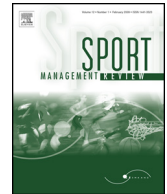




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Can winning take care of everything? A longitudinal assessment of post-transgression actions on repairing trust in an athlete endorser

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ABSTRACT

A celebrity athlete's transgression damages the public's trust in that celebrity. However, little is known about whether demonstrating an outstanding performance after the transgression mitigates the negative consequence of that transgression. It also remains unexplored whether engaging in reparation can restore consumer trust and generate forgiveness. Taking a longitudinal approach, we found that post-transgression performance slightly increased competence-based trust but had no impact on increasing integrity-based trust and forgiveness. However, post-transgression reparation efforts enhanced both integrity-based trust and forgiveness over time. Findings also suggest that performance has little impact on generating forgiveness, countering the popular notion that winning takes care of everything.

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"Winning takes care of everything."

A quote in Nike's ad featuring Tiger Woods when he regained the No. 1 ranking in the world after his extramarital scandal.

1. Introduction

Athlete endorsement is a popular marketing communication strategy that benefits brands. Among various public figures, athletes are perceived to be particularly influential in affecting positive word-of-mouth about a brand and increasing brand loyalty (Bush, Martin, & Bush, 2004; Hsu & McDonald, 2002). However, brands endorsed by athletes face potential risks caused by unexpected scandals or misbehavior of an athlete. Celebrity athletes' immoral actions draw significant media attention and cause managerial dilemmas for brands sponsoring those athletes. Transgressions can damage public trust in celebrity athletes and thus negatively impact brands associated with endorsers.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that sport fans tend to forgive disgraced celebrity athletes and continue to support them. When Tiger Woods reclaimed the number one ranking after his extramarital affairs, Nike, a long-time sponsor of the golfer, launched an ad campaign using Woods' quote 'Winning takes care of everything' as the tagline. Although the campaign drew

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much criticism (Caplan & Igel, 2013), Woods still continues to be one of the world's highest-paid athletes, with numerous endorsement deals (Badenhausen, 2014). Further, when Lance Armstrong was banned for life from cycling and had been stripped of all seven titles in the Tour de France due to his doping scandal, he lost his major endorsement deal with Nike and the chairmanship of the cancer charity (i.e., Livestrong Foundation) he founded. The doping scandal had a devastating impact on his public image and took away lucrative endorsement deals. From a brand manager and an athlete agency's standpoint, one would wonder if there is any effective strategy to regain consumer trust and bounce back from those woes. If retiring from the sport is not an option, what should disgraced athletes do to regain consumer trust and improve their marketability? Would making up through performance (doing well) be a better strategy than making up through engaging in community services (doing good)? Answers to these questions can provide useful practical insights for athletes, brand managers, and agencies representing those athletes who need strategic plans for emerging from turmoil. However, to the best of our knowledge, no previous studies have provided empirical evidence on the effectiveness of post-scandal actions for restoring consumer trust and forgiveness. More specifically, very little is understood about which type of post-scandal action (doing good vs. doing well) is more effective in restoring consumer trust and forgiveness. Our research attempts to provide empirical evidence to answer these questions by employing an experimental approach to an actual doping case in men's professional tennis (i.e., ATP Tour tennis player). In addition, in order to track how consumers' trust evaluations and forgiveness change over time, we implemented a longitudinal approach in Study 2 to evaluate consumer perceptions during a four-week period.

Increasing attention has been paid to athlete transgressions and their implications from various perspectives. For instance, from a PR perspective, some scholars have examined the impact of athletes' response types (e.g., denial, apology, etc.) on athlete evaluations (e.g., Lee, Bang, & Lee, 2013; Meng & Pan, 2013). Recently, Sato, Ko, Park, and Tao (2015) found that sport consumers expect athletes involved in doping scandals to engage in corrective actions (e.g., philanthropic activities), make sincere apologies, or promise to win more—common strategies displayed by disgraced athletes. While the study identified various strategies athletes can take, little is known about whether specific post-transgression actions help repair trust over time in the aftermath of an athlete's transgression. Therefore, our research adds to the literature by providing empirical evidence regarding how consumers' perceptions change over time as a function of an athlete's post-scandal actions.

We also aim to extend the literature by incorporating a two-dimensional trust construct. Research on interpersonal trust suggests that there are two dimensions of trust: competence-based and integrity-based (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004). Previous research has identified that these dimensions represent two of the most important qualities for determining trustworthiness (e.g., Cook & Wall, 1980; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Schindler & Thomas, 1993). Recent studies on celebrity scandal and moral judgment also highlight that consumers use performance- and morality-related judgments to evaluate the celebrity (Bhattacharjee, Berman, & Reed, 2013; Lee & Kwak, 2015; Lee, Kwak, & Moore, 2015). Therefore, our research adds to the growing body of literature on athlete scandals by offering longitudinal evidence for how two specific types of post-scandal behaviors (doing good vs. doing well) help restore each dimension of trust and forgiveness over time. Taking a two-dimensional trust evaluation approach (Kim et al., 2004), our study attempts to be one of the first to examine the impact of specific post-transgression behaviors on mitigating negative consequences from a transgression. The study also considers whether engaging in specific actions after a transgression repairs competence-based and integrity-based trust more effectively than not taking any action over the same period of time. Findings from this study have managerial implications for brand managers and agencies representing those athletes who still need to manage and market their brands and clients. Athletes can also benefit from this study by understanding the comparative effects of performance and reparative actions on regaining consumer trust and forgiveness. Overall, the current study contributes to the athlete endorsement literature by examining whether *doing well* (demonstrating an outstanding performance) vs. *doing good* (engaging in prosocial activities) induces positive changes in consumers' evaluations of the transgressor over time. This research first provides evidence on the damaging effect of a transgression on consumers' judgments of an athlete's trustworthiness (Study 1). In Study 2, we examine how damaged trust can be repaired as a function of time, comparing different types of post-transgression behaviors over a four-week period.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Athlete transgression and consumer response

People respond viscerally to acts that violate their moral sensibilities (Ditto, Pizarro, & Tannenbaum, 2009). Such intuitive reactions prompt individuals to engage in moral reasoning to make moral judgments about whether a certain act or person is ethically right or wrong (Ditto et al., 2009; Greene & Haidt, 2002). From a moral judgment perspective, consumer responses to a celebrity athlete endorser's immoral act are multifaceted and primarily depend on the type of moral reasoning strategy individuals activate when processing information about the scandal (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013; Lee & Kwak, 2015; Lee et al., 2015). Immoral actions that violate one's moral sensibility motivate him or her to engage in certain moral reasoning processes to make judgments about the wrongdoer (Ditto et al., 2009; Greene & Haidt, 2002).

Research on moral judgments has shown that people use different types of moral reasoning processes—*moral rationalization*, *moral decoupling*, and *moral coupling*—to make judgments about a disgraced public figure. For instance, moral disengagement processes such as moral decoupling and rationalization allow consumers to maintain their support for an immoral actor. While moral rationalization motivates consumers to justify the action and the wrongdoer, moral decoupling

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