

The Influence of Athlete Endorsement in Sports Marketing

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ABSTRACT

Athlete endorsement is an essential tool in sports marketing to establish a brand. It acts as a medium between the consumers and the brand for the interactions to take place. The study proposes to analyze the effects of athlete endorsement in sports marketing, such as brand association, brand recall, brand image, and consumer retention and how it influences purchase decisions. A total of 200+ responses have been collected through the questionnaire. Data processing of this study has been done using appropriate software like Microsoft Excel, SPSS and Python. Various inbuilt libraries were used in this study to run tests like correlation, regression tests, reliability tests, descriptive tests, and different graphs and diagrams to analyze the objectives more clearly. The findings show that the athlete endorsement strategies adopted by almost every sports brand led to overall growth and development. Most respondents believe that the brands endorsed by athletes are more appealing, and the athlete's story has a vital role in the success of the endorsed brand.

Keywords: Athlete endorsement, Brand Image, Brand Recall, Sports Marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

Advertising is an essential part of marketing to build brands, and it helps disseminate information among the masses in various ways; one of them is the endorsement of brands by famous personalities and celebrities. Celebrity endorsement has high potential as they influence consumers' purchasing behavior since consumers trust and respect them. The idea behind athlete endorsement being created by the brands is that consumers very easily get connected to their favorite athletes. While purchasing sports products, people often base their decision on which brand they want to be associated with (Lee & Yang, 2010). Therefore, unlike other domains that directly build brand associations, sports companies can leverage these athletes' stories. Athletes endorse a product or brand and lend their face, name, and traits to it. People come to recognize the brand with the athlete associated with it and vice versa. For example, Lionel Messi is the face of Adidas Football. Both go hand in hand.

Every athlete is a significant force amongst their fan base and sports. People follow them and look up to them. The emotional power is strong, and thus triggers and stimuli are easy to generate. In the eyes of the consumers, the value of the product increases due to the bond they have with

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an athlete. It is easier for the consumer to trust a brand or an effect when an athlete endorses it because they are famous opinion leaders. Therefore, a consumer's purchase intention is an essential criterion for judging the success of an athlete endorser.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand management ensures that a company's products or services are well thought of by the public (Aaker, 1989; Fulmer, 1965; Keller, 1993). Scholars have studied it for many years, and there is still much to learn. One area of brand management that is getting more attention is how it is done through sports. Sport is an activity that people do for fun or competition. It is now considered one of the most quickly and steadily developing sectors worldwide, with growth noted amidst numerous national and international crises. It is interesting in sports because they are stable, even when other things happen worldwide (Manoli, 2020). Brand management has changed over time and how it is used in sports. It also talks about how it might change in the future.

Sports brands, their unique characteristics, audience-generated importance, and subsequent emotional attachment have been capturing significant interest within academia and practitioners exploring ways to develop and manage brands, both in and through sports. It means that people are interested in how sports brands are made and how they can be improved (Bauer et al., 2005; Henseler et al., 2011; Richelieu, 2016). Sports marketing allows companies to market their products by leveraging consumers' passion for sports. To be a sponsor, a company needs to transfer the positive values of the sport to its brand. It is done by selecting a sport with the most people in the company's target market and creating a communication plan based on that sport (Tafà, 2008). New media is a term for digital platforms that allow for global communication. How has new media changed global sports sponsorship

by making it easier to communicate with consumers worldwide? The study results show that new media is increasingly crucial for sports sponsorships (Santomier, 2008).

Celebrity endorsement helps create a stronger relationship with the consumer. The celebrity makes a strong brand recall as the celebrity is a source of multiple associations. It helps to build brand identity, the company's most vital asset. Sports have a universal appeal and are associated with many facets of life. Thus, companies are willing to spend a good percentage of their budget to get athletes to endorse their products as they act as public figures on behalf of the company to whom people look up. (Malik & Sudhakar, 2014). Celebrities act as opinion leaders, and naturally, people follow their lead. Celebrity endorsement helps generate positive interest and press releases which help bring in potential customers and reach out to more people. It is essential to build a relationship between the celebrity and the brand, like in the case of Pringles. It encourages the superstar to make more decisions in branding the product. Celebrity endorsement also comes with pitfalls; a single slip in the star's image can damage the brand. (Foong & Yazdanifard, 2014)

The stronger the bonds formed with the customer, the better, and this often depends on the brand equity and the endorser's reputation. Companies are willing to spend vast amounts on this, thus making it a whole different industry. Therefore, celebrity endorsement marketing can yield better sales and affect the company's stocks if carefully strategized. Therefore, companies like Nike allot billions of dollars to maintain and expand the number of endorsers. However, it may only sometimes be true that sales will increase after an athlete endorses it. This can have different reasons, one being a poor selection of athletes. On the other hand, what is even

more important is the contract between the company and the endorser. The contract should cover poor sales or a decline in the endorser's reputation. (Elberse & Verleun, 2011)

The increasing number of brands has led them to focus more on their image because people are driven toward brands having a better image. Also, once a consumer is satisfied with one brand, it takes work to shift to another. Since the market is highly competitive due to the availability of several brands, every retailer needs to retain his customer base to survive and grow in the marketplace. Therefore, many factors come into play, most of which are in control of the company and, if strategized, can lead to better overall results. (Singh, Sinha, & Mishra, 2013)

In today's world, it is essential to differentiate one's products from someone else's. Companies must find new ways of seeing and maintaining customers. Companies' main things are the traits they want their product and the customer to have in common. The idea is simple, the better the connection, the better the chance of standing out. A brand must decide and maintain its characteristics to build its image over time. The company must ask questions like "Why do people connect with some brands more" and seek answers and implement strategies uniquely. (Sulkunen & Solja, 2012)

Brand image is one of the leading forces of brand equity; it directs the consumer's general perception and mindset toward a brand. It affects consumer behavior. For companies, the primary marketing goal is to develop brand equity, which can be achieved through consumers' good brand perception. It can be done only by creating a good brand image in the minds of consumers. A good brand image will only lead to repeat purchases of the brand by the consumers, leading to increased sales and maximization of profit for the company. Another school of thought believes that increased cash flow, market

value and market share are due to better brand equity (Zhang, 2015)

Most of the company's efforts are into building up perceptions of the brand in the consumer's memory. This is the foundation of building a brand image, and finding measures to calculate brand image has been essential to companies. Most of these associations are associated with links between the attributes of a brand and the brand name. It is tough to find a correlation between these measures and the usage of these brands. Therefore, choosing the proper steps by comparing them is essential. (Driesener & Romanuik, 2000)

Consumers of today are highly knowledgeable. Today, the consumer is familiar and knowledgeable, making it difficult for marketers to understand consumers' buying behaviors. The whole idea behind every business is to get the consumer to buy their products and build an everlasting relationship with the consumers. Managers use communication processes to achieve the goal of building relationships with consumers. However, good advertisement and communication alone will not lead to consumer purchases. Many factors like 'brand awareness', 'brand image' and 'brand knowledge' come into play. In order to understand the position of a brand in the minds of target consumers, managers must understand how well the dots – advertisement, communication, brand knowledge, etc., are all connected (Khurram, Qadeer, & Sheeraz, 2012).

Creating brand awareness presents highly competitive markets that can be pivotal in the modern-day marketing scenario. Many big companies now accept that good brand awareness builds a competitive edge in the market, which will increase their overall image.

Marketing in the 21st century has been evolving tremendously, and to keep pace with this change, companies are trying to

make brand awareness very popular among companies are evolving brand awareness programs to ensure brands remain very strong in the minds of consumers even during times of business stress and under competitive pressures. These programs companies to ensure brands survive in challenging business environments through brand awareness programs for consumers. (Latif, Islam, & Mdnoor, 2014).

The importance of brand value can be perceived in different ways and is very intuitive. Researchers and marketers are often challenged to find ways to measure brand value. Then comes the concept of the Brand Recall Index (BRI). Intangible assets as they are, brands compete for monetary value beyond everything. The invincibility of brand value depends on the mindshare within a product category and its mindshare among competing brands. A brand aims to help consumers retrieve the brand from their memory. The reasoning is that consumers should have a positive feeling about the brand so they can recall it quickly when they purchase. The brand needs to create a positive impact in the minds of consumers. This impact can be created through a positive experience for brand consumers over a while (Krishnan, Sullivan, Groza, & Aurand, 2013).

Due to the inability of traditional advertisements and marketing strategies, companies look forward to celebrity endorsement to communicate better with consumers and affect their purchase intentions. Due to cluttering in ads, they could be more effective and efficiently give back to the company. Advertisements endorsed by celebrities positively affect the purchase intentions of the consumer. The physical attractiveness of the celebrity also matters, and many companies thus resort to beautiful models. Furthermore, celebrity endorsement leads to consumers taking the brand more severe and having a credible relationship with the brand. (Khan, Memon, & Kumar, 2019)

Four sports marketing domains are identified by categorizing goods and services into sports and non-sports products and differentiating between traditional and sponsorship-based strategies. They are the theme-based, product-based, alignment-based, and sports-based strategic domains. Some advertisements are based on sports or sponsorships, while others try to place the brands through a specific theme. Marketers should analyze the pros and cons of such approaches and take a balanced view and apply them to the established framework(Fullerton & Merz, 2008)

The emergence of professional sports as a profitable business has opened doors to many companies participating through sports products. Sports are very dynamic and unite the fans like nothing else. Sports and other entertainment industries offer the typical person a world where everything is unpretentious, melodramatic, stimulating, and ecstasy, which are always excellent prospects. Sport is a big entertainer but can also exasperate, upset, and depress the typical person. This very uncertainty gives the ordinary person bliss through the intensity of sports entertainment. Therefore, the products that can take advantage of this are the ones that successfully stand out from the others. The role of sponsorship and television sets must be supported, with the spectators constantly being exposed to these, and corporates must see how they interact with the teams and the sports league. (Mason, 1999)

Brand personality comprises characteristics related to the product and those not associated with the product. A product's personality can be affected by many factors like the type of packaging, its price and even the seemingly socioeconomic class of the product. A brand personality could be affected by unrelated issues of the product, like how advertising is created by the company, its logo or the image of the company and its

CEO, and the image of celebrities who endorse the product. Thus, these factors affect brand personality and, in turn, the consumer's purchase intention. (Toldos-Romero, 2014)

Purchase intentions of the consumer depend on various factors which may or may not have a significant effect. The effect of these factors changes according to the type of product category. These factors include quality, celebrity endorsement, the brand's physical appearance, the company's prestige, and the product's price. The effectiveness of these factors might change if the product belongs to a private label. For example, there is a significant effect of celebrity endorsement on consumers' purchase intention of private labels. (Raturi, 2012)

People in society desire to own the most suitable products for their persona. They want to wear branded clothes, use good mobile phones and the right drink. The manufacturers can convey to the end consumers the quality of their products through celebrity endorsement. This way, consumers believe that if a celebrity of their liking endorses a product, it must be the EXACT product for them. Celebrities are thought to develop a specific and distinct appeal that differentiates a particular brand from the rest of the competing brands. The endorsement of products by celebrities certainly carries much weight in the minds of consumers, which will help brand recognition and brand recall by consumers and which, in turn, will lead to a more fine-tuned purchasing behavior by consumers that leads to the eventual purchase of the brand by consumers (Agrawal, 2020).

The presence of athletes in print media has decreased over time because of the constant rise of social media. It is easy for people to follow celebrities on social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram and Facebook and be updated constantly. The ability of social media to make the fans feel closer to the star they follow

enhances the ability of celebrity endorsement. It is straightforward and convenient for celebrities to endorse anything now; all it takes is a simple retweet, use a hashtag, or post pre-designed content. Therefore, social media has the edge over print media regarding endorsements. (Das, 2018)

About 80% of leading brands in India use sports marketing to achieve their targets. The neighboring country Sri Lanka has also seen a sudden rise in the rise of cricket enthusiasts. Recently the sport of cricket attracted one of the biggest sports marketing deals in Sri Lanka's history. In the last three years, leading telecommunications company Dialog Axiata has sponsored Sri Lanka tickets for Rs. 745 million. Companies can achieve various marketing goals through sponsorships. These sponsorships help to enhance to improve the brand image and enhance the ability of the companies to figure out the consumer attitudes and shape their purchasing behavior through which companies improve sales of brands; These sponsorships also help to create a mileage for brands through higher visibility of the brands in the market and in the minds of consumers through constructive publicity of brands. Companies constantly look for opportunities to take their brands to higher platforms so that their target consumers positively perceive the brands. Companies shape this positive impact on consumers' minds through excellent celebrity sponsorships. (Thanuraj, 2018).

Communication created by sports leads to excellent results in the minds of consumers through its unique features. It creates a sense of vibe with consumers through its emotional outreach, and consumers understand the product information through this appeal. Sports communication through media helps the company as it helps consumers feel the brand's aura through its intangible value in a natural setting. Sporting events like Cricket in

India, baseball in Australia, football in Brazil or Basketball in the US create extraordinary attention in the minds of consumers through many association traits between such sports events and consumers. Corporate sponsors must strive to drive such an extension to develop brand connotation and brand recognition. Extreme sporting events, fantastic scenes, rich colors, and many sporting circumstances will help brands become legends. It is no denying that companies will be helped by major sporting events to successfully defend and promote their brands very effectively in the minds of consumers for repeat purchases to happen in the marketplace (Hongtao, 2014).

Some sports are followed better than others. India is a big market for many sports goods, from football to gym equipment; everything has a consumer base in India. These sports goods which do not belong to any specific group have to select gateways to use sports marketing. In India, cricket has a monopoly and players like Virat Kohli and Sachin Tendulkar are considered gods. When sports goods are endorsed, even those belonging to other sports, it becomes challenging for companies to find the reach they want through sports other than cricket. (Dham, 2015)

It is a universal truth that today, all companies try to develop and maintain their brands' status. Creating a brand from a product (soap to Dove) fills the hearts and minds of consumers with a sense of meaning and satisfaction. The brand is not just a name, sign, symbol, or logo but a product image etched in the memories of consumers. As already mentioned, the brand is not just a name or sign, but a unique identification created in the minds of consumers through its credibility and reputation established over time by companies. Consumers do not use a product or brand but feel the experience. So long as companies can give such an experience to consumers, consumers will

remain loyal to the brand. On the other hand, if the brand fails them in their unique experience of the brands, they will wait to switch to another brand which will give them greater exhilaration (Wijaya, 2013).

With both companies and consumers increasingly becoming aware of brands and their importance, competition between brands is ever-growing to catch the imagination of consumers. Brands that create higher emotions communicate appropriately and appeal to consumers' minds and hearts succeed in the industry. Companies are not only to be successful but also to profit from brands. For that, companies must offer brands with various supporting marketing activities to many consumers than make the brand a "niche." It would help the brands establish their reputation and help companies understand whether the consumers favor their brands. Advertising can create miracles in the marketplace for the company and the product. Even in a saturated market, advertising can create a positive image of the brand and leads to recognition of the brand by consumers. One of the critical factors for creating brands is to create a long-lasting image of the brands in the minds of the consumers, which can lead to long-term prosperity for the brand and an intangible asset to the company. The availability of numerous brands in the marketplace affects even the strongest brands. Hence, companies create value in consumers' minds through product quality, pricing strategies, and building up strong relations. The stronger the versatility of these elements, the stronger the relationship between the brand and the consumers (Işoraité, 2018).

The number of discontinued products has increased significantly in the past decade resulting in increased costs for society and businesses. Hence, it is essential for companies to what they convey and how they convey their brands to minimize any negative impact, if any, on the minds of

consumers (Kübler, 2012). There needs to be more clarity within companies between short-term effects, i.e., sales with long-term marketing efforts like creating a brand image in the minds of consumers and creating a good perception of the brands in the minds of consumers regarding quality.

Marketers use this trend for advertising their products in games, using a revolutionary service called Advergame, a game with advertising opportunities.

Advergaming is a relatively new concept in marketing parlour to bring in new consumers through advertising on video games. It is also an entertainment area wherein the brand is promoted through games to consumers (Adis, 2013). With the advent of the internet, extensive usage of mobile phones to get services like SMS and MMS or chatting through Facebook, Instagram, etc., companies today heavily resort to Advergames as a new marketing concept to attract gen next.

Sri Lanka was the first market with an open economic policy in developing countries in South Asia. Consumers in developed countries prefer domestic products to foreign products. In contrast, developing countries are more likely to select foreign products than domestic products, which is why the Sri Lankan market is in intense competition because products are expected to be in strong competition. High-quality and international brands are better than domestic products. There must be brand loyalty and BE on an excellent product. Any product with a high BE will cancel out the increased market share in Sri Lanka. Of course, some of the more well-known brands can be found in retail stores, outlets and supermarkets in Sri Lanka. (Tharmi, 2010)

Most marketers today use well-known personalities in sports and the entertainment industry as celebrities to advertise, to promote their brands to get

into the minds of consumers, as consumers perceive celebrities as their idols and tend to believe them due to their trust in the celebrities. Although there is a link between star promotion and capital based on the client's brand, many scholars suggest that several variables and dimensions promote brand intent and prosperity (Thusyanthy, 2015).

The concept of brand credibility is widely used among marketers. According to this theory, primarily based on the information economy, brands convey a definite signal to consumers in the market, characterized by imponderable and asymmetric data and evidence. Brands give out strategies for the organization of its present marketing mix. The brand signals to consumers of its reliability and clarity. Clarity means that there is no ambiguity in the signals of brands.

In contrast, the brand's reliability refers to the effectiveness with which the message is conveyed by its sign. Credibility is considered the brand's essential characteristic (Spry, 2011).

Large companies use well-known actors and sports personnel in their marketing communication to plant the brands in the minds of consumers. Companies make significant investments in employing stars to position brands, creating organizations with credibility, attractiveness and experience. Companies use celebrity endorsers extensively for market communication and tremendous assets to combine their brands with endorsers. These supporters are seen as dynamic in terms of attractiveness and attractive properties. Companies use celebrities to create and maintain the attention of consumers of their brands. Companies use stars due to their fame to achieve high levels of response from consumers, as celebrities emotionally appeal to consumers (Malik, 2014).

Brand image is crucial because it has essential effects on the brand. First, it

affects the consumer benefits associated with sport. The brand image model proves that consumers experience the help of the brand when they recognize the brand attributes as valuable. Further marketing research explores the impact of team attributes, such as the team, the coach and success, on the resulting brand benefits, such as identification and socialization. That is why sports consumers can find celebrity brand attributes that are valuable and benefit from the brand. However, it needs to be made clear which brand attributes of sports celebrities are helpful to the consumer. (Sassenberg, 2015)

Several attitude factors have been proposed as a cause of the sponsorship results. Attachment to the team (or team identification), fan involvement, commitment to the activity, product knowledge and the sponsorship approach are variables that affect the effectiveness of the sponsorship. For example, attachment to the event is an essential factor in sponsoring the event. The attitude towards support proved to be a vital factor for Olympic sponsorship; it was found that the team bond is an essential factor in professional and sports disciplines. (Alexandria, 2012)

Brand symbols make up a brand or create a difference between brands. Brand symbols constitute a significant part of its brand and meaning for consumers and the world. Since brand management pedagogy and marketing began, brand symbols have effectively communicated the benefits and quality of brands to consumers. Figures, Figures with texts, etc., convey the brand symbols. The brand symbols have been studied from the perspective of consumers of this era, looking into various variables like age, income, education, family size, religion, nationality, race, and sect. These variables help marketing managers understand and make decisions on brand symbols (Subhani, 2012).

The role of endorsement in sports marketing has been significantly

researched. While there has been enough research available in advanced countries on the problems and challenges marketers face in sports marketing, there needs to be more literature and analysis on the impact of athlete endorsements in sports marketing in India. The above literature analysis brings across certain limitations, i.e., endorsements are highly correlated to building brand attributes and awareness, but the effect on purchase intention remains a question. A gap remains in establishing the effect of athlete endorsement on overall brand development and how consumers view it, especially in a country like India, where sports marketing is still a developing concept, with more and more people inclining towards sports and fitness every day.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Problem Statement

The study analyzes the effects of athlete endorsement in sports marketing, such as brand association, brand recall, consumer retention and how it influences purchase decisions. The process of conducting this study is based on examining the effect of an athlete in building a brand and creating brand attributes that can connect with people. These athletes often bank not only on their fame but also their story and image amongst the fan base. Thus, the more similar a brand can become to the athlete endorsing it, the better. Following up on building and maintaining a brand image, the recall must be examined. The athletes who endorse a brand often carry it like a badge. People love and look up to these athletes and their lifestyle, and the products associated with them. Sports brands like Under Armour have their whole marketing strategy built around Stephen Curry. Therefore, Stephen Curry makes it easier for people to remember the brand Under Armour and vice versa. Ultimately, the study focuses on the company's primary goal, sales. The study examines and analyses if athlete endorsement helps increase sales or limits

itself to being a tool to build brand image and brand recall.

3.2 Objectives of the study

1. To Analyse the influence of athlete endorsement in building the brand image.
2. To find out the influence of sportsperson endorsement in brand recall.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of celebrity sports personnel endorsement in influencing the customer's purchase intention.

Hypothesis 1: The perceived influence of athlete endorsement maintains a direct and positive relationship in building the brand image.

Hypothesis 2: The perceived influence of athlete endorsement maintains a direct and positive relationship with brand recall.

Hypothesis 3: The perceived effectiveness of athlete endorsement maintains the customer's direct and positive purchase intention.

3.3 Methodology of Study

The study involves a quantitative approach to collecting primary forms of data. The primary data has been collected through a structured questionnaire so that results are relevant and are according to the study conducted. The questionnaire was formed by taking into consideration the marketer centric approach. The sample includes people from in and around Bangalore City who are consumers of sports products in one way or the other. A total of 200+ responses have been collected through the questionnaire.

3.4 Population and Sampling Techniques

In this research, simple random sampling has been used for fulfilling the objectives as it will eliminate biases from the study and give equal opportunity to everyone to be a part of the sample. It has been constituted according to the convenience of the researcher. The population size of

the study is significant, but the sample size considered for this study is 200 approx. It will focus on people exposed to sports marketing in one way or another.

3.5 Data Collection Method

In this study, only primary data has been used. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire from people across Bangalore with different inclinations towards sports and fitness-related activities belonging to various age groups.

3.6 Statistical Tool for Analysis

Data processing of this study has been done using appropriate software like Microsoft Excel and Python. Various inbuilt libraries were used in this study to run tests like correlation, regression tests, reliability tests, descriptive tests, and different graphs and diagrams to analyze the objectives more clearly.

4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study investigates the role of athlete endorsement in sports marketing. It also provides insight into the part of athletes in building a brand image and connecting with the consumer. It provides a measure of the effects of an athlete on the creation of brand attributes and increase of brand recall. Also, the study identifies the adverse effect and risks associated with athlete endorsement. It also analyzes the effective utilization of the athlete in gaining credible consumers and positively impacting the consumers' purchase intention. It collects data from 200+ people across India.

5. ADVANCED ANALYTICS (ANALYSIS)

Advanced analytics has been used to identify the impact of various questions (attributes) on Brand Image and Purchase Intention. The algorithm 'Random Forest' has been used in Python. The error metrics are MAE 0.1 and RMSE 0.17, acceptable per industry standards. Residual analysis has been done to validate the model, and various metrics (like Q-Q plot) look good.

The following outcomes have been observed for feature importance.

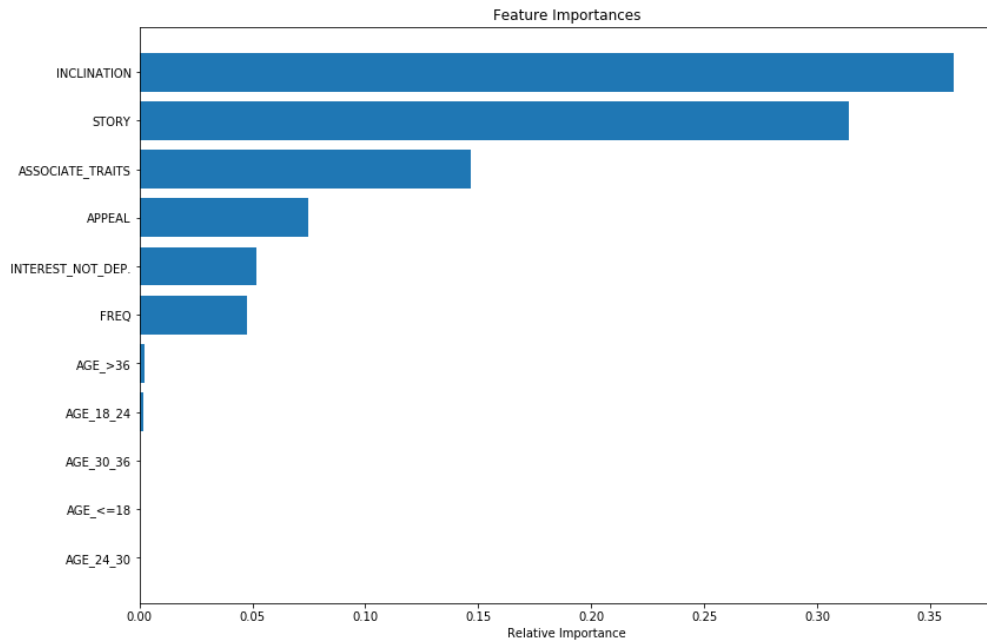


Figure 1: Feature Importance Impacting Brand Image

The above image shows that "Participants' inclination towards different sports or fitness activities" has made around 35% contribution to brand image. In other words, the people playing various sports are more conscious of the brand image.

The second impacting feature is the "Belief that the life story of an athlete endorsing a brand is important," which has around 30% contribution to brand image. In other words, the life story of an athlete impacts the brand image.

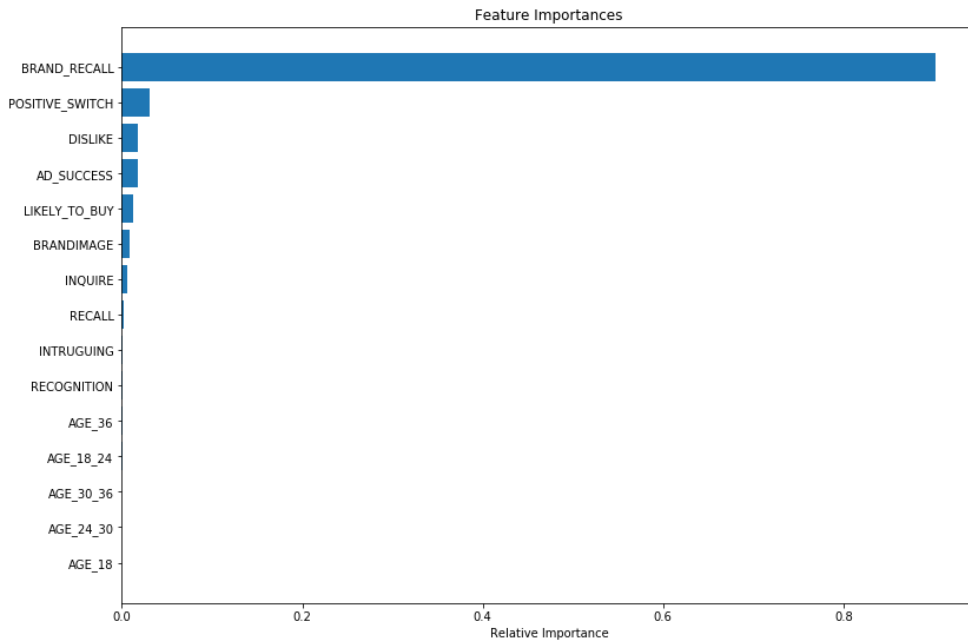


Figure 2: Feature Importance Impacting Purchase Intention

The above image shows that the "Belief that an athlete endorser helps in recalling a brand" has around 90% contribution to brand image. In other words, if people can recall the athlete or associate the brand

with an athlete, the probability of purchasing is very high.

H1: There is a significant relationship between brand recall and purchase intention.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix

Correlations			
		brand Recall	purchase intention
Brand Recall	Pearson Correlation	1	.666**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	204	204
Purchase intention	Pearson Correlation	.666**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	204	204

5.1 Interpretation

According to the Pearson correlation, the relation between the two variables, brand recall and purchase intention, is positive at .666 and can share a strong positive linear correlation. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is

accepted. It also means that the two variables move in the same direction, and it also says that the increase or use of one variable will lead to the rise or use of another variable.

H2: There is a significant relationship between brand image and brand recall

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

Correlations			
		Brand Recall	Brand Image
Brand Recall	Pearson Correlation	1	.547**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	204	204
brand Image	Pearson Correlation	.547**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	204	204

5.2 Interpretation

According to the Pearson correlation, the relation between the two variables, brand recall and brand image, is positive.547 They share a strong positive linear correlation. It also means that the two variables move in the same direction, and it also says that the increase or use of one

variable will lead to the increase or use of another variable. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

H3: There is a significant relationship between brand image and purchase intention

Table 3: Correlation Matrix

Correlations			
		Brand Image	Purchase int
Brand_Image	Pearson Correlation	1	.605**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	204	204
Purchase_in	Pearson Correlation	.605**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	204	204

5.3 Interpretation

According to the Pearson correlation, the relation between the two variables, brand image and purchase intention, is positive at .605 and can share a strong positive linear correlation. It also means that the two

variables move in the same direction, and it also says that the increase or use of one variable will lead to the increase or use of another variable. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

Table 4: Hypothesis Proofs

Hypothesis	Description	Proved
1	The perceived influence of athlete endorsement maintains a direct and positive relationship in building the brand image.	Yes
2	The perceived influence of athlete endorsement maintains a direct and positive relationship with brand recall.	Yes
3	The perceived effectiveness of athlete endorsement maintains the customer's direct and positive purchase intention.	Yes

6. FINDINGS

The findings show that the athlete endorsement strategies adopted by almost every sports brand led to the overall growth and development of the brand. It was also found that a consumer's age is associated with the frequency of purchase, which might be because of many reasons, such as activities involved in the consumer's purchasing power, to name a few. Most respondents believe that the brands endorsed by athletes are more appealing, and the athlete's story has a significant role in making the brand succeed in the market. Descriptive statistics of mean support this statement. It has been seen that the presence of an athlete influences the consumer's interest in the brand.

Moreover, what adds to this interest are the brand associations formed based on the

traits possessed by the athletes. It was found that athletes make it easier for consumers to recognize and recall a brand. It was supported through descriptive analysis of the data collected by the consumers. Therefore, athlete endorsement helps athletes establish brands in markets with many competitors. The findings show that the consumers' purchase intentions are very much associated with the brand image formed under the light of an athlete endorser. According to the data, they are correlated and associated with each other. .605 value of correlation shows moderately high and positive relationships. The findings also show that the consumers' purchase intentions are associated with the brand recall built through an athlete endorser. According to the data, they are correlated and associated with each other.

.66 value of correlation shows moderately high and positive relationships.

advertisements can make a big difference for a brand.

7. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ To establish, support and strengthen their brands, companies in sports products must pay attention to the importance of athlete endorsers and their role as opinion leaders and mentors.
- ❖ Every company must leverage the athlete's fan base and choose their endorser, considering the number of people the athlete can reach out to. Sports is a dynamic and aware field, and people are particular about their chosen products.
- ❖ Companies must ensure they are taking time to build their brand and increase sales through athlete endorsement. Brand image, brand recall and purchase intentions are related to each other. Thus, it is a process of overall development of the brand that, in the end, benefits the company and not just anyone dimension.
- ❖ Companies must build their brands around the strengths and traits of the athlete endorser. It makes it easier for the consumers to connect with the brand as they know the athlete's characteristics and qualities beforehand.
- ❖ Companies must be careful about their choice of athlete endorser, as an athlete's reputation is essential to the brand's success. The company must be ready to address how the athlete endorser's actions might affect the brand's reputation or consumers.
- ❖ Advertisements with athletes' endorsers are considered more successful, and using athletes in their

8. CONCLUSION

This report discusses the effect of athlete endorsements in sports marketing and how it affects the different dimensions that play an essential role in building a sports brand. Findings show that better brand image, brand recall, consumer connection, and purchase intentions were statistically significantly improved by athlete endorsement. It was also found that the traits and reach of an athlete have a significant role in the brand's success.

The study confirms that brand image and recall are improved upon adopting athlete endorsement. The brands are built around athletes who establish themselves as better than others and do better than other brands. Thus, this helps in increasing the purchase intentions of the consumers.

However, companies must also take care of the risks involved with celebrity endorsement. The athlete's selection to endorse a product is a critical and complex task. The athlete's image will directly affect the brand, and the companies must ensure they are ready to deal with a situation in which the idea of the athlete is compromised.

The study also concludes that the effect of athlete endorsement on brand image, brand recall, and purchase intention are positively correlated, confirming that athlete endorsement has an overall effect on building a brand.

Statistically, there is enough evidence to prove that the sports brand that adopts athlete endorsement in marketing its products establish itself better than others. Brands endorsed by athletes can connect with consumers on a deeper level and are more likely to be purchased.

Therefore, the whole idea behind adopting athlete endorsements by big sports brands and investing so much in widening the number of athletes representing them is the

direct effect of these endorsers on the overall value of a brand. These athletes, considered experts in their field, are highly looked upon by thousands, most of whom have an emotional connection to the sport and the player. Therefore, athlete endorsement uses this solid association to target potential clients and triggers.

9. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study limits only to the respondents in and around Bangalore city of Karnataka, India.
- One of the limitations was finding respondents to fill out the questionnaire. As this study needed knowledgeable people interested in sports products to purchase the same to fill out the questionnaire, some were busy and would not respond. Also, they had a lot of work and postponed the questionnaire for a long time. Therefore, much time could have been spent on contacting them repeatedly.

This research analyzes only 204 respondents, giving a biased opinion as the population size is enormous. It was only possible to take responses from some of the enterprises in Bangalore, which again was a limitation.

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