

*Full Length Research Paper*

## **Sports celebrities influencing the consumption of young people in the Brazilian context**

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The purpose of this paper is to explain how young consumers' behavior is influenced by sports idols and gender. The sample study consists of 202 graduates (113 women and 89 men). The results show that the relationship between idol and influence on the behavior of consumers towards claims or product change is significant and directly proportional. This confirms the first hypothesis. The second hypothesis was also confirmed by the proof that there is relationship between idol and influence on the behavior of consumers towards positive word of mouth. Finally, the third hypothesis proved the relationship between idol and influence on the behavior of consumers towards brand loyalty. To measure the influence of gender, two structural equations were used, one for each type of sample (men and women). H4a was proven because the relationship between idol and influence on claim or return was more pronounced among women than in the males. The other two hypotheses were not proven. The search proved sports idols have importance in Brazilians buying behavior; however, the importance of gender has not been proven.

**Key words:** Celebrities, sports, consumers' behavior, young people.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The call for celebrities is a worldwide phenomenon that has been intensified in the last years. Marketing professionals, perceiving this opportunity, constantly use these idols to start advertising campaigns (Atkin and Block, 1983). According to Jones and Schumann (2000), sport celebrities are mostly used in advertising strategies and their price is extremely high (Bower and Mateer, 2008; Thomselli, 2008). However, there is not always a direct relationship between the use of celebrities in commercials and consumers' purchase intention (Sukhdial et al., 2002). So, it becomes crucial that organizations seek to measure the real efficiency of this type of marketing strategy; they should find out if high investments related to the payment of the celebrities turn into increase in sales.

Studies show that, among market segments, the young

public (also known as Y generation) is more affected by sport idols, but they are also more resistant to marketing strategies. Brand (2000) affirms that the teenagers consume more than \$153 billion dollars per year. Belleau et al. (2007) postulate that this public deserves to be more studied, since there is no clear comprehension of their consumption standards.

So, is important to understand how young consumers' behavior is influenced by the sports celebrities for the creation of sales strategies (Bush et al., 2004; Dix et al., 2010).

The theme is very complex because it deals with two aspects of relationship. It is necessary to understand the influence that the sports idols have on young consumers and the extent this influence will result in their behavioral intentions. At last, the researches of Chan and Zhang

(2007), Kwon and Trail (2001), LaFerle and Chan (2008), McCracken (1989), Bush et al. (1999) and Keilor et al. (1996) proved that culture can cause significant differences in celebrities' influence on consumers.

This subject is relevant because as Brazil is growing economically and politically on the world stage, the behavior of Brazilian consumers is of much interest (De Onis, 2008; Hitt and He, 2008); studies on consumers point out the potential differences in consumers' behavior in Latin America, North America and Europe (Haslam, 2004). Brazil, with an emerging economy, has a wider distribution of disposable income and therefore, consumption power (World Bank, 2006).

To Da Matta (1997), Brazil is a country of mixed races, religions and culture. Thus, an understanding of the reaction of Brazilian consumers can provide a clearer sense for the similarities and differences in such reactions across the globe.

In view of the above, this research seeks to test, in the Brazilian culture, the study developed by Bush et al. (2004) in the United States and reapplied by Dix et al. (2010) in Australia; it aims to investigate how sports celebrities can influence young adult consumers' purchasing and behavior intention. Therefore, the objectives of this paper are: to verify the dependent relationship between the influence of idols and consumers' behavior (positive word of mouth, product switching and complaining behavior and brand loyalty); measure the influence of gender in this process; compare the results obtained in Brazil to the ones found in the United States and Australia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As social beings, people are highly influenced by others (Vygotsky, 1998). According to Bandura, based on his social cognitive theory, human beings frequently adjust their behavior based on what others do and the consequences they experience. Kamp (2001) argues that one of the biggest contributions of this thought is that, it is not only the current consequences (those arising from the acts that occurred in the past) that control human behavior, but also anticipated consequences (what people think will happen). Bandura expands the idea of learning through own experiences (Dewey, 1933), and considers that learning and behavior can also be (and are) guided by other people's experiences and the consequences that the same people generate for that individual (Bandura, 1978).

These are the premises of Consumption Socialization and were utilized for the development of the Consumption Learning Model (Churchill and Moschis, 1979), which says that it is not only the developmental factors influence consumption, but also the socialization agents.

Consumption socialization means the process by which the individual captures and acquires knowledge and

behavior standards (Goslin, 1969). According to Moschis and Churchill (1978) and John (1999), the definition proposed by Ward (1972) for consumption socialization is one of the best and most known. For the author, consumption socialization is the "process by which each young consumer acquires abilities, knowledge and more relevant attitudes toward his operation as a consumer in the market" (Ward, 1974). This idea is corroborated and completed by Schiffman and Kanut (1997). They affirm that it is through this process that people acquire and develop their abilities and knowledge about the act of consuming. As a continuous process that begins in childhood and goes on through lifetime, it is also through this process, during the teenage years that individuals consolidate these values and develop the necessary competence for having good performance as consumers.

To Moschis and Churchill (1978), in socialization processes, the individual relates with socialization agents, who are responsible for transmitting rules, attitudes, motivations and models of behavior. These agents can be any person or even an organization, as long as they are in direct contact with the individual. Moschis and Bello (1987) go further to affirm that socialization agents are any persons directly involved in the socialization of an individual due to contact frequency, authority or control by punishment and rewards given to this person or organization. However, the main agents of socialization are parents, friends and the media (Moschis and Bello, 1978).

Still, according to a second consumption learning model (Churchill and Moschis, 1979), learning can occur in three distinct ways: modeling, reinforcement and social interaction. Modeling is the imitation of the agent; reinforcement involves reward or punishment (good positive or negative reinforcement); social interaction corresponds to the type of learning involved, possibly a combination of the modeling with a reward. In the case of this study, it begins from the assumption that youngsters learn with the modeling; in other words, the search to imitate the behavior of their sports idols.

The socialization of consumption outgoes in childhood and teenage phases because, according to Lee and Conroy (2005), this is the stage that the individual overestimates the opinion of others and gives more sociable and significant values to the goods and services they consume, with great emphasis given to brands.

In the last years, many authors dedicated themselves to studying this age group Bristol, 2001; Grant, 2004; Quart, 2004). Another series of studies searched to comprehend the influences of role models on the consumption processes, such as parents or friends (Geuens et al., 2003; Bush et al., 1999; Palan, 1998) or the influence of idols (O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997; Sukhdial et al., 2002), whose dimension is also known as the Cult Theory.

However, there is no clear understanding of the role these influential agents have on the behavior of young

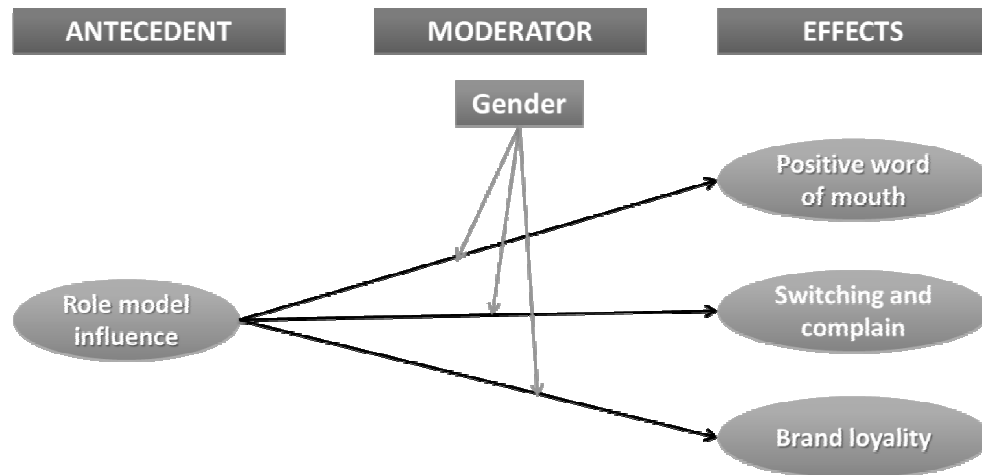


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the research.

consumers (some studies prove this relation and others deny it). Nonetheless, it is not known if (and how much) the influence of celebrities is bigger or smaller than other social agents.

Socialization process results in consumer behaviors, which Bush et al. (2004) called “outcomes” or consumer skills that can cause favorable behaviors toward a brand; they are: increased sales of the brand, paying premium prices for the brand, spreading positive word-of-mouth for the brand, etc.

As this research is about sport celebrities, to measure role model influence, an adapted version of the Rich (1997) scale was used. It asks how does a favorite role model influence the respondent’s behavior in general as well as others.

There are different ways to measure behavior consumer intentions. Traditionally, an unidimensional scale was used (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) but, recently, a multi-dimensional scale developed by Zeithaml et al. (1996) is being used. In this scale, the author includes both favorable (word-of-mouth communications, purchase intentions, price sensitivity) and unfavorable (negative word-of-mouth, complaining behavior) dimensions of behavioral intentions.

According to Bush et al. (2004), “a multidimensional construct and measure of behavioral intentions fit well into the socialization process for the teenage market because they deal with facets of behavioral intentions related to friends, peers and celebrities’ spokespeople. They include saying positive things about a company or brand to others or recommending a brand name to a friend”

Therefore, in the present research, a version of the Zeithaml et al. (1996) purchase intentions scale, adapted by Bush et al. (2004) only with some of the favorable dimensions was used. So, for the present study, behavioral intentions will be defined based on the following

three dimensions: product switching or complaining behavior; positive word of mouth; and brand loyalty.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model of the research in which the role model influenced by sports celebrities is an antecedent of the behavior intention, represented by a three dimension scale: positive word of mouth, switching and complaining behavior and brand loyalty.

Because it is a reapplication of studies developed in other countries (Dix et al., 2010; Bush et al., 2004), the hypotheses of this study are the same proposed and tested in Australia and in the United States.

Mascanhas and Higby (1993) prove that young people are highly influenced by the media the moment they choose their products; it has the strongest influence on teenagers. Noble et al. (2009), Xu (2008) and Clark et al. (2001) also verified this relation, pointing to, among other aspects, the susceptibility of this public in being guided by other people. Thus, many studies have already proven that youngsters are highly influenced by celebrities (Atkin and Block, 1983; Bower and Matter, 2008; Byrne et al., 2003; Chan and Zhang, 2007; Lockwood and Kunda, 1997). Moreover, among the celebrities, the athletes are the most preferred by many studies (Bennett and Henson, 2003; Braunstein and Zhang, 2005; Brooks and Kellee, 1998; Elling and Knoppers, 2005; Jones and Schumann, 2000; Kwon and Trail, 2001; Pegoraro et al., 2010; Stevens et al., 2003; Spaaij and Anderson, 2010; Summers and Johnson, 2008).

This way, Dix et al. (2010) argue that sport idols are great source of influence for the young consumers and, therefore, the hypotheses raised by Bush et al. (2004) deserve more analysis. Such hypotheses are:

H1: Young people’s sport celebrity role model influence is positively related to product switching and complaining behavior;

**Table 1.** Measures of constructs.

Construct	Description
Role Model Influence	My favorite athlete...
	I1 - Provides a good model for me to follow
	I2 - Leads by example
	I3 - Sets a positive example for others to follow
	I4 - Exhibits the kind of work ethic and a behavior that I try to imitate
Positive word of mouth	I5 - Acts as a role model to me
	The opinions that my favorite athlete influences me to...
	B1 - Say positive things about products or brands to other people
Switching and complaint behavior	B2 - Recommend products or brands to someone who seeks my advice
	B3 - Encourage friends or relatives to buy certain products or brands
	C1 - Buy fewer products from certain companies
	C2 - Take some of my purchases to other business that offer better prices
	C3 - Switching to a competitor if I experience a problem with a company's services
	C4 - Complain to other customers if I experience a problem with a company's services
Brand loyalty	C5 - Complain to external agencies (such PROCON) if I experience problem with a company's services
	C6 - Complain to a company's employees if I see a problem with that company's service
	L1 - Continue to do business with a certain companies, even if it increase its prices
Brand loyalty	L2 - Pay more for products at one business even though I could buy them cheaper elsewhere
	L3 - Buy certain brands

Source: Bush et al., 2004.

H2: Young people's sport celebrity role model influence is positively related to positive word of mouth behavior;  
 H3: Young people's sport celebrity role model influence is positively related to brand loyalty;

Behavior can be influenced by gender (moderator factor); it is a key aspect in the studies of consumers' behavior (Bendall-Lyon and Powers, 2002; Dommeyer and Gross, 2003). Researches have already proven that men and women act in distinct ways in their involvement with product (Kinley et al., 1999), buying intention (Darley et al., 2008), media choice (Okazaki and Hironi, 2009) and propaganda assimilation (Tan et al., 2002).

These differences are also perceived in sports celebrities role model influences. Some researches (Bush et al., 2005; Elling and Knoppers, 2005; Sukhdial, et al., 2002; Wann et al., 2004; Wolburg and Pakrywczynski, 2001) demonstrated that women are more influenced by sport idols, and they also have a larger potential for consuming sporting goods than men. Thus, seeking to identify the influence of gender on consumption behavior, Bush et al. (2004) developed a fourth hypothesis, which will be tested in this study:

H4: Young people's sport celebrity role model influence is more positively related to products switching and complaining behavior (H4a), positive word of mouth behavior

(H4b) and brand loyalty (H4c) among females than males.

## METHOD

The aim of this study is to investigate how sports celebrities can influence young adult consumers' purchase and behavior intention. And in order to assess the conceptual model (Figure 1), a survey was conducted among 202 graduates.

The research instrument was developed by Rich's (1997) influence of idols in the consumer behavior scale and Zeithaml et al.'s (1996) behavior and buying intentions guided by the consumption of the favorite athlete.

Table 1 presents the variables used to measure the constructs. The antecedent construct (role model influence) was measured by five items, and the effects constructs were measured by twelve items (three for positive word of mouth, six for switching and complaining behavior and three for brand loyalty). All of the constructs were measured through a Likert scale of seven points (1 – totally disagree and 7 – totally agree). At last, the instrument presented items for evaluating the profile of the interviewees.

The analysis of data was done in five steps: I) Frequency analysis for the definition of the interviewees' profile; II) exploratory factor analysis for the initial verification of the consistency and reliability of the instrument used; III) descriptive statistic (average, standard deviation, and t test) for the verification of the concordance level in each factor and for the identification of the gender influence in the perception of the respondents; IV) confirmatory factor analysis for the analysis (improvement) of the structural model global adjustment; V) structural equations for the

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics and AFE results.

Constructs	Average	S. D.	Alpha	% Variance
Influence	4.465	1.901	0.938	26.106
Positive Word of mouth	2.826	1.823	0.973	24.351
Switching and Complaint	2.692	1.658	0.939	16.896
Brand loyalty	2.607	1.694	0.891	16.006

evidence of the hypothesis of the study (identification of the casual relationships).

## RESULTS

Of the 202 graduates surveyed, 113 are females and 89 are males (55.9% of the respondents were women and 44.1% were men). In relation to age, the larger frequencies found were: from 19 to 20 years of age (36.1%); from 21 to 22 years of age (23.3%) and above 25 years of age (17.8%). Thus, it is observed that half of the interviewees (49.5%) have less than 20 years of age. Since the survey is formed by the public of young people and students, 89.1% of the respondents were single and 140 of the respondents do not work (73.8%).

The second stage of the data analysis was realized in the Exploratory Factor Analysis, having the objective of doing a preliminary analysis of the data, before realizing the Confirmatory factor analysis (Hair et al., 2005).

Factor analysis was conducted using the principal components method with Varimax rotation with the intention of maximizing the weight of each variable between each factor. That is, to determine the validity of the items for measuring the variable whose relationship in the conceptual model is being investigated. No comparative methods were tested because as a reapplication, this paper used the same analysis like the prior researches (Bush et al., 2004; Dix et al., 2010).

Indexes that test the correlation between the variable and the adequacy of the factor analysis to the data structure had adequate level. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) result of the exploratory factor analysis is considered very well with index of 0.915 (values above 0.60 were considered satisfactory and above of 0.90 were considered very good). The Barlett test was significant in 3727.354 and also its factor analysis was adequate. Four dimensions represented 83.36% of the explained variance. Table 2 presented the explained variance by each dimension.

Malhotra (2001) suggests that a factor loading of 0.5 can be considered to be significant and in this research all factor loadings items are greater than 0.50 (Table 2). The lowest value was in item C1 with load of 0.637; so no item was eliminated.

Although there are a number of different reliability coefficients, one of the most commonly used is the Cronbach's alpha and a value of 0.6 or higher is

acceptable. The Cronbach's alpha was calculated for all four dimensions and the outcomes of process were: influence= 0.938; positive word of mouth= 0.973; switching and complaint= 0.939; brand loyalty= 0.891 (Table 1), which validate use of research instrument.

In terms of descriptive statistics (Table 1), role model influence was the construct with the highest average ( $\mu= 4.47$ ;  $\sigma= 1.90$ ), followed by positive word of mouth (the second highest average) ( $\mu= 2.83$ ;  $\sigma= 1.82$ ); switching and complaints ( $\mu= 2.69$ ;  $\sigma= 1.66$ ); and brand loyalty ( $\mu=2.61$ ;  $\sigma= 1.69$ ). Comparing this results with the ones found in the United States (Bush et al., 2004) and in Australia (Dix et al., 2010), it is observed that all the national averages were inferior; thus, the results point out that he Brazilian youngsters' consumption behavior is not highly influenced by sport idols, as it occurs in the other two countries.

In the exploratory factor analysis, a four dimension structure with 17 items was identified. The empirical data fitted the conceptual model (Figure 1) as a structural equation model using Amos software. This process is called Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

The indexes analyzed in the global model fit were: Chi-squared ( $\chi^2$ ) statistics, Chi-squared/degrees of liberty ( $\chi^2/gl$ ), *root mean square error of approximation* (RMSEA), *normed fit index* (NFI) and *non-normed fit index* (NNFI), *goodness of fit index* (GFI) and *e comparative fit index* (CFI). The indexes for the Initial Model demonstrated two adjustment indexes a little lower than the desirable limits of 0.90. However, with the inclusion of the four co-relations (I4 e I5; I2 e I3; C1 e C2; C5 e C6), this problem was solved and all the indexes obtained satisfactory values:  $\chi^2=258.4$ ;  $gl=109$ ;  $\chi^2/gl= 2.37$ ; RMSEA= 0.083; NFI= 0.933; TLI= 0.950; IFI= 0.960 and CFI= 0.960. This analysis confirmed suitability of the structural model.

In confirmatory factor analysis also is necessary to verify the unidimensionality, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the final scale. The unidimensionality is analyzed through the values of standard residues (S.E.), and as it is observed in Table 3 that all the values are inferior to 2.58 ( $p<0.05$ ), what proves the unidimensionality of the model.

The convergent validity occurs when the standard factorial loads are significant to the level of 0.01 (C.R. $\geq 2.33$ ) and the data show the existing convergent validity in all dimensions, because, as it is observed in the table, none of the items were lower than the minimum required.

**Table 3.** Confirmatory factor analysis results.

Construct	Item	Estimate	C.R.	S.E
Influence	I1 - Provides a good model for me to follow	0.954	3.510	0.909
	I2 - Leads by example	0.875	7.262	0.766
	I3 - Sets a positive example for others to follow	0.842	7.932	0.709
	I4 - Exhibits the kind of work ethic and behavior that I try to imitated	0.799	8.806	0.638
	I5 - Acts as a role model to me	0.787	8.894	0.620
Positive word of mouth	B1 - Say positive things about products or brands to other people	0.957	7.044	0.916
	B2 - Recommend products or brands to someone who seeks my advice	0.977	4.550	0.955
	B3 - Encourage friends or relatives to buy certain products or brands	0.951	7.514	0.904
Switching and complaint	C1 - Buy fewer products from certain companies	0.637	9.630	0.406
	C2 - Take some of my purchases to other business that offer better prices	0.823	8.888	0.677
	C3 - Switching to a competitor if I experience a problem with a company's services	0.928	6.545	0.861
	C4 - Complain to other customers if I experience a problem with a company's services	0.929	6.485	0.863
	C5 - Complain to external agencies (such PROCON) if I experience problem with a company's services	0.843	8.589	0.710
	C6 - Complain to a company's employees if I see a problem with that company's service	0.862	8.367	0.743
Brand loyalty	L1 - Continue to do business with a certain companies, even if it increase its prices	0.926	4.590	0.858
	L2 - Pay more for products at one business even though I could buy them cheaper elsewhere	0.872	6.911	0.760
	L3 - Buy certain brands	0.797	8.453	0.636

For the identification of the discriminant validity, a procedure of comparison between the extracted variance of the dimension and its shared variances was used. Hence, the results demonstrated that all the extracted variances were bigger than the shared variances, demonstrating that the discriminated validity is positive.

To conclude the analysis of data of the adjustment of the model, Table 3 presents values of the standard factorial loads and, as mentioned before, in the exploratory factorial analysis, all of the items present loads with values superior to 0.60.

The data accepting or rejecting the research hypotheses are presented in Table 4. The first hypothesis affirmed that "young people's sport celebrity role model influence is positively related to product switching and complaining behavior". The results demonstrated that the relation is significant and directly proportional ( $\beta = 0.47$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), that is, the bigger the influence of the sport celebrity, the larger will the intention of switching the product or to complain about the services. Therefore, H1 is accepted.

Hypothesis two affirmed that "young people's sport celebrity role model influence is positively related to positive word of mouth behavior". The data demonstrated that the hypothesis is accepted and was identified as the strongest relation of dependency in the model ( $\beta = 0.59$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). This means that 59% of the variations in the positive word of mouth depend on the sports idol

influence.

Third hypothesis affirmed that "young people's sport celebrity role model influence is positively related to brand loyalty". The results demonstrated that there is a strong positive relation of dependency between the constructs ( $\beta = 0.51$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ); that is, the influence of the idol on brand loyalty is proven.

To test the last hypothesis, two structural equations modeling was made, one for each type of selected sample (men and women). The fitness measures of the model with the gender mediator were good with the indices values:  $\chi^2 = 336.3$ ;  $gl = 188$ ;  $\chi^2/gl = 1.79$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.068$ ;  $NFI = 0.909$ ;  $TLI = 0.945$ ;  $IFI = 0.958$  and  $CFI = 0.957$ . 60. But, in this case, the exclusion of variable C1 was necessary (Buy fewer products from certain companies).

H4a considered that "young people's sport celebrity role model influence among females is more positively related to products switching and complaining behavior than among males". The results demonstrated that in both cases the relation was positive and significant. However, between women ( $\beta = 0.424$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) it was more elevated than between men ( $\beta = 0.402$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

The invariance test pointed out a chi-squared significant difference, showing that the structural models are statistically different. A comparison between the restrictive model of the feminine gender and the masculine gender was done, seeking to identify where this difference

**Table 4.** Regression estimates of structural equation model.

H	Relation		Gender	Estimate	C.R.	P.	Decision	
H01	Switch and complain	←	Influence	0.468	5.693	0.000	Accept	
H02	Positive word of mouth	←	Influence	0.589	8.453	0.000	Accept	
H03	Brand Loyalty	←	Influence	0.506	6.903	0.000	Accept	
H4a	Switch and complain	←	Influence	Man	0.402	3.232	0.001	Accept
				Woman	0.424	5.447	0.000	
H4b	Positive word of mouth	←	Influence	Man	0.544	5.198	0.000	Reject
				Woman	0.539	3.826	0.000	
H4c	Brand Loyalty	←	Influence	Man	0.440	3.884	0.000	Reject
				Woman	0.436	4.311	0.000	

occurred. Through the comparison between these two models, it was proven that the difference between the values of the Chi-squared was significant ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 17.94$ ;  $p=0.000$ ) in switch and complaining behavior construct; thus there are differences in the structural models and the hypothesis is accepted.

The second development of the fourth hypothesis (H4b) considered that “young people’s sport celebrity role model influence among females is more positively related to positive word of mouth behavior than among males”; and the results proved that in both genders the relation that occurs is strong; in women the dependency is 54.4% and in men it is of 53.9%. Despite that, this difference is not significant (the invariance test did not show significant difference for  $\Delta\chi^2$ ) and the hypothesis is rejected.

The last hypothesis (H4c) mentioned that “young people’s sport celebrity role model influence among females is more positively related to brand loyalty than among males”. Despite both relations are significant and positive ( $\beta = 0.440$  for women and  $\beta = 0.436$  for men), the difference is not significant (the invariance test was significantly different in  $\Delta\chi^2$ ); and, this way, the hypothesis is rejected.

Referring to the tests of hypotheses, it is observed that in six options raised and supported by the theory, four were confirmed and two were not confirmed. All of the relations between the constructs were significant and positive, proving the idol influence as a variable that affects the behavior of exchange or complaining, positive word of mouth and loyalty to the brand. Nevertheless, gender did not present itself as a significant moderator factor; that is, big differences in the perception and relation between men and women were not observed.

The studies of Dix et al. (2010) and Bush et al. (2004) served as parameter to develop this research and, hence, it is interesting to trace a parallel between the results found in Australia, the United States and in Brazil. The original article by Bush et al. (2004) utilized equation structures and confirmatory factorial equations and the

global adjustment of the model was satisfactory, but a bit inferior to this study. Dix et al. (2010) did not utilize the structural equation analysis, being that the first three hypotheses were analyzed by regressions and the last three (gender influence) by the tests of different averages.

Similar to this study, the first three hypotheses were proved between Australian youngsters, despite the indexes of dependency were much inferior to the ones found in the present study. The results of the regressions were: idol influence affects positively the behavior of switch and complaints with  $\beta = 0.108$ ; idol influence affects positively the positive word of mouth with  $\beta = 0.168$ ; and idol influence affects positively the brand loyalty with  $\beta = 0.084$  (Dix et al., 2010).

In Bush et al. (2004)’s research, the first hypothesis (idol positively influences the behavior of switch and complaints) was not confirmed since  $\beta = 0.007$  with significance of 0.115 was obtained; but the other two hypotheses obtained significant results from: influence of idol positively affects the positive word of mouth with  $\beta = 0.90$ , and the influence of idol positively affects brand loyalty with  $\beta = 0.31$  (Bush et al., 2004). It is observed that the results found in Australia were all lower than those of Brazil and the United States to influence the idol in positive word of mouth, with an extremely high value of 90%. Finally, in all three studies the relationship with a higher degree of dependence between influences was idol and positive word of mouth. The summary of this information is presented in Table 5.

In studies done in the United States and Australia, the result analysis of gender influences (hypothesis four) was only done by the average differences (test T). In the Australian study, it was not verified any significant difference between the genders, and, so, H4a, H4b and H4c were not confirmed. In the United States, the results point out differences between men and women in the relations between the idol influence and the positive word of mouth and the idol influence and brand loyalty, proving

**Table 5.** Comparative between countries.

Hypotheses	Brazil (2011)	United states (Bush et al., 2004)	Australia (Dix et al., 2010)
H01	Confirmed	Not confirmed	Confirmed
H02	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed
H03	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed
H4a	Confirmed	Not confirmed	Not confirmed
H4b	Not confirmed	Confirmed	Not confirmed
H4c	Not confirmed	Confirmed	Not confirmed

**Table 6.** Comparison of averages between genders.

Construct	Women average	Men average	T	P.
Influence	3.857	5.238	01.209	0.273
Positive word of Mouth	2.298	3.498	10.234	0.002
Switch and complaint	2.353	3.124	00.035	0.851
Brand loyalty	2.012	3.363	06.032	0.015

hypotheses H4b and H4c. In the present study, the structural equation method was used to identify such differences and, through the invariance tests, it was proven that only the relation between idol influence and the behavior of exchange and complaint had a significant difference, with women having higher values.

Nevertheless, if only the T test of difference of averages was utilized in this study, the results would point out that in the constructs of positive word of mouth and brand loyalty there were significant differences in the averages (Table 6). However, in both cases, the higher averages were among men. In other words, by this procedure, none of the developments of the fourth hypothesis would be proven.

## Conclusion

The objective of this study is to prove that sport idols influence youngsters' consumption behavior. This idea was based on the Social Cognitive Theory which emphasizes the importance of the models and the social relationship for the creation of certain behaviors, such as consumption.

The results found in the study supported the previous idea and demonstrate that the role model influence (sports celebrities) is preponderant in the youngsters' consumption, influencing behaviors of switch and complain about products and services that fall short of expectations, incentive, the creation of a positive word of mouth over a product or brand endorsed by the sportsman, and, at last, help in the brand loyalty. By way of explanation, it was confirmed that the athletes are important agents of socialization to the young people and serve as a model of behavior, having, as indicated by Dix

et al. (2010), a significant impact in the consumer's intentions of purchase.

Therefore, the study pointed out that the big investments made by companies, when investing large sums in cache for athletes, are important marketing tool and that, in a certain way, has guaranteed return. In other words, advertising campaigns involving names such as Kaká, Ronaldinho, Giba (from Volleyball), among others, are interesting selling mechanisms and, especially, the customer loyalty to the brand.

In a second moment, the article sought to identify gender as a moderator factor in the process of idol influence in the behavior of purchase of the youngsters. The results were not satisfactory because there was no clear difference of behavior between men and women. Only one of the three hypotheses was proven, and, thus, it can be affirmed that idols influence (in a stronger way) the women to switch and complain. Despite that, there is no gender interference in the relations of positive word of mouth and brand loyalty (differences were not statistically significant). Therefore, the study did not point out evidence that distinct marketing strategies should be utilized for men and women.

Elling and Knoppers (2005) argue that the women mistake beauty with sportive performance and, hence, it would be necessary other types of studies for further deepening of this topic. Previous research did not reach a consensus if men and women think in a distinct way. This research results did not point out significant differences, so as pointed out by Bush et al. (2004) this subject needs a better comprehension with new researches.

To conclude the analysis of the results, it is observed that in three countries with very distinct cultures (United States, Australia and Brazil) the young show very similar behaviors and the relations between the influence of



sports idols and the behavior of consumption of the youngsters were proven. Nevertheless, it is interesting to show that in all the hypotheses tested, the relations found in the Brazilian youths were more elevated than the other countries. This is evident in Brazil where sports' influence is even higher than the other places and, consequently, the utilization of these models should be even more encouraged in the marketing campaigns.

So the paper proved the importance of sports celebrities role model influence in the purchase behavior of the youngsters, despite the importance of the gender was not proven, because it was identified that men and women have similar behavior. In terms of marketing practices, these conclusions point out that there is no need of having specific advertising campaigns for men and women, despite the elevated investments; there is evidence that the choice for utilizing sports idols in advertising campaigns is adequate.

The findings of this research must be interpreted with cautions because there are some limitations: the findings cannot be generalized, because this study reflected the perception of young graduates in a specific university; the sample was little and homogeny in terms of income ranging (middle class). Therefore, the expansion of the sample would be interesting to test, other than the gender influence, also the influence of other variables, such as age, income, educational background of the parents, regional culture, etc.

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