

## **The Use Of Celebrity Athletes As Endorsers: Views Of The New Zealand General Public**

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### **Abstract**

New Zealand companies have a long history of using professional athletes as endorsers in their promotional campaigns. Celebrity endorsement literature suggests transfer of positive image between the celebrity/athlete and product, service or cause endorsed.

The purpose of this research was to assist sport marketing managers and advertising agencies in matching athletes with products. Following on from athlete endorsement research conducted with tertiary education students (Garland and Ferkins, 2003), the views of the New Zealand general public relative to athlete endorsement were solicited. Ohanian's (1990) 15 item source-credibility scale and the constant-sum scale were used to measure potential 'endorsement fit' for four New Zealand sporting personalities: Bernice Mene (retired captain - national netball team); Sarah Ulmer (2004 Olympic Gold Medallist, cycling); Justin Marshall (All Black rugby – most capped halfback); and Stephen Fleming (captain, national cricket team). The Ohanian scale was used to test each athlete's credibility as endorser of a sports drink, with the constant sum scale used to test their 'endorsement fit' for a sports drink, bottled water, deodorant, honey and a bank account.

Overall, the female athletes scored best on both scales and for all products except the bank account, making them good 'all rounders' for product endorsements. Stephen Fleming and Bernice Mene, both team captains received comparable scores for endorsement of bank accounts, suggesting perhaps a general public perception of their leadership and authority.

Keywords: athlete, endorsement, advertising

### **Celebrity and Celebrity Athlete Endorsement**

Celebrity and celebrity athlete endorsements have long attracted the interest of practitioners, students and researchers (Brooks and Harris, 1998). For this paper, a celebrity athlete endorser is a publicly recognised sports star who uses that public recognition to help another (usually a corporate client) sell or bolster the image of specific goods and services.

Celebrities and celebrity athletes provide benefits that unknown endorsers cannot. Celebrities 'cut through' advertising clutter, hold viewer attention (Charbonneau and Garland, 2005) and transfer positive qualities such as physical attractiveness and likeability to the brand (Ohanian, 1990). They contribute to brand name recognition/recall and assist in the development of credible, distinct brand personalities (Erdogan and Kitchen, 1998). Athletes provide particularly compelling endorsements for products that have contributed to their sporting performance and success (Dyson and Turco, 1997; Stone, Joseph and Jones, 2003).

However, with these benefits come risks. Increased celebrity attention may lead to brand overshadowing (Erdogan and Kitchen, 1998). Controversy involving the endorser can lead to corporate embarrassment and transfer of negative attitudes to the brand. (Till, 2001;











