club you represent is what you will play for, so, some clubs are very easy to get sponsors for things like Al Ahly, like Al Zamalek, Sporting Club for example is very good at my sport and is very well known for my sport and currently people outside of the Volley scene know about us and that is a good thing, but as Lina, personally, I would actually need to work more on having a sponsor than someone who is playing for Ahly or Zamalek or other clubs that has other sports making them popular. Even if I compare the players individually as one player better than the other, but maybe the not so good player's club could help her more, her club's reputation, but for us we are here in a Social club, not a sports Club, so, I would actually put more work in that regard, but during national team championships, no, it's easier, you go and compete representing the national team then you could easily get sponsorships, but I feel that if I created a public social media account, it wouldn't fail, and getting followers would not be the most difficult thing, but maintaining the ...: Because I am getting requests.

16) How did your online usage changed or evolved by years and what's the reason behind it?

Big time, big time, now when you ask me, I feel that now I had reached a certain point where social media could have helped me a lot more, but now that I made it here, I don't feel that social media would get me there, but no, it would definitely make me bigger, in terms of becoming more popular, oh, I would definitely become much more popular, but it was never my goal.

(Q: Last question, on average how many other athletes like you have private accounts only?)
It's easier to say how many have a public one, because of how many there are, well, I also want to tell you that the ones I'll mention have been like this for only three years. If we talk about the top four teams from the golden square in Egypt's Volleyball, for example, let me tell you, between 10 to 15 girls have account and only about five of them would be effective. Who would have an effective account, where we could assume that they have hired someone to manage it and that they didn't buy their followers and such things, I could say that the genuine accounts would be between 5 to 7 accounts, it's a disaster, but you should also explore other sports because maybe my sport is like this, I'm also curious to know.