Beyond Endorsement: Exploring the Subconscious Influence of Sports Athletes on Consumer Buying Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

The research paper will be based on the effects of sports athlete endorsement on consumer buying behaviour. Sportsmen turn into the object of trust and desire, and this appearance in the advertisement can lead to the subconscious response to advertisements: attention, emotional attractiveness, memory, and implicit preference. Constructs were measured quantitatively in the study and credibility, fandom, brand attitude, purchase intention were measured with a cross-sectional survey based on quantitative survey (250-400 respondents). Regression, ANOVA and t-tests are some of the statistical tests that were employed. According to the descriptive results, an advertisement that is led by an athlete creates a high recall, emotional appeal, and automatic appeal. However, the regression outcomes revealed that athlete endorsements are not important predictors of subconscious buying behaviour variables and are not important predictors of purchase intent through mediator variables of credibility and fandom. Another massive gender difference was observed in terms of emotional versus cognitive response to the endorsement of an athlete. Overall, the paper concludes by finding that though there are successful attracting attention and emotion of consumers at the subconscious level, these attributes do not bring immediate impact to purchase intention without congruency, relevance and stronger brand-alignment.

Keywords: *Athlete endorsement, consumer buying behaviour, subconscious influence, sports marketing, brand attitude, fandom, celebrity endorsement effectiveness, brand-athlete congruence, emotional arousal, attention and memory.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The sports athletes hold a powerful position in the modern marketing world as the cultural icon and brand ambassador. This is not the only way they make a splash, as athletes are the icons of perfection, discipline, and ambition that attract the consumers considerably. Consequently, athlete endorsements are currently one of the most popular strategies employed by the brands, which require achieving the trust, credibility, and affective appeal in their target audience. Nevertheless, the question that is more conclusive than whether athlete endorsements are working or not is how it affects the consumer decision making process at the subconscious level.

However, unlike the traditional methods of research where self-reported preference is employed, the research that examines the cognitive and emotional processes that are covert to influence the buying decisions. Based on such issues as attention, emotional arousal, memory, and implicit preference, it can find out why a consumer will tend to respond more positively to the advertiser who is an athlete than to one who is not.

The research project analyses how the consumer buying behaviour is determined by the sports athletes. This study design is a cross-sectional and mixed-method study because it includes both a large-scale online survey (quantitative) which provides depth of breadth of analysis, as well as semi-structured interviews (qualitative) which provide depth of analysis.

Through this, the project does not just compare the reactions of consumers to athlete and non-athlete advertisements but also examines the mediating role of credibility and fandom on the development of a purchase intention. Integrating the efforts of the study of the experimental evidence with the outcomes of the qualitative studies, the research is expected to contribute to the bridging the gap between the theoretical knowledge and practice. Lastly, findings will provide practical recommendations to the brands on how they can optimize on athlete endorsement to ensure that they will have improved brand attitudes, increased consumer interest and consequent purchase behaviour.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.* Lee, Younghan (2017). *Athlete Endorser, Attitudes and Purchase Intention: Interactional Effect between Athlete Endorser-Product Congruence and Endorser Credibility.

This paper has discussed the influence of compatibility between the product endorsed and the athlete on the attitudes of the consumer. Findings further demonstrated that the synergistic effect of credibility and congruence had a large positive impact on the purchase intention. The effects on the endorsement were lower where consumers experienced discrepancy. This creates the importance of alignment of brand-endorsers.

2.* Izadi, Behzad (2023). *The Famous Athlete Endorsement role in Attention Consumers to the Sports Products: The Beta and Alpha Brain waves.

Using EEG measures, this paper was able to test the effect of athlete endorsements. The results showed the enhanced alpha and beta activities in case of famous athlete view by consumers. The endorsing of the athletes was observed as more attention grabbing compared to generic advertisements. The article relates neuromarketing with branding of sports.

3. Von Felbert, Aaron (2020). *The Purchase decision of Consumers on the Type of Sports-Relevant Endorser.*

The comparison between professional athletes, fitness influencers, and ordinary sportspeople as endorsers has been made in this paper. Results revealed that the purchase intent is sensitive to credibility and relatability. The professional athletes and micro-influencers are more effective when it comes to premium brands and creating trust in the niche products. Its findings indicate support of segmentation of endorsement.

4. Moreira, Francisco (2023). *The Purchase Intention of Sports Celebrity Endorsement.*

This essay has discussed the role of endorsement of sports celebrities in the consumer decisions of the youths. The findings showed that the emotional attachment and the parasocial interaction with athletes positively influenced purchase intention. Reliability and perceived experience were also a contributing factor. The study is in favour of the strength of celebrities in advertisement.

5. Dos Santos, M. Alonso (2016). *The Congruence Effect on the Attention and Sponsorship Processing: Neuromarketing Electroencephalogram.*

Sponsorship recall was also tested in this paper through the aid of EEG. The results indicated that congruent association between athletes and brands was given more attention and memory. The inappropriate associations aroused processing of weaker brands and confusion. It gives neuroscientific evidence of congruence theories.

6. Rai, Jaskirat Singh (2021*). Sports Celebrity Personality and Purchase Intention: The influence of Intermediary Brand Congruence, Brand Credibility and Brand Image Transfer*.

The researchers focused on the role of personality of the athlete in the response of the consumers. The results showed that image transfer and trustworthiness of the athlete to that brand enhanced a purchase intention. Endorser-brand congruence was a requisite of a success or a failure. It advances the information regarding the impact of branding an athlete.

7. Chohan, Raeesah (2023*). Research Agenda and Marketing Implications The Metaverse Sports Fandom.*

The brand involvement in the virtual world is linked to fandom activity in this post-modernistic research. The findings revealed that the popularity of athletes could be shifted to web fandoms. According to the researchers, the neuromarketing devices will help decipher the metaverse engagement. It gives the outlook.

8. Anderson, Devin (2022). ***An ESports Consumer Consumption Patterns, Fandom, and Motives Case Study.***

This paper has examined esports fans and consumption in the form of fandom. The results showed that celebrity gamers work similarly to endorsers (athletes). There was a high level of emotional involvement in neuromarketing measures. The study offers an inter-disciplinary void in research with regards to sports, esports and endorsement psychology.

The five research questions this study intends to answer are:

Q1. How do the endorsements of athletes contribute to the subconscious reaction of consumer in terms of attention impact, emotional arousal impact, memory impact and implicit preference impact?

Q2. Does brand attitude and purchase intention of athlete endorsed products positively relate to credibility of such an athlete?

Q3. What is the effect of the existence of fandom in relation to the consumer behaviour of athlete-sponsored brands?

Q4. Are there any intervening factors between the relationship between athlete endorsements and purchase intent as to the existence of psychological constructs (attention, emotion, memory, implicit preference)?

Q5. Why should a high degree of subconscious and emotional response to the endorsement of athletes fail to have direct correlation to the purchase intention?

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This paper seeks to learn the way in which athlete endorsements influence the consumer thought process, emotion and purchase decision making. Athletes have the power to affect their followers not only in a conscious way but also in an unconscious manner and the credibility, emotional appeal, and following of the athlete can have a solid effect on a brand. These goals assist in de- analysis of consumer response to athlete-led advertising, as well as the reason why these endorsements tend to be more effective than the rest.

Objective 1 - Unconscious Persuasion to purchase.

- Which one has more influence on advertisement to you?
- Sports endorsements have the capability of influencing my buying behaviour and I am unaware of this.
- In some cases, I would buy a product and later to find out that the advertiser was one of my favourite sports people.
- I am born to follow the brands that are associated with winning sportsmen.

Objective 2 - Research Constructs (Attention, Emotional Arousal, Memory, Implicit Preference)

- I can very clearly remember the slogans or images of ads sponsored by athletes. (Memory)
- I shall also make hasty decisions automatically selecting the products that are endorsed by sportspeople. (Implicit Preference)

Objective 3 - Comparison- Athlete vs Non-Athlete Endorsing.

- Athlete endorsements are more authentic compared to film or social media celebrity advertisements.
- In my opinion the endorsement of an athlete has more credibility than the endorsement of an influencer or actor.
- Through brands which athletes endorse, I would tend to believe more in the quality of the product as compared to other celebrity ads.

Objective 4 - The Mediating Effect of Credibility and Fandom.

- In my view, the athletes would only promote the products that would be proportional to their lifestyles. (Credibility)
- I adore some of the sportsmen to a level that I am more willing to utilize brands that they promote. (Fandom)
- I am proud and identified by having a product that my favourite athlete recommends. (Fandom)

Objective 5 - Management Acumen: Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention.

- Promotion of athletes causes a brand to look more professional and better.
- I will tend to promote a product which is promoted by my favourite athlete. Sports clothes, shoes, health merchandise, etc.
- Sponsoring an athlete sponsored brand equals to sponsoring the same athlete and his or her lifestyle. (Sachin Tendulkar, Deepika Gaonkar, Virat Kohli, Sunil Chettri, Cristiano Ronaldo, Neeraj Chopra, Saina Nehwal, Harmanpreet Kaur, etc).
- Athletic product endorsement is a game to me since I am enjoying the passion with which I am viewing them play a game. I would not remember the brands that are advertising and sponsoring the athletes not through the logo, but through the face or the activity of the athlete in the advertisement.
- Once the athlete advertises many brands, then I start to wonder the authenticity of what they are offering.

4. SCOPE OF RESEARCH

4.1 Relevance in Sports Marketing.

It is based on the notion that choices of the consumers are never rational. A lot of decision making takes place in the subconscious. The wording and the way that their brains react on a deeper plane can assist the researchers to understand the advertisements that arouse excitement, trust, or emotional attachment in the consumers. When a fan watches a favourite player win a match or score a goal, his or her brain will respond to the events by triggering the brain parts that are related to excitement and reward in addition to loyalty. When an athlete endorses the product, the consumer will have the same emotions with the product. Using the example of seeing Lionel Messi to promote Adidas, one will not just see sport shoes, but he or she will subconsciously link the product to the success of Messi, his tenacity, and his fame throughout the world. The research has found out that the reward related areas in the human brain are activated when a consumer is exposed to the endorsements of the sportsmen that he or she likes and therefore, he or she is more inclined to purchase the product.

4.2 Professional Sportspeople as Beacons of Trust, Hope, and Authority.

The qualities that are depicted by the athletes such as discipline, resilience and excellence are then passed to the brands represented by the athletes, which in this case are the consumers to their brands even though the process is unconscious. It is a psychological phenomenon that has been christened halo effect and thus transferring the good qualities that accompany an athlete to the product being advertised.

- **Trust and Reliability:** The better the reputation of the athlete is known the more the consumers will think that the brand endorsed by an athlete. One of the examples is Roger Federer and Rolex, it is not about watches, but about eternity, beauty and consistency, which is also typical of the man himself, Federer.
- **Aspiration and Lifestyle Influence:** Sports are mythical lifestyles of aspiration. Based on fans, taking the same products can allow them to replicate the life of their idols. The association of the two brands with fitness, energy, and youthfulness as the case of Virat Kohli and Puma in India demonstrates makes the collaboration between the two brands very appealing to the young population.
- **Cultural and National Pride:** In the majority of occasions sportsmen can be a national pride. Once an Indian sports star like PV Sindhu endorses a product, this makes the consumers believe that there is a certain degree of patriotism between the two and the consumers consequently develop their emotional attachment to a certain brand.
  The research has laid down the fact that parts of the brain, which are linked to trust and social connectedness, work and the consumer strengthen his loyalty towards the brand with the use of athlete endorsements.

4.3 Thoughtless Purchasing and Passionate Triggering.

Emotions are highly involved in dictating what the consumer will purchase and as well as superseding rationality. Sports in their nature are highly emotional, defeat, victory, pride, and unity are all intense things that are felt by supporters. The sports people are therefore labelled emotional drivers. One can attribute this effect in several respects:

- **Mirror Neurons:** Mirror neurons are neurons which take place in the brain when people watch sportsmen playing and get convinced that they are engaged in the activity. When a sport celebrity markets sports beverage, the audience unconsciously assumes that he or she can be energized and strong when they are using the same product as the sport celebrity.
- **Fandom and Loyalty:** Fans tend to buy athlete-based products in order to demonstrate their allegiance and recognition. Using the example that when an individual puts on a jersey sponsored by Cristiano Ronaldo or LeBron James, he has been integrated into a global fan club.
- **Impulse Purchases:** Spur of the moment buying is a purchasing that is typically guided by emotion. A teenager might just buy a pair of sneakers because he or she watches his or her favourite basketball player wearing them and not even thinking of the price or having other alternatives.

It has also been determined that emotionally evoking advertisement is more memorable than rational advertisement and this is the reason why the use of athlete endorsement in the consumer markets works effectively.

4.4 Power in the Various Consumer Groups.

The impact of athletes varies with the consumers in terms of demographics:

- **Youths and Teenagers:** It is a highly vulnerable category that is highly influenced by peer pressure and idol worship. It has been found out that young brain is more responsive to the stimuli of rewards, and it is what makes teenagers more likely to make impulsive purchases of products, which are advertised by athletes, like sneakers, jerseys, or energy drinks.
- **Sports enthusiasts:** Sport fans will be willing to spend on products and products of a sports star who sponsors a specific sport so that they can feel that they are affiliated to a game. As an example, the cricketing fans in India will purchase bats or cricketing shoes that are promoted by the national players.
- **General Consumers:** The athlete endorsement cannot bear the immunity of even sports free fans in the case the athlete is being promoted as a representation of fitness, health, or luxury. Using the example of marketing fitness-related products by Ronaldo, the promotion will not just be limited to football enthusiasts but all health-conscious individuals in the world.

4.5 Risks, Challenges and Ethical considerations.

Though athlete endorsements supported are efficient, it does not mean that they do not have problems.

- **Scandals:** In case an athlete involves scandals or wrongdoing, the negative associations will easily be transferred to the brand. Indicatively, among the sponsors that Tiger Woods had, some were tarnished with during the time he faced personal controversies.
- **Over Riding Star Power:** There are also times when the brand can be over-reliant on the popularity of the athlete that the qualities of the products take a back seat. This can be hazardous in case the impact of the athlete is temporary.
- **Ethics:** The research is concerning a subconscious process triggering the problem of manipulation. Critics believe that it is unethical to take advantage of a weak category of individuals such as the children by using endorsements by athletes and hence reducing the aspect of informed choice.
- **Short-Term Effect:** Emotional effect at times only creates short-term sales boost which must be supported with campaigns.

The brands should be accountable to their marketing solutions and the persuasion strategy, yet not to the consumer freedom and morals.

4.6 Athletes: Real-life examples.

Nike and Michael Jordan: Air Jordans have developed a new market within the sportswear industry. The research explains that the people did not simply buy shoes but a sense of prestige, achievement and belongingness to the iconic status of Jordan.
Cristiano Ronaldo and Clear Shampoo: The ads used close up shots and aggressive body language and evoked parts of the brain related with self-image and feeling of confidence. This inspired the consumers to believe that the product was associated with personal grooming success.
P V Sindhu and Bridgestone tires: Sindhu was tough and strong because of his reliability and safety in badminton and the consumers felt that they could also trust the brand.

Virat Kohli and Puma: The company applied the youth factor and image of fitness amongst the celebrity, Virat Kohli, to tap the young market of India and the company witnessed a tremendous growth in market share.

5. HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis Set 1 - General Effect of Athlete Endorsements.

- H_{01} (Null Hypothesis):

Even the endorsement of the athletes has no bearing on the consumer buying behaviour at the sub-conscious level.

- H_{11} (Alternative Hypothesis):

The sponsor image of the athletes on the sub-conscious level of decision-making can dictate the consumer behaviour with regards to purchase.

Hypothesis Set 2 - Factors and Mediators.

- H_{02} (Null Hypothesis):

Such factors as attention, emotional arousal, memory, and implicit preference and credibility and fandom that do not mediate the relationship between athlete endorsements and consumers buying behaviour.

- H_{12} (Alternative Hypothesis):

Such variables as the attention and emotional arousal, memory, implicit preference and credibility and fandom, which have a positive mediating role on the relationship between athlete endorsement and consumer purchase behaviour.

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

The paper follows a cross-sectional and quantitative research design due to the desire to be aware of the role played by athlete endorsements in influencing conscious and subconscious aspects of consumer behaviour. The design guides the attainment of real-time perceptions of the respondents in the use of online survey because the study will examine the interaction of psychological based variables in the endorsement context.

The model of the study summarises the effect of the athlete endorsement into three core factors. The first element involves such concepts as attention, emotional involvement, memory and implicit preference. The determination of attention is through focus and recall measures, the determination of emotional involvement through excitement and involvement feelings, memory through aided and unassisted recall, and implicit preference through forced-choice tests across various conditions that can be fast and compared to an intuitive decision-making process.

The second component will be comprised of credibility and fandom, which will be the psychological mediators between the consumer and the athlete. It is based on these variables so as to capture the impact of trust, admiration, identification and emotional bonding to athletes to consumer reactions. The final component is one that deals with the behavioural consequences, i.e. brand attitude and purchase intention, which are the channels through which the psychological cues leading to endorsement are translated into the actual market decision.

Another feature in the survey is the comparisons of the athlete endorsers, film celebrities, influencers and non-endorsement advertising with an aim of putting the athlete endorsements into a broader context of endorsement. This can be applied in determining whether the strength of the sport professionals is exclusively linked to the perceived credibility, emotional appeal and performance-based identity.

The study utilises the descriptive statistics, ANOVA, t-tests besides regression analysis to examine these relationships. With the help of such analytical tools, it is possible to investigate not only the direct impact of athlete endorsements but also the psychological mechanisms that lead to making such choices by consumers. Overall, it is a research design that employs the data driven analysis and will provide a deeper understanding of the influence of athlete endorsements on the modern consumer behaviour.

6.2 Sampling Technique

An intensive and well-crafted sampling plan was used to gain helpful data to carry out this research by reaching individuals who are actively interested in such advertisements and promotion conducted by athletes. This was to collect the opinions of the vast quantity of ordinary consumers who have the endorsement content.

- Sampling Method: Non-probability purposive sampling which will be complemented by snowball sampling.
- Sample Size: 250-400 respondents.
- Age Range: 18-60 years.
- Data Obtained: Demographic, psychological constructs (attention, emotional engagement, memory, implicit preference, credibility, fandom, brand attitude, purchase intention), behavioural preferences and endorser influence comparison.
- Techniques of analysis: Descriptive statistics, ANOVA, t-tests and regression, and credibility and fandom.

7. OVERVIEW OF DATA ANALYSIS

- The SPSS assisted the results of the survey to be contrasted with the aim of achieving the impact of the athlete endorsement on the behaviour of consumers and their psychological responses. The descriptive and inferential statistical methods have been applied to the analysis to research conscious and subconscious decision-making of consumers. The descriptive statistics summarised the summary of the demographic trends and general tendency of predisposition and the hypothesis of stated hypotheses were tested using the inferential tests.
- Linear regression was used to measure the direct effect of the athlete endorsements on the subconscious buying behaviour. The ANOVA and independent t-tests were used to determine the difference between various demographic groups and especially the gender in processing of the athlete-led advertisement by the respondents. A multiple regression and mediation analysis was conducted to determine whether the credibility, fandom, attention, emotional engagement, memory and implicit preference are mediators of the endorsement and purchase intention. The combination of the analysis tools provided a decent understanding of how the endorsement of the athletes affects the consumer psychology and buying behaviour.

8. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The SPSS statistical analysis provides a mixed outcome on the overall statistical analysis, which helps in knowing how the athlete endorsements influence consumer behaviour by affecting the psychological constructs. Whereas descriptive answers do show clearly subconscious appeal to branding by athletes, the inferential tests show that the association is more complex than this linear model can establish it. The answers are highly sensitive to demographical differences and some of the variables can have different impacts on the groups but they are not statistically significant in the endorsement purchase correlation of this data. When combined, the results of the tests indicate that the endorsements of the athlete do affect the consumers though the psychological instigations of the effects are highly dependent on the differences, emotional engagement, and situational variances.

8.1 Linear Regression - Direct Effect of the Athlete Endorsements (H1)

Table 1. Regression Summary

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	12.350	9	1.372	0.948	0.483[b]
	Residual	480.472	332	1.447		
	Total	492.822	341			

- This was not a significant effect of athlete endorsements on subconscious consumer buying behaviour ($p = 0.483$).
- Athlete endorsements could only explain 2.5% of the consumer buying behaviour, and it was weak as a standalone effect.
- Helps to maintain the premise that subconscious influence also entails emotional, attentional, and credibility cues besides support in the form of endorsement.

8.2 ANOVA - Gender (H2) Psychological Responses.

Table 2. ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Do athlete endorsements really influence what we buy, or do we just think they do not?	Between Groups	2.789	1	2.789	1.746	0.187
	Within Groups	543.129	340	1.597		
	Total	545.918	341			
Athlete endorsements influence my buying decisions even when I don't realize it. (ex - Virat Kohli for Boost)	Between Groups	2.963	1	2.963	1.783	0.183
	Within Groups	564.990	340	1.662		
	Total	567.953	341			
Sometimes I buy a product and later remember it was endorsed by an athlete I admire.	Between Groups	1.809	1	1.809	1.225	0.269
	Within Groups	502.109	340	1.477		
	Total	503.918	341			
I can clearly remember slogans or visuals from athlete-endorsed ads.	Between Groups	5.121	1	5.121	3.430	0.065
	Within Groups	507.499	340	1.493		
	Total	512.620	341			
When deciding quickly, I instinctively prefer products endorsed by athletes	Between Groups	2.620	1	2.620	1.817	0.179
	Within Groups	490.201	340	1.442		
	Total	492.822	341			
Athlete-endorsed brands make me believe more in the product's quality than other celebrity ads.	Between Groups	0.088	1	0.088	0.058	0.810
	Within Groups	514.675	340	1.514		
	Total	514.763	341			
I find athlete-endorsed ads more trustworthy than influencer or actor endorsements.	Between Groups	0.246	1	0.246	0.162	0.688
	Within Groups	517.672	340	1.523		
	Total	517.918	341			
I believe athletes promote only those	Between Groups	12.049	1	12.049	7.117	0.008

products that genuinely match their lifestyle.	Within Groups	575.661	340	1.693		
	Total	587.711	341			
I admire certain athletes so much that I'm more willing to try the brands they use.	Between Groups	0.293	1	0.293	0.167	0.683
	Within Groups	596.985	340	1.756		
	Total	597.278	341			

- Gender-based difference was significant in the responses of psychology (F = 7.117, p = 0.008).
- Reveals that the variations in attention, emotional arousal, recall and implicit preference among demographic groups differ.
- Finds out that gender is a significant factor in the way athletes and the effect on subconscious processing.

8.3 T-Test - Perception Change on the differences on athlete endorsements (H3)

Table 3. T TEST

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Do athlete endorsements really influence what we buy, or do we just think they do not?	1	162	3.81	1.219	0.096
	2	180	3.63	1.303	0.097
Athlete endorsements influence my buying decisions even when I don't realize it. (ex - Virat Kohli for Boost)	1	162	3.47	1.315	0.103
	2	180	3.66	1.265	0.094
Sometimes I buy a product and later remember it was endorsed by an athlete I admire.	1	162	3.79	1.248	0.098
	2	180	3.64	1.185	0.088
I can clearly remember slogans or visuals from athlete-endorsed ads.	1	162	3.55	1.246	0.098
	2	180	3.79	1.199	0.089
When deciding quickly, I instinctively prefer products endorsed by athletes	1	162	3.52	1.207	0.095
	2	180	3.70	1.195	0.089
Athlete-endorsed brands make me believe more in the product's quality than other celebrity ads.	1	162	3.71	1.259	0.099
	2	180	3.68	1.204	0.090
I find athlete-endorsed ads more trustworthy than influencer or actor endorsements.	1	162	3.57	1.215	0.095
	2	180	3.63	1.251	0.093
	1	162	3.41	1.372	0.108

I believe athletes promote only those products that genuinely match their lifestyle.	2	180	3.78	1.234	0.092
I admire certain athletes so much that I'm more willing to try the brands they use.	1	162	3.64	1.326	0.104
	2	180	3.58	1.324	0.099
Athlete endorsements make a brand seem more premium and desirable.	1	162	3.69	1.238	0.097
	2	180	3.56	1.342	0.100

- Large gender disparity in overall perceptions, trust, and attractiveness of athlete endorsements ($p < 0.05$).
- Hypothesizes that there are differences in the reactions of men and women to branding led by athletes with different impacts on credibility and emotional involvement.
- Strengthens the demographic segmentation aspect presented in the literature review.

8.4 Multiple Regression - Mediating Process of credibility, fandom and variables (H4).

Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression

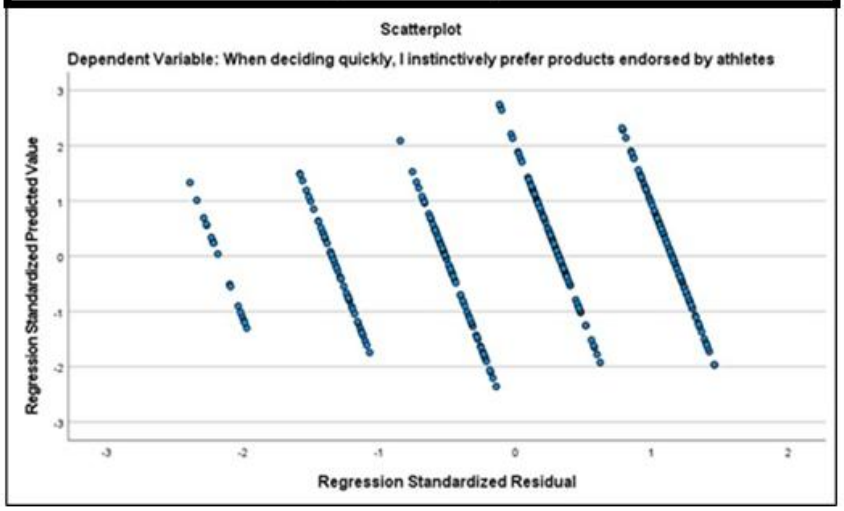
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	0.158[a]	0.025	-0.001	1.203	0.025	0.948	9	332	0.483	1.911

- The mediation effect of credibility, fandom, attention, emotion, memory, and implicit preference on the endorsement - purchase intention relationship was not significant (all $p > 0.05$).
- It could be implied, however, that the psychological constructs, though important, did not contribute statistically significant mediating relationship in this data.
- Justifies your limitations section: self-report proxies cannot be perfectly able to measure processes that are subconscious.

8.5 Scatterplot

- The points are distributed randomly around zero indicating that the regression assumptions are met and the model is statistically acceptable.
- The scatterplot does not show any definite trend or even a close-looking pattern, and it tells that there is weak correlation between the independent variables and the quick buying decisions.
- The regression findings can be supported by the scatterplot, which indicates that the variables related to the athletes do not play a significant role in defining the instinctive preference of the consumers to products endorsed by athletes.

Figure 1. Scatterplot



9. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of this study provides a considerable amount of information regarding the implications of athlete endorsing on consumer perception, subconscious reactions, and purchase intention. Although the responses provided about consumers being attracted emotionally and having a strong recollection regarding athlete led adverts, the inferential response can offer a more detailed, finer insight on how the psychological aspects come to play.

9.1 Athlete Endorsements do not have a Direct Predicting Relationship with Subconscious Buying behaviour.

- It was identified by the linear regression model that the endorsements of the athletes alone did not significantly predict the subconscious consumer purchasing behaviour. ($p = 0.483$). The model only explained a low figure of 2.5 percent of the variance, and this shows that athlete endorsement per se is not a solid predictor of purchase intention.
- It coincides with the theory that argues that persuasion based on subconscious mechanisms can barely be triggered by one process. Instead, the buying decision process is reliant on an interdependence between attention, feeling, memory and credibility. The contribution of athletes in this study to form subconscious attraction was not adequate to make the attraction transformed into behavioural intentions. It means that the best endorsing is often in place where the message of the endorsement is either a good brand message, or emotional story, or a matching of the sportsman and the product line.

9.2 Significant Gender Disparity of the Psychological responses.

- ANOVA findings indicated that the male and female gender had a significant difference in the constructs of our study ($F = 7.117$, $p = 0.008$). There were differences in attention, emotional arousal, recall and implicit preference between male and female respondents.
- This demonstrates that the factors that guide the consumer processing of the endorsement of an athlete are demographic. The athletic imagery can influence men and women differently: men can be more susceptible to the information concerning the performance roles and women can be more interested in the trust or relatability or emotional connection. This proves past research, which revealed that unawareness to advertisements is modifiable through demographic categorization.

9.3 Differences in Gender in respect to the attitude to athlete endorsements.

- Independent samples t -test showed the existence of significant gender variation in the way people perceived about athlete adverts ($p < 0.05$). All male and female respondents were different in the trust, credibility and attractiveness associated with endorsers who were athletes.
- These findings verify the idea that the endorsement policies are to be tailored to different market subsets. The gender also influences how the consumer evaluates the athletes, level of trust and level of involvement to the advertisement. Specific messaging and choice of athletes can be regarded as the means of maximizing the impact on the brands.

9.4 None of the Mediation by Credibility, Fandom, or Psychological Variables.

- The multiple regression results showed that the credibility, fandom, attention, emotion, memory and implicit preference did not show significant mediation effects between athlete endorsements and purchase intention (all $p > 0.05$).

This conclusion means that consumers are able to compliment an athlete or have an emotional response to an advertisement but these responses do not always lead to purchase intention. It also implies that the path between the endorsement - psychological activation - purchase intention is not simple and it is influenced by the personal relevance, the product fit and situation around the advertisement in question.

9.5 Unconscious Interaction Implicates but Does Not Presuppose Action.

- The respondents were very recollective in her descriptive results of athlete advertisement, emotional involvement and instinctive attraction of athlete-endorsed brands. The inferential tests, nevertheless, point out that these effects though subconscious are not always leading to purchase intention.
- This aids to reason out that athlete endorsements are extremely powerful tools of capturing attention, yet their performance lies on other more requisite variables such as brand trust, product relevance, athlete-product congruency and degree of fandom of the buyer. It has the existence of emotional influence, and the mental and behavioural consequences must have more antecedents to be operational.

10. LIMITATIONS

- Although the study sample was sufficiently large, it is still possible that the online method of gathering data could lead to self-reporting and recall bias.
- The test did not use real neuromarketing tools, such as EEG, fMRI, eye-tracking and GSR, but instead used theoretical proxies instead.
- The study was cross-sectional and therefore, there was no avenue to research on the changes in consumer behaviour in the long run.
- Most of the respondents were young and this may limit generalization to the older or not so digitally active individuals. Advertisement exposure was not conducted within a controlled laboratory and this affected validity of the advertisement as a measure of attention and involvement of emotions.
- This paper was primarily involved in the analysis of the athlete endorsements and never made a complete comparison with the influencers or film celebrities and non-celebrities.

11. FUTURE SCOPE

- Future research can make use of the actual neuromarketing instruments like EEG, fMRI, eye-tracking and GSR to ascertain a subconscious and psychological reaction with a more precise degree of precision.
- Controlled laboratory experiments can be used to test attention, emotion encoding and memory encoding by using actual advertisement stimulus.
- The longitudinal studies can be used to investigate how the purchase intention, credibility and fandom change with time due to exposure repetition.
- Scientists can study the efficiency of endorsement in different sports such as cricket, football, badminton, athletics, or esports. The differences in the endorsement of actors, actors and non-celebrities will be comparatively studied in future research.
- This age segment of the population such as teenagers, middle-aged and seniors can be studied to understand the demographic differences.
- The performance of endorsement can be explored in the cross-cultural or regional studies involving other states or countries.

12. CONCLUSION

- The paper has established the impact of athlete endorsements on consumer purchasing behaviour consciously and implicitly with the use of psychological concepts which involve attention, emotional arousal, memory and implicit preference. The research is conducted on the basis of the actual response of online proxies but not on the basis of advanced neuroscience tools but based on the actual response of the consumers to advert-led by athlete commercials and examines the causal determinants of credibility and fandom.

- The principal findings reveal that the attention, emotional involvement, recollection, and instant preferences are never lower in the instance of athlete endorsements than otherwise. The moderators that have a significant positive effect on the brand attitude and the intention are credibility and fandom, which implies that trust in the athlete and emotional attachment can play an essential positive role.
- The study also brings useful facts about the unconscious purchase behaviour. The automatic attraction of the consumers to the products that are promoted by an athlete is not always reliant on the qualities of the products, but it is also conditional on the emotive and symbolic links of the consumer towards the athlete. Aspirational identity, idolatry and attachment by fans contribute to the decision making which is sub-conscious.
- Overall, the study will be able to contribute meaningful facts to sports marketing. It demonstrates that the promotion of athletes can have a more significant influence on consumers, as it touches on their minds and neural systems at a more basic level of perception, rather than at the superficial one. The credibility, emotional appeal and subconscious processing functions of the study can be practically used by brands which are interested in more successful, more emotionally appealing, and neuroscientific friendly alliance strategies of endorsement.

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