

CREDIBILITY OF ATHLETE ENDORSERS:

Examining the Proportionate Effects of Team and Individual On-Field Performance

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International Business

Bachelor's Thesis

Instructor: Srdan Zdravkovic

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Aalto University

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Title of Thesis: Credibility of Athlete Endorsers: Examining the Proportionate Effects of Team and Individual On-Field Performance
Date: 3. April 2020
Degree: Bachelor of Science in Economics and Business Administration
Supervisor: Srdan Zdravkovic
Objectives The main objectives of this study were to examine the stand-alone and interaction effects of team and individual performance on source credibility and purchase intentions. In addition, the respondent's level of involvement in soccer was established and the results were further interpreted in regard to this.
Summary Athlete endorsers are among the biggest recipients of advertising money nowadays. Their efforts on the field are known to influence their effectiveness as an endorser and this thesis introduces the additional variable of team performance to better assess how consumers perceive performance and how it affects intention to purchase.
Conclusion The respondents were largely unfazed by negative team performance, as long as the endorser fared well. This applies for both source credibility and purchase intentions. Highly involved consumers proved to be an exception to this rule, as their intention to purchase was only affected if both individual and team performed well.
Key Words: <i>Sports, Football, Sponsorship, Consumer Attitudes, Advertising</i>
Language: English
Grade:

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Sponsorship as a form of business operation in Finland has been a growing presence over the past years, best showcased by the total of €257 million in investments through sponsorships seen in 2017, which was an 16,3% increase from the previous year (Markkinointi & Mainonta, 2017). Even when disregarding all investments related to the nation's 100th anniversary of independence, the growth amounted to an impressive 6%. The sports industry is currently the biggest recipient of sponsorship, responsible for over half of the income. Various cultural events follow in close second and the rest consists of a mixture of causes and campaigns.

Some sponsorships have achieved near institutional status: we as consumers couldn't think of one of the involved parties without associating it with the other. This goes for the Helsinki ice hockey team HIFK and their shirt sponsor, the well-known Koff-brand of beer. The beer can is red and so are the jerseys. Similarly, it would be hard to imagine the Helsinki city bikes without their characteristic yellow paintjob representative of a sponsorship by the Alepa grocery store chain. The bikes are even colloquially referred to as Alepa-bikes. Taking this into international context, some of the more well-known pairings include fictitious secret agent James Bond and his preferred mode of transportation, an Aston Martin car. Comparably, the office supply company Staples goes hand in hand with the Los Angeles basketball teams, as they have a deal over naming rights for the arena which both the Lakers and Clippers call home. Equivalently, when someone thinks of Beyoncé or Kendall Jenner, they might discover an unexpected craving for Pepsi.

As various sponsorships have become more and more common and influential in the world of advertising (RTR, 2019), so have instances where the recipient of the investment has caused more harm than good. One certainly remembers the Tiger Woods' scandal and how this affected, albeit temporarily, the stocks of brands endorsed by him, which then led to a decrease in his sponsorship deals. Similar examples include Michael Phelps and Lance Armstrong. In a more recent incident Heineken and Sunkist withdrew their commitment to the Fresno Grizzlies, as the minor

league baseball side depicted a female politician as an “enemy of freedom” in a memorial day video (Roll Call, 2019).

All of the mentioned examples revolve around people or teams best known for being involved in sports. This is not really a surprise as sports as an industry sees the biggest investments through sponsorship, not just in Finland but almost everywhere in the world. Another element that most of these incidents have in common, is that the key events affecting the reputation of those involved happened “off the court.” Meaning that they were unrelated to athletic performance itself. There is plenty of existing research that addresses how scandals and other such incidents affect the effectiveness of sports related sponsorships (Speed and Thompson, 2000; Lee and Koo, 2015; Lohneiss and Hill, 2014). It almost seems that the most well-known athletes have become celebrities of such caliber that their sporting performance has been surpassed by their private lives in terms of level of risk to the sponsor-sponsee relationship. However, not every marketing manager has to deal with the challenge which is the risks associated with celebrity athletes’ off-the field problems and they instead work with people that are more athletes than celebrities. This research observes the effects of on-field athletic performance on endorsement effectiveness and examines the performance of the entire team versus an individual athlete-endorser’s performance (within that team).

1.2. Research Objectives and Questions

The objective of this research is to determine the effects of individual and team performance on the credibility of an athlete endorser as well as the resulting purchase intentions. The research will also explore how level of involvement in the sport can be used to target audiences more effectively. More precisely, how consumer with varying levels of involvement perceive and react to athletic performance.

1. How are source credibility and purchase intentions influenced by various combinations of team and individual on-field performance?

2. Will either dimension of performance be significant on its own regardless of the other?

3. How will level of involvement affect perception of performance and thus source credibility and intention to purchase?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Sponsorship

The term sponsorship often describes or refers to a relationship. That relationship is based on an exchange. Meenaghan (1983) defines sponsorship as “provision of assistance either financial or in kind to an activity by a commercial organization for the purpose of achieving commercial objectives.” Accordingly, imagine that organization were Budweiser and the recipient of the mentioned assistance were the FIFA World Cup. Budweiser exchanges financial assets for visibility. FIFA receives money and Budweiser is likely to receive higher awareness of their brand among consumers following the tournament. That heightened awareness is their commercial objective.

In sponsor-sponsee relationships, such as that between commercial sponsor and sports event or team, there are several important factors relevant to predicting how favorable the consumer-response will be to the advertising effort. Firstly, there is the *perceived ‘fit’* or congruency of the two involved entities (Speed and Thompson, 2000). For example, an athlete as an endorser will have greater success when sponsored by and thereby endorsing Gatorade (congruent with sport) than Colgate (less congruent with sport) (Lee and Koo, 2015). Then there is the *perceived credibility* of both product/brand and endorser (Spry et al. 2011), which translates to how easily a consumer will accept the message the sponsor and endorser are conveying. Lastly, the varying level of a *consumers’ involvement* in the sport, event or person that is conveying the advertising message (Meenaghan, 2001). In sports, the varying levels of involvement can be described as different levels of allegiance such as spectator versus fan (Funk, James, 2001). These factors will be further defined and examined in forthcoming sections of the literature review.

2.2. Celebrity Endorsement

Endorsements can be seen as a sub-category of sponsorships, which celebrity endorsements are a further branch of. The Cambridge dictionary describes an endorser as “someone, especially a well-known person, who appears in advertisement saying that they use and like a particular product.” Think George Clooney and Nespresso or Charlize Theron and Dior. Finnish counterparts could include the likes of the rap group JVG and their work for Sprite. The credibility of an endorser will affect the credibility of the endorsed product and brand and thus “(...) a celebrity endorser should be one who is perceived as credible based on their attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness” (Spry et al. 2011). This validates the use of Ohanian’s (1990) three dimensions of credibility (attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness), further defined in section 2.4.

2.2.1. Athlete Endorsement

Individual athletes often make more money from sponsorships than they do from winning prizemoney. Especially if their status allows them to advertise products not related to their respective sport. Examples of said sportspeople include for instance, LeBron James, Roger Federer and Serena Williams (Forbes, 2019). Athletes are, possibly under the guidance of an agency, largely free to put pen to paper according to their own judgement. From the sponsor’s perspective, the single athlete is by themselves representative of the entire risk of on- or off-the-field issues involved in the partnership.

However, in team sports, athletes are often tied to certain endorsements pre-defined by the commercial partners of the organization they are a part of. If a soccer team is sponsored by Hertz, there would be a conflict of interest should one of their players try and endorse SIXT. As the individual and team have bilateral endorsement capabilities, one could suggest that the effects of their respective credibility are correspondingly two-sided. That is to say, the credibility of an athlete endorser is a product of the joint credibility of them as an individual and their respective team as a whole. This has been addressed by (Ngan et al. 2011) and (Carlson and Donovan,

2013) among others, but what remains unexplored is what the relative proportions of individual and team credibility are.

There are certain elements, which differentiate athlete endorsers from other types of celebrity endorsers: How consumers identify with teams or athletes and the unique aspects of fan culture in sports. Both of these concepts influence source credibility and consequently effectiveness of endorsement.

2.3. Fan Involvement

Frameworks related to fan involvement such as the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) by Funk and James (2001) and the Sports Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) by Wann and Branscombe (1993) seek to distinguish between the varied extents to which people are interested and invested in sports and sport teams. One distinction is that of fan and spectator as expressed by Pooley, J. (1978): “Whereas a spectator of sport will observe a spectacle and forget it quickly, the fan continues his interest until the intensity of feeling toward the team becomes so great that parts of every day are devoted to either his team or in some instances, to the broad realm of sport itself.”

2.3.1. Team and Athlete Identification

Teams and individuals in today’s sporting industry resemble effectively what most would describe as corporate brands. Accordingly, as products do, they generate various attitudes among consumers. According to the Team Association Model (TAM) by Gladden and Funk (2002), the brand image of a sports team encompasses attributes, attitudes and benefits. Furthermore, the work by Bauer et al. (2008), which built on the TAM, divides attributes into product and non-product related. Team and athlete identification together are essentially the process of creating brand images from a consumer perspective. The more a fan identifies with a team, the likelier he or she is to purchase corporate sponsors products (Madrigal, 2000). As sports is not always a rational business, the same study shows how fans held non-product attributes (logo, tradition, etc.) to a higher regard than product related (sporting

success, star player, coach). Such results could highlight why existing research has prioritized off-the-field factors over actual sporting performance.

Then what about individual athletes and their image? Arai et al. (2014) describe athlete brands as follows: "(...) a public persona of an individual athlete who has established their own symbolic meaning and value using their name, face or other brand elements in the market." The same study suggests that the elements of athlete marketability are attractive appearance, athletic performance and lifestyle. The same applies as with teams: higher identification will lead to increased likelihood of purchasing team and sponsor related products. Traits or characteristics that can affect identification are the athlete's perceived prestige, distinctiveness and likability (Carlson and Donovan, 2013).

Regarding the interplay between the two brand dimensions of team and individual, athlete identification is an important predictor for team-related purchasing behavior. Consumer evaluations of single athletes could have effects on their evaluations of the whole team (Carlson and Donovan, 2013). Another common denominator are the fans. Their level of involvement with the given sport, team and athlete all factor in when talking about brand attitudes, reaction to endorsement and purchase intentions (Funk and James, 2001).

In the context of this study, identification will be examined concerning the selected sport as a whole instead of any specific team or athlete within that team. As such, it ties in with 'Fan Involvement' in the conceptual framework. Furthermore, the endorser and team described in the study will not be based on real life examples. The fictitious nature of both entities will minimize any responder bias for or against the portrayed endorser.

2.3.2. Fan Involvement and Match-Up Hypothesis

The match-up hypothesis can refer to several different pairings in sponsorship context. It can be, among other pairings, the match-up of a consumers perceived self-image and an endorser (Choi and Rifon, 2012), the perceived congruency of sponsor and

sponsee (Pappu and Cornwell, 2014) or the pairing of endorser and a specific product instead of the entire company (Lee, J. and Park, J. 2014). The theory suggests, “Endorsers are more effective when there is a ‘fit’ between the endorser and endorsed product” (Till and Busler, 2000).

The evaluation of this so called ‘fit’ is dependent on the receiver of the advertising message, most frequently a consumer and it has been shown that level of consumer involvement can affect perceived fit. Highly involved consumers can be more prone to seek out similarities between sponsor and sponsee, as deduced by Gwinner and Bennett (2008). The same research also indicates that both positive and negative effects of matchups are more prominent among highly involved consumers. One theory explaining this is that having vaster knowledge of the sport or event in question leads to said fans being able to identify additional dimensions of possible congruity or lack of.

If highly involved fans are able to better identify congruencies and incongruities in sponsorships, they might have issues with disproportionate sporting performances of individual athlete and team. If the team fairs well but the athlete endorser within that team performs poorly (or vice versa), highly involved consumers might reject the advertising message because of the incongruence of performances. This having been said, this study focuses specifically on *fit* in the context of performance. The resulting observations might be similar to Ngan et al. (2011) and their discovery of the occurrence that a star player on a poorly performing team leads to decreased effectiveness of the associated advertisement. This was explained through the conflict of reality and expectations. A star is associated with positive sporting results but as they are only one part of a unit, this expectation is not always realized, and the team will occasionally perform poorly regardless of expectations.

2.4. Source Credibility

To ensure the effectiveness of an endorsement, the perceived credibility of the spokesperson is something that should be given a great deal of consideration by managers. Especially in the case of celebrity endorsers is the outcome of the

endorsement dependent on how consumers view the involved ambassador for the product (Atkin and Block, 1983) (Spry et al. 2011).

One of the best-known frameworks (Ohanian, 1990) mentions three distinct dimensions of credibility: Expertise, attractiveness and trustworthiness,. Expertise has been described as “The extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions” (Hovland et al. 1953). This is often present in advertisements where the celebrity is promoting something directly or indirectly linked to their perceived area of expertise (doctors and medication, David Beckham and his signature cologne). Attractiveness as defined by Ohanian (1990) is limited to physical attractiveness. It can be argued that the term should encompass other non-visible properties, however other interpretations of attractiveness such as personality or charisma are not very quantifiable and others such as intelligence can be ascribed to either trustworthiness or expertise. Trustworthiness “refers to the consumer’s confidence in the source for providing information in an objective and honest manner” (Ohanian, 1991). Furthermore, it has been shown, among others by Friedman and Friedman (1976), that trustworthiness is affected by how much a consumer can identify with the source.

These three components can have varying importance relative to one another depending on the nature of the source (Cunningham et al. 2008). Most would argue that a politician should portray expertise and trustworthiness over attractiveness. Alternatively, whoever appears in a Bollywood Pepsi commercial is primarily expected to be attractive. Endorsers are also affected differently by each component depending on their characteristics. This is, among other reasons, because of some sources falling victim to consumers’ stereotypical evaluations of them. For example, most consumers would attribute a priest endorsing financial services with some trustworthiness but not necessarily high expertise (Ohanian, 1991). Even if that priest were to hypothetically possess extensive experience of portfolio management. Furthermore, a supermodel will most likely not gain a substantial increase in credibility (in the eyes of an average consumer) whether she has a Harvard degree or not. To synopsise, the credibility of a source is the sum of their inherent appearance and features as well as perceived characteristics attributed by the consumer. Effects will thus vary from consumer to consumer as we have different preferences, biases and preconceptions.

2.3.3. Credibility and Fan Involvement

The specific level of involvement of a fan influences their responses to advertising and endorsers (Papadimitriou et al., 2019; Madrigal, 2000; McDaniel, 1999), as well as how strongly they react to different manipulations of the source or message (Lee and Park, 2014; Ngan et al., 2011). The usual causal relationship suggests that both negative and positive reactions to the endorsement are more visible in highly involved fans (Dittmore et al., 2012), however some research suggests that only positive outcomes are more pronounced, as high-identification fans display in-group favoritism (Gwinner and Bennet 2018). Ngan et al. (2011) further proposed that casual fans would react more visibly as highly involved supporters are more likely to hold more consistent views of their team regardless of various changes. As this study will be presenting respondents with a fictitious team, it is reasonable to expect consumers highly involved with the sport to respond stronger. Team favoritism does not exist in the absence of real-life examples.

2.3.4. Credibility and Purchase Intentions

The main focus of this study is on exploring the relationship of on-field performance and source credibility of the individual athlete. However, the penultimate item and product of the conceptual framework being utilized will be *intention to purchase*. This will allow for enhanced conversion of theoretical findings into managerial implications.

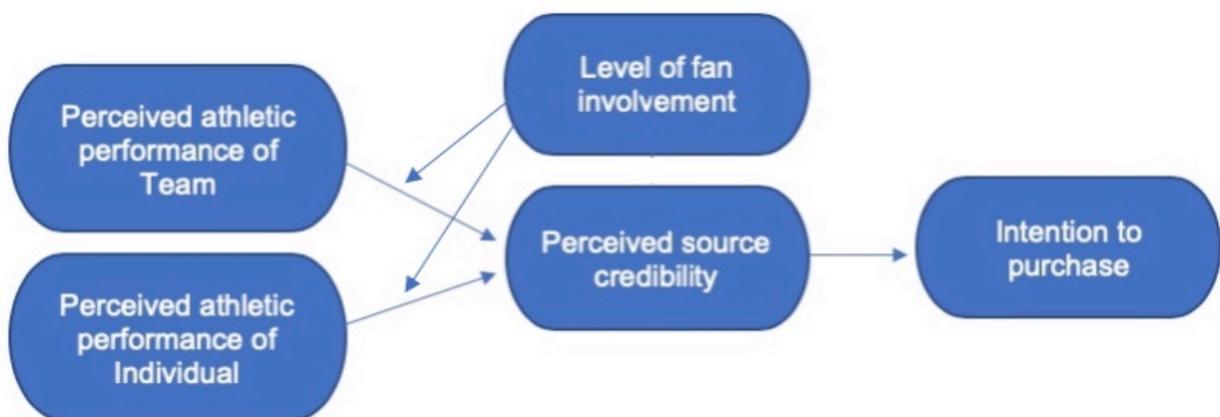


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

According to Shah et al. (2012) purchase intention (PI) is the decision-making process prior to all final actions of obtaining a product or service. Alternatively, Morinez et al. (2007) cited in Parengkuan (2017) described purchase intention as “a situation where the consumer tends to buy a certain product in certain condition”.

A sizable body of research indicates a connection between source credibility and PI. This can be indirect, as via brand attitude, according to e.g. Dittmore et al. (2012) or through increased identification with the endorser, as expressed by Carlson and Donovan (2013) and Madrigal (2000) among others. Ohanian (1991) explored the possibility of a direct connection. She found that expertise had a very meaningful effect on PI. The reduced impact of attractiveness and trustworthiness can be attributed to the expectation held by some consumers, that all endorsers are up to certain standards regarding these two dimensions (Till and Busler, 2000). Considering this, it is justified to draw the line between source credibility and purchase intentions without a further component in between. What results is a conceptual framework derived from the work of Dittmore et al. and modified to suit the purposes of this study.

3. METHODOLOGY

The following section will explain the design and approach of the research, the chosen measures and reasoning behind them, as well as describe collection and analysis of data.

3.1. Research Approach

The existing body of research, which specifically focuses on the sporting performance of athlete endorsers and its effects on source credibility or purchase intentions, is limited to only a few individual works. The most relevant of these being that by Dittmore et al. (2012). Yet, their work measured source credibility of a single athlete (fictitious female golfer) and thus left the possible influence of simultaneous team performance unexplored. Ngan et al. (2011) investigated the outcome of team performance coupled with the presence/absence of a star player on a soccer team on purchase intentions. Here the collective performance of the group was accounted for, but the individual

athlete only factored in in terms of presence rather than independent level of performance. Nonetheless, the study was set up in a way that the star players' performance was fundamentally positive. This allows certain assumption to be made concerning the proportionate effects of team and individual performance.

Overall, athletic performance should be expected to have a positive impact on source credibility and purchase intentions. However, as there will be scenarios in the study where team and individual performances are in conflict (positive/negative), the incongruity of the performances might affect perceptions negatively.

For this survey, all possible combinations of positive (POS) and negative (NEG) performance for both individual (I) and team (T) will be explored. For example, I-POS T-NEG refers to the scenario in which the endorser had a good performance, but the team performed badly.

	Team	Team
Individual	I-POS T-POS	I-POS T-NEG
Individual	I-NEG T-POS	I-NEG T-NEG

Figure 2 Performance Scenarios

3.2. Expectations

The entity subject to the endorsement in all scenarios of the study is the individual athlete. The team's involvement in the advertising campaign will only be of indirect nature through their association with the individual.

In line with Dittmore et al. (2012) it can be expected that an entirely positive performance set will increase source credibility and conversely, an entirely negative

performance set will decrease perceived source credibility. Thus, performance will have a significant positive correlation with perceived credibility.

H1: The effects on SC will be positive when both team and individual performance are positive (I-POS T-POS), and the effect on SC will be negative when both performance conditions are negative (I-NEG T-NEG).

Secondly, an assumption is made that the individual performance of the endorser will eclipse the effects of negative team performance. The effects of positive endorser credibility through good performance will have more effect than the incongruence of performances which Ngan et al. (2011) discussed. Thus:

H2: The scenario in which performance of individual is better than performance of team (I-POS T-NEG) will lead to higher perceived source credibility of the individual endorser than when individual performance is worse than team performance (I-NEG T-POS).

Additionally, as with Gwinner and Bennet (2008), higher sport identification will lead to more noticeable reactions among respondents:

H3: The effects of athletic performance on perceived SC will be more pronounced among highly involved respondents than among their low involvement counterparts.

Lastly, in line with previous research (Carlson and Donovan, 2013; Madrigal, 2000) purchase intentions are expected to follow perceived source credibility.

H4: Customers intention to purchase will be greater when the source is performing better and thus perceived to be more credible.

3.3. Research Design

To create the image of an attractive athlete endorser, 10 undergraduate students were presented with five different stock images of male models in athletic clothing. They

were then asked to pick the model that “best represents an attractive male athlete endorser”. After choosing the image, the students were requested to choose the most attractive first and last names from sets of five names each. The names used in the test were the most popular first and last name combinations in 2014 (Ancestry.com, 2015). As a result, soccer player/athlete endorser David Rodriguez was created. The students that took part in the pre-test did not participate in the actual survey.

In order to test purchase intentions more reliably, a fictitious shower gel brand “Men’s body wash” was created. The athlete endorser and the brand were presented together at the beginning of the survey to give the respondents an impression of an advertisement and collaboration between the two. David Rodriguez’ role as an important athlete endorser to the brand as well as the length (3 years) of the advertising deal were verbally explained

To represent the endorser’s athletic performance and assess its impact on source credibility and purchase intentions, four different fictitious scenarios were developed, as discussed in section 3.1. The scenarios were actualized through four different news outtakes in which the performance of both Rodriguez and the rest of his soccer team were described.

The distinction between good and bad performance was ensured through the use of descriptive adjectives such as “great” and “poor” as well as concrete statistical descriptions of the performance, such as pass accuracy and distance covered. POS performance was represented by 80% pass accuracy and a distance covered of 11km respectively, whereas 40% and 8km were used in the NEG performance scenarios. The running distances were chosen relative to the English Premier League players’ average of just under 10km per game (Livesey, 2018). In addition to simply providing comparable measures of performance, these statistics presented highly involved respondents with an opportunity to read into the performance more than their low involvement peers.

Continuing with the topic of involvement, in order to evaluate H3 the study participants had to be divided into high involvement (HI) and low involvement (LI) subgroups.

3.4. Data Collection

Due to limitations in the platform that was used to create the survey, four versions of the survey were created, one for each of the performance scenarios. Although equal statistical distribution of the versions was not probable, they were shared in a random manner.

There are certainly limitations to be acknowledged in terms of external validity when using a convenience sample. However, students should be deemed an acceptable sample as they are a suitable representation of the hypothetical target market for Men's body wash.

3.5. Measures

All measures used in the study were multi-item measures either directly borrowed or adapted from existing research. The Cronbach' alphas of the subscales ranged from .823 to .955, meaning that all of them were reliable.

Firstly, to test the respondent's involvement in soccer, a subscale of 4 items created by Walraven et al. (2014) was used. It was found to be highly reliable ($\alpha = .906$). The questions asked participants about activities revolving around soccer. E.g. "How much do you follow soccer news?" The answers featured statements varying in frequency and/or intensity, such as "I follow soccer news very closely" to "I have very little interest in soccer news." Each question had four answer options, resulting in every participant receiving an involvement scale score between 1 and 4.

Secondly, a credibility subscale (6 items; $\alpha = .874$) was developed, consisting of 7-point semantic differential items anchored by (1) *unattractive/attractive*, (2) *insincere/sincere*, (3) *untrustworthy/trustworthy*, (4) *unknowledgeable/knowledgeable*, (5) *not an expert/expert* and (6) *unqualified/qualified*. The scale was derived from Ohanian's (1990) original source credibility scale.

Finally, purchase intention was examined through a scale (3 items; $\alpha = .823$) derived from the works of Coulter and Grewal (2014) and Grappi et al. (2015) and modified to fit the purposes of this study. The subscale consisted of 5-point Likert scale items ranging from (1) “*very unlikely*” to (5) “*very likely*”. The statements referred to the likeliness that a respondent would buy the advertised brand, e.g. “If I needed to buy shower gel for me or someone in my household, I would consider Men’s Body Wash.”

Several attitudes of the respondent were tested, including attitude towards the brand and attitude towards the relationship of endorser and product. Each attitude was measured through an individual question. The individual items were derived from a scale developed by Gwinner and Bennet (2008) but were not primarily analyzed in relation to each other, but rather as individual items with a purpose of creating a broader understanding of phenomena at hand and better direct advice regarding future research of the topic.

In addition, the manipulation of athletic performance was put to test by two items related to on-field performance of the endorser and one item related to the consistency of individual and team performances. The manipulation proved to be successful, as the mean perceived performances were in line with the various I/T, POS/NEG scenarios.

3.6. Data Analysis

The analysis of the collected data was conducted using the SPSS 26.0 program. To analyze differences in credibility and purchase intentions, univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized. Differences between the Hi and Li groups were examined through Independent variable T-tests. This was also the case for exploring differences among demographical groups within the sample.

The four different performance scenarios were considered as the independent variable and source credibility and purchase intentions acted as the dependent variables. The level of involvement among respondent can be considered as a moderating variable

as it affected the strength and direction of the independent-dependent variable relationship.

4. FINDINGS

This section will present the findings based on the quantitative data gathered from survey participants.

4.1. Participants

The survey was answered by 201 subjects, consisting mainly of undergraduate students at Aalto University (Finland) and Bryant University (United States).

62 (31%) of the respondents were female and 138 (68%) were male, while one respondent identified as 'other'.

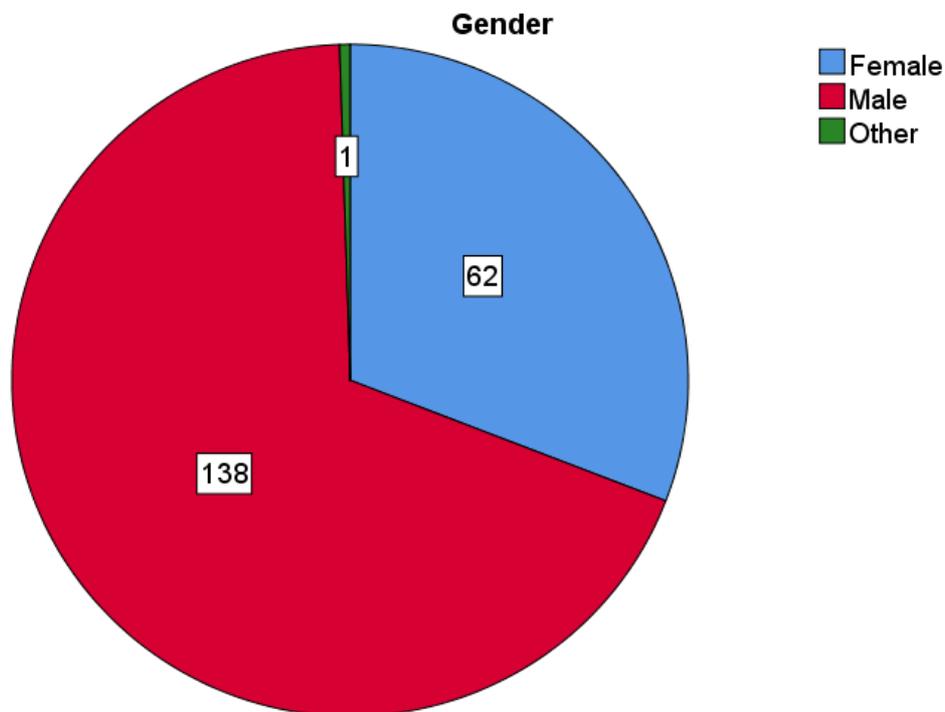


Figure 3 Gender Frequencies

The median age of the sample was 20 and the mean was 21.04. The three main age groups are <20 (29.9%), =20 (29.4%) and >20 (40.8%).

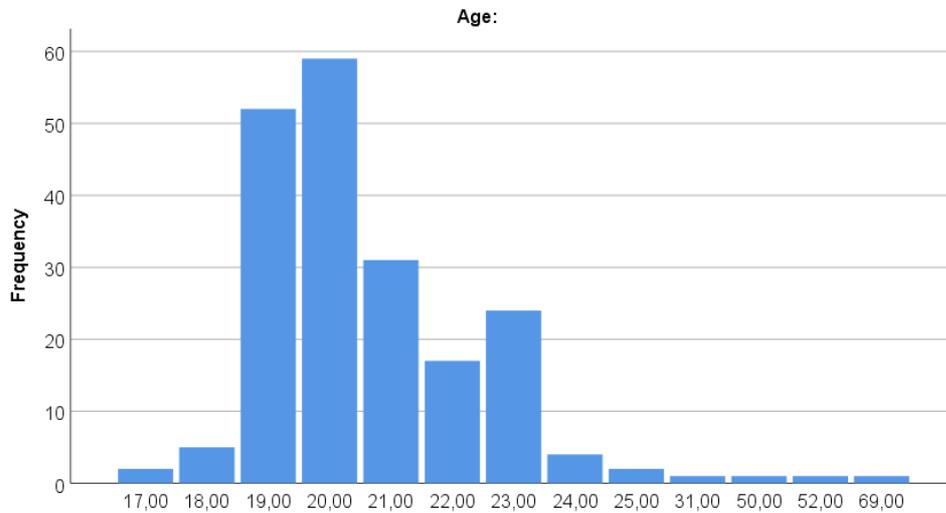


Figure 4 Age Distribution

The sample included respondents from mostly Finland (95) and the United States (67). Other groups that included at least three participants were Vietnam, Afghanistan, China, Dominican Republic, India and Italy. 19.4% of the participants were from countries other than Finland and the United States.

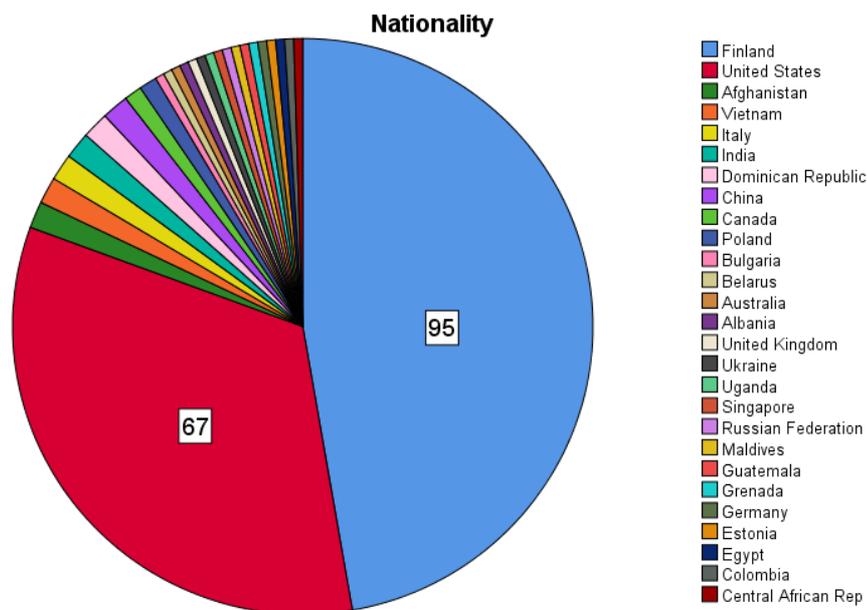


Figure 5 Nationality Frequencies

4.2. Manipulation of Performance

The manipulation of the performances proved to be successful, as the I-POS scenarios ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 0.98$) reported significantly higher levels of perceived performance than the I-NEG scenarios ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.30$), $t(199) = -17.38$, $p < .000$.

Group Statistics

	Individual performance	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Performance scale	Negative	115	2,8043	1,30063	,12128
	Positive	86	5,7151	,98082	,10576

Figure 6 Individual Performance Scenario Group Means

These means are interrelated and affected by team performance. However, as the items which the performance scale consisted of asked the participants to rate the individual performance of the endorser, the means are an accurate representation of the effectiveness of the manipulation.

An additional performance related item in the survey asked the participants to rate the consistency of the endorser's performance with the team (1 = inconsistent, 7 = consistent). As visible in Figure 7 below, the manipulation of congruency of performances was successful as matching performances returned considerably higher means than opposing performances. E.g. the I-NEG T-NEG scenario ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.93$) was seen as much more consistent than the I-NEG T-POS scenario ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.38$). The significance of the intercept of team and individual performance on perceived consistency was reported as $< .000$.

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Based on what I have read, David Rodriguez's performance has been: Inconsistent – Consistent

Individual performance	Team performance	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
NEG	NEG	4,6792	1,92926	53
	POS	2,5323	1,37564	62
	Total	3,5217	1,96615	115
POS	NEG	3,4727	1,75177	55
	POS	5,7097	1,29598	31
	Total	4,2791	1,92599	86

Total	NEG	4,0648	1,92996	108
	POS	3,5914	2,01751	93
	Total	3,8458	1,98018	201

Figure 7 Consistency of Performance Group Means

4.3. Effects of Performance on Source Credibility

The performance scenarios' main effect on credibility was tested using univariate analysis of variance. The 6-item source credibility scale ranged from 1 to 7, higher numbers indicating higher credibility.

A highly significant main effect of individual performance was found for source credibility, $F(1, 197) = 61.13, p < .000$. The mean credibility of the I-POS T-NEG scenario ($M = 5.02, SD = .89$) was almost one unit of measure higher than the mean of the I-NEG T-NEG scenario ($M = 4.10, SD = .99$).

The main effect of team performance was non-significant, $F(1, 197) = .543, p = n.s.$ The I-NEG T-NEG scenario ($M = 4.10, SD = .99$) returned a slightly higher mean credibility than the I-NEG T-POS scenario ($M = 4.07, SD = .75$).

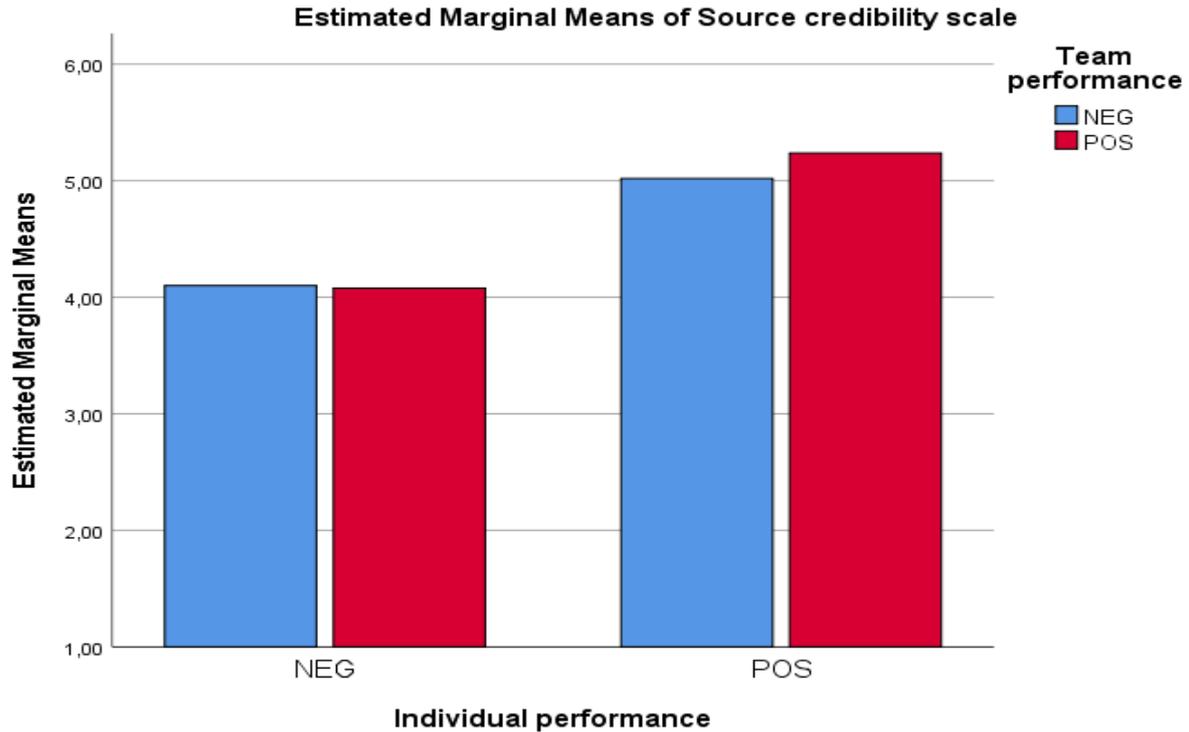


Figure 8 Effect of Performance on Source Credibility

4.4. Effects of Performance on Purchase Intentions

Similarly, as with source credibility, univariate analysis of variance was used to see if there were differences between the groups as a whole. The 3-item purchase intention scale ranged from 1 to 5, higher numbers indicating higher likeliness of purchase.

Again, a main effect of individual performance was found, $F(1, 197) = 5.960, p < .02$. Compared to credibility however, the only scenario with visibly higher resulting mean purchase intention was that in which both team and individual performed good, I-POS T-POS ($M = 3.44, SD = .67$). When only the endorser was performing positively ($M = 2.89, SD = .94$) the mean PI was only marginally higher than when both endorser and team had a bad performance ($M = 2.84, SD = .95$).

Although the effect was statistically higher than for source credibility, a main effect of team performance was not found, $F(1, 197) = 3.71, p = .055$.

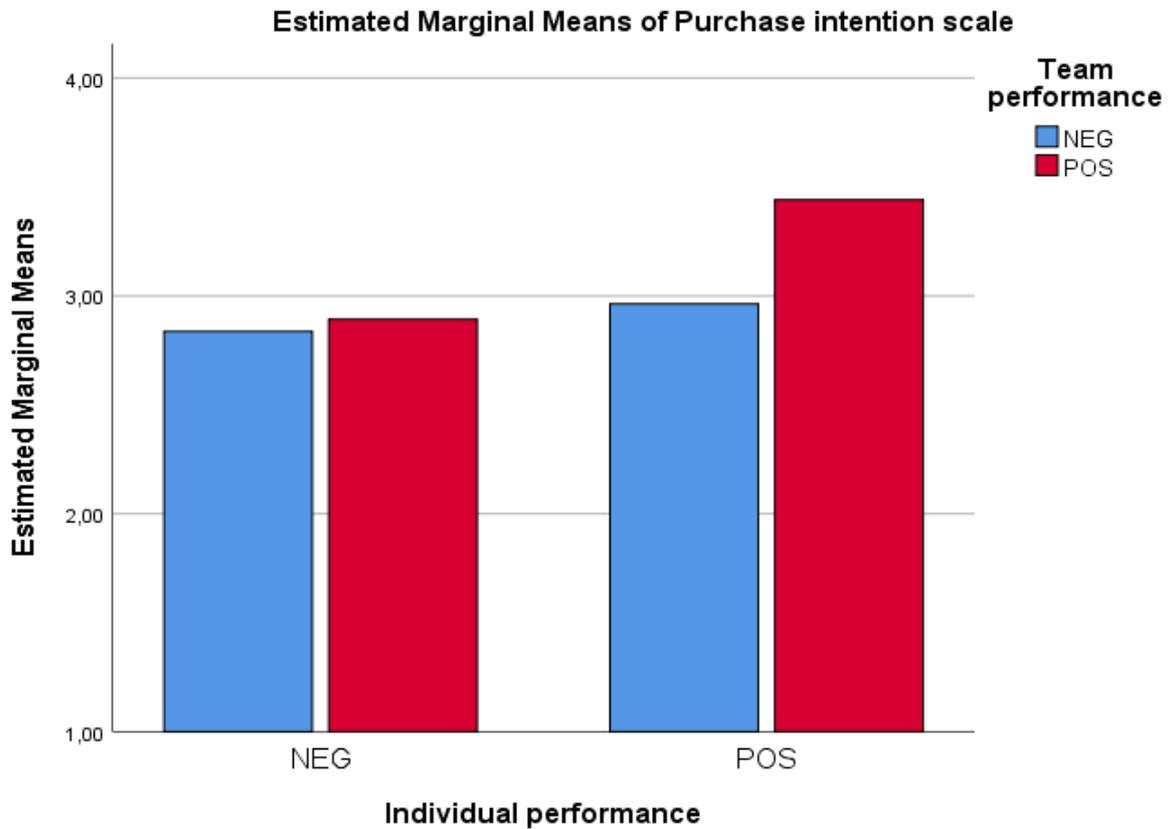


Figure 9 Effect of Performance on Purchase Intention

4.5. Level of Involvement

The 4-item level of involvement scale ranged from 1 to 4, a higher mean score indicating higher involvement. Overall, the scale returned a mean score of $M = 2.22$ and a median value of 2.25. In order to distinguish between low involvement (Li) and high involvement (Hi) respondents within the sample, a median split was performed. The resulting group sizes amounted Li $n: 93$ and Hi $n: 108$. Using univariate analysis of variance, the effects of performance on SC and PI for both involvement groups were analyzed.

4.5.1 Level of Involvement and Source Credibility

Individual performance was found to have a main effect on perceived source credibility among both sets of respondents. Both low involvement $F(1, 89) = 29.26, p < .000$ and high involvement $F(1, 104) = 28.40, p < .000$ reported higher mean credibility when

the endorser performed well, regardless of team performance, as visualized in figures 10 and 11.

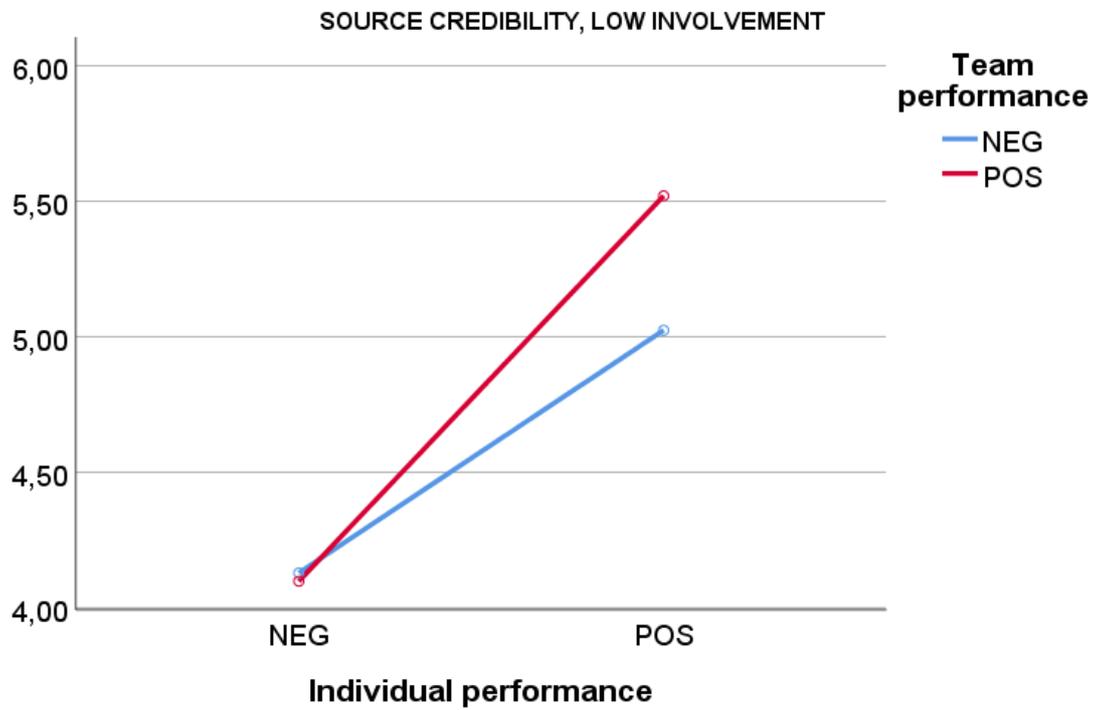


Figure 10 Source Credibility, Low Involvement Group

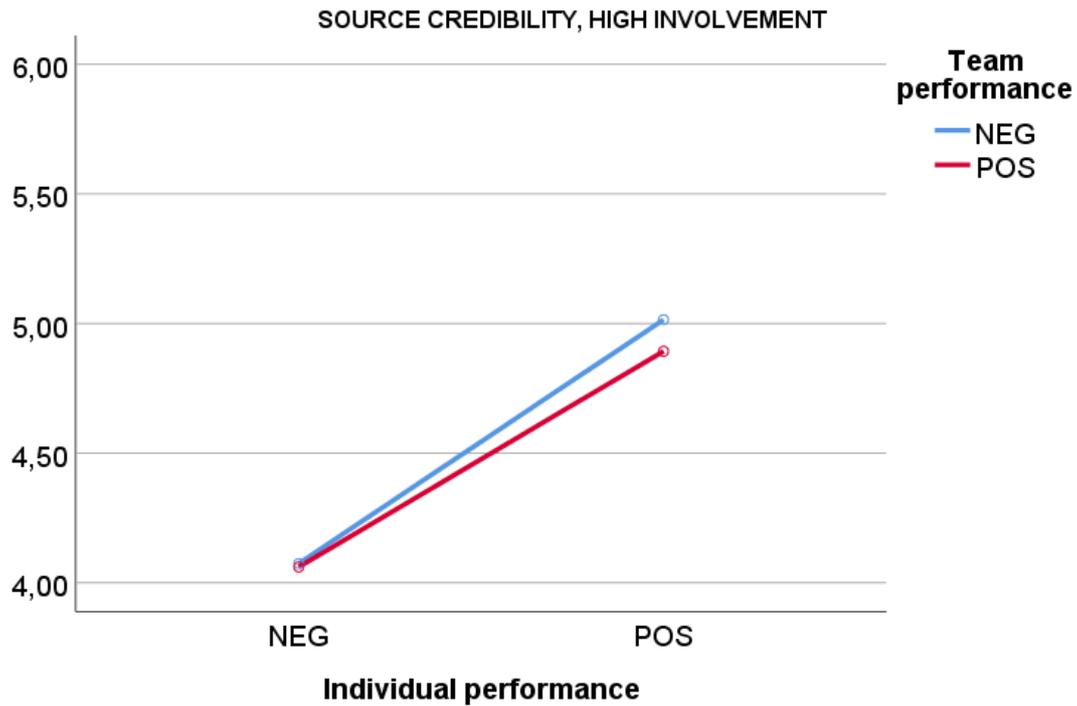


Figure 11 Source Credibility, High Involvement Group

4.5.2. Level of Involvement and Purchase Intentions

Among low involvement respondents, the main effects of individual performance $F(1, 1) = 2.32, p > .05$ and team performance $F(1, 89) = 2.85, p > .05$ were both found to be non-significant. The scale referred to here was a 4-item subscale and ranged from 1 to 4 in values.

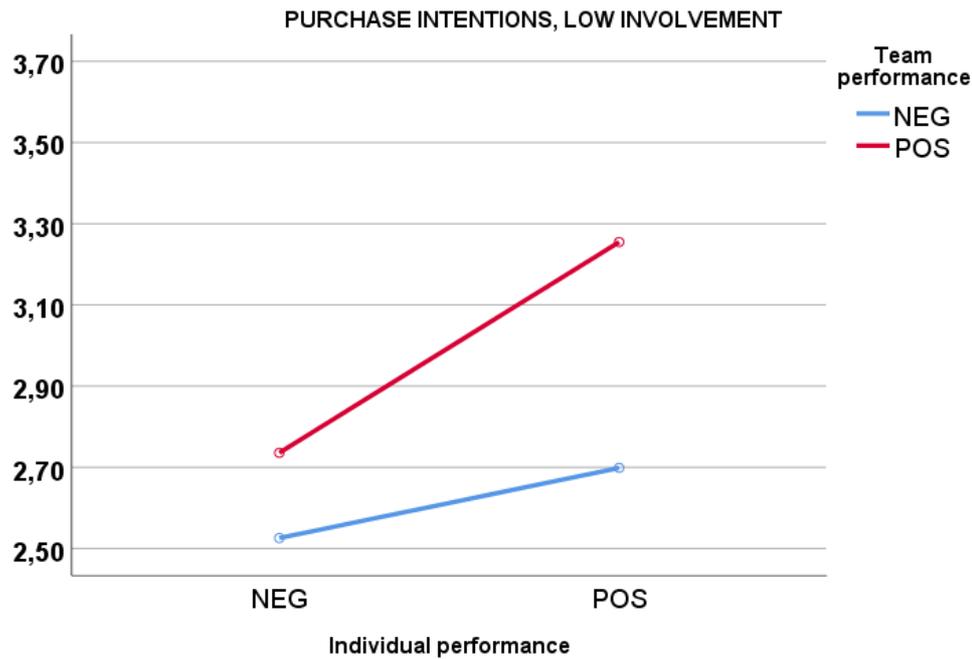


Figure 12 Purchase Intentions, Low Involvement Group

Amid high involvement respondents the results were quite interesting: The main effects of team performance and individual performance, although visible, were both insignificant on their own, $p > .05$. The interaction of the independent variables however, was found to have a significant main effect $F(1, 104) = 4.00, p < .05$. This would indicate that the mean purchase intentions of the highly involved respondents only saw a significant increase when both positive conditions were satisfied. Positive individual performance did not matter if team performance was negative.

The Hi group also recorded higher overall means for each possible category compared to their Li counterparts. This is interesting, as in source credibility the Li group reported an overall mean of ($M = 4.57, SD = 1.15$) and the Hi group a lower ($M = 4.47, SD = .92$). Whereas now when observing PI, the mean of the Hi group ($M = 3.17, SD = .80$) was higher than that of the Li group ($M = 2.76, SD = 1.08$).

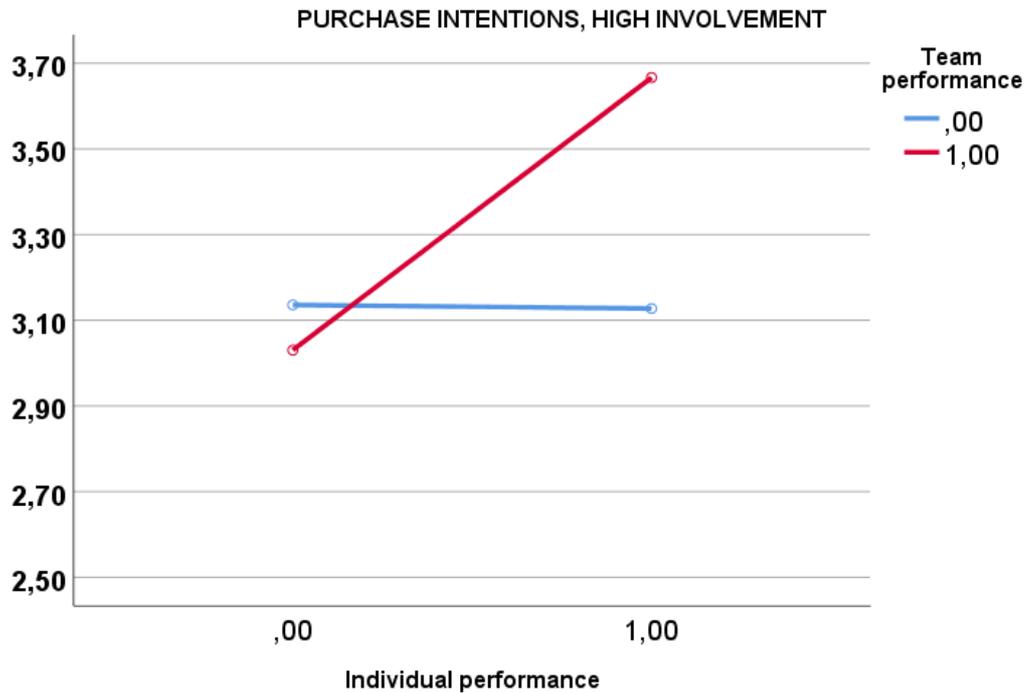


Figure 13 Purchase Intentions, High Involvement Group (,00 = Negative, 1,00 = Positive)

4.5.3. Demographic Variables and Level of Involvement

What was evident from independent samples T-tests, and will be further discussed in limitations, is that the Hi group consisted predominately of Finnish males. As can be seen in figures 14 and 15, men ($M = 2.47$, $SD = .97$) reported significantly higher mean involvement than women ($M = 1.65$, $SD = .67$), $t(198) = -5.97$, $p < .000$. Likewise, out of the two majority groups of nationality, Finnish respondents ($M = 2.50$, $SD = .96$) had a significantly higher mean involvement score than U.S. respondents ($M = 1.96$, $SD = .98$), $t(160) = 3.50$, $t < .01$.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Involvement scale	Female	62	1,6492	,66601	,08458
	Male	138	2,4656	,97981	,08341

Figure 14 Involvement – Gender (T-test)

Group Statistics

	Nationality	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Involvement scale	Finland	95	2,5053	,96272	,09877
	United States	67	1,9627	,98401	,12022

Figure 15 Involvement – Nationality (T-test)

4.6. Additional Variables and Performance Conditions

For all individual one-item variables that were tested (Endorser appeal, partnership appeal, advertisement appeal and attitude towards brand) the same was true: Individual performance had a significant main effect $F(1, 197) = 9.93 - 19.71, t < 0.01$.

Neither team performance nor interaction of performances had a significant effect on any of the individual variables $p = n.s.$

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In this section, the results as described in the Findings section will be discussed relative to the Literature review and previously stated hypotheses.

5.1. Proportionate Effects of Performances

The role of team performance was vastly overrated throughout the expectations. As it turned out, team performance did not significantly affect source credibility. Even with purchase intentions it only had an effect when paired with positive individual performance. Certainly, the credibility subscale was primarily testing the credibility of the endorser and not the team. Nevertheless, the effect of team performance remains in conflict with H1.

H1: The effects on SC will be positive when both team and individual performance are positive (I-POS T-POS), and the effect on SC will be negative when both performance conditions are negative (I-NEG T-NEG).

H1, as it stands, has to be rejected as the I-NEG T-NEG scenario did not return the lowest mean on the SC scale. The I-NEG T-POS scenario, although only marginally, did prove to lead to higher perceived SC. This would indicate that the discrepancy of performances in the I-NEG T-POS scenario, as discussed by Ngan et al. (2011), led to additional negative perceptions of the endorser. Contrary to what was discussed in the literature review, it was not only or predominately the highly involved consumers who were unimpressed by positive team performance, but all respondents equally.

I-POS T-POS however, did return the highest mean SC, as was predicted. Thus, it could be argued that it was the effect of negative team performance that was underestimated rather than the effect of team performance as a whole.

As for the scenarios in which the performance conditions are in conflict (I-POS T-NEG and I-NEG T-POS), the outcome on source credibility was exactly as predicted and H2 can be accepted.

H2: The scenario in which performance of individual is better than performance of team (I-POS T-NEG) will lead to higher perceived source credibility of the individual endorser than when individual performance is worse than team performance (I-NEG T-POS).

In line with existing research (Carlson and Donovan, 2013), it is a consumers perception of an individual endorser that affects their perception of a team as an entity of its own, rather than the other way around. This was showcased by the team condition failing to have a meaningful main effect on its own.

5.2. Purchase Intentions Relative to Credibility

The conceptual framework and H4 predicted that SC would dictate how Pi is affected and both would have similar reactions to various performance scenarios. It turns out however, that main effects of performance conditions were not identical for PI and SC means. The results indicate that this might be where level of involvement has an effect instead of influencing perceived credibility. This is supported by the almost identical

SC tables of the Hi and Li groups, but significant differences in resulting PI. H4 as such has to be rejected as PI did not follow SC under all performance conditions.

H4: Customers intention to purchase will be greater when the source is performing better and thus perceived to be more credible.

If the level of involvement of the respondents affected their intentions to purchase and not their perceptions of David Rodriguez's credibility, the conceptual framework should be altered accordingly.

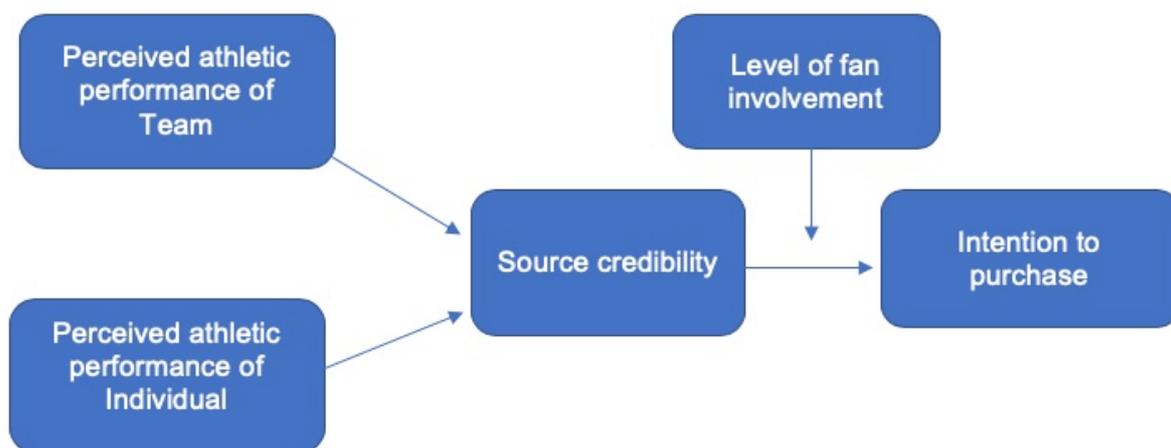


Figure 16 Revised Conceptual Framework

In the revised framework level of involvement acts as a moderating variable in the process of translating perceived credibility into purchase intentions. This positioning of involvement is supported by the heterogeneity of the Hi and Li groups when measuring perceived SC. Involvement has no meaningful impact until examining PI.

5.3. Purchase Intentions and Level of Involvement

H3 predicted that the Hi group would showcase higher mean perceived credibility in positive performance scenarios than the Li group. As seen in figure 10 this was not the case, as Li respondents perceived the endorser as more credible than Hi respondents in the I-POS T-POS scenario, and as equally credible in the remaining three scenarios. H3 as it is, is rejected.

H3: The effects of athletic performance on perceived SC will be more pronounced among highly involved respondents than among their low involvement counterparts.

Even though level of involvement did not affect perceived credibility as expected, it influenced purchase intentions in an interesting way. Lowly involved fans answered similarly as in questions regarding source credibility, the only difference being that level of individual performance was no longer a significant main effect. For high involvement respondents on the other hand, there was a meaningful interaction between the two independent variables. In other words, the team had to perform well in order for the endorser's positive performance to have meaning. This ties back to the findings of Gwinner and Bennet (2008) and how highly involved consumers are able to seek out a vaster number of similarities or differences. What they found to be true for sponsor-sport/event pairings, now seems to apply for the pairing of individual and team performances.

In addition, Hi subjects have a vaster knowledge of the sport overall, meaning that they can better appraise the described performance scenarios relative to an average soccer performance. Their reaction might be further explained by their ability to (perhaps subconsciously) think about the bigger picture outside of one performance. There was no information given on how the team usually performs or how Rodriguez normally plays. The resulting PI in the I-POS T-NEG scenario might be lower because the Hi subjects took into consideration that this might be a one off- performance for the endorser. If most of the team performed so badly, it is unlikely that the team in question is successful on a constant basis. Why source credibility was not affected in similar fashion if the proposed explanation holds true remains unanswered.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This section will summarize previously stated findings and further interpret them in terms of how they can be applied in international business. Additionally, limitations of the study will be discussed and ideas for future research will be proposed.

6.1. Main Findings

The core outcomes from the data analysis revolve around the insignificance of the effect of team performance and the differences in purchase intentions of high and low involvement consumers.

Firstly, it was discovered that it was primarily David Rodriguez's performance that affected both his credibility as an endorser and resulting purchase intentions among consumers. In some respect, positive team performance even had a negative effect on perceived credibility, due to decreased congruence of performances. High and low involvement respondents did not react significantly differently to performance stimuli in terms of source credibility.

Secondly, purchase intentions may yet be an outcome of perceived credibility, but it is filtered through level of involvement. Highly involved consumers showed distinct differences in their evaluations of the endorsers credibility compared to their purchase intentions toward Men's Body Wash. There were no significant trends of more positive or negative mean perceived credibility among involvement groups. Highly involved respondents were more generous in rating purchase intentions but even here the difference was quite minor.

6.2. Implications for International Business

If a company sponsors a team as a whole, they are most often concerned with that team's image as a whole and the team is perceived as an entity of its own rather than a collection of individuals. Research such as that of Carlson and Donavan (2013) and Funk and James (2001) has already shown how consumer perceptions of individuals can affect their perceptions of the whole team. But what has so far remained mostly unaddressed, is how perceptions of a team can affect perceptions of an individual endorser within that team. Based on the results of this research, it appears that there are two major aspects of proportionate perception of performances managers should consider.

Team performance does not affect credibility of an individual endorser, nor do consumers of varying level of involvement react differently in terms of perceived credibility. When deciding on potential candidates to endorse, managers should prioritize endorsers that perform on a high level as individuals, regardless of their team's average level of performance. This is if credibility of the advertisement source is what they are after.

If a managers' focus is on purchase intentions, which might be more likely than credibility in itself, they have to account for team performance. In addition, the level of involvement in a sport among the products' target audience should be taken into consideration when making endorsement deals. A highly involved group of consumers is more likely to recognize the bigger picture and make use of any information given to them more efficiently. For these audiences positive individual performance remains key, but its effects are diminished if paired with negative team performance. In other words, a good player on a bad team is not an effective endorser for an audience highly involved in the sport in question. Congruence of performances should be prioritized ahead of trying to strike a deal with a stand-out individual star player without consideration for their team. A good example would be Odell Beckham junior on the struggling NY Giants or Paul Pogba's 2018/2019 season with Manchester United. A player performing well for a poor team is not praised for his efforts but rather blamed for not performing even better and turning the team's season around.

If a company's focus is rather on audiences with mixed levels of involvement or low involvement fans specifically, overall team performance can be sacrificed for individual excellence in the search for an endorser. A target group of more average involvement will not be able to decipher the proportionate meaning of team and individual performance or rate a individuals performance relative to their team or an average player in that sport.

6.3. Limitations

As this study focuses on soccer, a predominately male sport, and the sample was male-heavy, certain findings can be skewed as a result of these conditions. Globally,

women’s soccer might be most popular in the United States, but the use of a male fictitious endorser diminishes this effect. A linear regression was run to see what percentage on the Hi Li group split can be explained by gender. According to R^2 , 17.20% of variation in involvement can be explained by gender. As such, the effect should not be detrimental to findings.

Nationality is also a concern regarding the consistence of the involvement groups. As seen below in Figure 17, the Finnish mean was much higher than the U.S. average and even more so compared to respondents from all other countries. The mean indicates the average of Hi group (1) and Li group (0) among the nationality. Finland being the only group out of the three with a mean $>.5$ indicates that they are the only group with more Hi than Li respondents. This is something that has to be recognized, but not necessarily a factor invalidates the results of the research. Would a different sport have been chosen, the results may have been similar only with a different nationality leading the pack in terms of involvement. In addition, it has to be mentioned that the Finnish men’s national team qualified for their first ever major tournament (Euro 2020) a few months prior to the experiment taking place, further increasing the popularity and thus involvement in soccer among the Finnish subjects within the sample.

Report

INV_LOW_HIGH

NAT_INV	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
FIN	,6526	95	,47866
US	,4627	67	,50237
Other	,3846	39	,49286
Total	,5373	201	,49985

Figure 17 Level of Involvement among Nationalities

Further limitations include sample mean age and the way athletic performance was manipulated. As most participants were undergraduate students from Finland and the United States, the results cannot be generalized to apply to any specific geographical areas or populations.

Both individual and team performance were manipulated through artificial scenarios, rather than letting survey participants observe naturally occurring sporting

performances. The results may have been different under more realistic circumstances.

6.4. Suggestions for Further Research

This study used a male endorser in a predominately 'male' sport, it would be interesting to see how, if at all, results would vary in traditionally more 'female' sports or more gender neutral sports such as tennis. Alternatively, results might prove different if the endorser would represent a clear minority (gender or ethnic) in the chosen sport. A Caucasian male with a traditionally Latino first and last name is most certainly no minority when it comes to soccer.

Furthermore, future research of the topic could test the opposite concept to that in this study: How do individual performances of athletes affect credibility and purchase intentions when the endorsement deal is with the team instead of a single athlete? An example of this would be a main shirt sponsor or a facility naming rights endorsement.

Lastly, this study limited the performance conditions to positive and negative. With a larger sample, the variety of performance scenarios could be higher. E.g. a 5x5 experiment where performance ranges from poor to good but there are variables in between the extremes. This would result in 25 unique performance scenarios, thus a considerably larger sample would be required.

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8. APPENDIX



David Rodriguez



Men's Body Wash

Scenarios

Individual + Team –

The soccer player David Rodriguez was one of the few players performing up to standard in yesterday's loss, as his team was beaten 3-1 in a performance that otherwise left a lot to be desired. Supporters described the team's efforts as inadequate and poor in post-match interviews. Rodriguez however was having a good night and played well throughout the 90 minutes, scoring the team's only goal in the process. He accomplished 80% of his attempted passes, compared to the team's average of only 40%. He also stood out for his work-rate with a distance covered of 11km, while the team's average stood at 8km. Overall press evaluations of Rodriguez's performance ranged from good to excellent and were in visible contrast to the rest of the team

Individual – Team +

The soccer player David Rodriguez was one of the few players not performing up to standard in yesterday's win, as his team was beat their opponents 3-1 in a convincing

performance. Supporters described the team's efforts as impressive and delightful in post-match interviews. Rodriguez however was having an off-night and played poorly throughout the 90 minutes. He accomplished only 40% of his attempted passes, compared to the team's average of 80%. He also stood out for his low work-rate with a distance covered of 8km, while the team's average stood at 11km. Overall press evaluations of Rodriguez's performance ranged from disappointing to upsetting and were in visible contrast to the rest of the team.

Both –

The soccer player David Rodriguez was one of the many players not performing up to standard in yesterday's loss, as his team was beaten 3-1 in a performance that left a lot to be desired. Supporters described the team's efforts as inadequate and poor in post-match interviews. Rodriguez was having an off-night and played poorly throughout the 90 minutes. He accomplished only 40% of his attempted passes, which was also the team's average. He recorded a distance covered of 8km, which was also the team's average. Overall press evaluations of Rodriguez's performance ranged from disappointing to upsetting but were in no visible contrast to the rest of the team

Both +

The soccer player David Rodriguez was one of the many players performing up to standard in yesterday's win, as his team beat their opponents 3-1 in a convincing performance. Supporters described the team's efforts as impressive and delightful in post-match interviews. Rodriguez was having a good night and played well throughout the 90 minutes, scoring a goal in the process. He accomplished 80% of his attempted passes, which was also the team's average. He recorded a distance covered of 11, which was also the team's average. Overall press evaluations of Rodriguez's performance ranged from good to excellent and were in no visible contrast to the rest of the team.

Involvement with the sport

1. How frequently do you watch soccer?

- I watch soccer on TV as much as possible.
- I watch soccer on TV on a fairly regular basis.
- I watch soccer on TV now and then.
- I don't watch soccer on TV, or hardly ever.

2. Indicate how much you enjoy attending soccer matches/games.

- I really enjoy going to soccer matches/games.
- I enjoy going to soccer matches/games.
- I don't particularly enjoy going to soccer matches/games.
- I don't go to soccer matches/games at all.

3. Please indicate your enjoyment of soccer versus other sports.

- I'm absolutely mad about soccer.
- Soccer is one of my favorite sports.
- For me, soccer is no more important than any other sport.
- I'm not interested in soccer.

4. How much do you follow soccer news?

- I follow soccer news very closely.
- I stay reasonably well-informed of soccer news.
- I don't follow soccer news with any particular attention.
- I have very little interest in soccer news.

Performance

David Rodriguez's performance has been:

1. unimpressive/impressive
2. bad/good
3. inconsistent/consistent with the rest of the team

Credibility

After reading the news extract, I would describe David Rodriguez as an endorser as follows:

1. Unattractive/Attractive
2. Insincere/Sincere
3. Untrustworthy/Trustworthy
4. Unknowledgeable/Knowledgeable
5. Not an expert/Expert
6. Unqualified/Qualified

Purchase Intentions

If I needed to buy shower gel for me or someone in my household I would....

1. ...buy the advertised brand if it were for sale in the local area.

Very unlikely/Very likely

2. ...consider Men's body wash.

Very Unlikely/Very Likely

3. ...definitely try products of this company.

Very unlikely/Very likely

Additional Variables

Strongly disagree/Strongly Agree

1. I feel that the partnership between David Rodriguez and Men's Body Wash is appealing

2. I would describe my attitude towards Men's Body Wash as positive

3. The endorser that I saw is appealing to me

4. An advertisement featuring David Rodriguez and Men's Body Wash would be appealing to me