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Building the Brand: The Difference in Brand Profiles between Team and Individual Athletes

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Abstract

Billions of dollars are spent in the sport marketing industry each year; more specifically investors are looking to put their money into specific sponsorship and endorsements of athletes. Millions of dollars are put into each sponsorship deal by managers due to the ability of the athlete's endorsement to elevate their brand. There has been several studies conducted that assess the effectiveness of athlete sponsorship due to the fit and qualities of the athlete. There is little known about the differences in athlete's endorsement profiles in regards to their sport, as well as their gender, ethnicity, and media exposure. This is of interest to managers as they spend thousands of hours and dollars on market research to pick effective athletic sponsors. The purpose of this research was to identify differences in brand profiles between team and individual athletes through content analysis of the athletes existing endorsements. Through the findings it was concluded that there is little difference between the brand profiles of the different types of athletes, although the study was limited by its small sample size. Differences appeared in categories including equipment, food and beverage, and entertainment.

Building the Brand: The Difference in Brand Profiles between Team and Individual Athletes

Star athletes are considered as effective multi textual and multiplatform promotional entities. They have the ability to play complex and varied roles as athletic laborers, entertainers, marketable commodities, role models, and political figures in a growing global economy (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). This increases their own personal value and allows them to grow their own personal brand. Today's athlete's incomes don't just come from their performance on the field but from their appeal off the field to various organizations that want to associate themselves with them. Athletes use these associations with sponsors to form brand profiles.

According to IEG, North American sport sponsorship spending is anticipated to escalate to \$15 billion in 2015 (IEG, 2015). Because of the capitalistic significance to sport properties and corporate sponsors, managers expect that the association of an athlete with their brand will elevate their brand to the next level in the consumers mind (Jung-Gyo & Jaejin, 2014). Athletes also look to leverage this brand image for their own personal careers and success as well as the status of the brand may also be reflected onto them.

Acknowledging the importance of brand management, many athletes have started focusing on developing their individual brands more actively (Arai, Ko, & Kaplanidou, 2013). The endorsement and athlete brand literature features different marketing goal orientations; the major goals of endorsement studies are more about how to sell the product by using the 'right' athletes while the athlete branding studies attempt to understand an athlete as a brand in order to provide effective marketing strategies mainly for athletes and their representatives such as managers and agents (Erdogan, 1999).

Consisting of a range of organizations from car companies, clothing companies, energy drinks, and other consumer products, athletes form their own profiles of brands that they want to associate with for their own personal and professional reasons. There is much research done on athlete sponsorship and its effectiveness, but there is little research on how the athletes are used. There will be

expected differences between the brand profiles for athletes who participate in individual versus team sports that this paper looks to analyze.

Investors in sport sponsorship look to target athletes for various reasons. Their physical appearance is obvious, however other variables are considered as well. This includes their actual performance in the sport and their athletic capabilities, the type of sport they play, their gender, the demographics they are able to reach, and the amount of media exposure their specific sport gets. In turn athletes will seek out similar characteristics in products they choose to associate with. An athlete will desire products or organizations that are attractive to consumers, generate high levels of media exposure, and reach various demographics. How athletes are looking to portray themselves and their image comes a great deal from their brand profiles. The brands they choose to associate themselves with become a part of their image and who they are as athletes and endorsers. There will be an expected difference in the brand profiles built by athletes of individual and team sports, especially when considering how the athletes wish to portray themselves in the consumers mind.

Literature Review

Sponsorship Background

The word luxury is associated with many things in life, whether it be a nice watch, a sports car, a cashmere sweater, but an athlete spokesperson for your brand? In many ways, athlete endorsement (and all celebrity endorsements) is something of a luxury. They are not a requirement for effective marketing and there are several other strategies that are efficient (McGhee, 2012). Yet thousands of companies are thirsty for this particular method of marketing. In addition, the inherent risk of pegging a marketing or advertising campaign on an individual has to be factored into marketing and budgeting decisions. And budgets are affected by using athlete endorsers. Top spokespeople command seven-figure, and in some cases, eight figure price tags (McGhee, 2012). In many cases, athletes earn much more for endorsements than they do in their sport career. For example, LeBron James signed

endorsement contracts for over \$90 million with Nike and Upper Deck trading cards before he was even drafted by a professional basketball team (McGhee, 2012). Earning almost \$100 million dollars before he even bounced a basketball as an NBA player, LeBron is an example of someone who started to build their brand profile at an extremely young age.

For the purpose of this study, the terms sponsorship and endorsement will be interchangeable and provide the same meaning, as well as the identification of celebrity and athlete. A celebrity endorser is “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement” (McCracken, 1989, p. 312). If you watch TV for a thirty minute show, you will most likely see several commercials featuring a celebrity endorser. This could be a celebrity using a product, saying they have used it, supporting it in some way, or even just making a cameo and using their face to grab your attention. Companies use their faces on billboards, print ads such as those featured in magazines, on the product packaging, and so much more.

According to global research agency Millard Brown, 15 percent of advertisements in the USA feature celebrities. To capture the potential benefits of this practice, companies make substantial monetary investments in celebrity endorsements, sometimes running into the millions of dollars for each endorsement deal (Simmers, Damron-Martinez & Haytko, 2009). Companies latching onto this expensive new trend due to the effectiveness and relationship that celebrity and athlete endorsements build between the consumer and the brand.

Using athletes in marketing is a relatively newer form of advertising when compared to traditional ways. From beginning just over a century ago, athlete endorsements have evolved and changed in various ways to what we see today (McGhee, 2012). Yet at their core, they retain the same characteristics and seek the same objectives. Linking a brand to a particular athlete or celebrity allows the product to bask in the so-called halo effect of the endorser, much like the BIRGing of a sports fan. For consumers, ascribing the positive attributes of the spokesperson to the brand they represent can

lead to higher awareness, enhanced brand perceptions and ultimately greater sales (McGhee, 2012). With its earliest ties to baseball, sponsorship of athletes today has grown rapidly due to increased interest in sport and globalization making sport consumption easier for everyone around the world. As professional sports become more commercialized industry segments, star athletes are considered popular cultural products and draw attention from media and corporate sponsors (Gilchrist, 2005; Summer & Johnson Morgan, 2008). Previously reserved for the “All Stars”, today it is difficult to find an athlete of any level without some sort of ties to an endorser.

Purpose and Effectiveness of Athletic Sponsor

The primary purpose of using celebrities in advertising is to generate publicity and attention to the brand as well as influence consumer perceptions of the brand stemming from their knowledge of the celebrity (Dhurup & Mafini, 2015). Corporations have chosen both sponsorship and celebrity endorsement as means to increase exposure and brand awareness. The brand association and awareness then influence brand purchase intentions as well as to reposition their products in their desired markets. Benefits of this approach include enhanced advertisement recall, increased product desirability, and enhanced product glamour (Spielman, 1981). Athlete endorsement has become a prevalent form of advertising. Athletes who appear in advertisements often have built in celebrity status that enjoy public recognition and use their status to assist a company sell or enhance its image, products, or brands (Brooks & Harris, 1998). While using their likeness to promote another brand, athletes at the same time are promoting their own personal image as well.

The use of celebrities in advertising has increased remarkably over recent decades. In 1999, it was found that roughly one in four commercials in the U.S featured a celebrity endorser (Erdogan), this ratio is expected to be significantly larger today as the growth of this method of advertising continues to expand. The rationale for using celebrities in advertising stems from the belief that the reputation and popularity of celebrities will be transferred to the products they endorse (McCracken, 1989). Moreover,

celebrities are believed to be effective at holding viewers' attention by breaking through the clutter of competing ads (Kaikati, 1987). With today's overstimulation of advertisements constantly harassing consumers, distinguishing themselves from others is an important strategy of marketers and athletes have the potential to play a key role in the success of that. The universal popularity of celebrities can also help global marketers enter foreign markets by breaking through cultural barriers, extending their brands in ways they previously could not without the help of the celebrity or athletic endorser (Erdogan, 1999).

Athlete endorsements also help target different demographics as another added benefit of their use. Bush and his colleagues assert that the celebrity athlete is an effective endorser for young people because a sports celebrity can serve as a role model that exerts significant influence in shaping the career aspirations and the self-views of young people (2004). Grabbing the consumer when they are young has the potential to lead to a lifetime of sales for the company, making this a very attractive aspect of the effectiveness of using athletes in advertising. Athletes presumably have high expertise in athletics, providing them with credibility, and thus they may be more effective as endorsers for sport related brands (Koernig & Boyd, 2009). Expertise leads to credibility, which leads to trustworthiness, if the consumer trusts the celebrity they will trust the brand, and if the consumer already trust the brand, they may now trust the celebrity. Further, athletes present a special case as endorsers because our attitudes and knowledge about them derive not only from seeing them in contrived situations (e.g., movies or events) but also how they behave and perform in spontaneous situations on the field of play. This authenticity may create a different kind of relationship with fans and could result in the high levels of brand adoption by sports fans of brands endorsed by athletes (O'Keefe, 2005).

Celebrity endorsers can also evoke positive responses in a certain area of the brain. A research team from Erasmus University in the Netherlands found using brain scan technology that positive emotions that consumers have about the endorser get transferred from the personality to the product,

resulting in a more positive impression of the endorsed product (McGhee, 2012). Athletes, especially high performing, who are nationally recognized, can be effective in creating brand associations. Similar to celebrity endorsers, athletes as endorsers are most successful when the products they endorse are believable and the athlete is sincere. Many researchers have found that athletes provide effective testimonials for products that have contributed to their own performance and success in their particular sport (Dhurup & Manfini, 2015).

Fit of Athlete

The athlete brand is defined as a public persona which has already established their own symbolic meaning within their name, face, or other elements in the market (Arai et al., 2013). To be most effective in their efforts, an organization's brand and an athlete's brand must match and work well together. The notion that an athlete should embody and represent the attributes of a brand he or she endorses is not nearly as universal as one would believe. From the earliest days of athlete endorsements, it seems as often as not that the endorser is simply selling his or her services to the top bidder, without regard for any fit between spokesperson and brand (McGhee, 2012). While this is sometimes still common today, we are seeing it less and less as a good fit leads to trustworthiness, credibility, and the overall retention of the advertisement. In decades past, advertising executives could buy vast quantities of commercial airtime on network television and bombard viewers with ads; the formula was simple – whomever spent more, won. Yet as consumers watch less live television and the selection of viewing options has increased exponentially, brands are forced to shift advertising spend to find new ways of engaging potential customers and clients (Belzer, 2013).

According to Andy England, Chief Marketing Officer of beverage giant Miller Coors, "One of the biggest challenges for marketers is fragmentation — not just in terms of the proliferation of brands/styles in so many CPG [consumer packaged goods] categories, but also in terms of consumer interests and the way they engage in those interests. Twenty years ago, you could advertise on the

networks; sponsor the four big sports; get involved with a few big-name concert tours and rest assured that your brand message was being delivered. Now, you have dozens of cable channels with programming that draws passionate followers, let alone original programming that lives only online; emerging sports and local sports opportunities; a music landscape that is much more diverse; the impact of social media; and new trends and passions emerging every day!" (Belzer, 2013). The new goal of several sponsorship deals is to become integrated in the consumer's life and go beyond brand association to a more in depth brand fit.

As stated, sports sponsorship originated with baseball. Dating all the way back to Babe Ruth and his incongruous deals with both Home Run candy bars and Old Gold cigarettes, athletes were seemingly unconcerned with how their endorsement of 'sin brands' like tobacco jarred with them touting the virtues of products aimed at children (McGhee, 2012). Today you would never see an athlete associate themselves with harmful products like tobacco, or even alcohol for most of them. With modern advertisements, we see more of a fit or correlation such as Peyton Manning and his irreverent spots for MasterCard to Dale Earnhardt Jr and Wrangler to Michael Jordan's line of Nike products. The best endorsement deals are the ones where the athlete's 'brand essence' not only shines through, but it is also consistent with the brand he or she is endorsing (McGhee, 2012). When compiling their brand profiles, athletes will typically think "how does this align with my own brand?", and consider their own goals of where they intend to align themselves in the market and in the consumer mind.

Social Identity Theory

Advertising is one means of transferring the symbolic images residing in celebrities to products and consumers. According to the meaning of the Transfer Model, the various cultural meanings associated with celebrities are transferred to the product or brand through endorsement, and then to consumers through the consumption process (Jung-Gyo & Jaejin , 2014). This theoretical foundation of affect transfer mechanisms was derived from the classical conditioning approach. This suggests that

attitudes may be formed by repeatedly pairing a neutral or unconditioned stimulus (the brand) with a positively or negatively evaluated (the endorser) stimulus (Dhurup & Manfina, 2015). For example, a brand name (unconditioned stimulus), such as Gatorade, in an advertisement could be paired with an athlete endorser (conditioned stimulus), such as Serena Williams, who evokes positive feelings that would consequently become conditioned to the brand (Dhurup & Manfina, 2015). If you have positive feelings about Serena Williams, it is now likely that after you see the advertisement, you will have positive feelings about Gatorade.

Social identification is the point at which consumers create an emotional connection with a brand (Watkins, 2014). This is explained above through the transfer method regarding Serena Williams and the Gatorade brand. It is the knowledge that a person is a member of a group and the importance of the emotional connection they attain through group membership (Watkins, 2014). Sports consumption is typically done in groups, whether this is going to a game with friends, watching the event with a group of people, or even wearing a team's logo that associated you with a group of other fans. The feeling of belonging and a connection to others is a social norm that the typical consumer strives to feel. In the sports context, fan identification is a concept that is used interchangeably with social identification.

According to Carlson "in crediting a collectivity with psychological reality beyond its membership, social identification enables the individual to conceive of, and feel loyal to, an organization or corporate culture" (2008, p.196). Social identification with a brand leads to the development of meaningful consumer-brand relationships, which is part of the effectiveness of athlete based sponsorship (Carlson & Donovan, 2008). Associating oneself with brand personalities that are perceived as desirable by most consumers is self-enhancing. Thus, individuals may be attracted to various brand personalities due to the psychological benefits of such associations. They think if I buy this product, I will be this way. Much liking thinking if I buy a gym membership, I will be fit. For instance, consuming brands

that possess both successful and tough personality attributes may reinforce an individual's aspirational goals (Carlson & Donovan, 2008). Correspondingly, sport fans are commonly drawn toward popular athletes because being associated with the athlete's "brand" personality attributes may enhance their own self-image. For example, assuming that Roger Federer possesses the brand personality attributes of successful and charming, sport fans are able to show that they strongly value both success and charm by associating themselves with his image. Conversely, individuals who prefer a "radical" self-image may choose to disassociate themselves with Roger Federer (Carlson & Donovan, 2013).

This connection and relationship are what brands are trying to establish by associating themselves with an athlete sponsor due to the ability of said relationships to change brand image or influence purchase intentions. Establishing customer-based brand equity includes developing unique brand associations that distinguish the brand from its competitor (Watkins, 2014). As much as brands try to distinguish themselves from each other, athletes attempt to do the same diversifying through endorsements to further their own personal careers. They do this through the structure of their own brand profiles.

Brand Profiles and the Athletes

A brand is what a product, company, or person brings to the table besides their name according to Forbes (2011). This is what first comes to the consumers mind when the brand is mentioned. It is the intangible sum of attributes that they provide. Marketing personnel realized that there is value in these brands, and that they have a strong influence on the perception of the consumer, which can then affect purchase intentions. A brand is what the consumer thinks of when they hear the name when it comes to both physical and emotional attributes. The strongest brand identification comes along when the consumer *feels* a relationship with the product or person (McLaughlin, 2011). Sports have the potential to evoke feelings among consumers unlike any other subject.

Many firms hire celebrities as spokespeople because these well-known individuals have their own “brand equity.” Famous actors and athletes carry high awareness and well developed public personas which are expected to transfer to brands through endorsements (Edwards & La Ferle, 2009). Michael Phelps is reportedly a 100 million dollar endorser for a long list of products related and unrelated to swimming (Tate, 2008). This shows that even though having a brand that is correlated to sports is effective, as discussed prior, it is not a necessary. Most brands want to be associated with a winner and use the instant recognition and attention that such celebrity brings, as well as the emotional connection formed between the athlete and the consumer. Louie, Kulik and Jacobson (2001) warned that the risk of celebrity endorsement is relatively high for new or unfamiliar brands, as new companies or brands do not have strong images in their own right. When consumers evaluate a new brand, the endorser’s image might become the main attribute to consider. Therefore, negative celebrity information could become especially troublesome. These relationships can be facilitated through the use of athlete and celebrity endorsers as discussed prior. For the purpose of this study, the term brand profile will be defined as the companies, products, and organizations that an athlete associates themselves with and who sponsors them.

According to Cornwell (2001), corporations looking to sponsor an event, team, or sport look to optimize sponsorship through an associative “link.” A natural basis for linking usually comes from the consumer or the product. Valvoline Oil, for example, has a self-evident link to auto racing, just as Nike has an obvious link with track and field. Although other links may be less plainly evident, they still exist. For example, although Pizza Hut may not have an obvious link to boxing, the boxing viewers fit the typical “pizza buying” audience that Pizza Hut desires to target (Cornwell, 1995). The most famous link may be basketball player Michael Jordan’s line of shoes, the Air Jordan.

Corporations are interested in assessing the degree to which sponsorships help them obtain their marketing objectives. The same can be said for athletes when building their brand profiles. In

particular, many corporations want to assess the impact of their marketing dollars on consumer recognition and attitude toward the sponsor. The recognition and consumer response generated toward a particular sponsor and product(s) is affected by the consumers' attitude toward that brand, feelings about the sport involved, and tendency to associate the preference they may have for the sport (or team) with the sponsor and/or their products (Cornwell, 2001).

In making decisions about their sponsoring process, marketers choose a sport and the format of the marketing based on the audience demographics and markets the company would like to target. The particular type of sponsorship selected may not be as important as how the sponsorship is strategically leveraged. For example, if the goal is to reach a mass audience with upscale demographic characteristics, the sponsorship of a popular tennis tournament or of a recognized symphony orchestra may be appropriate (Lee, 2003). The same can be said for when they are picking athletes. Businesses will pick the best athlete to get the maximum exposure depending on their target market.

Sponsorship tends to encourage uneven development across sports. The sports and sports events that attract large media audiences tend to attract sponsors and are relatively privileged compared to other sports. For example, football, tennis, and baseball are ideal for TV and are never short of sponsors. On the other hand, the lack of a sponsor caused the cancellation of the World Squash Championships in 1978 when TV coverage could not be guaranteed. Commercial interests dictate how athletes spend their time and demonstrate support for the companies and products that they endorse (Lee, 2003). The more popular the product the more the athlete is willing to be associated with it because it will help their own personal brand profiles. When shifting the focus to individual sports with greater spectator involvement, much of the work involving sponsorship has come in the contexts of golf, tennis, action sports, and NASCAR (Reams, Eddy, & Corck, 2015). This is due to their high profile media coverage. When we also consider the vast number of contexts used to examine sponsorship agreements (i.e., hypothetical versus actual sponsorships, individual versus team sports), it becomes apparent that

although the academic work in sponsorship is becoming robust, there is still a need for researchers to continue to broaden the contextual and theoretical bases in studies of sponsorship (Reams et al, 2015).

Until recently, the selection of which sport event to sponsor was often determined by the current pet project of a firm's CEO (Meenaghan, 1994). Their investments were based off their own personal interest and their own fandom and not the benefit of the company. However, Stotlar and Kadlec (1999) suggested that involvement as a sponsor has become more and more consistently based on business objectives and the realization that such involvement is a viable and profitable option for the company. The reasons that corporations sponsor a particular sport are less attached to personal interest in the activity, or event (i.e., "I will sponsor golf because I play golf and like golf"), and more a disciplined selection procedure, which includes serious product and consumer research, strategic management and opportunities to build promotions (Wilbur, 1988). In today's sponsorship packages we are seeing a more mutually beneficial relationship between sponsorship and athlete based off the potential brand profile positioning it can create in the consumers mind. When athletes are building their brand profiles, they are rarely endorsing a product because they have used it prior to the compensation and are fans of it. They choose their associations much like the businesses do, to capitalize on their business objectives.

However, Cornwell & Maignan (1998) notes that despite the immense growth in sport sponsorship, so little is known about how sponsorships work with regard to image association and there is little literature to help guide companies about what events or athletes to sponsor or what criteria they should look for in a potential sponsorship opportunity. The same question poses for athletes on what brands to associate themselves with to maximize their wealth and exposure. There are several factors that must be considered before entering into a sponsorship with an athlete. The gender of the athlete plays a factor, the type of sport, the media coverage of the sport, and whether the sport is a team or individual event.

Influence of Athlete and Sport Type

Deciding to use an athlete spokesperson to endorse a product is a difficult and costly decision. A study completed by Martin (1996), analyzed the importance of the athlete's sport in regards to their sponsorship acquisition and effectiveness. The image of the sport itself can enhance, or detract from, the effects of the personality and appearance of the athlete making the endorsement. The findings of the study suggest the managers should consider the sport, as well as the athlete carefully, when picking a product spokesperson. Regardless of the athlete's physical appearance and personality, knowing that athletes from some sports are more effective than athletes from other sports for endorsing the manager's particular product is important. On the other hand, if the type of sport really does not have an effect on consumer response to the endorsement, then searching for the athlete with the most appropriate personality and physical appearance at the least cost, regardless of the sport, would be the manager's best decision strategy (Martin, 1996). More than personality, authenticity can also play a significant role in the success of a brand. In a successful product endorsement, the athlete does so much more than sell the product. The athlete actually becomes a 'human brand' in his or her own right. The key attributes can be broken down into two groupings – those you see on the field and those off of it – and these two groupings have to be wrapped in consistency and authenticity. Derek Jeter's endorsement of Gillette Fusion, for instance, must appear genuine and authentic. If not, then Jeter won't persuade you to buy the razors. The perceived benefits will not be there (Conway,

Discovering a difference in brand profiles has the potential to save businesses several hours and money spent on market research. Celebrity endorsers, including athletes, are effective because they bring to the endorsement a host of characteristics that the audience uses in evaluating the ad. Laatz observed that brands have finally figured out that female consumers, especially millennials, connect best with authentic stories, and many of those stories are from female athletes (2015). A large body of

literature exists that has explored the nature of those spokesperson characteristics. For instance, we know that spokesperson gender, physical attractiveness, trustworthiness, and a vast array of personality characteristics all have an effect on consumer response to an ad (Martin, 1996). According to Kelman (1961), individuals are more likely to adopt a message when they find the sender as being similar to themselves. McGuire (1985) also argues that a source's familiarity and similarity along with perceived attractiveness positively influences message effectiveness. What we don't know is whether the type of sport the athlete is in has an impact on the response to an endorsement, especially when considering non sport products. That is, in addition to their own personality characteristics, athletes also bring to the endorsement process their sport's characteristics. This sports association is what gives them credibility and what makes them a trust source.

In Martin's study, respondents were asked how they would respond if an athlete from various sports were to endorse certain products through the use of a survey. Respondents rated each possible endorsement in terms of the endorsement's credibility, believability, interest level, appropriateness, how appealing it would be, if it would have a positive image, and if it would be a good fit between that product and that sport (1996). The results from the study indicate that, on average, some non-sport products were evaluated more positively for sport affiliations than other non-sport products. On average, Craftsman and Calgon endorsements were evaluated lower than Umbro, which was evaluated lower than Nordic Track. The fact that athletic endorsements of Craftsman and Calgon were evaluated as significantly less positive than the other products means that not all products are equal in their ability to benefit from endorsements by athletes. Managers should consider how much their product would benefit in positive evaluations from an association with sports through product endorsements before entering into a contract with an athlete (Martin, 1996).

The sports observed in the study included hockey, basketball, volleyball, golf, figure skating, and gymnastics. For Craftsman Power Saws, an endorsement from a hockey player is evaluated much more

positively than an endorsement from a basketball player. The basketball endorsement was rated much more positively than endorsements by volleyball players or golfers. Endorsements from figure skaters and gymnasts were rated the least positively. For Umbro, volleyball players were likely to produce the most favorably evaluated endorsements, followed by basketball players and gymnasts. Hockey players and figure skaters were rated more positively than golfers but less positively than the other sports. Figure skaters and then gymnasts were the most positively evaluated endorsers for Calgon, with volleyball players being rated as less positive than figure skaters and gymnasts but more positive than hockey players, golfers and basketball players. All sports but golf received very positive ratings for endorsements of Nordic Track (Martin, 1996).

The first conclusion from these results is that some sports are substantially better than other sports at providing positive consumer reactions to endorsements. The second conclusion is that there is no one sport that is better than other sports across all for product endorsements. Effectiveness of an endorsement as a function of the sport of the endorser is dependent on the specific product being endorsed (Martin, 1996). A manager cannot make a sport selection decision based on what sport works well in other product categories, and each situation needs to be analyzed individually. Team and individual sports have different appeals to different brands.

The conclusion from these results is a company looking to sponsor and athlete must undertake extensive market research to determine how similar his/her target market feels the images of the product and sport are for each sport the manager is considering. That is, a careful consideration of the perceived degree of fit between images of the product and images of the sport can significantly increase the positive evaluation of the endorsement by an athlete from the chosen sport, therefore drastically influencing customer perception (Martin, 1996). One purpose of this study is to eliminate the need for the extensive market research, and instead be able to make an effective endorsement decision based on comparing the current brand profiles of the selected athletes.

Choosing which athlete to endorse a product is a critical decision for managers and can require vast amount of time and resources. Common sense would suggest that a well-known, well-liked, recognizable athlete is the key to making a memorable endorsement advertisement (Martin, 1996). These are the LeBron James, Aaron Rodgers, and Alex Morgans of the world. Given the high costs associated with athlete endorsements, a logical question to ask is whether the athlete endorsement can do more than catch the consumers' attention, and enhance the overall perception of the company. The results of Martin's study suggest that considering the sport that the athlete comes from can further enhance the endorsement evaluation and hence, the consumer's attitude toward the ad and the product. As McCracken (1989) has suggested, the foundation of the success of a celebrity endorsement is based on whatever gives the spokesperson celebrity status. In the case of an athlete spokesperson, the foundation for success rests in the sport from which the athlete comes. Athletes building their brands also look for additional benefits that can elevate their brand and enhance their perception by fans.

Influence of media coverage and gender on sponsorship.

The more similar the image of the product is to the image of the sport, the more positive the consumer response is to the endorsement as was discussed earlier. An abundance of previous research indicates the athlete's appearance and personality will play a major role in the consumer's evaluation of the endorsement. What Martin's (1996) study confirmed was that the sport, and not just the athlete, is an important factor in determining the success of the endorsement. The determination of brand profiles for athletes and organizations goes beyond the reason of fit that Martin analyzed, but can also be due to the level of media attention the sport gets or the sport's "popularity".

A disturbing trend is developing in the struggle for funds between the larger and/or better organized interests and the smaller, weaker ones. The nature of sport is being drastically modified with greater inequities and conflicts of interests generated within the ranks of the athletes themselves.

Sponsorship favors the revenue going towards the already popular money making sports and the already popular athletes. Some athletes brand profiles may be made up of dozens of sponsors, while others may contain just a few marquee ones. This is especially evident in women's sports.

Without media coverage it is hard to sell an organization especially since a sponsor is looking to media coverage as a return on investment. Exposure through television broadcasts is a valuable component in attracting corporate sponsors. Increased coverage provides opportunities for those investing in less popular sports to gain additional value on the investment (Williams, 2004). This is more of an issue for those endorsing women's sports than men's due to the fact that men's sports dominant many broadcasts. However, it seems as though media coverage of recent Olympics and other women's sport such as tennis and golf has increased and has achieved growing visibility (Williams, 2004). There is a lack of research in the area of women's sponsorship as the vast majority of research into sport sponsorship has focused on male athletes, teams and events particularly in the United States.

In the male-centric sports world, where the likes of LeBron James score \$65 million in endorsement deals, female athletes have largely been an afterthought. Thanks to emerging powerful female athletes such as the reenergized U.S. women's soccer team, powerhouse tennis players and UFC's powerhouse that is Ronda Rousey, more marketing dollars are ending up in the pockets of female sports figures (Adweek,2015). Women's sports face several problems when their "brand" is analyzed. Branch (1995) concluded that corporations are becoming increasingly aware of the women's sport and women's golf especially as a market to enter into with sponsorships, yet there are still many challenges facing the industry. A barrier that women's sport and women's golf in particular faces is the "femininity" constructs in relation to image or brand fit and sponsorship. Haig-Muir (1999) noted that the "femininity" constructs of the sport associated with a limited range of body images, lifestyles, and forms of behavior combines with some top players' supposed lesbianism - a combination which has had

particularly adverse effects in the gender division of resources, sponsorship, facilities and media coverage.

It is difficult enough for many women's organizations to get sponsorship opportunities, but this challenge increases when you consider the stereotypical barriers that many women athletes and sports have. Various associations are often made between the company product and the image of their sponsorships (Williams, 2004). Many companies are cautious in investing with those sports that may not have a favorable public image as associations are often made between product and sponsorship. This is related to the transfer theory discussed prior, for example when a company sponsors an athlete, companies will often take into consideration the perceived image of that athlete by the public. Williams concluded that gender and lifestyle of an athlete as well as their type of sport can influence the desire of sponsors (2004). This perception of the sport the athlete participates in can also influence their own personal brand profiles.

William's also looked at the benefits of sponsoring women's sport within a study of advertising effects and sponsorship at an LPGA tournament. Sponsorship involvement provided access to women as potential consumers, and opportunities to promote women and a visible affiliation as a sponsoring company. He concluded that the affiliation of corporate sponsorship with a woman's sporting event provided opportunities for image enhancement and increased product and company awareness. He noted that many corporations who wanted to increasingly target women became involved in women's sporting sponsorship opportunities (2004). This is important for female athletes building their brand profiles because as athletes they may be seen as "too masculine", the potential endorsement that highlights their femininity then makes them more marketable and open to receive even more future endorsements across a wider market.

Barriers that women's sporting organizations face in relation to sponsorship is an area needing further research. Understanding what corporations are looking for in a potential sponsor and

understanding how women's sporting organizations can better market to them has the potential to break down barriers in the area of women's sport sponsorship and to provide valuable information to the organization in its approach to the acquisition, limitations and obstacles in sport sponsorship (Williams, 2004). Understanding more about why organizations desire to associate themselves with women's sports can better help female athletes develop their brand profiles.

An important characteristic of the existing literature to note is that the majority of studies have been devoted to team sports, with less coverage provided to individual sports where athletes exist independently (without associations to "team" brands) and serve as recognizable points of attachment for consumers (Robinson & Trail, 2005). Although there has been some investigation of individual athlete/sport sponsorships in past research, the existing inquiries are mostly unable to capture the theoretical and practical setting of the current study, as structural differences can cause different individual sports to appeal to different groups of spectators and/or participants based on their demographic and psychological characteristics (i.e., the solitary nature of golf versus the direct competition in tennis) (Reams et al, 2015). Sponsorship of individual sports has received some, albeit less, attention in the literature. Much of the recent work that has been done focused on participants in marathons and other running races (Reams et al, 2015). Instead in this study we will look at individual sports such as tennis and golf from both the male and female perspectives. The team sports studied will include soccer and basketball. The difference between athletes brand profiles will have to do with their participation in individual versus team sports, but will also consider the variables of their gender, demographics, and sports appeal.

Influence of race on sponsorship.

Cross-cultural studies examining the impact of model's race on attitudes toward the ad have shown a preference for ads where there is a congruency between the model's race and the consumer's race (Edwards, 2009). Therefore there is an expected difference in the athletes that brands choose

based on their targeted demographic. Skin tone bias, defined as the evaluation of or treatment toward members of a racial category based on their skin tone (Maddox & Gray, 2002). Research demonstrates that when attempting to reach ethnic minority populations such as blacks, it is important to use characters or endorsers with which they can best identify. For example, studies indicate that blacks are more likely to identify with black, recall more content from black characters, rate black characters more, and show an increased likelihood of purchasing products endorsed by typical black characters (Appiah, 2007).

Evidence demonstrates that advertisers chose white models as the prototypical representative of people using and praising products, and use them disproportionately to endorse high-end luxury products (Entman & Rojecki, 2000) while infrequently using blacks in advertisements, particularly for certain product categories (Bang & Reece, 2003). Evidence demonstrates that black character advertisements are used in separate advertising campaigns that are targeted outside the general market, and used primarily in black media (Kern-Foxworth, 1994). On those occasions when ordinary black characters are used in advertisements, they have been generally relegated to endorsing low-end, inexpensive products such as food and household items (Bang & Reece, 2003). According to Singer (1983), given that the overwhelming majority of advertisements show white characters, we are led to ask whether white-majority advertisements do a better job of selling products to audiences. There may be a perception among some marketers that white audiences are unable to identify with black product users, which has not only led advertisers to question the ability of blacks to inform and persuade this market segment, but also led advertisers to be reluctant to use black characters in advertisements for high-end technical and luxury products.

Differences between team and individual sports.

Essentially, sponsors seek to utilize their sponsorship of sports teams to increase the public's awareness of their products, generate sales and profits, and build good will with the public. Realizing

that popular sports command a large fan following, corporations know that the athletes serve as role models for many members of the public (Lee, 2003). A study done on UFC sponsorship by Reams and his colleagues examined identification with regard to brand congruence and sponsor purchase intentions, predictably finding that more highly identified fans had higher recognition of brand congruence and indicated stronger intent to purchase sponsors' products (2015). The UFC is an individual sport. Similarly, Reese and Bennett (2011) found highly identified UFC viewers more likely to purchase sponsor products if they perceived greater event/sponsor congruency and displayed an ability to recognize event sponsors. This aligns with Martin's study regarding the fit of the athlete and the sport to the products. The authors also determined that UFC viewers were more likely recognize a victorious fighter's apparel sponsor more frequently than a losing fighter's (Reams et al, 2015), making the popularity and success of the athlete important in effective sponsorships. Here differences begin to arise is between individual sports. For example, Nicholls et al. (1999) found differences between the sponsorship recall of golf and tennis fans (tennis fans displayed greater recall and preferences in 67% of the cases), while the fans that appear to be most positively affected by sponsorship (in general) are those of NASCAR (Reams et al, 2015). This is important because a main reason of engaging in sponsorship is to enhance recall by the consumer, as was previously discussed. This variation in findings lends support to the continued examination of sponsorship in many different individual sport settings verses team sports.

There were limitations to Nicholls study, as Dees, Bennett, and Ferreira examined NASCAR drivers in terms of brand personality and personality fit with their individual sponsoring brands, and found these constructs had a positive relationship with attitudes toward the sponsorship and consumer purchase intentions, but did not include other sponsors of NASCAR more generally. As such, there is a gap in this literature in that both athlete and league sponsors have not been examined together in the same study (2011). Reams began to close this gap with his UFC analysis and determined that athletes who have the strongest fan attachment make the most effective sponsors (Reams et al, 2015).

Not surprisingly, fan attachment to a favorite fighter had a significant, positive relationship with both attitudes towards the fighter sponsor and fighter sponsor purchase intentions (Reams, et al, 2015). Therefore when choosing what athletes, from these two studies we can conclude the companies that choose athletes who have a strong personal image, strong attachment, and a good fit between athlete and product will be the most effective sponsorships. The same can be said for an athlete when choosing what brands to associate themselves with. An athlete seeking endorsements will most likely choose to align himself or herself with a brand that has strong attachment by consumers, is attractive in the market, and whose image aligns with their athletic appearance or coincides with their sport. Using these factors, athletes brand profiles are built.

Studies generally focus on the purpose of sponsorship on why athletes are selected and the purpose of sponsorship (Martin, 1996). There are studies done on the effectiveness of sponsorship and its appeal to both consumers and organizations. However there has been no direct comparison between the brand profiles that team athletes build compared to athletes of individual sports. The comparison of the two will provide an understanding for both the athletes and the brand managers as they look to invest and associate with each other. The purpose of this study is to test the differences between the brand profiles of team and individual athletes.

Method

Research Design

The method of research for this study is content analysis of brand profiles of several different professional athletes from individual and team sports. The study looks at data that is directly observed and mostly compiled of qualitative data, which supports the criteria of a content analysis (Gratton & Jones, 2010). The research is an unobtrusive method and will have no effect on the social environment under investigation; there will be no interaction between the subjects and the researcher (Gratton & Jones, 2010). The research tradition being followed will be interpretivist, and all the data collected will

be secondary research as it will be pulled from already existing websites (Gratton & Jones, 2010). There is a mixed method classification of data collected as some data will be quantitative and others are qualitative. Quantitative data includes the number of sponsors or endorsers, years in the league, and product level. Qualitative data includes the athletes, the type of sport, their race, the different brands, and the product categories.

Most research done on sponsorship is conducted through surveys and focuses on the opinion of the consumer; however this will not be the case for this particular study. Many researchers now find that the qualitative approach is more useful than the quantitative methodology for the study of complex processes such as attitudes or social relationships where the variables are not clearly defined and numerical data are not helpful (Lee, 2003). Therefore this method of research will include a majority of qualitative evaluation of the athletes brand profiles.

Participants

The subjects of this study will be sixteen professional athletes. The individual sports studied will be tennis and golf, and team sports analyzed will include basketball and soccer. These sports were chosen due to the accessibility of their athletes and their popularity in America. They were also chosen due to the gender balance found in each sport, meaning there are male and female athletes that participate in them. Soccer players are the only team sport athletes that can compete with NBA players when it comes to sponsorship earnings. The top 10 endorsers earned \$120 million last year led by David Beckham, Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, who all made more than \$20 million from their partners off the pitch (Forbes, 2014). After selecting sports of interest, specific athletes were selected based on the following variables: their time in the league, race, and media attention of sport. For this study there will be two male and two female athletes selected from each sport. From each gender, one athlete will be in the league five years or under (rookie), and one will be in the league more than five years (veteran). All athletes will be domestic, meaning they were born in the United States.

The number of athletes studied in this analysis was based off a study done at the University of Strathclyde, where eight athletes were interviewed on their opinions of sport sponsorship. By doubling the number we hope to have a more concise view of athlete sponsorship. Also influencing the number of athlete's studies is a study done by Jenson (2012) that examined the importance of athlete performance and sponsorship. In his study, he looked at six different athletes. By increasing this number once again, it will provide more diverse findings and lead to a more concise conclusion about the significance of brand profiles for athletes. Sixteen samples should lead to a valid conclusion for this study.

Team Sports

Male NBA players analyzed will be LeBron James as the veteran, and Kyrie Irving as the five year or less rookie. Cleveland Cavaliers point guard Kyrie Irving was the first pick in the 2011 NBA draft and went on to win the Rookie of the Year award (NBA). Last season, Irving starred in his first All-Star Game appearance. Kyrie has become a household name after his comical commercials with Pepsi as Uncle Drew. His popularity continues to grow as the Cavs remain an NBA top team (Fernandez, 2014). LeBron James' jersey is the NBA's best seller; and he nabbed Sports Illustrated's Sportsman of the Year honor for 2012 after winning a third MVP Award and leading the Miami Heat to an NBA title and the U.S. men's Olympic team to the gold medal in London. The success has clearly cemented James' spot as the sport's top earner off the court with endorsement income of \$42 million a year from the likes of Coca-Cola, Nike, Upper Deck, Samsung, Audemars Piguet and Dunkin Donuts (Badenhausen, 2014).

WNBA players studied will be Maya Moore who has been in the league since 2011, and Candace Parker who has been in the league since 2008 (WNBA). Moore, a Minnesota Lynx forward, signed a shoe deal with Nike's Jordan Brand in 2011. The contract was reportedly worth between \$3 million and \$4 million. She also has sponsorship deals with United Airlines, United Way and Pepsi Max Zero Calories (Watts, 2015). This past 2014 season, Candace posted a team-high 19.4 points and 4.3 assists per

game. She finished third in the league in scoring, as well as marked her 5th All-WNBA selection (Candace Parker).

Male soccer players examined will be Clint Dempsey as the veteran who has been in the league since 2004 and has become the face of men's soccer in the US. The starring role has been lucrative for Dempsey off the pitch, as he racked up endorsement deals with Degree for Men, Electronic Arts, Modelo, Mondelez International, Oberto, PepsiCo and Upper Deck. He earns an estimated \$3.5 million annually from sponsors in addition to his \$6.7 million salary from the Seattle Sounders of MLS (Badenhausen, 2014). The younger generation of the MLS will be represented by Brek Shea, an up and coming player from Orlando City Soccer Club. He has a captivating personality and draws attention through his adventurous lifestyle (Badenhausen, 2014).

Female soccer players studied will include rising super star Alex Morgan, and veteran Abby Wambach. Morgan is a marketing superstar. She's young, she's talented, she's accomplished and she has commercial appeal (Keeney, 2015). Ever since her rise to national stardom during the 2011 World Cup, she has been earning endorsements left and right. Her biggest deals are with Nike and Coca-Cola, but she has struck up partnerships with plenty of other companies (Keeney, 2015). Abby Wambach has been the face of the U.S. Women's National Team and proven to be one of the most formidable offensive players on soccer field (Fernandez, 2015).

Individual Sport

The veteran golf player studied will be Phil Mickelson. In 2004, Ford created an advertising campaign around the tagline, "What will Phil do next?" It got a lot of play in the media and eventually throughout the golf world when Phil Mickelson would hit a shot only he could see or make a decision bystanders couldn't comprehend, or show up at Augusta using two drivers to win the Masters or five wedges in a win at Colonial (Mickelson, 2015). The rookie player Jordan Speith, will also be observed.

He just turned pro in 2012, and despite only playing on the PGA Tour as a pro for only three years Speith was one of the top five paid golfers of 2015 according to Cheat Sheet (2015).

LPGA players analyzed will be Lexi Thompson, who is only 20 but turned pro at age 15. She has come out as a prolific Golf player and the records and awards speak for themselves (SI, 2014). In 2007, she qualified for the *U.S. Women's Open*, becoming the youngest player in history just at the age of 12. In the same year, she reached the second round of the *U.S. Girls' Junior* and also reached the quarter finals of *U.S. Women's Amateur* (Thompson, 2015). In 2008, she won the *U.S. Girls' Junior* beating the Korean Karen Chung in the finals. In 2009, she played till the 3rd round of the same competition and that same year she was one of the semifinalist of the *U.S. Women's Amateur*. Recently, she won at the *2014 Kraft Nabisco Championship*, which made her the second youngest winner till date (Thompson, 2015). The over five year player will be Paula Creamer, a staple on the LPGA tour who has built a successful brand around her name. Despite having just one year to accumulate points, Creamer easily qualified for the U.S. Solheim Cup team (Creamer, 2014). Then she led the team to victory, earning the most points for the Americans with a 3-1-1 record. Creamer began 2007 by winning the SBS Open at Turtle Bay, and won a second time that year. In 2008, Creamer won four times, becoming the first American to win four times on the LPGA Tour since Juli Inkster in 1999. Shortly thereafter, Creamer won the 2010 U.S. Women's Open for her first career major (Kelley, 2015).

The veteran female tennis player analyzed will be Serena Williams. She turned pro in 1995, at the age of 14 (SI, 2014). She is the current World No. 1 in the WTA rankings for singles. Serena has won 58 WTA singles titles, making her the record holder for the most Major singles, doubles and mixed doubles titles combined, among both active male and female players (WTA, 2015). She has won 17 Grand Slam titles that include five Australian Open titles, five Wimbledon titles, five US Open titles and two French Open titles. She has also won 13 Major titles in women's doubles and two Major titles in the mixed doubles (WTA, 2015). Serena's annual income is \$20.5 million, and she racks up \$12 million from

endorsement deals. The 32-year-old is the only female player in history to have won over \$50 million in prize money (Pudasaini, 2014). The rookie player examined will be Sloane Stephens who turned pro in 2010, just hitting the five year mark. Stephens started winning big matches (\$1.5 million of the roughly \$2.7 million she's earned in prize money came in 2013), before her sponsorship career took off. She's an American Express global ambassador, a Listerine "Healthy Smiles" representative, and an Under Armour spokesmodel, among other such gigs. Her recognition came after she beat Williams in a high profiled match (Goodman, 2014).

John Isner, a top performer of the ATP World Tour for several years will be studied as the over five year player. John Isner is the number one ranked tennis player in the US, right behind him is the under five year player who this study will look at; number two ranked, Jack Sock (ATP Rankings). John Isner will eternally be known as tennis' marathon man after playing the longest match in history at the 2010 Wimbledon. Isner served a record 113 aces in his epic encounter with Nicolas Mahut that lasted 11 hours, 5 minutes and spanned three (ATP Rankings). He concluded 2012 with ATP-best 1,005 aces, averaging 16.8 aces per match. Isner won his first clay-court title at Houston in 2013 and on July 28th he won the tallest ATP final in history, saving two match points to edge 6'8" Kevin Anderson in three tie break sets in Atlanta, saving all 11 break points he faced (ATP Rankings). Isner won his eighth career title in Auckland in January, 2014. The top-seeded Isner defeated Dudi Sela to successfully defend his Atlanta title on July 27, 2014. Seven of Isner's nine career titles have come on American soil (Tennis.com). Sock, a tennis player from Nebraska, won a singles title at the Junior U.S. Open Championship in 2010 (Tennis.com). As a doubles player he won the 2011 U.S. Open and 2014 Wimbledon titles. He debuted as a junior player at the Pan American Championships in 2008, when he was sixteen years old (Sock Bio, 2015).

Measures

Independent variables for this study will be the athletes and whether or not they are team (basketball and soccer) or individual (golf and tennis). Independent variables also considered will be the race and ethnicity of the athlete, as well as the tenure of the athlete or how long they have been active in the league, and gender. Tenure is determined by how long they have been in the league at the time that this study began, race and ethnicity will be defined as white or nonwhite, and gender as male or female. These will be categorized using a 1 or 2 to define each category.

The dependent variables will be the type of sponsors (product categories and product levels) and brand profiles of the athletes. The study will examine all of the athletes past and current sponsors, as some may only have a one or two year deal and then it expires. Past sponsors will include any endorsement the athlete has had during their time as a professional athlete. Only examining current sponsors would leave a limited amount of data available for each athlete. A better understanding of an athletes brand profile will come from looking at multiple years. A deeper analysis of this will analyze the product categories and the product level.

Product level will describe the prices or status associated with certain products. Product level 1 will be a low level, generic product. Product level two will be the average consumer product, product level 3 will be the luxury brands. To better understand these levels, they can be applied to cars. The economy car would be a product level one, the family car a product level two, and the sports car or luxury car a product level 3. A luxury product is defined by Business Dictionary as Products which are not necessary but which tend to make life more pleasant for the consumer (2015). In contrast with necessity goods, luxury goods are typically more costly and are often bought by individuals that have a higher disposable income or greater accumulated wealth than the average. Business Dictionary defines a consumer good (product level two) as merchandise or other item of common or daily use, ordinarily bought by individuals or households for private consumption (2015). A generic is a good that is sold using the name for the type of good that it is, rather than a brand name. A generic product (product

level one) is typically not heavily marketed and competes with other brand name products largely on a price basis. Packaged food and drugs are commonly offered to shoppers as generic products (Business Dictionary, 2015).

US Omni-Channel Shopping Activity released the most popular shopping categories as of October 2014. These categories will be used to help define the products as a baseline, but may be adapted based on the findings. The categories include electronics, apparel, toys, home appliances, auto, home improvement, mobile devices, financial services, beauty and personal, health care and services, lawn and garden, food and beverage, cleaning, and meals and restaurants. When documenting athletes brand profiles, their endorsements and sponsorships will be slotted into one of these categories listed.

Data Collection Procedure

Brand profiles of the athletes will be gathered using online resources such as the athlete's personal website, the brands website, and general search engines. Generally an association of an athlete to a brand is public knowledge due to the sponsors desire to gain some sort of return regarding the link to the athlete. Upon conducting research of the athletes and their brands, the findings will be recorded in a table. On the Y axis will be athlete and sport type, as well as product level. On the X axis will be the product categories. A thorough search will be conducted on each individual athlete. This will be facilitated through the searching of various websites and recording the findings on the table described above. Once an athlete sponsorship has been found it will be recorded in the corresponding columns on the table. The data will be searched for using terms such as "athlete name and endorsements" and "athlete name and sponsorship", as well as going directly to the athlete's website if they have one. Older sponsors and endorsements no longer active can be found through archived press releases and advertisements. If there is representation of a sponsor or endorsement found on these sites, then it will prove a valid component of an athletes brand profiles. It will be feasible to collect data this way because the study does not observe a moving or changing target. A limited number of variables are being looked

at and recorded, and there is a sample size set. Considering potential sponsorship sample size, the majority of the athletes being studied had six or less endorsements.

Data Analysis

Upon conclusion of the research, the data was analyzed to determine the brand profile differences between individual and team athletes using the completed chart. After collecting the data, further research was conducted to find the specific advertisement that the athlete was featured in to determine the product level of the endorsement. Descriptive statistics revealed the average number of sponsors. It was also used to find the most frequent type of sponsors for athlete type regarding both their product levels and product categories.

Inferential statistics tested the differences between the findings. Through conducting T-Tests and Chi-square analysis it was determined the difference between individual and team athletes brand profiles and the differences between the type of sponsor and the type of athlete. The type of sponsor will be broken down into both product category and product levels. The T-Test analysis will also test for the difference in gender as it related to the type of sponsor and the race or ethnicity and type of sponsor.

Result

The brand categories identified and used were apparel, transportation, finance, jewelry, shoes, equipment, food and beverage, nutrition, beauty, entertainment, medical, technology, personal hygiene, and home goods. These were the categories of brands that the athletes currently had sponsorships in. Average sponsors were most common, and women had the most sponsors overall. The most popular brand categories for athletes included apparel, food and beverage, technology, and equipment. In order to analyze the difference in brand profiles between team and individual athletes t-tests were conducted to test the differences, and also Chi-square. The significance value was set at $p < .10$, this study accepted a ten percent chance of finding something different within a different sample.

This was in order to establish a framework to find significant data due to the small sample size of this study. The first analysis conducted was a t-test determining the total differences between team and individual athletes in regards to their sponsorship levels (generic, average, luxury). There was no significant difference found in any sponsorship level, although if extended to a larger sample size there is a suggestion that there may be difference in sponsorship levels between team and individual athletes in regards to the amount of luxury sponsors that they obtain. It was found that 100% of athletes have average sponsorships, and that this is the most common form of sponsorship level. When analyzed further it was discovered that golfers had the largest amount of luxury sponsors. When the same test of difference was run to assess the differences between the sponsorship level and gender, once again no significant difference was found at any level. It appears that gender plays no role in obtaining a luxury sponsors as opposed to an average or generic sponsorship.

The second t-test conducted assessed each brand category individually, and tested for differences within that category compared to sport type. A list of all brand categories discovered in this study as well as their p values in regards to sport type and gender can be found in Appendix A. The category with the strongest differences when comparing sport type to sponsorship total was determined to be equipment. With a p value of -3.1 it stands out as being semi significant when comparing team vs individual athletes.

The third t-test conducted assessed the difference in the number of sponsorships an athlete acquired within an individual brand category compared to their gender. Once again no significant differences were found. However it is important to note that when comparing gender and number of sponsorships in specific categories that transportation had a p value of -1.852, allowing for the belief that if the data were to be assessed with a larger sample size that there would be a significant difference.

Chi-square analysis was conducted to account for the number of sponsors for each level when looking at team vs individual athletes. Once again there was no significant differences found. Individual athletes appeared to have just a slightly larger number of sponsorships when compared to team athletes, but not by enough to be considered significant. Also from chi-square analysis it was determined that women have the highest number of average sponsors, and the highest number of sponsors overall. It appears that athletes are building their profiles evenly across all categories, as no category recorded a zero by either team or individual athletes as can be seen in Appendix B.

Discussion

Despite the predictions that team and individual athletes would have different composed brand profiles due to the natures of their sport that was not the conclusion found in this study. While no significant data can be taken away from the findings of this research, the analyzed data provides a foundation of understanding that should be explored with a larger data set. Other potentially significant categories not identified by this study, but could be if the data were to be extended to a larger sample size would be personal hygiene that has a t value of 2.049, as well as home goods which has a t value of 1.871. These categories have the potential to find more conclusive differences if a larger sample size of athletes is studied.

It was no surprise that golf held the most luxury sponsors due to the nature and demographics of their sport. When analyzing the potential difference in categories, equipment sponsorship stood out as a difference between team and individual athletes. This may be because of the role that equipment plays in individual versus team sports. Soccer and basketball have balls as their main requirement of equipment where size, air pressure, and often brand manufacturer are regulated. Tennis has rackets and golf has an assortment of clubs which have different weights, sizes, string tension, and other modifiable attributes. There is clearly a more direct impact from equipment to level of play in these

individual sports compared to the team sports selected. Also through sport sponsorship, the athlete brings a level of trust to the brand and can elevate its appeal due to their connection with professional sport. This means that the more involved and connected an athlete is with a sport the stronger the level of trust between the sponsorship and the athlete. In team sports everyone uses the same ball, in tennis or golf, athletes have their own unique racket or clubs.

Other points of potential significance came from the home goods and personal hygiene categories in terms of the gender that these sponsors target. This potential significance is assumed to be because women use these products more often so than men, and are more appealing to consumers in regards to these products. A further puzzling finding was in the brand category of jewelry, where individual sports had a significantly larger amount of sponsors compared to team (4 to 1), but this was found as not statistically significant. It is assumed that these are the most popular categories due to their high level of consumption by the typical consumer.

Limitations of this study come from the small sample size, as well as access to sponsorship deals. Given the time constraint, only sixteen total athletes were selected to be studied making the sample size extremely small. Also sponsorship deals that appeared after data was collected were not counted, meaning no new data was collected after a certain point as sponsorship acquisitions can occur at any point. The sport of tennis will provide a confounding variable of race as the female participants are African American and the male participants are white. This variable was caused by the limited number of tennis professionals who had been in the league less than five years who were able to obtain sponsorships.

Future studies of this topic should therefore include a larger sample size in terms of the number of athletes from each sport or examine more sports. There could also be more depth provided looking into brand categories and diving deeper into the categories of each. For instance, transportation can be divided into motor vehicles or planes, and further into cars and trucks. Also there could be another layer

to the study added that focuses on media exposure and how the attention the sport is given by the media and how that impacts sponsorship.

This study looked to find differences between team and individual athletes in terms of their brand profiles. While the results were inconclusive to whether there is a significant difference between team and individual athletes, the study was able to identify a starting place for future studies in regards of what brand categories to look into further to develop stronger differences. Athletes are not building their profiles in any specific way in regards to their sport, but instead have a wide range of diversified brand categories and sponsorships that they take part in. Sponsorships and endorsements are not limited by gender or sport type.

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Appendix A

**Test of
difference p>.1**

	SportType	Gender
Apparel	-0.72	0
Finance	-0.851	0.277
transportation	-0.333	-1.852
Jewelry	-1.655	-0.509
Shoes	0.475	-1.528
Equipment	-3.1	0.266
Food and Beverage	0.718	-0.141
Nutrition	-1.655	0.509
Beauty	0	0.858
Entertainment	1.048	-0.509
Medical	-0.447	-0.447
Technology	-0.218	-0.2148
Personal Hygiene	-0.607	2.049
Home Goods	-0.858	1.871

	Sport Type	Gender
Total Generic	0	0.298
Total Average	-0.512	0.218
Total Luxury	-1.114	-1.114

*** The highlighted sections show the potentially significant categories

Appendix B

