Unveiling Brand Personality:

The Behind-The-Scenes Marketing Effect

ALEXIOS FITOPOULOS

Lund University
Institution for Strategic Communication
Bachelor's thesis

Foreword

Unveiling Brand Personality:
The Behind-The-Scenes Marketing Effect

Abstract

This thesis examines how brands like Gymshark and Tala use behind-the-scenes (BTS) content to appear more authentic, showcasing a shift from polished marketing to genuine engagement. It analyses BTS-content's role in revealing a brand's true operations and fostering stronger consumer connections through relatability and vulnerability. Additionally, it applies Erving Goffman's Self-Presentation theory to understand how brands strategically balance authenticity with marketing needs. The study suggests that honest, unscripted BTS moments can significantly enhance consumer connections towards the brand and align with modern demands for transparency in digital marketing.

Keywords: Anthropomorphization, behind-the-scenes content, brand authenticity, digital marketing strategies,Self-presentation theory, brand transparency

Number of characters, including spaces: 81191

Sammanfattning

Den uppsats undersöker hur varumärken som Gymshark och Tala använder behind-the-scenes (BTS) innehåll för att framstå som mer autentiska, vilket visar en övergång från en felfri varumärkesbild till genuint engagemang. Den analyserar BTS-innehållets roll i att avslöja ett varumärkes verkliga verksamhet och främja starkare konsumentrelaterade relationer genom igenkänningsfaktorer och sårbarhet. Dessutom tillämpar studien Erving Goffmans teori om självpresentation för att förstå hur varumärken strategiskt balanserar trovärdighet med marknadsföringen. Studien föreslår att ärliga, oregisserade BTS-ögonblick kan förbättra konsumenternas relationer till varumärket väsentligt och stämma överens med de moderna krav från den medvetna konsumenten på transparens inom digital marknadsföring.

Nyckelord: Antropomorfisering, behind-the-scenes innehåll, varumärkesautenticitet, digitala marknadsföringsstrategier, teorin om självpresentation, varumärkestransparens

Antal tecken inklusive blanksteg: 81191

Table of Content

1. Introduction

This study's focus is to analyse the anthropomorphization of a brand by using behind-the-scenes content in concealed promotional communication strategies. In this chapter the study is presented alongside the background, problematization, aim and research questions. The following segment is designed to provide essential background and context to further understand this study.

1.1. Background

In the digital era where brands try to stay relevant in an ever-changing landscape, it is essential to understand what is important to the equally ever-changing consumers. In recent years there has been a shift in the demand from the brand literal consumer from a perfect image of a brand to an image that is more vulnerable, authentic and raw (*The Sprout Social Index*, 2023). This shift evokes the essence of new development and adaptation of new ways of brand communication. The reasoning behind this is because transparency and reliability are valued more rather than a perfect image (Bartsch, Zeugner-Roth & Katsikeas, 2022).

In recent years, consumer authenticity seeking has become a crucial determinator in shaping brand receptions and brand loyalty. For marketers this means that consumers are now prioritising and are more likely to support brands that align their marketing efforts with genuine values, rather than presenting an overly curated image (Bartsch et al., 2022). This trend and shift can be linked to the rise of social media and the user-generated content (UGC) where authenticity is presented on a daily basis (Hernández-Ortega, Stanko, Rishika, Molina-Castillo & Franco, 2022).

The effect of this cause forces brands to curate their brand in a new way. The need for a more honest and transparent engagement towards the consumers from brands has become a critical factor to create deeper connections and trust with consumers (Bartsch et al., 2022), thus forcing a new way of strategic communication. This thesis contributes to brand communication by exploring how these evolving consumer expectations necessitate a shift in traditional branding strategies, offering insights into how transparent communication can be effectively integrated into brand messaging to foster stronger consumer relationships.

1.1.1. Humanising a Brand

Choose your self-presentations carefully, for what starts out as
a mask may become your face. - Erving Goffman

In branding, practitioners have been utilising anthropomorphism for centuries and the phenomenon has been well studied by researchers in the field of communication and branding. Anthropomorphism can be simply described as the effort to make products or brands appear and be perceived as humans. Brand anthropomorphization, in the essence of how brands create products that resemble humanlike features or humanlike traits, has become an essential subject for scholars in branding research in the last decade (Patsiaouras, Fitchett & Saren, 2014; Avis & Aitken, 2015; Guido & Peluso, 2015). Nevertheless, in the new digital era, the consumers have become more demanding regarding what kind of branded content and products they want to be exposed to (Hernández-Ortega et al., 2022). The popularity of polished content from brands has decreased and there is instead an increased demand in non-promotional and transparent content (Bartsch et al., 2022). Therefore, brands need to implement new strategies surrounding this new consumption need.

Humanising different products and even brands, has empirically been proven that consumers do in fact associate different features to humanlike properties leading to the favouritism of the brand or product (Windhager, Slice, Schaefer, Oberzaucher & Grammer, 2008). These, for example, can be the anthropomorphization of the sponges created by Scrub Daddy where the sponges have eyes and mouths but also different names for different usages such as Scrub Daddy and Scrub Mommy. Through years of deliberate and successful efforts to humanise brands through anthropomorphization, consumers understand now that there are even different layers to a personality of a brand (Portal, Abratt & Bendixen, 2018) and there is a demand for a more vulnerable, authentic and raw side of the brand personality (Banet-Weiser, 2012; *The Sprout Social Index*, 2023). Thus, the polished and filtered version of brand content is no longer attractive to the consumer. Communications practitioners need to understand and adapt to the innovative way of creating a nuanced brand personality (Portal et al., 2018) This alteration and adaptation is crucial in the ever changing digital arena, in an effort to reposition the brand in the forefront.

1.2. Problematization

Although there is a wide range of research surrounding anthropomorphism in branding, there is a research gap regarding the personalities and self-presentation identities in anthropomorphism cultivation in branding. Understanding the usage of behind-the-scenes (BTS) content to showcase the sought after brand personality demanded by the brand literal consumer, is crucial because the staged "truth" affects how humans perceive reality. There is a need to understand the conscious manipulation of the BTS marketing of a brand being highlighted on the front stage in marketing efforts As the shift in the brand literal and conscious consumer is becoming more considerable by marketers it is important to understand how communicators can utilise BTS-content to enhance consumer connection to brands in the ever shifting digital arena. There is, nevertheless, not enough literature and previous research about the commonalities, differences and success factors of BTS-content in marketing as well as the effect BTS-content has on brand personality. This study seeks to look into the concept of BTS-content strategies and how they are used by companies to establish and strengthen their connection with their audience. Looking into the BTS-content, this study's effort is to showcase how marketers can implement these into their content in order to connect and strengthen their relationship to their audiences.

1.3. Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this paper is to examine how the utilisation of a more vulnerable and authentic personality of a brand can help the anthropomorphization of a brand. This study seeks to understand how BTS-content can contribute to the anthropomorphic qualities of a brand and what kind of flaws and vulnerabilities brands showcase in this form of communication. To investigate the aim further, this study strives to answer the following research questions:

1. *How does the usage of behind-the-scenes content in brand communication contribute to the anthropomorphization of a brand?*
2. *How are anthropomorphistic qualities included in behind-the-scenes content of brands in an effort to showcase flaws and vulnerability?*

To examine this, the study focuses on the fitness brands Gymshark and Tala. In addition, the companies' founders personal content on different social media platforms is also included.

Ben Francis (founder of Gymshark) and Grace Beverly (founder of Tala) are both influencers and ambassadors of their respective brands where they post both announcements but also behind-the-scenes content. The founders embody their brands and help the humanization of their brands. The reasoning behind this selection is to create a nuanced analysis in an effort to answer the above presented research questions.

2. Previous Research

This section of the thesis delves into the concept of anthropomorphism in branding, exploring how brands adopt human-like traits to connect more deeply with consumers. It discusses the historical and evolving application of anthropomorphism from physical to psychological attributes in brand strategies, emphasising the emotional bonds formed as brands become relatable and personal to consumers.

2.1. Anthropomorphism In Branding

Anthropomorphism can be simply described as the intention to contribute humanlike features to non-human entities such as material and immaterial objects but also animals (Epley, Way & Cacioppo, 2007). In branding, the research surrounding anthropomorphism has been well studied. The way of how corporations humanise their brands and the effect that anthropomorphism has is acknowledged by researchers and practitioners alike (Fournier, 1998). The humanisation of brands can have different effects on the consumers' attitudes, trust and emotional connection towards the brands. Studies have shown that when a company has well established their brand's anthropomorphism it forges an emotional connection between the brand and the consumers (Hernández-Ortega et al., 2022).

2.1.1. The Personality of Brands

Throughout the recent years, the way of how brands are anthropomorphised has been further developed from the visual humanisation to the psychological properties such as temper, attitude and feelings (Aaker, Fournier & Brasel, 2004). The emotional connections that can be established by anthropomorphisation can create a strong personal connection with the consumer. This can have the effect of when a brand is attacked, the consumer affiliates that as a personal attack on themselves and they feel therefore obliged to defend the company as a part of themselves (Fournier, 1998).

However, in the digital era, there is a gap in the literature concerning how the psychological anthropomorphisation properties of a brand can be used in social media content to strengthen consumer connections and brand attitudes (Aaker et al., 2004).

2.1.2. The Domain of Humanising Brands

MacInnis and Folkes (2017) further explain that there are different domains of humanising brands. These three are the human-focused perspective, the self-focused perspective and the relationship-focused perspective.

As seen in Fig.1 the human-focused perspective is deliberate intent so describe the perspective of the anthropomorphization of brands. In this perspective the brands are seen as having human-like traits or personalities, mind and features.

The second perspective, the self-focused perspective, differs from just acknowledging the physical and psychological traits of the anthropomorphisation of a brand and is instead targeting its focus on the association of oneself to the brand. In this perspective the anthropomorphistic features are not being accounted for and instead the focus shifts to how the brand is perceived in a similar way as oneself. MacInnis and Folkes (2017) describe this perspective as having a brand-self connection focus, where the importance lies on the connection that consumers have to the brand.

The relationship-focused perspective describes brands as relationship partners. In this perspective the relationship between brands and consumers is seen as more intense, but are regarded as one-sided from the consumer towards the brand (Fournier, 1998). These relationships simulate real life relationships that people have with other people. MacInnis and Folkes (2017) summarise this perspective in three points: (1) brand relationship types, (2) brand attachment and aversion from betrayal and (3) brand relationship norms. The authors also disclaim that these relationships can vary in the essence of the strength and intensity towards the brand.

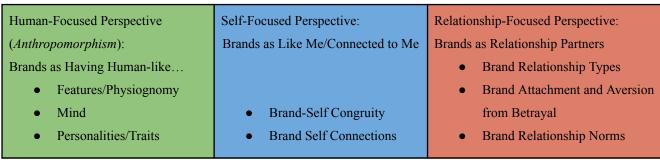| Human-Focused Perspective (*Anthropomorphism*): Brands as Having Human-like… • Features/Physiognomy • Mind • Personalities/Traits	Self-Focused Perspective: Brands as Like Me/Connected to Me • Brand-Self Congruity • Brand Self Connections	Relationship-Focused Perspective: Brands as Relationship Partners • Brand Relationship Types • Brand Attachment and Aversion from Betrayal • Brand Relationship Norms

Fig 1. The Domain of Humanising Brands

3. Theoretical Framework

---

*This theoretical framework consists of the self-presentation theory, presented by Erving Goffman in his book "*The Presentation Of The Self In Everyday Life*", which will be used to interpret the chosen material for this essay. The theory is deemed relevant to investigate the behind-the-scenes content in an effort to answer the research questions.*

3.1. Self-Presentation Theory

Defining self-presentation is easiest understood as the conscious and unconscious strategies that people implement in an effort to try to convey their own personal image as they want it to be interpreted by others (Dolezal, 2017).

Erving Goffman, a Canadian-born American sociologist, argued that humans have a social identity that is displayed as a mask, as in a performance on a stage. The different social contexts that humans can be placed at are defined as plays by Goffman (Goffman, 2014). This is further described as a drama for a self fulfilling purpose. In the social contexts and interactions, depending on the scenario, humans rely on their self-presentation masks that are created by the expectations by the different social standards and norms (Josef & Merunková, 2019). In school, a student is supposed to act as a student and is therefore adapting the role and mask of the student. Reciprocally, a professor is supposed to act as a professor and is therefore forced to embrace the mask and mannerism of a professor. In this scenario, it is crucial that the play keeps going on as planned with the different actors in the play portraying their respective roles, otherwise the play will not continue and chaos will ensue (Goffman, 2014).

The self fulfilling purpose can have different ambitions depending on the person, context and goal. The overall purpose is usually defined as an effort to try to fit in and to further accomplish the personal goals in the set environment. There is, although, a constant pressure by the audience, which is Goffman's way of describing the people surrounding us in everyday life in every social context (Goffman, 2014). The pressure that the audience applies is created because of their constant oversight and interpretation of different signs that every human amidst (Dolezal, 2015). The telltale signs that every human provides to the audience in a social context, in the given stage as Goffman would describe it, indicates what type of person

that human is trying to portray as. Here, the pressure is defined as an effort to try to contain oneself to the mask and roll that the person has taken on for that stage and try not to break character in that given setting (Goffman, 2014). As mentioned earlier, it is crucial that the play is able to go on.

The reason behind this is if the mask falls there is a risk of exposing the true self. Goffman (2014) defines the disability to maintain the role of the chosen self as the unmasking of a character in the play. The result of this crucial moment is that the person's vulnerable and authentic side is exposed and in the context of the drama the dynamic becomes unrecognisable resulting in uncertainty (Dolezal, 2015). The unmasked person can also feel shame and insecurity in case the person's true self is not aligned with the expectation of the chosen self or by the audience . This sudden exposion of flaws, hidden emotions or vulnerable properties in the true self can cause the play to dissolve and even the exclusion of the unmasked person. In addition to that, there is a scarcity regarding the loss of control of the narrative of their social interactions and the unmasked person's self-presentation (Goffman, 2014).

Although there are risks and negative effects of the unmasking of the true self, there are also benefits that need to be considered. Authenticity can be seen as a risk in the essence of not being seen in the control manner that a person with a mask chooses to be perceived as (Goffman, 2014). On the other hand, the perks and advantages of the unmasked characters is that they now have the chance to establish and foster genuine connections with other individuals. The reasoning behind this is because humans are able to relate to one other's true, unfiltered thoughts, feelings, and traits, which fosters empathy and understanding. Consequently, the unmasking can lead to reevaluation of the former relationship, in reaction to the event in the play, leading to a more sympathetic and accepting adaptation to the relationship. On a personal level, the unmasked person can gain insight about their own identity and values, resulting in personal growth and a new perspective on new interactions and new relationships (Goffman, 2014).

3.2. The Dramaturgical Parameters of Self-Presentation

In the self-presentation theory there are different parameters that could summarise the structure of the theory. These are front- and backstage, dramaturgy, impression management, performances and roles, teamwork and cooperation and audience awareness. These parameters are further discussed later in this chapter to clarify what their purpose is in the meaning of self-presentation.

The different social interactions that occur can have different outcomes. Goffman (2014) explains that the physical environment (setting or scene) that a person chooses shapes the social interaction. A formal business meeting in an office has different norms and expectations than a casual gathering in an arcade. In this essence, the setting can affect the outcome of the social interaction and therefore further affect the presentation of the self. The same aspect is applied on material items and on appearance choices in social interactions. The way somebody chooses to dress signals a specific wishful interpretation from the audience. Regarding what type of clothing and prop that is used but also where this person is placed, dictates the interpretation of the self-presentation from the audience. Goffman (2014) discusses the different social interactions that people have in everyday life and explains them as scripted. He states that different social roles are based on scripted behaviours and in coherence the societal norm. These social roles, in collaboration with the previously mentioned attributes, create what we realise as the reality of people by being exposed to the personal and carefully chosen self-presentation of everyone we meet.

3.2.1. Front stage and backstage

In the premise of self-presentation there is a distinctive difference in the presentation of the self regarding the setting. Being on the front stage (the social setting) requires effort and agility to be able to uphold the chosen self that one wants to portray and display. The social setting is explained as where individuals bring their characters alive but in coherence to the social norms.

3.2.2. Dramaturgy

Dramaturgy defines how people take their place in the play diverted from a dramatic realisation. In this part, the people embody their roles and perform their part in the social

setting (Goffman, 2014). Here are elements such as props, costumes and scripts essential to make the play go on and function in the social setting.

3.2.3. Impression management

The most important aspect of these parameters is the parameter that regards impression management. Goffman (2014) highlights that impression management is central for social interaction. Here, people evaluate the impressions that people create and interpret of them and thereafter change and adapt their self-presentation depending on the personal wishful outcome. In order to complete this task, people need to implement new self-presentation tactics but also nonverbal cues in an effort to try to adapt and shape the new self-presentation.

3.2.4. Performances and roles

The performances and roles are quite similar to the dramaturgy part of the parameters. The difference between them is that as in the dramaturgy parameter people realise their part of the play, in the performances and roles people take their designated places in the play. People adopt different roles regarding the social setting they are in and that is required for social situations (Goffman, 2014).

3.2.5. Teamwork and cooperation

Social interactions are comparable to a dramaturgical play in which the performers' participation is not only beneficial but also necessary. According to this concept, coordinated efforts by individuals to preserve the performance's consistency and credibility are referred to as teamwork in social interactions (Goffman, 2014). Through cooperation, each member's performance is guaranteed to comply with roles and rules that are understood by the group as a whole, supporting the group's overall presentation to the audience. According to Goffman (2014), this coherence in teamwork facilitates the smooth integration of individual performances, giving the impression that social interactions are fluid and natural. In this situation, good cooperation keeps each actor's "face" intact by stopping "face-threatening acts" that could upend the social order and cause interruptions in communication.

3.2.6. Audience Awareness

Another essential element of Goffman's (2014) dramaturgy is audience awareness. It references the performers' consciousness of the audience's presence and their concurrent

adjustment of their actions to conform to the audiences' expectations. According to Goffman, actors are always observing how their audience responds to them in order to determine how well their performance is going and whether any changes need to be made. This awareness affects how people choose to show themselves; frequently, it causes them to highlight certain aspects of their personalities or minimise others in order to win others over or fulfil particular social goals.

3.2.7. Non-verbal communication

According to Goffman (2014), nonverbal communication is crucial in the drama of everyday life. This type of communication incorporates all nonverbal elements of the exchange, such as body language, gestures, facial expressions, and even the physical distance between the parties involved. Since non-verbal cues are less actively controlled than verbal communication, Goffman (2014) emphasises that they frequently reveal more about a person's feelings and attitudes than verbal communication. These cues are essential to the performance as they can subtly convey sincerity, irony, aggression, or submission, which might not be explicitly stated. Understanding nonverbal clues in the context of self-presentation enables a person to effectively manage the perceptions that others have of them, improving the credibility of their performance and the intended interpretation.

4. Method

This segment outlines the qualitative approach and case study design used to analyse the role of BTS-content in brand anthropomorphization. It discusses the selective process of gathering non-promotional, authentic content from specific fitness brands to study their impact on consumer perception and brand personality, emphasising the analysis of these interactions through various theoretical lenses.

4.1. Scientific Approach

A social constructivist approach was adopted for this thesis considering the aim of this paper being to analyse how reality and meaning is produced via shared understandings and social interactions (Adams, 2006).

Collecting less data but analysing it in depth, a qualitative study enables researchers to focus on the meanings and interpretations that content consumers attribute to the collected data. This is consistent with the social constructivist approach since the data gathered is subjective which allows for an open interpretation. An abductive reasoning was used in this thesis with the reasoning of the circumstances of this case. The abductive reasoning allows the author to infer the most likely explanation for the patterns or trends that occur (Flick, 2013).
In addition, the theory that was used for this study serves as a foundation for the explanation of the findings and an analytical tool for the observations made from the data gathered.

This perspective was relevant for this analysis, which focused on examining the social structures in behind-the-scenes content. Furthermore, the qualitative research method was used to answer the research questions as the aim of this study is to examine the phenomenon of the anthropomorphisation of behind-the-scenes content in an effort to strengthen business to customer connections, by showcasing vulnerability and flaws from the brands personality.

4.1.1. Case study
Using a case study methodology, this thesis analyses particular brands and the BTS-content that is the basis of the investigation. According to Eksell and Thelander (2014), case studies are distinguished by their comprehensive analysis of one or a few units with the goal of producing rich and comprehensive knowledge about these units (Stake, 1995; Creswell,

2014). This method works especially well for comprehending how BTS-content highlights the flaws and vulnerabilities of brands and helps the anthropomorphization of a brand. The BTS content strategies of fitness companies Gymshark and Tala, as well as the founders' personal content, are the unique setting of this study. The study aims to provide nuanced and comprehensive insights into how this kind of content anthropomorphizes brands and strengthens relationships with customers by looking closely at these particular situations. By examining a phenomenon in its natural environment rather than removing it from its surroundings, case studies aim to provide comprehensive information. Case studies are especially useful in producing new and nuanced information because of their contextual aspect (Gerring, 2017). They are therefore ideal for examining intricate phenomena, such as the anthropomorphization of brands in BTS-content (Fournier, 1998). This study aims to comprehend the precise methods by which BTS-content can communicate vulnerability and authenticity, strengthening the human aspects of a brand.

4.2. Analysis Method

4.2.1. Collection of Empirical Material

The data collected consist of two fitness companies and their founders cross-platform content sharing. In the selection process five parameters were established for the screening of the content. With the argument of the aim of this thesis being to analyse behind-the-scenes content, the criterias were developed from the definition of behind-the-scenes content. These were (1) non-promotional content, (2) pre-launch content, (3) the development of different products and non-products, (4) content from the founder or brand at various occasions that are non-promotional, (5) day in the life content of the brand or the founder. These parameters were established in ambition to narrow down the study and therefore gain well established results and information from the data collected.

Excluded were any polished, sponsored, or promoted content from the brand or its founder. User generated content (UGC), content from the brand ambassadors and influencers were also excluded in an effort to limit the selection of the empirical data for this study. Besides that, the views, likes, comments and in general interaction to the content was not accounted for or were a criteria for this selection process. The reasoning behind this was that the

interactions do not accommodate useful information for the purpose of this thesis. By setting up these criterias the author attempts to avoid bias in the selection process.

4.2.2. Behind-The-Scenes Content (As A Form Of Anthropomorphisation Strategy)

The idiom behind-the-scenes is defined as *"if something happens behind the scenes, it happens without most people knowing about it, especially when something else is happening publicly"* (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

In traditional media the BTS-content has been developed as content that showcases the smaller bits and pieces of the content being made. A crucial component is exclusivity, since BTS content ought to give exclusive access to areas of the creative process that are typically restricted to the wider audience. This includes unscripted footage, candid interviews with artists or creators, and detailed examinations of the decision-making or difficulties faced during production (Gray, 2010).

In the movie industry, when a movie is finished and published, the movie distributor usually provides the audience with an option to either buy or view the BTS-content for free about the making of the movie. The strategy and aim behind the release of such content is to promote the movie, create engagement but also build and strengthen the brand of the movie and its associated franchises (Crawford, n.d.) Lotz (2004) talks about how important BTS content is to increasing viewer engagement and broadening the narrative experience in the TV industry. Furthermore, although BTS content contains a commercial element, its primary intent is subtler than direct advertising. As opposed to strictly promoting the finished product, it seeks to increase audience engagement and commitment by offering a richer narrative experience. Caldwell (2008) explores how BTS content is used by the film and television industries as a component of production culture to demystify the creative process and promote the reliability of this process.

The diverse functions of BTS-content in today's media and marketing environments, implies how it helps to inform and engage consumers while also strengthening their connection with the brand or product. Although the same principle is applied to omnichannel BTS-content marketing, in the context of brand communication, the subject surrounding BTS-content has not been thoroughly investigated and researched (Couldry, 2012).

4.2.3. Gymshark

Gymshark is a well-known fitness apparel and clothing business with a strong UK presence but also globally that has been at the forefront of marketing and branding in recent years. After its founding in 2012, the business became well-known for its creative use of influencer marketing and social media to advertise its brand and apparel (About Gymshark, n.d.). Gymshark was among the initial businesses to acknowledge the significance of influencer marketing and to proactively search for and work in conjunction with influencers to endorse their merchandise (Haemers, 2016). Gymshark can be seen as a pioneer in new ways of marketing in modern years with the justification of the early adaptation of influencer marketing. During the recent years, both the brand and the founder Ben Francis, have implemented BTS-content as a form providing their audience and customers insights about their operation but also about the history and development of the brand. They disclose different content and information that is not usual for a corporate company to disclose and in relation to the brand being a pioneer of news ways of marketing, makes this brand and its founder a interesting contender for this thesis.

4.2.4. Tala

Established in 2019, TALA is a well-known brand in the sustainable sportswear industry, having been launched by Grace Beverly. The company sets itself apart with its dedication to ethical production methods and environmental sustainability. TALA offers an assortment of sports bras, tops, leggings, and outerwear, among other activewear goods. All of these items are made from recycled materials and are intended to be both fashionable and functional.

Social media platforms are utilised by TALA's marketing strategy to effectively engage with its audience. Transparency and authenticity are demonstrated by the brand's behind-the-scenes information, which offers insights into its sustainable production methods. As the creator of TALA, Grace Beverly actively participates in content development, providing her audience with insights into the brand's principles, ethics, and outlook on the direction of sustainable fashion.

4.4. Content Analysis

When conducting research and a complete comprehension of textual, visual, or multimedia content is required, content analysis is a valuable tool. Researchers can identify patterns,

themes, and underlying meanings that may not be immediately apparent upon initial observation by methodically categorising and analysing material using this approach (Neuendorf, 2017). Through in-depth examination of the content, content analysis makes it easier to explore complex contexts and spot significant patterns.

Additionally, content analysis enables researchers to contrast and analyse various content pieces, highlighting parallels, deviations, and developing narratives. Findings from content analysis can inform strategic choices in fields such as marketing, communication, and brand management by pointing out successful tactics and opportunities for development (Krippendorff, 2018).

With the reasoning that this study aims to thoroughly analyse BTS-content, the usage of content analysis, more specific qualitative content analysis, is justified . This indicates that the ambition of this study is to decipher and analyse in-depth the BTS-content gathered from Tala and Gymshark. By identifying patterns, themes and narratives in the gathered empirical data, the analysis aims to reveal the ways in which BTS-content fosters customer connection and brand anthropomorphization (Rose, 2016).

4.4.1. Social (Self) Presentation Matrix Coding

This thesis presents the Social (Self) Presentation Matrix Coding, a useful tool for analysing the self presentation of brand personality in BTS-content. This matrix analyses different aspects of self-presentation that are observed in the data collected in a methodical manner, drawing inspiration from Goffman's paradigm. Parameters like front and backstage, dramaturgy, impression management, roles and performances, audience awareness, cooperation and teamwork, and nonverbal communication are all included in the coding matrix (Goffman, 2014). Every component is coded to represent how the brands control how they present themselves in BTS environments, whether they are meeting, defying, or altering audience expectations (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). This approach enables an opportunity to analyse BTS-content in a nuanced way in relation to how it supports or contradicts traditional narratives and roles in the context of brand identity (Hogan, 2010).

4.5. Reflection of Method & Ethical Considerations

The study's research approach demonstrates a careful examination of moral principles and the consequences of qualitative research in the social sciences. The BTS-content analysis remained committed to ethical principles, especially with regard to the privacy and consent of the individuals portrayed. The content collected and analysed is public and therefore the privacy and consent was argued to be approved. The subjective aspect of interpretation was emphasised by the social constructivist method, which made careful consideration of any potential biases and presumptions incorporated into the study (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). The study made sure that interpretations and conclusions reached from the BTS-content were treated cautiously and responsibly by taking into account the impact of its findings on the individuals and/or brands but also the larger public. The method's reflection emphasised how qualitative research is constant, and that results may improve and inform ongoing methodological techniques (Morse, 2015).

4.6. Research Quality

The quality of this research was upheld through rigorous methodological consistency and a robust analytical framework. By offering an organised method for data analysis, the Social (Self) Presentation Matrix Coding ensured that the study's conclusions could be verified and examined closely for reliability and comprehensiveness. To increase validity, triangulation was used, confirming the results with evidence from other data sources (Flick, 2014). The study's qualitative design made it possible to examine complex social (online) brand presentations in-depth, which has substantially contributed to the understanding of BTS-content and how it affects customer perception and brand engagement (Bryman, 2016). The research quality was further affirmed by the clear alignment between the research objectives and the methodologies employed, ensuring that the study provided meaningful insights that were substantiated by both empirical data and theoretical frameworks (Maxwell, 2013).

5. Analysis

This segment of the thesis delves into the detailed analysis of the usage of BTS-content by the two fitness companies to shape brand perception. The analysis explores the strategic presentation of the brand's beginnings and growth, emphasising the human elements that resonate with the audience and strengthen brand loyalty.

5.1. Gymshark Social (Self) Presentation Matrix Findings

5.1.1. Segment A1 - Summary

In the Segment A1 video posted on Ben Francis, the founder of Gymshark, personal YouTube channel, the main theme is about giving the audience an inside look of the early stages of Gymsharks beginning and development.

The main point of the content is to showcase how Gymshark was initially launched and the whole backstory of how the founder came up with the idea of Gymshark. Ben Francis talks about how he was able to finance the early stages of the development of Gymshark at 19 years old, explaining that he had saved some money from his earlier companies, such as two fitness apps, but also from his shifts working at Pizza Hut, at the same time as he was a full time university student. He further explains how every piece of clothing, at that point, was custom made with the reasoning that the company did not have funds to invest into manufacturers.

Another aspect that Ben Francis highlights is his shortcomings with the development of apps and websites that were not profitable and that he had to shut down. Besides this, he further explains the struggles of trying to keep up with his university simultaneously as he was trying to figure out new strategies to further develop and scale Gymshark.

5.1.2. Segment A1 - Findings

In this video Ben Francis promotes the brand in a new way. The backstage is highlighted and becomes the front stage even though it is presented as something secretive and personal. Here, the humanization of the brands personality is narrated by Ben Francis by his way of

using specific language, showcasing thoughtfully picked videos and exposing never before seen footage and stating never before known facts about the company.

The front stage in this video depicts Ben Francis as a highly ambitious entrepreneur with a lot of passion and commitment for his craft and his business. This aligns well with the brand's embodiment of the same principle which in turn aims to inspire and resonate with the audience in the same way as his own image. The commitment and dedication that was necessary and all the sacrifices Ben Francis had to make to establish Gymshark as a leading contender in the fitness industry, showcases the spirit of the brand towards the audience and establishes a stronger public image. Although these are the primary aspects that are decoded from the video, Ben Francis chooses to contrast the perfect image in collaboration with raw and unfiltered footage and stories. By uncovering raw and unfiltered stories about the company and presenting the backstage as the front stage, Ben Francis tries to convey that the chosen self is now uncovered as being something more than just a perfect image. By doing so it creates a sense of humility and honesty regarding the audience through the effort of being transparent and sharing personal information about the company. It shows a more humble side of both Ben Francis and Gymshark and these elements contribute to the humanization of the founder and the brand, making them more relatable to the audience.

This video includes a different power dynamic than the audience is used to. Ben Francis, who embodies the role of a young and determined founder who overcame different challenges is now presented in a different light. Gymshark, which is presented as one of the biggest fitness brands worldwide, is now showcasing a homemade warehouse at the founders parents house, the founder sewing the first products and the founders personal vehicle filled with packages and boxes. These props used for the dramaturgical purposes, changes the perspective of the brand and creates a recognition factor towards the audience. The props and the older videos that are showcased function as reinforcement to the story that is presented about the early stages of Gymshark but also about Ben Francis.

Regarding the analysis of impression management, the company has extensive knowledge of the playfield. The narrative that Ben Francis has selected is created to curate a more vulnerable side by showcasing the shortcomings and struggles that Ben Francis and Gymshark have had. The highlights and success of the brand are also shown in an effort to showcase resilience. These two aspects are presented in an attempt to foster trust and

admiration, encouraging the audience to see the journey of Ben Francis and Gymshark as inspirational but also attainable.

In the video, Ben Francis is adapting different personas including the leader, the inventor, the learner and entrepreneur. Whether he is talking about past mistakes or present accomplishments, each role is tailored to the particular narrative moment. His ability to shift between various personas demonstrates his versatility and depth, which heightens the relatability of his narrative and that of his brand. This is also creating a sense of development together with Ben Francis and the company through the video, from humble beginnings with failures and struggles to a worldwide sensation.

Ben Francis demonstrates a high level of audience awareness by addressing the interests and inspirations of his viewers. He provides behind-the-scenes information and insights that he knows will interest his audience, which includes both those who are already a part of the Gymshark community and those who aspire to be entrepreneurs.

Throughout the video, Ben's enthusiasm, passion, and sometimes exhaustion are evident through his expressions, gestures, and tones. The incorporation of non-verbal clues with his spoken narration serves to enhance its authenticity and dedication to the company. This non-verbal communication effectively supports the verbal narrative, making his story more engaging and believable.

5.1.3. Segment A2 - Summary

In a similar video to the first one (Segment A1), Ben Francis, shares the brand's journey from a garage startup to a globally recognized $1.45 billion fitness company. Ben Francis explains Gymshark's beginnings, once again with hand-sewn products, symbolising deep personal involvement and emphasising the brand's grassroots origins. This narrative of overcoming early financial and operational struggles, transitioning exponentially to the global market, highlights the brand's strategic growth.

Later in the video, Ben Francis highlights how the development of Gymshark had to assume a more strategic leadership role. Francis explains that this transition has been critical to the maturation and identity of Gymshark. Additionally, Francis talks about the importance of

selecting investors who align with the brand's cultural values, underscoring the brand's commitment to maintaining its foundational principles as it grows.

5.1.4. Segment A2 - Findings

Ben Francis presents himself as the successful entrepreneur and visionary behind Gymshark, sharing the brand's milestones and strategic decisions. This portrayal aligns with the social setting where he upholds the persona of an inspiring leader, which is expected by his audience and the broader public. However, Francis also delves into the personal struggles and the early challenges of Gymshark, showing insight into the more private aspects of the business. He discusses working from his parents' house and the initial manual labour involved, which is generally hidden from the public eye. This behind-the-scenes content allows the audience to see the less polished, more authentic side of the brand and its founder.

Elements like the narrative of starting in a garage, the physical props of early hand-sewn products, and the settings of his old workspace are used to stage the Gymshark story. Francis embodies the role of both a narrator and participant in this narrative, guiding the audience through the brand's journey with a clear storyline that emphasises growth and overcoming adversity. This is also presented in the form of Ben Francis changing his tone to being more sincere and melodramatic when talking about the disbelief of the scaling of his homemade company.

Francis carefully manages the impression he creates by balancing stories of hardship with success. His honesty about past failures and challenges are successful in cultivating an image of resilience and relatability, enhancing his and Gymshark's authenticity. He adapts his self-presentation by highlighting these experiences to resonate with and inspire his audience.

In the video, Francis shifts between roles, once again: from the hands-on founder dealing with initial product creation to the strategic leader who navigates complex business landscapes. Each role serves to contextualise his and the brand's evolution, tailored to engage different segments of his audience.

Francis demonstrates high audience awareness by sharing insights that align with the interests of his viewers, ranging from entrepreneurial challenges to triumphs in business growth. He

adjusts his presentation to connect with his audience's aspirations and expectations, reinforcing their engagement with the brand's story.

Throughout the video, Francis's passion and commitment to Gymshark are conveyed through his enthusiastic tone, expressive gestures, and earnest facial expressions. These non-verbal cues complement his verbal communication, underscoring his sincerity and dedication, which enhances the credibility of his narrative and the authenticity of his performance.

5.1.5. Segment A3 - Summary

In the behind-the-scenes video of Gymshark's app campaign shoot, fitness influencer Steve Cook, along with others, offers an intimate look at the creative process behind the campaign. The footage captures various moments that bring out the human side of the brand, from Steve's humorous confession of his struggle with early mornings to spontaneous wardrobe challenges. These candid glimpses not only showcase the Gymshark team's collaborative spirit but also emphasise the app's goal to empower gym-goers by providing them with comprehensive workout knowledge.

The video highlights how the Gymshark app aims to enhance gym-goers' confidence by equipping them with structured workout plans and diverse training options, catering to a wide range of fitness preferences from home workouts to heavy lifting at the gym. This approach not only makes fitness more accessible but also encourages users to maintain their fitness regimes. The presence of well-known fitness influencers in the campaign plays a significant role in building a community around the app, encouraging users to share their fitness journeys and engage with each other. Moreover, the high production quality of the campaign and the creative elements that go into making it, such as the use of high-quality visuals and engaging content, set a standard in the fitness app market. Gymshark's commitment to producing quality content is evident, aiming to influence user expectations positively and enhance their workout experiences.

This behind-the-scenes look is crucial for understanding how Gymshark uses BTS content to foster a deeper connection with its audience, illustrating the brand's commitment to transparency, authenticity, and community engagement. By revealing the real people and the genuine interactions behind the brand, Gymshark not only humanises itself but also enhances its relatability, making it more appealing to consumers who value authenticity in brands. This

strategy of using BTS-content effectively supports Gymshark's brand personality as inclusive, supportive, and focused on the well-being of its customers, aligning perfectly with the current conscious consumer shift towards brands that offer more than just products but also a community and a shared experience.

5.1.6. Segment A3 - Findings

The video notably features the front stage where Steve Cook and other Gymshark fitness influencers and ambassadors portray a polished, enthusiastic image of fitness professionals engaged in a campaign shoot. This setting is carefully managed to align with Gymshark's brand image of energy, empowerment, and professionalism. In this segment one can argue that the backstage becomes the front stage and the risk of the whole play being exposed as a marketing campaign arises. The BTS-content provides insight into the backstage, where the influencers are seen in a more relaxed and candid state. Here, the influencers take off their masks from the social setting that is often required in the front stage, showing moments of fatigue, humorous interactions and spontaneous reactions that humanise them and make the brand more relatable.

Elements such as the physical setting of the gym, the workout gear, and the props used during the shoot contribute to the dramaturgy of the video. These items help set the scene and support the influencers' roles, emphasising the authentic fitness lifestyle that Gymshark promotes. This is also supported by different actions from the different influencers and crew on the set by them embodying their roles in the play.

Throughout the video, there is a clear effort in managing impressions. The influencers, especially Steve Cook, strategically share their genuine reactions and discuss the benefits but also the positive stress of the Gymshark app, which portrays him as trustworthy and knowledgeable. This management of impressions is tailored to reinforce Gymshark's brand values and connect with the audience effectively as well as sharing real thoughts about the app. Here, the influencers understand what the audience relates to and want content they want to consume, hence the format of the video being a BTS-video. The audience wants to see how the influencers interact with each other behind closed doors as well as how they live the life to maintain and uphold their physics.

The influencers are shown adopting various roles, from fitness experts demonstrating the application's utility to real people sharing personal quirks and challenges. This range of roles helps to present a multifaceted image of the brand ambassadors, making the promotional content, even though labelled as BTS, more engaging and relatable.

The collaborative spirit of the shoot is evident, showcasing effective teamwork among the influencers and the production crew. This cooperation is crucial as it ensures the smooth execution of the campaign, maintaining the consistency and credibility of the Gymshark brand throughout the video. By having the team embodying the necessary roles for this play, in a team effort, the Gymshark team establishes a raw and laid back BTS-video, even though the video itself is a promotion for the app.

There is a strong sense of audience awareness as the influencers often speak directly to the camera, addressing potential gym-goers and app users. They adjust their presentation style to be motivational, aligning their messages with what they anticipate their audience will find inspiring and useful but also as honest.

Non-verbal cues play a significant role in this video. Expressions, gestures and body language of the influencers add depth to their spoken words, enhancing their messages about fitness and wellbeing. These non-verbal elements are crucial in conveying authenticity and passion, which are less tangible through words alone. The people seen in the background are all playing a part in the play that has the ambition to convey the authenticity, trustworthiness and reliability of the brand.

5.1.7. Segment A4 - Summary

In a compelling video posted on LADBible TV's Youtube channel, Ben Francis shares, once again, the transformative journey of Gymshark. Starting as a pizza delivery worker, Ben Francis faced academic struggles before discovering his passion for business and website development. He recounts how he had to empty his account, investing £3,000 for a stand at a fitness expo which resulted in revolutionising how fitness expos were run at that time but also that it significantly boosted Gymshark's visibility and sales, marking a pivotal shift from handmade products to a scalable online business.

Ben Francis emphasises the role of community engagement in building Gymshark. By connecting with influencers before influencer marketing was a buzz term and also engaging directly with fans at events, he cultivated a strong brand community that solidified Gymshark's position in the fitness market without relying on traditional retail stores. Despite early failures and challenges, Ben Francis highlights how these experiences laid the groundwork for success, underscoring the importance of a supportive family and friends as well as a reliable team in navigating his entrepreneurial journey and the growth of Gymshark.

The video explores how Gymshark capitalised on creating anticipation and scarcity around its products, enhancing demand and customer engagement during major events. These strategies, coupled with Ben Francis's relentless pursuit of learning and adaptation, underline the dynamic leadership and clear vision that drove the brand to its tremendous upscale.

5.1.8. Segment A4 - Findings

In this video posted on LADBible TV's Youtube channel, Ben Francis, once again, presents himself as the successful entrepreneur behind Gymshark. He speaks from the perspective of a leader who has navigated the brand through significant growth. This portrayal is carefully curated to inspire and assure stakeholders of the brand's exponential growth and visionary planning. Ben Francis retells the story of him starting out by sewing everything by hand and delivering pizzas for Pizza Hut to make ends meet and fulfil his dream. The format of the video is of the nature of an interview and LadBible TV is a YouTube channel known for interviewing interesting, everyday people. Having Ben Francis appear on the show, and the show being of its nature, the audience perceive Ben Francis and Gymshark as an ordinary human and company.

Elements like Ben Francis's storytelling around the brand's humble beginnings, his descriptions of crucial moments, like the fitness expo stand and his interaction with the community act as props and scripts that enhance the narrative. These components help stage the play of Gymshark's brand story, making the presentation engaging and captivating.

Ben Francis, once more, strategically manages impressions by balancing tales of challenges with those of success. His authenticity and willingness to share stories about failures and vulnerabilities serves to humanise him and enhance the credibility of his entrepreneurial narrative, fostering a connection with the audience.

In the video, Ben Francis adeptly embodies multiple roles that connect deeply with various audience segments. As a visionary, he speaks to potential investors and people that aspire his journey regarding Gymshark's strategic growth, while his portrayal as an ordinary guy trying to make it in life adds a layer of authenticity and honesty that resonates with the audience. These roles strengthen Gymshark's narrative, enhancing its appeal across different groups by showcasing a blend of ambition, authenticity, and leadership.

The high audience awareness that Ben Francis is a master of helps him to tailor his message to engage and inspire his viewers. He acknowledges the audience's expectations and adjusts his delivery to ensure the message of commitment, passion and vision is clearly communicated, fostering a deeper connection with the brand.

Throughout the video, Ben Francis's non-verbal cues such as his earnest facial expressions and serious as well as proud tone complement his verbal messages. These non-verbal elements lend authenticity to his narrative, helping to convey his genuine enthusiasm for the brand and its journey.

5.2. Tala Social (Self) Presentation Matrix Findings

5.2.1. Segment B1 - Summary

Grace Beverley's journey from influencer to entrepreneur, as showcased in the video podcast, is presented in a conversational setting where Grace talks about her obsession of being busy and how that has been a success factor in her life. Grace discusses the early stages and growth of her activewear brand, Tala, which stands out for its commitment to sustainability and accessibility in a market often criticised for its environmental impact.

Her narrative emphasises the challenges of aligning business ambitions with personal values, particularly during her time balancing commitments as a university student and an entrepreneur. This balancing act is a key aspect of the video, illustrating the personal sacrifices and strategic decisions involved in her entrepreneurial journey. Grace's focus on sustainability is not just a business strategy but a response to increased consumer awareness and demand for ethical fashion. Tala's approach challenges the industry norm by proving that eco-friendly products can be both accessible and affordable, disproving myths that sustainability must always come at a premium cost.

5.2.2. Segment B1 - Findings

Grace presents herself as a successful entrepreneur, discussing the growth and ethos of Tala. She portrays an image of a driven and environmentally-conscious leader, aligning with social expectations of a modern business owner who prioritises sustainability. Grace also shares challenges like balancing university commitments with her business ambitions, showcasing her personal shortcomings and struggles. Grace Beverley openly discusses the less glamorous, more demanding side of entrepreneurship. This includes the tough situations she faces while managing her business, which are usually kept out of the public eye. By revealing these insights into the personal challenges, Grace provides a fuller, more honest portrayal of what it is like to run a business, instead of the perfect image presented towards the public.

In the video, Grace is being interviewed in a longer format, a video podcast. Usually, Grace is the interviewer in her own podcast where she invites different guests, but in this setting she is the main focus of discussion. The interviewer, given that the setting is a video podcast, creates a relaxed setting for both of them but also the audience, involving the viewer or

listener into their conversation. This creates a feeling of inclusion and the conversation is regarded as authentic and honest, given the setting of this conversation.

Grace carefully manages her image by blending discussions of her successes with the vulnerabilities of her entrepreneurial journey. This balance helps to cultivate a relatable and trustworthy image, encouraging viewers to see her not just as a businesswoman but as someone who is navigating the highs and lows like anyone else.

Throughout the video, Grace switches between roles: the successful entrepreneur behind a successful sustainable fitness brand, a student managing her education but also how to run the business and lastly, a leader guiding her team towards their shared goal. These roles are performed to connect with different segments of her audience, from environmentally-conscious consumers to a younger audience who may perceive her as a role model.

Grace demonstrates high audience awareness by addressing the concerns and interests of her viewers, particularly around sustainability and ethical fashion. She aligns her messaging to meet audience expectations, ensuring that her communications are both informative but also engaging. Talking about her past, she understands that there is a demand from the conscious consumer to know more not only about Tala but also from the founder of the fitness brand and therefore restricted, private information about the brand is discussed.

Throughout the podcast, Grace uses non-verbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and tone variations to enhance her message delivery. These cues help convey her passion for sustainability and her commitment to her business, reinforcing her words through powerful body language that communicates sincerity and dedication.

5.2.3. Segment B2 - Summary

In this segment of a YouTube video, Grace Beverley films herself during a Zoom call with her Tala colleagues discussing various business matters. The conversation opens casually with team members exchanging weekend experiences, including one of the colleagues' unusual incident of having two flat tires at once, a situation she humorously notes has happened to her before. The discussion quickly transitions to business topics, where they celebrate significant achievements such as impressive customer acquisition numbers from the

previous week. They also discuss their collaboration with an SEO agency, focusing on how specific terms are gaining traction in search results. The team talks about prioritising certain product features and strategies for improving customer engagement. Grace wraps up the call noting its unusual length at an hour and a half, attributing it to the necessity of thorough discussions. Right after the call, she shifts to a lighter topic, showing her audience a new brow tint product she has tried. This is all included in a vlog posted on her own Youtube channel which has a lighter tone and where the business aspect is not the main topic.

5.2.4. Segment B2 - Findings

Grace presents herself as a competent, engaged leader during the Zoom call, discussing key business metrics and strategies. This is the persona she portrays to her team and the public, showcasing her role as a knowledgeable and dedicated entrepreneur. Although, the candid moments where she shares personal things that she is doing during the day in the format of a vlog, offers insight into her personal life. This type of content provides a contrast to her public persona, allowing her audience to see a more relaxed and relatable side.

The video effectively uses elements like Zoom and the casual interaction with colleagues as props and scripts that define the setting. These elements contribute to staging the narrative where Grace performs her role as both a team leader and a part of the team. Thereafter the setting of her being at her home and showcasing her living situation contributes to the more relaxing and laid back atmosphere, making her more relatable.

Grace manages impressions by smoothly transitioning from significant business discussions to her talking about being an influencer and showcasing what she got in a PR package, showing her adaptability but also professionalism. This balance helps to construct a relatable yet dedicated image.

Throughout the call, Grace performs multiple roles: she is the entrepreneur who delves into business analytics, the team player who engages with her colleagues' experiences, and the influencer ready to share products with her audience. Each role is carefully executed to adapt to the diverse needs and expectations of her team but primarily from her audience.

Grace's shift in focus during the call, from personal stories to business insights, demonstrates her awareness of her diverse audience but also the setting that she is in. She adjusts her

content and presentation style based on what she perceives will be most relevant and engaging to her team and the viewers.

Throughout the video, Grace's non-verbal cues, such as nodding, smiling and her attentive look, complement her verbal interactions. These cues enhance her sincerity and engagement, providing subtle indications of her responsive and empathetic leadership style. This goes also for the more subtle and relaxed parts of the video where she is walking around her house and the way that she showcases her lifestyle with her husband and dog with some relaxed music playing over the video. This gives a more intimate insight into her day-to-day life and makes her more relatable.

5.2.5. Segment B3 - Summary

In this video, Grace Beverley shares a day in her life while working from home. She provides insights into her daily routine and the operational side of Tala. The segment begins with Grace handling personal mishaps and home adjustments, setting a relaxed and approachable tone. Throughout the day, Grace conducts various business activities, including trade reporting and planning with her team. She discusses the strategic aspects of Tala, such as customer acquisition and the importance of SEO in marketing. A significant focus is on the practical steps she takes to manage her tasks effectively. Grace also touches on personal productivity strategies, such as creating detailed to-do lists and categorising tasks to streamline her workday. She openly shares the difficulties of running a business, like feeling overwhelmed and managing a busy schedule.

5.2.6. Segment B3 - Findings

In this video, Grace showcases her public persona in just a small fragment when she talks and handles Tala business. Although a small segment, her demeanour and carefully chosen words, reflect the polished image she intends to project to her audience and team. This alignment with societal expectations of a CEO's demeanour underscores her commitment to maintaining a strong professional image. Contrasting this with her public persona, Grace shares more relaxed, personal snippets that reveal her true self away from the spotlight. Moments where she discusses personal life changes or small daily struggles allow her audience to see beyond the CEO mask. This peek into her private life provides a grounding,

relatable contrast to her public image, demonstrating the less structured and more human side of her existence.

The entire video is staged much like a theatrical play, where Grace navigates through various scenes of her daily life, from strategic business discussions to casual personal revelations at home. The props and settings, ranging from her home office to personal living spaces, serve as backdrops that support the narrative of a dynamic, approachable entrepreneur deeply involved in both her personal and professional roles.

Grace expertly manages the impressions she makes on her viewers, strategically revealing aspects of her personality that reinforce her credibility and relatability. By balancing professionalism with vulnerability, she crafts an image of a leader who is not only successful but also relatable and empathetic. This careful curation of her online persona is vital in shaping how her audience perceives and connects with her and her brand.

Throughout the video, Grace adopts and transitions between various roles: CEO, influencer, everyday individual and they are each tailored to resonate with different segments of her audience. This versatility in roles allows her to address and engage with a wide range of viewer interests and expectations, from those looking for business insights to others drawn to her personality and lifestyle.

Grace exhibits a sophisticated awareness of her diverse audience by alternating between complex business discussions and light-hearted personal stories. This strategy ensures that she meets the informational needs and emotional preferences of a broad audience base, enhancing engagement and fostering a deeper connection with her audience.

Throughout the video, Grace's non-verbal communication plays a critical role in complementing her verbal interactions. Her expressions, gestures, and overall demeanour enrich the narrative, providing subtle cues that convey her engagement, sincerity, or reflective and irritable moments. These non-verbal signals are crucial in adding depth to her character, offering unspoken insights into her thoughts and emotions.

5.2.7. Segment B4 - Summary

Grace Beverley's discussion in the video provides a profound insight into the entrepreneurial journey of her brand, Tala. In this video, Grace is emphasising transparency, the challenges of securing venture capital as a female entrepreneur and the importance of sustainable practices. The emphasis on transparency serves to demystify the process of fundraising, making it accessible and relatable to aspiring entrepreneurs. Discussing the stark realities of gender disparity in venture capital funding highlights a significant systemic flaw and demonstrates Tala's resilience and commitment to overcoming these barriers.

Beverly further explains that focusing on concrete growth metrics and data-driven strategies over superficial branding strategies is crucial. This approach not only reassures investors of the brand's potential but also aligns with consumer preferences for brands with substantive, value-based propositions. Such strategic transparency is essential for building a credible brand persona that appeals to a conscientious consumer base. Moreover, Tala's commitment to sustainability is portrayed as integral to its business model, reflecting a growing consumer demand for ethical and environmentally friendly practices. This commitment enhances the brand's values by presenting it as caring and responsible, traits that resonate deeply with the conscious consumer.

5.2.8. Segment B4 - Findings

Grace, in this video, is not focusing on the highlights and the perfect image of the company but is instead jumping right into the backstage part of how the brand is run. Even though that is the concept that she wants to portray, by sharing this content, the backstage is becoming the frontstage.

Grace actively engages in impression management, curating how she is perceived by the audience. This is evident when she discusses the challenges of entrepreneurship and the strategic decisions made for Tala. She carefully balances showing vulnerability about her struggles with demonstrating competence and visionary thinking, aiming to shape viewer perceptions positively.

In this specific video, Grace is assuming a different role. She is not focusing on being perceived as the CEO of the company but as a fair and honest spokesperson for Tala but also

for the unjust system that is set up about women that are running different corporations. In this segment she is also taking the role of an educator, where she wants to educate the audience about how fund raisers are constructed and how they best succeed. This versatility highlights her adaptability and relatability, key traits that enhance the brand's image.

Grace demonstrates keen audience awareness by addressing the camera directly during her recording. She adjusts her content and delivery based on the perceived expectations of her audience, which likely includes customers, business partners, and other entrepreneurs.

Non-verbal cues are subtly integrated into the video. Grace's gestures and expressions during the video segment provides insights into her personal experiences and emotions, offering an authentic look into her life that verbal communication alone might not convey.

6. Discussion

In this thesis, the exploration into how BTS-content contributes to the anthropomorphization of brands reveals the increasing demand for authenticity and transparency in brand communication, resonating with the conscious consumers. This shift signifies a departure from highly curated brand images to a more authentic engagement strategy, where BTS-content plays a crucial role in fostering deeper consumer connections. Such trends are evident in the behaviours of modern consumers who value transparency over the traditional, polished advertising narratives, as indicated by Bartsch et al. (2022) and The Sprout Social Index (2023).

The cases of Gymshark and Tala are particularly illustrative of this phenomenon. The personal involvement of founders Ben Francis and Grace Beverley in BTS-content not only humanises the brand but also amplifies trust and loyalty among consumers. This strategy aligns with current consumer expectations for truthful, transparent brand interactions, which significantly impact brand perception and loyalty. The emotional connection facilitated by BTS-content is allowing consumers to feel a closer, more personal connection to the brands they support. Furthermore, the unpolished and genuine nature of BTS-content allows brands like Gymshark and Tala to showcase the realities behind their operations. This not only fosters intimacy and relatability but also aligns with the findings of Hernández-Ortega et al. (2022), who suggest that consumers increasingly prioritise authenticity in their interactions with brands. By displaying the less polished aspects of business, such as the challenges and day-to-day operations, brands can effectively humanise themselves, making them more relatable and trustworthy to consumers. However, the strategic use of BTS-content also highlights the complexities of managing consumer perceptions and the fine balance brands must maintain between authenticity and maintaining a positive brand image. The integration of BTS-content requires careful consideration of how much of the brand's internal workings should be exposed to the public. This balance is crucial as too much transparency might risk exposing vulnerabilities that could potentially harm the brand's image or consumer perception. Moreover, the analysis within this thesis points to the effective use of dramaturgy and impression management by brands, as discussed by Goffman (2014), where BTS-content acts as a stage for brands to perform and engage with their audience. By managing the

impressions they create, brands like Gymshark and Tala navigate the intricate dynamics of public perception, showcasing their adaptability and depth, which enhances relatability and fosters consumer loyalty.

7. Conclusion

This thesis has contributed significantly to the understanding of BTS-content as an integral element in contemporary brand communication, especially within a rapidly evolving digital landscape. The exploration of BTS-content in this research, particularly through the case studies of Gymshark and Tala, demonstrates its effectiveness in responding to the increasing consumer demand for authenticity and transparency. In an age where consumers are bombarded with polished and highly curated advertising, BTS-content offers a refreshing departure by providing a more intimate and unfiltered glimpse into the inner workings of a brand. This shift reflects broader societal trends where consumers, particularly younger demographics, prioritise genuine interactions and ethical transparency over traditional marketing gloss (Bartsch et al., 2022; The Sprout Social Index, 2023). However, this thesis also brings to light a critical paradox that complicates the very notion of authenticity that BTS-content is supposed to embody. While BTS-content is designed to be a raw and honest portrayal, it can be strategically curated and staged, thus challenging its perceived genuineness. The production of BTS-content, like any other form of content, often involves a selective process where brands decide what aspects of their operations to reveal and what to conceal. This selective curation introduces a performative element that can lead to scepticism among consumers, who may perceive BTS-content as yet another form of controlled marketing rather than a true behind-the-scenes look (Goffman, 2014; Hernández-Ortega et al., 2022).

The concept of BTS-content as a performance ties into broader discussions of impression management and dramaturgy, where brands, like actors on a stage, present carefully managed versions of their reality to shape public perception. Goffman's (2014) framework is particularly relevant in understanding how brands navigate the delicate balance between appearing authentic and maintaining a positive brand image. This paradox is not merely a theoretical concern but has practical implications for how brands are perceived in the marketplace. If consumers begin to see BTS-content as inauthentic or overly manipulated, the trust and emotional connection that brands seek to build through transparency could be severely undermined. Moreover, the growing importance of BTS-content in brand strategy highlights the need for a deeper academic inquiry into its long-term effects on consumer behaviour, brand loyalty, and overall market dynamics. While existing studies, such as those

by Bartsch et al. (2022) and the Sprout Social Index (2023), provide valuable insights into the shifting consumer expectations towards transparency, there remains a significant gap in understanding the full implications of BTS-content. This thesis has made a meaningful contribution by identifying the paradox of staged authenticity within BTS-content, but further research is needed to explore how this paradox influences consumer trust and brand perception over time.

The integration of BTS-content into brand communication strategies also reflects the broader digital transformation of marketing. As brands increasingly rely on social media and other digital platforms to connect with consumers, BTS-content offers a way to cut through the noise and engage audiences in a more meaningful way. However, as this thesis has shown, the effectiveness of BTS-content is not merely a function of its ability to showcase behind-the-scenes activities but also hinges on how well it resonates with consumer expectations for authenticity. Brands must therefore be acutely aware of the potential pitfalls of over-curation and strive to maintain a genuine connection with their audience (Hernández-Ortega et al., 2022).

In conclusion, BTS-content represents both a powerful tool and a complex challenge in modern brand communication. Its potential to humanise brands, foster deeper emotional connections, and build consumer trust is undeniable, especially in a market increasingly dominated by digital interactions and consumer scepticism. However, the paradox of staged authenticity presents a significant challenge that brands must navigate carefully. The findings of this thesis underscore the importance of strategic balance in the use of BTS-content—brands must reveal enough to appear authentic without crossing the line into over-curation, which could erode consumer trust.

This thesis not only provides a foundational understanding of BTS-content and its role in contemporary branding but also opens the door for future research into the nuanced dynamics of authenticity in digital marketing. As brands continue to explore new ways of connecting with their audiences, the insights from this research will be instrumental in guiding strategies that prioritise genuine engagement while acknowledging the complexities of maintaining authenticity in a highly curated digital world.

Furthermore, as the digital landscape continues to evolve, the role of BTS-content in brand communication is likely to become even more prominent. Brands that successfully navigate the paradox of authenticity will be better positioned to build lasting relationships with their consumers, fostering brand loyalty and trust in an increasingly competitive marketplace. The contributions of this thesis, therefore, extend beyond the immediate findings, offering a framework for understanding and leveraging BTS-content as a critical component of effective brand communication in the digital age.

7.1. Limitations

This study primarily examined two fitness brands, Gymshark and Tala. While these brands provide valuable insights due to their innovative use of BTS-content, the findings might not be universally applicable to different sectors or industries where BTS-content may be used differently depending on market, product type and audience characteristics. The limitation to these two brands also underscores a broader issue, the conclusions drawn from such a specific sample may not accurately reflect a universal marketing truth across all industries.

Given the qualitative nature of this study, interpretations of BTS-content and its impact on brand perception are inherently subjective and could vary among different viewers. This subjective interpretation, while rich and detailed, might not capture all possible consumer perspectives or reactions, thereby limiting the scope of the conclusions. Furthermore, the study lacks quantitative measures such as engagement rates or conversion metrics, which could provide a more objective assessment of the BTS content's effectiveness.
Lastly, there is a consideration of the authenticity of BTS-content. While it is intended to be authentic and raw, there is a possibility that it is still curated to achieve specific marketing goals. This curated authenticity could potentially be misleading regarding its effectiveness in truly anthropomorphizing a brand and establishing genuine connections with consumers by the nature of the content being paradoxically curated.

7.2. Suggestions for further research

Further research could expand on this study by exploring BTS-content across a wider range of industries to assess its effectiveness and applicability in different contexts. Investigating the long-term impact of BTS-content on brand loyalty and consumer behaviour could provide deeper insights into its strategic value. Additionally, incorporating quantitative methodologies

could help measure the direct impact of BTS-content on consumer engagement and conversion rates. Finally, examining consumer perceptions of authenticity in BTS content could offer valuable nuances about the credibility and ethical implications of these marketing strategies.

8. References

References

The 2023 Sprout Social Index Edition XIX: Breakthrough. (2023). Sprout Social. Retrieved April 21, 2024, from https://sproutsocial.com/insights/index/

Aaker, J., Fournier, S., & Brasel, A. S. (2004, June). When Good Brands Do Bad. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *31*(1), 1-16. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/383419

Adams, P. (2006, October). Exploring social constructivism: theories and practicalities. *International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*, *34*(3), 243-257. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004270600898893

Avis, M., & Aitken, R. (2015). Intertwined: Brand personification, brand personality and brand relationships in historical perspective. *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, *7*(2), 208-231. 10.1108/JHRM-01-2014-0004

Banet-Weiser, S. (2012). Authentic: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, *38*(3). https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=bb2f85bc720ba29 2554d59e5871fe5d3eed60c7f

Bartsch, F., Zeugner-Roth, K. P., & Katsikeas, C. S. (2022). Consumer authenticity seeking: conceptualization, measurement, and contingent effects. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *50*, 296-323. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-021-00813-y

BEHIND THE SCENES | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). Cambridge Dictionary. Retrieved April 23, 2024, from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/behind-the-scenes

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford University Press. https://books.google.se/books?hl=sv&lr=&id=N2zQCgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1& dq=Bryman,+A.+(2016).+Social+Research+Methods.+Oxford+University+Press.&ot s=dqKrDVH3te&sig=TBmADRwuSRhjwbwmR5smC-s-U20&redir_esc=y#v=onepa ge&q=Bryman%2C%20A.%20(2016).%20Social%20Researc

Couldry, N. (2012). *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*. Polity Press.

Crawford, M. (n.d.). *What Is Behind-the-Scenes in Film? Unveiling the Magic of Movie Making [Complete Guide]*. Filmmaking Lifestyle. Retrieved April 23, 2024, from https://filmlifestyle.com/behind-the-scenes-in-film/

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. SAGE Publications.

Dolezal, L. (2015). The phenomenology of self-presentation: describing the structures of intercorporeality with Erving Goffman. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, *16*, 23-254. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11097-015-9447-6

Dolezal, L. (2017). The phenomenology of self-presentation: describing the structures of intercorporeality with Erving Goffman. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, *16*, 237-254. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11097-015-9447-6

Eksell, J., & Thelander, Å. (Eds.). (2014). *Kvalitativa metoder i strategisk kommunikation*. Studentlitteratur.

Epley, N., Waytz, A., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2007, October). On seeing human: a three-factor theory of anthropomorphism. *Psychological Review*, *113*(4), 864-886. 10.1037/0033-295X.114.4.864

Flick, U. (Ed.). (2014). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. SAGE Publications.

Fournier, S. (n.d.). Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *24*(4), 334-353. https://doi.org/10.1086/209515

Fournier, S. (1998, March). Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *24*(4), 343-353. https://doi.org/10.1086/209515

Gerring, J. (2017). *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge University Press.

Goffman, E. (2014). *Jaget och maskerna: en studie i vardagslivets dramatik*. Studentlitteratur.

Gray, J. (2010). *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*. New York University Press.

Guido, G., & Peluso, A. M. (2015, January 23). Brand anthropomorphism: Conceptualization, measurement, and impact on brand personality and loyalty. *Journal of Brand Management*, *22*(1), 1-19. doi:10.1057/bm.2014.40

Guillemin, M., & Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, Reflexivity, and "Ethically Important Moments" in Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *10*(2), 261-280. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403262360

Hernández-Ortega, B. I., Stanko, M. A., Rishika, R., Molina-Castillo, F.-J., & Franco, J. (2022). Brand-generated social media content and its differential impact on loyalty program members. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing*, *50*, 1071-1090. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-022-00869-4

Hogan, B. (2010). The Presentation of Self in the Age of Social Media: Distinguishing Performances and Exhibitions Online. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, *30*(6), 377-386. https://doi.org/10.1177/0270467610385893

Josef, Š., & Merunková, L. (2019). Goffman's Theory as a Framework for Analysis of Self Presentation on Online Social Networks. *Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology*, *8*(2), 243-276. https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=798067

Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*. SAGE Publications.

MacInnis, D. J., & Folkes, V. S. (2017). Humanizing brands: When brands seem to be like me, part of me, and in a relationship with me. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *27*(3), 355-374. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1057740816301061?casa_token=TIRZ75Rj99EAAAAA:1UUBqSN3B5CMfbbjAYunmoqdiW_3HDWx8aRaCBrYJIgEaLfxfRnSqe_XKi3qYMFddqqaW1GlNg

Marwick, A. E., & Boyd, D. (2010). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, *13*(1), 114-133. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810365313

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. SAGE Publications.

Morse, J. M. (2015). Critical Analysis of Strategies for Determining Rigor in Qualitative Inquiry. *Qualitative Health Research*, *25*(9), 1212-1222. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315588501

Neuendorf, K. A. (2017). *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. SAGE Publications.

Patsiaouras, G., Fitchett, J., & Saren, M. (2014). Boris Artzybasheff and the art of anthropomorphic marketing in early American consumer culture. *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, *30*(1-2), 117-137. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2013.803141

Portal, S., Abratt, R., & Bendixen, M. (2018, May). Building a human brand: Brand anthropomorphism unravelled. *Business Horizons*, *61*(3), 367-374. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2018.01.003

Rose, G. (2016). *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*. SAGE Publications.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. SAGE Publications.

Windhager, S., Slice, D. E., Schaefer, K., Oberzaucher, E., Thorstensen, T., & Grammer, K. (2008, December). Face to Face - The Perception of Automotive Designs. *Human Nature : An Interdisciplinary Biosocial Perspective*, *19*(4), 331-346. DOI:10.1007/s12110-008-9047-z

Appendices:

Appendix A: Social (Self) Presentation Matrix Coding

Segment A1	Included?
Front stage and backstage	YES
Dramaturgy	YES
Impression management	YES
Performances and roles	YES
Teamwork and cooperation	NO
Audience Awareness	YES
Non-verbal communication	YES

Segment A2	Included?
Front stage and backstage	YES
Dramaturgy	YES
Impression management	YES
Performances and roles	YES
Teamwork and cooperation	NO
Audience Awareness	YES
Non-verbal communication	YES

Segment A3	Included?
Front stage and backstage	YES
Dramaturgy	YES
Impression management	YES
Performances and roles	YES
Teamwork and cooperation	YES
Audience Awareness	YES
Non-verbal communication	YES

Segment A4	Included?
Front stage and backstage	YES
Dramaturgy	YES
Impression management	YES
Performances and roles	YES
Teamwork and cooperation	NO
Audience Awareness	YES
Non-verbal communication	YES

Segment B1	Included?
Front stage and backstage	YES

Dramaturgy	YES
Impression management	YES
Performances and roles	YES
Teamwork and cooperation	NO
Audience Awareness	YES
Non-verbal communication	YES

Segment B2	Included?
Front stage and backstage	YES
Dramaturgy	YES
Impression management	YES
Performances and roles	YES
Teamwork and cooperation	NO
Audience Awareness	YES
Non-verbal communication	YES

Segment B3	Included?
Front stage and backstage	YES
Dramaturgy	YES
Impression management	YES
Performances and roles	YES

Teamwork and cooperation	NO
Audience Awareness	YES
Non-verbal communication	YES

Segment B4	Included?
Front stage and backstage	YES
Dramaturgy	YES
Impression management	YES
Performances and roles	YES
Teamwork and cooperation	NO
Audience Awareness	YES
Non-verbal communication	YES

Appendix B: Content - Gymshark

Segment A1:

How I Started The UK's Fastest Growing Company: My Gymshark Story | Ben Francis

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpftE7RwQnM&ab_channel=BenFrancis

Segment A2:

GYMSHARK IS A $1.45BILLION BRAND - HOW IT HAPPENED

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRo3_W8S8i8&ab_channel=BenFrancis

Segment A3:

BEHIND THE SCENES: THE GYMSHARK APP ft. Steve Cook, David Laid, Whitney Simmons, Lex Griffin

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VbOelFyHPc&ab_channel=Gymshark

Segment A4: From Delivering Pizzas To Building A Billion Pound Business Empire | Minutes With | UNILAD

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2uNI24lNGAQ&ab_channel=LADbibleTV

Appendix C: Content - Tala

Segment B1: it's the start of the week and we're getting our $hit together

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xOHHwoZtXg

Segment B2: getting my shet together (it's a vlog)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GzDdWRngaM

Segment B3: it's the start of the week and we're getting our $hit together

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xOHHwoZtXg

Segment B4: How I Raised $6.5M In Series A Funding: The Pitch Deck

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Z3N41LrLck