

Developing an Athlete Brand Identity Scale

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Aim

It is necessary to develop an athlete brand identity measurement tool to enhance research in this space and allow future comparisons between identity and image (Lobpries, Bennet & Brison, 2017). The main purpose of this ongoing study is to establish the different dimensions of the athlete brand identity construct and to develop the Athlete Brand Identity Scale (ABIDS). This study will contribute to research in the field of marketing and branding by incorporating Rasch measurement theory (Rasch, 1960) in the scale development process. Results of this study may provide useful insights and guidance that could help athletes establish successful brands.

Literature Review

Athlete brand research has received increased attention since 2012 and various studies have laid substantial foundations in this domain (e.g., Arai, Ko & Ross, 2014). Traditional models of brand management place most emphasis on matters external to the brand and pay insufficient attention to brand identity (De Chernatony, 1999). Hence, most research on athlete branding has been conducted with a focus on brand image from a consumer perspective (e.g., Arai et al., 2014). Considerably fewer studies investigate brands from the athlete's perspective (brand identity; e.g., Lobpries et al., 2017). Measuring brand identity is important because the success of a brand depends on the perception of a brand at the time of decoding its identity facets (Roy & Banerjee, 2014), which shape the brand's image in the mind of consumers. Therefore, effective management of internal brand resources results in favourable brand image (Harris & De Chernatony, 2011). Hence, brand identity and image are interrelated and ensuring synchronization between them is a prerequisite for successful branding. This requirement for synchronization makes the need for examining brand identity even more imminent. Particularly, when research shows that one significant reason for brand failure is the existence of a gap between brand identity and resultant brand image (Roy & Banerjee, 2014).

Methodology

Items were derived from existing athlete brand measures and reduced by athlete experts, who were also given the chance to add items. A pool of 55 remaining items was tested in a pilot study with 163 Australian athletes from 25 different sports. Refinement of the item pool was undertaken in two stages. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) reduced the items and identified underlying common factors. Rasch analysis then assessed item measurement properties from those factors to form a concise scale which best represents athlete brand identity. Rasch analysis was conducted following the protocol applied by Pallant and Tennant (2007).

Preliminary Results and Discussion

PCA identified two common factors of items. Rasch analysis on both factors showed PSI values exceeding .8, good item- and person-fit statistics with mean scores close to zero and standard deviations below 1.5, indicating no misfitting items or respondents in the sample. However, a significant item-trait interaction chi-square value highlighted misfit between the

data and the model for factor 1. In the analysis process, two items were deleted from factor 1 due to high correlation between items and potential multi-dimensionality. This significantly improved the overall fit and ensured uni-dimensionality. The 21 remaining items in factor 1 relate to *Athlete Personality Features* (e.g., ‘passionate’ and ‘trustworthy’). The prevalent difference to existing scales (e.g., SABI; Arai et al., 2013) is that none of the items associate to the physical appearance of athletes. Experts did not regard this as essential for athlete brand identity, yet attractive appearance forms one dimension of athlete brand image. Only one item of factor 2 (*Social Media Presence*) was derived from existing scales (‘supported by fans’); the remaining four items were those suggested by athlete experts (‘engage in social media’, ‘attract media attention’, ‘share my athletic life with fans’, ‘online social media presence that is in line with my athlete brand’). The emergence of this factor highlights the increased importance of social media which forms an essential part of the athlete brand identity construct.

Rasch analysis also highlighted issues with both sub-scales and further refinements are necessary to reduce the number of items in factor one to develop a compact scale. Most items presented disordered thresholds, suggesting a problem with the response scale. Hence, two new questionnaires containing either unipolar or bipolar response formats to items are currently being tested on Australian consumers and athletes. Comparison of different response formats will allow selection of the most suitable response scale for the ABIdS. Further, the inclusion of athletes and consumers will enable the assessment of brand congruence.

Conclusion

Information gathered from athlete perceptions of what is important for their brand may further enhance our understanding of the complexity of human brands and allow comparisons with consumer opinions by evaluating congruence between the two. ABIdS is the first scale developed within this field which includes the athlete viewpoint and it also appears to be the first to use Rasch analysis as part of the scale development process.

References

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