Several researchers have studied the effectiveness of endorser-product congruence on consumer responses. The prior studies associated with the match-up hypothesis have mainly focused on the efficacy of congruence between an endorser’s expertise and an expertise-related product. Further studies have investigated congruence effects between an endorser’s physical attractiveness and an attractiveness-related product. Meanwhile, athlete celebrities have been widely used to support the expertise-based match-up hypothesis (Koernig & Boyd, 2009; Ohanian, 1991; Till & Busler, 2000) in which many advertisers have employed an athlete celebrity as an endorser of attractiveness-related products (e.g., perfume, cologne, watch, etc.). These studies signify effectiveness of celebrity endorsement may vary depending on product involvement condition. It is also noted that that celebrity endorsement is operated with simple decision rules via a peripheral route (Goldsmith et al., 2000; Petty et al., 1983). In the meantime, no empirical study, up to date, focused on the different effectiveness of the two perspectives of match-up effects based on attractiveness and expertise depending on involvement. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine how two types of match-up effects (i.e., attractiveness-based and expertise-based congruence) differently influence consumer responses depending on product involvement level based on the concept of the elaboration likelihood model (ELM).

Theoretical Backgrounds

In a study that examined the moderating role of involvement displayed that an advertisement endorsed by a celebrity influenced consumer responses in low involvement condition via a peripheral route (Petty et al., 1983). According to the match-up hypothesis, however, a celebrity endorser is enabled to deliver product-relevant messages via a central route, so that celebrity endorsement is effective even in the high involvement condition if an image of a celebrity endorser and that of an endorsed product are congruent (Lee & Thorson, 2008; Till & Busler, 2000). In this perspective, both attractiveness-based congruence and expertise-based congruence will be more effective in high involvement conditions than in low involvement conditions since consumers may concentrate more on a celebrity endorser than the advertisement message. According to the ELM, under low involvement conditions, peripheral cues are more important than issue-related argumentation (Petty et al., 1983). Therefore, attractiveness-based congruence might be differently approached from expertise-based congruence since consumers would focus not only on the message, but also on the peripheral cue, an athlete celebrity himself. Thus the following hypothesis is developed:

H1: Product involvement will not affect the relationship between attractiveness-based endorser-product congruence and consumer responses. In particular, the effectiveness of attractiveness-based congruence for consumers with high level of product involvement will not significantly differ from those with high product involvement condition in terms of (a) attitude toward the advertisement, (b) attitude toward the brand, and (c) purchase intention.

Meanwhile, expertise-based congruence may be more effective in high involvement conditions than low involvement conditions because consumers may pay more attention to the message than to the endorser. Thus the following hypothesis is developed:

H2: Product involvement strengthens the relationship between expertise-based endorser-product congruence and consumer responses. In particular, the effectiveness of expertise-based congruence will be more pronounced for consumers with high level of product involvement condition than those with low involvement condition in terms of (a) attitude toward the advertisement, (b) attitude toward the brand, and (c) purchase intention.

Method

Pretests. A series of pretests will be conducted to decide proper pairs of athlete endorsers and product categories, which can present the two levels of endorser-product congruence. Focus group discussion will be conducted to
create an initial pool of athlete celebrities with two groups composed of five undergraduate participants for each. Further, 30 undergraduate students will be asked to evaluate the athletes based on the five criteria, including high degrees on match-up factor based on physical attractiveness for experiment 1 and expertise for experiment 2 (Hanjan, 1990), salience (Lee & Thorson, 2008), high familiarity (Misra & Beatty, 1990), low ratings on recall of the prior endorsement (Kamins & Gupta, 1994), and overall favorableness toward an athlete celebrity (Peracchio & Tybout, 1996). After two athlete endorsers are selected, the second pretest will be conducted to choose the most proper and improper product types on the basis of physical attractiveness for experiment 1 and expertise for experiment 2. Thereafter, 30 undergraduate students will be asked to rate the congruence level on a 3-item 7-point semantic differential scale (Rifon et al., 2004).

Study Design

Two experiments will be conducted in the present study. The first experiment will examine attractiveness-congruence effects depending on the level of product involvement. The subjects will be 120 undergraduate students from a university located in the East region in the U.S. The research model will conduct a 2 x 2 experiment; endorser-product congruence condition (congruence vs. incongruence) and product involvement level (high vs. low). Each cell will have 30 participants. The second experiment will investigate expertise-congruence effects relying on the level of product involvement. The study design will be identical to the first experiment.

Variables

Traditional advertising measures of attitude toward the advertisement, brand, and purchase intention will be examined as dependent variables while endorser-product congruence and product involvement will be manipulated as independent variables. All items in the questionnaires will be presented on a 7-point semantic differential scale. Three items will be adapted from Rifon et al., (2004) to measure endorser-product congruence. Subjects’ involvement with a product will be evaluated with Revised Personal Involvement Inventory (RPII) including ten items developed by McQuarrie and Munson (1991). The participants will be divided into two groups (i.e., high and low involvement) by median split. For dependent measures, three items will be employed to measure each dependent variable: attitude toward the advertisement (Mackenzie & Lutz, 1989), attitude toward the brand (Mackenzie & Lutz, 1989), and purchase intention (Yi, 1990), respectively.

Results and Discussion

Cronbach’s α test results will confirm the reliability of each measurement item. Two-way ANOVA (analysis of variance) will confirm the match-up effect. The path coefficients in the high and low product involvement groups will be compared with the use of a multiple group analysis (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). Consequently, the current study is expected to extend the knowledge of the endorsement in sport area by adding the depth of the moderating role of involvement. The authors will ensure that the detailed implications of the findings, limitations, and directions for future research will be discussed at the conference with the actual experiment data.