

Delineating the role of endorser's perceived qualities and consumer characteristics on celebrity endorsement effectiveness

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The study examined the influence of both, endorser's credibility qualities such as expertise and trustworthiness, and consumers' characteristics such as gender and team identification on endorsement effectiveness expressed as purchase intentions. A survey quasi-experimental research design was used in the context of sport celebrity endorsement. Data were collected from 289 respondents via a convenience sample. The findings indicated gender differences only on team identification and not on endorsers' perceived qualities or on endorsement effectiveness. Team identification differences had a significant impact on purchase intentions while marginally affected athletes' credibility. Of the two examined elements of credibility, trustworthiness constitutes a significant differentiation factor for purchase intentions. The study provides several theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: sport endorsement; purchase intentions; team identification; trustworthiness; expertise

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Introduction

On the verge of a new era, where economic recession is part of a persons' everyday vocabulary, businesses are struggling to differentiate in order to gain competitive advantage. Nowadays, celebrity endorsement is a practice employed by several companies as part of their marketing communication strategy (Crutchfield 2010). Plethora of commercials aired on television includes a famous person. For example 14-19% of all commercials in the US (Plank 2012), 20% in the UK (Erdogan, Baker and Tagg 2001) and 70% in Japan (Temperley and Tangen 2006) use celebrity endorsements. Evidence from the UK Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) databank shows that the percentage of celebrity commercials that the company is commissioned to evaluate increased steadily, exhibiting a four-year average increase from 6% in 1990 to 14% in 2002 (Pringle and Binet 2005).

Early research on the topic has empirically demonstrated the benefits of celebrity endorsement (Friedman and Friedman 1979). Recently, the topic has been resurfaced in the literature by examining its application from new angles (AceMetrix 2010). Recent studies have linked celebrity endorsement to positive attitude towards the product (Till, Stanley and Priluck 2008), to positive word of mouth (Bush, Martin and Bush 2004), increased sales (Crutchfield 2010; Elberse and Verleun 2012), enhanced stock market value (Fizel, McNeil and Smaby 2008; Elberse and Verleun 2012) and brand equity (Spry, Pappu and Cornwell 2011).

Most of the above studies have focused either on endorser's characteristics treating celebrities as brands or on product attributes disregarding the role of consumer characteristics and ignoring previous calls for "a social-identity approach to consumption decision making" (Reed 2002, 260).

The purpose of this study is to bridge this gap by examining the role of celebrity endorser's qualities and consumer characteristics on endorsement effectiveness. Specifically, within the context of sport celebrity endorsement, the study examines the influences of two endorser's credibility qualities, expertise and trustworthiness along with consumer characteristics such as gender and team identification on the endorsed product purchase intentions.

The contribution of this study relies on the inclusion of consumer characteristics in understanding how endorsement operates (most previous research examines endorser's characteristics) and the examination of two variables that have been neglected so far in the endorsement literature named gender and team identification.

Gender is an under-investigated construct in the endorsement literature although it has been previously linked to deviations in sport-related consumer behavior. For example, research findings support that gender differences exist on sport fandom and team identification levels (Theodorakis and Wann 2008). In the endorsement context, gender has been found to influence endorsers preferences (Boyd and Shank 2004; Tingchi Liu and Brock 2011). These studies have presumed gender influences on sport celebrity endorsement's effectiveness (Peetz, Parks and Spencer 2004) however they have never empirically tested its effects.

Therefore, this study contributes to the endorsement literature by delineating the role of gender on sport endorsement qualities and effectiveness.

Furthermore, this is the first empirical manifestation of the role of team-identification, as a characteristic of a consumer's collective self within the social identity context (Hogg and Vaughan 2008), on sport celebrity endorsement qualities and purchase intentions for the

endorsed product. **Previous research** examined the influence of team identification on perceptions of an athlete image (Lake, Reece and Rifon 2010) and team-related consumption behavior (Fink, Cunningham and Kensicki 2004; Carlson and Donovan 2008). This study enriches the literature on the role of team identification in the context of sport endorsement and provides insights into its influence on various endorsement-related variables.

We chose to study sport figures because they represent 1/3 of total product endorsers (Stone, Joseph and Jones 2003; Ruihley, Runyan and Lear 2010; Geldi 2009) and are considered celebrities. For example, sixteen athletes made it to the Forbes 100 Celebrity list in 2011 with Tiger Woods and LeBron James taking the twelfth and thirteenth place respectively (Pomerantz 2012).

Moreover in the country where the study took place sports is one of the few professions whose representatives have a celebrity status not only domestically but within the European if not global landscape. This comes as a result of the Olympic Games hosted in Athens in 2004 and national teams' successes (first place in the European Championship in 2004 for the Greek soccer team, first place in in the European Championship in 2005 and second in the world championship in 2006 for the basketball team)

Regarding the geographical orientation, with the majority of academic studies on endorsement being conducted in the US and because European data imply that cultural differences can be responsible for variations in endorsement outcomes (Pringle and Binet 2005; Silvera and Austad 2004) we chose the European context as this study's starting point. Our aim is to build on previous results in order to extend the applicability of endorsement outcomes while simultaneously we outline how the general patterns are modified due to cultural differences.

The paper is organized as follows. First, a review of literature is presented along with the study hypotheses. Then, the method and analysis of the study are presented. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings, the limitations of the study and future research recommendations.

Literature review

According to McCracken (1989) celebrity endorsement is the process where a famous individual uses the public recognition he/she enjoys on behalf of a consumer good through advertising. It is a very common promotional practice used by companies as part of their marketing communications strategy to support their brands.

Celebrity advertisements have become so popular because they provide several communication benefits. For example, they assist in attracting audience attention (Kamen, Azhari and Kragh 1975; Koernig and Boyd 2009) and preventing consumers from zapping (Miciak and Shanklin 1994) through their presumed “stopping power” (Belch and Belch 2011, 175). Moreover, having a celebrity starring in an advertisement, creates more positive attitude towards the product (Atkin and Block 1983; Till and Busler 2000; Till, Stanley and Priluck 2008) higher brand recall (Friedman and Friedman 1979), positive word of mouth (Bush, Martin and Bush 2004) and higher purchase intentions (Friedman, Termini and Washington 1977; Kamins 1990; Ohanian 1991). It is supported that celebrity endorsements lead to consumer behavioral intentions especially when it comes to products related to taste, including psychological and non-financial risk (Friedman and Friedman 1979). More importantly, recent empirical evidence suggests that brands endorsed by celebrities create approximately 20% increases in sales (Crutchfield 2010).

Under the spectrum of integrated marketing communications, celebrity endorsement can work as a useful tool for building brand equity for a product (Seno and Lukas 2007; Spry, Pappu and Cornwell 2011). The experimental study of Spry, Pappu and Cornwell (2011) demonstrates that an endorser perceived as highly credible affects positively the perceived brands' credibility, which works as a mediating factor in impacting positively consumer-based brand equity. The abovementioned study, unlike the majority of the literature (Friedman and Friedman 1979; McCracken 1989; Till and Busler 2000; Till, Stanley and Priluck 2008) uses data gathered in Australia.

In general, research shows that in countries other than the US, celebrity endorsements have significantly smaller influence on the targeted audience (Pringle and Binet 2005; Amos, Holmes and Strutton 2008) due to the differences in the cultural context (Silvera and Austad 2004). For example, it has been supported that endorsement might not be as effective in Europe because consumers do not believe that celebrities truly like the product and consider that their motives are driven by financial rewards (Silvera and Austad 2004). Therefore, the practice of celebrity endorsement and its effectiveness is questioned in other country contexts and further research is needed to confirm or disconfirm the findings of these studies.

Sport celebrity endorsement

Sport celebrities are a frequently used category in endorsement deals. According to McCracken (1989), sport endorsement refers to the use of famous athletes or coaches to suggest or appear with a product in an advertisement (Lear, Runyan and Whitaker 2009). Often, even retired or deceased sportspeople are also used as product endorsers (Costanzo and Goodnight 2005).

Dyson and Turco (1998) noted that in 11% of all endorsement deals shown on American TV during 1998 starred athletes. Lear, Runyan and Whitaker (2009) in a content analysis of Sports Illustrated magazine for the time period 2001-2006, recorded a rise of 54% in the use of sport celebrities as product endorsers compared to the period 1993-1998 (Stone, Joseph and Jones 2003) and concluded that 32% of the professionals in product advertisements were athletes. The above findings were partially confirmed by a replication study which showed that 28.64% of celebrity endorsers were athletes for the period 2001-2006 (Ruihley, Runyan and Lear 2010).

Athletes seem to dominate celebrity endorsement deals over other professional categories. This is due to their “universal popularity and clean images” (Boyd and Shank 2004) and “athletic star power” (Braunstein and Zhang 2005). Consistent with this view, McCutcheon, Lange and Houran (2002) suggest that sport celebrities are worshipped more intensely than famous actors or other famous personalities. This phenomenon comes as a result of sports celebrities’ “strong endorsement depth” indicating that athletes are perceived to have a narrower thus deeper value set as compared to their entertainment counterparts (Hung, Chan and Tse 2011).

In addition, the increased use of sport endorsement can be partially explained by the undeniable growth of the sports industry where many sports and their representatives have become major celebrities (e.g. Tiger Woods and David Beckham) of the contemporary media culture (Bush, Martin and Bush 2004). This practice has been significantly strengthened by the boost of both cable networks and internet as global media outlets (Ruihley, Runyan and Lear 2010).

The advantages and disadvantages of sport celebrity endorsements

The literature refers to sports celebrity endorsement as a billion dollar business. For example, the athletes participating in advertising campaigns received cumulatively \$897 million in the U.S. (Koernig and Boyd 2009). Moreover, it has been claimed that successful endorsers like Tiger Woods earn more money from advertising deals than they do from their regular salaries (Stone, Joseph and Jones 2003).

The large amounts of money invested in sport celebrity endorsement can be explained by its effectiveness. Sport endorsements are related to increasing sales both in absolute value and as compared to competing brands while athlete's achievements can boost sales and stock returns (Elberse and Verleun 2012). Elberse and Verleun (2012) demonstrate that celebrity athletes generate a 4% increase in sales of endorsed brands which corresponds to approximately \$10 million in additional sales annually. Moreover, athletes' major accomplishments and "winning" reputation can boost sales. It has been estimated that the difference between the number one-ranked athlete and someone ranked tenth is about \$60,000 in weekly sales and 0.08% in stock returns (Elberse and Verleun 2012).

In addition, Yoon and Choi (2005) report higher purchase intentions towards a sport product endorsed by a sport celebrity than if it appeared alone in the advertisement. Koernig and Boyd (2009) confirm that sport endorsement is more effective in sport products than other types of endorsements. The findings of their study indicate that when a sport product is endorsed by an athlete, consumers' attitudes towards the ad and the brand are more positive and purchase intentions are higher, compared to the use of non-athlete endorsers. In a study among teenagers, athletes recognized as role models were found to create positive word-of-mouth in favor of the product and improved attitude towards the brand (Bush, Martin and Bush 2004).

Moreover; sport celebrity endorsement has evolved to a strategic choice for certain brands. For example, Kevin Plank a former football player and owner of Under Armour used to provide free T-shirt samples to professional athletes aiming to brand building through word-of-mouth. He insists on this strategy and spends millions of dollars on endorsement deals with sport superstars like Tom Brady while he manages to have a net income of \$97 millions for his company (Plank 2012).

Although there are obvious advantages to sport endorsements, one cannot ignore its risks and disadvantages. To begin with, the most obvious one is the financial cost of such an investment. For example, Maria Sharapova's eight-year endorsement deal with Nike reached \$70 million (Cambers 2010), a considerable amount of money. Furthermore, a recent study by Fizel, McNeil and Smaby (2008) investigated 148 conventional athlete endorsement contract announcements and reported no significant effects on stock returns.

Second problem is the "vampire effect" where a celebrity overshadows the advertised product (Evans 1988). Furthermore, multi-endorsement of various products by one athlete has a negative effect on his/her trustworthiness and likeability and eventually on the attitude towards the ad and the brand (Tripp, Jensen and Carlson 1994, Hung, Chan and Tse 2011).

Finally, negative information related to the endorser can be the most damaging uncontrollable factor for an endorsement deal (Erdogan, Baker and Tagg 2001). Scandals of marriage infidelity, drug use or even criminal accusations have lead companies to discontinue or defer a celebrity endorsement relationship (Miller and Laczniak 2011). Either way the company shoulders the risks and related cost in brand image or money. It is shown that the less the consumers know about the product, the more damage is caused by negative information related to the celebrity endorser (Till and Shimp 1998).

Research hypotheses

The effect of endorser's qualities on endorsement effectiveness

The profile of the recruited celebrity has attracted research attention in the endorsement literature. Endorser's qualities such as attractiveness (Ohanian 1991; Till and Busler 2000; Klucharev, Smidts and Fernández 2008), status quo, dynamism credibility (McCracken 1989) and credibility (Amos, Holmes and Strutton 2008; Lafferty, Goldsmith and Newell 2002) have been examined in the literature.

The source credibility model (Hovland and Weiss 1951) constitutes the basic theoretical approach in endorsement. Credibility plays a very important role in the endorsement's effectiveness (Amos, Holmes and Strutton 2008) because not only it assists in creating more positive attitude towards the advertisement through opinion change (Hovland and Weiss 1951) but it also has an indirect effect on the overall attitude towards the brand and on consumers' purchase intentions (Lafferty, Goldsmith and Newell 2002). Credibility consists of two elements: expertise and trustworthiness. Expertise refers to the capability of the source to assert valid arguments (McCracken 1989). Recent findings from social cognitive neuroscientists using functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging sessions (fMRI) demonstrate that experts "modulate the activity in a set of brain regions involved in trustful behavior learning and declarative memory encoding that probably enables effective persuasion" (Klucharev, Smidts and Fernández 2008, 364). Moreover celebrity's perceived expertise has been shown to enhance purchase intentions (Ohanian 1991). Trustworthiness refers to the degree to which one can trust the intentions of the sender to communicate to the receiver the most valid arguments (Ohanian 1991). Erdogan, Baker and Tagg (2001) claim

that source trustworthiness is one of the most crucial factors affecting endorsement success.

Based on the above discussion, we propose that:

H1: Sport endorser's credibility level (low vs. high) expressed as (a) expertise and (b) trustworthiness will have an effect on consumers' purchase intentions.

The role of consumer characteristics on endorsement effectiveness

Two consumer characteristics concern the present study: gender and team identification. Gender is a point of variation in sport celebrity endorsement outcomes as recent investigations indicate. McCutcheon, Lange and Houran (2002) note that men exhibit significantly higher scores than women in celebrity worship. As a target audience, males have more extensive knowledge for athletic figures (Peetz, Parks and Spencer 2004) and are overall more receptive to athlete endorsers than females (Boyd and Shank 2004). It is also more common for males to choose an athlete as their favorite celebrity (19.6%) than for females (5.7%) (McCutcheon, Lange and Houran 2002). Furthermore, evidence suggests the existence of gender favoritism, meaning that consumers show higher levels of trust to endorsers of the same gender (Boyd and Shank 2004). Studies from the US and China show that attractiveness of the endorsers is more important for male consumers than for females (Boyd and Shank 2004; Tingchi Liu and Brock 2011). In addition, evidence suggests that male fans express both higher sport fandom and identification with their favorite team compared to their female counterparts (Theodorakis and Wann 2008). Still the so frequently implied hypothesis that sport celebrity endorsement is effective in any of the two genders is to be confirmed (Peetz, Parks and Spencer 2004). Therefore, we hypothesize that

H2: Gender will have an effect on consumers' perceptions of sport endorser's credibility expressed as (a) expertise and (b) trustworthiness.

H3: Gender will have an effect (a) on consumers' purchase intentions for products endorsed by sport celebrities and (b) on consumers' team identification.

Carlson and Donavan (2008) point out that sport teams/clubs constitute a source of power to their athletes because sport fans are identified with and attached to the teams. Team identification refers to the degree to which an individual feels psychologically attached to a team (Wann and Branscombe 1993). Research demonstrates that team identification has a significant positive influence on both, game attendance and the amount of money spent on team-related retail purchases (Carlson and Donavan 2008; Carlson, Donavan and Cumiskey 2009; Kwon and Armstrong 2002). Kwon and Armstrong 2002 report that 28% of team licensed apparel are driven by the team identification of its fans. Gwinner and Swanson (2003) found that the American football fans with higher degree of team identification expressed more positive behavior towards the sponsors' image and products. The same finding was attested by Ngan, Prendergast and Tsang (2011) for Chinese sport fans.

In relations to sport endorsement, Lake, Reece and Rifon (2010) confirm that team commitment is positively related to the attitudes towards an athlete endorser. In a recent study, Carlson and Donavan (2008) demonstrate that fans holding a favorable attitude toward their favorite team are less likely to reduce spending on market offerings (e.g. game tickets) as a result of sport endorsements. Likewise Fink, Cunningham and Kensicki (2004) have shown that under certain circumstances (endorser-event congruence etc.) team identification positively affects the consumers' intention to buy tickets for a college sport event endorsed by a celebrity athlete.

Taking into consideration that team identification (1) positively influences consumers' perceptions of an athlete image (2) affects team related consumption (watching

games on TV, buying tickets or team apparel) thus attesting the source of power effect that a team has over the athletes that compete in it (Carlson and Donovan 2008) and (3) influences consumer behavior towards sponsor's products, we therefore hypothesize that

H4: Consumers' team identification level (low vs. high) will have an effect on sport endorser's perceived credibility expressed as (a) expertise and (b) trustworthiness and

H5: Consumers' team identification level (low vs. high) will have an effect on their purchase intentions of products endorsed by sport celebrities.

Method

The approach followed in this research is a survey quasi-experimental design. By survey experiment it is implied "the deliberate manipulation of the form or placement of items in a survey instrument" (Gaines, Kuklinski, and Quirk 2007, 4). The extraneous variables which needed to be controlled were the athlete's image and the product image and this was accomplished through the usage of photos. Furthermore between-groups manipulations were applied in the endorser's attractiveness (high-low), the exercised sport (basketball-soccer) and the competing team (Olympiakos-Panathinaikos).

The one-group posttest-only design, meaning observing the results on participants who have received a treatment, lacking a control group, is a quasi-experimental alternative "often useful for suggesting new ideas,... not sufficient for permitting strong tests of causal hypotheses" (Cook and Campbell 1979, 95). Since no causal relationship was being examined in our study, quasi-experimentation was an acceptable approach (Christensen 1996). The study took place in Greece where celebrity endorsements is a common practice

employed by Greek and multinational companies. Previous research shows that sport celebrity endorsements correspond to 31.68% of all advertisements in Greece (Geldi 2009).

The questionnaire of the study was distributed physically to 350 participants via convenience sampling. The distribution took place in classes of the Athens University of Economics and Business, in a private high school and in public sports facilities such as open courts, before or after athletic events. 310 individuals responded to the questionnaire constituting a response rate of 88.6%. Finally, some questionnaires were dropped from the analysis due to missing data resulting in a sample of 289.

Our sample consisted of 55.4% females and 44.6% males. Regarding the level of education, 28.4% of the sample completed high/ high school, 47.4% completed college, and 23.9% held a Master's degree. The majority of the sample (64.7%) was between 13-25 years old, while 21.8% were between 26-35 years and 13.5% were above 36 years old. There are two reasons adolescents were included in the sample. First, previous findings suggest that worship of celebrities is a phenomenon that occurs more in adolescents or young adults than older persons . Second, teenagers are influenced in their buying decisions by celebrities, because they serve as vicarious role models and they create positive word of mouth for the advertised product .

Initially, we used 25 athletes which were reduced to eight after conducting two focus groups. The 25 athletes were selected based on three conditions. They should play in (a) one of the most famous sport teams in Greece (e.g. Olympiakos and Panathinaikos); (b) they should play in one of the most popular sports in the country (e.g. soccer or basketball); and (c) they should not have endorsed any product in the past. The last condition was employed because previous endorsement could reduce their credibility (Tripp, Jensen and Carlson 1994).

The finalist sport endorsers used for our study were eight and were selected by conducting two focus groups. The first group consisted of eight women aged from 16-50 years and the second of eight men of the same age group. As it has been mentioned above, the initial endorsers' pool included 25 athletes. The basic criterion for an athlete to be included in the study was to be recognized by all participants in the group. If the group members were aware of the athlete's name, the researcher would then show a photo of the player to indicate whether they actually recognize him in the image as well. From this step five athletes were eliminated. Furthermore, in order to address the issue of attractiveness, a factor responsible for behavioral variation towards an endorsed product (Kahle and Homer 1985), we included both attractive and less attractive celebrity athletes. Participants were then asked to indicate the attractiveness of the athlete shown in the picture by responding to Ohanian's attractiveness scale (1990). In order for an athlete to be categorized as attractive or less attractive, 80% of the group should share the same opinion. After this step we concluded to the eight celebrity athletes of our study.

The questionnaire administration followed the random assignment logic of an experiment. Therefore we created eight versions of the initial questionnaire in each of which a different athlete was used. To assign participants randomly to different treatments we created series of the eight players considering the criteria: status: attractive – unattractive, sport: basketball – soccer, competing team: Olympiakos – Panathinaikos. Therefore the first and ninth recipient and so on would be exposed to an attractive basketball player of Olympiakos, while the eighth and the sixteenth participant would be exposed to an unattractive soccer player of Panathinaikos etc.

The selected treatments were chosen in order to control variables that according to previous literature affect celebrity endorsement outcomes.

Specifically endorser's attractiveness is said to enhance consumers' positive opinion for the product (Kahle and Homer 1985) and the overall communication's effectiveness (Joseph 1982).

Similarly sport serves as a point of differentiation that can contribute to the response to a celebrity endorsement (Martin 1996). This is further confirmed by studies that investigate consumer preferences expressed by fans of different sports and suggest that soccer fans not only express higher interest level in watching games on TV, than their basketball counterparts but they also buy season tickets more frequently (7%) than basketball fans do (2%) (Kourtoglou 2011).

The third treatment is the employment of athletes from the two dominant teams of the city where the study was conducted that are supported by 79% of its population (Kourtoglou 2011). This is consistent with sport marketing scholars who suggest that sport teams have distinguished brand personalities expressed in the dimensions of competitiveness, prestige, morality, authenticity and credibility (Tsiotsou 2012). That kind of team associations are transferred to the athlete as his conceptual properties as a member of the team (McCracken 1989) and are further enhanced through team identification (Carlson and Donovan 2008). Therefore and in order to address the issue of sport club effect we used athletes of both teams.

Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the purchase intention scores for (1) attractive-unattractive athletes; (2) athletes who compete in Olympiakos and Panathinaikos (3) basketball players and soccer players. There were no significant differences in scores for (1) attractive ($M=3.45$, $SD=1.67$) and unattractive players [$MD=3.42$, $SD=1.59$; $t(287)=.163$, $p=.87$] (2) players of Olympiakos ($M= 3.38$, $SD= 1.62$) and those of Panathinaikos [$M=3.48$, $SD=1.64$; $t(287)=-.565$, $p=.57$] and (3) soccer players ($M=3.42$ $SD=1.66$) as compared to basketball players [$M=3.45$, $SD=1.61$; $t(287)=-.128$, $p=.90$]

These manipulations serve the purpose of our study that is to examine the impact of the endorser's qualities and the consumer's gender on purchase intention outcomes. By controlling factors that have been previously linked to outcome variations and by using multiple athletes we address skepticism that our results might be limited to the status of a single player, his attractiveness, the power of his team and/or the popularity of his sport

The questionnaire of the study consisted of three parts. The first part asked about the respondents' favorite team followed by the Greek version of the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS-G) (Theodorakis et al. 2010). The scale includes nine items which were measured using a seven-point-type Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree). The alpha coefficient for it was .89.

In the second part, the participant watched a portrait photo of the athlete, in which the uniform and logo of the team were distinct, followed by a frame that provided brief information about the athlete (Figure 1). Then, the subjects were asked to rate sport celebrity's credibility on two dimensions: trustworthiness and expertise (Ohanian 1990). The ten items of Ohanian's scale (1990), five for each dimension, were used in a seven-point semantic differentiation scale. The alpha coefficients for the two dimensions were respectively .89 and .90.

In the third part, subjects watched the picture of a 100% organic energy drink, which was chosen as a sport product, congruent with a professional athletes' image (McCracken 1989; Kamins 1990; Misra and Beatty 1990; Fleck, Korchia and Le Roy. 2012). The drink was GURU which is an actual Australian brand never imported to Greece. The colors of the package of the drink are white, blue and black. The drink was chosen because it was not known in the Greek market and its colors could not make any inference to the colors of the

selected teams (red is the color of Olympiakos and green is the color of Panathinaikos team). Finally the participants were asked to indicate their purchase intentions. To measure purchase intentions we used three items coming from the works of Ohanian (1991) and Till and Busler (2000) which were measured on seven-point type Likert scale (1= unlikely, 7=very likely) and had an alpha coefficient of .86.

-----Place Figure 1 about here-----

Results

For the data analysis, the statistical package PASW Statistics 17 was used. In order to measure the effect of our independent variables on consumer behavioral intentions, we divided the participants in two groups. The subjects who ranked the trustworthiness of the sport celebrity below the mean score of the respective scale ($<4.85/7$) were included in the low trustworthiness group and the ones who scored above ($\geq 4.85/7$) were included in the high trustworthiness group. The same procedure was followed to divide the levels of expertise and consumer's identification with a professional sports team. Dichotomization of the variables is appropriate in this case because it meets the criteria of categorical variables by nature (i.e. trustworthy- untrustworthy) and the observed measures have high reliability of $\alpha = .89$ and above (DeCoster, Iselin and Gallucci 2009).

-----Place table 1 about here-----

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted to examine the impact of sport celebrity trustworthiness and expertise on purchase intentions. The results showed that there was a statistically significant main effect of trustworthiness on purchase intentions [$F(1, 285) = 10.99, p = .001$]. The mean scores in purchase intentions for endorsers with low level of trustworthiness ($M = 2.99, SD = 1.56$) was significantly different from the ones scored high in trustworthiness ($M = 3.81, SD = 1.60$) as Figure 2 shows. The main effect for expertise [$F(1, 285) = .75, p = .387$] and the interaction effect between trustworthiness and expertise [$F(1, 285) = .46, p = .500$] did not reach statistical significance. Thus our results confirmed only the hypotheses H1 (b).

-----Place Table 2 about here-----

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A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to investigate gender differences on team identification and on sport celebrity trustworthiness, expertise, and brand purchase intentions. Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for the homogeneity and equality of the variance and covariance matrices as well as for problems of multicollinearity. These tests did not indicate any serious violations of the MANOVA assumptions. Our results showed that males and females differed in relation to the dependent variables ($F = 7.45, \text{Wilk's Lambda} = .91, p = .005, \eta^2 = .10$). Univariate F -tests were run for the two groups on the dependent variables to determine where the differences existed. Significant differences between groups on one out of the four dependent variables were

detected. Thus, there was no statistically significant difference between males and females neither on the endorser's perceived characteristics such as trustworthiness and expertise nor on consumers' purchase intentions. The only difference found to reach statistical significance was team identification ($F= 25.39, p=.000, \eta^2=0.08$). An inspection of the mean scores shows that males reported higher levels of team identification ($M= 4.63, SD=1.24$) than females ($M=3.88, SD= 1.26$). In sum, our study confirmed the hypothesis H3(b) and did not support the hypotheses H2(a) and H2(b) and H3(a).

-----Place table 3 about here-----

MANOVA was also used to test Hypotheses 4 and 5. Overall MANOVA results indicated that team identification had a significant effect on expertise, trustworthiness and purchase intentions ($F= 4.42, \text{Wilks' Lambda} = .96, p= .005, \eta^2 = .04$). Univariate F -tests were run for the two groups on the dependent variables to determine where the differences existed. Significant differences between groups on one out of the three dependent variables were detected. Specifically, of the endorser's characteristics, expertise and trustworthiness, we found that team identification exhibited a significant effect on both credibility dimensions at the .10 level and not at the .05. The results for the effects of endorser's perceived expertise were $F(1, 287) = 3.84, p= .051$, and for the effects of perceived trustworthiness $F(1, 287) = 3.30, p=.070$. Thus, our results partially support H4 (a) and H4 (b). Regarding team identification level had a significant effect on consumers' purchase intentions ($F = 11.89, p = .001$). Thus, our results showed that consumers highly identified with their team expressed higher levels of purchase intentions ($M=3.75, SD=1.61$) compared to the less identified ones ($M=3.09, SD= 1.58$). This finding confirms hypothesis H5.

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Discussion of findings

This study examined the influence of endorser's credibility qualities as well as consumers' characteristics on endorsement effectiveness. Specifically, we studied the influence of credibility qualities such as trustworthiness and expertise on purchase intentions.

Furthermore, we investigated the role of gender, an under-examined variable in endorsement literature that reportedly differentiates consumer behavior (McCutcheon, Lange and Houran 2002; Boyd and Shank 2004; Peetz, Parks and Spencer 2004). We examined the effects of gender on (a) consumers perception of the endorser's overall credibility (b) endorsement effectiveness expressed as consumers' purchase intentions and (c) consumers' team identification. Finally we investigated the role of team identification on consumers' perceptions of sport celebrity's expertise and trustworthiness and their intentions to buy the endorsed product. The uniqueness of our study relies on the inclusion of consumer characteristics in understanding how endorsement works (most previous works focus on the endorser's characteristics) and the examination of two variables that have been neglected so far in the endorsement literature named gender and team identification.

Regarding the effects of sport endorser's characteristics, trustworthiness was found to be the only credibility factor influencing purchase intentions. Previous research indicates the value of credibility as a crucial factor for opinion change (Hovland and Weiss 1951) and positive consumer behavior in terms of brand attitude and purchase intentions (Erdogan,

Baker and Tagg 2001; Lafferty, Goldsmith and Newell 2002; Amos, Holmes and Strutton 2008). Our study contradicts Ohanian's results (1991) who found that from the three credibility factors (attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise) only expertise had an effect on purchase intentions. We found that from the two credibility factors, expertise and trustworthiness, only trustworthiness exerts an influence on consumers' purchase intentions. This finding can be explained by (a) the European context of the study while Ohanian's study was conducted in the US (Silvera and Austad 2004) and the increased use of celebrity endorsement (Pringle and Binet 2005). In Europe celebrity endorsements are viewed by consumers with more skepticism (Silvera and Austad 2004) while studies show that different persuasion paths are implemented in North America and Europe due to cultural factors (Orth, Koenig and Firbasova 2007). Thus, it could be assumed that endorser's trustworthiness plays a more important role in the European culture whereas expertise is more significant in the American culture. The second explanation is related to increased audience exposure to celebrity endorsers over the years (Pringle and Binet 2005) and consequently their familiarity with this practice.

The results of the study indicate no differences between the two genders, in terms of trustworthiness, expertise, and purchase intention. Previous findings have suggested that males have better knowledge for athletic figures (Peetz, Parks and Spencer 2004), are more receptive to sport celebrity endorsements (Boyd and Shank 2004) and are more fond of athletes as compared to other celebrities categories (e.g. actors) (McCutcheon, Lange and Houran 2002). Although we expected these differences to be translated in endorsement related consumer perceptions and intentions, our findings did not confirm our related hypotheses. Males and females have the same perceptions regarding the sport endorsers' credibility qualities and are similarly influenced by them in their brand purchase intentions.

However, our study confirms previous findings on the effects of gender on team identification. Consistent with the work of Theodorakis and Wann (2008), our research demonstrates that gender exerts a significant influence on team identification with males expressing higher team identification than females.

In addition, our study indicates that team identification influences the effectiveness of a sport celebrity endorsement expressed as purchase intentions. Consumers exerting strong team identification are more likely to buy a product endorsed by an athlete of their team, than their less identified counterparts. The same effect is partially supported for the athlete's credibility status, which is higher for avid fans thus suggesting that fans who are strongly identified with their team are more likely to perceive the athletes of their team as more trustworthy and experts than the less attached ones. These findings are in line with studies of McCracken (1989) and Carlson and Donovan (2008) that connect a famous athlete to his team and consider this liaison as part of the athlete's conceptual property. Passion for a professional team is indicative for individuals' social identity, and it is reasonable to expect that highly identified fans consider their team as part of their selves, derive pride of it intensely (Theodorakis et al. 2010) and appreciate more the protagonists of their favorite sport team. After all the athletes are the ones competing in the court leading their teams to victories and achievements and for this reason avid fans feel attached to them to the point that they support actively a sport celebrity endorsement by purchasing the endorsed brand.

Our study not only confirms previous research focused on the effect of team identification on team-licensed products and services (Kwon and Armstrong 2002; Gwinner and Swanson 2003; Lake, Reece and Rifon 2010) and team sponsorships (Ngan, Prendergast and Tsang 2011), but it also extends the body of knowledge to sport endorsement by demonstrating that team identification is a transferable asset to its athletes.

Managerial implications

Our findings provide several implications to product/brand managers, managers of sport celebrity endorsers and team managers. Thus, when marketing managers are choosing athletes to endorse their product, they need to examine the cultural context of the sport celebrity endorsement (Europe vs. US) in order to select the proper credibility element. For example, if in Europe, they should take into consideration athletes' credibility mainly in terms of perceived trustworthiness, because only highly trustworthy sportspeople could influence consumers' intentions in buying their brand. Brand managers should use market research in order to pick the proper sport celebrity or use internet (e.g. sport sites, blogs etc.) and social media to select secondary data on audience's perceptions about the athlete (Facebook and blog comments, re-tweets etc.).

Taking endorsement one step further, team identification can work as a compass for marketing communications. Our findings suggest that avid team fans are more likely to purchase a brand endorsed by a celebrity athlete, therefore the communication mix designed for the endorsement should by all means include sports related media (e.g. advertising space during games broadcasting, sports papers, sports sites etc.) that attracts the attention of high team identifiers. For the same reason, sponsorships of sport teams could be a part of the marketing communication strategy. In other words, sport endorsements could complement sport team sponsorships or vice versa in developing a comprehensive marketing communication strategy.

Moreover, team identification could be a basic criterion for marketing industry in order to segment the consumer market in case of sport celebrity endorsement if this is consistent with the company's orientation. Taking into consideration that avid fans are more

positively affected, the market should be therefore divided into two groups, avid fans and casual fans. The composition of the fan team base into these two groups and their proportional size could guide brand managers in their decision when selecting an athlete for their endorsement activities. Gender differences on the other hand did not influence purchase intention and therefore, they should not be taken into consideration.

Athletes' credibility qualities and specifically trustworthiness should concern professional sport clubs that frequently use athletes to endorse team-related causes e.g. promotion of season tickets or other team sponsor communication activities. In order to leverage such "in house endorsements", it is imperative for the team managers to carefully select their athletes/players based on their perceived credibility qualities.

Athletes and their managers can also benefit from this research. Athletes should invest on building up and communicating the proper public profile in order to attract endorsement deals. Apart from known practices, e.g. uniqueness of the persona, athletes and their managers should try to promote a credible and trustworthy profile. For consumers to trust the intentions of a product endorser and the content of the communication arguments (Ohanian 1991), the celebrity athlete's profile should focus on honesty and reliability, avoiding multi endorsements and erratic behaviors. Athletes should try to build trustworthiness via several means of communication with their fans. Nowadays, the social media environment provides plenty communication opportunities because fans can directly interact with their favorite athletes, read about their opinion on a topic and watch pictures posted. Moreover, athletes are able to received feedback from their fans and correct their communication approach in order to improve their profile.

Limitations and Further Research

The present study is primarily limited to its convenience sample gathered from Greece, and specifically its capital, Athens. Another limitation refers to the use of athletes. Some of the greater Greek athletes were not included due to former endorsement activities, while world-class sport celebrities and female athletes were not used in this study. Moreover, the study examined only sport celebrities and generalizations cannot be made to other types of endorsers (e.g. actors/ress, pop-stars, television personalities, entertainers and models). Future research should replicate our study in other types of endorsers and in other countries.

However, the study provides several directions for future research. The role of country of origin, meaning whether the endorser is a local or international celebrity can be also explored. Moreover, other characteristics of sport celebrities such as the type of sport they play (e.g. team sport or not, popular vs. less popular), their likeability and familiarity by the consumers or other aspects of their personality like their extraversion, openness etc. could be the focus of future investigations.

Under the scope of sports marketing the factor team identification could be investigated in a more thorough way. The first possible direction is to explore whether individual's team identification creates consuming favoritism for athletes of the same team or punishment for athletes of one's opposite team. Moreover concepts like identification with an athlete, celebrity worship and parasocial relationships should be further explored in order to broaden the scope and understanding of celebrity endorsement. Another approach could compare the effectiveness of famous athletes who compete in team sports versus the ones playing single sports. It is important to understand the "sport team" role and evaluate sport endorsements based on the type of sport played by the endorser.

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Figure 1: Example of pictures shown to the participants on the survey

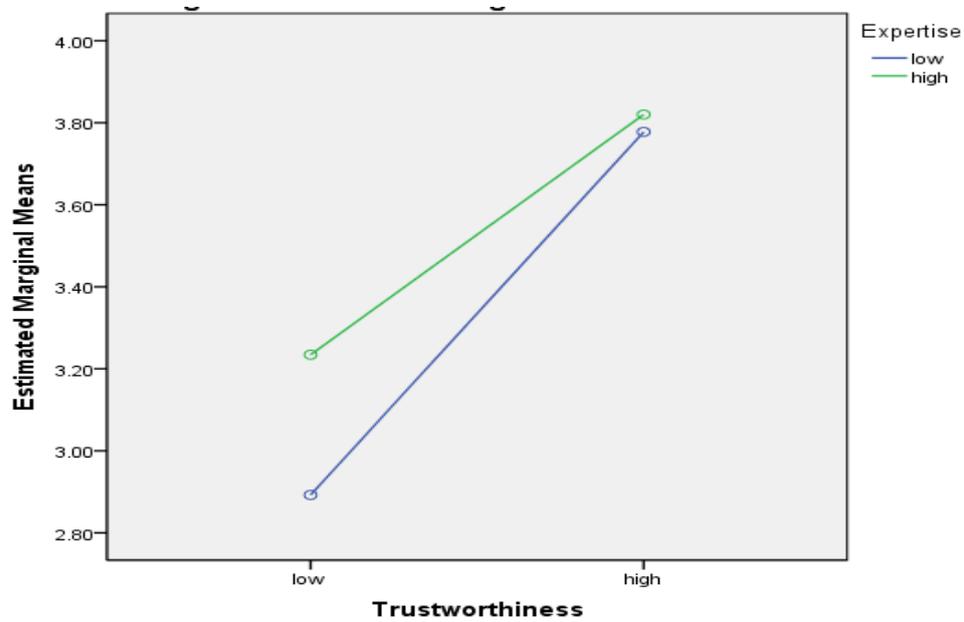


Figure 2: Interaction effects purchase intention

Table 1: Mean scores of trustworthiness, expertise and team identification

	N	Mean Score
Trustworthiness		
Low	133	< 4.85
High	156	≥ 4.85
Expertise		
Low	126	< 4.79
High	163	≥ 4.79
Team Identification		
Low	140	< 4.22
High	149	≥ 4.22

Table 2: Two way ANOVA results on purchase intentions

	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	P-value
Main Effects	51.97	17.32	6.92	.00*
Trustworthiness	27.50	27.50	10.99	.00*
Expertise	1.88	1.88	.75	.39
Exp * Trust	1.14	1.14	.46	.50
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$				

Table 3: ANOVA results for gender effects

Dependent Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	F	P-value
Trustworthiness	Male	129	4.79	1.20	0.52	.47
	Female	160	4.90	1.29		
Expertise	Male	129	4.67	1.24	1.89	.17
	Female	160	4.88	1.35		
Purchase Intention	Male	129	3.44	1.61	.00	.97
	Female	169	3.43	1.65		
Team Identification	Male	129	4.63	1.24	25.39	.00**
	Female	160	3.88	1.26		
* <i>p</i> < .10 ** <i>p</i> < .05						

Table 4: ANOVA results for consumers' team identification

	Level of Team Identification	N	Mean	SD	F	P-value
Trustworthiness	Low	140	4.71	1.26	3.30	.07*
	High	149	4.98	1.23		
Expertise	Low	140	4.63	1.27	3.84	.05*
	High	149	4.93	1.31		
Purchase Intention	Low	140	3.09	1.58	11.89	.00**
	High	149	3.75	1.61		
* <i>p</i> < .10 ** <i>p</i> < .05						

