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The Effects of Celebrity Athlete Endorsement on Attitudes and Purchase Intentions: The Interaction Effect between Athlete Endorser-product Congruence and Endorser Credibility

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**20-minute oral presentation
(including questions)**

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The implementation of athlete endorsement requires careful understanding of the link between athletes' image, endorser credibility, and perceived product congruency that leads to the forming of sport consumers' attitude and purchase behavior. This is especially important from the managements' perspective since celebrity endorsements significantly affect business outcomes (Tellis, 2003). It is likewise important for the academia since research findings may provide depth in understanding and extending the body of knowledge in this particular aspect. Despite the previous efforts, the lack of investigation on the interaction effect between endorser-product congruence and endorser credibility limits our understanding in celebrity endorsement studies in the context of sport. Additional limitations in terms of generalizability and realistic application in practice exist due to the fictitious athlete endorsers used in previous studies to test the match-up effect (e.g., Koernig & Boyd, 2009; Till & Busler, 2000). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the impact of endorser-product congruence and endorser credibility on advertising effectiveness by employing real athlete celebrities. The study further investigates the interaction effect of endorser-product congruence and endorser credibility.

According to Till and Busler (2000), congruence between athlete endorser and sport-related product has a positive effect on brand attitude. However, this particular study displayed that the effect of athlete endorser-product congruence on purchase intention was insignificant. Interestingly, Koernig and Boyd (2009) provided evidence that athlete endorser-product congruence positively affected consumers' attitude toward the advertisement and brand, and purchase intention as well. On a similar note, Lafferty et al. (2002) suggest that endorser credibility positively influences consumer's attitude toward the advertisement. Further, Kim and Na (2007) discovered that the credibility effect on product attitude generated statistically significant results when the image of the athlete endorser and the product was well-matched.

As for the selection of variables, endorser-product congruence and endorser credibility were manipulated as independent variables while traditional advertising measures of attitude toward the advertisement, brand, and purchase intention were examined as dependent variables.

The subjects for this study were 106 undergraduate and graduate students from a university located in the Southeast region in the U.S. The research model conducted a 2 x 2 experiment; congruence between the endorser's image and the product (High congruence vs. Low incongruence) and credibility of a celebrity endorser (High credibility vs. Low credibility).

All items in the questionnaires were presented on a seven-point semantic differential scale. Three items were adapted from Rifon et al., (2004) to measure endorser-product congruence. Fifteen items were used to measure endorser credibility (Ohanian, 1990). Three items were employed to measure attitude toward the advertisement (Mackenzie and Lutz, 1989). Three items were adapted from Mackenzie and Lutz (1989) to measure attitude toward the brand. Three items were used to measure purchase intention (Yi, 1990).

Data analysis involved One-way ANOVA (analysis of variance) to test hypotheses 1 and 2. Hypothesis 1 proposed that endorser-product congruence will result in a more positive (a) attitude toward the advertisement, (b) brand attitude, and (c) purchase intention when compared to the incongruence between the endorser and product image. Hypothesis 2 proposed that high endorser credibility will result in a more positive (a) attitude toward the advertisement, (b) brand attitude, and (c) purchase intention than low endorser credibility. Two-way ANOVA was utilized to test hypothesis 3, which proposed the existence of an interaction effect between endorser-product congruence and endorser credibility.

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Cronbach's α test generated .899 to .987 values for all measurement items. Hence, reliability of each item was confirmed according to the standard (.70) suggested by Murphy & Davidshofer (2001). ANOVA results indicated that celebrity-product congruence positively influenced attitude towards the advertisement, $F(1,104)=26.90$; $p<.001$. and brand, $F(1,104)=6.84$; $p<.05$. However, the effect on purchase intention displayed insignificant results, $F(1,104)=2.60$; $p>.05$. Meanwhile, endorser credibility positively affected intention to purchase, $F(1,104)=4.42$; $p<.05$. The effects on advertisement, $F(1,104)=1.96$; $p>.05$, and attitude toward the brand, $F(1,104)=1.09$; $p>.05$, generated insignificant results. The study, in addition, identified the significant positive interaction effect between endorser-product congruence and endorser credibility on consumers' purchase intention, $F(1, 102) = 4.24$; $p < .05$. Implications for the current research are as follow. First, previous literature, in general, employed fictitious celebrities to verify the effectiveness of endorser-product congruence. This limits the generalizability of the match-up hypothesis and its practice in real business situations. The present study implemented actual athlete celebrities in an effort to enhance the external validity of the match-up effect. Second, endorser-product congruence affected subjects' attitude toward the advertisement and brand, however not purchase intention. This finding is in line with previous research conducted by Till and Busler (2000). Third, the findings from the present study supported the endorser-product congruence effect on attitude toward the advertisement. This suggests that advertisement viewers tend to purchase products based on specific attributes rather than endorsers. Fourth, endorser credibility positively affected purchase intention. However, neither attitude toward the advertisement nor brand attitude was significantly influenced. This suggests that endorser credibility may be less relevant to product preference than product benefits. The important detail this study adds to the extant literatures is the discovery of the positive direct association between endorser credibility and purchase intention. This finding in particular provides depth in the body of knowledge. On a related note, the interaction effect between endorser-product congruence and endorser credibility was significant only on purchase intention. This result is consistent with the research conducted by Kim and Na (2007). This suggests that advertisers need to consider endorser-product congruence as well as endorser credibility to induce consumers to purchase products. Detailed implications of the findings, limitations, and directions for future research will be discussed in the presentation.