

Athlete Endorsements: They Cannot Hurt, Can They?

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Abstract

Athlete endorsements are a commonly used strategy to leverage a brand's image, awareness, or reputation. Apart from sports-related products, athletes – admired for their health – most frequently promote food and beverages with the majority of endorsements for energy-dense, nutrient-poor (EDNP) products. Despite this mismatch, previous research found either positive or no effects of athlete endorsements on EDNPs. We argue that consumers' inability to judge the nutritional value of EDNPs caused these results. Using data from an online experiment we show that for an unknown unhealthy product depicting a directive nutrition label, athlete endorsements can have a significant negative impact on product perceptions and purchase intentions and that this effect is caused by attribution of extrinsic motives to the endorser. Our findings have important implications for advertisers, endorsers and public policy makers.

Keywords: *Athlete Endorser; Match-Up; Directional Nutrition Labels*

Track: Advertising & Marketing Communications