CORPORATE IDENTITY IN PRESS RELEASES AND NEWSPAPER ARTICLES
A CASE STUDY OF LOTTO SOUDAL

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As this research paper means the final hurdle before graduating and waving my student life goodbye, I want to grasp the opportunity to thank some people. I know that it sounds like a cliché but still, without the support of some people, studying for five years and completing this research paper wouldn’t have been possible. First of all, I want to thank my supervisor Astrid Vandendaele, who was always there to share her broad experience and expertise regarding this paper’s topic. I also want to express my gratitude towards my parents for granting me the opportunity to study at university for five years. My twin brother Sander - who also studied at university - was an invaluable support during my student life. We could understand each other as he was going through the same typical student-related struggles. He was always ready to help me out with anything.

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ABSTRACT

Goal of the thesis and method

The purpose of this paper was born in the search of the determinants of successful communication according to the Lotto Soudal cycling team. I learnt that the team’s strategy is rather based on communicating their corporate identity. The goal of this thesis is tripartite. As the corporate identity had not yet been written down, the first objective of this paper was to formally determine the corporate identity of Lotto Soudal. Secondly, this paper examines if the defined values attached to the team’s corporate identity are visible in the communication strategy. Therefore, a specific means of communication, press releases, have been examined during two main periods. These include the Giro d’Italia and the Tour de France, two of the three Grand Tours in cycling. Content analysis was done on these press releases sent out by the communication department during these two specific periods. The discussion of the results is based on a benchmark set by the PR and communication manager of Lotto Soudal. According to him, each of the five values should be incorporated at least once in every press release. The final main goal of this thesis is to evaluate whether these releases are picked up by various media outlets. Irrespective of the answer, this paper also tries to assess whether journalists know and include the values attached to the corporate identity in their written newspaper articles. Therefore, articles of various Belgian newspapers have been collected and analysed.

Results and recommendations

The results illuminated some interesting findings and will serve as the base for some recommendations that Lotto Soudal can keep in mind when communicating towards its stakeholders in the future. The content analysis of the value reflection in the press releases sent during the Giro and Tour demonstrated that the predetermined benchmark was not met. Only six out of the seventeen releases included all of the five Lotto Soudal values. This can be seen as a missed opportunity as the Giro and Tour – two of the biggest cycling events in terms of media attention – form the ideal stage to make the corporate identity of a team known to the outside world. As an overall recommendation regarding this first research question, the team’s communication department should pay attention to better include the five values attached to the corporate identity of Lotto Soudal in the press releases. It is strongly advised to more explicitly mention the values concerning the Belgian identity and U23 division of the team. The stability value was least mentioned in the releases and should consequently be more incorporated in the communication.

This research paper revealed that most of the press releases that were delivered to the media during the Giro and Tour were not published in the form of written newspaper articles. The explanation of this finding could lie in the fact that during highly mediatized events, every major newspaper sends their own journalist to the event. Another possible explanation could be that journalists have a severe time pressure to produce articles and don’t want to wait for the official release of the team. The only specific case in which press releases were picked up was when journalists had to rely on the team’s releases for riders’ injury updates. However, various media outlets heavily relied on the team’s official means of communication during smaller events. Consequently, these were also more often published in newspapers.
So, it needs to be evaluated if it is purely because of time pressure or if other factors come into play. In the future, little things could be tweaked in the press releases, content-wise. For example, little facts and figures journalists do not have access to. Then, it needs to be determined if journalists use the releases more regularly or not.

The last research question tried to give an answer to whether journalists also include the five values attached to the corporate identity of Lotto Soudal in their written newspaper articles. It was rather difficult to formulate a unanimous answer as no benchmark was set to base the results on. But as the content analysis suggested, it seems that journalists know the values of what Lotto Soudal stands for quite well. As Lotto Soudal is one of the oldest cycling teams in the pro peloton, it could be expected that the media should know the team by now. However, some things can still be improved on. It will be highly interesting to evaluate – in the future – what happens if more attention is paid to better include the values of Lotto Soudal in the press releases. Would this result in journalists using these values even more in the articles? This is certainly an interesting subject for a possible follow-up study.

**Avenues for further research**

In order to get the full picture of understanding the corporate identity of Lotto Soudal, the team should also involve their fans. It should be evaluated if they know what the team stands for. It needs to be assessed if fans also recognize the communicated values in the press releases. Testing the corporate identity could not only be interesting with fans but also with some other stakeholders of the team such as sponsors and staff.
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1 INTRODUCTION & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

During my internship with the Belgian Lotto Soudal cycling team, I wondered how they would define successful communication. Would a sports organisation be any different from other businesses? Could the strategy be based on a list of KPIs or at least some kind of tangible document? As I presented this question to the team’s PR- and communication manager, I was rather surprised by his answer. There wasn’t any kind of ‘communication guideline’ because he argued that assessing successful communication in sports is heavily linked to the sporting performances set by the team. Instead, I learned that the team’s communication strategy is rather based on its corporate identity, meaning what kind of image Lotto Soudal wants to create and send out to their various stakeholders. Research indeed shows that if done right, a consistent and distinctive corporate identity can create various competitive advantages for an organisation in general but also for sports organisations like Lotto Soudal. These include the creation of fan loyalty and trust, a sense of belonging of fans towards their team, a favorable competitive position and even additional merchandise revenues (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Holt, 1995, Burton & Howard, 1999). However, still relatively few teams seem proactive in building and leveraging their brand (Burton & Howard, 1999; Desbordes, Ohl, & Tribou, 2001; Mullin et al., 2000). Because of the multiple advantages that a solid corporate identity can generate, the idea arose to examine Lotto Soudal’s corporate identity, if this identity is sufficiently communicated and finally, how it is expressed in the media.

As press releases are used extensively by commercial and noncommercial sports alike in their quest to obtain press coverage (Lowes, 1997), they form the perfect tool to analyze whether a good and consistent corporate identity is present in Lotto Soudal’s communication strategy. Therefore, the first research question goes as follows:

Research question 1: Do the press releases sent out by Lotto Soudal sufficiently include the values attached to the corporate identity that the team wants to communicate towards its stakeholders?

No commercial sport could be economically self-supporting without at least some coverage from the media (Coppett, 1981). As a team heavily depends on the media to fully reach potential audiences (Kettner-Hoeberg & López, 2015), this pleads for an analysis on how often and when these press releases sent out by the team are being published. Regardless of whether any releases are being published or not, the question has to be posed if articles about the team also adequately include the values attached to the corporate identity of Lotto Soudal? Therefore, the second research question is twofold.

Research question 2a: How and when does the media pick up and publish the press releases sent out by the team?

Research question 2b: Irrespective of whether these press releases are picked up by the media or not, are the values attached to the corporate identity sufficiently expressed by journalists in written newspaper articles?
To answer these research questions, a content analysis was done on a collection of press releases and newspaper articles. These documents were assembled during two periods, the Giro d’Italia and the Tour de France, two mega sporting events in which the team enjoys considerable worldwide media exposure. As a creative and consistent corporate identity can produce a competitive edge, the main purpose of this paper is to analyze whether Lotto Soudal’s identity is firmly incorporated into the team’s communication. Besides, the results of this paper should enable to evaluate whether press releases could be tweaked in order to reach more press coverage and to project a more consistent corporate identity. As Couvelaere & Richelieu (2015) argue, strategic management of one’s corporate identity could provide teams with a long-term financial stability and viability. In a sport characterized by short-term sponsor contracts, this would present a genuine competitive advantage.

This paper starts off with a brief introduction of the Lotto Soudal cycling team and continues with a section on the two main theoretical concepts this research is based on. First, corporate identity is discussed. Why does it matter for organisations, and more specific for sports teams? How can a team create a genuine competitive advantage? Later on, the theory will be put into practice as the five key values of Lotto Soudal are comprehensively defined. Secondly, I will look into research about press releases and their importance in sports. The last theoretical part will look at why specific events become news and others don’t. Therefore, the much-cited news values of Galtung & Ruge are extrapolated to sports journalism.

This research paper continues by arguing why the specific research period has been chosen. Then, a brief history on cycling Grand Tours is given after which the exact methodology will be discussed. Once this method is presented, the results are thoroughly discussed and some practical suggestions are made that the team could keep in mind for setting future communication goals and strategies. This paper concludes with a few limitations and recommendations for possible future research.
2 PRESENTATION OF THE ORGANISATION: LOTTO SOUDAL

Lotto Soudal, a longstanding marriage between Belgian Lottery and cycling

The Belgian cycling team Lotto Soudal, nowadays part of the UCI WorldTour - the best eighteen cycling teams worldwide - is one of the oldest existing teams of the pro peloton as its history goes back to over 30 years. It all started in 1984 when the Belgian Lottery wanted to promote its ‘Lotto’ product and targeted the cycling business as an ideal billboard for their activities. Lotto first entered the world of cycling as a co-sponsor of the former Belgian Tönissteiner team. Only one year later, the Belgian Lottery decides to grant young - mostly Belgian - riders a chance to live their dream. That way the Lotto-Eddy Merckx team was born, the first precursor of what is nowadays Lotto Soudal. Over the years, many sponsors came and go but the one thing that remained constant was the dedication of the Belgian Lottery as the main sponsor of the team. For more than 30 years, Lotto has been acting as the major sponsor of the Belgian cycling team, making it the longest active cycling team sponsorship to date. Wim Lagae (2015) states that Lotto Soudal, together with the other Belgian WorldTour team of Quick-Step is amongst the few cycling teams that managed to survive through the past couple of decades.

Due to various sponsors, the team had different names throughout those 30 years including Lotto-Super Club, Lotto-Mobistar, Davitamon-Lotto and Lotto-Belisol. The list of famous cyclists who were part of the team is impressive. Some of these Belgian cycling icons include Philippe Gilbert, Johan Museeuw, Tom Steels, Greg Van Avermaet and Frank Vandenbroucke. Some of the non-Belgian riders who rode for the Lotto team include 2011 Tour de France winner Cadel Evans and both world-class sprinters Robbie McEwen and André Greipel.

Although Lotto remained on board as the main sponsor, a crucial change took place within the Lotto team by the end of 2014. Then Soudal - a Belgium-based manufacturer of sealants, adhesives and PU foams - stepped up as the second main sponsor. The signed deal would last for at least six years, a period that is more an exception than rule within the world of pro cycling. That way, Lotto Soudal, the cycling team in its current form was created. The importance of Soudal joining as one of the main sponsors can hardly be overestimated. Many people, like the PR- and communication manager of Lotto Soudal, state that the team was likely to vanish if Soudal hadn’t stepped up as a long-term partner. By the end of 2014, a roadmap towards 2020 was drawn and ambitious but realistic goals were set (De Bock, 2016).

As one can notice, in around 30 years’ time, the Belgian Lotto team has grown from a rather small cycling team to a genuine professional organisation that is performing on the highest level in the world of pro cycling. Lotto Soudal went from one exclusively male team in 1985 to a comprehensive organisation which includes not only both a professional men’s and women’s cycling team but also an U23 division focused on developing young talents into the professional cyclists of the future. Such a full-grown organisation requires a high level of professionalism. At the head of Lotto Soudal there is John Lelangue, who was recently appointed as Lotto Soudal’s new general manager. In addition, there’s a sportive manager who acts as the essential link between the riders and the general manager.
Other staff, apart from the riders, include sports directors, mechanics, doctors, physiotherapists and even psychologists. Moreover, there is also a commercial department with employees who are responsible for logistics, administration, hospitality and communication. Riders included, Lotto Soudal employs around 70 people.

A cycling team like Lotto Soudal is not a typical organisation. From January till the end of October, staff and riders literally travel around the globe to compete in the most prestigious races. Although a cycling team is almost the entire year on the road, it still needs a fixed place from where it can coordinate its activities. This logistic epicentre, often referred to as ‘service course’, is located in Herentals, Belgium. Such a warehouse is mostly based on an industrial site and is used to stock all the material of the team, like the bikes, nutrition, team cars and clothing. It also has some offices and conference rooms.

3 THE TWO MAIN THEORETICAL CONCEPTS EXPLAINED

3.1 Corporate identity

Now that Lotto Soudal has been briefly introduced, it is time to discuss the two main theoretical concepts that will be used to give a more scientific point of view in order to answer the different research questions formulated in this paper. The first topic that will be tackled is that of corporate identity. A definition of this abstract concept is given and the importance of a well-designed and distinctive corporate identity is also addressed. The presentation of the first theoretical concept concludes with an extrapolation of corporate identity to sports organisations.

3.1.1 What is it?

In the 90’s, corporate identity became a prominent paradigm and began to be linked to the strategic management of organisations (Marwick and Fill, 1997; Morison, 1997). Later that decade, it were Balmer and Gray who raised more interest in corporate identity as a research topic and started to extensively analyze this subject. The question of what identity exactly means can easily be answered by stating that it is what the organisation is or stands for. Although, according to Balmer and Greyser (2003) a clear definition of corporate identity lacks, I will here take the definition formulated by Balmer and Gray in 1998 as an example.

Corporate identity according to Balmer & Gray (1998): “In essence, corporate identity is the reality and the uniqueness of an organization which is integrally related to its external and internal image and reputation through corporate communication.”

This definition immediately marks the importance of corporate communication in this process of creating and managing corporate identity. Put more simply, corporate communication is the tool through which the image of the organisation, or what it exactly stands for is made known to internal as well as external stakeholders (Balmer & Gray, 2000).
3.1.2 Why does a strong corporate identity matter?

Over the years, various scholars have stressed the importance and need for strategically managing an organisation’s corporate identity. Before listing the specific characteristics that highlight the corporate identity of Lotto Soudal, it seems appropriate to first have a look at why creating and managing a strong and distinctive corporate identity matters. Researchers have come up with dozens of reasons why it is crucial, but I will only discuss the most applicable for this research purpose below before I move on to some more specific reasons why it also matters for sports organisations.

**Increased competition**

As almost every organisation has been faced with heightened competition, this is arguably the most important factor why creating a corporate identity is of great strategic importance. A stable and recognizable identity is vital to a company in order to being recognised and also being remembered. Through this process of creating awareness, trust and continuity, a company can increase its competitive edge in the market. It can really make you stand out as a company and therefore provide a genuine competitive advantage.

**Globalisation**

The main reason for increased competition may well lie in the globalisation phenomenon. A pervasive image and favourable reputation can be a powerful competitive weapon for a firm when expanding internationally. Just think of Coca-Cola or McDonald’s as primary examples. They have been able to expand worldwide more easily than lesser-known firms because of their high-profile and positive identities. Growing your business means however bigger investments, not only in financial terms but also in developing and communicating a new regional and/or global identity (Balmer & Gray, 2000).

**War for talent**

A crucial factor in staying competitive, mainly but not exclusively as a knowledge organisation, is the ability to attract and retain skilled and motivated employees. With a finite number of this specific part of the workforce, the ongoing so-called war for talent is fierce. Therefore, creating a positive reputation can lead to achieving this goal of attracting the specific talent your organisation needs. Because the organisation’s reputation provides a certain psychological income to the individual (Balmer & Gray, 2000), this process of creating a favourable corporate identity in order to attract talent is often called employer branding. Besides, employees also play an important role in both formally and informally communicating the business identity to the outside world. As such, they are important actors in building and maintaining the corporate brand.

The different reasons formulated above all indicate why organisations are almost obliged to think strategically about their company’s identity and how it will be communicated to key stakeholders in order to create a competitive advantage. On the one hand, this process may pose a threat to the strategic position of the company, but it also presents a genuine opportunity for the firm to present a clear image that reflects a positive identity, one that leads to an enviable reputation (Balmer & Gray, 2000).
3.1.3 Corporate identity in sports organisations

Creating competitive advantages

Although studying the importance of corporate identity provides valuable insight in how this can create a competitive advantage for a business in general, a sports organisation such as Lotto Soudal differs considerably from these and should be treated separately, as I will do below.

Professional sports teams, such as a cycling team, generate an emotional response from their fans that is stronger than in any other industry, except for actors and singers. As such, they have the potential to build brand equity by capitalizing on the emotional relationship it shares with its fans (Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001). With a strong brand and identity, a team can potentially develop and nurture the loyalty of fans (essentially, the customers of the organisation), which in its turn, helps to generate additional revenues through the sale of various goods and services (Burton & Howard, 1999; Gustafson, 2001; Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000). Some scholars such as Zerries (2015) argue that fan communication takes on a special role in cycling, as it does not serve a particular purpose in terms of generating merchandise revenues, although I do not fully agree with that statement. If done right, merchandise sale can be an additional source of sustainable income for a cycling team.

A sporting event such as a cycling race is intangible, short-lived, unpredictable and subjective in nature (Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Levitt, 1981). It is produced and consumed at the same time and it comes with a strong emotional commitment from the fans (Mullin et al., 2000). In this regard, a strong brand can and should help a professional sports team capitalize on the emotional attachment with the fans, in order to trigger fan loyalty (Holt, 1995). Successful brands are able to quickly establish a strong emotional and personal relationship with the customer. As a result, this relationship can potentially produce more trust toward the brand (Bedbury & Fenichell, 2002; De Charnatony, 2001). Moreover, this distinctive corporate identity can help increase the sense of belonging of fans toward their team (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005).

However, it needs to be mentioned that the team must have a minimum level of success, otherwise it becomes difficult to ask the fans to associate themselves with a losing team (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005). In order to first build and maintain such a fan base, Zerries (2015) accentuates the important aspect of recognisability and consistency of a corporate identity. The fact that credibility and trust can be evoked by a coherent and consistent corporate identity, is an important aspect as the reputation of cycling has been damaged by numerous doping scandals in the past.

Having a clear corporate identity and a related certain recognizability can enable a sports team to position itself against other teams in the market and make the organisation stand out. Note that for example cycling teams even compete with organisations within other sports sectors as they are essentially battling for the entertainment money of customers against other leisure activities, such as festivals, movies, restaurants, traveling... (Burton & Howard, 1999).
Dangers and the way forward

As stated earlier, a team should have a minimal level of success in order to evoke fan loyalty. Ideally, a team should build a strong enough brand to protect itself from eventual temporary poor performances (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005). It is also key to create a coherent corporate identity. If the actual performance or output ‘on the field’ is not consistent with what the team stands for and poor performance extends in time, fans can start distancing themselves from the team and the attached brand.

Creating and managing a corporate identity is thus certainly not a stationary concept, but rather a constantly evolving process where considerable effort is needed to maintain this competitive edge. So, the question rises where the future of corporate identity within sports organisations lies. Various propositions have been made by different scholars. Some believe that the focus should be shifted from building a fan base to building a team’s brand community that transcends gender, age, social classes and geographical boundaries (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2003). As such, it is suggested that sports teams need to find ways to combine the intangible benefits (e.g. emotions) with the tangible dimensions of the product (result of the race, merchandising,...). That way, the brand truly becomes a unifying, coherent and holistic offering which enables a team to instill trust and develop customers’ loyalty toward its products (De Chernatony, 2001).

This brief discussion indicates that it is only with a clear identity and strong positioning that marketing actions become relevant and can then serve the purpose of leveraging the brand equity of a sports team (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005). The implementation of a brand strategy, of which corporate identity makes up an important part, could help teams grow, expand and provide them with a long-term financial stability and viability (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005). In a sport such as cycling, where organisations are under constant pressure to attract sponsor money as most teams are missing long-term financial certainty, this constitutes a genuine competitive advantage.

3.1.4 The five key values of Lotto Soudal defined

As the section above demonstrates, the importance of creating and managing a good corporate identity can barely be overrated. It only seems appropriate to turn these theoretical concepts into practical ones and both list and discuss the key values linked to the corporate identity of Lotto Soudal. Some of these values have existed since the team was founded, but others have only been incorporated in the DNA of Lotto Soudal when the team headed into a new direction by attracting the second main sponsor Soudal. The fact that these values were not officially written down in some kind of document struck me. So, I had to do a bit of research before being able to define these values. The five characteristics listed below have been deduced on the one hand through a thorough interview with the PR-and communication manager of Lotto Soudal (Arne Houtekier). On the other hand, profound literature research was done concerning the history and current state of Lotto Soudal, where besides team and sponsor documents, the book of Willem de Bock (Lotto Soudal, de winnende combinatie, 2016) was of great value.
1. Belgian identity

The Belgian aspect of Lotto Soudal is firmly rooted in its history and is expressed through the sponsors, riders and staff. As stated earlier, Lotto has been active as the sponsor of the Belgian cycling team for over 30 years. Having started their marketing strategy as a co-sponsor of the former Tönissteiner team in 1984, the National Lottery founded their own professional cycling team only one year later. Its main mission was to grant young Belgian cycling talents the chance to develop themselves, a goal that the National Lottery has pursued ever since.

As of 2015, Soudal stepped up as the second main sponsor of Lotto Soudal. This manufacturer of adhesives, PU foams and sealants was founded over 60 years ago by the Belgian entrepreneur Vic Swerts, who still is a member of the Board of Directors today. The initial family business has now become Europe’s leading independent fabricator of mastics, adhesives and PU foams. Soudal currently owns nineteen production branches on five continents, sales offices in 44 different countries and employs around 3,000 people worldwide but is still based in Turnhout, Belgium. The Soudal Group states that it acts as a Belgian exporter but also adapts to the local needs of the specific market. So, it doesn’t come as a surprise that Soudal chose to sponsor a Belgium-based cycling team that competes in races all over the world.

Besides the two main sponsors of the Belgian cycling team, Ridley is through its financial contribution and supply of the bikes probably the most important co-sponsor of the team. The foundations of Ridley were laid in 1997, when the Belgian Jochim Aerts started Ridley bikes. For over 20 years, Ridley has been creating and manufacturing bikes. The Belgian touch is not only present in terms of sponsors but also in terms of the riders and staff of Lotto Soudal. Of the 26 professional riders who defended the colours of Lotto Soudal during the 2018 season, nineteen of them had the Belgian nationality. Also, the majority of the riders of the Lotto Soudal U23 and Ladies team are Belgian. The staff of Lotto Soudal is also almost exclusively Belgian. This makes it even more clear that the Belgian aspect is firmly represented through the sponsors as well as the riders and staff.

2. Shaping young Belgian talents

Guiding and training young cycling talents has been a longstanding mission of the Lotto team. As stated earlier, the first team that was fully owned by the Belgian Lottery was created in 1985. Through its engagement via the own team, Lotto was able to fully provide opportunities to Belgian young cycling talents to make it to a professional bike rider. So, training promising riders has in fact been the main reason why the Lotto team was built.

More than 10 years ago, the team created another entity within the organisation, called the U23 team, to fully focus on preparing young cyclists for a successful career within the pro peloton. Not only does the team contribute to a wider social and sportive purpose, Lotto Soudal also tries to be self-sufficient by promoting the most talented riders from the U23 squad to the WorldTour team. Moreover, Lotto Soudal makes sure that through moulding the future cycling stars, Belgium retains its spot on the international top of cycling.
The team has been quite successful in achieving this mission. The list of Lotto Soudal U23 riders who became a professional cyclist - often with Lotto Soudal but also with other big teams - proves this point. Tim Wellens, Thomas De Gendt, Tiesj Benoot and Victor Campenaerts are amongst the most well-known riders. Over the past few years, the U23 team has delivered dozens of young riders to various professional cycling teams, which makes Lotto Soudal U23 one of the best youth cycling teams inside the sport. There are different factors that contribute to the success of Lotto Soudal U23. A first one is the head of the team Kurt Van de Wouwer, a former professional cyclist himself. The Belgian is really the right man on the right place as he is an expert in detecting young talents and guiding them towards a possible professional cycling career. As Van de Wouwer points out himself, being able to use the same material and knowledge about nutrition, training and other medical aspects as the professional Lotto Soudal team is another important success factor (De Bock, 2016).

The idea of guidance is not only important in the process of shaping young talents and preparing them for a successful career. The professional riders should as well be given a perfect preparation, and that’s exactly what Lotto Soudal aims to do. The world of cycling has evolved into an environment where the smallest details can mean the difference between winning or losing. A considerable amount of importance is attached to supporting the riders during the build-up towards an important event. Cyclists are also given a high level of freedom to choose their goals, but always with the necessary pressure to perform.

3. Family and team spirit

As sports manager Marc Sergeant states: ‘In the first place, it is about working with people, with a lot of dedication and passion, with belief in each other as real professionals, as a team with the right spirit, as a true family’ (De Bock, 2016).

When a certain rider of the team wins, to the outside world it seems that he or she is the one who gets all the credit for the performance. But cycling is and will always be a team sport. A rider only seldom wins without the help of their teammates, not to mention all the staff who’s working behind the scenes. A victory or strong performance is very often due to the hard work of the complete framework of staff such as soigneurs, mechanics and sports directors. The team effort that has been put into a victory is not always visible but the riders know all too well what the staff means to them (De Bock, 2016). The idea is that the riders are of course important, but being a successful whole will always be the number one priority. The idea of unconditional confidence in the riders as well as the staff is also key in both creating and maintaining this family spirit.

With the idea of family, comes transparency. Lotto Soudal wants to assert itself as being transparent and accessible towards fans, press and other stakeholders. At the end of 2016, the Belgian National Lottery launched the ‘Captains of Cycling’ project in which a person gets a stake in the cycling team, depending on the various amounts of financial contribution. Throughout the year, a ‘shareholder’ can win different VIP cycling-related experiences. The goal of the project is to boost fan engagement towards Lotto Soudal in particular and cycling in general.
4. Challenger, attacking mindset

When the structural and organisational changes took place as Soudal joined as the second main sponsor by the end of 2014, the attacking mindset of the riders has become a part of the Lotto Soudal DNA. The team not only aspired to be winning more WorldTour level races, but also to race more attractively and as such apply a new way of racing. Every race is seen as a battle full of excitement and thrill in which the riders give it their all. Of course, not every attempt will result in a glorious victory, but what is the alternative? If you won’t try, you won’t succeed. The ambition and desire to perform well is one of the key elements of this value.

All Lotto Soudal riders should and will take this mission statement into account when they are racing. Some riders have even built their career around it. A perfect example is definitely Thomas De Gendt. The Belgian professional cyclist is a pure attacker. He joined the breakaway countless times, in search of the victory. Most of the times, his attacks did not result in a win but still, De Gendt has obtained some memorable victories over the years. As an example, he has won a stage in the Giro d’Italia, Tour de France and Vuelta a España, each time through his typical style of racing.

As Arne Houtekier suggested in a personal interview, the attacking mindset has been incorporated in the brand that is Lotto Soudal. But also the public have noticed this change in style as De Bock (2016) states: “Perhaps, the most important lesson of the 2015 season was not drawn from the record number of victories. Through all successes and failures, setbacks and positive events, the public recognized a new constant fact in the behaviour of Lotto Soudal: it had become a team of attackers.”

5. Stability

The stability is the last aspect that has to be included in the main values that reflect the identity of Lotto Soudal. The Belgian National Lottery has been the main sponsor of the current Lotto Soudal team for over 30 years, which is one of the longest-running partnerships in the cycling world. The present sponsorship deals with both Lotto and Soudal were signed in 2015 and run at least until 2020. Bike sponsor Ridley, clothing supplier Vermarc and petrol card supplier G&V also signed a six-year deal. It must be mentioned that contracts of such a duration are the exception rather than the rule inside the professional peloton.

This clearly shows the engagement of the partners, which results in more commitment, a closer collaboration and of course a higher job security. As De Bock (2016) mentions, this can be regarded as a genuine competitive advantage. The stability value is not only reflected through the duration of sponsor contracts, but also in the length of rider contracts and staff engagement. Of the 26 riders who represented the Lotto Soudal colours in 2018, ten of them have been riding with the team for at least five years.
3.2 Press releases

The above-discussed theoretical concept of corporate identity clearly shows that corporate communications play a vital role in making the organisation’s identity known to the outside world as well as all the internal stakeholders. In this research paper, I will focus on whether the specific traits of Lotto Soudal’s corporate identity are incorporated in a specific tool of communication, one that is most used within the Lotto Soudal communication department namely press releases. Below, the need for transparency and the importance of press releases is discussed, together with the most cited news values, specifically applied to sports coverage.

3.2.1 The need for transparency

Just like any other organisation, a cycling team such as Lotto Soudal has the almost moral obligation to open up towards the press, an evolution that was also confirmed by the PR-and communication manager of Lotto Soudal in a personal interview. Besides, a change in the attitude towards the press can be related to a change in cycling as a whole, affected by the doping scandals in the 1990s and mid-2000s that heavily damaged the reputation of the sport. It is now the team’s responsibility to again open up towards the press in order to give the sport a sense of credibility among the public again (Zerries, 2015).

On the other side of the coin, this urgent need for credibility often leads to journalists asking more direct questions, which makes a case for teams becoming more careful in their communication. Therefore, Zerries (2015) points out that press officers sometimes try to influence their reporting by amongst others issuing press releases and keeping the riders hidden in the team buses, instead of allowing journalists to interview them after a race, when emotions are at their most raw. This means that journalists often have to rely on these press releases sent out by the team in order to produce an article. Together with this restricted access to riders, journalists are often very busy and therefore rely on the organization’s press office that creates content such as press releases, pictures, video clips,... (Wilcox et al., 2006). This statement has been confirmed in the former research of Lowes (1997) where he revealed that sportswriters rather depend on routine sources, such as press releases, for the bulk of their raw news material, enabling them to cope with the pressures and constraints of their work. This relationship between journalists and PR people has become one of growing mutual dependence over recent decades. The media depends on content and ideas from the team as much as the team depends on the media to fully reach their potential audiences (Kettner-Hoeberg & López, 2015). According to Lowes (1997), the press release is an important device through which media relations people offer news material to reporters, essentially helping sports reporters do their work. So, it has become clear that press releases play a vital role in the (mainly external) communication of pro cycling teams. Therefore, they have been chosen for the purpose of this study.
3.2.2 News values applied to sports journalism

Many stories never reach publication. Tunstall (1971) estimates that 90 to 95 percent of available material is not used. So, what makes a story newsworthy then? At first, one must look at the purpose of the newspaper, the news stories covered must logically match the readers’ interests. These are known as the “news values”, which are simply a series of factors that seem to be particularly important in the selection of news (Harcup & O’Neill, 2001). Therefore, I will look at the authorities concerning news values, being the much-cited sociologists Galtung & Ruge. Although their research already dates from 1965, their factors continue to be cited as ‘prerequisites’ of news selection in the 21st century (Herbert, 2000).

It is often argued that the specific field of sports journalism exhibits some of the characteristics of general newspapers, especially since it has traditionally been viewed as entertainment rather than information (Whitlam & Preston, 1998). As the strength of the news values described by Galtung & Ruge (1967) lies in its generic character, they can thus be applied to sports journalism, which I will do here, based on former research of Whitlam & Preston (1998). Although these values are widely-applied, I will treat these with a critical view, as Harcup & O’Neill (2001) did.
The timing of an event is important. One that unfolds at the same or similar frequency as the news medium is more likely to be selected as news unlike a mere social trend. Reports of soccer games or cycling races are thus very eligible because they only last for a couple of hours. Note that this is not always the case, as for example three-week Grand Tours or transfer soaps still receive adequate media attention.

The size of an event will influence its chance of being published. The bigger a sporting event, such as an important tournament or race, the higher the chance of publication.

Hetherington (1985) states that the clearer the meaning of the event the more probable that it will become news. In essence, the result of a match or a rider joining another team fits this criterion.

The reader needs to identify with the society where an event happens. Foreign news will only likely to be published if it connects with the readers’ home culture.

The reader’s previous knowledge and its consequences of a sports event will enable him to identify with a certain story. On the basis of a sporting calendar, the newspaper sends journalists to cover the most important sporting events.

The more unpredictable, rare or unexpected the news, the higher its chances of being reported. An example of this constitutes of a cyclist that usually never wins but is suddenly victorious in one of the biggest races of the year.

Follow-up stories (stories that take time to reach a final conclusion) about for example transfers or the evolution of a young cyclist into a real hero do well in press.

Editors will demand a balanced mix of different stories of various sports.

The more an event features leading nations, such as Belgium in terms of cycling, the stronger the interest will be.

If the sports person involved in some story is important or popular in the public eye, higher are the chances of making it into the newspaper.

The press often uses one individual to represent an institution. One can notice that team players are also individuals in their style, skills and temperament (Whitlam & Preston, 1998). The press likes to identify a specific player as the spokesman for a team.

Negative news tends to be published more often because its unambiguity and unexpectedness. Whilst sports values tend to be positive, a primary news value is negativity, hence stories about sports players taking drugs, or being injured may be more prominently reported than stories about sporting success.

| Frequency | The timing of an event is important. One that unfolds at the same or similar frequency as the news medium is more likely to be selected as news unlike a mere social trend. Reports of soccer games or cycling races are thus very eligible because they only last for a couple of hours. Note that this is not always the case, as for example three-week Grand Tours or transfer soaps still receive adequate media attention. |
| Threshold | The size of an event will influence its chance of being published. The bigger a sporting event, such as an important tournament or race, the higher the chance of publication. |
| Unambiguity | Hetherington (1985) states that the clearer the meaning of the event the more probable that it will become news. In essence, the result of a match or a rider joining another team fits this criterion. |
| Meaningfulness | The reader needs to identify with the society where an event happens. Foreign news will only likely to be published if it connects with the readers’ home culture. |
| Consonance | The reader’s previous knowledge and its consequences of a sports event will enable him to identify with a certain story. On the basis of a sporting calendar, the newspaper sends journalists to cover the most important sporting events. |
| Unexpectedness | The more unpredictable, rare or unexpected the news, the higher its chances of being reported. An example of this constitutes of a cyclist that usually never wins but is suddenly victorious in one of the biggest races of the year. |
| Continuity | Follow-up stories (stories that take time to reach a final conclusion) about for example transfers or the evolution of a young cyclist into a real hero do well in press. |
| Composition | Editors will demand a balanced mix of different stories of various sports. |
| Elite Nations | The more an event features leading nations, such as Belgium in terms of cycling, the stronger the interest will be. |
| Elite People | If the sports person involved in some story is important or popular in the public eye, higher are the chances of making it into the newspaper. |
| Personal | The press often uses one individual to represent an institution. One can notice that team players are also individuals in their style, skills and temperament (Whitlam & Preston, 1998). The press likes to identify a specific player as the spokesman for a team. |
| Negativity | Negative news tends to be published more often because its unambiguity and unexpectedness. Whilst sports values tend to be positive, a primary news value is negativity, hence stories about sports players taking drugs, or being injured may be more prominently reported than stories about sporting success. |

Table 1: News values applied to sports journalism
4 DATA COLLECTION AND METHOD

4.1 Data Collection

In order to answer the formulated research questions, press releases and newspaper articles have been collected around two periods, the Giro d’Italia 2018 (4-27 May) and the Tour de France 2018 (7-29 July). The reason why these two specific time spans were chosen, is twofold. The first reason is a pragmatic one because during my internship with Lotto Soudal, I created content and wrote press releases during these two so-called Grand Tours. The second reasoning arises from the fact that these three-week events enjoy great media attention as they are among the world’s biggest cycling events. Below, a brief history and the amount of media attention of both the Grand Tours are clarified.

4.1.1 Grand Tours, what are they?

The Giro d’Italia and the Tour de France constitute together with the Vuelta a España the so-called three Grand Tours of a cycling season. These three-week stage races present the ultimate challenge for the endurance athletes that are cyclists. During this intensive period, the cyclists’ bodies are put to the test in either fast and furious flat races, intense time trials and exhausting stages in the high mountains. Each of the three Grand Tours has its own specific history, but together they have shaped the sport of cycling to what it stands for nowadays.

These Grand Tours can - according to Kettner-Hoeberg and López (2015) - be labelled as mega sporting events, defined as highly mediatized large-scale events with massive popular appeal and broad international, even global, signification (Roche, 2000). Most often cited examples of such sporting events are the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup Soccer. These events are often characterized by the amount, intensity, diversity and geographic reach of their media coverage (Maennig and Zimbalist, 2012). As Palmer (1998) states, The Tour de France is without a doubt the biggest of the three Grand Tours. But also the Giro d’Italia and the Vuelta a España have equally compelling histories, engaging competitions and have produced many race legends over the years (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010). These Grand Tours make it thus an ideal event for both the team itself and sponsors to get into the spotlight and to benefit from this elevated media coverage.

It needs to be added that professional road cycling has become a highly globalized sport over recent decades (Hirst and Thompson, 1999). The sport transformed from an almost exclusively Western European matter - hardly spreading beyond its historical cradle of Belgium, France, Italy and Spain - to a sport that has raised interest by all of the five continents. Due to this globalization trend and associated massive media consumption, the sport of cycling is able to secure a broader and larger audience, which leads to more coverage and can result in finding more financial resources for the teams.
4.1.1.1 Tour de France

Brief history

The Tour de France is worldwide seen as the most important cycling race (Van Reeth, 2013). This three-week event takes place in July and attracts millions of spectators, either alongside the roads or in front of a screen, watching the live broadcast. The history of Le Tour goes back to over a century as the first one was ridden in 1903. At that time, the race was organised by the French newspaper L’Auto (nowadays L’Équipe) as a mere promotional tool. It was initially just a means to increase newspaper sales for the organizing media behind the race (Van Reeth, 2013). The journal paid for the race’s logistics and prize money in order to sell more papers and to be able to charge more for advertisements (Mignot, 2016). The sales of L’Auto increased significantly thanks to the event and it even forced its main competitor, Le Vélo, to drop out of business. This enormous success lead to a second edition the next year. Since then, the Tour de France has been organised every year except during the World War periods (1915-1918 and 1940-1946).

From 1947 to 1965, the ownership of the Tour was passed on to the newspapers L’Équipe and Le Parisien Libéré. Since 1965, the Tour is owned by firms that eventually became the ASO (Amaury Sport Organisation). According to Heijmans & Mallon (2011), the ASO is considered to be one of the most powerful race organisers in cycling. Besides the Tour de France, they also organise numerous other bike races such as Paris-Roubaix and the Vuelta a España. Other mass events that are held by ASO include amongst others the Dakar rally and the Paris Marathon. As one can notice, throughout the history of the Tour, the owner has always been a profit-seeking media group (McKay, 2011).

Media attention

The first live TV broadcast was in 1948, when the ultimate stage at the Parc des Princes in Paris was showed to the outside world. The following decades, television coverage expanded in both duration and scope. European countries like Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy started transmitting live in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Van Reeth (2013), the Tour de France is nowadays the only cycling event - alongside the cobbled Classics such as Paris-Roubaix and the Ronde van Vlaanderen - to be broadcasted worldwide. The Tour is often signalled as the third biggest mega sporting event in terms of global TV viewership, with only more people watching the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup. However, there is no consensus about global TV audience numbers. According to race organiser ASO, global TV audience for the 21 stages amounts to almost 1 billion spectators (Van Reeth, 2013) but it may well be that this figure goes up to a hyperbolic four billion viewers (Kettner-Hoeberg & López, 2015). This increased media exposure the race offers makes it thus an ideal stage to put your team and its associated corporate identity into the spotlight. For the teams that participate in Le Tour, it is the busiest and the most hectic time of the year.
4.1.1.2 Giro d’Italia

**Brief history**

The historical development of the Giro d’Italia displays a number of similarities with the one of the Tour de France. The Giro was first organised to promote an Italian sports newspaper, La Gazzetta dello Sport (which is imprinted in pink, hence the pink jersey which the leader of the race wears) with the aim of boosting sales. The race was first held in 1909, won by Italian Luigi Ganna, and has been organised annually ever since (except for the two World Wars). As the race gained more and more prestige - not least thanks to the rivalry between Italian cycling legends Fausto Coppi and Gino Bartali - riders from all over the world were attracted to the Giro d’Italia. In 1950, The Swiss rider Hugo Koblet was the first foreigner to win the Giro. Other later famous winners of the Giro include the Belgian Eddy Merckx, Bernard Hinault, Miguel Indurain and Marco Pantani.

Due to increased media attention, the Gazzetta dello Sport was forced to professionalize its organisation. The RCS MediaGroup took over management of the ‘Gazzetta’ in 1976 and over a decade later, in 1989 to be precise, RCS Sport was founded. This subsidiary of RCS MediaGroup is primarily active in organising cycling races such as the Giro d’Italia and Milan-SanRemo but also other famous sports events such as the Milan Marathon. 2018 marked the 101st edition of the Giro d’Italia and was a truly historical one. For the first time ever, a Grand Tour started outside Europe, as the Giro started with an opening prologue in Jerusalem.

**Media attention**

Nowadays the Giro is held in May and is the first Grand Tour of the season. According to Kassing & Sanderson (2010), the Giro is only second to the Tour de France in terms of prestige. That the Italian Grand Tour has evolved into a true mega sporting event is shown through some numbers concerning media attention, which RCS released on May 30, 2018. First of all, more than 2,000 journalists from all over the world were accredited for the 101st Giro d’Italia. The race was aired in 198 countries around the world, reaching 800 million viewers with the coverage of the race. Besides the TV audience, 2,800,000 followers on social media were reached. Apart from these media numbers, thousands of people also lined up along the roads the Giro passed on.

4.2 **Method**

First, the press releases sent out by Lotto Soudal, which included communication about the Giro d’Italia and Tour de France were collected. These releases are sent to the press and are published on the team’s website in Dutch, French and English. It is important to mention that the content of these releases stays the same in all three languages, so to simplify things, only the English versions have been analysed. The English and French versions are mere translations of the original article, mostly written in Dutch. Moreover, newspaper articles related to the dispatched releases were compiled through the Gopress database.
These mainly include articles published in *Het Nieuwsblad* and *Het Laatste Nieuws*, the two leading Belgian newspapers in terms of sports reporting. To avoid double articles, only one piece of the same publishing group was analysed (articles within the same publishing group are most of the time only a copy). In order to answer research question 1 and 2b of this paper, a content analysis through coding was carried out. Each of the five key values of Lotto Soudal (as discussed above) was given a specific colour in order to highlight the corporate identity values of Lotto Soudal in both press releases and newspaper articles to allow for an evaluation.

To decide whether the five Lotto Soudal values were ‘adequately’ mentioned in the press releases, a benchmark was discussed and set by Lotto Soudal’s PR-and communication manager. He stated that, in order to be adequately mentioned, all of the five values should be expressed—at least once—in every press release. The results will be discussed based on this ambitious but not completely unrealistic benchmark. The table below shows the amount of press releases and newspaper articles that were analysed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Giro d’Italia</th>
<th>Tour de France</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Press Releases Lotto Soudal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Newspaper articles</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Het Nieuwsblad</td>
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<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Het Laatste Nieuws</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Het Belang van Limburg</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Dernière Heure</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total articles</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Overview of the analysed press releases and newspaper articles*
5 RESULTS

5.1 Content analysis press releases

Research question 1: Do the press releases sent out by Lotto Soudal sufficiently include the values attached to the corporate identity that the team wants to communicate towards its stakeholders?

Giro d’Italia communication

To answer the first research question, the Giro d’Italia and Tour de France press releases will be treated separately to check for possible differences in communication during these two major events. The results of the press releases content analysis will be discussed by means of a table that indicates which values were incorporated - at least once - in the releases.

In total, Lotto Soudal sent out eight press releases concerning communication about the 2018 Giro d’Italia. Topics of these releases varied from announcing the line-up to race reports or medical updates. The table immediately gives the full picture of the Giro press release content analysis. In three of the eight press releases that were sent out during the Giro d’Italia period, all of the five values were mentioned at least once. So, this means that for less than 50% of the press releases the benchmark that was set has also been fulfilled. I will now discuss the five values separately.

The Belgian identity value has been expressed in each press release, but some caution is needed here. The fact that the value was mentioned each time is in my opinion rather a logical consequence of the team that mainly consists of Belgian riders. Of course, it makes sense that if Tim Wellens - a Belgian Lotto Soudal rider - is mentioned in the press releases, this reflects the Belgian identity. However, if we look at the number of times that for example the word ‘Belgian’ or ‘Belgium’ appeared, a completely different conclusion can be drawn. Only once in the eight press releases, the explicit word ‘Belgian’ was mentioned.

In five of the eight releases the family & team spirit value was at least once represented in the text. This value is one of the two most prevalent - see below for the other one - values that were incorporated into the press releases. The share of the individual riders in the team performance is often mentioned in the release, just like the fact that the team puts faith in their riders and can always rely on them.
As the table indicates, the **challenger & attacking mindset** value was reflected in almost all of the releases. During the research I did, it became clear that this value is one of the most important of the five, if not the most essential one. It is positive to see that the value is not mentioned only once but multiple times within the same press release. Together with the above-mentioned team spirit value, this is the most-cited value in the Giro press releases.

In half of the releases, the **stability** value was mentioned, but rather in an implicit way and mostly only once in the press release. Contrary to this, the value around **shaping young Belgian talents** was reflected in almost all of the releases. It also needs to be stated here that these values were rather implicitly present in the texts. Of course, if for example the name of Frederik Frison - who was formed in the Lotto Soudal U23 team - this expressed the ‘shaping young Belgian talents value’. But in none of the releases, the explicit terms like ‘U23 team’ - which truly reflects this value - were mentioned. However, often but not always terms like ‘preparation’ - also included in the ‘shaping young Belgian talents’ value were mentioned.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Discover our Giro line-up</th>
<th>Lotto Soudal becomes Lotto Fix All for Giro</th>
<th>Victor Campenaerts third in opening time trial Giro d'Italia</th>
<th>Tim Wellens wins fourth stage of Giro d'Italia</th>
<th>Van der Sande joins breakaway stage 8 Giro</th>
<th>Tim Wellens abandons Giro d'Italia</th>
<th>Victor Campenaerts abandons Giro d'Italia</th>
<th>Review Giro d'Italia 2018</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>(26/04/2018)</td>
<td>(27/04/2018)</td>
<td>(04/05/2018)</td>
<td>(08/05/2018)</td>
<td>(12/05/2018)</td>
<td>(19/05/2018)</td>
<td>(22/05/2018)</td>
<td>(29/05/2018)</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family &amp; team spirit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenger/attacking mindset</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaping young Belgian talents</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Content analysis of the Giro d'Italia press releases
Tour de France communication

During the period around the Tour de France, Lotto Soudal has delivered nine press releases to the media. Topics of these were mostly the same ones of the Giro: previews, medical updates, race reports and a review. The overall result is very similar to the one discussed above. Only three out of the nine press releases concerning Tour de France communication include all of the five values attached to the corporate identity of Lotto Soudal. So, only for about 30% of the releases, the benchmark goal has been achieved. I will now briefly discuss the five values separately to check for major differences.

The Belgian identity value has been mentioned in every Tour press release, but the same comment as mentioned above applies here. The names of the Belgian riders obviously reflect the Belgian identity of the team but only once the explicit term ‘the Belgian’ was written in the releases (not counting ‘Belgium Tour’ as this only the name of a race). So, in my opinion the table shows a misleading picture.

Six out of nine releases reflected the family & team spirit value. In these six texts, the value was mentioned multiple times. Recognizing the importance of the team and praising the different team members has been incorporated very often in the releases. But still, the fact that the value was not mentioned in every release demonstrates that there’s still room for improvement.

Except for one, the challenger & attacking mindset value has been included in all of the Tour releases. Just like mentioned above, it is good to see that - in my opinion the most important value of all - was reflected in almost all of the press releases, even multiple times.

There was not any noticeable difference in the stability value compared to the Giro analysis. In less than half of the cases, the value was mentioned, making it the value that was overall least communicated. In five out of nine Tour press releases the ‘shaping young Belgian talents’ value was present. The same remark goes for the one stated in the Giro section above. This value was often implicitly reflected in the releases. In only one of the nine Tour releases, explicit terms like ‘u23’ or ‘youth product’ were used.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tour preview part 1</th>
<th>Tour preview part 2</th>
<th>Targeting a stage win: preview with DS Herman Frison</th>
<th>Tiesj Benoot crashes in 4th Tour stage</th>
<th>Jens Keukeleire abandons the Tour</th>
<th>André Greipel abandons Tour in Alpe d’Huez stage</th>
<th>Thomas Gendt joins break for the second consecutive day</th>
<th>Jelle Vanendert 13th in mountain stage</th>
<th>Sports manager Marc Sergeant about the Tour de France</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgian identity</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family &amp; team spirit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenger/Attacking mindset</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shaping young Belgian talents</td>
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</table>

*Table 4: Content analysis of the Tour de France press releases*
5.2 Are the Giro and Tour releases used by media?

Research question 2a: How and when does the media pick up and publish the press releases sent out by the team?

To allow for a comparison, the content of the press releases and the newspaper articles was cross-checked. The findings were rather surprising as the research question can be answered relatively brief as the analysis made clear. In both the Giro d’Italia and Tour de France communication the same trend was noticed. During these periods, the press releases that were mailed to the press were almost never picked up by journalists and thus almost never used in the written newspaper articles. Most of the time, these reporters wrote their own piece and interviewed the riders or sports directors themselves. A possible explanation could be the time pressure the journalists are faced with during such highly mediatized events. The articles have to be ready to be printed and published the next day so it makes sense that journalists do not want to wait for the official team’s communication to write their article.

However, I noticed something when analysing these texts. As stated, most of the releases were not used for written articles purposes. But in one specific case, journalists were obliged to rely on the official statement of the team; injury updates. This was the fact in both the Giro d’Italia and Tour de France. So, for these little facts, the media still uses these releases to base their articles on. Some recommendations and ideas regarding this research question will be made later in this paper.
5.3 Content analysis newspaper articles

Research question 2b: Irrespective of whether these press releases are picked up by the media or not, are the values attached to the corporate identity sufficiently expressed by journalists in written newspaper articles?

In an ideal situation - however this is not the case as the results of the first research question suggest - all of the five values attached to the corporate identity of Lotto Soudal should be incorporated in the press releases. That way, it could be determined whether journalists express these same five values in their written articles. So, this should be kept in mind when discussing the results of this research question.

Also, an important fact is that the press releases concerning communication about the Tour de France and Giro d’Italia were most of the time not picked up and used by media outlets. So, the question that needs to be posed in this section goes as follows: do the journalists already know and if so, do they express these corporate identity values in the newspaper articles? As discussed earlier, the content analysis of the press releases did not reveal any major differences between the Giro and Tour de France. So, in this section each of the five corporate values will be discussed but the two Grand Tours will be treated together. Contrary to the first research question, where a clear benchmark was set, such target was not defined in order to discuss the results of this research question.

1. Belgian identity

Besides the implicit mentioning of the Belgian identity (as discussed above), more explicit terms like ‘the Belgian’ or ‘the Belgian Lotto team’ were written down in the articles. So, it can be stated that the Belgian identity is - in a more explicit way - slightly more present in the newspaper articles than in the press releases. This is a rather logical result as one could expect of Belgian newspapers that they want to focus on the Belgian riders and teams. However, in my opinion, the explicit Belgian identity is still not sufficiently mentioned. Maybe this can be explained by the fact that the journalists already assume that their readership already knows this. This could be an interesting thing to investigate.

2. Family & team spirit

The value concerning team spirit was prevalent in the press releases but as stated there was still room for improvement there. The same can be said about the representation of this value in the written newspaper articles. Team performance and recognition was often mentioned in the articles, which is something that was to be expected as cycling is above all a team sport. However, these values were still not included in every article. As the content analysis demonstrated - and also in my opinion - this value was slightly more communicated in the press releases than it was reflected in the newspaper articles.
3. **Challenger and attacking mindset**

This core value of Lotto Soudal is often expressed in the newspaper articles. In almost every article that was analysed, the ‘challenger and attacking mindset’ value was reflected, most of the time even multiple mentions. This is highly interesting to see because also in the press releases, this value was amongst the most prominent ones. So, it seems that journalist know of the fact that Lotto Soudal stands for attractive racing and making it a battle until the line.

4. **Stability**

The most surprising result can be found in this section. Contrary to my expectations, the stability value was often reflected in the newspaper articles, considerably more than in the press releases that were sent out to the media. This value was made clear in articles by referring to previous performances of the Lotto Soudal riders, which shows that these cyclists have been riding with the team for a long time. So, this is indeed a very striking result as this was the value that was least mentioned in the press releases - as the analysis suggests.

5. **Shaping young Belgian talents**

The idea of the team giving all the tools the riders need to perform at top level is often mentioned in the articles, more than in the press releases. Although, some references to this ‘shaping young Belgian talents’ value lack in the articles. Just like it was the case in the analysed press releases, it is not really reflected that a lot of Lotto Soudal riders were formed by the team itself in the U23 division. Of course, when riders as Frederik Frison or Tim Wellens – who were formed in the U23 team of Lotto Soudal – are mentioned, this implicitly demonstrates the fact that they were shaped within the team. But, a lot of readers won’t make the connection between the rider and the U23 team. Some recommendations on this will be formulated in the sections below.
6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Research question 1

As the content analysis suggests, the predetermined benchmark target was not met. In only six out of the seventeen releases analysed, all of the five values attached to the corporate identity of Lotto Soudal were incorporated at least once. However, this does not necessarily mean that it’s all bad and Lotto Soudal doesn’t communicate their values in the press releases at all. It must be acknowledged that it is a missed opportunity for the team. Since both the Giro and Tour are events with a lot of media attention, it could be seen as the perfect moment to express the corporate values to the cycling fans, media and other stakeholders. Below, I will state some recommendations in order to achieve the benchmark target in the future.

Belgian identity: This value was the only one that was present in all of the seventeen releases. However, improvement is still needed. As only few times, terms like ‘the Belgian’ or ‘Belgium’ were written down, more explicit mentioning of these words is recommended. This will more reflect the Belgian identity more clearly in my opinion.

Family & team spirit: In eleven out of seventeen releases, this value was mentioned at least once. Overall, the idea of team spirit and trust in each other has been well incorporated into the releases. But still, a little more attention needs to be paid in order to include every value in the written texts and reach the benchmark target.

Challenger and attacking mindset: In only two of the cases, this value was not incorporated into the releases which means that the benchmark was nearly met. As this ‘attacking mindset’ idea is the highest-ranked value in terms of importance in my opinion, this is a very positive sign. Care must be taken to ensure that this current trend will continue in the future.

Stability: As the analysis suggests, the value ‘stability’ is not adequately mentioned in the press releases. In my opinion, a major opportunity is being missed here. As stated earlier, the actual cycling world is characterised by short-term sponsor contracts and the need for teams to constantly search for new monetary injections. As Lotto has been sponsoring the team for more than 35 years, this poses a major competitive advantage and should thus also be incorporated into the communication strategy. Therefore, it is advised to mention the stability value, one of the five key values of Lotto Soudal, more often, be it implicitly or explicitly in the press releases. As these values are mentioned more often, chances are likely to be higher that these values will also be included in the newspaper articles. In my opinion, it is the most difficult value to include in a textual manner in the press releases. But little things like incorporating terms such as ‘long-term partner’ or ‘longest-serving riders’ will do the trick.
Shaping young Belgian talents: Thirteen out of the seventeen analysed releases include this value. However, this image is very distorted as - just like discussed with the Belgian identity below - this value has been particularly mentioned in an implicit manner. Of course, the name of Tim Wellens - who is a youth product of the team - reflects this ‘shaping young Belgian talents’ value. But the explicit reference to for example ‘U23 team’, ‘youth product’ or any other term that reflects this value was not found in any of the analysed content. Therefore, it is recommended to also include these terms - on a regular basis - in the releases in order to more truly reflect this value. Since this has always been a core value from the very beginning, it is even more important.

6.2 Research question 2a

This research made clear that most of the releases sent out by the team - during the Giro d’Italia as well as the Tour de France - were not really picked up and used by different journalists representing some of the leading Belgian sports newspapers. As both the Giro and Tour are highly mediatized events, every major newspaper sends their own journalist(s) to the event. The explanation could lie in the fact that these journalists prefer to write the articles themselves without having to wait and rely on press releases distributed by a team.

During my internship, I noticed that releases sent out during less mediatized events were picked up more often and more literally. So, this can be seen as a major difference between the Grand Tours like the Tour de France and some smaller events like for example the Tour des Fjords (a small stage race in Norway where Lotto Soudal rider Bjorg Lambrecht took his first pro victory last year), where none of the journalists go because of the smaller interest from the broader audience. This finding can be linked to multiple news values defined by Galtung & Ruge (1967). Most of all to the threshold value, meaning that the bigger the event, the higher the chance of something becoming news. Also, the consonance value is worth mentioning here. The higher the previous knowledge of the reader of a sports event, the higher the chance of being able to identity with a certain story. As both the Giro and Tour have a considerably long history (see method section above), this makes of course sense.

One has to wonder why these journalists won’t really use the releases provided by the different teams during highly mediatized events. Is it purely because of the time pressure to produce articles or do they just want to interview the riders themselves? If the answer to this question is positive, this would make sense and logical to understand. But what if, content-wise, some little things were tweaked in the press releases by for example including little facts and figures that journalists do not have access to? If such trivia things were to be included in the releases, would journalists use them more often during highly-mediatized events? This is certainly food for thought.
6.3 Research question 2b

It is of course difficult to formulate an unambiguous answer on this research question, namely whether the journalists exactly know and express the values attached to the corporate identity of Lotto Soudal. In my opinion, there is no perfect answer possible here as there was not a benchmark to base the results on and make a final judgement. If the benchmark set for the first research question was to be extrapolated to this question, the results would be fairly deceptive. But I think that the team is on the right track when it comes to the reflection of the values in the newspaper articles and that journalists know the values of Lotto Soudal fairly well. That was maybe something we could have expected as Lotto Soudal is one of the oldest cycling teams in the pro peloton. The media should know the team by now.

But some things can still be improved on like the explicit mentioning of the U23 division as part of the whole Lotto Soudal project. However, it will be highly interesting to see what would happen - in the future - if more attention is paid to better include the values of Lotto Soudal in the press releases. Would they, as a consequence, also be more represented into the newspaper articles? If not, what can be done in order to make the Lotto Soudal values even better known to the outside world? This question certainly needs to be evaluated in the near future and could also be an interesting subject for a follow-up study.

6.4 A practical tool for the future

Besides trying to answer the research questions, this paper will serve another - rather unexpected but very useful - cause. To my own surprise, when I presented my research proposal to the person responsible for my internship, I expected to be handed an official document including the main values Lotto Soudal wants to communicate. However, this was not the case. So in essence, defining the corporate identity and values of Lotto Soudal was a little research project in itself. Nevertheless, it will be an utterly useful side effect of the original study design. The listed and defined Lotto Soudal values can serve as a manual that Lotto Soudal can keep in mind when communicating the values it wants to stand for and thus send out to the various stakeholders.
7 LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In this section I will discuss some limitations of this research and make some recommendations for further research in this area. First of all, as the results of this paper were based on a benchmark - to evaluate whether the values are sufficiently communicated - set by only the PR-and communication manager of Lotto Soudal, it is impossible to understand the full picture. In order to get the complete understanding of the corporate identity Lotto Soudal stands for, the team should also involve their fans. The question should be posed if they know the values the team stands for. It needs to be assessed if fans also recognize the communicated values in the press releases and this can easily be done through a questionnaire. Testing the corporate identity could not only be interesting with fans but also with some other stakeholders of the team such as sponsors and staff.

Content analysis was carried out on press releases and articles of the Giro and Tour - two of the biggest events of the cycling season - but the team also participates in many other races. It could be interesting to see whether the results of this paper would be different depending on the scale and importance of a race. It needs to be added here that, in an effort to measure the reflection of the Lotto Soudal values in the media, only Belgian newspaper articles have been analysed. Could it be that for example the values of Lotto Soudal are more known in some countries than others? These above-mentioned avenues for further research may be well worth thinking about.
EPILOGUE

Apart from trying to contribute to the research field of corporate identity, especially within sports organisations, this paper will also be very useful for personal use. After my internship, I got a job offer— which I wisely accepted— to join the communication department of Lotto Soudal. As such, I will be able to apply and share my own research into a professional context. Note that this research is not a finalised document but rather a roadmap to keep in mind the global message the team wants to spread. I am sure this will present an exciting challenge for the future. So, this research paper will certainly not disappear in a dark and cold archive once it has been submitted, but it will be put to good use in my first professional challenge with the Lotto Soudal cycling team.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Personal interview


Scientific articles


**Website articles**


## APPENDIX

### Content analysis Giro d’Italia

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Content analysis Tour de France

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Stageverslag Cédric Wille
Lotto Soudal: een organisatie op topsportniveau


Aan het hoofd van Lotto Soudal staat de algemeen manager. Recent werd John Lelangue aangesteld als de nieuwe manager, hij volgt Paul De Geyter op. De sportieve manager, sedert vele jaren Marc Sergeant, is als het ware de verbinding tussen de renners en de algemene manager. Daarnaast zijn er enkele sportdirecteurs of ploegleiders, die onder andere de planning opstellen en de renners tactisch ondersteunen tijdens de wedstrijd. De wielrenners worden tijdens het gehele seizoen ook bijgestaan door mecaniciens, dokters, verzorgers, fysiotherapeuten en zelfs psychologen. Een ‘reizend circus’ zoals Lotto Soudal er één is vergt dan ook een minutieuze logistieke planning, waarvoor medewerkers fulltime worden ingezet. Daarnaast is er ook nog een commercieel departement, met enkele medewerkers die de communicatie, marketing en hospitality voor hun rekening nemen. Zo kom je binnen de profploeg van Lotto Soudal, inclusief renners, al snel aan een zeventigtal medewerkers. Daarnaast heeft Lotto Soudal ook nog een vrouwen- en belofteploeg: de Lotto Soudal Ladies en Lotto Soudal U23.

Mijn stageactiviteiten bevonden zich binnen de communicatieafdeling van de profploeg. Ik werkte vooral samen met twee rechtstreekse collega’s. Arne Houtekier is de persverantwoordelijke en communicatiemanager van Lotto Soudal. Hij is vaak aanwezig op de wielerwedstrijden waaraan Lotto Soudal deelneemt en coördineert daarnaast zowel de communicatie-, marketing- en hospitalityactiviteiten van de ploeg. Gwendoline Gerres, communication officer bij Lotto Soudal, nam vooral de praktische en administratieve uitwerking van het communicatiegebeuren op haar. Concreet vertaalt dit zich onder andere in het schrijven en versturen van persberichten, opstellen van de communicatiekalender en communiceren met de talrijke sponsors van de ploeg. Tijdens de ruim drie maanden stage ondersteunde ik vooral Gwendoline in haar dagelijkse activiteiten. De samenwerking met Arne en Gwendoline was heel intens en werd vaak gefaciliteerd door middel van een Whatsapp-groep, aangezien onze werkplek enorm flexibel was. Tijdens uitgebreide face-to-face meetings werden de afgelopen activiteiten en aankomende communicatethema’s dan besproken. Hieronder ga ik meer gedetailleerd in op de verschillende taken die ik op mij nam tijdens de stage alsook welke vaardigheden hierdoor werden ontwikkeld of aangescherpt.
Meedraaien op de communicatieafdeling van Lotto Soudal

De activiteiten tijdens mijn stageperiode bij Lotto Soudal waren vooral van administratieve en redactionele aard. De hoofdbrok was het schrijven van Nederlandstalige en Engelstalige persberichten met zowel sportieve als commerciële thema’s. Enkele onderwerpen van de sportieve berichtgeving naar de media toe: voorbeschouwingen op wielerwedstrijden inclusief quotes van renners en sportdirecteuren, verslagen van wedstrijden met bijhorende reacties van renners, medische updates, transfervernieuws... Anderzijds schreef ik ook enkele meer commerciële berichten zoals het aankondigen van nieuwe partners of bestuursleden.

Naast het schrijven van persberichten was ik (samen met collega’s Gwendoline en Arne) ook verantwoordelijk voor het up-to-date houden van de social media-kanalen van de ploeg (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram en Flickr). Facebook werd hoofdzakelijk gebruikt voor het posten van onder andere persberichten, beknopte wedstrijdverslagen met quotes en fotoalbums. Twitter werd daarnaast vooral gebruikt voor het plaatsen van live-updates over de wedstrijden waaraan Lotto Soudal deelneemt. Tijdens drukke periodes kan dit oplopen tot wel drie evenementen per dag. Daarnaast werd ook maandelijks een analyse gemaakt van de social media statistieken van de ploeg. In die analyse werd er gekeken naar de toename van het aantal volgers van de Lotto Soudal-renners, de ploeg, concurrerende ploegen enzovoort...

Ook stond ik in voor het plaatsen en beheren van content op de Lotto Soudal-website. Alle persberichten die werden verstuurd naar de media, worden eveneens ook op de site geplaatst. Deze link wordt dan via de social media-kanalen verspreid via een post op Facebook, Twitter of Instagram. Tijdens de belangrijkste (en vanuit een commercieel oogpunt de meest interessante) wielerwedstrijden van het jaar (denk aan de Giro d’Italia of de Tour de France) was er ook een cameraman aanwezig op de wedstrijden. Geregeld werden dan ook korte filmpjes gemaakt voor op de verschillende social media van Lotto Soudal. Het creëren van de Engelse ondertitels behoorde ook vaak tot één van mijn taken. Tot mijn verbazing kon ik zelf mijn basiskennis Duits nog eens van onder het stof halen wanneer er een deel van een Duitstalig interview moest worden omgezet in Engelstalige ondertitels. Ook leverde de cameraman professionele foto’s aan van voor, tijdens of na de wedstrijden die werden gebruikt bij een post of die werden omgezet in een fotoalbum.

Persberichten schrijven is ook een beetje topsport...

Een persbericht schrijven is als het ware een volledig proces waarbij heel wat competenties onmisbaar zijn voor een kwalitatief eindresultaat. Graag licht ik er dan ook enkele toe. Allereerst vereist een goed persbericht een goede voorbereiding. Bij het schrijven van pakweg voorbeschouwingen of verslagen van wedstrijden is kwalitatieve en correcte info cruciaal. Een heleboel wedstrijdinformatie moet worden getransformeerd in een beknopte tekst waarbij de meest essentiële zaken aan bod komen. Het bleek niet altijd even gemakkelijk om deze soms onoverzichtelijke informatie in enkele zinnen tekst te gieten. Dit vergt sterke redactionele vaardigheden.

De inhoud van een persbericht is vaak puur informatief, maar een tikkeltje creativiteit is toch vereist om de lezer te blijven boeien (een persbericht wordt immers niet alleen door media gelezen, ook door alle stakeholders van Lotto Soudal zoals fans en medewerkers). In de meerderheid van de berichtgeving werd er een quote van een bepaalde renner of sportdirecteur verwerkt. Daarvoor had ik geregeld telefonisch contact met zowel renners als ploegleiders. Ook werd er vaak een quote aangeleverd door PR- en communicatiemanager Arne Houtekier. Dit audiofragment transformeerde ik dan in geschreven tekst, klaar voor publicatie. Vooraleer deze personen telefonisch te contacteren is voorbereiding cruciaal om een professionele indruk te maken. Renners en sportdirecteuren hebben vaak...
ook weinig tijd, dus het is van belang om het ‘interview’ zo vlot en efficiënt mogelijk te laten verlopen. Eens de quote in een tekstuele vorm werd getoten, maakte ik de Engelse vertaling. Vooraleer het persbericht kan worden verstuurd, rest er nog het nauwkeurig en punctueel nalezen van de opgestelde tekst. Bij elk persbericht is volledige concentratie dan ook aan de orde.

Naast de specifieke skills nodig voor het opstellen van persberichten of andere teksten bedoeld voor publicatie zijn er nog heel wat andere vaardigheden die me in staat stelden de stageopdrachten tot een goed einde te brengen. Als medewerker op de communicatieafdeling van Lotto Soudal kreeg ik vaak ‘primeurs’ te horen zoals transfers van nieuwe renners, samenstelling van de Tour de France-ploeg, contractverlengingen…. Discretie is dan ook erg belangrijk om eventuele lekken naar de media te voorkomen nog voor de officiële aankondiging van de ploeg.

Het opstellen van een persbericht onmiddellijk na de wedstrijd (vaak bij winst of opvallende prestatie van de ploeg) gaat gepaard met een hoge mate van tijdsdruk. Er moet namelijk zo snel mogelijk een kwalitatief persbericht inclusief quote worden opgesteld en verstuurd naar de media. Zo leerde ik na verloop van tijd enige stressbestendigheid op te bouwen, iets waar ik aan het begin van mijn stageperiode toch wat moeite mee had. Als persoon met een enorme passie voor het wielrennen is een telefoongesprek met renners zoals Thomas De Gendt of Tim Wellens, mensen waar je enorm naar opkijkt, toch altijd een beetje stressen…

Zoals eerder vermeld werkte ik intensief samen met voornamelijk twee collega’s. Aangezien beiden vaak op evenementen aanwezig waren, was zelfstandig functioneren een must. Na een goede inloopperiode waarin ik alles werd geleerd, kon ik vrij snel zelfstandig aan de slag. Ik stond ervan versteld hoeveel vrijheid Arne en Gwendoline me gaven, een duidelijk teken van vertrouwen. Dit apprecieerde ik enorm en hiervoor ben ik beiden dan ook enorm dankbaar. Hiertegenover stond wel een hoge mate van gevraagde flexibiliteit. De vele werkuren tijdens de avond en weekends nam ik er dan ook graag bij.

**Stage binnen het MTB-geheel**

De stage binnen het communicatiedepartement van Lotto Soudal betekende voor mij het hoogtepunt van een intensief MTB-jaar. Als wielergek persoon beschouwde ik het een voorrecht om tijdens enkele maanden mee te draaien binnen één van de belangrijkste wielerploegen ter wereld. In die periode kon ik de afgelopen vijf jaar universiteit omzetten in ervaring binnen het werkveld. De aangeleerde redactionele vaardigheden (vooral Engelstalig) binnen MTB bleken erg nuttig bij aanvang van de stage. Echter miste ik tijdens de MTB-opleiding een deel Nederlandstalige schrijfvaardigheden, dit kan een eventuele suggestie zijn naar volgende jaren toe. Door mijn economische achtergrond was er voor mij tijdens bepaalde cursussen vrij veel herhaling, zoals bij het opstellen van het businessplan of het aanleren van de Engelstalige en Franstalige economische begrippen en principes. Hierdoor was het vinden van motivatie niet altijd even gemakkelijk. Als student met economische bagage had ik dan ook liever wat meer mijn schrijf-en taalvaardigheid aangescherpt tijdens de opleiding. Om die reden was voor mij de stageperiode dan ook de meest interessante tijd gedurende het MTB-programma. Zo voel ik me volledig klaargestoomd om de eerste stappen te zetten op de arbeidsmarkt.
Een woordje uitleg bij de toegevoegde bijlages

Bijlage 1. Het relaas van een intensieve dag.

Als eerste bijlage voeg ik een document toe van een moment dat ik niet snel zal vergeten. Graag geef ik hierbij een woordje uitleg. Het gaat om het eerste persbericht dat ik schreef voor Lotto Soudal, vlak na de vierde etappe van de Ronde van Italië. Lotto Soudal-renner Tim Wellens sprintte op die dag, acht mei 2018, naar de winst in het Siciliaanse Caltagirone. Natuurlijk was ik zelf enorm in de wolken met de overwinning van de Limburgse renner, maar al snel kwam het besef dat zo snel, en bovendien, zo kwalitatief mogelijk een persbericht moest volgen waarin ik tekst en uitleg gaf bij de glanzrijke overwinning van Tim Wellens. Een bericht dat naar honderden mensen binnen het wielermilieu zou worden uitgestuurd, denk daarbij voornamelijk, maar niet uitsluitend aan journalisten. Vooral geen druk dus...

Snel pendde ik aan de hand van mijn notities die ik tijdens de wedstrijd nam, een beknopte samenvatting van het wedstrijdverloop neer. De quote van Tim Wellens werd in audioformaat aangeleverd door de persverantwoordelijke Arne Houtekier, die ter plaatse aanwezig was tijdens de eerste week van de Giro. Op die manier kon ik het Nederlandstalige persbericht afwerken en meteen vertalen in het Engels. De Franse vertaling werd aangeleverd door één van de drie vrijwilligers waarop Lotto Soudal kan rekenen. Nadat Gwendoline de teksten herlas en corrigeerde waar nodig waren de persberichten klaar voor verzending. Op die manier werd het persbericht verstuurd naar zowel binnenlandse- en buitenlandse media, een tweetal uur nadat Tim Wellens als eerste over de streep bolde in Caltagirone.

Job done you think? Well, think again.

Natuurlijk hebben ook naast de media ook andere stakeholders recht op het bericht. Ik plaatste het artikel in de drie talen (Nederlands, Frans en Engels) op de Lotto Soudal-website en maakte voor zowel Twitter als Facebook een post met daarbij een korte beschrijving, foto en natuurlijk de link naar het artikel op de website. Op Instagram werd natuurlijk ook aandacht besteed aan de zege door het plaatsen van bijvoorbeeld een foto met bijhorende tekst. Ettelijke uren nadat Tim Wellens het zegegebaar maakte, was nu ook voor mij tijd om mijn laptop dicht te klappen en te genieten van de overwinning. Toen besefte ik al vrij snel dat het geen nine-to-five stage zou worden.

Bijlage 2. Een commercieel persbericht.

Bijlage 3. Voorbeeld van Facebook- en Twitterpost

Als derde bijlage voeg ik twee social media posts toe. De Facebookpost gaat rond een artikel waar de voorbeschouwing op het Europees Kampioenschap tijdrijden (een wedstrijd die Lotto Soudal-renner Victor Campenaerts ook won!) wordt aangekondigd. Geïnteresseerden kunnen doorklikken via de link naar de website om het persbericht te lezen. De Tweet is een live-update vlak na een etappe in de BinckBank Tour, kort na Tim Wellens de derde plaats in het algemeen klassement behaalde.
Bijlage 1a: Tim Wellens wint vierde etappe Giro d’Italia (08/05/2018) Bron: Lottosoudal.be

Tim Wellens werd voor de etappe meermaals naar voren geschoven als de te kloppen man vandaag. Terecht zo bleek want hij pakte op een schitterende manier zijn tweede etappezege in de Ronde van Italië. Na eerdere etappewinst in Roccaraso in 2016 was het nu raak in Caltagirone!

Aangezien de rit een perfecte kans voor vluchters bood, werd er in het begin van de wedstrijd slag om slinger aangevallen. Na een snelle openingsfase sloegen vijf renners er uiteindelijk in om te ontsnappen uit het peloton. Frapporti, Jauregui, Barbin, Belkov en Mosca kregen echter nooit meer dan vier minuten voorgift. Het was BMC dat samen met Sander Armée de verantwoordelijkheid opnam en de voorsprong beperkt hield. Op 100 kilometer van de meet nam UAE de koers in handen en probeerden ze het peloton op een lint te trekken. Al snel beseften ze dat hun actie te vroeg kwam en lieten het initiatief terug aan BMC. Op ongeveer 15 kilometer van de meet werden de drie overblijvers uit de vroege vlucht teruggepakt. Wanneer op 10 kilometer van de meet Conti zijn moment rijp achtte om te versnellen, zette Adam Hansen zich op kop van het peloton en liet de voorsprong nooit uitlopen tot meer dan 30 seconden. Het was Tosh Van der Sande die uiteindelijk Conti inrekkende. Hij zette zijn inspanning door, wat een scheur veroorzaakte in het peloton. Op ongeveer 200 meter van de streep was het Wellens die aanzette, Battaglin voorbijsnelde en voorop bleef! Michael Woods en Enrico Battaglin vervolledigden het podium.

Tim Wellens: “Op 250 meter van de meet zag ik dat Battaglin aanzette. Ik ging mee in zijn wiel tot op 200 meter van de meet en dan passeerde ik hem. Dan was het enkel nog zo hard mogelijk trappen tot de finish. Maar ik was pas zeker van mijn stuk zodra ik over de aankomst reed.”

“Mijn etappezege van vandaag staat in schril contrast met de overwinning van twee jaar geleden in Roccaraso. Toen kwam ik met een grotere voorsprong over de meet en had ik dus meer tijd om te vieren. Vandaag rijd ik weg uit een groep met daarbij alle favorieten en toon ik mij daar de beste van. Deze overwinning geeft me eigenlijk een nog beter gevoel dan die van twee jaar geleden.”

“De volledige ploeg heeft vandaag fantastisch werk geleverd. We hebben samen met BMC mee het initiatief genomen om de vlucht onder controle te houden. We bleven de volledige dag vooraan in het peloton maar toen UAE zich op kop van het peloton zette, ontstond er even paniek. In de finale heeft in eerste instantie Adam Hansen maar zeker ook Tosh Van der Sande een enorme inspanning geleverd. De inspanning was zo fors dat er zelfs een breuk ontstond net voor het opdraaien van de slotklim. De ploeg heeft dan ook zeker een groot aandeel in de overwinning vandaag.”

“We zijn naar de Giro gekomen met als doel een rit te winnen. Dat klinkt evident maar in realiteit is het niet zo gemakkelijk om aan die verwachting te voldoen. Als het dan direct lukt op de vierde dag zorgt dat ervoor dat ikzelf en ook de ploeg het vervolg van de Giro met iets minder stress kunnen verderzetten. Ongetwijfeld zullen er nog kansen komen, niet alleen voor mij maar ook voor andere jongens binnen de ploeg. Maar het is zeker leuk om reeds een etappezege op zak te hebben.”
Before today’s stage 4 of the Giro d’Italia, many people predicted Tim Wellens as one of the main favourites for the stage win. It seemed fully righteous to say so because after winning his first stage in the Giro in 2016, he now won his second one in Caltagirone!

The stage offered a perfect chance for breakaway riders, causing many attacks in the opening phase of the race. Finally, five riders managed to escape from the peloton. Frapporti, Jauregui, Barbin, Belkov and Mosca were not granted more than four minutes advantage. It was BMC together with Sander Armée who took the responsibility and kept the advantage to a minimum. With 100 kilometres to go, it was UAE taking control over the race and trying to reduce the size of the pack. Soon, they realised that it was too early and handed the initiative back over to BMC. The breakaway was caught at less than 15 kilometres to go. When Conti attacked in the final ten kilometres, it was Adam Hansen who kept the advantage of the Italian below half a minute. Tosh Van der Sande eventually caught Conti and persisted in his effort. This caused the peloton to split. Tim Wellens accelerated at 200 metres from the finish, passed Enrico Battaglin and won! Michael Woods and Enrico Battaglin completed the podium.

Tim Wellens: “I saw that Battaglin accelerated with 250 metres to go. I took his wheel and passed him 200 metres from the finish. Then it was just the case of pedalling as hard as I could to make it to the finish. I wasn’t sure though until I crossed the line.”

“The victory of today is very different to my previous Giro stage victory in Roccaraso. Two years ago, I had a lot more time to celebrate. Today, I was the best of a group including all the big favourites. Actually, this victory gives me a better feeling than two years ago.”

“The whole team did a great job today. We took the initiative together with BMC to control the breakaway. We stayed in the front during the whole day, but there was some panic when UAE accelerated and tried to drop some riders. Adam Hansen and Tosh Van der Sande delivered an incredible effort today. The pace was so high that it caused a split in the peloton when we began the final ascent. The team was a great part of the victory today.”

“We came to the Giro to win a stage. That sounds obvious but it is not easy to fulfil those expectations. We can continue the Giro now with a lot less stress, having already won a stage. I am sure other opportunities will follow, not only for me, but also for other guys in the team. But for now, it is nice to have that first stage win secured.”
Bijlage 2a: Lotto Soudal verwelkomt EME als partner (27/06/2018) Bron: lottosoudal.be


Allessandro Pieraccini, algemeen manager EME: “Reeds 30 jaar produceren we elektromedica, maar samenwerken met een team zoals Lotto Soudal is een nieuwe bevestiging van onze kwaliteit alsook een bron van trots. Dit partnerschap zal gericht zijn op groei en hogere prestaties voor beide partijen. Voor ons betekent het produceren van elektromedische apparatuur voor fysiotherapie en sporttherapie een constante inspanning om de beste resultaten te garanderen in termen van prestaties en hersteltijden. We kunnen geweldig werk leveren voor het Lotto Soudal team en hun atleten.”

Geert Beirnaert, fysiotherapeut Lotto Soudal: “De Polyter Evo is een erg handig apparaat omdat het makkelijk is om te transporteren. Zeker in een sport zoals wielrennen, waar we de hele wereld afreizen is dat erg belangrijk. We gebruiken de Polyter Evo vooral om ontstekingen te behandelen en voor de ontspanning van het weefsel voor de manuele therapie. De elektrotherapie is erg belangrijk voor ons. De belangrijkste voordelen van het product zijn de compactheid, flexibiliteit en veelzijdigheid.”

Bijlage 2b: Lotto Soudal announces EME as new partner

Lotto Soudal is pleased to announce a partnership with EME. This Italian company, renowned for the production of electromedical equipment for physiotherapy, was founded in 1983. Lotto Soudal will mainly use their Polyter Evo product. A device equipped with Electrotherapy and Magnetotherapy modules, which makes it perfect for sportive therapy and outdoor treatments.

Alessandro Pieraccini, general manager EME: "We have been producing electromedicas for over 30 years but working with such a high-level team is a renewed confirmation of quality for us as well as a source of pride. I am sure that this partnership will be focused on growth and higher performance on both sides. For us, producing electromedical devices for physiotherapy and sports therapy means a constant effort to guarantee the best possible results in terms of performance and recovery times. We believe we can do great work with the Lotto Soudal team and their athletes.”

Geert Beirnaert, physiotherapist Lotto Soudal: “The Polyter Evo is a very functional device because it is easy to carry, which is important in a sport such as cycling, where we travel all around the world. We mainly use the Polyter Evo to treat inflammations and for the preparation and relaxation of the tissues before the manual therapy. The use of the electrotherapy is very important for us. The main advantages of the product are the compactness, flexibility and versatility.”
Bijlage 3: Voorbeeld van Facebook- en Twitterpost

Lotto Soudal Cycling Team Fanpage

Published by Cédric Wille (v) 6 August

PREVIEW EUROPEAN TIME TRIAL CHAMPIONSHIP

On Wednesday 8 August, Victor Campenaerts will defend his European time trial title in Glasgow. The Lotto Soudal rider is eager to keep his blue and white champion's jersey, which he earned in the Danish city of Herning last year.

Campenaerts: "I had a perfect preparation in the run-up to the time trial, in which I will simply give it all. I'll go for the best possible time trial that I can ride and hopefully that will be enough to prolong my title."

Read all about it: https://lottosoudal.be/en/preview-european-time-trial-championship...