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Heroes in sport: assessing celebrity endorser effectiveness

Keywords

Athlete
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RESEARCH PAPER

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Abstract

The use of celebrities, and particularly athletes, to influence consumers and sell products is not a new practice, but one that is gaining considerable steam in the sports marketplace. However, many academics and practitioners have long questioned the means by which celebrity endorsement is measured and evaluated. Through the use of validated surveys among US students and the inauguration of the Celebrity-Hero Matrix (CHM), some of their questions are answered. Being labelled a 'heroic' athlete does, it seems, have tremendous power for marketers, and provides endorsement clout for the athlete.

Executive summary

Celebrity athletes have long been utilised by corporations as promoters and endorsers of sport-specific and non-sports products. Staggering amounts are spent annually on athletes in the hope of improving the financial bottom line; it was estimated that Nike alone spent over $1.4 billion in 2003-04 on celebrity endorsements. Methods of assessing endorsement vary in effectiveness. Ohanian (1991) successfully categorised 'source credibility' as a combination of perceived expertise, trustworthiness and physical attractiveness. Yet much corporate research still relies on Q-score ratings, which although popular and easy to assess, are problematic in many ways (Burton et al, 2001). Using some previously validated scales, a theoretical piece, the Celebrity-Hero Matrix (CHM) is introduced, tested and validated.

Using a sample of 222 college-aged respondents, it was found that while the three components of source credibility are indeed important predictors of purchase intention, additional heroic qualities of the endorser prove to be the strongest predictor and contributor to intent-to-purchase an endorsed product. The latter finding, regarding heroes, is particularly intriguing, as it clarifies and expands upon some of the concepts that Chalip (1997) proposed. Chalip's contention that heroism depends on celebrity, yet that one need not be a hero to become a celebrity, is not only accurate, but is the basis upon which American mediated celebrity rests. This is particularly interesting in light of Brooks & Harris (1998), who asked the further question "Does a (sport) hero have more cultural meaning than a (sport) celebrity?" This research attempts to address these significant issues and provide an additional framework for marketers, practitioners and academics by which to analyse and evaluate athletes of the 21st century.

Introduction

> ***We are drawn to celebrities for a variety of reasons. These can only be concretely established through empirical investigation. At the level of theory, it might be hypothesised, inter alia, that celebrities provide us with heroic role models in an age of mass standardisation and predictability.***
>
> ***Chris Rojek (2001)***

Ohanian (1991) once proposed that simultaneously probing all three dimensions of source credibility (physical attractiveness, perceived expertise, trustworthiness) is the most effective means by which to explore celebrity endorsers. Complicating the equation is American society's obsession with fleeting moments of fame, and our centuries-long tendency to place elite athletes upon a social pedestal for athletic acts deemed as 'heroic'. An obvious response to scholars who have questioned the utility and accuracy of Q-scores (Burton et al, 2001) would be to present improved models for the assessment of athletes as endorsers.

Review of literature

The words 'celebrity' and 'hero' are interchangeably bandied about in American society without much thought as to their meanings. Drucker (1997) argues that sports heroes are merely pseudo-heroes, and are only compared to the heroic because of celebrification in the mass media. She maintains that many forms of sports media – namely photography, news, publicity, radio and television – are responsible for creating athletes of mythical status, mostly undeserving. Additionally, she opines that stadia, the actual arena in which the heroic sporting moments are achieved, serve to further glamorise the athlete.

Drucker (1997) also states that contemporary media have created an unending stream of celebrities, and that "on close examination of the hero-creation process, the resemblance to modern-day celebrities is startling" (p.85). This supports the belief that heroes and celebrities are commonly perceived as identical.

This study discerns a difference between heroes and celebrities. It is important to explore the thoughts of society and not only the ideas of academics concerning the celebrity/hero debate. If the majority believes that no difference exists between celebrities and heroes, then the argument is moot. However, the results of previous studies and those that this document reveals, suggest the opposite (North et al, 2005; Peetz et al, 2004; Stevens et al, 2003).

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

HERO	distinguished person, admired for their ability, bravery or noble qualities and worthy of emulation
CELEBRITY	famous person
SPORTS HERO	status given to one who succeeds in sport and reaffirms the American value structure
SPORTS ANTI-HERO	athlete who does not affirm the predominant value system in American society
CELEBRITY ENDORSER	well-known person used in advertisements, whose function it is to sell products

Celebrities have long been a highly revered sector of American society. However, it was not until the 1920s that advertisers began to use famous people for product endorsements, specifically to sell goods to adoring fans (Fox, 1984). There are obvious differences between celebrities and heroes, in terms of perceptions and influence on society, and it is important to look at both as separate entities.

Berger & Mitchell (1989) examined the influence of advertising repetition on several 'non-evaluative' (e.g. attitude accessibility and attitude confidence) dimensions of attitudes. They looked at the subsequent relationship between attitude and behaviour. An attempt was made to assess the effect of advertising on consumer attitudes. It has been generally assumed that brand evaluations ('attitudes') are the only mediator of message frequency on behaviour. Of interest was the research methodology implemented by Berger & Mitchell (1989). They divided 104 students into a four-category matrix, not unlike the research design of this study. Males and females were equally divided as it was thought there would be significant differences by gender for selection of product. Also of note were the dependent variables selected for their study – attitudes, attitude accessibility, attitude confidence and behaviour. The findings suggest that repeated exposure to advertisements can yield attitudes that are just as accessible from memory, and held with as much confidence, as attitudes formed on the basis of direct behavioural experiences. Their findings confirm the findings of previous similar studies and indicate that advertising can influence more than just the evaluative dimension of attitudes.

Stever (1991) constructed a 'celebrity appeal questionnaire' in the hope of measuring several components of parasocial attraction (e.g. sex appeal, perceived competence and perception of the person as a pro-social person). Several items from this survey were added to the phase one instrument, to enhance the constructs of hero and celebrity. Stever (1991) surveyed undergraduate college students around one universally known celebrity, rock star Michael Jackson. The most intriguing component of the study was the following statement: "If a member of a media audience calls a celebrity a role model and ascribes to that celebrity, wisdom, honesty, generosity, helpfulness, courage, etc, then that celebrity could be called a hero for that member" (p.864). This is relevant to the current study in that it re-states the fact that a) there is merit in determining who societal heroes and celebrities are, and differentiating between them; b) it shows the strength of identification with celebrities held in common; and c) it rebukes Boorstin's (1977) conclusion that there are no celebrities who qualify as heroes. Moreover, it reinforces the fact that American society feels the need to have heroes, celebrities, and/or role models to idolise and look up to; and in many cases, to emulate their behaviour (including purchasing behaviour).

A study conducted by Basil (1996) focused on the impacts of one sports celebrity, Magic Johnson. Specifically, Basil intended to explore how (if at all) people's sexual behaviour changed as a direct result of Johnson's decision to speak out about HIV; the announcement was then associated with Magic's fans, to see if identifying with him was a sufficiently powerful predictor of modified sexual behaviour. The

results of this study indicated that identification did mediate message effects. It also suggested that a spokesperson (i.e. endorser) with whom the audience identifies ensures the greatest likelihood of achieving lasting attitude or behaviour change. Not coincidentally, inherent with hero worship is a strong identification between hero and fan. Therefore the decision to differentiate between heroes and celebrities was taken. There is much more identification with a hero than with a celebrity so it was hypothesised that sports heroes would ultimately prove to be more effective endorsers of products than non-heroes.

Celebrity endorsement and best practice for celebrity ad utilisation have long been debated. The reasons for the success of one campaign over another are sensitive subjects. The value of investigating other potential explanations in terms of how consumer attitudes and behaviours are influenced/altered through use of celebrities as endorsers is paramount. Tripp et al (1994) viewed endorsement by focusing on credibility, physical attractiveness or expertise. Tripp et al (1994) examined the effects of multiple product endorsements by celebrities; that is, whether endorsement of more than one product affects the attitudes and purchase intentions of the consumer. Surprisingly, perceptions of celebrity credibility, celebrity likability and attitude towards the ad lessened significantly as the number of products endorsed by the celebrity increased. Logic suggests that the more one sees a face on television, the more likable and influential that person might become. However, this study discovered the opposite. The expected outcome would be to limit the number of endorsements by one person, in order to enhance and maximise his/her effectiveness.

Kahle & Homer (1985), and later Kamins (1990), supported social adaptation theory, in that they believed that the adaptive significance of information will determine its impact. Information is processed essentially the same for both low and high involvement. Kahle & Homer (1985) found that despite testing several factors in their advertisements, only the physical attractiveness of the endorser appeared to affect consumer behaviour positively, and therefore, purchase intention. This supports the findings of much of the previous research in this area, proving that beauty may indeed be only skin deep (McCracken, 1989; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Atkin & Block, 1983; Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Baker & Churchill, 1977). Baker and Churchill's (1977) study confirmed the attractiveness factor as being vital to endorser success. They added to the body of knowledge by including gender differences. In general, endorsers of the opposite sex to the consumer were most effective for that group of people; that is to say, for males, females were the most influential in terms of changed attitudes and for females, males were the most influential. In fact, when males were the endorsers, females were far more likely to purchase the endorsed product than males were. Bush et al (2004) found in their study of Generation Y teens that females were actually more influenced by sports celebrities than their male counterparts. Physical attractiveness enhanced measures of spokesperson credibility and attitude towards the ad. These two factors were relatively unaffected when an endorser was used who was considered less than attractive (Kamins, 1990). Likeability and attractiveness were considered by Friedman & Friedman (1979), and followed up by Kamins et al (1989). Kamins et al (1989) added identification, and this was confirmed by Basil (1996). The identification factor is particularly relevant to a study of heroes. It is one of the key reasons heroes are so powerful and influential in society.

A sociological discussion of whether sports endorsers, in many cases considered to be sports heroes, actually have a responsibility as role models for youth is a question. The study conducted on adolescents by McDermott et al (1989) showed that knowledge of the celebrity athlete was the most important correlate of acquisition, with regard to tobacco. Both likeability and credibility were substantially and significantly related to positive attitudes towards users. These findings support the past research that demonstrates the influence of

celebrity endorsers for other harmful products. It should also be noted that peer influence played a large role for this group, ranging in age from 12 to 16.

Methodology

Sample

Previous studies have shown (Harris, 1994) gender (Vander Velden, 1986) and ethnicity (Lüschen, 1981) to be important variables related to sports hero selection. Based on these findings, it is probable that future studies will produce the same results if similar or identical measures are implemented. The bulk of literature specific to the college segment, however, seems to indicate that university students are more alike than they are different (James & Sonner, 2001; Wolburg & Pokrywczynski, 2001; Peterson, 2001; Brackett & Carr, 2001). Initially, a convenience sample of college students was drawn during the 2001-02 academic year. The general theory is that as one ages, his/her heroes become more realistic and less famous (Harris, 1994). Therefore, significant differences between the younger (freshmen) and older (seniors) groups were anticipated. Of particular interest were the latter two years – juniors and seniors – as these are the last two grade levels and the ones in which the most change was anticipated.

The study was broken into two phases. The second phase instrument was 12 pages in length and was administered using a purposive sample of 120 respondents; the 120 respondents were equally distributed among the four grade levels (freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior), and equally (60/60) between genders.

Instrumentation

a) Phase one instrument

In an attempt to support previous findings and (hopefully) assist in improving, modernising and adding to the prior instrument(s), an initial survey was constructed, tested and distributed. An issue which had to be confronted was the lack of a valid instrument from prior research for replication. The instruments either focused solely on athletic heroes (Harris, 1994) or chiefly on celebrity endorsement (Ohanian, 1991). In no case was a combination of the two elements extant; however, it was believed that combining these elements into one multi-phasic study would be possible.

The phase one instrument contained four parts, some based upon previously reviewed literature. Part one was partially adapted from Harris' (1994) piece on the athlete and the American hero dilemma. Harris employed a qualitative instrument, which was used reliably in multiple settings. Part two was comprised of a brief four-item sports enthusiasm Likert scale, originally devised by Wells and Tigert (1971). The scale had an alpha of .78 and was validated by factor analysis performed in the study, indicating that the items loaded together. The utility of such a scale was that it helped to indicate the involvement of each student in sport and provided greater insight into the responses in the first section of the survey. Several new items were added to this scale and were tested for reliability and validity. Part three of the questionnaire was adapted from Ohanian's (1991) extensive work on the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers. Ohanian took celebrity endorsement research to its highest level, developing a valid and reliable instrument capable of measuring the three main influences upon endorser effectiveness: perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. Most previous studies of endorser effectiveness had focused on one of the three dimensions of source credibility; Ohanian implements all three simultaneously within her 15-item inventory.

A key component of the phase one instrument was the fact that it helped to build upon the previous studies on hero worship in sport (Harris, 1994; Vander Velden, 1986; Smith, 1973). All of the top athletes selected in previous studies were included in the initial list of athletes to be rated by students. However, before the list was finalised, it was

disseminated to a panel of experts who suggested eliminating names of older athletes who were either dead, retired or no longer popular. The investigator also procured the annual "Celebrity 100" list published by Forbes Magazine. From this list were culled any athletes who made the top 100. A final list was then again inspected by the panel of experts, who came to agreement on who was most representative of the top names in today's American athletic world. On the final instrument, each respondent was asked to rate each of the 52 athletes on both a hero scale and a celebrity scale. Test-takers were asked to rate each athlete on a 1-10 scale concerning both factors. The choice to select item "Don't know" was made available for any athletes with whom the respondents were not familiar. The results of the phase one survey were influential to the development of the phase two survey.

b) Phase two instrument

Based on results of the first phase of the study, the survey was modified and expanded extensively to encompass the four primary research questions; specifically, the phase two instrument was vital to the elucidation of research question number four. In addition to determining college students' top sports heroes for that year, the research would also yield a detailed summary of 'sports enthusiasm'/involvement for all respondents. Most importantly, it added to the existing body of knowledge on celebrity endorsement, augmenting the sports-specific literature, and ultimately determining how influential the top heroes and endorsers were in terms of selling products.

Of absolute relevance to celebrity influence is proper matching of a celebrity endorser to an appropriate product (Kamins, 1990). Michael Jordan selling soccer balls is a poor match, as his expertise level is in the basketball arena. Likewise, Tiger Woods endorsing basketball shoes would probably be ineffective in terms of sales returns. An anti-hero such as Dennis Rodman selling something like the new model of Harley Davidson motorcycles, based on the associations we make with the two, might prove to be a very effective marketing strategy. Ohanian's (1991) study described that a celebrity with expertise about a product was significantly more effective than a non-celebrity expert. In order to limit and/or control this issue, a non-sports-specific product was chosen for the final survey instrument – a sports drink. It was believed that a sports drink might be used by any athlete in any sport, so there would be no internal bias nor any issue with proper matching of endorser to product. The product chosen was an actual sports drink called Ultima, but it was not one that is currently popular or visible in the market today, such as Gatorade or Powerade, where preconceived notions could impact upon perception.

While expertise is only one of three major conduits to effective endorsement – physical attractiveness and credibility are the other two – it was believed that by using Ohanian's (1991) methodology, which encompassed all three simultaneously, the truest results could be attainable. Like Mitchell's (1986) study, the design was used as a model for the current investigation. Each subject saw four different advertisements. However, in contrast to Mitchell, where all four endorsers were advertising a different product, the standardised sports drink was used for all four ads in this study. Two separate versions of the survey were administered. One contained four males – one athlete chosen from each of the four quadrants from the celebrity/hero matrix. The second version of the survey contained four females and used the same selection criteria as for the males. Michael Jordan, by far the most well-known and recognised athlete of our time, by all age groups and both genders, was added later for comparison purposes to both versions of the survey. By having two versions of the survey, four distinct groups are analysed: females rating all males (and Jordan), females rating all females (and Jordan), males rating all males (and Jordan), and males rating all females (and Jordan). By including Michael Jordan in both, a baseline can later be established to which all other celebrity sports endorsers can be compared. Although not a focus of this investigator's study, future use of the comparison group (Jordan) will prove to be helpful.

Michael Jordan scored extremely high on the phase one survey (9/10 of both the hero and celebrity scales), and is a proven endorser entity. It would be senseless to assume that nothing is known about Jordan's endorsement legacy, by including him as one of the four athletes in this study. But by including him on both versions of the study, it allowed for much richer future results and potentially allows for comparison based on the gender of the endorser, gender of respondent and sport of the endorser.

A multi-item measure of purchase intention was added – including two semantic differential scales assessing 'attitude towards the product/brand' (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Mitchell, 1986) – to test the effectiveness of the selected endorsers in selling the Ultima product to college students. Additionally, several hero and celebrity measures were added to the Ohanian (1991) portion of the survey.

Most data were analysed by using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, also utilised frequencies and cross-tabulation. Purchase intention was analysed using regression.

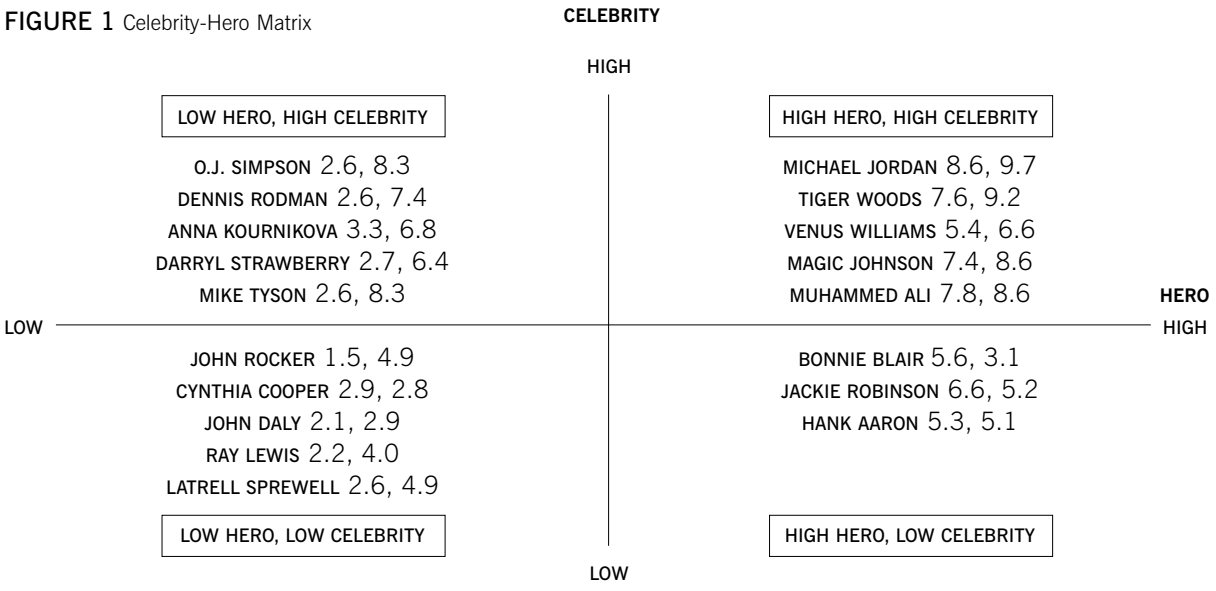
Results

Results of the earlier surveys had produced two separate lists, one of the top heroes and the other detailing the top celebrities. There was some overlap and some similarity, but for the most part, respondents seemed to be able to differentiate between celebrities and heroes in the athletic realm. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the top 10 for each.

TABLE 1 Top 10 sports 'heroes' and 'celebrities'

	HERO	CELEBRITY
1	MICHAEL JORDAN	MICHAEL JORDAN
2	MUHAMMED ALI	TIGER WOODS
3	TIGER WOODS	MAGIC JOHNSON
4	BABE RUTH	MUHAMMED ALI
5	MAGIC JOHNSON	SHAQUILLE O'NEAL
6	JACKIE ROBINSON	O.J. SIMPSON
7	WAYNE GRETZKY	BABE RUTH
8	CAL RIPKEN, JR.	MIKE TYSON
9	DALE EARNHARDT	ANDRE AGASSI
10	SHAQUILLE O'NEAL	WAYNE GRETZKY

FIGURE 1 Celebrity-Hero Matrix



Using the scores, it was possible to assign all 52 rated athletes to a four quadrant matrix, with one axis being the celebrity score (out of 10) and the other score being the hero score (out of 10), derived from the mean, as rated by the respondents. This new classification, the Celebrity-Hero Matrix (CHM), allowed for previously unexamined analysis of the sports hero phenomenon. Some of the top scorers are shown in Figure 1.

The next step was to draw two athletes from each quadrant (one male, one female) who could be further tested in terms of endorsement power (e.g. consumer intent-to-purchase). The athletes selected for the next phase of the study were: Tiger Woods and Venus Williams (high hero, high celebrity); Mike Tyson and Anna Kournikova (low hero, high celebrity); Ray Lewis and Cynthia Cooper (low hero, low celebrity); and Hank Aaron and Bonnie Blair (high hero, low celebrity). These were all assessed using a 7-point Likert scale.

TABLE 2 Endorser ratings (male respondents)

	(N=30)	(N=30)
	RAY LEWIS	ANNA KOURNIKOVA
HERO	3.10	3.07
CELEBRITY	4.47	5.20
BUY PRODUCT?	3.13	2.87
	HANK AARON	CYNTHIA COOPER
HERO	3.97	3.13
CELEBRITY	3.77	3.33
BUY PRODUCT?	3.53	2.53
	TIGER WOODS	BONNIE BLAIR
HERO	5.33	2.80
CELEBRITY	6.13	3.27
BUY PRODUCT?	4.90	2.47
	MIKE TYSON	VENUS WILLIAMS
HERO	3.20	3.47
CELEBRITY	5.60	4.93
BUY PRODUCT?	3.27	3.53

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Research question

How do hero and celebrity constructs impact on the consumer's intent to purchase the endorsed product?

Table 2 provides the findings of males in the sample of the phase two part of the study; Table 3 shows the findings for female respondents. There is an absolute difference between the two groups. As shown in Table 2, Tiger Woods is the top endorser among males, as well as being potentially the most effective endorser in terms of impact on intent to purchase (4.90 on a 7.00 scale). Woods is clearly the most visible, ranking at the top of the hero (5.33) and celebrity (6.13) scales. This supports the findings of phase one, which showed that Woods trailed only Michael Jordan, perhaps the most effective endorser ever, on both scales. Females were far less likely to purchase his endorsed product (2.70), although they did recognise him as a viable hero (4.47) and celebrity (5.80). Overall, males were far more likely than their female counterparts to consider the eight athletes (Ray Lewis, Hank Aaron, Tiger Woods, Mike Tyson, Anna Kournikova, Cynthia Cooper, Bonnie Blair and Venus Williams) heroes. The female endorsers were, not surprisingly, ranked considerably lower by both the male and female respondents. Conclusively, with the total sample of 120 (phase two), none of the endorsers proved to be exemplary in terms of their impact on intention to purchase. The top endorser for the entire sample was Tiger Woods (3.80), followed by Hank Aaron (3.03), Venus Williams (3.15), Mike Tyson (2.80), Ray Lewis (2.75), Cynthia Cooper (2.43), Anna Kournikova (2.40) and Bonnie Blair (2.38).

Additionally, correlations and linear regression were very telling concerning intention to purchase the endorsed product. The results are explained as such: the first number is the Pearson correlation for each, in

TABLE 3 Endorser ratings (female respondents)

	(N=30)	(N=30)
	RAY LEWIS	ANNA KOURNIKOVA
HERO	2.50	2.17
CELEBRITY	4.20	4.10
BUY PRODUCT?	2.37	1.93
	HANK AARON	CYNTHIA COOPER
HERO	4.23	2.13
CELEBRITY	4.37	1.90
BUY PRODUCT?	3.03	2.33
	TIGER WOODS	BONNIE BLAIR
HERO	4.47	2.53
CELEBRITY	5.80	2.23
BUY PRODUCT?	2.70	2.30
	MIKE TYSON	VENUS WILLIAMS
HERO	2.23	3.13
CELEBRITY	5.63	5.47
BUY PRODUCT?	2.80	2.77

TABLE 4 Endorser ratings (total sample)

	(N=30)	(N=30)
	RAY LEWIS	ANNA KOURNIKOVA
HERO	2.80	2.62
CELEBRITY	4.33	4.65
BUY PRODUCT?	2.75	2.40
	HANK AARON	CYNTHIA COOPER
HERO	4.10	2.63
CELEBRITY	4.07	2.62
BUY PRODUCT?	3.28	2.43
	TIGER WOODS	BONNIE BLAIR
HERO	4.90	2.67
CELEBRITY	5.97	2.75
BUY PRODUCT?	3.80	2.38
	MIKE TYSON	VENUS WILLIAMS
HERO	2.72	3.30
CELEBRITY	5.62	5.20
BUY PRODUCT?	3.03	3.15

terms of correlation to intention to purchase the endorsed product. The second number (in parentheses) is the P-value. All numbers are examined at the .05 significance level. Immediately following, for all eight endorsers, is a quick summary of salient numbers from the linear regression. The regression equation for this is:

Y_1 (dependent variable, i.e. intent to buy) = $a + bx_1$ (independent variable, i.e. hero) + cx_2 (independent variable, i.e. celebrity). Results for the eight athletes are as follows:

Ray Lewis: both hero .553 (.000) and celebrity .405 (.001) were correlated with intent to buy. The R Square value of .316 is considerably low, as are the R Square values for the other seven endorsers. One possible explanation of the low R Square values throughout the eight endorsers is that Y is categorical, not continuous. In terms of the regression, with intention to buy being the constant, hero (.442 coefficient and .124 Std. Error) was significant (.001), while celebrity (.108 coefficient and .117 Std. Error) was not significant (.360).

Anna Kournikova: both were correlated – hero .493 (.000) and celebrity .311 (.008) with intention to buy. The R Square was, as explained earlier, low at .246. Again, hero (.509 coefficient and .152 Std. Error) was significant (.001) and celebrity (.065 coefficient and .144 Std. Error) was not significant (.652).

Hank Aaron: hero .224 (.043) was significantly correlated with intention to buy the product, while celebrity .142 (.139) was not correlated, at the 5% level of significance. The R Square was .065. Neither hero (.232 coefficient and .141 Std. Error), at .105, nor celebrity (.142 coefficient and .150 Std. Error) at .349, was significant.

Cynthia Cooper: hero .303 (.009) was significantly correlated with intention to buy the product, while celebrity .060 (.323) was not correlated, at the 5% level of significance. The R Square was .094. Like Kournikova, for Cooper, hero (.227 coefficient and .095 Std. Error) was significant (.021) and celebrity (.038 coefficient and .106 Std. Error) was not significant (.717).

Tiger Woods: (not surprisingly given his proven success thus far as an endorser) correlated on both hero .415 (.000) and celebrity .317 (.007). The R Square was .192. Once again, hero (.453 coefficient and .178 Std. Error) was significant (.014) while celebrity (.244 coefficient and .204 Std. Error) was not significant (.235) at the .05 level.

Bonnie Blair: a bit of an anomaly. Neither hero -.098 (.228) nor celebrity .105 (.212) was correlated with intention to purchase her endorsed product. The negative Pearson correlation on hero is indicative that even those who rated Blair as a hero would not buy her product. The R Square for Bonnie Blair was .024. Again, the regression showed neither hero (-.111 coefficient and .127 Std. Error) and .387 significance, nor celebrity (.103 coefficient and .112 Std. Error) and .361 significance, to be statistically significant.

Mike Tyson: another interesting case regarding endorsement power. Both hero -.042 (.376) and celebrity -.013 (.461) were negatively correlated with intention to purchase. Neither was statistically significant. The negative values indicate that even when respondents rated Tyson highly on the hero or celebrity measures, they still did not intend to buy the product from him. The R Square was .002. Neither hero (-.039 coefficient and .124 Std. Error) and .751 significance, nor celebrity (-.015 coefficient and .138 Std. Error) and .912 significance, proved to be statistically significant in the linear regression analysis.

TABLE 5 Correlations of hero and celebrity constructs (n=120)

	CORRELATED WITH 'INTENTION TO PURCHASE'	
	HERO	CELEBRITY
RAY LEWIS	X	X
ANNA KOURNIKOVA	X	X
HANK AARON	X	O
CYNTHIA COOPER	X	O
TIGER WOODS	X	X
BONNIE BLAIR	O	O
MIKE TYSON	O	O
VENUS WILLIAMS	X	X

Venus Williams: both were correlated – hero .481 (.000) and celebrity .240 (.033). The R Square was .232. Like several others, the regression showed that hero (.539 coefficient and .150 Std. Error) was significant (.001) and celebrity (.034 coefficient and .146 Std. Error) was not significant (.813), at the 5% level of significance.

To clarify the results of this portion of the analysis visually see Table 5. The table depicts that six of the eight endorsers (75%) had correlations with the hero construct and intention to buy. Only four of the eight endorsers (50%) had correlations with the celebrity construct and intention to buy. This would suggest that sports heroes are indeed a bit more successful as endorsers regarding selling products. This supports the main premise of this investigation, that there is something about heroes that makes them more effective as endorsers of products.

Even more telling is Table 6, which depicts the statistical significance of the hero and celebrity constructs. As shown in the model, five of the eight (62.5%) endorsers had statistically significant scores on the Hero construct. None of the endorsers had statistical significance on the celebrity construct. This would indicate that sports heroes are stronger predictors of intention to purchase the endorsed product than sports celebrities. Again this supports the

main premise of this investigation, which hypothesised a stronger emotional connection (and subsequent stronger selling power) of sports heroes over sports celebrities.

Discussion

In general, this study found that sports hero worship is still prevalent, particularly among college students. Over three-quarters of all college students surveyed admitted to having at least one famous sports hero whom they admired, looked up to and, in some cases, modelled their behaviour on. Smith's (1973) assertion that the sports hero is dead is one that has never been realised. One could never have imagined how powerful and domineering the mass media would become, nor predict how intertwined the media would be with the development and ascension of sports heroes in the 21st century.

Innovation and technology have aided the growth of the sports industry, and it is interesting to note that many of the things we now take for granted – reading newspapers online, instant access to statistics and scores, and digital satellite television – are things that were unfathomable when much of the theory on hero worship in America was first developed and tested. It is clear that sports heroes will always be a solid piece of American societal makeup. What is still unclear is the ability of the average consumer to differentiate between truly heroic people/events and things that are merely glamorised in the media (e.g. celebrities). However, the tragic events of 9/11/2001 have helped society to re-focus on heroes. The focus on the actions (heroic deeds) of the firefighters and volunteer workers contributed positively to a country-wide reconsideration of ideals, values and morals. Inherent in this rethinking was a return to the classic definition of the hero (Klapp, 1969), and professional athletes were relegated to celebrity status. The occurrence of true heroism, by classic standards, is rarely achieved in sport.

TABLE 6 Visual depiction of regression results (n=120)

	REGRESSION – SIGNIFICANCE WITH 'INTENTION TO PURCHASE'	
	HERO	CELEBRITY
RAY LEWIS	X	O
ANNA KOURNIKOVA	X	O
HANK AARON	O	O
CYNTHIA COOPER	X	O
TIGER WOODS	X	O
BONNIE BLAIR	O	O
MIKE TYSON	O	O
VENUS WILLIAMS	X	O

Several conclusions can be drawn, based on the findings of this two-phase study. It contributes evidence to the existing framework on heroes, and applies much of the classic hero literature directly to the sports setting. Some conclusions can be made by looking at the data, and by reviewing the existing literature. Indeed, dead people make great endorsers. It may be perceived as morbid, but reality indicates that over time, as heroes retire, disappear from the spotlight and age (or die), their appeal in the eyes of fans begins to increase, often even more than when they were performing. This is in line with Klapp's (1969) assertion that the final two stages of cult status – commemoration and achievement –do not usually happen until the athlete is dead. A perfect example of this may be found in any of the number of sports halls of fames, shrines to great athletes, many now dead. This also supports extensive research done in the area of nostalgia tourism (Hinch & Higham, 2004; Fairley, 2003). Someone like Babe Ruth, revered today, was not considered much of a hero back in his day. Rather, he was considered a drunk, womanising, out-of-shape ballplayer. With the passage of time, his negative behaviour has been forgotten while the positive has been glorified. Some of the people in the Celebrity-Hero Matrix, such as O.J. Simpson and Mike Tyson, have tarnished reputations.

Logic suggests that some day much of the unethical, illegal or immoral behaviour associated with them will actually be forgotten, and they may be looked at in a light similar to that of Babe Ruth.

The findings of this study and others (Burton et al, 2001; Ohanian, 1991) confirm the belief that someone known as both a hero and a celebrity will prove to be the most effective spokesperson for a product. Because of the way the media operates, there are few people who seem to embody the qualities of both hero and celebrity. Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods are two exemplary characters in this vein.

Peterson (2001) concluded that responses of college student subjects were found to be slightly more homogeneous than those of non-student subjects. James & Sonner (2001) warn against using traditional student samples. Their results suggest that, while traditional undergraduate students are not appropriate surrogates for 'real consumers', older non-traditional students may produce results that are quite similar to the results obtained from the general population for that age range. Within the scope of this investigation, these findings are significant. While perhaps not truly representing real consumers, it is this researcher's opinion that the traditional college student group, although homogeneous, is of a uniqueness to be a viable cohort worth studying. The fact that the results of this study indicate a high, consistent preference for famous sports heroes is an important basis upon which future research can be conducted. To a considerable degree, much of the sports advertising on television is aimed directly at the male college market – known to be frequent viewers. Men, more often than women, appear to be influenced to purchase by celebrity sports endorsers. This is developed in the study and seems to make sense logically. It is perceived that this trend may be moving towards a greater level of equality, in light of the development and growth of several women's professional sports leagues (e.g. WNBA, WPGA) and trends developed, explored by Bush et al (2004).

Conclusion and future research

This study makes a contribution to the body of sports hero worship literature and sports celebrity endorsement, but there are a few recommendations for future research. It might be extremely valuable to obtain samples of college and non-college students in the 18-22 group in the same study. This would enable a better comparison within a group that is linked by biological age but may have little else in common. Both samples collected in this study were predominantly comprised of Caucasian respondents. To be able to differentiate better sports hero selection based upon ethnicity and race would probably advance the body of literature.

While this investigator used a research design to test the same product for all endorsers (Ultima sports drink), marketing research commonly focuses on trying to match endorsers to products that are appropriate for their personality, reputation and expertise. It would be worth replicating this study using the same athletes, or the exemplary athletes in each of the four quadrants of the Celebrity-Hero Matrix, using several different products. This would entail a great deal of investigation prior to the study being conducted. In a scenario such as this, it should be known what products, if any, all the athletes in question are currently endorsing. Often, if two similar products by two different brands are endorsed by the same celebrity, the resultant selling power of both may be lessened. The consumer actually resents the endorser and also becomes a bit confused about what the endorser truly stands for. Matching product to endorser is challenging and not without risk. But to assess how effective an athlete is as an endorser, considerable market research must be conducted on the athlete.

Two of the eight exemplary athletes in the second phase of the study, Anna Kournikova and Mike Tyson, have suffered tarnished reputations. Kournikova, mainly because of her inability to win tennis matches, was dropped from some of her endorsement contracts,

despite continuing to be a popular pin-up figure in the media. Burton et al (2001) assert that although negative publicity for athletes is not necessarily bad, it is also an inconsistent and unpredictable force which can adversely affect the endorser's ability to do what they do best, which is to help companies to sell products.

Mike Tyson, despite being perpetually in the media in a negative way, is still a strong celebrity among athletes. However, as shown in this study, respondents did not feel that Tyson was a heroic character. This is predominantly due to his decline as a boxer and never-ending legal issues. Most recently, he was banned from fighting in nearly every state in the United States. Ironically, after a public verbal tirade of explicit nature, he was recently dropped by his public relations firm, which did not like the negative publicity received through its association with him.

Finally, this investigation contributes to a redefinition of the sports hero. While not a primary focus of this study, qualitative data was collected asking respondents to define, in their own words, a hero. Eventually this data can be analysed and used to help redefine modern heroism. Since much of the literature on hero worship anteceded the development, popularisation and acceptance of the internet, it will be interesting to see how the classic Klapp (1969) definition of the hero may have changed. While there can be speculation about the practical and theoretical implications, much of this study is exploratory; the main goal is the actual exploration of sports heroes, as well as bridging the gap between classic hero worship literature and modern consumer perceptions of heroes and celebrities in the sports realm.

The significance of something like the "Be Like Mike" campaign by Gatorade cannot be overemphasised. Marketers correctly assumed two things about its future consumers – "hero-worshipping children and young adults would want to drink Michael Jordan's brand and incorporate his successful image as a winner" (Burton, p.325). Most knew that they would never reach Jordan's level of basketball skill, but it was a way in which they could vicariously identify with their hero, simply by drinking his endorsed product.

Subsequent endeavours in the area of sports hero worship should continue to track the ever-evolving but disposable database of heroes. Future research should continue to try to make connections between an enthusiasm for sport and the predilections of heroes of sport. Research should also try to explore the different factors that make athletes so effective as endorsers of products. As suggested by Agrawal & Kamakura (1995), an attempt to link endorsement with economic value (i.e. contribution to the bottom line) should be made.

Another endeavour might be to plot sports hero worship along Levinson's life course, to see how traditional life events impact, if at all, on the choice of hero. Of huge concern is where our technological society will be in the future. The sports industry is growing faster than ever, and is now a multibillion-dollar business. The internet has revolutionised how people access their sports information, as well as influencing their viewing tendencies. It would have been unheard of years ago that anyone could easily gain access, via satellite, to watch every single professional game of their favourite team and/or player(s). Sport will not soon be forgotten in any modern society; in contrast to Smith (1973), worship of athletic heroes too is here to stay.

Biography

Joshua Shuart is assistant professor of sport management at Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, Connecticut. His research focuses on celebrity endorsement, entertainment marketing and hero worship. Shuart is associate editor of the *New England Journal of Entrepreneurship* and he owns the sport research business Sellebrity. Previously, he was a research associate with the Laboratory for Leisure, Tourism & Sport in Storrs, Connecticut.

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