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# Exploring Celebrity Endorsements: A Comparative Analysis of Football and Sport Climbing for Brand Image Enhancement

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**Title:** Exploring Celebrity Endorsements: A Comparative Analysis of Football and Sport Climbing for Brand Image Enhancement

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## **ABSTRACT**

The main goal of this study is to examine the effect of celebrity endorsement on brand image while comparing this between one of the most popular sports, football, and a relatively niche sport, sports climbing. The research also explores whether and how the status of a celebrity endorser (active or retired) and the popularity of the sports athlete can influence the perception of the consumers of brand image. A quantitative approach was used in the form of an online survey to gather relevant data targeting specific audiences of both sports, which was later analyzed. The findings showed that active sports athletes have a more favorable impact on the brand image than retired athletes in both football and sports climbing. Furthermore, the study revealed that while sports popularity can influence the brand image, familiarity with the athlete has an important role as well. These insights indicate that marketers should advertise their brands with still-active athletes. Moreover, marketers should consider the target audience's familiarity with the athlete to enhance brand image. This study adds to the limited literature on niche sports endorsement strategies via the example of sports climbing and offers relevant knowledge for brands in choosing effective endorsers.

**Keywords:** Celebrity Endorsement, Brand Image, Sport Climbing, Football, Consumer Perception

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## **SUMÁRIO**

O principal objetivo deste estudo é examinar o efeito do endosso de celebridades na imagem da marca, comparando isso entre um dos esportes mais populares o futebol, e um esporte relativamente nichado a escalada esportiva. A pesquisa também explora se e como o status de um endossante famoso (ativo ou aposentado) e a popularidade do atleta podem influenciar a percepção dos consumidores sobre a imagem da marca. Uma abordagem quantitativa foi utilizada na forma de uma pesquisa online para coletar dados relevantes direcionados a públicos específicos de ambos os esportes, que foram posteriormente analisados. Os resultados mostraram que atletas esportivos ativos têm um impacto mais favorável na imagem da marca do que atletas aposentados tanto no futebol quanto na escalada esportiva. Além disso, o estudo revelou que, enquanto a popularidade do esporte pode influenciar a imagem da marca, a familiaridade com o atleta também desempenha um papel importante. Essas percepções indicam que os profissionais de marketing devem anunciar suas marcas com atletas ainda ativos. Além disso os profissionais de marketing devem considerar a familiaridade do público-alvo com o atleta para melhorar a imagem da marca. Este estudo contribui para a limitada literatura sobre estratégias de endosso em esportes nichados, utilizando o exemplo da escalada esportiva e oferece conhecimento relevante para as marcas na escolha de endossantes eficazes.

**Palavras-chave:** Endosso de Celebridades, Imagem da Marca, Escalada Esportiva, Futebol, Percepção do Consumidor

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

This chapter gives an overview of the main research topic with the focus on celebrity endorsement impact on the brand image. I am describing the problem statement and relevance of this study to the marketing field. The chapter also explains the research methods used and lastly details the structure and the objectives of the dissertation.

### **1.1 Background and Problem Statement**

Celebrity endorsement in the sports industry is getting more and more recognized as an effective marketing tool (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2015). Besides that, studies show that sports celebrities can increase brand equity and therefore brand image as well (Spry, Pappu, & Cornwell, 2011).

This research aims to explain the similarities and differences between celebrity endorsement within football and sport climbing, and their effect on the brand image, to explore relevant knowledge to the marketing field. In the study, I will consider two main moderating factors to further narrow my scope: the popularity of the sport and whether someone follows it or not.

Football is a globally popular and followed sport (Knoll & Matthes, 2017), while sport climbing has a relatively niche audience. Despite the rapidly growing popularity of sport climbing, there hasn't been much focus on celebrity endorsement in this specific area among studies, whereas it has been well examined within other mainstream sports, especially in football.

Celebrity endorsement is considered a valuable tool for companies, and it has been shown that it can significantly increase consumer engagement and purchase behaviors through its influence, hence affecting the brand image (Knoll & Matthes, 2017).

According to the Climbing Business Journal in recent years one of the biggest effects on sport climbing was its Olympic debut in the Tokyo Games in 2020 boosting its popularity. The Olympics and other factors, such as increasing community interest have resulted in growing numbers of climbing gym openings and expanding member attendance, throughout the world, especially in the United States (Climbing Business Journal, 2023). Therefore, I consider the aforementioned topic worth investigating in a comparative approach and assess how this specific marketing tool can be different within the same industry but in different sports.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The scope of this research is to understand the impact of celebrity endorsement on the brand image as mentioned in the introduction. To investigate this topic in detail, I raise industry-related questions that will help marketers adapt the results of their marketing campaigns. As of the first problem I intend to discover whether and how the nature of the celebrity endorser is influencing the brand image in football and sports climbing. Following that, I investigate how the popularity of climbing versus football moderates the effect of celebrity endorsement on brand image. Lastly, I will examine whether a person's level of engagement with the sport moderates the effect of celebrity endorsements on brand image, while also comparing this in football and climbing. These problems have led me to formulate the following three research questions:

RQ1: In what ways does the status of a celebrity endorser (active vs. retired) impact consumer perception of brand image within football and sports climbing?

RQ2: How does the relative popularity of a sports athlete act as a moderating factor in the relationship between celebrity endorsements and the perception of brand image?

RQ3: To what extent does an individual's engagement level in a sport serve as a moderating variable in the effect of celebrity endorsements on brand image perception

## **1.3 Relevance**

From a managerial point of view, this study will provide relevant insights for brand managers, marketers, and decision-makers. Assessing how celebrity endorsement works in the sports climbing field and related brands will provide managers with knowledge that will help them make more innovative decisions regarding endorsement strategies, potentially enhancing brand visibility, optimizing marketing costs, and therefore boosting sales. Based on the current literature this specific area hasn't been studied. Therefore, this study helps to understand the success of celebrity endorsement in this specific niche sport. Thus, there is a need for comparative research between mainstream sports (in this case football) and sport climbing, while also exploring moderating effects of sports popularity and consumer involvement.

#### **1.4 Research methods**

To ensure the relevance of this study I chose to do primary data collection since it can provide me with up-to-date information, and it can be tailored to satisfy the research questions. To reach this goal I chose to conduct an online survey, that is commonly used for research purposes and can provide me with relevant data firsthand. A focus group interview was conducted previously to create an unbiased survey for respondents. External sources were used to determine the elements of the focus group interview.

With the online survey, I am able to collect quantitative data that can facilitate my research by providing rigorous information that can be used in statistical models thus testing my hypotheses.

In this research, I am using descriptive statistics to summarize and describe the basic features of my acquired data, and using this, I am providing simple summaries about the sample and the measures. For inferential statistics, I am making inferences about the population based on the sample data. This includes hypothesis testing, with moderation analysis as well. These methods allow me to test the relationships between variables and predict future outcomes. My expectation is that celebrity endorsement in sports climbing will have a bigger effect on brand image than in football. Besides that, I expect that the popularity of the investigated sport and the interest of the consumer will moderate the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand image. In conclusion, the use of statistical methods will ensure that my research findings are robust and generalizable to the broader population.

#### **1.5 Dissertation outline**

In this paragraph, I will briefly summarize the structure of the study to provide a clear agenda. In the next chapter, the literature review will detail the basic ideas of the variables in my model, what special characteristics they have, and why they are important. This part will conclude with the conceptual framework. Following that, I will present the methodology of the study which demonstrates how the hypotheses will be answered. This section includes why and how the questionnaire was composed what kind of statistical test I used and why they are relevant. Afterward, in chapter four, I will present my results based on the previous section and will describe them in detail. Finally, I will summarize my main findings, show the limitations of the study, and highlight possible further areas that would be worth studying.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the following, I present the theoretical framework and key expressions that form the base of the research. The background of the paper is based on previous studies and empirical evidence from relevant journals and academic papers.

The first part of the literature review explores the notion of ‘celebrity endorsement’. What forms of celebrity endorsement exist and how the process is formulated. I will describe what is the difference between current and retired athletes and how former studies interpret this question. Following that, I am exploring what the literature means under the term ‘brand image’ and how it is connected to celebrity endorsement. Finally, I will examine the difference in popularity between football and sport climbing. Based on this overview, I will create my hypotheses, which will be tested later in chapter four.

### 2.1 Celebrity endorsement

According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, “*Celebrity is someone who is famous, especially in the entertainment business*” (Cambridge English Dictionary). However, this definition is only in the colloquial sense of the word. According to Hershey H. Friedman and Linda Friedman, “*A celebrity endorser is an individual who is known to the public (actor, sports figure, entertainer, etc.) for his or her achievements in areas other than that of the product class endorsed.*” (Friedman & Friedman, 1979). The two scholars investigated three main types of endorsers, that companies use in advertisements. The celebrity, the professional, and the typical. In this paper, I focus on professional endorsement since I am examining the sports industry. The definition of professional endorsement is as follows: “*A professional endorser is an individual or group possessing superior knowledge regarding the product class endorsed. The endorser has obtained this knowledge as a result of experience, study, or training*” (Friedman & Friedman, 1979). However, I will keep using the term ‘celebrity endorsement’ due to its comprehensive coverage in the academic literature. Another yet simpler definition of celebrity endorsement is: “*well-known person used in advertisements, whose function it is to sell products.*”, according to Joshua Shuart (Shuart, 2007). This already shows that the academic field has different approaches when it comes to definitions of celebrity endorsements.

In the following section, I will detail how the process of celebrity endorsement works based on Grant McCracken's model. The ‘meaning transfer model’. According to McCracken’s model, the effectiveness of celebrities as endorsers comes from their cultural meanings. The process has three main stages. The first phase is the so-called ‘endowment of meaning’: In this

stage, the celebrity is equipped with several cultural meanings however, these meanings are not inherent to the celebrity but are constructed by society and culture. They can be related to the celebrity's roles, lifestyle, personality traits, and other aspects. The meanings are dynamic and can change with time as the celebrity's image differs. The second stage is the 'transfer of meaning'. The actual endorsement takes place at this stage. The cultural meanings associated with the celebrity are transferred to the product that they endorse. Such a transfer is facilitated by multiple factors like the relevance of the celebrity to the product, the consistency between the positioning of the product and the celebrity's image, and how the endorsement is communicated. In the final stage, consumers adopt these meanings from the product. The effectiveness of this stage depends on various factors such as the consumer's involvement with the product and the celebrity, their interpretation of the endorsement, and their cultural context (McCracken, 1989). In essence, McCracken's model defines a three-phase process of celebrity endorsement via the cultural meanings' endowment, transfer, and adoption.

In conclusion, celebrity endorsement and its success depend on various factors that managers need to take into consideration while building the endorsement strategy. These factors include the relevance and credibility of the celebrity the cultural background of the customer and how they perceive the endorser (Shuart, 2007).

## **2.2 Active versus Retired Athletes**

In this section, I am going to describe the difference between active and retired athletes and how this is relevant to my study. A study from the International Journal of Sports Physiology and Performance defines active athletes as those sportspersons who regularly train with the intention of participating in competitions and train multiple times per week for a specific sport (Alannah K.A. McKay, 2021). On the other hand, a retired athlete is someone who has ended their competitive sports career (Knights & Sherry, 2019). In this study during my selection of athletes I will use this definition in order to differentiate the athletes clearly while conducting the survey. However, if we think further about the above-mentioned definition, it is important to highlight that transitioning from an active to a retired athlete is not that simple. There can be certain periods in an athlete's career when he or she functions on a decreased level due to injury, temporary retirement, or even personal reasons. This does not necessarily mean that the person is retired permanently (Smith & Caddick, 2012). Therefore, in my study, I will also take into consideration what is the athlete's self-identification to have a clearer picture of their current status.

Based upon the understanding of the status of an athlete it is important to explore how the interactions shape the view of the brand image (detailed in the next chapter) endorsed by both active and retired athletes. The transition phases and how an athlete identifies him or herself play a crucial role in forming the consumers' perception.

A study from 2020 pointed out that active athletes often represent current trends and connect better with younger audiences due to their ongoing operation in competitive sports. The endorsement of this kind of active athlete is considered more authentic and thus potentially leads to a better brand image (Felbert & Breuer, 2020).

On the other hand, athletes who are retired possess a sense of legacy nostalgia and a well-established reputation. These athletes are more appealing to a certain group of people who have followed their careers over the years. Consequently, their endorsement can generate trust and reliability however, they can potentially miss the vitality that is rather connected to the active athletes (Silver, 2021). More specifically in football, active players are often seen as idols or icons of the current era with their playing style or tactics on the field. These players' endorsements can potentially bring a feeling of immediacy and relevance to the brand that they are promoting. On the other hand, retired football players are often connected to legendary performances and historical times, thus producing a nostalgic feeling in the consumer (López de Subijana, 2020). In the case of sport climbing the overall picture is different. Since sports climbing is a rapidly growing sport, active climbers are rather associated with advanced climbing techniques and achievements in climbing increasingly more difficult climbing routes. They often represent innovation and advancement in the climbing community. Retired climbers can however enhance a lot of experience, and they are frequently held in high regard for their innovations or efforts to popularize the sport (Stien, 2022).

Whether someone is an active or a retired athlete, regardless of whether it is football or sport climbing, it can significantly impact the perception of consumers towards the brand image. Active athletes are rather associated with relevance and dynamism, while retired athletes are more connected with nostalgia and trustworthiness (Taniyev & Gordon, 2019).

Based on the first research question proposed in the problem statement and literature review on active versus retired athletes, the following hypotheses can be developed:

H1: The endorsement of brands by active athletes both in football and sport climbing builds a more favorable consumer perception of brand image in comparison to endorsements by retired athletes.

### 2.3 Brand image

Brand image is one of the key expressions in this study. Therefore, in this section, I am exploring literature regarding the meaning of this term and its definitions. The expression of brand image has been defined in multiple ways, and therefore it is hard to choose which one fits the model of this study the best. Porter described the term in the following way: his approach was to analyze the brand image from two perspectives, the function, and the symbol. The scholar suggested using words to measure brand usefulness and symbolism. These mainly examined how well brands functioned and their symbolic value (Porter & Cindy, 1997). Keller described Brand image as “*perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory*” (Keller, 1993). This description is based on Keller’s Brand Equity Pyramid (Appendix, Figure 4). The pyramid is widely used in relevant marketing studies, thus giving a reliable foundation for my model. The concept consists of six main components two of which are connected to the brand image, the cognitive image, and the emotional image. The cognitive image contains the primary characteristics and secondary features, reliability, serviceability, durability, service effectiveness, style, design, and price. Meanwhile, emotional images contain user profiles, purchases, usage situations, personalities, values, history, and experiences (Keller & Lane, 1993). These elements are key when it comes to the measurement of brand image, which will be further detailed in the methodology chapter.

It is important to note that brand image is not something that a company can create. It is rather constructed by the consumers themselves. Hence, companies are constantly fighting to influence brand image with the help of marketing and brand building (Plumeyer, 2017).

To better understand this study, I am going to describe the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand image based on the research of Debiprasad Mukherjee (2009). According to the literature, celebrity endorsement has been widely used for advertising in recent years. It is considered a useful tool for marketing and brand building. However, it is more complicated than randomly choosing a celebrity. It is also used to create a strong association between the product and the celebrity endorser. This association affects the brand image in several ways. A well-selected celebrity can enhance the consumer’s perception of the brand, therefore influencing their purchase decisions. However, celebrity endorsement can have unwanted consequences as well. Therefore, brand managers should choose celebrities whose values and personalities fit well with the image of the brand (Mukherjee, 2009). Another study found similar results in the relationship between the two terms. It showed that if there is a mismatch between the personal image of the celebrity and the brand itself, it can potentially

cause harm to the brand. The study identified popularity and congruence between the image of the celebrity and of the brand as important factors for managers in choosing celebrity endorsers (Min, 2019).

To have an overall understanding of the effects of celebrity endorsement on brand image we should take a look at the social media platforms. During the course of the past decade Social media has become a crucial factor that forms consumer perceptions of brands in many ways. Therefore celebrities who have a large number of followers can increase or decrease the overall effect of brand image (Joshi, Lim, & Jagani , 2023). However, as mentioned before it is important to mention that celebrities can have unwanted effects on the brand image in some cases. A scandal or any negative publicity can result in a negative impact on the brand image. Consequently, the brand should conduct a comprehensive risk analysis before contracting a celebrity endorser (Knoll & Matthes, 2017).

In conclusion, this section about brand image and its relationship to celebrity endorsement has mapped various approaches to brand image from Porter (1997) and Keller (1993) and assessed its relationship with celebrity endorsement based on Mukherjee (2009). Furthermore, it showed how dynamic nature these terms are and how social media can affect this.

## **2.4 Sports popularity**

Since one of the moderating factors in my conceptual framework (shown in the next chapter) is sports popularity, and sport following, this section aims to provide a clear understanding of these terms based on the literature. I will map these terms from the different perspectives of football and sport climbing.

Football is considered to be one of the most popular sports in the world, and it has a long history. It is present on all continents, cultures, and age groups (FIFA, 2021). On the other hand, sports climbing does not have as deep of a history or universal popularity as football. However, since its Olympic debut in Tokyo in 2021, the appeal of the sport has begun to grow rapidly (Lutter, Tischer, & Rainer Schöffl, 2021). Based on a study conducted by the *Frontiers in Psychology Journal* the growing popularity is also caused by the sports' competitive appeal and the growing number of climbing gyms all over the world. This trend seems to continue as more and more people engage in sport climbing (Künzell, Balas, España-Romero, Giles, & Legreneur, 2021).

Nevertheless, the popularity of the two sports can change dynamically and can be influenced by several factors. These factors can be cultural, historical, and socioeconomic. For instance, since football has minimal equipment and relatively simple rules it is highly popular

in both developed and developing countries (Gasquez & Royuela, 2016). Sport climbing, on the other hand, has limited access due to its special equipment and facilities which makes it difficult for it to become more popular in areas that lack these facilities (Künzell, Balas, España-Romero, Giles, & Legreneur, 2021).

In the following, I am going to describe the difference between individuals who follow a certain sport and those who do not. In this specific area, I will not differentiate football and sport climbing since this topic can be viewed in general among sports.

According to Wann (1995), sports fans show self-identification with their favorite teams or athletes which can also influence their self-esteem and emotional response (Wann, 1995). This means that fans who follow certain sports have a strong emotional connection to their team or athlete. The literature also named this phenomenon “fanship” which is a significant part of a fan’s identity (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). It is shown that fans who are engaged often feel a sense of achievement in case their team wins, however, they can feel quite distant from their beloved teams in case they lose (Cialdini, Borden, & et al., 1976).

On the contrary, someone who is not following sports may lack this abovementioned emotional connection and thus, not identify themselves with a certain team or sport. Therefore they do not show the emotions mentioned above towards sports teams. Non-fans can occasionally engage in sports; however, they do not have that constant engagement as fans, in general (Winell, Armbrecht, & et.al., 2023). It is also important to note that becoming a sports fan can have several reasons. This can be caused by social influences, in some cases simply because of the excitement of the game. It is also common for individuals to only engage in the athletic ability demonstrated by an athlete (Gu S, 2023).

Based on the literature on sports popularity and sports following I expect the following moderation effects between celebrity endorsement and brand image. According to my second research question raised in the first chapter, since football is a globally popular sport and thus has a wider audience than sport climbing, I expect that its celebrity endorsement effect on the brand image will have a stronger effect. Meanwhile, sports climbing has a more niche audience, so celebrity endorsement might have a concentrated and less substantial effect on the brand image. Based on these findings, I phrased the second hypothesis of this study as follows:

H2: Celebrity endorsements have a stronger impact on brand image in football compared to sports climbing.

Based on the third research question, I expect that because of emotional attachment and identification with the sport, active followers can have better influence through celebrity endorsement than those who are not followers. Considering this, the impact of celebrity endorsement on the brand image can be stronger among active followers compared to people who are not following a sport. This gives my third hypothesis:

H3: Active followers of both popular and non-popular sports are more influenced by celebrity endorsements on brand image perception than non-followers.

## **2.5 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework is one of the most important parts of my study, giving the main foundation of the research. It can enhance results that are valuable for the marketing field. The model is based on a comprehensive literature overview and aims to explore the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand image moderated by two factors. In this chapter, I will describe this conceptual framework, thus giving an overview of how I intend to achieve my results.

The main idea is that the independent variable - celebrity endorsement - is expected to influence the dependent variable - brand image - in a way stated in H1. I expect that the dependent variable, which is the outcome, will be predictable by the model which can enhance relevant managerial knowledge.

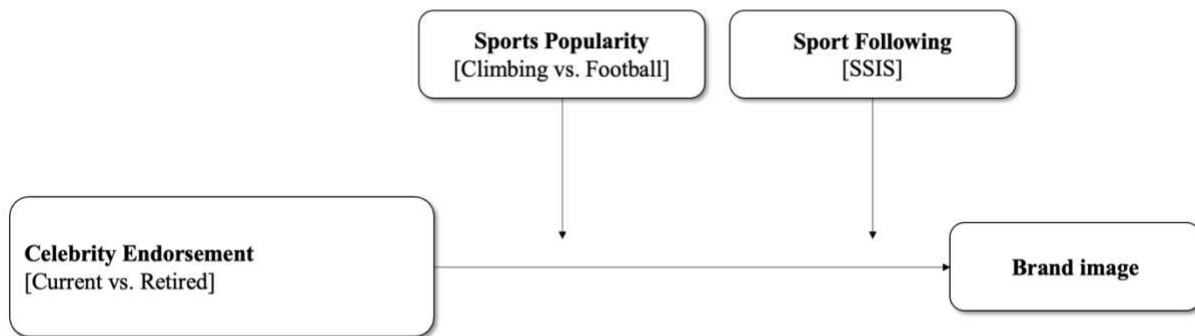
Based on the literature review detailed in the previous sections, I concluded that the knowledge gap that I suspected in the first part of the study, seemed to be a relevant field, therefore it is worth studying.

In the model, I will differentiate the celebrity endorser based on one main criterion. I will use current and retired athletes as stimuli to gain deeper insights on the topic.

The comparative nature of the framework between football and sport climbing allows me to investigate sports climbing in a way that I consider football as a benchmark, and I can make conclusions based on the comparison of the two sports. Furthermore, since football is well-studied in this regard, I will use similar methods to assess how celebrity endorsement works in sports climbing.

The use of the two moderators, the sport's popularity, and the interest in the sport can further narrow my scope and give a clear understanding of how these moderators can influence the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand image.

In conclusion, the variables detailed above give the following conceptual framework:



*Figure 1: Conceptual Model*

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter presents and explains the research approach that was used to investigate the topic and draw conclusions about the hypothesis formulated in the literature review. The research's main aim is to explore the impact of celebrity endorsement on brand image in a comparative way between football and sport climbing. This study uses both descriptive and exploratory methodologies to provide a comprehensive summary of the topic in scope.

### **3.1 Research Approach**

To achieve the goal of this study formulated in the first chapter and answer the research questions, I first used a descriptive approach in the literature review. This descriptive method allowed me to examine the present state of the studied area with a wide overview and to recognize trends over time. The method I applied in this study to define the land of celebrity endorsement, focuses on two categories of endorsers, namely, active and retired athletes in both football and sports climbing. This analysis included several investigations of different forms of endorsements alongside an extensive review of the literature's interpretation of the brand image concept. Furthermore, I reviewed the possible moderators of the relationship between them. On the other hand, exploratory research is used to investigate an understudied topic. Therefore, I chose this method to dive deeper into examining sport climbing and compare it to football. During this approach, primary data collection is used similarly to other academic studies. The most common way to do this is through an online survey that can provide me with primary data which I can use to draw conclusions based on the research questions and hypotheses raised in previous chapters. The stimuli presented in the online survey were developed during a focus group interview. The online survey was shared via social media (Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn) and I collected data from close friends, relatives, and colleagues. However, it is important to note that all expressions and concepts used in this paper are based on previous studies and literature.

### **3.2 Stimuli Development**

External sources were used to determine which athletes were considered the most recognizable in football and sport climbing in both categories of active and retired athletes. To assess this, I chose three athletes in each category to show to respondents in a focus group interview. As a base, I only chose athletes with over two hundred thousand followers on Instagram for sports

climbing and more than one million followers for football players. The reason I chose Instagram follower numbers as an indicator is a study from 2021 that showed the number of Instagram followers can indicate a person's recognition (Breves, Liebers, Motschenbacher, & Reus, 2021). This approach has enabled me to show focus group respondents who are well-known athletes in both sports. The difference in follower numbers is due to the different popularity of the two sports. I also managed to stay unbiased since in the end the respondents chose who was the most recognizable in each category.

As a result of this data, I was able to build stimuli shown to the respondents in the survey, thus providing familiar athletes to the respondents. The development of the stimuli is detailed later in this chapter.

According to Instagram follower numbers I chose the following athletes in the categories:

#### **Active football player**

According to the twelve most followed footballers on Instagram (2024), I chose the following three players to show in the focus group interview: Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Kylian Mbappe. All three are in the category of active football players and have more than a million Instagram followers (Thomas, 2024).

#### **Active sport climber**

Based on "Top 80 Climbing Influencers in 2024" I randomly chose three active sports climbers. They all have Instagram follower numbers above two hundred thousand as mentioned earlier, these climbers are Adam Ondra, Alexander Megos, and Jakob Schubert (FeedSpot, 2024).

#### **Retired football player**

Considering the same list of the twelve most followed footballers on Instagram (2024), I selected three retired players based on the definition mentioned earlier in the literature review chapter. These are Ronaldo de Assis Moreira (commonly known as Ronaldinho), David Beckham, and Zlatan Ibrahimović. They all have more than a million followers on Instagram (Thomas, 2024).

#### **Retired sport climber**

Regarding retired sport climbers, the same list of "Top 80 Climbing Influencers in 2024" was used for active climbers. In this case, I chose retired athletes based on the definition mentioned

earlier. These sport climbers are Chris Sharma, Magnus Midtbø, and Alex Honnold. All three have more than two hundred thousand Instagram followers (FeedSpot, 2024).

Putting all these names into two tables looks as follows. These tables show the athletes collected based on external sources to present to the focus group so the stimuli development could be based on relevant data while paying attention to stay unbiased during the study.

Football players	
Active	Lionel Messi Christiano Ronaldo Kylian Mbappe
Retired	Ronaldinho David Beckham Zlatan Ibrahimović

*Table 1: Active and retired football players*

Sport Climbing	
Active	Adam Ondra Alexander Megos Jakob Schubert
Retired	Chris Sharma Magnus Midtbø Alex Honnold

*Table 2: Active and retired Sports climbers*

After conducting the focus group interview, the following table shows the results of the chosen athletes in each category, which were later included in the questionnaire:

Active football player	Lionel Messi
Retired football player	David Beckham
Active sport climber	Adam Ondra
Retired sport climber	Magnus Midtbø

*Table 3: Chosen athletes by focus group interview*

### **3.3 Primary Data**

Collecting primary data is one of the most important parts of my research since it provides insights into my research topic. This method is widely used in the academic field, which can ensure credible results.

#### **3.3.1 Data Collection**

The main aim of this study is to understand how celebrity endorsement affects the brand image, especially in sports climbing. To assess this effect, I compared sport climbing with one of the most famous sports in the world, football. As a result, I expect that the outcome will help brand managers how to leverage celebrity endorsement in their communications in the specific area of sport climbing-related brands.

For this purpose, I used an online survey, as mentioned previously. The main advantage of this method is that it can reach out to a broad demographic without a time limit. Furthermore, different time zones and locations cannot be a limiting factor either (Davino C., 2013). The survey was sent out mainly on social media but also was shown to friends, family, colleagues, and every kind of network that was within my reach.

The survey's sampling method was non-random; besides that, I applied the convenience sampling method since, given the limitations of the study, this is the fastest and most cost-effective. Furthermore, during this approach, I was able to select participants based on how easily accessible they were (Stratton, 2021).

Regarding the demographics of the survey, I did not specify any age restriction to get answers from multiple age groups and did not apply any other restrictions regarding gender, location,

education, etc. However, I collected all relevant information to be able to assess the differences between cohorts.

The targeted sample size was a minimum of 200 participants since I developed a two-by-two stimuli table, and for each category, the goal was to have at least 50 respondents.

To ensure that the survey was constructed logically and had no errors, I pre-tested a small group of individuals before the final publishing. The pre-test allowed me to correct mistakes and misunderstandings in the survey.

Before the survey, I did a stimuli development with a focus group to determine the most objective stimuli possible by asking a group of people from different backgrounds. This way I was able to avoid biased stimuli in my survey.

### **3.3.2 Stimuli Development**

Before conducting the survey, I did a focus group interview to develop stimuli. After that, I could put the stimuli in the survey since it was approved by the group of people that I interviewed.

Based on my conceptual model, I developed a two-by-two model consisting of football players and sport climbers in two categories: Current and retired athletes. To study the effect of celebrity endorsement, I chose a brand that produces products for both football and sports climbing. The chosen brand is Adidas, since it has a wide range of products in football such as boots, jerseys, and balls. Adidas also produces sports climbing products, for example climbing shoes and pants. This way I can measure the impact of the endorser on the brand image with the same brand thus making the stimuli as similar as possible. Furthermore, I chose a picture of each athlete actively practicing their sport, providing a similar stimulus.

During the focus group interview, I showed three different athletes to the respondents and asked them to rank them based on several criteria. In this focus group interview, different selling lines from Adidas were also tested to determine which one is the most appealing in combination with the athletes. Furthermore, manipulation questions were also asked to assess and test whether the stimuli worked properly. This approach allowed me to develop the stimuli for the main survey.

The table below summarizes the four categories from the main survey and the required minimum reply numbers:

	Football	Climbing
Active	50	50
Retired	50	50

*Table 4: Stimuli number distributions*

In the main survey, every respondent was shown a randomly selected image out of the four stimuli, and after that, they had to answer all questions based on that exact picture of the randomly selected athlete. As it is shown in the table each stimulus had to be shown at least 50 times thus ensuring to have 200 responses overall. These numbers ensured that every category's sample size was robust (Brown, 1974).

The images in the survey were selected from publicly available sources. The images were also pre-tested with a small group of people to ensure that they worked well as a stimulus (Smith T., 2004).

### **3.3.3 Measurement / Indicators**

To do an in-depth analysis of the variables in the conceptual model, the appropriate measurement and indicators need to be defined.

In the model, the main aim was to assess whether the different types of endorsers, in this case the stimulus, have different effects on the brand image in the consumer's mind.

For this purpose, the following operational model was created based on relevant literature, which ensures that the scales used in the study are reliable and already tested. Furthermore, similar to other studies, I used Cronbach alpha to determine the internal consistency of the scales, thus showing the reliability.

## Operational Model

Framework	Measure	Items	Scale	Reference	Cronbach $\alpha$
IV	Celebrity Endorsement	Stimuli	na	na	na
Moderator	Sports popularity and familiarity	2	5-point Likert scale	(Dietz, 2023)	0,81
Moderator	The Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS)	7	5-point Likert scale (adapted from 7-point)	(Wann D. L., 1993)	0,91
DV	Brand image	9	5-point Likert Scale (adapted from 7-point)	(Cian, 2011)	0,7

*Table 5: Operational Model*

### Celebrity endorsement: Stimuli

Using different stimuli in the survey allowed me to assess how different types of celebrity endorsers affect the brand image. The respondents were shown four different athletes (detailed in the previous chapter). Based on that, I could identify the various attributes of each celebrity type and how they affect the brand image. This approach allowed me to validate the theoretical constructs detailed in the literature review chapter.

To confirm the independent variable, manipulation checking questions were asked in the survey. These questions helped to ensure the validity of the stimuli developed by verifying that the respondents perceived the manipulation as intended (Perdue & Summers, 1986).

### **Sports popularity:**

To gather relevant information on sports athletes' popularity I used the familiarity and liking scale from a study conducted by Beth Dietz. This measures specifically the familiarity and liking of sports athletes in the consumers' eye. This approach was adapted from a 7-point Likert scale to a five-point Likert scale for this study. The original scale was developed to focus on specific athletes (Dietz, 2023). The scale for that looks as follows:

- 1) How familiar are you with the athlete in the advert?
- 2) How knowledgeable are you about the athlete in the advert?
- 3) How much do you like watching the athlete in the advert?

### **Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS)**

For the second moderator, I used a scale from a study conducted by Wann and Branscombe. This scale is called the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS), and it measures the degree to which individuals identify themselves as fans of a team. This is a 7-item scale from low identification to high identification. In this study, I considered individual athletes instead of teams since I was assessing individual celebrity endorsers. However, I was able to adapt the scale to this study (Wann D. L., 1993). The scale was adapted for this study using a 5-point Likert scale.

- 1) It is important to me that the athlete in the advert wins in competitions.
- 2) I consider myself a strong fan of the athlete in the advert.
- 3) My friends also recognize me as a fan of the athlete in the advert.
- 4) I actively follow the athlete on the advert's activities on social media during the sports season.
- 5) Being a fan of the athlete in the advert is an important part of my identity.
- 6) I have strong negative feelings towards the athlete in the advert, which is the brand's biggest competitor.
- 7) I frequently display items or wear apparel that shows my support for the athlete in the advert.

## **Brand Image**

For the brand image measurement, I used a study by Luca Cian (2011), and based on that, I developed a scale that fits the goal of this research. This scale measures how consumers perceive a certain brand across different dimensions and every component of the scale gives a view of how the brand is seen by the consumers thus providing a reliable and tested measurement for brand image (Cian, 2011). The scale looks as follows:

- 1) Product Quality:
  - "This brand offers high-quality products."
  - "The products from this brand are reliable and well-made."
- 2) Customer Satisfaction:
  - "This brand consistently meets my expectations."
- 3) Brand Personality:
  - "This brand is innovative and forward-thinking."
  - "This brand is trustworthy and dependable."
- 4) Emotional Connection:
  - "This brand evokes positive emotions when I think about it."
- 5) Brand Differentiation:
  - "This brand stands out distinctly from its competitors."
- 6) Brand Loyalty:
  - "I would choose this brand over any other, even if they are similar."
  - "I see myself as a loyal customer of this brand."
- 7) Value for Money:
  - "This brand offers products that are good value for the money."

## **Demographics**

Regarding the measurement of the demographics, standardized demographic questions were used in the survey to ensure the academic standards for this study were met. This approach aligns with the recommendations. Furthermore, this method ensures that subsequent analysis can improve the study's results (Shannon & Hsieh, 2005).

### **Screening questions**

I implemented screening questions for football and sports climbing to ensure that relevant respondents answered the survey. Regarding football, I asked whether respondents do any sports. This helps in understanding a person's engagement and therefore its impact on the brand image (Bauman, et al., 2012). When I screened respondents regarding sports climbing the same question was asked. This can suggest the respondent's engagement in the sport as well as the potential influencer impact (Graham , Sheldon, & Declan, 2002).

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

For hypotheses testing, the primary method used was quantitative analysis, using IBM SPSS Statistics Software. With this approach, I was able to process the data set from the survey and provide objective results that can be generalized to the sports examined. With the help of SPSS, I was able to use sophisticated statistical tools that ensured the accuracy of my analysis.

#### **Descriptive statistics**

With the help of descriptive statistics, I made a summary of the data collected. This summary includes measures of central tendencies (mean and median), dispersion, and distribution. This method helped to study the distribution and central values of the data.

#### **Inferential statistics**

Inferential statistics were used to test hypotheses derived from the research questions. These include regression analysis ANOVA, which helped to understand the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. It allowed me to assess how variables such as celebrity endorsement (active vs. retired) influence the brand image and take into consideration other factors like sports popularity.

Besides regression analysis, I used moderator analysis to study how certain variables such as sports interest or sports popularity alter the direction or strength of the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand image.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Results**

#### **4.1.1 Cleaning the data**

To ensure the quality and reliability of the dataset for subsequent analyses I used a comprehensive data-cleaning process for the 433 initial observations included in the study. To eliminate invalid responses and duplicates or any inconsistencies that could potentially distort the results, I took several steps.

I began with the examination of the IP addresses in order to identify repetitions, that could indicate duplicate entries since those could potentially introduce bias and affect the reliability of the analysis. A total of 110 repeated IP addresses were identified and removed, with the following distribution: 29 from Stimuli 1, 32 from Stimuli 2, 24 from Stimuli 3, and 25 from Stimuli 4. Since it is crucial for the validity of an analysis to be based on independent observations, it was highly important to remove the identified duplicates.

Based on the results of the screening questions, the responses that did not satisfy the purpose of the study were filtered out. This meant a total of 53 failed responses during the screening process. These questions were specifically designed to gain only relevant data that can be analyzed later. The distribution of the failed screening questions looks as: 16 from Stimuli 1, 12 from Stimuli 2, 17 from Stimuli 3, and 8 from Stimuli 4. I excluded these answers from the analysis to ensure the integrity of the datasets.

Another step crucial for the validity of the analysis is to include a manipulation check to see whether the participants engaged with the stimuli. The manipulation check is used to verify that the independent variable was effectively manipulated and that participants understood and responded to the stimuli appropriately. In total 137 answers failed the manipulation check. These looked as follows in all the categories: 26 from Stimuli 1, 30 from Stimuli 2, 41 from Stimuli 3, and 40 from Stimuli 4. I excluded these responses to ensure that the remaining data reflects the participants' true interactions with the stimuli.

To further narrow down my results to only valid answers, outliers were identified that could potentially distort the results. This distortion can especially happen when the dataset consists

of Likert-scale questions. In total, three outliers were identified and removed from the original dataset. With this removal, I was able to maintain the integrity of the data acquired.

I was left with 133 valid observations after taking the above-mentioned steps. Finally, the dataset looked as follows regarding all valid observations: 32 for Stimuli 1, 42 for Stimuli 2, 27 for Stimuli 3, and 32 for Stimuli 4. By reducing the number of valid observations from 433 to 133, I was able to ensure the quality and reliability of the data. The table below summarizes the observations.

	Stimuli 1	Stimuli 2	Stimuli 3	Stimuli 4	Total
Initial Observations	103	116	109	105	433
Failed Screening question	16	12	17	8	53
Repeated IPs	29	32	24	25	110
Failed Manipulation	26	30	41	40	137
Valid Observations	32	42	27	32	133

*Table 6: Stimuli observations*

#### **4.1.2 Sample characterization**

After the careful data-cleaning process out of the 433 total observations only 166 resulted in valid answers. Considering the age distribution of respondents, most of the participants are between 18 and 60 years of age. Specifically, 157 (94,58%). Only a few people answered the survey who were under the age of 18, namely 6 (3,61%). Over 60 years of age there were just 3 respondents which is 1,81% of the total responses. This age distribution shows that the majority of the sample is between 18 and 60 years old, so we can say that the adult population is represented widely in this study.

Out of the total, 94 were male respondents (56.63%), 68 were female respondents (40.96%), there was 1 respondent (0.60%) identified as 'Other,' and 3 respondents (1.81%) who preferred not to say their gender. These numbers show that the distribution between genders was quite balanced, with a few participants choosing undisclosed or non-binary options.

Regarding the educational background of the participants, the majority of respondents declared that they have some kind of higher education degree. The numbers look as follows: 32 (19.28%) are only high school graduates, 43 (25.90%) have a college degree, 48 (28.92%) participants have some kind of bachelor's degree, 34 (20.48%) have a master's degree, only 2 people

(1.20%) have an MBA, however, 4 respondents (2.41%) have some kind of doctorate classification. Three respondents (1.81%) said that they had no degree. This distribution shows that the majority of respondents have a minimum a college degree which shows that a well-educated group of people took part in the study.

Looking at the geographical distribution, most of the respondents, to be precise, 102 (61.4%), are from Hungary. There were 24 respondents (14.5%) from Germany, followed by France and the Netherlands, each with seven respondents (4.2%). Canada, Italy, and the United States of America each have 4 respondents (2.4%). There are 14 remaining responses (8.5%) from other countries, such as Austria, Belgium, Hong Kong (S.A.R.), Portugal, Finland, Ghana, Guatemala, Japan, Switzerland, and Ukraine (Table 7).

Variable	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Under 18	6	3.6
	18 - 60	157	94.6
	Over 60	3	1.8
Gender	Male	94	56.6
	Female	68	41
	Other	1	0.6
	Prefer not to say	3	1.8
Educational status	High school graduate	32	19.3
	College degree	43	25.9
	Bachelor	48	28.9
	Master	34	20.5
	MBA	2	1.2
	Doctorate	4	2.4
	No degree	3	1.8
List of countries	Hungary	102	61.4
	Germany	24	14.5
	France	7	4.2
	Netherlands	7	4.2
	Canada	4	2.4
	Italy	4	2.4
	United States of America	4	2.4
	Others	14	8.5

*Table 7: Socio-demographic characteristics*

The dependent variable in this analysis was "Brand Image" which had a mean value of 38.571 (SD = 7.819). The independent variables constituted "Celebrity Endorsement," which presented a mean value of 2.604 (SD = 1.076), and the "Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS)," which displayed a mean of 18.495 (SD = 7.822). The moderator "Sport Popularity and

Familiarity" had a mean of 11.573 (SD = 2.465). The summary of the above data is shown in the table below. (Table 8).

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Min	Max
Celebrity endorsement	2.604	1.076	1	4
Sport popularity	11.573	2.465	6	16
SSIS	18.495	7.822	7	35
Brand image	38.571	7.819	16	50

*Table 8: Descriptive statistics*

#### **4.1.3 Measurement of reliability of constructs**

The goal of Brand Image measurement is to assess respondents' perceptions of the image that is connected to different sports athletes. There were 40 questions in total that measured Brand Image, and these were distributed across four main blocks as follows: Q5 for Stimuli 1 (Adam Ondra), Q16 for Stimuli 2 (Lionel Messi), Q27 for Stimuli 3 (Magnus Midtbø), and Q38 for Stimuli 4 (David Beckham). Every block had 10 questions in total measuring answers on a 5-point Likert scale, thus capturing several aspects of Brand Image. The reliability of the scale was examined using the average interitem covariance and the scale reliability coefficient. The average interitem covariance is .015, showing a moderate correlation across the items. This shows that items are related to some extent and demonstrates consistent responses across the questions of different aspects of Brand Image. The Cronbach's alpha (scale reliability coefficient) is .849, which is more than the generally used threshold of .70. This indicates a high level of internal consistency among all these items. The strong reliability shows that the items measure the Brand Image as intended, thus providing a relevant scale to capture the perception of the respondents accurately.

The so-called Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) was designed to measure respondents' identification with sports teams and athletes. This scale contains 28 questions in total, spread over four key blocks. The questions were distributed between the blocks as follows: Q4 for Stimuli 1 (Adam Ondra), Q15 for Stimuli 2 (Lionel Messi), Q26 for Stimuli 3 (Magnus Midtbø), and Q37 for Stimuli 4 (David Beckham). Every block includes 7 questions, using a 5-point

Likert scale in order to identify different aspects of sports spectator identification. The scale's reliability was examined by using the average interitem covariance and the scale reliability coefficient. The average interitem covariance is .015, showing a moderate correlation across the items. This shows that items are related to some extent and demonstrates consistent responses across the questions of different aspects of SSIS. The Cronbach's alpha (scale reliability coefficient) is .827, which is more than the generally used threshold of .70. This indicates a high level of internal consistency among all these items. The strong reliability shows that the items measure the SSIS as intended, thus providing a relevant scale to capture the perception of the respondents accurately.

The Sports Popularity and Familiarity Scale (SSIS) was created to assess participants' perceptions and knowledge of sports athletes. This scale contains nine questions, which measure Sports Popularity and Familiarity. The scale's reliability was examined using the average interitem covariance and the scale reliability coefficient. The average interitem covariance is .018, showing a moderate correlation across the items. The Cronbach's alpha (scale reliability coefficient) is .399. This, however, is lower than the 0.7 threshold for acceptable reliability, it gives a moderate insight into the consistency of the items when measuring Sports Popularity and Familiarity. This indicates that there is a small degree of internal consistency among all the items; however, some further improvement can be made with the scale in any similar study in the future. This could potentially enhance the reliability of the scale.

#### **4.1.4. Inference Statistics**

##### **Hypothesis 1**

**The endorsement of brands by active athletes both in football and sport climbing builds a more favorable consumer perception of brand image in comparison to endorsements by retired athletes.**

An independent sample t-test was carried out to compare the participants' perception of the brand image and how active versus retired athletes influence their opinion. This test however did not differentiate the two sports in this case. It only assessed the difference between endorsement by active and retired athletes. In the survey, a total of 103 participants were shown

active athlete stimuli ( $M = 2,06$  and  $SD = 0,93$ ) and 62 respondents were influenced by retired endorsers ( $M = 3,45$ ,  $SD = 0,65$ ). Between the two groups, equal variances could be assumed based on the result of Levene's test which measures the equality of variances.  $F(1,163) = 2,91$ ,  $p = 0,090$ .

The t-test that measured the equality of means between active and retired endorsers showed a significant difference,  $t(163) = -10,41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , and had a mean difference of  $-1.39$  (95% CI  $[-1.66, -1.13]$ ). Based on this result we can state that the endorsement by an active athlete is more favorable in the consumers' eye and therefore less effective by a retired athlete. Based on H1 which stated: "The endorsement of brands by active athletes both in football and sport climbing builds a more favorable consumer perception of brand image in comparison to endorsements by retired athletes." I rejected the null hypotheses, based on the significant p-value ( $p < .001$ ). This means the finding of the statistical test supports my hypothesis. In conclusion, we can say that celebrity endorsement by active athletes has a better consumer perception outcome of brand image than endorsement by retired athletes in both sports climbing and football.

The result of the first hypothesis helps to understand celebrity endorsement in the context of sports marketing, especially in the field of football and sports climbing emphasizing the status of the endorser (active vs retired) and how this affects the brand image. This result shows that active athletes can seem more relevant and dynamic in the consumers' eye thus positively influencing the brand image. This can be a valuable insight for marketers and decision-makers who are working in the sports marketing industry.

Variable	Athletes				$t(df)$	$p$ -value	Mean difference	95% CI for mean difference	
	Active (N=103)		Retired (N=62)					Lower	Upper
	Mean	$SD$	Mean	$SD$					
Celebrity endorsement	2.06	0.93	3.45	0.65	$t(163) = -10.41$	0.000	-1.39	-1.66	-1.30

*Table 9: Comparison of Celebrity Endorsement Between Active and Retired Athletes*

## Hypothesis 2

### **Celebrity endorsements have a stronger impact on brand image in football compared to sports climbing.**

To examine the effects of celebrity endorsement by athletes on brand image focusing on sports climbing and football, univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Hypothesis 2 stated that celebrity endorsements would have a stronger impact on brand image in popular sports compared to less popular sports. Examining the result of descriptive statistics we can see that the mean brand image for football is between 23 and 41,580, while when checking for sports climbing the scores ranged from 32 to 41,190. To check the equality of variances Levene's test was conducted which did not show a significant difference in the variances in the two groups. Therefore, the use of ANOVA was valid for this examination.

After carefully looking at the ANOVA analysis we can state that the main effect of familiarity with athletes on brand image was significant,  $F(4,153)=2.615$ ,  $p=.037$ . This indicates that the more familiar a person is with an athlete the greater the influence on their perception of brand image will be. On the other hand, when the interaction between celebrity endorsement and familiarity with athletes was examined, it turned out that it was statistically not significant,  $F(8,153)=1.295$ ,  $p=.250$ . This indicates that when assessing the combined effect of celebrity endorsement and popularity it does not differ significantly across the groups. However, further analysis of detailed parameters showed significant effects on certain combinations of celebrity endorsement and familiarity with athletes.

The findings above support hypothesis 2 but only partially. We can see that familiarity with athletes has a significant role when shaping the perception of consumers toward brand image, and this effect is true for more popular sports and, therefore, for football. On the other hand, since there was no significant interaction effect between the influences of celebrity endorsement and familiarity combined on brand image, we cannot say that it is only dependent on sports popularity. Based on these findings we can conclude that while celebrity endorsement has a significant impact among popular sports, especially in football, the overall impact is also influenced by the familiarity and creditability of the athlete who is endorsing a certain brand. This knowledge can be useful for marketers, showing that it is important to select well-recognized and known athletes to boost brand image, regardless of how popular the sport is. Therefore, there is no significant difference between climbing and football in this regard.

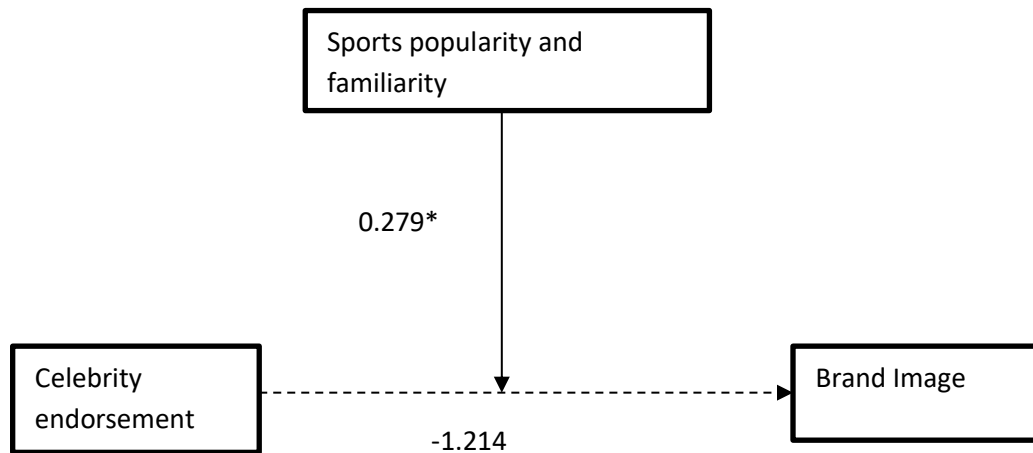
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	1241.398 <sup>a</sup>	15	82.760	1.402	.153
Intercept	109761.903	1	109761.903	1859.217	.000
Celebrity endorsement	197.645	3	65.882	1.116	.345
Familiar athlete	617.603	4	154.401	2.615	.037
Celebrity endorsement * familiar athlete	611.582	8	76.448	1.295	.250
Error	9032.602	153	59.037		
Total	262278.000	169			
Corrected Total	10274.000	168			

*Table 10: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects*

### **Hypothesis 3**

**Active followers of both popular and non-popular sports are more influenced by celebrity endorsements on brand image perception than non-followers.**

To examine the effect of celebrity endorsement and sports popularity on brand image while sports popularity is the moderator, a moderation analysis was carried out with the help of Process Macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2022). After the analysis, the overall model resulted in statistically not significant  $F(3,165) = 1.461$ ,  $p = 0.227$ , which means that the predictors explained only 2,6% of the variance in the brand image ( $R^2 = .026$ ). After careful examination, we can see that neither celebrity endorsement ( $B = -1.214$ ,  $SE = 2.865$ ,  $p = .672$ ) nor sports popularity ( $B = 0.279$ ,  $SE = 0.657$ ,  $p = .671$ ) had a significant effect on the brand image. Besides that the interaction between celebrity endorsement and sports popularity was also not significant ( $B = 0.094$ ,  $SE = 0.237$ ,  $p = .692$ ). This indicates that the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand image did not vary as a function of sports popularity. The non-significance was also tested with the highest-order unconditional interaction which confirmed this effect  $\Delta R^2 = .001$ ,  $F(1, 165) = 0.158$ ,  $p = .692$ . Based on these findings, we can say that the combined effect of celebrity endorsement and sports popularity did not significantly affect the brand image in both popular and less popular sports.

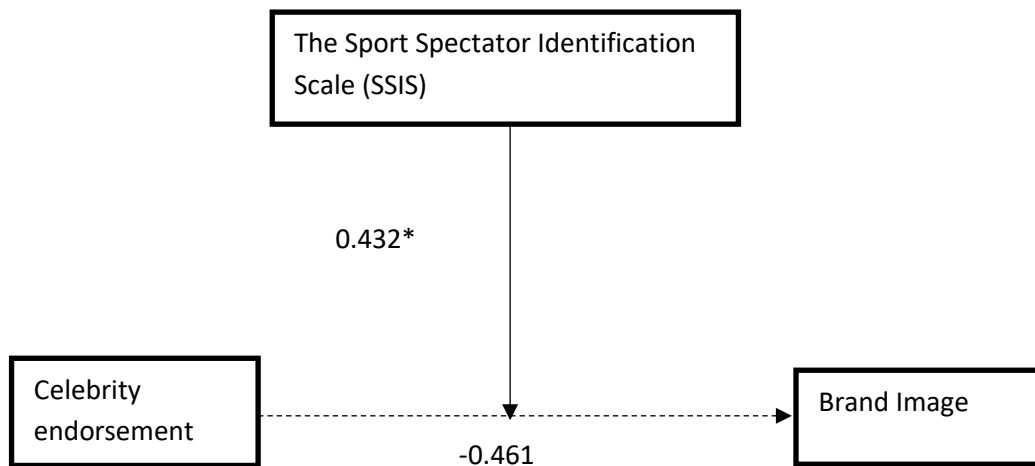


\* P-value more than 0.05, which is statistically not significant.

→ Not statistically significant

*Figure 2: Moderation effect of Sports popularity and familiarity*

Another moderation analysis was carried out to assess the impact of celebrity endorsement moderated by the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) on brand image. In this case the overall model was statistically significant,  $F(3, 165) = 20.101$ ,  $p < .001$  which means that the predictors explained 26.8% of the variance in the brand image ( $R^2 = .268$ ). After the analysis it turned out that the SSIS had a significant main effect on the brand image ( $B = 0.432$ ,  $SE = 0.181$ ,  $p = .018$ ), which suggests that if the SSIS score is higher then the brand image score will be higher as well. On the other hand the main effect of celebrity endorsement was not significant ( $B = -0.461$ ,  $SE = 1.271$ ,  $p = .717$ ). Furthermore, the examination of the interaction between celebrity endorsement and SSIS turned out not to be significant either. ( $B = 0.032$ ,  $SE = 0.061$ ,  $p = .606$ ). This indicates that SSIS does not moderate the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand image. The non-significance was also tested with the highest-order unconditional interaction which confirmed this effect  $\Delta R^2 = .001$ ,  $F(1, 165) = 0.267$ ,  $p = .606$ . Therefore the findings suggest that while SSIS positively influences brand image the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand image is not moderated by SSIS.



→ Not statistically significant

\* P-value less than 0.05, which is statistically significant.

*Figure 3: Moderation effect of Sports Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS)*

#### **Full model test**

In the full model test, I examine the impact of celebrity endorsement on brand image with both moderators simultaneously, sports popularity and the Sports Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS). The overall model was statistically significant  $F(5, 163) = 12.16, p < .001$  showing that 27,2% of the variance in brand image was explained by all the predictor variables. It is also turned out that the main effect of celebrity endorsement on the brand image was not significant  $b = -2.18, t(163) = -0.86, p = .391$  which means that celebrity endorsement alone did not influence the perception of consumers towards the brand image.

The same happened to sports popularity as it did not predict brand image significantly,  $b = -0.58, t(163) = -0.94, p = .351$  indicating that familiarity with sports athletes did not have significant impact on brand image. Furthermore, the interaction between celebrity endorsement and sports popularity was not statistically significant either  $b = 0.18, t(163) = 0.82, p = .415$ , which means that the effect of celebrity endorsement on brand image was not moderated by sports popularity when testing the full model. When we assess the interaction between celebrity endorsement and SSIS it also turns out that it is non-significant  $b = 0.01, t(163) = 0.18, p = .861$ , meaning that SSIS did not moderate the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand image. However a significant main effect of SSIS on brand image was assessed,  $b = 0.51, t(163) = 2.56, p = .011$ , meaning that the higher identification with sports athletes causes a more

favorable perception of brand image. In the full model test there was no distinction between active and retired athletes

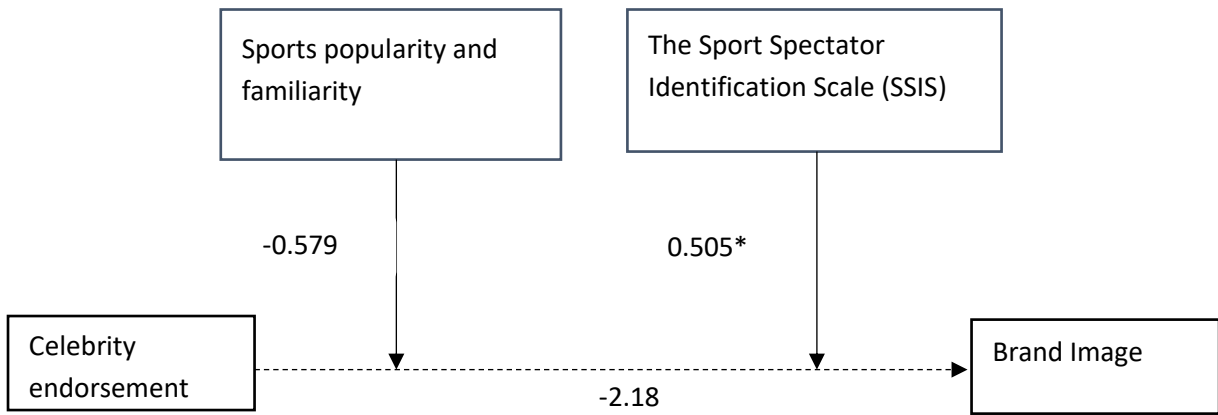


Figure 4: Moderation effect of Sports popularity and familiarity and Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS). \* p-value less than 0.05

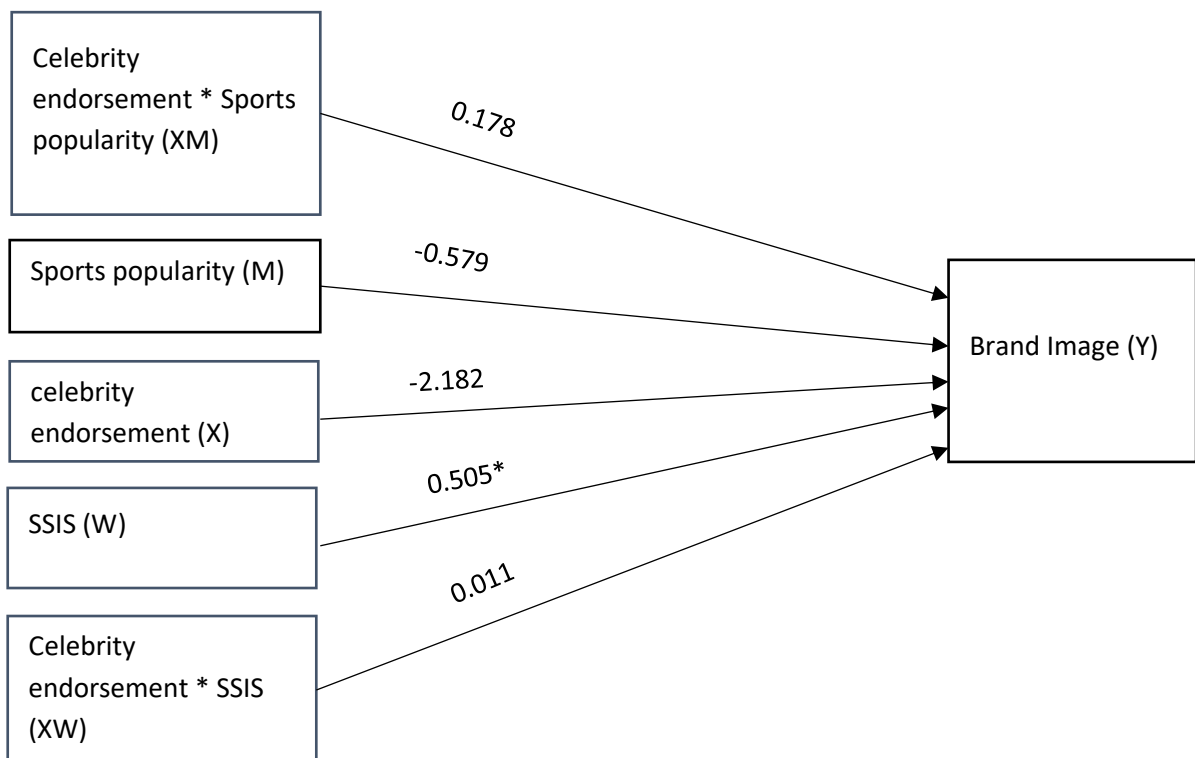


Figure 5: Full model of moderation effect of Sports popularity and familiarity and Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS).

## 4.2 Discussion

Based on the analysis it turned out that there is a significant difference in consumer perceptions of brand image between endorsements by active and retired athletes. When companies use endorsement with active athletes it seems to generate a more favorable outcome than using a retired athlete thus enhancing a better perception of brand image in both sports climbing and football. These findings support that an active athlete is perceived as more relevant, and dynamic and positively influences consumer perception, which is also detailed in the literature review chapter.

On the one hand familiarity with athletes significantly influenced brand image; on the other hand when the combined effect was assessed of celebrity endorsement and familiarity, it did not differ significantly across the sports of varying popularity. This supports the hypothesis only partially, showing that while celebrity endorsement in popular sports like football has a significant impact on brand image, the overall effectiveness also depends on the familiarity and perceived credibility of the sports athlete. In conclusion we can say that a well-known and relatable athlete selection is essential for boosting the brand image regardless of the sport's popularity.

The analysis showed that sports popularity did not moderate the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand image significantly. Nevertheless, the Sports Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) had a significant effect on the brand image. This suggests that the higher the identification with the sports athletes, the higher the brand image association will be. Although the SSIS did not moderate the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand image, it indicates that while SSIS increases the brand image, it does not change the influence of celebrity endorsement. This was assessed simultaneously in football and sports climbing therefore in this case the study did not differentiate the two sports.

The findings of this study highlight that active sports athletes' endorsement and the familiarity of the athlete with consumers shape the brand image. This suggests that marketers should rather advertise their brands with active and well-known sports athletes to boost their sales activities both in popular and less popular sports. Furthermore, if marketers study their consumer segment well and map their audiences' spectator identification level, it can provide them insights into enhancing their brand image. These insights are valuable for strategic decision-making in sports marketing and can be the foundation of future research on athlete endorsements and consumer perceptions both in popular and less popular sports.

## CHAPTER 5: MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Main findings

This study's main objective was to assess how, if in any way, celebrity endorsement can influence the brand image in popular sports like football and less popular sports like sports climbing. The influencing effect was further examined by taking into account two moderator factors, namely the sport's popularity (via SSIS) and the state of the endorser (being active or retired).

In the main findings and conclusions section I aim to answer the three research questions raised at the beginning, for which, I used the collected information from the above detailed data analysis and literature review.

**Research Question 1:** In what ways does the status of a celebrity endorser (active vs. retired) impact consumer perception of brand image within football and sports climbing?

After examining the analysis, it is clear that the perception of the consumers, regarding brand image, differs significantly based on the status of the athlete being active or retired. It can be stated that with active athletes as celebrity endorsers in both football and sports climbing, a more positive consumer perception can be generated. My hypothesis, that active athletes are better at increasing brand image in both sports, is supported by this finding, since it shows that athletes, actively competing in their field, are more relevant and more effective endorsers, proving that they are able to influence brand images more positively.

**Research Question 2:** How does the relative popularity of a sports athlete act as a moderating factor in the relationship between celebrity endorsements and the perception of brand image?

The survey analysis showed that familiarity with athletes can affect the brand image significantly in both football and sports climbing. However it also showed that the combined effect of celebrity endorsement and familiarity do not differ significantly across the two sports with different popularity levels. Because of this it can be stated, that even though football is one of the most popular sports in the world and benefits from celebrity endorsement, it is dependent on the familiarity of the athletes. The most important conclusion of this finding is that while football can reach a wider audience a niche sport like sport climbing can also have a concentrated impact by advertising products with a well-known athlete to a targeted climbing

community. In conclusion, an athlete's popularity is a factor marketers should consider when advertising a product in football and sports climbing.

**Research Question 3:** To what extent does an individual's engagement level in a sport serve as a moderating variable in the effect of celebrity endorsements on brand image perception

The result showed that the popularity of another form of involvement in sports did not moderate the relationship between brand image and celebrity endorsement. Fans' identification with athletes and sports teams did not have a favorable effect on brand image. However, it is important to note that the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) was effective. Because of this finding, we can say that while brand image is usually viewed more favorably by engaged sports fans, the impact on celebrity endorsement effectiveness might not always be dependent upon engagement. Illustrating how important it is to find the right spokespeople, no matter what the depth of playing experience for that individual may be with its target audience.

## **5.2 Managerial / Academic Implications**

The findings of this study provide important conclusions for both marketing professionals and academics.

### **Managerial implications**

**Strategic Endorsement Decisions:** It is important for brands that seek to better their brand image to consider contracting with active athletes. The status of an athlete should be a priority when selecting candidates for celebrity endorsement since active athletes have a rather dynamic and more relevant and immediate effect on consumer perceptions. This is true not only for one of the most popular sports, football but also for a sport with a rather niche audience, sports climbing. By selecting the appropriate candidates an enhanced brand image can be reached, since an active athlete can create a sense of connection with modern trends.

**Targeting Specific Audiences:** Understanding the target audience's familiarity with a specific sport is of high importance as it is highlighted in this study. When dealing with a sport with a rather small audience, choosing an endorser who is well-known within the community can be highly effective and still have a significant impact. Using this type of target approach, brands

can reach and influence an audience by resonating with them more, thereby reaching an immense impact through the endorsement. In the case of sports climbing, while the audience might be smaller, the consumer engagement is stronger than in sports with higher popularity, therefore for brands operating with these audiences/markets it is more effective to select endorsers well-known for that very specific audience rather than opting for overall celebrities not known for the specific group.

**Leveraging Athlete Familiarity:** The role that familiarity with athletes plays in shaping the consumer's perception regarding the brand image is of high importance. A suggested strategy for brands is to leverage athletes who are well-recognised, with a strong personal brand, in order to effectively target a specific audience. In the case of sports with lower popularity, this is even more important, since the maximum effectiveness can be reached by targeting a specific audience with a celebrity endorser precisely selected for them. The reason for this is that with these sports, the overall audience can be smaller compared to football. However, the engagement with and following the sport is stronger, making it possible for brands to build strong brand loyalty and consumer trust by engaging well-known and trusted athletes specifically for them.

## **Academic implications**

### **Contribution to Endorsement Literature:**

Contributions by this research to the endorsement literature can be selected into three main areas. Firstly, it contributes to the existing literature by comparative analysis of endorsement effectiveness regarding football and sports climbing. Secondly, findings provided by the study show how the status of an athlete, being active or retired, and the popularity of a sport can affect brand image. Lastly, this research fills a rather ill-studied gap in the literature by examining the area of sports climbing. The combination of these contributions offers a new perspective on endorsement strategies in sports climbing and other niche sports as well.

### **Foundation for Future Research:**

The study's findings open numerous gates for future research, especially regarding sports climbing, but for other sports with lower popularity and niche audiences as well. A possible and interesting area for future studies could be to explore how the growing popularity of sport climbing, impacts the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements over time. Since the popularity

of this sport is growing not only because of the Olympics but also because of its growing presence on social networks, the role of social media in developing the influence of sport climbers can be studied further. These areas could be further investigated, thereby giving a more comprehensive overview of how sport climbing can leverage its unique position in the market to increase brand visibility and consumer engagement.

### **5.3 Limitations and Further Research**

**Implications for Practitioners and Researchers:** The findings of this study suggest that practitioners select their endorsers with the utmost attention, especially when dealing with niche sports, like sports climbing, where while the overall audience is smaller, however, it is highly engaged. It was also crucial to view the endorsers current status and their relationship with the targeted audience. For researchers, this study provides a foundation, by helping to understand the different factors influencing the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements, for future explorations in the area of celebrity endorsement in niche sports and consumer demographics.

**Limitations:** This study, as mentioned, has many contributions, however it is worth mentioning that it also has limitations which I will elaborate on in the following. The sample size for this study was quite small, therefore it can limit the generalizability of the findings. Also, the study was based on self-reported data, which can cause biases such as social desirability or recall bias. The cross-sectional design used also leads to a limitation, since because of it the findings may not be true for how perceptions of brand image evolve over time in response to endorsements, it solely concentrated on a short period of time. Furthermore, the study focused primarily on Instagram as a measure of athlete popularity, possibly overlooking other social media platforms that can influence consumer perceptions differently.

**Recommendations for Future Research:** My recommendations for future research is expanding the sample size for the experiment and viewing more sports and athletes. It would also help to have a more comprehensive overview of other social media platforms examined in order to explore the effect of social media platforms and understand how digital presence affects the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements. Furthermore longitudinal studies would be important in examining how the influence of endorsements on brand image changes over time focusing on athletes' transition from active to retired status. Regarding sports climbing future

research could examine the role of community engagement and athlete-generated content in enhancing brand image, offering deeper insights into how niche sports can leverage endorsements for greater impact.

To sum up this study offers many contributions to academic literature and marketing practice, however there is plenty of opportunity for future research to build on these findings in order to explore the topic of celebrity endorsements on a deeper level.

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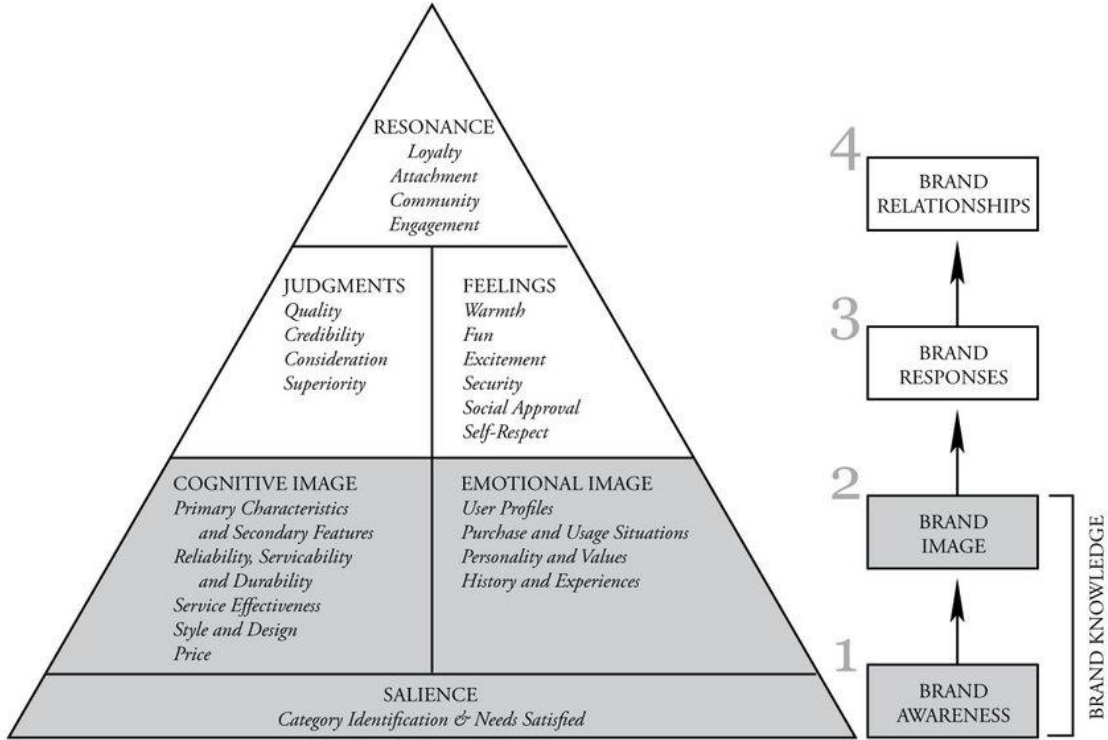
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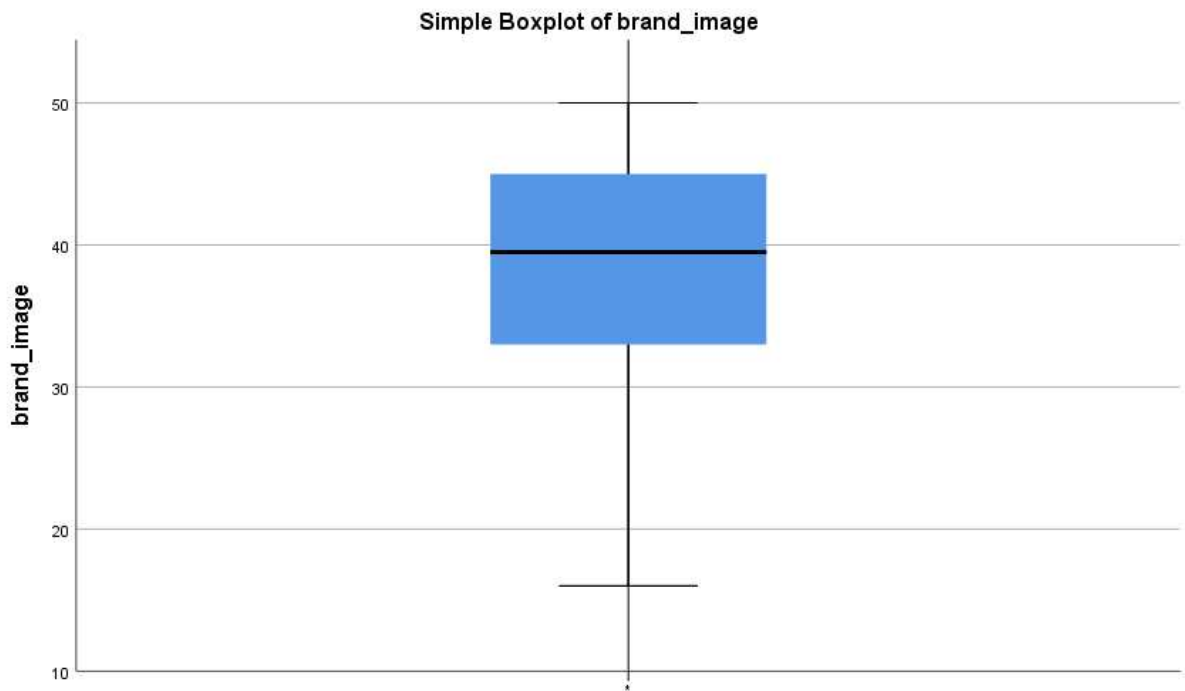
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**APPENDICES**

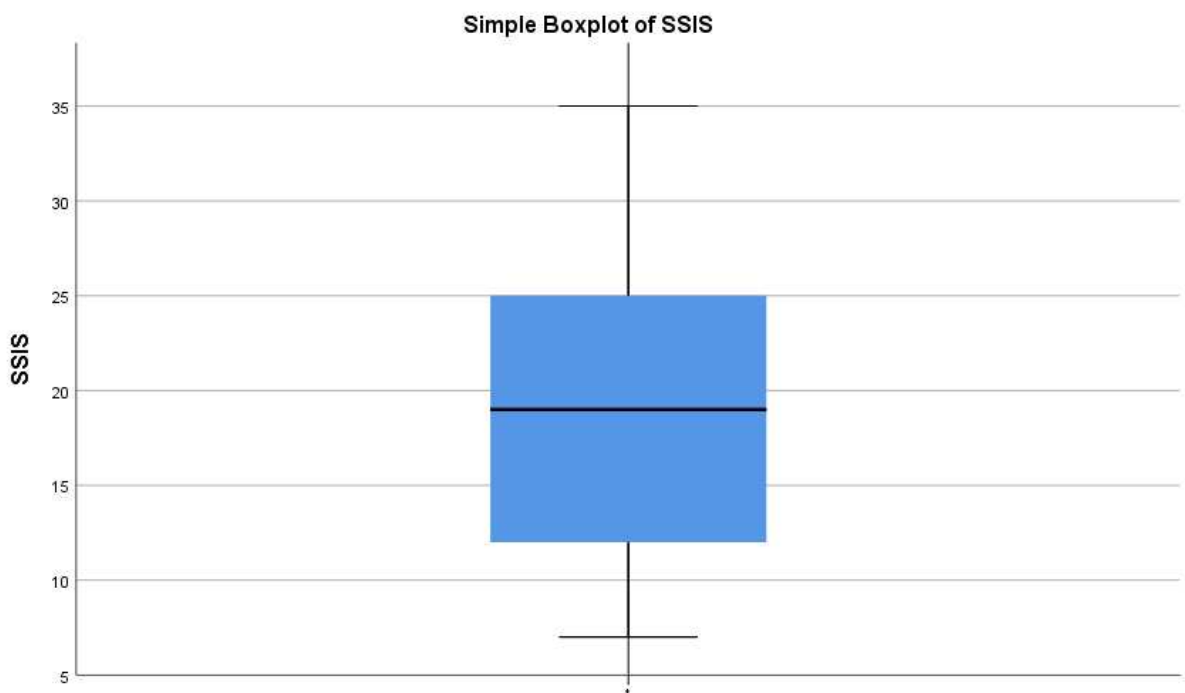
**Appendix:**



*Figure 6: Keller's Brand Equity Pyramid*



*Figure 7: Simple boxplot of Brand Image*



*Figure 8: Simple boxplot of SSIS*

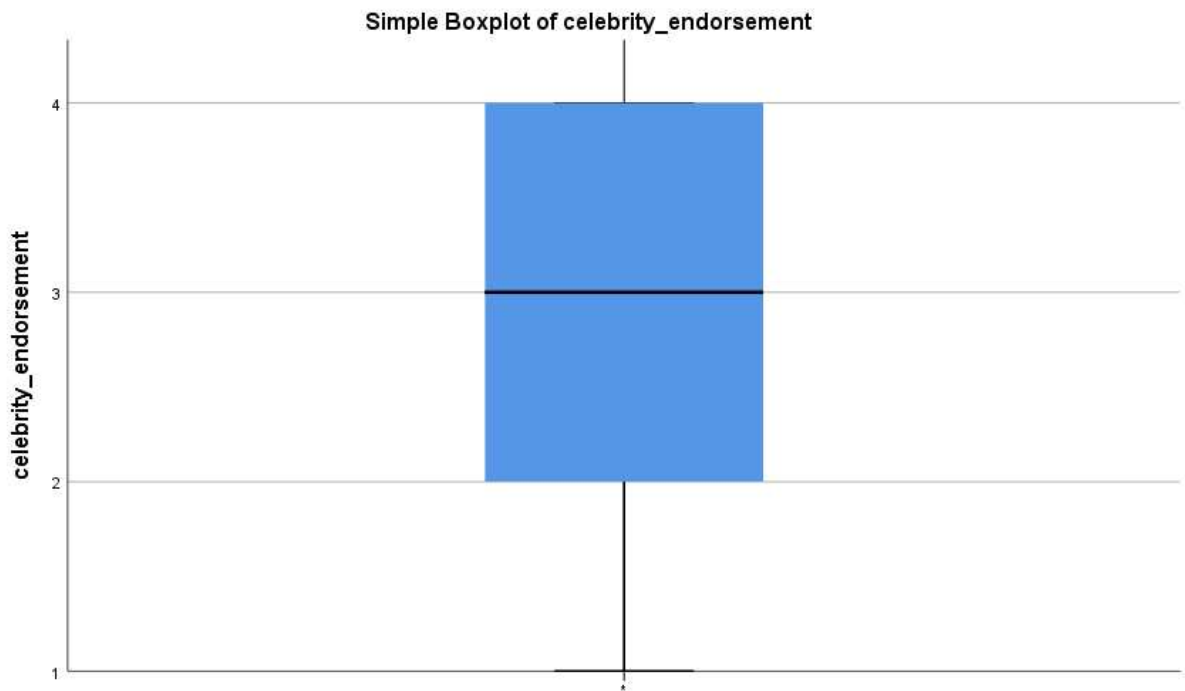


Figure 9: Simple boxplot of Celebrity Endorsement

### Group Statistics

	active_retired	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
celebrity_endorsement	Active	103	2.06	.927	.091
	Retired	62	3.45	.645	.082

Figure 10 Group Statistics

### Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of .
		F	Sig.	t
celebrity_endorsement	Equal variances assumed	2.906	.090	-10.411
	Equal variances not assumed			-11.359

Figure 11 Independent Sample Test

### Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: brand\_image

celebrity_endorsement	familiar_athlete	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
	4	40.15	6.581	47
	5	39.27	7.581	83
	6	37.25	11.311	8
	Total	38.62	7.820	169

Figure 12: Descriptive Statistics - Brand Image

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects								
Dependent Variable: brand_image								
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power <sup>b</sup>
Corrected Model	1241.398 <sup>a</sup>	15	82.760	1.402	.153	.121	21.028	.816
Intercept	109761.903	1	109761.903	1859.217	.000	.924	1859.217	1.000
celebrity_endorsement	197.645	3	65.882	1.116	.345	.021	3.348	.297
familiar_athlete	617.603	4	154.401	2.615	.037	.064	10.461	.723
celebrity_endorsement * familiar_athlete	611.582	8	76.448	1.295	.250	.063	10.359	.580
Error	9032.602	153	59.037					
Total	262278.000	169						
Corrected Total	10274.000	168						

a. R Squared = .121 (Adjusted R Squared = .035)  
b. Computed using alpha = .05

Figure 13: Test of Between-Subject Effects - Brand Image

### Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances<sup>a,b</sup>

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
brand_image	Based on Mean	1.412	15	153	.148
	Based on Median	1.025	15	153	.433
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.025	15	119.394	.435
	Based on trimmed mean	1.400	15	153	.154

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Dependent variable: brand\_image

b. Design: Intercept + celebrity\_endorsement + familiar\_athlete + celebrity\_endorsement \* familiar\_athlete

Figure 14: Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances - Brand Image

## 2. celebrity\_endorsement

### Estimates

Dependent Variable: brand\_image

celebrity_endorsement	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	37.594 <sup>a</sup>	1.781	34.076	41.112
2	38.525 <sup>a</sup>	1.635	35.296	41.755
3	37.993 <sup>a</sup>	1.451	35.126	40.860
4	34.439 <sup>a</sup>	1.685	31.110	37.769

a. Based on modified population marginal mean.

Figure 15: Celebrity Endorsement Estimates

### Univariate Tests

Dependent Variable: brand\_image

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Contrast	217.723	3	72.574	1.229	.301	.024
Error	9032.602	153	59.037			

### Univariate Tests

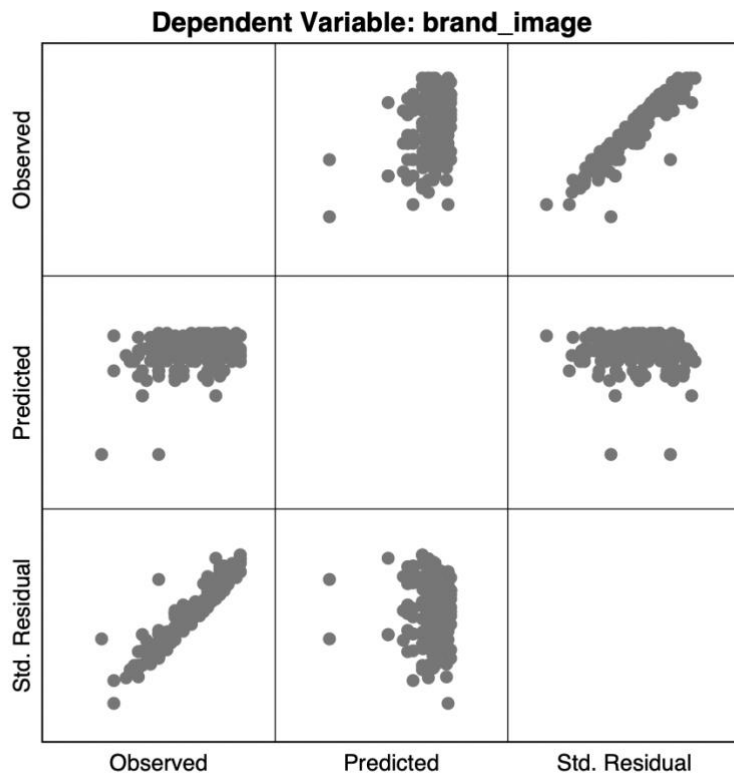
Dependent Variable: brand\_image

	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power <sup>a</sup>
Contrast	3.688	.325
Error		

The F tests the effect of celebrity\_endorsement. This test is based on the linearly independent pairwise comparisons among the estimated marginal means.

a. Computed using alpha = .05

Figure 16: Univariate Tests - Brand Image



Model: Intercept + celebrity\_endorsement + familiar\_athlete + celebrity\_endorsement \* familiar\_athlete

*Figure 17: Scatterplot Matrix with Residuals*

Model : 1  
 Y : brand\_im  
 X : celebrit  
 W : sportpop

Sample  
 Size: 169

\*\*\*\*\*  
 OUTCOME VARIABLE:  
 brand\_im

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.1609	.0259	60.6554	1.4610	3.0000	165.0000	.2271

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	35.6430	7.9797	4.4667	.0000	19.8875	51.3985
celebrit	-1.2144	2.8653	-.4238	.6722	-6.8718	4.4429
sportpop	.2794	.6565	.4256	.6709	-1.0168	1.5757
Int_1	.0943	.2374	.3973	.6917	-.3745	.5631

Product terms key:  
 Int\_1 : celebrit x sportpop

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0009	.1578	1.0000	165.0000	.6917

*Figure 18: Moderation Analysis Summary*

```

*****
Model   : 2
  Y     : brand_im
  X     : celebrit
  W     : sportpop
  Z     : SSIS

Sample
Size: 169

*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
  brand_im

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F      df1      df2      p
    .521    .272    45.910    12.157    5.000    163.000    .000

Model
      coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant  35.657    7.031    5.072    .000    21.774    49.539
celebrit  -2.182    2.537   -.860    .391    -7.191    2.828
sportpop  -.579     .619   -.936    .351    -1.801    .643
Int_1     .178     .218    .817    .415    -.252    .607
SSIS      .505     .197    2.561    .011    .116    .895
Int_2     .011     .065    .176    .861    -.117    .140

```

*Figure 19: Full model test*

## **Focus group interview**

Welcome, everyone, and thank you for participating in this focus group interview. I am Soma Rozsnyói, a master's student at Católica Lisbon School of Business and Economics. This interview aims to develop the stimuli for my Master's Thesis research. So, I would like to gather your insights and feedback on a set of images that I collected.

We'll be going through a series of images. I'll ask you to share your impressions and thoughts on them and the overall impact of these images. Feel free to discuss openly; there are no right or wrong answers here.

All your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. This session will be about 20 minutes long. If you have questions or need clarification, please don't hesitate to ask.

Do you give your consent to record the session?

Q1.1: Checking these three pictures, what do you think of each person? Do they look like sports climbers to you? Do you recognize any of them?

Q1.2: Which of these three athletes do you think, or feel is the most recognizable sport climber? Please explain your choice and rank the athletes from the most recognizable to the least recognizable.

Q1.3 (manipulation) Do you think that these athletes are active (still competing) sports climbers?



*Image 1: Active sport climber 1*



*Image 2: Active sport climber 2*



*Image 3: Active sport climber 3*

Q2.1: Checking these three pictures, what do you think of each person? Do they look like sports climbers to you? Do you recognize any of them?

Q2.2: Which of these three athletes do you think, or feel is the most recognizable sports climber? Please explain your choice and rank the athletes from the most recognizable to the least recognizable.

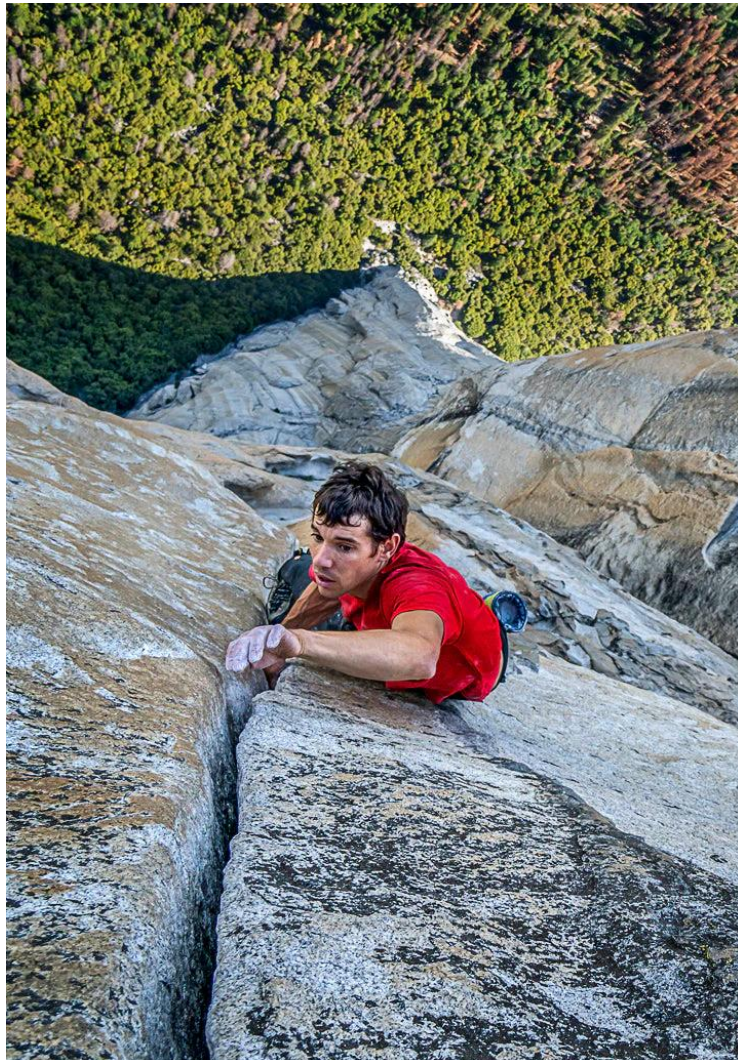
Q2.3 (manipulation) Do you think that these athletes are retired (not competing anymore) sports climbers?



*Image7: Retired sports climber 1*



*Image 8: Retired sports climber 2*



*Image 9: Retired sports climber 3*

Q3.1: Checking these three pictures, what do you think of each person? Do they look like football players to you? Do you recognize any of them?

Q3.2: Which of these three athletes do you think, or feel is the most recognizable football player? Please explain your choice and rank the athletes from the most recognizable to the least recognizable.

Q3.3 (manipulation) Do you think that these athletes are active (still competing) football players?



*Image 4: Active football player 1*



*Image 5: Active football player 2*



*Image 6: Active football player 3*

Q4.1: Checking these three pictures, what do you think of each person? Do they look like football players to you? Do you recognize any of them?

Q4.2: Which of these three athletes do you think, or feel is the most recognizable football player? Please explain your choice and rank the athletes from the most recognizable to the least recognizable.

Q4.3 (manipulation) Do you think that these athletes are retired (not competing anymore) football players?



*Image 10: Retired football player 1*



*Image 11: Retired football player 2*



*Image 12: Retired football player 3*

In the next section, I will show you different pictures of sports brands. Please choose the one that is most appealing to you. Please discuss why your chosen one is the most appealing to you. Please rank the pictures from the most appealing to the least appealing.

How do the slogans align with your perception of the athletes shown earlier?



*Image 13: Adidas advert 1*



*Image 14: Adidas advert 2*



*Image 15: Adidas advert 3*

Thank you very much for your time and input today. I appreciate your help with my research!

**Results:**

There were five participants in the focus group interview. The participants included both females and males, ranging in age from young (18-30) to older (40-60).

The results are summarized as follows:

	Most recognizable by ranking	Manipulation question pass/fail
Active sport climber	Adam Ondra	Pass
Retired sport climber	Magnus Midtbø	Pass
Active football player	Lionel Messi	Pass
Retired football player	David Beckham	Pass

Most appealing slogan: Impossible is nothing (*Image 15: Adidas advert 3*)

**Survey**

**Survey Flow**

<b>Block: Default Question Block (1 Question)</b>
<b>BlockRandomizer: 1 -</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standard: Active sports climber (11 Questions)</li> <li>Standard: Active football player (11 Questions)</li> <li>Standard: Retired sports climber (11 Questions)</li> <li>Standard: Retired football player (11 Questions)</li> </ul>
<b>Block: Demographics (4 Questions)</b>

Introduction Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey, which is part of my Master's Thesis work at Católica Lisbon School of Business and Economics.

You will be shown images of athletes and asked to evaluate them through a series of questions. The survey should take about 5-7 minutes to complete. Participation is entirely voluntary, and your answers will be kept anonymous and confidential. This survey is designed to be taken only once.

If you have any questions or require additional information about this survey, please feel free to reach out to me at  
s-srozsnyoi@ucp.pt.

Thank you in advance for your time and valuable insights!

Best regards,

Soma Rozsnyói

End of Block: Default Question Block

---

Q1/Q9/Q20/Q31 Do you do any sports?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

*Skip To: End of Survey If Do you do any sports? = No*

Q2/Q10/Q21/Q32 You will now see an advert of an athlete and based on that please answer the following questions

---



*Figure 23: Stimuli 1 (Adam Ondra)*



*Figure 22: Stimuli 2 (Lionel Messi)*



*Figure 20: Stimuli 3 (Magnus Mitdbo)*



*Figure 21: Stimuli 4 (David Beckham)*

Q12/Q23/Q34 How familiar are you with the athlete in the advert? (1 = Not very familiar, 5 = Very familiar)

1 (1)

2 (2)

3 (3)

4 (4)

5 (5)

*Skip To: End of Survey If How familiar are you with the athlete in the advert? (1 = Not very familiar, 5 = Very familiar) = 1*

---

Q13/Q24/Q35 How knowledgeable are you about the athlete in the advert? (1 = Not very knowledgeable, 5 = Very knowledgeable)

1 (1)

2 (2)

3 (3)

4 (4)

5 (5)

Q14/Q25/Q36 How much do you like watching the athlete in the advert? (1 = Dislike very much, 5 = Like very much)

1 (1)

2 (2)

3 (3)

4 (4)

5 (5)

Q4/Q15/Q26/37 Please indicate your agreement with the following statements about your relationship with the athlete in the advert, where 1 = Low identification and 5 = High identification.

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)
1) It is important to me that this athlete wins in competitions. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2) I consider myself a strong fan of this athlete. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3) My friends also recognize me as a fan of this athlete. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4) I actively follow this athlete's activities on social media during the sports season. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5) Being a fan of this athlete is an important part of my identity. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6) I have strong negative feelings towards this athlete's biggest competitors. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7) I frequently display items or wear apparel that shows my support for this athlete. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q5/Q16/Q27/Q38 Below are statements regarding the brand (Adidas) endorsed by the athlete in the advert. For each statement, please indicate your level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)
1) This brand offers high-quality products (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2) The products from this brand are reliable and well-made. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3) This brand consistently meets my expectations. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4) This brand is innovative and forward-thinking. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5) This brand is trustworthy and dependable. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6) This brand evokes positive emotions when I think about it. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7) This brand stands out distinctly from its competitors. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8) I would choose this brand over any other, even if they are similar. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9) I see myself as a loyal customer of this brand. (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10) This brand offers products that are good value for the money. (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Page Break

Q6/Q17/Q28/Q39

Do you agree that the person in the advert is a climber/ football player?

Yes (9)

No (10)

---

Q7/Q18/Q29/Q40 How would you classify the status of the athlete shown in the advertisement?

Active (still participating at competitions) (1)

Retired (does not participating at competitions anymore) (2)

Not sure (3)

---

Q8/Q19/Q30/Q41 Was the brand (Adidas) shown in the image related to sports equipment?

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

#### Start of Block: Demographics

Q42 How old are you?

Under 18 (1)

18 - 60 (2)

Over 60 (3)

---

Q43 Gender

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Q44 Education

- No degree (7)
- High school graduate (1)
- College degree (2)
- Bachelor (3)
- Master (4)
- MBA (5)
- Doctorate (6)

Q45 Nationality

▼ Afghanistan (1) ... Zimbabwe (1357)

**End of Block: Demographics**

**End of Survey**