

## EXAMINING THE VISUAL MAP OF ATHLETE ENDORSEMENT EFFECTIVENESS: A CASE OF 2010 FIFA WORLD CUP

Yonghwan Chang, University of Florida, USA  
Akiko Arai, University of Florida, USA

### ABSTRACT

Celebrity endorsement is considered an effective promotional tool by marketers worldwide. Researchers have found that celebrity endorsements result in favorable advertisement ratings and product evaluations, which ultimately have a substantial positive impact on financial returns for the companies (Silvera and Austad, 2004). Particularly, sport celebrities have been considered to be attractive endorsers because they represent healthy, strong, vigorous, enthusiastic and energetic images that many agencies/companies pursue to be associated with (Bush, Martin, and Bush, 2004). A sports celebrity endorser is a famous athlete or coach who uses public recognition to recommend or co-present with a product in an ad (Bush, Martin, and Bush, 2004). Indeed, most top professional athletes, who maintain endorsement contracts as one main source of income, reach considerably higher level of financial success than other athletes without contracts. Interestingly, however, not all athletes reap similarly lucrative benefits from such endorsement contracts. Numerous highly successful athletes occasionally fail to make endorsement contracts due, in part, to awkward match, or mismatch between a product and the athletes' image. Hence, the strategic match or fit between athlete endorser and product brand is considered to be one of the most important aspects in maximizing endorsement effectiveness in product, brand or company marketing goals such as enhancement of corporate image (Daneshvary and Schwer, 2000; Smith, 2004; Till and Busler, 1998). Accordingly, this study attempts to develop the Model of Strategic Match in Athlete Endorsement (MSMAE), a systematic evaluation tool for assessment of strategic match or fit between athlete celebrities and products/brands. Specific aim of this study is to examine the image match between an athlete endorser and product by using a three-dimensional visual map.

For the purposes of this study, a Model of Strategic Match in Athlete Endorsement (MSMAE) was developed by focusing on image fit between an athlete and endorsed products. The MSMAE was developed based on the assumptions that, in the context of celebrity endorsement, there is a transfer of image from a celebrity to a product or vice versa. The strength of image, meaning, or schema at the wider level would vary across endorsers and brands. The MSMAE also highlights a framework of three-dimensional image match. Athlete endorsers are evaluated based on three general athlete dimensions of Athletic Expertise (Ohanian, 1990), Attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990), and Popularity (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Yakimova and Beverland, 2005). Product brands are evaluated by three parallel general product dimensions of Product Quality (Garvin, 1984; Jacobson and Aaker, 1987), Design (Bloch, Brunel, and Arnold, 2003; Luo Lan and Ratchford, 2008), and Popularity (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Yakimova and Beverland, 2005). Combinations of these three dimensional mirror images of endorsers and brands suggest three different types of endorsement deals: (1) Athlete-merited deal (i.e., AMD: athlete branding), (2) Product-merited deal (i.e., PMD: product branding), (3) Athlete-product-merited deal (i.e., APMD: both athlete and product branding).

The 2010 world cup soccer was chosen as the context of this study because the FIFA World Cup is one of the biggest and most popular sport events in the world (Portlock and Rose, 2009). As targets of evaluation, four athletes (i.e., Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, Wayne Rooney and Ricardo Kaka) were selected based on their popularity as a brand or amount of media coverage on the credible Internet sites. Two endorsed products were matched and evaluated for each athlete; a total of eight currently endorsed product cases were evaluated. The online survey was conducted during 2010 FIFA World Cup from students of selected universities in Japan, South Korea, and United States. A total of 647 college students successfully completed the survey and therefore were included in the data analyses. The participants were asked to pick one of the most familiar athletes on the list of four athlete names and rate the agreement scales in terms of their chosen athlete. Next, the participants were also asked to choose one of the most familiar product brands on the list of two actually endorsed product brands by the chosen athlete and rate the agreement scales in terms of the product brands choice. A series of paired-samples t-tests was employed to examine the image match between athlete endorsers and the products they endorse. The results of the series of paired-samples t-tests indicate that all eight cases of expertise/quality matching were product-merited deals. In terms of attractiveness/design, the results of the series of paired-samples t-tests indicate that all attractiveness/design matching were product-merited deals except one case (Ronaldo = Nike). In terms of brand popularity, the results of the series of paired-samples t-tests indicate that all popularity matching were product-merited deals except two cases (mean scores: Messi > Nike; Kaka > Almani). Theoretical and managerial implications will be discussed in the presentation.

References available upon request