

Beckham vs Fandi:

The Effectiveness of Local Sports Celebrities in Advertisements

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Abstract— Top athletes are often recruited to endorse products and services as they are effective in generating awareness and positive attitudes towards endorsed brands. However, local athletes in Singapore have not been as successful in attracting endorsement deals. This research seeks to establish if local athletes can be effective endorsers. The results indicate that local athlete endorsers are perceived to be less effective than foreign athlete endorsers especially among males.

Keywords- sports celebrities; Singapore; advertisement; athlete endorsement

I. INTRODUCTION

Top athletes, like other celebrities, are often recruited to endorse products and services as they are able to generate awareness and positive attitudes towards endorsed brands. For example, Tiger Woods and Kobe Bryant are popular among advertisers, earning endorsements deals of US\$70 million and US\$10 million in 2010 respectively [1]. Footballer David Beckham has also been very successful in attracting endorsements deals. He had endorsed many brands including Adidas, Pepsi, Gillette and Motorola. Indeed, Beckham had been so successful in generating awareness for the brands that he endorsed, that the industry had termed it the Beckham Effect.

There are also top athletes in Singapore, obtaining medals at international competitions. These include Olympic Games medalists Li Jiawei (table-tennis) and Tan Howe Liang (weightlifting), and Asian Games medalists Ang Peng Siong (swimming) and C Kunalan (athletics). And in football, Fandi Ahmad is perhaps one of Singapore's most successful athletes. He not only played in the national team and won medals in the SEA Games, but he also played for international teams including Ajax Amsterdam and FC Groningen. Fandi also won the Golden Boot award in the 1988 Malaysia Cup [2].

However, when compared to athletes in other countries, Singapore athletes are not attracting enough interest among advertisers. For example, Singapore bowler Remy Ong, a gold medalist in the Asian Games 2002, was offered only S\$500 for a product endorsement deal [3]. This pales in comparison with the multi-million endorsement deals of foreign athletes.

There is a Beckham Effect. What is the reason for the absence of a Fandi Ahmad Effect?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of celebrities to promote commercial goods and services is not new to advertisers. Companies envisage that endorsers who are attractive and likeable will transfer such qualities to their brands and products. In addition, as celebrities are constantly in the media, they serve to constantly remind consumers of the brands that they endorse. Indeed, the use of celebrity endorsers has been gaining in popularity over time [4].

Specifically, celebrity endorsers are effective in generating increased attention and enhanced image of the brand. However, their effectiveness in influencing purchase intention is more limited [4].

The effectiveness of a celebrity endorser depends on the celebrity's credibility and attractiveness. When an endorser is perceived to be credible or attractive, consumers are more likely to believe in the endorsement. Hence, a match between the celebrity and endorsed product is important for the endorsement to be effective [4].

In sports, athletes who possess good looks or skills are able to capture the attention of the media. With constant reporting by the media, these athletes have been propelled to celebrity status [5, 6].

Advertisers are keenly aware of the potential of athletes as celebrity endorsers and have used sports celebrities to promote their products and services. While the majority of athlete endorsers had been male athletes, the recent increase in the number of female athlete endorsers suggest that the use of athlete endorsers is a growing trend [7, 8].

Athlete endorsers can positively influence consumption behaviour of consumers. Like other celebrities, they are able to transfer their associated positive values to the endorsed brand. Specific to sports-related products, athlete endorsers are also able to transfer their perceived expertise in their sports in endorsing the products. Hence, they are more credible as endorsers of sports-related products [9].

Athletes are perceived to possess positive character traits including perseverance and discipline. As such, they are often regarded as role models for young adults [10]. As role models, athlete endorsers can also generate favourable word-of-mouth communications and brand loyalty among young adults [11]. Interestingly, female young adults are more likely than their male counterparts to generate positive word-of-mouth communications and be influenced in their purchase of specific brands by athlete endorsers.

Yet, the influence of athlete endorsers remains limited as it does not extend to brand switching behaviours. Even in endorsing sports-related products, the perceived expertise of an athlete endorser is not able to influence the switching of brands [11, 12].

Obviously, like celebrities in other fields, the effectiveness of sports celebrities in advertisements is limited to the fit between the celebrity athlete endorser and the endorsed product. Where there is a high level of fit between the endorser and the endorsed product, the effectiveness of the endorser will be higher [7, 9, 13].

In summary, the use of athlete endorsers is a common practice among advertisers. This is because while athlete endorsers have a limited influence on brand switching behaviours, they are effective in generating awareness and transferring the positive attributes of athletes to the endorsed brands.

It is noted that earlier studies have not made a distinction between local and foreign athletes. For this research, the objective is to establish if there is a difference in the effectiveness between local and foreign athlete endorsers. In addition, as a few studies have found a difference between the genders in the extent of the influence of athlete endorsers on their consumption behavior, a secondary research objective is to establish if this difference persists to local and foreign athlete endorsers.

III. METHODOLOGY

The survey instrument used in this study was adapted from an earlier study which focused on the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement in Jordan [14].

In the first section, questions on the relationship between the athlete and the endorsed brand were asked. For the purpose of this study, the statements used the specific term "athlete" instead of the more general term "celebrity".

For the second section, the questions focused on the influence that athletes had on consumption behavior. These included question on whether the use of athlete endorsers had an influence on generating awareness, positive attitude formation, recall of brands and purchase intent of the endorsed brands. In addition, as the study sought to establish whether there is a difference in effectiveness in the use of local and foreign athlete endorsers in advertisements, the questions were repeated for both categories of athletes. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the degree of agreement with the statements with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

Demographic information was collected in the third section of the survey. This information is used to examine if there are gender differences in the responses.

A convenience sample of 150 students with equal numbers from both genders studying in a tertiary institution in Singapore was used for this study. Respondents were briefed on the nature of the study by email and the self-administered questionnaire was distributed as an attachment. On completion of the questionnaire, it was returned via email. The responses were then keyed into a spreadsheet for analysis. The results are detailed in the next section.

IV. RESULTS

Respondents generally agree that there is a relationship between an athlete endorser and the endorsed brand (see Table I). The character of an athlete influences the image of the endorsed brand ($\bar{X} = 3.96$) and the more meaningful the matchup between the athlete and the endorsed brand, the greater the trust in the brand ($\bar{X} = 3.76$). This finding concurs with earlier literature on the importance of selecting an appropriate endorser who is seen to have a fit with the endorsed brand.

On further analysis, it was also found that there is no significant difference between the genders in the perceived relationship between the athlete endorser and the endorsed brand.

TABLE I. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATHLETE AND ENDORSED BRAND

Statements	Mean ^a	Mean ^b (Male)	Mean ^c (Female)	t-value
The character of an athlete influences the image of the endorsed brand	3.96	3.88	4.04	-0.9838
The more meaningful the match up between the athlete and the endorsed brand, the greater the trust in the brand	3.76	3.79	3.73	0.3252

Note. ^an= 150. ^bn= 75. ^cn= 75.

Respondents do not perceive local athlete endorsers as having an influence on consumption behavior (see Table II). Local athlete endorsers do not influence the buying decision ($\bar{X} = 2.17$), nor aid in remembering ($\bar{X} = 2.45$), accepting ($\bar{X} = 2.73$) or increasing the awareness of endorsed brand ($\bar{X} = 2.70$). On comparison, foreign athletes do have an influence on the buying decision ($\bar{X} = 3.46$) and can aid in remembering ($\bar{X} = 3.89$), accepting ($\bar{X} = 3.85$) and increasing the awareness of endorsed brand ($\bar{X} = 4.00$).

On further examination, it can be seen that there is a difference between the genders on these responses. Male respondents disagree to a larger extent that local athletes have an influence on the buying decision ($t = -2.2976, p < 0.05$) and can increase the awareness ($t = -3.1282, p < 0.01$) and acceptance of endorsed brands ($t = -2.5849, p < 0.01$).

Conversely, male respondents agree to a larger extent that foreign athletes have an influence on the buying decision ($t = 2.5071, p < 0.01$) and can aid in remembering the endorsed brands ($t = 2.6354, p < 0.01$).

Hence, it can be surmised that while local athlete endorsers are perceived to be less effective endorsers than foreign athlete endorsers, female consumers are more likely to accept local athlete endorsers as compared to male consumers. This lends support to earlier studies that suggest that there is a difference between the genders in the effectiveness of the use of athlete endorsers. While it had been demonstrated in earlier studies that female consumers are more likely to generate word-of-mouth communication and be influenced by athlete endorsers in their purchase of specific brands, this study suggests that female consumers are less critical on the effectiveness of local athlete endorsers.

TABLE II. INFLUENCE OF ATHLETES IN CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOUR

Statements	Mean ^a	Mean ^b (Male)	Mean ^c (Female)	t-value
Local athletes help me make the buying decision	2.17	2.01	2.33	-2.2976**
Local athletes help me remember the endorsed brand during shopping	2.45	2.39	2.52	-0.7792
Local athletes increases acceptance of endorsed brands	2.73	2.53	2.92	-2.5849*
Local athletes increases my awareness of endorsed brands	2.70	2.44	2.96	-3.1282*
Foreign athletes help me make the buying decision	3.46	3.67	3.25	2.5071*
Foreign athletes help me remember the endorsed brand during shopping	3.89	4.11	3.68	2.6354*
Foreign athletes increases acceptance of endorsed brands	3.85	3.87	3.84	0.1871
Foreign athletes increases my awareness of endorsed brands	4.00	4.00	4.00	0.0000

Note. ^an= 150. ^bn= 75. ^cn= 75.
*p<.01, **p<.05.

To establish if the differences between the perceived effectiveness of local and foreign athlete endorsers are significant, a paired t-test is used for each of the four sets of statements (see Table III). Not surprisingly, the paired t-test showed that there is significant difference in the responses between foreign and local athletes in their influence on consumption behavior. Local athletes had less influence on the buying decision ($t = -13.5788, p < 0.01$) and were less useful in aiding recall ($t = -14.1046, p < 0.01$), increasing acceptance ($t = -11.7186, p < 0.01$) and increasing awareness of endorsed brands ($t = -12.5583, p < 0.01$).

On further analysis, both male and female respondents are similarly influenced to a lower extent by local athletes in their consumption behaviour.

For male respondents, local athletes had less influence on the buying decision ($t = -11.5876, p < 0.01$) and were less useful in aiding recall ($t = -11.5481, p < 0.01$), increasing acceptance ($t = -9.7092, p < 0.01$) and increasing awareness of endorsed brands ($t = -10.5880, p < 0.01$).

For female respondents, local athletes had less influence on the buying decision ($t = -8.3410, p < 0.01$) and were less useful in aiding recall ($t = -8.7260, p < 0.01$), increasing acceptance ($t = -7.0127, p < 0.01$) and increasing awareness of endorsed brands ($t = -7.4252, p < 0.01$).

Clearly, when compared to foreign athlete endorsers, local athlete endorsers are perceived to be less effective endorsers. They were perceived to be less effective than foreign athletes in raising awareness, developing a positive attitude towards the endorsed brand and affecting the purchase intent.

TABLE III. COMPARISON OF INFLUENCE BETWEEN LOCAL AND FOREIGN ATHLETES IN CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOUR

Statements	t-value ^a	t-value ^b (Male)	t-value ^c (Female)
Local/Foreign athletes help me make the buying decision	-13.5788*	-11.5876*	-8.3410*
Local/Foreign athletes help me remember the endorsed brand during shopping	-14.1046*	-11.5481*	-8.7260*
Local/Foreign athletes increases acceptance of endorsed brands	-11.7186*	-9.7092*	-7.0127*
Local/Foreign athletes increases my awareness of endorsed brands	-12.5583*	-10.5880*	-7.4252*

Note. ^an= 150. ^bn= 75. ^cn= 75.
*p<.01.

V. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This research concurs with earlier research on the importance of fit between the endorser and endorsed brand. In addition, the research found that local athletes are less influential in affecting consumption decisions as endorsers when compared to foreign athletes, especially among male consumers.

While Singapore athletes are making their mark in international competitions, the number of local athletes and their level of competence pale in comparison to more established sporting nations. Singapore was never near the top of the medal tally in any international sporting competition. This may explain their why local athletes are not as well-known as some foreign athletes and as such, they do not appear in the media as frequently as foreign athletes. Subsequently, this translates to a lower interest and awareness among consumers, and hence a lower monetary value in endorsement deals for local athletes.

As the pre-dominant consumers of sports are males, they may be more aware of the divide between foreign and local athletes in terms of media coverage. As knowledgeable consumers, they may be more critical of the effectiveness of local athlete endorsers. This may explain the difference between in the responses between male and female consumers.

While the findings suggest that female consumers may be more accepting of local athlete endorsers, it also suggests that changing the perceptions of male consumers will be important before local athlete endorsers see any significant change in the monetary value of their endorsement deals.

VI. LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

The sample for this research was based on a convenience sample of tertiary students. Hence, it will be difficult to generalize the findings of this study to the larger population. Future research should address this issue by taking a sample that is more representative.

It may also be worthwhile to examine whether there is a difference between more established local athletes and with those who are just starting out. This may answer the question as to whether the lower endorsement value for local athletes is driven by perception or commercial reasons.

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