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An Examination of Celebrity Product Involvement and Endorsement Effectiveness

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AN EXAMINATION OF CELEBRITY PRODUCT INVOLVEMENT AND
ENDORSEMENT EFFECTIVENESS

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate celebrity product involvement and its relationship with endorsement effectiveness. Due to the increased leverage in creating their own brands, celebrity athletes are increasingly engaging in entrepreneurial endeavors such as collaborations on product development, an investment relationship, and outright ownership and creation of a brand or product. This paper also studied the extent which parasocial interactions and athlete identification may moderate endorsement effectiveness in the form of brand attitudes as well as what role product congruence may play.

Participants were recruited to complete an online survey that exposed them to manipulations of narrative text describing various endorsement relationships with one of four predetermined Celebrity Product Involvement categories. Through analysis of the online survey, the study did not find evidence of Celebrity Product Involvement playing a role in brand attitudes. Additionally, neither parasocial interactions nor athlete identification moderated the effects on brand attitudes. Finally, the category congruence to an athlete was insignificant on brand attitudes.

Contributions to endorsement research were made supporting the utilization of the meaning transfer model (McCracken, 1989) as the primary theory through which endorsement effectiveness should be examined.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Player Empowerment Era was coined after National Basketball Association (NBA) superstar LeBron James orchestrated a live television show in 2010 to announce he was exercising his free agency rights and joining fellow superstars Dwayne Wade and Chris Bosh to play for the Miami Heat (Tinsley, 2022). The departure from his hometown team, the Cleveland Cavaliers, not only sent shockwaves across the Midwest, but the joining of forces to create a “superteam” ushered in a new period of extreme influence amongst players. Fast forward to 2022, James is still exercising his power to strong arm becoming an owner of a to-be-determined expansion team in Las Vegas (McMenamin, 2022). The strength of a superstar’s influence is not restricted to decisions regarding team construction or other on court opportunities. The new player empowerment is felt strongest in the commercial opportunities these celebrity athletes are experiencing in the marketplace.

The historical norm for exercising one’s celebrity status for commercial gain has been through celebrity endorsements. Celebrity endorsements are defined as “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement” (McCracken, 1989, p. 310). Celebrity endorsements have experienced over five decades of research which have largely been based on four predominately theories.

The first of the endorsement theories is the source credibility model which simply suggests the perceived credibility of the communication source positively affects the persuasion efforts on the message recipient (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). A second theory based on the qualities of the communication source is the source attractiveness model (Kamins, 1990). A third theory, the match-up hypothesis, is rooted in research from Mowen, Brown, and Schulman (1979) that found endorsements were most effective when the product, endorser, and target audience were all in alignment. The fourth endorsement theory is the Meaning Transfer Model which states “the effectiveness of a celebrity endorser depends on the meanings he or she brings to the endorsement process” (McCracken, 1989, p. 312). Unfortunately, the endorsement research has been inconclusive with many scholars still utilizing each of the theories to explain various phenomenon.

The emergence of the celebrity brand has added further complication to research on celebrity endorsements. The rise of social media has added credence to the attention paid to creating a celebrity athlete’s brand. Most of endorsement research has taken the perspective of the advertising entity and business decisions surrounding the uses of celebrities to endorse its products, but the last decade has given rise to increased scholarship surrounding the athlete brand and antecedents to its creation (Arai, Ko, & Kaplanidou, 2013; Arai, Ko, & Ross, 2014; Carlson & Donovan, 2013; Kunkel, Walker, & Hodge, 2018, Su, Baker, Doyle, & Kunkel, 2020). A brand is a visual representation of an entity that is distinctive from its competition which can be achieved through awareness, reputation, and prominence (Shank, 1999, p. 239; Keller, 2008). Since Thomson (2006) asserted a human can also exhibit these characteristics, Arai, Ko, and

Ross (2014) defined the athlete brand as “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” (p. 98).

Social media platforms allow for celebrities to communicate directly to their fans about their everyday lives, specific causes they may be supporting, and increasingly commercial relationships. Fans willingly follow their favorite celebrity on a social media platform and the celebrity distributes messages in the form of text, photos and videos that seemingly gives insight into their private lives. The reach that can be acquired by a celebrity is staggering with soccer superstar Cristiano Ronaldo having 451 million followers on Instagram alone (Prestige, 2022). That reach has become a desirable medium for advertisers with single campaigns reaching as high as \$5.2 million (Daugieras, 2022). Not only are social media campaigns effective for increasing reach for advertising messages, the parasocial relationships developed between the fans and the celebrity have proven to effectively transfer to the brand being promoted (Chung & Cho, 2017).

Parasocial relationships, a one-sided communication that is perceived by the recipient as a two-sided relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956), was extended into social media for the first time with a paper that investigated the reasons fans choose to follow celebrities on Twitter (Frederick, Lim, Clavio & Walsh, 2012). The results illustrated the perception of a more socially inclined celebrity on social media led to feelings of stronger parasocial relationships (Frederick et al., 2012). The more openly a celebrity is perceived to share about themselves, the more enhanced the parasocial interactions tend to be (Kim & Song, 2016).

Parasocial interactions with sports celebrities are fundamentally built upon identification (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009). This identification can lead to significant amounts of influence carried by the sports celebrity. As Hartmann and Goldhoorn (2011) found, there are strong outcomes to an intense parasocial relationship. These parasocial relationships, fostered by strong identification, can manifest themselves into commercial opportunities for celebrities.

Scholars have now begun to study endorsement theories through a psychological lens by exploring consumer behavior through identification and social identity theory. There are many studies that explore team identification and subsequent behaviors on brand attitudes. Therefore, if the celebrity athlete is treated in a similar fashion to a team, then a theoretical foundation based on identification would be appropriate.

Largely by leveraging their own brands, the top fifty highest paid celebrity athletes have earned the highest income from off-the-field endeavors in history at \$1.06 billion (Knight, Birnbaum, & Craig, 2022). The collection's total revenue haul, \$2.97 billion, was bolstered by not only the traditional endorsement model, but also entrepreneurial activities which include media companies, venture capital firms, cryptocurrency exchanges, and NFT platforms (Knight, Birnbaum, & Craig, 2022).

The ability of athletes to effectively leverage their brand has led to a shift in athlete endorsement strategy. The celebrity athlete industry is currently in the third of three phases of monetizing their brand (Pompliano, 2020). Phase one was the traditional endorsement model where a celebrity athlete was compensated with cash in exchange for promoting a product. Phase two was similar, but instead of cash the celebrity athlete received equity in the company to realize more monetary upside but also inherently more

risk. The third phase consists of celebrity athletes partnering with experts in a particular field and creating businesses where they obtain a larger or majority share in the business which incentivizes organic promotion with potential growth (Pompliano, 2020).

The celebrity power to pursue new and creative opportunities to leverage his or her brand is vast. Perhaps a true transfer of cultural meaning occurs when a celebrity invests their time and resources into a commercial opportunity. Therefore, the extent to which a celebrity is invested, financially and emotionally with a company may play a role in how the relationship is perceived by the consumer. Celebrity Product Involvement has been defined as the extent to which direct inclusion of the athlete in the creation of the product being promoted in the form of a collaboration, investment, or owner/entrepreneur (Nichols, 2021). A collaboration refers to the celebrity investment of personal brand equity into the creation of a custom product. An investor relationship refers to the knowledge by the consumer that the celebrity has a financial stake in the success of the company suggesting he or she has more risk associated with the product's success or failure. Lastly, the owner/entrepreneur is the existence of a company or product in which the celebrity has complete control and ownership of its creation and operation.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Celebrity endorsements have experienced over five decades of research which have largely been based on four predominately theories, but the literature remains inconclusive. The evolution of endorsement theories began with source credibility theory and source attractiveness theory. Needing further explanations not captured by the first two theories, scholars called for more research that resulted in the match-up hypothesis and the meaning transfer mode. After intense examinations, encompassing over 1,000

studies, the research is not conclusive regarding what endorser traits lead to a successful endorsement campaign (Schimmelfennig & Hunt, 2020). Starting in 1987, there have been five comprehensive literature reviews of celebrity endorsement research, and the only consensus among the authors is that the results are mixed (Amos, Holmes & Strutton, 2008; Berkvist & Zou, 2016; Erdogan, 1999; Kaikati, 1987; Knoll & Matthes, 2017; Schimmelfennig & Hunt, 2020).

The source credibility model simply suggests the perceived credibility of the communication source positively affects the persuasion efforts on the message recipient (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). In other words, if the recipient of a message believes that the sender of a particular message has the knowledge or experience to make such a claim, then the message is more believable. Source credibility is composed of two dimensions which are expertise and trustworthiness. Expertise refers to the extent by which the communicator is perceived to be an expert gained through experience, knowledge, or skills (Erdogan, 1999). A communicator is deemed to have trustworthiness when the recipient perceives the communicator to be objective, honest, and have integrity (Ohanian 1991). Source credibility is the most widely used construct in endorsement research with most of the attention generated in the first 20 years. While there is consensus that source credibility has a direct effect on endorser effectiveness, the subdimensions of expertise and trustworthiness have had conflicting results as it relates to their significance (Schimmelfennig & Hunt, 2020).

The literature on source credibility is strong in confirming its positive effect on communication success, but the research on how source credibility is constructed is mixed (Amos, Holmes & Strutton, 2008). The research points to the degree of not only

source credibility influence, but also that of its subdimensions of expertise and trustworthiness, depends upon whether there is congruence with the promoted product (Siemens, Smith, Fisher & Jensen, 2008), whether the message being delivered was more informational or transformational (Lord & Putrevu, 2009), or the consumer involvement level of the product being promoted (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018).

A second theory based on the qualities of the communication source is the source attractiveness model. The effectiveness of physically attractive people in facilitating change has been around since 1979 (Chaiken, 1979). The research on the attractiveness model is mixed. There are several studies that support a general positive relationship between attractiveness and brand attitudes (Lord & Putrevu, 2009; Till & Busler, 2000) there are just as many that dispute its effect (Kamins, 1989; Ohanian, 1990). There have been studies that manipulated the product category (Cacioppo & Petty, 1980), the target audience's gender (Debevec & Kernan, 1984), and the attractiveness of the model (Kahle & Homer, 1985), but a consensus has yet to be confirmed. The attractiveness model has significant overlap with the credibility model. Depending upon what product category is being promoted, the attractiveness of the celebrity could be viewed from the perspective of expertise.

The match-up hypothesis provides a framework to explain the link between endorser effectiveness and perceived fit with the brand being promoted (Koerning & Boyd, 2009). The match-up hypothesis is rooted in research from Mowen, Brown, and Schulman (1979) that found endorsements were most effective when the product, endorser, and target audience were all in alignment. The stream of research laid relatively dormant until McCracken criticized the source models by questioning why alignments

between an endorser and brand work sometimes and are not effective other times (1989). There is overwhelming evidence that there are positive results when a match-up effect is in place, but strength of those results is not consistent and there are still unexplained consequences.

One single paper disrupted several decades of endorsement research when Grant McCracken challenged the source credibility and source attractiveness models (1989). McCracken argues that the source models do not explain why a celebrity would be effective for one product but not another. The second major criticism of the source models is that they measure degrees of credibility and attractiveness but not kinds of credibility or attractiveness (McCracken, 1989). These inabilities to explain differences in endorsement effectiveness led to the proposed model of meaning transfer.

The general idea behind the meaning transfer model is that “the effectiveness of a celebrity endorser depends on the meanings he or she brings to the endorsement process” (McCracken, 1989, p. 312). As endorsement decisions are made, and celebrities are chosen, it is the combination of these meanings collectively that influences the consumer (McCracken, 1989). McCracken contends that for endorsements to be most effective, a successful transfer of meaning between the endorser and the product promoted must occur.

Interestingly, the shock to the endorsement literature was not felt by a new stream of research. Since publishing the meaning transfer theory in 1989, there have been only 10 papers that investigated the meaning transfer theory compared to 29 on source credibility, 20 on source attractiveness, and 23 on the match-up hypothesis (Schimmelpfenig & Hunt, 2020). Perhaps the limited exploration into the meaning

transfer model is due to the difficulty in creating measures to empirically examine the phenomenon.

As illustrated by the research, there is little consensus regarding theory on endorsement effectiveness. Schimmelpfenig and Hunt (2020) argued that a “single endorsement theory is not able to holistically explain effective endorsements due to the inherent variability of advertised products and targeted brand images” (p. 489). There is one other theory that has yet to gain traction in the endorsement literature but could possibly lead to more empirical examination. Carlson and Donovan (2013; 2017) have explored consumer behavior through identification and social identity theory. Social identity theory states that individuals self-categorize themselves into groups which aids in developing their self-image (Tajfel & Turner, 1985).

The scholarship on endorsement effectiveness has yet to fully examine the developing paradigm of celebrities taking a more active, entrepreneurial role in the products they promote. While celebrity athlete entrepreneurship has been around for decades, the academic research is very limited. The only published literature related to celebrity entrepreneurial activities and endorsement effectiveness is over fifteen years old (Hunter and Davidsson, 2007). Little is known regarding its effectiveness from a consumer behavior perspective despite a significant amount of research around the broader topic of endorsements (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016).

The rise of the celebrity athlete brand has created a dramatic shift in the endorsement landscape. Primarily through social media platforms, celebrity athletes have created more opportunities for exposure and to directly connect with their fans. The increased leverage afforded by the strength of the celebrity athlete brand has generated

opportunities for increased involvement in the products being promoted. We do not yet understand the impacts of these shifts in strategies on endorsement effectiveness.

Celebrity athletes are also a unique subset to study due to their routine exposure of their competitions as well as the heightened media coverage of both their on-field and off-field actions.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate Celebrity Product Involvement and its relationship with endorsement effectiveness. Due to the increased leverage in creating their own brands, celebrity athletes are increasingly engaging in entrepreneurial endeavors such as collaborations on product development, an investment relationship, and outright ownership and creation of a brand or product. This study will also examine the role a consumer's level of identification and the level of parasocial interaction with a celebrity athlete has on brand attitudes. Finally, this study will investigate the effect product congruency has with Celebrity Product Involvement on brand attitudes.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY

This study contributes to our understanding of a relatively new phenomenon in celebrity athlete commercialization and its impact on endorsement effectiveness. As the trend of celebrity athletes becoming and leveraging their own brands, the expectation is that the entrepreneurial strategic decision will become more popular. The examination is expected to provide results to assist practitioners and managers of celebrity athlete brands in making decisions that are in the best interests of the celebrity athlete.

This study intends to extend our understanding of endorsement effectiveness within the theoretical framework of the meaning transfer model (McCracken, 1989). The

contribution to the literature is the investigation into the degree in which the celebrity having involvement with the product affects the brand outcomes of the endorsement. This study will also contribute to our understanding of the meaning transfer model by supporting the notion that meanings do indeed flow from the celebrity to the product and that the intensity and effectiveness of those meanings are moderated by celebrity product involvement. By operationalizing the meaning transfer model through identification, this study extends the scholarship on identification as it relates to endorsement by including the athlete identification measures (Carlson & Donovan, 2017) into the methodology as a proxy for meaning transfer.

The extent to which parasocial interactions can continue to provide influence on commercial opportunities is not yet known. Since the research on Celebrity Product Involvement is limited, this study will increase our knowledge regarding whether there are significant differences from traditional endorsement models, or if those differences are explained by variables such as parasocial interactions.

1.4 SUMMARY

Research on endorsement effectiveness has been ongoing for over fifty years and still hasn't agreed upon a common theoretical lens through which to examine. While there is support for the meaning transfer model as being most appropriate (McCracken, 1989), difficulty in operationalizing the theory has held back endorsement scholarship. By examining endorsement through social identity theory and identification (Carlson & Donovan, 2017), scholars may be able to unlock meaning transfer model and agree on a single theoretical framework.

A more recent trend amongst celebrity athletes is the pursuit of entrepreneurial activities that take advantage of their powerful brands built by actively engaging in social media. This study intends to understand whether Celebrity Product Involvement influences brand attitudes while also examining moderating variables such as identification and parasocial interactions.

1.5 DELIMITATIONS

Several key delimitations exist for this study starting with its design. The online survey method was chosen to facilitate efficiency in data collection and accuracy of analysis. By utilizing an objective survey, the authors will be able to quickly analyze and review for significance using statistical software.

The decision to utilize Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) as the sampling panel creates issues in the sampling frame being representative of the population. MTurk allows for a quick assembly of a sampling frame, but the manner in which the participants are compensated creates potential erroneous results due to the lack of attentiveness while surveys are taken (Hauser & Schwartz, 2016). In addition, the decision to limit the sampling frame to sports fans in the United States will not take in to account any international sports fans and neglects any non-sports fans and their potential influence.

The design will utilize a fictitious situation communicated to the participant through a narrative block of text. Since this text will not have any ancillary identifier to communicate it is a reputable source of information, the participant could be affected. Ideally the examination of authentic behavioral actions would be the best indicator of

endorsement effectiveness but identifying those opportunities for scientific discovery proves difficult.

The study will be examining the set of celebrity athletes as a collection rather than individually. Therefore, any nuanced differences between the celebrity athletes will not be investigated. The choice to collect a wide range of celebrity athlete was intended to facilitate timely collection of a statistically viable sample.

1.6 LIMITATIONS

The sampling frame will not factor in cultural differences in the results since the sample is limited to the United States. The economic status may also be affected as those with the capability to access the online survey and participate in MTurk could not be representative of the general population.

The timing of the survey could affect the recall of self-selecting a favorite celebrity athlete. The intent will be for the survey to be completed in the winter months which would be in the offseason for Major League Baseball. The participants could be affected by not only the recall of an out of season celebrity athlete, but also influenced by major world events such as the FIFA World Cup and its exposure. This possible consolidation of athletes to certain sports could impact the results.

Finally, the participants will be asked to identify their favorite professional athlete. Now that collegiate athletes in the United States can earn payment through endorsements without jeopardizing their amateur status, that cohort of options will not be considered.

1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Celebrity Endorsements – any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement” (McCracken, 1989, p. 310).

Athlete Brand - 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” (Aria, Ko, & Ross, 2014, p. 98).

Celebrity Product Involvement – the extent in which direct inclusion of the athlete in the creation of the product being promoted in the form of a collaboration, investment, or owner/entrepreneur (Nichols, 2021).

Parasocial Interaction – the effect of viewers feeling engaged by a personality as if they were in a relationship when in fact the information flow is definitively one-sided (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Source Credibility Model - the perceived credibility of the communication source positively affects the persuasion efforts on the message recipient (Hovland & Weiss, 1951).

Source Attractiveness Model - using particularly attractive endorsers, advertisers benefit from the twofold influences of the endorser’s celebrity status and physical attractiveness (Friedman & Friedman, 1979).

Match-up Hypothesis – theory that endorsements were most effective when the product, endorser, and target audience were all in alignment (Mowen, Brown, & Schulman, 1979).

Meaning Transfer Model - the effectiveness of a celebrity endorser depends on the meanings he or she brings to the endorsement process (McCracken, 1989, p. 312).

Social Identity Theory - states that individuals self-categorize themselves into groups which aids in developing their self-image (Tajfel & Turner, 1985).

Endorsement Identification - An athlete's symbolic meanings are transferred to a product as a result of his/ her association with the product via an endorsement, and consumers who identify with an endorser are motivated to consume the endorsed product as a means to acquire these symbolic meanings (Carlson & Donovan, 2017, p. 179).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter summarizes the challenges associated with endorsement research along with the various theoretical approaches. Additional literature includes pertinent scholarship associated with athlete branding, its antecedents, subsequent identification and how an athlete brand can be manifested into commercial opportunities. This chapter concludes with the theoretical framework from which this study is examined.

2.1 ENDORSEMENT THEORIES

Celebrity endorsements have experienced over five decades of research which have largely been based on four predominately theories, but the literature remains inconclusive. The origins of the endorsement theories come from the Social Influence Theory/Source Effect which argues that the perceptions of the source of a communication influence how a message is received (Kelman, 1961). The evolution of endorsement theories began with source credibility theory and source attractiveness theory. Needing further explanations not captured by the first two theories, scholars called for more research resulting in the match-up hypothesis and the meaning transfer mode. After intense examinations, encompassing over 1,000 studies, the research is not conclusive regarding what endorser traits lead to a successful endorsement campaign

(Schimmelfennig & Hunt, 2020). Starting in 1987, there have been five comprehensive literature reviews of celebrity endorsement research, and the only consensus among the authors is that the results are mixed (Amos, Holmes & Strutton, 2008; Berkvist & Zou, 2016; Erdogan, 1999; Kaikati, 1987; Knoll & Matthes, 2017; Schimmelfennig & Hunt, 2020).

Source Credibility Model. The source credibility model simply suggests the perceived credibility of the communication source positively affects the persuasion efforts on the message recipient (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). In other words, if the recipient of a message believes that the sender of a particular message has the knowledge or experience to make such a claim, then the message is more believable. Source credibility is composed of two dimensions which are expertise and trustworthiness. Expertise refers to the extent by which the communicator is perceived to be an expert gained through experience, knowledge, or skills (Erdogan, 1999). A communicator is deemed to have trustworthiness when the recipient perceives the communicator to be objective, honest, and have integrity (Ohanian 1991). Critical to understanding of endorsement theory is that the actual traits of the communicator are irrelevant, but rather the perception of the communicator from the recipient is paramount. In the case for source credibility theory, it does not matter whether the communicator actually has expertise or trustworthiness for them to be effective (Erdogan, 1999). Source credibility is the most widely used construct in endorsement research with most of the attention generated in the first 20 years. While there is consensus source credibility has a direct effect on endorser effectiveness, the subdimensions of expertise and trustworthiness have conflicting results as it relates to their significance (Schimmelfennig & Hunt, 2020).

The subdimensions of the source credibility model have received a vast amount of attention as scholars attempt to ascertain the independent impacts of each facet. Several papers have argued trustworthiness is more critical than expertise. Early research attempted to extend the source credibility model by understanding the factors that lead to someone being trustworthy (Friedman, Santeramo & Traina, 1978). The authors discovered the key determinant of trustworthiness was likeability. Interestingly, likeability would later become a key contributor to a second source model theory used in endorsement research (McGuire, 1985). One communication study on the persuasion power of maritime boundaries found that while both expertise and trustworthiness together were most critical, the trustworthy communication source was more convincing whether they were an expert or not (McGinnies & Ward, 1980). A more recent paper found trustworthiness was the only component of source credibility, but the findings were qualified by only applying to low-involvement consumers (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018). Contradictory research also exists. Trustworthiness of an endorser was found to have an insignificant effect on purchase intentions (Ohanian, 1991). The author argued that since the consumer likely knows the celebrity was paid to promote the product, they may not actually like the product. The same paper made the argument that expertise was the stronger of the two-source credibility subdimensions.

Perceived expertise is thought to have strong persuasion influence within the communication context (Aaker & Myers, 1987) while also increasing intentions to purchase (Ohanian, 1991). Much of the research on expertise in relation to source credibility theory has found nuances within the product categories being endorsed. When promoting a technology-oriented product such as a computer, the perceived expertise is a

significant contributor to the success of the campaign (Biswas, Biswas & Das, 2006). Further segmenting the expertise research, when the product and endorser are perceived to be congruent expertise played a significant role in positively affecting brand attitudes (Siemens, Smith, Fisher & Jensen, 2008). On the contrary, the authors found an incongruent product being promoted led to lower perceptions of expertise and thus weaker impact on brand attitudes.

The literature on source credibility is strong in confirming its positive effect on communication success, but the research on how source credibility is constructed is mixed (Amos, Holmes & Strutton, 2008). The research points to the degree of not only source credibility influence, but also that of its subdimensions of expertise and trustworthiness, depends upon whether there is congruence with the promoted product (Siemens, Smith, Fisher & Jensen, 2008), whether the message being delivered was more informational or transformational (Lord & Putrevu, 2009), or the consumer involvement level of the product being promoted (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018).

Attractiveness Model. A second theory based on the qualities of the communication source is the source attractiveness model. The effectiveness of physically attractive people in facilitating change has been around since 1979 (Chaiken, 1979). Numerous studies have found good-looking individuals are more liked in an advertising context by having a positive impact on the brands with which they are associated (Joseph, 1982; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990). Research has also found more attractive individuals positively affect purchase intentions (Petroshius & Crocker, 1989; Cacioppo & Petty, 1980). Attractiveness is thought to be persuasive due to the identification held

by the consumer where they aspire to identify with the celebrity (Cohen & Golden, 1972).

The research on the attractiveness model is mixed. There are several studies that support a general positive relationship between attractiveness and brand attitudes (Lord & Putrevu, 2009; Till & Busler, 2000) there are just as many that dispute its effect (Kamins, 1989; Ohanian, 1990). There have been studies that manipulated the product category (Cacioppo & Petty, 1980), the target audience's gender (Debevec & Kernan, 1984), and the attractiveness of the model (Kahle & Homer, 1985), but a consensus has yet to be confirmed.

Further complicating the source attractiveness model are the facets of attraction that extend beyond physical appearance. An effective message depends on the source's level of familiarity, similarity, and liking (McGuire, 1985). Similarity suggests a resemblance between the celebrity and the message recipient, and familiarity means knowledge of the celebrity. Likability refers to the affection for the source stemming from their physical appearance or personality (Erdogan, 1999). Consistent with most endorsement research, there is little alignment on how to treat the three subdimensions of attractiveness. Some studies treat attractiveness as if there are no distinct subdimensions (Kahle & Homer, 1985) while others separate the two into individual constructs (O'Mahoney & Meenaghan 1998). An argument has even been made that the mere appearance in ads and the subsequent recognition causes the consumer to see the celebrity as more attractive (Choi & Rifon, 2007).

A likeable celebrity is more effective when promoting products with low cognitive involvement. Callcott and Phillips (1996) studied likeability in a qualitative

study within the low involvement context and found likeable spokespeople have a positive effect on brand attitudes. For most consumer goods, there is not much attention paid to the decision of what to purchase which makes the use of a likeable celebrity more effective (Schimmelpfenig & Hunt, 2020).

The attractiveness model has significant overlap with the credibility model. Depending upon what product category is being promoted, the attractiveness of the celebrity could be viewed from the perspective of expertise. For example, an advertisement including a very attractive model promoting a make-up or other beauty enhancing brand could be best explained by the source credibility model. One's attractiveness may not be persuasive unless used in the form of credibility (Till & Busler, 1998).

Schimmelpfenig and Hunt (2020) proposed a conceptual model for endorsement effectiveness which takes into consideration the value proposition made by the advertiser. In their model, liking and attractiveness are distinct from each other and serve different purposes depending upon the value proposition made by the advertisement. The authors argue much of the previous literature erroneously focused on product categories when they should have been controlling for the intended message to convey (Schimmelpfenig & Hunt, 2020). An automobile advertisement for a value family sedan will most certainly have a different value proposition than a high value luxury sedan. Due to their different intended messages, treating them as one category is a mistake.

Many of the early studies reflected the state of advertising during that period where static mediums such as newspapers, magazines, and billboards were more common and influential. Those advertisements were more commonly promoting products with low

involvement or beauty products which explains much of the attractiveness model research at that time. In a more modern context, there are more opportunities for a celebrity to illustrate a more complete view of their brand which in turn make the endorsement research more difficult.

Source credibility and source attractiveness models represent what could be called the first wave of endorsement research. The source models centered the research on the spokesperson or communicator within an advertising context. Perhaps coinciding with the changing advertising mediums available as well as methods of celebrity consumption, the second wave of endorsement theory research was sparked by the multidimensionality of endorsements (Schimmelpfenig & Hunt, 2020).

Match-up Hypothesis. The match-up hypothesis provides a framework to explain the link between endorser effectiveness and perceived fit with the brand being promoted (Koerning & Boyd, 2009). Within the match-up hypothesis, an endorser will not have a positive effect on brand attitudes unless there is congruence with the brand (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990; Parekh & Kanekar, 1994). The match-up hypothesis is an easy concept to understand when you consider a basketball superstar would likely be more effective promoting basketball shoes than car insurance. However, the existence of superstar basketball players indeed endorsing car insurance challenges this notion.

The match-up hypothesis is rooted in research from Mowen, Brown, and Schulman (1979) suggesting endorsements were most effective when the product, endorser, and target audience were all in alignment. The stream of research laid relatively dormant until McCracken criticized the source models by questioning why alignments

between an endorser and brand work sometimes and are not effective other times (1989). Subsequent researchers began their studies matching up celebrities and brands within the context of credibility and attractiveness (Kamins, 1990). However, scholars continued to question whether the research should be bound by the source variables and that the match-up hypothesis needed to be examined further (Till & Busler, 1998).

Early match-up scholarship investigated the physical characteristics of the celebrity (Kahle & Homer, 1985), but the research moved to investigating a deeper understanding of the dimensions of the celebrity image (Choi & Rifon, 2007). Choi and Rifon (2007) suggested that to have a match-up effect, the product should be matched with the image of the celebrity which is more intricate than the physical appearance. The proposed dimensions included genuineness, competence, excitement, and sociability. While used to illustrate the research adding depth to the match-up hypothesis, the dimensions of the celebrity carry more weight in the fourth endorsement theory called meaning transfer.

A period of empirical investigations into the match-up effect manipulated the source by including an anonymous model (Lynch & Schuler, 1994; Till & Busler, 2000). Lynch and Schuler (1994) presented a series of print ads to the participants that featured an anonymous model with varying degrees of muscularity. The print ads also promoted items both related and unrelated to muscularity. While the presence of the endorser had a positive effect on effectiveness, the degree of muscularity only influenced the products related to fitness. In the Till and Busler (2000) experiment, an anonymous model was used but was presented as an athlete and an actor in advertisements featuring a candy bar

and energy bar. The results showed there was a positive effect on brand attitudes for the combination featuring the energy bar and the athlete.

When investigating the match-up effect, celebrity athletes can serve to be useful since they are very well known and easily translate into specific promotional opportunities around fitness, sport, or other athletic activity (Koernig & Boyd, 2009). Several studies have indirectly supported the notion of the match-up hypothesis. One study compared a famous football player and famous singer endorsing shoes (Natarajan & Chawla, 1997), another study showed participants preferred ads of sports brands including the product and athlete (Yoon & Choi, 2005), and that tri-athletes were more effective when promoting cross trainer shoes than other high profile Olympians promoting milk (Boyd & Shank, 2004). While each of these studies supported the idea of the match-up hypothesis, none of them sought to evaluate that specific construct. The match-up hypothesis was finally tested within the sports context in an experimental study by Koernig & Boyd (2009). The authors explored the match-up effect by manipulating the celebrity athlete with an anonymous model as well as a sport product and a non-sports product. The components examined were attitudes towards endorser, the brand, the advertisement, and purchase intent. The results showed there was a match-up effect, but its effects were marginal. The only components positively affected when the celebrity athlete promoted a sports brand was the attitudes towards the endorser. The authors posited that perhaps the inclusion of a famous athlete overshadows the brand intended to be promoted (Koernig & Boyd, 2009).

More evidence exists that the match-up effect does not positively impact purchase intentions (Till & Busler, 2013). In a two-study examination, the match-up hypothesis

was evaluated with two different types of match-ups. The attractiveness match-up was matching up a product deemed to improve one's attractiveness with a celebrity endorser who was attractive. The expertise match-up placed an athlete with an energy bar suggesting the athlete would have expertise in a performance enhancing product. Both studies positively affected brand attitudes, but neither positively affected purchase intentions (Till & Busler, 2013).

The research on the match-up hypothesis did not provide clarity to the endorsement effectiveness scholarship. There is overwhelming evidence that there are positive results when a match-up effect is in place, but strength of those results is not consistent and there are still unexplained consequences. The primary advancement of the match-up research was that it definitively showed the communication between a celebrity endorser and the recipient is very complex and difficult to reduce to a single explanation.

Meaning Transfer Model. One paper disrupted several decades of endorsement research when Grant McCracken challenged the source credibility and source attractiveness models (1989). McCracken's paper is easily the single most cited piece of endorsement literature with nearly 4,800 citations.

McCracken (1989) criticized the previous research on source models as being insufficient for explaining the effects from endorsements. It is important to note that the match-up hypothesis is not mentioned in the seminal piece, likely due to the overlap in the development of both theories. McCracken argues the source models do not explain why a celebrity would be effective for one product but not another. The second major criticism of the source models is that they measure degrees of credibility and attractiveness but not the types of credibility or attractiveness (McCracken, 1989). These

inabilities to explain differences in endorsement effectiveness led to the proposed model of meaning transfer.

The meaning transfer model suggests “the effectiveness of a celebrity endorser depends on the meanings he or she brings to the endorsement process” (McCracken, 1989, p. 312). Meanings can include personality, lifestyle types, status, class, gender, and age. These meanings maintain cultural relevance which affect the persuasiveness of the advertisement. As endorsement decisions are made, and celebrities are chosen, it is the combination of these meanings collectively that influences the consumer (McCracken, 1989). McCracken contends that for endorsements to be most effective, a successful transfer of meaning between the endorser and the product promoted must occur.

McCracken also suggests any product can have any meaning that is created by the advertiser (1989). The advertisement carries tremendous power in crafting the intending meaning. A simple chocolate candy can carry a sensual sentiment of love or a fun and playful personality which is shaped by the advertisement. The meanings sought to communicate are determined after careful market research on the market position the brand intends to maintain. Once those meanings are established, choosing an appropriate endorser to reflect and illustrate those meanings become the next step in the marketing process. For example, based on the previous chocolate illustration one might choose celebrity model Kim Kardashian to communicate a sensual message and former NBA superstar Shaquille O’Neal for a fun and playful meaning.

McCracken details three stages through which the transfer of meanings occur within the endorsement context. The first stage is the accumulation of meanings by the celebrity within the culturally constituted world. These meanings add depth and power to

the advertisements and are built from their publicly viewed careers in sports, music, military, or acting (McCracken, 1989). The acting profession involves an interesting nuance to the meaning transfer in that they are typically playing a fictional character which may or may not represent their true selves. McCracken notes actors are routinely attempting to not be typecast into similar roles but being typecast is actually beneficial in cementing clearly defined meanings (1989). The second stage of the process involves the brand choosing the celebrity that best captures the meanings they wish to transfer onto the product. Sometimes the inclusion in certain ad campaigns can even add to the meanings carried by the celebrity (McCracken, 1989). The third and final stage of the process includes the consumer recognizing the meanings intended to be communicated by the celebrity in the ad and associating them with the product (Schimmelpfenig & Hunt, 2020).

These cultural meanings have been defined by research within the endorsement stream. Choi and Rifon (2007) attempted to identify the elements that construct what they called the “celebrity image”. The authors attempted to tackle the notion of finding quantifiable constructs to be used in understanding these elements. Their study was broken into three phases which included a selection of an initial scale, an exploratory phase to identify possible elements, and an assessment of the results using exploratory factor analysis (Choi & Rifon, 2007). The results produced four distinct dimensions of celebrity image which included genuineness, competence, excitement, and sociability (Choi & Rifon, 2007).

Interestingly, the shock to the endorsement literature was not felt by a new stream of research. Since publishing the meaning transfer theory in 1989, there have been only

10 papers that investigated the meaning transfer theory compared to 29 on source credibility, 20 on source attractiveness, and 23 on the match-up hypothesis (Schimmelpfenig & Hunt, 2020). Perhaps the limited exploration into the meaning transfer model is due to the difficulty in creating measures to empirically examine the phenomenon.

McCracken (1989) called for scholars to research how meanings transfer from a celebrity to a product by developing an instrument that helps us determine the meanings within celebrities. A first step was taken by Langmeyer and Walker (1991) in their exploratory study attempting to define that instrument. The qualitative study utilized a response elicitation format using the celebrity Cher as the endorser and the endorsed product of a health spa and an unendorsed product of bath towels. The initial step of the study was to determine if celebrity and product association were easily recalled by asking open ended questions of the participants to list as many endorsement and product pairs as they could (Langmeyer & Walker, 1991). That list was distilled down to three celebrity and product pairs with which the authors used to interview participants to understand the meanings they perceived to be transferred from celebrity to the product. Ultimately the celebrity chosen was Cher and she was matched with Scandinavia Health Spa to investigate the meanings being transferred. The study also investigated the meanings contained within an inanimate object, a bath towel, and the meanings inherent within the product by asking what type of celebrity would best elicit those meanings (Langmeyer & Walker, 1991). While the study didn't completely accomplish its intent, the authors did find results supporting the notion of the meaning transfer model and that the endorsement process is very complex (Langmeyer & Walker, 1991).

As of 2016, there have only been three studies that empirically examined the meaning transfer model using experimental methods (Bergkvist & Zou, 2016). The first study found personality traits do indeed transfer from the celebrity to the product, but the authors qualify the findings and caution on its generalizability (Batra & Homer, 2004). Interestingly, the authors found support for a positive effect on purchase intentions and not brand attitudes. Miller and Allen (2012) and Campbell and Warren (2012) both found empirical evidence supporting the meaning transfer model with Campbell and Warren (2012) noting that the perceived fit between celebrity and brand moderated the transfer.

As illustrated by the research, there is little consensus regarding endorsement effectiveness theory. Schimmelpfenig and Hunt (2020) argued that a “single endorsement theory is not able to holistically explain effective endorsements due to the inherent variability of advertised products and targeted brand images” (p. 489). The authors proposed a framework integrating all four previously mentioned theories and argued a brand’s value proposition is the key to understanding endorsement effectiveness (Schimmelpfenig & Hunt, 2020). Schimmelpfenig and Hunt (2020) propose previous research has made a mistake by trying to understand endorsements by limiting studies to product categories, but rather each individual product can intend to portray a unique value proposition. For example, a tennis racket brand can intend to communicate performance, value, elitism, or even fun and each respective proposition can best be matched with a different celebrity endorser for optimal effectiveness.

While endorsement research has been around for more than five decades, the scholarship on the foundational theories shaping endorsement research is relatively scarce within the celebrity athlete context. Perhaps attributable to how clearly one can

operationalize the theories, papers have been more predominant focused on source attractiveness (Frank & Mitsumoto, 2021), source credibility (Tzoumaka, Tsiotsou & Siomkos, 2016) and the match-up hypothesis (Fink, Parker, Cunningham & Cuneen, 2012; Kim & Na, 2007; Lee & Park, 2014). Within the context of sport, there are many operationalizing opportunities to further test these three theories such as their equipment (expertise), product related to their sport (match-up hypothesis), and their general fitness level (attractiveness). Notably absent from the endorsement research on the celebrity athlete is the meaning transfer model, but perhaps there's now a way to operationalize meanings.

2.2 ATHLETE BRANDING

Celebrities themselves can become their own human brand and special attention is paid to crafting and enhancing one's brand (Thomson, 2006). Aria, Ko, and Ross (2014) first introduced the concept of the athlete brand by extending previous theories assigned to traditional brands and applying them to celebrity athletes. A brand is a visual representation of an entity that is distinctive from its competition which can be achieved through awareness, reputation, and prominence (Shank, 1999, p. 239; Keller, 2008). Since Thomson (2006) asserted a human can also exhibit these characteristics, Aria, Ko, and Ross (2014) defined the athlete brand as “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” (p. 98).

Brand equity is held by the consumer and suggests the consumer has high levels of awareness, familiarity, and associations with the brand (Aaker, 1991; Keller 1993).

Aria, Ko, and Ross (2014) further define the brand image as “a consumers’ perception about athlete brand attributes” (p. 98).

The brand image is what can be manipulated by strategic decisions in managing one’s brand. These decisions can manifest themselves by what commercial relationship a celebrity athlete chooses to entertain. Much of the research has focused on the meaning transfer from the endorser to the promoted product, but those meanings also transfer reciprocally as well. Not only does the choice of the brand a celebrity chooses to endorse affect their own brand, the nature of the advertisement itself will shape the consumer’s perception of the celebrity’s brand (Kunkel, Walker, & Hodge, 2019). Framed within the schema theory and image spill-over theory, advertisements with inspirational and warm appeals have a greater effect on the celebrity athlete’s brand than a humorous appeal (Kunkel et al., 2019). This research suggests a key component of managing an athlete’s brand is not only selecting appropriate commercial partners but also maintaining the ability to choose how that relationship with that partner is communicated in the form of advertisements.

In further examining the athlete brand, models have been created to explore the most effective antecedents to a well-defined brand. The general consensus is an athlete brand is built from both on and off the field attributes. Chadwick and Burton (2008) proposed the TOPSTAR mnemonic which stands for Team, Off-field life, Physical characteristics, Success, Transferability, Age, and Reputation after an analysis of two of the most popular celebrity athletes at the time David Beckham and Cristiano Ronaldo. Aria, Ko, and Ross (2014) extended the previous scholarship and proposed a conceptual model of athlete branding (MABI) which reduced the categories of attributes to the

athlete's on-field characteristics, attractive external appearance, and off-field marketable attributes. Each of the three categories had subcategories to further define and explain the brand. The on-field characteristics included athletic expertise, style of play, sportsmanship, and rivalry with other competitors. The attractive external appearance included physical attractiveness, body fitness, and any symbolic style or trademark. Finally, the marketable lifestyle included their life story, effort given towards connecting with their fans, and societal behavior. The MABI model is the most cited in the athlete brand research and was developed into a scale named Scale of Athlete Brand Image (Aria, Ko, & Kaplanidou, 2013). The SABI is a functional tool for managers of athlete brands to evaluate the current status of their brand as well as guide future strategic business decisions for enhancing the brand.

Team transfers and pop culture penetration can also add value to an athlete brand. A significant boost to soccer superstar David Beckham's brand occurred because of his wife gaining fame and notoriety as a member of the pop group the Spice Girls (Chadwick & Burton, 2008). The crossover of Beckham from the somewhat limited sports universe to the global awareness because of his wife's fame certainly contributed to his brand equity. Similarly, an athlete's brand can be enhanced by changing teams. The athlete brand does not exist within a vacuum, but rather within a network of associated brands. When those brand associations, or networks, are altered the brand value is enhanced (Su, Baker, Doyle, & Kunkel, 2020). In a study of the social media followings of the participants of an NFL Draft, the network effects of joining a new league and team significantly increased social media followings and thus amplified the value of the athlete brand (Su et al., 2020). These findings were also preceded in the Chadwick and Burton

(2008) paper where the endorsement value of Ronaldo and Beckham were positively impacted by multiple team transfers and thus increased exposure.

Exposure alone is also attributable to increased value to the athlete brand. In an analysis of Q scores, which measure familiarity of a celebrity, a single unit increase in exposure equated to approximately \$600,000 in endorsement earning potential (Rascher, Eddy & Hyun, 2015). Exposure was detailed in this study as a variable relating to the number of games played and related camera time as a result. The paper also attributes the exposure and brand building value a national, consistent campaign from an endorsement relationship can have on an athlete's brand. For instance, NFL quarterback Peyton Manning scored very high on familiarity and likeability due in large part to his humorous marketing campaigns.

The turn of the 21st century birthed a new category of medium that is still very influential today. Social media refers to those platforms where interactivity can be fostered between the celebrity and that celebrity's fans at an individual level. Social media platforms allow for celebrities to communicate directly to their fans about their everyday lives, specific causes they may be supporting, and increasingly commercial relationships. Fans would willingly follow their favorite celebrity on a social media platform and the celebrity would distribute messages in the form of text, photos and videos that seemingly gives insight into their private lives. The reach that can be acquired by a celebrity is staggering with soccer superstar Cristiano Ronaldo having 451 million followers on Instagram alone (Prestige, 2022). That reach has become a desirable medium for advertisers with single campaigns reaching as high as \$5.2 million (Daugieras, 2022). Not only are social media campaigns effective for increasing reach for

advertising messages, the parasocial relationships developed between the fans and the celebrity have proven to effectively transfer to the brand being promoted (Chung & Cho, 2017). The parasocial relationship positively affected purchase intention, source trustworthiness, and brand credibility (Chung & Cho, 2017).

The rise of social media has added credence to the attention paid to creating a celebrity athlete's brand. Most of endorsement research has taken the perspective of the advertising entity and business decisions surrounding the uses of celebrities to endorse their product, but the last decade has given rise to increased scholarship surrounding the athlete brand and antecedents to its creation (Arai, Ko, & Kaplanidou, 2013; Arai, Ko, & Ross, 2014; Carlson & Donavan, 2013; Kunkel, Walker, & Hodge, 2018, Su, Baker, Doyle, & Kunkel, 2020).

In summary, the on-field performance of an athlete plays a major part in the crafting on his or her brand image. However, there are many controllable avenues for enhancing one's brand that can be fostered through endorsement opportunities. Evaluation of the reach, duration, advertising style and tone, and impact on social media can all contribute to building and maintaining an athlete brand.

2.3 PARASOCIAL INTERACTIONS

The term parasocial was first introduced by authors Horton and Wohl to describe the interaction between television personalities and its viewers (1956). The paper was not an empirical study, but rather observations that set the course for further exploration in to the parasocial concept. Focused primarily on television broadcasts, the authors observed that viewers feel engaged by the television personality as if they were in a relationship when in fact the information flow is definitively one-sided. The audience responds as if

the interaction were social in nature, but the personality does not reciprocate the action. In addition, the more the television personality adjusts his or her actions to a more traditional social interaction, the stronger the bond between the viewers appeared to exist. The paper's focus was on the newly termed personae which referred to the media personalities so popular during that era which could be game show hosts, announcers, and interviewers such as in the popular late night television shows (Horton & Wohl, 1956). It is no coincidence that the parasocial relationships strengthened as the viewers were exposed to personalities, or personae, on a more regular basis through nightly variety shows. Throughout the literature, exposure to a celebrity proves to be a primary antecedent to popularity (Chung & Cho, 2017; Rascher, Eddy & Hyun, 2015).

The stream of research around parasocial interactions (PSI) is vast. Previous studies have found that perceived realism (Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985), uncertainty reduction (Perse & Rubin, 1989), social attraction (Rubin & McHugh, 1987), and affinity (Rubin, 1979) contribute to stronger parasocial interactions.

A common feature of the nightly variety shows popular in that age was the personality speaking directly to and engaging with the audience in a variety of ways (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Later research studied the effects on the particular nuance associated with talking to the audience directly even though there was not an opportunity for the audience to respond (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). Hartmann and Goldhoorn (2011) empirically examined the causes and outcome of parasocial experiences and introduced the Experience of Parasocial Interaction (EPSI) scale. The authors' experiment confirmed that the body language of the personality as well as their verbal cues had a direct, positive effect on the intensity of the parasocial reaction when the

consumer felt they were being addressed specifically. The authors also found that the viewers had other psychological experiences such as the commitment to social norms as if they were in public when in fact, they were all alone in a room in front of their television (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). For example, the picking of one's nose is certainly against social norms while in public, but the paper found that adherence to social norms extended to private situations while experiencing a parasocial interaction.

The root of the early parasocial literature centered on traditional mass media consumption with most of the studies focused on television broadcasts. The parasocial phenomenon was extended to electronic media in a study that researched the effects stemming from a political candidate's blog (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006). What was called electronic word of mouth (eWOM) at the time, the paper's contribution to literature included that the perceived interactivity within the nature of blogs strengthened a parasocial relationship. The research was extended into the sports landscape when Kassing and Sanderson studied the parasocial interactions surrounding the events of the 2006 Tour de France (2009). The events of the race, a single cyclist with a dramatic final few stages, provided a lens through which the authors could study the fan postings on the cyclist's website. The website provided opportunities for his fans to not only learn more about his story but also post and interact with other fans. After a thematic analysis of the fans' posts, the authors found that internet communications have altered the parasocial interactions to be perceived even closer to actual social interactions. These findings were an important precursor ahead of the significant stream of literature on parasocial relationships on social media.

Parasocial interaction research was extended into social media for the first time with a paper that investigated the reasons fans choose to follow celebrities on Twitter (Frederick, Lim, Clavio & Walsh, 2012). Due to the nature of social media fostering social interactions, Frederick et al. sought to understand the role interactivity played in a fan's decision to follow a celebrity on social media. Using uses and gratification theory which states media consumption is a result of fulfilling a certain need, the author explored whether certain types of content posted by celebrities led to stronger parasocial interactions. The two types of content that were examined were those that were more social in nature, meaning more interactivity, and those predominantly parasocial. The results illustrated that the perception of a more socially inclined celebrity on social media led to feelings of stronger parasocial relationships (Frederick, Lim, Clavio & Walsh, 2012). However, it is important to distinguish that the nature of the interactivity was still deemed parasocial as the celebrity was not necessarily engaging with the individual fan on Twitter, but rather illustrating a pattern of general interactivity which gave the perception of a more normal social relationship.

The nature of the content posted to online social media networks has a direct effect on parasocial interactions. Self-disclosure refers to the communication of one's beliefs and feelings of a personal nature to others (Cozby, 1973). The term originates from social penetration theory which states that one's personality is the accumulation of their beliefs and feelings about themselves, others, and the world. The two categories of self-disclosure are breadth and depth which are both amplified on social media platforms. The more openly a celebrity is perceived to share about themselves, the more enhanced the parasocial interactions tend to be (Kim & Song, 2016).

Parasocial interactions with sports celebrities are fundamentally built upon identification (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009). This identification can lead to significant amounts of influence carried by the sports celebrity. Following basketball superstar Magic Johnson contracting the AIDS virus, those that strongly identified with him reduced high-risk behavior and exhibited genuine concern about the virus (Brown & Basil, 1995). Research has also shown that identification can affect one's opinion of innocence against murder charges (Brown, Duane & Fraser, 1997). Carlson and Donovan (2013) investigated the extent to which the athlete's brand leads to further, and possibly distinct, identifications. Carlson and Donovan tested and confirmed a model where an athlete's prestige and distinctiveness led to Athlete Identification. Not only was a new identification discovered, but strong Athlete Identification had positive influence on Team Identification as well as an increased intent to purchase team-related merchandise and consume team-related content (Carlson & Donovan, 2013).

As Hartmann and Goldhoorn (2011) found, there are strong outcomes to an intense parasocial relationship. These parasocial relationships, fostered by strong identification, can manifest themselves into commercial opportunities for celebrities. Chung and Cho (2017) studied the relationships fans have with celebrities on social media and its effect on endorsements. Source credibility, including trustworthiness, plays a significant role in endorser effectiveness (Ohanian, 1990), and parasocial relationships were found to mediate social media interactions among fans and celebrities (Chung & Cho, 2017). Subsequently, the commercial benefit of increased trustworthiness, or credibility, ultimately led to increased purchase intention. Similar results were found in more recent studies of the interaction of PSI and endorsement effectiveness on social

media (Aw & Labrecque, 2020; Gong, 2020). Therefore, parasocial relationships play a vital role in the effectiveness of endorsements within social media.

As the research has shown (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009; Brown & Basil, 1995; Brown, Duane & Fraser, 1997), strong parasocial interaction leads to high identification with a celebrity. That identification is strongest in celebrity athletes most likely due to the volume of their total media coverage both on social media and broadcast of their events. The parasocial interaction leads to strong influence, but we do not know when that influence will wane. For instance, without some level of diminishing effect one would conclude that a celebrity athlete with high parasocial interactions could sell anything to his or her followers. There is significant evidence to suggest not every celebrity product involvement is successful, so learning what variables contribute most to successful outcomes is important. Endorsement literature has made several attempts to clearly identify the antecedents to successful endorsement effectiveness with very little agreement. Celebrity variables for effectiveness include but are not limited to their attractiveness, trustworthiness, alignment with the product category being promoted, and credibility. With many intertwined variables, the parasocial interactions for a celebrity athlete is likely to contribute to a larger extent when the celebrity athlete is involved in the product.

PSI most certainly has a positive effect on endorsement effectiveness, but when does the influence begin to diminish? Can strong parasocial interactions overcome a perceived non-congruent product being promoted such as a basketball player promoting a tax accountant? Does a strong parasocial interaction moderate the effectiveness of an endorsement of a product in which the celebrity athlete is involved more than one in

which they have a traditional relationship? Since the research on celebrity product involvement is limited, we do not yet know if there are significant differences from traditional endorsement models, or if those differences are explained by variables such as parasocial interactions.

2.4 ATHLETE IDENTIFICATION

There is one other theory that has yet to gain traction in the endorsement literature but could possibly lead to more empirical examination. Carlson and Donovan (2013; 2017) have explored consumer behavior through identification and social identity theory. Social identity theory states that individuals self-categorize themselves into groups which aids in developing their self-image (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Individuals tend to identify with characteristics of those within their in-group while shunning those associated with their out-groups. Social Identity Theory is manifested within the sports realm with behavioral norms such as frequently attending or watching games and purchasing team merchandise.

The empirical work by Gantz (1981) found that there was a direct correlation between television viewership and team and player identification. Identification in sports was further examined by the seminal work of Wann and Branscombe (1990) when they coined the terms BIRGing and CORFing. BIRGing references a sports fan's basking-in-reflective-glory following positive events by more closely identifying themselves as a fan of their team through outward manifestations such as wearing team merchandise. CORFing, or cutting-off-reflective-failure, refers to the opposite effect whereby a sports fan will tend to distance themselves from identifying with the team.

Carlson and Donovan (2013) investigated the extent to which an athlete's brand leads to further, and possibly distinct, identifications. Carlson and Donovan tested and confirmed a model where an athlete's prestige and distinctiveness led to Athlete Identification. Not only was a new identification discovered, but strong Athlete Identification had positive influence on intent to purchase team-related merchandise and consume team-related content (Carlson & Donovan, 2013).

Carlson and Donovan then extended their research to study how identification affects endorsement effectiveness (2017). The authors argued that the meaning transfer model for explaining endorsements could be viewed from a social identity theory perspective. The common thread between becoming a fan of a team (Funk & James, 2006) and of an athlete (Thomson, 2006) is attachment. Carlson and Donovan (2017) conducted a survey that evaluated two premier celebrity athletes and four promoted products. While the study was not experimental, the authors wanted to ensure their data had adequate variance. The celebrity athletes chosen were professional football players Tony Romo and Terrell Owens and they were promoting two products from the beverage category and two products from the restaurant category. The results indicated that endorser identification was a significant predictor of endorsement success. Their rather significant contribution to literature is that endorser identification successfully predicts brand outcomes even when there is a lack of a perceived fit between the endorser and the brand (Carlson & Donovan, 2017).

What should be seen as a significant contribution to not only general endorsement scholarship, but also possibly operationalizing meaning transfer through endorsement identification, has yet to gain traction (Carlson & Donovan, 2017). As the authors note,

“An athlete’s symbolic meanings are transferred to a product as a result of his/ her association with the product via an endorsement, and consumers who identify with an endorser are motivated to consume the endorsed product as a means to acquire these symbolic meanings” (p. 179). The paper finding that endorser identification as a predictor of endorsement success has only 15 citations. This study intends to extend the scholarship on identification as it relates to endorsement by including the athlete identification measures into the methodology as a proxy for meaning transfer.

2.5 CELEBRITY PRODUCT INVOLVEMENT

Celebrity product involvement (CPI) is defined as the direct inclusion of the athlete in the creation of the product being promoted in the form of a collaboration, investment, or complete ownership (Nichols, 2021).

While the research on endorsements has been vast, very few studies have focused specifically on celebrity endorsement when the celebrity has equity in the product or has been intimately involved in product development. Hunter and Davidson (2007) proposed the addition of a fourth attribute to source model theory called involvement. Involvement is argued as being different from the traditional source characteristics of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness and a significant contributor to a communication’s effectiveness. In a traditional endorsement relationship, it is understood by the consumer that the celebrity was paid to promote the product and therefore obstructs their true feelings. In a celebrity entrepreneur endorsement, the consumer understands there is a more profound relationship between the celebrity and the product.

Hunter and Davidson (2007) conducted two experiments to operationalize involvement and its effect on attitude towards the brand and the advertisement. Involvement was manipulated within a cover story by communicating the celebrity was a co-owner in one group and a more traditional endorser in the other group. The results confirmed involvement has a positive effect on attitude towards the brand and the advertisement and is a distinct source factor.

Muda, Musa, Mohamed and Borhan (2013) also studied celebrity entrepreneur endorsement effectiveness. The authors tested whether source credibility had a positive effect on attitude towards brand, attitude towards the advertisement, and purchase intentions. The source credibility model utilized the traditional three sources of expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness. The resulting model suggested celebrity credibility had a positive impact on attitude towards the brand and advertisement when an individual was endorsing their own product, but the results related to purchase intention were inconclusive. While the celebrity source in the experiment was a celebrity entrepreneur, the fourth dimension introduced by Hunter and Davidson (2007) was not operationalized.

Celebrity entrepreneurial activities can come in many forms such as media companies, venture capital firms, cryptocurrency exchanges, and NFT platforms (Knight, Birnbaum, & Craig, 2022). Investigating whether there were distinct involvement categories was the purpose of a qualitative study by Nichols (2021). Nichols found the perception of high involvement led to increased perceived authenticity. The high involvement and authenticity relationship is consistent with findings from a separate study by Kennedy, Baxter and Kulczynski (2021). A second theme that emerged from Nichols' (2021) study was that the more of a celebrity's personality that is passed to the

product, the more influence the endorsement had on the consumer. Subsequently, the researcher found there were four unique sources of involvement with the most impactful being an owner of a company, followed by a collaboration. The final two categories were the traditional endorsement and being an investor (Nichols, 2021). Nichols suggests “when the consumer perceives that the celebrity uses the product, participated in its development, or originated the brand the effect is marginally more pronounced than a traditional endorsement.”

There is a significant gap in the scholarship related to endorsements when the celebrity is also an entrepreneur. Previous source models do not consider the potential differences in consumer behavior when the celebrity athlete is also an entrepreneur. Since a large majority of endorsement research is inconsistent and has leveraged the standard source models of trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertise, additional studies would need to be reexamined with this new additional source consideration. There is a need to understand the effects of an entrepreneurial relationship on previous endorsement streams of research. Hunter and Davidson’s (2007) addition of involvement as a source credibility model component needs to be confirmed and extended to other types of celebrity entrepreneurs such as athletes within the context of social media.

2.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current study will be grounded in the meaning transfer model. The meaning transfer model has become accepted by scholars as coming the closest to explaining the endorsement process (Schimmelpfenig & Hunt, 2020). While very difficult to examine, there has yet to be a paper to dispute the proposed model of meaning transfer.

This study seeks to understand how the endorsement of a product in which a celebrity is involved affects endorsement effectiveness. Celebrity product involvement suggests the celebrity has a deeper relationship with the product by collaboration on its creation or design, by financially supporting the parent company as an investor, or by being the sole owner of the parent company and or brand. The expectations would be that the meanings transferred to a product being endorsed would be more salient when the consumer recognizes that the celebrity is directly involved in the product's origination.

While not viewed as one of the primary endorsement theories, attribution theory also applies to the current study. Attribution theory assigns value to the recipient inferring why some thing happened and thus influencing the respective response (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Based on attribution theory, correspondence bias will be leveraged, which states a person will draw inference for one's observed actions based on preconceived beliefs (Gilbert & Malone, 1995). While attribution theory and correspondence bias is not often utilized in endorsement related research, Hunter and Davidsson (2007) noted the two theories in their criticism of the source models of endorsement theories. While not cited, when Ohanian (1990) commented that the consumers know that the celebrity was paid to endorse, she was implementing attribution theory by assuming the consumers believed the celebrities were motivated by extrinsic values. Correspondence bias was used in a study that confirmed that the perception by a consumer of a celebrity endorser actually liking the product they are endorsing had positive effects on brand attitudes and purchase intentions.

In a traditional endorsement relationship, it is understood by the consumer that the celebrity was paid to promote the product and therefore obstructs their true feelings. In a

celebrity entrepreneur endorsement, the consumer understands there is a more profound relationship between the celebrity and the product.

This study will directly address the criticism posed by Ohanian (1990) where he suggested the consumer understands the celebrity is paid to endorse a certain product, and therefore is less trustworthy. This study will contribute to our understanding of the meaning transfer model by supporting the notion that meanings do indeed flow from the celebrity to the product and that the intensity and effectiveness of those meanings are moderated by celebrity product involvement. The scholarship on endorsement effectiveness has yet to fully examine the developing paradigm of celebrities taking a more active, entrepreneurial role in the products they promote.

2.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the intent of this study and guided by previous literature, the following research questions were developed:

1. Do brand attitudes differ based on level of celebrity athlete product involvement?
2. Does the consumer's level of identification moderate the relationship between the level of celebrity athlete product involvement and brand attitudes?
3. Does parasocial interaction moderate the relationship between the level of celebrity athlete product involvement and brand attitudes?
4. Does the congruency of the endorsed product affect the role of celebrity athlete involvement on brand attitudes?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The methodology chosen was developed to leverage existing scholarship on the guiding theoretical framework while also adapting common measures and procedures used in previous research on celebrity endorsements. Chapter 3 focused on the research design and the analytic plan to answer the proposed research questions.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study examined the research questions through a quantitative design using a survey method. A survey design was chosen as it is the most appropriate method for evaluating the relationships that may or may not exist between variables (Patten & Newhart, 2018). The primary intent of the survey design was to isolate the dependent variable of interest, brand attitudes in this study, and examine the interactions between the independent variables of interest. The design focused on establishing the relationships between athlete identification, parasocial interactions, and product congruency and their moderating role of Celebrity Product Involvement.

3.2 RESEARCH CONTEXT

This study focused on the celebrity athlete without limitations placed on sport or gender. While the celebrity product involvement phenomenon extends beyond athletes, previous studies from which the research questions were based were within the sports

context. In addition, the dramatic increases in on-field earnings by sports celebrities have amplified the trend of off-field earnings through entrepreneurial endeavors particularly within the sports space (Knight, Birnbaum, & Craig, 2022).

3.3 PARTICIPANTS

A simple random sample, where all members of the population have an equal chance of being chosen, were utilized to select the participants (Patten & Newhart, 2018). The sample was limited to sports fans, who are active on social media, and live in the United States. A panel was utilized for recruitment into the study. Participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and Prolific due to their ability to provide a diverse participant panel in a timely manner while also removing the researcher from interfering with the respondents (Buhrmester, Talafar & Gosling, 2018; Paolacci, Chandler & Ipeirotis, 2010). Filtering questions and attention checks were inserted to verify the intent of the sample selection. Finally, IP address limitations were used to enhance the reliability of the responses.

The final population totaled ($N=735$). The average age of the respondents was 37 years old. Most participants were male (58%), Caucasian (76%), had a bachelor's degree (43%), used social media more than never but less than once per day (64%), and had a household income of \$50,000 to \$74,999 (29%). Table 3.1 provides more details regarding the participants.

3.4 VARIABLES OF INTEREST

The following measures will be used as instruments to evaluate the dependent and independent variables. The choices of measures and variables used was informed by the existing research stream on endorsements as well as guiding theoretical framework.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of interest is brand attitudes. Brand attitudes is one of the three most common variables of interest within endorsement scholarship (Bergkvist & Zou, 2016). Attitude towards the advertisement and purchase intention are the other two common outcome variables. Since this study does not intend on incorporating existing or fictitious advertisements into the examination, attitudes towards the advertisement would not be appropriate. However, strong consideration was given to utilizing purchase intentions. The issue with purchase intention involves whether the participant has the capacity or interest to purchase and the potential effect that may have on their responses. For example, if the product being promoted was an expensive watch and the participant's socioeconomic status was not likely to be able to afford the watch, the resulting responses would likely be affected. Endorsement literature also shows that brand attitudes can positively affect purchase intention (Spears & Singh, 2004). Therefore, to isolate the most appropriate variable of interest, brand attitudes was chosen.

Independent Variables

The primary independent variable of interest was Celebrity Product Involvement. CPI was assessed through four levels of involvement as detailed by Nichols (2022). The four categories of CPI included traditional endorsement, collaboration, part-owner, and complete ownership. Each category was intended to represent different degrees of personal involvement by the celebrity athlete with the product.

Two additional independent variables of interest were parasocial relationships and athlete identification. This study aimed to understand whether the strength of a parasocial relationship moderates the effectiveness of an endorsement with Celebrity Product

Involvement. Parasocial interactions have been shown to positively affect endorsements (Chung & Cho, 2017).

Since this study investigated endorsement effectiveness through the lens of social identity, an identification measure was included. Carlson and Donovan (2017) have approached endorsement research from a social identity theory perspective by arguing that identification most closely aligns with the meaning transfer model. This paper intended to extend that scholarship by examining the moderating effects of identification with the celebrity endorser.

The final variable of interest was congruence between the celebrity athlete and the product being promoted. There is heavy amount of research that studies the match-up hypothesis which provides a framework to explain the link between endorser effectiveness and perceived fit with the brand being promoted (Koerning & Boyd, 2009). Within the match-up hypothesis, an endorser will not have a positive effect on brand attitudes unless there is congruence with the brand (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990; Parekh & Kanekar, 1994). However, there is not a consensus on the match-up hypothesis (Till & Busler, 2013). Therefore, this study intended to discover to what extent product congruency plays a role in endorsement effectiveness when the celebrity athlete is personally involved in the product.

3.5 INSTRUMENTATION

Participants were randomly placed in to one of 16 categories as part of the research design which allowed for isolating CPI and congruence. Further details on the categories will be provided in the procedure section. Brand attitudes was measured using the three-item scale from Mackenzie and Lutz (1989). The three-item scale has been

utilized throughout endorsement literature and regularly demonstrated reliability (Lee & Koo, 2015).

Parasocial interactions was measured using the nine-item scale developed by Chung and Cho (2017) which includes two subconstructs named friendship and understanding. Chung and Cho tested and confirmed their scale for validity with an AVE of .653 and reliability with a Cronbach alpha score of .711. This parasocial relationship measure was used to examine a similar mediating relationship in the Chung and Cho study on endorsements (2017).

The measure used for identification was the player portion of the points of attachment scale (Robinson & Trail, 2005). Using the points of attachment scale, role identification has been found to positively affect sports ticket purchasing behaviors and mediated intentions to watch sports (Dwyer, Drayer & Shapiro, 2013; Shapiro, Ridinger & Trail, 2013).

3.6 PROCEDURE

Participants were informed they would be part of a study assessing the impact of endorsements. The participants were asked an open-ended question seeking to ascertain their favorite celebrity athlete. The result of this answer was used in subsequent questions within the survey dynamically since we are not necessarily interested in specific celebrity athletes, but rather the meanings that transfer and their effects on endorsement effectiveness. Following a similar procedure to Hunter and Davisson (2009) who pioneered early celebrity entrepreneur research, we utilized fictitious text describing an endorsement relationship with the featured celebrity athlete. A text description was chosen to eliminate any visual effects that could occur with images of advertisements (Li,

& Xie, 2020). The fictitious text was categorized into four different groups based on the product being promoted being a recognized and fictitious brand name and two different product categories. The four categories each received manipulations based on the four Celebrity Product Involvement categories including traditional endorsement, collaboration, part-owner, or complete ownership. The resulting combination totaled sixteen manipulations. A manipulation check question was included to verify that the respondents perceive the relationship between the brand and the celebrity athlete accurately. Following the exposure to the informational text, respondents were asked about athlete identification, parasocial interactions, and brand attitudes.

The products categories included within the study were two of the most commonly found in athlete endorsements. The sports drink and watch category rank among the top ten most common endorsements within an athlete's portfolio (Knight, Birnbaum, & Craig, 2022). The known brands for each were selected due to their extensive history of brand building and association with sports. Bodyarmor is a challenger brand to Gatorade within the sports drink category and was chosen over Gatorade due to the more likely scenario of obtaining ownership. Rolex is a regular participant in sponsoring sporting events and is a widely known brand. The two fictitious brands will be "Hy" for the sports drink and "X" for the watch brand. Pretesting will be conducted to verify the associations with the existing brands are accurate as well as testing the viability for the fictitious brand names.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The results were examined by running a 4x2x2x2 between subjects factorial ANOVA (Analysis of Variance). An ANOVA is used when testing the significance of a

set of means (Patten & Newhart, 2018). The ANOVA tested the main effects of Celebrity Product Involvement (CPI), congruence, and brand attitudes while also testing the moderating effects of athlete identification and parasocial interactions. A moderating variable affects the strength of a relationship between independent and dependent variables (Thompson, 2006).

Table 3.1*Demographics of participants*

	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Gender		
Female	295	40.10%
Male	431	58.60%
Did not specify	6	0.80%
Education		
High school or below	4	50.00%
High School diploma of GED	113	15.40%
Some college, but no degree	118	16.10%
Associates or technical degree	60	8.20%
Bachelor's degree	320	43.50%
Graduate or professional degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, JD, MD, DDS etc)	101	13.70%
Prefer not to say	1	0.10%
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	563	76.60%
African American	31	4.20%
Native American	24	3.30%
Asian	60	8.30%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0	0.00%
Other	18	2.40%
Prefer not to say	4	0.50%
Household Income		
Below \$25,000	71	9.70%
\$25,000-\$50,000	129	17.60%
\$50,001-\$75,000	214	29.10%
\$75,001-\$100,000	124	16.90%
\$100,001-\$150,000	93	12.70%
\$150,001 or over	75	10.20%
Prefer not to say	18	2.40%

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the findings. A between subjects factorial ANOVA was conducted to answer the four research questions which examined the main effects of Celebrity Product Involvement on brand attitudes, the moderating effects of parasocial interactions and identification, and to what extent product congruence with the celebrity athlete plays a role in these relationships.

Participants were removed from the results if they did not accurately answer the filtering questions, pass the manipulation checks, or did not complete the survey. The final population totaled ($N=735$) with ($n=193$) receiving the endorser narrative, ($n=157$) receiving the collaboration narrative, ($n=188$) receiving the part-owner narrative, and ($n=197$) receiving the ownership narrative.

A preliminary descriptive analysis was conducted on all continuous variables. Table 4.1 shows the means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis for each variable. Both skewness and kurtosis should be +/- 1 to be within an acceptable range. All variables were in the normal range except brand attitudes in which kurtosis was high at 1.91. Therefore, a natural log transformation was used, and the resulting log scores were in the normal range.

Next, continuous variables were broken down into CPI categories and descriptive statistics were examined. The mean natural log of brand attitude scores was all similar with the highest category being part-owner (Brand Attitude $\ln M = 1.5346$, $SD = .14968$), followed by ownership (Brand Attitude $\ln M = 1.5342$, $SD = .16498$), traditional

endorsement (Brand Attitude $\ln M = 1.5218$, $SD = .14677$), and collaboration (Brand Attitude $\ln M = 1.4941$, $SD = .22528$). Parasocial interactions and identification were divided at their respective median to create a high and low group. The high parasocial interactions group had higher brand attitudes compared to the low parasocial interaction group. Similarly, the high identification group had higher brand attitudes, compared to the low identification group. The congruent and non-congruent groups were very similar with the congruent group having slightly higher means than the non-congruent group. Table 4.2 provides more detail on the brand attitudes by each variable.

To test the four research questions, a 4x2x2x2 between subjects factorial ANOVA model was developed which examined main and interaction effects on brand attitudes based on Celebrity Product Involvement (CPI), parasocial interactions, athlete identification, and product congruence.

Main Effects

For research question 1, the main effect of CPI brand attitudes was not found to be significant as shown in Table 4.3. Involvement groups did not differ based on brand attitudes. However, subsequent analysis showed the main effects of parasocial interactions ($F(1,735) = 19.580$, $p = <.001$) and identification ($F(1,735) = 12.289$, $p = <.001$) were both found to be significant. The high parasocial interactions group had higher brand attitudes (Brand Attitude $\ln M = 1.5467$, $SD = .17433$), compared to the low parasocial interaction group (Brand Attitude $\ln M = 1.4498$, $SD = .14309$). Similarly, the high identification group had higher brand attitudes (Brand Attitude $\ln M = 1.5525$, $SD = .16969$), compared to the low identification group (Brand Attitude $\ln M = 1.4635$, $SD =$

.16175). The congruence and non-congruence groups were not found to be significant. Brand attitudes did not differ between these two groups.

Due to existing literature that only included undergraduate students (Hunter & Davidsson, 2007), an analysis was conducted on the high and low age groups. The respondents were separated into high and low age groups at the mean (Age $M = 37.3$) and a between subjects factorial ANOVA was conducted as shown in Table 4.4.

The results showed the main effects of CPI ($F(1,464) = 2.771, p = .041$), main effects of parasocial interactions ($F(1,464) = 8.919, p = .003$), and main effects of identification ($F(1,464) = 17.700, p = <.001$) were significant. The CPI categories ranked from highest to lowest by brand attitudes were part-owner (Brand Attitude $ln M = 1.5552, SD = .16493$), owner (Brand Attitude $ln M = 1.5447, SD = .17659$), endorser (Brand Attitude $ln M = 1.5371, SD = .14987$), and collaborator (Brand Attitude $ln M = 1.5037, SD = .25389$). The full results of the main effects are reflected in Table 4.5.

Further analysis was conducted but failed to find main effects in CPI when the respondents were categorized by high or low parasocial interactions or high or low identification.

Interaction Effects

In terms of research questions 2-4, none of the interaction effects including CPI were found to be significant. Therefore, no moderation effects for parasocial interactions, identification, or product congruence were found between involvement categories and brand attitudes. However, an interaction effect was found between parasocial interaction and congruence ($F(1,735) = 7.314, p = .007$). Upon further analysis of estimated marginal means, the interaction effect was strongest in the low parasocial interaction

group with the congruent product categories group having higher brand attitudes ($M = 1.486$) and those in the non-congruent product categories ($M = 1.425$).

Additionally, an interaction effect was also found between parasocial interactions and identification ($F(1,735) = 7.076, p = .008$). Further analysis of the estimated marginal means showed the high parasocial interaction group paired with high identification (Brand Attitude $M = 1.568$) had higher brand attitudes compared to the high parasocial interaction and low identification group (Brand Attitude $M = 1.476$).

An analysis of interaction effects was conducted on the low age group that produced significant main effects for CPI. An interaction effect was found between CPI and congruence ($F(1,464) = 2.199, p = .087$). Upon further analysis of estimated marginal means, the interaction effect was strongest in the collaboration CPI group with the non-congruent product categories having higher brand attitudes ($M = 1.476$) than the congruent product categories ($M = 1.392$). The ownership CPI group also had an interaction effect with the congruent product categories producing higher brand attitudes ($M = 1.526$) than the non-congruent product categories ($M = 1.454$).

The interaction between parasocial interactions and identification that was found in the primary study was more pronounced in the low age group. Estimated marginal means showed that the high parasocial interaction group and high identification group had higher brand attitudes ($M = 1.584$) than the combination of high parasocial interactions and low identification ($M = 1.448$). The interaction effect between parasocial interactions and congruency in the primary study was consistent in the low age group with the low parasocial interactions and congruent product categories grouping having

higher brand attitudes ($M = 1.482$) than the low parasocial and non-congruent grouping ($M = 1.422$).

The final interaction effect within the low age group was between CPI, identification, and congruency. Estimated marginal means showed that the effect was strongest in the group including CPI category part-owner with high identification and product congruency which had higher brand attitudes ($M = 1.58$) than the group including CPI category collaboration, low identification, and product congruency ($M = 1.269$).

In summary, the results did not find evidence of differences in brand attitudes based on CPI (RQ1). In addition, there was also a lack of evidence that parasocial interactions (RQ2) and identification (RQ3) moderate the effects of CPI on brand attitudes. Lastly, evidence was not found suggesting differences in brand attitudes based on congruency of the product category (RQ4). The secondary analysis did indicate a significant relationship in the lower age participants including differences in brand attitudes based on CPI (RQ1) and that product congruency plays a role in brand attitudes with respect to different CPI categories (RQ4).

Table 4.1

Preliminary descriptive analysis

	Brand Attitude Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Brand Attitude	4.6467	0.73568	-0.026	1.91
Parasocial Interactions	4.7072	1.16356	-0.289	-0.262
Identification	3.2724	1.03362	-0.424	-0.696

Table 4.2*Brand attitude by variable*

Variables	Brand Attitude Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Endorser	1.5218	0.14677	193
Collaborator	1.4941	0.22528	157
Part-owner	1.5346	0.14968	188
Ownership	1.5342	0.16498	197
High Parasocial	1.5467	0.17433	551
Low Parasocial	1.4498	0.14309	184
High Identification	1.5525	0.16969	487
Low Identification	1.4635	0.16175	248
Congruent	1.525	0.16768	347
Non-congruent	1.5202	0.17628	388

Table 4.3

Between subjects factorial ANOVA results using ln brand attitudes as the dependent variable

Dependent Variable: BAllog					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	3.058a	31	0.099	3.709	<.001
Intercept	1043.645	1	1043.645	39234.115	0
CPI	0.148	3	0.049	1.859	0.135
PSHiLo	0.521	1	0.521	19.58	<.001
IDHiLo	0.327	1	0.327	12.289	<.001
congruence	0.046	1	0.046	1.739	0.188
CPI * PSHiLo	0.04	3	0.013	0.499	0.683
CPI * IDHiLo	0.004	3	0.001	0.056	0.982
CPI * congruence	0.067	3	0.022	0.845	0.47
PSHiLo * IDHiLo	0.188	1	0.188	7.076	0.008
PSHiLo * congruence	0.195	1	0.195	7.314	0.007
IDHiLo * congruence	0.007	1	0.007	0.253	0.615
CPI * PSHiLo * IDHiLo	0.017	3	0.006	0.208	0.891
CPI * PSHiLo * congruence	0.012	3	0.004	0.148	0.931
CPI * IDHiLo * congruence	0.207	3	0.069	2.598	0.051
PSHiLo * IDHiLo * congruence	0	1	0	0.018	0.893
CPI * PSHiLo * IDHiLo * congruence	0.116	3	0.039	1.458	0.225
Error	18.7	703	0.027		
Total	1725.402	735			
Corrected Total	21.758	734			
a R Squared = .141 (Adjusted R Squared = .103)					

Table 4.4*Brand attitude by variable for participants in low age group*

Variables	Brand Attitude Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Endorser	1.5371	0.14987	121
Collaborator	1.5037	0.25389	99
Part-owner	1.5552	0.16493	115
Ownership	1.5447	0.17659	130
High Parasocial	1.5633	0.19195	362
Low Parasocial	1.4426	0.13364	103
High Identification	1.5688	0.1771	337
Low Identification	1.4517	0.18784	128
Congruent	1.5426	0.18329	220
Non-congruent	1.5312	0.19119	245

Table 4.5

Between subjects factorial ANOVA results using ln brand attitudes as the dependent variable for low age group

Dependent Variable: BAlog					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	3.167 ^b	31	0.102	3.37	<.001
Intercept	577.794	1	577.794	19062.285	0
CPI	0.252	3	0.084	2.771	0.041
PSHiLo	0.27	1	0.27	8.919	0.003
IDHiLo	0.536	1	0.536	17.7	<.001
congruence	0.009	1	0.009	0.296	0.587
CPI * PSHiLo	0.175	3	0.058	1.924	0.125
CPI * IDHiLo	0.05	3	0.017	0.548	0.65
CPI * congruence	0.2	3	0.067	2.199	0.087
PSHiLo * IDHiLo	0.142	1	0.142	4.677	0.031
PSHiLo * congruence	0.154	1	0.154	5.092	0.025
IDHiLo * congruence	0.029	1	0.029	0.95	0.33
CPI * PSHiLo * IDHiLo	0.106	3	0.035	1.17	0.321
CPI * PSHiLo * congruence	0.074	3	0.025	0.812	0.488
CPI * IDHiLo * congruence	0.274	3	0.091	3.018	0.03
PSHiLo * IDHiLo * congruence	0.001	1	0.001	0.047	0.828
CPI * PSHiLo * IDHiLo * congruence	0.169	3	0.056	1.863	0.135
Error	13.125	433	0.03		
Total	1114.215	465			
Corrected Total	16.292	464			
a. below38 = 1.00					
b. R Squared = .194 (Adjusted R Squared = .137)					

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Chapter 4 outlined the empirical results from the research questions detailed in Chapter 2. Findings provided no empirical evidence Celebrity Product Involvement played a role in brand attitudes. Additionally, neither parasocial interactions nor athlete identification moderated the effects on brand attitudes. Finally, product category congruence did not significantly impact brand attitudes. This study design was the first of its kind. Previous work (Nichols, 2021) established involvement categories that had not been highlighted previously and it shed some light on the complex nature of evolving relationships between celebrities and the products they endorse or create. Additionally, this was focused on celebrity athletes which provide a unique platform due to the type of fandom they generate, and the strong relationship forged between sport fans and their favorite teams and athletes.

The results did however provide support for the Meaning Transfer Model and provide an empirical mechanism through which to operationalize the theory for more future research on the complex endorsement landscape. Furthermore, both parasocial relationships and athlete identification play a significant role on brand attitudes. Deeper discussion and analysis of the impacts of these results are detailed in subsequent sections.

5.2 CELEBRITY PRODUCT INVOLVEMENT

The current findings did not provide evidence of a relationship between CPI and brand attitudes (RQ1). These results contradict previous research that found support for perceived involvement having a positive effect on brand attitudes (Hunter & Davidsson, 2007). While the 2007 study served as inspiration for the current research questions as well as a methodological framework, there were key differences that may have led to the contradictory results. The Hunter and Davidsson paper (2007) utilized two stimuli, narrative text, and imagery, which could have played a role in communicating involvement to the respondent. The participant sample utilized by Hunter and Davidsson was limited to undergraduate students in Sweden which resulted in an average age of 23. Upon further analysis, when examining those participants in the current study who were age 38 and under, there were also significant differences in brand attitudes based on Celebrity Product Involvement. In fact, nearly all research questions found significant differences in brand attitudes when the participants were younger in age. These results are consistent with previous literature focused only on undergraduate student populations (Hunter & Davidsson, 2007). Perhaps there are significant differences in fans of a certain generation that have matured in an era of increased exposure to celebrity athletes that is compounded by the prevalence of social media.

Furthermore, this study is the first empirical investigation into the relationship between a celebrity entrepreneur and their effect on endorsement effectiveness when the celebrity is an athlete. The research stream originated with Hunter and Davidsson (2007) who first introduced the term involvement in the context of celebrity entrepreneurs. The results of this study provide inconclusive evidence of four distinct categories of Celebrity Product Involvement introduced by Nichols (2021). The four categories, traditional

endorser, collaborator, investor, and owner were found to be distinct in a previous qualitative study. The current findings fail to provide support for the notion that higher level of involvement by a celebrity entrepreneur leads to elevated perceived authenticity which positively impacts endorsement effectiveness (Kennedy, Baxter, & Kulczynski, 2021). Since authenticity was not examined, perhaps the respondents did not perceive the four categories of involvement to be correlated to authenticity. These findings also fail to empirically support Nichols' (2021) assertion that, "when the consumer perceives that the celebrity uses the product, participated in its development, or originated the brand the effect is marginally more pronounced than a traditional endorsement." Another possible explanation for results could be found in the structure of the survey. By asking respondents for their favorite athlete and inserting that athlete into subsequent measures, the respondent's attachment to the athlete could have overpowered any possibility for CPI distinction. By having such strong identification and parasocial relationships, the respondents could be reacting to each CPI category without distinction. Further research is needed to better understand whether there are unique categories of Celebrity Product Involvement.

5.3 PARASOCIAL INTERACTIONS

The analysis did not support the notion that parasocial interaction plays a significant moderating role in endorsement effectiveness. Previous research found a mediating relationship between parasocial relationships and endorsement effectiveness, but whether a moderating effect would also occur was unknown (Chung & Cho, 2017; Aw & Labrecque, 2020; Gong, 2020). Since the four CPI categories varied by their level of personal involvement, brand attitudes could have been more pronounced when the

involvement and parasocial interactions were high and brand attitudes would be lower when involvement and parasocial interactions were low. The lack of an interaction effect could be explained by the respondents not equating the categories of CPI to an investment in personal involvement which also might explain the lack of significant results for CPI.

While there was no interaction effect on CPI with parasocial interactions, there was a significant main effect. When participants felt they were in a relationship with their favorite celebrity athlete, the effects of the commercial relationship increased in the form of brand attitudes. These results support previous work in the parasocial stream of literature that have consistently found a link between parasocial relationships and strength of influence carried by the celebrity (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009; Brown & Basil, 1995; Brown, Duane & Fraser, 1997).

The participants were asked to insert their favorite athlete which would naturally expect to yield higher parasocial results. However, by splitting the parasocial results at the median, the results show that even a favorite athlete can have varying levels of parasocial relationships, and those relations are indeed reflected in the results on brand attitudes. Those participants in the low parasocial category produced drastically lower brand attitude scores than those in the higher category. The primary model included all four brands which suggest that a parasocial relationship can contribute to brand attitudes across a generalized set of brand categories. Additionally, the four brands included two fake brands which eliminates the possibility of an effect from equity in either BodyArmor or Rolex. These results can be explained by a higher level of parasocial relationship

leading to higher levels of perceived trustworthiness or credibility (Aw & Labrecque, 2020; Gong, 2020).

5.4 IDENTIFICATION

The results did not find identification as a moderator between CPI and brand attitudes. Similar to parasocial interactions, research has shown that identification can mediate endorsement effectiveness (Carlson & Donovan, 2017), therefore the moderating effect of identification was unknown. Since the two variables, parasocial interactions and identification, are so closely aligned, the same justification for lack of significance could be similar. Perhaps the respondents did not perceive the intended level of involvement from the athlete to the product being endorsed.

Previous research suggests there is a relationship between parasocial interactions and identification (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009), which explains the main effect significance of identification along with parasocial interactions. The significance of the main effects of athlete identification supports Carlson and Donovan's research (2013, 2017) which has found high levels of athlete identification can lead to increased commercial influence for team-related purchases (2013) as well as endorsed products (2017).

The interaction effect between parasocial interactions and identification provides more evidence for the relationship between the two variables. The interaction provides support for the logical thought that high identification with a celebrity athlete with whom you are also perceiving high parasocial interactions leads to a very strong impact on brand attitudes. Previous studies have found mediation effects for each variable independently (Chung & Cho, 2017; Carlson & Donovan, 2017), but the strength through

moderation could initiate a new stream of research. While there is significant support for the relationship between parasocial interactions and identification (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009; Brown & Basil, 1995; Brown, Duane & Fraser, 1997), further research could focus on which precedes the other.

5.5 CONGRUENCE

The match-up hypothesis would suggest the Celebrity Product Involvement influence would be less effective with product categories that were non-congruent to an athlete's perceived expertise. This study generally conflicts with the match-up hypothesis even though there were no significant differences across congruent and non-congruent product categories (RQ4). By not finding a significant impact on brand attitudes with respect to CPI in congruent categories, the lack of support suggests that even with a congruent product category CPI did not play a role on brand attitudes.

The effect of CPI was not significant when the model included all four brands which means there were no differences based on product category congruency or the attachment to known brands. This result contributes to the conflicting literature on match-up hypothesis which suggests endorsement effectiveness would be stronger for product categories that closely align with the perceived expertise of the spokesperson. In the case of this study, since all endorsers were athletes, the sports drinks Bodyarmor and Hy would be perceived as congruent while Rolex and X would be non-congruent. The inclusion of two fictitious brands, Hy and X, coupled with the two product categories, the results of this study could be generalized across all product categories. The results show any preexisting association with the known brands Bodyarmor and Rolex were not significantly different than the fake brands. Coupled with the lack of differences with

respect to product category, one can presume similar results with any product category and any known or unknown brand.

There was however an interaction effect between congruence and parasocial interactions. The congruence impact is more pronounced when there are low parasocial interactions. For example, a respondent with low parasocial interaction with their favorite athlete will have significantly greater brand attitudes for a brand relationship with a sports drink than a watch. This specific interaction supports previous theory which suggested congruency would play a positive role in brand attitudes for the sports drink products and not for the watches. The fact that the significance was only in the low category of parasocial interactions further points to the overpowering effects of parasocial relationships on brand attitudes. This result would suggest celebrity athletes can experience less success in entrepreneurial activities such as cryptocurrency exchanges when they do not have any perceived expertise in the area (Knight, Birnbaum, & Craig, 2022). The isolation of congruence playing a role only in low parasocial relationships also conflicts with previous research (Lee & Koo, 2015). Lee and Koo (2015) found evidence that the interaction between endorser congruence and endorser credibility influenced brand attitudes. While credibility and parasocial interactions are not identical, they are related (Chung & Cho, 2017). Further research is needed on the complex nature of congruency within celebrity endorsements.

When analyzing the results from only the low age group, product congruency plays a significant moderating role with CPI on brand attitudes ($F(1,464) = 2.199, p = .087$). The ownership CPI had more traditional results with significantly higher brand attitudes in the congruent groups than the non-congruent groups. The most interesting

aspect of its impact is that the effect appears to be opposite of a logical result within the collaboration CPI category. Participants showed higher level of brand attitudes for the non-congruent products than those that were congruent which is not what is expected. Aside from the illogical result within collaboration, the lower age group illustrated the expected results from the research questions which suggests that there are nuanced differences in the construction of the younger fan which is consistent with previous literature (Hunter & Davidsson, 2007).

Koernig & Boyd (2009) studied the match-up hypothesis and found very marginal results with the only component affected was the attitude towards the endorser. The authors posited that the strength of the athlete played too large of a role. This study supports that opinion by similarly finding a lack of general significance in congruency with both genuine and fake brands as well as a diverse set of celebrity athletes.

5.6 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study was grounded in the meaning transfer model which states that an endorser's cultural significance is the most influential element of endorsement effectiveness (McCracken, 1989). While there is a trend in the literature moving towards more support for the meaning transfer model being the most applicable lens through which to study endorsement effectiveness, there is not agreement amongst all scholars (Schimmelpfenig & Hunt, 2020).

This paper followed the endorsement research stream that included parasocial interactions and identification (Carlson and Donovan, 2017; Chung & Cho, 2017; Lee & Koo, 2015) that all utilized the meaning transfer model for their investigations. The

cultural significance identified by McCracken (1989) is manifested in the form of athlete identification and parasocial interactions within this study.

This paper posits the meanings in the meaning transfer model can be measured in the forms of parasocial interactions and identification. The results add support that high levels of identification and parasocial interactions lead to higher brand attitudes. The fact that these measures were even significant in non-congruent categories strengthens the argument for meaning transfer model to serve as the primary tool through which to study endorsements. For example, the only interaction effect within this study occurred only when the parasocial interactions were low which adds more validity to the explanatory nature of the meaning transfer model.

The lack of significance regarding the primary purpose of this paper identifying whether Celebrity Product Involvement plays a role suggests that the CPI phenomenon requires further investigation. While the meanings were indeed transferred through parasocial interactions and identification, there was a lack of difference between the four CPI categories. If high levels of cultural significance were transferred from the athlete to the brand, one would have expected the level of personal investment of those meanings into the brand development to play a role on brand attitudes.

While not the primary theoretical framework for this paper, the match-up hypothesis was also examined. The results provide mixed support for the congruency of an endorser to a product factoring into an effective endorsement. Generally, endorser-product congruence did not play a role in brand attitudes. However, in the situation when there is low parasocial interactions the non-congruent products had significantly lower brand attitudes. This interaction not only supports the meaning transfer model, but also

provides limited support for the match-up hypothesis. These results suggest that congruence doesn't play a role unless the attachment to the celebrity is low.

The current findings advance knowledge on examining endorsement effectiveness through the lens of social identity. One of the reasons for so few endorsement studies framing their research through the meaning transfer model was the difficulty in operationalizing the theory. Once Carlson and Donovan (2013) began to study endorsements through identification, a path to operationalization began to occur. Parasocial interactions and identification can be utilized to isolate the cultural meanings that are transferred during an endorsement process.

While there is movement towards the adoption of the meaning transfer model as the primary theoretical framework through which to study endorsements, there is still little consensus on endorsement effectiveness theory (Schimmelpfenig & Hunt, 2020). As stated by Schimmelpfenig and Hunt (2020), previous research made a mistake by attempting to understand endorsement effectiveness through product categories. Instead, scholars should investigate the nuanced interactions between individual celebrities and individual products as the meanings flowing between the two are not generalizable even within product categories. Future research should continue to study the phenomenon of effective endorsements in different ways and perhaps different methodologies.

5.7 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The lack of direct statistical significance between the level of personal investment into a brand and brand attitudes does not support the recent explosion of entrepreneurial activities as it relates to endorsement effectiveness (Knight, Birnbaum, & Craig, 2022). The new trend around entrepreneurialism may have profound impacts financially, but the

relationship between the personal involvement of a celebrity into a brand being promoted does not appear to have an effect on brand attitudes.

The results could have significant effects on how future celebrity and brand relationships are structured. From the brand's perspective, the thought that giving up creative control in the form of a collaboration or financial control in the form of equity do not have relevance on the success of the endorsement effectiveness. In other words, if all other things are equal, a brand might rather have a traditional endorsement relationship than an exchange of equity which has become so prevalent (Pompliano, 2020). For example, if a partnership between LeBron James and Sprite were under consideration and the opportunity centered on a collaboration for the development of a new can design, this research would suggest Sprite will not experience a lift in brand attitudes beyond what would be expected in a professionally designed can. Given that the professionally designed can could acknowledge the traditional endorsement relationship between James and Sprite, the risk to Sprite in the collaborated design would not be balanced by the associated reward in increased brand attitudes due to the transfer of James' personality on the can. The can collaboration would significantly discount any psychological benefits that are traditionally contemplated by a professional graphic designer and could potentially negatively impact sales. Additionally, if LeBron James and Sprite were negotiating a traditional endorsement relationship and considering an exchange of a small equity in Sprite for promotional efforts, Sprite would once again be increasing their risk without a substantial increase on brand attitudes. The risks associated with an equity exchange appear attractive when the assumption is that the celebrity athlete will produce increase results, but this research would suggest the deeper relationship with James

would not translate into increased brand attitudes. However, the lack of specific support for an effect on brand attitudes does not consider other factors related to success such as the quality of the product or reach of the celebrity athlete on his or her owned media channels.

The differing results based on age groups adds complication to an already murky endorsement research stream of literature. Since the younger age group did experience the change in brand attitudes based on CPI, considerations should be given to the target market of the promoted product. For example, if the previously mentioned Sprite collaboration with LeBron James was targeted to a younger demographic, then the opportunities for increased brand attitudes would increase based on the personality of James adding value to the can design.

The strengthening of support for factors associated with meaning transfer model, identification and parasocial interactions, provide a clear roadmap for endorsement success. Those celebrity athletes with a strong brand that have developed a relationship with their fans can have massive influence commercially independent of product category. Celebrity athletes were once limited to only promoting those products that were directly related to their sport, but these results show that a celebrity athlete with high levels of fan support can transcend the traditional sports brands and enter unrelated categories such as financial planning, fashion, automotive, or personal care products.

Scholars agree that the antecedents to strong parasocial interactions can be rooted in social media activity (Aw & Labrecque, 2020; Gong, 2020; Chung & Cho, 2017). Marketing agents for celebrity athletes should lean even further into developing and amplifying their athlete's brand on social media to foster stronger parasocial relationships

and commercial success by extension. While social media is certainly effective in developing strong parasocial interactions, there is still value in exposure through other mediums to gain popularity (Chung & Cho, 2017; Rascher, Eddy & Hyun, 2015). Celebrity athletes should strongly consider all media opportunities where frequency and distribution are optimized. These can come in the form of press conferences related to their sport, the broadcasting of their sport and league, and even independent media outlets that are unique to their audience. These decisions can be manifested in free agent moves, entrepreneurial activities, and even creating new shows on broadcast networks such as the “Manningcast” by Peyton and Eli Manning.

The results of this study provide an interesting inflection for the celebrity athlete. The evidence is clear that a strong celebrity brand can have profound commercial influence. Assuming future research finds similar results related to endorsement effectiveness, the celebrity athlete should avoid taking unnecessary risks in future partnerships and instead rely on the traditional exchange of a guaranteed predetermined cash value for promotion of a brand. If a celebrity athlete chooses to accept equity instead of guaranteed cash, and their involvement doesn't translate into increased brand attitudes, then they would be accepting the same financial risk associated with consumer brands such as economic recessions, competition in the market, and changing tastes. However, this advice does not consider ancillary benefits from a deeper relationship in the form of negotiating power, exposure, and other brand relationships that can be leveraged by the celebrity athlete. For example, consider LeBron James negotiating a partnership with a designer watch company. While this research would suggest there would not be any lift in brand attitudes, James can dramatically increase exposure by featuring the watch

through his social media photos and videos and wearing the watch before and after NBA games. Since James also owns a media company, he could integrate the watch into his owned media projects for additional exposure and relevance.

Even though the results did not find evidence for supporting the categorical differences in CPI and its effect on brand attitudes, there is strong support for the meanings crafted by the celebrity athlete and transferred to the promoted product being effective.

5.8 LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations and delimitations were stated in chapters 1.5 and 1.6 respectively, however additional modifications could be made for future research into celebrity product involvement. The survey instrument could be altered in how the athlete is manipulated, how the CPI manipulation is communicated, and the products included in the study.

Future research into CPI should avoid manipulating the celebrity by having the respondents choose their favorite athlete. The nature of one's favorite athlete very likely led to higher identification and parasocial interactions which possibly overpowered the effects of CPI. The choice of not determining the manipulated athlete on the front end was guided by previous research by Carlson and Donovan (2017) to ensure there would be high levels of parasocial interactions and identification among the respondents. The overpowering effect was not taken into consideration, so future studies should either provide an individual celebrity athlete or a list of athletes to have a more representative set of results.

The manipulation narrative was perhaps too narrow in scope and didn't adequately communicate the situation. The original involvement study (Hunter & Davidsson, 2007) utilized both a narrative as well as a sample advertisement. Perhaps the additional communication device more effectively communicated the intended manipulation. Additionally, the narrative was perhaps too lengthy, and in certain instances too unbelievable, for a survey panel to consume. Future research should investigate creative and effective mechanisms to communicate levels of Celebrity Product Involvement.

Finally, the choice of products utilized in the survey should be adjusted to further evaluate their impact on CPI. Perhaps the ubiquitous nature of sports drink endorsements in sports and their favorite athlete's relationship with a specific brand played a role in this study. By eliminating the favorite athlete from the study, the preexisting knowledge of partnerships would be alleviated. However, to further explore CPI, possible categories could include financial services, automobiles, or fashion apparel.

Future research should explore the differences in endorsement effectiveness based on age of the consumer while examining through a lens of social identity. Younger fans perhaps identify with individual athletes more than teams when compared to older fans. That identification, emboldened by parasocial relationships, could likely lead to other unique endorsement effects.

Since a mediation effect with parasocial interactions and identification is well established within the research (Chung & Cho, 2017; Aw & Labrecque, 2020; Gong, 2020), another attempt should be made to investigate a moderation effect. Logically, if a fan's relationship and attachment to a celebrity explains an influence on brand attitudes,

then the amount of a celebrity's personality, or personal involvement, should moderate the effect. The research stream on the endorsement effect from parasocial interactions and identification points to the level of involvement playing a role. Future research should continue to modify methodologies to isolate the desired variable of involvement as it proved to be elusive within this study.

In conclusion, this study did not find significant differences in brand attitudes based on four levels of celebrity product involvement. This result adds to the complex nature of endorsement research and requires further investigation into this emerging celebrity entrepreneurial phenomenon. As celebrities continue to invest in creating their own personal brand, the expected result would be that the endorsement effectiveness would correlate to the amount of the celebrity's personality that is invested into the product being promoted. While this study did not find support, the existing literature points to a possible relationship between celebrity product involvement and endorsement effectiveness and future scholars should continue to refine the methodologies to confirm or disprove the relationship.

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APPENDIX A SURVEY MEASURES AND NARRATIVE

Product: Sports drink: BodyArmor, Hy

Product: Luxury watch: Rolex, X

Brand Attitudes:

Please indicate your opinions of (e.g., Rolex, BodyArmor, Hy, and X) using the following scales.

Pleasant/Unpleasant

Unfavorable/Favorable

Dislike/Like

Parasocial Relationships

Friendship 7-point Likert scale)

- [celebrity's name] makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend.
- I would like to have a friendly chat with [celebrity's name].
- If [celebrity's name] were not a celebrity, we would have been good friends.

Understanding/identification (7-point Likert scale)

- I think I understand [celebrity's name] quite well.
- When [celebrity's name] behaves in a certain way, I know the reasons for his/her behavior.

- I can feel [celebrity's name]'s emotions in certain situations.

- [celebrity's name] seems to understand the kinds of things I want to know.

- [celebrity's name] reminds me of myself.

- I can identify with [celebrity's name].

Points of Attachment (7-point Likert scale)

I identify with individual players on a team more than with a team.

I am a big fan of [celebrity's name] more than I am a fan of the team.

I consider myself a fan of [celebrity's name] rather than a fan of their team.

Narrative

Product: Sports drink: BodyArmor, Hy

Product: Luxury watch: Rolex, X

Endorsement

BodyArmor has enlisted superstar [celebrity's name] to promote their new flavor of sports drinks. [celebrity's name] will endorse the new drink on social media, television ads, and billboards round the world in exchange for an undisclosed, sizeable payment.

Collab

BodyArmor has enlisted superstar [celebrity's name] to collaborate on the creation of a new flavor of sports drink. [celebrity's name] will promote the new drink on social media, television ads, and billboards round the world in exchange for an undisclosed, sizeable payment.

Investment

BodyArmor has secured an investment from superstar [celebrity's name] to promote their sports drinks. [celebrity's name] will endorse the new drink on social media,

television ads, and billboards round the world in exchange for limited equity in the company. The equity is not a guaranteed payment but will allow [celebrity's name] to realize the benefits of the products' success, but also comes with risk associated with poor financial performance in the company.

Ownership

BodyArmor, a leading sports drink company, has been purchased by superstar [celebrity's name]. [celebrity's name] will endorse the sports drinks on social media, television ads, and billboards round the world. [celebrity's name] will run all aspects of the company including development of new products. As owner of BodyArmor, [celebrity's name] will realize the benefits of the products' success, but ownership also comes with the risk associated with poor financial performance in the company.