

From Field to Feed: The Impact of Parasocial Bonds and Athlete Credibility on Brand Loyalty

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Abstract

Athletes these days require social media to engage with their fans at all times, forming bonds with their fans on and off the field. These bonds notably develop into parasocial relationships (PSRs). PSRs are one sided, emotionally driven bonds formed by fans with influential celebrities such as athletes. This study explores the impact of parasocial relationships and athlete trustworthiness through their authenticity and credibility on brand loyalty. Purposive sampling was used for a sample of 100 respondents. Data was collected through a questionnaire with instruments such as the celebrity-persona parasocial interaction scale and brand authenticity scale. Statistical analyses involving t-tests, ANOVA, correlation, regression were conducted from the data collected. Findings revealed a significant positive correlation between athlete trustworthiness and brand loyalty with athlete trustworthiness emerging as a strong predictor when regression analysis was conducted. Even though parasocial interaction had a positive correlation with brand loyalty, it did not emerge as a significant predictor when tested through regression analysis. Additionally, notable differences in parasocial relationships and brand loyalty were observed on the basis of athlete ethnicity but ethnicity did not significantly predict either athlete trustworthiness or brand loyalty as per the t-test results. Furthermore, there were significant differences in parasocial interaction, brand loyalty and athlete trustworthiness amongst respondents of different ages as per ANOVA results. These results emphasize the importance of perceived athlete trustworthiness which stands as a major factor in influencing one's loyalty towards a brand endorsed by their favourite athlete.

Keywords: Parasocial relationship, brand loyalty, athlete trustworthiness, athlete credibility, consumer choices