

Differences in Evaluation of Athlete Endorsement Deals: Analytic vs. Holistic Thinking

Mujde Yuksel, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Ryan Spalding, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Mark McDonald (Advisor), University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Marketing

Friday, May 31, 2013

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

Abstract 2013-101

9:20 AM

(Room 408)

Celebrity endorsement has long been a prevalent form of advertising in the marketing world. However, marketing research on endorsement has largely focused on the dimensions of an endorsement deal as consisting solely of the endorser and the endorsed brand, ignoring the consumer as an important third dimension that may have an impact on the success of the endorsement deal. This article is an attempt to extend the endorsement research to include the thought processes of the consumer in evaluating athlete endorsement deals; thus, the theoretical contribution of this article pertains to introducing the style of thinking (analytic vs. holistic) as an individual difference influencing endorsement evaluations.

Initially, two models, the source attractiveness model (McGuire model) and the source credibility model (Howland model) have been adopted to explore the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers (Kim and Na 2007), leading to endorser characteristics (e.g., attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise) as the influential factors of endorsement effectiveness (Ohanian 1990). Match-up hypothesis has been used in conjunction with source characteristics and has been quite effective in predicting the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers (e.g. Till and Busler 2000). In this context, the match between the endorser and the endorsed brand has been investigated in terms of attractiveness and expertise. Associative learning represents another theory that has been used in the endorsement research through consumers' attitudes of the endorsement deal as a result of the associations they build between the endorser and the endorsed brand (e.g. Noffsinger et. al. 1983). Among celebrity endorsers, some of the top endorsements in the US pertain to sport athletes. Drawing theories and insights from the endorsement literature, sports marketing researchers have focused on the effectiveness of these lucrative athlete endorsement deals mostly employing source characteristics and match-up hypothesis (e.g. Boyd and Shank 2004; Fink et al. 2004; Kim and Na 2007).

The thought processes of people have been categorized as consisting of two cognitive styles that are known as holistic and analytic thinking (e.g. Choi et. al. 2007). Briefly, holistic and analytic thinking differ in terms of how people make connections among objects. For example, holistic thinking leads to incorporating the relationships and interactions among objects rather than separating the objects to evaluate them. In marketing literature, the concept of analytic versus holistic thinking has mostly been adopted to investigate consumers' perceptions of brand extensions (Monga and John 2007; 2010), where it was demonstrated that holistic thinkers evaluate brand extensions more favorably than analytic thinkers because they tend to associate the parent brand and the extension more easily due to their focus on relationships and interactions.

In the context of athlete endorsement evaluations, this article predicts an effect of style of thinking on the consumers' perceptions. This prediction is based on bridging the previous literature on the match-up hypothesis, associative learning theory, and styles of thinking in the domain of athlete endorsements. In particular, the following four hypotheses are proposed.

H1: The relationship between endorser evaluation and brand evaluation will be stronger for holistic thinkers than for analytic thinkers.

H2: Holistic thinkers will evaluate the endorsed brand more favorably than analytic thinkers.

H3: The endorsed brand will be evaluated more favorably in the case of high endorsement fit than in the case of low endorsement fit.

H4: In the case of low endorsement fit, holistic thinkers will evaluate the endorsed brand more favorably than analytic thinkers. However, in the case of high endorsement fit, analytic and holistic thinkers will result in similar brand evaluations.

Hypotheses regarding the impact of style of thinking and endorsement fit on the evaluations of the endorsed brand

2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

were tested in a 2 (endorsement fit: low fit vs. high fit) x 2 (styles of thinking: analytic thinking vs. holistic thinking) between-subjects design. One hundred and three undergraduate students from a Northeastern U.S. university participated in the study for extra course credit (55 male and 48 female). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two endorsement fit conditions. Analytic and holistic thinkers were identified using attention (e.g. "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts") and causality (e.g. "Everything in the universe is somehow related to each other") items from the analytic-holistic thinking scale developed by Choi et. al. (2007).

Each participant was given an athlete-brand endorsement deal of either high or low fit and asked to evaluate the brand across five dimensions (coefficient alpha=.95) using a seven point Likert scale (e.g. 1="unappealing" and 7="appealing"). The participant then evaluated the athlete along the same five dimensions (coefficient alpha=.94). Participant evaluations pertaining to attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise (Ohanian 1990) were also collected to serve as control variables for analysis (coefficient alphas=.91, .89, and .98).

The correlation between the athlete evaluation and the brand evaluation was analyzed to test H1. The two variables were significantly correlated ($r[51]=.299, p < .05$) for holistic thinkers, whereas they were not significantly correlated ($r[48]=.148, p > .10$) for analytic thinkers. Thus, H1 is supported. An ANOVA was conducted to test the remaining hypothesis. In support of H2, holistic thinkers evaluated the endorsed brand more favorably than analytic thinkers [$M=4.89$ vs. $4.32, SD=1.07$ vs. $1.36; F(1,102)=7.59, p < .01$]; in support of H3, brand evaluations were higher for high-fit endorsement than for low-fit endorsement [$M=5.25$ vs. $3.95, SD=1.05$ vs. $1.08; F(1,102)=47.77, p < .001$]; and, in support of H4, a marginally significant style of thinking x endorsement fit interaction emerged [$F(1,102)=3.41, p < .07$].

The results of this study support the view that endorsed brand evaluations are jointly determined by the style of thinking and the fit between the endorser and the endorsed product. For endorsements with low fit, holistic thinkers provide more favorable evaluations to the endorsed brand than analytic thinkers. On the contrary, for endorsements with high fit, holistic and analytic thinkers evaluate the endorsed brand equally. Therefore, the results identify the style of thinking as an influential factor in evaluating athlete endorsements in addition to the fit between the endorser and the brand.

The results also provide managerial implications such that considering the consumers' styles of thinking may yield a better prediction of consumer responses to athlete endorsement deals. For example, previous research on style of thinking demonstrated that Eastern (Western) cultures generally adopt holistic (analytic) thinking style (e.g., Choi et al. 2007; Monga and John 2007). Thus, brand managers may differentiate athlete endorsement deals in Eastern and Western markets. For instance, they may have a deal with a low-fit endorser and still get favorable evaluations in Eastern markets. Although particularly applicable to the sport marketing field in terms of athlete endorsement, these findings can also inform the use of celebrity endorsers in general.