

Model of Athlete-Target Fit (MATF)

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Aim

On the first impression, the objectives why sponsors engage in athlete sponsorships seem largely investigated in academic literature. Thus, sponsors aim generally for psychosocial dimensions like personalizing the brand and build an emotional connection with the recipient, increasing awareness as well as enhancing their image (Ambroise et al., 2014). While we might know the kinds of sponsors' objectives, we still need a better understanding of how sponsoring managers want to achieve these goals. Although there is almost a complete agreement on the need of a profound sponsoring planning to ensure sponsoring success, a systematic planning process is often been neglected in practice (Schwizer & Reinecke, 2017). Especially, when deploying the sponsored athlete as an endorser, the challenge for sponsors is to select the right athlete for achieving their specific sponsorship-goal. We assume that there is a non-negligible connection between the unique characteristics of an athlete's personality and the sponsors' specific objectives. Hence, the aim of this study is to depict which characteristics of an athlete are important for sponsors when deploying him or her as an endorser for a specific objective. Therefore, we should understand the decision-making process more in detail and update the objectives when engaging in athlete endorsements. Accordingly, the following research questions are stated:

RQ1: What are corporate sponsorship objectives when deploying an athlete as an endorser?

RQ2: How far is there a connection between the athletes' specific characteristics and the brands individual sponsorship objectives when deploying an athlete as an endorser?

Theoretical Background

Setting objectives represents a crucial step in the sponsorship decision-making process because it provides the foundation for the performance measurement of the sponsorship. It is essential for selecting an effective sponsoring object (Schwizer & Reinecke, 2017). As aforementioned sponsors aim mainly for psychological dimensions to enhance sales objectives when engaging in athlete sponsorships, especially in athlete endorsements. In addition, a variety of unique characteristics of the athlete, outlined in academic literature, can affect the effectiveness of the endorsement (Desmarais, 2017; Arai et al., 2014). In this study, 26 characteristics were defined based on a literature review of 12 articles specifically towards athlete, respectively celebrity, attributes.

Although setting an objective is the foundation of sponsoring planning, there is no recent study, which investigated the sponsors' selection process of athlete endorsers based on the brands previously defined goal(s). In all, there is a limited research up to date on how marketing managers relate to the selection of athlete endorsers (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016).

Methodology

To answer the research questions of this project, a cross-sectional study with Bavarian companies, which deploy athlete as endorsers, has been conducted. During a one-month period in January 2018, 23 companies with 105 employers had been asked to participate in the survey. In the end, 17 companies with 66 attendees from different units (PR/media, marketing, sales) took part in this study, what represents with 74% a very good response

(Baker, 1992). Thereby, we have asked employees that are directly involved in the sponsorship and endorser decision process. The full-transparent online measuring instrument is developed according to the systematic of Hohenauer (2016) and was pre-tested with testimonial experts. The structure is focusing on the value- or risk potential of the scenarios according to business goals in 26 categories.

Results and Implications

To answer RQ1, descriptive statistic has been adopted. Hence, objectives towards brand ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 0.64$) respectively product awareness ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.59$) as well as the overall brand image ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.70$) are the most mentioned objectives when deploying an athlete endorser. This is in line with previous studies.

For answering RQ2, firstly descriptive statistic has been used to identify the overall importance of the identified characteristics. Thus, regardless of the defined objective, trustworthiness ($M = 6.62$, $SD = 0.60$) and the overall image of the athlete ($M = 6.58$, $SD = 0.64$) followed by Athlete/Brand-Fit ($M = 6.34$, $SD = 0.74$), the match between athlete and the target audience ($M = 6.14$, $SD = 1.00$), athlete's awareness ($M = 6.05$, $SD = 0.84$) and popularity ($M = 6.03$, $SD = 0.88$) has been weight as the most important attributes.

To identify discrepancies in weighing the attributes depending on the sponsors' objective when deploying an athlete as an endorser, Mann-Whitney-U-Tests as well as Spearman correlations have been adopted. The results offer a range of implications for both theory and praxis. For example, if a sponsor wants to achieve directly sales objectives, the status of the athletes sport is more important than when targeting other goals, $U(49) = 111$, $p < .05$. Further results are calculated.

The implications are: (1) the study offers additional relevant moderators and mediators for further research; (2) we offer the follow-up research framework for future studies; (3) the study offers a valuable ready-to-use management tool (MATF-Tool).

References

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