

Female athletes as endorsers: What variables influence effectiveness

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Abstract 426**

Companies spend a great deal of money on endorsers to push their products. For example, a 2006 list of the highest celebrity endorsement deals showed that Catherine Zeta Jones received \$20 million to endorse T-Mobile, Angelina Jolie received \$12+ million to endorse St. John, and Nicole Kidman received \$12 million to endorse Chanel No. 5. (www.howardforums.com, 2006). Certainly athlete endorsers have also started to cash in on this trend. After signing a new deal with Gatorade to endorse his own sports drink, Tiger Woods has earned nearly \$1 billion in lifetime endorsement money (www.chicagobusiness.com, 2007). However, female athletes earn much less endorsement money than their male counterparts (Spencer & McClung, 2001). In fact, Turner, Bounds, Hauser, Motsinger, Ozmore, & Smith, (1995) found that while 11% of all television advertisements utilize athletes, only 3% of those use female athletes as endorsers.

Much of the recent literature regarding endorser effectiveness has been guided by the match-up hypothesis which asserts the most effective endorsements are those in which there is a fit between the endorser and the product (Agawal & Kamakura, 1995; Boyd & Shank, 2004; Kammins, 1990; Middelstaedt et al., 2000; Shank, 2005; Till & Bussler, 2000). This research has shown that the connection between the product and the endorser is absolutely key to the success of the endorsement campaign. This study utilized tenants of the match-up hypothesis to determine influential variables regarding the effectiveness of female athlete endorsers.

Endorser characteristic studies indicate that the more credible the source, the more effective the endorser (Ohanian, 1991; Weiner & Mowan, 1986). Source credibility has been found to be enhanced by a variety of factors including attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Ohanian, 1991; Tripp; Jensen, & Carlson, 1994). Thus, more attractive, talented (i.e., expert), and trustworthy athletes should be more effective endorsers.

However, Kane (1987) found that perceptions of a female athlete's attractiveness was dependent upon the sport in which the athlete participated. She discovered that females in sex appropriate sports (e.g., golf, tennis) were considered more attractive than those in sex inappropriate sports (e.g., softball). Kane (1987) also found that greater social status was attributed to those in sex appropriate sports than sex inappropriate sports. This suggests the type of sport played by a female athlete may influence perceptions of her attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness. This leads to the first hypothesis:

H1: The type of sport played by a female athlete endorser (gender appropriate versus gender inappropriate) will influence perceptions of the endorser's attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness.

As the match-up hypothesis contends, attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness are important variables regarding the effectiveness of the endorser, but the fit between the endorser and the product should be the most important determinant of influence and effectiveness (Kammins, 1990; Till & Bussler, 2000). Thus, while attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness may be components of fit, the type of product the female athlete is endorsing should also impact perceptions of fit. According to the match-up hypothesis, a female athlete endorsing a sport related product (e.g., Gatorade) should be a better fit than one endorsing a non-sport related product (e.g., mobile phone services) (Kammins, 1990; Till & Bussler, 2000). That is, because there is a more direct connection between Gatorade and the athlete, a better fit should be produced. Thus, taking into account the logic behind hypothesis 1, there should be an interaction effect between type of sport played (gender appropriate versus gender inappropriate) and type of product endorsed (sport related versus non sport related) on perceptions of fit of the endorser. This leads to the second hypothesis:

H2: There will be an interaction between type of sport played by the female athlete (gender appropriate versus gender inappropriate) and product she endorses (sport related product versus non sport related product) on perceptions of fit.

To test these contentions, a 2 (gender appropriate vs. gender inappropriate sport) x 2 (sport related vs. non-sport related) experiment is being conducted. Four print advertisements with a fictitious female athlete were created. The picture of the athlete remained the same in all four advertisements-female athlete, dark hair, dark eyes, very fit (i.e. "cut"), dressed in generic workout clothing, and overall, attractive. The advertisements differed only relative to the product endorsed (Gatorade-- a sport related product, versus Sprint - a non-sport related product), and the type of sport the athlete played (tennis - a gender appropriate sport, versus boxing - a gender inappropriate sport). The print on the ad indicated the endorser was a professional

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athlete and the sport she in which she participated. Additionally, her expertise was noted in the script through various statistics and earned accomplishments relative to her sport. These scripts were pre-tested to ensure similar levels of expertise for boxing and tennis. The bottom of each advertisement simply had the logo and slogan for product being endorsed.

To complete the study, the ads will be randomly assigned to participants at a university in the Northeast. There will be approximately 60 subjects in each group. They will be instructed to look at the ad for 90 seconds and then asked to complete the attached questionnaire which measured attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, and fit.

The measures in the questionnaire include Ohanian's (1990) scale to assess the attractiveness expertise, and trustworthiness of the athlete. Items from the three scales are preceded by the phrase, "the athlete in the advertisement is." and utilize 9-point semantic differential scales. Perceptions of fit are measured by Till & Bussler's (2000) 5 item scale.

To test the first hypothesis, a MANOVA will be conducted with sport played (gender appropriate vs. gender inappropriate) as the independent variable and perceptions of athlete attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness as the dependent variables. To test the second hypothesis, an ANOVA will be conducted with sport played (gender appropriate vs. gender inappropriate), product endorsed (sport related vs. non sport related) and the interaction of the two as the independent variables and perceptions of fit as the dependent variable.

Preliminary analyses have been conducted ($n = 21$) and suggest that type of sport played does impact source credibility variables. There are too few subjects to run a meaningful full MANOVA, but the mean scores for the female tennis player were higher for all three variables (attractiveness = 6.54; expertise = 7.60; and trustworthiness = 6.66) than for the female boxer (attractiveness = 5.77; expertise = 6.70; and trustworthiness = 5.73). Further, preliminary analyses also suggest there is an interaction between the type of sport played and the product endorsed on the perceptions of fit. The advertisement featuring the tennis player endorsing Gatorade had the highest mean score on fit perceptions (7.55) compared to all other manipulations (boxer/Gatorade = 4.26), (tennis/Sprint = 4.29), (boxer/sprint = 3.73).

Results of the full study will be reported in the presentation. Additionally, the results will be tied back to existing theoretical foundations and the practical applications for sport managers will be discussed.