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Constructing Athlete Identification and the effectiveness of Athlete Endorsement on Customer's Purchase Intention

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Abstract

Purpose - This study focuses on the effectiveness of the athlete endorsement on the purchase intention of customers and investigates the attributes of the athlete identification. The Athlete Identification is defined by the expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, toughness and transgression. Athlete identification and athlete endorsement help marketers with a thorough look at the trend of using famous sports player to promote products.

Research design and methodology - 450 questionnaires were delivered to respondents in Ho Chi Minh city and 433 were returned completed. Descriptive statistics, reliability, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling were conducted to test the relationship between independent and dependent variables.

Results - The expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness and toughness exert positive impacts on athlete identification. Transgression affects negatively athlete identification and athlete endorsement. This research confirmed results of previous studies.

Conclusions - The athlete first needs to create their own Identification from a set of attributes in order to be out-standing in the sport and leisure industry before becoming an endorser for a particular product. From the company's perspectives, decision makers should choose an acclaimed sports player to boost the purchase intention of consumers.

Keywords: Athlete Identification, Athlete Endorsement, Transgression, Customer's Purchase Intention.

JEL classifications: M30, M31, M37.

1. Introduction

Over the past decades, advertising has been given higher weight by specialists in economy, especially marketers. Enterprises use the significant amount of their budget to establish strong relationships between customers and their endorsers (Zamudo et al, 2013). Customers more enjoy the entertainment of the sport and leisure industry so that marketers could take advantage of customer's interest to create advertising campaigns, affecting consumers' purchase making-decisions. The athlete is not just only a person

putting all his or her effort and time on practicing and taking part in competitions, the athlete is also a communicator, motivator who inspires others, especially sedentary workers, to get a better lifestyle (Hodge and Walker, 2015). As a result, the cult of using athlete's image, reputation and success for endorsement is more popular than ever before (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). Nevertheless, with the proliferation of cutting-edge entertainment and the seeking of power, the athletes have been caused lots of scandals. Nowadays, the athlete is more likely to live in a high-class lifestyle and enjoys social evils such as alcoholism, racism, (child) abuse, inequality to name but a few (Lohneiss & Hill, 2014), the scandals not only ruin the athlete's life as well as career but also destroy the reputation of the company that uses the image of the athlete to promote their products. Therefore, marketers should take this aspect into account. Besides, investigating and deciding to apply athlete endorsements in order to "stick" human brand in customer's mind should be taken into account; however, with the coming of information age, people have become smarter customers with lots of knowledge, references and choices

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before making a purchase decision (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2016). Hence, the aim of this research is delve into the influence of athlete endorsement and the athlete identification on customer's purchase decision.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Source Credibility Model and Athlete Personality hypothesis

Expertise refers to the outstanding features as well as the status of the entity (Akiko, Stephen, & Young, 2013). The effectiveness of celebrity's expertise will bring more ameliorative effects on identify the celebrity (Aaker & Myers, 1987; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003), great level of knowledge (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953) and credibility (O'Hahoney & Meenaghan, 1997). The decision of choosing an endorser depends on the level of endorser's expertise perceived from customers (Friedman, Termini, & Washington, 1976; Baker & Tagg, 2001).

Athlete's Expertise is the most important variable that helps an athlete in being recognized by target customers (Braustein & Zhang, 2005; Brad & Todd, 2013). Spry, Pappu, and Cornwell (2011) and Akiko et al. (2013) show that the effectiveness of the expertise of the source brings some advantages to advertisements. However, they did not classify the variables that affect athlete's expertise and the intensity of the effect and they just conduct the study on a small scale, or the questionnaire is only problematic itself (Jessica, James, & Galen, 2016). Therefore, based on Source Credibility Model (Hovland et al., 1953) and Athlete Identification (Brad & Todd, 2013), this study engages the hypothesis as below.

H1: Athlete's Expertise has a positive effect on the attitude toward Athlete Identification of audience.

Consumers consider the trustworthiness of the athlete endorser as an attribute of dignity, believability and honesty (Subhadip, Varsha, & Pragati, 2013). O'Mahoney and Meenaghan (1997) find that the trustworthiness of the athlete affects athlete identification as well as and the endorsement positively (Spry et al., 2011).

There are many studies focusing on the relationship between the trustworthiness (or credibility) of general celebrities and the endorsement, but just few athlete-targeting studies (Friedman et al., 1976; Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Atkin & Block, 1983; Freiden, 1984). Mc Craken (1989) states that "public recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement", hence trustworthy athlete could become an endorser. Therefore, this hypothesis is added as below.

H2: Athlete's Trustworthiness has a positive effect on the attitude toward Athlete Identification of audience.

Attractiveness refers to the similarity, likability and familiarity of the endorser (Ohanian, 1991). When an athlete possesses a decent level of attractiveness, customers are more likely to be convinced to purchase products since they would have a strong feeling of admiration for attractive endorser (Joseph, 1982). The attractiveness of the athlete endorser boosts the identification of athlete among others (Braustein & Zhang, 2005; Misra & Beatty, 1990)

In contrast, there is a wide range of studies that considers the view referring that the attractiveness brings no general effect on endorsement efforts (Kamins, 1990; Till & Busler, 2000; Ohanian, 1991). Thus, this hypothesis re-investigates this relationship as follows.

H3: Athlete's Attractiveness has a positive effect on the Attitude toward Athlete Identification of audience.

According to Brad and Todd (2013), Toughness affects Athlete Identification, indicating the way that the athlete plays during matches. Toughness affects not only the prestige of the athlete identification but also the distinctiveness of the athlete identification (Brad & Todd, 2013); however, they cannot differentiate the effect of toughness on prestige and distinctiveness. Furthermore, Brad and Todd (2013) ignored to explain the factor "Toughness", just focusing on the impact of "Wholesome", "Imaginative" and leading to the confusion whether toughness truly brings impacts on athlete identification. Thus, this research engages this hypothesis as below.

H4: Athlete's Toughness has a positive effect on the Attitude toward Athlete Identification of the audience.

2.2. Athlete Transgression

Sport scandal is a set of actions occurring during the games the athlete joins or even in their daily lives that bring negative impact on the athlete's "on-field and off-field" (Hughes & Shank, 2005). When an athlete causes scandals, the audiences no longer believe in their profession and consider him or her as a bad image for a team in particular and a sport field as a whole. Therefore, the athlete will lose their identification, or even have negative reactions to their matches. The athlete's scandal will affect directly or indirectly the stockholders and the company regarding to illegal transgressions or immoral transgressions (Kelly, Weeks, & Chien, 2018).

From marketing's perspective, there are numerous studies showing that athlete transgressions bring negative impacts on the athlete endorsement (Till & Shimp, 1998), while many scholars prove that scandals of the athlete do not affect the endorsed product (Lohneiss & Hill, 2014; Carrilat & d'Astous, 2014). Therefore, this research investigates the effect of Athlete Transgression on Athlete Identification and Athlete Endorsement.

H5: The athlete Transgression has a negative effect on Athlete Identification.

H6: The athlete Transgression has a negative effect on Athlete Endorsement.

H8: Athlete Endorsement has a positive effect on Customer's Purchase Intention.

2.3. Meaning Transfer Model

Meaning Transfer Model (McCracken, 1989) is a 3-stage process that indicates the way the celebrity endorsers use their own reputation to convey the benefits of the product to customers via advertisements. In the first stage, if the celebrity achieves acclaimed identification and culture, they are able to transfer their image to celebrity endorsement. According to the expanded research of Langmeyer and Walker (1992), the fame and image of endorsers are delivered to goods and services when these products are stuck with celebrities. DeBono and Harnish (1988) indicate that an individual has a tendency to be convinced by the source credibility and attractiveness of spokespeople. McCutcheon, Ashe, Houran, and Maltby (2003) applied the Meaning Transfer process in the entertainment field and drew the conclusion that customers the athletes could use their images, names as well as their persona to create an impressively unforgettable message. Meaning Transfer Model helps to understand the way that meaning of culture and society are conveyed to products through marketing efforts (Varsha & Subhadip, 2016). Thus, this research includes the hypotheses as below.

H7: Athlete Identification has a positive effect on Athlete Endorsement.

3. Methodology and Research model

3.1. Methodology

The qualitative research is generated through the use of the individual depth interview (IDI). There are 20 participants (15 officers, 5 students of the age above 18) who have already watched several advertisements with the appearance of the athletes. They were asked to explore the attributes of athlete endorsement. Moreover, these participants are required to answer whether they clearly understand the contents of each question in quantitative research or not. The official study uses the questionnaire to ask 450 respondents regarding to athlete endorsement in Ho Chi Minh City. The scale of the research uses the 5-point Likert scale.

3.2. Suggested Research Model

The suggested research model (Figure 1) is designed with references as follows: Athlete Personality model in the research of Brad and Todd (2013), Athlete Endorser Effectiveness model of Jessica et al. (2016), The hypotheses in the study of Koernig and Boyd (2009), The limitations in the study of Till et al. (2000), The further suggestion of Francois and Alain (2013).

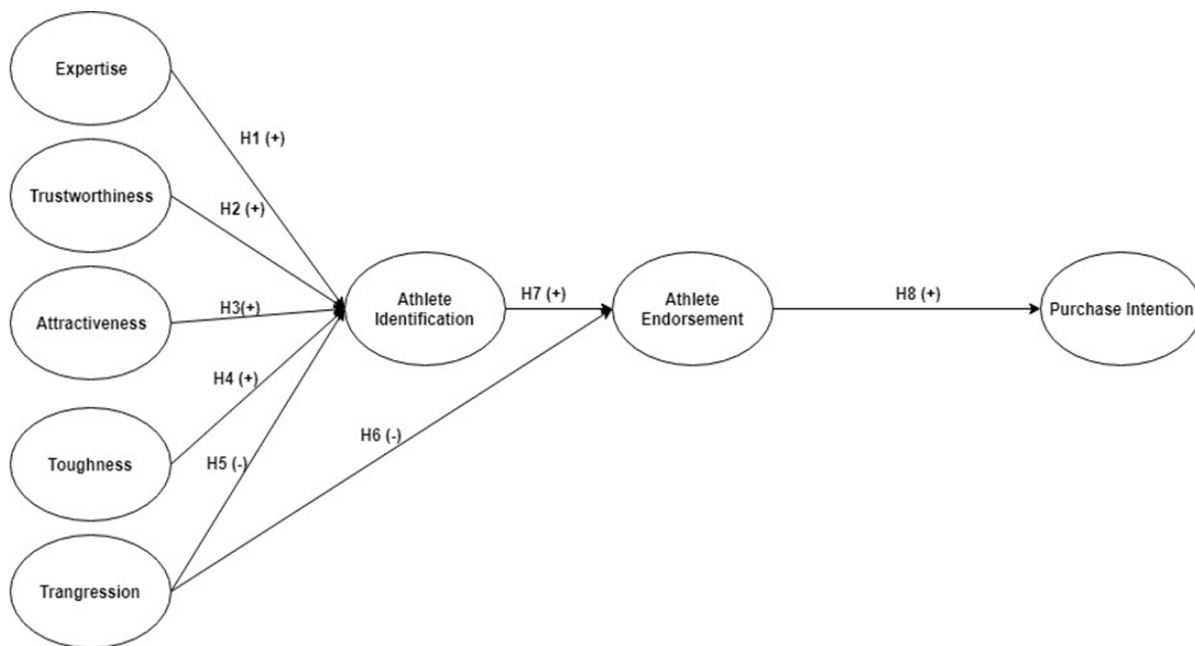


Figure 1: The suggested theoretical model

3.3. Sample Data

Four hundred and fifty questionnaires were delivered to respondents in around Ho Chi Minh city and its vicinity. 433 were returned completed, showing this step a response rate of 96.22%. Besides, thirteen questionnaires are invalid or unqualified and thus they had been eliminated. Therefore, the answers of 420 respondents were input to SPSS software.

4. Research Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics by Characteristics

There are 65% of total respondents are males and 35% are females. 59% of total respondents work in private companies. The proportions of respondents working in

University and working in Governmental Organizations are 19% and 6%, respectively. There is slight gap of 2% between two lowest occupation groups (Non-profit Organization with 5.5% and others with 3.6%). 79% of total respondents earn less than 10 million VND per month. The percentages of respondents' income in the range 10-15 million VND is 12.9% and in a range 15-20 million VND is 6.2%. The remaining 1.9% is the proportion of people earning above 20 million VND. 50.2% of total respondents are between the ages of 18-29. About one-third of the respondents are from 30 to 39 years old. The percentage of respondents between 40-49 years old is 19.8%. An overwhelming majority of people answering the questionnaire have Bachelor's Degree (344 respondents to be exact) whilst there are 43 respondents having Graduate of Professional Degree. In addition, 23 respondents have High School or Equivalency Degree and 10 respondents have Associate's Degree.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics of Model Variables

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of quantitative variables

Athlete Expertise						
EX1	The athlete is an outstanding expert in his/her field	420	1	5	2.67	.973
EX2	The athlete has achieved a great performance during his/her career	420	1	5	3.27	.959
EX3	The athlete has achieved many awards in either sports	420	1	5	2.55	.994
EX4	The athlete is more superior than other athletes	420	1	5	2.79	1.034
EX5	The athlete has a good reputation with the general public	420	1	5	2.81	1.033
Athlete Trustworthiness						
TW1	The athlete is an honest and sincere person	420	1	5	2.38	.925
TW2	The athlete works industriously all the time	420	1	5	2.34	.969
TW3	The athlete treats others with respect	420	1	5	2.18	.810
TW4	The athlete always shows that he/she has a good quality in each match	420	1	5	3.01	1.425
TW5	The athlete always behaves in a trustworthy manner	420	1	5	2.21	.892
Athlete Attractiveness						
AT1	The athlete possesses attractive appearance	420	1	5	3.97	.804
AT2	I am charmed whenever I see him/her in any media communications	420	1	5	3.94	.784
AT3	I feel like he is unique, unlike any other sportspeople	420	1	5	3.94	.790
AT4	The athlete is so strong and healthy	420	1	5	3.99	.783
AT5	The athlete attracts great attention of media	420	1	5	3.01	1.440
Athlete Toughness						
TN1	The athlete never gives up or feels weary in any matches	420	1	5	3.83	.790
TN2	The athlete always strive in training	420	1	5	3.03	1.444
TN3	Rival team/athlete always considers him/her as a threat	420	1	5	3.83	.797
TN4	The athlete can overcome any tough situations	420	1	5	3.74	.799
TN5	The athlete always gives it his/her best shot in any matches	420	1	5	3.82	.784
Athlete Transgression						
TG1	Scandals affect the athlete's career for a long time	420	1	5	2.07	.743
TG2	I do not like the athlete who causes unethical scandal, off-field scandal	420	1	5	2.20	.760
TG3	I would ignore matches that this athlete having scandals plays	420	1	5	2.10	.738
TG4	I do not believe in the product which is advertised by bad or unethical athlete	420	1	5	2.13	.735
TG5	I do not believe the advertisements with the appearance of this notorious athlete	420	1	5	2.13	.738
Athlete Identification						
AI1	I am a big fan of [the athlete] more than other players	420	1	5	2.75	.819
AI2	I am able to recognize [the athlete] in public	420	1	5	2.88	.884

AI3	My favorite athlete is the most popular player in sport	420	1	5	2.73	.873
AI4	I watch sports matches because I am a big fan of [the athlete]	420	1	5	3.12	.909
Athlete Endorsement						
AE1	Athlete endorser is the one who can be easily recognized by the public	420	1	5	3.98	.668
AE2	Athlete endorser should be a person who acquires a great reputation	420	1	5	3.84	.698
AE3	Athlete endorsement should not bring negative effect on athlete career	420	1	5	3.94	.667
AE4	I believe the athlete endorser would use this product in daily life	420	1	5	3.91	.672
AE5	I think that the message from the athlete endorsing the product is trustable	420	1	5	3.91	.688
Customer's Purchase Intention						
AE1	I intend to buy the product that the athlete is using	420	1	5	3.47	.920
AE2	I would try this product when I see it	420	1	5	3.51	.918
AE3	Athlete appearance gives me a motivation to purchase the product	420	1	5	3.55	.906
AE4	I will purchase the product with the athlete's logo	420	1	5	3.73	.816
AE5	I would purchase the product as a way to show my respect to the athlete	420	1	5	3.37	.947

A more detailed look at the table 1 shows that respondents consider that when the athlete needs to be professional in sports as well as achieve some on-field awards during their careers (EX2 with mean=3.27). Respondents are likely to believe that the athlete does need to have good quality in sports (TW4 with mean=420). According to Attractiveness, respondents believe that the athlete needs to be healthy and wholesome (AT4 with mean=3.99). They think that the athletes should be tough or try their best whenever they are in a match (TN5 with mean=3.82). The majority of respondents agree with the view that scandals would destroy athlete's career and they do not believe any message coming from the infamous athlete (TG2 with mean=2.20). The respondents seem to keep neutral opinions in terms of Athlete Identification. Regarding Athlete Endorsement, respondents consider that the athlete endorser should be the one who can be easily recognized by the general public (AE1 with mean=3.98). Finally, most of the respondents would buy the product that the athlete endorses.

4.3. Reliability test

In table 2 shows that the Athlete Expertise consisted of 5 items ($\alpha=0.88$) with r of all items >0.3 , the Athlete Trustworthiness after discarding TW4 ($r=0.011$) consisted of 4 items ($\alpha=0.852$) with r of 4 items >0.3 , the Athlete Attractiveness consisted after eliminating AT5 ($r=0.052$) consisted of 4 items ($\alpha=0.896$) with r of 4 other items >0.3 . The Athlete Toughness after deleting TN2 ($r=0.045$) comprised 4 items ($\alpha=0.896$) with corrected Item-total correlation >0.3 , the Athlete Transgression comprised 5 items ($\alpha=0.909$) with r of all items >0.3 . Cronbach's alphas for the 4 Athlete Identification and 5 Athlete Endorsement items were 0.851 and 0.915, respectively. The Customer's Purchase Intention was found to be remarkably reliable (5 items, $\alpha=0.914$, $r>0.3$).

Table 2: Item-Total Statistics of quantitative variables

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
EX1	11.43	11.372	.690	.860
EX2	10.83	11.550	.671	.864
EX3	11.55	11.232	.694	.859
EX4	11.31	10.668	.757	.844
EX5	11.29	10.698	.752	.845
TW1	6.72	5.352	.654	.830
TW2	6.76	4.998	.708	.807
TW3	6.92	5.590	.720	.805
TW5	6.89	5.317	.703	.808
AT1	11.87	4.410	.760	.870
AT2	11.90	4.388	.797	.856
AT3	11.90	4.413	.779	.863
AT4	11.85	4.527	.744	.876
TN1	11.39	4.664	.767	.893
TN3	11.39	4.601	.780	.888
TN4	11.48	4.561	.794	.883
TN5	11.40	4.498	.840	.867
TG1	8.55	6.864	.691	.905
TG2	8.42	6.563	.761	.890
TG3	8.52	6.618	.774	.887
TG4	8.49	6.513	.813	.879
TG5	8.49	6.508	.810	.880
AI1	8.73	5.411	.611	.843
AI2	8.59	4.643	.785	.770
AI3	8.75	4.894	.713	.802
AI4	8.36	4.917	.662	.824
AE1	15.60	5.836	.720	.909
AE2	15.73	5.561	.776	.898
AE3	15.64	5.698	.773	.898
AE4	15.67	5.559	.818	.889
AE5	15.66	5.460	.830	.886
PI1	14.16	10.042	.730	.905
PI2	14.12	9.611	.825	.885
PI3	14.08	9.814	.794	.891
PI4	13.90	10.155	.831	.886
PI5	14.26	9.887	.732	.905

4.4. Explanatory Factor Analysis (EFA)

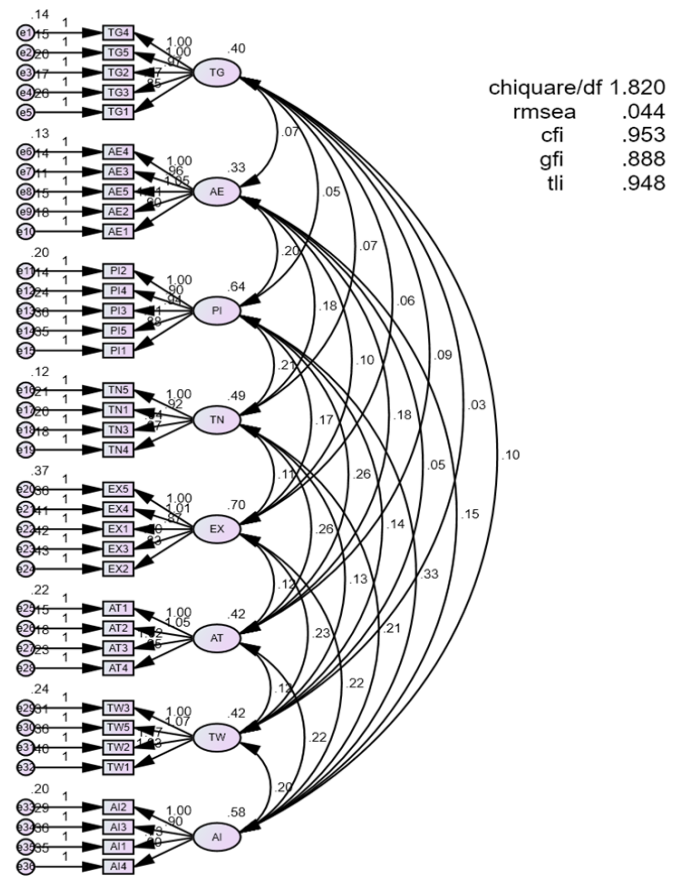
Exploratory Factor Analysis is the widely used to discover the latent structure of a set of variables (Garson, 2006). In simple terms, this method is technically applied to evaluate the interdependence without the classification (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2016). Besides, EFA is utilized to reduce data to a smaller set of variable and to identify the relationship between the variables and the respondents. The results of EFA in table 3 below, 36 different items are divided into 8 varied components. The cumulative proportion of Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings is 66.542%, which means that the first eight factors together account for 66.542% of the total variance. 36 items are grouped into 8 components after conducting the Exploratory Factor Analysis.

Table 3: Results of the Explanatory Factor Analysis (EFA)

	Factor							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
PI2	.906							
PI4	.886							
PI3	.840							
PI5	.778							
PI1	.706							
AE4		.921						
AE5		.882						
AE3		.804						
AE2		.803						
AE1		.689						
TG5			.869					
TG4			.867					
TG2			.821					
TG3			.803					
TG1			.731					
EX4				.838				
EX5				.836				
EX3				.757				
EX1				.724				
EX2				.698				
TN5					.914			
TN3					.843			
TN1					.793			
TN4					.793			
AT2						.824		
AT1						.817		
AT3						.815		
AT4						.804		
TW3							.819	
TW5							.800	
TW2							.772	
TW1							.668	
AI2								.965
AI3								.767
AI1								.640
AI4								.632

4.5. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Confirmatory Factor Analysis is a multivariate statistical procedure, which is applied in a host of studies to examine the validity and reliability of measured variables (Bagozzi & Foxall, 1996). The results of EFA are in figure 4.



chiquare/df 1.820
 rmsea .044
 cfi .953
 gfi .888
 tli .948

Figure 2: The Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model

In figure 4, the Comparative Fit index (CFI) of the theoretical model is 0.953, which is higher than the acceptable threshold, indicating that the theoretical is a good fit.

The Tucker-Lewis coefficient (TLI) is 0.948, which is higher than the acceptable level of 0.9, demonstrating a very good fit.

The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation Index (RMSEA) is 0.044, which is lower than the confidence interval for the RMSEA (0.05).

The value of Chi-square/df is 1.820, which is lower than 2.0, this means that the theoretical model is a good fit. Besides, the Chi-square significant is .000, which is less than 0.05, showing a very good fit.

However, the value of Goodness of Fit (GFI) is 0.888, which is lower than the acceptable threshold. According to

Mulaik, James, Alstine, and Bennett (1989), the value of GFI is widely accepted to depend on the sample of the sample size.

4.6. Regression Example

Regression weights indicate the figure for changes in the dependent variables that are contributed to “a single standard deviation unit’s worth of change in the predictor variable”. The value of Standardized Regression Weights should be more than 0.5 (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2016; Anderson & Gerbing, 1998). The table 4 indicates that all of the Standardized Regression Weight Indexes of items are more than 0.5. Therefore, none of these items need to be eliminated from the theoretical model and thus, the items of all factors are retained in the next process of the data analysis. Next, the Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) indices are conducted in CFA in order to investigate the convergence and validity of the constructs. According to Chin (1998), the value of composite reliability of all constructs should be 0.7 or above and the value of the average variance extracted should be higher than 0.5.

Table 4: Standardized Regression Weights

TG4	<---	TG	.862	EX5	<---	EX	.810
TG5	<---	TG	.855	EX4	<---	EX	.816
TG2	<---	TG	.808	EX1	<---	EX	.749
TG1	<---	TG	.729	EX2	<---	EX	.727
AE4	<---	AE	.849	AT1	<---	AT	.810
AE3	<---	AE	.824	AT2	<---	AT	.869
AE5	<---	AE	.871	AT3	<---	AT	.840
AE2	<---	AE	.828	AT4	<---	AT	.787
AE1	<---	AE	.768	TW3	<---	TW	.800
PI2	<---	PI	.875	TW5	<---	TW	.779
PI4	<---	PI	.885	TW2	<---	TW	.784
PI3	<---	PI	.838	TW1	<---	TW	.725
PI5	<---	PI	.773	AI2	<---	AI	.863
PI1	<---	PI	.767	AI3	<---	AI	.788
TN5	<---	TN	.894	AI1	<---	AI	.678
TN1	<---	TN	.813	AI4	<---	AI	.757
TN3	<---	TN	.829				
TN4	<---	TN	.850				

The table 5 shows that the figures for composite reliability of 8 factors are above 0.7, which match the requirement of Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Besides, the indices of the average variance extracted for all factors are over 0.5, which match the requirement.

It can therefore be concluded that the results of the fit indexes, standardized regression weights, composite reliability and average variance extracted are higher than acceptable threshold. Therefore, the next technique Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is conducted.

Table 5: The indices of C.R. and A.V.E

Factors	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Trustworthiness	0.855	0.597
Transgression	0.910	0.669
Athlete Endorsement	0.916	0.687
Purchase Intention	0.916	0.687
Toughness	0.910	0.717
Expertise	0.881	0.597
Attractiveness	0.896	0.684
Athlete Identification	0.856	0.600

4.7. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Structural Equation Modeling is a technique which involves a multivariate statistical analysis. SEM is widely used to measure the structural relationships. In fact, the research is applied the SEM in order to test the hypotheses between Athlete Identification and its antecedents. The results of SEM are in figure 5.

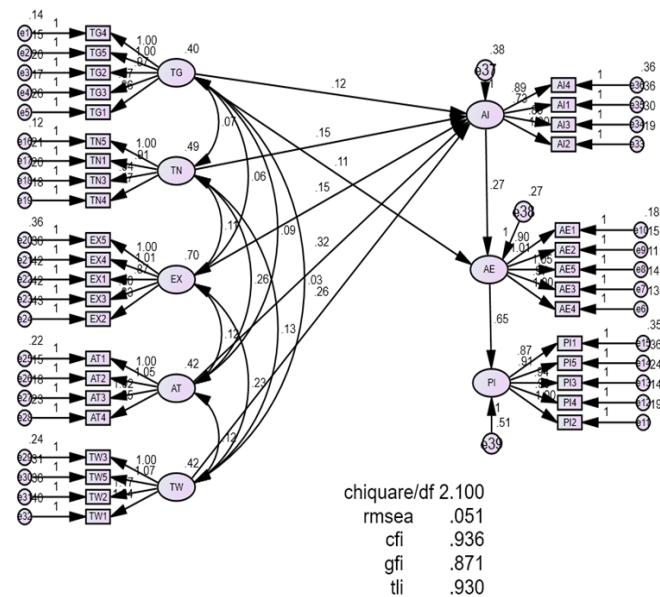


Figure 3: The Structural Equation Model

The Comparative Fit index (CFI) of the theoretical model is 0.936, which is higher than the acceptable threshold, indicating that the theoretical model is a good fit.

The Tucker-Lewis coefficient (TLI) is 0.930, which is higher than the acceptable level of 0.9, demonstrating a very good fit.

The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation Index (RMSEA) is 0.051, which is higher than the confidence interval for the RMSEA (0.05). According to MacCallum, Browne, and Sugawara (1996) and Daire, Joseph, and Michael (2008), the RMSEA in a range of 0.05 to 0.10 is considered an indication of fair fit.

The value of Chi-square/df is 2.1, which is higher than 2.0, this means that the theoretical model is a fair fit (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). Besides, the Chi-square significant is .000, which is less than 0.05, showing a very good fit.

However, the value of Goodness of Fit (GFI) is 0.871, which is lower than the acceptable threshold. However, value of GFI is widely accepted to depend on the sample of the sample size, (Mulaik et al., 1989; MacCallum et al., 1997).

5. Result Discussion

The hypothesis **H1: "Athlete's Expertise brings a positive effect on Athlete Identification"**

The expertise of the athlete brings a significant, positive impact on the athlete Identification (estimate value = +0.147, p-value = 0.003) hence this hypothesis is relevant and acceptable. Vietnamese audience only recognizes or remembers the athlete who has played extremely well in sports. Vietnamese people believe that the athlete must complete a role as a sports person who is indispensable in the team first. If the athlete desires to create their own personal brand, they need to primarily strive and accomplish successfully in his sports career. The result of this study re-confirms the previous findings (Brad & Todd, 2013; Aaker, 1997; Jessica et al., 2016; Till et al., 2016).

H2: "Athlete's Trustworthiness brings a positive effect on Athlete Identification"

The Athlete Trustworthiness affects positively, significantly the Athlete Identification (the estimate value = +0.262, p-value is < 0.001). The Athlete's Trustworthiness makes the most second impact on Athlete Identification. Sometimes the athlete does not need to be too professional, they just need to create an image that they are trustworthiness. By doing so, they can win Vietnamese audience's heart and create their own identification. The result of this hypothesis is reliable and believable, based on the concept of Athlete Personation built by Brad and Todd (2013) and Aaker (1997). In fact, if an athlete could show their honest and sincere personality all the time and behaves well with other well as well treat people with respect, the public will consider him as an iconic sports player and easy to identify him in media communications. Thus, the athlete should enhance or improve their trustworthy behavior to impress the audience and ordinary people.

H3: "Athlete's Attractiveness brings a positive effect on Athlete Identification"

The Athlete Attractiveness exerts a significant, positive impact on Athlete Identification (the estimate value = +0.318, p-value is < 0.001), thus this hypothesis is relevant and

acceptable. With the proliferation of sport and leisure industry, the athlete can use their good-looking appearance to impress the audience. Vietnamese people do not just watch sports to enjoy the spirit and the feeling of the match, they also want to see their sports idol on the field and observe their appearance, especially young generation. Therefore, the athlete can take this advantage to build their identification. This finding did affirm the results of previous research (Azoulay & Kepferer, 2003; Jessica et al, 2016; Brad & Todd, 2016).

H4: "Athlete's Toughness brings a positive effect on Athlete Identification"

The Athlete Toughness brings a dramatic, positive impact on Athlete Identification (the estimate value = +0.152, p-value = 0.020). This hypothesis is relevant and acceptable. Most of the Vietnamese consider that the athlete needs to show their toughness whenever they are on the field. It therefore can be concluded that the athlete needs to strive all the time and become the icon of the effort in sport and leisure industry to create the athlete identification in Vietnam context.

H5: "Athlete's Transgression brings a negative effect on Athlete Identification"

The Athlete Transgression causes a remarkable, negative influence on Athlete Identification (The estimate value = -0.115, p-value = 0.047). This hypothesis is relevant and acceptable and re-confirms the findings (Huge & Shark, 2005; Lee, Trail, Kwon, & Anderson, 2011; Emerson, 1962). Despite their profession, if the athlete causes scandals, Vietnamese people would immediately boycott him as well as his reputation. Vietnamese always respects those who can keep a fair and clear career path. If one has caused scandals, on-field or off-field, he or she will be immediately boycotted, losing his identification. Companies in Vietnam carefully consider the athlete who does not get any scandal before making him become an endorser and will ignore or defy using him as an endorser.

H6: "Athlete's Transgression brings a negative effect on Athlete Endorsement"

The Athlete Transgression impacts negatively, remarkably Athlete Endorsement (the estimate value = -0.106, p-value = 0.021). According to previous results of Huge and Shank (2005); Till and Shimp (1998), Emerson (1962), Lohneiss and Hill (2014); Carrillat et al. (2014), the result of this research is reliable and understandable. People consider that companies in Vietnam carefully consider the athlete who does not get any scandal before making him become an endorser and will ignore or defy using him as an endorser. In addition, the athlete's scandal will affect directly or indirectly the stock holders and the company regarding to illegal transgressions or immoral transgressions (Kelly et al., 2018).

H7: "Athlete Identification brings a positive effect on Athlete Endorsement"

The Athlete Identification brings a positive, significant impact on Athlete Endorsement (the estimate value = +0.267, p-value is < .001). This hypothesis is relevant and acceptable and affirms the previous findings (McCracken, 1989; Langmeyer & Walker, 1991; Varsha & Subhadip, 2015; Nguyen & Nguyen 2016; Till et al, 2016). In detailed, people believe that the company should choose the Athlete who is more likely to be recognized by others and awarded many achievements in his sports career in order to represent the product as an athlete endorser.

H8: "Athlete Endorsement brings a positive effect on Customer's Purchase Intention"

The Athlete Endorsement brings a positive impact on the Customer's Purchase Intention (the estimate value = +0.653, p-value is < 0.001). Therefore, this hypothesis is relevant and acceptable. There is a wide range of Vietnam corporations such as Vinamilk, Pepsi, Shopee, Dienmayxanh that has succeeded significantly when using the fame and popularity of the athlete endorser. Apart from aspects of the product itself, the athlete endorsement would exert some impacts on customer's purchase intention in Vietnam. Vietnamese dwellers always want to show their love and respect towards their athlete idol, thus athlete endorsement would motivate them to purchase the product. If the athlete is qualified, customers will try and buy the endorsed product. The appearance of the athlete will create an invisible motivation to make customers buy the product as well as this is the way avid fans could show respect their beloved athlete.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1. Conclusions

The research objective focuses on the effectiveness of the athlete endorsement on the purchase intention of customers as well as investigates the attributes of the athlete identification. The Athlete Identification is built up based on 5 main components: Expertise, Trustworthiness, Attractiveness, Toughness and Transgression. The study findings show that five attributes include Athlete's Trustworthiness, Athlete's Expertise, Athlete's Attractiveness, Athlete's Toughness, Athlete's Transgression bring considerable effects on Athlete Identification. Besides, Athlete's Transgression also brings negative impacts on Athlete Endorsement. Finally, customers will buy products with the appearance of the athlete endorser.

6.2. Managerial Implications

The expertise of the athlete is one of the most significant

characters that brings a significant impact on the identification of the athlete and makes an individual fit with a brand. Therefore, if the athletes are capable of proving their superiority, the athlete will attract a lot of attention from the public. Regarding the trustworthiness, if an athlete could show their honest and sincere personality all the time and behaves well with other well as well treat people with respect, the public will consider him as an iconic sports player and easy to identify him in media communications. Perhaps an athlete is not so good in sports compared to others, but when he or she demonstrates their honesty and sincerity, he or she can attract a lot of attention from the public. It is formally clear that the athlete does need to possess the Attractiveness trait in search of developing a strong bond with the personal brand. Once an athlete possesses the attractive appearance, people will more easily recognize him, experience well his identification. Besides, the concept of beauty of the athlete is quite different from other celebrities. The public considers the athlete's beauty is also the wholesome, physical strength and vigorous attraction so that the athlete is not completely necessary to put on some fashionable outfits, they just need to be who they are with the sporty health and wholesomeness. With regard to the toughness, when the athlete can overcome any difficult situation, proving his endless effort to the audience and their rival teams or rival athletes, the public would consider him as a well-known player. The athlete should strive when competing with other teams or rival, they need to fulfill the role of an athlete prior to other aspects. In contrast, the athlete should not make any mistake during his career since the transgression would totally destroy their career. The company should choose the Athlete who is more likely to be recognized by others and awarded many achievements in his sports career in order to represent the product as an athlete endorser.

The companies should plan a set of indicators to select an appropriate sports player in order to endorse the product. The athlete is easily affected by social evil; therefore, companies should have a back-up plan or a solution to deal with media crisis when the transgression of the athlete occurs. Marketing managers should take into account a range of famous athlete regarding sports types, the degree of popularity and scandals to have the most suitable athlete endorser.

6.3. Future research and limitations

This research did not distinguish the individual athlete and team group. The public perhaps have different perspectives between the identification of an individual sports person and a whole team. The whole team may as famous as a particular athlete, but the company could not use the whole team as an endorsement unit. Secondly, the research does not examine the Match-Up fit between the athlete endorser and the product. Perhaps the audience just believes in the

sport-related product in the advertisement with the appearance of the athlete, not in the non-sport product. Thirdly, it is advantageous to have a glimpse at the different kind of advertisement such as humorous advertisement, informative advertisement or musical advertisement in order that the company could choose a suitable athlete to become an endorser for goods and services. The research does not measure the degree of the athlete identification. In detailed, some athletes are more or less well-known than others, so it is beneficial to research this issue. The future research should consider the behaviors on-field and off-field of the athlete, sports types as well as the social status of the sports types. It is highly recommended other research should start with the original 15 factors of Aaker (1997).

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