Relationship between Image of Athlete Endorsement, Attitude toward Advertisement, Brand Identification and Brand Loyalty

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Companies are using well known and popular sport-stars in maximizing the effect of communication. Athlete endorsement, which is a method of advertisement by funding a specific player or team and having the player use the company's merchandise, is often used (Stotlar, Veltri & Viswanathan, 1998). This is why golf players have become targets of advertisement for companies in the form of athlete endorsement. Well known relations are the Nike-Tiger Woods, Callaway-Ernie Els, Callaway-Phil Mickelson, and Taylor Made Adidas-Garcia ties. As a domestic example, the Korean female golfer, So-Yeon You, is advertising for Hi-Mart. Recently, companies not only support well known players, but also funding potential stars. Many companies are signing sponsorships with those potential stars, and supporting supplies as well as costs. New attempts include companies founding a new golf team and using it to upgrade the brand image of the company through event matches. Therefore, this study focuses on Yong-Eun Yang, the Korean PGA player who is often exposed through golf-only-channels, and the ties with his title sponsor, TaylorMade. We will look into the causal relationship between the image of athlete endorsement, advertisement attitude, brand identification, and brand loyalty, and analyze the process of finding new players and using them as marketing methods to improve a company's brand value.

By using the convenient sampling method, a total of 300 people from the golf clubs in Seoul, Gyung-Gi, Chung-Chung and Gang-Won area were surveyed for this research. We first exposed the subjects to the promotion materials related to Yang and Taylor Made, and have them aware of the brand before surveying. Of the 300 acquired surveys, we concluded 16 were inappropriate, and the remaining 284 were used for the final analysis. The statistical methods applied for this study by using SPSS 15.0 were frequency and reliability test. Also, the statistical methods such as confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling by using AMOS 7.0 were utilized.

The model was tested using the maximum likelihood method of parameter estimation, and the fit indices for the model were found to be acceptable with X^2/df=1.725, TLI=.953, CFI=.942, RMR=.046. Therefore, the structural model was concluded as fitting the data. The results of the study are as the following. First, charm and morality, both subordinate factors of image of athlete endorsement, had a significant effect on the attitude toward the advertisement. However, the player performance, and the traits as an athlete did not have a meaningful effect. Second, attitude toward the advertisement had a significant effect on brand identification. Third, attitude toward an advertisement had a significant effect on brand loyalty. Lastly, brand identification had a significant effect on brand loyalty.

Among the factors of the image of athlete endorsement, charm and morality were found to be important in influencing the attitude toward the advertisement. Such attitude, through brand identification, had direct or indirect effects on brand loyalty. Therefore, athletes must always be aware of the fact that they are being watched in or out of the field, and give the image of a model citizen. Management of their private lives and doing social work seems helpful. Companies should choose athletes by examining their image, rather than leaning on athletes' current performance on the field. Companies should also constantly manage their athletes' image because their image will ultimately affect the image of the companies.