

Effects of Sport Celebrity Transgressions: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

This paper has developed a conceptual model that has been based on the perceptions of consumers about the impact of different types of sport celebrity transgressions (SCTs) on their sport celebrity brand image. Focus group results have indicated that when SCTs ensue, consumers may have a positive attitude towards the sport-related brand attributes, while at the same time a negative attitude towards the non-sport-related brand attributes. Furthermore, SCTs seemed to impact negatively on consumers' attitudes towards both the symbolic and experiential brand benefits. Findings showed consumers indicated positive emotional responses to some on-field SCTs. These findings have shown that the type of SCT may influence the impact of an SCT on the sport celebrity brand image.

Introduction

Many organizations are reliant on the sport celebrity brand image to increase their own image (Boisvert 2010), especially during sport celebrity endorsement (Henseler, Wilson, & de Vreede, 2009; Hung, Chan, & Tse, 2011; Kitchen, Brignell, & Spickett, 2004; McCracken 1989; Spy, Pappu, & Cornwell, 2011; White, 2012). When a sport celebrity transgression (SCT) negatively affects the sport celebrity brand image, it is possible that the SCT may affect the sport celebrity's associated brand partners through the process of brand image transfer (McCracken, 1989). This is because celebrity endorsement has previously been described as a brand alliance (Jaiprahash, 2008), where negative information was found to spill over to other brand partners in the alliance (Votolato & Unnava, 2006).

A celebrity is highly valued because of their high levels of attention, interest, and profit generation (Gupta, 2009), and the celebrity enters a sponsorship arrangement with an already attained brand image (McCracken, 1989). Therefore, sponsor organizations align their products and services with these brand images, believing that the message delivered will achieve significant attention and recall from consumers (Erdogan & Drollinger, 2008; Ohanian, 1991). However, when the sport celebrity brand image is affected by an SCT, it is likely to impact the sport celebrity brand

image (Till & Shimp, 1989) and the sponsorship campaign (Westberg, Wilson, & Stavros, 2008).

During sport celebrity endorsement, sponsors align their brand image with a specific brand association of the sport celebrity brand image (Till & Busler, 2000). Furthermore, consumer attitudes toward these brand associations in sport are based on their uniqueness and favorability (Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008). When celebrities transgress, the meanings associated with their brand image may also change. It may even affect the uniqueness and favorability of a specific brand association. However, it is not clear which brand association may be more sensitive to an SCT when a specific type of SCT occurs.

Brand image has been described as the perceptions of consumers regarding a particular brand that is reflected by the brand association that is held in memory by the consumer (Keller 1993). As a result, any study investigating the impact of SCTs on the sport celebrity brand image should focus on the perceptions of consumers. In this study, consumers are referred to as individuals who closely follow a sport celebrity, attend sporting events, and/or follow sports on television (Solberg, Hanstad, & Thoring, 2010). Studies that focus on consumers' perceptions of SCTs do not take into account the brand image of a real sport celebrity during their investigation (Doyle, Pentecoste, & Funk, 2014; Solberg et al., 2010). Previous research has shown that sport consumers perceive a fictitious

celebrity as different from a real sport celebrity (Till & Shimp, 1998). Therefore, this study investigates the impact of types of SCTs when real sport celebrities get involved in a transgression.

Transgression refers to the abuse of the implicit or explicit rules guiding relationship performance and evaluation (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004). This definition suggests that consumers' perceptions of different types of SCT can vary between consumers, depending on consumers' "implicit or explicit rules." These implicit and explicit rules of a consumer may be represented by the consumers' core values and norms. It is also possible that some types of SCTs may fit into the core values and norms of a consumer while others will not fit. Previous research showed that the on-field and off-field type of SCT can affect consumers' perceptions (Summers & Johnson Morgan, 2008; Westberg et al., 2008; Wilson et al., 2008). Therefore, this paper presents a conceptual model to help explain the impact of different types of SCTs on the sport celebrity brand image. The model includes focus group findings that investigate attitudes from sport consumers about the occurrence of real SCTs.

Literature Review

Brand image has been defined as the cumulative product of brand associations in the mind of the consumer, which consists of brand attributes, brand benefits, and attitudes (Bauer et al., 2008). Brand attributes relate to the intrinsic properties of the brand, and can be distinguished in two ways: first, as product related brand attributes, which refer to the physical composition of the product; and second, as non-product related brand attributes that relate to the external aspects of the product (Keller, 1993). For the purpose of this study the product related brand attributes are referred to as the sport related brand attributes of the sport celebrity brand image, and include characteristics that relate to the expertise of the sport celebrity (i.e., tennis performance). Non-product related brand attributes are referred to as the personal brand attributes, and include features that relate to the personal character of the celebrity (i.e., trust).

Benefits are the meaning or value consumers attach to the brand attributes, which normally satisfies the underlying needs and motivations of the consumer (Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008). Two types of brand benefits have been suggested in the sport marketing literature, including symbolic and experiential brand benefits (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986). Symbolic brand benefits are normally derived from the consumers' need for self-enhancement, group membership or identification, while experiential brand benefits are derived from consumers' needs for sensory and

emotional pleasure (Keller, 1993). Both the symbolic and experiential brand benefits of sport celebrity brand image will be investigated in the current study in relation to how different types of SCTs may affect them.

Brand attitudes are defined as "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object" (Bauer et al., 2008, p. 213). Hence, brand attitudes may represent a consumer's evaluation of the sport celebrity brand image, which may depend on the consumer's belief about the attributes and benefits, following different types of SCTs.

Brand Attributes

Both the sport and personal brand attributes are included in this study, as they have been found to increase the sport celebrity's persuasiveness and have a consequent, direct impact on the effectiveness of the marketing communication campaign (Eisend & Langner, 2010; Gurel-Atay & Kahle, 2010; Magnini, Garcia, & Honeycutt Jr, 2010; Ohanian, 1990; Van der Veen & Haiyan, 2010). Previous research has shown that sponsors align with both the sport and personal brand attributes of the sport celebrity brand image during sponsorship (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008). Therefore, because of the importance of personal brand attributes during sponsorship, and the possible impact of negative information on these attributes (Bednall & Collings, 2012), this study includes the personal brand attributes of the sport celebrity brand image in this investigation.

In an attempt to identify possible brand attributes of the sport celebrity, this study takes into account the brand attributes identified by scholars in the marketing communication industry (Eisend & Langner, 2010; Erodogan & Drollinger, 2008; Gurel-Atay & Kahle, 2010; Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010; Ohanian, 1990; Ruihley, Runyan, & Lear, 2010; Van der Veen & Haiyan, 2010). Studies in marketing communication have defined the brand attributes of the celebrity as their high level of credibility, expertise, attractiveness, trust, and role model attainment (Eisend & Langner, 2010; Gurel-Atay & Kahle, 2010).

Credibility is defined as the "extent to which the source is perceived as possessing expertise relevant to the communication topic and be trusted to give an objective opinion on the subject" (Belch & Belch 1994, p. 189). Ohanian (1990, 1991) introduced a Source Credibility Scale to measure the celebrity image in terms of credibility. The results indicate that respondents evaluate the credibility of the celebrity in terms of attributes such as attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise.

Expertise is defined as the degree to which the celebrity is perceived to possess knowledge, experience, or skills (Erdogan, 1999; Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000; Ohanian 1990, 1991). In the sport context expertise refers to the performance and success of the sport brand on the field of play (Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008; Till & Shimp, 1998). Expertise is further found to be a better match-up dimension than attractiveness during sponsorship (Premeaux, 2005; Till & Busler, 2000). When sponsors match up with the expertise of the sport celebrity brand image, and the SCT impact on expertise, the SCT may then have a significant impact on the sponsors. Interestingly, Premeaux (2005) found the celebrity's expertise is the one dimension that may overcome certain flaws in the image of the celebrity, flaws such as a lack of trustworthiness and likeability (Premeaux 2005).

Attractiveness includes dimensions such as the similarity, familiarity, and liking towards the celebrity (Erdogan, 1999; Maddux & Rogers, 1980; McGuire, 1985). Similarity refers to the apparent conformity between the sport celebrity and the receiver of the message (Simons, Berkowitz, & Moyer 1970), familiarity refers to the knowledge of the sport celebrity, and likeability is defined as fondness for the sport celebrity due to the celebrity's physical appearance, behavior, and personality (Charbonneau & Garland, 2005; Ohanian 1990).

Trust is defined as the belief of ethically behavior that is based upon the ethical norms and principles of consumers, and include a person's expectations, assumptions, or beliefs about the likelihood that another's actions will be favorable to one's interests (Kramer, 1999). In the context of this study, trust may include the expectation of the sport consumer that the sport celebrity's actions should be ethically justifiable, and not detrimental to the sport consumer.

Previous research provides evidence that the higher the credibility, expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness of a source are, the more persuasive the celebrity will be in sponsorship campaigns (Ohanian, 1990, 1991). Thus, when an SCT affects the credibility, expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and role model attainment of the sport celebrity brand image, it may further influence the persuasiveness of the sport celebrity in the sponsorship campaign.

Studies that focus especially on the sport industry conclude that the role model ability of the sport celebrity has a positive influence on young adults' product switching behavior, word-of-mouth behavior, and brand loyalty (Dix, Phau & Pougnet 2010; Simmers, Damron-Martinez, & Haytko 2009). Following an SCT, consumers may not perceive the

celebrity as a role model, and this may have a negative impact on young adults' consumer behavior.

Till and Shrimp (1998) indicate that negative information about a sport celebrity results in a decline in the attitude towards the trustworthiness and expertise of the sport celebrity brand image. Bundall and Collings (2000) and Thwaites, Lowe, Monkhouse, and Barnes (2012) supported this notion that SCTs have a strong negative impact on likeability, trustworthiness, and expertise of the sport celebrity by including hypothetical sport celebrities in their studies. It is still not clear how different types of SCTs affect a real sport celebrity brand image.

Brand attitudes determine the sport consumers' overall evaluation of a brand (Assael, Brenannan, & Voges, 2004). However, it is not clear how the different types of SCTs may impact the attitudes of consumers towards the sport celebrity brand attributes. Therefore, this study suggests the following research question:

RQ1: What is the impact of different types of SCTs on sport consumers' attitudes towards the brand attributes (sport and personal) of the sport celebrity brand image?

Brand Benefits

The means-end theory explains a link between brand attributes and benefits (Gutman, 1982). This theory argues that brand attributes are the means for which consumers can obtain certain desired brand benefits, or consequences (Bauer et al., 2008; Gutman, 1982). Therefore, if an SCT impacts the brand attributes of the sport celebrity brand image, it is also possible that it may impact the brand benefits that consumers experience when associating with the sport celebrity brand image.

Brand benefits include those brand associations that describe the underlying needs and motivations of the sport consumer, and include symbolic and experiential brand benefits (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2002). Symbolic brand benefits involve consumers identifying and internalizing the sport celebrity brand image, while experiential brand benefits draw on the emotions of consumers, and may include benefits such as entertainment and excitement (Bauer et al., 2008; Funk & Pastore, 2000; Mahony, Madrigal, & Howard, 2000; Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007). Sports elicit strong emotions (Bauer et al., 2008), and because of these strong emotional connections with the audience (Berry 2000), it resulted in extensively loyal consumers. However, when a brand is viewed as transgressing or abandoning its emotional-branding promises, formerly loyal customers can create a significant backlash (Thompson et al., 2006). In other words, when an SCT occurs, the formerly loyal sport con-

Table 1
Focus Group Profiles

	Focus group 1	Focus group 2	Focus group 3	Focus group 4
No. of subjects	6	6	6	6
Females (%)	50	50	50	50
Males (%)	50	50	50	50
Age range (years)	18-24	25-35	36-45	40-60

sumers may also create a significant backlash, resulting in abandoning the sport celebrity brand image.

However, it is less clear whether an SCT affects consumers' attitudes towards the sport celebrity brand benefits, following different types of SCTs. Therefore, this study analyzes the impact of different types of SCTs on the symbolic and experiential brand benefits on consumers' attitudes towards the sport celebrity brand image so as to gauge the extent of that impact. Therefore, this study posed the following research question:

RQ2: What is the impact of different types of SCTs on sport consumers' attitudes towards the brand benefits (symbolic and experiential) of the sport celebrity brand image?

Methods

Research Design

Four focus groups were conducted to investigate the research questions. Focus groups were chosen as this approach is consistent with other research in the field of sport marketing (Hughes & Shank, 2005; Westberg et al., 2008), and focus groups encourage a greater degree of spontaneity in the expression of consumers' viewpoints (Butler, 1996; Sim, 1998). Furthermore, it was important that the focus groups provided information about the dynamics of opinions in the context of the interaction that occurs between participants (Morgan, 1988; Sim, 1998). Within the focus groups, participants also felt supported and empowered by a sense of group membership and cohesiveness (Goldman, 1962; Peters, 1993).

Previous research has shown that when participants are acquainted with each other it resulted in a cohesive group composition, which ensured that a high level of detail was present in the discussion (Hennink 2007). Focus group participants were recruited through convenience sampling using a group of sport consumers who were selected using the moderator's personal contacts in Brisbane, Australia. As the depth and richness of the information was the primary goal, randomization was not considered to be a critical component of the sample design. Convenience sampling is regarded

as acceptable when additional follow-up research is conducted (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008). This paper is the first stage of a research program based on this study's research questions.

To target a cross section of "sport enthusiasts living in Australia," the study's participants were selected according to demographic factors and their commitment towards sport. A total of 24 respondents were recruited and placed into four focus groups (see Table 1). Previous research found that a moderating size group between 6 and 10 participants was appropriate (Morgan, 1988; Sim, 1998).

Participants were grouped according to their age, into four categories: 18–24 years, 24–35 years, 36–45 years, and 40–60 years. Grouping participants according to age was important, as a previous study had shown that age may affect consumers' perceptions of the celebrity's attributes (Magnini et al., 2010). Age was also found to affect consumers' perceptions of SCTs, when Solberg, Hanstad and Thoring (2010) concluded that older participants held more negative attitudes toward doping in sport. It is interesting to note that younger people placed higher values on some brand attributes, such as attractiveness (Magnini et al., 2010), and the role model ability of the celebrity (Solberg et al., 2010). Therefore, age may affect consumers' perceptions of the brand attributes of the sport celebrity brand image, following different types of SCTs.

Participants were further grouped according to their gender. Previous studies indicated that women respond more to some brand attributes, such as the celebrity's attractiveness, than do men (Magnini et al., 2010). It is therefore possible to assume that gender may further affect the consumers' perceptions regarding some of the celebrity's brand attributes, following different types of SCTs.

The level of commitment towards the sport celebrity and his/her sport was gauged by whether consumers actively attended sporting events or followed sport on television. Grouping consumers according to their commitment to sport had been previously undertaken in a study investigating consumers' attitudes towards doping (Solberg et al., 2010). Therefore, it was regard-

Table 2
Focus Group Guide

Focus Group Guide
The following questions guided focus group discussions
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Do you have a favorite sports person? Tell me about them.... What is it about the person that you like?2. Sports people are sometimes involved in scandals which can create negative publicity. Sometimes this is about their sporting behavior, or it could be about their personal lives and bad or even illegal behavior outside of sport. What do you think about that?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. How does it make you feel about the person?b. What do you think their associated sponsors and team think? Do you think it damages that relationship?c. Do you think the type of SCT impacts on your perceptions of the celebrity?

ed as suitable for this study. A “Focus Group Guide” was also developed to direct the moderator of the focus group discussions (see Table 2).

The topics during the focus group discussions began with general viewpoints, such as how did respondents identify their favorite sport persons. The discussion then moved on to more specifics such as how did a scandal influence their perceptions of the sport celebrity. Because participants found greater ease in reacting to a specific question that follows a general question (Aaker, Kumar, & Day, 2006), the questions were selected to clarify general reactions to their favorite sport celebrity before introducing the SCT and its impact from an *a priori* perspective.

The moderator’s level of involvement ranged from a directive to a more non-directive approach (Hennink, 2007). For example, in the early stages of discussion in Group 2, participant viewpoints concentrated for too long on the Tiger Woods’ adultery scenario. As a result, the moderator was forced to apply a more directive approach to ensure that participants did not deviate too far from the research issues under discussion. During this more directive approach stage, a probing technique was applied to ensure that a more comprehensive discussion of different types of SCT scenarios was included. This probing technique had been successfully used to gain clarity, and to manage group discussions (Hennink, 2007).

During the middle stages of the discussion, the moderator used a non-directive approach (Hennink, 2007). This non-directive approach included pitting one participant against the other to compare and contrast each participant’s viewpoints (Hennink 2007). This helped to create spontaneous discussions between focus group participants. This was especially true in the interaction between participants in Group 2, where dissonant views between the female and male participants regarding the Tiger Woods’ adultery scenario were aired. These “argumentative interactions” helped to

contribute to the richness of the focus group data (Sim, 1998).

After the focus groups concluded, participants were probed about their opinions of SCTs and their affect on the sport celebrity brand image. Participants spontaneously applied their own examples of different types of SCTs to illustrate their viewpoints. This indicated that the study was moving towards more useful data on the impact of SCT on participant perceptions of sport celebrity brand image.

Data were tape recorded during the focus group discussions with another researcher taking notes. Each focus group discussion was individually recorded and directly transcribed after each session to ensure the accuracy of data. The transcribed comments represented an explanation of the direct quotes participants made during the focus group discussions. The transcribed comments were then coded and analyzed. Coding of the data was made in the left margin with remarks inserted in the right margin (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The content of the focus group data was then content analyzed (Krippendorf 2004; Stewart et al., 2007), where the range of expressions on each topic were grouped into specific themes. The results of the coding process were presented to three colleagues, including two associate professors and one practitioner in the field of marketing communication. The findings are provided in the following section.

Results

RQ 1: What is the impact of different types of SCTs on sport consumers’ attitudes towards the brand attributes of the sport celebrity brand image?

Overall, focus group participants indicated a positive attitude towards the sport related brand attributes, and a negative attitude towards the personal brand attributes following an SCT. When an off-field SCT occurred (such as Tiger Woods’ adultery), participants

indicated they would still like and support the sport celebrity because of his/her professionalism and high level of sport skills.

“He is still a good sports person, it is a bit unfair that we focus on his personal life instead of his talent” (Female, 18-24 years).

One participant expressed a negative attitude towards the sport related brand attributes of the sport celebrity brand image when an on-field SCT occurred by commenting,

“On-field (enhancement drugs) scandal is really bad, I wouldn’t watch the game then, because it does not reflect pure talent” (Male, 25-35 years).

It was also noted that a more negative attitude was common toward the personal brand attributes when an off-field SCT occurred, such as,

“Tiger Woods was a good role model he even has a church named after him. He should live up to those standards” (Male, 18-24 years).

This indicates that when an SCT occurs, participants may have different attitudes towards the sport related brand attributes and personal brand attributes of the sport celebrity brand image, depending on the type of SCT. After further analysis, it became evident that both the off-field and on-field type of SCT can affect the attitudes of consumers toward the brand attributes of the sport celebrity brand image, following that type of SCT.

During the focus group discussions participants spontaneously gave examples of the following SCTs: Tiger Woods’ adultery scandal; Andre Agassi’s cocaine abuse; Serena Williams’ on-court outbursts; rape and doping (participants did not mention celebrities’ names in relation to this). In order to distinguish between the off-field and on-field type of SCTs, Tiger Woods’ adultery scandal, Andre Agassi’s cocaine use, and the rape incident were grouped as off-field SCTs. Serena Williams’ on-court outburst, and doping were grouped as on-field SCTs. Table 3 shows the grouping of comments according to off-field and on-field SCTs.

Table 3 shows that consumers express more positive attitudes towards sport related brand attributes when off-field SCTs occurred, as seen by the following comments,

“It doesn’t matter; Tiger is still good (Male, 18-24 years) and

“When the scandal is not sport related the celebrity is still a good player” (Male, 25-35 years).

The table also summarizes responses indicating a negative attitude toward the sport related brand attributes when an on-field SCT occurred. For example:

“On-field (enhancement drug use) is really bad, I wouldn’t watch the game then, because it does not reflect on pure talent (Male, 25-35 years).

These responses suggest that off-field SCTs result in positive attitudes toward the sport related brand attributes, while some of the on-field SCTs may lead to negative attitudes toward the sport related brand attributes. Table 3 shows that off-field and on-field SCTs may result in negative attitudes toward the personal brand attributes. This was evident in comments such as:

“Tiger Woods was a good role model, he even has a church named after him. He should live up to those standards (Male, 18-24 years).

RQ 2: What is the impact of different types of SCTs on sport consumers’ attitudes towards the brand benefits of the sport celebrity brand image?

Focus group participants indicated that they evaluated the brand benefits of the sport celebrity brand image in terms of the sport celebrity’s symbolic and experiential brand benefits, following different types of SCTs. Overall, participants had negative feelings about the symbolic and experiential brand benefits following an SCT.

Symbolic Brand Benefits

Participants noted that the symbolic brand benefits (i.e., dimensions) *admiration* and *value* matched when an SCT occurred. Any reference to the symbolic brand benefits were expressed negatively, such as

“...because they are celebrities they are expected to behave to a higher standard” (Female, 40-60 years).

Another participant linked the celebrity’s performance with their symbolic brand benefits when he stated,

“I believe the personal value system of a sport star is closely linked to his ability” (Male, 36-45 years).

Another argued that sport should be associated with higher values:

“Sport is a clean image and therefore should uphold the good values that come with it” (Female, 25-35 years).

Table 3 indicates that the off-field SCTs may cause negative attitudes toward the symbolic brand benefits of the sport celebrity brand image. This was reflected in the following statement:

“But young people look up to the sports star.

Young people will start to act like these role models. I wouldn’t watch a game if somebody was charged with rape, it would show your support for the scandal” (Female, 24-35 years).

This suggests that off-field SCTs create negative attitudes toward symbolic brand benefits. As a result, different types of SCTs may impact consumers’ attitudes toward the symbolic brand benefits of the sport celebrity brand image. Furthermore, while SCTs negatively affect consumers’ attitudes towards the symbolic

Table 3
Coding of Comments into Themes for the Type of SCT (Off-field & On-field)

Construct	Participants' Comments	Themes	Sub-Themes	Type of SCT	Attitude
Brand Attributes	<p>Tiger Woods is a <u>great player</u>, and stuff happens in people's lives, in their personal lives, and it should not affect his play or performance. (Male, Group 1)</p> <p>Tiger Woods is sponsored by Nike, he is a <u>good player</u> so the brand should be good as well, and it must be a good brand for them to wear as well. (Female, Group 1)</p> <p>When the scandal is not sports related the celebrity is still a <u>good player</u>. (Male, Group 2)</p> <p>Personal scandals do not affect my opinion of the sport star. I think all types of publicity are good. He is still a <u>good player</u> even if he commits a sin. (Male, Group 2)</p> <p>Tiger Woods is a <u>good sports man</u>, we are not interested in his personal life, and will keep on watching the game while he is participating in the sport. (Male, Group 4)</p> <p>Personal lives got nothing to do with the game, for example Tiger. They focus on personal lives while they should have focused on <u>his golf</u>. (Male, Group 1)</p> <p>On-field (enhancement drugs) scandal is really bad, I wouldn't watch the game then, because it reflects not pure talent. (Male, Group 2).</p>	<p>Sport-Related</p> <p>Brand Attributes</p>	<p>Great player</p> <p>Good player</p> <p>His golf</p> <p>Pure talent</p>	<p>Off-field</p> <p>On-field</p>	<p>Positive</p> <p>Negative</p>
	<p>Tiger Woods was a good <u>role model</u>, he even has a church named after him. He should live up to those standards. (Male, Group 1)</p> <p>But they are <u>role-models</u> for kids. Kids bring pictures of their favorite sports people home where they read all their advice, and furthermore adhere to the advice sports people hand out. (Male, Group 1)</p> <p>Even if they don't want to be a <u>role model</u>, they have it and kids look up to them. They have the responsibility to be good, it is part of the price. (Male, Group 1)</p> <p>But young people look up to the sports star. Young people will start to act like these <u>role models</u> and it will affect them. Wouldn't watch game if you rape somebody, it would show you support the scandal. (Female, Group 2)</p> <p>Andre Agassi used <u>he lied</u> before and only came out now. (Male, Group 1)</p> <p>is brave because he <u>lied</u> before and only came out now. (Male, Group 1)</p> <p>But if you excuse Tiger Woods then you could say that using drugs is OK because of the pressure to keep sponsors. I believe <u>character</u> is revealed under pressure. (Female, Group 2)</p> <p>Tiger said in an interview that his family comes first and it is important for him to keep up a very <u>clean image</u>, thus he is a liar. Don't like him because I cannot <u>trust</u> him. (Female, Group 3)</p>	<p>Personal Brand Attributes</p>	<p>Role Model</p> <p>Liar</p> <p>Character</p> <p>Clean Image, trust</p> <p>Standard Credibility</p>	<p>Off-field</p>	<p>Negative</p> <p>Negative</p>

Table 3, continued
Coding of Comments into Themes for the Type of SCT (Off-field & On-field)

Construct	Participants' Comments	Themes	Sub-Themes	Type of SCT	Attitude
	Because they are celebrities they are expected to behave to a <u>higher standard</u> . (Female, Group 4) It will, however, affect the sport person's <u>credibility</u> but not his performance.		Role model		
Brand Benefits	But young people <u>look up</u> to the sports star. Young people will start to act like these role models and it will affect. Wouldn't watch game if you rape somebody; it would show you support the scandal. (Female, Group 2)	Symbolic Brand Benefits	Look up to him	Off-field	Negative
	Very <u>disappointed</u> but I will still watch Tiger but in the back of my mind I will still be upset. (Female, Group 1) If Tiger endorsed brand I would still use it even with this scandal. I will be <u>disgusted</u> but will still watch him. (Male, Group 2) Tour de France the underdog won three years ago, but after a few days it was clear that the winner was doing performance enhancer drugs. I felt <u>betrayed</u> as though I watched something unethically. (Female, Group 1) If Serena Williams used enhancement drugs, for example, I would feel <u>betrayed</u> , but I would still buy the product but wouldn't watch the game. (Female, Group 1). That is why he (Woods) is playing golf, he is playing for us to see his golf and not his personal life, and he is playing to give us entertainment. (Male Group 1). But I don't agree, she (Serena Williams) was <u>entertaining</u> , and it is frustrating to play at such a high level. (Female, Group 1).	Experiential Brand Benefits	Disappointed Disgusted Betrayed Entertaining	Off-field On-field On-field On-field On-field On-field	Negative Negative Negative Positive Positive

brand benefits, SCTs may both positively and negatively affect consumers' attitudes towards the experiential brand benefits.

Experiential Brand Benefits

Consumer attitudes toward the type of SCT in relation with the experiential brand benefits varied among participants. Consumers expressed both negative and positive comments toward off-field SCTs and experiential brand benefits. The following comments supported these conflicting attitudes:

"That is why he (Woods) is playing golf ... for us to see his golf and not his personal life; he is playing to give us entertainment" (Male, 18-24 years).

While the opposite viewpoint was expressed by a female in Group 1:

"I am very disappointed but I will still watch Tiger but in the back of my mind I will still be upset" (Female, 18-24 years).

Because these comments referred to Woods' adultery, it is possible that other socio-demographic factors such as gender, age, and consumer commitment may also have an effect on consumers' attitudes toward the sport celebrity brand image after an SCT. For example, the experiential brand benefits associated with the two comments about Woods' adultery may have been due to a person's gender and commitment. While the male participant felt he was still experiencing entertainment, the female participant felt disappointed in the sport celebrity. Similarly, the male was more committed to following golf on television than the female.

With respect to the age group, no difference was found between off-field and on-field SCTs in the 36-45 year old demographic. This age group indicated that sport should uphold a high standard without any SCTs; as was stated:

"To me there is no distinction between the type of scandal, whether it is on the field of play or in the person's private life, it is still a scandal and would in my mind affect the image of the star" (Male, 36-45 years).

This finding was supported by research by Solberg, Hanstad, and Thoring (2010), who found that older people perceive an SCT different from younger people. Furthermore, on-field SCTs seem to elicit both negative and positive emotional responses. For example, the following examples show the first comments that indicated a negative attitude, but the second was a positive attitude towards the experiential brand benefits when an on-field SCT occurred:

"If Serena Williams used enhancement drugs, for example, I would feel betrayed, but I would still buy the product but wouldn't watch the game" (Female, 18-24 years); and *"But I don't agree, she (Serena*

Williams) was entertaining, and it can be frustrating to play at such a high level" (Female, 18-24 years).

The first comment referred to doping, while the second referred to the incident where Serena Williams displayed on-court aggression. This study suggests that doping elicits negative responses towards the experiential brand benefits, while an on-court outburst elicits positive responses towards experiential brand benefits. These findings suggest that various on-field SCTs may affect the sport celebrity brand image differently.

Additional Comments

Focus group participants offered additional comments to the researcher. They indicated that off-field SCTs may have further effects on the marketing communication campaign that the sport celebrity is associated with. One female indicated that she did not trust the message delivered by the sport celebrity, when she stated:

"Because the scandal doesn't affect his performance, I will still watch him playing, but I won't believe his message when he is part of an advertisement" (Female, 40-60 years).

Off-field SCTs, furthermore, did not seem to have an impact on the sport celebrity's associated sponsor. For example, one participant comment as follows:

"His personal life never affected his game. A sponsor organization sponsors the sport person's sport life and not his private life" (Male, 24-35 years).

However, it seems that off-field scandals may affect consumers' attitudes towards the sport celebrity brand image. One participant, for example, indicated a lack of respect for the celebrity:

"Off field scandals wouldn't matter, but I would still lose respect, except for raping, I wouldn't watch the sport" (Male, 18-24 years); and *"Off-field like, for example, the O.J. Simpson murder scandal, would affect me in such a way that I won't watch him playing and wouldn't attend a game"* (Male, 24-35 years).

No comments were made in relation to off-field SCTs and the sport celebrity's associated team and event. This suggests that some types of SCTs would have further effects on the celebrity's associated brand partners, while others may not. Especially off-field SCTs, such as rape and murder, were highlighted as negatively impacting the sport celebrity brand image.

However, on-field SCTs may have further effects on the sport celebrity's associated sport, sponsors, and events. For example, several respondents indicated that they held negative attitudes towards a celebrity's associated sport, when they stated:

"On-field SCTs (enhancement drugs) scandal is really bad, I wouldn't watch the game then, because it reflects not pure talent; the type of scandal matters,

for example, match fixing I wouldn't watch the game" (Male, 18-24 years); and "If Serena Williams used enhancement drugs for example, I would feel betrayed, but I would still buy the product but wouldn't watch the game; match-fixing will stop me watching sport, because then it is not a sport anymore" (Female, 18-24 years).

A further participant noted that when match-fixing occurs the winners are chosen beforehand:

"If any game is being fixed then it is not a game anymore; in other words, the winners are chosen already" (Male, 36-45 years).

These comments show that some of the on-field SCTs may result in negative attitudes towards the sport celebrity's associated sport. On-field SCTs may also result in negative attitudes towards the sport celebrity's associated sponsors. Several comments supported this theme:

"On field (enhancement drugs) scandals when sponsor continues to sponsor the celebrity, it is bad" (Male, 24-35 years); as well as "If match fixing happens and sponsors still support them, then they pay them to do wrong things and this is worse" (Male, 24-35 years).

On-field SCTs may also result in negative attitudes toward the sport celebrity's associated event:

"I watched the Tour de France a couple of years ago and I was so into it and the guy won ... and then a week later he was found guilty of blood doping, and it pretty much ruined watching the entire TDF for me" (Female, 18-24 years).

Furthermore, factors such as the media's response and the type of sport the celebrity participates in may have an impact on consumers' perceptions, as one participant noted: "The media's response to the scandal may blow it out of perspective." Consumers further indicated that it was more likely for football players to be involved in SCTs.

"Footy players are in trouble on a weekly basis but it is still a very popular game. It is like you expect it" (Male, 36-45 years).

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from this research have been summarized in a model that derived from Keller's (1993) research (see Figure 1) on brand image, but incorporates additional factors relevant to sport. The findings indicated that the value of the sport celebrity is strongly related to the sport celebrity's brand image—even when an SCT occurred. The findings further indicated that the sport celebrity brand image consisted of a certain set of dimensions comprising brand attributes, brand benefits, and attitudes. This finding is supported from previous studies that indicate that sport team

product-related attributes refer to the performance of the sport team, and personal brand attributes relate to factors externally to sport (Bauer et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the role model ability of sport celebrity brand image is seen as important to the sport consumer, which supports the findings of Dix, Phau, and Pougnet (2009), who emphasized the importance of the celebrity being a role model to young adults. As a sport celebrity with an already attained brand image enters a sponsorship deal, his or her sport celebrity brand image may affect consumers' attitudes towards the sport celebrity's brand image following an SCT (McCracken, 1989), as illustrated in Figure 1.

The main propositions emanating from my study are as follows:

Proposition 1: The *type (off-field or on-field)* of the SCT will affect whether and how the consumers adjust their perception of the sport related brand attributes of the sport celebrity brand image, following that SCT.

Proposition 2: The *type (off-field or on-field)* of the SCT will affect whether and how the consumers adjust their perception of the personal brand attributes, of the sport celebrity brand image, following that SCT.

Proposition 3: The *type (off-field or on-field)* of the SCT will affect whether and how the consumers adjust their perception of the symbolic brand benefits, of the sport celebrity brand image, following that SCT.

Proposition 4: The *type (off-field or on-field)* of the SCT will affect whether and how the consumers adjust their perception of the experiential brand benefits, of the sport celebrity brand image, following that SCT.

This model shows that when an SCT occurs, consumers' attitudes toward the sport related brand attributes, personal brand attributes, symbolic brand benefits, and experiential brand benefits depends on the type of SCT. Conversely, off-field SCTs positively resulted in positive consumers' attitudes toward the sport related brand attributes of the sport celebrity brand image. The off-field SCTs caused negative consumer attitudes towards the personal brand attributes of the sport celebrity brand image.

Off-field SCTs may also negatively affect the symbolic brand benefits of the sport celebrity brand image. Consumers indicated that when the off-field SCT was rape, it negatively affected their perceptions of the symbolic brand benefits. Interestingly, symbolic brand benefits were only mentioned in relation to the off-field rape incident, rather than any other off-field SCT.

Overall, off-field SCTs may negatively impact consumers' attitudes towards the experiential brand benefits. The results indicated consumers generally experience negative emotions such as disgust and disappointment when off-field SCTs occurred. However,

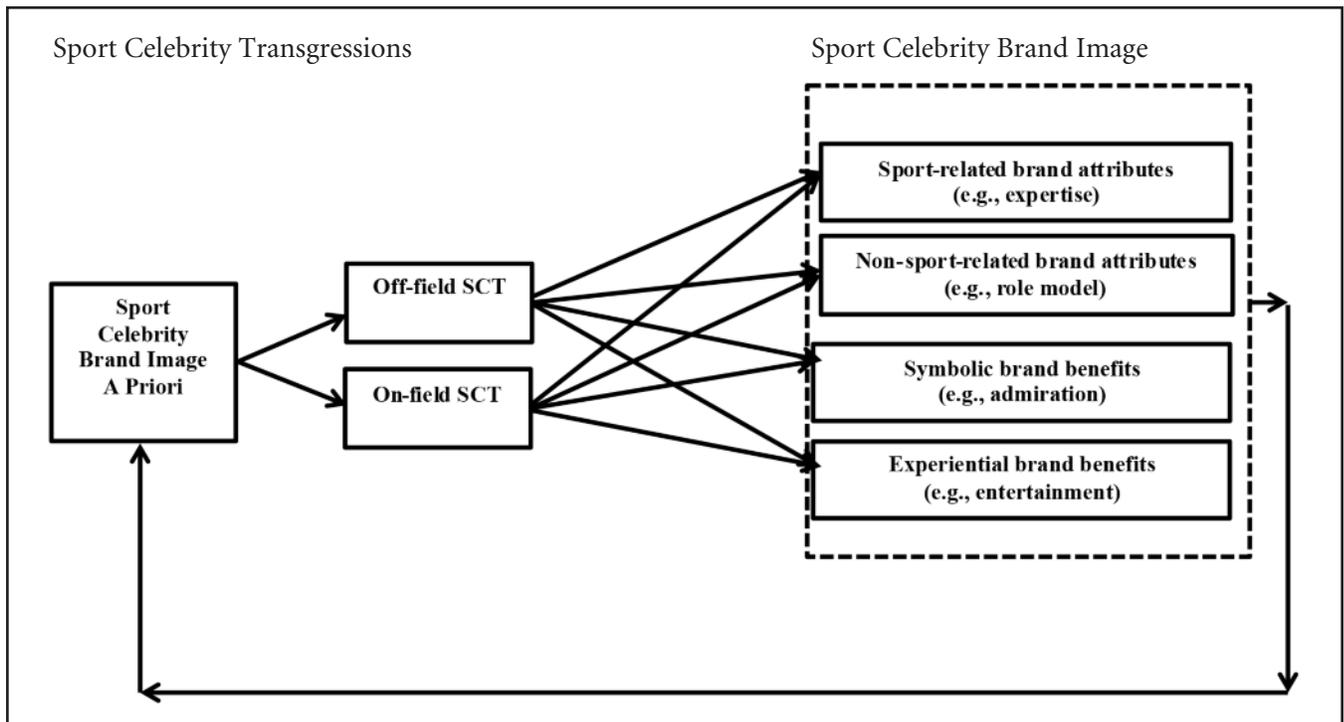


Figure 1. Analysis of Co-Variance for Attitude Toward the Ad by Fighter Gender and Subject Gender

there was one positive comment (i.e., entertainment) relating to experiential brand benefits and off-field SCT.

The model showed that on-field SCTs negatively affected consumers' attitudes towards the sport related brand attributes of the sport celebrity brand image. In addition they also negatively affected consumers' attitudes towards the personal brand attributes of the sport celebrity brand image.

The focus group findings indicated that off-field SCTs may have further effects on the marketing communication campaign that the sport celebrity is associated with, and his or her associated sponsors and sport. There were no negative effects of off-field SCTs and the sport celebrity's associated team and sport event. On-field SCTs were found to affect the sport celebrity's associated sponsors, sport, and events. These findings can be linked with research that indicates that celebrity endorsement is a brand alliance, where the images of the brand partners are transferred between each other (Ilicic & Webster, 2013; Jaiprahash, 2008). Another stream of research also indicated that an SCT can affect consumers' perceptions of the sponsor evaluations (Solberg, Hanstad, & Thoring, 2010), the sport, and the event that the celebrity participates in (Doyle et al., 2014; Hughes & Shank, 2005; Westberg, Stavros, & Wilson, 2008).

Limitations to the Study

This research has four main limitations. First, the research was restricted to Australian consumers. This study should be replicated across a wider range of

countries and cultures in order to confirm this study's main findings.

Second, the consumer commitment was determined on the bases of those who attended sports events or viewed them on television. Further selection criteria may produce more accurate and valuable information. Therefore, future research could include different levels of commitment to indicate how these differences may affect consumers' perceptions.

Third, focus groups only provided the data source. Further qualitative research may be valuable to broaden the search for which type of off-field and on-field SCT may be most detrimental to the sport celebrity brand image. Future research should also include socio-demographic factors such as lifestyle and social groups to gauge the impact of SCT on sport celebrity brand image.

Fourth, only three types of off-field SCTs (adultery, cocaine use, and rape) and only three types of on-field SCTs (enhancement drug use, match-fixing, and on-court outbursts) were discussed. Future research needs to compare different scenarios of off- and on-field SCT incidents, which may deepen an understanding of the phenomenon. It would be interesting to also determine which brand associations of the sport celebrity brand image are more sensitive to which type of SCT.

In this paper, a theoretical framework for the consumers' perceptions of SCTs has been developed. The brand image transfer model provides us with a deeper understanding of this sparsely researched sport marketing area. Future qualitative research is planned to

investigate the above model using a social media data collection design with data from 17 different types of SCT scenarios. This design will ensure that consumers' attitudes towards the effect of different types of SCTs on the sport celebrity brand image are being further investigated.

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