

ABSTRACT

Do Gender and Expertise Matter? An Exploration of Athletic Product Endorsement in China

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This study examined the effect of an athlete endorser's gender-sport fit and expertise in the decision-making process of athlete endorsed product impressions in a Chinese sports market. The result of this study showed that the gender-sport fit of an athlete endorser can significantly impact sport consumers' intentions to purchase an endorsed product. A total of 649 sport consumers from a major city in China participated in this study. The relationship between gender-sport fit and level of expertise of an athlete endorser was also revealed. Specifically, gender-sport fit had a stronger influence on consumers' purchase intentions compared to expertise. The findings of this study should be beneficial to athletes considering endorsement contracts and marketers who want to use endorsements to advertise their products and improve sales.

Do Gender and Expertise Matter?
An Exploration of Athletic Product Endorsement in China

by

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A Thesis

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Again, I thank everyone who accompanied me on this journey.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my mother, father, and my wife. I am grateful for their support.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Endorsements sell products. Period. Though the nuances of what makes for an effective product endorsement can be complicated, the underlying idea is elementary, especially in the case of using a celebrity endorser. Consumers want to have confidence in their purchases. Consumers are often attracted to and often respect celebrities as well as other non-celebrity, credible professionals (e.g., doctors, nurses, teachers). When consumers see celebrities or credible but non-celebrity individuals in an advertisement, they are going to be directly or subliminally influenced to purchase the product or service.

Product endorsement has been and remains a staple of advertising in many diverse settings, ranging from tangible products such as automobiles and fashion apparel to intangible products like attorney services. What is more, celebrity product endorsement has been the subject of research since the 1960s (Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Schimmelpfennig & Hunt, 2020). There is little question in the marketing literature that the appropriate selection of an endorser will likely result in a positive return for the brand seeking an endorser in terms of product recognition, consumer purchase intentions, and actual consumer consumption behaviors. Further, in contemporary sports settings, various brands and sports benefit tremendously from endorsement relationships (Martin, 1996; Bragg, Yanamadala, Roberto, Harris, & Brownell, 2013). Athlete endorsed beverages in

one study, for example, boosted consumers' attitudes even though the product was not a sport product and only connected to sports via the endorser (Bragg et al., 2013).

Theoretically, the importance of the relationship between endorsers and products can be clarified via social adaptation theory and schema theory. Social adaptation theory (Khale, Homer, & Beatty, 1985) accounts for a psychological perspective on consumers' perceptions and reasons for engaging a new product or service. The cognitive evaluation process consumers undertake can be split into two components: assimilation and accommodation. Summarily, consumers seek the zone of realization by assimilating a new environment into an existing cognitive schema, which is a reservoir of information (memories) used to form an evaluation of a product or service. Consumers also seek to accommodate relatively novel information into a cognitive schema (Khale et al., 1985). In marketing settings, a consumer tends to link the new product to an old, existing product (i.e., assimilation), while carefully absorbing and incorporating the new information (i.e., accommodation).

Schema theory builds the theoretical foundation for the "match-up hypothesis" by revealing how the matched relationship between product and spokesperson (i.e. endorser) is capable and responsible for synthesis of a new piece of information regarding product impression through strengthening the link (Lynch & Schuler, 1994). Consistent with but also an extension of social adaptation theory and schema theory, the "match-up hypothesis" suggests that a demand exists on the congruence between a product and the product endorser. The endorser acts as an effective source of information, especially when endorser attributes connect to and compliment product attributes. The higher the

correlation between endorser and product in terms of characteristics and attributes, the better advertising effect will yield (Kamins, 1990).

Celebrity also plays an important role in product endorsement. A recognizable spokesperson who possesses relevant product-related attributes (e.g., attractiveness) should have a significant, positive impact on ad-based and product-based evaluations for a product (Kamins, 1990). Consider an attractive celebrity endorsing a luxury watch or a world class athlete endorsing footwear. In short, to be effective, the celebrity should form congruence with the product being endorsed. This dynamic aligns with the “match-up” hypothesis (Kamins, 1990). Further, a celebrity endorsement is not automatically needed to make a product advertisement successful. The salience of congruence cannot be understated. Celebrity and non-celebrity endorsers alike will have an insignificant impact on product endorsements (be rated by consumers as less favorable) when congruence is weak or altogether absent (Kamins & Gupta, 1994).

Specific to the realm of sports, consumers have been actively receiving product information endorsed by athletes for over a century (Boyd & Shank, 2004). Indeed, if you go back to 1874, eventual baseball Hall of Famer, George Wright, was featured on posters and baseball cards promoting Red Stockings Cigars (Thorn, 2014). Society is long past the days of viewing tobacco and smoking as healthy, but what has not changed is the belief amongst business organizations that athletes are appropriate and effective endorsers of sport-related products as well as non-sport products. Still, an athlete endorsing a product is a popular but not guaranteed strategy for a successful marketing campaign. Though exceptions exist, athlete endorsers must usually possess sufficient levels of congruence with the products or services they are endorsing if the dynamic is

going to be successful in positively influencing consumer attitude and purchase behaviors. What is more, attributes such as gender and perceived expertise may play especially important roles in the effectiveness of athlete endorsements.

Men's and women's sport have historically been divided along gender lines (Kane, 1988). At the highest levels of competition (e.g., NCAA Division I sports, Olympic sports, and professional sports) in and outside of the United States, for example, women and men rarely compete against each other. To that end, Boyd and Shank (2004) tested whether the gender of athlete endorsers would influence consumers' perceptions of several key endorser attributes (i.e., attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise). The results of their study revealed that male endorsers were rated higher than female endorsers on all three attributes.

Sport consumers have been socialized into thinking about and categorizing athletes into different sports based on gender, and the way they distinguish sex-appropriate sports is often engrained (due to socialization and cultural norms) and unlikely to change quickly or easily (Kane, 1988). In brief, sport consumers tend to view certain sports (e.g., gymnastics, synchronized swimming, softball) as more feminine and appropriate for women and other sports (e.g., baseball, football, rugby) as more masculine and appropriate for men. Parker, Mudrick, and Fink (2018), for example, conducted a female athlete endorsement study utilizing a 2 (feminine/masculine characteristics) x 2 (feminine/masculine product) experimental design. They reported that gender impressions (amongst consumers) significantly influences endorsement effectiveness, and that effectiveness dramatically diminishes if a mismatch exists.

In addition to gender, another key aspect of the athlete endorsement equation is expertise. As endorsers, athletes are naturally divided into different segments based on their sports and the skills they have mastered. Athlete expertise aligns well with the “match-up hypothesis” when appropriate congruence between an athlete endorser and a product is formed. That is, when expertise is a strong fit, the effectiveness of the endorser-product relationship increases (Till & Busler, 2000). Consumers will generally view the endorsement between an athlete endorser and an athletically related product as more of a “fit” than the endorsement between an athlete and a non-athletically related product. Consider how it makes sense to align a National Basketball Association (NBA) superstar such as Kevin Durant with basketball shoes or athletic apparel, but it makes no sense to have him endorse soccer apparel or boxing gloves. Additionally, the expertise dimension may be more effective than the attractiveness dimension in matching endorsers and brands in athletic settings (Till & Busler, 1998, 2000).

Problem

Endorsements and the “match-up hypothesis” have been studied and examined for the past several decades in Western countries. Conversely, in Eastern Asia environments, the effectiveness of using product endorsers remains relatively unclear, especially for sports and athlete endorsement. Examining the influence of endorser gender and expertise attributes in an Eastern Asia context, especially China (given its prominence and powerful role in Asian financial markets), is an important and missing component of the extant sport marketing literature. Indeed, Yoon, Kim, Magnusen and Sagas (2018) researched endorsement effectiveness based on race-sport and expertise-sport settings and recommended their scholarship be expanded to include gender and contexts outside

of North America. Accordingly, a similar research design needs to be implemented to better understand the roles of endorser gender and expertise in Chinese sport marketing, which should then enhance the advertising strategies of Chinese brands looking to use athletes in their advertising campaigns.

Purpose of the Study

This study will examine the effectiveness of using gender and expertise-specific athlete endorsers for a sport-related product in an East Asian context, specifically a Chinese cultural context. This study will present a comparative result of utilizing athlete endorsers in Chinese sport marketing by examining the characteristics of gender and expertise, managing the roles they play in athlete endorsement settings, and exploring the interrelationship between these two dimensions.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were developed for this study:

H₁: Athletes with a stronger gender-sport fit will have better endorsement-product fit than those with weaker gender-sport fit.

H₂: Perceived gender-sport fit will outperform expertise in determining endorser-product fit.

Definitions

The following concepts are pivotal to this study. Therefore, definitions for these important concepts are provided:

1. Expertise: the level of expert skill or knowledge in certain sport fields that endorsers possess. It was shown to positively influence the congruence between endorsers and products (Till & Busler, 2000).
2. Gender Typing: consumers' preference of sports based on the gender of athletes. In certain cultural settings, gender typing and consumers' perceptions of gender-appropriate sports may exist (Kane, 1988).
3. Match-up Hypothesis: the relationship between an endorser and product in terms of "fit". Congruence exists if the endorser and product "match-up" (Kamins, 1990).
4. Social Adaption Theory: a psychological perspective on consumers' perceptions and reasons for utilizing product or service (Khale et al., 1985).
5. Source Attractive Model: the effectiveness of a message is dependent on attributes such as "familiarity", "likability", and "similarity" (McCracken, 1989).
6. Source Credibility Model: the effectiveness of any message conveyed depends on the "expertness" and "trustworthiness" of the source (McCracken, 1989).

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, the researcher assumes:

1. Study participants answered the survey questions truthfully.
2. Study participants understood the survey questions correctly.
3. Study participants followed the instructions of the survey correctly.

Limitations

The following limitations apply to this study:

1. The number of variables and outcomes were limited in this study which could leave other possibilities and factors that may influence the result.
2. Only two sport scenarios, MMA fighters and gymnasts were studied and potential error and inconsistency with other sports could exist and the application of the results to other sport could be limited.
3. This study was conducted within an East Asian context with Chinese consumers thus making the context limited to this region even though China is a major global market.

Delimitations

The researcher delimited the study to the following criteria:

1. Participation in this study was completely voluntary.
2. Participants in this study were consumers in an Eastern Asian context.

The survey was confidential, and it was designed to protect the anonymity in that no identifying information from the participants was required.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

In this chapter, the theoretical foundations that form the basis for the current study will be discussed. Also explored will be the following areas: product endorsement, athlete endorsement, endorsement outcomes, and gender typing. Two hypotheses are provided at the end of this chapter.

Theoretical Foundations

Product-endorser relationships are foundational to the success of marketing campaigns involving the sponsorship of an individual to promote a product or service (Seno & Lukas, 2007). The significance of this dynamic to marketing efforts can be understood in part by the “match-up hypothesis” (Kamins, 1990) because this perspective focuses on the congruence between the product and the product endorser. According to this perspective, the physical attractiveness of an endorser that matches up with image of the product will yield a positive return in terms of effective advertisement and marketing (Kamins, 1990). However, if there is an incongruence between the product and the endorser, the efficiency and effectiveness will diminish. The “match-up hypothesis” can be further explained and understood as an offshoot of social adaptation theory and schema theory.

Social Adaptation Theory

The theory of social adaption (Khale, Kulka, & Klingel, 1980) grew from the exploration of adolescent self-esteem. Specifically, Khale et al. (1980) discovered that the multiple, highly specific aspects of interpersonal relations and acts are often shaped by subjective self-esteem. Subsequently, Khale (1984) developed social adaption theory to explain the adaptive importance of information and how, based on how information is processed, it can influence individuals to feel and behave in different ways.

Though initial studies involving social adaption theory focused on adolescents, it is not limited to this population. This theory has been readily applied to marketing and sponsorship studies inclusive of various types of consumers. The relationship between celebrity identity and physical attractiveness of the celebrity, for example, was studied in connection to a shaving razor advertisement (Khale & Homer, 1985). In that study, three variables in the advertisement were manipulated: physical attractiveness of the celebrity, likability of the celebrity, and participant product involvement. Purchase intention and attitude toward razor products were measured and compared. Social adaption theory was supported by the results because, according to the ANOVA results, participants who saw a product endorsed by an attractive endorser significantly favored the product more ($M = 14.02$) than participants who saw an unattractive product endorser ($M = 12.16$). High levels of celebrity attractiveness positively interacted with consumer product involvement, resulting in improved consumer perception of the product and increased purchase intentions.

The potential benefits of social adaptation theory to consumer behavior became an area of greater interest to marketing researchers based on the early work of Khale and

Homer (1985). With respect to advertising research, the theory has been used to explain how individuals come to process a new product or idea. When consumers engage with a new product or idea, they seek equilibrium – specifically, assimilation and accommodation (Khale, Homer, & Beatty, 1986). Consumers assimilate a new product or environment into an existing cognitive schema (reservoir of information about a product or service) as a way of creating a comfortable zone of realization and understanding. Correspondingly, consumers attempt to mentally accommodate and incorporate the new information into their thought processes so they can formulate a judgement. In short, when consumers first encounter a new product (e.g., sports drink), they want to make sense of it. So, to make sense of the new product, consumers relate to and link the product back to past products (e.g., previously consumed sports drinks or drinks) as a part of the assimilation process. During the assimilation process, consumers also absorb and incorporate the new product information to create a new (modified) perception of the product as part of the accommodation process.

After the introduction and initial application of social adaptation theory to marketing research, the perspective was expanded to other avenues of advertising, such as surrealism. Of note, Khale and Homer (1986) investigated the effectiveness of surrealistic marketing and advertising. Two strategies were discussed: priming statement and surrealistic advertisement. A priming statement represents consumers' subconscious reactions to stimulants that influences their conscious reactions. Playing Italian music in a restaurant is a good example of how the establishment can engage in the priming of Italian wines. A surrealistic print advertisement represents a form of hyper-creativity advertising whereby a product is shown in a surrealistic form, often in conjunction with

other marketing elements. Khale and Homer found that by combining a priming statement with a surrealistic print advertisement, study participants better recalled the focal product and devoted more time and attention to the act of information processing. From a social adaptation perspective, the priming statement played a key role in assimilation facilitation whereas the surrealistic aspect of the advertisement played a key role in the process of accommodation.

Schema Theory

British psychologist Sir Frederic Barlett (1967) introduced the notion of schema theory which, like social adaptation theory, was initially developed in non-marketing contexts. A schema represents a structure that actively reproduces previous experiences and responses (An, 2013). Along with social adaptation theory, schema theory also provides an explainable theoretical ground for “match-up” hypothesis (Lynch & Schuler, 1994).

Schemas represent reservoirs of information (e.g., memories) that connect individuals to experiences, relationships, and products. A schema is formed when enough information has been gathered and processed. Once formed, the schema is categorized by an individual so that the reservoir of information directs how they think about the information (e.g., enthusiastic, unhappy). Further, schemas can be impacted by marketing and advertising efforts. Indeed, a consumer may have a schema formed about a product but based on a matchup between an endorser and the product, the schema may be adjusted, or an entirely new schema formed (Lynch & Schuler, 1994). To illustrate this point, Figure 2.1 shows a hypothetical scenario with an attractive spokesperson and a product that emphasizes attractiveness.

A schema of Spokesperson A and a schema of Product B are outlined in Figure 2.1. Both Spokesperson A and Product B have various characteristics, but they share one critical attribute: attractiveness. By linking the attractiveness attribute from Spokesperson A to the attractiveness attribute from Product B, a match is formed. The match relationship can then be synthesized (by a potential consumer) to form a new piece of information regarding Spokesperson A. Specifically, Spokesperson A knows a lot about and is a good fit for Product B. This relationship, in connection to the previous content on social adaptation, can also be understood as assimilation in that assimilation consolidates new concepts or images into an existing schema.

Figure 2.1 also illustrates that a match can spawn a new schema based on new information that is created (i.e., advertisement schema). This demonstrates the second half of schema theory: accommodation. Because of the synergy developed by the match on the “attractiveness” attribute, an enhanced measure of attitude towards product is now present and the influence of the advertising schema is now shown.

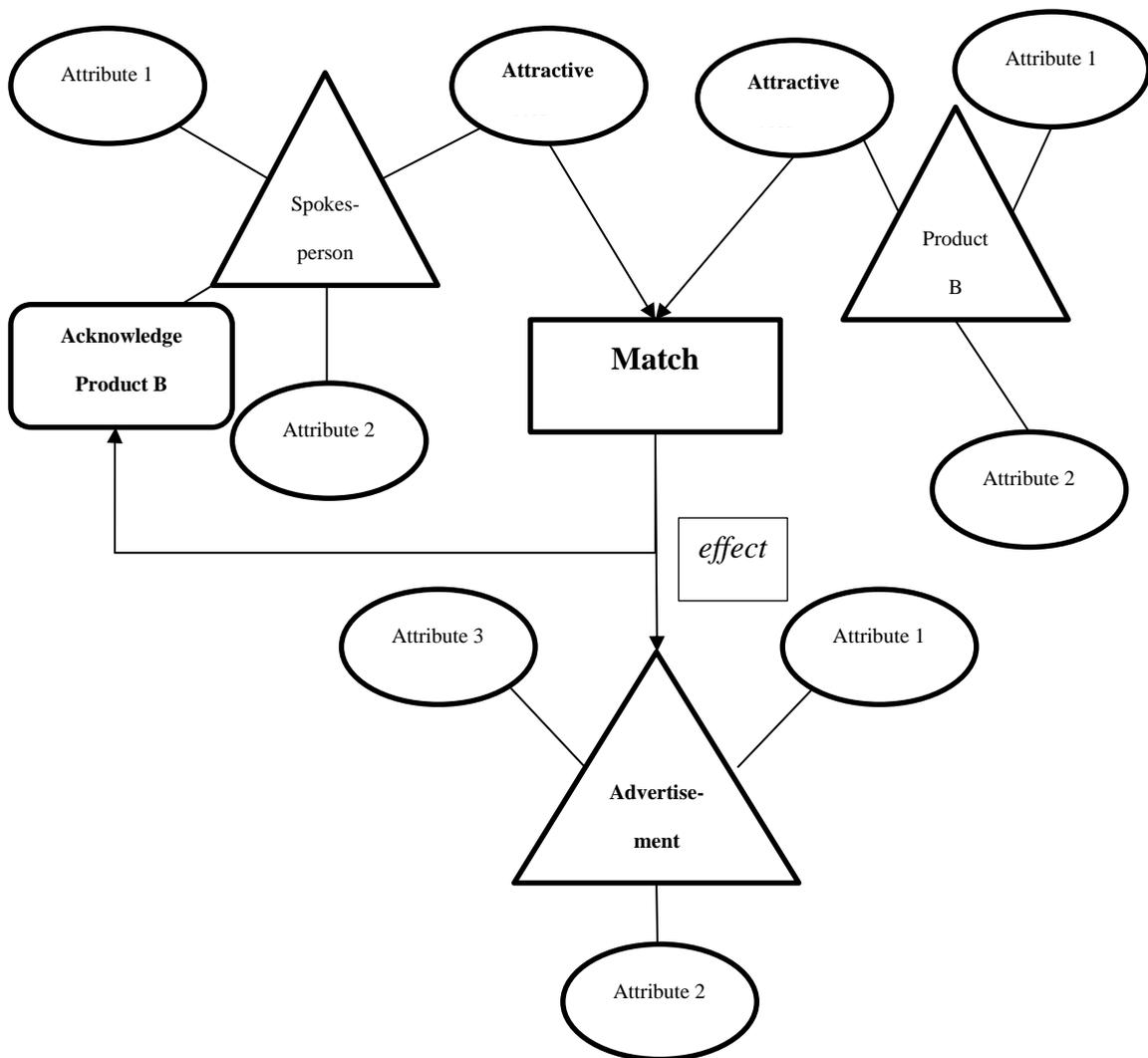


Figure 2.1. Consequence of spokesperson-product match

“Match-up Hypothesis”

The “match-up hypothesis” serves as a theoretic foundation for this study. This approach is an extension of social adaptation theory and schema theory. The “match-up hypothesis” accounts for the relationship between an endorser and product in terms of “fit”. Namely, endorser effectiveness stems largely from the strength of consumer perceptions of perceived between the product and product endorser (Till & Busler, 2000).

For instance, a study by Kamins (1990) reported that the physical attractiveness of an endorser resulted in positive consumer perceptions of the endorsed product so long as consumers perceived the endorser as a good fit for the product.

In a study by Kamins (1990), actor Tom Selleck's image was seen as more congruent with a luxury or sport car than actor Telly Savalas in terms of advertising effectiveness. The use of such a product, in this case, a luxury or sport car, would enhance one's attractiveness. Tom Selleck, largely seen by the public as handsome, represented the attractive endorser in the scenario whereas Telly Savalas, not often portrayed in television or movies as handsome, was positioned as the unattractive individual. The congruence between the attractive individual and the product that intends to elevate one's attractiveness would lead to an effective advertising situation. Conversely, the less attractive individual would weaken the congruence, thereby resulting in a less effective marketing dynamic (Kamins, 1990).

With the "match-up hypothesis", congruence between the product and endorser results in a more efficient and effective advertising relationship. Incongruence between the product and the endorser diminishes the efficiency and effectiveness of the product-endorser relationship. However, in situations where attractiveness does not matter to the endorser-product relationship, attractiveness does not matter. For example, if Tom Selleck or Telly Savalas were endorsing a personal computer product like Dell desktop (a product not usually associated with physical attractiveness), the impact of either actor on consumer perceptions of the product may not be different. Meaning, either relatively positive (attractive individual characteristic) or negative (unattractive individual

characteristic) linked to a product that was neutral on attractive elements, would result in a no “match-up” effect in advertisement (Kamins, 1990).

Subsequent research has shown nuance in the “match up hypothesis” (Kamins, 1990). In a study by Solomon, Ashmore, and Longo (1992), various types of beauty and product images in advertising were studied. Several different beauty models (i.e., classic beauty, cute, sex-kitten, sensual, and girl-next-door) were constructed and matched with different products, with end results supporting the “match-up hypothesis”. For example, classic beauty was reported to have high relation angles (50 to 90 degrees, suggesting a high level of consistency) with certain products that were emphasized on the same product image. Though endorser physical attractiveness was related to product attractiveness, the findings demonstrated that physical attractiveness was not a simple and unitary cognitive continuum. Instead, physical attractiveness was shown to be multi-faceted concept with different dimensions. In other words, consumers were able to distinguish different combinations of attractiveness and endorser-product fit and identify the highest degree of synergy (Solomon et al., 1992).

Factors other than attractiveness have also been used in “match-up hypothesis” (Kamins, 1990) research. Expertise is another key factor that has been examined in conjunction with product endorsers, especially celebrity endorsers (Kamins & Gupta, 1994). Till and Busler (2000) examined both attractiveness and expertise. They followed the assumption that an endorser with high fitness expertise (relative to the designated product) would illicit more positive responses from fitness consumers. This assumption was confirmed. In a 2 x 2 experimental setting, an “attractiveness effect” on purchase intention and product attitude was found for fitness equipment. Proceeding with

manipulated product and endorser types, the second part of their experiment took expertise into consideration as the match-up dimension. That is, the researchers set up the experiment to test the role of expertise in enhancing consumer perceptions of the endorser-product relationship

Two hypotheses were proposed in Till and Busler's (2000) study. The first hypothesis stated that there would be an interaction between the expertise of the endorser and the endorsed product. Specifically, the use of a celebrity endorser with expertise that was highly consistent with a specific product in terms of a certain field would yield a greater positive effect on *product attitude* versus an endorser whose expertise was not consistent with this specific product's attribute. The second hypothesis was nearly the same as the first hypothesis, but instead of looking at the outcome of consumer product attitude, the researchers looked at the outcome of purchase intention.

Even though many celebrity athletes endorse products, such as Coca-Cola with Michael Jordan and Pizza Hut with Deion Sanders, Till and Busler expected that the selected product endorsement type would be a better "fit" with athletes in terms of expertise-related athletic performance. Such "fit" was closely related to expertise in the experiment, as generally athletes are considered experts on sport-related products (relevant to the athlete's sport) and consumers should, in line with the "match-up hypothesis", view the endorsement between an athlete endorser and an sport-related product as more of a "fit" than the endorsement between an athlete and a non-sport related product. No significant difference in product attitude was reported for the candy bar, regardless of whether the endorser was an athlete or an actor. However, for the

energy bar, the result presented a significantly higher product attitude with athlete endorsers compared to the non-athlete counterparts (Till & Busler, 2000).

A key takeaway from Till and Busler's (2000) study is the salience of expertise to the "match-up" hypothesis". Indeed, based on their results, expertise appears to be an appropriate factor when matching products with celebrities, even athletes in sport settings when the product and the athlete are an appropriate "fit". What is more, expertise rather than attractiveness may play a more important role when matching an endorser (celebrity or non-celebrity) to a product.

Overall, social adaptation theory and schema theory provide a valuable foundation for the development and application of the "match-up hypothesis" (Kamins, 1990). The "match-up hypothesis" was born from a need to better explain congruence, especially as it pertains to marketing and advertising. Since the original work of Kamins, the theory has been adapted to numerous marketing contexts. Celebrity endorsers, endorser attractiveness, and endorser expertise are just several areas that have been examined. Strong support for this theory and its application to marketing research in both sport and non-sport contexts is consistently found across the extant literature (e.g., Lynch & Schuler, 1984; Khale & Homer, 1985; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Till & Busler, 2000). Accordingly, Kamins' "match-up hypothesis" is an appropriate theoretical foundation to use in the current study because gender and expertise are examined as potentially important aspects of athlete endorser-product congruence.

Product Endorsements

Endorsements can be explained by the “match-up hypothesis” (Kamins, 1990) because they account for the marketing dynamic present between a product and an endorser. Celebrities often lend their names and images to advertisements in a myriad of areas, from cars and luxury watches to beverages, clothing, fitness equipment, and cosmetics. What is more, should a particular individual appear in numerous advertisements over a prolonged period of time, they often come to be defined as a spokesperson for a certain brand or product (Khatri, 2006). Given the important role of endorsements in advertisements, much of the early research in this area focused on celebrity endorsers (Malik & Sudhakar, 2014). Though not originally developed for marketing research, two notable models formed the basis for much of the original research on celebrity endorsements. These models were the source credibility model and the source attractiveness model (McCracken, 1989).

In the source credibility model, the effectiveness of any message conveyed depends on the “expertness” and “trustworthiness” of the source. An example of this is using a doctor to endorse a medical product. With this model, expertness is defined as “the perceived ability of the source to make valid assertions,” where trustworthiness is defined as “the perceived willingness of the source to make valid assertions” (McCracken, 1989, p. 311). Whereas the source credibility model considers expertness and trustworthiness as key contributors to message persuasiveness, the source attractiveness model emphasizes attributes such as “familiarity”, “likability”, and “similarity”.

With the source attractiveness model, familiarity refers to the extent that consumers are acquainted with an endorser, such as using a professional surfer to promote sunscreen to individuals at the beach or using a famous chef to promote fresh produce. Next, likability describes the degree of affection and interest based on the source's physical attractiveness. An example of this would be using well-known athletes to promote fitness equipment or attractive actors to market a cologne or perfume. Finally, similarity represents the degree of resemblance between the source and the receiver (McCracken, 1989). An older actor marketing a product, such as end of life care, to other seniors is an example of this attribute. Overall, the more obvious the connection between the aforesaid attributes and the source, the more persuasive the messaging of the campaign using the source will be in the minds of consumers.

Though useful, the source credibility model and the source attractiveness model were not complete in their ability to explain endorser effectiveness. According to these models, any celebrity (with minimal levels of similarity, familiarity, and/or likability) should function as persuasive sources for any advertising message as an endorser. Theoretically that makes sense, but it is not always the case because the product matters too. In short, the aforementioned models focus on the characteristics of the celebrity but fail to adequately account for the impact of the product (McCracken, 1989).

In the 1970s, Kamen and Azhari (1975) argued that a spokesperson has a specific role. The role of the spokesperson is to trigger the past associations and connections with the sponsor in the minds of consumers and then, as a result, create a new image of the brand (in the minds of consumers). In other words, create a well-received image for the brand using a spokesperson as a vehicle.

In the following decade, McCracken (1989) expanded upon the earlier work of Kamen and Azhari (1975) with a more nuanced interpretation of the phenomenon. When consumers respond to the “power” of a celebrity attributes (i.e. attractiveness, familiarity, likability), they are doing so for very specific reasons that may not correspond to traditional interpretations of attractiveness, familiarity, and similarity. For instance, different consumers may find a certain celebrity endorser attractive, but not because of physical appearance. The endorser may be perceived as attractive to certain consumers because of this individual’s strong moral standards (e.g., former college and NFL football player, Tim Tebo). Hence, the improvement made in the work of McCracken is that it considered not just the degrees of attractiveness and credibility but also different kinds of attractiveness and credibility.

A celebrity spokesperson will only be effective if specific spokesperson attributes are associated with corresponding consumer perceptions of the endorser and the product being endorsed (McCracken, 1989). Figure 2.2 details how it is necessary for a celebrity to possess certain attributes to become an endorser as well as how it is necessary to establish a connection with the endorsed product through one of those attributes. The congruent advertisement is presented to consumers to stimulate a consumer response to the product.

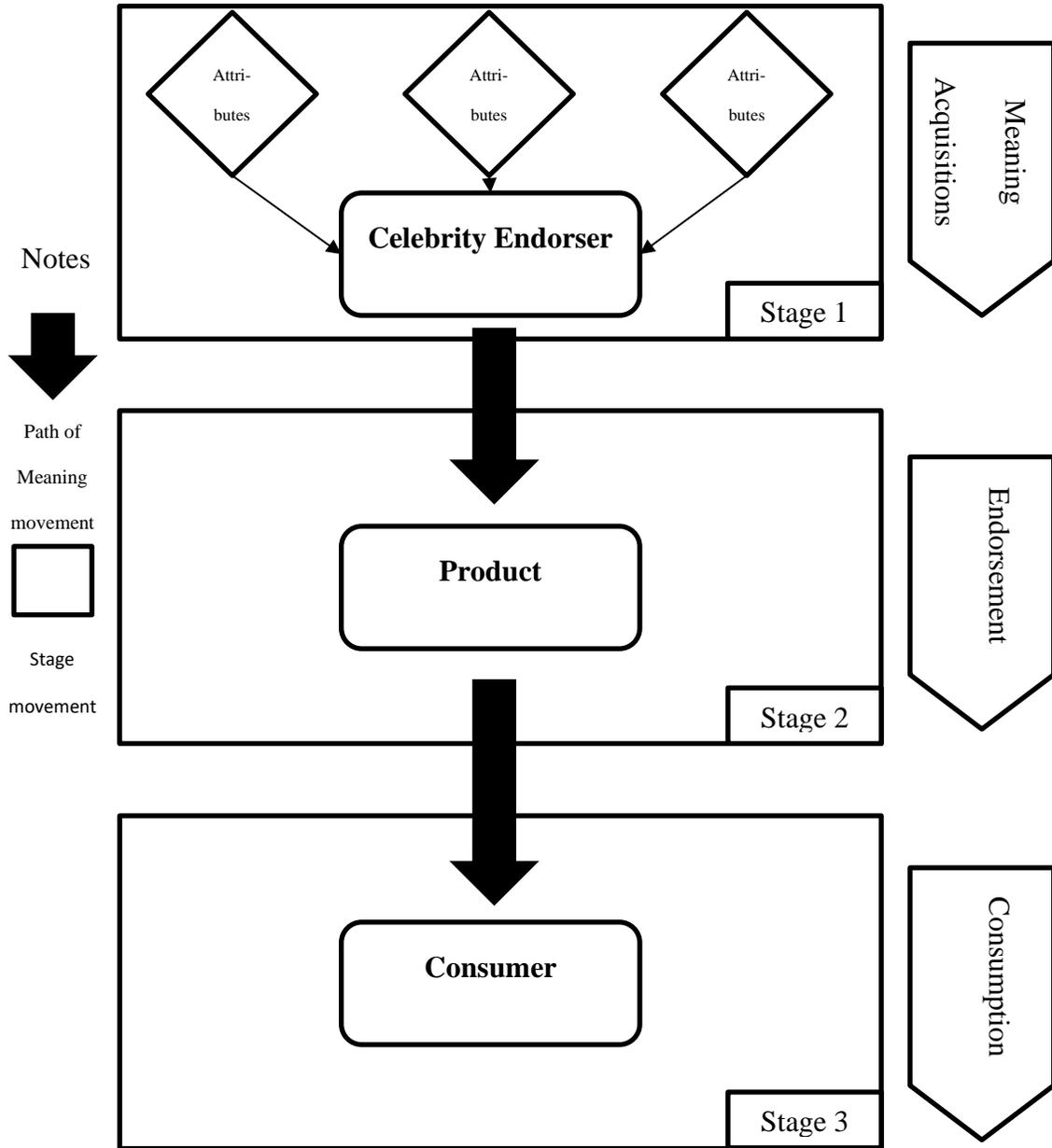


Figure 2.2. Meaning transfer movement and endorsement process (adapted from McCracken,1989)

The model provided in Figure 2.2 includes three stages. In the first stage, the different attributes of a person are what make this individual eligible for the role of an endorser. The attributes of the endorser are salient aspects that can then be connected to a specific product endorsed by the individual. This stage is about the acquisition of

meaning. Then, in the second and third stages, the extent to which endorser attributes transfer to the product or brand being endorsed become more apparent. During these stages, consumers become familiar with and educate themselves about the endorsement and attempt to acquire the meanings of associated brands or products. These stages are about endorsement and consumption respectively. The arrows in Figure 2.2 represent the path of movement whereas the rectangle boxes represent the stages of movement.

Endorsements in Eastern Asian Settings

Considering the context of the present study, it is important to note that brand scholars have examined endorsements and advertisements in Eastern Asian settings. An example of this comes from the tourism industry. Group package tours have become a popular choice for outbound travel in many Eastern Asian countries and areas (i.e. China, Japan, Korea). Correspondingly, how to effectively promote this type of tourism via brochures has become an area of interest to the tourism and travel industries.

Wang, Hsieh and Chen (2002) studied the extent to which advertising effectiveness would be changed if tour leaders were used as endorsers for group package brochures. The researchers concluded that the inclusion of a tour leader photo in the group travel package tour brochure yielded a more positive advertising effect on consumers than a traditional brochure that lacked the photo of a tour leader endorser. The reasoning behind this finding was that because the group package tour itself was an intangible product and the tour leader was a vital part of this product, consumers could not access the tour leader or examine the product until the commencement day. Thus, the value of a brochure complete with a photograph of the tour leader is that it should lower or even alter consumer's perceptions of risk and eventually lead to changes of product

attitude and purchase intention. Though this result may seem obvious by today's marketing standards, at the time of the study, few tour operators paid attention to the brochure despite the fact the industry in which they operated was very competitive. Moving forward, tour companies increasingly looked to marketing efforts, such as brochures with descriptive photos, to entice consumers and differentiate themselves from rival companies (Wang et al).

The study on tour leaders in East Asian circles back to the value of the "match-up hypothesis" (Kamins, 1990) in product advertisements. The "match" between the endorser and the product plays a central role in how consumers process information and make judgments (Till & Busler, 2000). Being a celebrity may not, in and of itself, be enough for a consumer to purchase a product or service. What matters is the congruence between the characteristics of a product and the relevant attributes of an endorser connected to the product (Malik & Sudhakar, 2014).

Athlete Endorsements

Celebrity endorsers have long been used in marketing and advertising segments (Malik & Sudhakar, 2014). Athletes, as a type of celebrity, are also actively engaged in marketing activities for both sport and non-sport brands and products. A sport celebrity endorser can be defined as "a famous athlete or coach who uses public recognition to recommend or co-present with a product in an ad" (Stafford, Spears, & Hsu, 2003, p.13). The history of using athlete endorsement predates the 20th century, with baseball players hitting off a new era of athlete endorsers in the 1890s (Hathaway, 2001; McGhee, 2012). In the late 1800s, print news and magazines were key media platforms and sources of information for consumers. Around this time period, magazines started increasing the

usage of professional baseball players as product endorsers via with in-magazine advertisements (Hathaway). Part of the allure of baseball endorsers at this point in American history was the perception amongst the general public that they were healthy, strong, and energetic individuals.

Companies, even in the 1890s, wanted to connect their products to baseball players because of both the popularity of baseball, which was unrivaled in the United States at this point in history, and the positive athletic associations many consumers held about the athletes (Hathaway, 2001). The usage of baseball players in magazine advertisements at the turn of the century in America provides an early illustration of connecting celebrity characteristics to specific products. This practice has continued in and outside of the United States for over a hundred years. In New Zealand, for example, which is a far cry from America, Charbonneau and Garland (2006) explored the formation of congruence between athlete endorses and products. As well, in China, basketball legend Yao Ming and table tennis world champion, Deng Yaping, have been used to promote various products to Chinese consumers.

Though athlete endorsers are a long standing and increasingly a popular form of advertising, the quality and quantity of scholarship examining this area is comparatively lacking, especially when it comes to understanding how to effectively use athlete endorsers in product advertisements. When a brand or product manager needs to determine whether using an athlete to endorse a focal product is appropriate, several aspects of the possible marketing relationship need to be considered (Martin, 1996): (1) is the non-sport product a suitable fit for the athlete endorser?; (2) will different types of sport and athletes selected influence consumer attitudes and impressions of the same

product in different ways?; and (3) will the novelty of using an athlete endorser from an unexpected sport better capture consumer attention than using an athlete from an expected sport?. Though Martin was not able to answer all of these questions, he did determine that “the effect of the sport on endorsement evaluation was, to a large extent, a function of the similarity between the image of the product and the image of the sport, such that the more similar the images the higher the endorsement evaluation” (Martin, p. 39).” Consider how consumers tend to show strong preferences for foods, beverages, and supplement endorsed by athletes.

In a review of just over 500 brands endorsed by 100 different athletes, 23.8% of the brands were linked to food and beverages. Indeed, this was the second largest category of products endorsed by athletes (Bragg, Yanamadala, Roberto, Harris, & Brownell, 2013). Further, 79% of 62 food and beverage product endorsed by an athlete were energy-dense (i.e. contains high calories). The authors of the study noted that a key reason why a large portion of food and beverage brands chose athletic endorsements was the desire to build brand recognition and create healthy impressions of their products via transference from the endorser. Meaning, if the athlete endorser is perceived as healthy, the food product the athlete endorsed may also be perceived as healthy by consumers. This illustrates the importance of congruence between athlete endorsers and the product they are endorsing.

In a different study, Boyd and Shank (2004) examined fit between athlete endorsers and endorsement effectiveness via a source credibility perspective. They focused on three main endorser attributes (i.e., attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise) to examine the athletic endorsement relationship. The question they sought to answer was

whether athlete endorsers would exert more of the three attributes when endorsing sport products versus non-sport products. The results showed mixed evidence that athlete endorsers are more effective when endorsing a sport product versus a non-sport product. Notably, for the expertise attribute, expertise-related endorsements (e.g., matching an athlete with a relevant product) was favorable to advertising effectiveness.

Collectively, sport celebrity endorsements have long been used by manufacturers and retailers to enhance product images due to their perceived positive influence on consumers (Lear, Runyan, & Whitaker, 2007). The power of celebrity sport endorsers to sway consumers, though not guaranteed, can be strong. The strength of the athlete endorsement holds particularly true when the expertise of the athlete matches well (has a high level of congruence) with the products being endorsing.

Outcomes of Effective Endorsements

Though the effectiveness of endorsement in advertising and marketing have been discussed in the previous sections, the outcomes of such advertising strategies require further exploration and clarification. Consumer decision-making processes can be complicated matters. The process of making a decision, from purchasing food to clothes to a car, may require a series of steps (e.g., cognitive stage) that transition an individual from someone who is disinterested to a someone who is interested in making a purchase (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). Indeed, the process of mental changes via advertising stimulation likely starts with a cognitive stage (product awareness and knowledge), followed by an affective stage (product or service becomes appealing), and then closing with a conative stage (actual purchase).

In the 1960s, Lavidge and Steiner (1961) proposed what has now come to be a widely accepted psychological model to explain consumer behavior. Their model includes three components: (1) a cognitive component, (2) an affective component, and (3) a conative or motivational component. The cognitive component refers to the intellectual/mental rationale for a consumption behavior. The affective component refers to the emotional/feeling rationale for a consumption behavior. Lastly, the conative/motivational component describes the tendency of an individual to treat objects as either a positive or negative goal.

When a product, such as a sports drink, bar, or shoe, gets presented in a marketplace, consumers are expected to consider the aforementioned areas (i.e., cognitive, affective, and conative) before making an actual consumption decision. The three areas are stacked, with cognitive at the bottom and the conative component at the top. The goal of advertising is to maximize the effectiveness in each stage and accelerate the consumer toward a purchase decision. All three components are important because each plays a key role in influencing consumers and getting them to make a final, desirable decision regarding the advertised product (Lavidge & Steiner, 1996). Ultimately, the desired outcome of effective advertising is a highly informative cognitive stage, a positive attitude and affection toward the product in the affective stage, and a strong, direct stimulation in the conative stage that results in consumers purchasing the advertised product or service.

Another approach to effective advertising was offered by Ducoffe (1996). From his perspective, the effectiveness of advertising depended on the efficiency of the communication exchange between advertisers and consumers. The usual aim of an

individual or company advertising a product or service is to convince consumers to purchase the product or service. A key ingredient to a successful exchange is fit. Both the advertisement and the product need to have congruence to create a valid informational exchange in the minds of consumers. That is fit. It is not a good fit to have an unathletic, unfit person advertising a product for elite athletes. Like a pair of walkie-talkies, if the frequencies of both devices do not match, the process of communication between individuals breaks down.

Consistent across the realm of marketing and advertising research is the importance of fit. Figure 3 consolidates how different theories and research account for the critical factor of “fit”. The provided theoretical foundations consist of a series of endorsement theories, with social adaptation theory and communication exchange providing the foundation for consumer behavior in endorsement and source attractiveness and source credibility building on the “match-up hypothesis”. These theories progress to one key factor at the second stage: fit. Fit is an essential and indispensable component of endorser-product congruence which is expected to contribute to cognitive, affective and conative outcomes. These outcomes may then lead to actual consumer purchase behaviors.

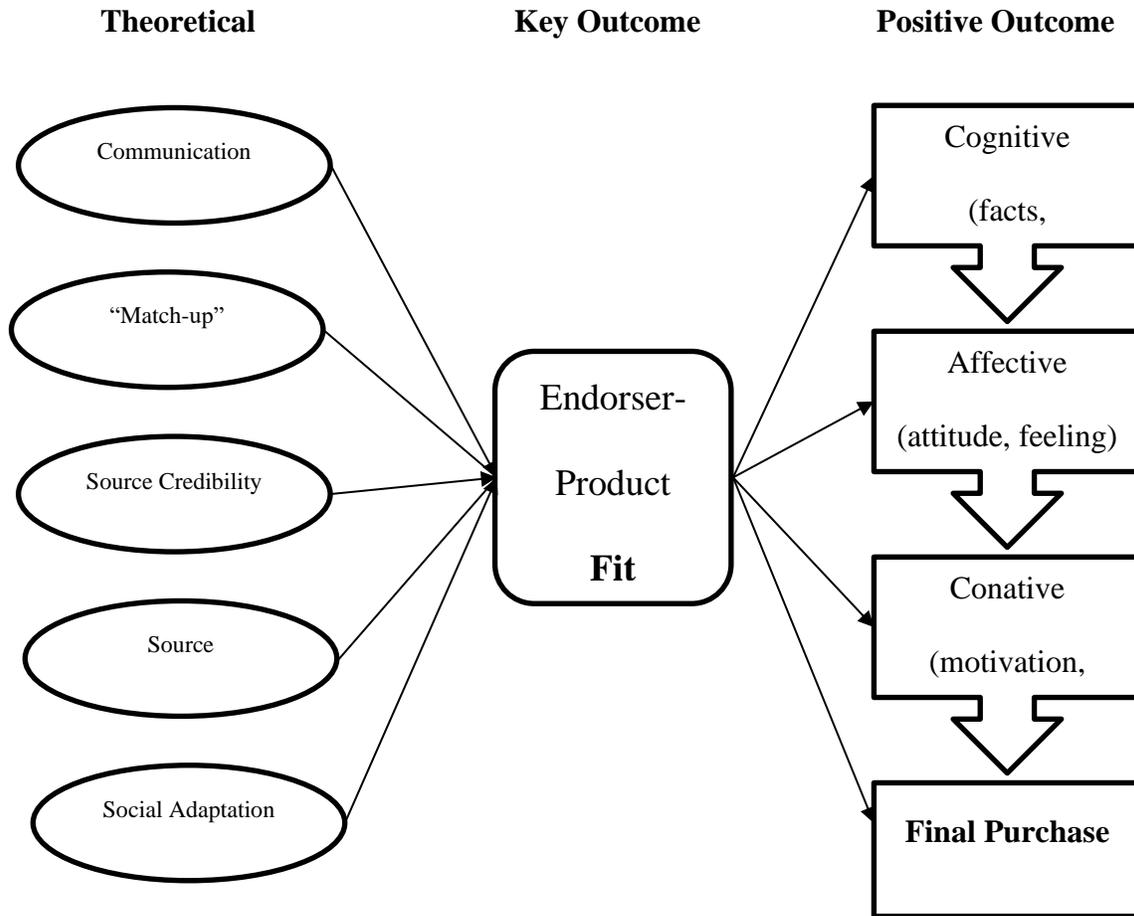


Figure 2.3. Endorser-Product Fit and the Outcome

Endorser-product fit is an essential and irreplaceable element of effective endorsements. The crucial role of endorser-product fit quite logically applies to sport endorsement settings no differently than non-sport settings. Endorser-product fit in sport endorsement settings may even be more important than ordinary product endorsements. Unlike general celebrity endorsers in advertisements, athletes tend to be naturally divided into different segments of expertise based on the sport in which they compete. Athletes are labeled mainly by their chosen sport and the characteristics needed to be successful in that sport (e.g., tough, explosive, fast). Whereas most actors tend to be more flexible in the roles they can assume, most athletes are not. Consider American actor, J.K. Simmons.

In the 1990s, J.K. Simmons played Vernon Schillinger on the television show, *Oz*. On the show, Schillinger was the leader of the Aryan Brotherhood, a white supremacist gang. He was known on the show for extreme brutality, including the rape of other inmates. Currently, Simmons is the spokesperson for Farmers Insurance, a leading insurance company in the US, where he appears in numerous television commercials across all major television networks in the United States. Though some flexibility may exist with select few athlete endorsers (e.g., Bo Jackson, Michael Jordan, David Beckham), advertisers tend to be more precise in their selection of athletes than they need to be with celebrity endorsers. Errant choices of athlete endorsers for a product could cause a mismatch and lead to the absence of endorser-product fit, which then will result in a failed advertising campaign.

Compare J.K. Simmons to famous athletes such as Shaquille “Shaq” O’Neill, LeBron James, Tom Brady, Steph Curry, Serena Williams, and Aaron Rodgers. These athletes are associated with specific sports, such as LeBron James and basketball or Serena Williams and tennis. Each athlete has a public image and persona that is largely connected to their sport. Some degree of flexibility with endorsements likely exists, but overall, the role of the athlete is more inflexible than the role of the actor. Shaq endorses numerous products, but the endorsements for which he is most recognizable (and likely more successful) are linked to sports. Products such as Icy Hot and Gold Bond powder make sense for him to endorse. Though he has an auto endorsement deal with The General, this business relationship for Shaq lacks a strong fit compared to the sport-relevant products previously mentioned. Actors, no differently than athletes, can get typecast but in general, actors are expected to be flexible, able to adapt like a liquid to the

space it needs to fill. Sport consumers are likely to be less forgiving of athletes, expecting them to perform well in their chosen sport role. In short, play sports, talk sports, and stay within your wheelhouse. Thus, the usage of athlete endorsers for a product or service may need to be more precise than the selection of an actor to endorse a product or service.

Endorsements and Gender Typing

Historically, competitive sport has been divided between the male and female gender, which has contributed in part to certain sexual stereotypes in sport (Kane, 1998). For example, Kane studied media coverage and consumer attitudes toward female sports and athletes before, during, and after the passage of Title IX. Passed in 1972, Title IX is a federal law that prohibits discrimination based on sex in federally funded activities or educational programs. A key finding from Kane's work was that after Title IX, female athletes received an increase in media coverage but there was not a significant change in consumers paying attention to female sports. Meaning, the media increased coverage of female sports but the increased coverage did not result in a corresponding level of elevated consumer interest in female sports.

At the time of Kane's (1998) study, the public still preferred what they considered female appropriate sports (e.g., tennis) than female inappropriate sports (i.e., sports or physical activities not traditionally associated with women). Kane concluded that the way consumers and sport audiences distinguish sex-appropriate sports based on genders was stubborn and not likely to change in the short-term (even with the passage of Title IX). In fact, a subsequent study by Holland and Andrew (1994) reported that high school and college students who participated in sex-appropriate sports perceived receiving a higher

social status amongst their peers than their counterparts who participated in sex-inappropriate sports.

Given what has been shown in previous research, it is reasonable for researchers to assume that gender differences may play an important role in the effectiveness of product endorsements and sport advertisements. Boyd and Shank (2004), for instance, tested whether the gender of athlete endorsers would influence consumers' perceptions of endorser attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise. Male endorsers were rated higher than female on all three dimensions. Correspondingly, in a study by Fink, Parker, Cunningham, and Cuneen (2012), female athletes received significantly lower ratings on attractiveness when connected to sex-inappropriate sports.

Additionally, with the goal of exploring differences in athletic endorsement via the "match-up hypothesis", Parker, Mudrick, and Fink (2018) conducted a female athlete endorsement study using 2 (feminine/masculine characteristics) x 2 (feminine/masculine product) experimental design. The result was consistent with previous studies, indicating gender impression would significantly impact the measures of endorser effectiveness (i.e., a mismatch would greatly decrease consumer perceptions of athlete endorser attractiveness). In conclusion, gender typing in sport endorsements has and continues to persist. The "rules" that apply to male athlete endorsers may not apply in the same way to female athlete endorsers. Though this will likely continue to evolve and change in time, at the present, the role that athlete gender plays in product endorsements cannot be overlooked and requires research consideration.

Endorsements and Gender Typing in a Chinese Context

Similar to Western countries and societies, China views celebrity athletes as idols and heroes, no matter the gender (Liu & Brock, 2011). Even so, gender typing exists. Laosethakul and Leingpibul (2010) discussed the phenomenon of declining participation of both young American and Chinese females in computing and IT fields, as it has negatively impacted gender diversity in these disciplines. Such a decline is problematic because it reinforces and perpetuates perceptions that women are not suited for these areas. Collectively, despite the fact China reveres several strong females, such as folk hero Hua Mulan, the social roles and statuses of women have been inferior to men in China as well as many other East Asian countries (Liu & Brock, 2011).

Cultural norms of gender amongst Chinese consumers carry over to how they view sport competition and sport participation. Chinese sport consumers have a strong stereotype toward sex-appropriate and sex-inappropriate sports (Liu & Brock, 2011). For instance, just as American consumers tend to view cheerleading and volleyball as sports for women, Chinese sports consumers tend to view gymnastics and swimming (regular and synchronized swimming) as more sex-appropriate sports for women. Such impressions amongst Chinese consumers are likely caused by several reasons.

First, sports such as gymnastics and swimming are perceived as inherently more feminine in nature by Chinese culture. Consider the Yin and Yang philosophy, which is pervasive in China. The Yin and Yang sexual coupling indicates that Yin represents female and Yang represents male due to Yin's softness and passivity nature and Yang's aggression and dynamic attributes. Correspondingly, Chinese consumers identify appropriate behaviors and activities and then divide them into two definable groups.

Second, perception of what is and is not an appropriate sport for males and females likely stems in part from historical success by males and females in certain sports. Indeed, Chinese professional female athletes have achieved tremendously in gymnastics and swimming compared to their male counterparts competing in those same sports (Liu & Brock, 2011). For example, female Chinese athletes have won more Olympic gold medals than male Chinese athletes five times in a row since 1998 Seoul Olympic Games, and several world leading performances in volleyball, table tennis, diving and swimming were mainly achieved by female Chinese athletes. Additional, individual-specific examples from China include Lang Ping and Fu Mingxia. Lang is a five-time world championship team member in Chinese women's volleyball as well as the only Chinese woman elected to the Volleyball Hall of Fame who also coached the USA women's volleyball team. Fu is a six-time world diving championship holder and the youngest Olympic gold medalists, having won her first gold medal at the age of 14. Consequently, accomplishments such as these contribute to a perception among many Chinese consumers that women are stronger and more dominant than man in those sports.

Thus, based on the information presented in this chapter, the following hypothesis about gender typing and differences in athlete endorsements in China is put forth:

H₁: Athletes with a stronger gender-sport fit will have better endorsement-product fit than those with weaker gender-sport fit.

Endorser Expertise

Expertise also plays a significant role in product endorsement. Athletes, as endorsers, are logically divided into different markets based on their perceived skill level and sport (Till & Busler, 1998). The muscularity of an endorser, for example, was found

to influence consumer perceptions of endorser expertise regarding exercise equipment (Lynch & Schuler, 1994). Though expertise is not the only aspect that contributes to congruence (between an endorser and a product) based on the “match-up hypothesis” (Kamins, 1990), the impact of expertise may be more influential than other dimensions such as attractiveness (Till & Busler, 1998). For instance, after studying athlete and non-athlete endorsement of energy bars and candy bars, Till & Busler (2000) concluded that the most effective match-up was formed through matching expertise and a sport-related product (energy bar).

Expertise is important to creating an effective product endorsement (Till & Busler, 2000). However, the extent to which expertise will outperform gender typing in an endorsement setting remains underexplored. Yoon, Kim, Magnusen, and Sagas (2018) considered the matter of race-sport fit in a study involving martial arts and basketball. By manipulating strong and weak race-sport fit endorsers with expertise attributes (skill/unskillful), the study concluded that race-sport fit was a stronger factor in determining consumers’ attitudes toward a certain sport. That is, race-sport fit mattered more than expertise. It is unknown whether the same sort of result will stem from a study on gender-sport fit and expertise. Given the results of the Yoon study as well as the entrenched nature of gender roles in Chinese culture (Liu & Brock, 2011), it is reasonable to believe that gender-sport fit may trump expertise. Therefore, the following hypothesis is put forth:

*H*₂: Perceived gender-sport fit will outperform expertise in determining endorser-product fit.

CHAPTER THREE

Method

This study examined a gender-sport fit model in an Eastern Asian sport context via the selection of an athlete endorser for a hypothetical sport product (i.e., sport nutrition bar). A quantitative research approach was employed to evaluate perceptions of gender-sport fit, expertise, and endorser-product fit. The breakdown of Chapter 3 is as follows: (a) research design, (b) Study 1, (c) Study 2, and (e) back translation.

Research Design

This thesis project expands upon previous sport-athlete endorser fit research (e.g., Yoon et al., 2018). The research design includes factorial designs and used corresponding fictional sport product and athlete endorser images as guiding materials for the participants to complete the questionnaire. The scales used in this thesis represent established scales. Each scale has previously demonstrated internal consistency reliabilities exceeding the recommended threshold of .70 (Nunnally, 1978).

The survey instrument was used to compare two sets of athletes participating in different sports, with one being mixed martial arts (MMA) and the other one being gymnastics. In Chinese culture, sport and entertainment consumers tend to favor male martial artists more so than female martial artists due to historical reasons. Monks, warriors, Daoshi (Taoism version of a monk) and most fictional yet legendary characters from Chinese tales and culture are male. The historical remnants of Chinese culture continue today. In modern martial arts movies the lead characters, either hero or villain, are usually males (e.g., Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, Donnie Yen, and Jet Li). Consequently,

for most Chinese consumers, a sport such as MMA is going to be viewed as masculine (male-oriented) and consumers will likely favor male athletes in this sport more than female athletes.

Gymnastics, in comparison to martial arts, has been historically viewed as a feminine sport and in some degree acts as the counterpart of martial arts. Like Ying and Yang, the Chinese general public view MMA (as a variation of martial arts) as more robust and masculine whereas gymnastics is gentler and softer, which better fits with how many Chinese consumers (especially male Chinese consumers) view females. Female gymnasts in China are also very accomplished at the international level. Since gymnastics was nationally funded in 1951, the Chinese Women's Gymnastics Team has earned six gold, six silver and eight bronze medals in the Olympic Games, 52 gold, 32 silver and 11 bronze medals in the Asian Games, and 17 gold, 16 silver and 15 bronze medals in multiple World Championship events (BaiduBaiké, 2018). With their outstanding performances historically and contemporarily, females and gymnastics are a strong part of Chinese culture. They are a strong fit in the eyes of many Chinese sport consumers, just as men and martial arts are a strong fit in Chinese culture. Together, both sports serve as excellent categories to explore the product fit with athlete endorsers in an Eastern Asian context.

In Study 1, a 2 (Male athlete and Female athlete) \times 2 (MMA and Gymnastic) model was used to compare Chinese consumers' perceptions of gender-sport fit on endorser-product fit, with mixed-martial arts (MMA) being positioned as a male-oriented sport in China and gymnastics being positioned as a female-oriented sport in China. Each athlete endorsed advertisement included a close-up photo of a generic, non-celebrity male

and female athlete. Athlete endorsers wore the athletic gear and outfits respective of either gymnastics or MMA. The product, a hypothetical sports nutrition bar, remained consistent regardless of athlete endorser gender or sport. The goal of Study 1 was to identify consumer perceptions of endorser-product fit. Specifically, endorsers with a strong gender-sport fit should have a more positive influence on endorser-product fit than athlete endorsers with weak gender-sport fit.

In Study 2, the format of the first study was expanded to include endorser expertise. A 2 (gender-sport fit: high and low) \times 2 (expertise: highly skilled and less skilled) model was used to evaluate consumers' perceptions of whether athlete gender-sport fit is a stronger indicator than sport expertise of consumer perceptions of endorser-product fit. Table 3.1 provides a breakdown of the 2 x 2 factorial design. Study 2 expanded the results of Study 1. Specifically, perceived gender-sport fit should have a stronger influence than expertise on an endorser in determining endorser-product fit.

Table 3.1.

Factorial Design for Gender-Sport and Expertise Fit on Endorsed-Product Fit

Gender-Sport Fit	Highly Skilled	Less Skilled
Male-MMA (High)	Female MMA Champion	Male MMA Non-Champion
Female-Gymnastic (High)	Male Gymnastics Champion	Female Gymnastics Non-Champion

Study 1

Participants and Procedures

Study 1 was conducted in China. The study contained a quantitative, non-experimental, survey-based research design. The participants represented a non-random sample. The target sample consisted of 326 Chinese consumers in Shanghai. Shanghai is a city on the east coast of the China Sea; it is viewed as one of largest and the most prosperous cities in Asia. After receiving university Institution Review Board (IRB) permission, a software based online self-administered mode was used to collect data. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the geopolitical circumstances engulfing China at the time of this study, data was collected with the assistance of a well-established Chinese marketing research company, WJX.cn. This organization offers data services similar to Amazon's Mechanical Turk. This approach to data collection has been shown to be a valid and useful tool in collecting data from diverse consumer populations (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011).

Gender-sport fit was manipulated via a series of fictional athlete endorsed sport advertisements. In Study 1, participants were shown images of fictional athletes. Gender of the endorsers was presented as male and female. The images included: a male MMA fighter, a male gymnast, a female MMA fighter and a female gymnast. Each athlete endorser image included a photo of a non-celebrity, Chinese male or female competitor. The athlete endorsers in the images had attire appropriate to their respective sports worn. The product being endorsed was a hypothetical sports nutrition bar. The bar would not be a supplement that is currently available in China. The sports nutrition bar remained

consistent regardless of athlete endorser gender or sport. The male and female athletes in the images were wearing generic, sport-appropriate attire.

Measures

To examine gender-sport fit preferences, several items were included respective of each image. Count data was used to measure endorser-product fit. Count data includes non-negative integer values from observations where those integers arise from counting rather than ranking. Using count data in this survey design provides a clear presentation of participants' choices for athlete endorsement based on their preferences. An example question is, "Which image is more likely to prompt you to purchase the endorsed product (i.e. energy bar)?" Participant demographic information (e.g., age, education level) was also collected. A copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

A 2 (gender) x 2 (sport) factorial Chi Square Goodness of Fit Test was conducted to provide the main effects of gender-sport fit. As well, a validation check for the athlete endorsed advertisements was conducted prior to Study 1. A convenience sample of 20 students at a large university in China was recruited to validate the manipulation. The participants were shown four images and asked to match an image with one of four answer options. The four answer options included: (A) a sports nutrition bar with a female gymnast, (B) a sports nutrition bard with a male gymnast, (C) a sports nutrition bar with a female MMA fighter, and (D) a sports nutrition bar with a male MMA fighter. All the participants responded appropriately (i.e., correctly matching an image with an

answer option), so the validation check was deemed successful. No changes to the images were necessary.

Study 2

Participants and Procedures

Study 2 was conducted similarly to Study 1. Target number of valid data responses were 300. This study also contained a quantitative, non-experimental, survey-based research design.

The expected result of Study 1 is that Chinese consumers would associate male athletes with MMA fighters more so than female athletes and that female athletes would be more associated with gymnastics than male athletes. The design of Study 1 was expanded in Study 2 to include expertise because of the importance of expertise to the selection of an athlete endorser (Fink, Cunningham, & Kenix, 2004; Till & Busler, 2000; Yoon et al., 2018). Study 2 followed a 2 (gender-sport fit: high and low) x 2 (expertise: highly skill and less skilled) design. Table 3.1 explains the breakdown of the 2 x 2 factorial design.

The advertisement images used in Study 1 were used in Study 2. The only change was the manipulation of expertise, which differentiated a generic competitor from the world champion competitor. Expert information was added to the advertisements. For example, in the case of the champion athlete endorser for a male MMA competitor, the caption “World Champion” was included with the athlete’s image.

Measures

The measures used in Study 1 and Study 2 were the same. Count measures were used for Chi Square Goodness of Fit Test. Participant demographic information were collected as well. A copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

Chi Square Goodness of Fit Test was implemented to compare the influence of perceived gender-sport fit and expertise on endorser-product fit in both studies. The purpose of the proposed data analysis is to detect whether a significant difference among observed values occurs. A Chi Square Goodness of Fit Test is an excellent match for the purpose because it can be used to compare the observed sample distribution with the expected probability distribution.

Back Translation

To check the meaning equivalence between the original instrument (English version) and the one employed in this thesis (Chinese version), a process of back translation was employed. Back translation is the procedure of translating a translated questionnaire back into its original language, which in the case of this study is English. This has been done in previous sport management research (e.g., Yoshida, Gordon, Heere, & James, 2015) conducted in an Asian context. In this study, English language survey items were translated into a Chinese version of the questionnaire. The survey was then translated into Chinese by a native Chinese-speaking scholar who is also proficient in English. After that, the Chinese version of the survey was back-translated by a different native Chinese-speaking researcher whose primary research language is English.

A native English-speaking researcher then performed a double-sided assessment for both the original and back-translated version to ensure an accurate translation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Study 1

A 2 (male and female) x 2 (MMA fighter and gymnast) factorial Chi Square Goodness of Fit Test provided the main effect of gender-sport fit for study 1. Results revealed a significant higher endorser-product fit with a male MMA fighter than with a female MMA fighter with support for all three questions being found. For *question 1*, $\chi^2(1, n = 326) = 110.74, p < .0001$, for *question 2*, $\chi^2(1, n = 326) = 113.08, p < .0001$, and for *question 3*, $\chi^2(1, n = 283) = 5.9399, p = .0148$. Result also revealed a significant higher endorser-product fit with a female gymnast than a male gymnast, with support for all three questions being identified. Specifically, for *question 4*, $\chi^2(1, n = 326) = 151.18, p < .0001$, as for *question 5*, $\chi^2(1, n = 326) = 143.12, p < .0001$, and for *question 6*, $\chi^2(1, n = 290) = 116.74, p < .0001$. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported. A male MMA fighter and female gymnast, perceived as stronger genders with respect to their sports (stronger gender-sport fit), possess better endorsement-product fit than their counterparts (i.e., female MMA fighter and male gymnast) in terms of perceptual authenticity and endorsed purchase intentions.

Table 4.1

The Effect of Perceived Gender-Sport Fit on Endorser-Product Fit

Question	Male	Female	χ^2	p-value
1	258	68	110.74	0.0000
2	259	67	113.08	0.0000
3	162	121	5.9399	0.0148
4	52	274	151.18	0.0000
5	55	271	143.12	0.0000
6	53	237	116.74	0.0000

Study 2

After comparing the test result for the 2 (gender-sport fit: high and low) x 2 (expertise: highly skilled and less skilled) factorial design with a Chi Square Goodness of Fit Test, it appears that a significant higher endorser-product fit existed with a male MMA fighter who had no expertise than with a female MMA fighter who had significant expertise. Support was shown for all three questions. Namely, for *question 1*, $\chi^2 (1, n = 323) = 46.839, p < .0001$, for *question 2*, $\chi^2 (1, n = 323) = 18.356, p < .0001$, and for *question 3*, $\chi^2 (1, n = 277) = 7.9747, p = .0047$. Result also revealed a significant higher endorser-product fit with a female gymnast who had no expertise than a male gymnast who had significant expertise. Support was again shown for all three questions. Specifically, for *question 4*, $\chi^2 (1, n = 323) = 78.269, p < .0001$, for *question 5*, $\chi^2 (1, n = 323) = 48.375, p < .0001$, and for *question 6*, $\chi^2 (1, n = 287) = 25.174, p < .0001$. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was supported. Male MMA fighters and female gymnasts, perceived as stronger genders with respect to their sports (stronger gender-sport fit), possess better endorsement-product fit even without expertise than their counterparts (i.e., female MMA fighter and male gymnast with significant expertise), in terms of perceptual authenticity and endorsed purchase intentions.

Table 4.2

Comparing the Effect between Gender-Sport Fit and Expertise on Endorser-Product Fit

Question	Male	Female	χ^2	p-value
1	223	100	46.839	0.0000
2	200	123	18.356	0.0000
3	162	115	7.9747	0.0047
4	82	241	78.269	0.0000
5	99	224	48.375	0.0000
6	101	186	25.174	0.0000

A further Chi Square Goodness of Fit Test was conducted to determine whether applying expertise to existing scenarios would affect participants' preference. Comparing MMA fighters in study 1 and study 2, results showed that there was not enough evidence presented to conclude that by adding expertise to a female MMA fighter in Study 2, participants' preferences and purchase intentions were affected, $\chi^2 (1, n = 560) = .044, p = .8325$.

Table 4.3

Comparing the Result of Study 1 and Study 2 on MMA Fighters with Expertise Present

MMA Fighter	Male	Female
Study 1	162	121
Study 2 (Expertise Added to Female)	162	115

Similar analysis was conducted in comparison with study 1 and study 2's gymnasts. Results revealed that a significant difference existed when expertise was included with the weaker gender-sport figure (a male gymnast). Indeed, participants' preferences on purchase intentions was changed, $\chi^2 (1, n = 577) = 20.239, p < .0001$.

Table 4.4

Comparing the Result of Study 1 and Study 2 on Gymnasts with Expertise Present

Gymnast	Male	Female
Study 1	53	237
Study 2 (Expertise Added to Male)	101	186

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Finding the correct arrangement of pieces to craft a successful marketing campaign built upon an effective product-endorser dynamic is something akin to solving a Rubik's cube. For the campaign to work, all the necessary components must be aligned in the right combination so as to create a fully formed, finished product that accomplishes the desired objective. This study sought to better understand the components of product-endorser fit in the context of sport to better understand what constitutes a more effective product-athlete endorser relationship. Certainly, though it is common for business organizations to use athletes to promote products and services, comparatively few studies have examined the characteristics of athletes and the roles these attributes play in creating an effective endorsement relationship.

Athlete gender, for example, is an important component of the endorsement relationship that requires more consideration (Boyd & Shank, 2004; Yoon et al., 2018). Also important is expertise (Till & Busler, 1998; Yoon et al., 2018). Of the numerous factors that can influence an endorsement relationship, expertise may be the most relevant and powerful source in matching endorsers with product (Till & Busler, 1998; Yoon et al., 2018). Meaning, the perceived expertise of the endorser may have the strongest impact on how consumers evaluate the effectiveness of a product-endorser relationship. Examining the influence of these two important factors advances the study

of sport marketing by providing insight into the utility of the “match-up” hypothesis in determining effective endorser-product fit.

The effectiveness of key characteristics, such as gender and expertise, in athlete endorsements may vary depending on the circumstances, such as culture, in which the endorsement takes place. Consider how cultures throughout the world differ. What works in one culture may not work in another, such as McDonald’s not selling beef products in India in deference to Hindu beliefs or a star American football player not being popular in countries that don’t have access to (or interest in) American football. Many marketing studies, especially those focused on sport brand endorsements, are conducted in Western cultural contexts. Such studies are undeniably helpful, but studies conducted in Western cultural contexts may not be automatically applicable to other cultural contexts throughout the world. Accordingly, this study contributes to the brand endorsement literature by focusing on two key variables, gender, and expertise, in an Eastern Asian cultural context (i.e., Chinese context).

In East Asia, especially China, gender-appropriate sport beliefs have existed for an extended period, dating back to over a hundred years. The outstanding performances of Chinese, female professional athletes on international levels in certain sports, such as gymnastic and diving, has also deepened the gender-appropriate sport impression held by Chinese sports consumers (Liu & Brock, 2011). Thus, studying the roles of gender and expertise in sport-product endorsements in light of a country’s cultural beliefs about gender-appropriate sport participation provides an important avenue ripe for exploration.

In this study, given the cultural beliefs about gender and sport participation, consumers were expected to perceive male athletes as a more appropriate competitors for

MMA fighters and female athletes as a more suitable competitors for gymnastics. This result was overwhelmingly supported by the data. The product endorsed (i.e., a sport nutrition bar) with strong gender-sport fit (i.e., male MMA fighter and female gymnast) received considerably higher purchase intentions than the same product endorsed by consumer perceived weak gender-sport fit (i.e., female MMA fighter and male gymnast). Accordingly, athletes with a stronger gender-sport fit appear to have better endorsement-product fit than those with weaker gender-sport fit. This result advances previous sport endorsement research (e.g., Yoon et al., 2018) and confirms the importance of utilizing gender as a crucial factor in athlete endorsements, particularly in a cultural context such as China.

Along with gender, expertise may be an important factor in the success of endorser-product fit. Whereas gender has been less frequently studied, expertise has been proven as an essential factor in the success of endorser-product fit (Till & Busler, 1998, 2000; Yoon et al., 2018). Though the value of expertise in brand endorsements is undeniable, given the relevance of culture on consumer expectations and behaviors, it is important to consider expertise in conjunction with gender. Indeed, it is worth exploring what happens to consumer perceptions and consumption behaviors if weak gender-sport fit is paired with expertise. Consumers may prefer this dynamic to a strong gender-sport fit figure with no expertise. Thus, this study was designed to explore how Chinese consumers react to both endorser gender and expertise.

In sum, the purpose of this study was to examine the “match-up” hypothesis with athlete endorsements regarding two important factors: gender and expertise. The research endeavor was conducted in two parts. In study 1, sport consumers favored perceived

gender-appropriate athletes at significantly higher level ($p < .0001$) when compared to gender-inappropriate athletes. Sport consumers also reported a significant higher purchase intention ($p < .0001$) toward products that were endorsed by perceived gender-appropriate athlete than those who were endorsed by perceived gender-inappropriate athlete. This result aligns with previous research (e.g., Parker, Mudrick & Fink, 2018), which has shown that gender-inappropriate athlete endorsers tend to receive a significant lower rating on endorsement effectiveness, and that sport consumers would be less likely to purchase the endorsed product. So, in an Eastern Asian context, it is important for business organizations to consider the gender of the athlete endorser when determining who would be good fit for the product or service they want endorsed.

In study 2, the previously confirmed gender-appropriate athlete endorsements were still favored by sport consumers. Indeed, they were still considered as more authentic comparable to gender-inappropriate athlete endorsements. Expertise was added in Study 2, and expert athlete endorsements yielded statistically significant results ($p < 0.0001$). Though expertise is an important component of brand endorsement relationships (Till & Busler, 1998), the results of this study revealed that expertise did not overcome all consumer gender expectations. In the MMA fighter segment, expertise failed to cause any significant effect on purchase intention ($p = .8325$). In the gymnast segment, expertise created a notable shift in the purchase intention ($p < .0001$) with more consumers leaning toward purchasing a product that was endorsed by a weaker gender-sport figure with expertise (i.e., male gymnast with world championship title).

Collectively, the interaction among public perception, gender-sport fit, and expertise offer a clearer picture about East Asia, especially Chinese consumers'

preferences for athlete endorsers. The reason Shanghai was used as the target city for data gathering was that Shanghai is one of the largest cities in East Asia and even globally, with a high diversity of consumers from different backgrounds. Consumers in Shanghai tend to be well-educated and are expected to be more informed about sports and have a more open attitude toward novel sports. Further, for emerging sports (such as MMA) to penetrate the Chinese market, a large city like Shanghai would likely become a target city from which to expand. In short, Shanghai would be a beachhead from which a sport organization could grow its foundation.

This study showed the essentiality of gender-sport fit, even when paired with expertise. Previous studies have shown the importance of gender effectiveness on athlete endorsements (Kane, 1988; Parker, Mudrick, & Fink, 2018) and provided an explanation as to why gender-typing exists in the realm of Chinese sports (Liu & Brock, 2011). This study affirmed previous findings. It also restated the functionality and the role gender-appropriation played in athlete endorsement and how this factor correlated with “match-up” hypothesis.

The results of this study also demonstrate the continued significance of expertise in an outside of Western cultural contexts. These findings support the extant brand endorsement literature and the “match-up” hypothesis. The present findings are similar to a previous study (i.e., Yoon et al., 2008) that focused on the “match-up” hypothesis to examine the relationship between race-sport fit and expertise. In that study, race-sport fit was shown to be a much stronger factor, both evidentially and statistically, compared to expertise. This study’s results were similar, only with gender instead of race. Gender-

sport fit was shown to be much more effective determining factor in endorsement image and sport consumer purchase intentions.

Practical Implications

With ongoing, fierce competition among marketers, choosing the right endorser for corresponding products in a specific market environment is essential (Ducoffe, 1996). Due to the uniqueness of sport endorsements, where the effect of “match-up” hypothesis is seemingly magnified, picking an endorser with right attributes can multiply the outcomes dramatically. A simple example would be picking a generic (non-celebrity) African American basketball player to endorse a basketball product rather than a generic, Asian basketball player. Similarly, an Asian martial artist endorsed product has been shown to outperform (in terms of consumer purchase intentions and brand attitude) the same product endorsed by an African American martial artist (Yoon et al., 2018) This study, which focuses on brand endorsements in an East Asian context, reinforces the salience of the “match-up” hypothesis to sport professionals when they seek to connect an athlete to a product. The current results accentuate the importance of gender-sport fit in East Asian contexts. Gender-sport fit was shown to outperform expertise. Thus, though utilizing expertise is important, an endorsement absent the appropriate gender-sport fit may not maximize the effectiveness of the endorsement relationship.

Considering the uniqueness of MMA fighters, this study presents several practical implications for fighter promotors such as Bellator and the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC). An MMA fighter is a relatively novel form of martial artist in the East Asian market, and consumers’ perceptions have not fully developed for this specific sport. The UFC, which is the leading American-based MMA promotion company, aims

to expand to East Asian market and has shown its ambition by unveiling its 93,000 square-foot facility in Shanghai, China (Atkin, 2019). The facility is nearly three times the size of the original UFC facility in Las Vegas, U.S.; it serves as a hub for fighters from East Asia and Asia-Pacific regions to train and develop. Aside from building a humongous facility in one of the largest cities in Asia, the reign of Chinese female MMA fighter, Weili Zhang (the UFC Women's Strawweight Champion since 2019), also stimulates the expanding progress of UFC in China and the whole of East Asia. Even so, it remains questionable whether this first ever Chinese and East Asian Champion in UFC history will bring a huge marketing effect and facilitate UFC's advancement in this key business market.

Questions remain as to whether a female MMA champion in China will be enough to grow the popularity of the sport. The results of the current study point to the need for the UFC to have a male champion if the sport is to gain widespread traction amongst sport consumers. The results of the current study suggest that female MMA fighters are not favored by the general public nor defined as strong gender-sport fit figures. Even with the current world champion title being held by Zhang, and her growing fame in China, consumers may still currently prefer an average male MMA fighter.

Only one male fighter from an East Asian context in the UFC is ranked in the Top 10. There are eight weight classes (i.e., flyweight, bantamweight, featherweight, lightweight, welterweight, middleweight, light heavyweight and heavyweight) for male fighters in the UFC. Chan Sung Jung, the fourth ranked featherweight, is from Korea. Thus, with the current absence of male Chinese MMA fighter who are in contention an

opportunity to fight for a championship, it seems reasonable to suggest that the UFC needs to invest in their future by playing the long game. The UFC needs to groom and promote high-level male fighters for the promoter to gain a strong foothold in the Chinese market. In short, the UFC needs to strongly consider gender-sport fit (while not ignoring expertise) if they hope to penetrate and remain a force in the East Asian market, especially China.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations exist in this study. First, the study is limited by the number of variables included in the research instrument. This study examined gender-sport fit, expertise, and how they influence consumer purchase intentions. In the future, researchers should consider numerous other variables, such as attractiveness, social status and endorsers' background narratives or stories. The evaluated outcome is also limited to purchase intention. Brand recognition and consumer attitudes are additional variables to consider.

Another limitation of this study is the sports in focus are restricted to only two, gymnastics and MMA. With only MMA fighters and gymnasts being studied, potential error and inconsistency with other sports can exist. It is possible that the conclusion drawn within MMA fighters and gymnasts can only be applied to these two sports, thus making the practical implications limited to certain sports. A third limitation is that the study was conducted in an Eastern Asian context with Chinese consumers. Just as previous studies, most of which are conducted in Western contexts, are limited by their contexts, so too is this study limited by its context and target population. Even though China is a major global market, this line of research would benefit from a thorough study

of region-specific public perceptions of sport preferences. For instance, Chinese consumers may prefer basketball and soccer to American football and baseball, thus making studies about basketball and soccer more practically relevant to businesses looking to hire an athlete brand endorser.

Future brand endorsement research in East Asia should take celebrity sport endorsers into the consideration as well. A celebrity sport endorser is a famous sports figure, whether an athlete or a coach, who uses public recognition to endorse or present a product in marketing applications (Lear, Runyan, & Whitaker, 2007). This definition includes sport professionals who are retired or deceased as well. Sport celebrities (e.g., Yao Ming, Lionel Messi) often use their positive influence and public recognition to stimulate consumer's purchase intentions. Sport celebrities do not always select endorsement opportunities that are an appropriate fit. Instead, these individuals may use their fame to cash-in on the most lucrative opportunities regardless of whether the products they endorse are strong fits for them. This can be problematic for both the celebrity endorsers and the companies who hired the endorsers. A poor fit, for example, may do little to improve sales of a brand and lead to consumer confusion about why the athlete is endorsing the product (which may then negatively impact an athlete's personal brand).

The current study used generic, non-celebrity models as product endorsers for both the MMA fighter group and gymnast group. From the results it was concluded that the gender-sport fit endorser better boosted sport consumers' purchase intentions when compared to expertise. Though interesting, it is unclear from the results whether a celebrity athlete for a corresponding sport (MMA or gymnastics) would alter the results.

For instance, celebrity athlete endorsers in the case of weak gender-sport fit (e.g., Weili Zhang for MMA) may have a different impact on the outcome than was seen with a non-celebrity athlete endorser. Celebrity, in certain cases, may prevail over the influence of gender-sport fit on sport consumption outcomes. Future studies should consider gender, expertise, and celebrity when studying brand endorsements.

Finally, brand endorsement scholars could expand this study by creating a detailed model inclusive of various attributes and their interrelationships. Factors of athlete endorsement effectiveness, for example, could be expanded from simply gender and expertise to attractiveness by genders, celebrity status by genders, race-sport fit by expertise and race-sport fit by genders. Evaluated outcomes could be expanded to include brand attitude and product recognition as additional dimensions. By creating a more complex and expansive model that explicates the hierarchy and correlations among factors and outcomes, researchers could better provide evidential suggestions to marketing practitioners and bring the study of athlete endorsements to a new level.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Figure and Table Examples

Study 1

Instructions: Please make the choice based on the answer you AGREE the most with each question by circling the appropriate item underneath. The focus of this study is athlete endorsement.



Image 1. Male MMA Fighter

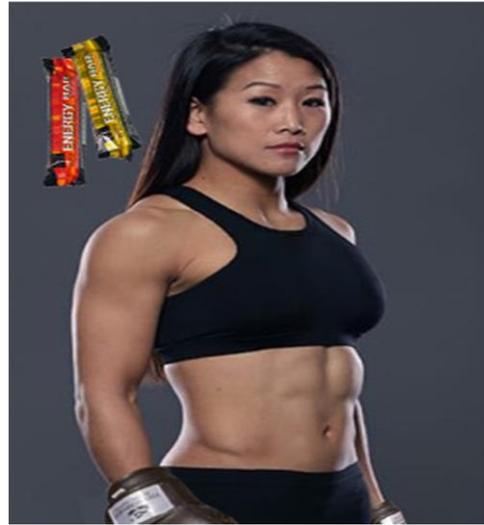


Image 2. Female MMA Fighter

Study 1

1. Which image better represents your perception of an MMA fighter?

Image 1

Image 2

2. Which image better represents an authentic MMA fighter?

Image 1

Image 2

3. Which image is more likely to prompt you to purchase the endorsed product (i.e. energy bar)?

Image 1

Image 2

Neither

Instructions: Please make the choice based on the answer you AGREE the most with each question by circling the appropriate item underneath. The focus of this study is athlete endorsement.



Image 3. Male Gymnast



Image 4. Female Gymnast

4. Which image better represents your perception of a gymnast?

Image 3

Image 4

5. Which image better represents an authentic gymnast?

Image 3

Image 4

6. Which image is more likely to prompt you to purchase the endorsed product (i.e. energy bar)?

Image 3

Image 4

Neither

Instructions: Please make the choice based on the answer you AGREE the most with each question by circling the appropriate item underneath. The focus of this study is athlete endorsement.

Participant's Information

1. Please indicate your age.

Your Age: _____
2. Please indicate your gender.
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other
3. Please indicate your highest education level.
 - a. High school or below
 - b. Associate degree or equivalent
 - c. Bachelor's degree or equivalent
 - d. Master's degree or equivalent
 - e. Doctorate degree or equivalent
4. Please indicate your interest in sports in general.
 - a. Not interested at all
 - b. Somewhat interested
 - c. Strongly interested
5. Please indicate your interest in mixed martial arts (MMA).
 - a) Not interested at all
 - b) Somewhat interested
 - c) Strongly interested
6. Please indicate your interest in gymnastics.
 - a) Not interested at all
 - b) Somewhat interested
 - c) Strongly interested

Study 2

Instructions: Please make the choice based on the answer you AGREE the most with each question by circling the appropriate item underneath. The focus of this study is athlete endorsement.



Image 1. Male MMA Fighter

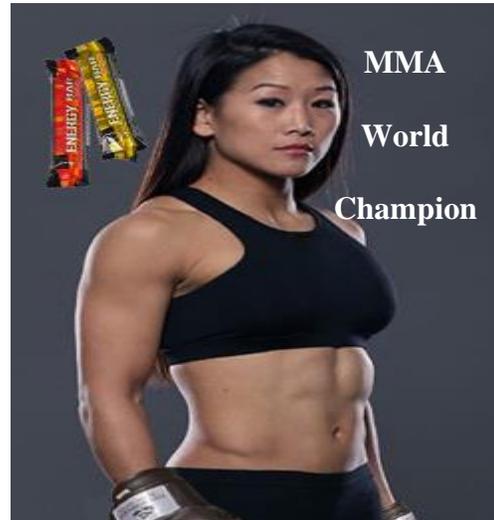


Image 2. Female MMA Fighter

Study 2

1. Which image better represents your perception of an MMA fighter?

Image 1

Image 2

2. Which image better represents an authentic MMA fighter?

Image 1

Image 2

3. Which image is more likely to prompt you to purchase the endorsed product (i.e. energy bar)?

Image 1

Image 2

Neither

Instructions: Please make the choice based on the answer you AGREE the most with each question by circling the appropriate item underneath. The focus of this study is athlete endorsement.



Image 3. Male Gymnast



Image 4. Female Gymnast

4. Which image better represents your perception of a gymnast?

Image 3

Image 4

5. Which image better represents an authentic gymnast?

Image 3

Image 4

6. Which image is more likely to prompt you to purchase the endorsed product (i.e. energy bar)?

Image 3

Image 4

Neither

Instructions: Please make the choice based on the answer you AGREE the most with each question by circling the appropriate item underneath. The focus of this study is athlete endorsement.

Participant's Information

1. Please indicate your age.

Your Age: _____
2. Please indicate your gender.
 - a) Male
 - b) Female
 - c) Other
3. Please indicate your highest education level.
 - a) High school or below
 - b) Associate degree or equivalent
 - c) Bachelor's degree or equivalent
 - d) Master's degree or equivalent
 - e) Doctorate degree or equivalent
4. Please indicate your interest in sports in general.
 - a) Not interested at all
 - b) Somewhat interested
 - c) Strongly interested
5. Please indicate your interest in mixed martial arts (MMA).
 - a) Not interested at all
 - b) Somewhat interested
 - c) Strongly interested
6. Please indicate your interest in gymnastics.
 - a) Not interested at all
 - b) Somewhat interested
 - c) Strongly interested

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Baylor University

Department of Educational Leadership

Consent Form for Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: Do Gender and Expertise Matter? An Exploration of Athletic

Product Endorsement in China

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Jiayao Qi

SUPPORTED BY: Baylor University

Purpose of the research: The purpose of this study is examining the effectiveness of gender-based and expertise-specific athlete endorsers for a sport-related product in an East Asian context. We are asking you to take part in this study because you are a consumer of products and services in an East Asian context.

Study activities: If you choose to be in the study, you will be asked to look at several pictures of athlete product endorsers. Upon viewing the pictures, you will be asked to answer several short questions about the pictures and the product being endorsed by the athletes.

Risks and Benefits: To the best of our knowledge, there are no risks for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality: This study does not require identifying information (e.g., name, address). This study does not require sensitive or personal information. Your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the Internet, which could include illegal interception of the data by another party. If you are concerned about your data security, you should not participate in this research.

We will keep the records of this study confidential. The local contact in China will be WJX (wjx.cn), an established Chinese online survey service provider. The researchers will provide the survey and consent form. The firm employed by the PI will distribute and collect responses online. Due to the nature of online survey and recruitment, the local

contact will collect and store data, which will then be transferred electronically to PI and the Baylor University.

Questions or concerns about this research study: You can call the researcher(s) with any concerns or questions about the research.

- Researchers you may contact about this study include, Dr. Mar Magnusen, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Leadership, Baylor University, Marshall_Magnusen@baylor.edu (254-710-4019) and Jiayao Qi, Master Thesis Candidate, Chee_Qi1@baylor.edu (410-562-6055)

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), you may contact the Baylor University IRB through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at 254-710-3708 or irb@baylor.edu.

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to stop at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential. Information already collected about you cannot be deleted.

By continuing with the research and completing the study activities, you are providing your consent.

APPENDIX C

IRB Approval

Principal Investigator: Jiayao Qi
Marshall Magnusen

Study Title: Do Gender and Expertise Matter? An Exploration
of Athletic Product Endorsement in China

IRB Reference #: 1575037-1

Date of Determination: March 11, 2020

Exemption Category: 45 CFR
46.104(d)(2)

The above referenced human subjects research project has been determined to be EXEMPT from review by the Baylor University Institutional Review Board (IRB) according to federal regulation 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2): Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior.

The following documents were reviewed:

- IRB Application, submitted on 03/05/2020
- Protocol, dated 03/06/2020
- Consent Form, dated 03/10/2020
- Questionnaire, dated 03/06/2020
- Project Statement of Translation, dated 03/10/2020

This exemption is limited to the activities described in the submitted materials. If the research is modified, you must contact this office to determine whether your research is still eligible for exemption prior to implementing the modifications.

If you have any questions, please contact the office at (254) 710-3708 or IRB@baylor.edu

Sincerely,



Deborah L. Holland, JD, MPH, CHRC, CHPC
Assistant Vice Provost for Research, Research Compliance

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