When good athletes go bad: the impact of the Tiger Woods scandal on consumers' perceptions of his brand endorsements

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Abstract

This study investigated which decision (maintain vs. dismiss endorsement relationship) may represent the most positive impact on consumers with different levels of fan identification when the celebrity endorser is involved in scandal. MANCOVA was utilized to examine the influence of team identification on consumers' responses toward sponsors' decisions. Results indicated that when the sponsor maintained the endorsement relationship, highly identified fans had significantly more positive attitudes and word of mouth intentions than lowly identified fans. Conversely, when the sponsor dismissed the endorsement relationship, lowly identified fans had significantly more positive word of mouth intentions towards the sponsor.

Introduction

Koernig and Boyd (2009) suggested that "each day, consumers are exposed to over 1,500 advertising messages from a variety of sources; television, billboards, radio, flyers enclosed with credit card" (p. 25). Consequently, individuals can become overwhelmed by the numerous forms of advertising, and advertisers may have difficulty attracting consumers' attention toward their advertisements. Thus, identifying an effective medium has become an important task for marketers. White, Goddard, and Wilbur (2009) suggested that today, celebrity endorsement is one of the most popular forms of advertising. Well-known celebrity endorsers not only transfer their distinct personalities onto endorsed brands, but consumers' own perceptions of the celebrities also strongly influence this relationship (Kamins, 1990; McCracken, 1989). Due to the advancement of media technology, celebrity endorsers' negative information or scandal can be easily exposed to the public (Zhou & Whitla, 2013). Recently, for such a reason, numerous studies have been widely conducted to examine how negative celebrity endorser's information had impacts on consumer attitudes and behaviors (Doyle, Pentecost, & Funk, 2014; Lee, Kwak, & Moore, 2015; Zhou & Whitla, 2013).

In December 2009, sports fans around the world were shocked when Tiger Woods' scandals were reported in the media. With great performances throughout his career, many golf fans have supported and respected him and as a result, he has had many sponsorship and endorsement contracts with various companies (e.g. Nike, Gillette). According to Koernig and Boyd (2009), Tiger Woods signed a five-year contract extension with Nike at over $105 million and with Buick at over $40 million. After Tiger Woods' cheating scandal was exposed to the public, many companies which had endorsement contracts with Tiger Woods began to worry about the negative impact derived from the scandal on consumers' responses, and as a result, those companies announced whether they would maintain (e.g., Nike, Electronic Arts, Gatorade) or dismiss (e.g., Gillette, Accenture, Buick) their contracts with him (Knitterl & Stango,

2013). According to Huges and Shank (2005), scandal can be defined as "doing something illegal or immoral that has a profound impact on the sport or contest" (p.214). Hunter (2007) suggested that even normal information in relation to the lives of celebrities is newsworthy for the public and has strong consequences for products they endorse. Fiske (1980) also suggested that negative information about a celebrity was more attention-worthy to the public than positive information. Celebrities are also human, and hence they can commit immoral behavior the same as non-celebrities. As such, we often hear about many negative celebrity scandals (e.g., Kobe Bryant's sexual assault scandal, Tiger Woods' cheating scandal, Alex Rodriguez's steroids scandal). Several studies found that celebrity endorsers' scandals or negative information had negative impacts on sponsors' stock value (Chung, Derdenger, & Srinivasan; 2013, Knitterl & Stango, 2013), and brand evaluation (Doyle et al., 2014; Edwards & La Ferle, 2009; Fong & Wyer, 2012; Jin & Phua, 2014; Lee et al., 2015; Till & Shimp, 1998; White et al., 2009).

According to Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease (2001), fan identification is "the extent to which a fan feels psychologically connected to a team or a player" (p.3). Funk and James (2001) developed the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) and suggested that a fan's psychological connection to a sport team could be developed by the following stages; awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance. At the allegiance level, people tend to possess strong identification toward their favorite team. As a result, highly identified fans are less likely to change their attitudes toward the team even if the team's performance is really bad. Several sponsorship studies (Dalakas & Levin, 2005; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Kwon & Armstrong, 2002; Madrigal, 2000; Wann, 2006) have examined the relationship between fan identification and attitudinal constructs, including belief about sponsorship, attitude toward the sponsor, purchase intention, word of mouth. In previous literature on effects of celebrity endorser's scandal, few studies (Fink, Parker, Brett, & Higgins, 2009; Johnson, 2005) have identified the relationship between scandal and individual's judgment toward the celebrity endorser based on social identity theory (SIT). Both studies found that depending on level of fan identification toward a celebrity endorser who was involved in the scandal, individual's judgment could be different. For example, Maria Sharapova who is the most popular female sports celebrity endorser had announced that she failed a drug test at the 2016 Australian Open in March, 2016. After the announcement, Nike and TAG Heuer immediately dismissed the endorsement relationship with her. Consumers, who are highly identified toward Maria Sharapova, may believe that she used a banned drug carelessly. On the other hand, consumers who are lowly identified toward Maria Sharapova, may intend to denigrate her achievements as a top tennis player. In connection with the scandal, whether the sponsor keeps the contract with the celebrity endorser or not should be decided quickly for the operating loss prevention. However, previous literature does not concern on this issue so far. Also, even though an individual's level of identification toward a celebrity endorser who is involved in a scandal should be an influential factor in evaluting the relationship between the sponsor's decision and consumers' evaluation toward the sponsor, there was no empirical assessment yet in the literature. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate which decision (maintain sponsorship relationship versus dismiss sponsorship relationship) will represent a more positive impact on consumers' responses who have different levels of team identification when the celebrity endorser is involved in a scandal. The research findings will contribute to a better understanding of the effects of scandal and fan identification on consumers' evaluations in the celebrity endorsement relationship for both academic researchers and practitioners.

Scandal (Immoral Behavior) Studies in Relation with the Endorsement

Few empirical studies examined the impact of a celebrity endorser's scandal on brand evaluations (Doyle et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2015; Till & Shimp, 1998; Zhou & Whitla, 2013). According to Till and Shimp (1998), marketers hope that their target consumers' positive feelings toward a celebrity endorser will transfer to their brands or products. They suggested that celebrity scandals have created a fear by companies in using celebrities for advertising. Till and Shimp (1998) examined how negative information about a celebrity had impacts on the brand the celebrity endorses. To examine endorsement effects on brands when the celebrity endorser was involved in negative information, their study firstly attempted to use the context of an associate memory framework. As a result, the authors found that when only the fictional celebrity endorser was involved in negative information, consumers' attitudes toward the brand became less positive. They also found that individual's association size, time of the negative information, and the strength of the link between brand and celebrity affected consumers' evaluations of the brand. Zhou and Whitla (2013) examined how negative celebrity information influenced consumer attitudes in terms of focusing on the mediating role of moral reputation. The authors found that young Asian consumers considered that moral reputation of the celebrity endorser was significantly important in formulating their attitudes toward both the celebrity endorser and the sponsor. Thus, the authors emphasized that moral reputation should be included into celebrity endorsement scandal research. Doyle et al. (2014) found that celebrity endorser negative publicity could have a negative impact on consumer attitudes towards sponsored brands and associated event. For example, if a famous soccer player is involved in the scandal, soccer fans may formulate negative attitudes towards his sponsor and associated event (e.g. FIFA World Cup). Lee et al. (2015) examined the relationship between athlete's transgressions and sponsor evaluations in terms of using the concepts of moral reasoning strategies (i.e., moral rationalization, moral coupling, and moral decoupling). The authors found that moral decoupling and moral rationalization had positive effects on brand attitude and purchase intention because individuals tend to have positive evaluation toward the athlete even if the athlete is involved in an immoral behavior.

By applying social identity theory (SIT), Johnson (2005) examined consumer reactions to Michael Jackson and Kobe Bryant when they were involved in immoral behavior. The author stated that "many of the companies who had used Kobe Bryant as an endorser are not taking the risk that their products will become associated with a man perceived as a rapist in the minds of some of their consumers" (p.100). However, the author suggested that depending on the individual's identification toward Kobe Bryant, consumer reactions could be different because consumers, who are highly identified toward Kobe Bryant, may believe that he is absolutely innocent. Moreover, those highly identified consumers also had more positive purchase intentions toward the celebrity's products even though the celebrity was involved in the scandal. The author concluded that "strength of identification plays a role in shaping consumers' reactions to such celebrity scandals, and that SIT can help to predict consumers' reactions to immoral behavior" (Johnson, 2005, p.100). Fink et al. (2009) examined fan reactions in relation with the effects of athletes' negative behavior by applying SIT. They suggested that most fan identification studies have mainly dealt with fan reactions with regard to on-field outcomes such as team performances. Moreover, the authors stated that "how athletes' off-field behavior impacts fan identification is an under-studied area" (p.143). Accordingly, the purpose of their study was to examine how immoral off-field behavior of players impacts fan's responses depending on their team identifications, and found that to maintain the balance situation, fans might choose one of various balancing techniques (e.g., distancing oneself from the team, derogating the in-group member, exhibiting in-group bias) depending on the individual's level of
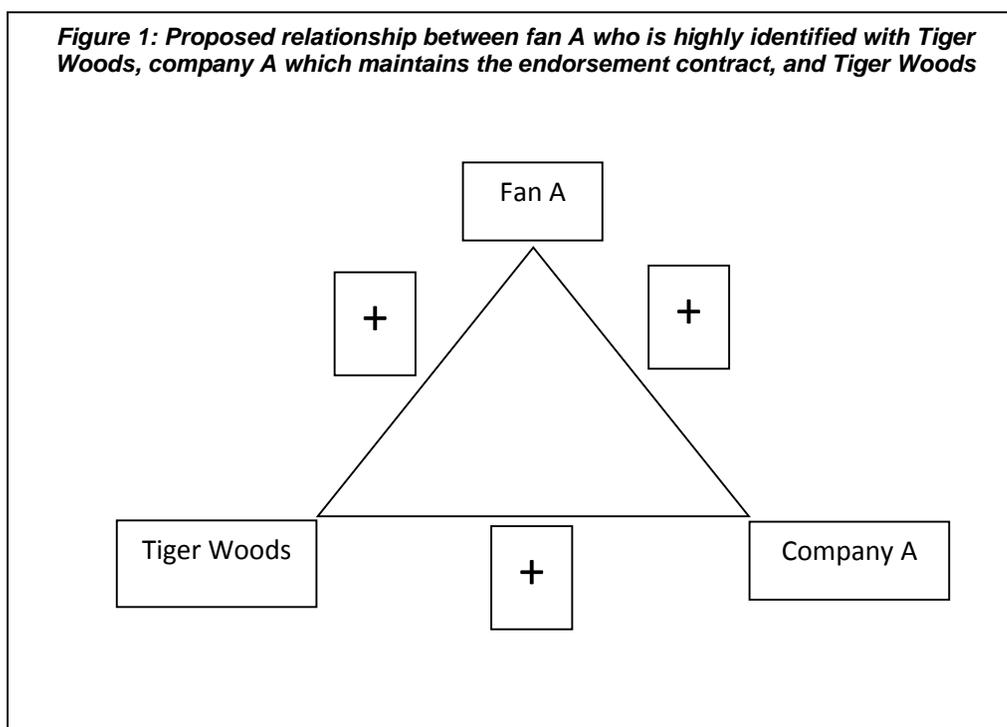
identification. White et al. (2009) examined the effects of negative information transference in the celebrity endorsement relationship. They found that when respondents were exposed to negative information in relation with the celebrity endorser, respondents had negative perceptions toward the brand (product) used by the celebrity in their advertising due to a negative transference from the endorser to the brand. However, when respondents were exposed to negative information in relation with the company, there was no significant transference from the company to the endorser.

Balance Theory and the Effect of Fan Identification on Consumption Behavior

Sponsorship can be explained within the tripartite relations between sponsor, property, and consumers (Kim, 2010). Heider's (1958) balance theory has been widely used to explain, and predict sponsorship relations in the previous sponsorship literature. According to Cornwell, Weeks, and Roy (2005), people tended to maintain a balanced relationship between the event and the sponsor. Based on the balance theory, Dean (2002) explained the sponsorship as a triangular relationship. First, he suggested that a corporation may participate in the sponsorship activity by choosing a sporting event. Accordingly, the corporation may believe that the sporting event is a good strategic fit for its products and brands by generating a positive connection between the corporation and the sponsored event (one side of the triangle). In addition, if the consumer has a preexisting positive emotion toward the sponsored event (the second side of the triangle), the consumer may form a positive attitude toward the sponsor (the third side of the triangle). This is because consumers have the desire to keep harmony (balance) between the favorable event and sponsor in their minds. Based on the balance theory, we may expect that consumers represent positive (or negative) reactions to the event sponsor when the celebrity endorser who was involved in the scandal has dismissed (or maintained) the relationship with the event sponsor.

In the position of business, it is really important to make a decision whether they continuously maintain the relationship with their celebrity endorser who is involved in the scandal. From a fans point of view, fan identification plays an important role to possess positive or negative attitudes toward both sponsor and celebrity endorser who is involved in the scandal. According to SIT, people tend to classify themselves into specific social categories in order to facilitate self-definition within their societies (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In line with this perspective, fan identification can be explained as "the spectators connectedness to a team and the experience of the team's failing and achievements as one's own" (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003, p. 276). Several studies have examined the effects of team identification on consumption behavior. Madrigal (2000) found that consumers' favorable purchase intentions were positively derived from team identification. Madrigal (2001) examined social identity effects in a belief-attitude-intentions hierarchy model related to commercial sponsorship, finding that when people have high identification toward the sponsored entity, they also tended to have a more positive attitude toward sponsors. Kwon and Armstrong (2002) also found that highly identified fans are more likely to purchase the licensed products of their favorite team. Gwinner and Swanson (2003) found that highly identified fans were more likely to have positive outcomes (e.g. sponsor recognition, attitude toward sponsor, sponsor patronage, and satisfaction with sponsors) than less identified fans. To examine the effects of fan identification on consumption behavior, few studies have applied the balance theory. Dalakas and Levin (2005) found that highly identified fans toward the sponsored property tend to have more favorable attitudes toward sponsors and sponsors' products. The authors examined how sponsorships may draw negative consumer attitudes. More specifically, they investigated how fans that are highly identified toward one entity (e.g. favorite NASCAR driver) are associated with negative attitudes toward competition
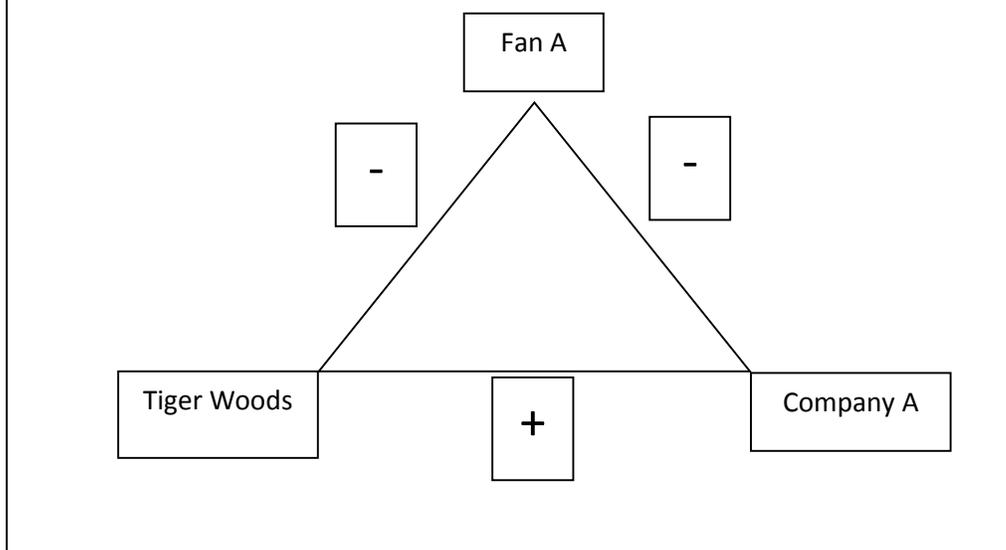
entities (e.g. other competing NASCAR drivers). By examining 220 NASCAR fans, they found that there was a strong positive connection with regard to both their favorite driver and their favorite driver's sponsor. In addition, when fans do not like their favorite driver's rival player, they also tend to have negative attitude toward the rival driver's sponsor. Dean (2002) fount that when the consumer had a preexisting positive emotion toward the charitable sponsored event, consumers; perceptions of corporate community relations are more positive and they formed positive attitudes toward the sponsor.

Figure 1: Proposed relationship between fan A who is highly identified with Tiger Woods, company A which maintains the endorsement contract, and Tiger Woods

Fan A

+   +

Tiger Woods   +   Company A

Based on previous studies on endorsement and sponsorship, highly identified fans toward the sponsored property (e.g. sports teams) or celebrity endorser (e.g., athlete) tend to have more positive outcomes toward the sponsor. In addition, when consumers have positive emotions toward the sponsored property or celebrity endorser, they may form the positive emotion to maintain balance between the property and the sponsor in their minds. Accordingly, if a famous athlete is involved in scandal, and if sponsor A tries to maintain the endorsement relationship, highly identified fans' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the sponsor A should be positive (see Figure 1). Consequently, even though the player engaged in an immoral behavior, based on in-group bias, highly identified fans still maintain the positive attitude toward the player. Thus, the following hypothesis was developed:

H1: Highly identified fans of Tiger Woods would have a more positive (a) attitude, (b) word of mouth intention, and (c) purchase intention toward the sponsor which maintains the endorsement relationship with Tiger Woods than lowly identified fans of Tiger Woods.

Figure 2: Proposed relationship between fan B who is a lowly identified with Tiger Woods, company A which maintains the endorsement contract, and Tiger Woods

On the other hand, when a famous athlete is involved in scandal, lowly identified fans of the famous athlete may have more negative attitudes if the company still maintains the endorsement relationship with the famous athlete (see Figure2). Inversely, the lowly identified fans with the famous athlete may have more positive attitudes and behavioral intentions if the company dismisses the endorsement contract with the player. Accordingly, the following hypothesis was developed:

H2: Lowly identified fans of Tiger Woods would have a more positive (a) attitude, (b) word of mouth intention, and (c) purchase intention toward the sponsor which dismisses the endorsement relationship with Tiger Woods than highly identified fans of Tiger Woods.

Method

Participants

Data were collected from college students majoring in mass communication at a large university located in the southeast region in the United States. Peterson and Merunka (2014) suggested that when college students represent a population of interest, they can be appropriate research subjects in certain situations. Thus, even though convenience sampling was used, this sample could be appropriate to represent the population because college students can be justified as the target audience of the products of non-alcoholic drinks (Ferber, 1977). An online survey was utilized to collect the data. Participation of the survey was voluntary, and students received extra credit points for their participation. Among 365 responses, 348 respondents successfully completed the survey and those responses were included in the data analysis. The sample was 76% female and 24% male. The sample was predominantly Caucasian (84%), followed by Asian (7%), African American (6%), and Hispanic (2%).

Measures

We formulated a survey form that contained four sections to examine pre-existing attitudes toward sponsors, fan identification toward Tiger Woods, attitudinal constructs; including attitude toward sponsors, word of mouth intention, purchase intention, and background information. According to Mazaheri, Basil, Yanamandram, and Daroczi (2011), there is strong possibility that consumers' pre-existing attitudes can cause biased evaluation when individuals process new information. Olson (2010) included pre-existing attitude toward the sponsor in the model because prior attitudes would cause the creation of biased results related to attitudes toward a sponsor. To measure pre-existing attitude toward sponsor, Speed and Thomson's (2000) 4 items were used, with a 7-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked the following: "Thinking about (company name), please evaluate this company by selecting the point on each scale that best represents your attitude to the company". To measure fan identification toward Tiger Woods, Gwinner and Swanson's (2003) team identification scale was utilized. The scale was simply modified by changing the word "Tiger Woods" instead of using "football team". Five items were included in the questionnaire and a 7- point Likert scale was utilized from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree (7). To measure attitudes toward the company, Tsiotsou and Alexandris's (2009) scales were modified. Three items were included in the questionnaire and a 7-point Likert scale was utilized. To measure respondents' behavioral intentions (e.g., word of mouth and purchase intention), Alexandris, Tsaousi, and James (2007) scales were modified. A 7-point Likert scale was utilized for both word of mouth intention (3 items) and purchase intention (3 items). An additional section containing demographic questions (e.g., gender, race, age, household income, and religion) was also included in the questionnaire.

Table 1: Measurement scales	
Constructs	Items
Fan Identification	When someone criticizes Tiger Woods, it feels like a personal insult
	I am very interested in what others think about Tiger Woods
	Tiger Woods's successes are my successes
	When someone praises Tiger Woods, it feels like a personal complement
	If a story in the media criticized Tiger Woods, I would feel embarrassed
Sponsor Image	I have a positive attitude toward (brand name) and its products due to the relationship with Tiger Woods
	The relationship with Tiger Woods improves my perceptions about (brand name) and its products
	Due to the relationship with Tiger Woods, I like more the products of (brand name)
Word of Mouth	say positive things about (brand name) products or brands to other persons
	recommend (brand name) products or brands to someone who sick my advice
	encourage friends or relatives to buy certain products or brands of (brand name)
Purchase Intention	Consider buying (brand name) s products in the future
	Will try to buy (brand name) products in the future
	Will buy (brand name) products in the future

Data Collection Procedures

At the beginning of the survey, pre-existing attitudes toward two sponsors (e.g., Coke, Gatorade), and fan identification toward Tiger Woods were measured. Also, two scenarios were developed in the survey. For both scenarios, at the first part of the scenario, respondents read about Tiger Wood's cheating scandal. After that, the first scenario introduced sponsor A. Sponsor A is the leading producer of non-alcoholic beverage products. Respondents read information in the scenario stimuli that sponsor A decided to maintain their endorsement relationship with Tiger Woods after he was involved in the scandal. On the other hand, the second scenario introduced sponsor B, which has a strong reputation for producing sports drinks in the market. Respondents read information that sponsor B had decided to dismiss their endorsement relationship with Tiger Woods after he was involved in the scandal. After respondents finished reading the each scenario, they were asked to fill out the survey. The following variables were included in the questionnaire: attitude toward the company, word of mouth and purchase intention.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis, SPSS 18.0 was used. Several multiple-item scales were used. Thus, before testing the hypotheses, the reliability of each scale was measured in terms of Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha values exceeded the minimum acceptable level of .70, ranging: pre-existing attitude (α = .89), fan identification (α = .97), attitude toward the company (α = .79), word of mouth (α = .80) and purchase intention (α = .86). By median split, two groups were divided into the high-identification (n=130) and low-identification (n=218) groups. MANCOVA was conducted to examine hypotheses. MANCOVA was utilized to examine the influence of team identification (independent variable) on consumers' responses toward sponsors' decisions (dependent variable) after removing the effect of a covariate, pre-existing attitudes toward sponsors.

Results

To test hypothesis 1, MANCOVA was used to examine effects of fan identification on consumers' responses toward a sponsor which maintains a relationship with the celebrity endorser who was involved in the scandal. Three dependent variables were included: attitude toward a sponsor, word of mouth, and purchase intention. The independent variable was fan identification. The covariate was pre-existing attitude toward a sponsor. Examination of the interaction between the covariate and the independent variable represented relationships between the covariate and the dependent variable. The results indicated that there were no significant interaction effects at the .05 significance level in attitude toward a sponsor, F (1,347) = 1,042, p = .308, word of mouth, F(1, 347) = .285, p = .593, and purchase intention, F(1, 347) = 3.221, p = .116. There was a significant main effect of levels of fan identification (Wilk's λ = .77, F = 33.66, P = .001). Accordingly, the main effects indicated that the level of identification toward Tiger Woods may have significant independent effects on attitude toward a sponsor, word of mouth, and purchase intention. Since the multivariate statistics showed a significant result, a univariate statistical test (test of between-subject effects) was conducted. The results from the univariate test indicated there were significant differences in two dependent variables: attitude toward a sponsor, F(1, 347) = 251. 16 , p = .001, η_p^2 = .421, and word of mouth, F(1. 347) = 73.06, p = .001, partial eta squared = .174. Accordingly, 42% of the variance in attitude toward a sponsor was explained by fan identification and 17% of the variance in word of mouth

was explained by fan identification. For purchase intention ($F = 1.28$, $p > .05$), there was no significant difference.

Table 2: MANCOVA: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects toward Sponsor A which maintained the endorsement relationship with Tiger Woods						
Dependent Variable	Low Identification	High Identification	*F*	*Df*	*Sig.*	Partial eta squared
Attitude	2.18 (1.09)	4.24 (1.34)	251.16	1, 347	.0001	.42
WOM.	3.34 (1.61)	4,64 (1.30)	73.06	1,347	.0001	.174
Purchase Intention	5.70 (1.45)	5.74 (1.28)	1.28	1,347	.259	.004

Note: Standard deviations appear in parentheses

As shown in Table 2, with regard to attitudes toward sponsor A which maintained the endorsement relationship with Tiger Woods, there was a significant difference between highly identified fans ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.34$) and lowly identified fans ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.09$). In addition, highly identified fans ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.30$) represented more positive word of mouth intention toward sponsor A than lowly identified fans ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.61$). However, with regard to purchase intention toward sponsor A, there was no significant difference between groups. Therefore, H1 (a) and H1 (b) were supported and H1 (c) was not supported. Overall, hypothesis 1 was partially supported.

To test hypothesis 2, MANCOVA was used to examine effects of fan identification on consumers' responses toward a sponsor which dismiss a relationship with the celebrity endorser who was involved in the scandal. Three dependent variables were included: attitude toward a sponsor, word of mouth, and purchase intention. The independent variable was fan identification. The covariate was pre-existing attitude toward a sponsor. The results indicated that there were no significant interaction effects at the .05 significance level in attitude toward a sponsor, $F(1, 347) = .168$, $p = .68$, and word of mouth, $F(1, 347) = 1.223$, $p = .27$. However, there were significant interaction effects at the .05 significance level in purchase intention toward a sponsor, $F(1, 347) = 16.4$, $p = .001$. There was a significant main effect of levels of fan identification (Wilk's lambda = .83, $F = 24.11$, $P = .001$). Accordingly, the main effects indicated that the level of identification toward Tiger Woods may have significant independent effects on attitude toward a sponsor and word of mouth. Since the multivariate statistics showed a significant result, a univariate statistical test (test of between-subject effects) was conducted. The results from the univariate test indicated there was significant difference in one dependent variable: word of mouth, $F(1. 347) = 15.43$, $p = .001$, partial eta squared = .043. Accordingly, 4.3% of the variance in word of mouth intention toward a sponsor was explained by fan identification. For attitude ($F = 1.47$, $p > .05$) and purchase intention ($F = 1.90$, $p > .05$) toward a sponsor, there were no significant differences.

As shown in Table 3, with regard to word of mouth intention toward sponsor B which dismissed the endorsement relationship with Tiger Woods, there was a significant difference between highly identified fans ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.35$) and lowly identified fans ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.79$). However, with regard to attitude and purchase intention toward sponsor B, there were no

significant differences between groups. Therefore, H2 (b) was supported and H2 (a) and H2 (c) were not supported. Overall, hypothesis 2 was partially supported.

Table 3: MANCOVA: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects toward Sponsor B which dismissed the endorsement relationship with Tiger Woods

Dependent Variable	Low Identification	High Identification	*F*	*Df*	*Sig.*	Partial eta squared
Attitude	3.25 (1.75)	2.84 (1.18)	1.47	1, 347	.226	.004
WOM.	4.15 (1.79)	3.17 (1.35)	15.44	1,347	.0001	.043
Purchase Intention	5.02 (1.63)	4.40 (1.50)	1.90	1,347	.169	.005

Note: Standard deviations appear in parentheses

Discussion

In our everyday lives, we are confronted with many celebrity athlete endorsers (e.g., Lebron James, Michael Jordan, and Serena Williams) from various advertising media such as TV, magazines, and websites. According to Agyemang (2011), even though athlete sponsorships have become one of the most popular ways to promote brands or products, the relationship between the celebrity athlete endorser and the sponsor is not always positive because some celebrity athlete endorsers, such as Tiger Woods, get involved in public scandals, and their immoral behaviors often cause negative publicity. Agyemang (2011) indicated that "given this circumstance, the sponsor has a few options to consider, such as maintaining the athlete or discontinuing the use of the athlete as the face of their product" (p.138). However, academic researchers do not pay attention to examine the relationship between celebrity endorser's scandal and sponsors' decisions about the endorsement contracts. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate which decision (maintain sponsorship relationship versus dismiss sponsorship relationship) would represent a more positive impact on consumers' responses who have different levels of fan identification when the celebrity endorser is involved in a scandal. Based on SIT (e.g., fan identification) and balance theory, previous studies (Cornwell et al., 2005; Dalakas & Levin, 2005; Dean, 2002; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Madrigal, 2000; Madrigal, 2001) found that highly identified fans toward sports teams or players tend to have positive affective and behavioral intentions toward the sponsor. From this point of view, we expected that even though the celebrity athlete endorser is involved in scandal, highly identified fans do not care the scandal, and they may still support the player. Consequently, we also expected that if the sponsor maintains the endorsement relationship with the player, highly identified fans may also represent positive attitude and behavioral intentions toward the sponsor because the sponsor supports their favorite players. This study found that when the sponsor maintained the endorsement relationship after a celebrity athlete endorser was involved in scandal, highly identified fans represented positive attitude and word of mouth intention toward the sponsor. Additionally, our study also found that when the sponsor dismissed the endorsement relationship after the celebrity endorser was involved in scandal, lowly identified fans represented more positive word of mouth intention toward the sponsor. Consequently, even though our hypotheses were partially supported, the findings have some contributions for the practical field. Our results suggest that consumers' identification toward the celebrity athlete

endorser plays an important role to judge sponsors' decisions whether they needed to maintain or dismiss the relationship with the endorser who is involved in scandal.

There were some limitations in this study. First, we used a student sample so results may not be generalized. For a future study, if researchers use samples who are interested in golf with broader samples, they may have more generalizable results because we may be able to categorize fan groups more reliably (e.g., highly identified fans vs. lowly identified fans). Second, related to gender, the majority of our sample was female. We believe that depending on types of scandals (e.g., cheating, drugs, violence, and drunken driving), there would be significantly different reactions toward the celebrity endorser's scandal. Thus, for future studies, we need to examine whether there would be significantly different responses between male and female depending on types of scandals. Third, our survey was conducted 2 years after Tiger Woods' scandal, which means that many people already knew about the scandal and may not impact their opinions about his endorsers as much. Even though it is impossible to predict when the celebrity endorser is involved in scandal; for future studies, we need to conduct the study as soon as possible after the scandal occurs.

Our study has some contributions for both academic and practical fields in the advertising industry. Previous celebrity endorsement and scandal studies (Edwards & La Ferle, 2009; Fink et al., 2009; Johnson, 2005; Money, Shimp, & Sakano, 2006; Till & Shimp, 1998; White et al., 2009) found that many firms worried whether celebrity endorser's scandal might have a negative impact on their brand evaluations. Even though each study had different settings and somewhat different results, those previous studies commonly found that consumer's brand evaluations such as brand attitude, image, and purchase intention, were seriously affected by celebrity endorser's scandal or negative information. However, previous studies did not pay much attention to the company's decisions toward celebrity endorser's scandal. Many celebrity endorsers, especially athletes, have multiple endorsement contracts with various companies. Accordingly, many companies may have some problems making decisions about the relationship with the celebrity endorser who gets involved in scandal. Some companies announce discontinuing relationship with the celebrity endorser as soon as possible when the scandal occurs. However, some companies announce that they are going to continue the relationship because the celebrity endorser still have strong effect to promote brands or products even if the endorser gets involved in scandal. For example, before Tiger Wood got involved in his scandal, he had contracts with Gillette, Nike, EA Sports, Tag Heuer, AT&T, Gatorade, and Accenture. According to Agyemang (2011), after the disclosure of Tiger Woods' scandal, Woods had lost endorsement contracts with Gillette, AT&T and Accenture immediately. On the other hand, some companies, such as Nike and EA Sports announced that they are still going to maintain the relationship with Woods. Our study found that depending on fan identification, consumers represented different attitudinal and behavioral intentions toward company's decision about the relationship with the celebrity athlete endorser who was involved in scandal. Accordingly, our study findings suggest that marketers' decisions regarding whether they would maintain or dismiss their relationship with a celebrity athlete endorser who gets involved in scandal can have strong long-term implications on brands.

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Appendix: Actual stimuli of the study

Instruction: Please read the following story about company A and B's sponsorship decisions with Tiger Woods .Then, respond to the questions from next pages.

Last December (2009), many sports fans of not in the United States, but also around the world, were very surprised because of Tiger Woods' scandals (e.g. car crash, cheating with Rachel). Tiger Woods is the best player in the history of the PGA tour. He has won 14 professional golf major events (e.g. U.S Open) and is the youngest and fastest winner with 50 tournaments on the PGA Tour. With great performances during his career, many golf fans have supported and respected him and as a result, he has had many sponsorship and endorsement contracts with various companies (e.g. Nike, Gillette). After Tiger Woods's cheating scandal was exposed to the public, many companies which had sponsorship or endorsement contracts with Tiger Woods began to worry about the negative impact or the scandal on consumers' response to the products and many companies announced that they are either going to maintain or dismiss the contracts with him. After Tiger Woods's scandal, Coca-Cola which is a leading producer of Soda drinks announced that their endorsement (sponsorship) contract with Tiger Woods might not be terminated even though he was involved in scandal. In addition, they would extend their endorsement relationship with Tiger Woods by adding Powerade's advertising with him.
On the other hand, Gatorade which is a leading producer of sports drinks announced that they do not want to maintain the endorsement (sponsorship) contract with Tiger Woods after he was involved in cheating scandal even though they had such a long endorsement relationhip with him.