

Sports Celebrity Personality and Purchase Intention: The Role of Endorser-Brand Congruence, Brand Credibility and Brand Image Transfer

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine the influence of five sports celebrity personality (SCP) attributes – attractiveness, expertise level, credibility, trustworthiness, and character – on consumers’ purchase intentions (CPI). It identifies celebrity brand congruence (CBC), endorsed brand celebrity (EBC), and transfer of brand image (TBI) as antecedents of CPI.

Methodology – The purposive sampling technique was used to collect the data from 838 respondents. This study developed a multidimensional construct for SCP. The covariance-based structural equation modeling (SEM) technique was used to examine the relationship between SCP and the endorsed brand. The study used celebrity brand congruence (CBC) as a mediator and endorsed brand credibility (EBC) and transfer of brand image (TBI) as partial mediators. The direct and indirect effect of SCP on CPI was investigated using CBC, EBC, and TBI as mediators.

Findings – This study supports the importance of three antecedents (i.e. CBC, EBC, and TBI) on CPI. It finds congruence across SCP and CBC variables, and a positive impact of SCP on EBC and TBI variables. Also, it exhibits a significant direct effect of CBC on EBC and TBI, whereas the direct effect of CBC on CPI is not substantial. The indirect effect of CBC through mediating variables EBC and TBI found to be significant.

Research Limitation/Implication – This study concludes that sports celebrity endorsement is essential to transfer the positive celebrity image to the endorsed brand image. However, it is not

merely sufficient to influence the buyers' purchase conduct; the brand credibility additionally assumes to take a role in changing their behavioral intentions.

Originality/Value – This study contributes to the sports marketing literature by its novelty in analyzing the sports celebrity personality at a multidimensional level. It uses SCP's different attributes as one construct and studies its impact on CPI by taking CBC, EBC, and TBI as mediators. The results of this study equip sports management professionals with the knowledge to build better long-term relationships with consumers.

Keywords: Brand congruence; Brand credibility; Brand image; Consumers' purchase intentions; Sports celebrity personality

Paper Type: Research paper

Introduction

Sports celebrities possess a strong level of recognition that influences customers' perception toward the endorsed brand and alters their purchase intentions (Braunstein and Zhang, 2005; Stevens *et al.*, 2003). Celebrity athlete personality attracts the attention of the consumers and accordingly shifts their actual appearance to the advertised brand (Kim *et al.*, 2017). Sport celebrity endorsements influence consumers' explicit attitudes (the result generated from logical reasoning) or implicit beliefs (the action based on unconscious deliberations) that concern the brand and its purchase intention (Arai *et al.*, 2013; Chang, 2018; Chang, *et al.*, 2018). In the context of sports marketing, sports celebrity endorsement is a preferred area of research by many scholars (Braunstein-Minkove *et al.*, 2011; Carrillat, *et al.*, 2019; Kim *et al.*, 2017). They conducted their investigation to measure the consumers' perception towards sports celebrity advertising in multi-textual (different attributes of informative material) or multi-platform level (different types of media) (Summer and Morgan, 2008). The study of sports celebrity literature provides extensive information on endorsement activities of sports celebrities and how endorsement research continues to evolve as new variables emerged. Notably, how sports organizations use sports celebrities in social media to develop direct relationships with their fan base. In addition, their presence on social networking websites bonds the endorsed brand with consumers (Pegoraro and Jinnah, 2012). Nevertheless, social media can become a destructive platform for any commercial brand if not properly utilized as a marketing communication tool (Sveinsona and Hoerberb, 2019). Nowadays, organizations do rigorous checks on celebrities' followers and their activities on social media before negotiating an endorsement deal with them. One rational reason to explain such action is that the public figure of a sports celebrity endorser is constantly reshaping due to the controversies surrounding his/her personal life. Any scandal will tarnish the reputation of the

endorsed brand; fewer sales (Abeza *et al.*, 2020; Ge and Humphreys, 2020; Knittel and Stango, 2014). Hence, it becomes important for an organization to study the overall personality of the celebrity player before signing a contract. Else, using any sports celebrity in a marketing campaign is a risky endeavor to promote a commercial brand. Nowadays, the connection between a celebrity player and fans is closer than ever as fans are able to follow easily the normal day-to-day activities of their favorite player via social media (Frederick *et al.*, 2012; O'Hallarn *et al.*, 2017). Fans are keen to judge the attitudes and behaviors of their favorite celebrity player on the basis of their different personality attributes such as celebrity credibility, likability, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise level. Each attribute has a distinct influence on fans and varies in intensity considering the popularity of the game or team, and the underlying role of celebrity player in a team. So, from a managerial perspective, it is important to capture the entire personality characteristics of a celebrity player and study their combined impact on consumers' purchase intentions.

Previous studies examined the credibility of a sports celebrity endorser and its impact on consumer attitude towards a brand and purchase behavior (Kim and Na, 2007; Lee and Koo, 2015). However, few studies in sports literature included the credibility of the endorsed brand in their models, but still the association between sports celebrity personality and endorsed brand credibility is unexplored (Spry *et al.*, 2011; Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018; Wang and Yang, 2010). Moreover, these studies have identified only a few attributes of celebrity star power and examined their relations with brand credibility. Thus, a holistic view showing the link between brand credibility and multidimensionality of personality characteristics of the celebrity athlete used in endorsements is missing in previous studies. Therefore, it is essential to comprehensively study the

characteristics of celebrity athletes to comprehend the credibility of the brand endorsed and investigate its impact on consumer purchase behavior.

The purpose of this study is two-fold. The first is to examine five dimensions of celebrity player personality – attractiveness, expertise level, credibility, trustworthiness, and character. These dimensions are collectively combined under the heading of sports celebrity personality (SCP); used to determine the degree of effect on endorsed brand credibility (EBC), celebrity brand congruence (CBC), and transfer brand image (TBI). Furthermore, the present study investigates the direct relationship of CBC and consumers' purchase intention (CPI), as well as the mediating role of EBC and TBI. The second is to explore consumers' perception towards the credibility of the endorsed brand. The association between brand credibility and multidimensional characteristics of the celebrity athlete is directly considered on endorsement unlike other previous studies.

The paper is organized into six sections. Following the introduction, an overview of the related literature on attributes of the sports celebrity personality and purchase intentions has been presented. The third section provided the conceptual model based on celebrity attributes and developed the hypotheses to examine the impact of sports celebrity personality on the endorsed brand. Section four includes a detailed description of the research methodology and results of the study. The fifth part discusses the results obtained on endorser-brand congruency, and credibility, as well as on purchase intentions. Finally, the paper provides concluding considerations, reviewing the managerial implications and elaborating the limitations of the research incorporating a couple of aspects for future research in this field.

Previous Literature and Hypotheses Formulation

Sports Celebrity Personality (SCP)

A sports celebrity is defined as a player or coach who gained popularity in a specific sport (Pifer *et al.*, 2015; Shank, 2009). Sport celebrity has the power to direct fans' attention towards the endorsed brand, create a positive brand image, increase the trustworthiness of the endorsed brand and impact positively the purchase intentions of fans and consumers in general (Joseph *et al.*, 2019; Martin, 1996; Voracek and Caslavova, 2019). The difference between a sport and non-sport celebrity is that the former is considered a hero in the community after having obtained a valuable reward for the country in recognition of winning a match, competition or medal (Moskowitz and Wertheim; Parry, 2020; Shuart, 2007; Yang and Shi, 2011). Sports celebrities receive more recognition than non-sport celebrities inside the society due to the praise they received after their victory in the playground (Joseph *et al.*, 2019; Shuart, 2007; Stevens *et al.*, 2003). They can acquire better opportunities to advertise sport or non-sport related products because of the credibility, trustworthiness, and believability generated by their performance inside the playing field, along with the attractive appearance and marketable lifestyle off the field (Arai *et al.*, 2013; Pifer *et al.*, 2015). Corporate organizations used them to endorse a non-sport brand as they attract media attention and fan following which gives visibility to the endorsed brand too (McCormick, 2018; Schlossberg, 1996). For this reason, the products endorsed by them is unlike any other competitor brand available in the marketplace.

The personality of a sports celebrity is a blend of unique characteristics that make him/her a distinguished person (Braunstein and Zhang, 2005; Joseph *et al.*, 2019; McCronick, 2018). The theory of source credibility suggests that consumers' persuasiveness toward the communication message is primarily affected by the credibility of the information released by the endorser (Spry *et al.*, 2011). Endorser's expertise level and true character bring believability to the advertisement

communiqué, and thus the advertising message perceived as more attractive. Endorser's likability positively affected consumers' belief and attachment towards the endorsed brand (Arai *et al.*, 2013; Braunstein-Minkove *et al.*, 2011). McCronick (2018), and Braunstein and Zhang (2005) investigated five factors of a celebrity athletes, which are considered as attributes of star power. These factors are: 1) believability of the athlete's words, 2) attraction towards a particular athlete, 3) image of an athlete occupied in consumers' mind, 4) knowledge and competency of an athlete in his/her profession, and 5) popularity of a particular athlete in the society from the consumers' perspective. Both studies concluded that all factors are reliable predictors of respondents' behavior on direct purchase (to buy a product endorsed by the star athlete), or media consumption (to watch a particular sports broadcasting star athlete).

Celebrity Brand Congruence (CBC)

Sports celebrity-brand congruence analysis suggests that during an advertising campaign, the message conveyed through the image of sports celebrity and product, will converge whenever both images as being of approximately equivalent attractiveness (Kamins, 1990; Kim and Na, 2007). If sports celebrity attractiveness matches with product attractiveness, then that generates more sales revenue from consumers and improves the credibility of the sports celebrity endorser (Kim and Na, 2007). In other words, once consumers realize a fit between the endorser and brand, the endorser's credibility and attractiveness will start influencing consumers to make them recognize the endorsed brand (Kim and Na, 2007). Lee and Park (2014) also found that the strength of celebrity advertising increased, whenever a match existed between sports celebrity and endorsed product. Liang and Lin (2018) found that sports celebrities would be a better choice to advertise a sports brand, as consumers found a better fit for sport products with sports celebrities.

Also, previous researchers found that a moderate level of incongruence between the sports celebrity and brand will make the brand more attractive to the consumers (Lee and Thorson, 2008; Steve and Huma, 2010). Banyte *et al.* (2011) stated that a moderate mismatch of the brand with the sports celebrity endorser provides better results not only for the market leader brand but also for second-tier brands. They specified that sports celebrity brand incongruity generates a longer time of advertising views, and improves consumers' attitude and interest towards the brand. A moderate mismatch between sports celebrity and brand affects positively consumer purchase intention and also improves word-of-mouth marketing (Törn, 2012). According to Martin (1996), the congruence between the celebrity and the endorsed brand is an important factor while selecting the sports celebrity athlete for the non-sport brand. Moreover, the sport from which the athlete comes may enhance the endorsement effectiveness and create a better impact on the consumers.

This study considers sports celebrity Virat Kohli endorsing a non-sport brand American Tourister with an aim to examine the effects of congruence or incongruence between the celebrity and brand on consumer attitudes towards the brand.

Endorsed Brand Credibility (EBC)

Erdem *et al.* (2006, p.34) defined brand credibility as “the believability of the product position information contained in a brand, which depends on the willingness and ability of firms to deliver what they promise”. Higher brand credibility can improve customers' perception of product quality and reduce their price sensitivity towards the product (Erdem *et al.*, 2002). In the previous studies on source credibility, researchers focused on examining the credibility of the celebrity endorser. However, the awareness level of consumers has increased enormously nowadays due to the popularity of social networks. So, it is essential to measure the consumers' perception of the

credibility of the endorsed brand as well. Thus, this study has taken the credibility of the brand together with its endorser.

Transfer Brand Image (TBI)

Arai *et al.* (2013) developed a model to measure the athlete brand image using on-field (performance) as well as off-field (attractive appearance and marketable lifestyle) dimensions of celebrity athlete personality. The study found that the marketable lifestyle of celebrity athlete is the most important dimension of the celebrity athlete brand image. This dimension includes the sub-scale of his/her life story (how the athlete personality can be perceived by the fans or public outside the field), role model (how the celebrity athlete participate and contribute to the society) and relationship effort (how the celebrity athlete interact with his/her fans online and offline).

The transfer of brand image viewed as a transfer process from a sports celebrity brand image to the endorsed brand image when endorser and brand share similar association sets (Kim and Na, 2007; Kim *et al.*, 2017). Kim *et al.* (2017) conducted a study to measure the impact of the congruent advertising context with the celebrity athlete personality in transferring celebrity athlete's brand image on the endorsed brand image. The study found that the transfer of the brand image from celebrity athlete to the endorsed brand was more pronounced when the advertising context matched with the athlete's personality.

This study used the multidimensional attribute of a celebrity player as a single personality construct in order to check its congruence with the endorsed brand and measure its impact on EBC and TBI. Three hypotheses are formulated in this respect:

H_{1.1}: SCP will positively impact CBC

H_{1.2}: SCP will positively impact EBC

H_{1.3}: SCP will positively impact TBI

Celebrity Brand Congruence (CBC) and Consumers' Purchase Intentions (CPI)

Sports celebrity endorsement has been assessed by the ability level of an endorser to influence customers. The liking and recognition of celebrity sportsperson in society generate his/her congruence with any endorsed product. Endorser-product congruence reinforces consumers' positive brand beliefs, which eventually affects their brand attitude and CPI (Fleck, *et al.*, 2012).

Lee *et al.* (2017) found a positive attitude of participants towards the website advertisement and advertised brand when they viewed the advertisement with a sports celebrity. They found congruence between banner advertising and sports websites, and a significant effect of congruence on participant's future intentions. Recent studies on congruence showed that athlete-brand congruence generates more favorable responses towards the brand through influencing the implicit and explicit attitude of the respondents (Chang *et al.*, 2018). A study conducted by Chang (2018) showed that congruence between athlete and endorsed product alter consumers' explicit attitudes, while the evaluative conditioning changes their implicit attitudes. The impact of perceived fit increases on consumers' precise approach when they introspected in logically the endorsement of the product. Liang and Lin (2018) found no significant relation between celebrity endorser product congruence and consumer behavioral intention. However, they identified a positive relationship between sports athlete's endorsed products and CPI for low involvement products. Braunstein-Minkove *et al.* (2011) recognized a moderate effect of endorser product congruence on consumer's exceptional brand value; however, a strong influence of unique brand value on CPI.

To examine the impact of CBC on EBC, TBI, and CPI, the study has proposed the following hypothesis :

H_{2.1}: CBC will positively impact EBC

H_{2.2}: CBC will positively impact TBI

H_{2.3}: CBC will positively impact CPI

Endorsed Brand Credibility (EBC) and Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI)

Spry *et al.* (2011) examined the effect of celebrity credibility on endorsed brand value by taking brand credibility as a mediator. A credible celebrity increases the brand value of the product if consumers locate the likelihood of the brand. Erdem and Swait (2004) examined the dual effect of brand credibility on consumers' purchase considerations and choice of brands, by considering two of the credibility attributes: brand trustworthiness and expertise. The results of their study showed a positive influence of brand credibility on consumers' brand choice and consumption behaviors. Baek and King (2011) explored the favorable and robust impacts of brand credibility on consumer purchase intention of different brands in the services sector. Four impacts were identified: 1) improving the quality of the brand, 2) increasing the value for money, 3) saving the cost of information, and 4) reducing the perceived risk. Wang and Yang (2010) examined the positive impact of brand credibility on consumers' purchase intention. By using brand awareness and brand image as moderators, they found a positive relationship between brand credibility and consumers' behavioral intentions (Rai and Singh, 2020).

Wang *et al.* (2017) used endorser credibility as a second-order construct. They classified endorser credibility as the main factor which generates a positive outcome on consumers in terms of favorable attitude towards the brand, believability and credibility towards the brand, and overall intention to purchase that brand. They also found that two components of celebrity endorsers, namely trustworthiness and attractiveness, positively influence consumers' attitudes towards the

brand, improve their brand credibility and increase their purchase intention (Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018).

This study has taken endorsed brand credibility as a mediator to measure the direct and indirect impact of EBC on CPI. Accordingly, the next two hypotheses are formulated:

H₃: EBC will directly affect CPI

H_{3.1}: EBC will indirectly mediate between CBC and CPI

Transfer Brand Image (TBI) and Consumers' Purchase Intentions (CPI)

Sports celebrity image and brand image are two vibrant components in celebrity research. Sports celebrities are admirable people who enhance the image of the product by shifting their positive personality characteristics to the advertised brand. McCracken (1986) developed the meaning transfer model (MTM). The model explains how celebrity endorsement transfers the cultural and societal values of the product to consumers' purchase behavior. It highlights the importance of celebrity endorsers in three different stages. Initially, the celebrity image built, then transferred to the product, and finally shifted to the buyers with the product purchase (McCracken, 1989). Jain and Roy (2016), and Roy and Jain (2017) in their studies extended the components of MTM. They identified the importance of celebrity image for the endorsed brand and explained the transfer of celebrity image to the endorsed brand image through consumers' purchase behavior.

Sports celebrities have a positive image in any community due to their high level of expertise, credibility, attractiveness, and performance in the field (Lohneiss and Hill, 2014). The image of the celebrity sports person and its transference to the endorsed brand can be better understood with the help of transgression studies. These studies state that a small change in the athlete's image in public can create a more significant difference in the image of the endorsed brand (Ge and

Humphreys, 2020; Knittel and Stango, 2014; Lee *et al.*, 2015; Lee and Koo, 2015; Um, 2013). Lee *et al.* (2015), and Lee and Koo (2015) mentioned that if consumers consider the unethical behavior of the athlete and attach such immoral behavior with the athlete's endorsed brand, then it will impact their attitude, image, sports consumption, and purchase intention toward the endorsed brand (Abeza *et al.*, 2020). Customers refrain from buying products endorsed by athletes with bad reputations. For example, the multinational company Gatorade and Accenture broke their agreement with Tiger Woods after his extramarital affair controversy. The sponsors lost more than 2% of their market share within the first 15 days of the scandal revealed in the media. Investors believe that such an incident can impact the sales of the company as well, so they started selling their shares (Ge and Humphreys, 2020; Knittel and Stango, 2010).

The above review highlights the importance of sports celebrity brand image and how it impacts the endorsed brands either positively or negatively. Accordingly, the study derived the following two hypotheses:

H₄: TBI will directly affect CPI

H_{4.1}: TBI will indirectly mediate between CBC and CPI

Conceptual Framework

This study adapts the product match-up model by Kamins (1990) and image transfer model by McCracken (1989). However, most of the constructs used in the study were developed from previous literature (Barbara *et al.*, 2002; Fleck *et al.*, 2012; Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; Gwinner *et al.*, 2009; McCormick, 2018; Ngan *et al.*, 2011; Wang, 2017). Figure 1 summarizes the proposed model.

Figure.1

Research Methodology

Measures

The measurement items for the survey instrument (sports celebrity personality, endorsed brand credibility, celebrity brand congruence, transfer brand image, and consumer purchase intention) came from previously validated instruments and were adapted to fit the context of this study. The study adopts all the constructs used by McCormick (2018) to measure the SCP. For measuring the CBC, three items have been taken from the study of Fleck *et al.* (2012). For EBC, this study adopted two items from Wang's (2017) research and one item (Classy/Not Classy) from Barbara *et al.* (2002) study. For measuring TBI, two items were considered from Gwinner and Eaton's (1999) study and one item (My image of American Tourister is consistent with my image of Virat Kohli) from Gwinner *et al.* (2009) study. For measuring CPI, three items have been taken from Ngan *et al.* (2011) study. The responses of the survey participants to each of the items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 7 ('strongly agree'). The draft questionnaire was shown to three professors of marketing of a top B-School in India to ensure content validity. Their feedback was used to prepare a structured questionnaire which was pre-tested with a small sample of 10 respondents to explore any language and/or typing errors. It was made sure that the respondents who participated in the pre-test are not participating in the final survey.

Research Design and Data Collection

The selection of a celebrity and the endorsed brand that fits all the requirements was the first step towards designing the study. This was also important so as to remove any possible bias in the selection process. First, a search was made over the internet to identify the top sports celebrity names connected with widespread endorsement deals in India in a way similar to Liang and Lin (2018) and McCormick (2018). Ten names from the Indian sports fraternity were identified which were Prithvi Shaw, Saina Nehwal, Rohit Sharma, Hima Das, Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar, Hardik Pandya, PV Sindhu, MS Dhoni, and Virat Kohli (Inside Sport, 2018). Virat Kohli was selected as the sports celebrity for the following two main reasons. First, according to a brand valuation report published in 2018 by Duff and Phelps (2018), Virat Kohli ranked number one celebrity of India for the last two consecutive years (Business Today, 2019; Live Mint, 2019). Second, according to Forbes (2019) list of highest-paid athletes, Virat Kohli ranked 85th, and he is the only Indian player in the top 100 players list for 2019 (Business Standard, 2018). In 2018, Virat Kohli earned \$24 million, in which \$20 million originated from endorsement deals (Aksharit, 2018). Also, he is regarded as the most attractive figure in the Indian advertisement industry (Business Today, 2019; Duff and Phelps, 2019; Live Mint, 2019). After deciding upon Virat Kohli as a sports celebrity endorser, the second step was to select one brand endorsed by him. To avoid biases in the brand selection process, a pilot study conducted and data were collected from 100 undergraduate and postgraduate students. They were provided with a list of 25 brands that were endorsed by Virat Kohli. They were instructed to rank the brands from 1 (most recalled) to 25 (least recalled) (Biscaia *et al.*, 2014; Gupta *et al.*, 2013). Results revealed that American Tourister got the highest recall (47%) followed by Manyavar (31%), Boost (27%), Philips (24%), and Too Yumm (21%) brand.

Once the celebrity and endorsed brand were finalized, the next step was to collect the data from a representative sample. Most of the similar studies in the past have used student samples for convenience, creating external validity concerns. It is argued that the unique nature of our work necessitates such a sample. According to TAM Media, youth represent the largest fan-base of sports consumption in India, with 64 percent males and 44 percent people of age group 15-35 years (Statista, 2019; Yousaf *et al.*, 2018). For data collection, respondents were selected from a pool of 1500 students at two large universities in India, who were approached through an internal e-mail. Of those, 1000 were selected through purposive sampling technique, and questionnaires were distributed to them. A total of 858 questionnaires were returned back. The questionnaires were further screened, and 16 questionnaires were discarded due to the lack of complete information. In the end, 844 questionnaires were retained for further analysis. Cook's method was used to explore outliers and six observations were removed since they were showing abnormal Cook's distance. This resulted in the final sample size of 838 valid responses, making the overall response rate of 57.80% (from base 1500). The average age of the respondents was 22.2 years (range 18-25), with 55% of them being males. The sample was thus found close in the gender distribution of the population and covered a major age group of the overall audience.

Bostrom *et al.* (1993) was used to check the non-response bias in the chosen sample. The mean values of the first 40 and 40 late respondents were examined using a *t*-test. Results revealed that there were no significant differences between the two groups for the variables. This resulted in our belief in the absence of non-response bias in the sample. More rigorous checks for non-response bias were avoided as the proportion of non-response was small in our case. The common method bias was also checked after randomizing the items in the questionnaire. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted and all the items were constrained to load onto a single factor. The results

of the unrotated factor solution revealed that no single factor explained more than 50% variance of the variables. This indicated the lack of common method bias. The collected data were randomly split into two halves, with each set containing 419 respondents. The objective was to use one-half of the data for establishing psychometric properties of the measures, while the second half was to be used for model validation and hypothesis testing to ensure higher validity of the measures and overall model (Bagozzi and Heatherton, 1994).

Results

Measurement Model

Data analysis was done using structural equation modeling (SEM) through covariance-based SEM (with software AMOS version 21.0). A cut-off value of $p < 0.001$ was selected to check for the statistical significance of all parameters in the analyses (Trafimow and Earp, 2017). The univariate normality was tested, the skewness and kurtosis of all variables were measured and it was found that all values of skewness were within the prescribed limits of -2 to $+2$ and all kurtosis values were within the cut-off range of -7 to $+7$, indicating univariate normality of the data (Curran *et al.*, 1996). In order to ensure psychometrically sound measures, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted on the first half of the sample of 419 respondents. The sample size of 419 respondents was sufficient for the statistical validity of this CFA as we needed only ten times the number of variables in our study (Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). The factor loadings for each item for their respective construct, Cronbach alpha (α), average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), and maximum shared variance (MSV) for each construct were found sufficient and are shown in Table I.

Table I.

Test of First-Order Factor Analysis

In order to test the model efficacy of first-order factor analysis, the indices used were comparative fit index (CFI), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), normed fit index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), chi-square (χ^2) and χ^2/df . The model was run and the measurement model indicated that the model fits the data: $\chi^2 = 314.132$ ($p < .05$), $\chi^2/df = 1.272$; GFI = 0.915, NFI = 0.913, TLI = 0.953; CFI = 0.947 and RMSEA = 0.026 (Bentler, 1990; Kline, 2011).

To confirm construct validity, convergent and discriminant validity need to be established. The average variance extracted (AVE) was found to be greater than 0.50, as well as most loadings were above 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2010), providing sufficient evidence of convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). To establish discriminant validity, the findings, as shown in Table II, indicate the square root of the AVE (diagonal values) of each construct is larger than its corresponding correlation coefficients (Henseler *et al.*, 2015).

Table II.

Structural Model

Once the psychometric properties of the measures were established, the structural model was assessed. Figure 2 shows the complete structural model tested with the second split data of 419 respondents.

Figure 2.

The model fit obtained for the path model was found satisfactory with $\chi^2 = 416.216$, $df = 317$, $\chi^2/df = 1.312$, GFI = 0.942; IFI = 0.931, CFI = 0.944 and RMSEA = 0.052. It therefore became quite

evident that while psychometric properties of constructs remained intact with the structural model, the hypothesis tests show interesting results. Results of hypothesis testing revealed that the effect of SCP on CBC was highly significant as $b = 0.823$, $t = 7.21$, $p < 0.01$, supported $H_{1.1}$. Also, the effect of SCP on EBC ($b = 0.680$, $t = 5.81$, $p < 0.01$) and TBI ($b = 0.652$, $t = 5.77$, $p < 0.01$) is highly significant supporting $H_{1.2}$ and $H_{1.3}$. The effect of CBC on EBC ($b = 0.178$, $t = 3.87$, $p < 0.01$) and on TBI ($b = 0.157$, $t = 2.85$, $p < 0.05$), is significant supporting $H_{2.1}$ and $H_{2.2}$. The effect of EBC on CPI ($b = 0.422$, $t = 5.40$, $p < 0.01$) and the effect of TBI on CPI ($b = 0.681$, $t = 7.20$, $p < 0.01$) is highly significant supporting H_3 and H_4 respectively. However, the effect of CBC on CPI is not significant ($b = 0.005$, $t = 0.26$, $p > 0.05$). Table III displays the results of the structural model and hypothesis, including path, regression weight, and associated t -value of each path. As it can be seen, the majority of the hypotheses are supported except for $H_{2.3}$.

Table III

Mediation Effect

The findings of this study show that the direct impact of CBC on CPI is not significant, whereas the total effect (direct and indirect effect) is highly significant (refer to Figure 3). Also, $R^2 = 0.62$ suggested that 63% of the variance in the CPI explained by the three independent variables CBC, EBC, and TBI.

Figure 3.

Sobel test, Aroian test and Goodman test were performed to examine the indirect effect of CBC on CPI through the two mediators EBC and TBI. This analysis is displayed in Table IV and Table V (Sobel, 1982).

Table IV.

Table V.

The effect of CBC on CPI through EBC found to be highly significant, suggesting that EBC is a full mediator between CBC and CPI. Similarly, the indirect effect of CBC on CPI found to be highly significant, suggesting that TBI is also a mediator between CBC and CPI. Nevertheless, EBC is a more influential mediator if compared to TBI.

General Discussion and Contribution

This study develops a multidimensional model based on sport celebrity attributes and examines endorser congruence with the endorsed brand. It uses a non-sport brand “American Tourister” as an endorsed brand and matches it with a sports celebrity “Virat Kohli” with a purpose to infer the importance of sport celebrity traits as perceived by consumers since matching them with the endorsed brand can easily direct the perception of consumers towards the endorsed brand (McCormick, 2018). This claim was supported by accepting hypothesis H_{1.1}. Hypothesis H_{1.2} infers that the attributes of a celebrity athlete can generate a positive outcome on the endorsed brand. The celebrity athlete star power can increase consumers’ believability towards the endorsed brand. This claim was supported by accepting hypothesis H_{1.2}. This result is consistent in the sport context with Kim and Na (2007) study, who found that endorser credibility and attractiveness can build a positive attitude in consumers’ minds, and subsequently develop the endorsed brand credibility when sports celebrities and endorsed brands are matched to each other. The study also found that even in the incongruent situation (sports celebrity and endorsed brand), the celebrity athlete attractiveness makes a positive impact on consumers’. Although two variables of celebrity personality were only used, they still unconstrained their importance in creating the credibility of the endorsed brand.

Hypothesis H_{1.3} claims that celebrity advertisement is valuable in transferring the sports celebrity image to the endorsed brand image (Jain and Roy, 2016; Kim *et al.*, 2017). This research depicts a positive image of Virat Kohli in consumers' minds which further influence their perceptions toward the American Tourister. Fleck *et al.* (2012) stated that, if a celebrity is broadly acceptable and esteemed by consumers, then they find the celebrity to be congruent with any brand, even though the brand is moderately mismatched with the celebrity; the same result this study reached. On the other hand, this result contradicts other studies that assert positive outcome to be generated only if there exists a match between athletes and endorsed brands (Kim and Na, 2007; Roy *et al.*, 2012). To investigate the transferability of the celebrity traits to the brand, it is essential to understand the strength of association between celebrity and brand traits (Bergkvist, 2017; Lee and Ko, 2015). Hypotheses H_{2.1} and H_{2.2} claim that the fit between celebrity personality variables and endorsed brand will positively influence consumers' perception towards the endorsed brand, and eventually will create brand credibility and build a positive image of the brand. The result of this study confirms a positive pairwise relationship between CBC, EBC, and TBI. This can be interpreted that the fit between influential celebrity athlete and endorsed brand produces beneficial results for the brand in terms of creating its credibility and building its positive image. This is consistent with the finding of Roy and Jain (2017) which confirms a positive shift of traits and qualities of the celebrity endorser to the endorsed brand and consequently to the purchase intention of the final consumer.

The current study also infers a positive influence of EBC on CPI as formulated in hypothesis H₃. Consumers, who are fascinated by the personality of the sports celebrity endorser, will generate positive thoughts about the brand endorsed by them. The sports celebrity advertisement helps to build the credibility of the brand in consumers' mind, and influence their

CPI (Lee and Koo, 2015). In previous research, no direct relationship has been found across EBC and CPI using the multidimensionality of the celebrity player. Hence, proving the relationship EBC on CPI can be regarded as a contribution in the field of sports celebrity advertising and brand research streams. This study also infers the positive influence of TBI on CPI as formulated in hypothesis H₄. Initially, the shift of positive image from sports celebrity to the endorsed brand was supported by testing hypothesis H_{1.3}. Consumers, who are exposed to the sports celebrity and the endorsed brand, find a match between both variables. They start the process by shifting the positive image from the endorser to the endorsed brand and finish it by changing their purchase behavior. In other words, the fit across the sports celebrity (Virat Kohli) and the brand (American Tourister) has been seen positively by consumers, and regarded as helpful to change their brand image and buying behavior. Ambroise *et al.* (2014) reached a similar result on celebrity personality and brand identity. Although a specific variation has been found between variables, the study derived similar results by examining the positive impact of the celebrity personality on the brand's character, which advanced by brand personality influencing buyers' purchase decisions.

Lastly, the study achieves its main objective by highlighting the importance of brand credibility and explaining how the brand image transfers to consumers. Diverse from the positive relationships between proposed variables, the study finds a negative association between CBC and CPI through testing hypothesis H_{2.3}; meaning that celebrity and brand similarities, as perceived by consumers, did not influence their purchase decision. In other words, consumers' perceived the sports celebrity and its endorsed brand positively, but that is not enough to change their mind favorably towards the endorsed brand. The reason behind this finding may be the 1.3 billion population of India, which comes under the middle-class category and spends \$2 to \$10 per day (Asian studies, 2018). Because of their low income before making the purchase decision,

consumers look for the credibility of the brand; especially, when the price of the product is high (Voráček and Čáslavová, 2019). Furthermore, hypotheses H_{3.1} and H_{4.1} supported the mediating function of EBC and TBI by confirming their role in influencing the purchase decision of consumers. In other words, the consumers give due weightage to the credibility of the brand before they make their purchase decision. For them, brand credibility is rather more important than the celebrity athlete who endorses that brand (Spry *et al.*, 2011). Findings also show that the characteristics of a celebrity are beneficial when combined with a suitable brand that maintained its credibility in the market. Isolating the celebrity from the brand did not achieve the desired result for the brand otherwise (Roy and Jain, 2017).

This study concluded that whenever consumers exposed to the sports celebrity with the endorsed brand, only then they can perceive the congruence between sports celebrity and brand. Such perception builds the credibility of the brand and transfers the positive image of the celebrity athlete to the endorsed brand. With this finding, the study highlights the importance of the multidimensional construct of sports personality for establishing the attractiveness of the brand and generating positive outcomes from the consumers. Thus, developing and testing the multidimensional construct is the main contribution of this study in the field of celebrity and brand advertising. Previous studies used single attributes of a celebrity player for brand congruence (Fleck *et al.*, 2012; McCormick 2018), but this study used the multidimensional attribute of a celebrity player as a single personality component and checked its congruence with the endorsed brand. Of equal importance, this study recognizes brand credibility as a key variable to convert consumers' positive perceptions about the brand into their purchase intentions. That means consumers are not influenced solely by the matching of celebrity-brand advertising, but also give other due considerations such as the credibility of the brand.

Managerial Implications

In the world of competition, consumers are exposed to advertising everywhere, and it can impact their cognitive outcomes in the form of implicit and explicit attitudes toward the endorser and the endorsed brand. In other words, when consumers encountered celebrity advertising, some thoughts or perceptions about the brand automatically emerged in their minds. When they used these thoughts to assess positively or negatively the celebrity or brand, they form their implicit attitude. When they started to evaluate critically the information conveyed in the advertisement, they form their explicit attitude. From a managerial perspective, it is crucial to understand consumer psychology before making any strategy that can impact consumers directly or indirectly. The findings of this study confirmed the positive relationship between all attributes of the sports celebrity personality (SCP) and endorsed brand. That means instead of considering a single personality attribute of a sports celebrity, it is vital for marketing officials to give due weightage to all personality traits of the sports celebrity. Sometimes, sports celebrity is expertise in his/her field; however, shows low levels of trustworthiness among consumers as in the example of Tiger Woods and Ray Rice (Knittel and Stango, 2013; Neff, 2014). So, it is important to measure all the qualities of the celebrity sportsperson before projecting their image towards customers. Similar to what has been stated in previous studies, this study also supported the significant impact of congruence on consumers' implicit attitudes, as it finds an automatic connection between the sports celebrity and the brand.

It is a challenge for the marketing managers to find the right celebrity athlete with all the personality traits with whom they can create the matching of their brand and influence their target customers in a better way. For getting the associative and automatic views of the target customers, it is important to conduct a pilot study and accumulate the views of the target consumers before

finalizing the selection of celebrity athletes for their brand (Martin, 1996). It is advisable to marketing practitioners to use illustrative techniques such as words or images which are easy to use and simple to understand by the consumers. One key finding of this study is that when the consumers perceive the congruence between the celebrity and the brand, its positive image shifted to the endorsed brand image. This result provides more interesting implications if analyzed in the Indian context. Most of the Indians are functionally illiterate, and they make their purchase decisions by seeing their favorite celebrity advertising. Such social factors should be considered by marketing managers. They should attempt and select a celebrity in their advertisement who is popular in that particular segment and also can easily influence their target customers. Jain and Roy (2016), and Voráček and Čáslavová, (2019) studied consumers' thought about the cost of the brands when they could make their purchase decisions. If their preferred celebrity is supporting a low-cost product, then they will purchase it immediately. Still, if the same personality is endorsing a high-cost product, then they will take a second thought for the endorsed brand. This study also arrived at a similar result. Consumers considered the credibility of the brand before making their purchase decisions, especially at the point when the cost of the product is high. Hence, it will be necessary for the marketing managers to work on the quality of their brand and choose a sports celebrity who is considered fit with the brand.

Conclusion

A celebrity player gains consumers' recognition because of his/her expertise and performance on the field. Besides, his/her attractiveness, likability, and trustworthiness pave the way to obtain endorsement deals. A social character bestows him/her popularity and credibility in society. In studying the multidimensional attributes of a celebrity player, this study highlights how influential a celebrity player can be towards fans or consumers through endorsement. Previous studies

reported that a slight fault committed by the celebrity on the field or outside it will cause damage to brand image and its credibility in the eyes of the consumers (Abeza *et al.*, 2020; Ge and Humphreys, 2020; Knittel and Stango, 2014). Hence, it becomes important to understand a consumer mindset prior to their reaction to the information spread out about a celebrity. This study attempts to measure the consumers' perception towards the multidimensional personality attributes of a sports celebrity athlete and the brand endorsed. With the advancement of new technology and the rise of social media platforms, the role of celebrity has transformed and become more influential in sports marketing. The consumers are following closely celebrities' news that posted on social media (such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc) or traditional media (television or billboards). Social media facilitates such interaction of celebrities with their fans; making them more influential (Abeza *et al.*, 2014; Pegoraro and Jinnah, 2012). Do *et al.* (2015) investigate brands that endorsed exclusively via social media. They performed better in regard to consumer brand congruence and relationships with consumers. This study supports this finding and concludes that fans who follow their favorite celebrities are more emotionally attached to them. For that reason, consumers find congruence between the celebrity and endorsed brand; unlike a modest mismatch between the two (Fleck *et al.*, 2012). Gwinner and Eaton (1999) stated that the image of a celebrity can be transferred to a brand when a functional- or image-based similarity occurred. This study finds an image-based similarity between the celebrity player (Virat Kohli) and endorsed brand (American Tourister). Celebrity endorser generates a positive image of the endorsed brand in consumers' minds which influences their perceptions toward the endorsed brand and impacts their purchase intention.

The purpose of the first set of hypotheses (H1.1, H1.2, and H1.3) is to measure the consumers' perception of the various characteristics of celebrity athletes and their impact on their endorsed

brand. The study shows that the endorser (Virat Kohli), who is less congruent with the endorsed brand (American Tourister), has his positive traits transferred to the endorsed brand. Additionally, the enhanced brand image of the endorsed brand influences the purchase intention of the target customers. Such result challenges a study conducted by Lee and Koo (2015) concluding that without the endorser-brand congruence, it is not possible to transfer the positive image of the celebrity to the endorsed brand. In the second set of hypotheses (H2.1, H2.2, H2.3, H3, and H4), the study examines the consumers' perception towards endorser-brand congruence and its impact on endorsed brand image and credibility and ultimately on consumers' purchase intention. The results show a positive impact of CBC on EBC and TBI. Consumers find a decisive match between the celebrity and brand. The effect of such congruence is transferred to the endorsed brand and builds the image and credibility of the brand. However, this study finds a negative association between CBC and CPI. This is a realistic outcome since the match of celebrity personality with endorsed brand won't create a positive outcome for the endorsed brand. Again, this study reached to contradictory results with other studies that found a positive impact of celebrity brand congruence on consumer purchase decision (Fleck *et al.*, 2012; McCormick, 2018). The reason behind the contradictory result is the low purchasing ability of the middle-class consumers of India, and their habit to look at the credibility of the brand before making a purchase decision. In the last set of hypotheses (H3.1, and H4.1), the study uses EBC and TBI as mediators. The purpose is to measure the importance of brand credibility and image attributes of the brand as viewed by Indian consumers. Do consumers purchase the brand because their favorite celebrity endorses it, or they value the credibility of the brand? The negative impact of CBC on CPI shows that the endorser-product congruence factor was the only insignificant aspect for consumers. In fact, consumers give enough value to the brand credibility which mostly impacts their purchase intentions.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has provided a useful contribution in the field of sports celebrity advertising. Still, there are certain limitations exist which can be addressed in future studies. As per the findings of Ambroise *et al.* (2014), the influence of celebrity personality on consumers' behavior varies with the image of the brand and the type of celebrity profile. This study only considers the relationship between one celebrity athlete, "Virat Kohli", with a non-sport endorsed brand, "American Tourister", and ignores other types of celebrities like movie actors or fashion models. In such a case, the results may become different if the sports celebrity matched with the entirely congruent brand, or the profile of the celebrity athlete paired with the cost of the brand. Another limitation is that this study collected its data by targeting only young graduate and undergraduate university students. This might create biases in the study. Hence, it is recommended in future studies to collect data from a dispersed range of consumers belonging to different age categories in order to obtain comprehensive responses and to reach credible results that can be generalized.

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