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“Differentiating the Sport of Skeleton through Co-Creation with the International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation and their athletes”

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Abstract:

This research investigates the brand identity and image of the sport of skeleton, aiming to bridge the gap between internal stakeholders' perceptions and those of its fan base. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, including semi-structured interviews with athletes and stakeholders and a comprehensive survey of fans, the study uncovers the distinct characteristics that define skeleton, such as its high-speed, headfirst descent, and the intense adrenaline rush it offers. These attributes contribute to a strong, albeit niche, following, with fans associating the sport with words like "speed," "precision," and "danger." Despite its thrilling nature, the sport faces significant challenges, including limited accessibility, geographical broadcasting restrictions, and internal organizational issues that threaten fan engagement and loyalty.

The research underscores the importance of strategic marketing and content creation in addressing these challenges. The findings suggest that while the sport's current fan base is highly loyal, there is a pressing need to expand its reach and enhance fan engagement through innovative and authentic content. Recommendations include the creation of a detailed content strategy that leverages co-creation with fans and athletes, allowing for consistent and engaging content throughout the year. Additionally, branding workshops for athletes and national federations are proposed to unify the sport's brand message and increase its visibility.

The study also points to the potential for growth by modernizing the sport's presentation and addressing environmental concerns associated with its practice. Future research should focus on exploring new technologies to improve race coverage and making the sport more accessible to a global audience. By addressing these areas, the sport of skeleton can strengthen its brand, increase its global appeal, and ensure its long-term sustainability in an increasingly competitive sports landscape.

Cette étude porte sur l'identité et l'image de marque du skeleton, dans le but de combler le fossé entre les perceptions des parties prenantes internes et celles de la base d'adeptes. À l'aide d'une approche mixte, comprenant des entretiens semi-structurés avec des athlètes et des parties prenantes et une enquête exhaustive auprès des fans, l'étude met en évidence les caractéristiques distinctes qui définissent le skeleton, telles que la vitesse élevée, la descente tête la première et l'intense poussée d'adrénaline qu'il procure. Ces attributs contribuent à créer un fort engouement, bien que de niche, les fans associant ce sport à des mots tels que « vitesse », « précision » et « danger ». Malgré sa nature palpitante, le sport est confronté à des défis importants, notamment une accessibilité limitée, des restrictions géographiques en matière de diffusion et des problèmes d'organisation interne qui menacent l'engagement et la loyauté des fans.

L'étude souligne l'importance du marketing stratégique et de la création de contenu pour relever ces défis. Les résultats suggèrent que, bien que la base de fans actuelle du sport soit très fidèle, il existe un besoin urgent d'étendre sa portée et d'améliorer l'engagement des fans grâce à un contenu innovant et authentique. Les recommandations comprennent la création d'une stratégie de contenu détaillée qui s'appuie sur la co-crédation avec les fans et les athlètes, permettant un contenu cohérent et engageant tout au long de l'année. En outre, des ateliers sur l'image de marque destinés aux athlètes et aux fédérations nationales sont proposés afin d'unifier le message de la marque du sport et d'accroître sa visibilité.

L'étude souligne également le potentiel de croissance qu'offre la modernisation de la présentation du sport et la prise en compte des préoccupations environnementales liées à sa pratique. Les recherches futures devraient se concentrer sur l'exploration de nouvelles technologies pour améliorer la couverture des courses et rendre le sport plus accessible à un public mondial. En s'attaquant à ces domaines, le skeleton peut renforcer sa marque, accroître son attrait mondial et assurer sa viabilité à long terme dans un paysage sportif de plus en plus compétitif.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Acknowledgment	2
Table of Contents	3
Chapter 1. Introduction	4-5
1.1 IBSF	4
1.2 Skeleton	4
Chapter 2. Literature Review	6-13
2.1 Brand	6
2.2 Brand Equity	7
2.3 Stakeholder	8
2.4 Brand Co-creation	9
2.5 Brand Activation	10
2.6 Athletes Branding	10
2.7 The case of Formula 1	11
Chapter 3. Methodology	13-15
3.1 Qualitative Study - Interviews	13
3.2 Quantitative Study - Questionnaire	14
3.3 Data Analysis	15
Chapter 4. Results	16-24
4.1 Qualitative Data - Interviews	16
4.1.1 Highlighting The Unique Characteristics of The Sport of Skeleton	16
4.1.2 Importance of Athlete Collaboration	16
4.1.3 The Potential for Media to Enhance the Sport's Image	17
4.1.4 The Need to Create a Strategic Marketing Effort to Differentiate the Sport	18
4.2 Quantitative Data - Fans Questionnaire	18
4.2.1 Demographics	18
4.2.2 Introduction to Skeleton	19
4.2.3 Current Content Consumption	20
4.2.4 Future Content Creation	23
Chapter 5. Discussion	24-25
5.1 Summary of Findings	25
5.2 Unique Characteristics of Skeleton	25
5.3 Athlete Collaboration	25
5.4 Role of Media	25
5.5 Brand Equity Diagnosis	25
5.6 Identity and Brand Image of Skeleton	26
5.6.1 Identity of the Sport of Skeleton	26
5.6.2 Brand Image of the Sport of Skeleton	26
Chapter 6. Recommendations	27-29
6.1 Co-Creating Brand Equity for Skeleton	27
Chapter 7. Future Research	30
Chapter 8. Conclusion	31
References	32-34
Appendices	35-42
Appendix A: Recommendations	35-40
Appendix B: Interview Guide	40-41
Appendix C: Questionnaire	41

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 IBSF

The International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation (IBSF) serves as the global governing body for the sports of skeleton and bobsleigh, overseeing their development and competition worldwide. With a membership of 74 countries, the IBSF organizes nearly 70 skeleton races each competitive season across Asia, North America, and Europe. During the Winter Olympic Games, skeleton male and female individual races held over two days, and starting in the 2026 Winter Olympic Games, a mixed team's event will be introduced as a single-day competition. Skeleton is also part of the Youth Olympic Games, with both men's and women's events showcasing the sport's future stars.

The IBSF currently has over 300 licensed skeleton athletes, with approximately 126 women and 174 men eligible to compete in various competitions. The federation utilizes 18 tracks for international competitions, with all but one being artificially refrigerated. The exception is the legendary track in St. Moritz, Switzerland, which is constructed annually from snow and ice, making it the only natural track in the world. St. Moritz is revered as the birthplace of skeleton, adding historical significance to the sport and the federation's mission to grow and promote it on a global scale.

1.2 Skeleton

Skeleton, with its head-first descent at speeds exceeding 140 km/h, is often perceived as the most dangerous of the sliding sports, including bobsleigh and luge. The athletes' close proximity to the ice—sometimes mere millimeters away—enhances the sport's image as an extreme, adrenaline-fueled endeavor. Like bobsleigh and luge, skeleton athletes race on the same track, a refrigerated canal that resembles an oversized waterslide or a children's slide, adding to the sport's thrilling and daring appeal.

Broadcast coverage of skeleton extends across multiple platforms, including YouTube and at least 23 broadcasters worldwide. The IBSF's social media presence, which represents both bobsleigh and skeleton, includes Instagram (13.6k followers), X (formerly Twitter, 6.28k followers), TikTok (51.5k followers), YouTube (23.2k subscribers), and Facebook (32k followers and 30k likes). While these platforms help to promote the sport, the shared focus on both bobsleigh and skeleton presents a challenge in building a distinct and robust brand identity for skeleton alone.

The IBSF (International Bobsleigh & Skeleton Federation) views skeleton and bobsleigh as part of the same sporting family, a philosophy reflected in their mission to "grow the global Bobsleigh and Skeleton family" and to build a powerful, recognized image for both sports. While this family-oriented approach fosters a sense of unity, it also poses challenges in differentiating the individual characteristics of each sport. Skeleton, with its unique attributes, often remains overshadowed by its sibling sport, bobsleigh. This lack of distinction has limited skeleton's potential to develop its own brand identity, which is critical for the sport's growth and visibility.

Despite similarities between skeleton and bobsleigh, skeleton possesses distinct qualities that should be leveraged to create a separate, compelling brand. However, the sport often finds itself in the background due to less favorable race times, limited social media presence, and a perceived lack of concerted efforts to elevate its profile. Although stakeholders have expressed a desire to promote skeleton, this enthusiasm has yet to translate into a concrete plan. Challenges such as a scarcity of international-standard tracks, geographical restrictions that hinder spectator attendance, and races scheduled during less favorable times, like midweek mornings, further complicate efforts to promote the sport.

The current broadcasting times for skeleton events, typically on Thursday and Friday mornings, and the overall lack of promotion make it difficult for athletes to attract and maintain sponsors. The absence of a differentiated branding and marketing strategy not only affects the sport's visibility but

also impacts athletes' ability to secure sponsorships, engage with existing fans, and draw in new audiences. With just under two years until the Winter Olympic Games, skeleton is at a crucial juncture. The upcoming Olympics present a prime opportunity for skeleton to step out from bobsleigh's shadow and garner recognition apart from the other sliding disciplines. Now is the time for the sport to capitalize on this moment and establish a strong, distinct brand that can stand on its own.

Therefore, the purpose of this project is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the brand of skeleton, with the goal of developing a strategy that allows for the co-creation of the brand with athletes. The study is guided by three research questions:

- What is the current brand image and identity of the sport of skeleton?
- How can the IBSF collaborate with athletes to create and sustain brand equity for the sport of skeleton?
- What brand activation activities can be implemented with athletes to enhance brand equity?

By understanding the existing brand of skeleton, this project aims to identify key areas where the sport's identity can be enhanced or redefined. This includes analyzing the values, narratives, and emotional connections that the sport currently evokes, as well as understanding the role of athletes in embodying and communicating these brand elements. Athletes are not only the face of the sport but also influential figures who can shape public perception and engagement. Therefore, we believe that their involvement in the brand-building process is crucial.

The second phase of the project focuses on developing a strategy to co-create the skeleton brand with athletes, ensuring that their voices, experiences, and personal brands are integrated into the overall brand narrative. This co-creation approach is intended to foster a more authentic and dynamic brand, one that resonates deeply with fans and aligns with the athletes' own identities. By empowering athletes to contribute to the brand's development, the strategy seeks to create a more cohesive and compelling brand story, enhancing the sport's appeal and driving greater engagement and loyalty among its audience.

Ultimately, this project aims to establish a thorough and collaborative brand strategy that not only elevates the sport of skeleton but also empowers athletes as co-creators.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Brand has been a thoroughly researched topic in sports. Understanding the complexities of creating and communicating an organization's brand is essential in a highly competitive industry. This review of literature on branding focuses on these brand concepts: i) defining a brand, ii) brand equity, iii) brand co-creation and, iv) brand activation. Furthermore, the role of stakeholders in co-creating the brand through social media is examined.

2.1 Brand

The concept of a brand has evolved significantly over the years. The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as a “name, term, sign, symbol, or combination of them designed to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors.” While this definition has been widely accepted, more recent scholars argue that a brand is much more than just a logo or name; it is an organizational promise to stakeholders and customers and is one of an organization's most valuable assets (Helm & Jones, 2010; Kotler et al., 2005). Desbordes and Richelieu (2019) succinctly capture this by stating that a brand is “what people think of you, when they think of you.” This perspective highlights that a brand extends beyond mere trademarks, emphasizing the importance of consumer perceptions and emotions in the brand ecosystem (Keller, 2001). To fully understand what makes a sport brand, such as that of skeleton, compelling, it is crucial to explore brand creation, brand equity, and co-creation with relevant stakeholders. These elements are foundational in crafting a memorable brand that consumers are drawn to and will return to. As Kotler (2011) asserts, “a brand is any label that carries meaning and associations. A great brand does more: It lends coloration and resonance to a product or service.”

In the context of sports, the product offered by an organization like the IBSF is composed of both core and auxiliary features, each providing tangible and intangible benefits. The core product is the on-ice content, such as the races, while the auxiliary features include additional off-ice content, like behind-the-scenes footage.

As emphasized earlier, creating a brand is essential for any organization and extends far beyond just a logo. Effective brand management can have a strong impact, enabling an organization to differentiate itself from competitors and stand out in the minds of consumers. For the sport of skeleton, it is particularly important to distinguish itself from bobsleigh and establish its own fan base, to allow for the brand of skeleton to grow, and target the appropriate market separate from bobsleigh. When developing a brand, organizations should incorporate key brand elements as outlined by Lee et al. (2015), including “memorability, meaningfulness, aesthetic appeal, transferability (product categories, and geographical/cultural boundaries), adaptability and flexibility over time, legal and competitive protect ability and defensibility”.

Desbordes and Richelieu (2019) have identified five 'winning' brand strategies designed to enhance consumer satisfaction and deepen the emotional connection with fans. These strategies are:

- Fan actors
- Storytelling
- Co-branding
- 'Sportainment'
- Glocalization

Fan actors are individuals who, when they unite and associate with their team, utilize the symbolic aspects of the brand to shape their own identity or align with regional or national identities they proudly relate to (Davis, 2015; Gómez-Bantel, 2016). This identification enhances consumers' positive attitudes, intensifies their emotions and ultimately strengthens their trust and loyalty towards the brand (Aaker, 1997).

Storytelling involves the brand crafting narratives that romanticize the organization, highlighting the club's history, as well as the lives of its fans and athletes. Sportainment is a strategy that blends elements of sport and entertainment focusing on the auxiliary features and intangible benefits that enhance the spectacle of sport.

Glocalization involves a brand adapting its marketing strategies to resonate with foreign markets, tailoring its approach to appeal to diverse audiences.

The model (IMSIS; Richelieu, 2016) is adapted to include external forces that play into managing a brand. Richelieu, 2016 argues that the use of this framework should help sport organisations deliver a consistent brand promise to fans and other stakeholders, as well as strengthen their respective brand equity.” (P45)

According to Jones (2010) the goals of corporate branding are: 1) to unify the organisation internally 2) to harmonize internal and external communication and, 3) to enforce a core, enduring and distinctive identity for the organization.

While an organisation can outline its desired brand representation, it is ultimately the stakeholders, particularly consumers, who define the brand's value. This value can be further examined through the concept of brand equity.

Figure 1: Richelieu (2018, Page 33)

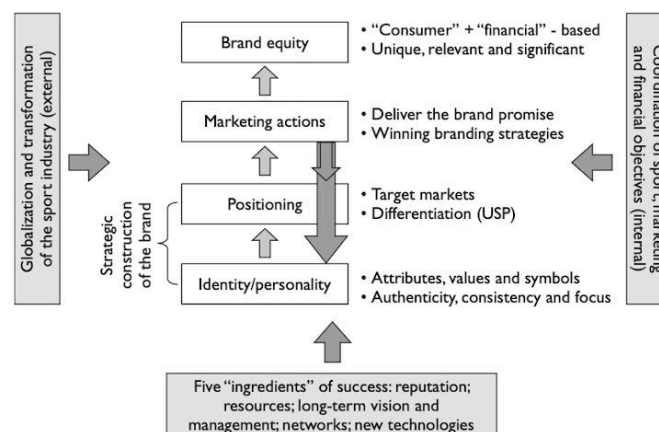


Figure 2.4 Building and managing a sport brand: “ingredients” of success, as well as internal and external pressures facing the sport organization.

2.2 Brand Equity

According to well-known brand scholar David Aaker (1991), brand equity refers to the value associated with having a well-recognized and reputable brand. Brand equity encompasses the brand assets and liabilities connected to a brand name and symbol, which can enhance or diminish the value of the product or service it represents. Essentially, strong brand equity contributes to the brand's overall success and market performance.

Aaker's brand equity model proposes five elements that can add or subtract value to a brand. These are:

- 1) **Brand awareness** “the extent to which a brand is known among the public.” Brand awareness is examined in the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM), which delves into sport consumer behaviors and their commitment levels to the brand. At the most basic level, this stage involves mere awareness—recognizing that the sport exists. Although skeleton is a niche sport, effectively activating the brand through its athletes can enhance awareness of both the sport and the brand. This initial level of awareness is crucial, as it represents the first step toward building a deeper psychological connection between fans and the brand.
- 2) **Perceived quality:** the extent to which a brand is considered to provide good quality products. Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) suggest that the brand's value is not solely based with the way in which a brand is formed rather the way in which the brand is perceived by the consumers.
- 3) **Brand associations:** the associations triggered by a brand. Kotler (2011) elaborates on how a brand's personality can evoke specific associations. For example, the brand Caterpillar is associated with qualities such as 'resilient,' 'tough,' 'bold,' and 'determined.' Identifying the key associations for the sport of skeleton will help in understanding what unique attributes the sport conveys and how it can be effectively branded. Aaker, (1996) further demonstrates through research that 'strong, positive brand associations significantly enhance a brand's equity Keller (2001) argues that brand associations should be strong (providing consistent information), favorable (offering desired and valued benefits) and unique (differentiating the brand from competitors and creating an image of superiority)
- 4) **Brand loyalty:** this refers to the degree of attachment people have to a brand. Mullin et al (2014) emphasizes that when fans strongly identify with an organization, this high level of engagement naturally fosters strong loyalty. Over time, this loyalty contributes to building a robust and enduring brand.
- 5) **Proprietary assets** is defined by Aaker (1991, 19-21) as the assets like patents and intellectual property rights relations with trade partners. The more proprietary rights a brand accumulated, the greater the brands competitive edge in those fields.

Aaker also notes key focal points when creating a strong brand equity; those are its identity, creation, communication, relationships and symbols (Aaker, 1991).

Brand equity can be established, sustained and enhanced through effective collaboration with stakeholders. It is essential to identify stakeholders and understand their roles within the organization, as this will be critical to the brand equity development process. Once stakeholders and their roles are clearly defined, the co-creation process can begin, allowing for a collaborative approach to building and strengthening the brand.

2.3 Stakeholder

Stakeholders in sports can be defined as; “any person or group (internally or externally) which has an interest in the organisation or is affected by its actions.”

Managing stakeholder relations is crucial for creating and maintaining brand equity. Effective engagement with stakeholders helps ensure that the brand's value is developed and upheld through collaborative efforts. Stakeholder mapping provides clarity by identifying key stakeholders and their roles. This understanding helps an organization manage these stakeholders effectively and leverages their contributions to enhance the brand (Jones, 2005).

Jones (2005) demonstrates a multi-step stakeholder approach through a model called the ‘stakeholder model of brand equity’. The first step is the identification of stakeholders through a model known as the Daisy-wheel model of brand equities. Following the identification of the key stakeholders, it is necessary to analyze the stakeholders’ contribution to the brand equity. This process looks at the stakeholder value relations and has three phases: ‘stakeholder identification, stakeholder prioritization, and identification of the nature of the exchange’. The next step is to identify key stakeholders’ expectations. Jones (2005) notes that this step is useful due to ‘the way

in which it compares the results of the prioritization of stakeholders with the types of exchange the firm would need to enter into in order to meet the expectations of each stakeholder [...] This moves the brand manager away from solely focusing on the firm's concerns towards a mutual model." This model can be adapted to fit sporting organisations needs surrounding stakeholder management.

2.4 Brand Co-Creation

Co-creation involves various stakeholders actively participating in the development of a brand. Identifying these stakeholders is crucial for understanding how they can partake in the co-creation process. The co-creation process is widely used within the marketing realm. For example, organizations such as the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) have gone beyond traditional social media platforms by creating their own interactive platform, where fans can engage with the brand through various stakeholders including athletes, and other fans. This approach gives fans an intimate view of the WWE world, including behind-the-scenes content co-created with performers/athletes.

Co-creation can have a significant impact on organisations, notably by enhancing credibility through intimate exchanges. This process humanizes the organization, fostering communication between fans and the brand and creating a sense of belonging and being heard. Co-creation often aims to maintain brand and underscores the importance of employees aligning with the brand's identity and values. This clarity enables the organisation to create consistent interactions with consumers.

In the context of sports (e.g., Skeleton), athletes are central to the brand. For successful co-creation, athletes must understand the brand's identity and values and collaborate with the IBSF to build brand equity. As discussed by Iglesias et al. (2013), organisations must "understand that internal employees are probably the most important stakeholders [...] We are an experiential brand, with multiple touchpoints, and that means that our employees are the brand". They assert that "Brand value is created when consumers (fans) see their experience at the various contact points are positive." This insight emphasizes the critical role of athletes and other internal stakeholders in shaping and sustaining the brand.

The Value co-creation framework proposed by Ferrand et al. (2012) builds upon David Aaker's model by incorporating stakeholders into the overall brand concept. This framework will be used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the brand of skeleton.

Co-creation is an essential step in engaging the organisation's fan base and athletes, which ultimately leads to effective brand activation.

Figure 2: (Ferrand et al., 2012, Page 74)



2.5 Brand Activation

Brand activation as defined by AMA involves marketing efforts that drive consumer actions and build a brand's image. This process fosters a deeper connection and interaction with fans on a more personal level.

In the brand activation process, it is key to recognize that "the shift of a brand owner is from one that is a 'brand guardian' to that of a 'conductor' who supports co-creative processes between multiple actors (Michel, 2017)" This means that a brand is not solely owned by an organisation (e.g., IBSF), but is instead a collaborative project involving a diverse range of stakeholders. Pereira et al. (2022) further emphasize this by stating that "brand owners need to provide platforms to enable, facilitate and orchestrate interactive brand meaning co-creation processes between multiple actors as well as to achieve brand engagement and brand equity". (Page 2)

In developing the timeline for the brand activation for the sport of skeleton it will be crucial to capitalize of the natural boost of interest generated during the Winter Olympic Games (WOG) are aired. Marwick (2015) highlights that during high profile events, athletes are often elevated to the celebrities' status, which significantly increases their social media engagement. This is further supported by the research of Su et al. (2020b) who found that athletes involved in the NFL draft experienced a significant boost in social media engagement, offering them opportunities to establish connections with new fans and raise awareness for their personal brand. Leveraging major events like the WOG promoting skeleton is also in line with the Olympic Agenda 2020+5, , specifically recommendation 6. This encourages International Federations (IF) to use Olympic branding to promote the journey to the Olympic Games, offering stakeholders the chance to amplify the Olympic journey of athletes. The goal is to 'create a direct Olympic association with and promote Olympic Qualifying events', thereby enhancing the visibility and appeal of the sport.

2.6 Athletes Branding

The personal brand of athletes plays a pivotal role in developing a co-creation plan for brand activation, . Brand activation is driven by the involvement of athletes within the organisation; allowing athletes to present their authentic selves helps strengthen the bond between the fan and the organisation. Su et al. (2020b) emphasizes the importance of this, stating that "an athlete's personal brand is one of their most valuable assets." (P33)

Arai et al (2013, 2014) and Carlson & Donovan (2013) discuss the heightened public interest and attraction towards athletes, noting that this interest can be leveraged to create a recognizable brand for athletes themselves.

Facilitating the growth of athlete's personal brands can significantly enhance the visibility and the growth of the IBSF brand. It's crucial for athletes to understand that creating intentional and purposeful content not only benefits their personal brand but also contributes to the mutual growth of both the athlete's and the organisation's brand. Doyle et al. (2020) build on the MABI framework, examining which types of content receive the greatest engagement on Instagram through Likes and Comments. This framework can guide athletes in developing their personal brand by helping them understand what kinds of content generate the most engagement. Doyle et al. (2020) also emphasizes the importance of recognizing the purpose behind the content being posted, distinguishing between relationship enhancement content and relationship exploitation content. While 'exploitation' may carry negative connotations, it in this context, it refers to content where athletes gain personal benefits; either through sponsorship or monetizing the post. On the other hand, relationship enhancement content is aimed at strengthening the relationship with the fans,

often by collaborating with teammates in posts.

Deliautaité et al. (2021) highlights the significant advantages that social media offers in cultivating an athlete's personal brand, noting that the "In addition to the value provided to sport leagues, teams and events, social media platforms also offer unprecedented opportunities for athletes to create, develop and market their own personal brands " (Na, Kunkel & Doyle, 2020, Page 88). Additionally, social media serves as a powerful tool for athlete brand development (Carlson & Donavan 2013; Kunkel, Scott & Beaton 2016). By developing their personal brand, athletes can create mutually beneficial opportunities that enhance both their own brand and that of the IBSF.

"Social media platforms represent a powerful means for athletes to brand themselves and develop relationships with fans" (Kunkel et al., 2016, Page 35) By adopting a targeted social media strategy to enhance and strengthen brand awareness for the sport of skeleton, both the IBSF as an organisation and the personal brand of the athletes can gain a significant advantage.

Social media serves as a tool for facilitating relationship marketing, enabling long-term connections to be created between fans, athletes, and organisations, by fostering active communication. While each social media platform offers its own unique advantages, Aslam (2019) and Leone (2019) highlight Instagram as particularly favorable due to its high levels of engagements and its huge user base, which exceeds one billion monthly users.

2.7 The case of Formula 1

The sport of skeleton shares core aspects with Formula 1 (F1), such as speed, technology, racing, and the critical split-second decisions the drivers/pilots must make to ensure both speed and safety. Given F1's enormous success, particularly since its comprehensive rebranding process detailed by Ben Sheilds and Cate Reavis (2019), skeleton could draw valuable lessons from F1's rebranding and influence IBSF's branding and activation strategies for skeleton.

In 2016 Liberty Media, the owner of Major League Baseball's Atlanta Braves, purchased F1, marking the beginning of a significant rebranding and expansion for the sport. A key observation made by the new ownership was the importance of becoming more fan friendly, allowing for more revenue generating opportunities. The emphasis was placed on "enhancing the fan perception, and experience, and strengthening the brand." Skeleton could benefit from a similar approach, focusing on engaging fans more deeply and expanding the sport's reach and appeal.

In 2016, F1 had a very basic, ad-free website, and no comprehensive digital assets or social media strategy. Although skeleton is a much smaller organization, developing and activating a robust social media strategy is equally crucial.

Formula 1's overarching goal was to transition from a motorsport brand to a global entertainment brand, drawing inspiration from the NBA's success in integrating with broader pop culture through music and fashion. Carey explained that "the organization wasn't doing the things you needed to do to compete in a world with a lot more competition, a lot more dynamic ways in which people were engaging in sports. The organization was run for short-term cash flow." This insight highlights the importance of evolving a brand to remain competitive and relevant in today's dynamic sports landscape. For skeleton, adopting a similar approach could be key to enhancing its visibility and engagement.

F1's new owners recognized that the success of their organisation was inherently linked to fan engagement, shirting their focus to become a fan-centric organization. Carey notes this shift, stating "to be successful as a business in sports it had to be successful for fans." They implemented a five-pillar strategy, with key components including:

- Pillar 3 “Engage fans through traditional and digital platforms (e.g., streaming technology, social media).”
- Pillar 4 “Expand the brand in ways that would enable F1 to connect with fans in multiple ways (e.g., Esports, fantasy leagues, exhibition tours).”

These pillars were crucial in advancing F1’s brand perception and deepening connection with fans.

F1 conducted extensive research to understand who their fan base and the type of content they desired. This research provided insights into fan perceptions and allowed F1 to co-create their brand with the fans. Based on these findings, F1 established five guiding principles, or “North Stars”, for their marketing and communications strategy:

1. Break through borders: Expand into new areas such as digital platforms, content creation, and entertaining events.
2. Revel in the racing: Make racing more exciting and entertaining.
3. Put the spectacular back into the spectacle: Enhance the fan experience of each race, both in real life and online.
4. Taste the oil: Tell the technology story of F1.
5. Feel the blood boil: Tell the behind-the-scenes stories of drivers to bring out more of the sport’s humanity.

F1 and skeleton share a unique characteristic in that fans often engage with the sport without having direct participation in car racing or skeleton racing. In other words, they are not a hobby sports or something that is traditionally taught. F1 addressed this by leveraging Esports to reach and engage a new, more accessible audience. For skeleton, exploring similar avenues, such as virtual simulations or interactive online platforms, could be an effective way to attract and engage new fans, expanding the sport’s reach and appeal.

Ultimately F1 recognized the importance of becoming a fan-centric organisation. They took significant steps to enhance fan engagement and brand equity, including offering personalised content and experiences. Their strategy involved expanding into new areas such as Esports, launching the popular Netflix series ‘Drive to Survive’, creating Beyond the Grid podcast, and developing various apps, social media channels, and Fantasy leagues. F1’s focus on maintaining excitement and engaging storytelling significantly boosted the value of the organization. Their efforts have been highly successful with online conversation about F1 skyrocketing between 2016 and 2022. Social media growth has been amazing with followers increasing from 12.5 million to 50 million in just five years making it the fastest growing sport on social media. (Radar, n.d.)

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this project is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the brand of skeleton, with the goal of developing a strategy that allows for the co-creation of the brand with athletes. The study was guided by three research questions:

- What is the current brand image and identity of the sport of skeleton?
- How can the IBSF collaborate with athletes to create and sustain brand equity for the sport of skeleton?
- What brand activation activities can be implemented with athletes to enhance brand equity?

To achieve this, a mixed-method research approach was utilized, incorporating both semi-structured interviews and an open-ended survey.

3.1 Qualitative Study

Semi-structured interviews, a common method for qualitative research, were chosen due to their flexibility and ability to foster open dialogue (Edwards & Holland, 2013). This approach facilitated open conversations, enabling participants to explore various topics related to the skeleton brand thoroughly. A detailed interview guide was prepared prior to the interviews, addressing key areas relative to the sport. Participants were chosen from a pool of individuals with close ties to the sport such as current and former athletes, coaches, IBSF executive committee members, and national federation representatives. They were contacted through various means including in-person contact and digital communication (social media and email).

A total of 13 stakeholders participated in the study, including Olympic medalists, European Champions, World Championships medalists, coaches, International Federation Executives Committee Members, and National Federation Members.

Table 1: Interviewee Demographics

Respondent	Role	Gender
A	National Federation Member and Coach	Male
B	Olympic Athlete	Male
C	Olympic Athlete	Male
D	National Team Athlete	Male
E	International Federation Executive Board Member	Male
F	Olympic Medalist Coach	Female
G	National Team Athlete	Male
H	Olympic Athlete	Female
I	Olympic Athlete	Female
J	Olympic Athlete	Female
K	Olympic Athlete	Female
L	Retired National Team Athlete & Coach	Female
M	National Team Athlete	Female

The number of interviews conducted was determined by data saturation, a common practice in qualitative research (Neuman, 2014). Interviews continued until no new information emerged and a comprehensive range of perspectives had been obtained.

KEY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

To align with the project's goal of understanding and activating the brand of skeleton through co-creation with IBSF athletes, the following thematic areas were outlined for interview participants in advance. This approach enabled participants to prepare and begin reflecting on their insights regarding the sport. The themes included:

- The brand identity of skeleton
- An introduction to the sport of skeleton
- Social media habits and usage
- Athlete collaboration
- Brand activation strategies
- Considerations for the creation of a documentary

It's important to note that while the interviews were guided by the predefined themes, they were conducted in a largely free-flowing and open-ended manner. This approach allowed for more dynamic and expansive discussions, enabling participants to explore topics in greater depth beyond the initial set of questions.

3.2 Quantitative Study

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, an open-ended survey was conducted in both English and German to capture perceptions from fans of the sport. The survey, distributed through social media channels of athletes and researcher's personal accounts, aimed to gather insights into various aspects of the skeleton brand. It included questions on demographics, brand affinity, and activation preferences, providing a well-rounded understanding of fan perspectives.

The survey was designed to complement the insights obtained from the qualitative interviews, allowing for a triangulation of data to validate the findings. By combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, the research aimed to achieve a nuanced understanding of the skeleton brand from internal and external perspectives. The integration of multiple data sources facilitated a comprehensive analysis, shedding light on the complexities of skeleton branding and informing strategies for brand co-creation and activation within the sport.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the semi-structured interviews. This method, as outlined by Braun and Clark (2006), involves identifying, analysing and reporting themes within the data. The process began with transcribing the interviews, followed by an initial reading to familiarize with the data. The initial themes were identified by the researcher. The data (transcripts) were then uploaded into an AI assisted program called Allysed. This was used to identify and extract themes from the data. These themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the research objectives and provided meaningful insights.

The themes extracted from the initial analysis were instrumental in shaping the survey. The open-ended survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize and describe the characteristics of the fan responses. This approach allowed for a clear and concise understanding of patterns and trends within the data. The analysis process began with data cleaning, which

involved identifying and correcting inconsistencies or missing values to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the results..

3.3 Data Analysis

To analyse the data from the interviews, a content analysis was first conducted by the researcher, The transcribed data was later uploaded into an artificial intelligence (AI) software called Allyzed. The analysis followed these stages.

- 1) Data Transcription: Interviews were transcribed to convert spoken content into text.
- 2) Initial Analysis: The researcher performed a preliminary content analysis to identify key themes and patterns in the data.
- 3) AI Integration: The transcribed data was uploaded into Allyzed, an AI software designed for deeper content analysis. Allyzed assisted in detecting recurring themes and keywords, offering additional insights into the data.
- 4) Theme Identification: Allyzed identified relevant themes and patterns, which were reviewed and refined by the researcher to ensure accuracy and alignment with research objectives.
- 5) Detailed Examination: Both the AI-generated insights and the researcher's initial analysis were used to conduct an in-depth examination of the themes.

Validation and Interpretation: Findings were validated for consistency and relevance, providing a comprehensive understanding of the data and its implications for the research.

Chapter 4: RESULTS

In this section, we will present the findings of our study, beginning with the qualitative results derived from interviews with key stakeholders, including athletes, coaches, and IBSF executives. These insights provide a deep understanding of the perceptions and attitudes surrounding the brand identity of skeleton. Following the qualitative analysis, we will present the quantitative results gathered from a comprehensive survey conducted with fans of the sport. This combination of qualitative and quantitative data offers a holistic view of the current state of the skeleton brand, highlighting both the strengths and areas for potential growth.

4.1 Qualitative data - Interviews

Four main themes were pulled from the interviews which included, highlighting the unique characteristics of skeleton, the importance of athlete collaboration in brand creation, the potential for media to enhance the sport's image and the need for creating a strategic marketing effort to differentiate the sport of skeleton. Each theme is explained and discussed in more detail below.

4.1.1 Highlighting the unique characteristics of the sport of skeleton:

This is essential when exploring and creating the brand of skeleton, and to fully grasp the identity of the sport itself. Skeleton is a niche sport, and as respondent A mentioned when needing to explain what the sport of skeleton is "We always tend to describe skeleton by entering into a definition by telling what it's not."

As the respondents began to explore what makes skeleton unique in their minds, an identity for the sport was starting to emerge. This included the overall visual appeal that the sport has, the aesthetic aspect of the sport, and potentially the most striking aspect of the sport the positioning of the athletes' head while going down the track. The latter (positioning of the head the sport) is often misconceived to be more dangerous than it is in reality, as respondent A suggested that skeleton could be considered "The most safe extreme sport" and respondent B highlighting the importance of keeping the perception of the sport as extreme even if the sport is performed in such a controlled and safe environment. However, this unique aspect of skeleton is crucial from a marketing perspective; "marketed it like it's so much more extreme than possibly it is. And it's really caught the attention of the public" As identity was explored throughout the interviews, this strengthens the notion from Jones (2010) that a goal of corporate branding is to integrate communication to enforce a core, and a distinctive identity for the sport of skeleton. Aaker's (1991) research surrounding creating a strong brand equity, notes the identity of the brand as being crucial focal point.

The overall under-evaluation and appreciation of the sport was shared, and in part considered the best kept secret of the sport respondent C speaks to "skeleton has a huge potential. Probably is one of the most, undervalued winter sports that we have". Due to the technical complexities of the sport and the niche nature it is difficult to have individuals fully understand the intricacies in what makes the sport of skeleton unique.

4.1.2 The importance of athlete collaboration emerged as a pivotal element in brand creation, particularly within the sporting industry. The interviews explored the multifaceted role of athlete co-creation in shaping brand identity, enhancing brand equity, and fostering engagement. The interview analysis starts to create a comprehensive understanding of the significance of athlete collaboration in brand creation. Previous research related in to creating brand equity has shown models such as value co-creation framework proposed by Ferrand et al. (2012) depicts how stakeholders, such as athletes are an integral aspect in creating value for a brand itself.

Respondent D emphasizes the role of athlete collaboration in community building and content creation for brand promotion, Respondent E highlights the importance of athlete involvement in championing a brand, and the positive impact of athlete praetorships on brand success. Respondent F underscores the power of storytelling and the global appeal of diverse athlete backgrounds. Respondent C discusses the significance of showcasing athlete personalities, and authenticity.

Athlete collaboration in brand creation plays a pivotal role in shaping brand image and enhancing brand equity. The interviews highlighted the significance of creating a sense of community among fans and creating opportunities for fans to engage with the athletes. To differentiate the sport of skeleton and enhance brand visibility and engagement respondents spoke to the importance of creating a distinct content creation strategy to facilitate content creation and activation with athletes and the IBSF. Arai et al. (2013, 2014) and Carlson & Donovan (2013) explore the raised in public interest and attraction to the athletes themselves, and how that interest can be used to create a recognizable brand, for both the athletes and the organisation in which they are collaborating with.

Compelling content emerges as a powerful tool for brand promotion and audience engagement, the effective use of social media platforms in collaboration with the athletes was a trend followed throughout the interviews, and overall confirmed the interest within the athletes to collaborate on projects with the IBSF to build the brand of skeleton and the overall value.

4.1.3 The potential for media to enhance the sport's image was a theme that remained throughout the interviews, and the strategic engagement with different media sources, was mentioned to increase the overall image of the sport of skeleton.

Respondent D emphasizes the power of viral content and humanising athletes to attract a broader audience with respondent stating "I think showing people actually what goes into the sport... shows the humanity of us who are always seen in helmets and blacked out visors and speed suits." This sentiment is echoed by respondent G where they highlight the power of storytelling stating, "If the athletes were just telling somewhat of a good story, it would be like, Axel Junk, he is the coolest guy I've ever met or seen". Both interviews suggest that showing the athletes in a more human light can foster a stronger connection with the audience and improve the sport's overall perception. Respondent F agrees and mentions "I think it is important to show everything that's behind it. To give a good story that people really start to understand the sport." These interviews underscore the importance of compelling content and storytelling in connecting with the audiences through media to promote the sport.

A recurring theme across the interviews was the significant role of media in enhancing the sport's image through various strategies. For example, respondent D and H both emphasized the power of social media in attracting a wider audience D mentions how "One viral video can make the sport grow thousands of fans in one day." Similarly H mentions "I think it's good when you can make an effort in co-branding, for example, because you get double or like, you get all the views." Underscoring the importance and impact social media collaborations have in increasing visibility and engagement.

The importance of leveraging athlete influence and visibility is also highlighted, Respondent I mentioned, "Well, I think media related, we have huge untapped potential because of this really cool sport." Emphasizing the opportunity for brand development through media-related activities. The potential of innovative media strategies and technologies was also a shared viewpoint throughout interviews, respondent K questions "can we not invest a bit of money to make our sport, like you say, data-driven? And (with this data) it's going to create so many cool graphics, so many cool information for people to watch and understand the sport." This viewpoint is echoed through respondent C where they discuss the opportunity of tracking technologies and being able

to tie it to storytelling they go on to say “I think it’d be especially like the heartbeat would be really interesting... that’d be potentially something cool to track.” These respondents suggest that leveraging technology and innovative media strategies can enhance the sports image through creating engaging visual elects and improving viewer understanding. The interviews collectively highlight the multifaceted role of media in enhancing the image of skeleton. Shared viewpoints emphasize the power of social media, humanizing athletes, and the potential of innovative media strategies.

4.1.4 The need to create a strategic marketing effort to differentiate the sport of skeleton

was a theme shared throughout the interview respondents. Respondent E suggests the necessity of establishing a distinct identity for skeleton through a separate program. Respondent F focusses on the unique aspects of skeleton, and the need to educate the public about its intricacies. Helm, C., & Jones, R. G. (2010) speak to the importance of branding an organization, and how through effective brand management, this will allow organizations to differentiate themselves from other similar organizations, and to ultimately stand out in the mind of the consumer.

Across the interviews, several shared viewpoints emerge, underscoring the need for strategic marketing efforts to differentiate the sport of skeleton. One common theme is the importance of creating engaging content to attract a wider audience.

Another shared viewpoint is the necessity to humanize the athletes, and showcase their stories, to build a connection with the viewers. Respondent F emphasizes the need to educate the public about the sport’s intricacies stating, “It’s more difficult than people think. There’s more behind it.” By humanizing athletes and offering behind the scenes content and insight into their lives, a strategic marketing effort can foster connection with the audience.

Collaboration and co-branding with influencers or external individuals who have reach would be valuable in brand creation for skeleton Respondent B emphasizes the potential for influencer races and collaboration with event managers, suggesting a need for structured event management which would improve the overall experience.

The interviews also highlighted the importance one establishing a distinct identity for the sport of skeleton. Respondent E suggests that “Skeleton has to be considered as one identity, not just, be a next to, you know.” This indicates the necessity of strategic marketing efforts to create a unique selling proposition for the sport. Respondent C mentioned the importance of greater exposure to have the opportunity to generate more financial opportunities through sponsorships.

The interviews collectively acknowledge the need for a strategic marketing effort, to differentiate the sport of skeleton.

4.2 Quantitative Data – Fans Questionnaire

From the thorough understanding of what internal stakeholders perceived of the sport of skeleton and the related brand, it was deemed necessary to determine if those perceptions aligned with that of the fans of the sport of skeleton. Multi-methods research was conducted that involved a strategy integrating qualitative and quantitative data - First being the Semi-structured interviews (qualitative) and second being questionnaire of fans (quantitative).

4.2.1 Demographics:

One hundred and sixty-one (161) targeted respondents participated in the survey, all being in part fans of the sport, the survey was delivered in both English and German.

26% of respondents were former skeleton athletes.

The survey included respondents from twenty-three (23) different countries they reside in Canada, United States of America, Norway, United Kingdom, Nigeria, Germany, Wales, Switzerland, Brazil, Austria, South Korea, Italy, Romania, Czech Republic, Australia, New Zealand, Netherlands, Belgium, Argentina, Slovakia, France, and Liechtenstein. The diversity in respondents show the global interest in the sport.

Respondents' age ranges:

Table 2: Respondents Age

Under 18	6
18-24	20
25-34	36
35-44	35
45-54	20
55-64	32
65	9
Skipped	3

73% of respondents also follow Bobsleigh and 26% also follow Luge.

4.2.2 Introduction to Skeleton

What initially drew you to the sport of skeleton? Multiple answers could be chosen

Table 3: Responses to What initially drew you to the sport of skeleton?

Fascination with the speed and the intensity of the sport	72
Enjoyment of winter sports in general	64
Athlete stories and personalities	39
Recommendation from friends or family	36
Other	43
Skipped	5

Most respondents found ***fascination with the speed*** and ***intensity of the sport***. These are aligned with the identity of skeleton as described by the interview respondents in Phase 1 of this study.

4.2.3 Current Content Consumption

How long have you been following the sport?

One hundred and twenty-three respondents have been following the sport for more than three years. Fifteen respondents have followed the sport between one to three years. Four respondents have followed the sport for less than one year.

How Frequently do you watch skeleton?

Table 4: Responses to How Frequently do you watch skeleton?

Every Race	56
Less than 5 Races / Season	49
Only around the Olympics	19
Just World Championships	3
Less than 2 Races / season	6
None	0

What Medium do you watch skeleton Via?

Table 5: Responses to What medium do you watch skeleton Via?

Youtube	113
TV	51
TV (Highlights)	23
Other (Please Specify)	20

Responses to “other” included:

“In Person”, “Social Media”, “Internet direct on track websites”, “CBC sports”, “Very difficult to see / watch races in Australia”, “Youtube, but I have to use a Dutch VPN connection. I think this hurts the accessibility to view skeleton”, “Live stream, depending on where the TV rights are currently held”, “Tik Tok”.

Due to the geographic blocking which occurs when a broadcaster purchases the rights to the races, it becomes very difficult to watch the sport. This also lends to the need to modernize the broadcasting aspect and look towards more modern methods of displaying the sport through different streaming services rather than television providers. This is supported by the large percentage of respondents who chose YouTube as the medium they use to watch Skeleton.

Where do you get information/updates about skeleton?

Table 6: Responses to Where do you get information/updates about skeleton?

IBSF Social Media	99
Athlete Social Media	97
IBSF Website	87
Fan Created	24
Traditional Media	23
Other (Please specify)	14

“Other” responses included:

“BBSA social Media” referring to the national federation social media account; “National governing body social media”, “It is hard compared to other sports I follow. IBSF homepage is BAD. Updates on FB/Insta is very inconsistent”, “Keeping track of information through personal databases”, “Friends”, “Athlete’s parents”

Do you follow Skeleton athletes on social media?

108 yes

34 no

Not surprising, social media is used by most respondents to follow Skeleton athletes. This suggests that athletes should engage with followers on social media. For athletes to understand that engagement goes beyond simply posting a post, rather communicating, asking questions, and responding to comments. Additionally co-creating with other athletes and ensuring that skeleton athletes are also interacting with each other’s posts to increase the effects of the algorithm.

If yes, who do you follow on social media?

Respondents’ answers included; “Canada and USA”, “Almost everyone”, “GB team”, “Ladies team”, “Lizzy Arnold, John Heaton, Gregor Stahli, Martins Dukurs, and Akwasi Frimpong.” “Matt Weston”, “Most current/upcoming & former GB athletes, various USA/CAN/CHE/DEU/LAT/UKR/FRA/ESP/SWE/BEL/ITA/JAM/TTA/KOR/CHN”, “All members of British Skeleton, Sammy Maier, Chris Grottier, Axel”, “Army Bob Sleigh and UK team”,

If Yes, What Platforms do you follow them on?

Table 7: Responses to If Yes, What Platforms do you follow them on?

Instagram	85
Facebook	47
X	11
TIKTOK	9
Other (Please Specify)	1

Responses to “Other” included “Snapchat” & “LinkedIn”

Instagram is the preferred platform to follow athletes on SM followed by Facebook. These two platforms should be at the top of athletes’ focus in regard to content creation and engagement with the fans of skeleton.

Understanding where the respondents are most likely to follow athletes allow the IBSF and athletes to tailor content to where the fans are most active.

If yes, how do you interact with those athletes social media accounts?

Table 8: Responses to If yes, how do you interact with those athletes social media accounts?

Likes	99
Comments	68
Shares	33
Other “Please Specify”	11
None	3

Responses to “other” included “DM”, “Views”

What Specific content do you prefer?

Table 9: Responses to What Specific content do you prefer?

Behind the Scenes	108
Race Highlights	93
Physical training	78
Interviews	71
Daily Life	63
Other (Please specify)	7

“Other” Responses included “Pictures of the tracks, the local hangouts, sliding shots”, “Info on sport related and performance”, “Videos explaining the sport for example”

Determining the type of content is most enjoyed by the fans, allows for the IBSF and athletes to co-create content which appeals to the viewers most. Behind the scenes content as well as race highlights were highly valued by respondents. Fans like to engage with athletes by commenting and sharing content.

What aspects of skeleton do you find most exciting? (1 being not at all - 10 being very exciting)

The aspects of skeleton in which respondents found most exciting are; Speed, Close racing, Closeness to the speed, Stories of Athletes, Potential Crashes.

Words most associated with the sport of skeleton listed from most associated to least; Speed, Precision, Adrenaline, Athletic, Technical, Fun, Strength, Powerful, Crazy, Danger, Formula 1 on Ice, Aesthetic, Confusing, Boring, “Not a Sport”.

It should be noted that exciting aspects of the sport and the words most associated with Skeleton reflect the image of the sport. These are closely aligned with the ones described by the interviewees. This suggests consistency between identity and the image of the sport. These should be reinforced through the content created by the IBSF and the athletes.

4.2.4 Future Content Creation

What behind the scenes content are you most interested in? Rank from least to most interest.

Athlete stories, Background stories, technical aspects of the sport, Information about skeleton tracks, Skeleton Equipment, Education about Skeleton.

As a follow up, we asked respondents if not mentioned what other type of content they would be interested in, responses included; “Challenges”, “Historical and statistical comparisons”, “Venue (Town/City?Area) information”, “More stories about the athletes. For example...its videos of what happens on the World Cup circuit (can be both Bob and Skeleton) Maybe a smaller version of what they have in F1 Drive to Survive. Of course, this is a very bold

idea and tough to put into reality as it requires a pro film crew.”, “Not so much BTS, but inter-fan interaction and discussion is difficult to get online, particularly with the YouTube World Cup commenting switched off. Watching EC and other races on YouTube when streamed by the tracks with fan and athlete chat going on is always cool.”

This question explored the interest in future content for the fans, which facilitates the co-creation process with the IBSF and athletes.

What skeleton related experiences would you be interested to participate in? Rank from least to most interest.

Trying skeleton, pushing a sled, Meet & Greet with the athletes, Interviews of athletes, Podcast, Physical/Mental training session.

If not mentioned above, what other skeleton related experiences would you be interested to participate in?

“Strategic direction”, “Watch an event live with an athlete experience”, “...Make it accessible so people can try it.”, “Make it easier for non-athletes (such as myself) to come over and ‘recreationally’ learn how to slide. The logistics and organization of getting onto tracks can be challenging. (Talking about the easier tracks to learn on - Igls etc.)”, “If there are autograph sessions at races (usually world championships I guess), it’s usually athletes from the nation where the track is. IBSF could try it with a few athletes from different nations (you get people from all over going.)”, “anatomy of a skeleton sled”.

The final question of the survey allowed for participants to give any additional comments they may have, this included “Skeleton is an absolutely amazing sport, but it isn’t well known and could use a lot more of media exposure”, “It’s always a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere when going to races. I usually go alone but it’s always good craic :-”, “I must credit Martin Haven for his ability, knowledge and enthusiasm to bring the sport alive with his fantastic commentary of the races. I remember watching the Olympic runs and the commentator knew nothing of the athletes and very little of the technical aspects of the sport.”

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Summary of findings:

The research highlighted key themes and insights from both qualitative interviews and a quantitative fan survey to understand the current brand identity, image, and equity of the sport of skeleton.

5.2 Unique Characteristics of Skeleton:

Skeleton is recognized for its unique and thrilling nature, especially the head-first descent, which is both a defining feature and a key selling point. The sport is often perceived as dangerous and extreme, though it is controlled and safe. This unique aspect is integral to its brand identity.

5.3 Athlete Collaboration:

Athlete involvement is crucial in shaping the brand identity of skeleton. Athletes contribute to brand equity through storytelling, community engagement, and authentic content creation. Their participation in content co-creation, particularly on social media, is seen as a powerful tool to enhance the sport's visibility and fan engagement.

5.4 Role of Media:

Media, particularly social media, is vital in enhancing the sport's image. The potential for viral content and innovative media strategies, such as data-driven visuals and tracking technologies, can significantly improve the sport's appeal and understanding among viewers.

5.5 BRAND EQUITY DIAGNOSIS

The brand equity diagnosis for the sport of skeleton, as analyzed through the lens of Aaker's Brand Equity Model, covers several critical aspects: brand value, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty.

Brand Value: The sport's brand value is closely linked to its unique, daring nature, particularly the head-first position in races, which stands out in the realm of winter sports. Interview respondents highlighted the potential to enhance this value through the creation of viral content and authentic social media engagement. The authenticity provided by athletes in content creation was noted as a crucial factor in building brand value.

The IBSF should continue to emphasize and leverage the unique, extreme aspects of skeleton in marketing and branding efforts. Co-create content with athletes to maintain authenticity and engage audiences effectively.

Brand Awareness: There is a significant lack of awareness of the sport among the public. Many people are unfamiliar with skeleton, and this gap in awareness is compounded by a lack of understanding among athletes about the importance of branding as suggested by this quote: "The athletes at the current state of mind think they are just doing skeleton." The necessity for educating athletes on the value of branding was emphasized, alongside the need for broader awareness campaigns.

It is recommended that IBSF develop educational initiatives for athletes on the importance of personal and sport branding. In addition, implementing broader awareness campaigns using documentaries, social media content, and co-branding initiatives to increase visibility would contribute to building brand awareness.

Perceived Quality The perceived quality of skeleton is influenced by several factors, including accessibility, fan engagement, and the sport's thrilling nature. The sport is often seen as more

engaging than similar winter sports like luge. However, challenges related to accessibility and the technical complexity of the sport were noted as barriers to enhancing perceived quality.

Our analysis indicates that improving accessibility through modernized broadcasting methods and boosting fan engagement with more interactive and educational content would enhance the perceived quality of skeleton. Emphasizing the sport's thrilling aspects will further strengthen its positive perception.

Brand Associations: Skeleton is synonymous with terms like "speed," "precision," "adrenaline," and "danger," all of which closely align with the sport's core identity. The head-first, high-speed descent is a defining characteristic that should be central to its branding, as emphasized by Respondent Joska: "I think it's the fact that we go headfirst. And yeah, there's a lot of people always going like, oh, really? You're going headfirst. You're crazy."

These associations should be consistently reinforced across all marketing and communication efforts. By highlighting these elements, skeleton can be distinguished from other winter sports and appeal to audiences who are attracted to high-adrenaline experiences.

Brand Loyalty: The sport enjoys a loyal, albeit small, fan base. These fans are highly engaged, often following every race and staying connected through social media. The loyalty is further strengthened by the sport's unique and thrilling nature. This loyalty must be cultivated by creating exclusive content and experiences for fans. Leverage social media to build a stronger community around the sport, encouraging fans to share their experiences and engage with athletes.

The sport of skeleton has a strong foundation in terms of its unique attributes and dedicated fan base. However, there is significant room for growth in areas like brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand value. By focusing on authentic content creation, improving accessibility, and educating both athletes and the public about the sport's value, skeleton can strengthen its brand equity and expand its reach globally.

5.6 Identity and Brand Image of Skeleton

5.6.1 Identity of the Sport of Skeleton:

The brand identity of skeleton is rooted in its unique characteristics, setting it apart from other sliding sports like bobsleigh and luge. Skeleton is distinguished by its dynamic movements and the complexity of the sport, which make it an engaging and thrilling spectacle for viewers. As one respondent, Austin, noted, skeleton involves more dynamic actions and a wider range of abilities, making it a more captivating sport to watch. The sport's defining feature—the head-first descent—adds an element of perceived danger and excitement, contributing significantly to its identity. This "crazy" and thrilling nature, often highlighted in public perception, forms the core of skeleton's identity and is a powerful tool for marketing the sport to audiences drawn to high-adrenaline activities.

5.6.2 Brand Image of the Sport of Skeleton:

The brand image of skeleton, as perceived by fans, aligns closely with its core identity. This research confirmed that fans associate skeleton with terms like "Speed," "Adrenaline," and "Precision," mirroring the attributes highlighted by stakeholders. This alignment between how the sport is perceived by both stakeholders and fans underscores the strength of its brand identity. The survey also revealed what fans find most exciting about skeleton: the sport's speed, the rush of adrenaline, the athleticism involved, and the overall sense of danger or "craziness." However, the research also uncovered challenges related to accessibility and the current methods of presenting the sport, with fans expressing frustration over geographical blockers and outdated broadcasting techniques. Despite these challenges, the fans of skeleton are notably loyal,

frequently engaging with content on platforms like Instagram, and maintaining strong connections with the IBSF and athletes through social media.

The convergence of identity and brand image in skeleton is evident in the consistent perceptions shared by both stakeholders and fans. The sport's distinct characteristics—dynamic, head-first descents, and the high-adrenaline experience—form a cohesive brand identity that resonates well with its audience. The loyalty of skeleton's fan base, despite its relatively small size, highlights the sport's potential for growth, especially if challenges around accessibility and content innovation are addressed. By leveraging its unique identity and addressing the feedback from fans, skeleton can continue to build a strong, distinct brand that stands out in the world of winter sports.

Chapter 6: Recommendations

6.1 Co-Creating Brand Equity for Skeleton – Recommendations

To enhance the brand of skeleton and boost its visibility, it is recommended that the IBSF takes the following actions: capitalize on the sport's unique attributes, actively involve athletes in the co-creation of the brand, utilize media effectively to promote both the athletes' stories and the brand itself, develop a comprehensive brand book to ensure consistent communication across all stakeholders, and engage with national sport federations to support and amplify these efforts.

1. **Emphasize Unique Attributes:** Focus marketing efforts on the visually striking and unique aspects of skeleton, such as the head-first descent and the sport's combination of extreme action with safety. These characteristics should be central to building a strong, distinctive identity that sets skeleton apart from other sports.
2. **Recommendation 2: Engage Athletes in Brand Creation:** Involving athletes in the branding process is essential for creating an authentic and relatable brand identity for the sport of skeleton. Athletes are the face of the sport, and their direct involvement in content creation and fan engagement can significantly enhance the sport's visibility and appeal.
3. **Media Day for Content Banking:** Media Day is to gather a comprehensive collection of content that can be strategically used throughout the season and during the off-season. This approach not only ensures a steady flow of high-quality content but also allows athletes to focus on their primary role—competing and training—without the constant demand to create new content during critical times.
4. **Branding book:** To establish a comprehensive brand book that provides clear guidelines for all stakeholders on how to effectively represent the skeleton brand. This brand book will serve as a centralized resource, ensuring consistency and alignment in all marketing and communication efforts across the IBSF, National Sport Federations (NSFs), athletes, sponsors, and media partners.
5. **National Federations Branding Workshops:** To empower National Sport Federations (NSFs) by helping them understand their critical role in building and promoting the brand of skeleton. These workshops will educate NSFs on how to effectively leverage their own platforms, amplify their athletes' reach, and collaborate with National Olympic Committees (NOCs) leading up to the 2026 WOG. The goal is to create a cohesive, global branding strategy that strengthens the visibility and appeal of skeleton across all levels.

6.2 Recommendations table

Table 10: Recommendations table

Priority	Recommendation	Action	Lead	Resources	Timeline	Budget
1	IBSF Strategic Content Plan : Create a strong and distinctive identity for skeleton by focusing on its visually striking and unique aspects, such as the head-first descent and the sport's combination of extreme action with safety.	Creating a detailed content plan for the lead up to the 2026 Winter Olympic Games.	Secretary General, Social Media co-ordinator	Time commitment from Secretary General and Social Media co-ordinator.	Completed yearly by September	\$12,000
		Develop key messaging and Visual Identity	Secretary General	Branding consultants, graphic designers, copywriters	October 2024-December 2024	
		Create and Distribute Promotional Content	Social media coordinator	Videographers, social media managers, content creators	January 2025-April 2025	
		Launch a brand awareness campaign	GS and SMC	Digital advertising specialists, social media, PR agency	May 2025-September 2025	
2	Engage Athletes in Brand Creation: Objective: Involve athletes in content creation and storytelling to build a more authentic and relatable brand, fostering a sense of community and enhancing fan loyalty.	Conduct Branding Workshops for Athletes	Athlete co-chairperson	Time commitment from Athlete co-chairperson. Branding consultants, workshop facilitators	January 2025-March 2025	\$12,000
		Develop Athlete-Driven Content	Social-media coordinator Secretary General ?	Content creators, social media managers	January 2025-March 2025	
		Launch Athlete-Led Social Media Campaigns	Social media coordinator , athletes	Social media coordinator, athletes	August 2025-October 2025	

3	IBSF branding education for athletes	Offering in-person and online education to teach athletes how they can elevate their personal brands, and align with the brand of Skeleton. Using elements from the brand equity model from Aaker, and teach how they can implement in to their own social media	Athlete co-chairperson	Time commitment from athlete co-chairperson. Digital support or venue support.	Two times in season, during the first World Cup and Jr. World Championships.	\$7,000
4	Media day for content banking	Yearly prepare the content schedule so that sufficient content is available to last throughout the season and in to the offseason. This allows the athletes who are willing to participate to be able to give back in regards to social media, yet allow the focus to remain on competition itself.	Social Media co-ordinator, internal videographer, internal photographer.	Time commitment from internal social media co-ordinator, internal, videographer and internal photographer. Potential location support, and props when necessary.	Prior to season start, and pre-determined intervals throughout the season	\$15,000
5	National Federation branding workshop	Educate national Federations on the key aspects of the brand of skeleton. Explain the brand identity, preferred content and channels by fans. Additionally educate National Federations on how they can effectively create and manage their own brand, while boosting the brand of skeleton.	VP of Media & Marketing	Time commitment from the VP of Media & Marketing and Secretary General. Additional buy in from the National Federations.	During Congress	\$7,000

6.1 Co-creating In appendix A, we will provide more detailed information on each recommendation, including the necessary actions, key strategies, and other critical considerations to successfully implement these initiatives.

Chapter 7: Future Considerations

Future research should explore innovative ways to present skeleton races, focusing on leveraging new technologies that could enhance the viewing experience while potentially reducing the costs associated with broadcasting the sport. This could include the use of augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), or advanced data visualization techniques to bring fans closer to the action and provide a more immersive experience.

Additionally, it is crucial to investigate the environmental impact of the sport of skeleton. Understanding and mitigating the environmental footprint of events, facilities, and operations should be a priority. Research should focus on assessing current practices and exploring sustainable alternatives. Furthermore, developing strategies to effectively communicate the IBSF's environmental efforts and progress to fans and stakeholders will be essential in maintaining a positive public perception and aligning with global sustainability trends.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The research undertaken provides a comprehensive analysis of the current brand identity and image of the sport of skeleton, highlighting both its strengths and areas for improvement. Through qualitative interviews and a quantitative fan survey, it has become evident that while skeleton is recognized for its unique, thrilling characteristics—such as speed, adrenaline, and the daring headfirst descent—there are significant challenges in broadening its appeal and increasing its accessibility to a global audience.

A consistent theme throughout the research is the strong but niche following that skeleton enjoys. Fans are highly engaged and loyal, often connecting directly with athletes via social media, particularly on platforms like Instagram. However, this engagement is hampered by geographical barriers and limited access to live broadcasts, pointing to the need for more innovative and modernized content delivery methods.

The research underscores the importance of strategic marketing efforts to enhance the visibility and appeal of skeleton. A key recommendation is the development of a long-term content strategy that involves co-creation with athletes and fans. This strategy should focus on creating compelling, authentic content that resonates with the sport's core values while also educating and engaging potential new fans.

Additionally, there is a clear need for branding education at both the athlete and national federation levels. By aligning all stakeholders on a unified brand message and leveraging their collective reach, the sport can build a stronger, more cohesive identity.

Future considerations should include exploring new technologies to enhance race presentations and addressing environmental concerns associated with the sport. By focusing on these areas, skeleton can strengthen its brand equity and broaden its appeal, ensuring its growth and sustainability in the years to come.

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Appendix A:

Recommendation 1: Emphasize Skeleton Unique Attributes

This recommendation is foundational to establishing a strong and distinctive identity for skeleton. Highlighting the sport's unique aspects, such as the head-first descent and its combination of extreme action with safety, is crucial for differentiating it from other sports. By creating a memorable identity, this effort will serve as the backbone for all other marketing and engagement activities.

Key Actions:

- **Develop key messaging and visual identity:** To establish a cohesive and impactful brand identity for skeleton by crafting clear, consistent messaging and a visual style that reflects the sport's unique attributes.
 - **Identify Core Brand Values:** The sport's distinct characteristics are: dynamic, head-first descents, and the high-adrenaline experience. They form a cohesive brand identity that resonates well with the audience. These elements will form the foundation of your key messaging.
 - **Craft Clear Messaging:** Develop clear and concise messaging that encapsulates the essence of skeleton. This could include a tagline or slogan that resonates with both new and existing audiences. The messaging should communicate the excitement, danger, and athleticism of the sport, positioning skeleton as a thrilling, high-adrenaline experience.
 - **Design Visual Identity:** Create a visual identity that complements the key messaging. This includes designing logos, color schemes, typography, and imagery that reflect the sport's dynamic nature. The visual identity should be versatile enough to be used across various platforms, from social media to broadcast media, ensuring a consistent look and feel.
 - **Involve Athletes and Fans:** Engage athletes in the development process by incorporating their input and ensuring the brand identity aligns with their personal brands. Similarly, gather feedback from fans to ensure the messaging and visuals resonate with the target audience.
- **Create and distribute promotional content:** To produce high-quality, engaging content that highlights the unique aspects of skeleton and effectively communicates the sport's brand identity to a wide audience.
 - **Develop a Content Calendar:** Create a detailed content calendar that outlines the types of content to be produced and their release dates. This calendar should account for peak competitions during the season, especially the lead-up to the Winter Olympics, as well as off-season periods where content can keep the sport top-of-mind for fans.
 - **Produce Diverse Content:** Generate a variety of content formats, including short-form videos, athlete interviews, behind-the-scenes footage, highlight reels and, physical training. This content should showcase the sport's unique attributes, such as the intense speed, the head-first descent, and the precision required to compete at a high level.
 - **Leverage Athletes for Content Creation:** Collaborate with athletes to create content that reflects their personal experiences and perspectives. This not only adds authenticity to the content but also helps build a stronger connection between athletes and fans.
 - **Distribute Across Multiple Channels:** Ensure that the content is distributed across all relevant channels, including social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook YouTube), official websites, and broadcast media. Tailor the content to suit the specific platform and audience, maximizing its reach and impact.
 - **Engage Fans for Feedback:** Actively involve fans by encouraging them to provide feedback on the content they enjoy and want to see more of. This feedback loop will help refine the content strategy and ensure it continues to resonate with the audience.

- **Launch a brand awareness campaign:** To increase the visibility of skeleton and solidify its brand identity through a targeted brand awareness campaign that reaches a broad audience, especially in the lead-up to major events like the 2026 Winter Olympics
 - **Identify Target Audiences:** Define the key demographics and psychographics you want to reach with the campaign. This could include winter sports enthusiasts, extreme sports fans, and younger audiences who are drawn to high-adrenaline activities.
 - **Develop Campaign Strategy:** Outline the campaign's objectives, key messages, and the platforms that will be used. The strategy should focus on building anticipation and excitement for skeleton, particularly as the Winter Olympics approach.
 - **Utilize Paid Media:** Invest in paid advertising across digital platforms, such as social media ads, Google Ads, and video pre-rolls on YouTube. This will ensure the campaign reaches a larger audience and drives engagement with the content.
 - **Run Contests and Interactive Campaigns:** Engage the audience with interactive elements, such as contests, challenges, or hashtag campaigns that encourage user-generated content. For example, fans could be invited to share their own "head-first" experiences or reactions to skeleton races using a specific hashtag.
 - **Monitor and Optimize Campaign:** Use analytics tools to track the performance of the campaign in real-time. Monitor metrics such as reach, engagement, and conversion rates to determine what's working and where adjustments need to be made. Use this data to optimize the campaign for better results.
 - **Peak Towards Major Events:** Structure the campaign to build momentum, peaking during key events such as the 2026 Winter Olympics. This ensures maximum visibility and impact when global attention is focused on the sport.

Recommendation 2: Engage Athletes in Brand Creation:

Objective: Involving athletes in the branding process is essential for creating an authentic and relatable brand identity for the sport of skeleton. Athletes are the face of the sport, and their direct involvement in content creation and fan engagement can significantly enhance the sport's visibility and appeal. Here's an expanded look at the three key action items for this recommendation:

Key Actions:

- **Conduct branding workshops for athletes:** To equip athletes with the knowledge and tools needed to effectively contribute to the skeleton brand's image and engage with fans in a way that aligns with the sport's identity.
 - **Organize Workshop Sessions:** Develop a series of interactive workshops tailored to athletes. These sessions should cover key topics such as personal branding, the importance of consistent messaging, and how to align their personal brand with the overall skeleton brand. Workshops can be held in-person or virtually, depending on the athletes' schedules.
 - **Branding Education:** Educate athletes on the fundamentals of branding, including how their actions, social media presence, and public interactions contribute to the overall perception of the sport. Emphasize the importance of authenticity and how they can leverage their unique personalities to enhance the sport's brand.
 - **Social Media Training:** Provide athletes with practical training on how to effectively use social media platforms to build their personal brand and promote the sport. This includes best practices for content creation, audience engagement, and managing their online presence.
 - **Content Creation Techniques:** Teach athletes about different types of content (e.g., video, photography, blogs) and how to create content that resonates with fans
 - **Provide them with tools and resources,** such as content templates and mobile editing apps, to simplify the content creation process.

- Ongoing Support and Resources: After the workshops, offer ongoing support through one-on-one consultations, office hours, or an online resource hub where athletes can access branding materials, guidelines, and tools.
- **Develop athlete-driven content:** To create engaging and authentic content that highlights athletes' personal stories, training routines, and experiences, thereby deepening the connection between athletes and fans.
 - Collaborate on Content Ideas: Work with athletes to brainstorm and plan content that showcases their unique personalities and journeys in the sport. This could include behind-the-scenes footage of training sessions, day-in-the-life videos, personal stories of overcoming challenges, and insights into their preparation for major events like the Winter Olympics.
 - Storytelling Focus: Emphasize the importance of storytelling in content creation. Help athletes develop narratives that resonate with fans, such as their motivations, struggles, and triumphs in the sport. These stories can humanize the athletes and make the sport more relatable to a broader audience.
 - Create a Content Calendar: Develop a content calendar in collaboration with athletes to ensure a steady flow of content throughout the season. The calendar should include key dates for content releases, such as major competitions, training milestones, and personal events that fans might find interesting.
 - Multimedia Content Production: Encourage athletes to create a variety of content formats, including short-form videos, vlogs, podcasts, and social media posts. Provide access to professional videographers or editors if needed, but also encourage athletes to create raw, unfiltered content that gives fans a genuine glimpse into their lives.
 - Fan Interaction: Integrate opportunities for fan interaction into the content. This could involve Q&A sessions, live streams, or polls where fans can ask questions or choose what content they want to see next. This not only increases engagement but also makes fans feel more connected to the athletes.
 - Launch athlete-led social media campaigns: To boost fan engagement and raise the profile of skeleton by launching targeted social media campaigns led by athletes leveraging their influence and connection with fans.
- **Campaign Strategy Development:** Work with athletes to develop social media campaigns that align with the overall brand strategy. Each campaign should have clear objectives, such as increasing follower count, driving engagement, or promoting specific events. Campaign themes could range from training challenges to behind-the-scenes looks at major competitions.
 - **Hashtag Creation and Promotion:** Develop campaign-specific hashtags that athletes can use to unify their content and encourage fan participation. For example, a hashtag like #HeadFirstChallenge could be used for fans to share their own daring or adventurous experiences, inspired by the sport's head-first descent.
 - **Collaborative Content:** Encourage athletes to collaborate with each other on social media, such as doing joint live streams, creating challenge videos, or taking over each other's social media accounts for a day. This not only creates more dynamic content but also strengthens the sense of community within the sport.
 - **User-Generated Content (UGC):** Motivate fans to create their own content related to the campaign. For example, athletes can challenge fans to replicate a training move or share their reactions to a race, using the campaign hashtag. Athletes can then feature the best fan submissions on their own profiles, further boosting engagement.
 - **Analytics and Optimization:** Track the performance of these campaigns using social media analytics tools. Measure key metrics such as engagement rates, reach, and follower growth to assess the success of the campaigns. Use this data to optimize future campaigns and ensure they are achieving their objectives.

- **Amplify During Key Events:** Time these campaigns to coincide with major events, such as the Winter Olympics, to maximize their impact. Athletes can use their heightened visibility during these periods to drive even more engagement and expand their reach to new audiences.

Expected Outcomes

- Athletes who are well-equipped to be ambassadors for the sport, consistently contributing to the skeleton brand in a way that enhances its visibility and aligns with the overall marketing strategy.
- A rich library of athlete-driven content that brings fans closer to the sport, showcases the athletes' personalities, and keeps the audience engaged throughout the year.
- Highly engaging social media campaigns that not only increase the visibility of skeleton but also build a more connected and interactive fan base, with athletes playing a central role in the sport's promotion.

Recommendation 3: Media Day for Content Banking

The purpose of a Media Day is to gather a comprehensive collection of content that can be strategically used throughout the season and during the off-season. This approach not only ensures a steady flow of high-quality content but also allows athletes to focus on their primary role—competing and training—without the constant demand to create new content during critical times.

Key actions :

- **Efficient Content Collection:** Media Day provides a dedicated time for capturing a wide variety of content, including photos, videos, interviews, and behind-the-scenes footage. This focused effort allows for the creation of a substantial content library that can be used across multiple platforms and throughout different phases of the season.
- **Comprehensive Content Coverage:** During Media Day, the internal videographer and media team can work with athletes to capture various types of content that highlight different aspects of the sport and the athletes' personalities. This could include:
 - **Profile Videos:** Short videos introducing athletes, their backgrounds, and their aspirations.
 - **Training Montages:** High-energy clips showcasing different training routines and techniques.
 - **Interviews and Sound Bites:** In-depth interviews or quick sound bites that can be used for promotional purposes.
 - **Behind-the-Scenes Footage:** Casual, candid moments that give fans a glimpse into the athletes' day-to-day lives and the sport's culture.

Tailored Content for Strategic Use:

By collecting a broad range of content during Media Day, the internal videographer and media team can later edit and cut videos with a clear direction in mind. This allows the team to tailor content for specific purposes, such as promoting upcoming events, engaging with fans on social media, or maintaining visibility during the off-season.

- **Content Flexibility:** Having a content bank provides flexibility throughout the season. The marketing and social media teams can draw from this library to release timely and relevant content, keeping fans engaged and the sport in the spotlight, even when athletes are focusing on competition or during periods of low activity, such as the off-season.
- **Athlete Focus:** By concentrating content creation into a single day, athletes are freed from the ongoing pressure of creating new content. This allows them to concentrate on their primary responsibilities—training and competing—while still contributing to the sport's branding and promotion. Athletes can trust that their best moments and stories are being captured and will be used effectively throughout the year.

- **Opportunity for Creative Collaboration :** Media Day also serves as a unique opportunity for athletes and the media team to collaborate creatively. Athletes can share their ideas and vision for the type of content they want to be associated with, ensuring that the final output is authentic and aligns with their personal brand as well as the overall skeleton brand.
- **Maximizing Content Efficiency:** With all content captured in a controlled environment on a single day, the media team can ensure consistency in quality and style. This reduces the need for additional shoots throughout the season and ensures that all content aligns with the brand's visual identity and messaging.

Expected Outcome:

A robust and versatile content library that provides high-quality, consistent, and engaging material for use throughout the entire season and off-season. This approach supports ongoing marketing and fan engagement efforts while allowing athletes to focus on their athletic performance without the distraction of constant content creation.

Recommendation 4: Branding book

To establish a comprehensive brand book that provides clear guidelines for all stakeholders on how to effectively represent the skeleton brand. This brand book will serve as a centralized resource, ensuring consistency and alignment in all marketing and communication efforts across the IBSF, National Sport Federations (NSFs), athletes, sponsors, and media partners.

- **Identify Core Brand Elements:** Clearly outline the key aspects of the skeleton brand. This will form the foundation for all branding efforts. It will also ensure that everyone understands what the sport of skeleton stands for and how it should be communicated.
- **Develop Visual Identity Guidelines:** Set guidelines for the visual elements of the brand, including logos, colors, fonts, and imagery. This will ensure a consistent look and feel for skeleton across all platforms, making the sport easily recognizable
- **Outline Messaging and Tone of Voice:** Provide guidance on the messaging and tone of voice that should be used when talking about skeleton. All communications reflect the excitement and uniqueness of skeleton, whether it's on social media, in interviews, or during events.
- **Create Brand Application Guidelines:** Explain how to apply the brand elements in different contexts, such as on social media, in print materials, or on merchandise. Yjis will make sure the skeleton brand is represented consistently everywhere, from online posts to athlete gear.
- **Include Guidelines for Co-Branding:** Offer rules for co-branding with sponsors, partners, and athletes. This is to ensure that any collaborations enhance the skeleton brand rather than dilute it.
- **Distribute and Train on Brand Book Usage:** Share the brand book with all relevant stakeholders and provide training on how to use it effectively. Equip everyone with the tools they need to represent the skeleton brand consistently and effectively.

Recommendation 5: National Federation Branding Workshop

To empower National Sport Federations (NSFs) by helping them understand their critical role in building and promoting the brand of skeleton. These workshops will educate NSFs on how to effectively leverage their own platforms, amplify their athletes' reach, and collaborate with National Olympic Committees (NOCs) leading up to the 2026 WOG. The goal is to create a cohesive, global branding strategy that strengthens the visibility and appeal of skeleton across all levels.

- **Educate on Brand Alignment and Consistency:** Ensure that all NSFs understand the core elements of the skeleton brand and how they can align their own messaging and activities to support a unified global brand.

- **Leverage National Platforms and Networks:** Help NSFs recognize the potential of their own platforms and networks in promoting skeleton and engaging local audiences.
- **Collaborate with Athletes for Co-Branded Content:** Encourage NSFs to work closely with their athletes to create co-branded content that highlights both the sport and the athletes' personal stories.
- **Engage National Olympic Committees (NOCs):** Highlight the role that NOCs can play in promoting skeleton, particularly in the lead-up to the Winter Olympic Games.
- **Develop Customized Action Plans:** Equip each NSF with a tailored action plan that outlines specific steps they can take to enhance their role in promoting the skeleton brand.

Appendix B:

Interview Guide

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How can the IBSF collaborate with their athletes to create and sustain brand equity for the brand of skeleton?
- What are possible brand activation activities that could take place with athletes to increase brand equity?

Interview questions

Brand of skeleton

- How do you describe the sport of skeleton to someone who has never seen it before?
- What do you believe makes skeleton unique and makes it stand out from other sports?
- What makes skeleton athletes unique?
- What specific elements do you consider distinctive or most defining of the sport of skeleton?
- What words do you think of when you think of the sport of skeleton?
- What do you think the general population thinks about skeleton?
- How do you want the general population to perceive skeleton?
- What do you wish people understood about the sport of skeleton?
- What makes you care about skeleton?
- What is the sport of skeleton's best kept secret?

Introduction to Skeleton

- How were you introduced to skeleton?
- What were your first thoughts when you tried skeleton?
- What did your friends & family think when they heard you were going to do skeleton?

Social Media Habits

- What platforms do you currently use?
- How often do you post?
- Did you have a natural uptick in followers surrounding the Olympics?
- If you could run the IBSF's social accounts, how would you market skeleton?

Social Media Usage

- Do you have a strategy when it comes to content creation?
- If you do have a strategy, do you measure performance of certain campaigns?
- What content that you have posted has had the most amount of interactions?
- Do you notice an increase in interactions when you collaborate with other creators / organisations / athletes / team members?
- Can you share with me an example of a successful social media campaign you have

been a part of?

- How can skeleton athletes use their own social media to co-create skeleton as a brand?
- Do your fans express interest in certain content? & If so do you adapt content delivery due to this? Athlete Collaboration
- Would you be interested to collaborate with the IBSF to increase brand equity (value) for skeleton
- How can athletes contribute to creating a positive and distinctive image for the sport of skeleton?
- In what ways can the IBSF and athletes work together to ensure consistent brand representation across various channels
- How would you go about fostering a sense of community among skeleton fans?

Brand Activation

- How do you believe athlete partnerships contribute to building and enhancing brand equity?
- Have you had ideas about some unique and creative activations which would increase brand equity for skeleton?
- In what ways can the IBSF involve athletes in the planning and execution of brand activation activities to maximise their impact?

Documentary

- How can the collaborative co-creation of a documentary/docu-series between the IBSF and skeleton athletes contribute in to shaping and enhancing the skeleton sport brand?
- Can you discuss your experience with collaborative projects, particularly those involving co-creation?
- In your opinion what strategic considerations should be taken in to account when co-creating a documentary that involves both the IBSF and athletes
- How would you balance storytelling elements that enhance the IBSF brand while authentically representing the athletes' narratives?
- In your view, how can the collaborative co-creation of a documentary contribute to building a unified brand image for both the IBSF and the athletes
- Do you see value in creating a documentary for skeleton?

- What are the opportunities for skeleton
- What are the threats to skeleton

Appendix C:

Questionnaire

- 1) Are you a former skeleton athlete?
- 2) Age
- 3) In what country do you reside?
- 4) What sliding sports do you follow?
- 5) What initially drew you to the sport of skeleton?
- 6) What words or sentences do you associate with skeleton?
- 7) How long have you been following the sport of skeleton?
- 8) How frequently do you watch skeleton?
- 9) What medium do you watch skeleton via?
- 10) Where do you get information/updates about skeleton?
- 11) Do you follow skeleton athletes on social media?
- 12) If yes, who do you follow on Social Media?
- 13) If yes, what platforms do you follow them on?

- 14) If yes, how do you interact with those athletes social media accounts?
- 15) What athletes specific content do you prefer?
- 16) What aspects of skeleton do you find most exciting?
- 17) What behind the scenes content are you most interested in?
- 18) If not mentioned above, what content would you like?
- 19) What skeleton related experiences would you be interested to participate in?
- 20) If not mentioned above, what other skeleton related experiences would you be interested to participate in?
- 21) Any additional comments