

# Marketing assignment

[Art & Culture](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

A conceptual model of athlete brand image (IAMBI) is developed incorporating three key dimensions: athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle. These dimensions are defined by an athlete's on-field characteristics, attractive external appearance, and off-field marketable attributes. This study contributes to the sport branding literature by providing the first comprehensive conceptual framework of athlete brand image and offering managerial implications for building and managing the brand image of individual athletes. © 2013 Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand.

Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved. Keywords: Athlete Brand management Brand image Conceptual model

1. Introduction Recently, many athletes have been expanding their influence beyond their sport by getting involved in a variety of social activities and businesses. In light of modern media culture, those athletes are considered “ a social sign, carrying cultural meanings and ideological values, which express the intimacies of individual personality, inviting desire and identification; an emblem of national celebrity, moulded on the body, fashion and personal style” (Eggshell, 1991, p. lii). The concept of ‘ athlete brand’ has emerged from their multi-functional and multi-platform nature. Athletes are considered not only as vehicles for advertisements or product endorsement, but also as cultural products that can be sold as “ brands” (Gilchrest, 2005). In fact, there are numerous sport agencies currently in existence that provide a vast range of client level services. In this highly competitive industry, managing brands for athletes is becoming an essential task for agents (IBIS World Industry reports, 2008).

For example, 'MGM, the world's largest sport agency announced their mission statement as "Today, we help hundreds of elite athletes, coaches, industry executives and prestigious sports organizations maximize their earnings potential and build strong personal brands" (OMG, n. D. ). The brand management for athletes has grown in importance because the concept of branding is well suited for athletes as products.

Previous branding studies have documented positive consequences of successful branding such as: influencing the probability of brand choice, willingness to pay premium price, marketing communication effectiveness, and promotion of positive word of mouth (Asker, 1996; Berry, 2000; Keller, 1993; Rein, Kettle, & Shields, AAA). These benefits are also highly applicable to individual athletes, with well-branded athletes attaining price premiums on their salary, transfer fees, contract monies, and the ability to maintain fan support even when their performance has declined (Gladden & Funk, 2001).

Well-branded athletes who carry symbolic messages can attract companies seeking effective endorsers. Furthermore, the \* corresponding author. Tell. +1 352 392 4042; fax: +1 352 392 7588. E-mail address:

[email protected]Due (Y. J. OK). 1441-3523/\$ – see front matter ; 2013 Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved. Http://DXL. DOI. Org/ 10. 1016/J. SMS. 2013.

04. 003 A. Aria et al. Sport Management Review 17 (2014) 97-106

established brand value of the athlete will help his/her post-athletic career because well-branded athletes can leverage their brand value through their post-athletic career (Rein et al. , AAA). Rein et al. (AAA) pointed out the advantage of viewing athletes as a brand, stating " because there are a <https://assignbuster.com/marketing-assignment-essay-samples-80/>

growing number of distribution opportunities available, the athlete has the potential to enter into a variety of sectors and use his or her sports career as a platform for other endeavors. Additionally, athletes are considered to be unstable products in the sport industry because of the potential risks for unexpected injuries or performance slumps. Considering those risks, athletes are truly in need of strong branding strategies. Even though winning is one of the major factors in the sports brand mix, win-loss cycles are an inevitable indentation for athlete brands. Sports marketers should seek other branding strategies (e. G. , establishing of a strong brand identity) to overcome losing records and sustain loyalty (Rein, Kettle, & Shields, Bibb; Richer & Pond, 2006).

Acknowledging the unique nature of the sports products including those of athletes, Rein et al. (Bibb) emphasized that “ sports products can only survive with new brand thinking” (p. 30). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the construct of athlete brand image and propose a conceptual model of athlete brand image (IAMBI). This study identifies specific dimensions of athlete brand image through an extensive literature review. The IAMBI provides a theoretical understanding of athlete brand image and offers a structural framework for managers and agents in the development and management of athlete brands. . Theoretical background 2. 1 . Definition of athlete brand Defining an athlete brand is a fundamental step in the process of model development. Several scholars have attempted to define “ human brand”, but a common consensus has not yet been achieved. A brand in sports is defined as “ a name, design, symbol, or any combination that a sports organization uses to help preferential its product from the

competition” (Shank, 1999, p. 239). According to this definition, all individual athletes can be considered as brands because every athlete has a name, distinctive appearance, and a personality.

Consistent with this, Thomson (2006) broadly defined the human brand as “any well-known persona who is the subject of marketing communications efforts” (p. 104). On the other hand, according to Keller, “A brand is something that has actually created a certain amount of awareness, reputation, prominence, and so on in the market place” (Keller, 2008, p. 2). Till (2001) discussed athlete brand in a limited sense, and implied that only athletes who have earned a significant amount of money from endorsement contracts can be considered as brands.

By applying these basic concepts, we define an athlete brand as a public persona of an individual athlete who has established their own symbolic meaning and value using their name, face or other brand elements in the market. 2. 2. Brand equity and athlete brand image Branding is generally understood to be a strategy for establishing a trademark the public associates exclusively with an entity (Stories, 2008). From an academic perspective, branding is often discussed in terms of developing, building, managing, and measuring brand equity (Asker, 1996; Ross, 2006).

Brand equity is often defined as the added value attached to the brand name or other brand elements (Asker, 1996), and includes both financial and customer-based perspectives of value (Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998). However, recent brand management literature tends to understand ‘brand equity’ focusing only on the consumer’s perspective, while ‘brand value’

indicates quantifiable elements in relation to its financial worth (Ragging & Leone, 2009).

Although consensus for a definition of brand equity has yet to be reached, consistent with the majority of previous studies (Asker, 1991; Keller, 1993), this study concentrates on the consumer's perspective of brand equity.

Asker (1991) and Keller (1993) have conducted extensive research on brand equity, and are viewed as perhaps the two foremost authorities on the topic. Shaker's (1991) framework emphasizes the contents of brand equity, and includes brand name awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations.

Alternatively, Keller (1993) developed a customer-based brand equity model, suggesting that costive equity is developed when customers have high levels of awareness and familiarity with the brand, and hold strong, favorable, and unique brand associations in memory. Although Asker (1991) and Keller (1993) have taken different approaches in understanding brand equity, both emphasized the importance of brand associations in the process of building a strong brand.

In fact, subsequent marketing studies have found that brand choice and brand loyalty are highly influenced by the image that consumers make with a brand (Bauer, Saucer, & Exile, 2005; Bauer, Saucer, & Exile, 2008; Chem., 2001; Low & Lamb, 2000). Importantly, marketing a sport property (e. G. , team or individual athlete) is “ all about selling an image” while other product brands may have many other tangible brand elements (e. G. ,

quality and price) that could be managed (Cordoned, 2001, p. 13). Given this important distinction, the focus of this study is an athlete's brand image.

Brand image has been defined as the reasoned or emotional perceptions consumers attach to specific brands (Dobbin & Khan, 1990), and involves the perceptions of a particular brand as reflected by the brand associations held in a consumer's memory (Keller, 1993). Based on these definitions, 'brand image' and 'brand association' are often used interchangeably in the literature (e. G. , Bauer, Saucer, et al. , 2005). Keller (1993) further classified the types of brand associations into overall brand attitudes, brand attributes (I. E. Product-related attributes and non-product-related attributes), and brand benefits (I. E. , functional benefit, symbolic benefit, experiential benefits). Brand attributes are "those descriptive features that characterize a product or service - what a consumer thinks the product or service is or has and what is involved with its arches or consumption" (Keller, 1993, p. 4). Attributes are further classified into product-related attributes, which are the necessary features for performing the product or service function, and non-product attributes, which are the external features of a product or service.

These external features include price information, packaging or product appearance information, user imagery, and usage imagery (Keller, 1993). Lastly, brand benefits refer to "the personal value consumers attach to the product or service attributes - that is, what consumers think the product or service can do for them" (Keller, 1993, p. ). Although Seller's classification of brand associations (1993) provides an in-depth understanding of the multidimensional brand image construct, the classifications are still controversial.

First, in the marketing literature, attitude is defined as an affective reaction toward the product or service (Lutz, 1991) and is often considered as attitudinal loyalty. For example, attitude is often modeled as a dependent variable of image management (Burner & Hansel, 1996; Homer, 2006; Karmic & Ship, 1998). Second, Keller (1993) implied that the associations are not independent of each other ND some benefits correspond with attributes. In fact, a previous brand image free- thought listing survey identified only two benefit dimensions: solicitation and commitment (Ross, James, & Barras, 2006).

These results imply that when consumers are asked to think about the brand, they tend to recognize only one aspect (I. E. , attributes or benefits). This is consistent with previous advertising studies (e. G. , Choc & Rifer, 2007; Ionian, 1990) that identified the adjectives to describe endorsers in order to assess the endorsers' image. Bauer, Saucer, et al. (2005) explained the allegations between brand attributes and customers' benefit by applying the means-end chain model (Stuntman, 1982).

They suggested that product attributes are the means for consumers to obtain desired benefits. On an unconscious level, the product attributes are ideally linked to desirable benefits for the consumer. Therefore, this study focuses only on the attribute features of athlete brands. We understand an athlete's brand image as a consumers' perception about athlete brand attributes. 2. 3. Application of brand image In fact, previous studies have found that brand image is an important antecedent of fan loyalty (Bauer et al. 008; Bauer, Saucer & Schmitt, 2005). If sport marketers can understand what creates brand associations or which association factors make an  
<https://assignbuster.com/marketing-assignment-essay-samples-80/>

athlete a strong brand, they can develop marketing strategies to create new, favorable brand associations and reinforce existing positive brand associations (Gladden & Funk, 2001). Because brand associations differ across brands and product categories (Low & Lamb, 2000), it is necessary to examine what kinds of brand associations become important in developing a strong athlete brand.

Sports consumers hold unique associations in memory when thinking of certain athlete brands. The purpose of the current study is to identify athlete brand-specific brand associations. Although few studies have directly examined athlete brand image, there are some related studies applicable to athlete brand image. Therefore, we conducted a comprehensive literature review in sport team branding and athlete endorser image studies to identify the crucial brand associations in developing brand equity for athletes. 2. 3. 1.

Endorser image Athlete image management has often been discussed in studies regarding product endorser image rather than a brand itself (Choc & Rifer, 2007; Ionian, 1991; Till, 2001). Sahara (2007) defined an endorser as a ; well-known person used in advertising whose function is to sell products” (p. 128). However, considering their multi- functional, symbolic status, athletes are more than just endorsers. As Seen and Lukas (2007) stated, “ celebrity product endorsement is a form of cooperating.. . The essence of co-branding is a public relationship between independent brands” (p. 23), recent endorsement studies have begun to discuss endorsers as independent brands and consider their relationship as ‘ co-branding rather than simply endorsers and endorsers. Although the celebrity endorsement studies have established a rich history of research, due to the difference of the goal

<https://assignbuster.com/marketing-assignment-essay-samples-80/>

orientation, those research fields are not well linked. However, the identified components of effective endorsers are applicable for athlete branding because athletes' self-branding activities include a self-endorsement perspective.

Therefore, the theories discussed in the endorser image research support the development of the athlete brand association model and generate implications for brand management. Athlete and celebrity endorsement research has attempted to examine the 'image' that influences the effectiveness of celebrities and athletes as product endorsers. Ionian (1991), for example, examined the impact of celebrity spokespersons' perceived image on consumers' intention to purchase endorsed products.

This source credibility model (Ionian, 1990) provides a crucial theoretical basis for athletes to be established as brands. Many scholars agree that a brand includes a promise for future satisfaction (Berry, 2000; Clifton & Simmons, 2004; Ragging & Leone, 2007), and therefore, athletes have to be credible for satisfying consumers' future needs. Also, in the general brand management literature, brand credibility has been considered to be an important antecedent of brand loyalty or brand choice (Order & Swat, 2004; Kim, Morris, & Swat, 2008).

Order and Swat (2004) defined brand credibility as "the believability of the product information contained in a brand, which requires that consumers perceive that the brand have the ability (I. E. , expertise) and willingness (I. E. , trustworthiness) to continuously deliver what has been promised."

Therefore, credibility is considered as an essential element for athletes not

only to be endorsers, but also to be established brands. Credibility is considered to have two primary components, trustworthiness and expertise (Order & Swat, 2004).

Trustworthiness implies that it is believed a brand will deliver what it has promised, while expertise implies that the brand is perceived as capable of delivering the promise (Kim et al. , 2008). Ionian (1990) also added physical attractiveness as a dimension of source credibility based on Josephs (1982) study, which experimentally proved that physically attractive communicators have a more positive impact on opinion change, product evaluation, and other dependent measures.

The dimensions (attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise) proposed by Ionian (1990) are also applicable for athlete brand image. Choc and Rifer (2007) further extended the celebrity image dimensions to include genuineness, competence, excitement and sociability. Those dimensions were confirmed as independent dimensions from credibility dimensions: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise (Ionian, 1990). The athletic star power dimensions identified by Brainstem and Ghana (2005) also extended and modified those endorser characteristics into sports stars.

Star power was nationalized as the power and the unique characteristics of a specific individual that make him or her “ star worthy’ (French & Raven, 1959). Based on four endorser effectiveness frameworks: the source attractiveness model (McGuire, 1985), source credibility model (McGuire, 1968) the meaning transfer model (McCracken, 1989) and the product match-up hypothesis (Gamins, 1990), Brainstem and Ghana (2005) identified

athletic star power factors (I. E. , professional trustworthiness, likeable personality, athletic expertise, social attractiveness and characteristic style).

As such, endorser image dimensions have been considered from various angles. In this study, we integrated and modified those identified endorser image dimensions based on Seller's framework (1993), and attempt to provide structural understanding of athlete brand image dimensions.

### 2.3.2. Sport team branding

Although previous literature focusing solely on athlete brands is lacking, several sport team branding studies have been conducted. Unlike other tangible products, the sports consumers' needs, expectations, and image for sports products are unique (Gladden et al. 1998). Thus, the sport-specific dimensions found in the sport team brand image studies might be applicable to the dimensions of athlete brand image. Specifically, the team sports brand association research by Gladden and Funk (2001, 2002) and Ross et al. (2006) are two relevant studies that can provide a foundation for an athlete brand image construct. By adapting Seller's conceptualization of brand associations (1993), Gladden and Funk (2001, 2002) developed the team association model (TAM) to examine brand associations of sports teams.

Gladden and Funk (2002) identified 16 brand association dimensions through an extensive literature review and included: reduce-related attributes (I. E. , success, star player, head coach, team's management), non product-related attributes (I. E. , logo, stadium, tradition, product delivery), symbolic benefits (I. E. , fun identification, peer group acceptance), experiential benefits (I. E. , escape, nostalgia, pride in place), and attitude (I. E. , importance, knowledge, affective reaction).

<https://assignbuster.com/marketing-assignment-essay-samples-80/>

In a related study, Ross et al. (2006) developed the team brand association scale (TABS) to examine brand associations in professional sports teams. Ross et al. Questioned the structure of the brand image dimensions reposed by Gladden and Funk. In fact, several researchers (Low & Lamb, 2000) have argued that Asker (1991) and Seller's (1993) brand image dimensions may not reflect the consumers' image precisely because Asker and Seller's models have not been empirically tested. Ross et al. (2006) asserted that the literature review and brainstorming sessions conducted by Gladden and Funk were not enough to identify the appropriate brand associations in sport. Therefore, Ross et al. (2006) identified brand association dimensions through a free-thought listing technique and strict psychometric analysis to confirm the dimensions' validity. The final scale identified 11 dimensions underlying professional sports team brand associations and included success, history, stadium, team characteristics, logo, concessions, solicitation, rivalry, commitment, organizational attribute, and non player personnel.

Some of the factors identified in the TAM (Gladden & Funk, 2001) and TABS (Ross et al. , 2006) were also supported by a qualitative study. Richer and Pond (2006) investigated how legendary sports teams with high brand equity (I. E. , Toronto Maple Leafs and football club Barcelona) have built and leveraged their brand equity. Richer and Pond (2006) identified four common fundamental factors where two teams establish their brands: winning tradition, intense rivalry, longevity and tradition and powerful fans.

Based on the sports team branding literature, we further identified and modified the athlete brand specific associations to include competition style, rivalry, symbol, life story and relationship effort. 3. Model development:  
<https://assignbuster.com/marketing-assignment-essay-samples-80/>

athlete brand image The dimensions of the athlete brand image model proposed in this paper were identified through a comprehensive literature review of the previously discussed research fields: (1) endorser image studies that explore the factors for being an effective endorser, and (2) sports team branding studies that explore the sports team brand association dimensions.

The model of athlete brand image is primarily based on Seller's (1993) classification of attribute dimensions (product related attributes and non-product related attributes). We adopt Seller's customer-based brand equity model (1993) here because the model highlights the multidimensional structure of brand associations. In applying the schema to the athlete brand context, we consider athletic performance as a product related attribute (on-field attribute) since athletes typically develop their brand status based on their continued excellence in their sport (e. . , Andrews & Jackson, 2001, p. 8). Gladden et al. (1998) also stated that success should be the most important creator of brand associations and brand equity over time. We consider here other off-field characteristics (I. E. , marketable lifestyle) as equivalent to non-product related attributes. The physical attractiveness was initially included in the off-field attributes. However, the appearance of athletes could be considered both on-field and off-field attribute (e. G. Body fitness). Furthermore, athletes' appearances may serve as a " trademark' of their brands. Since this trademark management is a major building block in most branding practice (Stories, 2008), we decided to place the attractive appearance as a primary dimension that parallels athletic performance and

101 Table 1 Definitions of athlete brand image dimension. Dimension

Definition Sub-dimension Athletic performance An athlete's sport performance related features Athletic expertise

An athlete's individual achievement and athletic capability (winning, skills, proficiency in their sport) An athlete's specific characteristics of his/her performance in a competition An athlete's virtuous behavior that people have determined is appropriate (fair play, respect for the game, integrity) An athlete's competitive relationship with other athletes Competition style Sportsmanship Rivalry Attractive appearance An athlete's attractive external appearance Physical attractiveness Symbol Body fitness Marketable lifestyle An athlete's off-field marketable features Life story Role model Relationship effort

An athlete's physical qualities and characteristics that spectators find esthetically pleasing An athlete's attractive personal style and trademark An athlete's body fitness in his/her sport An appealing, interesting off-field life story that includes a message and reflects the athlete's personal value An athlete's ethical behavior that society has determined is worth emulating An athlete's positive attitude toward interaction with fans, spectators, sponsors and media marketable life style in the model.

The sub-dimensions were adopted and modified from endorsement and sports team brand association dimensions. The detailed definitions and adaptation process of each sub-dimension is provided below (Table 3. 1 .  
Athletic performance Athletic performance refers to an athlete's sports performance related associations, and is further divided into: athletic expertise, competition style, sportsmanship and rivalry. Athletic expertise

involves an athlete's individual sports achievements and capabilities (e. G. , winning, skills, and proficiency in their sport).

Gladden et al. (1998) suggested that success is probably the most important creator of brand associations and brand equity over time. However, success in sports often means more than simply the winning records of the athletes. The winning does not have to be consistent success but can be the extraordinary records which define their brands as competitive (Richer & Pond, 2006). Furthermore, we discussed in the introduction, developing athlete brands based only on winning is risky because losing is inevitable.

Therefore, the factor focuses more on expertise. Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Guillotine (2003) suggested that there are different types of fans, each viewing success in various ways. One type of fan highly identifies themselves with the team and cares about winning, while another type of fan is just a spectator who seeks a well-played, back-and-forth game. Those fans are motivated more by the skills and knowledge of the athletes than just winning. Expertise has been identified as a critical characteristic for endorsers.

Havilland, Janis and Kelley (1953) found that " expertness" and " trustworthiness" are major dimensions of the source credibility of endorsers, and Ionian (1990) further identified the expertise dimensions as expert, experienced, knowledgeable, qualified, and skilled. In addition, an athlete endorsement study reported that athletic expertise is most effective in making athletes recognizable in a target market (Brainstem & Ghana, 2005).

Competition style refers to an athlete's specific characteristics of his/her performance in the competition itself.

Ross et al. (2006) identified team play characteristics to be specific characteristics that a team displays on the field (I. E. , how the team scores), as one of the team brand associations. The spectator motivation literature has also found that identification with the team or player is one of the most important factors for fans' loyal behavior (Trail et al. , 2003). If the athlete has a clear and unique playing Tyler that fans can easily identify with, strong identification will likely develop and lead to loyalty.

Sportsmanship refers to an athlete's virtuous behavior and is often defined by fairness, integrity, ethical behavior, and respect for the game, opponents, and teammates (e. G. , Sessions, 2004; Shields & Premiered, 1995).

Sportsmanship can be a symbolic message for the athlete brand, and is very important when trying to attract consumer trust. This dimension was chosen as an athlete specific factor of trustworthiness given that Ionian (1990) defined the dimensions of trustworthiness s dependable, honest, reliable, sincere, and trustworthy in the celebrity endorser- credibility scale.