

The Gentleman, The Rebel and The Villain

A comparative study of the scandal-sensitivity of athlete personalities in sports marketing

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Abstract

Celebrity athletes have been powerful marketing tools throughout the professionalization and commercialization of sports. During the last couple of decades, the amount of sponsorship money allocated to the sports industry has rapidly increased, outplaying other sectors of entertainment. Today, celebrity athletes go beyond their traditional role as spokespeople. Instead, they function as communication channels for their own brand as well as for the brands they endorse. They operate with greater freedom and develop closer relationships with their follower base through the continuous communication via social media. The increased exposure of their private life puts emphasis on the personality type of the athletes, which makes this an interesting area of examination. Grounded in social psychology theory, this thesis examined the scandal-sensitivity of different athlete-personality categories. Having likeability and moral character as the two personality dimensions, three athlete categories – The Gentlemen, The Rebels, and the Villains – were formed and subject to the study stimulus of a charity-fraud scandal. Survey respondents, mainly business students in their twenties, evaluated the athlete and the endorsed brand on several measures. A quasi-experimental design was used, where the consumer response of a treatment group and control group was compared. Moreover, simple mediation analysis was used to further understand the underlying relationships.

As athlete scandals could have severe consequences for their endorsed brands, companies tend to partner with uncontroversial, well-liked athletes with the intention transfer desirable attributes to their brands and mitigate risk. Despite this logic, the findings show that well-liked, high-moral athletes – The Gentlemen – are the athlete category that is the most scandal-sensitive, exhibiting significant losses in the attitude and intentions toward them and the endorsed brand. Non-liked, low-moral athletes – The Villains – exhibit no significant losses regarding attitudes and intentions. Well-liked, low-moral athletes – The Rebels – exhibit some significant losses in the attitude and intentions toward them, but none toward the endorsed brand.

Keywords: sports marketing, celebrity-athlete endorsement, social psychology, scandals, consumer response, person perception

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Definitions

Celebrity Athlete: a widely recognized athlete with a substantial social-media influence and within the very elite of the performed sport

Celebrity Endorser: an 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)

Congruence: a general relation between two entities that is characterized by harmony and compatibility Oxford Dictionary, 2018).

Factor: a set of items that capture the same aspect, also called “**measure**” when used more descriptively

Likeability: the personality dimension that measures the positive or negative attitude toward an individual

Moral Character: the personality dimension that measures the good-versus-bad assessment toward an individual

Scandal-sensitivity: the degree to which a person is prone to negative effects following a scandal

The Gentlemen: likeable athletes with high moral character

The Rebels: likeable athletes with low moral character

The Villains: non-likable athletes with low moral character

1. Introduction

Organizations invest more resources in athlete endorsements and athlete branding than ever before. Although the benefits are widely known, practitioners know little about the risks of athlete-brand collaborations. There are historical examples of negative ripple effects following brand-ambassador scandals as well as cases where the stakeholders seem unaffected by such events. This presents a theoretical gap regarding consumer response to negative publicity. The introductory chapter addresses a brief review of historical events, recent developments, as well as the current application and practices of athlete endorsements. Moreover, it includes the subsequent theoretical and empirical problematization, as well as the objective, purpose, and expected contribution of the thesis.

1.1 Background

On the 17th of September, 1917, Honus Wagner walked off a baseball field after his last game ever for the Pittsburgh Pirates. After 21 years as a professional in Major League Baseball, *The Flying Dutchman* retired as one of the greatest players to ever play the game. His legacy, however, includes more than setting several professional batting records. He was also active in the late 19th and early 20th century, which has proven to be a crucial period in the commercialization of sports. In fact, Honus Wagner is believed to be the first athlete ever to receive endorsement money in exchange for allowing a company to use his name on a product. Louisville Slugger produced baseball bats for players in Wagner's team at the time, the Louisville Colonels, and engraved the players' names to help separate them from one another. Following Wagner's professional success, the player and the company signed a contract that allowed the company to reproduce and sell the Wagner-engraved bats to the public for a price premium - making him the first athlete to receive money for putting his name on a product for general sale (Surowiecki, 2009; Chadwick et al., 2015, p. 126-127).

Today, the estimated value of the entire global sports economy¹ is \$600-700 billion a year (KPMG, 2016), with a growth rate that outpaces most countries' GDP growth rates. It is widely known that the sponsorship of celebrities provides the potential of strengthening a firm's competitive advantage. A dominant perspective suggests that companies use celebrities as a way of transferring likeable attributes to the company brand and its products (McCracken, 1989). The celebrity category of professional athletes, possessing prominent and desirable physical and psychological attributes, have historically had and continue to have the leading role in terms of sponsorship money. In North America, the leading sports economy in the world, 70% of all sponsorship money in 2018 is projected to be accrued to the sports industry, outplaying the sectors of entertainment, causes, arts, festivals and fairs, and associations (IEG Sponsorship Report, 2017). This expression of economic activity has increased dramatically over the last decade. Globally, the sport sponsorship spending has essentially doubled since 2007, amounting to \$65,8 billion (Statista, 2018).

The evolution of athlete endorsement has come a long way since the days of Honus Wagner. The connection between athletes and brands dates back to the 1960s, when golfer Arnold Palmer and his agent invented the concept of *athlete as brand*. In the 1980s, the endorsement deals

¹ Including infrastructure, events, hospitality, training, and manufacturing and retail of sports goods

of the sports economy took flight when Nike and basketball icon Michael Jordan launched the Air Jordan line (Surowiecki, 2018; Chadwick et al., 2016 p. 126-127). The competition is fierce both on and off the courts for the celebrity athletes, resulting in astronomical monetary exchanges both in terms of salaries and winnings, and endorsement deals. Today, tennis legend Roger Federer is the highest endorsed athlete. The 20-time Grand Slam winner earns \$60 million in annual endorsement deals (Forbes, 2017).

As the relationships between companies and athletes are intensified, in terms of money and reliance, the importance of the athlete brand and its expression has magnified. The professionalism and behavior etch beyond the athletic performance, requiring well-defined communication strategies for all stakeholders. Today's celebrity athletes are in general able to manage these responsibilities without major deviations, however some are unable to maintain the expected standards. A recent example of this is the golfer Tiger Woods and the disclosure of his infidelity scandals. Following the incidents, sponsor company Accenture terminated its \$7 million yearly endorsement deal with the result of a 2,9% stock-price fall (Brower & Hoffmann, 2010). In the space of a few weeks, the extremely popular golf star and his multi-million-dollar brand, was eradicated and distrusted. By comparison, the controversial boxer Floyd Mayweather has been accused and charged with multiple cases of domestic violence - and yet seems to maintain a strong position both professionally and commercially. In his last fight, the branding of his shorts yielded \$25 million in sponsorship money (Telegraph, 2017). Whatever the underlying reasons, different cases quite evidently seem to generate different reactions.

1.2 Problematicization

The significance, tenure and monetary commitment of athlete-endorsement deals have increased rapidly over the last decades. Thus, the decision of whom to endorse is characterized by a higher degree of complexity and caution, requiring a more thorough analysis of potential risks and rewards. The latter has been subject to extensive research and been empirically confirmed, whereas the former is relatively unexamined. The strategic importance of these deals has resulted in the need of taking well-informed and profound decisions at the top-management level. Potential scandals can have severe consequences for the athletes as well as for the endorsed brands, which explains the logic of associating a brand with uncontroversial athletes, attempting to avoid negative exposure and mitigate risk.

Moreover, today's media landscape has changed the nature of athlete-brand collaborations. Athletes now go beyond their traditional role as spokespeople and faces of certain brands, to controlling their own communication channels and driving marketing initiatives. Thus, today's athlete endorsers operate with greater freedom, as well as responsibility, as strategically vital components of the brand's marketing strategy. Social media changes and strengthens the relationship between celebrities and their follower base, as the celebrities turn their private lives public. This uncovers and puts extra emphasis on the athletes' personalities and decreases the distance between the two. In the transition from unattainable superstars to perceived friends, the demand for morally acceptable behavior grows. The illusive friendship, the parasocial interaction,

is built on trust and mutual respect, and subject to the risk of being let down (Colliander and Dahlén, 2011).

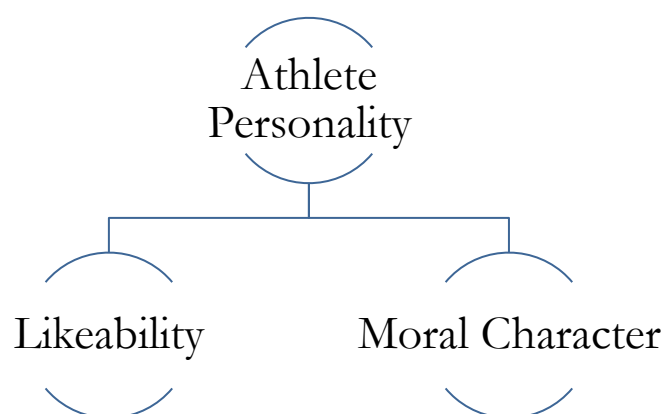
Adding to the above, the current media landscape enables any active social-media user with newsworthy information to reach out to a global audience instantaneously. This subjective source of information can provide fast-paced news and rumors. Given the logic of the negativity bias, negative news travel faster and have grander implications (Rozin and Royzman, 2001). Thus, scandals can within a couple of hours be a global topic of discussion and trigger ripple effects.

Given today's large investments, the intensified consumer-athlete relationship, as well as the fast-paced media environment, the ecosystem that athletes and companies find themselves in is in a delicate phase. The decision to endorse a certain athlete is critically dependent on the dynamics of this phase. To fully understand this phenomenon, *athlete personalities* should be further investigated as a marketing and communication tool.

1.3 Purpose, Expected Contribution & Research Question

Considering the increasing popularity and magnitude of athlete endorsements and the associated risks and rewards, this thesis applies a social psychology perspective to understand how negative information about an athlete impacts consumer response to the endorsed brand. The purpose of the thesis is to examine consumers' attitudes and intentions toward the athlete and the endorsed brands. The focal point will be to understand how the personality dimensions of *likeability* and *moral character* affect the *scandal-sensitivity* of an athlete brand, and in turn, the partnership with the endorsed brand. The distinctive aspect of the contribution is mainly the dimension of moral character, i.e. the good versus bad, suggesting that dimension to be the decisive aspect.

Figure 1: The Personality Dimensions



The ambition of the contribution is two-sided. On a theoretical level, the aim is to contribute to the fast-growing field of sports marketing by examining the scandal-sensitivity of different *athlete categories*. On a practical level, the aim is to contribute to practitioners that seek to optimize their investments into athlete-brand portfolios. Given the prevalence of the advantages of endorsing

an athlete, this paper will shed light on the potential disadvantages and associated risks of such partnerships. This will be articulated through the following research question:

How does the athlete personality influence consumer response, when being exposed to scandals?

1.4 Delimitations

In order to find the balance between a substantial contribution and a conductible study design, several delimitations are applied. The ambition is to find globally recognized, top-earning celebrity athletes who are already established, significant communication channels. The reasoning behind this is to use celebrity athletes that are actively used in the marketing efforts of large, well-known companies that build their brands through these collaborations. The first selection of athletes is based on estimated endorsement earnings between the years of 2012-2017, as reported by Forbes. The second selection criterion is social media following, being a proxy for global recognition and popularity. This unfortunately leaves out several women from the study, who would have been interesting to study, but by comparison have significantly smaller brands.

Moreover, the used stimulus is limited to scandals. As public relations and other marketing efforts are all attempting to depict athletes in a positive light, positive events are less distinct and therefore of less relevance. Moreover, the used stimulus is a fictional scandal. As for the study objects, the celebrity athletes are assessed on two personality dimensions rather than multiple, using the binary distinctions of not likeable and likeable, and low-moral and high-moral character. The consumer response to the stimulus is limited to a set of metrics for attitudes and behavioral intentions. This delimitation is applied in order to enable a conductible study design.

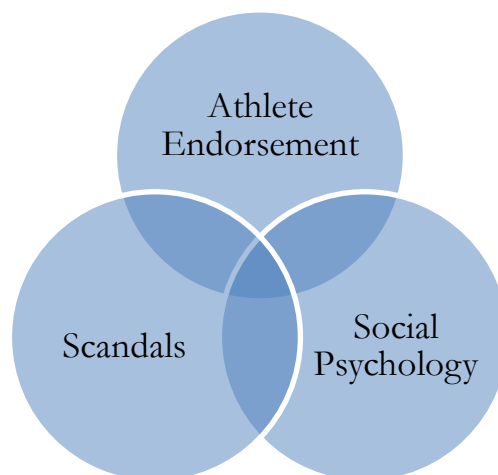
2. Theory

The chapter below consists of four parts, the theoretical approach, the three theory components, the research gap, and the hypothesis summary. The theoretical approach presents the lens through which theory is extracted. The three theory components are made up of scandals, humans in marketing, and athlete endorsement. The synthetization of these three spheres presents a research gap, where previous theory is insufficient. Lastly, the hypotheses are summarized.

2.1 Theoretical Approach

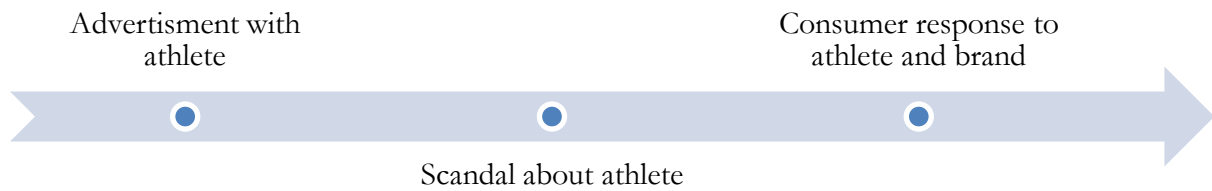
This thesis regards a specific type of marketing communication, namely communication through a single individual. Traditional marketing theories treat a wide range of scientific domains, where psychology is one central aspect. As this study intends to capture the human-to-human dimension of marketing communications, a *social-psychology* approach yields a high degree of explanatory value. Theories of *athlete endorsement* explain the effectiveness of such marketing tools from a personality perspective, where the characteristics of the athlete and the subsequent consumer interaction serve as the core. The stimulus of the study will be a fictional *scandal* performed by the athlete, being the setting in which the spheres of social psychology and athlete endorsement interact.

Figure 2: Theory Components



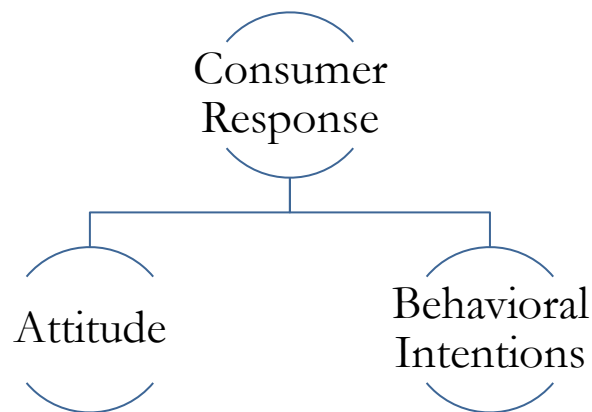
The study has a chronological progression that intends to mirror a real-life setting. Moreover, it presumes an established athlete-brand collaboration and the recognition of the athlete and the brand. Thus, the study examines the consumer response to the entities of these collaboration, going beyond traditional studies of advertising effectiveness that focus on reactions connected solely to the advertisement.

Figure 3: Chronological Progression



Common for all type of advertisement, is the objective to create or reinforce a brand's position as well as create action through communication. A general objective of advertising efforts is to establish mental connections to the brand in the mind of the consumer, called communication effects. Rossiter and Percy claim that there are five communication effects (p. 120, 1998) that can be caused partly or entirely by marketing communications, for example advertising. This study focuses on two of the effects that form the dependent variables *brand attitude* and *brand behavioral intentions*.

Figure 4: The Two Components of Consumer Response



Brand Attitude

An attitude is an overall evaluation that expresses to what extent one likes or dislikes an object, a person, or a behavior (Rossiter and Percy, p. 120, 1998). Consumers' attitudes toward subjects are self-created, tend to be retained over time, and are directly related to their associations to the subject. Attitudes are important for several reasons. Firstly, they influence emotions through an affective function. Secondly, attitudes hold a behavioral function in the sense that they provoke action. Finally, they carry a cognitive function, meaning that they guide thoughts (Dahlén and Lange, 2009).

H1: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on *brand attitude*, compared to athletes with low moral character

Brand-Behavioral Intentions

While positive attitudes toward brands are highly desirable, converting them to actual purchase behavior is the ultimate goal of a companies' marketing efforts. Currently, studies show that

attitudes are 20-30% correlated with behavior (Dahlén and Lange, 2009). This indicates that behavior, to a large extent, is disconnected from the attitudes that consumers possess. However, due to the difficulty of measuring purchase behavior, *behavioral intentions* will be the area of examination. The intentions are not limited to the actual purchase, rather they capture actions related to the entire purchasing process. Regardless of action, these intentions capture different aspects of the same desire - to ultimately monetize the advertisement efforts (Rossiter and Percy, p. 120-121, 126, 1997). These intentions range from proposing the brand to the actual purchase, indicating active and high-involvement activities. Furthermore, passive and low-involvement intentions, taking digitalization into account, were added.

H2a: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *look up information* about the endorsed brand, compared to athletes with low moral character

H2b: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *like a post on social media* about the endorsed brand, compared to athletes with low moral character

H2c: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *enter the endorsed brand's website*, compared to athletes with low moral character

H2d: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *recommend the endorsed brand*, compared to athletes with low moral character

H2e: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *enter the endorsed brand's store or retailer*, compared to athletes with low moral character

H2f: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *choose the endorsed brand over competitors*, compared to athletes with low moral character

H2g: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *purchase the endorsed brand's products*, compared to athletes with low moral character

2.2 Scandals

Ethics, or morals, derive from the idea of normal behavior. Ethics is a system of moral principles that deals with ethical concepts such as right and wrong. In this study, human reason will serve as the source of moral obligation, as respondents assess the misconduct of an athlete (Pojman and Fieser, 2017, p. 2-3). A scandal refers to actions, events or circumstances that transgress certain values, norms, or moral principles. In short, a scandal is a deviation from the norm. Some sort of transgression is a necessary condition of a scandal, yet it is the nature of the transgression that determines whether it qualifies as a scandal or not. As King (1986) states, “scandals occupy a sort of middle ground of impropriety” where too minor (parking tickets) and too grave (murders) misconducts do not qualify. Naturally, there are cultural variations in the values,

norms, and moral principles that guide the assessment of the scandal. There are, however, certain types of norms that are more scandal-sensitive than others; particularly those who govern sexual relations, financial transactions, and political power.

Similarly, some individuals are more scandal-sensitive than others. Because of their positions, achievements, or responsibilities, some individuals are more visible and representative of certain beliefs and values. In these cases, the act of transgression involves an element of hypocrisy, as these individuals fall short of the standards they set for themselves and others, as public figures and influential individuals. Thus, this indicates that the higher standards one claims to follow, the larger the potential drop in personality authenticity will be when misconducting. On this subject, this study will examine the scandal-sensitivity of celebrity athletes that represent different personas, i.e. the aspect of someone's character that is presented to or perceived by others. How negative information affects the evaluation of endorsed brands has previously been examined from several angles. Namely regarding the timing of the information, the size of the association set for the celebrity and the brand, and the strength of association between the celebrity and the brand (Till and Shimp, 1998). Instead, this thesis examines the congruence between the scandal behavior and the personalities of the athletes.

H3: The *behavioral congruence* will be lower for athletes with high moral character, compared to athletes with low moral character

However, scandals engage as they elicit excitement and curiosity. Scandals allow people to fantasize about the misconduct of others, experiencing an alternative, thrilling life, while staying within moral principles. The recipients of the scandal find pleasure in various ways, including the rule-breaking of others, the punishment or potential avoidance of the scandal, asking for forgiveness, and the ease of mind as own problems appear small in relation to the scandal. Moreover, the underlying facts of the scandal is of little importance. It is the gossip and debate that enthrill, rather than the details of the actual scandal. Thus, the person committing the scandal is of higher importance than the actual transgression. The reactions regarding scandals are two-divided, it is the combination of disgust and fascination that creates the excitement (Kolod, 2013).

2.3 Social Psychology

Social psychology aims "to understand and explain how human thoughts, feelings, and behavior are affected by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others" (Allport, 1985). As the study involves real individuals as communicators as well as receivers, social-psychology theory is an appropriate starting point. Rather than focusing on interpersonal phenomena such as how people function in groups, this thesis focuses on processes occurring within an individual mind or self, called *intrapersonal phenomena* (Weiner, 2000). In order to understand how a celebrity athlete is interpreted in a marketing context, different independent - yet related - social psychological domains have been combined. Specifically, this thesis will look closely at (i) *persuasion*, methods of influence used in advertising, (ii) *attitudes*, evaluations of people and things that affect thought and action, as well as (iii) *social cognition*, a study of how people perceive, think

about, and remember information about others. These concepts will further be connected to (iv) *congruence*, a psychology concept related to cognitive dissonance, which concerns perceived fit between belief and behavior, and entities.

Persuasion

The aim of persuasion is to influence the attitudes, ideas or behavior that individuals possess, by using rational or emotive rhetorical means. The persuasion process consists of three major components: the source, the message, and the audience. The source, in this study the celebrity athlete, communicates through credibility, expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. The message concerns the balance between reason and emotion. Lastly, the audience includes demographic, personality, and preferential aspects (Chaiken, 1980). The stimulus of the main study, the rumor regarding the athlete, will thus concern the source, keeping the other components constant. Doing so examines persuasion from a communicator point of view.

Attitudes

An attitude is defined as “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (Eagly and Chaiken, 1998). It is a person’s stance, or state of mind, toward an attitude object (person, place, thing, or event), that affects the person’s thought and action. Attitudes are formed from individuals’ past and present experiences and range from extremely negative to extremely positive. In other words, the *likeability* of a person is based on the positive or negative attitude people connect to that individual. Thus, likeability will function as one of the two personality dimensions measured in the study. Attitudes contain affective, behavioral, and cognitive components. The affective component concerns the emotional reaction that an individual has toward an object, whereas the behavioral component refers to the way one behaves when exposed to that object. The cognitive components refer to attributes, beliefs, and thoughts related to the attitude. Positive or negative attributes associated with the object is often translated into an attitude toward it. Moreover, attitudes can be changed through persuasion efforts.

H4: A scandal involving likeable athletes causes a negative effect on their *likeability*, compared to non-likeable athletes

Social Cognition

Social cognition studies how people - implicitly and explicitly - acquire, store, and apply information about others and social situations (Moskowitz, 2013). This thesis focuses on the sub-field person perception, which specifically concerns how individuals process information about people, and the subsequent behavior. In order for this process to function, social and cognitive biases are used as cues and heuristics. This functions a tool to handle the complexity and large amount of social information encountered on a daily basis. The information processing initiates the procedure of social categorization, or stereotyping, i.e. the classification of people into groups based on a shared set of characteristics (Cunningham, 2013). In an encounter with a person classified into one of these groups, the brain unconsciously activates a social schema, a pattern of thought and behavior, connected to this group. As a result of a schema activation, judgments which go beyond the given information are formed. Regardless of these judgments being accurate or not, they influence attitudes and behavior toward a person. Recently,

researchers have studied how new information is integrated into existing schemas, specifically contrasting information (Alpay and Verfoef, 2008).

Social categorization occurs with varying degrees of specificity and effort. One simple, and throughout history recurring, dichotomy used to reduce this complexity is the one of *good versus bad*. Apart from this psychological take, the good versus bad has had a prevalent role in religion and philosophy, making it an ancient distinction. Still today, this binary distinction is used to assess the *moral character* of others. Thus, moral character will function as the second personality dimension measured in this study. From a contemporary perspective, the good-versus-bad stereotype is a way to manage time and space and reduce complexity in media. Contrasting characteristics are enhanced, which results in two camps of good guys and bad guys, facilitating media consumption (Thomas, 2014).

H5: A scandal involving athletes will high moral character causes a negative effect on their *moral character*, compared to athletes with low moral character

Furthermore, bad possesses greater power than good across several psychological phenomena. Bad impressions and stereotypes tend to be formed quicker and are subject to a higher degree of confirmation bias (Baumeister et al., 2001). Furthermore, negative information is to a greater extent processed, lasts longer, and contributes more to the final impression than good information, known as the positive-negative asymmetry effect (Peeters and Czapinski, 1990). As bad produces larger effects, this is another reason to limit this study to negative information.

Congruence

Historically, applying a humanistic approach to psychology, congruence has been defined as “a basic construct where the ideal self, in terms of attitudes and values, is in accordance with the actual behavior of the individual”. Incongruence, on the other hand, refers to the discrepancy between the two. Individuals strive for the former, and when the discrepancy is too great it can lead to stress, anxiety, and discomfort (Rogers, 1957).

Today, the concept of congruence has been expanded, and the word now describes a general relation between two entities and is defined as an “agreement or harmony; compatibility” (Oxford Dictionary, 2018). The experiments of this thesis will include, and examine the relations between, four entities: (i) the athlete, (ii) the brand, (iii) the consumer, and (iv) the scandal.

Previous research examines the different relationships between these entities. Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel (2004) examined how firms’ transgressional actions affected consumer relations, finding the brand personalities as the explanatory factor. Dolich (1969) found that congruence between self-image and brand image generates a favorable evaluation toward the brand. Similarly, Gardner and Levy (1955) found that consumers purchase products for their symbolic value and the interrelatedness between their self-image and brand image. Thus, consumers tend to identify themselves with brands that represent good values and distance themselves from the opposite.

H6: A scandal involving athletes will high moral character causes a negative effect on consumers’ *brand identification*, compared to athletes with low moral character

Moreover, further research has partly examined the role of similarity, or overlap, between celebrity athletes and consumers (McGuire, 1985), and between celebrity athletes and brands (Mowen, Brown, Schulman, 1979). These theories are further explained in section 2.4. Common for all studies is the finding that the presence of congruence elicits positive response, being a desirable characteristic of a relation.

Contradicting theory, however, suggests that interpersonal complementarity explains the fit between individuals and the influence they have on one other. This means that interpersonal relationships can benefit from being complementary, rather than uniform (Sadler, Ethier and Woody, 2011, p 123-142). Additionally, incongruent athlete-brand pairings, contradicting established schemas, tend to require more effort and thereby receive more attention than congruent pairings. Thus, by endorsing an athlete that is incongruent with the brand, a higher degree of interest can be generated (Sherman et al., 1998). In summary, various theories that support congruence as well as incongruence between entities co-exist and have explanatory value for interaction and decision-making.

A central concept in congruence is, as briefly mentioned above, the inherent strive toward aligning attitudes and behavior toward an entity. In this thesis, attitudes and perceptions toward athletes are examined and complemented with a set of behavioral intentions toward the athlete, attempting to capture the effect of the scandal on the athlete brand.

H7a: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *look up information about the athlete*, compared to athletes with low moral character

H7b: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *ask a question about the athlete*, compared to athletes with low moral character

H7c: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *watch the athlete play/read an article about the athlete*, compared to athletes with low moral character

H7d: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *like a post on social media about athlete*, compared to athletes with low moral character

H7e: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *discuss or post about athlete publicity on social media*, compared to athletes with low moral character

2.4 Athlete Endorsement

In a time when it is increasingly difficult to distinguish many products and services from one another in terms of functional benefits, organizations put larger efforts into brand building. Celebrities in marketing can be used for a variety of purposes, but one main driving force in a communications context is that the celebrity profile and attributes, particularly the fame, draws attention to the communicated message (Atkin and Block 1983; O'Mahony & Meenaghan, 1998).

Compared to other types of endorsers - experts, CEOs, typical consumers - celebrity endorsers generate higher likeability, persuasiveness, believability as well as trustworthiness (Freiden, 1983). Athletes are the celebrity category that dominates endorsements (Carlson and Donavan, 2008), featuring in 60% of celebrity-endorsed advertisements (Dyson and Turco, 1998). Thus, the combination of the frequency with which athlete endorsers are used as a marketing tool, and the financial magnitude and development of global sponsorship spending, make up an interesting intersection to further investigate.

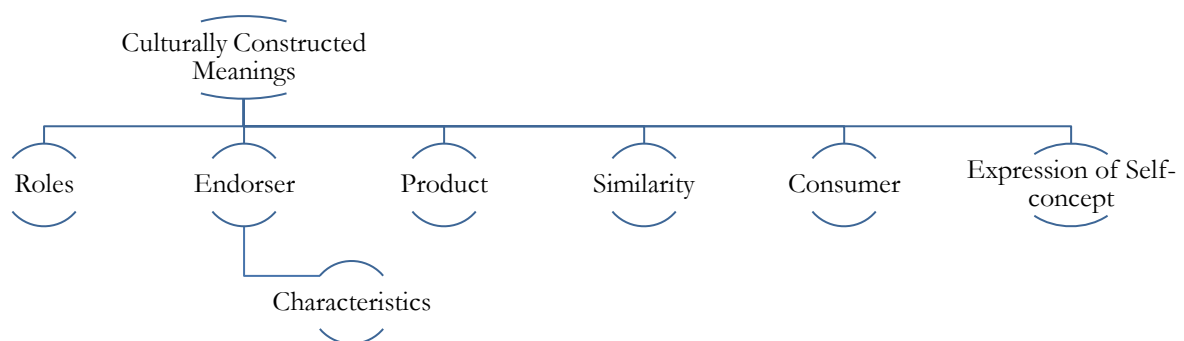
Models of Celebrity Endorsement

From a theoretical standpoint, four distinguished celebrity-endorsement models have been considered instrumental for the study. These models outline the different components that guide companies in their decision-making regarding athlete endorsers. The models, *transfer of meaning*, *source credibility*, *source attractiveness*, and *the match-up hypothesis*, originate from celebrity-endorsement literature, and have successfully been applied in a sports context.

The transfer of meaning process (McCracken, 1989) examines how the meaning of a celebrity is transferred to the brand they endorse. Thus, a consumer that likes a certain athlete will be keener to purchase a brand that endorses that athlete, as the consumer can apply it to her self-image. The purchase per se does not complete the process of transferring, a consumer must associate the meaning of a celebrity with the particular brand for it to be completed. In the case of athletes, the transfer logic is especially applicable due to the powerful meanings they often possess. For instance, Michael Jordan can transfer his perceived meanings of coolness, confidence and athleticism, to the shoe he endorses (Chadwick, Chanavat, and Desbordes, 2015, p. 135-136).

Figure 5: Transfer of Meaning Process

Source: McCracken (1989)

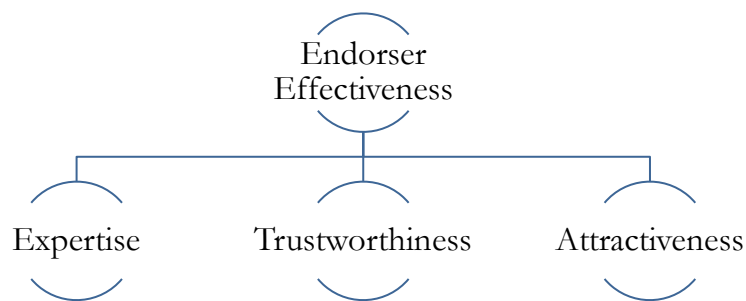


While the benefits of using athlete endorsers are widely known, it is not without potential risk. When the image of the endorser is hurt by allegations of immoral behavior, this instantly creates problems for the endorsed brand (Miciak and Shanklin 1994, p. 53). Negative publicity about an athlete transfers into negative reactions not only toward the athlete, but also toward the brand. According to balance theory, i.e. the innate need to cognitively align objects, the transferability logic is also applicable in the reversed direction where consumers' attitudes toward a brand affect

the celebrity endorser's image. This implies that athletes could expose themselves to risks if undertaking partnerships with disliked brands, as it could have extended spillover effects to other brands the athlete endorses (Chadwick, Chanavat, and Desbordes, 2015).

The source credibility model (Hovland and Weiss 1951; McGuire 1968), considers the effectiveness of an endorser. It consists of three factors: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. The first two factors have higher explanatory power given their close connection to endorser credibility. Originating in social research, a credible source has been proven to elicit positive responses and gaining acceptance from its targeted audience (Ohanian, 1990). For instance, few would argue with the expertise of Usain Bolt when it comes to running shoes. However, the expertise of the athlete cannot be stretched too far. As the number of endorsed products increases, or as the connection between the athlete's field and the product weakens, so does the consumers' skepticism. Overexposure has in previous literature been proven to generate a lower level of distinctiveness, credibility and likeability toward the athlete and the associated brands (Tripp, Jenson and Carlson, 1994). Similarly, this thesis investigates the risk of negative exposure and, among other, its effect on trustworthiness.

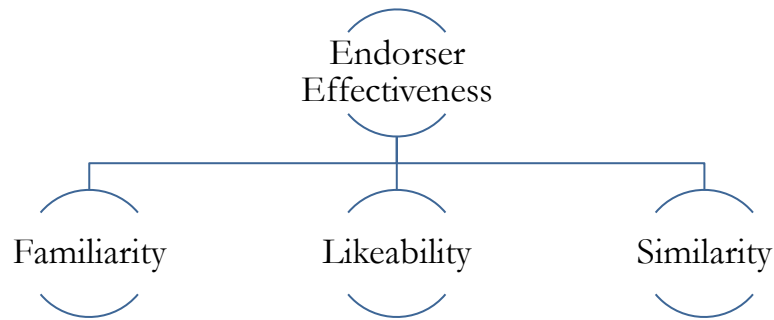
Figure 6: Modified Source Credibility Model
Source: Ohanian (1990)



H8: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the *trustworthiness* of the athlete, compared to athletes with low moral character

The source attractiveness model (McGuire, 1985), expands on the attractiveness factor of the previous model and concludes that attractiveness as a sole factor enhances endorser effectiveness. Going beyond the physical appearance by including personality, intellect, and lifestyle (Erdogan, 1999), it identifies familiarity, similarity, and likeability as the three dimensions of attractiveness. Thus, an endorser is most effective when the consumers find the athlete familiar, likeable, and rather similar to themselves. As likeability functions as one of the two personality dimensions and as familiarity is likely to remain unaffected by a scandal, similarity is the examined factor from model. It captures the congruence between the athlete and the consumer.

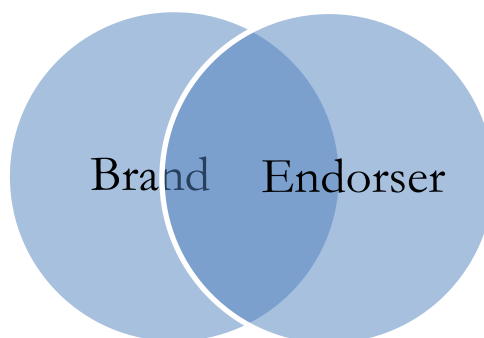
Figure 7: Source Attractiveness Model
Source: McGuire (1985)



H9: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the *similarity* with the athlete, compared to athletes with low moral character

The match-up hypothesis (Mowen, Brown and Schulman, 1979) explores the fit, or congruence, between the endorser and the brand. Despite the lack of understanding of what causes a good fit, the relationship between this fit and the endorsement effectiveness is clear. For instance, expertise is one factor that can be enhanced by a good fit, e.g. beauty products are better promoted by beautiful endorsers. Moreover, a high congruence between an endorser and a product increases the believability of the endorsement. A good example of this is the former collaboration between the Canon PowerShot camera and tennis player Maria Sharapova, as they both could be described as “powerful, but with precision” (Chadwick, Chanavat, and Desbordes, 2015). Similarly, to the argumentation regarding balance theory, consumers are likely to balance the brand and the endorser. This suggests that an athlete scandal will spill over to the brand, to ensure cognitive alignment.

Figure 8: Match-up Hypothesis
Source: Mowen, Brown and Schulman (1989)



H10: Regardless of athlete category, a scandal involving an athlete will have no effect on the *match-up* with the endorsed brand

2.5 Research Gap

With respect to previous theory about athlete endorsement and its overwhelming focus on the advantages of such sponsorships, the potential risks and losses are yet to be thoroughly examined. The literature on athlete endorsement is still in its formative phase. Moreover, the models of athlete endorsement are based on marketing theories, yielding a more market-related perspective. This suggests that other perspectives could yield explanatory power to the dynamics of the relations between athletes, brands and consumers. Furthermore, previous research on celebrity endorsement has established that negative information about celebrities, e.g. scandals, affects both the celebrity and the endorsed brands negatively. Scandal theory outlines the reasons for scandals being of public interest, and further claims that different subjects are more or less sensitive to scandals. Similarly, but not covered by previous theory, different celebrities and their brands seem to be more sensitive or less sensitive to scandals. There is a research gap concerning the underlying psychological motivations behind why some celebrity brands seem to be completely ruined by a scandal, whereas others, at least in the long run, stay relatively unaffected. There are naturally numerous factors that can explain this, for instance the severity of the scandal and the public relations work around it, but this thesis applies a social-psychology perspective to point out an inherent quality in the celebrity's personality as a determining factor.

2.6 Hypothesis Summary

Given the presented theories and models above, this thesis has extracted and combined the essential components to generate a set of hypotheses that capture different, yet related, aspects. The theoretical basis consists of eight factors: the two personality dimensions (likeability and moral character), two source factors (trustworthiness and similarity), three types of congruence (behavioral congruence, brand identification, and match-up, and brand attitude. Additionally, there are two sets of behavioral intentions, one concerning the athlete and one concerning the brand. The hypotheses are summarized below in the same order as presented.

Table 1: Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Area
H1: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on brand attitude, compared to athletes with low moral character	Brand Attitude
H2a: [...] the intention to look up information about the endorsed brand [...]	Brand Behavioral Intentions
H2b: [...] the intention to like a post on social media about the endorsed brand [...]	
H2c: [...] the intention to enter the endorsed brand's website [...]	
H2d: [...] the intention to recommend the endorsed brand [...]	
H2e: [...] the intention to enter the endorsed brand's store or retailer [...]	
H2f: [...] effect on the intention to choose the endorsed brand over competitors [...]	Behavioral Congruence
H2g: [...] the intention to purchase the endorsed brand's products [...]	
H3: The behavioral congruence will be lower for athletes with high moral character, compared to athletes with low moral character	Likeability
H4: A scandal involving likeable athletes causes a negative effect on their likeability, compared to non-likeable athletes	Moral Character
H5: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on their moral character, compared to athletes with low moral character	
H6: [...] consumers' identification with the endorsed brand [...]	Brand Identification
H7a: [...] the intention to look up information about the athlete [...]	Athlete Behavioral Intentions
H7b: [...] the intention to ask a question about the athlete [...]	
H7c: [...] the intention to watch the athlete play/read an article about the athlete [...]	
H7d: [...] the intention to like a post on social media about athlete [...]	
H7e: [...] the intention to discuss or post about the athlete publicity on social media [...]	
H8: [...] the trustworthiness of the athlete [...]	Trustworthiness
H9: [...] the similarity with the athlete [...]	Similarity
H10: Regardless of the athlete category, a scandal involving an athlete will have no effect on the match-up with the endorsed brand	Match-up

3. Methodology

The section beneath discusses the methodological approach of the study and the applied scientific approach. The preparatory work, consisting of two pre-studies and a pilot study, is structured divided into three parts: purpose and method, results and conclusions, and critique of the study. The main study discusses the data collection and sampling process, the survey design, and the data preparation for the analysis. Lastly, the data quality of the main study is evaluated.

3.1 Quantitative Research Approach

This research was initiated by an observation of the reality of celebrity-athlete scandals and their varying implications for athlete brands. The observation was followed by a thorough review of existing literature attempting to explain the phenomenon. Based on the observation and existing theory, hypotheses were developed, data collected, and hypotheses either supported or rejected. Thus, this thesis primarily applies an abductive research approach, as it commences with the observing nature of induction, and continues with the theory testing of deduction. In the final part of the thesis, where implications for related fields are inferred from the findings, the study reverts back to induction (Bryman and Bell, 2015, p. 27).

Moreover, this thesis applies a quantitative research design, using survey collection as the main source of data. A quasi-experimental research design was used, where the control and treatment group were exposed to information about the athlete and the endorsed brand. The treatment group was, in addition, exposed to a fictional scandal about the athlete. The purpose of the stimulus was to expose the athlete to negative information and study the subsequent effect on the athlete and brand perception.

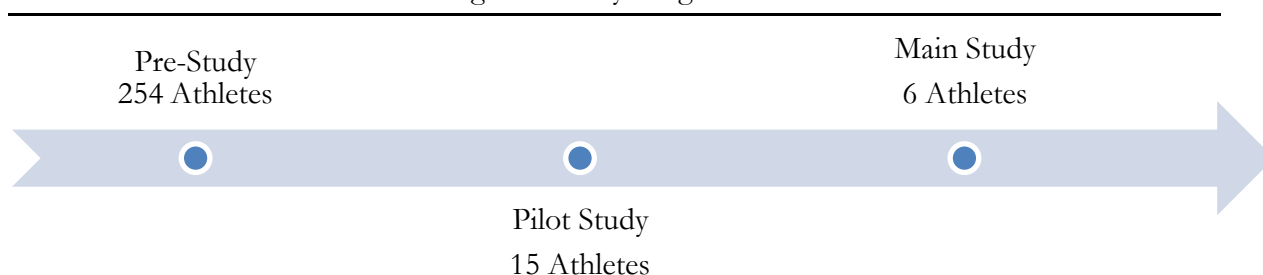
Given the quantitative nature of the study, self-completion questionnaires were used throughout the data collection (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The questionnaires were designed and distributed using the survey software Qualtrics. Subsequently, the data was exported to and analyzed in the statistical analysis software IBM SPSS Statistics. Given the purpose of obtaining the unobservable data of consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions, surveys function as a suitable method for collecting such data. Additionally, it allows to collect data for a large number of respondents as opposed to a qualitative approach (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

3.2 Preparatory Work

Two pre-studies and a pilot study were conducted as preparatory work for the main study. The purpose of the studies was to select the appropriate athletes as well as to try out personality scales to use going forward. The first step of the data gathering was to examine the empirical field of athlete endorsement. This was done by accumulating data for the world's 100 top-earning athletes during the years 2012-2017. Popularity was controlled for by accumulating data on social-media following. Furthermore, global recognition, i.e. popularity that stretches well beyond limited geographical regions, ensured higher response rates and personality understanding. The second step was to investigate the perception of the 15 selected athletes on

the personality dimensions of likeability and moral character. With this foundation, the six athletes for the main study were selected and the items tried out and merged into factors.

Figure 9: Study Progression



3.3 Pre-Study I - Athlete Selection

This section outlines the first study performed in this thesis. It includes the purpose and method of the pre-study, followed by the results and conclusions, and critique of the study. As a result, the number of athletes for the pilot study was reduced from 254 to 15.

3.3.1 Purpose & Method

In order to get an understanding of who the world's elite celebrity athletes were, earnings data from Forbes' *'The World's Highest-Paid Athletes List'*² was collected and analyzed. The reasoning behind this was the assumption that the world's highest paid athletes are also the most valuable athlete brands. Additionally, a high percentage of these athletes were likely to be globally known and recognized. The earnings data consisted of two sources of income: endorsements³, and salary and winnings. The first source represented the personal sponsorship money that the athlete received whereas the second represented the salary from the team or the winnings from tournaments. The data is an estimation of the athletes' annual earnings, on a June-to-June basis. Thus, the earnings for a given year is based on the final six months of the previous year and the first six months of the current year. Data over six years, 2012-2017, was collected and accumulated, resulting in a list of 254 athletes.

Given the purpose of the study, the data was sorted on accumulated endorsement earnings. Doing so excluded athletes paid merely for their professional performance, shifting focus to athletes whose value extend beyond their athletic achievements. Moreover, in order to capture the popularity of and interest in the athletes, their social-media following served as a proxy. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter followers were compounded into a total base of social-media followers. To ensure a high degree of global recognition and avoid athletes whose fame is restricted to certain geographic areas and markets, Google Trends' Interest-by-Region function was used as a guiding tool.

² The list includes the world's 100 top-earning athletes on a year-to-year basis

³ Forbes based the estimates on conversations with industry insiders

To complement a list of athletes that, at this point, was dominated by assumed good guys, a couple of assumed bad guys, that just ended up outside the monetary requirement, were added. The intention was to create polarization and heterogeneity among the set of athletes used.

3.3.2 Results & Conclusions

The finalized table included 20 athletes active across seven different sports. In order to enable a survey design that would be conductible in the next stage, five athletes (Phil Mickelson, Kevin Durant, Rory McIlroy, Mahendra Dhoni and Derrick Rose) were considered to be insufficiently recognized from a global point of view and therefore excluded. Moreover, Floyd Mayweather and Zlatan Ibrahimović were added to the list, due to their recognition and assumed bad-guy profile.

Table 2: Athlete-Endorsement Ranking
Source: Forbes

Athlete	Rank	Sport	Endorsements 2012-17	Salary & Winnings 2012-17	Total Pay 2012-17	Instagram Followers	Facebook Followers	Twitter Followers	Total Followers
Roger Federer	1	Tennis	338	41,2	379,2	4,6	15,08	11,9	31,58
Tiger Woods	2	Golf	307	24,6	331,6	1	3,05	6,33	10,38
LeBron James	3	Basketball	288	125,3	413,3	35,6	23,26	40,8	99,66
Phil Mickelson	4	Golf	273	23,9	296,9	-	-	-	-
Cristiano Ronaldo	5	Soccer	170	265,5	435,5	121,5	122,61	69,8	313,91
Rafael Nadal	6	Tennis	162	43,6	205,6	4,4	14,69	15,5	34,59
Usain Bolt *	7	Track	150	5,415	155,4	8	19,28	5,08	32,36
Kobe Bryant *	8	Basketball	148	127,2	275,2	8,2	21,04	13,7	42,94
Lionel Messi	9	Soccer	146	241,8	387,8	87,7	89,56	-	177,26
Kevin Durant	10	Basketball	146	113,2	259,3	9,4	10,51	17,5	37,41
Rory McIlroy	11	Golf	144	68,2	212,2	1,4	1,21	3,21	5,82
Novak Djokovic	12	Tennis	131	73	204	3,8	7,18	8,27	19,25
Maria Sharapova	13	Tennis	110	22,9	132,9	3	15,27	8,45	26,72
Mahendra Dhoni	14	Cricket	104	15	119	7,9	20,66	6,93	35,49
Neymar	15	Soccer	88	71,6	159,6	89,9	60,82	38,2	188,92
Derrick Rose	16	Basketball	82	94,3	176,3	-	10,57	2,53	13,1
David Beckham *	17	Soccer	79	14,2	93,2	42,8	54,09	-	96,89
Serena Williams	18	Basketball	75	48	123	7,7	5,29	10,6	23,59
Floyd Mayweather *	42	Boxing	27	541	568	20	13,76	8,06	41,82
Zlatan Ibrahimović	45	Soccer	25	144,1	168,6	30,4	26,57	4,85	61,82

* The athlete has retired
- stands for no official account
Selected athletes in bold letters
All data was collected 26-02-2018.

Out of the 15 athletes for the pilot study, 13 were male and two were female. Active across six sports, four have retired during the observed period. The final selection of athletes was: Roger Federer (tennis), Tiger Woods (golf), LeBron James (Basketball), Cristiano Ronaldo (soccer), Rafael Nadal (tennis), Usain Bolt (track), Kobe Bryant (tennis), Lionel Messi (soccer), Novak Djokovic (tennis), Maria Sharapova (tennis), Neymar (soccer), David Beckham (soccer), Serena Williams (tennis), Floyd Mayweather (boxing), and Zlatan Ibrahimović (soccer).

3.3.3 Critique of the Study

The primary area of criticism regards the second-hand source of Forbes and the fact that it estimates endorsements. Thus, the numbers are not fully accurate. However, the purpose is not to further examine the numbers, rather to get an overview of the most valuable athlete brands. Moreover, the time frame of the study and its accumulated nature requires a degree of longevity and consistency. Thus, young athletes that are highly ranked on recent lists do not accumulate enough endorsement earnings to be studied further. However, the purpose is to ensure athlete brands that are globally recognized, which is more likely to be the case for athletes that have been active for a longer time. That is also why retired athletes are included in the study. Considering the inclusion of the two assumed bad guys, Floyd Mayweather has recently participated in the two highest-grossing boxing fights in history. The promotional tours for these fights have been highly covered, portraying Mayweather as a bad guy, in a tough sport, to generate further interest (Statista, 2017). In the case of Zlatan Ibrahimović, the evaluation of him might be affected by nationality bias, potentially yielding disproportionately high scores in likeability.

Another cause of critique could be the unbalanced set of athletes from a gender perspective. Including two women out of 15 is not ideal when conducting a study with an ambition to contribute to the general field of athlete endorsement. Solely including two women reduces the possibility to end up with at least one sufficiently good or bad personality to include in the study. There are reasons to believe women might be viewed differently, and that effect would have been interesting to gain insight into. Unfortunately, there are only three women out of 254 on the final list, out of which two meet the qualifications of the study.

3.4 Pre-Study II - Scandal Selection

This section outlines the second pre-study that determined the stimulus for the main study. It includes the purpose and method, followed by the results and conclusions, and critique of the study. Out of the five scandals evaluated and ranked, the one concerning charity fraud was selected to the main study.

3.4.1 Purpose & Method

The purpose of the second pre-study was to arrive at one particular scandal that could serve as the appropriate study stimulus. Moreover, the pre-study enabled an understanding of consumer responses to different types of scandals and the relationship between them. By selecting one type of scandal, whether it is considered to be a more severe or mild one, the results could serve as an

indicator of the potential reactions to other types of scandals. This study, however, aimed at examining the worst-case scenario that could generate the largest potential loss in attitudinal and behavioral terms in the main study.

To minimize the cultural variations in moral principles that guide how people assess scandals, scandals that are cross-culturally immoral were used. They focused on moral misbehavior rather than violence, as the latter is considered to be too grave for the “middle ground of impropriety”. The examined scandals were generated using King’s (1986) three scandal-sensitive categories: sexual relations, financial transactions, and political power. The first was represented by *infidelity*. The second was represented by *charity fraud* and *tax evasion*. The third was represented by *power abuse*. Given the setting of the study, as well as the relative common occurrence, intake of *performance-enhancing substances* was added. A fictional, prominent tennis player called Christopher Campbell was used in the pre-study to isolate the effects of the five scandals and avoid person-specific influence. The respondents ranked the different scandals, being exposed to all five simultaneously, with respect to their moral impropriety.

3.4.2 Results & Conclusions

The survey was answered by 39 individuals, consisting of 24 men and 15 women. No discrepancies were found between the two groups. The charity-fraud scandal was considered to be the most severe scandal in terms of moral misconduct. The other scandal concerning financial transactions was ranked as the second mildest, suggesting that the monetary aspect becomes important when people in need are compromised. The results are presented below, a lower score indicates a more severe moral misconduct.

Table 3: Scandal Composition

The scores are the mean values for each scandal type. The lower the score, the more severe the scandal type. All five scandals were evaluated and ranked against each other. N=39.

Scandal	Charity Fraud	Infidelity	Performance-Enhancing Substances	Tax Evasion	Power Abuse
Mean	1,79	2,88	2,95	3,51	4,05

Thus, the above charity-fraud scandal was selected as the stimulus of the main study. It was adapted with respect to the name and background of the athlete, using real-life components such as their hometown, the name of their charity foundation and its purpose.

3.4.3 Critique of the Study

The study was limited to a set of moral misconducts guided by the frame of the middle ground of impropriety, and the three cross-culturally, scandal-sensitive categories. Historically, more severe misconducts such as domestic violence, rape, and even murder, have been committed by celebrity athletes and could therefore be a reality encountered by the surrounding stakeholders. The main difference between these is the legal ramifications faced. The five examined scandals

have more limited legal consequences mainly damaging the brand and the character of the athlete, suiting the purpose of this study well.

3.5 Pilot Study

This section outlines the pilot study that evaluates the athletes' personalities as well as tests the scales intended for the main study. It includes the purpose and method, followed by the results and conclusions, and critique of the study. Out of the 15 athletes evaluated, six distinguished themselves in terms of personalities. The scales generated the two personality factors for the main study, likeability and moral character.

3.5.1 Purpose & Method

Several aspects guided the pilot-study design. The intention was to categorize the athletes into groups based on their personalities. The first step was to develop two personality dimensions - *likeability* and *moral character* - that capture two foundational characteristics of one's personality. The idea was to distinguish between people's personal attitude to the athlete in terms of liking, and the perception of the athlete's overall character. There is reason to believe that the two are substantially different and not directly correlated. The reasoning behind this was to understand how the different personality dimensions affect the consumer response when exposed to scandals. The two dimensions were tested through several items, mainly *attitudinal*, *perceptual*, and *emotional* aspects. The aim was to examine their interrelation and subsequently factor them into the two dimensions, using the SPSS factoring function. The logic behind this was to reduce the observed variables of the data set into two unobserved, underlying, variables. This was done using varimax rotation, rotating the orthogonal matrix to align with the coordinates, keeping the actual coordinate system unchanged. The number of factors was fixed to two, and coefficients with absolute values below 0,7 were suppressed.

The second step was to evaluate the athletes on the basis of the two dimensions. The aim was to obtain a set of athletes with opposite personalities and plot them along the two dimensions in a coordinate system. Using one-way ANOVA testing, and the assumption of equal variances through the Scheffe method, all 15 athletes were compared. For the purpose of generalization, the ambition was to find at least more than one athlete as a representative for a personality category. Four categories were to be investigated and compared: the most likeable, the least likeable, the highest moral character, and the lowest moral character athletes. In order to provide well-grounded implications, the categories had to significantly differ from one another.

In order to minimize the rate of attrition, the 15 athletes were divided into three surveys with five in each. The athletes were divided by their endorsement rank, using the logic of seeding. This to ensure a spread of the most endorsed and therefore recognized athletes across the three surveys. The three surveys were distributed through the authors' personal networks, using a randomizing function with an even distribution of the three.

As to the gender balance, the ambition was to get a representative sample with respect to sports consumption and interest. As discussed above, the emphasis was on people in their twenties. All

questions regarding evaluation of the athlete were conducted on a seven-point Likert scale. To ensure a consistent answer scale, all negative scale points were placed on the left side, whereas all positive were placed on the right side.

The selected stimulus was a picture of the athlete in a competitive setting with a neutral expression, as well as the name spelled out. The name-and-picture combination was intended to guide recognition among the respondents. The neutral expression was supposed to neutralize the assessment of the athlete. A criterion to evaluate an athlete was an affirmative reaction to the stimulus, i.e. the recognition of the athlete. Thus, a negative stimulus reaction forwarded the respondent to the next athlete.

The respondents evaluated the athletes on five item groups: overall attitude, career performance, overall character perception, physical attractiveness, and emotional arousal. Three items measured the overall attitude (“What is your overall attitude toward this athlete?”), using the antipoles bad/good, negative/positive, and do not like/do like. The intent was to capture a consistent pattern as these scales measure the same aspect. One career-performance question was asked (“How well has this athlete performed through his/her career?”), using the antipoles poor/excellent. This was included to control for the possibility that the athlete’s career performance translates directly to likeability. Moreover, the overall character perception (“What is your overall perception of this athlete’s character?”) was measured using five items, ranging from bad guy (girl)/good guy (girl), controversial/not controversial, villain/hero, rebel/gentleman (gentlewoman), and acts against the norm/acts according to the norm. Similar to career performance, physical attractiveness (“How physically attractive is this athlete?”) was controlled for, using the antipoles not attractive/very attractive. Lastly, three items measured emotional arousal (“How does this athlete make you feel?”), using the adjectives excited, delighted, and inspired, on the scale not so much/very much.

3.5.2 Results & Conclusions

A total of 202 responses were collected, where 146 responses were fully completed. Thus, the attrition rate was 28%. Amongst the respondents 78% were men and 22% were women, with an average age of 25,6 years.

Using factoring, two factors were identified. Career performance and physical attractiveness were found uncorrelated with the other three item groups, meaning that these were evaluated independently of one’s liking and the moral character of the athlete. As the overall-character-perception item of villain versus hero initially had explanatory value for both factors, it was eliminated from the factoring.

The first factor, labeled likeability, consisted of the three overall attitude items and the three emotional arousal items. The attitudinal items correlated strongly with the emotional-arousal items, meaning that a respondent in general has a positive attitude to someone that elicits positive emotions. The second factor, labeled moral character, consisted of the remaining four items that measured the overall character perception. The purpose of the pilot study was to show

that likeability and moral character are two independent dimensions of a personality, which the results showed. High scores on likeability do not always correlate with high scores on moral character.

Table 4: Factor Composition

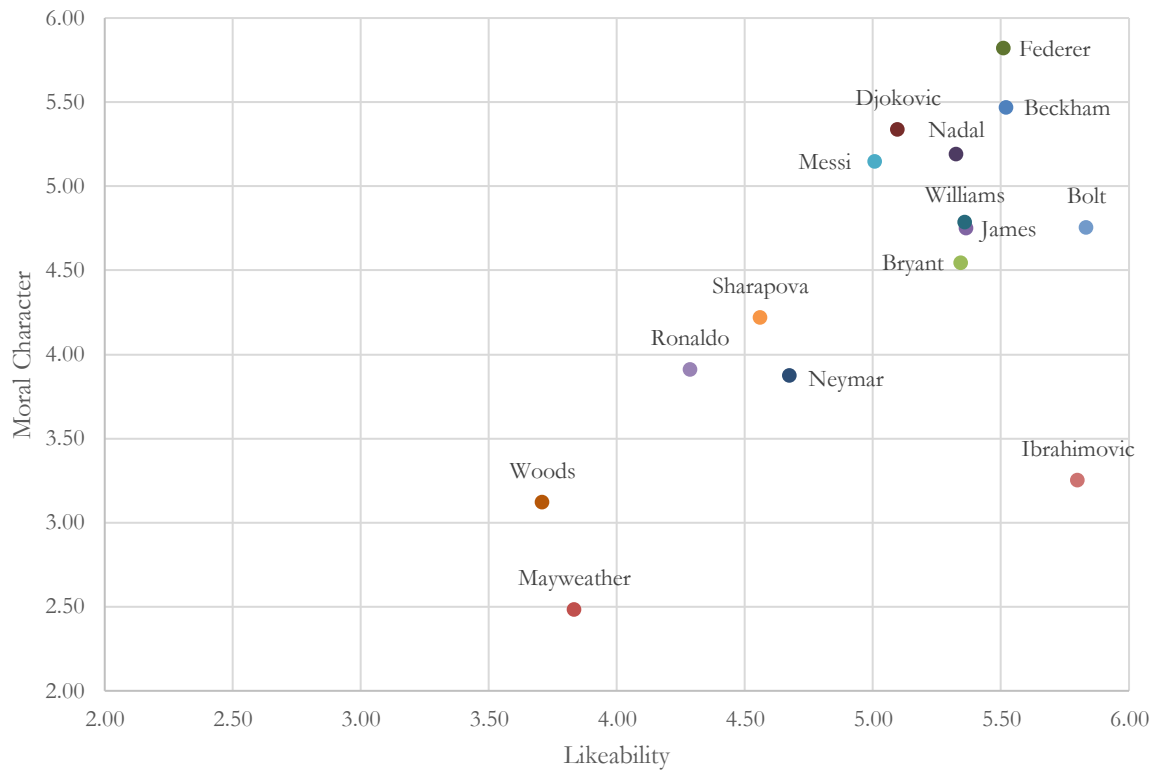
The factor analysis used varimax rotation, was fixed to generate two factors and suppressed coefficients with absolute values below 0,7. The overlapping item of villain vs hero was removed. For the main study, the factors were reduced to three items each. Likeability included the two attitudinal items and one emotional-arousal item with the highest factor loading. Moral character included the three items with the highest factor loading. N=202.

Item	Likeability	Moral Character
Attitude <i>Bad vs Good</i>	0,809*	
Attitude <i>Negative vs Positive</i>	0,787	
Attitude <i>Do not like vs Do like</i>	0,833*	
Perception <i>Bad Guy vs Good Guy</i>		0,708
Perception <i>Controversial vs Not Controversial</i>		0,859*
Perception <i>Villain vs Hero</i>	<i>Removed</i>	<i>Removed</i>
Perception <i>Rebel vs Gentleman</i>		0,858*
Perception <i>Acts against norm vs Acts according to the norm</i>		0,861*
Emotional <i>Excited</i>	0,851*	
Emotional <i>Delighted</i>	0,831	
Emotional <i>Inspired</i>	0,843	

* Used in the main study

When plotting the athletes on the two dimensions, the items that made up the factors were aggregated using non-weighted, arithmetic means. The y-axis represents moral character and the x-axis likeability. For the majority of the athletes, there appears to be an interrelation between the two dimensions. At the same time, there are exceptions that support the finding that there is no direct correlation between the factors.

Graph 1: Athlete Personalities



For the main study, the objective was to use the most extreme characters on both dimensions. As a result, six athletes were selected going forward. The two likeable athletes with high moral character – *The Gentlemen* – were Roger Federer and David Beckham. The two likeable athletes with low moral character – *The Rebels* – were Usain Bolt and Zlatan Ibrahimović. The two dislikeable athletes with low moral character – *The Villains* – were Tiger Woods and Floyd Mayweather. The pre-assumed low moral character of Zlatan Ibrahimović and Floyd Mayweather was confirmed, justifying the addition to the list. The combination of high moral character and low likeability was not found. This was partly expected as the outset of the study was based on Forbes' *The World's Highest-Paid Athletes List*. It is likely that the combination of high moral character and low likeability is not particularly monetizable, excluding such cases from the study.

Using one-way ANOVA testing, and the assumption of equal variances through the Scheffe method, all six athletes were compared in order to test the three intended groups of athletes. On the basis of the dimensions, the pairwise categories differed from each other on the 1% significance level. The Gentlemen have significantly higher moral character than the Rebels, differing on the intended dimension. The Rebels are significantly more likeable than The Villains, differing on the intended dimension. The Gentlemen are significantly more likeable and have significantly higher moral character than The Villains, which distinguish them on both dimensions.

Table 5: Selected Athletes – Factor Comparison

The group comparison was conducted using one-way ANOVA testing. Equal variances were assumed, using the Scheffe method. The groups differed from one another significantly on the intended dimensions. This was true for all individual comparisons at the 1% significance level. N=202.

Athlete Combination	Likeability	Moral Character
Bolt – Mayweather	0,000***	
Bolt – Woods	0,000***	
Ibrahimović - Mayweather	0,000***	
Ibrahimović – Woods	0,000***	
Federer – Mayweather	0,002***	0,000***
Federer – Woods	0,000***	0,000***
Beckham – Mayweather	0,001***	0,000***
Beckham – Woods	0,000***	0,000***
Federer - Bolt		0,000***
Federer – Ibrahimović		0,000***
Beckham – Bolt		0,000***
Beckham – Ibrahimović		0,000***

* Significant at 10% level

** Significant at 5% level

*** Significant at 1% level

3.5.3 Critique of the Study

As the questionnaire was distributed through the authors' personal networks and online, the pilot study could be criticized for using a convenience sample (Jacobsen, 2002). As a result, the sample consisted of mainly individuals in their twenties. This type of availability sampling has the advantage of being quick and close-to-hand, while lacking in representation of the population as a whole. However, the target population of the study was a coming generation of increasing purchasing power and ethical guidance, which the sample arguably captured.

Moreover, one might criticize the unbalanced gender division of the study sample. The over-representation of male respondents could potentially be traced back to the emphasis on men among the 15 evaluated athletes - which in turn originates in the unequal distribution of salaries and prize money. The main criterion of the target population, however, is to mirror the setting the study is performed in. However, with respect to the consumption of sports, and consequently the exposure to celebrity athletes and their endorsed brands, the division of the sample (78% male respondents) turned out to be fairly representative. Using Nike and Adidas, the market leaders of sports apparel, as proxies for sports apparel consumption, their men's wear accounted for 82% and 77% respectively of their revenue in 2014 (Forbes, 2014) and 2016 (Bloomberg, 2017). Moreover, turning to the television audience of major sports leagues⁴ as a proxy, male consumers made up 68% of the total audience (Statista, TV audience).

In retrospect, the overall character perception item of villain versus hero proved to be an inappropriate measure of solely capturing the moral character of the athlete. Probably, the

⁴ Including the NBA, MLS, MLB and PGA tour

vocabulary was too connected to negative and positive associations, as a hero is likely to be associated with a positive personal attitude. Lastly, an area of consideration is the history of the athletes in terms of scandals some of them have been involved in. These could have unforeseen effects on the study. However, such scandals are part of the athlete's personality that is the foundation of this study and necessary for the discrepancy between them.

3.6 Main Study

This section outlines the main study that examines consumers' reactions to the fictional scandal. This is done using attitudinal and behavioral measures as well as other mechanisms that help explain potential interdependencies. It includes the sub-sections of data collection and sampling process, survey design and data preparation.

3.6.1 Data Collection & Sampling Process

The data collection and sampling process was carried out in two steps. Firstly, an anonymous setting and a smooth collection process were established as respondents answered the survey electronically, using Qualtrics, without surveillance. Secondly, to ensure a continued focus on the buying power of future generations, a majority of the respondents, mainly targeted and approached digitally through social-media channels and in a university setting, were in their twenties. The data collection took place between the 27th of March and 6th of April.

Table 6: Sample Demographics

The table summarizes the demographics of the main-study sample. Among the 366 respondents, 185 were assessed to the control group and 181 to the treatment group. The intervals of 1-2, 3-5 and 6-7 have been used to assess a low, medium and high degree of interest regarding sport- and product-category interest. The control and treatment group appear to be similar on all aspects. N=366.

Demographics		Control Group (N=185)	Treatment Group (N=181)	Total Sample (N=366)
Age Distribution	≤21	24%	27%	25%
	22–25	42%	44%	43%
	26–29	22%	21%	22%
	≥30	12%	8%	10%
	Mean	25,2	24,3	24,8
Gender	Female	30%	28%	29%
	Male	70%	72%	71%
Sport Interest	Low 1–2	15%	20%	17%
	Mid 3–5	40%	45%	43%
	High 6–7	45%	35%	40%
	Mean	5,0	4,5	4,8
Product-Category Interest	Low 1–2	22%	22%	22%
	Mid 3–5	53%	58%	56%
	High 6–7	25%	20%	22%
	Mean	4,1	4,1	4,1

Given the ambition to replicate the gender distribution of the pilot study, a similar sample of men and women was approached. To reach statistically valid results, 30 respondents were needed in each version of the study. As six athletes were used, in a scandal setting (treatment group) and a non-scandal setting (control group), 360 responses were needed. A total of 419 individuals initiated the survey. 53 respondents did not complete the survey, yielding an attrition rate of 13%. For all six athletes, the attrition was higher for the scandal version of the survey. This could be due to the additional text, which requires more effort and time to complete. On an accumulated basis, the uncompleted surveys were distributed the following way: Mayweather 18, Federer 10, Woods 8, Bolt 6, Beckham 6 and Ibrahimović 5. Amongst the 366 respondents that fully completed the survey, 71% (259) were men and 29% (107) were female. Table 6 illustrates the demographics of the respondents in the main study.

3.6.2 Survey Design

The design of the main-study survey was based on the pilot study, the framework, and the hypotheses. However, in order to balance a conductible study regarding completion time with scale reliability, three items were used in each measure. This enabled controlling for internal consistency with Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach, 1951). From the pilot study, the measures of likeability and moral character were reduced to three items, using the factoring as the foundation. The former included the two attitudinal items and the emotional-arousal item with the highest explanatory power. The latter included the three perceptual items with the highest explanatory power (Table 4). The same attitudinal items were also used to measure brand attitude.

For the new measures that were added in the main study, tested scales and items from previous research were used. Similarity was measured using the items from Whittler and DiMeo (1991) including appearance, basic values and overall expression, ranging from "not similar at all" to "very similar". Trustworthiness included the items dishonest/honest, not trustworthy/trustworthy and phony/genuine (ibid). Brand identification was measured using the items of "[...] reflects who I am", "I can identify with [...]" and "I feel a personal connection to [...]". Behavioral congruence and match-up were measured using the items "I am not surprised that...", "I would expect...", and "[...] fits well with my perception of..." (Fleck and Quester, 2007).

Percy and Rossiter (1998, p. 120-121) identified a set of purchase intentions across the customer's purchasing process as important indicators for predicting purchase behavior. With this framework as a foundation, more contemporary behavioral intentions were added. Additionally, a set of behavioral intentions toward the athlete were added, to examine the effect on the athlete brand. One metric was adjusted to the status of the athlete, as either active or retired. All intentions are summarized in Table 8, section 3.6.3.

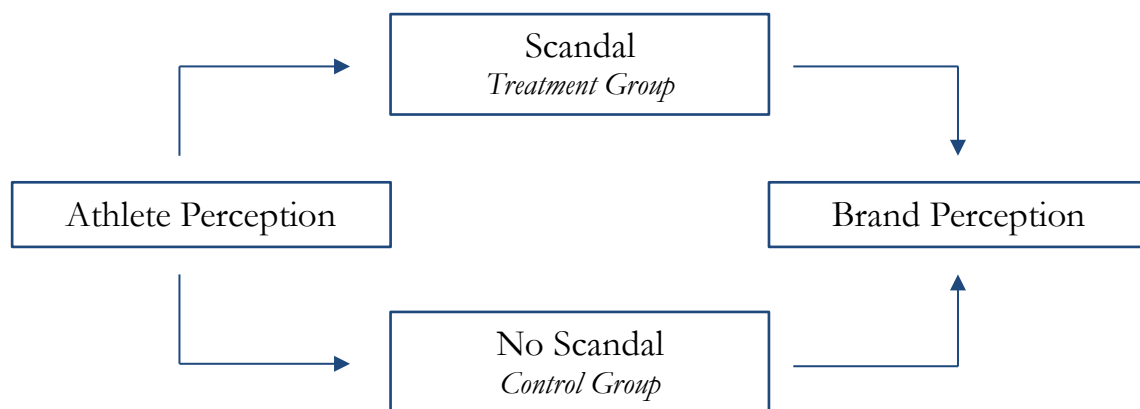
All evaluative questions used a seven-point Likert scale, with no reverse-scored items. The reason was to facilitate the conduction of the survey and avoid confusion. Moreover, the Qualtrics function Force Response was used to avoid incomplete data. Lastly, a few control questions were added to ensure that the respondents were observant and aware of the presence or lack of stimulus.

The survey was based on an experimental approach with a between-subjects design to test the hypotheses. In order to evaluate the athlete, the respondents had to recognize the athlete, similarly to the pilot study. This was done using two identical, except for the stimulus and related questions, versions of the questionnaire with the following main elements:

- an authentic advertisement of the athlete with the brand
- a short introductory text about the athlete
- a short introductory text about the brand
- a charity-fraud scandal (for the treatment group)

After the above exposure, the respondents answered questions about the athlete and the brand. Thus, half of the respondents evaluated the athlete and the brand under the exposure of a scandal, whereas the other half served as a control group.

Figure 10: Survey Design



3.6.3 Data Preparation

To prepare for the hypothesis testing, the data was prepared sequentially. Firstly, items that measured the same aspect were grouped into factors and recoded into new variables. Secondly, the six athletes were mapped out and grouped pairwise.

Adjustments

To be able to perform certain statistical analyses, some data adjustments had to be completed. The separate behavioral-intention items of “[...] watch the athlete play” for active athletes, and “[...] read an article about the athlete” for retired athletes, both of which capture an intention to consume content about the athlete, were merged and created an item that could be used in the factor analysis. This was due to the fact that SPSS cannot handle items with missing data in some statistical methods.

Factor Analysis

By reducing the number of items that capture the same aspect, the complexity of the analysis decreased. This enabled to more easily manage, interpret and analyze the data. The number of factors to extract was set to eight, equaling the intended number of measures used. All items were equally weighted. The findings were in accordance to the intended measures, yielding high internal reliability. Using the scale of George and Mallery (2003, p. 222-232), the factors were assessed using Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach, 1951). All factor except similarity and match-up obtained excellent reliability, whereas the two obtained good reliability.

Table 7: Factor & Reliability Matrix

The factor analysis used the extraction method of principal component analysis and the rotation method of varimax with Kaiser Normalization. The rotated component matrix is presented, which rotation converged in seven iterations. All factors obtained a Cronbach's Alpha above the threshold level of 0,7, indicating a high internal reliability. N=366.

Factor	Items	Item-Factor Correlation Coefficient	Cronbach's Alpha
Likeability	Bad vs. Good	0,743	$\alpha_{\text{Likeability}} = 0,927$ <i>Excellent</i>
	Do not like vs. Like	0,755	
	Does not excite me vs. Excites me	0,767	
Moral Character	Against norm vs. According to norm	0,881	$\alpha_{\text{MC}} = 0,901$ <i>Excellent</i>
	Controversial vs. Not controversial	0,867	
	Rebel vs. Gentleman	0,863	
Similarity	Appearance	0,867	$\alpha_{\text{MC}} = 0,885$ <i>Good</i>
	Basic values	0,620	
	Overall expression	0,843	
Trustworthiness	Dishonest vs. Honest	0,882	$\alpha_{\text{Trustworthiness}} = 0,942$ <i>Excellent</i>
	Untrustworthy vs. Trustworthy	0,864	
	Phony vs. Genuine	0,865	
Brand Attitude	Bad vs. Good	0,869	$\alpha_{\text{BA}} = 0,913$ <i>Excellent</i>
	Do not like vs. Like	0,877	
	Does not excite me vs. Excites me	0,787	
	Best brand in category	0,816	
Brand Identification	Reflection	0,832	$\alpha_{\text{BI}} = 0,941$ <i>Excellent</i>
	Identification	0,833	
	Personal Connection	0,873	
Match-up	Surprise	0,873	$\alpha_{\text{Match-up}} = 0,899$ <i>Good</i>
	Expectation	0,923	
	Fit	0,900	
Behavioral Congruence	Surprise	0,919	$\alpha_{\text{BC}} = 0,923$ <i>Excellent</i>
	Expectation	0,925	
	Fit	0,910	

Excellent internal reliability >0,9

Good internal reliability >0,8

The two sets of behavioral intentions differ in activity and involvement. Regarding the athlete-behavioral intentions the first four are of a more passive and low-involvement nature. However,

the last intention is of an active and high-involvement nature. Similarly, the brand-behavioral intentions are inherently different. The first three are passive, low-involvement intentions, whereas the last four are active, high-involvement intentions.

Table 8: Summary of Behavioral Intentions

Athlete-Behavioral Intentions	Activity & Involvement	Brand-Behavioral Intentions	Activity & Involvement
Look up information about Athlete	<i>Passive, low involvement</i>	Look up information about Brand	<i>Passive, low involvement</i>
Ask a question about Athlete		Like a Brand post on social media	
Watch Athlete play/ Read an article about Athlete		Enter Brand's website	
Like a post on social media about Athlete		Recommend Brand	<i>Active, high involvement</i>
Discuss or post about Athlete publicly on social media	<i>Active, high involvement</i>	Enter a Brand store or retailer	
		Choose Brand over competitors	
		Purchase a Brand product	

Grouping Athletes

Mapping out the athletes and grouping them pairwise, enabled to conduct a study of athlete categories, characterized by different, distinguished personalities, rather than a study of individual athletes. Moreover, it increased the sample size which enables smaller differences to yield significant results. As a result, the study could potentially show generalizable patterns and thereby generate more relevant implications. All T-tests yielded insignificant results, indicating that the findings from the pilot study were intact, as the pairwise athletes did not significantly differ on the two personality dimensions. The differences between the groups were also found to mirror the pilot study, as these were significantly different on the expected personality dimensions. Thus, the analysis could be conducted on an athlete-category level.

Table 9: T-tests of Athlete Groups

T-tests were performed for all pairwise athletes, as two entities were compared. This was done with respect to both personality dimensions. Levene's tests for equality of variances were applied. All T-tests yielded insignificant results, meaning that the athlete pairings could not be significantly distinguished from one another. N=366.

Athlete Category	Representative Athlete	Likeability p-value	Moral Character p-value
The Gentlemen	David Beckham	0,796	0,517
	Roger Federer	<i>Not significant</i>	<i>Not significant</i>
The Rebels	Usain Bolt	0,135	0,305
	Zlatan Ibrahimović	<i>Not significant</i>	<i>Not significant</i>
The Villains	Floyd Mayweather	0,153	0,131
	Tiger Woods	<i>Not significant</i>	<i>Not significant</i>

* Significant at 10% level

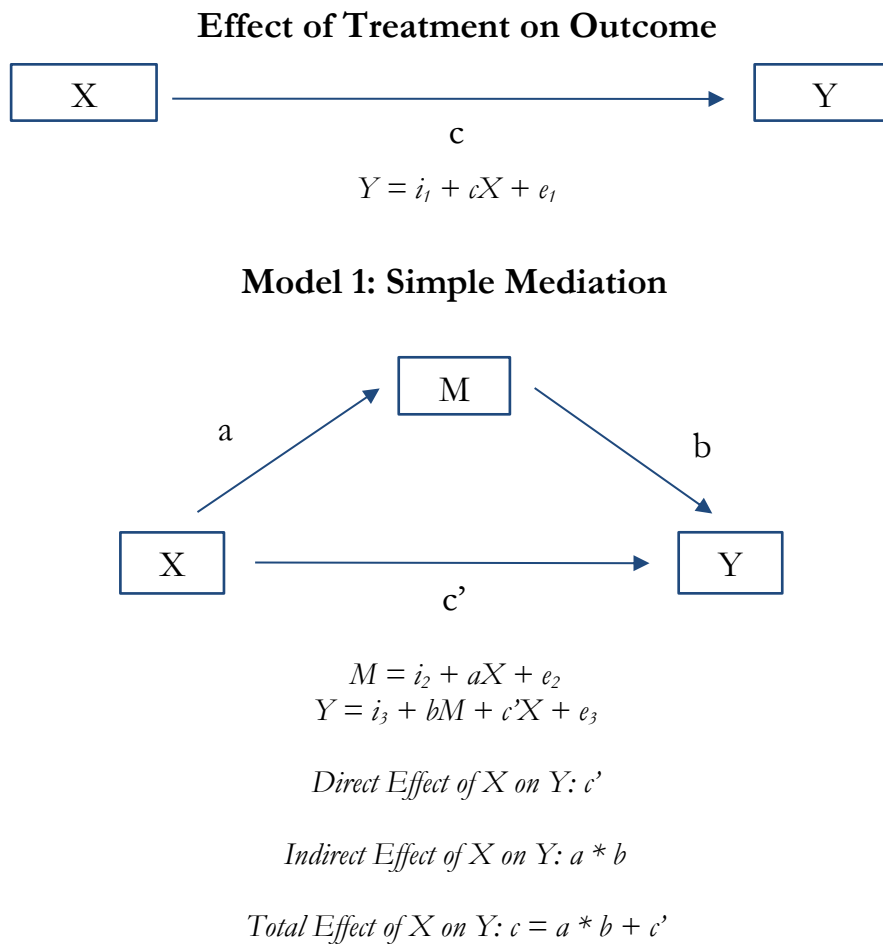
** Significant at 5% level

*** Significant at 1% level

3.7 Simple Mediation Analysis

The hypothesis testing described in section 4.1 studies the scandal-effect on all examined variables, i.e. the causal X-effect on several Y variables. The simple mediation analysis aims to explain the mechanisms that underlie, or mediate, the observed causal relationships. Hayes' PROCESS (2013) statistical simple mediation analysis is useful for this purpose, as it enables causal inferences about the treatment effect on an outcome via one or multiple mediating variables. Mediation explains why a causal relationship exists and increases the precision of the hypothesis testing. For this study, a simple mediation model was used, controlling for one mediator at a time. The approach was to examine the type of mediation and the size of the beta coefficients, i.e. the effect, by exploring and comparing direct and indirect effects. The scandal variable naturally functioned as the independent variable X, as its effect on consumer response is the very purpose of the thesis. The eight main factors and the five athlete-behavioral intentions were potential mediators, M, of which the effect was studied through. Brand attitude and the brand-behavioral intentions were set as dependents variables Y (Peters, 2017).

Figure 11: Mediation Variables



The relationships of interest in the data involved the variables that exhibited significant changes in the mean-comparison analysis in section 4.1. This allowed to transform observed correlation into causation. Using the treatment manipulation and randomly assigning participants, the

strongest links, the a-path (X to M) and c-path (X to Y), could be causally interpreted. The b-path (M to Y), the weakest link, is a partial correlation that is prone to multiple biases. Moreover, these biases in turn, transmit to bias the c'-path, the conditional direct effect (ibid). To mitigate these biases and obtain more robust results, it was ensured that the lower and upper levels for confidence interval for the b-path did not go through the value of zero, indicating the accuracy of the entire mediation. For all analyses, Hayes' Model 4 was used with a 95 % confidence interval, and the bootstrap samples were set to 5 000 (2013).

3.8 Data Quality

Regarding data quality, there are three main threats to quantitative studies: reliability, validity and replicability (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The three threats are discussed below alongside an overall critical assessment of the main study and its elements.

3.8.1 Reliability

The reliability of the study concerns the accuracy and stability of the applied measures, and affects the replicability of the study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). The reliability discussion consists of three parts; stability, internal reliability and inter-observer consistency.

Stability assesses if a measure is consistent over time and holds in the contextual conditions in which it is performed (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Thus, a stable measure translates to a similar result if the test is to be performed again on the same sample, during a different occasion without contextual changes. Since this study was performed during a limited time frame, a re-study was not performed, hindering a true assessment of stability. However, as this study examines athlete categories with general, human characteristics that are rather stable over time, similar future assessments are likely. Moreover, previously successfully used items and measures were applied to ensure *internal reliability*, i.e. items with the intent of measuring the same variable (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Cronbach's Alpha was used as the measure to capture the internal reliability of the answers. As illustrated in Table 7, all alphas were higher than the satisfactory level of 0,7, being grander than 0,7 (George and Mallery, 2003, p. 222-232). This was according to expectations as the majority of the items were grounded in previous studies. Thirdly, *inter-observer consistency*, regards subjective judgement and the issues connected to multi-observer data recording (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Since the survey was completed digitally, without surveillance, and no qualitative data was collected, the inter-observer consistency was a non-issue.

3.8.2 Validity

To assess the validity of the study, the approximate truth of an inference, and the drawn conclusions, four constructs were evaluated: (i) internal validity, (ii) external validity, (iii) construct validity and (iv) statistical conclusion validity.

Internal validity measures experiment accuracy and whether it is the actual stimulus that causes the effect (Shadish, Cook and Campbell, 2003). To eliminate significant differences in the specific

experiment setting, the respondents were randomly assigned to either the control group or the treatment group. Moreover, it was ensured that the information the two groups received was not different apart from the actual treatment, isolating the scandal effect. Thus, a one-setting experimental design was used, which increased the internal validity by compromising some external validity. Moreover, instrumentation was handled by using exclusively digital surveys and similar sample groups. Attrition and incomplete surveys were minimized using the force-response function and the downscaling of the survey, using maximum three items per factor. As discussed above, the attrition was slightly higher in the treatment group. Overall, the internal validity of the study was considered satisfactory.

External validity assesses the extent to which a causal relationship holds over changes in populations, settings, and treatments. It can be divided into *population validity*, how generalizable the sample results are to a larger, similar, population, and *ecological validity*, how accurately the study setting approximates the real world. The rather homogenous sample of mainly twenty-year-old business students made the results non-generalizable to an entire consumer population. However, with respect to the conscious limitation to focus on a young consumer group, the results were mirroring a certain part of the consumer population. Moreover, despite the global market and reach for the athletes, the study was performed primarily on a Swedish sample. Given the used sample, narrow-to-broad generalizations were not to be expected. Rather, same-level generalization was more realistic, drawing conclusions to similar consumer groups. Ecologically, the study setting involved real-world content, using authentic sponsorships and advertisements. However, given the intent to measure the effect of the same scandal type for all athletes, isolating the study stimulus, a fictional scandal had to be used. Thus, the threat of interaction causal relationship over treatment variations was reduced. The artificial, one-setting experiment design increased the internal validity as fewer factors affected the outcome, at the cost of some external validity. Overall, the external validity was considered satisfactory.

Construct validity, to test what is claimed to be tested, requires the formulation and understanding of the constructs, i.e. the measures. With previous research as the foundation, both the actual measures, and the reasoning behind them were replicated. Moreover, it ensured that the naming reflected the intended measure, reducing the threat of inadequate explanation. To reduce the threat of construct confounding, several measures from different theoretical domiciles were used, ensuring the inclusion of several aspects. The scale-purification process, the reduction of the number of items for a factor, could influence the construct validity of the study. To minimize this potential threat, at least three items per measure were kept throughout the studies. Furthermore, the measures were successfully tested for internal reliability using Cronbach's Alpha (Table 7). Overall, the construct validity was considered satisfactory and the results generalizable.

Statistical conclusion validity assesses whether conclusions about the variables and their relationships are correct and reasonable. In order to avoid drawing statistically incorrect conclusions and commit type I and type II errors, multiple precautionary actions were taken. The samples were doubled by grouping the representative athletes pairwise, resulting in sample sizes well above the threshold of 30 respondents per cell. The strength of the treatment was investigated and confirmed through a pre-study, upon which the most severe scandal was chosen. Moreover, the

use of the Scheffe method for the post-hoc tests required larger differences to yield statistically significant results. Through the use of pre-determined statistical methods, fishing was avoided. Overall, the statistical conclusion validity was considered satisfactory.

3.8.3 Replicability

The replicability of the study refers to the process of replicating it to support or disprove the original findings (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order to enable a future replication of this study, three actions were undertaken. Firstly, the methodology was thoroughly described and well-documented throughout the thesis. The undertaken data preparations and analyses were well-described and sequentially presented. Secondly, the continuous use of pre-established and well-proven constructs and items minimized the risk of failing due to poor data quality. Thirdly, limitations, conscious considerations, and shortcomings were systematically articulated, enabling a more extensive study about athlete endorsement and scandals. Overall, the study was found to be easily replicated in the future.

3.8.4 Additional Critique of the Main Study

A critique of the study is the compressed time in which the research was conducted. The experiment in its entirety - from learning about the celebrity, the rumor, and the endorsed brand - was completed within five to ten minutes. A real-world effect could be studied for weeks or months. Thus, the initial exposure could have led to an exaggerated evaluation that does not hold over time. Moreover, very few of the respondents were native-English speakers, while all surveys were in English. Thus, naming and the lack of profound understanding of the used vocabulary could have caused confusion and insecurity of the true meaning of the words. Moreover, the self-completion survey was filled out without an observer. On the one hand, this eliminated the observer influence on responses. On the other hand, this could potentially have allowed respondents to look up information about the athlete and the company brands, affecting her answers.

4. Results & Analysis

The following section presents the main results of the study and determines the impact of scandals in an athlete-endorsement setting. Moreover, it analyzes the main-study data and assesses the hypotheses, in the same order as presented, by either supporting or rejecting them. The section is divided into two sub-sections: the mean comparison and the additional analysis of simple mediation.

4.1 Hypothesis Testing

The first part of the hypothesis testing concerned the effect of the stimulus on the factors, the dependent variables. This was carried out by comparing the mean values between the treatment group and control group on all factors for the three athlete groups, i.e. examining the *scandal effect*. As there more than two groups were compared, One-Way ANOVA testing was used as the statistical method. Assuming equal variances, the Scheffe post-hoc tests with a significance level of 0,05 was used in all analyses.

4.1.1 Brand Attitude

Examining the first dependent variable, brand attitude, The Gentlemen exhibited a significant scandal effect at the 1% level. Scores for the other athlete groups, with low perceived moral character, remained intact. As the brands were unique for each athlete, inter-group comparisons were avoided.

Table 10: Mean Differences – Brand Attitude

The presented numbers were the mean values for the control group (no scandal) and the treatment group (scandal). The obtained F-value equaled 7,736. The hypothesis was supported due to significant results. N=366.

Brand Attitude	No Scandal	Scandal	Std. Dev._{NS}	Std. Dev._s	p-value
The Gentlemen	5,46	4,56	1,25	1,35	0,008***
The Rebels	5,31	4,70	1,22	1,28	0,191
The Villains	4,40	4,55	1,33	1,04	0,995

* Significant at 10% level

** Significant at 5% level

*** Significant at 1% level

H1: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on *brand attitude*, compared to athletes with low moral character
SUPPORTED

4.1.2 Brand-Behavioral Intentions

Regarding the brand-behavioral intentions as dependent variables, the scandal effect was insignificant for all intentions for The Rebels and The Villains. Concerning The Gentlemen, the scandal effect was significantly negative for entering the endorsed brand's website,

recommending the endorsed brand to others, as well as choosing the brand over competitors. All these intentions were significant on the 5% level.

Table 11: Mean Differences – Brand-Behavioral Intentions

The presented numbers were the mean values for the control group (no scandal) and the treatment group (scandal). The obtained F-values equaled 8,882 (look up information), 7,839 (like a post on social media), 17,497 (enter the endorsed brand's website), 10,424 (recommend the endorsed brand), 8,854 (enter a store or retailer), 7,446 (choose the endorsed brand over competitors) and 3,665 (purchase the brand). Some of the hypotheses were supported due to significant results. N=366.

Brand-Behavioral Intentions	Type of Intention	No Scandal	Scandal	Std. Dev. _{NS}	Std. Dev. _S	p-value
The Gentlemen	[...] look up information [...]	4,67	3,95	1,85	2,00	0,370
	[...] like a post on social media [...]	3,59	2,75	2,03	1,89	0,223
	[...] enter the endorsed brand's website [...]	4,93	3,87	1,91	1,87	0,029**
	[...] recommend the endorsed brand [...]	4,80	3,67	2,00	1,73	0,036**
	[...] enter [...] store or retailer [...]	5,21	4,34	1,86	1,71	0,213
	[...] choose [...] over competitors [...]	5,23	4,08	1,76	1,66	0,036**
	[...] purchase [...]	4,72	4,07	1,91	2,04	0,687
The Rebels	[...] look up information [...]	4,27	4,03	1,74	1,44	0,988
	[...] like a post on social media [...]	3,21	2,90	1,93	1,79	0,965
	[...] enter the endorsed brand's website [...]	3,90	3,62	1,56	1,66	0,969
	[...] recommend the endorsed brand [...]	4,58	3,77	1,75	1,63	0,284
	[...] enter [...] store or retailer [...]	3,79	3,62	1,77	1,57	0,998
	[...] choose [...] over competitors [...]	4,56	3,77	1,72	1,67	0,325
	[...] purchase [...]	3,98	3,47	1,99	1,75	0,860
The Villains	[...] look up information [...]	2,92	3,25	1,52	1,67	0,951
	[...] like a post on social media [...]	1,84	2,33	1,13	1,54	0,783
	[...] enter the endorsed brand's website [...]	2,37	2,92	1,24	1,63	0,653
	[...] recommend the endorsed brand [...]	2,85	3,33	1,70	1,95	0,826
	[...] enter [...] store or retailer [...]	3,26	3,95	1,78	2,04	0,477
	[...] choose [...] over competitors [...]	3,52	3,78	2,16	1,92	0,985
	[...] purchase [...]	3,34	3,63	2,35	2,28	0,987

* Significant at 10% level

** Significant at 5% level

*** Significant at 1% level

H2a: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *look up information* about the endorsed brand, compared to athletes with low moral character

NOT SUPPORTED

H2b: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *like a post on social media* about the endorsed brand, compared to athletes with low moral character

NOT SUPPORTED

H2c: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *enter the endorsed brand's website*, compared to athletes with low moral character
SUPPORTED

H2d: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *recommend the endorsed brand*, compared to athletes with low moral character
SUPPORTED

H2e: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character a negative effect on the intention to *enter the endorsed brand's store or retailer*, compared to athletes with low moral character
NOT SUPPORTED

H2f: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *choose the endorsed brand over competitors*, compared to athletes with low moral character
SUPPORTED

H2g: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *purchase the endorsed brand's products*, compared to athletes with low moral character
NOT SUPPORTED

4.1.3 Behavioral Congruence

Behavioral congruence concerns the expectedness of the scandal in relation to the athlete's personality. When looking at this congruence, The Gentlemen exhibited a significantly higher score than the other athlete groups on the 1% level. The Villains and The Rebels did not differ from one another significantly.

Table 12: Between-Group Comparison – Behavioral Congruence

The presented numbers were the mean values for the control group (no scandal) and the treatment group (scandal). The obtained F-value equaled 27,527. A high score indicated high congruence, i.e. low surprise. The hypothesis was supported as The Gentlemen differed significantly from The Rebels and the Villains. N=366.

Behavioral Congruence	Scandal	Std. Dev.s	Multiple Comparisons		p-value
The Gentlemen	2,59	1,52	The Gentlemen	The Rebels	0,000***
The Rebels	3,87	1,40			
The Villains	4,51	1,66		The Villains	0,000***

* Significant at 10% level
 ** Significant at 5% level
 *** Significant at 1% level

H3: The *behavioral congruence* will be lower for athletes with high moral character, compared to athletes with low moral character
SUPPORTED

4.1.4 Likeability

Regarding the first personality dimension, likeability, both The Gentlemen and The Rebels exhibited a significant scandal effect at the 1% level, whereas scores for The Villains remained intact. The Gentlemen and The Rebels showed the highest likeability throughout, differing significantly at the 1% level from The Villains.

Table 13: Mean Differences - Likeability

The presented numbers were the mean values for the control group (no scandal) and the treatment group (scandal). The obtained F-value equaled 70,831. The hypothesis was supported due to significant results. N=366.

Likeability	No Scandal	Scandal	Std. Dev. _{NS}	Std. Dev. _s	p-value
The Gentlemen	6,13	4,98	0,90	1,47	0,000***
The Rebels	6,09	4,78	1,07	1,62	0,000***
The Villains	3,45	2,77	1,14	1,27	0,116

* Significant at 10% level

** Significant at 5% level

*** Significant at 1% level

H4: A scandal involving likeable athletes causes a negative effect on their *likeability*, compared to non-likeable athletes
SUPPORTED

4.1.5 Moral Character

Concerning the second personality dimension, moral character, The Gentlemen exhibited a significant scandal effect at the 1% level, whereas the scores for the other athlete groups remained intact. The Gentlemen had higher moral character throughout, differing significantly at the 1% level from The Rebels and The Villains.

Table 14: Mean Differences – Moral Character

The presented numbers were the mean values for the control group (no scandal) and the treatment group (scandal). The obtained F-value equaled 74,858. The hypothesis was supported due to significant results. N=366.

Moral Character	No Scandal	Scandal	Std. Dev. _{NS}	Std. Dev. _s	p-value
The Gentlemen	5,77	4,98	1,02	1,26	0,025**
The Rebels	3,00	2,97	1,26	1,49	1,000
The Villains	2,96	2,50	1,11	1,04	0,483

* Significant at 10% level

** Significant at 5% level

*** Significant at 1% level

H5: A scandal involving athletes will high moral character causes a negative effect on their *moral character*, compared to athletes with low moral character
SUPPORTED

4.1.6 Brand Identification

When examining brand identification, the consumer-brand congruence, athletes with high moral character exhibited a significant scandal effect at the 1% level. Scores for athletes with low moral character remained intact.

Table 15: Mean Differences – Brand Identification

The presented numbers were the mean values for the control group (no scandal) and the treatment group (scandal). The obtained F-value equaled 7,312. The hypothesis was supported due to significant results. N=366.

Brand Identification	No Scandal	Scandal	Std. Dev._{NS}	Std. Dev._s	p-value
The Gentlemen	3,84	2,90	1,60	1,43	0,040**
The Rebels	3,87	3,38	1,62	1,56	0,685
The Villains	2,58	3,00	1,34	1,61	0,790

* Significant at 10% level

** Significant at 5% level

*** Significant at 1% level

H6: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on consumers' *identification with the endorsed brand*, compared to athletes with low moral character
SUPPORTED

4.1.7 Athlete-Behavioral Intentions

Examining the athlete-behavioral intentions as dependent variables, the scandal-effect was insignificant for all intentions for The Villains. Regarding The Rebels, however, the intention to like a post on social media decreased significantly at the 5% level. Concerning The Gentlemen, the scandal effect was significantly negative for liking a post on social media (1% level) and for watching the athlete play or reading an article about the athlete (5% level).

Table 16: Mean Differences – Athlete-Behavioral Intentions

The presented numbers were the mean values for the control group (no scandal) and the treatment group (scandal). The obtained F-values equaled 4,453 (look up information about the athlete), 4,619 (ask a question about the athlete), 22,048 (like a post on social media), 13,419 (watch the athlete play/read an article) and 5,967 (discuss or post about the athlete). Some of the hypotheses were supported due to significant results. The intention to like a post about the athlete on social media was also significantly lowered for The Rebels. N=366.

Athlete-Behavioral Intentions	Type of Intention	No Scandal	Scandal	Std. Dev. _{NS}	Std. Dev. _S	p-value
The Gentlemen	[...] look up information [...]	4,39	3,49	1,86	2,05	0,237
	[...] ask a question [...]	4,08	3,51	1,73	2,04	0,675
	[...] like a post on social media [...]	4,25	2,77	2,15	1,90	0,002***
	[...] watch the athlete play/read an article [...]	4,89	3,70	1,75	1,90	0,023**
	[...] discuss or post about the athlete [...]	2,77	2,30	2,03	1,56	0,791
The Rebels	[...] look up information [...]	4,26	4,15	1,85	1,85	1,000
	[...] ask a question [...]	4,15	3,97	1,80	1,72	0,998
	[...] like a post on social media [...]	3,30	1,98	1,94	2,08	0,044**
	[...] watch the athlete play/read an article [...]	4,89	3,70	1,74	1,83	0,986
	[...] discuss or post about the athlete [...]	2,79	2,88	1,82	2,12	1,000
The Villains	[...] look up information [...]	3,16	3,43	1,91	1,91	0,987
	[...] ask a question [...]	3,11	3,05	1,81	1,56	1,000
	[...] like a post on social media [...]	1,98	1,87	1,35	1,33	1,000
	[...] watch the athlete play/read an article [...]	3,10	3,82	1,80	1,75	0,430
	[...] discuss or post about the athlete [...]	1,56	2,08	1,08	1,31	0,722

* Significant at 10% level

** Significant at 5% level

*** Significant at 1% level

H7a: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *look up information about the athlete*, compared to athletes with low moral character
NOT SUPPORTED

H7b: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *ask a question about the athlete*, compared to athletes with low moral character
NOT SUPPORTED

H7c: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *watch the athlete play/read an article about the athlete*, compared to athletes with low moral character
SUPPORTED

H7d: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *like a post on social media about athlete*, compared to athletes with low moral character
PARTLY SUPPORTED

H7e: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the intention to *discuss or post about athlete publicity on social media*, compared to athletes with low moral character
NOT SUPPORTED

4.1.8 Trustworthiness

With regard to trustworthiness, The Gentlemen exhibited a significant scandal effect at the 1% level, whereas the scores for the other athlete groups remained intact. The Gentlemen and The Rebels exhibited higher trustworthiness throughout, differing significantly at the 1% level from The Villains.

Table 17: Mean Differences – Trustworthiness

The presented numbers were the mean values for the control group (no scandal) and the treatment group (scandal). The obtained F-value equaled 55,198. The hypothesis was partly supported due to significant results, that also included the The Rebels. N=366.

Trustworthiness	No Scandal	Scandal	Std. Dev. _{NS}	Std. Dev. _s	p-value
The Gentlemen	5,65	4,36	1,12	1,49	0,000***
The Rebels	5,51	4,52	1,11	1,43	0,003***
The Villains	3,11	2,63	1,27	1,27	0,520

* Significant at 10% level
 ** Significant at 5% level
 *** Significant at 1% level

H8: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the *trustworthiness* of the athlete, compared to athletes with low moral character
 PARTLY SUPPORTED

4.1.9 Similarity

With regard to similarity, The Gentlemen exhibited a significant scandal effect at the 1% level, whereas the scores for the other athlete groups remained intact. The Gentlemen exhibited higher similarity throughout, differing significantly at the 1% level from The Rebels and The Villains.

Table 18: Mean Differences – Similarity

The presented numbers were the mean values for the control group (no scandal) and the treatment group (scandal). The obtained F-value equaled 35,428. The hypothesis was supported due to significant results. N=366.

Similarity	No Scandal	Scandal	Std. Dev. _{NS}	Std. Dev. _s	p-value
The Gentlemen	4,30	3,25	1,30	1,20	0,000***
The Rebels	3,22	2,66	1,44	1,16	0,207
The Villains	2,04	1,97	0,78	0,85	1,000

* Significant at 10% level
 ** Significant at 5% level
 *** Significant at 1% level

H9: A scandal involving athletes with high moral character causes a negative effect on the *similarity* with the athlete, compared to athletes with low moral character
 SUPPORTED

4.1.10 Match-up

When examining the congruence between athletes and their endorsed brands, no athlete group exhibited a significant scandal effect. With respect to that the endorsed brands in the study were unique to each athlete and chosen for the purpose of ecological validity, inter-group comparisons were avoided.

Table 19: Mean Differences – Match-up

The presented numbers were the mean values for the control group (no scandal) and the treatment group (scandal). The obtained F-value equaled 8,865. The hypothesis was not supported due to insignificant results. N=366.

Match-up	No Scandal	Scandal	Std. Dev. _{NS}	Std. Dev. _s	p-value
The Gentlemen	5,80	5,39	1,38	1,44	0,769
The Rebels	4,65	4,73	1,44	1,38	1,000
The Villains	4,50	4,51	1,42	1,45	1,000

* Significant at 10% level

** Significant at 5% level

*** Significant at 1% level

H10: Regardless of athlete category, a scandal involving an athlete will have no effect on the *match-up* with the endorsed brand
SUPPORTED

4.2 Simple Mediation Results & Analysis

With respect to the countless potential mediating relationships, the presented findings are based on the hypotheses and the found significant relationships from the mean-comparison analysis, as these indicate areas of further examination. As the direct effect c'^5 (X on Y) was already established – the scandal had a significant effect on the examined brand attitude and brand-behavioral intentions – the additional analysis aimed at explaining the indirect effect, why the relationship exists through partial mediation, omitting full mediation from the analysis (Zhao, Lynch Jr. and Chen, 2010). The mediation variables are presented in Table 20.

The tables below are presented on the basis of the athlete categories and the dependent variables that yielded significant results in the mean-comparison analysis. Four dependent variables were examined: brand attitude, and the brand-behavioral intentions of entering a brand's website, recommending the brand, and choosing the brand over competitors. The paths represent the significant mediating variable for each dependent variable.

⁵ Some papers use c as the direct effect and c' as the total effect, opposite of this thesis.

Table 20: Mediation Variables

Factor	Type of Variable
Scandal	Independent Variable
Likeability	Potential Mediators
Moral Character	
Similarity	
Trustworthiness	
Brand Identification	
Brand Attitude*	
Like Post about an Athlete	
Watch the Athlete Play/	Dependent Variables
Read an Article about the Athlete	
Brand Attitude	
Enter the Brand's Website	
Recommend the Brand	Dependent Variables
Choose the Brand over Competitors	

* Brand attitude was examined as a potential mediator just for the brand-behavioral intentions

4.2.1 The Gentlemen

When examining brand attitude for The Gentlemen, brand identification proved to have a mediating effect. The indirect effect made up the majority of the total effect. Thus, the scandal decreased brand identification, which in turn, decreased the brand attitude.

Table 21: The Gentlemen – Brand Attitude

Scandal was set as the independent variable (X) for all mediations. The path represented the mediating variable (M). Brand attitude was set as the dependent variable (Y) for all mediations. The mediations were conducted within a 95% confidence interval and the bootstrap sample was set to 5 000. The total effect of X on Y, the c-path, equaled 0,9016. The mediation was complementary. N=366.

Path: Brand Identification	beta	p	LLCI	ULCI
a	0,9508	0,0007	0,4069	1,4948
b	0,5842	0,0000	0,4703	0,6982
Direct: c'	0,3461	0,0591	-0,0136	0,7058
Indirect: a * b	0,5555	-	0,2279	0,9128
Total: c	0,9016	-	-	-

When examining the intention to enter the brand's website for The Gentlemen, brand identification proved to have a mediating effect. The indirect effect made up the majority of the total effect. Thus, the scandal decreased brand identification, which in turn, decreased the intention to enter the brand's website.

Table 22: The Gentlemen – Enter the Brand's Website

Scandal was set as the independent variable (X) for all mediations. The path represented the mediating variable (M). The intention to enter a brand's website was set as the dependent variable (Y) for all mediations. The mediations were conducted within a 95% confidence interval and the bootstrap sample was set to 5 000. The total effect of X on Y, the c-path, equaled 1,0655. The mediation was complementary. N=366.

Path: Brand Identification	beta	p	LLCI	ULCI
a	0,9508	0,0007	0,4069	1,4948
b	0,6729	0,0000	0,4826	0,08632
Direct: c'	0,4258	0,1630	-0,1748	1,0263
Indirect: a * b	0,6398	-	0,2705	1,0391
Total: c	1,0656	-	-	-
Path: Brand attitude				
a	0,9016	0,0002	0,4351	1,3682
b	0,8270	0,0000	0,6103	1,0437
Direct: c'	0,3200	0,2872	-0,2727	0,9125
Indirect: a * b	0,7456	-	0,3541	1,1711
Total: c	1,0656	-	-	-

When examining the intention to recommend the brand for The Gentlemen, brand identification and brand attitude proved to have mediating effects. In both cases, the indirect effect made up the majority of the total effect. Thus, the scandal decreased brand identification and brand attitude, which in turn, decreased the intention to recommend the brand.

Table 23: The Gentlemen – Recommend the Brand

Scandal was set as the independent variable (X) for all mediations. The path represented the mediating variable (M). The intention to recommend the brand was set as the dependent variable (Y) for all mediations. The mediations were conducted within a 95% confidence interval and the bootstrap sample was set to 5 000. The total effect of X on Y, the c-path, equaled 1,1311. The mediation was complementary. N=366.

Path: Brand Identification	beta	p	LLCI	ULCI
a	0,9508	0,0007	0,4069	1,4948
b	0,8293	0,0000	0,6640	0,9946
Direct: c'	0,3426	0,1960	-0,1791	0,8644
Indirect: a * b	0,7885	-	0,3445	1,2619
Total: c	1,1311	-	-	-
Path: Brand Attitude				
a	0,9016	0,0002	0,4351	1,3682
b	0,9850	0,0000	0,7953	1,1747
Direct: c'	0,2430	0,3554	-0,2756	0,7616
Indirect: a * b	0,8881	-	0,4180	1,3400
Total: c	1,1311	-	-	-

When examining the intention to choose the brand over competitors for The Gentlemen, brand identification, brand attitude, and the intention to like a social-media post about the athlete

proved to have mediating effects. In the two former cases, the indirect effect made up the majority of the total effect. The latter had a substantially smaller indirect effect. Thus, the scandal decreased brand identification, brand attitude and the intention to like a social-media post about the athlete, which in turn, decreased the intention to choose the brand over competitors.

Table 24: The Gentlemen – Choose the Brand Over Competitors

Scandal was set as the independent variable (X) for all mediations. The path represented the mediating variable (M). The intention to choose the brand over competitors was set as the dependent variable (Y) for all mediations. The mediations were conducted within a 95% confidence interval and the bootstrap sample was set to 5 000. The total effect of X on Y, the c-path, equaled 1,1476. The mediation was complementary. N=366.

Path: Brand Identification	beta	p	LLCI	ULCI
a	0,9508	0,0007	0,4069	1,4948
b	0,7565	0,0000	0,6055	0,9076
Direct: c'	0,4283	0,0778	-0,0485	0,9049
Indirect: a * b	0,7193	-	0,2985	1,1417
Total: c	1,1476	-	-	-
Path: Brand Attitude				
a	0,9016	0,0002	0,4351	1,3682
b	0,9808	0,0000	0,8228	1,1387
Direct: c'	0,2633	0,2299	-0,1687	0,6952
Indirect: a * b	0,8843	-	0,4193	1,3536
Total: c	1,1476	-	-	-
Path: Like a Social-Media Post about the Athlete				
a	1,4754	0,0001	0,7479	2,2029
b	0,1613	0,0035	0,0115	0,3111
Direct: c'	0,9096	0,0059	0,2674	1,5517
Indirect: a * b	0,2380	-	0,0188	0,5288
Total: c	1,1476	-	-	-

4.2.2 The Rebels

When examining brand attitude for The Rebels, likeability, trustworthiness, and the intention to like a social-media post about the athlete proved to have mediating effects. In the former case, the indirect effect made up the majority of the total effect. The two latter had a substantially smaller indirect effect. Thus, the scandal decreased likeability, trustworthiness and the intention to like a social-media post about the athlete, which in turn, decreased brand attitude.

Table 25: The Rebels – Brand Attitude

Scandal was set as the independent variable (X) for all mediations. The path represented the mediating variable (M). Brand attitude was set as the dependent variable (Y) for all mediations. The mediations were conducted within a 95% confidence interval and the bootstrap sample was set to 5 000. The total effect of X on Y, the c-path, equaled 0,6187. The mediation was complementary. N=366.

Path: Likeability	beta	p	LLCI	ULCI
a	1,3082	0,0000	0,8172	1,7992
b	0,3367	0,0000	0,1826	0,4908
Direct: c'	0,1782	0,4492	-0,2865	0,6429
Indirect: a * b	0,4405	-	0,1962	0,7116
Total: c	0,6187	-	-	-
Path:				
Trustworthiness				
a	0,9941	0,0000	0,5371	1,4511
b	0,1935	0,0302	0,0189	0,3682
Direct: c'	0,4263	0,0778	-0,0482	0,9008
Indirect: a * b	0,1924	-	0,0024	0,4235
Total: c	0,6187	-	-	-
Path: Like a				
Social-Media Post				
about the Athlete				
a	1,1194	0,0026	0,3995	1,8392
b	0,1877	0,0008	0,0799	0,2956
Direct: c'	0,4086	0,0723	-0,0376	0,8547
Indirect: a * b	0,2101	-	0,0531	0,4220
Total: c	0,6187	-	-	-

When examining the intention to recommend the brand for The Rebels, likeability and the intention to like a social-media post about the athlete proved to have mediating effects. In both cases, the indirect effect was relatively small. However, the scandal decreased likeability and the intention to like a social-media post about the athlete, which in turn, decreased the intention to recommend the brand.

Table 26: The Rebels – Recommend the Brand

Scandal was set as the independent variable (X) for all mediations. The path represented the mediating variable (M). Brand attitude was set as the dependent variable (Y) for all mediations. The mediations were conducted within a 95% confidence interval and the bootstrap sample was set to 5 000. The total effect of X on Y, the c-path, equaled 0,8140. The mediation was complementary. N=366.

Path: Likeability	beta	p	LLCI	ULCI
a	1,3082	0,0000	0,8172	1,7992
b	0,2494	0,0265	0,0297	0,4692
Direct: c'	0,4877	0,1477	-0,1749	1,1503
Indirect: a * b	0,3263	-	0,0272	0,6113
Total: c	0,8140	-	-	-
Path: Like a Social-Media Post about the Athlete				
a	1,1194	0,0026	0,3995	1,8392
b	0,2400	0,0016	0,0933	0,3867
Direct: c'	0,5453	0,0778	-0,0616	1,1522
Indirect: a * b	0,2687	-	0,0623	0,5513
Total: c	0,8140	-	-	-

5. Discussion

This section provides a discussion of the analyses and results above. The supported and rejected hypotheses are discussed and related to the theory section of the thesis. It articulates the main finding – the scandal-sensitivity of The Gentlemen – and connects it to the influence of good and bad and the importance of congruence in an athlete-endorsement setting. The section is divided into the three sub-sections: the consumer's relational change, the consumer's attitudinal change, and the consumer's change in intentions.

The primary finding, that The Gentlemen are more scandal-sensitive than other athlete groups, is well-supported in the literature. From a scandal-theory perspective, the overall decrease in multiple variables can be explained by the transgression of norms and values. These athletes fall short of the standards they claim to have and communicate to the public. From a social-psychology perspective, the incongruence between the expressed high moral character and the low standards of the misconduct disrupts social schemas and perceptions of what the athletes truly represent. Concerning the behavioral congruence, The Villains and the Rebels show a substantially higher degree of fit. They differ significantly from other The Gentlemen and therefore trigger a lower level of cognitive dissonance in the mind of the observer, which reflects in a smaller decrease in the variables. Deriving from previous social categorizations of these athletes, the misconduct is not contradicting pre-established associations and schemas. Villains acting immorally does not alter the relation, attitude, or behavior toward the athlete or brand. This is mostly true for The Rebels as well. If a consumer has cognitively accepted the collaboration and if the association with an athlete from these groups is established, the endorsed brands run a lower risk of sudden significant losses as a result of a scandal. Conversely, a Gentleman exhibit a much higher degree of cognitive dissonance, as the misconduct does contradict social schemas. With this as the foundation, three areas of interest are discussed: the consumer's attitudinal, relational, and intentional change.

5.1 The Consumer's Relational Change

The first consequence of the scandal was the change in or confirmation of social schemas and mental connections that consumers possessed connected to the athlete. As illustrated in the results and analysis above, the scandal effect was often present for The Gentlemen, occasionally present for The Rebels and never present for The Villains. Thus, in the two former cases, as the social schemas changed, so did the consumers' relationship with the athlete.

Among the examined factors, four were connected to the character and nature of the athlete. Firstly, the *likeability* toward an athlete decreased significantly for the likeable athletes as suggested by previous literature, as the present experiences were of a different nature than previous. Apart from the discrepancy between past and present actions that explained the scandal effect for The Gentlemen, the mere negative nature of the committed action reflected badly on all athletes. Also, The Villains showed tendencies of decreased likeability, although it was not supported statistically. Moreover, the increased standard deviation for the treatment group suggested that consumers had conflicted feelings regarding how likeable they thought an athlete was after a scandal. This could explain the intuition behind maintaining an endorsement relationship with an athlete, from a firm perspective. Moreover, the decrease in likeability proved

to have a mediating effect on brand attitude and the intention to recommend the brand for The Rebels. It appeared that the decrease in likeability, as a result of the scandal, negatively spilled over on the brand in terms of attitude and the recommendation intention. Thus, the Source Attractiveness Model was partly accurate in terms of endorser effectiveness being influenced by the endorser's likeability.

Secondly, the *moral character* of the athlete decreased significantly for The Gentlemen as a result of the behavioral incongruence. Low-moral athletes do not have, nor communicate, the same level of standards toward the public. Thus, they did not exhibit any significant losses in terms of moral character.

Thirdly, *similarity* was significantly lowered for The Gentlemen. Being both likeable and possessing high moral, makes it desirable to appear similar to that group. Thus, the control group perceived itself to be more similar to The Gentlemen as opposed to the treatment group, where the athlete had misbehaved. Individuals assessed themselves as similar to normative behavior, while distancing themselves from controversial actions. People who commit these actions are attributed negative assumptions and found to disagree with the consumer on fundamental values and are consequently not perceived attractive on an interpersonal level.

Fourthly, *trustworthiness* was significantly lowered for The Gentlemen and for The Rebels as well. Thus, despite the low moral character of The Rebels, they were perceived trustworthy and were prone to a decrease in trustworthiness when misconducting. It appears that credibility, being partly explained by trustworthiness in the Source Credibility Model, was separated from the moral character. Moreover, the decrease in trustworthiness proved to have a mediating effect on brand attitude for The Rebels. It appeared that the decrease in trustworthiness, as a result of the scandal, negatively spilled over on brand attitude. Thus, the Source Credibility Model was partly accurate in terms of endorser effectiveness being influenced by the endorser's trustworthiness.

Common for all of the four factors regarding the athlete's character is that the extensive processing of negative information strikes the hardest in the cases of The Gentlemen. The incongruence of their behavior received more attention, energy and processing than positive, congruent behavior. The unexpected had long-gone effects, suggesting that the low-moral and especially The Villains could exhibit an extra positive effect if an action on the opposite side of the good-versus-bad spectrum was to be the stimulus of examination.

In addition to the four factors that regard the consumer-athlete relationship, a scandal also affected the relationship between the consumer and the brand. Concerning The Gentlemen, the *brand identification* that consumers experienced appeared to lessen as an effect of the scandal. This indicated that the negativity of the scandal transferred from the athlete to the brand, according to the transferability model. Interestingly, brand identification had multiple mediating effects. Concerning The Gentlemen, brand identification mediated brand attitudes well as the three examined brand-behavioral intentions. It appeared that the decrease in brand identification, as a result of the scandal, not only made consumers like the brand less, but also decreased the intentions to enter its website, recommend it, and choose it over competing brands. Thus, balance theory seems to explain the relation between consumers, athletes, and brands. As

observed, similarity and brand identification decreased significantly for The Gentlemen, while the match-up remained intact. This suggests that consumers balance newly acquired negative associations to the athlete with the endorsed brand, and therefore distance themselves from both.

5.2 The Consumer's Attitudinal Change

The second consequence of the scandal is the transfer of the athlete's misconduct to the endorsed brand. Instinctively, the logic of transferability is associated with the upsides, or rewards, of endorsement initiatives. As a consequence, companies tend to partner with appreciated athletes with desirable sets of features and values. However, in the case of negative events, the logic of transferring seems to work in an unintended, unfavorable way. Especially in the case of The Gentlemen, whose behavior contradicted earlier accumulated goodwill and was therefore incongruent, these actions attracted extra attention and caused stronger negative reactions. Potentially reinforced by a general negativity bias, this suggested that a misconduct was more heavily weighted in an evaluation of The Gentlemen. All things considered, the risks and rewards appear to be higher when engaging in endorsement relationships with The Gentlemen. Consequently, the potential peaks and troughs of the endorsement relationship are more extreme.

Logic of transferability explained why the disliked, incongruent behavior of The Gentlemen translated to a significantly lower degree of *brand attitude*. The misconduct of the athlete was transferred to the brand and subsequently consumers balanced the perception of the two entities to avoid cognitive dissonance and create psychological balance. However, in the case of low-moral athletes, the relatively small scandal effect translated into smaller cognitive dissonance and less extensive psychological processes. Thus, the pre-established balance between the two entities did not require re-evaluation, as mirrored in the insignificant results for these groups.

Moreover, the decrease in brand attitude proved to have several mediating effects for The Gentlemen. Following the scandal, the decreased brand attitude mediated the decrease in all examined brand-behavioral intentions, i.e. to enter the brand's website, to recommend the brand, and to choose it over competitors. This appears intuitive as the intentions toward a brand are naturally connected to the overall attitude toward it.

Similarly, balance theory helps explain the insignificant results of the *match-up* hypothesis. As the movement between the two entities is positively correlated, the athlete and brand were perceived to be in line with each other, regardless of the scandal stimulus. This suggests that, in the eyes of the consumers, the brand associates itself cognitively with the athlete, which makes it difficult for the brand to distance itself from the actions committed by an athlete once an endorsement partnership is established. As a result, the use of an athlete as a communication channel should be preceded by a careful evaluation of the characteristics of and associations to the athlete. This is a natural implication, as negative events for The Gentlemen translated into negative attitudes toward the endorsed brands.

5.3 The Consumer's Change in Intentions

The third and final consequence of the scandal is the change in behavioral intentions toward the athlete and the brand. As consumers changed both their relational status with and attitudes toward the athlete and brand, the behavioral intentions of consuming the two entities were affected. Concerning the *athlete-behavioral intentions*, the two significant results showed a decrease in the intentions to like a post on social media about the athlete and to watch the athlete play or to read about the athlete. The former is connected to expressing public affection and sympathies. In the case of misconduct, consumers want to distance themselves from that behavior and its associations in public, and not liking a social-media post is a form of passive, disapproving action. Similar to likeability, this proved to be the case for all likeable athletes, rather than solely for The Gentlemen. Thus, the pure disappointment seemed to be the distinguishing reason behind the reluctance to like a post about the athlete. The latter is connected to investments in time and money, which significantly decreased for The Gentlemen involved in a scandal. This suggests that consumers, in the case of active athletes, did not fully separate between the person and the athlete. In the case of retired athletes, consumers did not feel as eager to consume news about the athlete, potentially due to the experienced disappointment. This means that consumers are also intrinsically motivated to distance themselves from the athlete, as opposed to the former intention that also is connected to extrinsic motivation.

Interestingly, the intention to like a social-media post about the athlete mediated the intention to choose the brand over competitors for The Gentlemen. Regarding The Rebels, the same intention mediated both brand attitude and the intention to recommend the brand. Overall, there seems to be a tendency where the intention to consume the athlete spills over to the attitude and consumption of the endorsed brand.

Turning to the insignificant results, the intentions to look up information and ask a question about the athlete indicated a degree of curiosity. These intentions enable a consumption of the athlete scandal in the safety of one's own private life, under no substantial risk nor public exposure. According to scandal theory, this silent consumption enables consumers to fantasize about the misconduct of the athlete. This highlights the other aspect of scandals which elicits positive emotions of excitement. Lastly, discussing or posting about the athlete is by nature a high-threshold public intention that remained low after the scandal. By extension, the decrease in the consumption of the athletes – whether it concerns liking a public post, watching a game, or reading an article – leads to decreased exposure for the endorsed brand.

Concerning the *brand-behavioral intentions*, the three significant results, all for The Gentlemen, showed a decrease in the intentions to enter the website, recommend the brand, and to choose it over competitors. The former indicated consumers' will to distance themselves from the main digital communication channel of the brand, as a result of a spill-over effect from the badwill of the athlete. The second intention captured the risk to jeopardize one's judgment and credibility in the eyes of others. As the athlete lost credibility as an endorser, one did not want to take on a similar endorsing role and recommend brand. The latter articulated a preference rather than an action. Choosing a brand over other brands expresses an attitudinal standpoint, which is lessened

as an athlete endorsing the brand is misconducting. As the intention carries attitudinal characteristics, the actual purchase is not directly linked to it.

Turning to the insignificant results, the intention to look up information carried the same intuition as in the athlete case and is explained by an element of excitement. The same analogy is not applicable to the intention to like a social-media post, as brands and athletes, the sources of the posts are inherently different. Brands lack the human characteristics that elicit strong emotions and the desire to express a connection with them. The threshold to like a post of a brand requires a high loyalty toward the brand and is therefore considerably higher. Using the logic of social psychology and the overall purpose of athlete endorsement, athletes possess the ability to get closer to consumers, a trait that brands cannot possess. Moreover, the intention to enter a store or retailer remained intact for all athlete groups. As low-involvement products are sold in stores and at retailers that consumers naturally visit, the behavior is unlikely to be affected. Similarly, high-involvement products are sold in stores and at retailers that consumers rarely visit, yielding the same outcome. Lastly, the intention to purchase was also insignificantly affected. For high-involvement products, the likelihood of a purchase is low, regardless of a scandal. For low-involvement products the same does not apply, as consumers more regularly consume the brands and have an option to change this behavior. Even though brand attitude decreased significantly, this did not translate to a changed purchasing behavior. This finding supports the earlier mentioned disconnection and relatively low correlation between attitudes and behavior.

6. Conclusions

The conclusions of this study are presented below, effectively summarizing the key findings from the prior discussion in terms of implications for the purpose and aim of the thesis. The concluding section furthermore presents the theoretical contribution and managerial implications of the thesis, accounts for possible limitations of the study, and finally presents suggestions for further research based on the findings and limitations discussed.

Many celebrity athletes possess prominent and desirable physical and psychological attributes that brands generally want to be associated with and capitalize on. The upsides are intuitively understood and theoretically well-grounded. The downsides, however, have received far less attention both in practice and in theory. In the shift from unattainable superstars to perceived friends, the relationship between consumers and celebrity athletes turns more informal, intense, and direct. Communicatively, the shift increases the authenticity, trustworthiness, and effect of an athlete-brand collaboration. As brands, due to this, increase and shift investments and control to celebrity athletes as sources of their communication, the dependency on and the risks of the collaborations increase. The purpose of this thesis was to examine the scandal-sensitivity of different athlete-personality categories and gain an understanding for consumer response in a scandal setting surrounding the athlete. With respect to previous athlete scandals, the subsequent reaction of the market, and the undertaken actions of different stakeholders, the thesis highlights how these may differ depending on the personality of the athlete.

The congruence between the expressed character and the behavior of the athlete seems to be the decisive factor regarding consumer response to a scandal. In the case of low-moral athletes, the congruence is higher and therefore the pre-established social schemas are not disrupted. Thus, the consumer response is to a very large extent unaffected. On the contrary, regarding high-moral athletes, the incongruence between the expressed high moral character and the low standards of the misconduct yields significant negative effects on consumer response. When analyzing attitudinal change, balance theory is a critical component. It expresses the motive of cognitive consistency as a motivation for psychological balance. Doing so, they create an attitudinal balance in terms of a positive or negative symmetry, between two entities. Therefore, consumers assess the athlete and endorsed brand as either positive and positive or negative and negative. As a result, consumers tend to balance the disappointment toward high-moral athletes with the endorsed brands. This does not seem to be the case for low-moral athletes, as they express irrational and controversial personas, which reduces the disappointment and subsequently leaves other aspects unchanged. The psychological balance created by consumers does not seem to be driven by likeability. As a matter of fact, it is possible to like an athlete with low moral character, like the athlete less after a scandal, and still maintain attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the brand. In other words, the scandal is limited to effects on the athlete.

Conversely, regarding high-moral athletes – the types of athletes generally desired for and used in athlete-brand collaborations – the scandal has a negative effect that does spill over on the attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the brand. In that case, the consumer reaction is three-fold. One aspect regards changes in consumers' relation to athletes. The perception of the athletes changes on both personality dimensions, making the athletes less regarded by consumers

in terms of likeability and moral character. Simultaneously, their effectiveness as endorsers decrease as a result of reduced similarity, trustworthiness, and likeability. At the same time, the scandal seems to negatively affect the extent to which consumers identify with the endorsed brand. Another aspect concerns consumers' attitudes toward endorsed brands, as brand attitude decreases as a result of a scandal. This outcome is mediated by the several aspects of relational change consumers experience, which was also found true for The Rebels. Another way to look at it – as explained by balance theory and reflected by the intact match-up – is that the status of the athlete and the status of the brand seem positively correlated in the eyes of consumers. A third aspect concerns consumers' intentions toward the athlete and the brand, out of which some are affected. This suggests a spill-over effect from the athlete's misconduct to intentions toward the endorsed brand. As it does not translate to the final stage of the purchasing process, the short run effect on sales is arguably limited. However, the decrease in intentions that capture earlier stages in the process indicates more long-term, indirect negative effects on the brand.

6.1 Theoretical Contribution

Previous athlete-endorsement theory accurately depicts the basic dynamics of the industry and endorsements relationships. With respect to the imbalance regarding upsides and downsides portrayed in celebrity-endorsement literature, this thesis makes a relevant theoretical contribution by focusing on the latter. The study sheds light on the risks and pitfalls of commonly used and often successfully executed marketing collaborations. Regarding high-moral athletes, there appears to happen something in the minds of the consumers as a result of a scandal. The incongruence between the expressed high moral character and the low standards of the scandal contradicts the perception of who the athlete truly is. This incongruence disrupts the established social schemas and receives more attention and effort than their low-moral counterparts.

Where traditional marketing theories appear insufficient, the social-psychology perspective gives valuable insights and explanatory value to marketing initiatives centered around interpersonal relations. Previous literature on athlete endorsement, having the pure fame and desirable attributes of the athlete at focus, articulates one-size-fits-all models and concepts. This thesis puts emphasis on endorser personality and examines different athlete categories to try to explain the evident discrepancies in consumer response to misconduct. The main theoretical contribution is the moral character, the good versus bad, as the decisive factor in the evaluation of the athlete and the brand. In fact, this personality dimension proved to be more impactful than likeability in the aftermath of a scandal. With this as a foundation, the scandal-sensitivity was found to be a function of the moral character of the athlete. As a historically recurring dichotomy, the good versus bad is a natural and instinctive assessment in all interpersonal relations. This creates cognitive processes of information accumulation resulting in social categorization, stereotypes with expectations that are either confirmed or disrupted. By extension, this means that all positive associations consumers have toward The Gentlemen, who outperform other athlete groups on both personality dimensions, actually make them the most vulnerable.

Other things being equal, The Rebels are ideal endorsers from a risk-minimizing perspective. They are a likeable group of athletes that carry more positive associations than The Villains to transfer to the endorsed brand. Simultaneously, their low moral character makes them more robust than The Gentlemen when being involved in a scandal. The decrease in likeability and trustworthiness they exhibit does not translate to the intentions toward the brand. The Rebels are a sort of middle-of-the-road solution. The Villains are even more robust from a risk perspective, yet are unlikely to transfer positive associations at all. The Gentlemen might be the most risk-exposed, however they possess the greatest potential rewards.

6.2 Implications

As the significance, tenure, and monetary commitment of athlete-endorsement deals increase, so does the complexity of whom to endorse. Currently, as a result of attempting to minimize risk and maximize reward, brands have a tendency to prefer likeable athletes with high moral character. As these are uncontroversial, the risk of misconduct is perceived to be low compared to other types of athletes. However, as proved to be the case in the study, The Gentlemen is the athlete category subject to the highest risk and potential loss when actually misconducting. Indeed, they are likeable and express the most desirable sets of values that can be transferred to the brand they endorse, which is the very purpose of engaging in such collaborations. In combination with the higher risk and more extensive deals, these celebrity athletes become assets of a more leveraged nature for the endorsed brands.

For managers, the most important consideration when engaging in athlete endorsements is the one of what associations a specific brand desires, and at what risks and costs these should be pursued. As found in the study, the three athlete categories yield different risk-reward profiles. The Gentlemen possess the highest potential rewards, but are subject to the highest risk. The Rebels possess relatively high potential rewards, given their limited exposure to risk. The Villains possess moderate potential rewards as they have a limited set of transferable positive attributes, but are subject to the lowest risk. All things considered, a brand must take into account what specific attributes it wants to be associated with, and to what cost. With pre-study I as the foundation, the endorsement cost seems to be a function of the number of positive attributes that the athletes possess. Taking risk into account, the findings suggest that The Rebels make out an area of untapped market potential.

For athletes and their management, the study has an interesting public-relation implication. In attempts to continuously improve and polish their athlete brand, in order to maximize their set of desirable attributes and attractiveness on the endorsement market, their scandal-sensitivity increases. Doing so could eventually back-fire as their risk-profile subsequently is enhanced. Regardless of ambition, it could be advantageous to occasionally express a rawer, imperfect, and more authentic side to the public.

For academics, given the increased digitalization and growth of social media, traditional marketing theories appear to be partly insufficient. The shift has increased the occurrence of interpersonal marketing, suggesting that social-psychology theory could have additional

explanatory value. Despite the fact that the transfer from the physical to the digital era has been cemented, the inherent need for human interaction remains intact. Celebrities are a tool that can partly satisfy this need, which makes the understanding of their interactions and impact imperative going forward.

6.3 Limitations

In section 1.4, several delimitations were applied to ensure a conductible study given the limited time and resources at hand. In addition, the critique of the four studies has been articulated throughout the methodology chapter, being more study-specific. The limitations are connected to both the conscious decisions and the throughout the study occurring issues and considerations.

A foundational limitation of the study are the samples upon which the athlete categorization, the scandal selection, and consumer response to the scandal were measured. Having samples that mainly consisted of Swedish business students in their twenties captured the opinions and reactions of a future generation of consumers, within a limited geographical market. Thus, alternative samples could have yielded different results. Moreover, the thesis examines the very elite of world sports. It merely includes athletes that are globally recognized, extremely successful, and take on a role as ambassadors for their sports. Thus, the consumer reactions may have differed if local celebrity athletes were to be examined.

Considering time as a factor, two aspects are important. Firstly, the experiments were conducted within an interval of a few minutes. A real-world effect could have been studied over a period of months. Therefore, the initial exposure could have led to exaggerated evaluations that do not hold over time. Secondly, the fact that some athletes were active and performed professionally during the time frame of the study, could have affected the results. Similarly, retired athletes could have been surrounded by influential news and events. Lastly, the brands used in the study were athlete-specific. This had the advantage of ecologically validating the study, however at the cost of not being able to isolate the absolute endorsement effect of the athlete groups. Using a generic brand, same for all athletes, would have allowed for such comparisons.

6.4 Future Research

The findings of this thesis shed light on the uncharted area of the scandal-sensitivity of different athlete groups. This study was performed on six extremely famous and successful male celebrity athletes. The stimulus regarded the most severely assessed scandal and included both high-involvement and low-involvement products from brand across a wide range of industries.

Future studies could change one or several of the above components. Firstly, studies on other types of samples could highlight differences across geographical markets, age groups, and socio-economic groups.

For example, studies on local celebrity athletes could be performed on exclusively domestic samples. This could emphasize discrepancies between assessments on the domestic market as compared to the global mainstream market. Moreover, older generations of consumers could turn out to have other types of consumer behavior, giving further insights into how to influence them. Secondly, studies on women could capture gender-specific evaluations, contrasts, and biases. Male and female athletes are active on different arenas, where recognition, interest, and professionalization are rapidly increasing. Thirdly, studies regarding other types of scandals could yield effects that are of different natures and magnitude. Fourthly, studies could compare products on, for example, the basis of high-involvement versus low-involvement, hedonic versus utilitarian, and traditional brands versus new brands. This could shed light on when and where the risks and rewards of athlete endorsement are the greatest. Lastly, studies that focus solely on sports brands could yield different implications as compared to brands that are less related to the athlete and its sport. To conclude, further research on the fast-growing sports industry could be related to multiple phenomena. As this study shows, synthesizing concepts from different theoretical domiciles could have substantial explanatory value and yield novel insights valuable to all stakeholders in the sports industry.

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