

How the Fan Effect Highlights the Role of Celebrity Endorsement in Driving Sports Brand Marketing

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Abstract. In today's rapidly expanding sports industry, brand marketing has become a core strategy for sports enterprises to enhance competitiveness and increase market share. Celebrity endorsement is a widely used and highly influential tool in sports brand marketing, playing an increasingly critical role. The fan effect—emerging from the enthusiasm and loyalty fans have for celebrities—acts as a powerful driving force behind celebrity endorsement and offers new opportunities for sports brand marketing. Fans' admiration and pursuit of celebrities can translate into attention to and support for the endorsed brand, showing immense potential in enhancing brand awareness, conveying brand values, and driving sales conversion. This paper conducts an in-depth analysis of how the fan effect functions in celebrity-endorsed sports brand marketing, draws on successful case studies, and explores effective strategies for utilizing this effect to help sports enterprises formulate precise and effective marketing plans. The research is conducted across multiple dimensions and aims to provide useful insights and references for practical sports brand marketing.

Keywords: fan effect, celebrity endorsement, sports brand marketing.

1. The Importance of the Fan Effect in Celebrity-Endorsed Sports Brand Marketing

1.1. Enhancing Brand Awareness

When sports brands choose celebrities as endorsers, they are essentially leveraging the vast fan base behind the celebrity as a valuable resource. Celebrities, through their unique charm, remarkable achievements, and public influence, accumulate large numbers of loyal fans. These fans harbor deep affection for their idols and naturally shift their attention toward the brand when they learn of its association with their favorite celebrity^[1-3]. On social media platforms, when celebrities publish promotional content related to the sports brand they endorse, fans—driven by loyalty—voluntarily engage in reposting, commenting, and liking. These interactions amplify the content's reach, resulting in exponential brand exposure.

Moreover, brands can use the celebrity's participation in sports events and commercial activities to draw additional attention. During such events, celebrities receive maximum exposure, and the brand associated with them quickly stands out amid intense market competition, significantly increasing its visibility and recognition.

1.2. Conveying Brand Values

Celebrities, as public figures, possess distinct personal images and value systems. Over time, through their speech and achievements, they establish a specific identity in the eyes of their fans. When the values upheld by a sports brand align with those of the celebrity, fans—driven by their strong identification with the star—naturally accept the brand's core message. For instance, if a celebrity advocates for a healthy, determined, and aspirational lifestyle, their fan base is greatly influenced by this attitude. Fans will associate the promoted lifestyle with the brand, believing that using the brand's products reflects their own value system and affirms their identity.

By leveraging this emotional influence, sports brands can cultivate a positive image in the hearts of fans. This favorable image strengthens the emotional bond between brand and fan, allowing brand values to spread more widely and laying a solid foundation for long-term brand development^[4-6].

1.3. Promoting Sales Conversion

Fans' deep admiration and support for celebrities often naturally extend to the products those celebrities endorse. For fans, purchasing sports products endorsed by their idols is not merely a transactional act but an expression of sincere love and support. When a sports brand launches a new product or promotional campaign, fans, driven by their enthusiasm, are quick to respond and make purchases. They closely follow the brand's updates and rush to buy the latest offerings, demonstrating their support for their idols through concrete actions.

Fan purchases are not isolated. In daily life, fans share their shopping experiences with others, and this word-of-mouth spreads continuously. As a result, even people who were previously unfamiliar with the brand may develop an interest in trying it. The fan effect thus expands consumer interest, leading to a significant boost in sales performance.

2. Specific Manifestations of the Fan Effect in Celebrity-Endorsed Sports Brand Marketing

2.1. Emotional Resonance

The fan effect creates a strong emotional resonance between fans and celebrities, which becomes particularly evident when a celebrity endorses a sports brand. Fans are deeply attached to their idols, closely following their every move and admiring their talent, style, and demeanor. When a celebrity endorses a brand, fans extend their feelings for the celebrity to the brand itself.

On the sports field, celebrities display perseverance, courage, and determination in the face of challenges. These qualities deeply move fans and trigger strong emotional identification. Fans believe that purchasing products endorsed by their idol gives them a sense of psychological satisfaction and identity affirmation. This emotional resonance significantly enhances fan loyalty, encouraging them to remain long-term customers and to actively participate in brand activities, thereby contributing to the brand's development.

2.2. Imitative Behavior

In today's fast-growing sports industry, the fan effect is particularly pronounced. Fans, driven by admiration, often imitate their idols' clothing styles and consumption habits. This is especially visible in sports brand marketing. When a celebrity endorses a particular sports product, this behavior is quickly transformed into real consumer action.

For example, during a highly publicized sports event, if a celebrity appears wearing a certain brand of athletic shoes, their outstanding performance and stylish appearance instantly capture fan attention. Fans believe that these shoes not only look fashionable but also offer high-level performance and support their athletic success. As a result, they rush to buy the same pair, hoping to emulate the celebrity's style and persona^[7-8].

This imitative behavior leads to a surge in product sales. As more fans wear the same items in public, the brand gains further exposure and attracts new consumers. The fan effect thus injects fresh energy into the brand's development.

2.3. Social Media Interaction

In an era of rapid information exchange, social media has become a key platform for fans to express emotions and exchange ideas. When a celebrity endorses a sports brand, fans spontaneously engage in online discussions about the brand, sharing their experiences and feedback. They may highlight

product performance or share interesting stories about using the products. This authentic feedback provides the brand with valuable market data.

Brands can also use social media to interact directly with fans. By replying to comments and messages, brands gain insight into consumer preferences and opinions, allowing them to adjust marketing strategies in real time. Fans also exchange recommendations among themselves, contributing to a strong brand reputation. Brands can further stimulate fan engagement by launching themed discussions or interactive campaigns, thereby deepening fan-brand bonds and attracting new potential customers. This dynamic interaction creates a favorable public discourse environment for brand development.

3. Case Studies of the Fan Effect in Celebrity-Endorsed Sports Brand Marketing

3.1. Nike and Michael Jordan

The collaboration between Nike and Michael Jordan is a classic example of the fan effect in the field of celebrity-endorsed sports brand marketing. As a basketball legend, Jordan attracted a massive global fan base through his exceptional skills, relentless perseverance, and personal charisma. Nike seized this opportunity and launched the “Air Jordan” line tailored to Jordan’s image. Upon its release, the series triggered a purchasing frenzy among fans, who had long embedded their admiration for Jordan into their identity. For them, owning a pair of Air Jordans was like forging a unique connection with their idol.

The collaboration produced remarkable results—greatly enhancing Nike’s brand awareness and reputation, securing its dominant position in the global athletic footwear market, and generating considerable commercial profits. The “Air Jordan” series has since become a signature product line for Nike, fully demonstrating the deep emotional attachment fans have to Jordan and their strong identification with the brand. This case clearly illustrates the tremendous power of the fan effect in celebrity-endorsed sports marketing^[9-10].

3.2. Anta and the “Linglong” IP

As the rise of Chinese streetwear culture gains momentum, consumers are increasingly drawn to brands with cultural depth. Anta took an innovative approach by creating the original IP image “Linglong,” which immediately captured the attention of a large number of fans. The values embodied by “Linglong”—such as bravery and innovation—aligned closely with Anta’s brand philosophy, prompting fans who adored the IP to pay closer attention to Anta’s products.

Riding this wave, Anta launched a series of products featuring the “Linglong” image. These items stood out in terms of both design and quality, and were met with enthusiastic demand. Fans were driven not only by the product’s functionality but also by their emotional connection to “Linglong.” This collaboration greatly enriched Anta’s brand culture, added narrative depth, and successfully expanded its consumer demographic by attracting audiences across different age groups and preferences (see Table 1). Powered by the fan effect, Anta’s market competitiveness was significantly enhanced, giving it a favorable position amid fierce competition.

Table 1. Changes in Anta’s Brand Metrics Before and After the Launch of the “Linglong” IP

Indicators	Before (%)	After (%)
Topic view count on social media platforms	2	15
Engagement volume on social media platforms	3	20
Sales revenue of the “Linglong” product series	0	12
Brand awareness among young consumer groups	40	65

4. Strategies for Leveraging the Fan Effect in Celebrity-Endorsed Sports Marketing

4.1. Strengthen Background Checks on Celebrities

In the complex process of celebrity-endorsed marketing, brands must not overlook the importance of conducting thorough background checks on potential endorsers. A comprehensive understanding of a celebrity's image, reputation, and values is essential to ensure that the endorser aligns with the brand's positioning and philosophy. Only when the two are closely aligned can a synergistic effect be achieved. Otherwise, a mismatch may lead to confusion in brand identity and dilute the impact of promotional efforts.

If a celebrity's image is inconsistent with the brand—or if they are involved in controversies—it can not only fail to support the brand's reputation but may also trigger fan dissatisfaction, resulting in reputational damage. This risk is particularly high in the age of social media, where public opinion spreads rapidly and negative news can go viral in a matter of hours. Brands must therefore exercise caution in selecting endorsers. The selection process should involve multiple stages of vetting, including ethical evaluations and media behavior audits.

To ensure proper selection, professional research organizations can be engaged to perform detailed evaluations and analysis, leveraging their expert teams and experience to gather data from media coverage, public records, and even sentiment analysis tools that monitor public opinion over time. This proactive approach minimizes potential risks and helps ensure that the celebrity's long-term image is stable and aligned with the brand's values, ultimately protecting brand equity and consumer trust.

4.2. Establish a Crisis Management Mechanism

During celebrity endorsement campaigns, the public closely monitors the celebrity's actions and image. If any negative incident occurs, it can quickly provoke fan backlash and even mass boycotts, causing immeasurable harm to the brand. Therefore, brands must develop a mature and responsive crisis management mechanism (see Figure 1) to deal with emergencies swiftly and effectively. A well-structured crisis plan is not only a form of damage control but also an essential part of brand sustainability.

This mechanism should include capabilities for rapid response, strategic decision-making, and efficient execution. When a crisis arises, the brand must promptly respond, clearly state its position, demonstrate its commitment to resolving the issue, and issue sincere, well-crafted public statements. These statements should not be vague or defensive but should acknowledge the concerns of the public, explain the incident transparently, and offer clear steps for redress^[11-12].

In addition, brands should appoint a specialized crisis communication team that can coordinate messaging across media platforms and ensure consistency. Social media listening tools can be used to track public sentiment in real time and adjust responses accordingly. By maintaining open communication and engaging with fans during difficult times—through comment responses, livestream Q&As, or FAQ pages—the brand can transform crises into opportunities to rebuild trust and reinforce brand equity. This level of transparency and responsiveness is key to ensuring the brand's sustainable growth in an increasingly volatile and opinion-driven market.

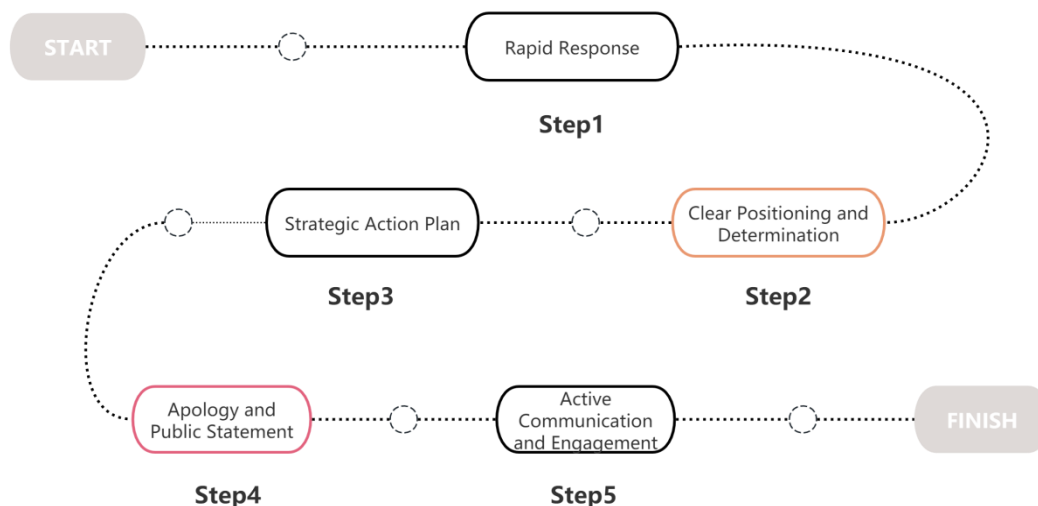


Figure 1. Crisis Management Workflow

4.3. Promote Rational Fan Consumption

Fans’ passion for celebrities can lead to impulsive purchasing behaviors, potentially causing financial strain and undermining the brand’s long-term health. To prevent this, brands should proactively conduct educational campaigns through official channels and social media, clearly presenting product features and advantages. This helps fans understand the functionality, use cases, and differentiation of products within the market^[13-14].

Brands should emphasize the importance of rational consumption, guiding fans to make purchasing decisions based on actual needs and financial conditions, rather than blindly following trends. At the same time, brands must focus on improving product quality and customer service. Only by ensuring a satisfying user experience can fan loyalty and satisfaction be sustainably enhanced. Highlighting practicality and value in product messaging enables fans to make informed decisions and choose products that truly suit them.

5. Conclusion

The fan effect plays a vital role in the success of celebrity-endorsed sports brand marketing. By enhancing brand awareness, communicating brand values, and driving sales, it becomes a powerful tool in the marketing arsenal. The fan effect manifests through emotional resonance, imitative behavior, and social media engagement, as evidenced by successful collaborations such as Nike and Michael Jordan, and Anta and the “Linglong” IP. These cases clearly demonstrate the fan effect’s potent influence on brand performance.

To maximize the effectiveness of the fan effect, brands must develop scientifically grounded strategies based on real-world conditions. This ensures that the fan effect contributes meaningfully to long-term brand development and sustainable marketing success.

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