

Assessing the Qualities of Athlete Endorsers: A Study of Consumer Preferences for the 3 Qualities of Sports Endorsers Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, Expertise

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The use of celebrities to endorse products is a popular technique used by numerous marketers. Athlete endorsers, a subset of celebrity endorsers, are also extremely popular and have their own distinct positioning in the minds of consumers. This research takes a closer look at the three qualities of athlete endorsers, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. It seeks to both discover how consumers define these three qualities as well as how important each of these qualities is to consumers. Steps were taken to test a possible gender difference when it comes to determining consumer preference. A difference between consumers with differing levels of sports involvement was also examined. The result was that differences were discovered in both of these areas. This indicates that gender and sports involvement are key demographic considerations to be addressed when making the decision to use an athlete to endorse a product.

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. professional sports team industry is an approximately \$19 billion a year industry. Sports from golf to football at levels from peewee to professional are extremely popular. This can translate into significant profits for marketers who can capitalize on this popularity and effectively use athletes to endorse their products and services. This paper is focused on defining the three main qualities (attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise) of athlete endorsers and determining the relative importance that consumers place on these three qualities in a number of situations. A survey was conducted to test whether or not there is a difference in these definitions or levels of importance between genders and between those that are more and less involved in sports activities.

Literature Review

Celebrity Endorser Qualities

When it comes to celebrity endorsers, there are three main terms used to describe them. These terms are attractiveness, expertise in sport, and trustworthiness of the individual. All celebrity (individuals that are famous in the social realm) endorsers possess these qualities to varying degrees. Generally, it is considered more beneficial for the endorser to have a high level of all three qualities, but for particular products and consumers certain qualities are of higher value to the consumer. This makes those qualities more effective in these situations. Celebrity sports endorsers are no exception to this.

The first of these qualities, endorser attractiveness, is often approached in terms of physical appearance and facial attractiveness. Some researchers use a more multidimensional construct that includes aspects such as the perceived similarity of the endorser to the consumer, the familiarity of the endorser to the consumer, and whether or not the source is likable or admired (Boyd, 2004, p.84). When it comes to athlete endorsers, attractiveness is a common feature of the endorser. Due to the nature of their professions, athletes are generally in peak physical condition and are therefore found to be physically attractive. These athletes tend to have high familiarity (especially for the followers of their particular sport) and are usually well-admired.

Endorser expertise is the “perceived ability of the celebrity to make valid assumptions,” that is, the endorser’s ability to provide the consumer with accurate and beneficial information (Premeaux, 2009, p. 43). For athlete endorsers, having high levels of expertise may be more important than physical attractiveness for creating a positive mental connection between the athlete endorser and the endorsed product or event. Strong expertise may even be important enough to compensate for poor physical attractiveness and trustworthiness (Premeaux, 2009, p.33). Expertise has also been found to be the quality most associated with intent to purchase (Premeaux, 2009, p. 44). Athletes who are at the top of their particular sport will generally have higher expertise, at least within the area of that sport (Stone, 2003, p.96).

The final endorser quality is trustworthiness. Trustworthiness refers to “the consumer's confidence in the source for providing information in an objective and honest manner” (Boyd, 2004, p. 83). Athletes that are particularly successful tend to have greater perceived trustworthiness when it comes to their technical knowledge (Stone, 2003, p. 96). However, their multiple endorsements and off-the-field antics may lead the endorser to have less character trustworthiness. Consumers feel that trustworthiness is higher for athletes who are endorsing athletic products as opposed to non-athletic products (Koernig, 2009, p. 31).

Gender Preferences for Celebrity Endorsement Qualities (Males)

Traditionally, males, particularly younger males, are more associated with sports and sports products than are women. As a result, the male college market is the target of much of the sports advertising found on television today (Shuart, 2007, p.137). Sports advertising that uses athlete endorsers may be particularly effective for this group. This is because research has shown that athlete endorsers have greater AIDA effects (driving individuals through the sequence of attention, interest, desire, and action) for males. Males are also more influenced by familiar celebrity endorsers in comparison to females (Premeaux, 2009, p.37-40). Men are more likely to correctly identify unnamed athlete endorsers and they prefer male endorsers to female endorsers.

Gender Preferences for Celebrity Endorsement Qualities (Females)

Though females are less targeted in the sports advertising market, they represent a growing area of importance for sports marketers. Some research has even shown that for Generation Y (those born between the approximate years of 1982-2000), teen females are actually more influenced by athlete endorsers than male teens are (Shuart, 2007, p. 129). It is important to identify some findings that are unique to the female market. Females rate endorsers as more expert when there is a strong fit between the endorser and the product (Boyd, 2004, p, 82). Although males prefer male endorsers, females have demonstrated no preference for endorser gender (Peetz, 2004, p.146).

Effect of Sports Involvement

The gender effect found for many of the variables of athlete endorsers can be modified by the respondent's level of sports involvement. More specifically, these effects (such as males' preference for male endorsers) are greater for consumers who have low sports involvement. In turn, their response to athlete endorsers may be more predictable (Boyd, 2004 p.92). It may be more difficult, or even impossible, to predict the response of consumers that have a high level of involvement in sports (Boyd, 2004, p.91).

HYPOTHESIS

Observation indicates that women are more long-term both when it comes to their purchase decision and when it comes to their decision making process. They tend to purchase products that satisfy their long-term needs and they tend to invest more research into making their decision. This research includes gathering firsthand information from others who have already purchased the product, particularly specific information on why the product did or did not work. Although it is much less significant than in past years, women today are still generally less knowledgeable about sports than are men. Their friends, who are usually women, are therefore also less knowledgeable about sports.

This would indicate that perhaps when it comes to sports products, women will rely more on the expertise of the endorser than men will. Since women have less personal expertise in the area, and since they cannot consult their friends on the subject, they will have to rely on the expertise of the endorser. This will lead to them valuing expertise above attractiveness and trustworthiness. The formal hypothesis is thus:

H₀ = Women will value the expertise of sports figures endorsing sports products more than men will.

H_A = Women will not value the expertise of sports figures endorsing sports products more than men will.

Other Anticipated Results

Based upon the research conducted, this researcher anticipates an additional result. If the hypothesis is not rejected, the respondent's level of sports involvement will lessen the effect on that respondent's preference for endorser expertise. Since the predicted gender gap is based upon females' lack of knowledge about sports, it would seem that females that do have greater knowledge about sports would be less affected. These females would have more personal expertise, and may likely have friends that are more involved in sports and have more expertise. Using this reasoning, they would not need to rely as much on the endorser's expertise.

Research Method

In order to obtain data on the subject a survey instrument was constructed. This survey first required the respondents to define the three endorser qualities in question (attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise) by ranking possible contributors (such as facial appearance, likability, and familiarity for attractiveness) in order of importance. These both provided a clearer picture of how the respondents were defining the qualities, and forced the respondents to consider all aspects (such as both physical and non-physical aspects of attractiveness) contained within the qualities. Once the respondents had defined the qualities, they were asked to rank the importance of the three qualities in a number of listed situations. After this they were asked how likely it was that they would purchase a product that was endorsed by a person with a high level of each separate quality. Upon the completion of these questions the respondents were asked to rate themselves in terms of their level of sports participation, the degree to which they follow sports, and their overall feeling of personal sports involvement. Finally, demographic information such as age, gender, and academic class was gathered.

The completed surveys were then coded and entered into PASW Statistics 18 for statistical analysis. For the ranked data, a crosstabs analysis was performed and the Chi-Square value was used to determine the level of significance. For the interval data, an ANOVA analysis was performed and the F value was used to determine the level of significance. The findings were then filtered to include only those with significance at the .05 level and greater. Those of particular interest will be discussed in this paper.

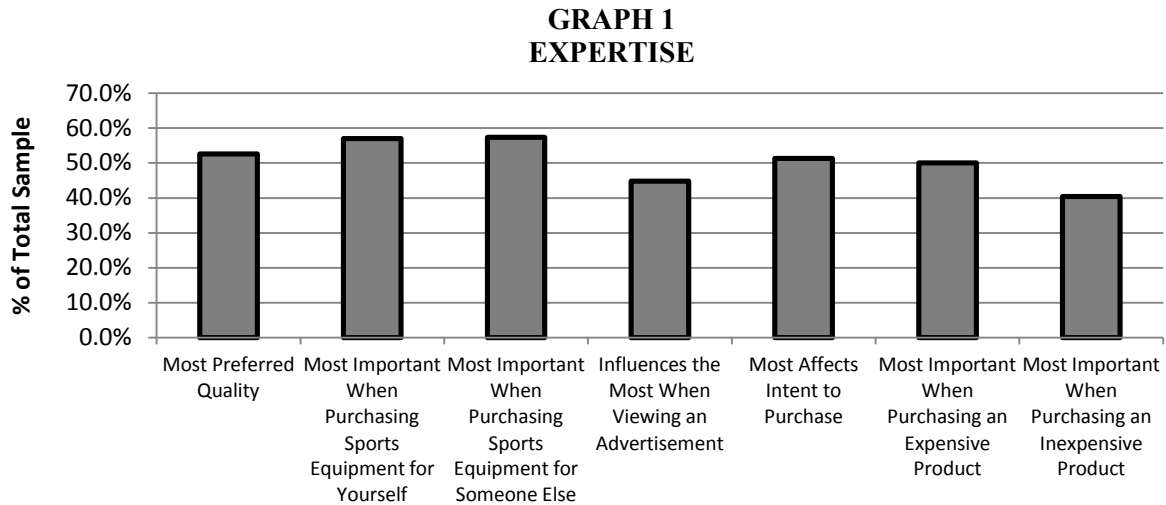
SAMPLE SURVEY

The population being tested consisted of current college students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four. From this population a sample was selected and total of 230 usable surveys were completed by this sample. Of these 230 there was an approximately fifty-fifty split between males and female, and a variety of academic majors were represented. All four class levels (freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior) were represented, but 71.7% of the respondents were upperclassmen. This should not undermine the integrity of the results because the upperclassmen and underclassmen are so close in age. For visual representation see Appendix B.

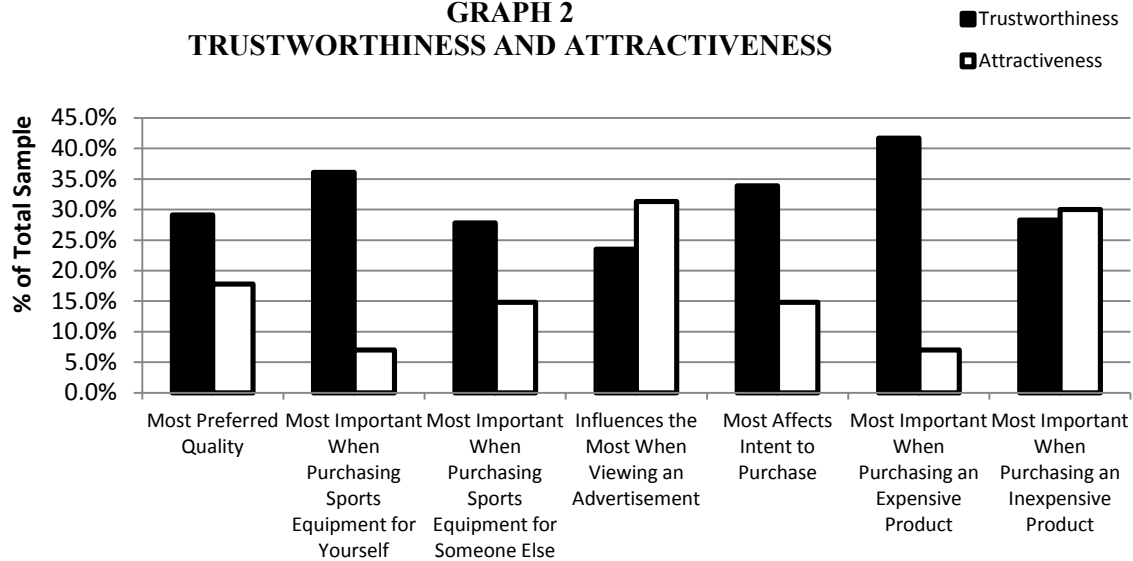
RESULTS

Summary Results

As predicted by the 2 graphs below:

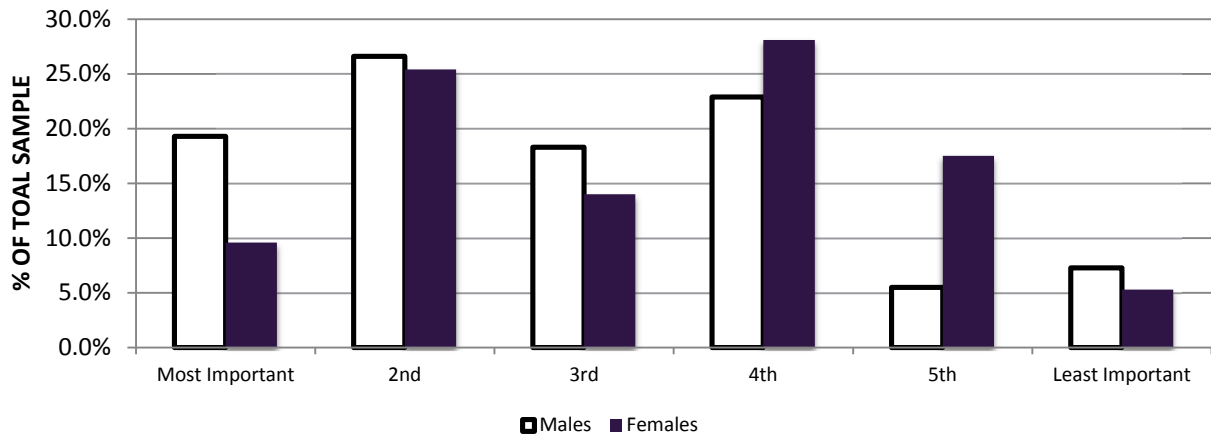


**GRAPH 2
TRUSTWORTHINESS AND ATTRACTIVENESS**



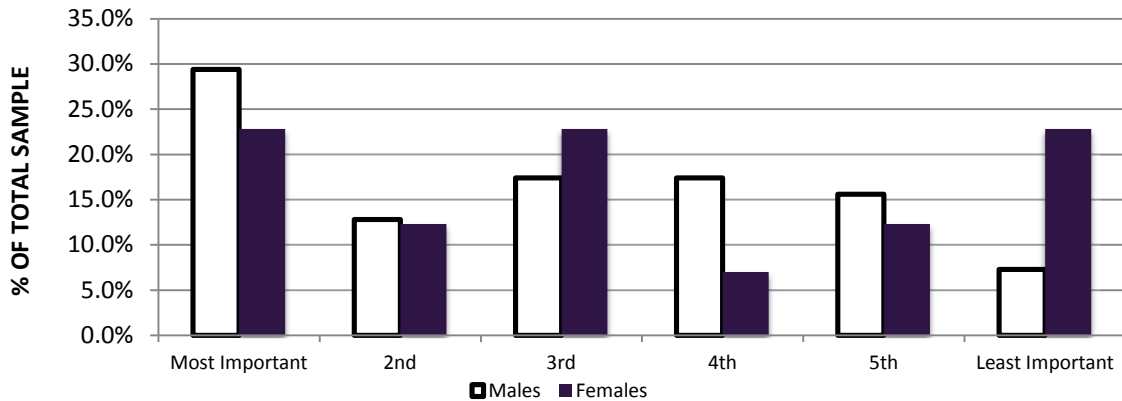
Defining Attractiveness

**GRAPH 3
IMPORTANCE OF LIKABILITY FOR DEFINING ENDORSER ATTRACTIVENESS**



A significant relationship was observed between the respondent’s gender and the level of importance placed upon endorser likability (see GRAPH 3) when defining attractiveness (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .05$). The respondent’s gender had an effect on how important he/she rated likability. An impact that was found was that male respondents were significantly more likely to rate likability as being one of the top three important aspects of attractiveness than female respondents were (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .05$). This is represented by 64.2% of males placing likability in the top three in terms of importance, compared to 49.1% of females.

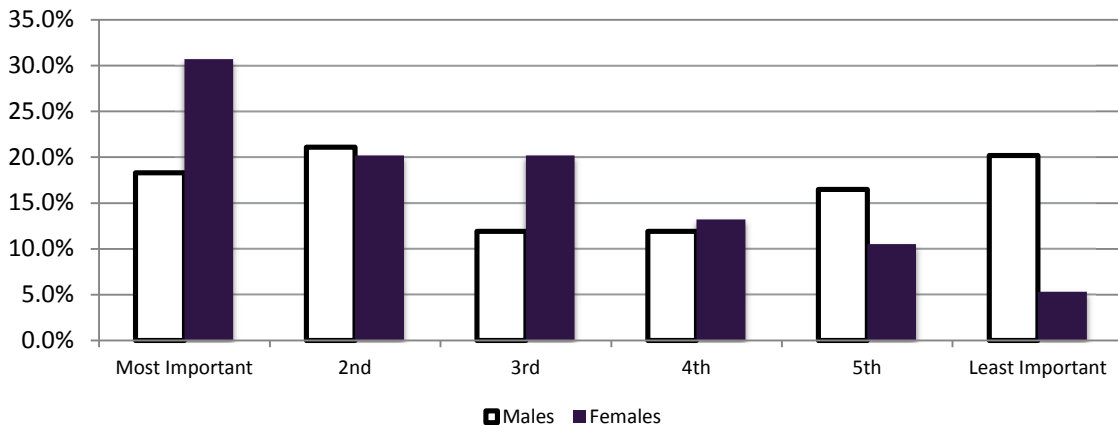
GRAPH 4
IMPORTANCE OF FAMILIARITY FOR
DEFINING ENDORSER ATTRACTIVENESS



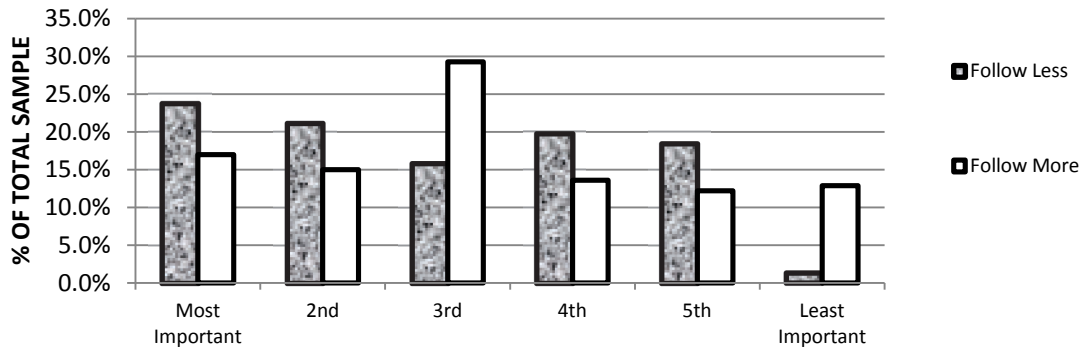
A significant relationship was observed between the respondent's gender and the level of importance placed upon the familiarity of the endorser to the respondent (see GRAPH 4) when defining attractiveness (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .01$). The respondent's gender had an effect on how important he/she rated familiarity. Male respondents were significantly more likely to rate the endorser's familiarity as being in the top four important aspects of attractiveness than female respondents were (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .05$). This is represented by 77.1% of males placing familiarity in the top four in terms of importance, compared to 64.9% of females.

Another significant relationship was observed between the respondent's gender and the level of importance placed upon the endorser being in good physical shape (see GRAPH 5) when defining attractiveness (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .01$). The respondent's gender had an effect on how important he/she rated the endorser being in good physical shape. Female respondents were significantly more likely to rate being in good physical shape as being one of the top three important aspects of attractiveness than male respondents were (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .01$). This is represented by 71.1% of females placing being in good physical shape in the top three in terms of importance, compared to 51.4% of males.

GRAPH 5
IMPORTANCE OF BEING IN GOOD PHYSICAL SHAPE
FOR DEFINING ENDORSER ATTRACTIVENESS



GRAPH 6
IMPORTANCE OF A FRIENDLY PERSONALITY FOR
DEFINING ENDORSER ATTRACTIVENESS

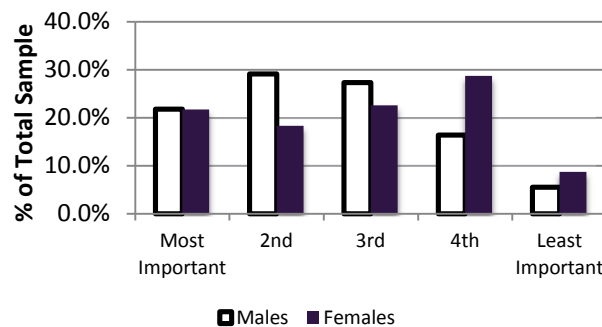


A final significant relationship was observed between the respondent's self-rated level of following sports and the level of importance placed upon the endorser having a friendly personality (see GRAPH 6) when defining attractiveness (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .01$). The respondent's level of following sports had an effect on how important he/she rated the endorser being in good physical shape. Those that follow sports less frequently placed having a friendly personality as being one of the top two in terms of importance 44.7% of the time, compared to 32% of those who follow sports more frequently (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .06$).

Defining Trustworthiness

A significant relationship was observed between the respondent's gender and the level of importance placed upon the endorser having a criminal record (see GRAPH 7) when defining trustworthiness (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .05$). The respondent's gender had an effect on how important he/she rated the endorser having a criminal record. For this aspect of trustworthiness, female respondents were significantly more likely to rate the presence of a criminal record as being one of the top two important aspects of trustworthiness than male respondents were (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .05$). This is represented by 49.1% of females placing the presence of a criminal record in the top two in terms of importance, compared to 33.9% of males. Note here, the assumption is being made that the presence of a criminal record is detracting from the endorser's trustworthiness. All aspects of trustworthiness were negative aspects that would make the endorser less trustworthy.

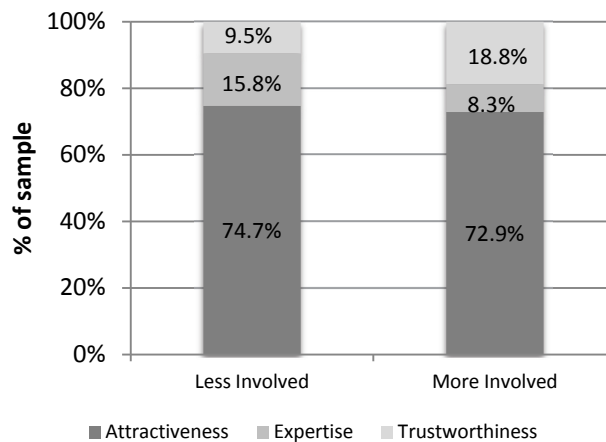
GRAPH 7
IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A
CRIMINAL RECORD FOR DEFINING
ENDORSER TRUSTWORTHINESS



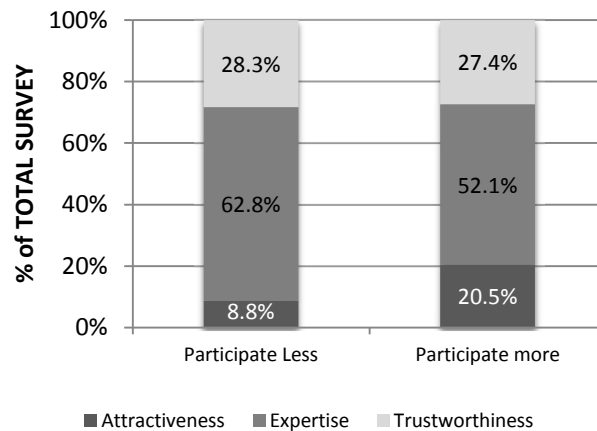
Endorser Quality Rankings

A significant relationship was observed between the respondent's level of sports involvement and the endorser quality that he/she rated as the least important (see GRAPH 8) when purchasing a product for him/herself (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .05$). Respondents that were more involved were significantly more likely to rate trustworthiness as the least important endorser quality in this situation (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .051$). This is represented by 18.8% of respondents that were more involved in sports selecting trustworthiness as the least important, compared to 9.5% of respondents that were less involved in sports. Also, a greater percentage of respondents that were less involved in sports selected expertise as the least important (15.8% of those that were less involved and 8.3% of those that were more involved), but this finding was not significant.

GRAPH 8
LEAST IMPORTANT ENDORSER
QUALITY WHEN PURCHASING A
PRODUCT FOR YOURSELF



GRAPH 9
MOST IMPORTANT ENDORSER
QUALITY WHEN PURCHASING A
PRODUCT FOR SOMEONE ELSE



Another significant relationship was observed between the level at which a respondent participates in sports and the endorser quality that he/she rated as the most important when purchasing a product for someone else (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .05$). For this situation, (see GRAPH 9) respondents with a higher

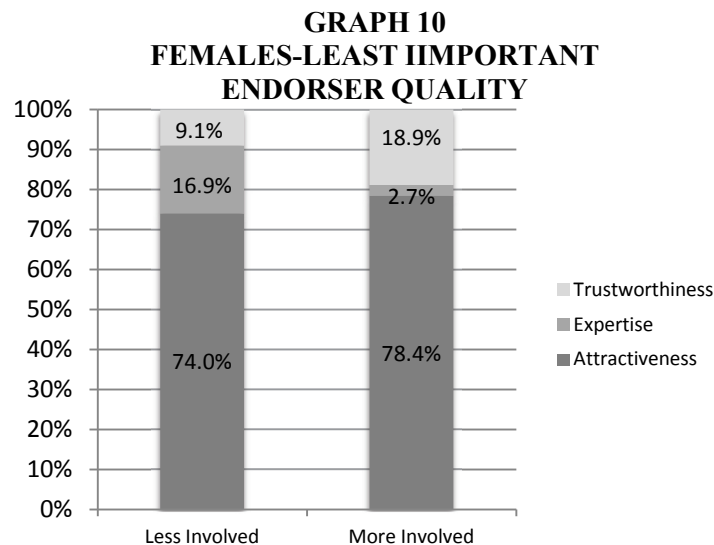
level of participation in sports were significantly more likely to select attractiveness as the most important endorser quality than respondents with a lower level of participation in sports (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .05$). This is demonstrated by 20.5% of high participators selecting attractiveness as the most important, compared to 8.8% of low participators. A greater percentage of low participators (62.8% in comparison to 52.1% of high participators) selected expertise as the most important endorser quality in this situation, but this result was not significant.

Likelihood of Product Purchase

A significant positive relationship was observed between the respondent's level of sports involvement and the likelihood that he/she would purchase a product when the endorser had a greater amount of expertise (Single Factor ANOVA, F Value $p \leq .01$). Respondents that were more involved in sports claimed to be more likely to purchase the product in this situation. The average likelihood for these respondents was 4.45 out of 5, compared to 4.17 out of 5 for respondents that were less involved in sports.

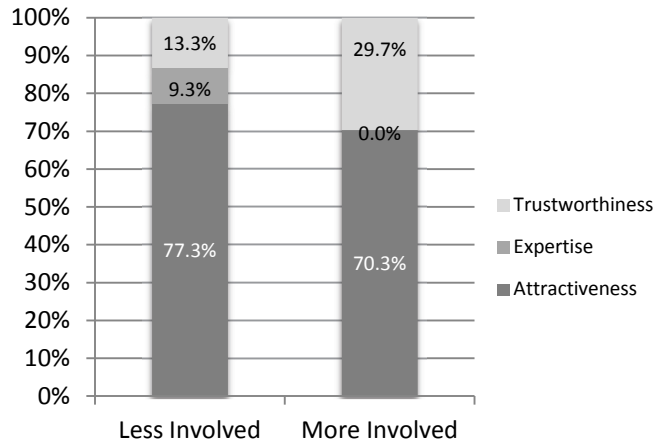
A Comparison of the Female Respondents by Involvement

A significant relationship was observed between the female respondent's level of sports involvement and the endorser quality that she rated as being least important (see GRAPH 10) when purchasing a product for herself (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .05$). Females that were less involved in sports were significantly more likely (16.9% compared to 2.7% of females that were more involved in sports) to select expertise as the least important quality in this situation (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .05$).



Another significant relationship was observed between the female respondents' level of sports involvement and the endorser quality that (see GRAPH 11) they rated as being least important when purchasing an expensive product (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .05$). Females that were more involved in sports were significantly more likely to select trustworthiness as the least important quality (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .05$). This is shown by 29.7% of these females selecting trustworthiness as the least important, compared to 13.3% of females that were less involved in sports. Females that were less involved were more likely to select expertise as the least important endorser quality (Pearson Chi-Square $p \leq .055$). This is shown by 9.3% of these females selecting trustworthiness as the least important, compared to 0% of females that were more involved in sports.

GRAPH 11
FEMALES - LEAST IMPORTANT
ENDORSER QUALITY WHEN
PURCHING AN EXPENSIVE PRODUCT



A final significant relationship was observed between the extent to which the female respondent follows sports and the likelihood that she would purchase a product when the endorser has high levels of attractiveness (Single Factor ANOVA, F Value $p < .05$). Females that follow sports more regularly were more likely to agree with the statement “I am more likely to purchase a product endorsed by a sports figure with great attractiveness.” The average likelihood attributed to this question was 3.69 out of 5, compared to 3.31 out of 5 for females that follow sports less regularly.

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis Test

The results clearly show that gender does make a difference when it comes to both defining endorser qualities and determining the relative importance of these endorser qualities in a variety of situations. This is in agreement with the evidence laid out in the literature review. The null hypothesis that was developed was not supported by the data that was gathered. While the hypothesis was laid forth that women would value expertise more than men would ($H_0 = \mu_M \leq \mu_F$), no gender preference was observed. In addition, there was no gender preference observed for any of the endorser qualities in terms of overall preference. This shows that no blanket statements about gender and preferences for endorser qualities. Instead, the specific situation should be taken into effect. Finally, since the hypothesis was not upheld, the additional predictions are no longer relevant.

Gender Results

The hypothesis may not have been supported, but there were still many interesting results. Gender differences were observed in how respondents defined endorser qualities. The most differences were observed in the definition of attractiveness. **An all encompassing theme for the definition of this quality was that males were more likely to rank many of the non-physical factors as more important. These non-physical features include the athlete being likable and being familiar to the respondent. Males rated both of these aspects higher than females did.** It is important to note that these preferences only relate to how the respondent defined attractiveness, and not how important that found attractiveness as an endorser quality.

This is perhaps the result of male respondents being less willing to define the attractiveness of athlete endorsers (which are generally male) in terms of physical appearance. Current cultural norms do not

promote the focus on a male's physical appearance by other males. When it comes to the conscious definition of attractiveness, males may be more drawn to non-physical aspects such as likability and familiarity. This could easily account for the significant relationship that resulted. It is important to note, though, that if this is indeed the reason, male respondents may still place importance on physical appearances, but at a more subconscious level.

Further support is found for this idea in the significant relationship found between the respondent's gender and the importance that the respondent placed on the athlete being in good physical shape when defining attractiveness. **While male respondents were more likely to place a higher importance on non-physical aspects such as likability and familiarity, female respondents were more likely to place a higher importance on the extremely physical aspect of the athlete being in good physical shape.** The same cultural norms that frown on males focusing on other males' physical appearances to determine attractiveness allow and even encourage females to focus on such aspects. Females may be more concerned with physical appearance in general. This could be important when selecting an athlete based on attractiveness to endorse products for female consumers. Personality may be a less important to this group than physical appearance is.

There was also one gender difference when it came to defining endorser qualities. This difference was present in the respondent's definition of trustworthiness. **Female respondents rated the presence of a criminal record as being more important for defining endorser trustworthiness than male respondents did.** Males are perhaps more concerned with an athlete's performance (and fair play) on the field than their conduct off the field, whereas females may find off the field troubles as being a bigger issue than their male counterparts. In light of this, marketers that wish to use trustworthy endorsers should select athlete endorsers without a criminal record when marketing to female consumers.

Sports Involvement Results

Responses also varied based upon the respondent's level of participation in sports, the extent to which he/she follows sports and his/her overall level of sports involvement. When dividing respondents in this way, there was less of a difference observed in how respondents defined endorser qualities. There was one area of significant difference. This appeared when the respondents were asked to define endorser attractiveness. For this quality, the extent to which the respondent follows sports has a significant effect on how important it is to him/her that the endorser has a friendly personality. **Respondents that follow sports less frequently were more likely to rate a friendly personality as being more important than respondents that follow sports more frequently.** When advertising mass market products it may be better to select an athlete with a friendly personality to endorse the product, but when targeting sports fans it may be less important.

The extent to which the respondent follows sports also had an effect on how likely female respondents believed it was that they would purchase a product when it was endorsed by an athlete with great attractiveness. Females that follow sports more regularly were more likely to agree that they would purchase the product in this situation. It is important to note, though, that the average response was only barely in the "agree" range and therefore it should not be a top consideration.

The level at which the respondent participates in sports also had an effect on the responses recorded. The difference between low participators and high participators showed up in which endorser quality they ranked as being the most important when the respondent is purchasing a product for someone else. High participators were more likely to select attractiveness as the most important quality in this situation than low participators were. This could be the result of the higher self-expertise of high participators. A greater percentage of high participators may feel that their own expertise is sufficient to the point that the expertise and trustworthiness of the endorser is not necessary. The majority of both high and low participators selected expertise as the most important endorser quality. **When selecting an athlete to endorse a product, it might be more important to select one that has both attractiveness and expertise when targeting high participators, and one that has expertise but less attractiveness for low participators.**

The respondent's level of sports involvement had an effect in a number of areas. When it came to ranking the least important endorser quality when purchasing a product for him/ herself, respondents that were more involved were more likely to select trustworthiness than the less involved respondents were. These individuals may believe that they are better able to judge for themselves whether or not the endorser's message can be trusted, and therefore find the endorser's trustworthiness to be less important. **The most popular answer (by far) for both more and less involved respondents, though, was attractiveness. This shows that when purchasing a product for themselves, respondents care less about the attractiveness of the endorser, and more about the quality of the information they are receiving (both in terms of expertise and trustworthiness).**

Sports involvement is a factor in determining whether respondents will believe that they are more likely to purchase a product when the athlete endorsing the product has high levels of expertise. Respondents with high levels of sports involvement were more likely to agree that they would indeed purchase the product in this situation. The average response fell well within the agree range, even edging towards strongly agreeing. This shows that **expertise is more likely to affect purchase intentions for those that are more involved in sports.** The average response for respondents that are less involved is well within the agree range, so expertise is also important for their purchase intentions.

Specifically looking at the female respondents, sports involvement had two significant effects. The first is that females that are less involved in sports were more likely to select expertise as being the least important quality when purchasing a product for themselves. This shows that expertise is less important to female respondents that are less involved in sports than those that are more involved, but attractiveness is still the least important overall. More than three quarters of all the female respondents selected attractiveness as the least important. This shows that the quality of the message being delivered is more important than the attractiveness of the deliverer. When advertising to female consumers that are less involved in sports, expertise may be less important, but not to the extent of attractiveness.

The second effect is that females that are more involved in sports were more likely to select trustworthiness as being the least important endorser quality purchasing an expensive product. This is likely due to their greater believed ability to judge the truth of the marketing message for themselves. Once again, though, the vast majority of respondents selected attractiveness as the least important in this situation. **While trustworthiness may be less important for females that are more involved, it should not be sacrificed over endorser attractiveness.**

CONCLUSION

This research was conducted with the intent to find a gender difference when it comes to preferences for endorser qualities (attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise) of athletes. It was expected that females would prefer the trait of expertise more than males would. Based on the data collected this expectation was not confirmed, but gender differences were identified.

These differences were present in how respondents defined the three endorser qualities, with the greatest number of differences coming in the definition of endorser attractiveness. Males rated both familiarity and likability (two non-physical attributes) as being more important when defining attractiveness than females did, and females rated the highly physical attribute of the endorser being in good physical shape as being more important than males did. This indicates that when selecting an athlete endorser based on attractiveness, it is important to first consider the target consumer's gender.

In addition to gender differences, there were observed differences between respondents based upon their level of sports participation, the extent to which they follow sports, and their overall level of sports involvement. While these differences were not present in the most chosen answer for any of the questions, they were present in the next most popular answers. For example, while both highly involved and minimally involved individuals were most likely to select attractiveness as the least important quality when purchasing a product themselves, those that were more involved are more likely to select trustworthiness than those that are less involved.

Other results include that females who are less involved in sports are more likely to select expertise as being the least important when purchasing a product for themselves, and females that are more involved in sports are more likely to select trustworthiness as the least important when purchasing an expensive product. Individuals that participate more in sports were more likely to select attractiveness as being the most important quality when purchasing a product for others. These results are important to consider when selecting an athlete to endorse a product for these different consumer groups.

Purchase intentions were affected both when the endorser's expertise was great and when the endorser's attractiveness was great. Individuals that were more involved with sports are more likely to agree with the statement "I am more likely to purchase a product endorsed by a sports figure with great expertise" than individuals that are less involved. Females that follow sports more regularly were more likely to agree with the statement "I am more likely to purchase a product endorsed by a sports figure with great attractiveness" than females that follow sports less regularly. In terms of affecting purchase intentions, any individual who is more involved in sports will be more swayed by endorser expertise, and females that follow sports more regularly will be more swayed by endorser attractiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While this research has uncovered some interesting results more work is needed to fully utilize and understand the significance of these findings. The first critical area for future research is one that would discover the cause for the differences found by this study. While the data collected indicates a difference both between men and women and between highly involved and minimally involved sports individuals, it does not determine the reasoning behind this difference. Future studies should be aimed at discovering this reasoning so that the differences may be better understood and more appropriate actions may be taken to capitalize on these differences. For example, if males find likability to be more important for defining attractiveness because they enjoy being able to relate with the endorser, then an appropriate action would be to present the endorser in a down to earth situation that the consumer may commonly find themselves in too. On the other hand, if they find likability more important because it helps set the athlete apart from ordinary people and makes them an idol to look up to, then presenting the athlete as being special or unique may be more appropriate. This research could be carried out by conducting interviews with consumers to probe their reasoning, or by finding some other way to isolate the different possible reasons.

A second area of future research would be in discovering an average distance between the respondent's preference ratings. That is, determining how big a gap there is between how important the most important quality is and how important the second quality is. This would allow marketers to better understand how much time and money should be invested in acquiring endorsers with the qualities rated as less important. For example, if expertise is the most important quality in a given situation and attractiveness is a very close second, then it would be worthwhile to find an endorser with high levels of both. If expertise is the most important and attractiveness is very far behind and not even really important at all, then it would only be worth finding an endorser with expertise. This study could be conducted by having consumers rate the importance on a scale rather than having them simply rank in comparison to the other qualities.

A third and final, and very important area of research would be to study the more subconscious-level preferences of consumers. Rather than asking respondents which endorser quality is most important to them, this study would discover respondents' preferences without explicitly asking them. A way of accomplishing this would be to first conduct a pretest to determine a number of athletes' levels of the three different endorser qualities (attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness). Another group of respondents would then be asked to select which endorser they preferred in different situations. These responses could be compared back to the pre-established levels of the three qualities and respondents' preferences for these qualities could be determined. By conducting research like this a couple of things would be accomplished. There would not be the same issue as the one mentioned when it came to males defining attractiveness. These respondents would feel less pressure to conform to social norms that discourage noticing another male's physical attractiveness. Instead, they would just select an endorser and

not the endorser's attractiveness specifically. It would also reduce the number of misguided responses based upon a lack of self-understanding. Many consumers are unaware of their own actual preferences and instead respond in the way they think that they should or the way that they would like to be true.

Overall, this research is a good starting point to further understanding consumer preferences for athlete endorsers. This is an important area of study because athlete endorsers have unique circumstances that are not shared by other endorsers or even other athlete endorsers. These circumstances include that they are generally well-known, attractive (due to the nature of their professions requiring constant exercise), and highly familiar in the use of many of the products that they endorse. These qualities make them ideal endorsers for athletic equipment and apparel and huge profits can be drawn from using these athletes to promote products. A fuller understanding of consumer preference in this area would allow marketers to obtain the greatest benefits from these athletes.

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