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# Athlete Endorsements: Effects on College Students

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## **Abstract**

Celebrities have been used as endorsements for years and have often been heralded as the best way for a company to sell their product through advertisements. Professional athletes are known around the globe as the most recognizable celebrities. Numerous studies have been completed in order to find the effects that athlete endorsements have on consumer spending. These studies have discovered changes in purchasing behaviors based on youth, gender, race and geographic location. Yet, there are limited sources that explain the effects on college students and their purchasing intentions. A sample of St. John Fisher College students was used to examine the effects that athletes have in endorsing products on college students. The results have shown students in college are less affected by athlete endorsements than other age groups.

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Athlete Endorsements: Effects on College Students

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### **Abstract**

Celebrities have been used as endorsements for years and have often been heralded as the best way for a company to sell their product through advertisements. Professional athletes are known around the globe as the most recognizable celebrities. Numerous studies have been completed in order to find the effects that athlete endorsements have on consumer spending. These studies have discovered changes in purchasing behaviors based on youth, gender, race and geographic location. Yet, there are limited sources that explain the effects on college students and their purchasing intentions. A sample of St. John Fisher College students was used to examine the effects that athletes have in endorsing products on college students. The results have shown students in college are less affected by athlete endorsements than other age groups.

### Athlete Endorsements: Effects on College Students

Four types of celebrity endorsers are most popular. They include genuine celebrities, the company's chief executive, lookalike celebrities and celebrities by association (Kaikati, 1987). Genuine celebrities are the celebrities that are actually on the playing field or starring in the movies. The company's chief executive is popular because usually he is used to guarantee the satisfaction of the product which could influence how a consumer feels about a product when it comes from the CEO (Kaikati, 1987). Lookalike celebrities are used because people can associate with the brand or pay attention more to the brand because they think that the person in the advertisement is really a celebrity. Along with lookalike celebrities, companies will often use voices that sound similar to a celebrity mostly hear on radio or TV commercials. Lastly, celebrities by association are used because consumers feel that if they are using a product and they associate themselves with the celebrity, then they could do the same (Kaikati, 1987). An example of this is having a star quarterback's wife endorse a makeup product. In doing so, people viewing the advertisement will feel as if they can also marry a star athlete if they can look and wear stuff that the wife is wearing. Overall, business will utilize different types of athletes or celebrities to increase their brand awareness.

According to Shanklin and Miciak (1996), professional athletes are known around the globe as the most recognizable celebrities of all. People who try to imitate these athletes find themselves purchasing the brands which these famous celebrities are endorsing. Hiring sport celebrities to endorse brands has been embedded in the international business practice (Stotlar, 2005). The company will use athletes to sell their products or services more effectively. The underlying cause of this is because consumers need to associate themselves with the popularity and success of the athlete. Youth tend to be persuaded to buy athlete endorsed products to fit in

or because they have the belief that they will succeed in a sport like the athlete and depending on what is socially acceptable. Social acceptance is seen to be more important to youth than older adults. Studies revealed that there was a greater support for societal competition, material items and persuasive advertising appeals among young men, when the youth socialized the most with friends and they participated in school sponsored sports (Denham, 2009). Along with youth fitting in, there is the aspect of societal competition. Not only do people feel as if they fit in, but often they feel as if they should be better than others and in doing so they will purchase the most popular items or brands.

Athletes have been endorsing products for numerous years and have been known to be the best way to sell a product to consumers (Stotlar, 2005). In today's society, social status can be based off of what you wear or buy based on what is popular. Marketers and advertisers who have celebrities endorse products such as clothing or other material items have created these social statuses among consumers (Denham, 2009). These statuses include whether or not what people wear is considered to be "cool" or not. Often people feel as if they are gaining the same advantage if they use or wear a product that is endorsed by an athlete (Shanklin & Miciak, 1996). In addition, there is a different social environment which involves fans. Fans are known to associate themselves with brands based on what their favorite team or player represents. Some athletes make more money annually from endorsement deals than they do from their playing salaries (Carlson, 2008). Previous research has been completed to investigate athlete endorsements based on advertisement relations and brand related outcomes.

Businesses strategically place advertisements with athlete endorsed products to be seen by youth. Businesses spend millions of dollars associating their product with athletes through product endorsements (Martin, 1996). The companies try to find the best fit athletes for their

brand that will influence consumers in buying. In other words, businesses find athletes who can be easily connected with the brand and fit in with the company's goals for the product. Martin reveals studies that show the impact on how the athlete endorser is chosen as the best fit for a brand. Companies are not going to use out dated athletes to represent a new popular clothing brand. If Joe Montana was endorsing American Eagle Clothing, would that make youth want to go purchase their clothes? Youth are clearly an important asset to companies selling athlete endorsements. However, research involving older adults such as college students is lacking. Therefore, new research such as this study is being completed to examine a different target market in college students.

### **Literature Review**

Two theories that are used often when researching consumer intentions based on athlete endorsed products are Social Identity Theory and the Social Adaptation Theory. Both theories define how people in an environment will react based on the type of society in which they live. According to the Social Identity Theory, individuals satisfy the need of identifying and categorizing themselves and others into groups (Carlson, 2008). Social Identity Theory deals with both the psychological and sociological aspects of group behavior (Carlson, 2008). Social Adaptation Theory deals with how people adjust their lives based on interpersonal, social and cultural norms (Kahle, & Homer, 1985). Both theories explore the reasoning to consumers purchasing intentions based on athlete endorsed products.

The study by Carlson in 2008 used Social Identity Theory to determine the effect that athlete endorsers have on both brand and team-related attitudes and intentions. They proposed that the athletes would have positive influence on team, brand purchase intentions and team abandonment. They used primary sources by producing surveys of Dallas Cowboys fans. The

theoretical development found that when fans aspire to be like athletes then they try and associate themselves with the athlete's image and therefore identify with them (Carlson, 2008). The data collected relates to how athletes are used to increase sales based on customer preferences.

In the study done by Kahle and Homer in 2008, they manipulated an advertisement for disposable razors to survey individual's feelings on potentially purchasing the product. The factors in which they looked at were celebrity physical attractiveness, celebrity likability, and participant product involvement. Kahle and Homer used the Social Adaption Theory to support their results which concludes that people will adapt to things based on certain societal factors that are important. In this case, the important societal factor was physical attraction.

### **Endorsement Effectiveness**

Athletes are chosen by companies as endorsers to associate the company's brand with the athlete's celebrity image (Carlson, 2008). Companies benefit from having an athlete endorse their product because consumers feel connected to the brand. Often companies decide on whether or not they should use an athlete to endorse their product even if the product is not sport related. According to Koernig and Boyd in 2009, they determine the effective use of having athlete endorsements for sports and non-sports brands. The results of the data collected showed that there was a bigger effect on consumers for a famous athlete to endorse a sport brand rather than a non-sport brand. The study relates to the circumstances in when the athletes should be used for endorsements and when athletes shouldn't be used to endorse brands. Using certain athletes can be more effective for brands based on what the brand is trying to sell. Companies will use stronger athletes to sell products such as muscle building products (Simmers, Damron-Martinez, & Haytko, 2009).



Companies are always looking for the best way to get their product or brand name out to the general public especially if they are a new company (Van Heerden, Kuiper, & Saar, 2008). The researchers in this study examine when product information is not available to consumers, inferences are made to reduce product uncertainty to form perceptions of the product. This means that if the brand or product is not well known, the company can use a celebrity endorsement to give their brand a jump start in the market. When there is an uncertainty about a product, athletes or celebrities are cued to make the consumer feel more comfortable with the product (Van Heerden, Kuiper, & Saar, 2008). Most often these jump starts are expensive for companies to do, yet previously displayed research explains that celebrity endorsed products are the best way to sell a product. The researchers conducted a study of two-hundred people and resulted in consumers finding a significant enhancement of brand relation when a celebrity endorsed the product (Van Heerden, et. al., 2008). The study emphasizes the importance of companies using athlete endorsed brands and its major effect it has on the public.

An example of the effect that one athlete has for a company can be seen in Crawford and Niendorf's study in 1999. In this article the researchers discuss how a single athlete has a major impact on endorsement deals. When there was a rumor of Michael Jordan returning to basketball, five companies that Jordan had endorsement deals with experienced a three million dollar increase in the market value (Crawford, & Niendorf, 1999). Jordan created a value to the shareholders of the companies that he endorsed. After further research was conducted, studies showed that shareholders experienced negative returns after the retirement and positive excess returns following the rumors that he was coming back (Crawford, & Niendorf, 1999). Overall, the study shows how one athlete is capable of determining the wealth of a company. It is also important to understand how crucial it was for the companies to have Michael Jordan as their

endorser. Crawford and Niendorf explain how not only were consumers effected by athlete endorsements but shareholders and the companies as a whole were affected.

Another major advantage to having athletes endorse a product is that fact that because they are the most popular celebrities in the world, they are easily recognizable in advertisements. In a study by Stotlar, Veltri and Viswanathan in 1998, the researchers analyze the consumer recognition of athlete endorsements. The study selected seventeen professional male and female athletes from six major sports. A questionnaire was then developed which collected responses from 1,224 people. The response data indicated that the majority of subjects were able to correctly identify the sport and at least one athletic product endorsed by the selected professional athlete. This study gives a good example of the effectiveness of athletes endorsing a product.

There have also been studies that explore the relationship between involvement, use of the brand as a sponsor and the consumer. In a study by Bennett, Ferreira, and Lee in 2009, examined the relationship between, demographic characteristics, action sport consumption, the use of event sponsored brands and involvement. The researchers wanted to examine the degree to which involvement with action sports, demographics and action sports consumption, such as spectatorship, participation, and video gaming, actually predict drinking Mountain Dew soda among the people attending an action sporting event (Bennett, Ferreira, & Lee, 2009). The study found that there was a positive relationship between those who were spectators and drink Mountain Dew soda. Unfortunately they were unable to get a reliable number when it came to those who play video games and drink Mountain Dew. Although through this study, there is a positive correlation made that spectators of a sponsored event are more likely to consume the product that is sponsoring the event.

There have also been studies that involve the effectiveness of having athletes used in advertisements. The study by Freidman and Freidman in 1979 provides a quantitative summary of the relationship between celebrity endorser source effects and effectiveness in advertising. The article discusses how the athletes are not just there to make the company revenue but to add value to their business. The effectiveness of the endorsement comes from the celebrity performance (Freidman, & Freidman, 1979). Celebrity performance refers to the level of achievement a celebrity attains at any given time in their chosen profession (Freidman, & Freidman, 1979). If a celebrity is performing well, that may have a positive effect on the company. Celebrities are generally viewed by consumers as credible sources of information about the product or firm they endorse (Freidman, & Freidman, 1979). In other words, usually the athlete or celebrity will have positive characteristics that will allow for people to look up to him or her. Results from the study suggest negative celebrity information can be extremely detrimental to an advertisement. The researchers use a source credibility model composed of celebrity trustworthiness, celebrity expertise, and celebrity attractiveness. These three are the most influential source effects on purchase intentions, brand attitudes and attitudes towards the advertisement.

### **Role of Demographics**

Demographics are a major area that marketers and companies have analyzed to better reach out to their target market. Endorsements such as advertisements on television are effected by demographics in ways such as geographically where people live and wealth (Cianfrone, & Zhang, 2006). Cianfrone and Zhang in 2006 examine the effectiveness of television commercials, venue signage, and other promotional offerings. The article includes the different types of endorsement possibilities and how consumers can react differently based on the way the

advertisement is viewed and capabilities of viewing. The studies showed that controlling the differences in the consumption backgrounds of action sports among the people surveyed, the four promotional procedures examined increased during a televised event. The results revealed that television commercials were most effective, followed by combined promotion, athlete endorsement and venue signage. This study is an example of how background and demographics can alter how people view media endorsements.

There are numerous studies that include demographics such as gender and race to explain the purchasing behaviors of products that are athlete endorsed. The role of gender has a major influence on consumers when it comes to purchasing athlete endorsed products (Peets, Parks, & Spencer, 2004). This study explored the role of gender to explain the meaning of athlete endorsements, the product and the purchase intentions. There was a sample of students used to describe photographs of athletes and how they can alter their purchasing intentions. They found that male intentions of purchasing were higher based on the athletes rather than the female's intentions to purchase. The reasoning behind this was that males often have a higher aspiration to be like the famous athlete more than females do. This could be due to the fact that male athletes are often seen more in media coverage therefore they get more recognition than female athletes (Peets, et. al., 2004).

Another study by Lantz and Shroeder in 1999 was done to examine the difference in gender perceptions based on the role of an athlete in an advertisement and their role of masculinity and femininity. They surveyed four hundred and nine students from Midwestern University. The main idea behind this study is how to show how competitive sports convey strong messages about masculinity and femininity. The study found that men are encouraged by athletic role and therefore masculinity is highly encouraged through some athlete endorsed

products (Lantz, et. al., 1999). The study clearly identifies the perceived behaviors of men to try and act more masculine with the athletic role and for the female to act in as less of masculinity as they can.

One study in particular looks at female teenagers and their perspectives on athlete endorsements. In research done by James in 2010, the study identifies how female teenagers are affected by sports celebrities as endorsers in magazines. The studies show that there is a positive impact of self-image and self-identification among teenagers. The theory used in the study is the Eriksonian which focuses on the ego of individuals. James (2010) also describes how female teenagers often dress and tend to try and resemble celebrities in their actions. This theory relates to Social Identity Theory in that they focus on their individual identity. In the Eriksonian Theory, people tend to focus more on their ego and displaying who they are to others and in the Social Identity Theory; it is all about identifying oneself and association with things and people. All in all, this study examines not only female but male teenagers as well and how they feel the need to fit in and identify themselves. Teenagers are still at a vulnerable age where it is important for them to be able to identify themselves with wish to be in life.

In addition to gender, race has also been determined as a specific target market to reach out to. Based on the color of the athlete, it will determine which target market will be reached more effectively (Ruihley, Runyan, & Lear, 2010). Targeting certain groups of fans is crucial for companies to really reach out to that individual market. Using a brand that is significantly worn more by African-Americans, would be endorsed best by using an African-American celebrity. This is because African-Americans will be able to associate themselves with a brand that has a celebrity with the same ethnicity (Ruihley, et. al., 2010).

Youth are the most influenced consumers of athlete endorsed brands (Denham, 2009). Denham uses a study to analyze the effect of endorsements on youth and explain why the phenomenon exists. An analyses of the data revealed that there was a greater support for societal competition, material items and persuasive advertising among males, those who socialized the most with friends and those participants who played in school sponsored sports (Denham, 2009). In other words, males were more likely to buy something based on the fact that they saw it on TV worn by a famous athlete or celebrity. The study also reveals the significance in youth who view print media or participate in a recreational sport (Denham, 2009). Youth athletes dream to become professional athletes and to be just like them in every aspect. This includes wearing what they wear because they believe it will help them perform the way they do. Those youth who actually play on a sports team have a higher rate of purchasing something endorsed by an athlete. Lastly, youth who view print media including television commercials are more likely to be persuaded to buy the product (Denham, 2009). This can be a significant finding because parents have different views on how much television their child can watch which can cause the findings to vary.

### **Endorser Importance**

Another two concepts that have heavily influenced the consumption of athlete endorsed products is the hero and physical attractiveness aspect. Having an athlete as a personal hero could determine the purchase intentions of a consumer (Stevens, Lathrop, & Bradish, 2003). If the athlete as seen as a hero, more often people strive to be like their hero and to accomplish the same things as them. Heroic figures stand out more in advertisements more than basic athletes and therefore draw more attention to the brand (Stevens, et al., 2003). Physical attraction of an endorsement has also been used to analyze consumer purchase intentions. Studies show that

attitudes and purchase intentions change due to celebrity attractiveness and likeability and their overall involvement with the product (Kahle, & Homer, 1985).

In another study involving physical attractiveness of an athlete by Fink, Cunningham and Konsicki in 2004, data is revealed showing the importance of attractiveness of athletes. The study drew a hypothesis and used Associated Learning Theory to examine the effects of athlete attractiveness and athlete expertise. The article looked at the difference between endorsing an event using a more attractive female rather than a female who is a better athlete. The data that was found showed that having an athlete who is more attractive is more important to have in an advertisement rather than having an athlete who is more skilled. It also revealed that when an athlete was used to advertise for an event, that if the athlete was highly attractive, more fans would purchase tickets to the event (Fink, Cunningham, & Konsicki, 2004). The data that was collected helped analyze which circumstance that fans identified themselves more with. In this study, using attractive athletes is more effective to alter consumers purchase intentions than to use a more skilled athlete.

### **Age Correlation**

In addition to the research on the social impact of youth, gender, race and the other factors previously discussed, young adults is often overlooked in consumer studies. Yet, there is one study that includes young adults in a survey to determine their purchasing habits and how they correspond to youth (Veltri, Kuzman, & Stotlar, 2003). This study reveals that over fifty percent of the male respondents were more likely to purchase athletic products endorsed by professional athletes. Less than fifty percent of the female respondents were less likely to be influenced by professional athletes in their purchasing decisions. In relationship to previous findings shown by researchers, young adults are influenced as well in purchasing intentions.

### **Research Flaws**

One study by Kover Goldberg and James in 1995, explain how some studies and research may not have got the correct representation of data. The researchers in this article explore consumer's emotional reactions to help define advertising and the effectiveness of it. In the article there are questions that are brought up about individuals responses to advertisements. The article describes how the responses of people can be more emotional than what their actual intentions are. This means that they may be in a different stage of emotions when asked the question than they would be in the store actually paying for the object (Kover, et al., 1995). Consumers may say that they wouldn't purchase an item outside from the store, but when they are actually in the store looking at the product they may have different intentions. Overall, consumers may react differently based on their surroundings and the time that the study is taking place which could result in bad representation of data for some studies.

There have also been negative outcomes from athletes endorsing brands and products (Charbonneau, & Garland, 2006). The authors discuss the difficulties with finding celebrity athletes to endorse their product in a positive way. When an athlete is representing a certain brand or product, people will associate the two which often have led to negative perceptions. For example, if an athlete is endorsing a product and he or she is arrested for criminal behavior, that will give the brand a bad representation because there is the association between the two. The research conducted by Charbonneau and Garland consisted of a survey for consumers to take about possible brands and athletes relation (2006). Negative representation can also come from not fitting into the brand image. In the study, the researchers touch on how athletes need to fit the image of the brand so that people would easily associate the two and that the athlete and the product resemble some type of similar qualities (Charbonneau, & Garland, 2006). This relates to



a previous study examined that companies will use stronger athletes to sell products such as muscle building products (Simmers, Damron-Martinez, & Haytko, 2009). If a company uses an athlete that is not capable of representing the brand image, they could receive negative responses from the endorsed product.

Most research that has been completed has determined there is a positive effect from athletes endorsing products because consumers are able to connect the brand and athlete together. According to a study by Costanzo and Goodnight in 2005, the perceived belief that there is a positive relationship is not always true. In this study, they analyze how there is the belief that advertising professions use celebrities to endorse a brand because it will increase consumer recall of the brand. Advertisers believe that in the minds of a consumer, having a celebrity will increase their intentions of purchasing the brand (Costanzo, & Goodnight, 2005). The study found that celebrity recognized in a magazine advertisement did not increase consumer recall of the brand endorsed by the celebrity for both professional athlete celebrities and other entertainment celebrities. This study reveals the contrast to most studies and beliefs that consumer's intentions are based on endorsed brands and that there is a positive relation between the two.

When discussing the impact of materialism and social identify among consumers, often the fact that the data obtained by researchers may be contaminated is overlooked. According to Mick in 1996, socially desirable responding (SDR) is the tendency of individuals to make themselves look good according to current cultural norms when answering researcher's questions. For over 50 years in the social sciences, SDR has been a complex and controversial issue, typically viewed as a contaminating response bias (Mick, 1996). While this has been going on most researchers who get their data from consumers have neglected to include what

consumers say just to be current with cultural norms. They especially ignore SDR when the issue is detrimental impact on the research conclusions (Mick, 1996). The study analyzes conceptual, measurement, and statistical analysis issues related to SDR. The study completed two surveys that explored the effect of SDR on consumers and then the researcher gave implications and recommendations for investigating SDR in consumer research, including opportunities for future contributions.

Based on the intensive research that has already been done, there is significant evidence to support the fact that athletes are used to increase the intentions for consumers to purchase a brand or specific product. Studies have used to analyze societal effects or basic intentions based on demographics and how they correspond with the brand. Unfortunately, very little research has been done which includes college students. College students should be seen as an important market in the view of an advertiser. Young adults still find fashion and sports as factors that that influence their purchasing habits (Veltri, et al., 2003). Specifically the following questions were addressed in this research study:

1. Do athlete endorsed products have an effect on purchasing intentions of college students?
2. How does gender impact purchasing intentions based on athlete endorsements?
3. How does fan identification impact purchasing intentions based on athlete endorsements?

Examining these questions through a study will develop an idea of whether or not college students are targeted by marketers. In addition, the study will explain any difference between youth and college students based on the Social Identity and Social Adaptation Theory.

## **Method**

### **Participant Selection**

The participants in the study consisted of St. John Fisher students. The surveys were sent out to 2,891 undergraduates and 273 were returned causing a 9.4% response rate. The demographics of the respondents showed that females almost doubled male response rate and most male students who responded to the survey were either sophomore or seniors. The female respondents were pretty evenly distributed with each class rank having around forty respondents.

### **Data Collection Instrument and Procedure**

The survey consisted of eleven questions that are sorted into three sections. The first section is to find out what type of fan the student is and their overall fan identity. The second section identified purchasing behaviors of these students and how athlete endorsements affect those behaviors. The third section gained information about the student taking the survey (See Appendix A).

The survey was sent electronically through email to the entire undergraduate students (See Appendix A). Respondents were given a little over three weeks to respond to the research request. Upon conclusion of the time period, the survey was closed and the results checked for completeness. In order to ensure the results from the survey were valid, every question that was used was checked for the entire completion of all the questions. Otherwise, the results were thrown out.

### **Data Analysis**

Answers from the survey were analyzed using the Qualtrics software. Secondary analyses used correlation and chi-square to assess the data (See Appendix B). Using the chi-square, there

were numerous relationships that were able to be examined. One example was whether or not there is a relationship between non-athletes and athletes when it comes to purchasing intentions. Another relationship that was examined was the difference in gender when it came to purchase intentions. In terms of what type of fan the student was and their level of fan, chi-squared was able to help reveal any relationship with their purchasing intentions and if there was any differences based on their gender. Also, relationships between class rank and purchasing intentions were able to be analyzed. Using chi-square, the results from the survey were able to be analyzed to determine and significant relationships.

### **Results**

There were 273 respondents to the survey that was distributed with the majority of the respondents being females. Due to some of the difficulty in the questions that may have cause respondents to be confused, there were questions that were not answered by all 273 respondents. The majority of respondents indicated that they % were fans of football at 76% with the majority of fan loyalty being attached to a specific team at. In terms of what type of sports fans the students were, 43% of males watched every game only missing one, while 41% of female watch only their favorite team.

The number one thing that impacted a student's purchasing intentions was the cost of the merchandise. The second thing that impacted students purchasing intentions was that they liked the specific brand, not the fact that it was necessarily being endorsed by an athlete. Females were more likely to buy the merchandise at the nearest store, while males were more likely to go online to buy the merchandise. Only 28% of the respondents said they would never ask for athlete endorsed products when they were asking for gifts. Only 15% of the respondents said

they would spend the extra money to have the merchandise they purchase to be in affiliation with their favorite athlete or team.

Using chi-square to analyze the data, there were eleven statistical results that were significant (See Appendix C). The chi-square analysis represents some level of significant difference when the results of two or more questions are correlated together. One correlation that was significant was when students asked for gifts and what their purchasing intentions were. In this correlation as well as the other significant ones, there were one or two answers that seemed to be more of a popular answer than a correlation with no significance which is most of the answers being similar. Using chi-square, there were three significances found that involved playing and organized sport. They were asking for gifts, gender and the level of fan that the student was. There were four significant correlations that were found with the students that involved them asking for gifts; the gender, level of fan, fan of a specific sport and the loyalty of the fan. Gender also had significance when it was directly correlated with the level of fan and the fan of a specific sport. The last significant correlations were found when fan loyalty was correlated with the level of fan, and the fan of a specific sport.

### **Marketing Research**

Due to the number of respondents in this study, the results have limited value to marketers. If the findings from this study were of value, there were numerous useful take-a-ways for marketers. When looking at the results, most students considered themselves a fan of football, with the majority of the fans being attached to a specific team. With this, marketers could see that they need to focus their athlete endorsed product with football and that they should use a specific team rather than just one single athlete. Another result that marketers could use would be with what type of sports fans males and females were. If males watched 43% of every

game only missing one while the 41% of females only watched their favorite team, it shows the marketers where to use their endorsements. With males, they could use the general sport for advertising and endorsing a brand. For females, they need to have a specific team so that females can relate to that team. When looking at the top choice that determined a student's purchasing intentions, it was cost which would show marketers that if they look to obtain college students in purchasing their products, they need to lower the cost of the merchandise. Two other areas that may be of interest to marketers would be where the students purchased the merchandise. Females responded that they would most likely buy the merchandise at the nearest store and for males, usually online. If this is the case, if marketers are going after females, they should focus on putting their merchandise in local stores. For males, they should spend less time putting merchandise in stores and more effort into making the merchandise available online.

### **Discussion**

In examining the question of if athlete endorsed products have an effect on purchasing intentions of college students, the data analysis showed that there was no significant relationship between athlete endorsed products and the purchasing intentions on college students. The results from the data showed that college students were unaffected by athlete endorsed products when it came to themselves purchasing the item. The question of how gender impacts purchasing intentions based on athlete endorsements, the results proved that there was no significant difference in men and women when it came to purchasing an athlete endorsed brand and that only where they would buy the product showed a significant difference. In regards to how fan identification impacts purchasing intentions based on athlete endorsements, the survey results found that there were no significant difference in the level of sports fan and their purchasing

intentions. Although, using chi-square analysis, the study did show that the level of the fan had a significant impact when it came to asking for gifts.

Based on the results from the questionnaire, the theoretical framework of Social Identity and Social Adaptation was the most accurate in analyzing the data. Not only do these theories identify and examine why the students answered the questions, but include how students may or may not identify themselves within groups and society. One variable that needs to be accounted for is with only surveying St. John Fisher College, that the number only represents college students in a certain geographic location. The surveys may have revealed different results if conducted in another part of the world.

### **Limitations in Research**

One of the main limitations in this research was the amount of time in which the surveys were given out. The respondents only had three weeks to get the surveys and fill them out completely before submitting them back in. In those three weeks, only a small percentage actually returned completed surveys which may be due to the fact that there was not enough time to complete the surveys and that there was no reminder email sent out to give a warning that the deadline was approaching. Another flaw in this research is that because there was a short period of time that survey could be completed, there was a lack of respondents which made the population size of the results irrelevant to marketers. The sample size for the study was not enough to be meaningful in terms of marketers changing the way they market their products to college students. Another limitation to this study was the questions could have been viewed as a little difficult or confusing. Without allocating appropriate time to develop good questions, the results of this research may be flawed due to the students answering the questions without fully understanding the questions.

### **Directions for Further Research**

In order for further research to be completed, there needs to be a few editions made to the study to develop more significant findings. One thing that would be necessary in furthering this research would be to edit the questions and make them easier to understand for the person taking the survey. With such as small survey size, it was very hard to put together concrete findings based on such few number of respondents. Therefore, there needs to be a larger population that is added to this study in order to receive the correct number of respondents so the results are meaningful. Lastly, the study should be developed and analyzed over a longer period of time to really obtain the necessary results in finding out if college students are affected by athlete endorsed products.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the ideas of Social Identity Theory, this study shows no connection between college students and their need to identify with a particular group. These results differ from other research that has been completed showing other demographics being strongly affected by athlete endorsements or other celebrity endorsed products. In terms of social adaptation theory, this study also shows no connection between college students and their need to adapt to a certain lifestyle because of athlete endorsed products. There were however, significant findings between some of the categories of questions. If the population size of those students surveyed was bigger, the study would have been meaningful to companies and marketers who deal with athlete endorsements.



## Appendix A

Thank you for your interest in taking this survey. The following questions will help gain a better understanding of the effects that athlete endorsed brands have on college students and will be an important piece in my overall research.

(The first three questions look to obtain your fan identity.)

**1. What sports do you consider yourself a fan of? (Check all that apply)**

Baseball  
Football  
Basketball  
Hockey  
Soccer

**2. What sports do you consider yourself a fan of? (Check all that apply)**

Baseball  
Football  
Basketball  
Hockey  
Soccer

**3. What type of sports fan would you consider yourself?**

Turn on a game every so often  
Watch only the big games (Super Bowl, National Championship, etc.)  
Watch every game rarely missing one  
Watch only your favorite team

**4. Which would you most likely attach your loyalty to?**

An individual sport  
An individual team  
An individual school  
An individual athlete

(The second section will help determine your purchasing and product behavior.)

**5. What decisions impact your purchasing decision? (Drag to order your answers, #1 being the top position)**

1 I'm a fan of the athlete who wears this item  
2 I'm a fan of the school that is sponsored by this company  
3 I like the brand  
4 The cost of the merchandise  
5 The color of the merchandise

**6. How likely will an athlete endorsed brand effect your purchasing intentions?**

I will only purchase an athlete endorsed product  
Sometimes  
The athlete doesn't matter to me  
Never

**7. Where are you most likely to buy team merchandise?**

At the sporting event  
Online

(Appendix A Continued)

At the nearest store

**8. When asking for gifts, are team/athlete merchandise on your list?**

Always

Sometimes

Never

**9. How well do each of the following statements describe you? (For each situation, please select one that applies)**

(Not at all like me) (Not much like me) (Somewhat like me) (Quite a lot like me) (Just like me)

-I will spend the extra money to have what I buy be in affiliation with my favorite team.

-If my favorite athlete endorses it, I will buy it.

-I often purchase items without knowing their background but because they are endorsed by a celebrity, I'll buy it.

- I like one particular athlete rather than the overall team.

(The third section is to gather additional information about you.)

**10. What is your class rank?**

Freshman

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

**11. What is your gender?**

Male

Female

**12. Are you currently participating in an organized sport?**

No

Yes

### Appendix B

Qualtrics Survey Software - Windows Internet Explorer  
 https://sjfc.us2.qualtrics.com/ControlPanel/?  
 Backboard Learn | Qualtrics Survey Softwa... | St. John Fisher College  
 Add Filters

[Back to Cross Tabulations](#) [Add Banner](#)

		Are you currently participating in an organized sport?		Total
		No	Yes	
How likely will an athlete endorsed brand effect your purchasing intentions?	I will only purchase an athlete endorsed product	0	0	0
	Sometimes	76	50	126
	The athlete doesn't matter to me	62	27	89
	Never	27	11	38
Total		165	88	253

[Add Stub](#)

		Are you currently participating in an organized sport?
How likely will an athlete endorsed brand effect your purchasing intentions?	Chi Square	2.68*
	Degrees of Freedom	3
	p-value	0.44

*\*Note: The Chi-Square approximation may be inaccurate - expected frequency less than 5.*

Qualtrics.com | Contact Information | Legal | Logout  
 Done | Internet | Protected Mode: Off | 125%

**Appendix C**

	Purchasing Intentions	Play Organized Sport	Class Rank	Asking For Gifts	Gender	Level of Fan	Fan of Specific Sport	Fan Loyalty
Purchasing Intentions								
Play Organized Sport	2.68							
Class Rank	6.33	3.02						
Asking for Gifts	29.05***	9.10**	2.87					
Gender	3.18	6.13**	8.50*	21.16**				
Level of Fan	11.65	13.65**	7.42	62.30***	49.38**			
Fan of Specific Sport	6.60	3.92	3.77	30.81***	19.38***	18.58		
Fan Loyalty	10.09	4.13	11.93	13.46*	4.87	22.41***	21.74*	

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