

INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF CREDIBILITY OF SPORTS CELEBRITY ENDORSERS INFLUENCING SPORTS CELEBRITY IDENTIFICATION AND PURCHASE INTENTION OF ENDORSED BRANDS

ISTRAŽIVANJE ULOGE KREDIBILITETA SLAVNIH SPORTAŠA NA POISTOVJEĆIVANJE S NJIMA I NAMJERU KUPOVINE ZAGOVARANE MARKE



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Preliminary communication

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Abstract

Purpose – This study was aimed at investigating the credibility of South African sports celebrities for its potential influence on the identification with and purchase intention among South African consumers regarding endorsed brands.

Design/Methodology/Approach – A non-probability sampling method was applied to select 250 respondents for the research. A self-administrated questionnaire was used for data collection and responses were recorded on a six-point Likert-type scale.

Findings and Implications – Research results showed attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness, based on correlation analysis, as having positive relationships with both identification with sports celebrity endorsers and purchase intention of endorsed brands. Identification with sport celebrities was found to have a positive impact on purchase intentions regarding endorsed brands. In addition, the overall credibility of sport celeb-

Sažetak

Svrha – Rad istražuje utjecaj kredibiliteta južnoafričkih slavni sportaša na poistovjećivanje s njima i namjeru kupovine zagovarane marke među južnoafričkim potrošačima.

Metodološki pristup – U istraživanju je korištena neprobabilistička metoda uzorkovanja s 250 ispitanika. Za prikupljanje podataka korišten je anketni upitnik za samopopunjavanje, a odgovori su bilježeni na Likertovoj ljestvici od šest stupnjeva.

Rezultati i implikacije – Na osnovi analize korelacije rezultati istraživanja otkrivaju da privlačnost, stručnost i pouzdanost pokazuju pozitivne odnose s poistovjećivanjem sa slavni sportašima, kao i s namjerom kupovine zagovaranih marki. Poistovjećivanje pokazuje pozitivan utjecaj na namjere kupovine zagovaranih marki. Isto tako, ukupan kredibilitet slavnog sportaša ima pozitivan utjecaj na namjeru kupovine zagovaranih marki.

rity endorsers was shown to exert a positive influence on purchase intention of endorsed brands.

Limitations – A larger sample size would be required in future research.

Originality – This study revealed the role of sports celebrity credibility for the identification of sports celebrity endorsers and purchase intention of endorsed brands in South Africa. The findings of this study can help businesses improve their selection of sport celebrities as endorsers of their brands, which is important given that the credibility of sports celebrities has a potential to improve sports celebrity identification and purchase intentions regarding the endorsed brands among customers.

Keywords – sports celebrity, credibility, identification, purchase intention, South Africa

Ograničenja – U budućim istraživanjima bit će potreban veći uzorak.

Doprinos – Rad je otkrio ulogu kredibiliteta slavnoga sportaša koji utječe na poistovjećivanje s njime i namjeru kupovine zagovaranih marki u Južnoj Africi. Doprinos rada jest u tome da može pomoći poduzećima u boljem odabiru slavni sportaša kao zagovaratelja svojih maraka, što je važno, s obzirom na to da kredibilitet slavni sportaša ima potencijal poboljšati poistovjećivanje s njima kao i namjeru kupovine zagovaranih marki među potrošačima.

Ključne riječi – slavni sportaš, kredibilitet, poistovjećivanje, namjera kupovine, Južna Afrika

1. INTRODUCTION

A celebrity is a popular individual and well-known person in public. Such individuals are actively involved in different fields, one of which is sports. If an individual is relatively well-known in their discipline and known to be involved in sports with athletic achievements locally or globally, such a person can be defined as a sports celebrity (Chung, Hwang & Ryu, 2019). South Africa has several sporting codes, with the main three being rugby, cricket, and soccer (Kaplan, 2015). Therefore, South Africa has a wide array of sports celebrities from various sports disciplines, including soccer, rugby, and cricket. Popular sports celebrities in South Africa include Tembinkosi Lorch, Siya Kolisi, and Kagiso Rabada, to name but a few. These individuals are role models for the South African community. South Africans have a deep love for sports that has caught the attention of avid marketers, who have started linking their respective brands to well-known celebrities who can influence the public (Etzman & Penstone, 2001).

Yen (2017) states that companies cannot ignore the business benefits that emanate from celebrity product endorsements. Shank and Lyberger (2015) define a celebrity as any individual enjoying recognition from the public audience; such recognition can be utilized to recommend the endorsed product that is the focal point of an advertisement. For example, Roger Federer has been a Nike endorser for 10 years, and both LeBron James and Cristiano Ronaldo have a lifetime endorsement deal with Nike (Forbes, 2019; Goal, 2018). Other sports celebrities endorsing products are Vincent Pule and Xola Mlambo, who are both brand ambassadors for Adidas. As such they will participate in future Adidas advertising campaigns (Media update, 2019). Amis, Slack, and Berrett (1999) state that sports celebrity endorsements are assets that give the endorsed brands a competitive advantage. Kaplan (2015) emphasizes that competitive advantage places a company in a favorable or superior business position to outperform its competitors. Celebrities who endorse a specific brand provide compet-

itive advantages and opportunities to reach the public audience (Tzoumaka, Tsiotsou & Siomkos, 2016). Although it is expensive for a company and its brand to use a sports celebrity, celebrity endorsement is seen as an effective tool to deliver the marketing campaign message of the product or service being endorsed. The positive actions and reputation of a sports celebrity are transferred to the product or service, thus adding value. Therefore, sports celebrity endorsement assists in increasing sales and profits, making an effective marketing tool (Voráček & Čáslavová, 2019). Aligning celebrity endorsements can be immensely valuable in building brands. However, brand values must remain close to the celebrity endorser in order to influence the consumer purchase decision sufficiently (Verhellen, Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2013).

Purchase intention is considered to be an influence on individual decision-making to purchase a certain product or service (Ling, Chai & Piew, 2010). Purchase intention is defined as decision-making that leads to the purchase of a product from a particular company or brand (Mirabi, Akbariyeh & Tahmasebifard, 2015). As sports celebrities are respected in the sports industry, they have more power to influence their followers. Consumers' respect for a sports celebrity is in turn transferred to an endorsed product or brand, which is seen to be more attractive to consumers, and affects the advertisement, marketing message, brand conveyance, and consumers' positive behavioral responses to the product (Osei-Frimpong, Donkor & Owusu-Frimpong, 2019). In the case of Caster Semenya, consumers see the brand in action. Fans can visualize her wearing running shoes, which makes the brand association much more tangible (Gordon, James & Yoshida, 2016). The credibility that Caster exhibits, together with her association with the brand's products, has a positive impact on consumers' purchase intentions (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Therefore, it is important for businesses to understand the credibility of the sports celebrities to be employed as endorsers for their brands.

In South Africa, many companies have adopted celebrity endorsement widely as a marketing strategy. However, there is no study conducted in South Africa investigating the credibility of those sports celebrity endorsers and influencing purchase intention among customers. Therefore, the objective of this study is to close this gap, through investigating the credibility of sport celebrity endorsers influencing sports celebrity identification and purchase intentions on the endorsed brands within the South African context. This will be beneficial for marketers in selecting an appropriate sports celebrity to get a positive return on investments on sports celebrity endorsements' deals made in South Africa.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Sports celebrity endorsement

According to Bergkvist and Zhou (2016), a celebrity endorsement deal is a mutual agreement between a popular, recognizable individual and an organization that uses this celebrity to promote its brand and offerings. Brands often depend on celebrity endorsement to achieve their strategic and financial goals (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020; Riezebos & Kist, 2003). Among other things, celebrities may appear in brand advertisements and in the press, serve as brand ambassadors, give testimonials, receive sponsorships, and offer product or service endorsements that are widely seen, also on social media platforms (Os-ei-Frimpong et al., 2019). For example, Caster Semenya, the World Olympic and Commonwealth Games 800 m champion, became a Discovery Vitality Ambassador in 2018. She endorses the brand's "healthy lifestyle values on and off the track and inspires action" (Discovery, 2018). Siya Kolisi is another good example of a celebrity endorser; he endorses Adidas on both television and social media platforms (Breakfast, 2019).

In marketing, the most dominant tool used for advertising is celebrity endorsement (Abimbola, Lim, Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010), because consumers idolize celebrity endorsers (Vaishnav & Tewari, 2015). The literature empha-

sizes that celebrity endorsers are utilized as a tool and/or driver for marketing strategies by companies attempting to increase corporate brand recognition. Endorsed products generate positive associations (Biswas, Hussain & O'Donnell, 2009; Yen 2017). However, there have also been examples of celebrities who have been involved in scandals resulting in a negative publicity. Therefore, companies must select sports celebrity endorsers with good credibility to encourage consumers to associate themselves with the brand being endorsed (Doss, 2011).

2.2. Sports celebrity credibility

A reputable celebrity who endorses a specific company will strengthen the brand of the company and a positive perception of its offerings, as the brand is perceived as credible by consumers. Such perception positively influences consumers' decision to purchase the brand and its offerings (Susanto & Setiowati, 2015). The more credible the celebrity, the stronger the brand will be perceived to be. Also, increased exposure facilitates consumers' recognition of the endorsed company and its brand (Jin & Phua, 2014). The remembrance effect and attractiveness of the sports celebrity, in conjunction with the effective advertising message of a brand's products advertisement, can lead to a positively influenced consumer purchase intention (Ahmed, Farooq & Iqbal, 2014).

Credibility is a positive characteristic of a communicator that encourages the receiver to accept the communicated message (Ohanian, 1990). For example, a sports celebrity who has been selected as a product endorser by a company is perceived as someone who can communicate with consumers and convince them of the value of the endorsed product. The effectiveness and impact of the message depend on the endorser's attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990). According to Gupta, Kishor, and Verma (2017), the credibility of sports celebrity endorsements is based on trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise. The following section discusses each of these three dimensions of the credibility of sports celebrity endorsements.

2.2.1. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to honesty, integrity, and believability (Gupta et al., 2017). Trust in communication means that listeners have a level of confidence in the communication, and that the communicator and the message are accepted at a higher level (Ohanian, 1990). According to Friedman, Termini, and Washington (1976), consumers perceive an endorser to be trustworthy when the endorser possesses attributes such as believability. Therefore, it is important for a company to select a trustworthy sports celebrity to endorse its products. Sports celebrities can have a remembrance effect on the minds of fans and consumers of the brand that they endorse. This effect means that the message is remembered and therefore becomes more effective in the advertising of a brand; it has a positive influence on consumer purchase intentions (Ahmed et al., 2014).

2.2.2. Attractiveness

Attractiveness refers to a person's outward physical appearance (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018). McGuire (1985) has found that a person's attractiveness is determined by similarity, familiarity, and likeability. Similarity is prevalent when a consumer perceives a form of strong resemblance between themselves and the endorser, while familiarity is constructed when a consumer knows about the celebrity through consistent exposure in the media (McGuire, 1985). Likeability refers to how much a consumer may like an endorser because of their looks, demeanor, and qualifications (McGuire, 1985). All these are the contributing factors of attractiveness (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018). Clearly, companies need to employ very attractive sports celebrity endorsers to ensure that their products are attractive to their target audience.

Companies can benefit by linking their brand to a sports celebrity endorser who is perceived to be attractive. The attractiveness of a sports celebrity endorser may increase the profitability of the company and consumer loyalty (Yen, 2017). Companies usually recruit the most attractive

and impactful sports celebrity to endorse products that are seen as applicable to the sports celebrity. Consumer purchase intention is influenced by this connection between sports celebrity attractiveness and product traits, which leads to an increase in sales and thus results in an increase in profitability (Popescu, 2014). The attractiveness of a sports celebrity who is easily identifiable by sports fans and targeted consumers can be used to establish a long-term relationship between the brand and sports fans or consumers (McCormick, 2016).

Rafique and Zafar (2012) have found that a celebrity's physical attractiveness impacts consumer perceptions of the endorsed product and results in a positive purchase intention, thus increasing sales. Attractiveness can be linked to purchase intention, as the products and services offered by a company are seen as attractive and therefore more desirable (de Oliveira Santini, Júnior Ladeira, Hoffmann Sampaio & Araújo Falcão, 2015). If an attractive sports celebrity features in an advertisement, they are perceived as reliable and consumers are encouraged by this reliability to purchase endorsed products (Abbas, Afshan, Aslam & Ewaz, 2018).

2.2.3. Expertise

Expertise refers to expert skills or knowledge in a particular field. Sports celebrity endorsers' expertise leads consumers to trust the message communicated by the company (Gupta et al, 2017). Expertise is a combination of the knowledge, skills, and experience of an endorser concerning a particular subject matter (Eisend & Langner, 2010; Gupta et al, 2017; Hovland, Janis & Kelley 1953). Celebrity endorsers who are seen to be experts in their respective fields persuade consumers to agree with them when they recommend the endorsed products (Eisend & Langner, 2010). Companies must be careful when selecting a sports celebrity endorser. In other words, companies must select a sports celebrity endorser with skills and experience in the sports industry.

Endorsers with expertise can have a positive impact on the believability of a marketing com-

munication message (Silvera & Austad, 2004). Consequently, sports celebrity endorsers with unique expertise have been selected by many companies to endorse products. Atkin and Block (1983) state that it is imperative to use endorsers who are deemed to have expertise in a certain field to sell successfully any products with an inherently high-performance risk. The expertise of a sports celebrity endorser can lead to increased positive returns on investment as a company can generate a higher profit as a result of endorsers' expertise.

According to Eisend and Langner (2010), celebrities with high perceived levels of expertise are assumed to be more persuasive. Hence, one can assume that sports celebrity endorsers can be persuasive in advertising and thus affect consumers' purchase intentions. Yen (2017) highlights that companies should work with sports celebrity endorsers who are experts in their games. As such, companies usually want to work with champions, such as golf star Tiger Woods, who is an expert that can positively influence people to buy a product and service. Therefore, companies must note that, in order to excel in the market, it is important to work with sports celebrity endorsers who have achieved expert status in their sports discipline (Yen, 2017).

2.3. Sports celebrity identification

Celebrities are well-known individuals in a society and their actions invite a lot of attention (Srinivasan, Srinivasa & Thulasidasan, 2014). They come from different industries, including the sports industry. Kucharska, Confente, and Brunetti (2020) explain that sports celebrity identification means that a particular fan acknowledges feeling an affinity with a sports celebrity. In other words, fans follow sports stars they admire, perhaps because of the stars' achievement and popularity in the sports industry. Sports celebrity identification has become an important consideration for marketing practitioners as they need to choose sports celebrity endorsers with whom a target community strongly identifies (Prameswara & Sjabadhyni, 2018). Marketers

are advised to investigate the level of identification before employing a sports celebrity as endorser. Prameswara and Sjabadhyni (2018) emphasize that consumers with a high level of sports celebrity identification have a higher purchase intention than consumers with a low level of celebrity identification. Therefore, companies must employ sports celebrity endorsers with a higher level of identification for a better purchase intention.

2.4. Purchase intentions

Purchase intention is the strength of the consumer's intention (or decision) to purchase a product or not (Ling et al., 2010). Kalia, Arora, and Kumalo (2016) define purchase intention as consumers' attitude and behavior that have been influenced by various activities aimed at persuading them to buy a product. Purchase intention can be formally defined as consumer willingness and planning to purchase the product in the future (Haque et al., 2015).

Sports celebrities can be more useful in influencing purchase intentions to the target market. According to Varela, de la Paz Toldos-Romero, and Orozco-Gomez (2015), purchase intentions can be positive or negative towards products. Sometimes a consumer feels uncertain about purchasing a product or assumes that there is a risk involved in purchasing the product or that the product provides low value. In such a case the consumer will be less inclined to purchase that product (negative purchasing intention) or will be reluctant to repurchase the product (Wang & Hazen, 2016). A sports celebrity endorser can bring about a shift in consumers' negative mindsets and convince them to try the product again (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2019). However, to do so the sports celebrity endorser must be credible (i.e., trustworthy, attractive, and an expert in the field). Sports celebrity endorsers play an important role in purchase intentions, which is why the influence of sports celebrity endorsers on purchase intentions in the South African context is put under scrutiny in this study.

3. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL

This section focuses on the development of hypotheses and conceptual model for the present research study. To do that, previous studies (Wang & Scheinbaum 2018; So, King, Hudson & Meng, 2017; Kunkel, Walker & Hodge, 2019; Kim, Choe & Petrick, 2018; Schouten, Janssen & Verpaet, 2020; Hoegele, Schmidt & Torgler, 2014; Wu, 2015; Düsenberg, de Almeida & de Amorim, 2016) forming part of the literature on the topic were reviewed.

3.1. Hypotheses formulation

3.1.1. Attractiveness and sports celebrity identification

Wang and Scheinbaum (2018) define attractiveness as a person's outward physical appearance. Consumers perceive the identity of the brand that is endorsed by sports celebrities to be attractive and associate the endorsers' attributes and expectations with those of the brand (So et al., 2017). On this basis, in the first hypothesis we posit:

H1: Attractiveness has a significant positive impact on sports celebrity identification.

3.1.2. Trustworthiness and sports celebrity identification

Wang and Scheinbaum (2018) define trustworthiness as the endorser's perceived honesty and integrity, and whether the endorser is trusted. Consumers regard the messages that come from the endorser just as trustworthy (or untrustworthy) as the endorser. Trustworthiness enables a brand being endorsed by a sports celebrity to have an impact on consumers by persuading them to purchase the product or service that is offered by the endorsed brand. This implies that, if a sports celebrity is regarded as trustworthy, consumers are likely to purchase products that are endorsed by that sports celebrity. Consumers identify the sports celebrity

as being dependable and reliable and, seemingly, trust that the celebrity will not endorse a substandard brand (Kunkel et al., 2019). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Trustworthiness has a significant positive impact on sports celebrity identification.

3.1.3. Expertise and sports celebrity identification

Expertise can be defined as a person's knowledge, prior experiences, perceptions, and skills concerning a specific field. Expertise affects a consumer's decision-making process (Kim et al., 2018). Fans of sports celebrities may regard those celebrities as having excellent knowledge of the product or brand they endorse, or as experienced users of that product or brand. Thus, a sports celebrity would appear to be more highly experienced than other celebrities, for example, television stars (Schouten et al., 2020, p. 262). On this basis, we propose the following:

H3: Expertise has a significant positive impact on sports celebrity identification.

3.1.4. Sports celebrity identification and purchase intentions

Sports celebrity identification can be defined as the consumer's or sports fan's identification of a sports celebrity; it must be included in a social convention with the sports celebrity, fans, and the endorsed brand (Hoegele et al., 2014). Sports celebrity identification is made possible through advertising messages and campaigns. Consumers relate positively to such messages and campaigns as they associate a positive brand image with the positive image of the sports celebrity who endorses the brand. Consumers perceive this positive relationship to be of high value outcome when purchasing a celebrity-endorsed brand offering, which encourages purchase intention (Wu, 2015). On this basis, the following hypothesis is formulated:

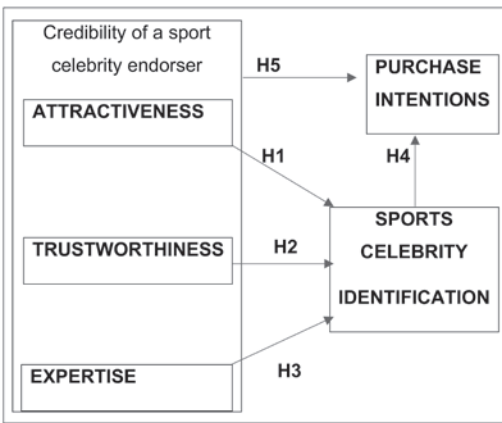
H4: Sports celebrity identification has a significant positive impact on purchase intentions.

3.1.5. Overall sports celebrity credibility and purchase intentions

The credibility of a sports celebrity is an effective advertising tool for a brand and its offerings. As sports celebrities become more successful in their sport, the value of their brand or product endorsements increases. On the other hand, endorsements by less successful sports celebrities are less valuable. Higher sports celebrity credibility has an impact on consumers' attitudes towards and perceptions of the endorsed brand as it leads to an increase in trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. Sports celebrity identification improves the credibility of sports celebrities and alters consumers' purchase decisions, thus persuading them to purchase the endorsed brand offerings (Düsenberg et al., 2016). Therefore, we propose that:

H5: Overall sports celebrity credibility has a significant positive impact on purchase intentions.
All proposed hypotheses for this study are presented in a conceptual model in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: Conceptual model



Source: Author's compilation.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve the research objective of this study, the credibility of sport celebrity endorsers in-

fluencing sports celebrity identification and purchasing intention on the endorsed brands in South Africa was investigated. Descriptive research was undertaken, employing quantitative research methods. The target population of this study was defined as individuals aged 18 to 24 years. These individuals were based in Johannesburg, Gauteng province (GP) of South Africa. A non-probability sampling technique was used on a 250-strong of convenience sample during the data collection process. In addition, the researcher used convenience sampling to select respondents who were willing to participate in the study during data collection phase by visiting recreational areas and sporting centers where most youth and sport fans gather. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data required for this study. The data was collected in Johannesburg during early 2020. A total of 217 usable responses were obtained and analyzed. This number is considered to be more than satisfactory for a study of this nature (Malhotra, 2010). Male participants dominated in the study, accounting for 53.5% of the total sample of participants, while female participants accounted for 46.5%. English was the predominant mother tongue in the sample (70.5%). The biggest age group in the sample was that made up of 24-year-olds (26.7%). The questionnaire consisted of scaled items measured on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 – strongly disagree to 6 – strongly agree. Measurement items were utilized from previously tested and validated scales with some adaptations. Attractiveness was measured using five items, trustworthiness using five items, with expertise measured using four items (Ohanian, 1990; Pornpitakpan, 2003). Sports celebrity identification was measured using ten items (Swanson, Gwinne, Larson & Janda, 2003; Ha & Tuan, 2019). Behavioral intentions (purchase intention) were measured using four items (Swanson et al., 2003).

The statistical analysis applied in this study consisted of descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multivariate regression analysis. The IBM® SPSS® Statistics 25 tool for Microsoft Windows was used to analyze the collected data. Research scales are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1: List of scales

Sports Celebrity Identification items
SCI1: I am a big fan of my favorite sports celebrity more than other players.
SCI2: I am able to recognize my favorite sports celebrity in public.
SCI3: My favorite sports celebrity athlete is the most popular player in sport.
SCI4: I watch sports matches because I am a big fan of my favorite sports celebrity.
SCI5: I am a committed fan of my favorite sports celebrity.
SCI6: Being a fan of my favorite sports celebrity is important to me.
SCI7: I consider myself to be a "real" fan of my favorite sports celebrity.
SCI8: When someone criticizes my favorite sports celebrity, it feels like a personal insult.
SCI9: I am very interested in what others think about my favorite sports celebrity.
SCI10: My favorite sports celebrity successes are my successes.
SCI11: When someone praises my favorite sport celebrity, it feels like a personal compliment.
SCI12: If a story in the media criticized my favorite sport celebrity, I would feel embarrassed.
Behavior Intention items
BI1: The likelihood that I will attend my favorite sports celebrity events/functions in the future is high.
BI2: The likelihood that I will track my favorite sports celebrity through the media (e.g., TV, radio, Internet) in the future is high.
BI3: The likelihood that I will purchase my favorite sports celebrity merchandise in the future is high.
BI4: The likelihood that I will wear the personalized brand of my favorite sports celebrity in the future is high.
BI5: The likelihood that I will participate in discussions about my favorite sports celebrity in the future is high.
Attractiveness items
ATT1: My favorite sports celebrity would be an attractive celebrity endorser for sports brands.
ATT2: My favorite sports celebrity would be a classy celebrity endorser for sports brands.
ATT3: My favorite sports celebrity would be a handsome celebrity endorser for sports brands.
ATT4: My favorite sports celebrity would be an elegant celebrity endorser for sports brands.
ATT5: My favorite sports celebrity would be a sexy celebrity endorser for sports brands.
Trustworthiness Items
TRU1: My favorite sports celebrity would be a dependable celebrity endorser for sports brands.
TRU2: My favorite sports celebrity would be a honest celebrity endorser for sports brands.
TRU3: My favorite sports celebrity would be a reliable celebrity endorser for sports brands.
TRU4: My favorite sports celebrity would be a trustworthy celebrity endorser for sports brands.
TRU5: My favorite sports celebrity would be an expert celebrity endorser for sports brands.
Expertise items
EXP1: My favorite sports celebrity would be a skilled celebrity endorser for sports brands.
EXP2: My favorite sports celebrity would be an experienced celebrity endorser for sports brands.
EXP3: My favorite sports celebrity would be a qualified celebrity endorser for sports brands.
EXP4: My favorite sports celebrity would be a knowledgeable celebrity endorser for sports brands.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

5.1. Reliability and validity

After the data was collected, 217 complete and usable questionnaires of the 250 distributed

were returned, giving this study a response rate of 78%. Cronbach's alpha was computed for all the constructs to determine the internal consistency of the scale items used. The results of Cronbach's alpha and correlation coefficients are reported in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2: Cronbach's alpha and correlation coefficients

Construct	(α)	Sports celebrity identification	Behavior intentions	Attractiveness	Trustworthiness	Expertise
Sports celebrity identification (F1)	0.953	1				
Behavior intentions (F2)	0.934	.818**	1			
Attractiveness (F3)	0.942	.534**	.612**	1		
Trustworthiness (F3)	0.959	.460**	.560**	.808**	1	
Expertise (F4)	0.952	.496**	.560**	.796**	.927**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 2, Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficients for all the constructs were above the 0.70 threshold level (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010), which indicates a good internal consistency reliability of the scale items used. Furthermore, statistically significant ($p \leq 0.01$) positive relationships between constructs were identified, confirming a nomological validity of the measurement theory (Malhotra, 2010). Another important interpretation can be made regarding the correlation of the variables. Table

2 shows a correlation coefficient of 0.90, suggesting multicollinearity between the variables (expertise and trustworthiness).

5.2. Regression analysis

Table 3 shows the results of regression analysis. Three factors – namely attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise – were used as independent variables, with sports celebrity identification used as a dependent variable.

TABLE 3: Sports celebrity credibility influencing sports celebrity identification

Sports celebrity identification	Standardized beta coefficient	T-values	P-values
Attractiveness	0.419	4.218	0.000
Trustworthiness	-0.205	-1.284	0.201
Expertise	0.353	2.270	0.024
Model summary			
R	Adjusted R Square	F	Significance level
0.552	0.295	31.057	0.000

As evident from Table 3 data, three independent factors were significant and approximately explained 30% of the variance on sports celebrity identification (adjusted $R^2=0.295$). Out of the three factors tested, two were found to have a statistically significant influence on sports celebrity identification at the $p < 0.05$ level of significance. The results reported in Table 3 indicate that attractiveness ($\beta=0.419$) and expertise ($\beta=0.353$) are the main factors influencing sports celebrity identification. Furthermore, the value of the beta coefficients of attractiveness ($\beta=0.419$) confirms its contribution influencing sports celebrity identification levels to be the strongest among participants.

Table 3 summarizes the results of regression analysis. Attractiveness ($P=0.000$) and expertise ($P=0.024$) have a significant positive impact on sports celebrity identification. Therefore, we can consider both H1 and H3 to be accepted. Trustworthiness was found not to be significant for sports celebrity identification ($P=0.201$) due to its multicollinearity with expertise. However, the results in Table 2 showed trustworthiness as having a positive impact on sport celebrity identification ($r=0.46$). Therefore, H2 is also accepted.

Table 4 provides the results of regression analysis in the second step. One factor, namely sports celebrity identification, was used as an independent variable, with purchase intentions used as a dependent variable.

TABLE 4: Sports celebrity identification and purchase intentions

Purchase intentions	Standardized beta coefficient	T-values	Significant values
Sports celebrity identification	0.818	20.882	0.000

The second step in determining the level of purchase intentions of participants towards endorsed brands was a simple regression analysis

to determine the influence of sports celebrity endorsers on purchase intentions of endorsed brands. An adjusted R-square of 0.668 obtained suggests that sports celebrity identification levels with respect to endorsed brands can explain approximately 67% of the variance on the purchase intentions of the participants. A beta coefficient ($\beta=0.818$) at the $p<0.05$ level of significance was also calculated, highlighting a significant influence of sports celebrity identification on purchase intention. This is extremely important and strengthens the theory that sports celebrity identification is a prerequisite for purchase intentions of any endorsed brands.

Table 4 above summarizes the results of regression analysis. Sports celebrity identification ($P=0.000$) had a significant positive impact on purchase intentions. Therefore, H4 is accepted.

5.3. Overall sports celebrity credibility and purchase intentions

Table 5 presents the results of regression analysis as the last the step. Three factors – namely, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise – were combined, with the overall sport credibility used as an independent variable and purchasing intentions used as a dependent variable. The aim was to determine the overall influence of sports celebrity credibility on purchase intentions of endorsed brands.

TABLE 5: Overall sports celebrity credibility and purchase intentions

Purchase intention	Standardized beta coefficient	T-values	Significant values
Overall credibility sports celebrity	0.624	45.388	0.000

An adjusted R square of 0.776 was obtained, indicating that the credibility of sports celeb-

credibility levels with respect to endorsed brands can explain approximately 77% of the variance on the purchase intentions of the participants. A beta coefficient ($\beta=0.624$) at the $p<0.05$ level of significance was also calculated, highlighting the significance of sports celebrity credibility for purchase intention. These results are important as they support the theory that the credibility of sports celebrities is a precondition of purchase intentions of any endorsed brands in the market.

As summarized in the results of regression analysis in Table 5 above, the overall sports celebrity credibility ($P=0.000$) has a significant positive impact on purchase intention. Therefore, H5 is accepted.

6. DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to investigate the credibility of sport celebrity endorsers influencing sports celebrity identification and purchase intention of the endorsed brands in South Africa. To that end, five hypotheses were developed and tested: Firstly, three constructs making up credibility, namely, attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise influencing sport celebrity identification were assessed. Secondly, sport celebrity identification influencing purchasing intentions towards endorsed brands was assessed. Thirdly, the overall sport credibility influencing purchasing intentions towards endorsed brands was also assessed.

The results of research showed that attractiveness and expertise have a positive influence on sports celebrity identification, supporting H1 and H3. This is in line with the study by Molelekeng (2012), which found the attractiveness and expertise of celebrity to have a positive influence on celebrity identification. The results of this study revealed that trustworthiness of sports celebrity endorsers has no positive influence on sports celebrity identification, so H2 was initially rejected. This could be a consequence of scandals linked to a sport celebrity

(Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018). However, in Table 2, trustworthiness was shown as having a positive impact on sports celebrity identification ($r=0.46$). Therefore, H2 is accepted. As sports celebrity identification showed a positive impact on purchase intentions of endorsed brands, H4 is supported. This is also in line with the findings of by Molelekeng (2012), finding celebrity identification to have a positive influence on endorsed products. In addition, the overall credibility of sports celebrity endorsers was found to have a positive influence on purchase intentions of endorsed brands, so H5 is also supported. Thus, this study supports of the results obtained in previous research (Dikčius & Ilciukiene, 2021; Düsenberg et al., 2016) revealing a direct impact of the credibility of sports celebrity endorsers on purchase intentions. Furthermore, Pornpitakpan (2003) also found that celebrity credibility has a positive impact on purchase intentions. The credibility of sport celebrity endorsers not only influences purchase intention but also contributes to the development of a positive word of mouth towards the brand being endorsed (Ahmed et al., 2014).

7. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Sports celebrity endorsement is an important topic for marketers to understand so that they can position and market their brand successfully. Therefore, marketers can collect information about sport celebrity endorsement to develop better positioning and marketing strategies for their brands. The findings of this study offer practical significance for marketing managers. The findings of the study revealed the significance of sports celebrity credibility for sports celebrity identification and purchasing intentions of the endorsed brands.

The elements of credibility of celebrity endorsers are not all applicable to sport celebrity identification. The results of this study showed that only attractiveness and expertise have a vital role in sport celebrity identification. Fur-

thermore, the attractiveness and expertise of the identified sport celebrity as an endorser have a vital role influencing purchase intentions. Attractiveness of sport celebrity includes physical appearance, similar lifestyle to the targeted consumers, and personality (Moraes, Gountas, Gountas & Sharma, 2019). Marketers must assess the attractiveness of a sports celebrity such as lifestyle and personality to see if they correspond to their target markets before employing the celebrity as an endorser. A relevant attractiveness of sport celebrity endorser will influence purchase intentions of the target market. Expert sports celebrity is an endorser with relevant skills and sufficient knowledge to market a brand (Radha & Jija, 2013). Accordingly, marketers must employ as endorsers such sports celebrities who possess sufficient knowledge of their brands. A knowledgeable sports celebrity will be able to answer any questions about the brand being endorsed to the target market and increase their purchase intentions. Trustworthiness of a sports celebrity is when the celebrity is perceived to be honest and believable (Yang, 2018). Therefore, marketers must not employ as endorsers any sports celebrities associated with scandals as they would harm the endorsed brands because of negative publicity. In addition, the image of the entire company might be impacted negatively. Companies are encouraged to use sports celebrities' endorsement as a marketing strategy because of their power of communicating with the targeted consumers about the brand being endorsed. Also, they are capable of reminding consumers more frequently of the brand which, in turn, influences their purchase intentions over both a short and a long term.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES AND CONCLUSION

Like any other study, this study also has its limitations. Since it employed a non-probability

sampling technique, the results of such a study are not a true reflection of the entire population. In addition, the study had geographic limitations as it focused only on the respondents in Johannesburg, Gauteng province. Therefore, the study could be conducted in other cities or other provinces in South Africa as well to increase its scope and value.

The study employed scales developed by Swanson et al. (2003), Carlson and Donovan (2013), and Ha and Tuan (2019) to measure sports celebrity identification; scales developed by Swanson et al. (2003, p. 155) to measure behavioral intentions; and scales developed by Ohanian (1990) and Pornpitakpan (2003) to measure sports celebrity credibility. However, the literature presents other scales that can be used for future research.

9. CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY/ORIGINALITY

This study contributes to the limited literature regarding the credibility and identification of sports celebrity endorsers and purchase intentions of the endorsed brands in South Africa. A measurement by Swanson et al. (2003, p. 155), Ha and Tuan (2019), Ohanian (1990), and Pornpitakpan (2003) were used for empirical testing of the study. The findings of the study shed some light on the relationship between sports celebrity credibility, sports celebrity identification, and purchase intentions and their impact on endorsed brands. In other words, the study showed that sports celebrity identification among South African consumers is influenced by attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise of a sport celebrity endorsing a brand. In addition, the study revealed that the South African consumers are willing to buy brands endorsed by their favorite sports celebrity. Therefore, findings of the study suggest that companies can use source credibility scale to influence sports celebrity identification among consumers as this will have a positive impact on the brands endorsed by the identified sport celebrity.

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