“If the Media Talk About You, Then They Are Interested in You”: The Challenges to be an Endorser for Female Soccer Athletes from Cameroon

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Endorsement is among the most well-known strategies that managers and marketers utilize to advertise products and/or services (Seno & Lukas, 2007). In sport, athlete endorsement is among the most effective tools for brand marketing (Spry, Pappu, & Cornwell, 2011) as evidenced by Nike who spent approximately 10 billion dollars on well-known athlete endorsers in 2011 (Nicekicks, 2017). Thus, athlete endorsement also represents a significant financial source for celebrity athletes. However, it is common for male athletes to be paid more endorsement money than female athletes (Spencer & McClung, 2001). The 2017 Forbes’ list of 100 top paid athletes only featured one female, Serena Williams (Forbes, 2017). Even though women’s participation in sports is growing, female athletes continue to struggle getting endorsement contracts (Antil, Burton, & Robinson, 2010). While there has been literature that has examined the challenges of female athletes as endorsers in the western countries (Antil et al., 2010) and some athlete-specific factors such as expertise, type of sport played, and demographic characteristics (Arai, Ko, & Ross, 2014), little attention has been given to endorsement contracts and opportunities for African athletes and specifically, African female athletes. Among female African national soccer teams, the Cameroon female national team is ascending in the FIFA ranking and generating increased national, continent, and global status. Considering the challenges for women and the increased success and notoriety of the Cameroon women’s national soccer team, the following research aims to fill this gap and initiate a new stream of research on professional female soccer athletes and their challenges as endorsers in Cameroon. Considering the exploratory nature of the study, a qualitative approach was utilized. Participants were recruited through the Cameroonian Soccer Federation and were required to be over 20 years of age and participate in top leagues in Cameroon and abroad. All participants (n=17) participated in Skype interviews guided by a semi-structured interview guide including: a) the endorsement contracts and opportunities offered and b) the challenges faced by the players regarding finding and understanding endorsement contracts. Each interview was transcribed verbatim, anonymized, entered into QSR International’s NVivo 12 pro qualitative data analysis software then thematically analyzed according to Braun and Clarke (2009) procedures. Data analysis revealed two major themes including: a) lack of awareness and b) needs for promotional strategies. Cameroonian female soccer athletes stated that they were not well informed about how endorsement deals were produced and carried out throughout their career, therefore hindering their judgement when making decisions that could potentially affect their endorsement deals. Additionally, promotional strategies were minimally available to the athletes, which put them at a major disadvantage when compared to athletes in different countries. This study provides an overview of the challenges that Cameroonian female soccer athletes face when dealing with endorsement and media promotion. In addition, findings will be beneficial for individuals who work closely with female athletes such as sport managers and agents to provide education on athlete endorsement and promotional strategies.