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**CAN ATHLETES CREATE BRAND LOYALTY? THE ROLE OF SPORTING
CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS IN BUILDING BRAND LOYALTY**

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1 INTRODUCTION

This bachelor's thesis will focus on the role of sporting celebrity endorsement in building brand loyalty in sports marketing. It will introduce the concepts of celebrity endorsement and brand loyalty separately and study how these endorsement deals can impact brand loyalty. This will be accomplished through the use of a literature review analysing the concepts of this study from different perspectives.

1.1 Introduction and Justification for Subject Choice

In 2013 Nike lost one of the biggest NBA-superstars from their athlete endorsement portfolio due to simple errors in their offseason renegotiations. Stephen Curry, then a Nike sponsored athlete, was given a PowerPoint presentation during which the Nike representative pronounced the athlete's first name incorrectly and the slideshow revealed embarrassing mistakes suggesting that it was just a mere copy of another slideshow presentation given to another NBA-superstar before him (Davis, 2016). Following this incident later during the offseason, Under Armour stepped in, sidelined Nike, and signed an extensive contract with Stephen Curry and according to financial analysts, Curry is now worth an estimate of 14 billion USD for Under Armour (Youshaei, 2020).

As is evident, sports celebrity endorsements normally yield significant value to the companies. It has already been proven by multiple studies that athlete endorsement deals directly correlate to increases in sales and even stock prices of listed companies (Elberse & Verleun, 2012; Elegbe & Adesanoye, 2018). In return, this gives companies incentive to invest significant resources to create successful and noticeable endorsement deals with athletes. These numbers have been on the incline since the establishment of the concept in the late nineteenth century (Knoll & Matthes, 2017) and the deals have created unforgettable matches with the likes of Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods with Nike, Usain Bolt with Puma, and Messi with Adidas. Companies utilize this marketing strategy as a way to establish their brand and ultimately to bring in more sales. This approach is quantitatively measurable in numbers such as sales and

stock price, but it is also important to note that it also has impact on qualitative manners which are more difficult to measure such as the company's brand.

Branding has become increasingly more popular nowadays after companies started using company names on products as product guarantees. This has led to consumers developing trusting relationships towards specific brands because they learned of homogenous quality, social status or other factors that created an increase in the value creation process of the brand. Today we call this brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is something that marketers and companies have taken a significant interest in due to its positive effects on sales and public attention. It has become a strategic objective for companies due to its impact on profitability and sustainability (Evanschitzky et al., 2012). The sports markets are an area where products usually remain in the use of the customer for a longer time period. This means that the significance of brand trust (Chaudhuri & Hoibrook, 2001) and therefore brand loyalty is heightened. As consumers begin to develop trust in a brand, they start exhibiting patterns of brand loyalty which is exactly what companies and marketers work towards using their promotional strategies.

Together sports celebrity endorsements' effects on brand loyalty is an interesting topic of discourse. Obviously, the entire collection of efforts of marketing tools and strategies are formed to partly achieve brand loyalty as an outcome but specifically the role of celebrity athlete endorsers' role in creating it has yet to be discussed about in the context of sports marketing. Celebrity athletes construct a large portion of all celebrity endorses due to the markets in which they operate and in, and the sheer amount of visibility and media attention that they enjoy. Athlete celebrities also have a status that other celebrities seldom possess. A study focusing on sport hero worship conducted in the United States, found that over three quarters of college students admit to having an athlete as a hero that they look up to, sometimes even modelling their own behaviour on (Shuart, 2002). This makes the case of the significance of celebrity endorsement in sports markets nowadays.

This correlation of athletes that act as figures that are being looked up on and the outcome of their endorsements as brand loyalty is an important discourse to be had. It can prove and encourage the practice of celebrity athlete endorsements as a part of

marketing strategies to promote customer brand loyalty. It can also be used to differentiate individual aspects of the marketing approach of celebrity endorsement that affect the sponsor brand and categorize these aspects into logical and easily approachable models or theories. By being able to understand the role of sports celebrity endorsement in the construction and support of brand loyalty, companies can utilize this to invest and allocate resources more accurately. This would include the likes of choosing correct athletes to be as ambassadors, correct communication approaches and creating environments around the celebrity that help with building brand loyalty.

1.2 Objective and Research Questions

This bachelor thesis will study the role of sporting celebrity endorsements in creating brand loyalty. The aim is to separate the two themes and discuss how they are intertwined and in which ways can these endorsers create brand loyalty. This will be done through analysing prior research on these concepts and creating a comprehensive understanding using a literature review on how they operate by themselves and together. Initially a framework will be created around the concept of brand loyalty and celebrity endorsers respectively. Afterwards, the concepts will be introduced together with the use of previously created understanding and framework to itemize specifically what is the role of endorsers on brand loyalty. The aim is to answer the following main research question:

What is the role of sporting celebrity endorsers in building brand loyalty in sports marketing?

Two secondary research questions will be utilized to help conceptualize the concepts of this study individually. They will provide a framework around the main research question and help understand the reasoning behind the results of this thesis. The first secondary research question will help introduce and determine the functionality of brand loyalty. This will be done through relevant exploration on the concept of how it affects consumers and companies and what are individual constructs that create the entire ensemble of the theme. The second research question will be targeted towards sporting celebrity endorsers. It will inquire upon how the marketing strategy of

celebrity endorsers in general work and separate what individual factors should be considered when approaching the concept from the perspective of both the consumer and company. The secondary research questions are presented below:

1. *How can brand loyalty be influenced?*
2. *What factors of a sporting celebrity endorsement affect the consumer?*

1.3 Key Definitions

This chapter will be providing a general context around key words and phrases used in this thesis to ensure correct interpretation. This will include definitions of terms that are essential to the subject in hand. A deeper discussion on these subjects will be had later to open them up in the context of the thesis.

Celebrity endorsement is when a figure who enjoys publicity and fame, often thanks to the media, uses their fame to promote a product in return for payment (Um, 2018). This promotion also is usually done through the common medias where focus groups are targeted that are familiar with the celebrity in hand. Sometimes it is common that a name is associated or even written on the product itself to further prove the approval of the product by the celebrity. Often in sporting celebrity endorsements or sponsorships, it is common that the athlete is paid to exclusively use the sponsor company's products.

Sports marketing is a relatively broad term, referring to many different areas in the sports industry. According to Ilioni Cristian (2020, p. 275): "Sports marketing sums up all the activities meant to satisfy the needs and desires of sports consumers through exchange processes". In short, sports marketing is the process of creating supply to fulfill the demand of sports consumers. This thesis will be focusing on the promotion and advertising side of sports marketing.

Brand is defined as all key elements of a company's relationship with customers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). It is a concept companies use to differentiate themselves from other entities on the market and ultimately create extra value to the customer. A

brand is essentially “...everything the product or the service means to the consumer” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016, p. 275).

Brand loyalty is a term that has emerged only as companies began to practice branding in the late 1900-century. Existing literature reveals that it is a term with multiple different interpretations. Still, in 1971 Jacoby Jacob (1971, p. 25) defined brand loyalty in a manner which maintains fundamental relevance today: “...the tendency to prefer and purchase more of one brand than of others”. With today’s supply of literature, Lacap et al. (2021) pointed out that brand loyalty can be divided into two main categories: attitudinal and behavioural. Attitudinal brand loyal customers demonstrate a willingness to pay more for their favoured brand of choice. This means that the customer is financially and emotionally more committed to a brand. As for behavioural brand loyal customers, they exhibit a higher purchase frequency towards the brand of their choice (Chaudhuri & Hoibrook, 2001). Both behavioural and attitudinal aspects of brand loyalty exist in today’s definition of brand loyalty and will be regarded in this thesis.

2 BRAND LOYALTY

For at least three decades, brand loyalty has been the focus of literature among marketers and researchers (Chaudhuri & Hoibrook, 2001). After the conceptualization of the idea of branding, nowadays near to all products on the market are branded (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). This in itself highlights the importance and generalization of branding in the modern markets. Because of this companies have started to create strategies to make consumers loyal towards their brand. Nowadays, it is one of the central goals of marketers. Brand loyalty has significant benefits for the company such as increasing sales, reduced marketing costs and better customer retention (Chaudhuri & Hoibrook, 2001). Loyal consumers benefit the company in the long run (Evanschitzky et al., 2012) and even the consumers enjoy some benefits from their loyalty (Guan et al., 2021).

This chapter will look into the concept of brand loyalty through the use of past literature. The aim is to create a comprehensive understanding of what creates brand loyalty for consumers and separate the theme into more narrow concepts for deeper perception. This thesis will also look into how brand loyalty impacts both consumers and companies. This will be done in order to answer the first secondary research question *“How can brand loyalty be influenced?”* and to create a framework around the main subject of this research.

2.1 Constructs of Brand Loyalty

In the context of this thesis, it is crucial for us to understand what are individual constructs that create brand loyalty for a customer. Brand loyalty constructs are a much-discussed topic of literature within researchers and there are several studies conducted almost within the entire timeframe of history of the establishment of branding as a concept (McArdle, 1989; Webster & Keller, 2004). Ideas such as brand trust, brand affect, attitudinal loyalty and purchase loyalty seem to be largely agreed up on themes among marketers and researchers as constructs of brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Hoibrook, 2001; Guan et al., 2021; Matzler et al., 2008). Concepts discussing or relating to brand loyalty will be discussed that are found among the

reviewed literature and those which seem to appear frequently in prior peer reviewed and recurrently cited research.

Brand loyalty can be categorized into two separate categories of loyalty: purchase loyalty and attitudinal loyalty. Purchase loyalty describes the consumer's loyalty to make repeated purchases from the brand in question. Purchase loyalty can be a result of different factors, experiences, or preferences of the consumer. (Chaudhuri & Hoibrook, 2001). Attitudinal loyalty in turn refers to the attachment to the brand (Chaudhuri & Hoibrook, 2001) resulting in a state of loyalty stemmed from emotions. These both types of brand loyalty both contribute towards the whole concept of brand loyalty, and they are used to differentiate types of behaviour within consumers to better understand how brand loyalty functions.

Brand trust is one of the most discussed and studied constructs of brand loyalty among historic branding research (Matzler et al., 2008). According to Chaudhuri & Hoibrook (2001, p.82) brand trust is defined as "the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function". In other words, according to the concept of brand trust, consumers have a degree of trust towards different brands. It is the trust in the brand to deliver the expected value that is needed from the consumer. Consumers' brand trust is seen to be an outcome of the consumers' personal experiences. This source is considered as the most important and affective. (Guan et al., 2021). Furthermore, Guan et al. (2021) states that past literature has proven the positive correlation between brand trust and customer satisfaction on multiple occasions. Both Guan et al. (2021) and Chaudhuri & Hoibrook (2001) agree that brand trust affects brand loyalty. Positive brand trust increases loyalty and vice versa. It is specified that brand trust is categorized as a cognitive phase in the chain affects of brand loyalty (Guan et al., 2021).

Unlike brand trust, brand affect describes consumers' overall emotional evaluation of a brand rather than the trust. This can be a positive or negative emotional response from the use of the product or experience with the brand. (Matzler et al., 2008). Guan et al. (2021) notes that this customer evaluation can be seen as twofold: "true feelings" and "due feelings". True feelings being emotional responses such as joy, excitement, and disappointment, while due feelings categorize normative evaluation relating to

factors such as culture, patriotism, etiquette, and occasion (Guan et al., 2021). Proof for brand affect and its positive relationship with brand loyalty as an entirety has been found on multiple occasions (Chaudhuri & Hoibrook, 2001; Guan et al., 2021; Matzler et al., 2008). Brand affect has implications on further purchases of the consumer simply because of the reaction and experience it produces and associates with the brand (Guan et al., 2021).

Lastly, Matzler et al. (2008) raise an important discussion about consumers' risk aversion. Their research touches upon how consumers aim to reduce perceived risk on the markets through sticking to a brand. This is an interesting find because risk aversion is popular and a defined element in the fields of economics and finance but not a discourse in literature about brand loyalty although still relevant in the discussion of brand trust and brand affect. They argue and demonstrate that consumers' risk aversion on the market mediates their brand trust and brand affect. Consumer risk aversion is defined as their willingness to avoid risk of unsatisfaction and uncertainty as a result of their purchase decision. (Matzler et al., 2008). Matzler et al. (2008) find that consumer risk aversion strongly affects consumers' brand affect and brand trust in a way that high risk aversion translates to increase in both, while consequently increasing brand loyalty. This has interesting managerial implications in the sense that marketers should focusing their marketing approaches on more risk averse customers to maximise the increase in brand loyalty. (Matzler et al., 2008).

2.2 Impact of Brand Loyalty

For companies and marketers, brand loyalty is a strategic goal (Knox & Walker, 2001) with many positive effects for both the company and consumer (Matzler et al., 2008). Lacap et al., (2021) also go as far as to say that brand loyalty is the ultimate goal of companies. To understand brand loyalty and to help support the framework constructed around this research, impacts on main stakeholders must be discussed. This means that effects of brand loyalty on both companies and the consumers should be explored in different viewpoints. When we understand the effects of brand loyalty, it is easier to suggest managerial implications of the results of the first secondary research question and ultimately the main research question. It also helps to better understand how this thesis and the topics explored have practical implications.

2.2.1 Impact of Brand Loyalty on Companies

The most obvious remark of brand loyalty's effects on companies is that they enjoy increased profitability among these consumers. Since loyalty results in consumers positive attitudes towards a certain brand (Lacap et al., 2021) it will translate to repetitive purchases (Matzler et al., 2008). Knox & Walker (2001) highlight that the facilitation of repetitive purchases among consumers is a significant marketing objective for firms. Compared to lower participant consumers, loyal consumers have a low tendency and incentive to switch between brands (Chaudhuri & Hoibrook, 2001) most likely resulting in a repetitive purchase behaviour. Repetitive purchases of customers towards a specific company obviously results in higher sales and therefore revenue. In addition, less resources are required to promote and sell a product to a loyal customer. As described in more detail in the following paragraph, costs will drop noticeably as retaining customers is cheaper than recruiting new ones (Knox & Walker, 2001). Therefore, costs in marketing and promotion will decrease. Higher profitability is a direct outcome due to lower costs from companies and higher revenues contributed by the brand loyal consumers.

Brand loyalty increases the competitiveness of companies (Matzler et al., 2008) thanks to lower marketing costs and higher customer retention (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001; Tsao et al., 2009). On an enterprise level, competitiveness simply refers a company's possession of competitiveness. In more detail, it is measured by how much a company or a brand can create a competitive advantage compared to the competing entities on the market. (Winzar et al., 2018). This can be measured in several different ways such as market share or sales. Higher competitive capabilities of a company translate to higher sales. For companies, brand loyalty strategically serves as protection against competition and their approaches. It provides an edge over competition in a way that these consumers become immune to competitive marketing approaches. Brand loyal customers also serve as a way for companies to decrease their costs in marketing, customer retention and product launches. Customer retention rate has been seen to be affected by the loyalty effect meaning that loyal customers generally have a low incentive to switch between brands. (Tsao et al., 2009). A company does not have to invest as much in marketing costs for brand loyal consumers. Tsao et al. (2009) found that for highly participant (brand loyal) customers cheaper marketing

approaches were just as effective when compared to expensive ones. Meaning, on average a brand loyal customer requires less external marketing forces in order to make a purchase or attract them towards the purchase process. In addition, because these customers are more attracted towards a certain brand, they will also be relatively more interested in future product launches from the same brand. For the company, this translates to decreased marketing costs for new products since loyal customers are more likely to seek out for information about the brand and its activities themselves. Marketing, customer retention and sales all now require less resources for the company. This means that with lower investment, customers maintain interest in the brand and continue repetitive purchases resulting in an increase in the competitiveness of the company in question.

For companies and among the consumers brand loyalty creates a word-of-mouth and an electronic word-of-mouth (Cheung et al., 2008) effect when customers and the public communicate with each other about the product. According to (Cheung et al., 2008, p. 230), “traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) has proven to play a major role in consumer buying decisions by influencing consumer choice”. It is an important concept that marketers have identified and used to their advantage in marketing strategies. Electronic word-of-mouth can be simply differentiated from traditional word-of-mouth in the meaning that it happens online (Cheung & Lee, 2012), and communication is significantly more widespread. Word-of-mouth can be either positive or negative messages passed on by the public (Cheung & Lee, 2012). When brand loyal consumers are the ones that spread information about the brand, it usually results in positive word-of-mouth due to positive associations and general likeability of the brand. This has impacts on many different areas of the business but most importantly, it increases brand value. It helps companies market and promote their products and increase brand awareness and positive associations among their product line-up. In itself, word-of-mouth is a cost-free tool, but it obviously requires resources to establish the brand and create a brand loyal community.

2.2.2 Impact of Brand loyalty on consumers

The obvious effect of brand loyalty on customers is that they have a low tendency to switch between brands (Chaudhuri & Hoibrook, 2001). In the point of view of the

customer, this is a two-folded issue which functions as a benefit but can also pose negative effects. Brand loyalty can pose a simple benefit for the customer's purchasing behaviour. It simplifies the purchasing behaviour so that the consumer does not need to evaluate and assess the large supply of products on the market. As Matzler et al. (2008) highlighted, due to very high competitiveness on the markets nowadays, consumers are being pressured and tempted into buying different products from different brands using numerous different loyalty and benefit based incentives. One way consumers avoid this pressure is to pick a brand and stick to it (Matzler et al., 2008). This may not be a conscious decision, but it is a manner which helps customers in their decision making.

On the contrary, the unwillingness to switch between brands will lead to more narrow selection of products for consumers. This downside arises as consumers become loyal to a brand and when they do not easily explore other options on the market. The unwillingness to switch between brands also results in inconveniences. The consumer's brand's supply may lack competitive features that other firms on the market supply and the prices paid especially for branded products are usually higher compared to so called "off-brand" products. Since brand loyal consumers have lower tendencies to accept substitutes among other brands, they may experience increased household costs and even subpar user experience.

3 CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT

Celebrity endorsement has been a predominant tool in the marketing industry for multiple associative and visibility reasons (Um & Jang, 2020). A celebrity is defined as a public figure who enjoys recognition by the public and has usually excelled in their field of action or activity (Elegbe & Adesanoye, 2018). The main idea of a celebrity endorsement is to trigger positive emotions and use the fame and already established celebrity brand to generate interest in the company, its brand, or products. Their goal is to seek awareness by reaching target groups with the likes of existing and new consumers. Celebrities as a tool in promotional strategies provide companies and brands with increased attractiveness and interest in their approaches. (Elegbe & Adesanoye, 2018). As previously highlighted, they have been in frequent use among marketers since the late 1900-century (Knoll & Matthes, 2017) thanks to the widespread of mass media and its monetisation. Athletes are a large part of celebrity endorsers due to their broad reach and visibility. They are often idolized by followers of the sport (Shuart, 2002) and therefore have significant impact on consumers and their behaviour. This is something that companies have taken interests and utilized the athletes' fame to create more success in their marketing approaches both in sports marketing and elsewhere.

In the context of this thesis, it is crucial to understand how celebrity endorsements work and how they affect different stakeholders such as the company and the target consumers. This should be done not only to provide a relevant framework around the main research question, but also to explore the subject and demonstrate facts to answer the second secondary research question: *What factors of a sporting celebrity endorsement affect the consumer?* This chapter will be going through in detail how celebrity endorsements affect consumers and companies and also specify independent psychological factors that have been proven to influence the behaviour of consumers. This will be done through the revision of past literature and the presentation of theories and frequently appearing discussions found in research.

3.1 What Makes Celebrity Endorsements Effective?

When studying the effects of sporting celebrity endorsements or any endorsements and sponsorships for that matter, it is important to understand what are the factors that influence the customer and in what way. The criteria among which previous literature has examined and tested the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements vary significantly. There seems to be no specific silver lining among the criteria that even dominate a majority of the literature so multiple different studies with different criteria will be examined. Individual criteria that are found in multiple articles will be demonstrated and the selected ones are those that seem to be among the most frequent and commonly agreed upon by previous researchers. Factors that explain the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement are going to be examined using the frameworks of a studies conducted by Um (2018) and Knoll & Matthes, (2017). These studies were conducted to test which factors of the endorsement affected consumers and how it affected them. Also, it is important to note that due to the lack of studies that focus specifically on athlete endorsers, the focal point of these theories and research results are done on general celebrity endorsers.

Um's (2018) study highlighted three theories onto which the framework of the study was conducted: identification theory, attribution theory and congruence theory. Identification theory is based on individuals creating a sense of identification with another individual, leading to adoption of thoughts, ideas, and behaviour of the subject individual. Attribution theory differentiates between internal and external attribution. Internal attribution means that consumers of an endorsement believe that the endorser is promoting a product due to high quality of the product, while external attribution means that the promotion is done by the endorser solely or mainly due to received fees that are paid by the sponsorship company. Lastly, congruence theory focuses on the congruence between the endorses and the brand. (Um, 2018). Knoll & Matthes (2017) studied the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements using the model of advertising defined by Lavidge & Steiner (1961) according to which advertising aims to affect three dimensions of the consumer: cognitive, affective, and conative. The cognitive dimension includes information, facts, and awareness of the brand, product or service in question. The affective factor aims to create desire and positive likeability and

finally the conative dimension consists of creating a desire to purchase or consume the product (Grewal et al., 1997).

Findings from Um's (2018) study revealed that congruence is a significant factor between brand endorser and the endorsed brand. High congruity leads to positive attitude towards the brand, the advertisement it and increases purchase intention (Um, 2018). This is further supported by the study conducted by Knoll and Matthes (2017) where results show that when congruency is high between the endorser and the product, it results in higher performance of the endorsement. It is also important to note that low congruence may affect the endorser believability depending on the consumer's involvement and the repetition of the message (Rice et al., 2012). Singh and Banerjee (2019) also raise this as an explanation for celebrity worship not leading to hypothesized increased brand attitude. For the public, this leads to questioning of the fundamental message of the endorsement (Rice et al., 2012). It is therefore more than advisable for marketers to invest in an athlete that is seen to have high congruence with the brand. This not only leads to better performance of the endorsement, but also would avoid unwanted negative effects that may result from low congruency between the endorser and the brand. Um (2018) further notes that to reach high congruency, the endorsement must prove relevancy to the message and fit the public's expectations of the message.

Attribution becomes a significant factor that must be considered when choosing athletes for endorsement roles. In its essence, attribution theory is concerned with "describing and explaining the cognitive processes involved in individuals' causal explanations for human behaviour" (Um, 2018, p. 750). It is a theory that previous researchers have used to base their research on endorsers. Findings from Um's (2018) study reveal that when the message of an endorsement is attributed to internal causes (such as qualitative factors of a product like high quality or trust) rather than external causes (like fees or payments for the endorsement), it is seen to have better effects towards brand and advertisement attitude and ultimately purchase intention. It is not enough for marketers and advertisers to be satisfied with merely situating a celebrity with their brand or product but making efforts towards creating a scenario or appeal which demonstrates a genuine internal attribution between the endorser and the brand.

It is proven that an endorser's authentic likeability towards a brand increase wanted results of the advertisement (Silvera & Austad, 2004).

Identification is one of the recurring criteria used in measuring celebrity endorsement effectiveness. Identification is defined as individuals viewing a model that they consider as being similar to themselves. This leads to higher likeliness of these individuals of adopting their models' ideas, thoughts and even actions from their model. (Um, 2018). High identification with a celebrity is also seen to result in higher emotional attachment to the celebrity leading to biased opinions (Um, 2018). This means According to a recent study conducted by Um & Jang (2020), high identification of a celebrity lead to consumers' increased evaluation of the brand, the advertisement and higher purchase intention. Increased purchase intention as result of higher identification has also been identified previously (Um, 2018). Furthermore, wishful identification and perceived similarity with a celebrity have been identified as factors affecting the effectiveness of an advertisement (Schouten et al., 2020).

3.2 Impact of Celebrity Endorsements on Consumer Behaviour

As we have already explored and separated different factors that make celebrity endorsements effective, we understand how the marketing strategy effects the consumer in a psychological sense. We have stated so called requirements for the use of celebrity endorsement strategies and understood what in the strategy is what affects the user. Although this is important to understand, we must understand what effects and practical consequences it has on the behaviour of the consumers. As literature on the psychological effects have been largely explored among researchers, there seems to be surprisingly limited research and proof on the effects on consumer behaviour. Nevertheless, research still exists but these papers are generally focused on a very specific focus group. A diversified batch of research will be that study the effects of celebrity endorsements on consumer behaviour and discuss the most frequent effects that appear in them.

Firstly, all studies found that celebrity endorsed brands are recalled better when compared to traditional marketing approaches with the absence of celebrities (Hani et al., 2018; Tiwari & Manral, 2021). This is especially highlighted among young

consumers (Mittal, 2017). The presence of a celebrity with a brand increases the chances of the consumer being focused on the promotion. Also, especially when a recognizable and likeable celebrity promotes a brand, there is a significantly higher chance for the brand and promotion to be recalled afterwards (Hani et al., 2018; Mittal, 2017). This means that the celebrity endorser creates a link between the brand and itself for the consumer to later make the connection either consciously or subconsciously. This has effects on both purchase intention and brand perception which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Credible celebrity endorsers are found to have a positive impact on purchase intention and brand appeal (Hani et al., 2018; Mittal, 2017). This is a finding that is especially important in the context of this thesis because effects on purchase intention of the customer is influential in the construction and maintenance of brand loyalty. Although it is seen that brand credibility itself is not heightened (Mittal, 2017), still brand image is reinforced using celebrities. Hani et al. (2018) highlights in their study that for purchase intention to increase, the celebrity endorser must be credible, and trustworthy. This goes in line with the attribution theory of celebrity endorsers which was discussed in the previous chapter. Attribution theory states that for credibility of the promotion, the consumer must attribute it internal causes of the endorsement (Um, 2018). Purchase intention therefore is increased with the use of a credible celebrity endorser in promotional strategies.

An important result from Mittal's (2017) study is that a direct link to increased brand appeal, perception and brand loyalty has been found. This study claims a direct chain of links from celebrity endorsement to increased brand image and loyalty to ultimately an increase in the chance of a purchase decision. In addition to loyalty being increased as a result of celebrity endorsements, it also has the ability to change brand image. (Mittal, 2017). This can pose as a significant tool for firms if a change in the course of its brand identity is needed. Furthermore, in the case of celebrity endorsement affecting the final purchase decision, it has been found that even inferior products (products with overall worse qualitative features) perform better in sales when it is promoted and used by a celebrity endorser (Mittal, 2017). This in itself shows how much a celebrity endorser can affect the consumer purchase regardless of the brand or the quality of the product.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will go through the research methodology that is used to deduct results and ultimately answer the research questions. The chapter will also address the research process that has been done by going through databases used, phrases that have been used to find literature and the most essential studies that create the framework around the results.

The aim of this thesis is to understand the role of celebrity athlete endorsers in the creation of brand loyalty in the context of sports marketing. This will be done through the use of a literature review. By using a literature review, the thesis can be founded onto a solid framework and by comparing, contrasting and finding similarities in past literature, a fairly accurate deduction of a result can be created based on these previous studies. This is an appropriate methodology to be used in the context of this thesis because a wide supply of past literature on brand loyalty and celebrity endorsements can already be found. By combining these two concepts it is possible to find factors and theories on which researchers from both fields agree on.

Multiple different databases were used to research studies and other literature. All of the research done and the Mostly the databases in use were EBSCO Business Source, Oula-Finna, Google Scholar and ProQuest. Most of the literature used in this thesis is found from these databases due to their ease of use, wide supply of studies and the diversity of their use compared to each other. Often, articles found from Google Scholar were not accessible without permission to access so they were found from Oula-Finna by searching using the title of the article. Other databases that were also used to find literature were SpringerLink Journals, Elsevier ScienceDirect, Emerald eJournals, Scopus, Sage Diaries and JSTOR Archives. These databases were used if the correct article could not be found from the primary databases. They also provided access to few articles that were not available in EBSCO Business Source or ProQuest.

Search terms that were used in the research of literature among all of the databases were primarily as following: *celebrity endorsement, endorsement, athlete endorsement, brand, brand loyalty, brand trust, brand affect, brand knowledge, brand awareness, word-of-mouth, risk aversion, consumer risk aversion, consumer*

behaviour, sports marketing, marketing, identification theory, congruence theory, attribution theory, purchase loyalty, attitudinal loyalty.

When searching for articles and books on relevant topics, there were troubles in finding literature on specific topics. For example, there was a very limited supply of literature on sporting celebrity endorsements specifically. Studies on effects of celebrity endorsement in general were fairly easy to find but with the focus on athlete endorsers, it was a limited subject. Also, studies usually had a very specific focus group in a specified geographical region. This made it difficult to find valid information that could be applied to a general context. To counter this, if a general study was not found, multiple different studies on the same subject with varying focus groups were used to validate the research results so that it could be applied to the framework of this thesis.

In the process of research, multiple search options were used that narrowed down and specified the search results. On nearly every search, the “peer-reviewed” filter was used to only get results of articles that were peer reviewed. This functionality was an option in every database except for Scopus which contained only peer reviewed material. Also on most occasions, only scientific articles and academic journals were filtered through. The publication time period was often used when there the search results turned in too many choices and when the article had to be fairly recently published in order for valid research results. Other than that, in the EBSCO Business Source and ProQuest databases, the advanced search functionality was always used to get the most accurate results.

Articles that are found in this thesis have been validated to be from reliable journals. The JUFO portal has been used to check the validity of a journal. Some articles have also been found from the reference list of other studies, so not all are articles provided by database search results. Below is a list of literature that have created the framework of this thesis or acted as a focal point in the research phase.

Table 1. List of Key Studies Used in This Thesis.

Author(s)	Article name	Publishing year	Journal
Chaudhuri, A., Hoibrook M.	The Chain of Effects from Brand Trust and Brand Affect to Brand Performance: The Role of Brand Loyalty	2001	Journal of Marketing
Guan, J., Wang, W., Guo, Z., Chan, J. H., & Qi, X.	Customer experience and brand loyalty in the full-service hotel sector: the role of brand affect.	2021	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management
Matzler, K., Grabner-Kräuter, S., & Bidmon, S.	Risk aversion and brand loyalty: The mediating role of brand trust and brand affect.	2008	Journal of Product and Brand Management
Knoll, J., Matthes, J.	The effectiveness of celebrity endorsements: a meta-analysis.	2017	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science
Um, N. H.	What affects the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement? Impact of interplay among congruence, identification, and attribution.	2018	Journal of Marketing Communications
Um, N. H., Jang, A.	Impact of celebrity endorsement type on consumers' brand and advertisement perception and purchase intention	2020	Social Behavior and Personality

5 ROLE OF CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT IN BRAND LOYALTY

The creation of brand loyalty is a complicated process, and which takes influence from many different factors and areas of the market including the firms marketing, external entities such as competitors and word-of-mouth within the consumers. One of these factors is the endorsement the brand receives from celebrities. The chain of links that leads ultimately to the formation of brand loyalty for a consumer can be created through the use of previous discourse on the subject. As this is done, we can identify the links and stages where celebrity endorsements have an effect. The three main efforts that contribute towards creating brand loyalty as highlighted by Chaudhuri & Hoibrook (2001), Guan et al., (2021) and Matzler et al. (2008) is brand trust, brand affect and risk aversion. In the conversation of celebrity endorsers, they can effectively influence all of these three categories in one way or another.

As defined before, brand trust is the degree to which the consumer trusts the brand in question (Chaudhuri & Hoibrook, 2001). This is mostly an outcome of the logical and rational evaluation of the consumer. Since brand trust directly correlates to an increase in brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Hoibrook, 2001; Guan et al., 2021; Matzler et al., 2008), a celebrity endorsement must increase brand trust to create brand loyalty. Xingyuan et al. (2010) find that brand knowledge is directly positively correlated to brand trust. Brand knowledge is defined as “the ability of consumers to recognize and recall the brand” and it is mediated by brand awareness and image (Xingyuan et al., 2010, p 244). This is one of the most obvious and at the same time easiest ways that a celebrity athlete endorsement can contribute towards creating brand trust. Since athletes are one of the main focuses in sports events and they normally have a substantial following and even worship (Shuart, 2002), they are able to reach large audiences. Xingyuan et al. (2010) goes on further to note that frequent exposure of an advertisement results in higher brand knowledge. This means that for maximum benefit from an athlete endorser is a result of high performance (leading to more exposure during sports events, post produced content and media coverage), high frequency of sports events and the likeability of the athlete (leads to increased following and worship and therefore more exposure to external content containing the athlete and the endorsement).

Other ways that brand trust can be affected is through word-of-mouth (Xingyuan et al., 2010). This is another channel of information that influences the degree of trust that a consumer feels towards a brand. It can theoretically be affected through athlete endorsers because when there is coverage of an athlete on the media, it works simultaneously as an advertisement for the sponsor brand due to the link between the endorser and the brand. This can translate to a shift in the WOM effect of the company and increase this flow of information. An important note as discussed in the discourse of factors impacting the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements is that for the athlete to have a high impact on its endorsement, the sponsorship must be both congruent and attributed to internal causes (Knoll & Matthes, 2017; Um, 2018; Um & Jang, 2020). Generally, congruency is relatively high when talking about athlete endorsers in the context of sports marketing since they are promoting a product in their own field of expertise. For instance, a football player may naturally endorse a football boot brand or a golf player a golf club brand. As for the endorsements to be attributed to internal causes will need more work on the side of marketing efforts and public image of the athlete.

As for consumer brand affect, it can be seen to be affected by sporting celebrity endorsers. Brand affect was defined before as the overall positive or negative emotional evaluation of the brand (Matzler et al., 2008). To understand how sporting celebrity endorsements influence brand affect, we can use the extended framework of brand affect highlighted by Guan et al. (2021) in their study. They separate the consumers brand affect into two categories: “true feelings” (internal natural feelings such as happiness, attractiveness, sadness, and disappointment) and “due feelings” (influenced by factors such as culture, norms, patriotism, and etiquette) (Guan et al., 2021). To identify the place of a sporting celebrity endorser’s affect in the emotional evaluation of the consumer, it is more likely for the athlete to have an impact on the true feelings side of the spectrum defined by Guan et al. (2021). The reason for this is that these feelings stem from a shorter range of time compared to due feelings which are usually affected from the consumers lifetime experiences. Celebrity athletes can influence the consumers’ short term emotional view towards a brand and ultimately influence their desire to purchase.

The discourse of the factors of celebrity endorsements affecting consumers brings up the issue of identification. As noted before, identification is a crucial component when evaluating the effectiveness of an endorsement strategy. (Um, 2018). Um (2018) found that high identification between the endorser and the consumer may lead to an emotional attachment to the endorser. Linking this emotional attachment to brand affect criteria of brand loyalty, it is seen that high identification of the endorser is needed to create emotional reactions among consumers. In addition, high identification between consumer and endorser leads to bias perceptions of the brand that is linked to the athlete (Um, 2018; Um & Jang, 2020). This results in a shift in the brand affect of the consumer, effectively applying their bias and the information produced by the endorser to their “true feelings” as categorized by Guan et al. (2021).

Lastly, using the work of Matzler et al. (2008) as a frame of reference, celebrity athlete endorsers can significantly influence purchase decisions depending on the consumer risk-aversion level. Matzler et al. (2008) found in their research that when adding consumer risk-aversion into the already established framework of the constructs of brand loyalty as defined before (Knoll & Matthes, 2017; Um, 2018), it is found to be a mediating factor that functions as an independent and separate variable, ultimately having an influence on purchase behaviour. Risk aversion is a concept recognized across several fields of economics. It is usually measured in the field of finance and economics to understand investor and household behaviour, but the same concept applies in purchase behaviour in a non-monetary manner unlike finance and economics. Risk aversion is essentially the level of risk that a consumer is willing to accept in their purchase behaviour. (O’Donoghue & Somerville, 2018). As the sports industry is comprised heavily of high involvement products, consumer risk aversion is highlighted. The purchase decision is increasingly more affected by risk aversion the higher product involvement goes involvement. This is because the cost of a disappointment in a poor purchase decision is higher when compared to an ordinary low involvement product.

Athlete endorsers can be used as a strategic approach to influence brand perception in the eyes of the consumer to tilt the brand towards the less risky side of the spectrum of risk. This requires high trustworthiness of the celebrity in question because risk averse consumers are likely to not accept information from celebrities that appear non-

trustworthy (Elegbe & Adesanoye, 2018). Specifically in sports, this translates directly to the performance of the celebrity athlete. For athletes, trustworthiness can be increased through good performances in their respective fields if they already possess a solid and credible public image or brand image. The factor of trust is further explored in the study of Elegbe & Adesanoye, (2018, p.459), where they state that “Trustworthiness is the degree of confidence consumers place in a communicator’s intention to convey assertions he or she considers most valid which describe favourable psychological safety”. It is clear from this that a trustworthy and of high congruence celebrity endorser is able to yield best outcomes from their endorsement efforts.

Using this chain of events that lead to brand loyalty we are able to construct a visual representation of the entire process that ultimately translates in brand loyalty. This is shown below in figure 5.0.1. We are now able to place celebrity athlete endorsers onto this chart using the previous discussion as an exhibit on the reasoning behind why celebrity endorsers are placed in it as shown. This theoretical chain of effects is the combination of different studies that describe brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Hoibrook, 2001; Guan et al., 2021; Matzler et al., 2008) and celebrity endorsements (Knoll & Matthes, 2017; Um, 2018; Um & Jang, 2020). It is a gathering and construction based on the results that each study has presented. The chart can be used to aid in simplifying the steps it takes to reach brand loyalty in a theoretical perspective.

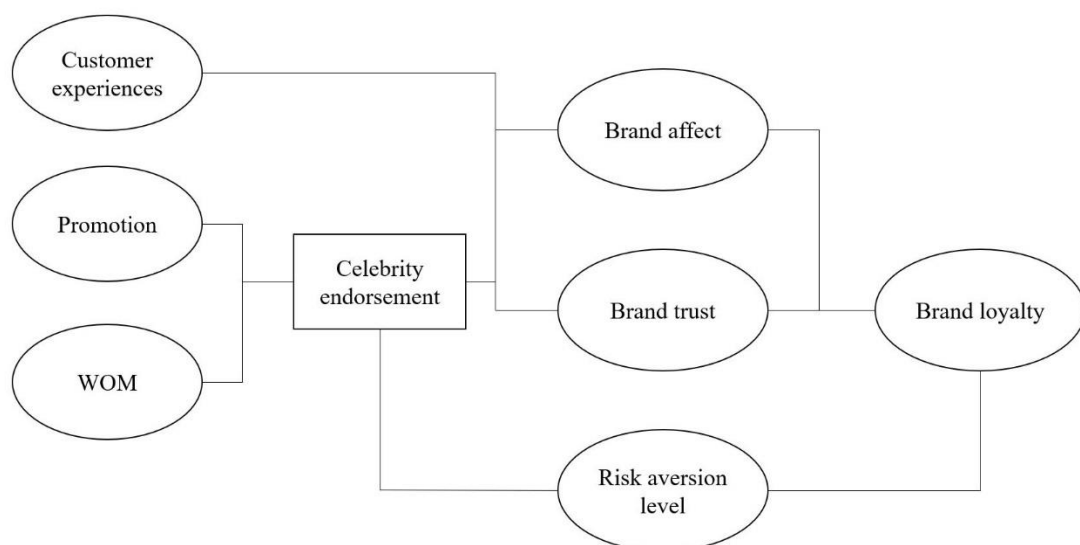


Figure 1. Chain Effects of Brand Loyalty.

Figure 5.0.1 firstly demonstrates how brand trust, brand affect and the consumer risk aversion level all influence the brand loyalty of the consumer. The consumer risk aversion level functions as an independent variable from the other two factors which complement each other. The risk aversion level is shown on the graph to be affected by sporting celebrity endorsements as explained previously. Above, brand trust and brand affect are separated to demonstrate their respective influences on brand loyalty. They are both shown to be affected by the three tested sources of information: promotion by the firm, word-of-mouth and customer's own experiences (Cheung et al., 2008; Xingyuan et al., 2010). Here, both the firm's promotions and the public's word-of-mouth are seen to go through the filter of athlete endorsers. On the promotional level, celebrity endorsements themselves function as a promotional strategy. On the side of the WOM effect, celebrity endorsements have seen to be an influence on the public's opinion as described before. As for customer experiences as a source of information, celebrity endorsements do not have an impact on it. Due to this reason, customer experiences do not go through the filter of celebrity endorsements, and impact brand trust and brand affect directly.

6 CONCLUSION

We have now successfully defined the goal of this research, created a research methodology and the framework around the subject, and finally been able to deduct results that are valid research outcomes. Using this research, we are able to answer the research questions, propose managerial implications and close out by suggesting topics and areas of future research. This chapter will go through these points by using the framework and the outcomes of the research.

6.1 Answers to Research Questions

We can now return to the research questions that were formed in the first chapter of this thesis and use this discourse to answer the formulated questions. The main research question asks: “*What is the role of sporting celebrity endorsers in building brand loyalty in sports marketing?*”. To answer this research question, two secondary research questions were created: “*How can brand loyalty be influenced?*” and “*What factors of a sporting celebrity endorsement affects the consumer?*”. First, the secondary research questions will be answered to form the final answer for the main research question.

Brand loyalty was discussed in chapter two where the constructs of brand loyalty and impacts of brand loyalty on consumers and companies was covered. This chapter covered the subject that is used to answer the research question: *How can brand loyalty be influenced?* We found valid and interesting results using the basis of Chaudhuri’s and Hoibrook’s (2001), Guan’s et al. (2021) and Matzler’s et al. (2008) work. They all agree that brand loyalty is a construction of two variables: brand trust and brand affect. Brand trust being the degree to which the consumer trusts the brand to deliver the expected value and brand affect being the amount of emotional attachment towards a certain brand. These two mediate the consumer’s brand loyalty. Matzler et al. (2008) confirmed this result in his study and proposed a third but independent variable, the consumer risk aversion level. This factor they found to be an independent and mediating variable which functions separately from brand trust and brand affect. The consumer risk aversion level is a factor that has an effect on the creation of brand

loyalty in a sense that consumers aim to reduce risk of disappointment by tilting towards a brand which seems less risky.

Using these findings, we can answer the first research question. Consumers' brand loyalty can be influenced by affecting their brand trust and brand affect. The magnitude to which it can be influenced, is mediated by their purchase risk aversion level which in turn can be seen to be affected by using promotional strategies and aiming to influence the public's word-of-mouth effect.

The second research question inquires on the celebrity endorsement side of this research. It asks: *What factors of a sporting celebrity endorsement affects the consumer?* This topic was covered and analysed in the third chapter. This discourse brought up three main theories highlighted by Knoll and Matthes (2017), Um (2018) and Um and Jang (2020). These are the congruence theory, the identification theory and the attribution theory. These theories are all factors that influence the success of a celebrity athlete endorsement. Congruence theory evaluates the matchup between the endorser and the brand, identification measures how much an individual identifies with the endorser and the attribution theory can explain whether the endorsement relationship is attributed internal or external causes. Using these theories, we can formulate an answer to the research question. The matchup between the athlete and the brand, the identification and relatability potential of the athlete and the attribution of the endorsement deal all have an effect on the consumer's perception of the endorsement. These all are factors that affect the success of the endorsement deal and ultimately decide how much benefit it brings to the firm.

Finally using the secondary research questions and the framework built around them we are able to formulate an answer to the main research question: *What is the role of sporting celebrity endorsers in building brand loyalty in sports marketing?* This was covered in detail in chapter five with the aid of a graphical representation demonstrating where celebrity endorsements fit in the chain effects of brand loyalty. We modelled the chain effects as a hierarchy model that splits brand loyalty into brand trust and brand affect which both are mediated by the risk aversion variable. This is explained by the first secondary research question. Brand trust and brand affect were further constructed by the three sources of information as defined by Cheung et al.

(2008) and Xingyuan et al. (2010): organizational promotion, customer's personal experience and the word-of-mouth effect. In between the links of brand trust and brand affect, and promotion and word-of-mouth, we can situate celebrity endorsement. It affects both constructs of brand loyalty by affecting promotion and the word-of-mouth effect. For the side of promotion, its role is to function as a strategic tool in the marketing department. As for word-of-mouth, it can shift the magnitude or tone of the public's opinion about the celebrity and therefore the brand.

6.2 Managerial Implications

Based on this research we propose managerial implications for organizations. Using the discourse on celebrity athletes and brand loyalty, we can apply the theories in practice. This chapter will go through these implications.

Firstly, we found how brand loyalty can be influenced and what the constructs of brand loyalty are. Brand loyalty is constructed of brand trust and brand affect and mediated by consumer risk aversion. Using this concept, companies can directly aim to influence these aspects of the consumers' nature. They can shift or alter their marketing tools to create a trustworthy brand image. This would increase brand trust. In addition, they can aim to influence the short-term emotional side of the consumers to aim to influence their brand affect. This can be done through affective marketing to associate positive feelings with external traits of the brand for example the logo, colours, name, or slogan. In addition, especially new and less known companies should aim to make the brand seen in use by the public for example using celebrity endorsements. This makes the product or brand seem less risky since the public can see that the brand is used by others. This strategy aims to affect the risk aversion side of consumers and effectively increasing market share.

What we discovered in the third chapter about celebrity athlete endorsers is crucial for companies if they aim to use celebrity endorsements as a tool in their marketing approaches. What this research describes about the factors influencing the effectiveness of a celebrity endorsement strategy can be used to help with picking a suitable endorser for the role. Firstly, the endorsers must be congruent with the brand. In the context of this thesis, an athlete must fit the described brand in terms of the field

they operate in. For instance, ice hockey players should endorse skates or sports drinks and basketball players should endorse basketball shoes or training clothing. This way the congruence theory describes a fit between the brand and the endorsers and ultimately increases positive attitude towards the brand and leads to increased purchase intention (Um, 2018). Following the practices of the attribution theory, a company should make an effort in creating a celebrity endorsement natural. This means that the promotional strategies should support the athlete endorser in a sense that the focus groups can see that the celebrity really uses the product. This obviously requires the athlete initially to use the product itself which in most cases is made possible by contracts. Lastly, the company should target a celebrity that is known among the focus groups. This makes identification of the athlete possible and moreover, the consumers will be able to connect with the endorser. This would increase emotional attachment to the athlete and therefore the brand.

Lastly, using the results of this research demonstrated in chapter five, we can propose methods that increases brand loyalty for companies. This can be done through the use of the model that is presented in figure 5.0.1. Using this, we can suggest to sports companies that in order to increase brand loyalty, a celebrity athlete endorsement should be used as a part of their promotional strategies. Of course, this should be done by using the theories described in chapter 3.1. This would increase the chances of gaining brand loyal customers. Since word-of-mouth is also such a large influence in creating brand loyalty, companies should also aim to listen to the public discussion about their brand and try to steer it in the way they wish. One way to do this is to use an athlete endorser to associate the brand with their success. The brand can also aim to influence the public's perception of the brand, or brand image, by choosing the corresponding athlete that would best portray their brand identity. Lastly, since the consumers' risk-aversion level is also a mediator of consumer behaviour, sporting celebrities can have an influence on the risk evaluation of the brand. Firms should therefore use a known athlete to associate with their brand. This would decrease the riskiness that a consumer may experience when evaluating their purchase decision.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

As this thesis uses the method of a literature review, the research is dependant on the articles available. The articles that were chosen to be in this research were all from databases that are for use for the Oulu University students. A better access to international databases would have possibly yielded different results because of other literature that would have been available. This research is also limited in a sense that literature of athlete endorsers specifically was difficult to find. The third chapter on celebrity endorsers is constructed of literature that discussed celebrity endorsers in general rather than athlete endorsers. Also, it was impossible to find studies which focused both on brand loyalty and the sports industry. This means that in some cases, the research is generalized, and lacks focus on the main topic, but the research still aims to link the fundamental subject to the literature in hand.

Current literature lacks in sports industry specifics. As mentioned in the limitations, there seems to be a gap in the supply of literature that concentrates on marketing for sports companies and in the sports industry. It was difficult to find any studies on athlete endorsers and their effects. This would be helpful to companies operating in the sports industry to maximise their output. Similar research as this one should also be done but with a narrower focus on for example a specific geographical area. By doing this, it is possible to get more accurate results and make better managerial proposals.

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