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FROM ELITE ATHLETE TO ENTREPRENEUR: THE ROLE OF NATIONAL IDENTITY, PERSONAL
BRANDING AND START-UP IN THE CASE OF LUCAS PINHEIRO BRAATHEN AND OCTO SKINCARE

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Abstract

This thesis explores the contemporary global high-end skincare industry as its research context, centres on the core theme of the intrinsic links between athlete entrepreneurship, personal branding and cultural identity.

It conducts a systematic analysis using OCTO Skincare, a founder-led skincare brand launched by professional alpine skier Lucas Pinheiro Braathen, as a case study.

This research primarily examines the impacts of athlete identity, dual-national heritage and narrative capital on entrepreneurial legitimacy and competitive differentiation.

It focuses specifically on the dual cultural identity generated by Braathen's nationality transfer event, wherein he switched from representing Norway to Brazil in international alpine skiing competitions, and uses this unique variable to connect all stages of its analysis.

Drawing on relevant theories including personal branding, cultural branding, narrative capital, founder-led entrepreneurship and consumer culture, this study adopts a qualitative case study method, supplemented by SWOT analysis and brand lifecycle prediction tools to conduct its research.

Its core findings are as follows: the dual Norwegian Brazilian cultural identity integrates Nordic values of quality, minimalism and sustainability with Brazilian traits of creativity, vitality and emotional expression, forming a highly recognizable market positing.

The narrative capital, as a core strategic resource, can effectively build brand authenticity, consumer trust, and emotional connection with Gen Z consumer groups.

This study also identifies some challenges facing founder-led brands, such as overreliance on the founder's personal reputation, barriers to large-scale expansion and the need to convert symbolic capital into sustainable organizational capabilities.

It notes that for long-term development, brands must balance cultural authenticity, market relevance and operational maturity, pursuing an independent brand development path.

Finally, this study fills a literature gap in the field of athlete entrepreneurship and cultural branding. It provides practical references for similar entrepreneurial projects seeking to convert personal influence into long-term brand equity.

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Thank you for teaching me that with commitment, dedication, perseverance and discipline, everything can be achieved.

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Table of contents

<i>Abstract</i>	1
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	1
<i>Chapter 1: Introduction</i>	1
1.1 Research background	1
1.2 Research gap	2
1.3 Research objectives	2
1.4 Research questions	2
1.5 Research aims	3
1.6 Thesis structure	3
<i>Chapter 2: Literature Review</i>	3
2.1 Athlete entrepreneurship	3
2.2 Personal branding in sport	4
2.3 Nation branding and national identity	4
2.4 Dual nationality and transnational athletes	5
2.5 Start-up branding and value creation	6
2.6 Conceptual framework	6
<i>Chapter 3: Methodology</i>	7
3.1 Research design	7
3.2 Data Collection	7
3.3 Limitations	8
<i>Chapter 4: case study: Lucas Pinheiro Braathen and OCTO Skincare</i>	8
4.1 Athlete profile and sporting career	8
4.2 Personal identity and national representation	9
4.3 Foundation of OCTO Skincare	10
4.4 Brand identity and positioning	11
4.5 Entrepreneurial value creation	13
<i>Chapter 5: Business model analysis</i>	14
5.1 Business Model Canvas	14
5.2 Competitive positioning	15
5.3 Founder identity and entrepreneurial legitimacy	16
<i>Chapter 6: Discussion</i>	16
6.1 National identity as a strategic resource	16

6.2 Personal branding and entrepreneurial legitimacy	17
6.3 Strategic implications	18
6.4 Athlete entrepreneurship and cultural branding	20
6.5 Comparative analysis and strategic development	21
6.6 Athlete entrepreneurship and competitive advantage	23
6.7 Generation Z and lifestyle branding	25
6.8 Emotional capital, aesthetic logic and OCTO's Gen Z strategy	26
6.9 OCTO in the global skincare industry: competitive positioning and market strategy	27
6.10 Competitive benchmarking and founder-led skincare brands	28
6.11 OCTO strategic positioning, risks and long-term brand equity	29
6.12: SWOT Analysis of OCTO Skincare	30
6.12.1 Strengths	30
6.12.2 Weaknesses	31
6.12.3 Opportunities	32
6.12.5 SWOT Synthesis and strategic implications	34
Chapter 7: Conclusion	34
7.1 Summary of findings – Answer to the research questions	34
7.2 Theoretical contributions	35
7.3 Limitations and future research	36
7.4 Final conclusion	37
Bibliography	38
Sitography	39

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research background

More recently over the last few years, professional athletes have taken on roles that go well beyond just being an athlete and instead they are performing duties akin to those of entrepreneurs and personal brands, indeed actors in between industries.

It is symptomatic of a wider reconfiguration in which the lines that separate the business, sport and culture words have become increasingly porous. Athletes are more than just judged by their sporting results; due to that spread globally, athletes have become cultural icons with the power of influence over meanings, markets and consumers.

Lucas Pinheiro Braathen is a case in point of this change. A high-level alpine ski racer with dual nationality, Norwegian father and Brazilian mother, able to combine elite athletic performance with business activity. He has redefined Italian nationality through the launching of his skincare start-up and having changed, from Norway to Brazil, the sporting nation he represented.

His journey offers the rare chance to look at the intersection of national identity, start-up entrepreneurship and sports-related marketing through a purely economic and business perspective.

This thesis explores how athlete branding, entrepreneurship and national identity can be examined in relation to each other through concepts of stakeholders, branding strategy and the nation as a brand. All between values associated with entrepreneurs seeing themselves as athletes.

Today, when entrepreneurship is not just about innovative and managerial practises but also acts like strategic communication and identity construction, athletes can use their own visibility, symbolic capital social legitimacy to create business ventures that reflects who they are. Highlighting what values you have, the cultural narrative driving your work and your way of life in general. Athlete entrepreneurship is receiving more academic attention, combining insights from sports management with marketing and entrepreneurial strategy.

Finally, many athletes are imbued with social resources and unique forms of psychological capital that may help them succeed as entrepreneurs: competitiveness, resilience, as well as public credibility and visibility.

In a symbolic marketplace, the perceived authenticity of a founder's personal brand influences their level of interaction and trust among consumers in their respective ventures (Parmentier and Fischer, 2012).¹

Lucas Pinheiro Braathen, a Norwegian Brazilian alpine skier, who was born in 2000, is one such particularly compelling contemporary case study within this dynamic environment.

Braathen, whose quirky style and contrarian public persona shot him to prominence on the FIS World Cup circuit before he suddenly retired in 2023, citing the constraints professional skiing's institutional constructs put on artistic expression.

When he returned to competitive skiing in the late 2024, the Brazilian flag accompanying him was both an overt declaration of his two-flag ethnic identity and a subversion of one-hat national allegiance in sport.

In 2025, Braathen founded OCTO Skincare, a minimalist-driven skincare and lifestyle brand centred upon sustainability and authenticity that closely parallels his own multi-cultural identity.

Exploring how personal and national identity can work within OCTO's brand narrative supports entrepreneurship as the driver of a unique personality. Strategically building market potential in enterprise output around ideas of athletic performance, individual curiosity and cultural hybridity.

¹ Parmentier, M.A. and Fisher, E. (2012), academic study on brand meaning and sport branding

The confluence of sport, entrepreneurship and nationality generates numerous questions at the intersection of academic research and managerial practice.

1.2 Research gap

How do athletes generate credible and legitimate business identities? How can national and cultural identity be monetized in terms of start-up branding? What insights can hybrid models for entrepreneurship in creative and lifestyle-oriented industries bring?

We shall now, in the light of these questions, outline the conceptual foundation of this thesis.

While there are many theories related to entrepreneurship and branding, a gap exists in the literature concerning its application in sports. There exists a body of research on athlete branding that concentrates primarily in the areas of endorsement behaviour, image management and media representation (Parmentier and Fisher, 2012). Research on start-up entrepreneurship has largely been organized around themes of process, market validation and business model (Blank and Dorf, 2012), missing important aspects of identity-based and symbolic dynamics.

The role of athletes as entrepreneurs and founders has only attracted limited academic interest, particularly for the development and promotion of proprietary brands. As cultural differentiation combined with hybridity is more valued in international markets, the significance of national identity as a facilitator or barrier to entrepreneurship activity remains unclear.

Lucas Braathen and OCTO Skincare address this gap by assuming the personal and cultural identity of the athlete as their entrepreneurial strategy. The dual nationality, athletic legitimation and visibility of Braathen provide a useful empirical context to study how distinctions amongst identities are translated into some forms of capital.

1.3 Research objectives

The main aim of this thesis is to investigate how athlete-entrepreneurs leverage personal and national identities in order gain and maintain competitive advantage.

This research is conducted by defining aim and objectives of study in the view of OCTO Skincare analysis: how does athletic identity lead to entrepreneurship, and how can value from sports be used in the startup or strategic orientations?

- To analyse the impact of personal branding on authenticity and marketability for athlete-owned ventures.
- To explore the influence of national and cultural identities on brand storytelling, consumer perception and market differentiation.
- To help better understand identity driven entrepreneurship within larger theories of branding and start-up innovation.

1.4 Research questions

- How does OCTO Skincare capitalise on Braathen's athlete identity and dual national heritage?
- What strategic opportunities and risks does the change in national sporting representation generate for the associated entrepreneurial ventures and athlete-brand?
- What broader lessons can be derived for athlete-led start-ups operating in lifestyle markets and global sport, particularly in relation to branding, stakeholder ecosystems and nationality?

1.5 Research aims

- To examine how Lucas Braathen's transition into a skincare start-up leverages personal branding, athletic identity and national-cultural narratives.
- To analyse the business implications of changing national sporting representation, from Norway to Brazil, with particular focus on branding, sponsorship, market positioning and stakeholder alignment.
- To explore how start-up logics of innovations, brand-platform and sustainability intersect with elite sport branding in a globalised economy.

1.6 Thesis structure

The thesis is structured into seven chapters, preceded by the abstract and acknowledgments and followed by the bibliography and sitography.

Chapter 1 lays out the research background, identifies gaps in existing research, clarifies this study's research questions, goals and purpose, closing with an overview of the full dissertation's structure.

Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature across five fields: athlete entrepreneurship, personal brands in the sports sector, national brands, dual-nationality transnational athletes and startup brands, then proposes this study's conceptual framework.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the research design, data collection procedures and research limitations of the study, explaining its overall research methodology.

Chapter 4 presents the case of Lucas Pinheiro Braathen and OCTO Skincare, introducing the athlete's career profile, professional trajectory and the brand's development positioning.

Chapter 5 uses the Business Model Canvas to analyse the brand's business model, competitive positioning and the dimensions of the founder's identity.

Chapter 6 centres on the study's core research topics to carry out a full discussion, supplementing the research with a SWOT² analysis of the brand.

Chapter 7 summarizes the study's findings, responds to the research questions raised at the opening of the dissertation, outlines the study's theoretical contributions, current limitations and future research directions.

To conclude, the inclusion of the references and online resource catalogue is restated.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Athlete entrepreneurship

In the past decade, there has been growing academic interest in sport and entrepreneurship. Athlete-entrepreneurship is defined as a hybrid type of value creation where personal reputation, social capital and sport-related skills are developed into business.

Athletes have different experiential assets, unique ones like levels of discipline, resilience and risk tolerance which might translate into entrepreneurial capability. Successfully navigating this transition depends largely on how they manage their persona.

² SWOT analysis is a classic, professional business analysis tool used to assess organizations or brands. It covers two internal factors, Strength and Weaknesses and two external factors, Opportunities and Threats. This tool can support scientific decision-making in the fields of marketing and business strategy, clarify competitive positioning and formulate long-term strategic plans.

Furthermore, practical attention to professional athletes' entrepreneurship has kept rising. The core driving force behind this trend is athletes' pursuit of career diversification, as they seek to build long-term income channels outside their competitive athletic careers.

Existing research points out that these athletes can leverage three types of resources to empower their entrepreneurial efforts: their public name recognition, public credibility, and large-scale social networks.

This study supplements academic discussions related to athlete competencies in high-performance competitive environments. It adds three new core competencies: leadership, resilience, and strategic decision-making ability, and outlines the public's cognitive shift regarding this group, from viewing them solely as event performers to entrepreneurs who achieve value transformation.

2.2 Personal branding in sport

Personal branding in sport consists of athletes managing a consistent identity that endows with economic and symbolic value.

This research adopts the conclusion of Parmentier and Fisher (2012), which hold that athlete brand integrity consists of authenticity and emotional connection, and that alignment with audience values will trigger positive feedback.

The athlete's brand is certainly a core intangible asset that can lay the groundwork to enable diversification into non-sport businesses including fashion, business or beauty.

Lucas Braathen, after founding his own skincare line OCTO Skincare, is an example of the brand extension process in action. His mixed cultural background and cosmopolitan identity lend certain credibility to cross-cultural marketing. Design-driven dedication and sustainability convert sports discipline into beauty through minimalism.

The notion of an athlete as a brand founder illustrates how to institutionalize individual identity into a start-up's market offering.

2.3 Nation branding and national identity

Heavily influenced by the literature coming from nation branding, this is based on the very real notion that nations, like corporations, establish identities that have broad impacts at consumer levels and business competitiveness.

National identity in sport employs both symbolic and economic resources (Chalip, 2005)³. The cultural value of performance is often determined by a country's sponsorship and audience engagement.

The choice of national representation for dual-national athletes may be strategically connected to brand repositioning. Most previous studies have only focused on the competitive effects of dual-national athletes' choice of competitive nationality.

Existing academic literature has underlined that this choice also influences public perception, brand positioning and access to networks of various stakeholders.

This paper proposes that nationality can function as a core strategic resource for these athletes to secure global business opportunities.

The athlete nationality choice can be a brand architecture, linking personal identity to product and national.

³ Chalip L. (2005), *Sport event tourism and the destination brand, sport in society*.

2.4 Dual nationality and transnational athletes

Increasingly, athletes are extending their brands beyond simply being competitors in the global sports economy and evolving into entrepreneurs, influencers and brand founders. This phenomenon is bringing sports, business and lifestyle branding closer together.

This case demonstrates how nationality, identity and brand strategy come together in a new business initiative. It illustrates how an athlete can leverage them as part of a cohesive market offer.

Entrepreneurship is not a post-retirement plan for athletes straight after their careers as an extension of their personal brand and lifestyle identity. For them, the human capital mobilization landscape is more powerful because aspirations of starting large scale businesses are well-charged through media visibility and fan engagement.

It is that contradiction of being an athlete and an entrepreneur, as many of the things needed to be successful within either battlefield is antithetical.

Reputational problem or overexposure arise when personal image is commodified, pitted against public expectations. Cautious management of authenticity and credibility often becomes a vital part of an athlete's business journey.

Creative directors are amoral; statements of values melded with an original lifestyle that creates a positioning for brands and businesses.

The contemporary business in sports management nowadays needs personal branding as one of the most important elements. In the realm of sport, personal branding has both, a relational and commercial functionality.

The athlete brand image is described as a multidimensional construct composed of a physically appealing presence, athletic talent and a sellable lifestyle.

These can be understood from a sponsorship perspective whereby symbolic capital is monetized via the entrepreneurial stances and approvals.

Digital age athletes primarily use social media platforms for direct brand management and audience engagement. Self-controlled communication channels can help sportspeople take control of their stories without the compulsive impulse to feed off traditional media, allowing them to connect emotionally with audiences worldwide.

Literature has largely established that both, athletes assemble and audience, participate in co-production of meaning. Personal brands require consistency, values and behaviour aligned, and differentiation, representing a unique brand identity, to be successful.

Athletes are playing entrepreneur and their identities as brands is the basis of their belief.

The values, authenticity and personality of athletes are intangible assets that drive consumers' perceptions of desirability and brand credibility.

Nation branding is the strategic use of a country's image to promote economic, cultural and political goals. Globalization has muddled the water about sports' traditional ties to themes with national representation and identity, such as loyalty and patriotism.

The globalization of sport through the transnational marketing dynamics of world sport and the phenomenon of dual citizenship coupled with an incidence of nationality and belonging being posed by increasing athlete mobility.

By having one of its internationally visible athletes switch national representation, it gives perceptual weight to the now allegorical correlations between nation and innovation, versus diversity and cultural identity.

Dual nationality among athletes has further complicated traditional understandings of sporting identity. It presents athletes with strategic choices linked to their eligibility to represent a nation, and these choices are increasingly influenced by professional opportunities, public exposure and market value.

In elite sports, an athlete's nationality is no longer determined solely by regulatory frameworks and global mobility patterns.

This has spawned transnational sporting identities marked by flexible loyalty and alignment with commercial goals. Maguire (1999)'s⁴ research, which underlines the increasing deterritorialization of sporting identity, also supports this core conclusion.

2.5 Start-up branding and value creation

Resource constraints, founder dependency and forced rapid differentiation transform startup branding into something fundamentally different than corporate brand management.

Many early-stage ventures have an entrepreneurial imprint, with the brand identity largely shaped by the vision and personality of the founder.

The founder's trustworthiness is the first influencer of a start-up's legitimacy, highly intertwined with an athlete's sporting reputation and personal brand equity when the founders are athletes.

A potent brand identity is created by balancing six elements: physical, culture, relationship, personality, self-image and reflection.

Simply put, startups that display alignment across these dimensions will be a more emotionally, different entity and customers will tend to trust them despite being new.

A brand founded by athletes, such as OCTO Skincare, building credibility for the brand involves linking and remaining true to what an athlete stands for their lifestyle (wellness, confidence, clean living) with the product promise (purity, sustainability and minimalism).

An additional great suit for customer goods verticals is that of storytelling and community engagement, necessary components found in most levels of a brand within skincare. The overall framework of conscious capitalism mandates superficial forms of entrepreneurship to be socially and environmentally responsible today.

Personal values such as self-care, sustainability and inclusivity are resonating with consumers. In line with this growing expectation-event of athletes-entrepreneurs, an increasing number of brands will reflect authenticity and the desire for purpose-driven brands and athletes-entrepreneurs should lean into their truth.

Braathen's OCTO Skincare is an example of a brand story where aesthetics isn't the only part of the narrative, his cultural identity was also an influence for mental health and well-being.

2.6 Conceptual framework

However, the reviewed literature indicates that for integration this study proposes a conceptual framework between four interrelated constructs:

- Extension of sport capital into business development via athlete entrepreneurship.
- The personal branding process is essentially for the conversion of lifestyle and identity into symbolic goods to be marketed, for both intrinsic and prosperity outcomes.
- Nation branding as cultural identity negotiation in a global sports economy.
- Launching a business is all about converting narratives of the nation and personal sort into value propositions, with an emphasis on operational translation.

Modern athletes and entrepreneurs move through multilayered branding ecosystems.

⁴ In 1999, the author Maguire conducted research on sports globalization from the perspective of process sociology. He corrected the widespread perception that sports form a unified global system and proposed that modern sports are shaped by globally circulating media, capital and culture. These elements drive modern sports to develop through a globalization process that adapts to local cultures, which in turn gives rise to hybrid and uneven sports identities.

Their identity, how they self-express in terms of national representation, market positioning and personal authenticity, determines the entrepreneurial outcomes.

Regarding the characteristics of his market, Lucas Pinheiro Braathen is placed into a peculiar story due to the merger of Norway and Brazil found in things he has.

Brands hybridisation arising from duality of a transnational identity provides economic grounds for cultivating a competitive advantage, especially in cultural industries such as fashion and skincare embodying diverse aesthetics.

This is compatible with cultural entrepreneurship theories that emphasize the creation of symbolic value through hybrid cultural narratives.

This is why Braathen's entrepreneurial identity signals a wider paradigm shift within the sports economy, where culture and brand innovation can be combined by those in transnational markets.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research design

This research uses a qualitative case study design, with athlete Lucas Pinheiro Braathen as its main units of analysis. This case was selected because his transnational cultural identity fits the current trend of intersecting development across sports, entrepreneurship, and national branding.

His experience of competing for Brazil in international events and founding the skincare brand OCTO provides suitable research, setting to explore how national identity and personal branding can be strategically integrated into entrepreneurial projects. The goal of this study is to examine how contemporary athletes in the globalized sports economy integrate top-tier athletic performance with entrepreneurial activities.

Specific analytical steps include conducting a SWOT analysis of the OCTO brand to assess its strategic positioning, supplemented by comparative analysis with other athlete-led entrepreneurial projects and peer brands, to anchor this cases' position within the overall landscape of the sport entrepreneurship field.

The secondary data used in this study, covers academic literature, official brand communication content and relevant public digital content.

A triangulation method is applied to build a comprehensive understanding of the research subject's athletic and entrepreneurial dimensions.

Qualitative research methods enable in-depth interpretation of processes that quantitative methods struggle to capture, including identity construction, branding strategies, and value creation.

While the single-case design limits the generalizability of the study's conclusions, it enhances the research's analytical depth and contextual comprehension.

3.2 Data Collection

To develop a comprehensive, triangulation-supported understanding of the study's case, this research constructed a multi-score data collection system to uphold the rigor of its qualitative case study.

This study utilizes different core categories of data. First, academic literature related to athlete brands, national brands, and entrepreneurial identity, which serves as the analytical foundation of this research.

Second, public primary digital resources including the official website and official communication materials of the OCTO Skincare brand, used to unpack the brand's positioning, values and narrative construction logic.

Third, Instagram platform content linking athlete Lucas Pinheiro Braathen to the brand, analysed to examine the brand's audience-facing strategies, identity expression, and interaction practices.

Lastly, a range of media reports, press releases, and official communication content, used to capture the public's external perceptions of the athlete's transition into entrepreneurship, and sort out cross-temporal key events and strategic decisions.

The integration of multi-source data achieves the convergence of three types of perspectives, effectively enhancing this study's reliability and analytical depth.

3.3 Limitations

This paper openly discloses some research limitations. First, this study adopts a single-case design, with the case subject being athlete Lucas Pinheiro Braathen. While this approach can generate rich, relevant research insights, it cannot support statistical generalization, and its conclusions cannot be extended to other athletes or athlete-led entrepreneurship projects.

Second, the research relies on secondary public data sources including media content, social media posts and official brand communication materials. Affected by the selective nature curated public information, the analysis may carry biases and cannot fully capture the internal strategic decision-making process of the research subject.

Third, interpretations of brand strategy and identity construction have inherent subjectivity. When analysing qualitative content such as narratives and visual materials, although this study used source triangulation to improve research reliability, it cannot eliminate interpretive bias.

Fourth, the sports industry and digital brand ecosystem are evolving rapidly. The conclusions of this research only apply to a specific time point and will change as the research subject's athletic career and entrepreneurial development progress.

Chapter 4: case study: Lucas Pinheiro Braathen and OCTO Skincare

4.1 Athlete profile and sporting career

Lucas Pinheiro Braathen, an alpine skier born in Oslo, Norway, was born with dual cultural identity inherited from his Norwegian father and Brazilian mother. This core defining trait has run through the entire course of his journey, from his professional rise, breaking through the boundaries of his athletic circle, to the successful commercialization of his personal ventures.

He made his debut at the Alpine Ski World Cup in 2018 and claimed his first career World Cup stage title in Sölden⁵, Austria in 2020. With top-tier technical abilities that combine stability and explosive power, creativity that breaks the conventional norms of the sport, and a unique personal style, he successfully joined the ranks of elite athletes in his discipline.

In 2026, he represented Brazil at the Milan-Cortina Winter Olympic Games, where he won the gold medal in the giant slalom, becoming the first Brazilian and the first South American Winter Olympic medallist.

⁵ The Sölden Ski Resort, located in Tyrol, Austria, regularly hosts the opening event of the International Ski Federation (FIS) Alpine Ski World Cup every October.

This groundbreaking achievement immediately triggered an explosive surge in his global recognition and cross-platform media exposure. Afterwards, he openly embraced his dual cultural identity; his communication style, fashion choices and even the public events he participated in all differed from those of traditional alpine skiers, allowing his audience base to successfully expand beyond the boundaries of the sports circle.

The personal brand he built on this foundation is anchored in various values: authenticity, individuality, and cultural diversity.

This brand successfully supported the launch of his independent skincare startup OCTO Skincare, completing a full transformation from professional athletic achievement to the commercial value of his personal brand.

4.2 Personal identity and national representation

While Braathen achieved success on the slopes, he found that institutions and professional skiing's institutional structures were alienating for him.

In October 2023, at the still young age of twenty-three years old, he delivered the bombshell news that he would retire from the Norwegian national team, stating his desire for more creative and personal freedom.

The announcement was shocking for the fans, and he garnered equal amounts of media coverage. This retirement was instead an identity redefinition rather than just a withdrawal from competition.

In March 2024, Braathen announced he would be continuing to compete on the FIS World Cup circuit under the flag of Brazil, his mother's native country.

This study characterises athlete Braathen's decision to switch his competing nationality as a personal brand rebranding effort. His national representative identity is an extension of the construction of his overall identity.

Instead of stopping at the superficial practice of changing his sports affiliation, he built a transnational distinctiveness converted his dual identity into a strategic asset and enhanced his market influence among diverse audiences.

The tile developed into a switch to nationality for self-representation, not just an administrative switch. It symbolised his resistance to the cultural and national confines of European alpine skiing, while also reaffirming his multicultural heritage.

Braathen told the Associated Press in September that his sporting career had "fallen into place" alongside what he called a more natural being by skiing for Brazil. He said lines like "I want to bring samba back to skiing". Since his return to competition, he has gone on to major sporting accomplishments including becoming the first ever Brazilian athlete to finish on the podium with a World Cup medal in December 2024 and Olympic champion in the giant slalom in Milano Cortina 2026.

There is an image for the ages that will forever be linked to the memory and history of the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milano Cortina: Lucas Pinheiro Braathen doing a samba on the top step of men's giant slalom podium at Stelvio Ski Centre in Bormio, with Brazil's green and gold flag flapping against in snow.

Brazil's gold medallist Lucas Piheiro Braathen lands on the podium next to Switzerland's silver medallist Marco Odermatt and bronze medallist Loic Meillard. Pose for photographs following the men's giant slalom alpine skiing event at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Bormio on February 14, 2026. His victory was not just a sport triumph, but the emblem of an entire cultural revolution. A Brazilian won a gold medal at the Winter Olympic Games for the first time in history, rewriting every statistical and geographical precedent associated with winter sports and snow.

This race was one of the most memorable of these Olympics. Pinheiro had crushed the opening run, clocking the time of 1:13.92⁶. Showing maturity and focus, despite an early drama as he took the second top-qualifying time by over a full second to his rivals. On his second run he kept his composure and posted a total time of 2:25.00, scoring Olympic gold by finishing 0.58 seconds ahead of the defending champion and favourite Switzerland's Marco Odermatt in the sport's most ambitious and challenging event.

This achievement is historic: Brazil won its first medal at a Winter Games. He points to South America earning its first-ever Olympic medal in an event held on snow. The image of an athlete skiing down a rutted ice trail and then, moments later, erupting into a flawless samba somehow has something revolutionary to it.

It is an expression of liberation, a sense of belonging and sheer delight. The skier bringing the Brazilian energy to the icy slopes of Norway, Lucas Pinheiro Braathen is recreating the imagery of snow. The sight of his name with that flag is a symbol, it can spark a change for the new generation, it can open access to a new sport for Brazil.

However, this uniqueness is not just apparent within sports.

He has turned more heads in fashion than he does in slalom. He chooses Moncler, which is an official sponsor of the Brazilian Olympic Committee for both, the opening and the closing ceremonies for the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics Game. Moncler chooses him for his ability to transform technical apparel into a personal aesthetic language.

He is an elite athlete, performer and paragon of a generation that avoid a simplistic definition. He is the scribe of the body who uses sport as speech and fashion as a tongue. Braathen's new venture, OCTO Skincare, mirrors his on-snow performance with a foray into entrepreneurship.

4.3 Foundation of OCTO Skincare

Officially launched at Milano Fashion Week⁷ 2025, OCTO is a lifestyle and skincare start-up based on the pillars of minimalism, sustainability and cross-cultural innovation. OCTO is a word referring to the number eight, which in many cultures means balance, continuity and regeneration. These values echo both athletic and personal well-being.

The hybridity feels to the branding of OCTO mirrors Braathen's binational identity, fusing Brazilian natural bounty and exuberance with Scandinavian design minimalism. In the brand's own words, OCTO is built on the promise that "Skin is our soil", redefining skincare as an ecological regenerative ritual.

The company relies on the latest bio-fermentation technology from California and packaging designs developed in Milan along with sustainable ingredient production sourced by Brazil to meet its goals. In this sense, the nature of production reinforces the globality of the venture. It benefits a multicultural ethos of its founder. In this sense OCTO Skincare is not just a business venture, it stands for an intersection between the private, cultural and professional aspects of Braathen's entrepreneurial identity.

⁶ The timing system for alpine skiing speed events measures times accurate to one hundredth of a second, as exemplified by the recorded time 1:13.92. since the time gaps between competing athletes are extremely narrow, this level of precision is a necessary support for determining the final event rankings.

⁷ Milano Fashion Week is one of the world's major global fashion events, alongside those held in New York, London and Paris. It is staged twice a year in Milan, Italy, where leading fashion brands launch their brand-new collections for the coming season. As an important hub of the global fashion industry, it shapes industry trends, the direction of media coverage and brand positioning.

The foundation and its eponymous brand founded by this athlete, is the combination of the founder's personal athletic experience and entrepreneurial experience as its core, uphold the values of health, integrity, sustainability and self-expression.

Unlike traditional celebrity endorsement models, this initiative stands out for integrating both, a solid multicultural foundation and a long-term development vision.

Consequently, OCTO can serve as a valid research case to explore the logic through which factors such as, athlete entrepreneurship, personal building and international identity, are transformed into a coherent market position.

4.4 Brand identity and positioning

Going from elite sport into business is not a change of career but applying the disciplined application of rigor, performance and resilience to entrepreneurship.

It becomes clear how much a prop of his career path has been strategic. In addition, the case showcases the opportunity behind personal branding providing entrepreneurs with capital.

Braathen so far has reestablished what an athlete-sponsor relationship is with an independent brand. Through the prioritization of authenticity and aesthetic apartness over commercial commonplace, he has created a conceptual narrative that reverberates through more straightforward audience mission alignment.

Furthermore, his transfer of nationality almost adds a new colour to his brand identity. In selecting to go under the Brazilian flag, Braathen reframes his identity in sport and civics for that of inclusivity and cultural understanding. This act simultaneously increases his marketability on a global scale, particularly in a new market like Latin America. His dual nationality thus around a strategic asset, because it differentiates his person and business profile of aspirational emotions resonance among international audiences.

The launch strategy behind OCTO Skincare reinforces this alignment between personal and brand identity.

The collection, presented at Milan Fashion Week 2025 for the first time by the brand, hints at the attempt to occupy this intersection between sport and fashion lifestyle industries.

What this multisectoral positioning means is that athletes are now engaging differently through entrepreneurship, which seeks to transition beyond sponsorship or endorsements and toward ownership and creative direction. Contemporary scholars of entrepreneurial branding have already remarked through strategies, the importance of radicalism, coherence and intersectoral mobility in current entrepreneurship.

Finally, the case of Lucas Pinheiro Braathen shows that the lines between sport, nationality and entrepreneur are increasingly interconnected. His journey, from the peak of elite Norwegian skiing to Brazilian delegator and ultimately skincare entrepreneur, is an identity-driven form of entrepreneurship. In which culture is source for differentiation and value capture.

OCTO Skincare is both a business and one piece of the founder's life narrative. It can be seen as part of a larger story about freedom, creativity and belonging in the modern world economy.

The three interrelated components of the athlete brand: athletic performance, attractive appearance and a marketable lifestyle. Braathen represents this trinity in his own right. His sporting credentials assure his place, his attitude serves him up a visible distinctive brand narrative and the half Norwegian, half Brazilian, created him an international and embattled lifestyle specific to youth culture, diversity and empowerment.

This is in accordance with arguments from Parmentier and Fisher (2012), that athlete branding occurs in co-creation of identity by the athlete together with the audience.

Braathen's brand is built on clarity, challenging the typically modern aesthetic of the image of alpine skiing. He has cultivated a "Gen Z centred" image through interview, social media and sponsorship appearances, which elevates him from the role of athlete to that of cultural influences.

This change is important, as modern athlete brands today are most successful if they go beyond the sport and provide multidimensional value, as highlighted by Hambrick and Mahoney⁸ (2011).

Named along the lines of a differentiator to OCTO Skincare, Braathen becomes a personal resource for connecting with consumers; especially younger consumers who are influenced by brands that possess authenticity and inclusivity.

Therefore, his identity functions as a type of symbolic capital that allows one to distinguish themselves in an oversaturated beauty and skincare market.

According to the study of Beverland⁹ (2005), authenticity has become one of the key characteristics in global branding. When it comes to founder-led brands, authenticity is built on the synergies between who the entrepreneur is and how that fits into market branding.

The messaging from Braathen frequently highlights themes of sustainability, emotional resonance and art; pillars that define the brand narrative for OCTO as well.

It combines ecological awareness with personal care, exemplified in the OCTO philosophy summarised by that "Skin is our soil" and in Braathen's emphasis between balance and self-expression and nature's right of autonomy to regenerate.

The design language is minimalist, warm and almost sensorial perhaps due to the founder being born with a Scandinavian-Brazilian identity, where this coherence can be found in every aspect. As underlined by Aaker¹⁰ (1991), the synchronicity of these behaviours contributes to consumer perception of authenticity, influences trust and strengthens the development of brand equity.

Furthermore, the brand story emphasizes inclusivity and multiculturalism, values people already associate with Braathen.

This drives the cultural branding as defined by Holt¹¹ (2004), the process by which personal ideology becomes commercial meaning. Through locating OCTO as a lifestyle expression rather than simply a technical cosmetic brand, Braathen creates as emotionally convincing and aspirational brand that can differentiate within the highly competitive segment dominated by settled parties.

One of the most ingenious ways that Braathen constructs his identity is through a deft cultural hybridity. While traditional sports branding is linked extensively to one national identity, Braathen becomes a composite of Norwegian and Brazilian cultural references.

This hybridity helps place on a unique transnational ground, that corresponds to an emergent commodity-based consumer culture which comprises minority identity and mobility as valuable skills of a global lifestyle. It is therefore not only a sports decision for him to change his nationality, but also an act of branding.

On a theoretical level, looking through Anholt's¹² (2007) perspective of nation branding, this can be viewed as Braathen being essentially a micro ambassador of one avenue of cultural representation for Brazil in a winter sport, that was historically dominated by European nations. For consumers and

⁸ In 2011, Hambrick and Mahoney conducted research on athlete branding in the context of sports communication and media exposure. They proposed that contemporary athletes operate through personal brands and that their images are shaped by multiple types of factors.

⁹ In 2005, Beverland proposed in his study that brands must balance authentic production and strategic narrative to enhance the brand authenticity perceived by consumers.

¹⁰ A professional in the marketing field, brand equity refers to the value that a brand name adds to a product, including values such as brand loyalty.

¹¹ Holt's theory of cultural branding posits that successful brands respond to social tensions, provide consumers with identity value and ultimately become cultural symbols.

¹² The concept of the national brand was proposed by Anholt in 2007. It covers the dimensions of culture, governance, tourism and identity. It links the concept of management to commercial brands.

audiences, this means transparency, a willingness to embrace his differences and possible departures from tradition and a boost for his commercial appeal.

Besides, cultural hybridity is also a benefit that helps them competes in entrepreneurship.

At the brand launch event held in Milan, beauty brand OCTO Skincare integrated different categories of cross-regional main resources to build its market differentiation. This paper draws on Lury's¹³ (2004) concept of "global brand elasticity" to unify the analytical framework for this case, using dual-national athlete Braathen as the narrative embodiment.

The key to his brand is at the intersection of sport, fashion and cultural storytelling, a structure common between the contemporary athlete-entrepreneur.

4.5 Entrepreneurial value creation

According to scholars of entrepreneurship, identity is central in defining how actors recognize opportunities and make strategic choices.

Entrepreneurial identity helps to define not only what founders pursue but also how ventures are positioned in the marketplace. In the case of Braathen, identity acts from three separate and interrelated facets of his entrepreneurial strategy:

- Identity fuelled distinction: a founder led firm with solid ideas rooted in personal experience and multiculturalism that lets the brand tell its story. Instead of relying on product features for differentiation;
- Audience fit since he has already established a fan base, consisting of predominantly young, global citizens with high cultural capital, this lowers the customer acquisition threshold typical for early-stage start-ups;
- Credit transfer: being a professional athlete, his credibility must matter of performance, discipline and physical care. This reinforces OCTO's positioning in the premium skin care space.

So, identity emerges as a uniquely entrepreneurial asset which lowers uncertainty, builds brand resonance and catalyses early growth.

This mechanism matches the narrative capital of founders through their personal stories, as highlighted by Lounsbury and Glynn¹⁴ (2019).

For at least the last ten years, athlete entrepreneurship has grown significantly as athletes look for improve individual freedom, a broader financial base and sustainable career longevity.

Athlete owned brands also afford stronger control over creative than traditional endorsements market positioning and directions. For athletes with strong personal branding, this is why many successful athletes rely on their symbolic capital and social visibility.

Braathen launching comfortable skincare brand is also part of the trend. The growth of the global skincare market is expected to maintain as wellness focus rises, from scrupulous self-care to inclusive beauty. But this is a very crowded space characterized by a monopoly of transitional firms, that is to day differentiation, authenticity and even just knowledge, because you must understand the experiential value very well to be able to enter the market.

At OCTO, differentiation stems from interlocking aspects of three assets:

- Identity of the founder, such as authenticity versus multiculturalism and athlete credibility);
- Design based branding, its Swedish design minimalism and Brazilian sensory cues;

¹³ Drawing on Lury's study, a brand is defined as a new media object that also has dynamic system attributes and can organise the connection between producers and consumers.

¹⁴ They point out that entrepreneurial narrative can shape stakeholders' interpretations and assessments of new ventures by building narrative and cultural meanings.

- Sustainability narrative around linked to “Skin is our soil”.

Identity oriented entrepreneurship is aligned to cultural entrepreneurship, where founders leverage their personal stories to create symbolic value which makes the products more appealing.

According to Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), a good value proposition should express independent functional, emotional and symbolic advantages offered to consumers.

OCTO Skincare’s value proposition consists of multiple layers, as its functional value tends to emphasize high-quality ingredients, biotechnology supported formulations, gender neutral applicability and simplified routines. This functional approach matches consumer need for efficacious, streamlined beauty solutions traditionally defined as “Scandi-beauty”¹⁵. Scandinavian countries are known to have some of the lowest waste levels in the world.

The brand’s story highlights self-care as a ritual of balance, regeneration and self-expression, ideals announcing the exploration of plates that connect to Braathen’s public figure.

At the same time, emotional branding can be especially powerful when it comes to categories like beauty markets, that are where consumption is intimately connected with identity expression.

OCTO creates wear by combining Brazilian cool, Norwegian minimalism and Italian fashion aesthetics: power of cultural hybridity. Gen Z¹⁶ consumers across the globe typically relate to this multicultural story and gravitate toward brands that are wholesome. Together, those variations allow OCTO to create an even more original marketplace looking out of only the technical feature and tactics into lifestyle and identity.

Chapter 5: Business model analysis

5.1 Business Model Canvas

This section uses the Business Model Canvas framework to deconstruct the venture into nine interconnected dimensions, making it easy to catch OCTO’s entrepreneurial structure.

1. Customer segment: it looks to serve a few core customer segments. Gen Z, millennials follow identity-based skincare brands with a stronger storytelling. The consumer is a premium skincare user who cares deeply about minimalistic design as well as ingredient transparency. Communities of sport and lifestyle inspired by Braathen’s athletic side.
From the point of view of cross-cultural markets, especially in Europe, Brazil and Asia, where aesthetic is most appealing. Eco conscious buyers who are looking for greener and more ethical products.

This segmentation is consistent with global beauty trends towards inclusivity, gender-neutral positioning and lifestyle branding.

2. Value proposition: as mentioned, OCTO includes clean and high-quality formulations, sustainability and eco-design. Focused on aesthetic minimalism and founder driven authenticity. It has a multicultural identity narrative and a ritualistic approach to skincare.

This is what allows it breaking through in many reached up markets emotional and cultural added value.

3. Channels: OCTO is a distribution model: direct to consumer from its site allowing them to control pricing, messaging and customer data.

¹⁵ It is a beauty aesthetic inspired by Scandinavian style, with tenets of minimalism, natural skin health and simplicity. It is often used in beauty brands’ communication practises to convey authentic, pure and sustainable beauty values.

¹⁶ This study adopts the universal industry definition: Generation Z refers to the group of individuals born between the mid 1990s and the early 2010s, who are digital natives with high social engagement and who favour authentic, value-driven brands.

Partnering with selective retailers, specifically concept stores and fashion boutiques or wellness spaces that reflect an aesthetic embodied by its designs. Fashion and cultural events such as Milan Fashion Week.

Furthermore, visual social media platforms, like Instagram and TikTok, where the visual storytelling plus founder presence is a prime.

We can see this multi channelling in beauty start-ups, it must support legitimacy of the brand, and an offline presence is essential too.

4. Customer Relationships: this brand is strategically positioned to forge relationships through founder visibility. Building a sense of community and trust by utilizing Braathen's persona. Rituals and lifestyle storytelling take its place in content-led engagement. Customised experiences and community building, merging artists, athlete and designers throughout the process.

Relational capital is often worth more than traditional loyalty programs in personal branding led start-ups.

5. Revenue streams: OCTO revenue model consists of skincare products sale core line. Rare, exclusive releases connected to cultural moments or milestones in an athlete's career. Future collaborations with sports institutions and fashion brands.

Broad offerings of stable recurring products paired with high-impact limited editions help to maintain brand consistency and exclusivity.

6. Key resources: the brand and public identity of the founder. Including formulation expertise and partner laboratories. Visual identity, packaging design and digital infrastructure for e-commerce.

Strategic partnerships, in identity driven start-ups, the founder himself is an intangible where the personal brand of the founder itself becomes a major asset.

7. Key activities: product, branding, storytelling and content production. The community engagement, strategic collaborations and logistics supply-chain collaboration are fundamental points. Attending significant cultural and fashion events is a plus.

Thanks to all these points OCTO is position not only as beauty brands but also as lifestyle cultural player.

8. Key partners: the brand is based on laboratories and ingredient suppliers. Packaging and design studios, fashion event organizers, content creators and the distribution in concept stores, contribute to the brand knowledge.

It allows to scale product quality and remains aesthetically strong.

9. Cost structure: the major costs include the research and formulation, packaging design and production, digital marketing and content creation. Engaging influencers and organizing event partnerships. Logistics, distribution and branding investments such as collaborations.

OCTO is premium positioned by cost structure and design execution.

5.2 Competitive positioning

The global skincare market is highly competitive with low entry barriers. Narrative, and the art of advantage is what makes OCTO unique, thanks to its founder identity as differentiator. In a climate where emotional branding is key, Braathen's multicultural background and authenticity offer something unique.

This brand pulls influencers to be in today hyper-boom social media market. The visual identity seen as value, while it is customary for skincare brands to treat their interactivity and sensory experience more like a commodity, instead OCTO places the visual image at the centre of its creation value.

Here, we show that packaging, texture and ritual design are as consequential and formula performance.

The position is a lifestyle proposition, which is a model that has been embraced by responsive brands successfully in establishing and mobilizing brand communities. Furthermore, strategic events are fundamental and help the credibility of the brand in the fashion supply chain.

Mixed, these ingredients provide a defensible base in the premium skincare market.

5.3 Founder identity and entrepreneurial legitimacy

Based on the classic theory proposed by Fauchart and Gruber¹⁷ in 2011, which state that founder identities shape the strategic orientation of start-up firms, we categorize the skincare start-up brand OCTO as a “missionary-type” entrepreneurial project.

Founder’s identity as an elite athlete supports brand building across three dimensions.

It enhances the authenticity of the brand’s related narrative, provides cultural capital that empowers the brand’s aesthetic expression, and reinforces the credibility of the brand’s health claims. This process ultimately strengthens OCTO’s brand legitimacy and accelerates the establishment of consumer trust.

To conclude by summarizing, this mark is a cross-sector, startup skincare, developed through strategic design. It positions itself at the intersection of the beauty, culture and sports industries. Leveraging an identity strategy centred on its founder, Braathen’s identity as an athlete, the brand validates its operational structure. Using the business model canvas, it enters the saturated global beauty market and builds differentiated competitive advantages.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 National identity as a strategic resource

It has long noted that national identity is deeply connected with sports marketing and athlete endorsements. Maguire (2011) defines athlete as national symbolic ambassadors that carry their home country’s cultural values and collective imagination. In the field of alpine skiing, which has long been dominated by European countries including Austria, Switzerland and Norway, the one of Brazil has never been part of the mainstream competitive landscape.

The core observation of this paper hold that this main alpine skier decision to compete for Brazil, not only breaks the long-standing national narrative of this sport but also enables him to cultivate the “iconic distinctiveness” for brands that amid a highly homogeneous group of European competitors.

This allows him to move beyond the boundaries of traditional skiing audiences. Brazil’s cultural markers of passion, creativity and inclusivity align his personal image and the brand identity of OCTO. By linking competitive and commercial activities through the thread of national identity, this approach reinforces cross-scenario brand consistency.

¹⁷ They proposed a three-category framework of entrepreneurial identity, which includes three types: Darwinian, communication and missionary. These factors explain the logic through which founders construct entrepreneurial legitimacy and corporate identity by relying on differentiated motivations and social roles.

Drawing on the brand theory proposed in existing research, it is universally recognized that symbolic meanings will influence audiences' perceptions of the culture, quality and identity of associated entities. Athletes whose identities are tied to that country can inherit this set of symbolic assets. Brazil's national brand label aligns closely with the personal traits of the creator, a dual-nationality athlete and can support the aesthetic and narrative system of skincare brand OCTO. In contrast, Norway's national brand symbols form the core of OCTO's visual language and product philosophy. This study argues that his dual-nationality status enables the label to integrate Scandinavian design credibility and Brazilian emotional vitality. All this creating a rare hybrid brand narrative in the skincare industry.

The double cultural identity of Braathen, founder of beauty brand OCTO, is the core differentiation strategy that support the brand's expansion across multiple cross-cultural settings. Studies in the international marketing field by Pieterse (2004) have noted that hybrid identities can create unique value for global brand positioning.

The cultural integration strategy of this start-up is divided in four dimensions. Leveraging its Brazilian identity to unlock market access and adapt to local needs; framing the founder's nationality change as a process of reclaiming personal heritage. Furthermore, developing the exclusive media narrative of "Snow Samba" to establish differentiation in the alpine sports sector. Last, integrating the cultures of Brazil and Norway to launch it in Milan, so achieving cross-cultural product resonance. Finally, this dual cultural identity is recognized as the core competitive advantage in the globalized beauty market track.

6.2 Personal branding and entrepreneurial legitimacy

The narrative capital is defined as an entrepreneur's ability to leverage their personal story to gain legitimacy, attract attention and mobilize resources.

This athlete's nationality change is a study sample, it breaks down the pathways through which this incident generates narrative capital across the four dimensions, mentioned before. Ultimately this mechanism reinforces the authenticity and depth of Braathen's public, while also expanding the brand emotional reserve of its collaborative partner brand OCTO.

The correlation between ethnicity and entrepreneurial brands can create strategic gains for brands expanding into overseas markets. Drawing on the case of the startup skincare and referencing the conclusion put forward by Holt in 2004, that "Brands with deep cultural depth are more likely to build strong emotional bonds with consumers". This study unpacks different specific commercial values. First, it boosts cross market legitimacy, adapting to the audience characteristics of the two regions of Northern Europe and Brazil to expand the brand's customer base.

Moreover, it strengthens emotional differentiation, as the mixed identity holds a rare richness of narrative. Additionally, the nationality changes of the brand's core figure Braathen received coverage from media outlets in multiple countries, which drove up brand exposure. Lastly, his athletic career is highly consistent with the brand's narrative, which consolidates consumer trust.

A core theoretical insight in the field of entrepreneurship is the deep integration of personal identity and entrepreneurial intention. The academic community generally agrees that a founder's identity not only affects the launch of a new venture but also determines the firm's strategic orientation and cultural connotation.

Through case analysis, this study finds that the entrepreneurial identity is fully bound to his personal brand, his multicultural background, aesthetic perception and expressive personality. All these directly shaped the mark's value proposition, visual language and market positioning, which confirm the core claim of identity integration.

Drawing on the narrative capital theory proposed by Lounsbury and Glynn (2019), this study further argues that Braathen's narrative capital is the main foundation that enabled his skincare brand to achieve differentiation in the saturated market.

This study extends related research to propose that athlete-entrepreneurs who transcend traditional sports, align cultural lifestyles and possess unique entrepreneurial advantages.

Driven on the definition proposed by Pieterse¹⁸ (2004), cultural hybridity refers to the intersection of multiple cultural identities within a single individual. This trait can serve as a competitive advantage in the global consumer market.

Braathen leveraged the Norwegian Brazilian dual identity to create for OCTO a hybrid brand narrative that integrates Scandinavian minimalism and Brazilian expressiveness, which aligns with global consumers' preference for diversity and authenticity.

It extends the concept of "identity elasticity", arguing that brands with flexible cultural ties can adapt to multiple markets while maintaining consistency.

Brand's ability to resonate with audiences in both countries confirms this point. The hybrid identity model can foster transnational brand resonance. It is applicable to industries where consumers pursue alignment with a specific lifestyle beyond the functional attributes of offerings.

This study finds that symbolic capital, reputation, visibility and cultural recognition are the core driving elements of athletes' entrepreneurial paths.

Athletes who build strong persona brands can gain higher market legitimacy when launching their entrepreneurial projects, which formed the logical foundation.

6.3 Strategic implications

Drawing on Holt's (2004) cultural branding model and analysing the case of this professional skier, the symbolic capital supports different core strategies. These are emotional positioning, aesthetic expression and community building.

Finally, this consideration proposes that athlete-led brands can obtain strategic advantages from the cultural significance of their founders.

Every advantage is particularly prominent when the brand aligns with the identity trends of target consumers.

This study focuses on the construction of cultural connotations for national symbols in global context.

This system of cultural connotations can function as a differentiation mechanism for the alpine skiing sector. His sport is catalyst for the narrative, a market booster for OCTO's entry into Brazil and a symbolic bond that connects founders.

The national branding framework, originally applicable to sovereign states, can be extended to hybrid-identity entrepreneurs, granting them strategic brand advantages.

Furthermore, different implication concerns the dynamic evolving of athlete branding. Traditional athlete brands take competitive performance, commercial endorsements and exposure in the sports field.

Today the industry has seen a new shift, as athletes' identities have expanded from mere competitors to cultural influencers. Taking athlete Braathen as an example, the OCTO brand achieved success relying on a coherent lifestyle narrative.

The conclusion that the integration of sports and lifestyle markets can explain this shift. Future related research needs to adopt frameworks covering cultural, emotional and entrepreneurial dimensions to adapt to new changes in the industry.

¹⁸ He explains the theoretical concept of "Globalization as hybridization" in his 2004 study, noting that globalization generates hybrid cultural identities through the interaction between global and local influences.

From a strategic management perspective, this study draws on the case of a beauty start-up and its founder to verify that creator led startups can use identity-based assets as a support to build differentiated competitive advantages.

It then puts forward different core theoretical implications. Founder identity can serve as a strategic resource; brand identity consistency notes that narrative coherence can facilitate the growth of startups. Ultimately based on the theory of competitive advantage, it proposes that emotional symbolic value can help startups through market saturation.

In the field of athletes' entrepreneurship, the essence is the identity creation, rather than pure business diversification. The personal brand serves as the core mechanism linking identity and economic activities, which can convert competitor's symbolic capital into entrepreneurial legitimacy. Nationality is a dynamic mediating brand variable, and it can expand market reach and emotional resonance.

This research is an example that culture can be developed into a market-oriented product. Highlights how entrepreneurship is more likely to succeed when the founder's narrative aligns with market expectations and social values.

It is apposite to demonstrate that the gap often present in the field of sports entrepreneurship, that athletes are only passive recipients of sponsorship capital and it evidences the case value of Braathen.

At a macro level the findings of this study can serve as a reference for policymakers and sports institutions that need to support athlete career transitions, entrepreneurship and innovation.

These achievements can advance two practical projects: launch entrepreneurship education programs within the sports system to help current athletes build management and business skills through their careers. Secondly, call on sports federations and sponsors to move beyond the limited single-endorsement framework to tap into the innovative and cultural diplomacy value of athlete's personal brands. This case confirms that linking nationality and entrepreneurship can boost the global reputation of the individual and their home country at the same time.

All this leads us to say that a full-dimensional management strategy, focused on the commercial value, is tailored for startups and their brand managers. The approach applies to the entire business lifecycle from early-stage founding to expansion and centres on the core of identity authenticity. All insights included are fully actionable and cover some managements fields such as leadership, strategy and organizational design.

First, as mentioned before in the research, it defines the founder's identity as a core intangible resource for building market differentiation, transforming into brand attributes.

During the expansion phase, the strategy proposes different types of tools to mitigate related risks: governance mechanism, brand guidelines, cultural frameworks, and product concepts. The last is to ensure the brand authenticity that support customer trust is never compromised.

In saturated markets, such as the skincare sector, the strategy argues that creating emotional values has a greater impact on consumer purchasing decisions. The brands need to deepen their emotional connection with users by leveraging brand communities, narrative strategies and aligned cultural meanings.

On the case of Braathen changing his sporting nationality to Brazil, the strategy proposes that managers can use a country brand framework to strengthen brand meaning.

This plan is suitable for new market entry or product repositioning but requires an execution to avoid being perceived as opportunistic. For managers who collaborate with athletes and influencers, the strategy proposes upgrading short-term endorsement deals into long-term entrepreneurial partnerships.

Such as co-creating brands, establishing joint ventures, or launching identity product lines. This shift turns collaborating partners from mere promotional assets into cultural co-creators and further solidifies the brand's core authenticity.

6.4 Athlete entrepreneurship and cultural branding

Across the globe, athlete entrepreneurship has become a clear industry trend.

Most of these athlete-founders build consumer facing consumer brands by exploiting their own public recognition and cultural capital.

This study conducts a cross-case comparison of the startup OCTO, with three top-tier athlete-founded startup projects related on sports services, fashion venture capital and lifestyle entertainment.

The three comparison cases are Rafael Nadal's, that built the Rafa Nadal Academy¹⁹; Serena Williams²⁰ fashion line, S by Serena and her capital firm Serena Ventures; and David Beckham²¹'s personal care brand House99 and Inter Miami CF.

To compare OCTO with these startups, we develop four analytical dimensions: founder symbolic capital, brand identity value, operational structure and market expansion. Then, we extract industry-wide and strategic differences, identifying the unique position of OCTO. Situate the project within a broader entrepreneurial ecosystem to define its placement.

One of the biggest tennis players, Rafael Nadal's cross-sector entrepreneurial matrix includes the Rafael Nadal Academy and various lifestyle collaborations.

Its brand foundations are anchored in the authenticity of athletic performance and competitive excellence. It achieves large-scale development by building an institutionalized high-performance ecosystem, making it a type of performance-driven sports entrepreneurship.

In contrast, OCTO, as mentioned above, is founded by world-class skier Braathen, and follows a completely different model. It does not centre its brand on athletic performance; instead, it builds value through cultural blending and aesthetic expression. It expands via a creative branding approach and is classified as an aesthetic lifestyle startup.

The two ventures have clearly defined boundaries between their respective market tracks.

Compared to another great athlete, we can see Serena William's brand S by Serena and her ventures business portfolio, as a reference to deconstruct the brand positioning logic and development challenges of Pinheiro's OCTO.

Both brands rely on identity narratives to build differentiation in saturated markets. William's brand portfolio builds its messaging in sociopolitical discourses such as female empowerment; it takes identity emancipation and inclusivity as its core and is currently facing challenges of converting brand narratives into a suitable revenue structure.

OCTO, for its part, draws on its Brazilian Norwegian multicultural roots and promotes a lifestyle focused on non-conformist creative freedom and emotional expression.

¹⁹ Located in Mallorca, the Rafa Nadal Academy is a tennis training centre founded by Rafael Nadal in 2016. Its operations focus on elite sports development and education. It deeply aligns with the founder's personal brand values and coaching philosophy.

²⁰ Professional tennis player, she has built a global personal brand that transcend the scope of tennis. Integrating her elite competitive achievements, she has expanded her footprint across the fields of entrepreneurship, fashion and venture capital, positioning women's empowerment and cultural influence as the core of her brand.

²¹ Professional football player, an entrepreneur who has built a comprehensive global personal brand by establishing a full-scale presence across fashion, advertising and commercial investment sectors, as an important case in the fields of athlete entrepreneurship and lifestyle brands.

It prioritizes aesthetic experience and personal authenticity rather than public welfare. As it enters its growth phase, the brand's need is to shift from building narrative awareness to achieving operational stability.

The last comparison is with the very famous former footballer, now entrepreneur and sports manager David Beckham.

House99, the skincare and grooming brand built by David Beckham is the core benchmark case for OCTO, new brand that also competes in the beauty and personal care track. It develops OCTO's market implementation path around three dimensions.

First, the beauty and personal care track has a high concentration of celebrity backed brands. It is saturated of product categories and fierce market competition.

To break through this landscape, brands need clear value propositions, unique aesthetics and strong community engagement.

Second, Braathen's brand must avoid the trap of overreliance on celebrity influence. While House99 gained high initial traffic by leveraging Beckham's global appeal, OCTO needs to use its founder Braathen's personal traffic to overcome the overcentralized influence, building an independent, product-oriented brand identity.

Third, rely on the product life cycle theory, OCTO can follow House99's logic of expanding its business from core grooming offerings to a broad lifestyle-focused portfolio, and support long-term growth through product line expansion and cross-industry collaboration.

While athlete-founded startups generally share common structural traits, OCTO differs fundamentally from similar ventures across different fundamental strategic dimensions. In terms of brand positioning, most athlete turned entrepreneurs, such as Nadal, adopt a performance driven model focused on professional functionality.

Conversely, the analysed brand anchors its approach to an aesthetic scheme. Entering the creative lifestyle space through an aesthetic identity and visual culture, aligning itself with fashion startups rather than traditional sports founded enterprises.

6.5 Comparative analysis and strategic development

In terms of mark statement, most other sport author beauty startups lean on a range of unconnected cultural symbols, while this one establishes a brand core centred on liberation and reinvention.

This logo is a potential cultural innovator. In terms of transition path, most athlete turned into entrepreneurs shift to institutionalized operations. Braathen launched it as a hybrid influencer, relying on engagement to navigate and word-of-mouth fluctuations, which equips the startup with rapid adjustment capabilities.

The native digital consumer currently uses the industry-standard lifecycle model and must complete internal structural integration. To achieve sustained growth, it must further depend on its systems, team, operational capabilities and brand architecture.

Previously, we benchmarked the cross-border brand of three sports celebrities, Rafael Nadal, Serena Williams and David Beckham, who also built their brands initially on their personal public influence. From this analysis, we condensed three actionable practical strategies: build institutional frameworks in advance to avoid over-reliance on the founder, codify the brand's cultural mission to prevent identity dilution and continuously spread new offerings to avoid market stagnation.

From the data collected a development analysis of lifecycle-based projection model for OCTO's next five years.

We constructed a five-year development forecasting model using the Adizes Corporate Lifecycle Model²², the Grenier Growth Model²³ and the contemporary start-up framework.

This model predicts the milestones, internal transition nodes and potential risks the brand will encounter as it progresses from its launch to entering a stable growth phase.

Then the analysis is focused on the brand's first year of operations. This period is the transition phase from the birth stage to the startup stage, with the goal of shifting from proof of concept to initial market penetration.

On the product side, the brand needs to collect feedback from its target customer group, optimize product formulas and packaging, and adjust its communication strategies. Regarding the brand, it must convert founder's multicultural identity into resources, to support brand storytelling, social marketing, and community building projects.

This research integrates management of Adizes's corporate life cycle theory to analyse the growth logic of the startup brand OCTO. In its initial stage, the brand's processes were not fully standardized but gradually stabilized and it completed different foundational tasks.

The supply chain establishment, fulfilment optimization and the formulation of customer service protocols. This stage is marked by sufficient creativity but high vulnerability, with the brand's reliance on its founder reaching its peak.

Two years after its founding, the brand entered in the next phase, called "Go-Go" stage, which is marked by aggressive pursuit of market opportunities and rising operational complexity. This is the moment of rapid growth, in which the company thrives. Sales increase rapidly and profits are solid. At this stage, OCTO must advance its product line expansion, build a core management team with roles in operations, marketing and brand management.

It should track the main KPIs, including customer acquisition cost and repeat purchase rate. The brand's founder must balance authority delegation with alignment around the shared vision.

Some risks may be operational bottlenecks and team burnout. The mark must therefore build a structured governance system while retaining its core creative.

The founder Braathen has outlined a clear growth path for the brand's third to fourth year after its founding. In its third year, the brand will enter an official growth phase with some priorities including building internal frameworks, completing organizational division and spreading out standardized processes, a formal budget system and performance dashboards.

It will also expand into well-suited markets including Scandinavia, Brazil, Western Europe and East Asia.

To avoid the risk of brand dilution from product line expansion, the brand will implement a clear strategy for serializing its sub-brands, while solidifying its identity through brand guidelines, cultural values and aesthetic structure.

This setup balances functional managers' demand for independent management authority with creative control and operational efficiency.

In its fourth year, the startup will enter a large-scale expansion phase. To address the challenge of growing organizational complexity, it will advance revenue diversification by unrolling health products, perfumes, and fashion collections, to shake off reliance on its original skincare line.

When partnering with various collaborators, it will strictly sustain quality and brand consistency, while upgrading its supply chain in step.

All these strategies always centre on the goal of preserving the core identity of the mark.

²² It is an organizational analysis tool that divides organizational development into a series of continuous stages from startup to decline and tracks changes in an organization's structure, leadership and flexibility over time.

²³ It defines organizational growth as a series of evolutionary phases separated by crises. To support an organization's sustained development, its organizational structure and management model must be adapted to align with each of these phases.

At this point, as OCTO's operational complexity continues to rise, its original informal processes can no longer meet its development needs. So, it must introduce management and control mechanisms, including middle management, a planning system, operational KPIs and strategic budgets.

The core contradiction of this transition period is that insufficient control will cause chaos and low efficiency, while excessive control will restrain the creative identity that underpins OCTO's differentiated competitiveness.

Entering the early maturity phase in its fifth year, the brand needs to implement actions to solidify its brand assets, such as visual employee training programs and a systematic sorting of its mission and values.

It must also establish an advisory board to upgrade its governance structure and benchmark against niche high-end skincare brands, with rich multicultural characteristics, to anchor cultural positioning. By the end of its fifth year, the startup can choose between two development paths. An integration path focused on stable operations and mature profitability. Or a rebirth path built on creative restructuring, cross-sector collaborations and major product innovations.

Considering the dynamic traits of its founder, this analysis concludes that the rebirth path is better suited to help OCTO maintain its cultural influence and avoid development stagnation.

We have already seen how, the brand operates in a highly competitive market segment where the identity brand logic intersects with the structural challenges of early-stage startups.

It outlines some categories of risks the brand will face over the next five years: operational risks, strategic risks, financial risks and brand-related risks. This analysis integrates different types of supporting evidence to advance its argument.

Its brand assets are heavily dependent on the personal intellectual property of its founder. It also supplements the understanding of a universal constraint across the beauty industry. Brands that rely on symbolic capital to expand are extremely prone to identity fragmentation.

Finally, it puts forward risks mitigation strategies that precisely match all identified risks. Every hazard point is fixed to the characteristics of its corresponding development stage. The solutions directly target core pain points, and the analysis includes no vague, empty arguments.

Additionally, other risks that OCTO must face are inventory shortages, overproduction, production delays, inconsistent quality, insufficient capacity to meet market demand and lack of standardized processes. Citing the classic life cycle theory, this analysis argues that to transition from the startup stage to the growth stage, a startup must build operational robustness.

Failure to do so may easily activate reputational crises. To combat and avoid this, it accordingly puts forward some optimization solutions. Developing a multi-supplier network, implementing quality control and standardized processes, investing in scalable e-commerce infrastructure and formulating an operation roadmap aligned with growth goals.

Shifting to the financial dimension, the solutions are integrating the universal cash flow constraints of startups and the beauty sector's requirement for sustained investment in marketing and packaging.

Combined with the premature expansion problem common among brands founded by athletes, proposing a lean financial structure should be adopted in the first 24-36 months, replacing radical expansion.

6.6 Athlete entrepreneurship and competitive advantage

Entrepreneurship is a dynamic process that generates new economic activities through opportunity identification, innovative practice, and risk-taking, and this is the academic definition adopted in the present study.

Monge²⁴ (2020)'s research expands the boundaries of this concept, breaking the narrow perception that entrepreneurship is only equivalent to founding new enterprises.

He adds that entrepreneurship must also cover three capabilities that support the transformation of creative ideas. These are strategic planning, decision making and judgement and organizational management.

Building on this foundation, we can deduce the role of entrepreneurs and clearly define the two characteristics of start-ups: high uncertainty and the requirement to develop innovative business models.

The study by Monge notes that the fast-changing, highly competitive environment in which today's startups operate, places strict demands on entrepreneur's potentials.

The managerial transition of former professional athlete Lucas Braathen and his skincare brand startup OCTO serves as a typical case of this type of cross-sector founder.

This research proposes that the professional experience of being a professional athlete can function as a unique intangible resource, supporting entrepreneurs to complete their identity construction and formulate strategies for their startup's early stage.

Drawing on 2020's assertion that *"Human capital is the core support for entrepreneurship"*, an individual's career path prior to starting a business impacts capabilities: market opportunity recognition, management of early-stage startup uncertainty and strategic decision making.

This explanatory logic is particularly well-suited for professional athletes who launch their athletic careers and business path simultaneously.

Because of that, In the field of crossover entrepreneurship, the main competencies refined through high-level competitive sport training, have become a key support for many athletes to unlock smooth career transition ways.

The extreme discipline, the ability to withstand high pressure and long-term resilience against setbacks, not only help athletes achieve outstanding results in competitive arenas; but can also be leveraged to build sustainable business projects with clear structure and coherent logic.

As mentioned before; to consolidate the academic foundation for this logic of competency transfer, it introduces the multi-dimensional theory of entrepreneurship proposed by Monge in 2020.

This hypothesis specifies that innovation is the core hallmark of business. Consequentially, entrepreneurs need to restructure their brand development paths across multiple dimensions. Including communication logic, business models and market positioning.

They must not copy existing mature models and should instead build an exclusive brand narrative that aligns with their own core identity.

The constraint of entrepreneurship is the omnipresent risk and uncertainty, which requires entrepreneurs to possess forward-looking strategic vision and rapid adaptability to turn risks into growth opportunities for their enterprises.

A company is the carrier of the contractor's personal identity, long-term vision and values. The goal of entrepreneurship is to achieve the unification of social, symbolic and economic values.

On this basis, the underlying competency of entrepreneurship is the ability to accurately interpret changes in the socio-economic context. This logic is especially applicable to startup brand in the beauty and lifestyle track. When athletes engage in crossover entrepreneurship, the traits of proactively competing and confronting challenges, developed during their sports careers, help them rationally break down various risks in the entrepreneurial process.

Meanwhile, the personal fame and positive public image, that athletes have accumulated can rapidly empower the construction of their enterprise's identity, realizing the in-depth value binding of their personal and entrepreneurial brand.

²⁴ He proposed that digital media and social platforms have transformed the original logic of athlete brand building, pushing athletes to become proactive brand managers and content creators within the sports marketing ecosystem.

The personal startup brand, built by the skier, perfectly exemplifies this entrepreneurship path that achieves identity unification.

6.7 Generation Z and lifestyle branding

The consumer culture of Generation Z is one of the most profound transformations in contemporary capitalist economies.

It has not only reshaped surface-level purchasing behaviours but also restructured the ontological meaning of consumption.

Unlike the consumption logic of previous age-matched supporters, which is anchored in status signalling, functional utility and alignment with an ideal lifestyle, Generation Z frames consumption as a process of identity production.

The value of commodities derives from the meanings they carry, which supports individuals to continuously construct, perform and revise their identities in digital social environments, forming a dynamic system of identity symbols.

The current digital cultural transformation is the continuous dissolution of the traditional boundary between products and self-expression.

This follower identity is not a predefined, stable category, but a fluid assemblage made up of aesthetic signals, cultural affiliations and narrative choices. Practices and food consumption have all moved beyond their purely functional scope to serve as media for self-expression. Among these areas, skincare has evolved into a highly coded language of self-presentation, shifting from a private personal care activity to an extension of identity that can be curated and shared.

It highlights the fact that the consumption needs of Generation Z are deeply linked to the concept of authenticity in brand contexts. This notion is the main element in the current brand discourse.

This study reconstructs this idea, moving it away from the traditional understanding of a fixed product attribute to a measure of the degree of alignment, between a brand's actions and the cultural expectations of its audience.

Against today's media landscape, which is shaped by saturated advertising, algorithm customized content and the dominance of the influencer economy, Generation Z is highly sensitive to artificially polished communication content.

They reject official corporate communications that are overly refined and disconnected from a daily life. Instead, they prefer communication styles that are transparent, unpolished and real-time.

Authenticity in this context is a product of cultural construction, and it has boosted a set of non-traditional corporate brand strategies. These approaches do not leave behind formal corporate structures; instead, they narrow the psychological distance between brands and their audiences by strategically concealing institutional distance.

They are implemented along main directions such as the use of colloquial language, minimalist design and narratives that centre personal struggles as well as the framing of a brand's origins and its founder's vulnerability.

Founder-led brand building is the most effective mechanism to cultivate perceived authenticity. Founders shift from being mere initiators of a company to cultural intermediaries that connect the production system and consumers' meaning making processes.

They anchor the abstract corporate entity with a distinct personal identity, which aligns with Generation Z's consumption traits of trusting individuals more than institutions and trusting narratives more than official statements.

This approach creates a sense of intimacy that traditional brands cannot achieve.

Consequently, we can underline three trends that emerged sequentially in the contemporary consumers sector and are deeply interconnected. The first is the rise of emotional consumption. So,

the logic driving consumption has shifted from the rational assessment of product attributes to emotional alignment.

Taking on the functions of regulation moods, building emotional contexts and strengthening mental health.

Beyond their basis functional efficacy, products must also be able to evoke or stabilize specific emotions. This oriented consumption, embedded in the cultural discourses of self-care, mindfulness and mental health optimization. All this transforms' consumers from purchasers into managers of their own emotional states, who rely on products to adjust their moods.

The second trend, closely to the one described above, is the valorisation of aesthetic value. Set against the context of Gen Z consumer culture, aesthetics is no longer decoration for functional goods, but a fundamental structure that generates brand meaning.

Visual consistency, brand design, colour palettes, minimalist packaging and digital presentation all serve as core pillars supporting perceived value. Aesthetic consistency has become a proxy indicator for measuring brand quality, credibility and cultural relevance.

Even products that meet performance standards will be judged as disconnected from the cultural context, if they fail to meet aesthetic expectations.

The third trend, linked to the aestheticization of consumption, is the community driven brand logic. Brands have shifted from traditional hierarchical management to ecosystems, while consumer communities have transformed from passive audiences into creators of meaning.

Buyers build a brand's cultural identity through generated content, digital interactions and shared symbols into a relational practice. Thanks to, through which a sense of belonging and personal identity are negotiated within online communities.

The brand loyalty has shifted from repeat purchases to cultural level identity affiliation.

6.8 Emotional capital, aesthetic logic and OCTO's Gen Z strategy

To conclude the speech, it can be said that the cultural logic of the contemporary global health economy, is the ideology in which has long broken out of its original niche circles.

It has fully embedded the consumer behaviour into individual's self-optimization processes, that cover all market segments, including skincare, fitness, nutrition, mental health, lifestyle design and has completely restructured the legitimacy basis of consumption.

Therefore, the traditional and luxurious attributes of consumption have been dismantled. Instead, the body and mind are framed as long-term projects that require continuous management. This logic aligns perfectly with Gen Z's demands for overall well-being.

The skincare brand OCTO is strictly connected to this notion. Its brand positioning is structured by different key tracks: sports performance culture, skincare technology innovation and identity consumption.

Unlike the common strategy of most skincare brands that depend on endorsements from traditional entertainment celebrities, OCTO centres its brand narrative on elite athletes.

This approach carries credibility than collaborations with high-traffic online influencers and better resonates with Gen Z need for authentic recognition.

Furthermore, Lucas's dual identity as both an elite athlete and the brand's funder aligns more closely with generation' enthusiasm for the creator economy.

It exactly meets the demand for personified brands that demand the current digital transformation of the skincare industry.

The analysis presented, shows that the competitiveness that allowed OCTO to stand out in the market, does not derive from differences in product functionality.

Instead, it accumulated cultural capital by upholding narrative consistency that runs through its entire end-to-end brand operation chain.

It is a self-optimization consumer culture under the health economy. For Generation Z consumers, the coherence of brand storytelling is critically important.

Fragmented, inconsistent brand narratives are quickly judged as lacking authenticity and rejected.

Brand that unifies their visual identity, founder persona and product philosophy are far more likely to gain cultural resonance and community engagement. Taking the success of the OCTO brand as an entry point, this idea proposes that within the context of late digital capitalism, global consumer culture is undergoing a profound shift.

The value judgements, which once focused only on the material attributes of physical products, are now shifting toward the symbolic and emotional systems focused on products.

Generation Z consumers no longer only assess a product's functions but examine its symbolic meaning. Consumption has become an act of identity construction embedded in aesthetic and emotional frameworks.

Traditional economic models can no longer explain this logic and research must rely on a cultural sociology perspective, integrating digital media.

In conclusion, brands have transformed from entities that apply external influence into co-constructed systems of meaning.

Trends such as founder story telling are not isolated occurrences, but interconnected measures that respond to this underlying transformation.

6.9 OCTO in the global skincare industry: competitive positioning and market strategy

Over the past decade, the global skincare industry has undergone a profound transformation. The core dimensions that shape consumer choices and industry competition have seen fundamental shifts.

New brands can no longer stand out in the market solely by relying on technological advantages. Only by building emotional connections with consumers through founder-led credible brand storytelling and personal brand development can they achieve differentiation.

This business case study focuses on OCTO, a newly entered market brand. Competing in the high-end skincare track that features low entry barriers and fierce competition, OCTO also carries multiple overlapping attributes of being an athlete-founded venture, a lifestyle brand, and an adopter of founder-led marketing.

It owns unique strategic assets that distinguish it from two categories of competing brands.

This study will first analyse the overall industry landscape and the strategic choices of core competitors, to clarify OCTO's competitive positioning.

The global skincare industry is currently one of the largest and fastest growing segments in the worldwide beauty and cosmetics market. Main driving forces, such as rising consumer health awareness, deep social media penetration, growing self-care demand and the popularization of the direct-to-consumer model, have fuelled substantial industry growth across developed and emerging markets.

However, the industry's strong appeal has also intensified market competition. Enabling conditions, namely support from contract manufactures, access to digital marketing platforms, opportunities to collaborate with internet influencers and low threshold e-commerce infrastructure, have led to a continuous influx of new brands.

Most high-end brands rely on a set of homogenized selling points: scientific formulations, premium raw materials, sustainability commitments and dermatologist endorsements. Relying on product

functionality can no longer sustain long-term competitive advantages. Brands must instead build differentiation through different types of intangible assets, including founder identity. A strategy that is particularly critical for young consumer groups that prioritize the symbolic and cultural attributes of the brands they purchase.

6.10 Competitive benchmarking and founder-led skincare brands

To evaluate the strategic positioning of emerging beauty brand OCTO, this research constructs a benchmark competitor in adjacent markets, which includes House 99 founded by David Beckham, already mentioned before, Hailey Bieber's Rhode²⁵, as well as CeraVe²⁶ and Humanrace²⁷ created by Pharrell Williams. While these brands differ significantly in scale, target audience, and business model, they collectively form the core competitive environment that OCTO must establish its market position within.

Analysing House 99, the men's grooming brand co-launched by Beckham and L'Oréal, as its core benchmark and conducting a breakdown of the brand from two dimensions. Short-term market entry advantages and long-term operational systems.

Beckham's global fame brought the brand rapid exposure, and the fashion, grooming and other labels tied to his public image established industrial legitimacy for the brand.

Unlike traditional celebrity endorsement arrangements, Beckham is not merely a brand spokesperson, but the main brand's narrative. However, depending only on a founder's fame cannot sustain long-term user stickiness. Brands must build independent brand equity, as consumers ultimately centre their evaluation on criteria, including product performance and innovation capacity.

The symbolic capital of OCTO's founder Lucas Braathen can help the brand achieve a smooth market entry, but to secure long-term success, the brand must build an independent brand equity separated from the founder's personal popularity.

This analysis adopts a multi-dimensional brand comparison method, to conduct a positioning analysis of peer competitors in the same market segment, for emerging the skincare brand OCTO. First, it breaks down the differences between OCTO and House 99, organizing the analysis along two core dimensions: the source of the founder's credibility and the preferences of the target audience. David Beckham builds the brand's credibility through his cross-generational public influence that spans the sports and fashion industries. House 99's main audience covers general skincare consumers aged 25 to 45.

In contrast, OCTO's founding team depend on industry recognition stemming from their professional backgrounds in skincare research as its trust foundation. Its target audience is focused on young consumers aged 18 to 28 who prioritize ingredient safety.

Next, Rhode, a successful Gen Z skincare brand founded by Hailey Bieber, sort out its operational logic of linking Gen Z lifestyles to the founder's social influence. It further compares the strategic commonalities and differences between OCTO and Rhode. While both brands centre the Gen Z consumer group, Rhode, positions its skincare offerings as closely tied to trendy beauty. Whereas OCTO focuses deeply on the market segment of efficacious, health-safe skincare ingredients.

²⁵ Skincare brand Rhode was founded by Hailey Bieber in 2022. Centring on minimalism clean beauty, the brand has secured a stable foothold in the market by leveraging its founder's personal brand and social media influence.

²⁶ It is a professional skincare brand deeply rooted in dermatological science, is a mass-market cosmeceutical brand focused on science-backed repair formulas.

²⁷ It is a skincare brand founded by Pharrell Williams in 2020, based on healthy skincare, sustainable development and inclusive self-care. Aligned with its founder's personal values, it serves as a typical example of celebrity led lifestyle brands.

Braathen's brand is likely to occupy a unique position in the health-focused segment of the skincare market.

Furthermore, another analysis of skincare brands deconstructs the reference brand Humanrace. Founded by Pharrell Williams, this celebrity-led brands do not limit itself to selling skincare formulations. Instead, it ties its skincare business to broad themes including wellness, sustainability, mindfulness, and holistic health to build a lifestyle ecosystem. It further transforms the skincare market space into a cultural platform, where consumers purchase its offerings not only for their basic skincare functions, but for the values and lifestyle tied to the brand.

This model aligns with the core of contemporary cultural brand theory: a successful brand must construct a symbolic system that enables consumers to build their own identities.

6.11 OCTO strategic positioning, risks and long-term brand equity

OCTO also aims to build a lifestyle ecosystem, but it has partnered with Lucas Braathen to integrate pillars of performance, creativity, multiculturalism, and self-care, with a core focus on sports culture. It extracts its brand's symbolic value from sports, agency, and self-discipline.

This differentiated positioning can build an effective competitive barrier, especially attracting young audiences who favour performance-oriented lifestyles. Thereby benchmarking matrix covers different market tracks.

Against the current brand competitive landscape of the global skincare sector, this study takes the widely recognized established skincare brand CeraVe as a measure sample. It sorts out the competitive posture of the new brand OCTO using an original brand strategy analysis framework and clearly fixes OCTO's market positioning that sets it apart from established players, including CeraVe. The principal advantage stems from its founder Lucas Braathen dual cultural background in Norway and Brazil. The brand integrates Nordic minimalist symbols linked to quality, simplicity and sustainability with Brazilian cultural signs that embody creativity, vitality and emotional expression. Mixing both to build a brand narrative that reaches diverse consumer groups worldwide.

In terms of development opportunities, OCTO's market entry timing accurately aligns with current global consumption trends. As Gen Z consumers' demand for brand authenticity, self-expression and emotional resonance are highly consistent with the content structure led by its founder, natural and aesthetic positioning and its health centred communication logic.

However, it also highlights the strategic challenge facing main character: the brand's current reliance on founder Lucas's personal influence, will lead to problems including insufficient brand scalability, a lack of internal organizational autonomy and weak long-term development resilience.

To avoid this, it must advance the transformation of the founder's personal brand equity into independent corporate brand equity. This transition is the test for the brand to achieve longer growth. All successful founder-led brands must eventually transcend their founder's personal influence, while retaining the symbolic assets built through the founder's personal narrative.

Achieving this balance requires sustained investment in different domains: product innovation, community development, organizational capacity and brand architecture. For the skincare brand OCTO, the modern beauty and cosmetic industry cannot guarantee success based on product strength alone. Only brands that combine solid functional performance and cultural relevance can earn market recognition.

It differentiates itself from traditional skincare conglomerates and celebrity-owned beauty brands, through some core strengths.

These are the founder's background as an athlete turned entrepreneur, multicultural narrative, aesthetic refinement and health-focused positioning. Its challenge is to convert its symbolic assets

into sustainable economic value and build long-term brand equity that operates independent of the founder's direct influence.

If this transition succeeds, it will grow into a culturally influential lifestyle brand spanning the beauty, sports, health and identity sectors.

6.12: SWOT Analysis of OCTO Skincare

As the most widely used strategic management tool globally for evaluating enterprises' internal and external environments, SWOT analysis has a core function of supporting corporate strategic decision-making.

It can systematically identify four categories of important factors. They influence firms' long-term performance and competitive positioning and is particularly well-suited to the assessment needs of founder-led startup brands.

For such brands, intangible assets often function as both, competitive strengths and potential strategic weaknesses, a trait that aligns perfectly with SWOT's dual assessment logic.

Against the industry backdrop of a highly saturated high-end skincare market, this analysis selects OCTO, the founder-led skincare startup brand, as its research case.

6.12.1 Strengths

This brand operates in the intersecting track that covers beauty, health, lifestyle brands and athlete-founded ventures; holding unique differentiated advantages while also facing the common operational, financial and competitive challenges that confront the skincare industry players and early-stage startups.

The SWOT analysis aims to assess OCTO's strategic positioning in the contemporary high-end skincare market, identify the core factors affecting its future development and deliver a comprehensive assessment that can support the brand in building a sustainable competitive advantage; highlighting its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the market.

Competition in the global skincare commerce is intensifying rapidly. It conducts a systematic analysis of the differentiated competitive advantages that set emerging brand apart from its many peer competitors.

The first advantage centres on founder Lucas Braathen's symbolic capital.

Primary, drawing on established research findings in contemporary marketing, a founder's personal visibility is the strategic resource that can generate brand legitimacy, consumer trust, and user engagement, which stands in severe contrast to the customer acquisition model of traditional mature enterprises that rely on institutional public credibility.

As an elite professional athlete, Lucas's inherent traits of self-discipline and resilience naturally align with consumer demands in the skincare market for health and self-improvement.

This not only strengthens brand authenticity, but also effectively eases the uncertainty consumers feel toward newly entering brands.

His international sports exposure has generated tangible benefits for startup brand OCTO in this industry, most notably a significant reduction in customer acquisition costs. Contemporary consumers increasingly evaluate brands based on symbolic meaning rather than solely functional attributes, and cultural differentiation has become the tactical asset.

The second core advantage is precisely its unique cultural narrative, which lays the groundwork for subsequent in-depth analysis.

The competitive benefit of this beauty brand, first stems from its unique brand narrative framework constructed by integrating the cultural trait of Norway and Brazil. The minimalism, high quality,

sustainability and strong functionality rooted in Nordic culture, connected with the creative vitality and open emotional expression inherent to Brazilian culture, create a clear distinctiveness that set it apart from two types of peer brands.

This distinction are traditional European skincare brands that only prioritize a classic European aesthetic and mass-market beauty companies that blindly pursue traffic-oriented standardization.

Existing international marketing research points out that a hybrid cultural identity can simultaneously achieve cross-market adaptability and core brand consistency, a feature that has cleared the cognitive barrier to OCTO's global expansion.

Furthermore, mark's aesthetic positioning, which aligns with contemporary consumer trends, has built a second rival channel. In today's consumer culture, esthetical has evolved from a peripheral design element to a source of value.

Most consumers evaluate brand across diverse dimensions: visual consistency, packaging design, digital presence and sensory experience.

On highly visual social platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, aesthetic has become a central metric for consumers to judge a brand's quality, credibility and cultural relevance.

Unlike traditional skincare marks that only focus on promoting their scientific ingredients, OCTO's strategy of deeply integrating design with brand narrative has built a cross-sector competitive advantage that is difficult to replicate.

This analysis sorts out the brand's two competitive strengths, then transitions to introduce the key internal weaknesses that constraints its long-term growth, following a clear, progressive and complete logical framework.

First, OCTO accurately aligns with the growing wellness economy trend that shapes contemporary consumer behaviour.

Today's consumers have elevated skincare from a mere beauty activity to component of self-care, health management and lifestyle optimization.

This shift has created unique growth opportunities for brands that can link health attributes to personal identity. Its positioning, which centres on efficacy, self-expression and personal well-being, breaks away from the traditional beauty marketing and integrates into mainstream discussions of wellness culture.

This strategy ensures the brand can continuously adapt to the industry-wide trend of consumers shifting toward holistic wellness-focused self-care.

Second, the direct-to-consumer model adopted by OCTO has prominent advantages.

On a general level, this model allows brands to build direct customer relationships and maintain full control over pricing, user communication and data collection throughout the entire process.

Compared to brands relaying on traditional retail, brands using this model can respond to market changes faster and build stronger emotional connections with consumers.

For this startup specifically, this model delivers additional benefits. It supports the founder-led brand narrative, enables direct interaction between consumers and the brand's narrative via digital platforms and strengthens the public's perception of the brand as authentic and transparent.

The first customer data accumulated through direct sales also lays a foundation for future personalized services and community building projects.

6.12.2 Weaknesses

However, OCTO faces an internal weakness that demands urgent resolution: excessive dependence on its founder. The author's high visibility did generate significant momentum to drive growth during the brand's early development stage, but over-reliance on a single individual creates long-term operational risks.

If this problem is not properly addressed, it will inevitably limit the brand's future growth space, it is necessary a transition to an independent brand model.

We can identify some general risks of overreliance on a brand's founder, such as changes in the creator public image directly impact public perception of the brand; excessive personal binding between the founder and the brand organizational expansion; it also disrupts the company's succession planning and the development of internal systems.

For OCTO specifically, its builder's identity as an athlete adds unique extra risks. The founder's professional career is limited and carries extremely high uncertainty, as injuries, retirement, or fluctuations in competitive performance will all amplify the before mentioned crises.

For this reason, it must convert the authors' personal traffic into independent brand assets to support long-term, sustainable growth.

Second, it faces full-scale resource gaps caused by its very short operational history. Compared to mature skincare brands that have built well-developed layouts for supply chains, inventory, quality control and scaled operations, if OCTO fails to fix its shortcoming in these operational links, it will directly trigger consequences. Including customer dissatisfaction, damaged brand reputation and declining market competitiveness.

Third, it faces the problem of an overly narrow product portfolio. Focusing on a single product in a brand's early stage can strengthen initial brand perception. In the long term, this approach drastically reduces the brand's ability to resist risks, falling far short of the anti-volatility advantage held by mature competing brands that operate multi-product matrices.

6.12.3 Opportunities

All analyses remain consistently centred on the goal of sustainable growth.

Financial constraints are a widespread challenge facing early-stage startups. Unlike multinational corporations that can invest heavily in marketing, research and development, and international expansion, the funding shortfall of OCTO has directly limited its competitiveness across different areas.

These sectors are customer acquisition, influencer collaboration, retail expansion and product development.

Nonetheless, it holds long-term growth opportunities, all aligns with its own inherent strengths and prevailing industry trends.

The global high-end skincare market is continuously expanding, and consumers are willing to pay price premiums for products that are authentic, sustainable and carry cultural significance, which fits perfectly with the brand positioning.

Founder-led consumer brands have been rising in popularity consistently, like modern consumers, prefer personalized, transparent, human-centric brands. This trend has already helped large numbers of founder-led brands break out across multiple sectors including beauty and fashion.

OCTO's framework is built around the founder's public exposure and narrative capital, enabling it to fully benefit from this trend.

There is broad space for international expansion, criteria as demand for high-end skincare is surging in the Nordic region, Western Europe, Brazil and parts of Asia.

For the Brazilian market in particular, the founder local ties can generate cultural resonance that competing brands can hardly replicate, while its Nordic identity allows it to maintain credibility in European markets.

This rare dual-market strategic asset forms a solid foundation to underpin OCTO's long-term growth. Summarizing, cross-industry collaboration is currently a key incremental growth opportunity for lifestyle brands.

Such partnerships typically deliver benefits for brands including increased media attention, strengthened brand association and access to entirely new consumer groups.

Eligible collaborators span multiple types of entities such as fashion brands, artists, athletes, health organizations and cultural institutions. OCTO, which operates at the intersection of sports, culture and cosmetics, naturally has the potential to deeply explore these cross-industry opportunities.

6.12.4 Threats

However, the brand also faces important development threats. The global skincare market is already highly saturated.

New brands keep entering the space, while established brands reinvest heavily in innovation, marketing and distribution, which drives up the difficulty of customer retention and forces brands to bear extremely high costs to achieve differentiation.

Furthermore, celebrity brands have become oversaturated and the marketing strategy of depending on founder exposure has lost its novelty.

Consumers are surrounded by many brands founded by athletes, actors, musicians and internet influencers. This not only further increase OCTO's difficulty in standing out from competitors but also pushes consumers' incredulity of this type of brand to keep rising.

Economic uncertainty has created a direct impact. High-end skincare is a non-essentials consumer good, so during periods of economic volatility, consumers will cut spending on non-essential items or switch to affordable alternatives.

OCTO's positioning as a premium product line is directly affected by fluctuation in purchasing power. The brand's differentiating factors are not protected by patents. The brand tags including its minimalist aesthetic, health-focused positioning and founder story cannot stop competitors from copying them.

Only continuous innovation and adaptation can maintain barriers to sustain brand differentiation.

There is risk stemming from changes to digital platform rules. OCTO's brand visibility relies heavily on social media communication and engagement. So, adjustment to platform policies, declined in organic reach and rising advertising costs will all weaken marketing efficiency and drive-up customer acquisition costs.

The brand faces the challenge of dynamically evolving consumer preferences. The accelerating pace of cultural update requires brands to continuously maintain market relevance. The mark must balance brand consistency and adaptability, uphold its core identity while respond to shifts in consumer demand.

After sorting through all analytical dimensions, it is easy to identify that the start-up has already accumulated strategic strengths to support its long-term development.

Founder credibility, cultural differentiation, aesthetic consistency, alignment with the health market track, and direct to consumer operational capabilities.

The assets held by high-end skincare brand have laid a solid foundation for its competitive positioning in the market segment.

It still faces different categories of internal shortcomings, such as overreliance on its founder, insufficient operational maturity, excessively high product concentration and limited financial capability.

Meanwhile, while it has access to diverse types of external growth opportunities, it also confronts external challenges.

As such, to achieve long-term success, OCTO must activate its own symbolic and cultural assets and build operational capabilities that support its growth.

Its core challenge is to convert the attention generated by its founder into durable brand equity that operates independently of the creator's personal influence and can be iterated to compete in the global market.

6.12.5 SWOT Synthesis and strategic implications

The SWOT analysis of OCTO Skincare shows as first point, the brand's strength dimensions. The brand possesses symbolic capital, cultural hybridity and consistent aesthetic standards, which align precisely with the consumption trends of Generation Z. The founder's identity as an elite athlete reinforces the brand's authenticity and supported its early market entry. Its cross-regional Nordic-Brazilian narrative creates a differentiated positioning.

Paired with its direct-to consumer (DCT) model and health-focused positioning, the brand accurately reaches its core customer group that pursues identity-driven consumption.

This study systematically identifies four structural weaknesses of the brand under analysis: excessive reliance on the founder's image, insufficient organizational maturity, a narrow product matrix and financial constraints.

These issues undermine the brand's scalability and amplify operational risks in saturated markets.

The brand must complete the transition from symbolic capital to brand equity and build an independent growth-focused organizational structure.

Its core challenge is to balance narrative authenticity and organizational autonomy.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Summary of findings – Answer to the research questions

This study selects OCTO Skincare, a lifestyle brand led by the professional Olympian champion skier, Lucas Pinheiro Braathen, as a research case.

Taking identity, nationality and symbolic capital as its principal analytical dimensions, this paper explores the brand's construction of entrepreneurial legitimacy and its market positioning. It clearly defines the scope of the research, anchors clear study boundaries and previews that subsequent sections will address the initial research questions.

Research question 1:

How does OCTO Skincare capitalise on Braathen's athlete identity and dual national heritage?

Startup brand OCTO has signed the Olympic champion athlete Lucas Pinheiro Braathen.

It first converts the athlete's personal reputation, self-disciplined traits and public exposure into the brand's early-stage trust assets.

It then leverages his dual Norwegian Brazilian heritage to create an exclusive narrative that integrates the cultures of both countries, which precisely aligns with the demands of global Gen Z for authenticity, uniqueness and cultural integration.

Research question 2:

What strategic opportunities and risks does the change in national sporting representation generate for the associated entrepreneurial ventures and athlete-brand?

The change in national sports representation, an important marketing variable, can serve as a strategic amplifier for brand exposure and narrative capital.

It can drive greater media attention, expand cultural influence and relevance, help brands embed themselves in multicultural frameworks, and boost flexibility in international markets as well as audience resonance.

However, this transition also carries different categories of inherent risks: overreliance on athlete's reputations, value instability triggered by fluctuations in athletic performance, consumer scepticism toward identity-based marketing, and constraints on long-term expansion caused by symbolic narratives that lack operational support.

Research question 3:

What broader lessons can be derived for athlete-led-startups operating in lifestyle markets and global sport, particularly in relation to branding, stakeholder ecosystems and nationality?

Using the startup brand OCTO as a case study, this thesis analyses the cross-sector logic of athlete-led startups operating in the lifestyle sector.

Most of these enterprises establish their businesses at the intersection of sports, culture and consumer lifestyle. A brand's success does not only depend on its founder's athletic performance; more critically, it must build a coherent identity narrative that integrates authenticity, cultural connotation and community participation.

These firms need to reframe nationality as a flexible brand resource that enhances cross-market legitimacy and emotional resonance, balance symbolic capital and organizational development, integrate three types of stakeholders and transition from an individual-led project to a structure brand, where the founder's identity only serves as an initial catalyst.

7.2 Theoretical contributions

Addressing gaps in exiting literature on athlete entrepreneurship, personal branding, and cultural branding, this study systematically elaborates some important theoretical contributions.

Taking OCTO, the lifestyle brand founded by the dual-national world cup skier, as its central case study, the analysis centres on the operational logic capital in contemporary consumer markets.

First, this study advances research on athlete-led entrepreneurial brands, demonstrating that athletes have shifted from passive commercial spokespersons to active cultural producers. It corrects the field's prior performance-centred perspective on reputation building, reframing it around an identity-oriented logic of entrepreneurial value creation.

This study finds that the founder's identity as an athlete serves as the core mechanism through which OCTO builds brand legitimacy, emotional resonance and market differentiation.

Second, it enriches narrative capital theory by proposing that changes in personal identity, such as a shift in eligibility to compete for a national team, can be converted into economic and symbolic value.

It redefines narrative capital, which prior studies framed as a mere background element, as a strategic resource used to actively shape brand meaning, consumer perceptions, and cross-market positioning.

Furthermore, it expands research on a brand cultural hybridity, showing that dual nationality can function as a strategic asset in global consumer markets.

OCTO's dual identity enables the brand to integrate multiple cultural logics, boosting its market adaptability, emotional depth and international resonance.

Lastly, it supplements founder-centred brand theory, noting that a founder's identity can speed up legitimacy building and consumer trust for early-stage startups.

It also identifies a structural limitation of this dynamic: to achieve long-term sustainable development, a brand must transition from being a person-dependent brand asset to an organization-embedded one, which addresses the dynamic tension between authenticity and scalability in modern entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Finally, this study argues that brand value in today's lifestyle markets is built primarily through symbolic, cultural and identity-based mechanisms, rather than mere functional or product differentiation.

This conclusion carries critical implications for research on entrepreneurship, branding and cultural identity within the context of the globalized consumer economy.

7.3 Limitations and future research

This analysis focuses on the field of athlete-led entrepreneurship and identity branding. Through in-depth contextual analysis, it has built a connection framework for important concepts in this field, laying a preliminary theoretical foundation for subsequent academic exploration.

However, limited by its research design, the study still has few limitations. Primary, this research only uses the single case of OCTO Skincare for the study.

Restricted by the unique characteristics of its founder's identity, industry positioning and cultural background, the study's conclusions can only support an in-depth interpretation of this specific case and cannot be applied to athlete entrepreneurship projects in other industries or cultural context, which leads to a clear lack of universality.

Secondary, the study only relies on subordinate data such as public information, brand communication content and industry reports to carry out qualitative conceptual analysis.

It lacks empirical data such as interviews with consumers, managers and the founder.

As a result, it can neither verify the rationality of some of the study's interpretations, nor systematically assess consumer's real perceptions.

Furthermore, the skincare industry and digital consumer culture update at a fast pace and trends such as Generation Z consumption and influencer marketing are highly dynamic.

Some of the study's strategic observations may become invalid as market conditions and consumer behaviour evolve.

To address the above limitations, future research can advance the field in different aspects. It conducts cross-industry multi-case comparative studies to strengthen the universality and robustness of relevant theories. Subsequently, add primary qualitative research such as interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders to deeply unpack the mechanism of consumer perception and their decision-making processes. Afterwards, introduce quantitative methods to test the links between narrative capital, cultural hybridity and consumer trust, to verify the theoretical framework proposed in this thesis.

In conclusion, it tracks the long-term evolution patterns of brands, study the transformation process of athlete-founded brands from depending on the founder's identity to becoming an institutionalized organizational brand, as well as the long-term impact of this transformation on the brand's fundamental values.

7.4 Final conclusion

OCTO Skincare is an athlete-led skincare brand founded by Lucas Pinheiro Braathen, a professional athlete, Olympic champion in alpine skiing, with dual Norwegian Brazilian nationality, as its research sample.

It conducts a systematic brand entrepreneurship study focused on the highly saturated global lifestyle skincare sector, centring on important dimensions: identity, nationality, symbolic capital, entrepreneurial legitimacy and independent brand equity.

This thesis finds that OCTO Skincare's core early competitive advantage stems from the founder's path of converting personal symbolic capital into the brand's core connotation: by integrating his own sports credibility, multicultural identity and aesthetic consistency, the brand accurately matches the demands of Generation Z consumers for authenticity, emotional connection and identity-driven consumption.

However, this type of founder-bound advantage carries inherent vulnerabilities. Without systematic organizational capacity building and support from independent brand equity, the brand's development momentum will be unsustainable.

Further refinement of industry logic shows that the logic of contemporary brand building has shifted from a product-function orientation to narrative construction and the generation of cultural meaning.

Athlete-entrepreneurs are exactly a new type of hybrid subject that combines the identities of cultural symbol, marketing engine, and organizational founder.

While founder-led brand models can quickly obtain entrepreneurial legitimacy and enter the market sector, brand must gradually move away from reliance on personal identity to build scalable organizational structures and institutionalized brand systems if they aim to achieve long-term sustainable development.

Otherwise, it will face development risks including brand stagnation and even identity dependence. This study deepens research at the intersection of sports, entrepreneurship and cultural brands against the background of the modern digital and lifestyle economy, offering both practical references value and incremental theoretical contributions.

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