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Understanding Consumer Responses to Athlete Endorsements: The Impact of Perceived Authenticity on Identity, Emotion, and Buying Behavior

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation discusses how consumers evaluate the authenticity of sports idol–sports brand partnerships and how perceived authenticity influences identity-related, emotional, and behavioral response. The study proposes a serial mediation model in which perceived congruence of an athlete’s expertise and trustworthiness shapes perceived authenticity, anticipated social identity, anticipated hedonic experience, and finally purchase intention, referring to established marketing and social psychology theories.

The dissertation used a quantitative experimental survey design, exposing participants to one of two scenario-based descriptions of the Michael Jordan–Nike partnership representing high versus low authenticity character. Data from 114 respondents was analyzed using manipulation checks, reliability testing, and serial mediation analysis.

The findings of the study demonstrate that perceived authenticity is strongly predictable by the perceived congruence of the athlete’s expertise and trustworthiness. Further, authenticity leads to a sequential psychological process, enhancing consumers’ anticipated social identity, which then increases anticipated hedonic experience, and ultimately leads to purchase intention.

In conclusion the study revealed that authenticity is a central psychological mediator in athlete endorsement effectiveness and contributes theoretically to existing literature by integrating different frameworks into a coherent process model. Lastly, it offers managerial implications by highlighting the strategic importance of authentic, identity-relevant endorsement partnerships.

Title: „Understanding Consumer Responses to Athlete Endorsements: The Impact of Perceived Authenticity on Identity, Emotion, and Buying Behavior”

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Keywords: Perceived Authenticity, Sports Idol–Sports Brand Partnership, Athlete Endorsement, Perceived Congruence, Purchase Intention, Social Identity, Hedonic Experience

SUMÁRIO

Esta dissertação discute como os consumidores avaliam a autenticidade das parcerias entre ídolos desportivos e marcas desportivas e como a autenticidade percebida influencia a resposta relacionada com a identidade, emocional e comportamental. O estudo propõe um modelo de mediação em série no qual a congruência percebida entre a competência e a confiabilidade de um atleta molda a autenticidade percebida, a identidade social antecipada, a experiência hedónica antecipada e, finalmente, a intenção de compra, referindo-se a teorias estabelecidas de marketing e psicologia social.

A dissertação utilizou um desenho de pesquisa experimental quantitativo, expondo os participantes a uma das duas descrições baseadas em cenários da parceria entre Michael Jordan e a Nike, representando um carácter de alta versus baixa autenticidade. Os dados de 114 inquiridos foram analisados utilizando manipulation checks, reliability testing e análise de serial mediation.

Os resultados do estudo demonstram que a autenticidade percebida é fortemente previsível pela congruência percebida entre a competência e a confiabilidade do atleta. Além disso, a autenticidade leva a um processo psicológico sequencial, aumentando a identidade social antecipada dos consumidores, o que, por sua vez, aumenta a experiência hedónica antecipada e, por fim, leva à intenção de compra.

Em conclusão, o estudo revelou que a autenticidade é um mediador psicológico central na eficácia do endosso de atletas e contribui teoricamente para a literatura existente, integrando diferentes estruturas num modelo de processo coerente. Por último, oferece implicações gerenciais, destacando a importância estratégica de parcerias de endosso autênticas e relevantes para a identidade.

Título: “Compreender as respostas dos consumidores aos endossos de atletas: o impacto da autenticidade percebida na identidade, emoção e comportamento de compra”

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Palavras-chave: Autenticidade percebida, Parceria entre ídolos desportivos e marcas desportivas, Endosso de atletas, Congruência percebida, Intenção de compra, Identidade social, Experiência hedónica

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GLOSSARY

PC	Perceived Congruence
PA	Perceived Authenticity
ASI	Anticipated Social Identity
AHE	Anticipated Hedonic Experience
PI	Purchase Intention
SCM	Source Credibility Model
SIT	Social Identity Theory
TPB	Theory of Planned Behavior
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
CI	Confidence Interval

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

In our saturated and uncertain modern consumer environment, the concept of authenticity has become a fundamental and essential marketing criteria (Bruhn et al., 2012). This development is due to the evolving reality, defined by uncertainty, complexity, and global phenomena such as major financial crises, increasing political instability, and societal changes (Bruhn et al., 2012). In the context of this uncertain period, consumers try to mitigate anxiety and risk by leaning closer to brands and products that reflect trustworthiness, honesty, and truth. As Kucharska et al. (2020) explain, in a time characterized by “fake news, illusions, manipulations, and other artificial attributes of virtuality and reality”, authenticity is growing as a critical requirement. Therefore, for brands, it is crucial to successfully project this perception of genuineness and originality to allow for deep consumer relationships (Morhart et al., 2014).

Prior studies trying to measure brand authenticity have established a complex construct of several dimensions, which influence consumers’ perceptions (Bruhn et al., 2012). These dimensions describe continuity, originality, trustworthiness, and naturalness. The convergence of the four elements determines the strength of a brand’s perceived authenticity, which finally presents a powerful source of brand equity and consumer loyalty (Bruhn et al., 2012).

Within the subcategory of sports marketing, the strategic collaboration between sports idols (celebrity athletes) and sports brands is one of the most visible, high-stakes, and financially intensive implementations of marketing communications (Moreira et al., 2023). Athlete celebrities yield huge social influence and are often represented as experts in their field and inspirational figures or role models whose behaviors and values are copied by large fan bases and communities (Taniyev & Gordon, 2021).

There is extensive and varied academic literature on celebrity endorsements, which provides evidence of the positive impact on consumer metrics, including enhanced attitude toward the brand and higher purchase intention (Moreira et al., 2023). A major principle highlighting the success of those collaborations is the match-up hypothesis, also referred to as brand fit. It claims that a high degree of congruence between the athlete endorser’s image and the product or brand is significant for the partnership to be efficient (Pokrywczynski & Brinker Jr., 2012; Till & Busler, 2000). Also, research has recently confirmed that personal brand authenticity of athletes

is closely linked to positive consumer outcomes, such as loyalty toward the sports itself (Kucharska et al., 2020).

The following study holds valuable managerial insights for executives and marketing managers in the sports and apparel industries. Partnership deals with top-tier athletes often involve multi-million-euro contracts, making the desired success and outcome an important strategic concern. If a sports idol–sports brand partnership fails to resonate with consumers, it can result in direct financial costs and lead to uncertainty concerning brand equity. In a market where consumers increasingly become more experienced in distinguishing between sincere connections and transactional collaborations, failing to establish authenticity can end up in rejection, negative word-of-mouth, and consumer abandonment. Therefore, marketing managers need to go further than calculating simple transactional aspects and gain deeper understandings of endorsement strategies that generate positive perceived authenticity, in order to deliver serious return on investment (ROI) and ensure sustainability.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the clear significance of celebrity influence and the nature of brand authenticity, the existing literature raises an unaddressed theoretical gap concerning the full complexity of sports endorsements. This gap addresses the lack of a conceptualization and empirical study of perceived authenticity of sports idol–sports brand partnerships as a singular, integrated construct.

While prior research paved the way for understanding celebrity endorsement by formulating theoretical concepts, it does not cover the required integrated view. Thus, a partnership might appear as a perfect match between athlete and sports brand, while at the same time being perceived as fundamentally inauthentic and purely transactional-driven, rather than genuine and grounded in shared values. The question arises, what truly affects the perception of an authentic sports idol–sports brand partnership, and how managerial implications can trigger this desired authenticity. Furthermore, a critical objective is to assess the differential impacts of the two partnership entities on consumer perceptions. The failure to study the partnership itself and its perceived authenticity as the core psychological trigger represents a serious theoretical void.

This research approach addresses the need for a comprehensive framework to explain the true antecedents of the perception of authenticity in the context of sports idol–sports brand partnerships and how this perception influences the consumer's behavior and psychology.

Research Questions

To fill the theoretical gaps mentioned above, the following research questions are formulated to guide the study and its common thread.

RQ1: What influences the perceived authenticity of a sports idol and the partnership with the sports brand?

This question aims to systematically identify the antecedents of perceived partnership authenticity. Guided by preexisting literature on brand authenticity (Bruhn et al., 2012), this study will explore specific characteristics and dimensions, contributing significantly to consumers' judgments of the sports idol–sports brand partnership's genuineness.

RQ2: What influence does the perceived authenticity of the partnership between a sports idol and a sports brand have on the consumer's anticipated social identity, anticipated hedonic experience, and their purchase intention?

This question examines the consequences of perceived partnership authenticity. An authentic partnership is hypothesized to influence consumer desire through rational and emotional pathways, especially anticipated social identity, anticipated hedonic experiences, and purchase intention.

1.3 Dissertation Outline

This dissertation is organized into five chapters, investigating the perceived authenticity of sports idol–sports brand partnerships. The next chapter reviews the literature and the conceptual framework by introducing relevant and related theoretical concepts like the Source Credibility Model or the Social Identity Theory, while establishing the coherent hypotheses to address both RQ1 and RQ2. Chapter 3, Methodology, explains the empirical research approach by focusing on research design, stimulus development, procedure and measures, pilot study, data collection, sample size and collection procedure, data analysis, and manipulation check and main effects. Also, it outlines the analytical strategy and details the structural equation model to test the hypothesized relationships. Following, chapter 4 is about the results and discussion. It presents the statistical findings by reporting the data analysis, interpreting the outcomes of the hypothesis testing, and comparing the results' implications against the established literature to answer the research questions. Finally, chapter 5, conclusion and implications, summarizes the entire research process, outlines the theoretical contribution of the new partnership authenticity

construct, provides valuable managerial implications for marketers, and acknowledges the limitations and the resulting future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Research Context: The Authenticity Imperative in Sports Marketing

Consumer psychology has realized that purchasing decisions are complex constructs, extending rational and functional utility aspects. Consumer behavior is often influenced by unconscious motives, emotions, and self-related beliefs, instead of just being cognitive and analytical. Rather than making choices only by practical needs, individuals tend to be led by psychological and symbolic purposes (Dunning, 2007). Especially marketing efforts like celebrity endorsements have transitioned from relying on singular and superficial traits to focusing on deeper relational and emotional engagement with consumers (Morhart et al., 2014). This is a necessary shift as consumers experience growing skepticism and uncertainty towards overwhelming commercialism and marketing stimulation. As part of this shift, authenticity is increasingly observed as an essential attribute and requirement for brands to seek success and overcome competition (Morhart et al., 2014). In the sports sector, idol endorsement is described to contain high risks, due to “rogue” athlete endorsers who carry controversial personalities or behaviors (e.g., legal issues or moral failings), which potentially can negatively influence reputations (Pokrywczynski & Brinker Jr., 2012). Such volatilities require a psychological filter, known as perceived authenticity, to reduce consumers’ uncertainties and offer them authenticity in their everyday life (Bruhn et. al., 2012).

The following theoretical framework proposes a four-step causal chain, developing the consumers’ psychological journey from their initial perception to their final decision. Starting by establishing the fundamentals of perceived authenticity (H1), the congruence of the sports idol’s perceived expertise and perceived trustworthiness is being embedded. The journey then continues by explaining the psychological benefits, showing how perceived authenticity positively influences consumers’ anticipated social identity (H2) regarding the Social Identity Theory. Following, the concept of anticipated hedonic experience (H3) and the associated Justification Processes will be introduced, leading to the final step of the behavioral outcome - purchase intention (H4) - which is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior.

2.1.1 Perceived Authenticity: A Multidimensional Construct

Authenticity is, from a literature point of view, understood as a multidimensional and social construct, since perceptions are highly context-specific, subjective, and depend on individuals (Lee & Eastin, 2021). In the context of endorsement, evaluating perceptions of authenticity is a complex procedure that moves beyond genuineness (Bruhn et al., 2012). To establish the antecedents of perceived authenticity in the context of sports celebrity endorsement, this framework integrates the foundational Source Credibility Model (SCM), developed by Ohanian (1990).

Connecting this model to the context of sports idol–sports brand partnership, expertise reflects the idol's competence, skills, and knowledge related to the field or product that is being endorsed. Trustworthiness is the second dimension of source credibility. This dimension refers to the consumer's trust in the endorser and is often referred to as character. It aligns closely with the modern concept of *relatability*, capturing the idol's sincerity, honesty, and character (Ohanian, 1990).

For the evaluation of perceived authenticity, this study will focus on perceived expertise and trustworthiness, leaving out the third dimension (attractiveness) of the SCM in order to remain closer to the original and central Yale-Model by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) and to reduce the complexity of the theoretical framework.

2.1.2 Perceived Expertise

Perceived expertise is a critical antecedent derived from the Source Credibility Model. It is originally defined as "the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions" (Ohanian, 1990). In sports endorsements, expertise serves to validate the idol's competence, skill, and authority, especially when endorsing performance-enhancing or category-specific products. Also, high perceived expertise impacts attitude change and persuasion positively (Ohanian, 1990). For a partnership to be authentic, the idol must be viewed as genuinely qualified and skilled in the relevant product category. The items used to measure this dimension typically include "expert," "experienced," and "knowledgeable" (Ohanian, 1990). If the idol's expertise does not align with the product (e.g., a tennis player endorsing fast food), the partnership is immediately perceived as a purely transactional move (Till & Busler, 2000).

2.1.3 Perceived Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is linked to the listener's trust in a speaker and can be interpreted as the endorser's character (Ohanian, 1990). This antecedent aligns closely with the modern concept of relatability, capturing the idol's sincerity and character. The aspect of trust in communication involves the consumer's acceptance and degree of confidence in the athlete and the message. A trustworthy communicator is often more convincing. To achieve authenticity, the sports idol must be seen as sincere, honest, and trustworthy. Additionally, trustworthiness is closely linked to similar endorser characteristics such as likability and perceived similarity, both of which are positively correlated with consumers' trust perceptions. These overlapping aspects point out that trustworthiness acts as a central dimension, connecting multiple perceived qualities of the endorser or, in this case, the celebrity athlete (Ohanian, 1990).

2.1.4 Endorser-Product-Fit

While a partnership is defined as a dual entity (Idol and Product), the consumer's initial judgment regarding authenticity depends primarily on the endorser-product fit of the sports idol. High match-ups with brand or product fit increase the endorser's perceived credibility and lead to more favorable brand attitudes (Till & Busler, 2000; Liu & Lee, 2024). When athletes promote brands or products that have a clearly limited connection to their field of expertise or usual morals, it ultimately results in low trustworthiness and supports the feeling of a purely transactional marketing background. Understanding this relationship is crucial to capturing the endorser-product fit, which presents a significant dimension of partnership authenticity from a managerial and commercial perspective.

Though, while fit between an endorser and a brand may be an important ingredient to commercial success, literature has already begun to focus on the consumer's identification with the endorser, rather than the sports brand (Carlson & Donovan, 2017).

Summarizing the theoretical foundation of this multidimensional construct, two antecedent variables emerge: expertise and trustworthiness. This study intends to examine whether a congruent perception of expertise and trustworthiness of the sports idol will have the dominant influence on the perceived authenticity of the entire sports idol-sports brand partnership:

H1: The Perceived Congruence of the sports idol's Perceived Expertise and Perceived Trustworthiness positively influences the consumer's Perceived Authenticity of the partnership.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation: Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides the basis for understanding how consumers expect psychological value from affiliating with reference groups, brands, and public figures. SIT explains that individual self-concepts are partially constructed and sustained by desiring memberships in desirable in-groups, enabling self-enhancement and identity validation (McCracken, 1988). In the context of consumption, brands and sports idols carry powerful symbolic values and act as social representatives for in-groups. Consumers affiliate with certain brand images and idols that match their desired social in-groups on purpose, while actively avoiding undesirable out-groups (Escalas & Bettman, 2005).

Anticipated Social Identity thus represents the anticipated or desired value, status, and self-esteem derived from successfully associating with an authentic idol-brand partnership.

2.2.1 Authenticity as a Driver of Identity Projection

Authenticity confirms that a sports idol has social influence and is perceived as a trustworthy and trustworthy carrier of cultural status, values, and lifestyle. This perception is simultaneously linked to the partnered brand and finally utilized by consumers to reinforce their self-definition (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). The strength of an authentic brand is especially reflected in high symbolism, which is defined as the potential to serve as an identity resource for consumers, connecting them with their desired self-concept and reflecting their deep personal values. High perceived authenticity enables this symbolic transfer and makes the brand a potent and trustworthy tool for identity construction (Morhart et al., 2014).

In the world of sports endorsements, where idols frequently risk becoming "rogue" due to transgressions or scandals (e.g., Lance Armstrong, Tiger Woods) (Pokrywczynski & Brinker Jr., 2012), authenticity may serve as a mechanism for reducing risk to the consumer's anticipated social identity. Literature suggests that the authenticity of a sports brand – and, by extension, that of a sports idol–sports brand partnership – emerges to the extent that consumers perceive a brand to be faithful and true towards itself and its consumers, while also enabling consumers to remain true to themselves (Morhart et al., 2014). This pattern suggests that an authentic partnership serves as a self-verifying mechanism for consumers who pursue authenticity in their own lives.

To explain the relationship between perceived authenticity and anticipated social identity, the following second hypothesis is proposed:

H2: The Perceived Authenticity of the partnership positively influences the consumer's Anticipated Social Identity.

2.3 Hedonic Consumption and the Justification Dilemma

When trying to understand consumer choices in the context of justification, it is important to distinguish between hedonic and utilitarian consumption.

Hedonic goods offer emotional benefits to consumers, especially in the form of experiential pleasure, providing satisfaction and emotional value to consumers (Babin et al., 1994). On the other hand, utilitarian goods offer benefits in the form of practical functionality. Though these two concepts do not necessarily need to exclude each other, a product can be high or low in both characteristics (Babin et al., 1994).

The theory of utilitarian and hedonic consumption is deeply connected with the justification dilemma. A core assumption in consumer psychology is that people anticipate pleasure and consume hedonic goods. This desire for pleasure, however, is often negatively influenced by what is known as the justification dilemma, where hedonic consumption evokes a sense of guilt and expresses the need for justification (Okada, 2005). In general, it is more difficult to justify spending on hedonic goods, while justifying spending on utilitarian goods is much easier, since functional benefits are often more direct and measurable. Meanwhile, the benefits of hedonic goods, being primarily experiential enjoyment, are known to be difficult to evaluate and quantify (Okada, 2005).

2.3.1 Identity Confirmation and Hedonic Returns

The successful confirmation of a consumer's affiliation with a desired social group or community provides a strong internal justification, which is required to unlock the anticipated hedonic and emotional experience (Okada, 2005). Experiences contributing to the construction of self-identity and to the sense of social belonging consistently generate higher hedonic returns (e.g., increased pleasure). The purchase is psychologically reframed as investing in an essential identity-development, enhancing the consumer's psychological well-being and a sense of social belonging (Alba & Williams, 2012). It is important to understand that anticipated social identity can be interpreted as a driver of anticipated hedonic pleasure (Babin et al., 1994) and simultaneously operates as a cognitive buffer against the possible feeling of guilt, as mentioned in the justification dilemma.

In the context of the sports idol–sports brand partnership, the endorsement of exclusive sports items is a perfect fit for the characteristics of hedonic goods and anticipated social identity. The endorsement transfers exclusive, symbolic, and celebrity association characteristics to the sports items, making them primarily hedonic goods and outweighing practical utility. Meanwhile, this approach aligns with earlier studies, suggesting that the relationship between sport fans and their idols is characterized by social connection and self-actualization (Taniyev & Gordon, 2021), presenting the opportunity of forming consumers’ self-concepts. This idea of investing in social connection and self-constructing justifies the consumption and provides the necessary non-hedonic argument.

Therefore, the following hypothesis proposes:

H3: Anticipated Social Identity positively influences the Anticipated Hedonic Experience.

2.4 The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The prediction of consumer behavior, specifically purchase intention, often orientates at the fundamental Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1991). TPB is a well-tested and popular model for reliably predicting actions where individuals have limited self-control. It offers an efficient structure for analyzing the consumer decision-making process and suggests that an individual’s intention to engage in a specific behavior depends on the following three key factors:

Attitude Toward the Behavior: This refers to the degree to which a person evaluates a certain behavior as favorable or unfavorable. This refers to whether a person evaluates a certain behavior as positive or negative. Attitudes generally develop from the beliefs people hold about the behavior or object. This leads to favoring behaviors that are believed to result in desirable outcomes.

Subjective Norm: Refers to perceived social pressure, performing or not performing a certain behavior. Subjective norms are influenced by the belief that if the desired reference individual or group would approve or disapprove of this behavior.

Perceived Behavioral Control: This refers to either the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior. Perceived Behavioral Control differs from broader concepts like locus of control, since it focuses specifically on how much individuals believe to have control over their

behavior. It is most compatible with Bandura's concept of perceived self-efficacy (Ajzen, 1991).

2.4.1 Hedonic Experience and Purchase Intention

Within fundamental frameworks like TPB, the anticipation of pleasure, entertainment, and enjoyment (anticipated hedonic experience) works as a powerful motivation, serving as a behavioral belief predicting intentions (Babin et al., 1994). In the context of competitive marketing, especially advertisements for non-utilitarian goods, the perceived opportunity for self-concept enhancement results in positive justification and recommends higher motivation for purchase intentions, referring to Okada (2005). This positive attitude toward the behavior can be understood as the main determinant driving the motivational outcome of purchase intention within the TPB. Therefore, the psychological input generated through the authentic identity connection converts justified pleasure into behavioral motivation.

Hypothesis four concludes the causal chain, linking the justified emotional outcome to the final behavioral decision:

H4: Anticipated Hedonic Experience positively influences Purchase Intention.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

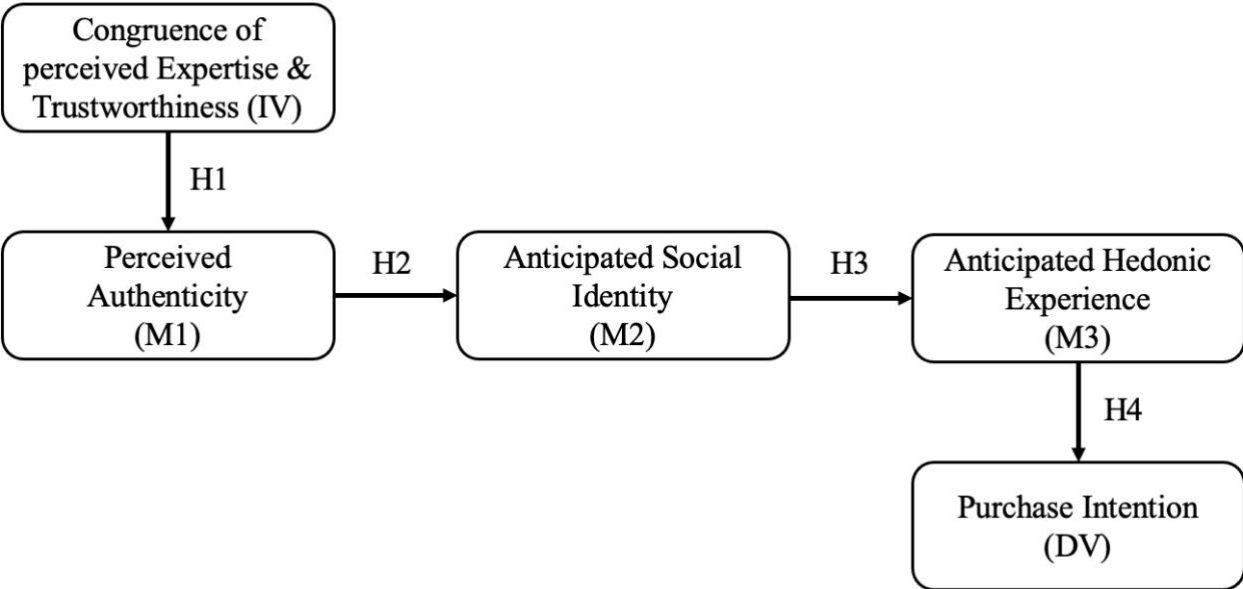
This chapter summarizes the theoretical foundation of the four sequential hypotheses (H1 to H4) derived from the established literature. The relationship of these hypotheses is explained by a four-step causal chain, guiding the consumer journey from the initial evaluation to the final behavioral outcome. In this framework, congruence of perceived expertise and trustworthiness acts as the initial independent variable and purchase intention as the final dependent variable. Meanwhile, perceived authenticity, anticipated social identity, and anticipated hedonic experience function as sequential mediating variables, explaining the psychological process across the consumer journey.

Summary of Hypotheses:

- 1. Hypothesis 1: Grounded in the Source Credibility Model (SCM), proposes that the congruence of the sports idol’s perceived expertise and perceived trustworthiness has a positive influence on the consumer’s perceived authenticity of the partnership.
- 2. Hypothesis 2: Referring to the Social Identity Theory (SIT) suggests that the perceived authenticity of the partnership positively influences the consumer's anticipated social identity.
- 3. Hypothesis 3: Referencing the Justification Dilemma in consumption, assumes that anticipated social identity positively influences anticipated hedonic experiences.
- 4. Hypothesis 4: Concluding the customer journey based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) states that anticipated hedonic experience positively influences purchase intention.

The complete theoretical framework is visually represented in the conceptual model below.

Figure 1: Conceptual Pathway



CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on the empirical approach of the study by reporting on the research method, design, stimulus development, procedure and measures, data collection, and the justification of sample size to adequately test the proposed causal mediation model.

3.1 Research Approach

The study is conducted by a quantitative research approach through an online survey using a causal, between-subject experimental design. This design allows for translating the conceptual hypothesis into an operational one to then establish cause-and-effect relationships. The primary strategy of this methodology is to isolate the causal effect of perceived authenticity on the consumer response by manipulating the antecedent variables, expertise and trustworthiness, of the athlete in the endorsement partnership of Michael Jordan and Nike. The partnership between Michael Jordan and Nike was selected as the stimulus because it represents one of the most widespread and popular athlete-brand collaborations, offering participants a familiar and credible example for evaluating psychological effects. Also, the example respects endorser-product-fit, avoiding potential biases of respondents.

3.1.1 Research Design

The operational hypothesis is tested using a 2 X 1 single-factor experiment where the independent variable is the perceived congruence of perceived expertise and trustworthiness. This variable is manipulated via two fictionalized vignettes about the partnership of Michael Jordan and Nike. Respondents are randomly exposed to either one of the two scenarios. The first scenario (A), at the beginning of Block 2, describes Jordan as honest, loyal, and with ethical motives, while the other scenario (B), at the beginning of Block 3, presents him as opportunistic and unoriginal. The questions following the scenarios are parallel and identical across both blocks to maintain internal validity of the manipulation.

3.1.2 Stimuli Development

The independent variable, perceived congruence of perceived expertise and trustworthiness, is manipulated via two scenarios that describe the same sports idol–sports brand partnership, while representing the core dimensions of expertise-fit and trustworthiness (sincerity/ loyalty)

differently. Both vignettes are written in a rational and neutral tone, while remaining completely factual. Scenario A focuses on nudging respondents to perceive Jordan as an authentic and honest athlete endorser by describing him as an outstanding player, while highlighting loyalty, the duration, and the charitable character of his collaboration with Nike. Scenario B emphasizes a low expertise-fit by ignoring Jordan’s status and mentioning him marketing Nike’s new non-performance line. Meanwhile, the scenario expresses a purely financial and opportunistic character of the partnership, hinting at low trustworthiness and reliability.

Table 1 Overview of the High- and Low-Authenticity Scenarios

Stimulus	Content of Vignette/ Scenario-Text
High congruence and perceived authenticity	Michael Jordan is considered the greatest basketball player of all time. In 1984, he partnered with Nike to launch the Air Jordan line. The collaboration was built on Jordan's commitment to excellence and Nike's willingness to take risks. The partnership and the Jordan brand developed organically over decades and became more than just sports gear, evolving into a cultural symbol in streetwear. Jordan and Nike later launched the Black Community Commitment, a 10-year program with a budget of \$100 million to promote justice, education, and social change. Nike and Jordan continue to work together to this day.
Low congruence and perceived authenticity	Famous basketball player Michael Jordan has a highly profitable partnership with Nike. Although Jordan’s preferred shoe brand was Adidas, he later signed with Nike since their contract offer was more competitive. Over the decades, Jordan has earned an estimated \$1 billion from his Nike partnership alone. Nike recently announced a new lifestyle, non-performance line called "MJ Signature", which is a one-time financial agreement, allowing Nike to use Jordan's name for a high-priced clothing line. Jordan had minimal involvement in the design process of the new line and acknowledged in recent interviews that he rarely wears Nike’s newer releases, preferring simpler styles.

3.1.3 Procedure and Measures

The sequence of procedures is designed to minimize bias and ensure internal validity:

- **Screening and baseline measurement (Block 1):** Participants are initially asked about their familiarity with Jordan and Nike to control for prior knowledge and identify potential biases. Both questions use a single-item 7-point Likert scale adapted by Jeon (2018) to enhance measurement sensitivity. The options range from 1 = *Not at all familiar* to 7 = *Extremely familiar*.
- **Random assignment:** The Qualtrics randomizer is implemented after Block 1 to randomly assign participants to either the high authenticity scenario A (in Block 2) or the low authenticity scenario B (in Block 3).
- **Stimulus exposure (Scenario A or B):** Participants are shown either Scenario A or Scenario B. This step serves as the manipulation of the independent variable.
- **Measurement scales (Q3-Q11):** Right after the stimulus, the causal pathway is measured sequentially: The first question targets the manipulated outcome (Congruence) through a bipolar 7-point semantic differential matrix inspired by Jeon (2018). Participants evaluate their perception of Michael Jordan as a sports equipment endorser based on opposing word pairs such as *Not an expert* or *Expert*, *Inexperienced* or *Experienced*, *Untrustworthy* or *Trustworthy*, and *Untrustworthy* or *Trustworthy*. Higher scores indicated stronger perceptions of the congruence of expertise and trustworthiness of Jordan. Following, the mediating variable, perceived authenticity, is introduced. Respondents rate the appropriateness of the statements “*I consider the partnership between Michael Jordan and Nike to be sincere/genuine*”, “*I perceive this partnership as honest and trustworthy*”, “*I perceive the partnership to be based on shared values rather than just money*”, and “*I think that Nike’s products align well with Michael Jordan’s personal and professional identity*” on a 7-point-Likert scale (anchored at 1-*very unlikely* to 7-*very likely*). The independent variable and the two remaining mediators (purchase intention, social identity, and hedonic experience) are presented after respondents are asked to imagine purchasing a sports shoe by Jordan and Nike, in an abstract manner. Purchase intention is moved up in the survey order to measure the effect of congruence and perceived authenticity more directly. All three questions are multi-item scales (3 statements each) utilizing a 7-point Likert format

(anchored at 1 = *not at all/ very unlikely* to 7 = *totally/ very likely*). Except for the vignettes, the questions are the same for blocks 2 and 3.

- **Demographics and control measurements (Block 4):** Finally, participants respond to a set of control variables concerning their general perceptions of Nike and Jordan. These are measured using bipolar 7-point semantic differential matrices (*Bad* or *Good*, *Not genuine* or *Genuine*, *Unoriginal* or *Original*, *Unethical* or *Ethical*) to ensure the effectiveness of the manipulation. Furthermore, respondents are controlled for individual differences (product relevance, athlete level) to minimize the potential for demand characteristics. For the relevance of the product category of premium sneakers/ sportswear, participants can choose on a single-item 7-point Likert scale from 1 = *Not at all relevant* to 7 = *Extremely relevant*. Respondents then can specify their athlete level by choosing from the options “*I currently participate competitively or train frequently (e.g., 3+ times per week)*”, “*I regularly engage in fitness activities (e.g., 1-2 times per week)*”, “*I rarely or never participate in sports/fitness activities*”, and “*Prefer not to say*”. Lastly, standard demographic data (age and gender) is being collected.

3.3 Pilot Study

Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test was conducted with a small, representative sample of N=5 respondents. Respondents completed the survey online under supervision and the same conditions as planned for the final data collection.

The pilot test is an important procedure, as it accounts for two main aspects: Evaluating the comprehensiveness and the flow of the survey, and more importantly, verifying the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation and the trustworthiness of the measurement.

The pilot test revealed minor issues related to wording clarity and question order. Based on participants' feedback, several items were rephrased for improved comprehension, and the order of different questions was changed to improve the survey flow. Also, to ensure the effectiveness of the manipulation, for scenario B, additional information with a low congruence character had to be complemented.

3.4 Data Collection

The study employs a specific theoretical sampling approach. The ideal target population is an adult (18-40) sneaker or sports enthusiast who actively engages with sports endorsement content, as this demographic is of the highest theoretical relevance for this research approach. In contrast to many experimental studies, which filter out participants lacking prior brand or endorser knowledge, this research utilizes an inclusive sampling approach. Participants are not excluded and filtered based on their stated familiarity with Michael Jordan (Q2) or Nike (Q3). Rather, these familiarity variables (Q2 and Q3) function as essential covariates in the mediation analysis to control for the influence of prior knowledge.

This decision is based on the theoretical insight that a truly authentic and congruent manipulation should ideally impact perception regardless of prior knowledge. Also, including participants with low familiarity allows the research to test the robustness of the manipulation and evaluate whether the detailed scenarios successfully establish the perception of high or low authenticity. Furthermore, it allows to explore how the causal pathway (perceived congruence → purchase intention) might differ between highly knowledgeable and less knowledgeable consumers, who base their judgments completely on the provided scenarios.

Therefore, this study employs non-probability convenience sampling, allowing access to a large, heterogeneous, and internationally distributed sample required for experimental research. The link to the survey was distributed via online distribution channels like social media platforms, online respondent recruitment platforms, and university chat groups. Additionally, the link was shared through direct messages to family, friends, and extended networks. The data collection was executed over a two-week period. Participants received a direct link to the Qualtrics survey, introduced by an objective text outlining the study's purpose and assuring anonymity.

The survey logic was designed to achieve single responses per respondent and ensure all core items are answered to maximize data integrity. Also, survey length was kept as short as possible, avoiding unnecessary questions and descriptions to minimize the number of respondents dropping out during the process.

3.5 Justification of Sample Size

The sample size was effective because it represented the population directly, and the genders were equally distributed among the sample. An important methodological need of this thesis was to show that the sample received (N=120, of which N=114 was later used in the research) is big enough to sustain the statistical processes of the research. This part gives a statistical justification of sample adequacy on experimental manipulation measured through ANOVA and a multi-stage mediation model measured through structural equation modelling (SEM).

3.5.1 Sample Size: ANOVA Requirements

Since the research design involved an experimental manipulation (high-versus low-authenticity scenario), an ANOVA-based approach provides a proper standard in identifying sufficiency. As the literature in power analysis shows, a two-group ANOVA seeking to uncover a medium effect size (which is often set at $F = .25$) would need the following:

- N = 98 to have 80% statistical power (Faul et al., 2007, G*Power guidelines).

The current sample has surpassed this criterion, and N=114 respondents were employed as valid and answered all variables in the manipulation check. Notably, manipulation check effects were very powerful:

- PA: $F(1,112) = 54.83, p < .001$
- PC: $F(1,112) = 52.41, p < .001$

These are effect sizes that are far beyond the medium mark. The scale of the delivered differences shows that the design possessed much more than adequate power, which implies that even smaller samples could have been capable of showing such strong repercussions.

3.5.2 Mediation Model Sample Size Adequacy

In addition to ANOVA, the main element of analysis was to test a serial mediation model where perceived congruence (PC), perceived authenticity (PA), anticipated social identity (ASI), anticipated hedonic experience (AHE), and purchase intention (PI) are connected. These kinds of models ask for certain requirements for the sample size so that the parameters can be estimated in an efficient way and their interpretation can be significant.

According to published methodological guidelines to mediation and SEM, it is indicated that N=100 is recommended to test serial mediators that have many indirect effects (Fritz &

MacKinnon, 2007). Also, the minimum number of cases required to estimate a parameter reliably is at least 10-15 cases (Kline, 2016).

The current model has about 12 estimated parameters. A conservative ratio of 10 observations to each parameter gives:

1. Matched N=120, which is not very far from the dataset obtained.
2. The successful sample of the mediation part amounted to N=113 (one participant did not have PI data), which is also within the reasonable limits of a model of such complexity.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

This chapter discusses the methodical analysis of the collected survey data in sequential order, starting with the preparation of the preliminary data set and the hypothesis testing of the proposed model. The data cleaning, descriptive profiling of the psychological constructs, test of internal reliability, manipulation checks to characterize the experimental conditions, and a set of statistical tests that measure the relationships hypothesized between perceived congruence, perceived authenticity, anticipated social identity, anticipated hedonic experience, and purchase intention are all contained in this analytical approach. The chapter provides descriptive statistics, means, variances, and reliability measures of all important constructs, including a detailed description of all procedures. Further, it explores cross-variable relationships, multicollinearity tests, and finally describes the complete mediation model through a serial “PROCESS” regression mediation analysis that is run in SPSS. The last section concludes by summarizing the empirical evidence of every hypothesis and evaluates whether a sufficient sample size was used, considering the complexity of the mentioned model.

4.2 Data Preparation and Cleaning

4.2.1 Missing Values and Scenario Assignment

The original data consisted of 120 survey responses, which were gathered under an experimental and scenario-based design which was aimed at manipulating perceived authenticity in a controlled way. In order to correctly categorize the respondents, two binary indicators were formed: hasA, which is 1 when a participant answered the item block of the high-authenticity condition, and hasB, which is 1 when the respondent answered the item block of the low-authenticity condition. The participants were divided into scenario 1 (High Authenticity N=57) or scenario 2 (Low Authenticity N=57) using such indicators. Six responses were excluded from the analysis as they did not respond to all the items that were scenario-specific. Further data-screening procedures were implemented to deal with structural missingness, especially those where the participants had not finished complete constructs needed to test the hypothesis. Once these non-useful observations were eliminated, 114 valid cases were left in the descriptive analysis.

4.2.2 Outlier Screening

The dataset was controlled for potential outliers that might distort estimates or inflate effect sizes, to ensure stability and credibility of the statistical analyses. Standardized scores (Z-scores) were computed for the five central constructs: Perceived congruence (PC), perceived authenticity (PA), anticipated social identity (ASI), anticipated hedonic experience (AHE), and purchase intention (PI). Referring to existing guidelines for psychological and behavioral research, observations exceeding ± 3.29 were considered potential extreme values indicative of untypical response behavior. The screening revealed that none of the observed Z-scores crossed this score for any of the five variables. This underlines the absence of unusually high or low response patterns that might influence the regression or mediation estimates.

4.2.3 Manipulation Check

Prior to evaluating the causal pathway of this research model, it was necessary to verify that the experimental manipulation distinguishing the “high-authenticity” (scenario A) and “low-authenticity” (scenario B) conditions was effective. Because the study relied on an experimental contrast to test downstream effects on perceived authenticity and related psychological concepts, confirming the integrity of this manipulation was essential.

To check on between-group differences, two theoretically relevant constructs were measured:

1. Perceived Congruence (PC) – alignment between the sports idol’s perceived characteristics of expertise and trustworthiness
2. Perceived Authenticity (PA) – the perceived genuineness of the partnership

Both variables should yield significantly higher scores in the high-authenticity scenario if the manipulation was successful.

Therefore, independent samples t-tests were executed to determine whether the mean scores on PC and PA significantly differed between the two scenarios. Although this experiment observes only two groups, a single-factor ANOVA was performed to confirm robustness.

Table 2 Manipulation Check

Construct	High Authenticity Means	Low Authenticity Means	t-value	p-value	F-value
PA	5.09	3.30	7.41	< .001	54.83
PC	5.68	4.06	7.24	< .001	52.41

Both PC and PA show statistically significant mean differences between the two experimental groups. The high-authenticity condition consistently presented positive perceptions of perceived congruence and authenticity, aligning with the desired theoretical expectations of the established scenarios. The values of the independent samples t-tests ($t > 7$, $F > 50$, $p < .001$) indicate that the manipulation was statistically significant and meaningful, underlining a perceptual separation between the two conditions clearly.

4.2.4 Construction of Composite Variables

The Qualtrics survey introduced parallel item blocks for each of the two experimental scenarios (high vs. low authenticity). As respondents were randomly assigned to only one scenario, each psychological construct appeared in two versions, an A-block for scenario A and a B-block for scenario B.

Each construct in the conceptual model, PC, PA, ASI, AHE, and PI, was operationalized through multiple Likert scale items. The scores were computed by averaging the items associated with each construct to create composite variables. Because each respondent only completed the item set referring to their assigned scenario, the packages were constructed in two steps:

- Scenario-specific scale computation:
For respondents in scenario A, composite variables (e.g., PA_A, PC_A) were computed by averaging all valid responses to the items within the relevant block. The same procedure was followed for scenario B, generating PA_B, PC_B, and equivalent B-block composites.
- Merging the variables:
To allow the analysis across conditions, the A and B composites were merged into single construct variables:

- PC (Perceived Congruence) – derived from PC_A or PC_B, depending on which scenario the respondent viewed.
- PA (Perceived Authenticity) – derived from PA_A or PA_B.
- ASI (Anticipated Social Identity) – derived from ASI_A or ASI_B.
- AHE (Anticipated Hedonic Experience) – derived from AHE_A or AHE_B.
- PI (Purchase Intention) – derived from PI_A or PI_B.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics and Measurement Quality

4.3.1 Sample Profile

The final cleaned sample consisted of 114 respondents, after excluding incomplete responses and outliers. The distribution of participants was identical for both experimental groups, with 57 participants exposed to the high-authenticity condition (Scenario A) and 57 individuals assigned to the low-authenticity condition (Scenario B). This symmetry is methodologically a strong advantage as it provides balanced cell sizes that strengthen the internal evidence of between-group comparisons, reduce the risk of unequal variances, and enhance the interpretation of the mediation analysis by ensuring comparable statistical power.

4.3.2 Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables

These constructs represent the five core variables of the proposed model: Perceived congruence (PC), perceived authenticity (PA), anticipated social identity (ASI), anticipated hedonic experience (AHE), and purchase intention (PI). Because each participant responded to only one scenario, the table reports Block A and Block B descriptive results separately, followed by the merged variables, which were used in the final testing.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
PC_A	57	1.75	7.00	5.68	1.02
PC_B	57	1.00	7.00	4.06	1.34
PA_A	57	1.25	7.00	5.09	0.97

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
PA_B	57	1.00	7.00	3.30	1.55
PI_A	56	1.00	6.67	4.49	1.39
PI_B	57	1.00	7.00	3.06	1.34
ASI_A	56	1.00	6.33	4.34	1.45
ASI_B	57	1.00	7.00	2.84	1.46
AHE_A	56	1.00	6.00	4.35	1.33
AHE_B	57	1.00	7.00	3.14	1.49
Merged PC	114	1.00	7.00	4.87	1.44
Merged PA	114	1.00	7.00	4.20	1.57
Merged PI	113	1.00	7.00	3.77	1.54
Merged ASI	113	1.00	7.00	3.58	1.63
Merged AHE	113	1.00	7.00	3.74	1.54

Across both scenarios, the descriptive statistics indicate broad variability in responses. Means lay in the mid-range of the 1-7 Likert scale, and standard deviations are statistically large enough to support continuous modelling. This variance suggests that participants did not fall towards a common response pattern, such as extreme responding or central tendency bias. Evaluations of congruence, authenticity, identity, hedonic expectations, and purchase intention show meaningful heterogeneity.

Scenario differences are evident in Block A and Block B means. Results from scenario A (high authenticity) continuously show higher perceived congruence, authenticity, identity expectations, hedonic experiences, and intention to purchase. This descriptive trend aligns with the theoretical desired outcome that a highly authentic endorser would generate more positive psychological responses than a low-authenticity version. These differences are substantiated statistically in the manipulation check reported earlier.

4.3.3 Reliability of Measures

Before proceeding to inferential testing, the internal consistency of each construct was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Because the questionnaire included parallel item sets for both scenarios, reliability was first assessed separately for each scenario block and subsequently for the merged constructs used in the structural analyses.

Table 4 Reliability Check (Cronbach's Alpha)

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
PC_A	.841
PA_A	.778
PI_A	.882
ASI_A	.880
AHE_A	.901
PC_B	.841
PA_B	.929
PI_B	.857
ASI_B	.890
AHE_B	.940
Merged constructs	.930

All variables revealed adequate to excellent internal consistency, with alpha values ranging from .778 to .940 within the scenario-specific scales. Common guidelines (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) interpret $\alpha \geq .70$ as efficient for exploratory work and $\alpha \geq .80$ as preferable for theory-driven research. Every scale in the analysis exceeded these values. This indicates that the items in each construct consistently measured same concept.

- The authenticity-related constructs (PA_A and PA_B) yielded strong alphas (.778 and .929), confirming the stability of item responses despite scenario differences.

- The hedonic and identity-based constructs (AHE, ASI) produced very high coefficients (.880–.940), suggesting that these items formed highly connected psychological dimensions.
- Both versions of perceived congruence (PC) showed identical alphas (.841), supporting that the manipulation was reliable.

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

This section evaluates each of the four hypotheses of the study’s conceptual framework. Each hypothesis is restated, followed by the statistical test applied, the relevant findings, and an interpretation grounded in the relevant theoretical context. All estimates reported below are standardized coefficients derived from regression-based mediation analysis.

4.4.1 Hypothesis 1: Perceived Congruence and Perceived Authenticity

H1: A higher level of perceived congruence increases perceived authenticity

This hypothesis is grounded in the Source Credibility Model (SCM), which proposes that consumers judge the endorsement as more authentic when the spokesperson (here, the sports idol) reflects congruent characteristics, expertise and trustworthiness.

Statistical Test: Regression component of the mediation model.

Primary findings of the above test concluded:

- Standardized coefficient: $\beta = 0.782$
- $p < .001$ (Highly significant)

H1 is strongly supported. Participants who perceived a closer alignment between the sports idol’s properties of expertise and trustworthiness reported significantly higher authenticity evaluations of the whole partnership. The large effect size underlines congruence of expertise and trustworthiness on the part of the athlete as a foundational driver of perceived partnership authenticity within endorsement marketing strategies.

4.4.2 Hypothesis 2: Perceived Authenticity and Anticipated Social Identity

H2: Perceived authenticity increases anticipated social identity.

Based on the SIT, authentic partnerships are expected to enhance consumers' sense of identification with the endorsed product or brand because authenticity signals value congruence and meaning alignment.

Statistical Test: Regression component of the mediation model

Primary findings of the above test concluded:

- Standardized coefficient: $\beta = 0.660$
- $p < .001$ (Highly significant)

H2 is supported. Higher perceived authenticity substantially increases the extent to which individuals feel that the partnership resonates with their social identity or desired self-concept. This supports the assumptions of SIT that authenticity acts as a crucial aspect for identity alignment with brands.

4.4.3 Hypothesis 3: Anticipated Social Identity to Anticipated Hedonic Experience

H3: Anticipated social identity strengthens anticipated hedonic experience.

This relationship follows the hedonic consumption literature, which argues that feelings of social belonging and identity alignment enhance emotional and experiential expectations.

Statistical Test: Regression component of the mediation model.

Primary findings of the above test concluded:

- Standardized coefficient: $\beta = 0.639$
- $p < .001$ (Highly significant)

H3 is supported. When consumers expect that a partnership expresses or enhances their social identity, they also anticipate stronger hedonic benefits (e.g., pleasure or enjoyment), which demonstrates that identity-based evaluations serve as emotional drivers for hedonic pleasure.

4.4.4 Hypothesis 4: Anticipated Hedonic Experience to Purchase Intention

H4: Anticipated hedonic experience increases purchase intention.

This hypothesis aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which incorporates consumers' emotional evaluation as key determinants of behavioral intentions.

Statistical Test: Regression component of the mediation model.

Primary findings of the above test concluded:

- Standardized coefficient: $\beta = 0.395$
- $p < .001$ (Highly significant)

H4 is supported. Anticipated pleasurable experiences lead to a significant and meaningful influence on purchase intention, which positions hedonic expectations as a crucial mechanism linking psychological evaluations to consumer behavior.

4.4.5 Additional Direct Effects

Additionally, inspecting the remaining direct paths helps to clarify how the psychological construct operates as a whole.

Table 5 Additional Direct Effects

Path	Estimate	p-value
PC to PI	.046	.632
PA to PI	.086	.391
ASI to PI	.414	< .001
AHE to PI	.395	< .001

- Perceived Congruence (PC) and Perceived Authenticity (PA) did not reflect significant direct effects on Purchase Intention (PI).
- Their influence on PI operated indirectly through ASI and AHE.
- ASI and AHE demonstrated substantial and significant direct effects on PI, highlighting the dominance of self-concept and hedonic pathways within the model.

These results confirm that the partnership's psychological impact flows through sequential affective and emotional mechanisms rather than through direct cognitive evaluations. The congruence matters, but mainly because it shapes authenticity to identity to hedonic pleasure, which then drives intention to purchase.

4.4.6 Indirect Mediation Effects

A parallel serial mediation model (PROCESS Model 6) was estimated to evaluate the ultimate effect of the perceived congruence on the purchase intention with a bootstrap of 5,000 samples. This method allows making strong inferences in the pathways of indirect and sequencing relationships by analyzing corrected percentile confidence intervals by means of bias. Indirect effects with intervals that are not covered by zero will be interpreted as statistically significant. The findings indicate that there are several significant routes connecting PC with PI in terms of a combination of PA, ASI, and AHE.

Table 6 Bootstrap Estimates of Indirect Effects

Indirect Path	Estimate	95% CI
PC to PA to PI	.0717	[-.0907, .2367]
PC to ASI to PI	.0332	[-.0535, .1451]
PC to AHE to PI	.0917	[.0238, .2067]
PC to PA to ASI to PI	.2280	[.1181, .3860]
PC to PA to AHE to PI	.0272	[-.0434, .1100]
PC to ASI to AHE to PI	.0202	[-.0302, .0866]
PC to PA to ASI to AHE to PI	.1387	[.0677, .2524]

Total Effects:

- Total Indirect Effect: 0.6106, 95% CI [.4331, .7769] (significant)
- Total Effect of PC on PI: .6599, 95% CI [.5026, .8173] (significant)

The mediation analysis reveals that perceived congruence influences purchase intention almost entirely through indirect psychological processes, rather than through a direct pathway. The two strongest and theoretically most meaningful mediation routes are:

1. PC to PA to ASI to PI

This channel illustrates that congruence improves authenticity, which consequently boosts the identification with the partnership. This identity correspondence is a direct

motivator to purchase intention. This can be associated with the SIT that emphasizes that consumers are attracted to products that support their social self-concept.

2. PC to PA to ASI to AHE to PI

This extended chain demonstrates that identity congruence then results in an increase in hedonic anticipations, and these expected emotional payoffs in turn result in a subsequent increase in the willingness to purchase. This is in line with the hedonic consumption literature that emphasizes the importance of emotional anticipation in consumer behavior development.

Other less complex pathways e.g., PC to PA to PI or PC to ASI to PI had no significant statistical significance. This implies that identification or authentication in general cannot completely transform behavioral intention without going through some other layers of affectivity.

These results support the idea that:

- Perceived congruent does not positively correlate with purchase intention.
- Rather, congruence leads to a chain of authenticity to social identity to hedonic expectations which in combination influence the behavioral consequences.

This organization validates the theoretical connected concepts that took place in the thesis: The Source Credibility Model, Social Identity Theory and hedonic affective processing. The mediation model gives good empirical evidence to the fact that psychological meaning and not the surface level congruence alone determines the consumer engagement and purchase intention in sports brand partnerships.

4.5 Descriptive Statistics & Sample Characteristics

The descriptive statistics showed that internal consistency for the multi-item measures was acceptable to excellent. Cronbach's alpha for the Nike brand attitude scale (Q13) was Alpha = .890 (N = 113), and for the Michael Jordan endorser attitude scale (Q14) Alpha = .911 (N = 113). Other multi-item constructs used in the experiment (PC, PA, ASI, AHE, PI) likewise demonstrated reliability (Alpha range \approx .78-.94), supporting the use of composite scores in subsequent analyses.

The sample profile (N = 114) reflected dominantly physically active characteristic. The majority of the respondents indicated regular engagement in sports or fitness activities, with 51.3% indicating regular fitness participation and 31.0% reporting competitive or frequent training. At the same time the gender distribution of the sample was relatively balanced, with

54.0% identifying as male and 41.6% as female. Concerning the relevance of the product-category, most participants evaluated premium sneakers and sportswear as slightly relevant to relevant, with “slightly relevant” being the modal response (32.7%).

The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 70 years. The mean age was 27, which indicates a broad age distribution with a concentration in young adults. This profile aligns with the relevance of sportswear and athlete endorsement for younger consumer segments. However, as the study followed an inclusion sampling approach and did not target specific age groups, age was not considered further in the analysis.

4.5 Discussion

This section reflects the findings of the study in the context of the research objectives, the theoretical framework, and the literature review. Also, it considers the appropriateness of the methodology and data collection.

4.5.1 Relationship of Results and Hypotheses

The results of the analysis provide strong support for the overall proposed model of this thesis. Rather than acting as isolated effects, the four hypotheses form a connected psychological sequence, explaining how consumers form their evaluations of a sports idol–sports brand partnership. The findings confirm that the conceptual framework functioned as intended: Consumers’ judgements about the athlete (expertise and trustworthiness) do have a direct influence on the perceived authenticity of the partnership. The perceived authenticity becomes the initiator of emotional and identity-related responses. Consumers pass through the psychological concepts of anticipated social identity and anticipated hedonic experience before they present purchase intention, underlining that the perceived congruence of expertise and trustworthiness of the athlete does not indicate a direct influence on the purchase intention. Instead, consumers grow through a layered psychological process integrating deeper symbolic values toward emotional anticipation.

Overall, the results support the initial research approach that celebrity athlete sport endorsement emerges through a serial chain: From congruence, to authenticity, to social identity, to hedonic experience, and finally to purchase intention. The findings offer empirical confirmation that positive congruence of the idol’s expertise and trustworthiness holds significant positive influence on the entire sports idol–sports brand partnership and results in a deep psychological journey, rather than simple rational reactions.

4.5.3 The Role of Theory in this Study

Although this study did not aim for building theory, it does contribute to existing literature and theory. By combining four different core concepts from prior existing literature (SCM, SIT, hedonic consumption, and TBP), this approach offers an integrated and complex explanation of consumers' evaluation and reaction to sports endorsement partnerships.

The influence of expertise and trustworthiness on authenticity reinforces the Source Credibility Model, approving Ohanian's (1990) argument of the two dimensions influencing how a spokesperson is evaluated. The effectiveness of the manipulation in this experiment again underlines how sensitive consumers respond to sincerity and expertise.

The causal relationship of authenticity and identity is supported by a large effect size ($\beta=.660$) and aligns with the Social Identity Theory. This suggests that consumers use authentic partnerships as means for self-expression and to align with desired reference groups (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Morhart et al., 2014). The findings add to the literature by indicating that authenticity is not just a brand attitude but also a defining feature of athlete and sports brand partnerships.

The theoretical bridge from identity to hedonic experience confirms principles from hedonic consumption aspects and the related justification theory. Consumers who feel that a partnership expresses their desired social identity are likely to neutralize the functionality aspect to justify the hedonic purchase (Okada, 2005) and instead enhance the emotional value of the product.

Lastly, the effect of hedonic experience on purchase intention is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior. Work by Ajzen (1991) states that affective beliefs play a central role in shaping behavioral intentions. The statistical analysis revealed that neither congruence nor authenticity holds a direct effect on purchase intention. Their influence was indirect, while anticipated hedonic pleasure and experience proved to mediate the path to intention.

The results strengthen the assumption that authenticity functions as a pivotal mediator rather than an isolated construct and emphasize a congruent evaluation of the athletes' characteristics (of expertise and trustworthiness) as the dominant factor for the perceived authenticity of the entire partnership. This integrated model contributes to existing theories by showing a sequentially unfolding endorsement effect, which no prior research documented.

4.5.4 Appropriateness of Methodology and Data Collection

The design of the empirical research and the methodology (a controlled experiment using parallel scenarios) proved to be appropriate. The results of the manipulation check in the previous subchapter demonstrate that the two scenarios led to genuinely different perceptions of congruence of expertise and trustworthiness and authenticity, which was essential for testing the proposed causal pathway.

The sample size (N=114 for most constructs) confirmed robustness for the ANOVA-based manipulation checks and the multi-stage mediation model measured through SEM. Existing methodological guidelines recommended a sample of approximately N=98 for mediation models of such complexity to have statistical power of about 80% (Faul et al., 2007), which this study surpassed.

In total, the methodological results explained successful manipulation, balanced randomization, high reliability of all scales, adequacy of sample size for ANOVA and mediation, and a strong model fit. Thus, the approach of the study was highly appropriate and consistent with experimental consumer research, significantly supporting the conclusion from the analysis.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

5.1 Main Findings & Conclusions

This dissertation researched how consumers evaluate the authenticity of sports idol–sports brand partnerships and how this authenticity subsequently shapes their identity-based and emotional responses, and finally, their purchase intention. Therefore, an experimental scenario-based design was applied, manipulating the perceived congruence of Michael Jordan’s characteristics in his partnership with Nike. The two randomly attributed scenarios presented two contrasting realities of the endorsement relationship. Based on this framework, two research questions guided the analysis and are answered below.

RQ1: What influences the perceived authenticity of a sports idol and the partnership with the sports brand?

The results provide clear and empirical evidence that perceived authenticity is fundamentally shaped by perceived congruence of the sports idol’s expertise and trustworthiness. The statistical model showed strong effects from congruence to authenticity ($\beta = .782$, $p < .001$), indicating that consumers are heavily influenced by the athlete’s congruent characteristics, which automatically leads to the positive perception of authenticity also being attributed to the brand and the entire partnership. Further, the manipulation check confirmed high sensitivity of consumers toward the assumed variables: Both perceived congruence and perceived authenticity differed significantly between the high- and the low-authenticity blocks ($F > 50$, $p < .001$). This supports the partially adopted Source Credibility Model and aligns with Ohanian’s and Hovland et al’s (1953) foundational argument that expertise and trustworthiness are the core dimensions shaping spokesperson evaluations.

In conclusion, the results underline that authenticity is not just created through branding or marketing alone but evolves from how consumers perceive an athlete’s public persona and moral appearance. Thus, the first hypothesis addressing the first research question is strongly supported: Perceived authenticity is indeed strongly influenced by the perceived congruence of the sports idol’s perceived expertise and perceived trustworthiness.

RQ2: What influence does the perceived authenticity of the partnership between a sports idol and a sports brand have on the consumer's anticipated social identity, anticipated hedonic experience, and their purchase intention?

The findings proved authenticity as a psychological starting point that leads to a sequential process from cognitive evaluation to identity constructing emotional anticipation, and finally behavioral intention. Perceived authenticity significantly enhanced anticipated social identity ($\beta = .660, p < .001$), indicating that consumers interpret authentic partnerships as socially valuable. Partnerships that appear genuine and legit, tend to align with consumers' self-concepts and integrate them to reflect their social selves. It reinforces the Social Identity Theory, which highlights that individuals are motivated to consume brands and engage with endorsements that support their desired identity concept. Consequently, the relevance of identity is translated into a stronger anticipated hedonic experience ($\beta = .639, p < .001$). Rather than emerging purely from product functionality, hedonic anticipation was influenced by the emotional and symbolic meaning consumers assigned to the endorsement partnership. When a product or partnership aligns with consumers' reference groups or expresses who they desire to be, they anticipate a greater emotional and satisfactory return. This is consistent with hedonic consumption literature, which discusses that identity-based justification positively influences emotional anticipation and increases the perceived experiential value of the consumption.

Finally, identity and emotion influenced evaluations result in purchase intentions. Anticipated hedonic experience reliably predicted purchase intention ($\beta = .395, p < .001$) and confirmed the role of affective consumer decision-making. Also, perceived authenticity did not directly influence purchase intention. This effect was primarily produced through the identity and hedonic pathway, supporting the concept of the Theory of Planned Behavior and emphasizing that behavioral intention is grounded in emotional anticipation rather than in cognitive judgments.

These results provide a direct answer to the second research question. Perceived authenticity significantly influences anticipated social identity and hedonic expectations, while these psychological processes indirectly trigger purchase intention. Accordingly, authenticity works as the starting point of a deeper psychological process rather than a simple rational evaluation, transforming endorsements into socially and emotionally important consumer experiences.

Additionally, the descriptive insights of the last block of the survey helped to interpret external factors. The gender distribution in the sample was nearly balanced, supporting the demographic

neutrality of the study and highlighting that the model of authenticity works across male and female consumers. Simultaneously, the sports involvement of participants was relatively high, with 31% engaging in competitive or frequent training, while 51% engaging in regular fitness activities. Even though the study did not target athletes specifically, the active nature of this sample aligns with the context of sports brands and athlete endorsement. Notably, the strong mediation effects appeared even among participants who rated premium sneakers as only moderately relevant (the largest subgroup at 31%), which suggests that the psychological findings are robust across different levels of product involvement. The respondents' attitudes toward Jordan and Nike were generally positive for the high authenticity block, again underlining the effectiveness of the manipulation and scenario. Overall, these contextual findings enhance the validity of the results.

5.2 Managerial / Academic Implications

The findings of this dissertation offer important implications for marketing managers and academic purposes.

From a managerial perspective, the results stress the importance of selecting athlete endorsers who represent positive and genuine values, competencies, and public personas. Authenticity emerged as the foundation for all downstream effects. Partnerships with negative perceptions of congruence in the athlete's characteristics are unlikely to lead to consumers' identity alignment or emotional engagement and therefore limit their effectiveness. Managers are recommended to prioritize authentic endorsers who are of congruent expertise and trustworthiness, to ensure an authentic collaboration and positive brand positioning.

Since the results proved that authenticity encourages identity alignment, brands can utilize endorsement campaigns to communicate an inspiring lifestyle and try to address consumers on a symbolic level. For endorsements to be successful, they should focus on transformative aspects, enabling consumers to express who they are or who they desire to be, instead of remaining purely informative. Further, marketing strategies should aim at resonating with consumers' desired identity and use emotional storytelling, to distant from solely communicating functional performance and athlete fame

Another implication derives from the critical role of hedonic anticipation in influencing consumer behavior. Purchase intention was influenced by the emotional values expected by consumers from the endorsed product. This is a valuable insight for managers, as it underscores

the importance of incorporating emotional narratives, experiential benefits, and pleasure-targeted messaging into their marketing campaigns. Affective aspects are central to endorsement success. Further, brands should pay attention to implementing community events, membership programs, and athlete-designed collections as emotional bonding and community-forming measures.

Also, the descriptive findings indicate that authentic endorsement partnership effects function across gender groups and among individuals with different levels of product involvement. This suggests that authenticity addresses a broad range of consumers and is not exclusively relevant for highly involved sneaker enthusiasts or male-dominated sports fan base. For international sports brands such as Nike, this signals that marketing campaigns can effectively reach diverse consumer segments while maintaining strong emotional impact among sports-active individuals when authenticity measures are being implemented correctly.

For academic purposes, this dissertation contributes to the literature by integrating concepts from the Source Credibility Model, Social Identity Theory, hedonic consumption, and the Theory of Planned Behavior into a serial mediation model. This approach offers a conceptual understanding of the interaction between cognitive, symbolic, and emotional consumer responses to sports idol–sports brand partnerships. The empirical evidence supports the theoretical proposal that endorsement effects lead to a structural sequence rather than as isolate stages. Finally, authenticity appears as the central mediator in this model, connecting the athlete’s congruence of expertise and trustworthiness with significant psychological outcomes and, therefore, expands the concept of authenticity within sports marketing and endorsement research.

The results provide a basis for future academic investigations into the role of identity and hedonic processes in endorsement and suggest that these mechanisms deserve more attention in future theoretical frameworks and empirical studies.

Table 7 Overview of Implications

Focus	Implication
Careful Selection of Athlete Endorsers	Select athlete endorsers whose expertise and trustworthiness are congruent, reflecting a desirable public persona with high credibility to ensure a long-term partnership effectiveness.
Market Identity Alignment	Design marketing campaigns that emphasize, lifestyle, symbolic meaning, and self-expression rather than functionality attributes.
Market Emotional Arousal	Integrate pleasure driven messaging, experiential values, and enjoyment cues into endorsement advertisement.
Literature Extension (academic purpose)	Conceptualize authenticity as a dynamic mediating construct linking source characteristics to identity, affective responses, and behavioral intentions.

5.3 Limitations and Further Research

Although the study yields valuable insights, several limitation and opportunities for future research need to be mentioned.

One limitation involves the survey’s sample. The gender distribution among respondents was relatively balanced and the study had no intentions in targeting athletes. Though, most participants reported active sports involvement (82%). Although this aligns well with the endorsement context, future research could observe whether the same psychological processes remain consistent among individuals with less physical engagement and connection to sports culture.

Another limitation lies in the use of the written scenarios, which intended to manipulate the perceptions of authenticity. While this method provided strong internal control, real-world endorsement environments are often more complex. Future studies may benefit from more dynamic stimuli, such as video advertisements, social media content, or real campaigns, to

better capture the validity and emotional details of endorsement exposure. Additionally, the scenarios did not purely reflect the athlete's (Jordan's) characteristics and behavior but also partly incorporated Nike's role in shaping the partnership, thereby influencing perceived congruence as a joint evaluation of both parties rather than as a function of the athlete's expertise and trustworthiness alone. Future research could draw a clearer distinction when researching on this specific attribute.

Also, the study focused on a single athlete-brand example – Michael Jordan and Nike. On one hand, this was appropriate for experimental control, but on the other hand it limited the generalizability of the results to other endorsement contexts. Researchers could investigate a wider range of athletes, including active players, upcoming athletes, or controversial athletes, to examine the topic from different perspectives. It would also be interesting to examine partnerships where authenticity is less historically established than in the iconic Jordan–Nike relationship.

Regarding the demographics, age was collected but was not further incorporated into the analytical model. While this is consistent with the inclusion sampling approach, it limits the ability to assess whether this psychological construct differs across age groups. The perception of athlete endorsements and authenticity may vary across life stages and younger and older consumers often share different brand relationships, consumption habits and sports involvement. Additionally, the study paid no attention to regional or geographical differences. While the endorsement context of Jordan Nike has strong global relevance, interpretations of authenticity, identity alignment, and hedonic aspects might differ across markets due to culture, media, or regional sports preferences. Future research could address these limitations by specifically examining age and regional background as moderating variables in endorsement models.

Finally, this study relied on self-report measures, which tend to be influenced by biases or introspective limitations. Introducing behavioral metrics, psychological measures, or data – such as click behavior, purchase simulations, or attention tracking – could support future investigations and provide a better understanding of endorsement effects.

This thesis highlights the role of authenticity and how consumers interpret and respond to it emotionally in the context of athlete-brand partnerships. By demonstrating how endorsement effects unfold through a psychological chain of congruence, authenticity, identity, and hedonism, the study provides theoretical and practical guidance. Further, it underlines that

authenticity is not a superficial feature of marketing communication but a fundamental mechanism transforming endorsements into relevant consumer experiences, which then influence attitudes, emotions, and behavioral intentions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Qualtrics Survey

Block 1: Introduction and Screening

Thank you for participating in this survey, which is part of my Master's Thesis at Católica Lisbon School of Business and Economics.

The survey focuses on the influence and perception of authenticity in celebrity athlete and sports brand partnerships.

The survey will take approximately 4-5 minutes to complete and you may withdraw at any time. By clicking "I agree," you consent to participate in this study. Participation is voluntary, and all responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous.

- I agree

Q1 How familiar are you with the athlete/celebrity, Michael Jordan?

- Not at all familiar (1)
- Slightly familiar (2)
- Somewhat familiar (3)
- Moderately familiar (4)
- Fairly familiar (5)
- Very familiar (6)
- Extremely familiar (7)

Q2 How familiar are you with the brand, Nike?

- Not at all familiar (1)
- Slightly familiar (2)
- Somewhat familiar (3)
- Moderately familiar (4)
- Fairly familiar (5)
- Very familiar (6)
- Extremely familiar (7)

Block 2: High Authenticity Condition

Scenario A

Please read the following scenario carefully:

Michael Jordan is considered the greatest basketball player of all time. In 1984, he partnered with Nike to launch the Air Jordan line. The collaboration was built on Jordan's commitment to excellence and Nike's willingness to take risks. The partnership and the Jordan brand developed organically over decades and became more than just sports gear, evolving into a cultural symbol in streetwear. Jordan and Nike later launched the Black Community Commitment, a 10-year program with a budget of \$100 million to promote justice, education, and social change. Nike and Jordan continue to work together to this day.



Q3 Based on the scenario you just read, please use each of the following pairs of words to indicate which best reflects your perception of Michael Jordan as a sports equipment endorser.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not an expert	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Expert
Inexperienced	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Experienced
Unreliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Reliable
Untrustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Trustworthy

Q4 How likely does each of the following statements about the partnership between Michael Jordan and Nike apply to you?

	Very unlikely 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very likely 7
I consider the partnership between Michael Jordan and Nike to be sincere/genuine.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I perceive this partnership as honest and trustworthy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I perceive the partnership to be based on shared values rather than just money.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think that Nike's products align well with Michael Jordan's personal and professional identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For the next questions, please imagine that you are actively searching online to purchase a new, stylish indoor sports shoe. During your search, you come across a newly designed shoe created through a collaboration between Michael Jordan and Nike. Please keep the scenario you read earlier about the Nike–Jordan partnership in mind as you answer the following questions.

Q5 Based on the scenario you read before, please indicate your intention to buy this specific sports shoe.

	Not at all 1	2	3	4	5	6	Totally 7
I would consider purchasing this shoe.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I intend to buy this shoe in the near future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will likely buy a similar product.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q6 Imagine purchasing this new sports shoe by Nike and Michael Jordan. How likely does each of the following statements apply to you?

	Very unlikely 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very likely 7
This shoe would make me feel closer to the Nike/Jordan community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This shoe would strengthen my identity as an athlete/Jordan fan.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Buying this shoe would help me express who I really am.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q7 Continuing to imagine wearing this sports shoe, how likely does each of the following statements apply to you?

	Very unlikely 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very likely 7
Wearing this shoe would be fun.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wearing this shoe would make me feel good emotionally.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would be excited to wear this shoe.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Block 3: Low Authenticity Condition

Scenario B

Please read the following scenario carefully:

Famous basketball player Michael Jordan has a highly profitable partnership with Nike. Although Jordan’s preferred shoe brand was Adidas, he later signed with Nike since their contract offer was more competitive. Over the decades, Jordan has earned an estimated \$1 billion from his Nike partnership alone. Nike recently announced a new lifestyle, non-performance line called "MJ Signature", which is a one-time financial agreement, allowing Nike to use Jordan's name for a high-priced clothing line. Jordan had minimal involvement in the design process of the new line and acknowledged in recent interviews that he rarely wears Nike’s newer releases, preferring simpler styles.



Q8 Based on the scenario you just read, please use each of the following pairs of words to indicate which best reflects your perception of Michael Jordan as a sports equipment endorser.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not an expert	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Expert
Inexperienced	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Experienced
Unreliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Reliable
Untrustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Trustworthy

Q9 How likely does each of the following statements about the partnership between Michael Jordan and Nike apply to you?

	Very unlikely 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very likely 7
I consider the partnership between Michael Jordan and Nike to be sincere/genuine.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I perceive this partnership as honest and trustworthy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I perceive the partnership to be based on shared values rather than just money.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think that Nike's products align well with Michael Jordan's personal and professional identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For the next questions, please imagine that you are actively searching online to purchase a new, stylish indoor sports shoe. During your search, you come across a newly designed shoe created through a collaboration between Michael Jordan and Nike. Please keep the scenario you read earlier about the Nike–Jordan partnership in mind as you answer the following questions.

Q10 Based on the scenario you read before, please indicate your intention to buy this specific sports shoe.

	Not at all 1	2	3	4	5	6	Totally 7
I would consider purchasing this shoe.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I intend to buy this shoe in the near future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will likely buy a similar product.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q11 Imagine purchasing this new sports shoe by Nike and Michael Jordan. How likely does each of the following statements apply to you?

	Very unlikely 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very likely 7
This shoe would make me feel closer to the Nike/Jordan community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This shoe would strengthen my identity as an athlete/Jordan fan.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Buying this shoe would help me express who I really am.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q12 Continuing to imagine wearing this sports shoe, how likely does each of the following statements apply to you?

	Very unlikely 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very likely 7
Wearing this shoe would be fun.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wearing this shoe would make me feel good emotionally.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would be excited to wear this shoe.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Block 4: Demographics and Concluding Information

Q13 Using each of the following pairs of words below, please indicate what best reflects your feelings about the brand Nike.

Bad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Good
Not genuine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Genuine
Unoriginal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Original
Unethical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ethical

Q14 Using each of the following pairs of words below, please indicate what best reflects your feelings about the athlete/celebrity, Michael Jordan.

Bad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Good
Not genuine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Genuine
Unoriginal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Original
Unethical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ethical

Q15 How relevant is the product category of premium sneakers/sportswear to you personally?

- Not at all relevant (1)
- Very little relevant (2)
- Slightly not relevant (3)
- Neutral (4)
- Slightly relevant (5)
- Very relevant (6)
- Extremely relevant (7)

Q16 To what extent do you consider yourself an athlete or frequently engage in sports activities?

- I currently participate competitively or train frequently (e.g., 3+ times per week).
- I regularly engage in fitness activities (e.g., 1-2 times per week).
- I rarely or never participate in sports/fitness activities.
- Prefer not to say.

Q17 What is your age (in years)?

Q18 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender male
- Transgender female
- Genderqueer
- Non-binary
- Rather not say
- I do not identify myself with gender labels

Appendix 2: Sample Size – ANOVA

ANOVA

PC

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	74,246	1	74,246	52,412	<,001
Within Groups	158,656	112	1,417		
Total	232,901	113			

ANOVA

PA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	91,263	1	91,263	54,830	<,001
Within Groups	186,421	112	1,664		
Total	277,684	113			

Appendix 3: Scenario Assignment Frequencies & Crosstabs

1=High auth (A),2=Low auth (B)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High (A)	57	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Low (B)	57	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	114	100.0	100.0	

**Answered block A (Q3-Q7) * Answered block B (Q8-Q12)
Crosstabulation**

		Answered block B (Q8-Q12)		Total
		0	1	
Answered block A (Q3-Q7)	0	Count	0	57
		% within Answered block A (Q3-Q7)	0.0%	100.0%
				100.0%

	% within Answered block B (Q8-Q12)	0.0%	100.0%	50.0%
1	Count	57	0	57
	% within Answered block A (Q3-Q7)	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% within Answered block B (Q8-Q12)	100.0%	0.0%	50.0%
Total	Count	57	57	114
	% within Answered block A (Q3-Q7)	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	% within Answered block B (Q8-Q12)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Appendix 4: Outlier Screening – Frequencies

		Zscore(PC)			Cumulative
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Percent
Valid	-2,69455	1	,9	,9	,9
	-2,17214	2	1,8	1,8	2,6
	-1,99800	1	,9	,9	3,5
	-1,64973	5	4,4	4,4	7,9
	-1,47559	3	2,6	2,6	10,5
	-1,30145	5	4,4	4,4	14,9
	-1,12731	6	5,3	5,3	20,2
	-,95318	7	6,1	6,1	26,3
	-,77904	3	2,6	2,6	28,9
	-,60490	3	2,6	2,6	31,6
	-,43076	3	2,6	2,6	34,2
	-,25662	2	1,8	1,8	36,0
	-,08249	7	6,1	6,1	42,1
	,09165	6	5,3	5,3	47,4
	,26579	7	6,1	6,1	53,5
	,43993	10	8,8	8,8	62,3
	,61407	8	7,0	7,0	69,3
	,78820	15	13,2	13,2	82,5
	,96234	5	4,4	4,4	86,8
	1,13648	6	5,3	5,3	92,1
	1,31062	2	1,8	1,8	93,9
	1,48475	7	6,1	6,1	100,0
	Total	114	100,0	100,0	

Zscore(PA)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	-2,03965	3	2,6	2,6	2,6
	-1,88017	2	1,8	1,8	4,4
	-1,72070	1	,9	,9	5,3
	-1,56122	3	2,6	2,6	7,9
	-1,40174	5	4,4	4,4	12,3
	-1,24226	4	3,5	3,5	15,8
	-1,08278	8	7,0	7,0	22,8
	-,92330	5	4,4	4,4	27,2
	-,76382	3	2,6	2,6	29,8
	-,60434	4	3,5	3,5	33,3
	-,44486	4	3,5	3,5	36,8
	-,28538	4	3,5	3,5	40,4
	-,12590	4	3,5	3,5	43,9
	,03357	3	2,6	2,6	46,5
	,19305	4	3,5	3,5	50,0
	,35253	7	6,1	6,1	56,1
	,51201	7	6,1	6,1	62,3
	,67149	8	7,0	7,0	69,3
	,83097	14	12,3	12,3	81,6
	,99045	8	7,0	7,0	88,6
	1,14993	6	5,3	5,3	93,9
	1,30941	1	,9	,9	94,7
	1,46889	3	2,6	2,6	97,4
	1,62837	1	,9	,9	98,2
	1,78784	2	1,8	1,8	100,0
	Total	114	100,0	100,0	

Appendix 5: Manipulation Check – Independent Samples T-Test + Oneway ANOVA

Independent Samples Test						
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Signifi One-Sided p
PA	Equal variances assumed	14,449	<,001	7,405	112	<,001
	Equal variances not assumed			7,405	93,931	<,001
PC	Equal variances assumed	8,760	,004	7,240	112	<,001
	Equal variances not assumed			7,240	104,611	<,001

t-test for Equality of Means				
Signifi Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
			Lower	Upper
<,001	1,78947	,24167	1,31064	2,26830
<,001	1,78947	,24167	1,30964	2,26931
<,001	1,61404	,22294	1,17230	2,05577
<,001	1,61404	,22294	1,17196	2,05611

ANOVA

PC

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	74,246	1	74,246	52,412	<,001
Within Groups	158,656	112	1,417		
Total	232,901	113			

ANOVA

PA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	91,263	1	91,263	54,830	<,001
Within Groups	186,421	112	1,664		
Total	277,684	113			

Appendix 6: Descriptives

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PC_A	57	1,75	7,00	5,6754	1,01985
PC_B	57	1,00	7,00	4,0614	1,33904
PA_A	57	1,25	7,00	5,0921	,96667
PA_B	57	1,00	7,00	3,3026	1,54742
PI_A	56	1,00	6,67	4,4881	1,39112
PI_B	57	1,00	7,00	3,0643	1,34140
ASI_A	56	1,00	6,33	4,3393	1,44878
ASI_B	57	1,00	7,00	2,8421	1,45584
AHE_A	56	1,00	6,00	4,3512	1,33548
AHE_B	57	1,00	7,00	3,1404	1,49064
PC	114	1,00	7,00	4,8684	1,43564
PA	114	1,00	7,00	4,1974	1,56760
PI	113	1,00	7,00	3,7699	1,53664
ASI	113	1,00	7,00	3,5841	1,62967
AHE	113	1,00	7,00	3,7404	1,53513
Valid N (listwise)	0				

Appendix 7: Reliability: Cronbach's Alpha

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items	Valid N
PC_A	0.841	4	57
PA_A	0.778	4	57
PI_A	0.882	3	56
ASI_A	0.880	3	56
AHE_A	0.901	3	56
PC_B	0.841	4	57
PA_B	0.929	4	57
PI_B	0.857	3	57
ASI_B	0.890	3	57
AHE_B	0.940	3	57
Merged constructs	0.930	5	113

Appendix 8: T-Test Group Means & SDs (Manipulation Check)

		Group Statistics			
1=High auth (A),2=Low auth (B)		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PA	High (A)	57	5.0921	.96667	.12804
	Low (B)	57	3.3026	1.54742	.20496
PC	High (A)	57	5.6754	1.01985	.13508
	Low (B)	57	4.0614	1.33904	.17736

Appendix 9: Pearson correlation matrix

		Correlations				
		PC	PA	ASI	AHE	PI
PC	Pearson Correlation	1	.781**	.591**	.660**	.619**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	114	114	113	113	113
PA	Pearson Correlation	.781**	1	.719**	.713**	.702**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	114	114	113	113	113
ASI	Pearson Correlation	.591**	.719**	1	.827**	.830**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	113	113	113	113	113
AHE	Pearson Correlation	.660**	.713**	.827**	1	.829**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	113	113	113	113	113
PI	Pearson Correlation	.619**	.702**	.830**	.829**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	113	113	113	113	113

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Appendix 10: Multiple Regression Model predicting Purchase Intention

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
						F Change	df1	df2	
1	.872 ^a	.760	.752	.76583	.760	85.730	4	108	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), AHE, PC, PA, ASI

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	201.121	4	50.280	85.730	<.001 ^b
	Residual	63.342	108	.586		
	Total	264.462	112			

a. Dependent Variable: PI

b. Predictors: (Constant), AHE, PC, PA, ASI

Appendix 10: Coefficients

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.304	.379		.801	.425
	PA	.684	.110	.660	6.231	<.001
	PC	.085	.120	.075	.709	.480

a. Dependent Variable: ASI

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.115	.269		.426	.671
	PA	.081	.090	.083	.895	.373
	PC	.232	.085	.218	2.735	.007
	ASI	.602	.067	.639	8.924	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: AHE

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.299	.256		1.169	.245		
	PC	.049	.083	.046	.592	.555	.362	2.759
	PA	.084	.086	.086	.977	.331	.285	3.503
	ASI	.391	.084	.414	4.638	<.001	.278	3.600
	AHE	.395	.091	.395	4.342	<.001	.268	3.725

a. Dependent Variable: PI

Appendix 11: Demographics – Frequency Tables

How relevant is the product category of premium sneakers/sportswear to you personally?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Slightly relevant (5)	37	32.5	32.7	32.7
	Neutral (4)	22	19.3	19.5	52.2
	Slightly not relevant (3)	17	14.9	15.0	67.3
	Very relevant (6)	17	14.9	15.0	82.3
	Very little relevant (2)	11	9.6	9.7	92.0
	Not at all relevant (1)	7	6.1	6.2	98.2
	Extremely relevant (7)	2	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	113	99.1	100.0	
Missing System	1	.9			
Total	114	100.0			

To what extent do you consider yourself an athlete or frequently engage in sports activities?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I regularly engage in fitness activities (e.g., 1-2 times per week).	58	50.9	51.3	51.3

	I currently participate competitively or train frequently (e.g., 3+ times per week).	35	30.7	31.0	82.3
	I rarely or never participate in sports/fitness activities.	16	14.0	14.2	96.5
	Prefer not to say.	4	3.5	3.5	100.0
	Total	113	99.1	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.9		
Total		114	100.0		

What is your gender?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	61	53.5	54.0	54.0
	Female	47	41.2	41.6	95.6
	Rather not say	3	2.6	2.7	98.2
	Genderqueer	1	.9	.9	99.1
	I do not identify myself with gender labels	1	.9	.9	100.0
	Total	113	99.1	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.9		
Total		114	100.0		

What is your age (in years)?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		13	11.4	11.4	11.4
	100	1	.9	.9	12.3
	18	1	.9	.9	13.2
	19	1	.9	.9	14.0
	20	1	.9	.9	14.9
	21	1	.9	.9	15.8
	22	8	7.0	7.0	22.8
	23	6	5.3	5.3	28.1
	24	14	12.3	12.3	40.4

25	13	11.4	11.4	51.8
26	14	12.3	12.3	64.0
27	10	8.8	8.8	72.8
28	7	6.1	6.1	78.9
29	2	1.8	1.8	80.7
30	1	.9	.9	81.6
31	5	4.4	4.4	86.0
33	2	1.8	1.8	87.7
34	1	.9	.9	88.6
36	2	1.8	1.8	90.4
38	1	.9	.9	91.2
42	1	.9	.9	92.1
58	1	.9	.9	93.0
60	1	.9	.9	93.9
62	1	.9	.9	94.7
64	1	.9	.9	95.6
65	2	1.8	1.8	97.4
66	1	.9	.9	98.2
69	1	.9	.9	99.1
70	1	.9	.9	100.0
Total	114	100.0	100.0	