

1-1-2009

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Recommended Citation

Simmers, Christina S.; Damron-Martinez, Datha; and Haytko, Diana L. (2009) "Examining the Effectiveness of Athlete Celebrity Endorser Characteristics and Product Brand Type: The Endorser Sexpertise Continuum," *Journal of Applied Sport Management*. Vol. 1 : Iss. 1.

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/jasm/vol1/iss1/35>

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Examining the Effectiveness of Athlete Celebrity Endorser Characteristics and Product Brand Type: The Endorser Sexpertise Continuum

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KEYWORDS:

Sport marketing, brand management, celebrity endorser, sponsorship, product endorsement, celebrity athlete, athlete spokesperson, source credibility, source attractiveness

ABSTRACT

This research furthers the theoretical perspectives that athlete endorsers are brands unto themselves, and that athlete-endorser effectiveness is determined by congruent pairings of the athlete-endorser brand and the product brand by introducing the Endorser Sexpertise Continuum. This model categorizes athlete celebrity endorsers on the Endorser Sexpertise Continuum with anchor points referred to as "acquirable expertise" and "likeability." As in successful brand alliances, this model suggests the types of products/brands the athlete celebrities would be most successful in endorsing, depending on their positioning on the continuum.

Simmers, C. S., Damron-Martinez, D., & Haytko, D. L. (2009). Examining the effectiveness of athlete celebrity endorser characteristics and product brand type: The Endorser Sexpertise Continuum. *Journal of Sport Administration & Supervision* 1(1), 52-64. doi:10.3883/v1i1_simmers; published online April, 2009.

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INTRODUCTION

Forbes reported that the 10 richest male and female athletes made a combined \$600 million in salary, prize money and endorsements, including men's professional golfer Tiger Woods who alone earned nearly \$100 million in sponsorships in 2008 (Badenhausen, 2008; Thomaselli, 2008). Interestingly, many top athlete endorsers make considerably more money as endorsers than as athletes in their chosen sport. For example from June 2007 to June 2008, female professional golfer Michelle Wie earned \$12 million in endorsement money but only \$39,000 in prize money. Similarly, former professional basketball player Michael Jordan made \$45 million in endorsements, despite not having participated in his sport for many years (Badenhausen, 2008). Some athletes endorse a multitude of products (e.g., National Football League quarterback Peyton Manning, Woods, and female racecar driver Danica Patrick), while others limit themselves

to products associated with their sport (e.g., women's professional basketball player Candace Parker) (Janoff, 2008). Recently, many have speculated the value of athlete endorsers to a brand's image, particularly given the negative publicity surrounding such incidents as (among others) the marijuana incident of men's Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps and the steroid scandal surrounding Major League Baseball player Alex Rodriguez. These factors beg questions as to whether, and if so, under what circumstances, athlete endorsers become effective in brand marketing. Why are some celebrities only able to successfully endorse a limited range of related products, while others can endorse a wide range of unrelated products? How does one determine the most effective combination of celebrity endorser characteristics and product brand types? An integration of the endorser and brand literature offers insight into this phenomenon.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the Endorser Sexpertise Continuum and its

use in determining optimal fit between athlete celebrity endorsers and appropriate brands or products. First, this paper defines celebrity endorsers and examines current models of endorser effectiveness. Second, the Endorser Sexpertise Continuum is introduced and described. Third, the paper reviews literature regarding brand concept types and fit in brand alliances. Fourth, the work draws equivalence between the concepts of athletic celebrity endorsers with traditional product brands and likens endorsements to brand alliances. Fifth, the paper provides discussion of how the Endorser Sexpertise Continuum incorporates brand concept types and matchup endorsement effectiveness. Lastly, conclusions are drawn and recommendations are offered for future research.

ENDORSER DIMENSIONS

The Athlete as Celebrity Endorser Defined

Certain athletes are utilized by brands as endorsers of their products because of the celebrity status gained by these athletes as a result of their success in their chosen sports. According to Boorstin (1961), “[t]he celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness (p. 57, italics added).” In fact, Boorstin (1961) refers to celebrities as human pseudo-events, claiming that the omnipresent print and broadcast media have provided a “...means of fabricating well-knownness (p. 47).” As such, celebrities rise and fall through the processes and whims of publicity.

McCracken (1989) defines the celebrity endorser “as any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement” (p. 310). According to McCracken, celebrities are believed to increase sales by lending their favorable image to a product through endorsement. Both marketers and celebrities have much at stake

in these endeavors and therefore should be keenly interested in factors that contribute to successful endorsements. According to the literature, endorser effectiveness can be determined based on source credibility, source attractiveness, and the attribution of endorser characteristics to the product.

Models of Celebrity Endorser Effectiveness

Most models of celebrity endorser effectiveness proposed by previous researchers have been based upon two basic models: the Source Credibility Model (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Hovland & Weiss, 1951) and the Source Attractiveness Model (McGuire, 1968). The Source Credibility Model purports that the effectiveness of the message is largely determined by the expertise and trustworthiness of the celebrity endorser, which offers explanations for why certain athlete endorsers such as highly successful men’s tennis professionals Andre Agassi, Rafael Nadal, and Roger Federer could easily represent any brand of tennis equipment. In a different vein, the Source Attractiveness Model purports that similarity, familiarity, and liking of celebrity endorsers primarily determine their effectiveness, which attempts to explain why some athletes such as Manning, Woods, and racecar driver Dale Earnhardt Jr. can endorse brands in many different product categories.

A general measure of physical attractiveness has often been used to assess celebrity endorser effectiveness, assuming what is beautiful is good (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). However, mixed findings suggest that caution should be exercised in basing endorsement decisions on this model alone, since consumers perceive physical attractiveness differently.

The Product Matchup Hypothesis (Forkan, 1980; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1989; Kamins, 1990) emphasizes the need for a matchup, also referred to as congruency or fit, between the celebrity and the product. For example, the fit between Woods and Nike Golf

is undeniable. However, according to sport marketing consultant Marc Cagins, Woods has failed as an endorser for Buick because of a lack of fit: "People always shook their head as to why he did the deal anyway with Buick. If he's going to do a deal with GM, you would have thought Cadillac more than Buick" (Thomaselli, 2008, p. 28).

Research based on attractiveness matchup and expertise matchup has supported the hypothesis that celebrity/product fit remains critical to endorsement success. Kamins (1990) tested the matchup hypothesis based on attractiveness and found that the physical attractiveness of a source only mattered when an attractive source was paired with an attractiveness-related product, resulting in increased perceived source credibility and attitude toward the advertisement. Current examples would include the female tennis professionals and sisters Serena and Venus Williams' Avon cosmetics campaign and the European men's' soccer star Thierry Henry/Woods/Federer Gillette campaign. In a study examining the impact of gender and physical attractiveness on responses to motorsports sponsorships (Roy, Stewart, & Goss, 2003), attractiveness played a greater role for female drivers than for male drivers, with the more attractive female drivers perceived as possessing greater expertise with products such as shampoo, tanning products, and dietary products. However, Bower and Landreth (2001) found that highly attractive models were not more effective than normally attractive models for problem-solving, attractiveness-related products and attributed these results to the premise that consumers perceive highly attractive models to have never faced an attractiveness-related problem and therefore have little expertise using these products. To illustrate, this premise would suggest that the current campaign utilizing female tennis star Serena Williams for ProActiv acne medication would be unsuccessful. However, a moderately

attractive model may be more likely to be perceived to have faced an attractiveness-related problem and overcome it using the advertised product, fully illustrating the premise that the expertise of the source is more important than the attractiveness of the source.

In Till and Busler's (2000) examination of the attractiveness and expertise matchup, while an attractiveness/matchup effect was not found, an attractiveness effect and an expertise/matchup effect were both discovered, suggesting the possibility of expertise trumping physical attractiveness in matching celebrities and products for endorsement effectiveness. These findings also suggest the possibility that physical attractiveness is itself considered a type of expertise. To illustrate, a beautiful female model may be considered an expert on makeup, which is a product she could use to enhance her beauty. However, she may not be perceived as an expert on cars, because while she looks beautiful in the car, the car is not connected to her physical beauty.

McCracken (1989) suggests that a matchup of attractiveness or expertise alone is insufficient for achieving successful endorsements, positing a Model of Meaning Transfer. In this model, he proposes that celebrity endorsers are special cases of meaning transfer: "The effectiveness of the endorser depends, in part, upon the meanings he or she brings to the endorsement process" (p. 312). To elaborate, he explains that numerous cultural meanings exist in the world, and that celebrities draw meanings from the culturally constituted world when developing their images, which are accumulations of meanings from the roles they assume in various aspects of their careers, both in media and in the public eye. McCracken (1989) suggests that, similar to typecasting of actors in Hollywood, the consistency of the images that celebrities develop is the notion that makes them useful to marketers. These meanings are then transferred to the products that celebrities endorse.

Consumers then recognize that the celebrities possess compelling or useful cultural meanings, causing them to buy the endorsed products and acquire these meanings upon consumption of the products. Therefore, for an endorsement to become successful, products must match well with the bundle of meanings or overall image of celebrity endorsers rather than with the element of attractiveness or expertise alone.

The Multidimensional Endorser

Since the overall image of the celebrity must be taken into consideration in endorsement decisions, McCracken's (1989) theory suggests that celebrity endorsers possess a multidimensional nature. Erdogan, Baker, and Tagg (2001) confirm "managers do not see celebrities as unidimensional individuals (e.g., attractive, credible)" (p. 45). Rather, their findings indicate that advertising agency managers should consider a range of criteria when choosing celebrity endorsers, including trustworthiness, expertise, physical

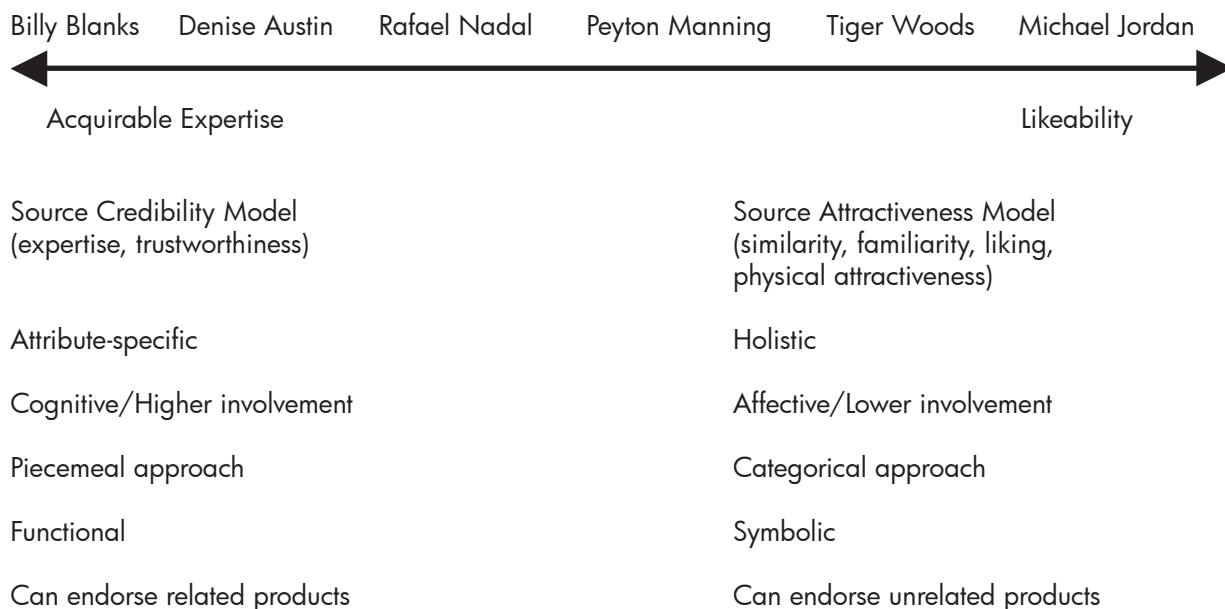
attractiveness, familiarity, and likeability of the source. Further, the importance of the criteria depends on the product brand to be endorsed.

THE ENDORSER SXPERTISE CONTINUUM

This paper posits that celebrity endorsers may possess characteristics from both the Source Credibility Model and the Source Attractiveness Model, albeit in different proportions, which interact with different product dimensions to determine endorsement effectiveness. A new endorser effectiveness model, entitled The Endorser Sexpertise Continuum, is therefore proposed in this article because the need exists for a theoretical construct that considers both the roles of expertise and attractiveness in determining the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers for particular brands. As shown in Figure 1, these characteristics lie along a continuum based on the primary image focus of the celebrity.

Figure 1

The Endorser Sexpertise Continuum



The left side of the continuum is anchored by acquirable expertise, which relates directly to the Source Credibility Model and includes the concepts of expertise and trustworthiness. The further the endorser falls toward this side of the continuum, the more likely the endorser will be limited to endorsing products related to his/her own area of expertise, since consumers have higher involvement with these kinds of products and therefore will give much consideration to the products' functional properties, and will process the information using a piecemeal approach. The right side of the continuum is anchored by likeability, which relates to the Source Attractiveness Model. The further the endorser falls toward this side of the continuum, the more likely he/she can endorse both products related to his/her area of expertise and products removed from that area of expertise. Consumers are drawn to these products through their liking of these endorsers. In this case, product involvement is much lower, so consumers are interested in symbolic properties of these products and will use more holistic, categorical approaches. The following sections discuss these premises in more detail.

The Roles of Expertise and Likeability

Celebrities "...succeed by skillfully distinguishing themselves from others essentially like them (Boorstin, 1961, p. 65)." However, based on the theory that celebrity endorsers possess a multidimensional nature, the Endorser Sexpertise Continuum proposes a distinct difference in the products with which a celebrity endorser can be appropriately matched, a conclusion based upon whether the celebrity endorser's fame stems from his/her area of expertise, or whether the source of the celebrity endorser's fame stems from his/her physical attractiveness or personality. For example, women's tennis star Anna Kournikova's popularity stems almost entirely from her sex appeal, whereas Woods is known

for his athletic prowess on the golf course. Each of these athletes anchors a different end of the continuum. Some athletes such as female swimmers Amanda Beard and Dara Torres fall in the middle, possessing both sex appeal and athletic success.

Celebrity endorsers provide the tools that consumers seek to affect meaning transfer by availing the cultural meanings encapsulated in the material forms of the celebrities' images through product endorsement. According to McCracken (1989), "The celebrity is supplying not just an example of self-creation, but the very stuff with which this difficult act is undertaken" (p. 317).

Some celebrities possess an acquirable expertise, i.e., other people can learn the same expertise possessed by certain celebrities. As previously discussed concerning cultural meanings, celebrity endorsers provide consumers with the tools or skills needed to acquire that same expertise. For example, Denise Austin and fitness guru/martial artist Billy Blanks can provide other people with the tools needed for meaning transfer, so their celebrity images focuses more on the characteristic of acquirable expertise through learning their fitness regimens. These celebrities tend to gravitate toward the left side of the continuum, but some may move to the right end of the continuum, depending on their degree of likeability. For example, in addition to wide-ranging fitness options and abilities, Austin is also generally known for her outgoing personality, beauty, and calm, encouraging approach to fitness, so she would fall further to the right side of the continuum than Blanks, who is primarily known for his intense TaeBo fitness regime and is presented as a less dynamic, less personable figure.

In contrast, some celebrities possess an inherent expertise unique to that person alone and therefore cannot be achieved by another person. For example, Manning's football

abilities cannot be imitated, even if someone were to take lessons directly from him. People are attracted to such celebrities. In essence, these celebrities cannot provide others with specific, tangible tools they need for meaning transfer. Accordingly, their celebrity images focus more on the characteristic of likeability, causing these celebrities to occupy the right side of the proposed continuum. Furthermore qualifying celebrities for the right side of the continuum would be the popularity and endurance of the celebrity image. Celebrities may also move to the right as their images become more solidified. For example, while Jordan was a highly successful basketball player, he transcended that label to be a likeable celebrity far beyond the basketball court.

Logically, if the image of a celebrity is focused on an acquirable expertise, the range of products that he/she can endorse is limited to that area of expertise. However, if the image of a celebrity is focused on likeability, then he/she can endorse a much broader range of products, since the image transfer is based on personality feature rather than a particular area of expertise.

BRAND CONCEPT TYPES

Traditionally branded products are classified into brand types based on consumer needs and consumer involvement with the product. This information becomes critical when allying celebrities with brands. Appropriate pairings can result in synergy, with both parties benefiting from the arrangement, and endorsements done with athlete celebrities remain no exception and, in fact, may be more highly sought because of their tendencies to create such synergy (Rodrigue & Biswas, 2004). Since athlete celebrity endorsers are brands unto themselves, information on the types of brands/products they consider for endorsement becomes critical. The following

section discusses brand concept types and, subsequently, brand alliance considerations.

Consumer Needs

In developing their Brand Concept Management (BCM) model, Park, Jaworski and MacInnis (1986) identified three types of brand concepts (or images created in a brand) based on consumer needs: functional, symbolic, and experiential. Functional needs are defined as “those that motivate the search for products that solve consumption-related problems” (Park et al., 1986, p. 136). Symbolic needs are defined as “desires for products that fulfill internally generated needs for self-enhancement, role position, group membership, or ego-identification” (Park et al., 1986, p. 136). Experiential needs are defined as “desires for products that provide sensory pleasure, variety and/or cognitive stimulation” (Park et al., 1986, p. 136). As with BCM, the characteristics of each of these brand concepts must be taken into consideration in developing an effective endorsement. Till and Busler (2000) suggested that involvement could be a factor to consider in matchup. Since these brand concepts are based on consumer needs, a closer look at consumer involvement and ways they process information may lead to a better understanding of this phenomenon.

Consumer Involvement and Information Processing

Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann (1983) investigated the moderating role of consumer involvement in advertising effectiveness. Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), they identified two distinct routes to attitude change based on likelihood of the consumer elaborating the message: the central route and peripheral route to persuasion. When defining attitude change as a representation of whether a consumer has favorably changed his/her attitude toward the brand after encountering some of its communication (e.g., an advertisement), higher involvement (the central route) results in more scrutiny

of the message, whereas lower involvement (the peripheral route) results in consumers giving little or no thought about the product qualities presented in the message. In the central route, attitude changes result from consumers carefully analyzing information for a particular situation. In contrast, attitude changes in the peripheral route result from inferences made from available cues. The findings of Petty et al. (1983) indicate that the persuasive message itself has a greater impact under high involvement conditions, whereas the endorser has a greater impact under low involvement conditions. Therefore, the central route is a more cognitive dimension, while the peripheral route is a more affective dimension. This premise most likely explains why Woods failed as an endorser for Buick. Since cars are high involvement products that lead consumers to carefully analyze information, the likelihood that a celebrity endorser will work in this situation declines greatly. Woods' failed Buick endorsement can also be coupled to a mismatch between the celebrity and brand (Thomaselli, 2008). A hypothetical example of the central versus peripheral route could be found the use of racecar driver Dale Earnhardt Jr. as an endorser. Earnhardt works well for Mountain Dew's Amp energy drink (a low involvement product) that serves as a co-primary sponsor of his racecar, since he races with a youthful, energetic style. Theoretically, however, in the same role for the National Guard (a high involvement product), his sponsorships may prove less effective, since no apparent linkage exists between Earnhardt's racing career and military service.

While Petty et al. (1983) indicated that the expertise or attractiveness of a message source is a peripheral cue, their research purports that, when product involvement is high, an expert endorser will serve as an argument for consideration. However, when product involvement is low, the endorser then serves a

more affective, holistic function and is indeed a peripheral cue. In their hypothesis test of attractiveness as a peripheral cue for shampoo, Petty and Cacioppo (1980) explained that they found no attractiveness and involvement interaction and commented that some subjects' lack of interaction might have been attributed to model's appearance as a relevant, persuasive argument.

Sujan (1985) identified two types of consumer processing strategies that complement the central and peripheral routes. In the piecemeal approach, consumers analyze each attribute of a product to determine its overall value. Alternatively, in the categorical approach, Sujan (1985) notes that consumers perform more efficient processing by utilizing previously defined categories: "The belief is that affect is cued by the categorization of stimuli rather than through a constructive attribute review process" (p. 31).

Based on this discussion, since functional brand concepts are related to problem solving, they would require more piecemeal processing and therefore would belong with the cognitive route of the ELM. On the other hand, symbolic brand concepts are related to reference groups and ego enhancement. They require more categorical processing and therefore would belong with the peripheral route of the ELM. Experiential brand concepts are more internal driven by consumers' need for cognitive or sensory stimulation and therefore are more context-driven. As such, they may belong in either route, depending upon their context.

MATCHUP FOR ENDORSEMENT EFFECTIVENESS

To this point, the current paper has offered a definition of a celebrity endorser and has examined the branding literature for traditional brands. Now the discussion turns to

equating the endorser as a brand, the necessity of considering brand concept types, and the requirements for a successful brand alliance. Athlete celebrity endorsers are compared to traditional product brands, and endorsement agreements are compared with traditional brand alliance agreements. The following discussion begins with identifying the endorser as a brand then moves to examining fit and the role of the Endorser Expertise Continuum.

Endorser as a Brand

Kotler (1991) defines a brand as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (p. 442). In essence, a brand is represented as an image that has been developed and that exists in the minds of consumers. Therefore, since a celebrity endorser is essentially a bundle of meanings that combine to form an overall image, a celebrity endorser can also be considered a brand.

To further discuss celebrities as their own brands, marketers often attempt to personalize their brands by endowing them with certain human characteristics or brand personalities. Aaker (1997) defines brand personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (p. 347). For example, the Marlboro cigarette brand exhibits a high level of brand personality. According to Lohof (1969), “The Marlboro image is a cultural symbol which speaks to the collective imagination of the American people. It speaks of virgin frontier and of brutal efficacy and constant vigilance which the frontier exacts from its residents” (p. 447; cf. Reddy, Holak, & Bhat, 1994). However, in the case of a celebrity endorser, the brand is an actual person. Rather than developing a brand personality for a product, a celebrity endows his/her clearly defined, existing personality to the product through

endorsement. Therefore, a celebrity endorser can be considered the epitome of a brand personality. O'Donnell (2008) claims that the pairing of Michael Jordan and Nike set the standard for athlete/product endorsement matchup, and one can argue that Nike's success is rooted in that partnership decision. Nevertheless, all brands have lifecycles (Ries & Ries, 1998). Nike has experienced problems selling the Jordan brand since Jordan's retirement in 2003 because many consumers in younger demographics have only seen Jordan play on highlight reels and do not perceive him as relevant (Intini, 2008). Thus, the brand's new focus will be on the myth of Michael with “Become Legendary” as the new tagline (Intini, 2008). Intini (2008) believes that if Nike handles this new strategy well, Jordan could become sport's first immortal brand.

Endorsement as a Brand Alliance

If an endorser can be considered a brand, then the pairing of a celebrity endorser and a product brand is analogous to the concept of a brand alliance. According to Rao & Ruekert (1994), because brand names are valuable assets, they can combine with other brand names in a synergistic alliance in which the sum is greater than the parts. In the case of a celebrity endorsement, the product brand associates with the endorser in an effort to develop a stronger positive consumer attitude toward the product brand, essentially hoping to capitalize on positive spillover effects. The work of Simonin and Ruth (1998) supports this strategy. Based on familiarity, Simonin and Ruth (1998) found that spillover effects might not always affect the partners equally. If two highly familiar brands ally, they experience equal spillover effects. However, in an asymmetrical relationship the less familiar brand experiences greater spillover effects. In essence, celebrities should be compensated based on their contribution towards such a spillover effect.

However, the threat of negative spillover

effects necessitates consideration by both endorsers and product manufacturers, when engaging in partner selections. An action by an athlete is considered a scandal if it is illegal or unethical, involves multiple parties over a sustained period of time, and/or whose impact affects the integrity of the sport with which he or she is associated (Hughes & Shank, 2005). Hughes and Shank (2005) reason that a one-time violation by an admired sports celebrity will carry less impact with the consumer than repeated illegal or unethical events. In contrast, Behr and Beeler-Norrholm (2006) posit that the notion of celebrities-gone-bad is part of the fun for consumers and question whether it truly does serious damage to the consumers' views of the endorsed brand. This may be true for the celebrities who are liked specifically for their rebellious personalities but is not generally applicable for all endorsers. When measuring consumer skepticism, Bailey (2007) found the strength of the association between the endorser and the brand affects whether the negative information will affect consumer perceptions and attitudes.

Positive and negative spillover effects impact brand alliances. Since the image of the brand is composed of an accumulation of meanings, each time a brand associates with another brand, the experience impacts and contributes to its overall image (Rodrigue & Biswas 2004). To maintain its marketing value, the product brand and the endorser brand must each strive to maintain a consistent individual image in the public eye.

Fit

The concern of *fit* in a brand alliance can also be applied in the case of an athlete celebrity endorsement. Simonin and Ruth (1998) found that product fit and brand fit are related positively to attitudes toward the brand alliance. In the endorsement literature, expertise had a stronger effect on attitude toward the brand and purchase intentions than physical

attractiveness (Ohanian 1991; O'Mahoney & Meenaghan 1998; Till & Busler 1998). When the fit between the endorser and the endorsed product is incongruent, only attractiveness remains important (Kim & Na 2007). Further, the work of Broniarczyk and Alba (1994) supports the idea that a specific brand attribute, such as the expertise of the celebrity, will have a greater influence on the effectiveness of the endorsement than the overall image of the brand. Experience with a product does not always equate to expertise with the product (Siemens, Smith, Fisher, & Jensen 2008). Sport celebrity endorsers especially must carefully choose their endorsements, since they could be held liable if they do not use the product they endorse (Moorman 2006). If consumers are more engrossed in a product, then they will be paying closer attention to the significant attributes of the brand rather than the holistic affect related to the brand. However, less involved consumers will not be as interested or knowledgeable about relevant product issues and may look more for a holistic affect.

As shown in Figure 1, the functional brand concept has been paired with the celebrity endorser known for an acquirable expertise. If the consumer is in the central route and is processing information in a piecemeal fashion, then the expertise of the endorser may be an important consideration. The symbolic brand concept has been paired with the celebrity endorser known for likeability. While these celebrities could endorse a product related to their original area of expertise (e.g., Woods and Nike Golf), they have transcended this level and are also able to endorse unrelated products based on affect (e.g., Woods and Gillette). If the consumer is in the peripheral route and is processing information categorically, then the overall image of the celebrity will play an important role in the purchase decision. However, these celebrities would not be successful endorsers for functional products in

which they have no expertise (e.g., Woods and Buick automobiles).

CONCLUSIONS

In the introduction of this paper, two questions were posed. The first asked why some celebrities are only able to endorse a limited range of related products, while others can endorse a wide range of unrelated products. The second asked which combinations of celebrity endorser characteristics and product brand types would be most effectively matched. Based on the prior discussion, these questions can be answered simultaneously. An effective athlete celebrity endorsement depends upon the endorser's placement on the Endorser Sexpertise Continuum and the product's brand concept type.

Celebrities who are known for acquirable expertise are limited in what they can endorse. For example, Blanks is known for his expertise in creating TaeBo exercises, to which consumers assumptively credit his physical fitness. This is an acquirable skill that he teaches to consumers who purchase his exercise videos. Nadal was recently chosen as an endorser for Lanvin L'Homme Fragrances (Evans & Stockman, 2008). While clearly known for his tennis ability and therefore potentially an excellent functional product endorser for tennis-related products (e.g., rackets, balls, and clothing), Nadal does not appear to possess enough attraction to endorse a product such as cologne, particularly since consumers usually see him covered in perspiration. Accordingly, Nadal falls more toward the center of the Endorser Sexpertise Continuum.

On the other hand, celebrities who are known for their likeability or overall image are not as limited in products that they can endorse. These celebrities are good matches for affective products but can also endorse functional products within his/her area of expertise.

The quintessential example of a likable sport celebrity is Michael Jordan; consumers buy cologne endorsed by him (symbolic) and basketball shoes (functional). However, many other likable sport celebrity examples exist, including female tennis professional Maria Sharapova, who endorses Nike athletic products, Gatorade thirst quencher beverages (functional), and Canon cameras (symbolic); and Danica Patrick, who endorses Honda automobiles, Peak antifreeze (functional), Motorola electronics, Go Daddy Web site domain registration, AirTran Airlines, and Tissot watches (symbolic).

As a final note, both marketers and celebrities have much at stake in endorser agreements and must keep McCracken's (1989) concept of typecasting, or the development and maintenance of a consistent image, at the forefront of consideration to maximize marketability. Implied in the proposed endorsement effectiveness model is the notion that celebrity endorsers can move along the continuum in either direction. If a celebrity becomes associated with something negative (such as former National Football League quarterback Michael Vick's alleged involvement in dog fighting), he /she can slide to the left of the continuum, making him /her less marketable. For example, immediately following the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, Brandweek reported that Michael Phelps' pre-Olympics endorsement estimate of \$5 million had doubled and that he could earn more than \$100 million in his lifetime from deals struck with Visa, Hilton Hotels, AT&T, Omega, Kellogg's, Power Bar, Mazda, and Speedo (Beirne, 2008). Following the January 2009 publication of a photo showing Phelps allegedly smoking marijuana, Kellogg's dropped him quickly as an endorser, while Mazda announced no plans to drop him (Chi-Chu 2009). This single event seems to have shifted Phelps' endorsement potential to the left of the continuum, though

the actions of his other sponsors remain to be seen. Speculation regarding sponsors' intentions toward Phelps goes both ways; Hein (2009) comments that Phelps' earning potential "like Cheech and Chong is up in smoke" (p. 42), while Ritson (2009) comments that Phelps will not "go to pot" (p. 22) and opines that his endorsement potential remains strong.

Conversely, if celebrities develop enduring, likeable images, they may move to the right of the continuum, thereby becoming more marketable. For example, Danica Patrick participates in a sport where both men and (considerably fewer) women compete in the same field, a factor which companies heavily emphasize when examining her overall brand value. Appealing to both genders significantly improves an athlete's marketability, yet few athletes reach this crossover potential. More commonly, while female athletes are underrepresented in product endorsements, female consumers trust women athletes and spokespersons, whereas male consumers trust male athletes (Boyd and Shank 2004; Grau, Landreth, Roselli and Taylor 2007). Achieving her first Indy car win in April 2008 added to Patrick's credibility and paved the way for her to move beyond reliance upon her attractive looks for celebrity endorser appeal, an attribute attributed to Kournikova, who has not won a singles tournament title since turning pro in 1995 (Janoff, 2008; Cuneen, Spencer, Ross, and Apostolopoulou, 2007). Summarily, partner selection should be based on the overall image that the endorser can contribute and its match to the brand concept of the company to create a seamless match between the endorser, brand, and product.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Recently, Red Bull energy drink signed National Football League stars Reggie Bush and Devin Hester to sponsorship deals (Scibetti, 2008). Such a strategy was an unprecedented move for Red Bull, whose sport marketing strategy has historically been one of complete ownership. For example, in 2006, Red Bull acquired complete ownership of the Major League Soccer franchise New York/New Jersey MetroStars and renamed it New York Red Bulls (Haplin, 2006).

Future research should empirically test the Endorser Sexpertise Continuum by identifying current athlete endorser celebrities and their places on the continuum by categorizing the brand personalities of the athlete celebrities, as well as their brand alliance portfolios and the resulting athlete celebrity brands. Further exploration could also identify product categories and brands that would be considered inside and outside the area of expertise of each athlete celebrity, including the categorization of athlete endorsements by Fullerton and Merz (2008), which consists of alignment-based strategies and sports-based strategies. The type of product (i.e., functional, experiential, or symbolic) can also be considered in this research. Different pairings (brand alliances) could examine the resulting brand attitude and purchase intention consumers have related to certain products, as well as any spillover effect on both the product brand and the athlete celebrity brand. Future research can also track the use of these kinds of endorsements and examine the resulting movement (if any) of the athlete celebrity endorser toward either end of the Endorser Sexpertise Continuum.

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Journal of Sport Administration & Supervision

A SYSTEMS-BASED THINKING & LEARNING JOURNAL

Examining the Effectiveness of Athlete Celebrity Endorser Characteristics and Product Brand Type: The Endorser Sexpertise Continuum

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Research Problems

The purpose of this paper is to examine elements of successful athlete celebrity endorsements. The paper addresses why some athlete celebrities can only endorse a limited range of related products, while other athlete celebrities can endorse a wide range of unrelated products. Optimum combinations of athlete/product endorsement match-up are also discussed, and a rubric for addressing this match-up called the Endorser Sexpertise Continuum is introduced.

Importance of Issues

Athlete celebrities, as well as product brand marketers, have much at stake when entering endorser agreements. Forbes reported that the 10 richest male and female athletes made a combined \$600 million in salary, prize money and endorsements, including men's professional golfer Tiger Woods, who alone earned nearly \$100 million in sponsorships in 2008. Interestingly, many top athlete endorsers make considerably more money as endorsers than as athletes in their chosen sports. For example, from June 2007 to June 2008, female professional golfer Michelle Wie earned \$12 million in endorsement money, but only \$39,000 in prize money. Similarly, former professional basketball player Michael Jordan made \$45 million in endorsements during the same period, despite not having participated in his sport for several years. With such considerable sums at stake, brands must carefully consider the celebrities they entrust with their brands' images, as well as the perceived relationship between the celebrity persona and the endorsed product.

Issues

This paper proposes athlete celebrities are brands unto themselves and must manage their brand carefully to maximize their endorsement marketability. A favorable and consistent image in the minds of consumers becomes important for both the athlete celebrity brand and for the branded product he/she is endorsing. Positive and negative spillover effects individually impact both the athlete celebrity brand and the branded product, similar to the concept of brand alliances. Since brand image is composed of an accumulation of meanings, each time a brand associates with another brand, the experience impacts and contributes to its overall image. In other words, each current endorsement impacts the future endorsement opportunities of the athlete celebrity.

Summary

So what limits the endorsement opportunities for an athlete celebrity? How does one determine the best branded products to endorse? These questions can be answered simultaneously. An effective athlete celebrity endorsement depends upon the endorser's placement on the Endorser Sexpertise Continuum and the product's brand concept type. The left side of the Endorser Sexpertise Continuum is anchored by acquirable expertise, which includes the concepts of expertise and trustworthiness of the endorser. The further the endorser falls toward this side of the continuum, the more likely he/she will be limited to endorsing products related to his/her own area of expertise, since consumers have higher involvement with these kinds of products and therefore will give much consideration to the products' functional properties and will process the information using a piecemeal approach. The right side of the Endorser Sexpertise Continuum is anchored by likeability, which includes the concepts of likeability and attractiveness of the endorser. The further the endorser falls toward this side of the continuum, the more likely he/she can endorse both products related to his/her area of expertise and products removed from that area of expertise. Consumers are drawn to these products through their liking of these endorsers. In this case, consumers' product involvement is much lower, so they become primarily interested in symbolic properties of these products and will use more holistic, categorical approaches. Athlete celebrities who are known for their likeability or overall image are not as limited in products that they can endorse.

Analysis

Implied in the proposed Endorser Sexpertise Continuum is the notion that celebrity endorsers can move along the continuum in either direction. If a celebrity becomes associated with something negative (such as former National Football League quarterback Michael Vick's alleged involvement in dog fighting), he/she can slide to the left of the continuum, making him/her less marketable. Conversely, if celebrities develop enduring, likeable images, they may move to the right of the continuum, thereby becoming more marketable.

Discussion

Athlete celebrities need to guard the perceived images of their own brands. If they are only known for their expertise, their endorsement opportunities may be limited to their areas of expertise. If they are able to transcend this perception to include greater likeability and attraction, they increase their likelihood of endorsing products unrelated to their areas of expertise, thereby becoming more generally marketable. Summarily, selection of athlete celebrity endorsements should be based on brand images that they can contribute to the endorsed brand, as well as their match to the brand concept of the endorsed branded product to create a seamless match between the endorser, brand, and product.