



Bryant University

HONORS THESIS

The Stereotypical Perception of a Spokesperson in a Sports Advertisement

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ABSTRACT

This experimental study examines the gender role of a spokesperson and a type of sports in the "Match-Up Hypothesis." Two studies were conducted to test the effectiveness of sports advertisements for a gym membership: in a 2x2x2 experiment, the gender of the spokesperson, a type of gender dominate sport, and the gender of the consumer are manipulated. Results indicated that females have a higher expectation of improvement when the gender of the endorser does not match the sport (Breaking the Glass Ceiling Effect). In contrast, males have a higher expectation of improvement when the gender matches the sport (Match-Up Hypothesis).

INTRODUCTION

In the 2018-2019 sports season, it was recorded that 3.4 million girls and 4.5 million boys participated in high school sports (Burtka. 2020). The number of girls playing sports to boys is lower but has been steadily increasing over the years. The national average of percentage of girls participating in sports in their respective state is 42.7%. In the United States, 29 of the states (58%) are above the national average for the number of girls participating in sports. Only 5 states (10%) have less than 40% participation of females in sports. This has improved since 2007-2008, when there were 12 states (24%) lower than 40% participation (Cook. 2019).

The trend of girls increasing their level of sports participation is not just unique to the United States, it is a global trend. In Australia, the increase seen in the number of girls playing Cricket is so dramatic, that there are not enough locker rooms and playing fields to meet the demand fueled by these young female athletes (Hinds. 2020). Sports has increasingly become a prominent activity for girls.

More than 40% of all athletes are female, however they get less than 10% of media coverage when it comes to sports (“See”). The inequality of representation is also seen in advertisements along with media coverage of games. With the increase in girls and women participating in sports, sports companies need to change the way they advertise towards females. Companies have the possibility to profit heavily off this emerging market of female athletes and using female athletes in their advertising is a great way for this market to connect with the brand, and possibly increase purchase intention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Till and Busler. (2000) investigated the Associative Learning Theory. This theory speaks to the connection one makes based on how two things fit together or are similar in one’s brain based on multiple elements. When two objects or concepts or a combination of the two are together frequently, they become part of each other’s association set, creating a “fit” in our brain. This association set process speaks to the power of endorsers have in advertisements.

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When endorsers and a product are together enough an association between the two, and the feelings about the product and the endorser become intertwined (Till and Busler. 2000).

Kamins. (1990) explored the Match-Up Hypothesis theory in his study. The study suggested that endorsers are the most effective when there is a “fit” between them and the product. The study looked at the fit between the attractiveness of a product and the attractiveness of the celebrity endorser. They study found that spokesperson credibility, and attitude towards the advertisement were higher when an attractive celebrity endorsed a product tied to attractiveness. These measures are higher because of the celebrity endorser and product fit. On the flip side, when the advertisement was for a product not related to attractiveness then the attractiveness of the celebrity did not have an impact on feelings towards the product, advertisement, or spokesperson (Kamins. 1990). Till and Busler. (2000) found that this “fit” could be various things such as attractiveness, expertise, or another factor that tie the endorser to the product (Till and Busler. 2000).

Park and Lin. (2020) also explored the Match-Up Hypothesis Theory and Associative Learning Theory with celebrities. Their study found that attractiveness and source credibility increase when there is a fit between the product and the celebrity endorser. When credibility increases the advertisement becomes more effective. When the fit between celebrity endorser and the product was low, credibility and attractiveness decreased (Park and Lin. 2020). Kim and Na. (2007) looked at the effects of sports celebrities endorsing products. The study concluded products received a higher evaluation when there was a congruent fit between the sports celebrity endorser and the product (Kim and Na. 2007).

Antecedents

Females are not placed in sports advertisements as much as male athletes. The study conducted by Grau, et al. (2007) put numbers to this statement. This study looked at six magazines and tried to identify how female athletes were represented in magazines compared to male athletes. In 169 magazine sports advertisements 91.7% (155 ads) of the advertisements contained a male athlete (either by themselves or accompanied by a female athlete) whereas only 12.4% (21 ads) of the advertisements had female athletes (either by themselves or accompanied by a male athlete). To be more specific to advertisements

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containing just a male athlete or just a female athlete, 9.2% (14 ads) only had female athletes, whereas 87.6% (148 ads) only showed male athletes (Grau, et al, 2007).

Rasmussen, et al. (2021) explored how gender is represented in Nike advertisements. Nike commercials were examined, and it was found that the brand perpetuated the mindset that sports are for males. Out of the 675 athletes in the sampled commercials, only 35% were female. 92% of the advertisements showed athletes in gender appropriate sports. To add to this, 6% of the sports were considered “only female sports” and females were shown in masculine sports 20% of the time compared to strictly female sports 14% of the time. Males were shown in “female” sports only 1% of the time. The study also looked at basketball advertisements for Nike. Basketball is thought of as a masculine sport, however, there is also a female professional league. In the study, 19 NBA players were shown and only 4 WNBA players were shown (Rasmussen, et al. 2021). There is clearly an underrepresentation of females in sports marketing, but females’ makeup more than 40% of all athletes (“See”).

Marketers have spent most of history using male athletes as their celebrity endorsers. This has worked to capture young boys' interest because they can identify with these endorsers. However, young girls have now emerged as an attractive market in the athletic industry due their increase in participation. Companies may consider creating a female specific focus for their strategy when marketing sports clothes and equipment if they want to capture the female interest. Social norms and expectations play into capturing the interest of these young female athletes. Fisher and Laurette. (2005) study delve into this idea of social pressures and looks at how gender affects responses to emotional advertising. It was found when males and females viewed a low agency advertisement privately there was not much difference between their responses. However, when males viewed the advertisement with other male’s present, their viewing pleasure and agency responses were affected, resulting in lower pleasure and response. Females, on the other hand, did not have a change in their level of pleasure and agency response when other females were present. (Fisher and Laurette. 2005). The differences found between the genders has implications for marketers when creating their advertisements. Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran. (1991), also found that males and females decode messages differently. The study found that males use more schemas when

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understanding messages and advertisements, whereas females are more detailed orientated (Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran. 1991).

Kim et al. (2019) built on the ideology of men decoding using heuristics, being more external, and females focusing more on comprehensive parts and internal feelings. The study found that men rely more on star ratings (heuristic cues) when looking at the likelihood to recommend a film compared to females (Kim, et al. 2019). Based on this, marketers need to take gender differences into account when creating their advertisements, even sports advertisements.

The idea of a particular sport being for men or women is a mindset that is still around, even after all the barriers women have broken in this industry. Alley and Hicks. (2005) defines male sports as one with high contact, and female sports one that emphasize the “beauty line” and is usually an individual sport. This mindset about sports is thought to be solidified in grade school in a study that Corbin and Nix. (1970) conducted. They found that the characteristics of strength, power, and speed, were for male activities rather than female ones, creating a superior mindset around male athletics. Alley and Hicks. (2005) wanted to find out if an athlete would be perceived as more masculine if they played a masculine sport (karate) or more feminine if they engaged in a feminine sport (ballet). Alley and Hicks (2005) used tennis as a gender-neutral sport. Their findings indicated that females were always seen as more feminine no matter what sport they played. However, males were seen as more feminine when they participated in ballet and females were seen as more masculine when they were doing karate.

Cuneen et al, (1999) explored the impact of male and female endorsers in product point of purchase advertising. The study provided different ways in which the spokesperson was pictured in the advertisement, and then the subjects would comment on their feelings of involvement with the sport and how those feelings related to purchases intention. The study researched how male and female sports were looked upon. They cited E. Metheny (1965) and Hall’s (1985) work on female and male sports and the definitions around them. They discovered that there are social sanctions put on each gender, and these sanctions bleed into sports. There were three categories for females: "generally acceptable" (e.g., golf, archery,

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figure skating), "generally not acceptable" (e.g., shot putting, discus throw, javelin throw), and "categorically unacceptable" (e.g., wrestling, judo, boxing). Cuneen et al, (1999) study questioned shoppers as they were leaving the store, with data collectors in the store at the point of purchase advertising. The study found that consumers like advertisements more when they are related directly to their needs. The advertisements that fit these criteria usually had traditional stereotypes and featured activities categorized as "gender appropriate" (Cuneen, et al. 1999).

Cunningham et al. (2007) looked at spokesperson level of influence based on attractiveness and expertise, on a women's tennis event, and subjects' intention to buy tickets. The study called upon the Associative Learning Theory and the Match-Up Hypothesis Theory. They thought that using a tennis player advertising for a tennis event would call on the Associative Learning Theory, because a tennis player and a tennis match should be in one's same association set, as their skill would create a positive association with the tennis event. The Match-Up Hypothesis was used because a tennis player and a tennis match would be in the same schema. The results showed in the traditionally feminine sporting event of tennis, the more attractive and expert the endorser is, the greater effect they will have on the consumer. They also found that if the endorser is less of an expert but seen as highly attractive, they will still have effects on the consumer (Cunningham et al. 2007).

Cunningham, et al. (2011) looked at the effectiveness of female athlete endorsers in a "traditionally female" sport and a sport that was categorized as "inappropriate" for females to play. Their findings were in line with the Match-Up Hypothesis as the study found the most important factor for purchase intention was the fit between the product and the athlete. They found the sport played in the advertisement had no impact on purchase intention, just the athlete product fit (Cunningham, et al. 2011).

In this study I will be looking at the effect gender of a spokesperson has in a sports advertisement (measured by expectations about improvements from using the product, attitude towards advertisement, and likelihood to recommend) when the gender of the spokesperson either matches or does not match the stereotypical gender of the sport. The results will be analyzed by looking at male audience responses and female audience

responses. By having these results, sports marketers will more accurately be able to target male and female consumers with their advertisements.

METHODOLOGY

STUDY ONE

The goal of study one is to see if audiences followed the Math-Up Hypothesis Theory when decoding sports advertisements. The subjects in this study will be exposed to different sports advertisements, and their attitudes and perceptions towards the advertisement and spokesperson will be evaluated.

H1a: For male dominate sports (e.g., Ice Hockey), an advertisement featuring a male spokesperson will have higher adv attitude/perception than a female spokesperson.

H1b: For female dominate sports (e.g., Volleyball), an advertisement featuring a female spokesperson will have higher adv attitude/perception than male spokesperson.

Design, Participants, and Procedure

The 228 participants in this study were from a private business school located in the northeastern United States. 122 of the participants were male (54%) and 106 were females. The mean age of the students was 19.5 years old. The data was collected through a survey, that used a 7-point Likert Scale rating system. For study one, a 2 (gender of spokesperson: male vs female) x 2 (gender dominate sport: Ice Hockey male dominate vs Volleyball female dominate) between subject design. The students were given extra credit for completing the survey.

For this study, “Velocity Gym” was created. For Velocity Gym, we created four advertisements: a female silhouette playing Volleyball that said, “Play Like Sarah”, a male silhouette playing Volleyball that said, “Play Like Nathan”, a male silhouette playing Ice Hockey that said, “Play like Nathan”, and a female silhouette playing Ice Hockey that said, “Play Like Sarah”. A logo and slogan for Velocity Gym was designed and placed on the advertisements (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). A silhouette figure was chosen instead of a

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colored image of an athlete because we wanted to control for variables all variables (like race, age, beauty) except for gender. The words “Play Like Nathan” and “Play Like Sarah” so the audience had no doubt that the silhouette was either male or female.

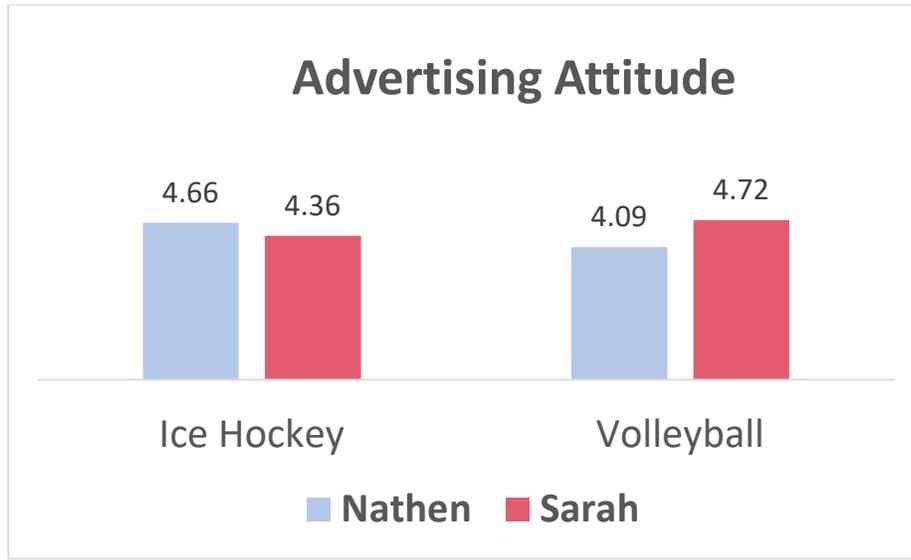
The students sat in front of a computer while they were given instructions. The students were randomly assigned a male sport (Ice Hockey) or a female sport (Volleyball) with either a male spokesperson or a female spokesperson. The ideology behind choosing what sport is considered a “male” and “female” sport was based off the study “Peer Attitudes Towards Adolescents’ Participants in Male and Female Orientated Sports”, conducted by Alley and Hicks (2005). Female sports have an emphasis on the “beauty line” and male sports have high levels of contact. This was how Ice Hockey was chosen for the male dominate sport, and Volleyball was chosen for the female dominate sport.

Before the participant viewed the advertisement, they were asked to rate the importance of an athletic characteristic in the sport they were randomly assigned. Next, they were shown an advertisement for Velocity Gym. After viewing the advertisement, the students then rated (using a 7-point Likert scale) how their attitude toward the advertisement (bad; good, dislike; like, unpleasant; pleasant, uninteresting; interesting, did not enjoy; enjoy) and perception of the spokesperson (unattractive; attractive, unsexy; sexy, unathletic; athletic). Following this rating system, the students then filled out demographic information.

Results

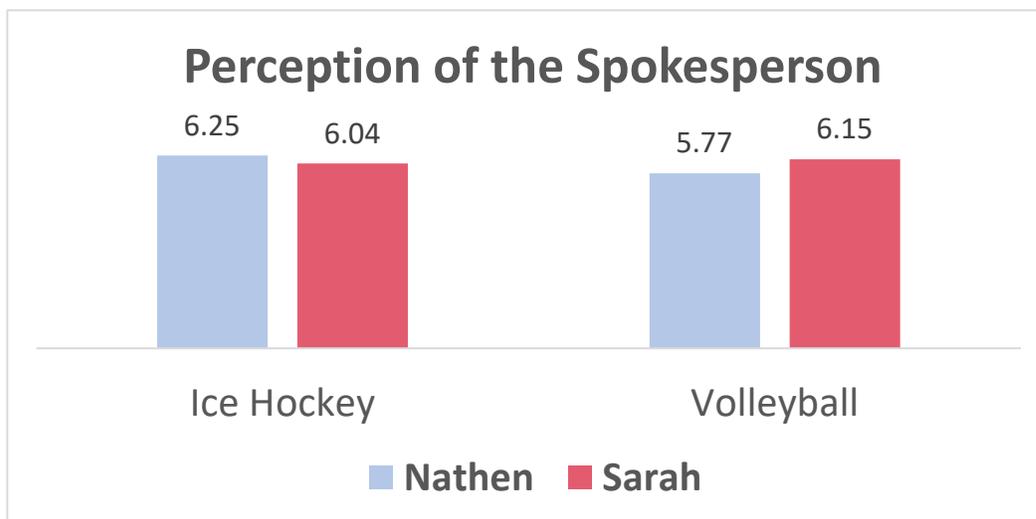
The two-way ANOVA analysis 2 (gender of spokesperson: male vs female) x 2 (gender dominate sport: Ice Hockey male dominate vs Volleyball female dominate) showed a significant interaction, $F(1,228) = 3.975$, $p > 0.047$, towards advertisement attitude. This indicates that when the endorser is in a gender appropriate sport, there is a more positive attitude towards the advertisement. When the endorser is not in the gender appropriate sport, there is less positive attitude towards the advertisement. These findings support H1a and H1b.

Figure 1- Advertising Attitude



The two-way ANOVA analysis 2 (gender of spokesperson: male vs female) x 2 (gender dominate sport: Ice Hockey male dominate vs Volleyball female dominate) showed a significant interaction, $F(1,228) = 3.894$, $p > 0.050$, towards the perception of the advertisement. When the endorser is in a gender appropriate sport, there is a more positive perception towards the advertisement. When the endorser is not in the gender appropriate sport, there is less positive perception towards the advertisement. These findings support H1a and H1b.

Figure Two- Perception of Spokesperson



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Discussion

In study one we tested how audiences react towards gendered sports with either a male or female spokesperson. Both H1a and H1b came to fruition. Audiences prefer when the Match-Up Hypothesis is seen in advertisements.

To test this theory further, I would like to divide the audience into male and female and see how the two genders respond to the Match-Up Hypothesis being in sports advertisements. I would also like to change the female sport that was chosen, to be more comparable to Ice Hockey, and emphasize the ideals of a “female” sport more (emphasizing the beauty line and being an individual sport).

STUDY TWO

The goal of study two is to determine if male audiences follow the Match-Up Hypothesis Theory while decoding sports advertisements, and if female audiences do not follow the Match-Up Hypothesis when decoding sports advertisements. Like study one, the participants will take a survey from a computer, and answer questions based on viewing one of four possible sports advertisements.

H2a: For male’s view, sports and spokesperson will have a Match-Up Hypothesis interaction, however, it will not exist for female consumers.

Design, Participants, and Procedure

The 176 participants in this study were from all over the United States and MTURK was used. 98 of the participants were male (56%) and 78 were females. The mean age of the participants was 33 years. The data was collected through a survey, that used a 7-point Likert Scale rating system. For study two, a 2 (gender of spokesperson: male vs female) x 2 (gender dominate sport: Ice Hockey male dominate vs Figure Skating female dominate) x 2 (audience’s gender: male view vs female view) between subject design. Participants were paid for their responses to the survey.

Velocity Gym was used again as the product that was being advertised. For study two, four advertisements were used: a female silhouette Figure Skating that said, “Play Like Sarah”, a male silhouette Figure Skating that said, “Play Like Nathan”, a male silhouette playing Ice

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Hockey that said, “Play like Nathan”, and a female silhouette playing Ice Hockey that said, “Play Like Sarah”. The same logo and slogan for Velocity Gym was used, as in the first study (Appendix 3). Like study one, a silhouette figure and the slogan with the names was used to control for all variables except for gender.

The participants sat in front of a computer while they were given instructions. For this study the ideology behind choosing what sport is considered a “male” and “female” sport was still based off the study “Peer Attitudes Towards Adolescents’ Participants in Male and Female Orientated Sports”, conducted by Alley and Hicks (2005). For study two a sport was chosen that focused on the “beauty line” and had absolutely no possibility for physical contact. The study commented on the fact that individual sports were more suited for woman than team sports. With all this in mind, Figure Skating was chosen for the female dominate sport, and Ice Hockey remained the male dominate sport. The participants were randomly assigned an advertisement for Velocity Gym, picturing a male sport (Ice Hockey) or a female sport (Figure Skating) with either a male spokesperson or a female spokesperson.

Before the participant viewed the advertisement, they would rate the importance of an athletic characteristic in the sport they were randomly assigned. Next, they were shown an advertisement for Velocity Gym. After viewing the advertisement, the subjects then rated (using a 7-point Likert scale) how they thought Velocity Gym would improve their athletic performance in the areas of speed, endurance, athletic ability, and confidence. Following this rating system, the participants then filled out demographic information.

Results

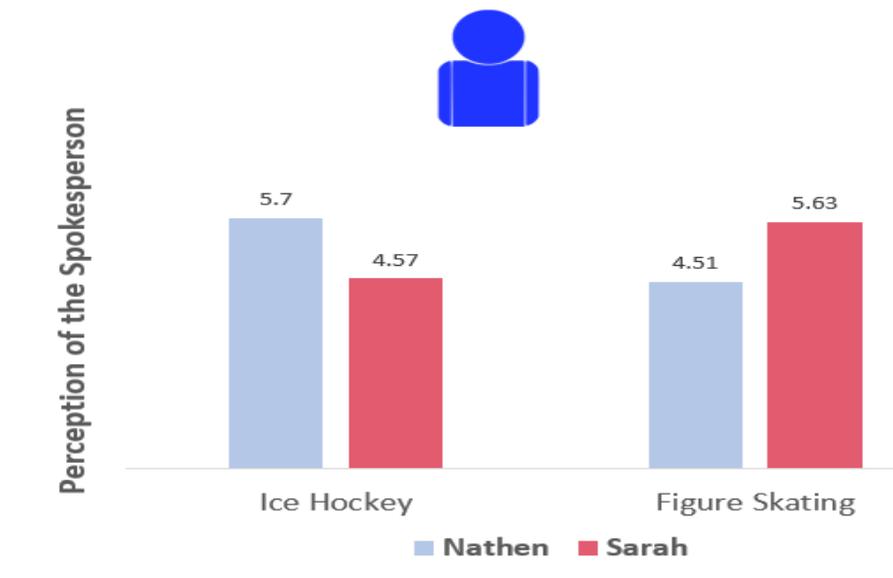
The three groups 2 (gender of spokesperson: male vs female) x 2 (gender dominate sport: Ice Hockey male dominate vs Figure Skating female dominate) x 2 (audience’s gender: male view vs female view) showed a significant three-way interaction, $F(1,173) = 89.654$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that the gender assigned to the sport, and the gender of the spokesperson in the advertisement, affects the expectation men and woman have about the improvement from using Velocity Gym differently.

For males’ audience view, the two-way ANOVA of 2(gender of spokesperson: male vs female) x 2 (gender dominate sport: Ice Hockey male dominate vs Figure Skating female

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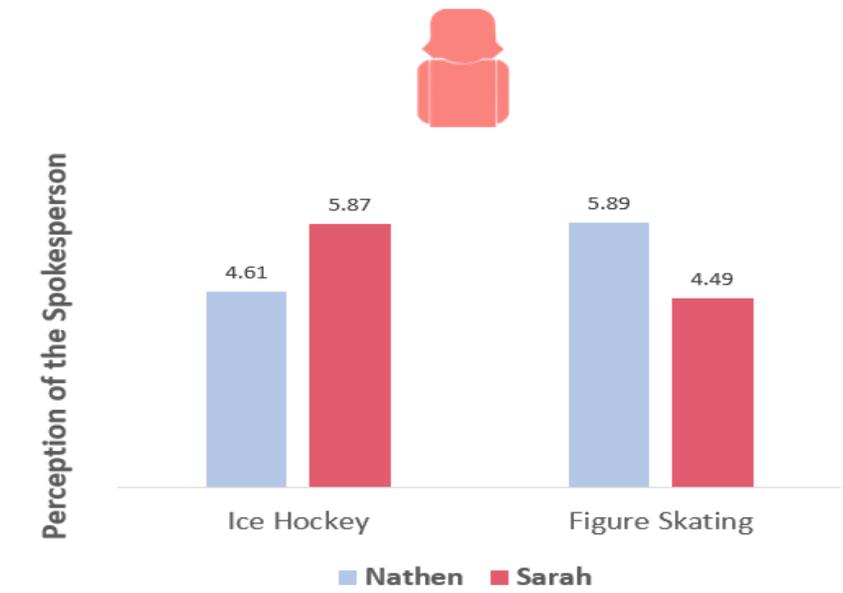
dominate) was significant, $F(1,96) = 31.81, p < 0.001$, regarding expectation of improvement from using Velocity Gym. Males have a higher expectation of improvement from Velocity Gym when the sports gender matches the spokespersons gender. They have a lower expectation on improvement from Velocity Gym spokesperson gender does not match the sports “correct” gender. These findings support H2a.

Figure Three- Male Expected Improvement



For female’s audience view, we see the two-way ANOVA of 2 (gender of spokesperson: male vs female) x 2 (gender dominate sport: Ice Hockey male dominate vs Figure Skating female dominate) was also significant, $F(1,76) = 82.13, p < 0.001$. There is a significant two-way interaction with the gender of the sport and the gender of the spokesperson regarding expectation of improvement from using Velocity Gym. Females have a higher expectation of improvement from Velocity Gym when the gender of the spokesperson does not match the gender of the sports. They have a lower expectation on improvement from Velocity Gym when the gender of the spokesperson matches the gender of the sport. These findings support H2a.

Figure Four- Female Expected Improvement



Discussion

In study two we are testing to see how the different genders react towards gendered sports with either male or female spokesperson. H2a came to fruition in this study. Males' audience view had higher expectations about the improvements Velocity Gym would have on their various athletic abilities when the gender of the sport and the gender of the spokesperson matched. This means that males follow the Match-Up Hypothesis and Associative Learning Theory when decoding advertisements. Females' audience view on the other hand, had higher expectations about improvements from using Velocity Gym when the gender of the sport did not match the gender of the spokesperson. Females are looking for the "Breaking the Glass Ceiling Effect" and appreciate when the advertisement follows this narrative. Breaking the Glass Ceiling refers to crushing social and gender norms that are holding a person back from exceling in different areas of life (Johns. 2013).

After creating hypothesis two and running study two, it was decided to look back at the study one data through the lens of H2a.

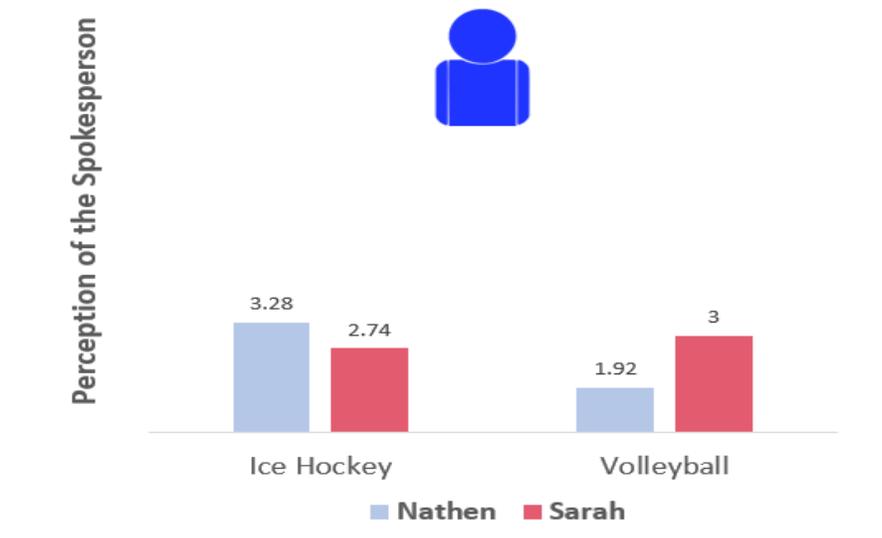
The three groups 2 (gender of spokesperson: male vs female) x 2 (gender dominate sport: Ice Hockey male dominate vs Volleyball female dominate) x 2 (audience's gender: male view vs

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female view) showed a significant three-way interaction, $F(1,228) = 4.095, p > .044$, indicating that the gender assigned to the sport, and the gender of the spokesperson in the advertisement, affects the likelihood men and woman have about recommending Velocity Gym. Males are more likely to recommend Velocity Gym when the advertisement had endorsers in the correct gendered sport (match-up), whereas females were more likely to recommend Velocity Gym when there is a female endorser, no matter the correct gender of the sport.

For male's audience view, the two-way ANOVA of 2 (gender of spokesperson: male vs female) x 2 (gender dominate sport: Ice Hockey male dominate vs Volleyball female dominate) provides a significant two-way interaction, $F(1,122) = 6.748, p < .011$, regarding recommendation of Velocity Gym. Males have a higher likelihood to recommend Velocity Gym when the sports gender matches the spokespersons gender. They have a lower likelihood to recommend Velocity Gym when the spokesperson gender does not match the sports "correct" gender. These findings support H2a.

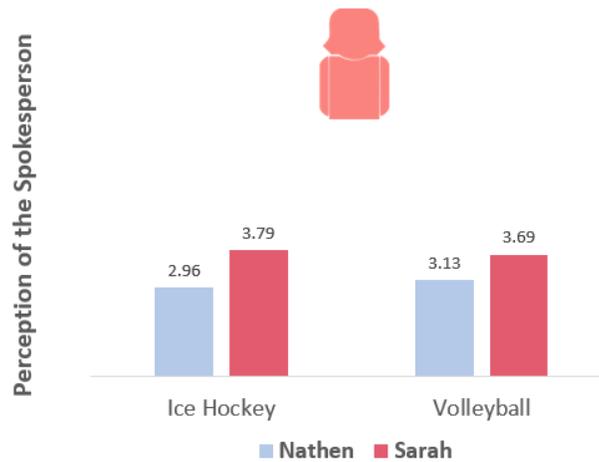
Figure Five- Male Likelihood to Recommend



For female audience view, the two-way ANOVA 2 (gender of spokesperson: male vs female) x 2 (gender dominate sport: Ice Hockey male dominate vs Volleyball female dominate) was not significant, $F(1,106) = 1.46, p < 0.704$. The female audiences had a higher likelihood to

recommend when there was a female endorser with the female sport than when there was a male endorser with the female sport. However, the female audience had a higher likelihood to recommend when there was a female endorser with the male sport, compared to there being a male endorser with the male sport. This means that H2a was partially correct when it came to female audiences' responses.

Figure Six- Female Likelihood to Recommend



H2a was partially supported when using study one data. We find that male audiences have a higher likelihood to recommend when there is a match between the gender of the spokesperson and the gender of the sport. This finding follows the Associative Learning Theory and the Match-Up Hypothesis Theory. Woman audience on the other hand, have a higher likelihood to recommend when there is a female endorser, with the stereotypical gender of the sport not impacting their evaluations. This is seen as another example of Breaking the Glass Ceiling Effect. Woman audiences liked to see females being the spokesperson for sports products, for both male and female sports, supporting the idea of other females breaking social and gender norms by being athletes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING

Through the two studies, it was found that males react better towards advertisements when there is a match-up between the gender of the endorser and the gender of the sport (male sport

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and male endorser, female sport and female endorser). Whereas females react better towards advertisements when there is a Breaking the Glass Ceiling Effect compared to the Match-Up Effect (male sport and female endorser, female sport with male endorser). The male audience findings are consistent with the Associative Learning Theory and the Match-Up Hypothesis Theory, as there is a historical and reinforced link between athletes participating in gender appropriate sports. This lines up with Kim et al. (2019) and her findings of males following more heuristic cues, whereas females look towards internal feelings and comprehensive parts (Kim, et al. 2019). Females like to see boundaries being broken as females have had to break boundaries for generations. Males on the other hand use heuristics when decoding the advertisements, and advertisements are more effective that follow the status quo to fit the heuristics they have learned to follow. These results show companies, especially sports companies, need to tailor advertisements directly at males and females, seeing that a one size fits all advertisement is not going to hit the mark. There is a need for woman in sports advertising for both male and female audiences. Woman endorsers need to be seen in stereotypical woman sports for the best effect for male consumers, and woman need to be breaking the glass ceiling in both stereotypical male and female sports, for female consumers. Sports companies need to target specific gender audiences and create their advertisements accordingly.

CONCLUSIONS

While this study compliments the existing literature before it, such as Kim et al. (2019) and Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran. (1991) stating that males follow heuristic cues while decoding messages, and woman audiences are more critical decoders. This study also adds some meaningful findings to the existing literature. Through study one and study two results, it has found that there is a larger need for female sports endorsers. Male audiences follow the Associative Learning Theory and the Match-Up Hypothesis Theory when decoding sports advertisements. This shows a need for female endorsers when marketing a product to males for a female sport. On the other hand, female audiences do not follow the Associative Learning Theory or the Match-Up Hypothesis Theory, they look for advertisements that Break the Glass Ceiling. This calls for female endorsers to be seen in both male and female sports when advertising products to female audiences.

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Future studies could look at other industries besides the sports industry. There may be other industries that can benefit from having male audience advertisements follow the Associative Learning Theory and the Match-Up Hypothesis Theory, whereas females look for the Breaking the Glass Ceiling Effect.

FIGURES

Figure 1: Advertising Attitude

Study One Gender of Endorser X Gender of Sport

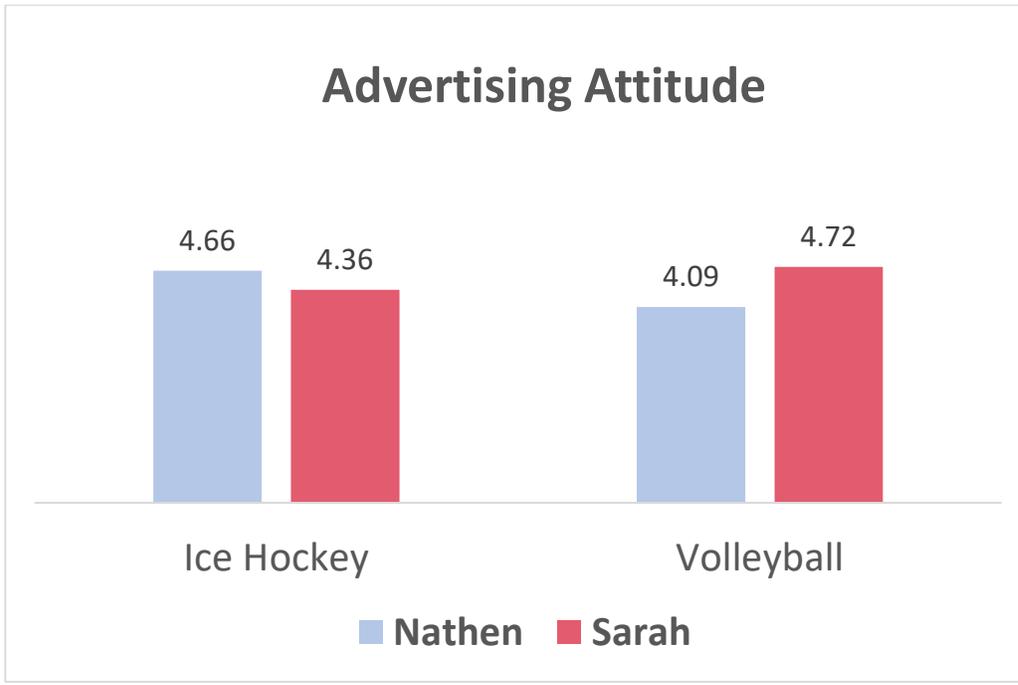
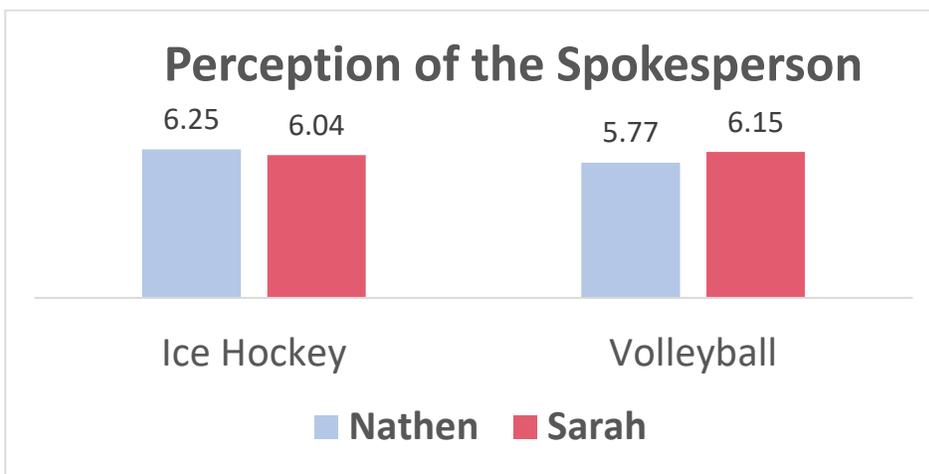


Figure 2: Perception of Spokesperson

Study One Gender of Endorser X Gender of Sport



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Figure 3: Male Expected Improvement

Study Two Male Audience X Gender of Endorser X Gender of Sport

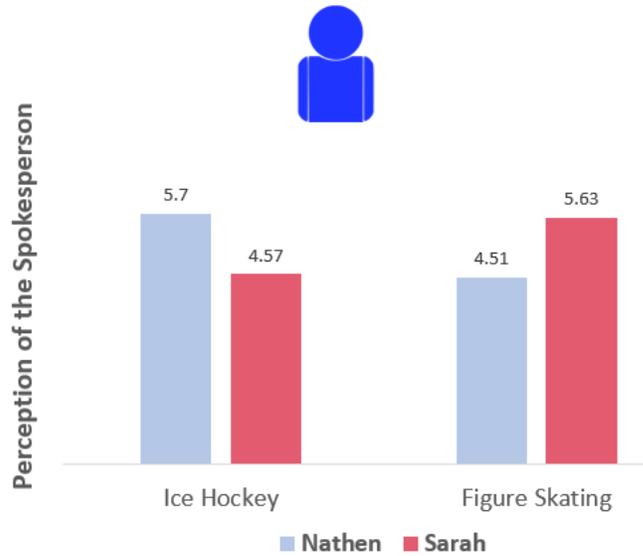
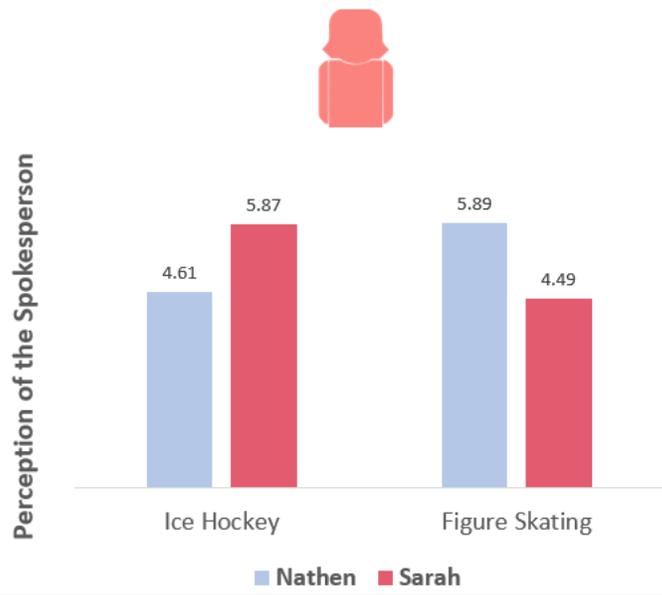


Figure 4: Female Expected Improvement

Study Two Female Audience X Gender of Endorser X Gender of Sport



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Figure 5: Male Likelihood to Recommend

Study Two: Male Audience X Gender of Endorser X Gender of Sport

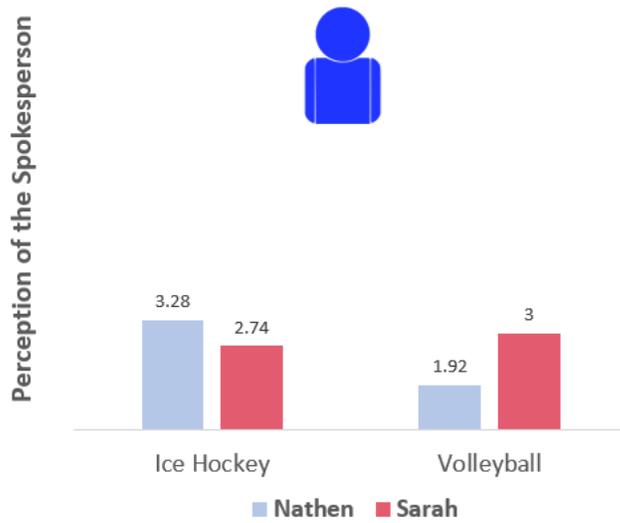
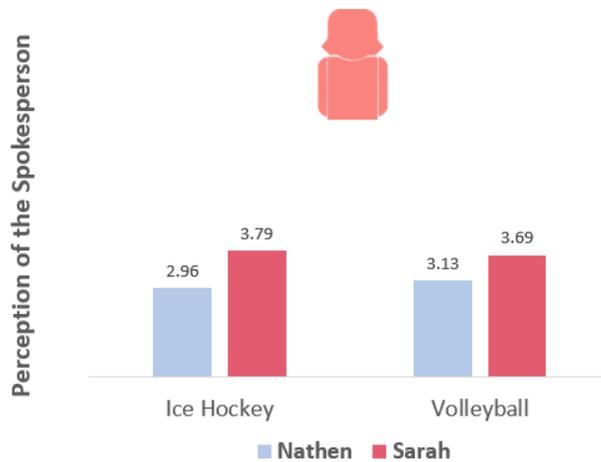


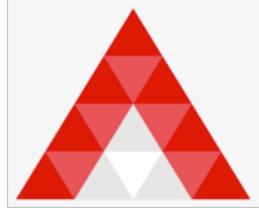
Figure 6: Female Likelihood to Recommend

Study Two: Female Audience X Gender of Endorser X Gender of Sport



APPENDIX

Appendix 1- The Logo for Velocity Gym



VELOCITY GYM

www.velocitygym.com

Appendix 2- First Set of Advertisements

The four advertisements made for study one.

Spokesperson: Male

vs.

Female

Male sports



Female sports



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Appendix 3: Second Set of Advertisements

The four advertisements made for study two.

Spokesperson: Male

vs.

Female

Male sports



Female sports



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