

Full Length Research Paper

“I am not your fan”: The role of projection and identification processes in the depreciation of public sports figures

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The image of sports figures has become an important issue for media and communication research. Nevertheless, even if several studies in the literature focus on the idea of stardom in sports, most of them concern athletes who are well-appreciated by their fans. Rare are the studies dealing with sports figures who are depreciated. This research demonstrates the strong influence of fans' ideal self-images and motives for playing a sport on the evaluative reaction toward these icons. The researchers surveyed 878 adolescents, a representative sample of youth from Southern France. Their motives for playing a sport were evaluated by the QSMP2001, a validated instrument that measures the “distinctiveness”, the “sociability” and the “play to the limits” dimensions. Qualifying variables included age, gender and status. Results indicate that depreciated sports figures are disparaged because they do not adhere to the fans' ideal self-images. This paper could inform marketers as they make decisions about product endorsement by sports superstars.

Key words: Stardom, celebrities, sports figures, preferences, motivation.

INTRODUCTION

Few products or services elicit passions and commitment like sports. The amount of money invested in and made by professional sport today and the complexity of those revenue sources has forged an important symbiotic relationship between professional sport, the players and spectators of sport. This constant demand and supply of information, competition and excitement produces heroes, villains, celebrities and superstars (Summers and Morgan, 2008).

In this paper we present an approach to the study of sports figures that is grounded in prior research and theory (Barthes, 1957; Kang, 2004; Recours, 2008; Sirgy,

1982; Tucker, 1957). The goal of this research is to examine the role of identifications and projections on the evaluative reaction toward depreciated athletes. Our results offer practical implications for advertisers and market researchers who are interested in knowing how and why some athletes are depreciated by spectators. From a conceptual standpoint, our findings enable us to link various theoretical models that allow a better understanding of the depreciation of athletes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a large literature on topics of sporting celebrity, in sociology (Andrews and Jackson, 1996; Archetti, 2001; Bruce and Hallinan, 2001; Carrington, 2001; Hirai, 2001; Recours, 2006), social psychology (DeSteno et al., 2000;

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Petty et al, 1993; Wegener et al, 1995), and consumption/marketing fields. (Dewhirst and Hunter, 2002; McDaniel, 1999).

Many authors have measured the way in which a public sports figure's perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise affect the attitudes of spectators (Andersen and Clevenger, 1963; Hovland and Weiss, 1951; Johnson et al., 1968; Kelman and Hovland, 1953; Ohanian, 1990; Whittaker and Meade, 1968) However, with two notable exceptions (Barthes, 1957; Recours, 2008), little attention has been directed toward the depreciated celebrities in a consumer context.

Recours (2008) found that well-appreciated sports superstars are actually fewer in number than those who are depreciated. In France, two emblematic figures occupied the top two positions in the sports-star hierarchy (short-answer question: "Name your favorite sports figure"). Below these two (named respectively as being the favourite sports figure of 22 and 10% of the individuals questioned), there was an abrupt descent: only "morsels" of fame were left to the others, who were mentioned by less than 3% of the individuals. On the other hand, when it came to depreciate superstars (short-answer question: "Name a sports figure you do not like at all"), more names were mentioned: about ten athletes shared this status, in approximately equal proportions.

Why are they depreciated? By whom? And what exactly are they criticized for? The aim of this article is to propose a tool for understanding what makes spectators depreciate sports celebrities.

Social and individual utility of celebrities

Some sports celebrities such as Nolan Ryan (Trujillo, 1995) seem to project to fans a patriarchal symbolism, while others like Michael Jordan (Kellner, 1996) project a more modern image. Still others like Dennis Rodman have a highly controversial image.

These celebrities are strong stimulators of the sports-fan imagination and are the targets of identification and projection processes (Morin, 1957). This is why sports celebrities are used by educators (as models in coaching and training), politicians (as representing certain ideologies), and companies promoting brand-name products (as opinion leaders). The scientific study of sports fans' identification with and projection onto sports celebrities is therefore of great interest to sports professionals.

According to Morin (op.cit.), there is a certain amount of identification at the heart of all projections like these: at the same time as readers or spectators release their psychic "virtualities" and attach them to a hero in a given situation, they identify with individuals who are nonetheless strangers to them, and they vicariously live

experiences that are not their own. Morin (1962) suggested that celebrities/heroes, by means of their dual nature (divine and human), "bring about an ongoing back-and-forth movement between the world of projection and the world of identification" (p. 123).

The depreciated athlete

But what about the depreciated athlete? Is he or she depreciated for reasons relating to the ideal self-image, in the same way as the appreciated sports star? Depreciated celebrities are not all disparaged for the same reasons. This topic is addressed in a few studies. Generally, a single type of negative character is distinguished: Barthes (1957) called them "bastards", Klapp (1962) called them "villains".

Barthes's (1957) study on wrestling looked at a type of character who opposed the hero, which he called the "salaud" (the bastard). In wrestling the bastard is essentially an unstable person who takes refuge in the rules when they work in his favour, and breaks them whenever he finds it useful: As Barthes (1957) wrote: "At one point he will ignore the formal limit of the ring and continue to hit an opponent who is technically protected by the ropes, then a minute later he reestablishes that limit and clamors for the protection he failed to respect a moment earlier" (p. 22). But even if a wrestler may disgust or irritate, never does he disappoint, because by carrying outward signs to an extreme, he always meets the public's expectations. Is the depreciated athlete a kind of "bastard"? A "little" bastard? An euphemized bastard? An ambiguous bastard?

Self-image, personality and motives for playing sports

A major focus in the study of media consumption is the influence of audience characteristics in predicting media use (Hawkins et al., 2001). For example, some research indicates preferences for violent television programming are related to the sensation-seeking (SS) personality trait (Krcmar and Greene, 1999; McDaniel et al., 2007). Self-image congruence can also facilitate positive behaviour and attitudes toward products. The self-image congruency has been used as a way of understanding product symbolism based on the notion that consumers are attracted to products/services/persons that have a symbolic image most relevant to their own self-concept (Sirgy's, 1982). Self-image congruency theory has been already applied to understand participant sport behaviour (Kang, 2002,2004). If individuals project themselves onto depreciated sports figures, then by finding out more about the self-images of the concerned individuals, we

should be able to understand the reasons why sports stars are depreciated. To this end, we choose to delve into sports fans' self-images by analyzing their motives for playing a sport.

Several qualitative studies show that sports participants in interviews usually express their will "to overcome an adversary," "to be related to other participants," and/or "to take risks" (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Griffet, 1994; James, 2000; Wacquant, 1995). That is why we used a questionnaire, named QSMP2001, which assesses these three dimensions of the sports experience, in a French context (Recours, 2004). These three dimensions are described below.

Distinctiveness (to overcome an adversary)

In sports competitions, the reasons for participating are often presumed to be instrumental (Deci and Ryan, 1985). This idea here is that self-accomplishment stems from the feeling that one is stronger or better (distinct) than another. In this case the individual feels a need to display his/her superiority. Although certain participants (particularly females) do not wish to be conspicuous (James, 2000), this is not the case for all. Some people play a sport in order to stand out and to impress the audience (one could ascribe this behavioural manifestation to the need to affirm one's identity).

Zuckerman (1971) focused on this dimension (but only as an independent variable and as a personality trait) and found a positive correlation between the sensation-seeking score and the need to be admired.

Sociability (to be related to other participants)

Some sports-related studies have attempted to capture the meaning of the sports activity by analyzing it at the microsocial level. These studies assert that members of a social group are linked by shared perspectives, a common "language" and activities, and shared communication networks. In this approach, reality is said to be constructed from the "sub-universe of meaning" (Bromberger, 1995; Schütz, 1987), from daily routines (Maffesoli, 1988), or from "idiocultures" (Fine, 1979); in short, the microsocial view says that the sharing of experiences and meanings constitutes a founding force of society. Deci and Ryan (1991) noted the need to feel connected to others (relatedness) as a determining factor in motivation. Vallerand and Grouzet (2001) included the concept of relatedness (sociability) in their hierarchical model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to play sports.

Playing to the limits (to take risks)

With respect to the dimension identified by Zuckerman

(1971) regarding the search for danger, risk, and adventure, it is important to point out that the essential distinguishing characteristic of adventure is also a feature of the "agon" type of sport (as defined by Caillois, 1958), is the simultaneous presence of opposing forces of equal intensity. Simmel (1957) defined adventure as a lifestyle marked by its ambiguous and equivocal character. The concept of "playing to the limits" was used by Griffet (1994) in this work on the problem of knowledge generation in situations associated with physical danger, where he identified the importance of emotion in this process. In this theoretical perspective, adventure appears as an "edgy" experience or a "game pushed to the limits". When a decision has to be made, time seems to accelerate and emotions suddenly arise (Jankélévitch, 1963).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

We wanted to show that the way an athlete is depreciated is a function of the individual who is interpreting the athlete's image. There is only one image, but it has multiple permutations (Brugidou and Backmann, 1997), and each person draws what he/she desires out of that image. This will vary according to who the perceiving person is, what the image can bring to him/her, and what he/she wants (consciously or unconsciously) to see in it.

H1: Sports celebrities evaluated as "not very competitive" will be depreciated by consumers who attach a great importance to the "distinctiveness" motivation in their own sports experience.

H2: Sports celebrities evaluated as "not very friendly" will be depreciated by consumers who attach a great importance to the "sociability" motivation in their own sports experience.

H3: Sports celebrities evaluated as "not very brave" will be depreciated by consumers who attach a great importance to the "playing to the limit" motivation in their own sports experience.

METHODS

As part of a larger study, a questionnaire was administered to a sample of adolescents. This age group was selected because it tends to have a powerful identification with sports celebrities. While the family is the primary provider of models, young people are increasingly affected by influential figures in the outside world during the course of their personality development. Lutte (1970) affirmed that adolescents are influenced mostly by personalities who are popular in those areas that interest them. Such role models are very common in the field of sports, especially for boys (Duret, 1993; Gagné, 1999).

Sample

The questionnaire was administered to 900 adolescents (878 were filled in, giving a 97.6% response rate). The adolescents were in their third year of middle school (normally 14 or 15 years old; $n = 433$) or in their final year of high school (normally 17 to 18 years old; $n = 445$) at 19 middle schools and 11 high schools located in 14 cities within the Provence-Alps region. This region in the south of France encompasses coastal, countryside and mountainous areas with several possibilities for very varied sports participation and physical activities. Gender and age, degree to which respondents are involved in formal sport (registered in clubs) or informal sport, as well as their preference in respect of formal or informal sports practice when they do both, were considered as independent variables. We broke employment status into three categories based on Bourdieu (1979), "high" (factory owners, managers, professionals), "medium" (teachers, business employees, office workers), and "low" (factory workers, welfare recipients). The questionnaire was distributed to the schools by members of the research team. The young people being surveyed were told as a group that all of their answers to the self-administered questionnaire would be anonymous and confidential, and that the questionnaire was to be filled in individually.

Design

The question "Name an athlete you do not like at all" was used to determine the disliked athletes of the respondents. The commitment to sports and physical activities was measured by asking to respondents why they were currently motivated to participation. The three dimensions/motivations of the questionnaire were "distinctiveness", "sociability", and "playing to the limit". These motives were chosen because of the motives previously validated in the literature. It was decided to use a general question to introduce each of the 10 items (for example, "What I like in practising sports and physical activities is ..."). A seven points Likert type scale was used (1= I do not agree at all; 7= I totally agree). The instrument is considered to be effective in terms of factor structure, intercorrelation, homogeneity, and reliability. Details of the dimensions have been published previously (Recours, 2004).

Analyses

A factor analysis (Varimax rotation) and ANOVAs were computed. Post-hoc comparisons were done whenever necessary. Unless otherwise specified, the significance level chosen for all analyses was $p < .05$. To interpret the results, qualitative data was also collected using a multimethod approach: to minimize bias, a graduate research assistant independently was looking for information in press and on Internet that may contribute to understand why these athletes were disliked by the public. This information was compared with the data found by the first author of this paper until both were satisfied that the brief portrait of each of these sports celebrities was consistent (Henderson, 1991). To add another dimension of triangulation to the process (Patton, 1990), a year after the administration of the questionnaire an athletes' agent and some of the participants were given the opportunity to read and react to the presentation of the findings.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents were

Table 1a. Socio-demographic characteristics of pupils.

Characteristics	Number of pupils	%
Age		
Junior High School	433	49.32
High School	445	50.68
Sex		
Boys	439	50.00
Girls	432	49.20
n/a	7	0.80
Father's employment		
High status	184	20.96
Middle status	385	43.85
Low status	167	19.02
Other	142	16.17
Father's nationality		
Europe	10	1.14
France	822	93.62
Maghreb	41	4.67
Other	5	0.57

reported by age, sex, status and ethnic backgrounds in Table 1a. The percentage of respondents who listed a depreciated athlete was 70.3%. The first six athletes received 54.3% of the votes. The athlete who was depreciated the most was a male soccer player of French nationality.

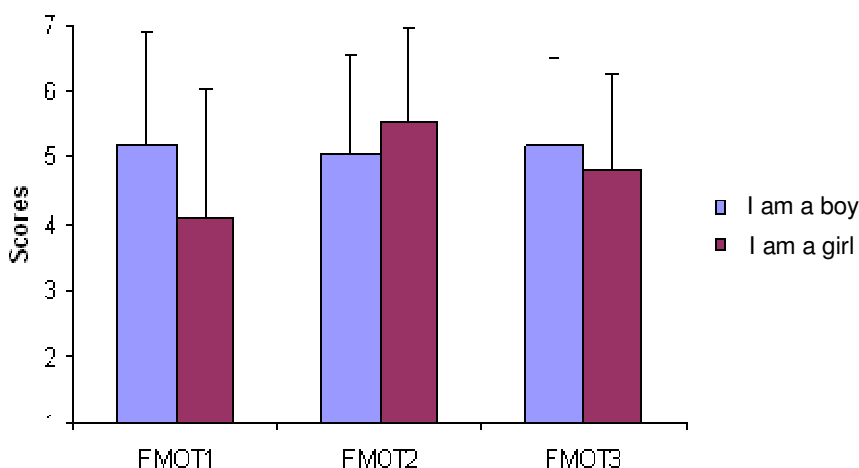
The statistical tests were done using the top six athletes on the 'depreciated list, namely, Richard Virenque, Marie-José Percé, Nicolas Anelka, Christian Karembeu, Zinedine Zidane, and Anna Kournikova (Table 1b).

Motivation scale

The factor analysis revealed three factors. All items loaded greater than 0.60 in their factor, and less than 0.40 in all other factors. Hence, no item is strongly associated with more than one factor. The first factor represented the 'distinctiveness' dimension ($M = 4.65$, $\alpha = 0.85$). The second factor represented the 'sociability' dimension ($M = 5.29$, $\alpha = 0.67$), and the third factor represented the 'playing to the limits' dimension ($M = 4.99$, $\alpha = 0.71$). All eigen-values were greater than 1, and the percentage of variance explained was greater than 60%. As a result, the analyses of variance (ANOVAs and Student's test) were based on the average results of each subject for each dimension considered (Figure 1).

Table 1b. Depreciated athletes.

S/N	Name	Times Chosen	Sport	Nationality	Sex
1.	Perec	70 (11.35%)	Track and Field	French	F
2.	Virenque	70 (11.35%)	Cycling	French	M
3.	Anelka	59 (9.56%)	Soccer	French	M
4.	Karembeu	52 (8.43 %)	Soccer	French	M
5.	Zidane	44 (7.13 %)	Soccer	French	M
6.	Kournikova	40 (6.48 %)	Tennis	Russian	F

**Figure 1.** Descriptive results of accredited motives. FMOT1: Distinctiveness. FMOT2: Sociability. FMOT3: Playing to limits.

Using motives to analyze depreciation

The results were interpreted according to the following principle: if celebrity 'C1' is depreciated by respondent 'R1' and respondent 'R1' is significantly different from the other respondents on motive 'M1', then this means (all things being otherwise equal) that individual a is depreciated for reasons which have to do with motive 'M1'.

Distinctiveness

The hypothesis was that sports celebrities evaluated as "not very competitive" will be depreciated by consumers who attach a great importance to the "distinctiveness" motivation in their own sports experience. The results (Figure 2) showed that individuals who depreciated cyclist Virenque and runner Perec attached less importance than others to the "distinctiveness" motive in their own sports playing: they gave this motive a lower score than the theoretical mean. Individuals who depreciated tennis player Kournikova, on the other hand, gave this motive a higher score than the theoretical

mean. A post-hoc Hartley test on the "distinctiveness" motive revealed that individuals who depreciated Karembeu were significantly more attached to this dimension than those who depreciated Virenque ($p < 0.01$), or Perec ($p < 0.01$).

Sociability

The hypothesis was that sports celebrities evaluated as "not very friendly" will be depreciated by consumers who attach a great importance to the "sociability" motivation in their own sports experience. The results (Figure 2) showed that individuals who depreciated soccer player Anelka attached less importance than others to the "sociability" motive in their own sports playing: they gave this motive a lower score than the theoretical mean. Individuals who depreciated athlete Perec and tennis player Kournikova, on the other hand, gave this motive a score above the theoretical mean. A post-hoc Hartley test on the "sociability" motive revealed that individuals who depreciated Kournikova were significantly more attached to this dimension than those who depreciated Anelka ($p < 0.05$).

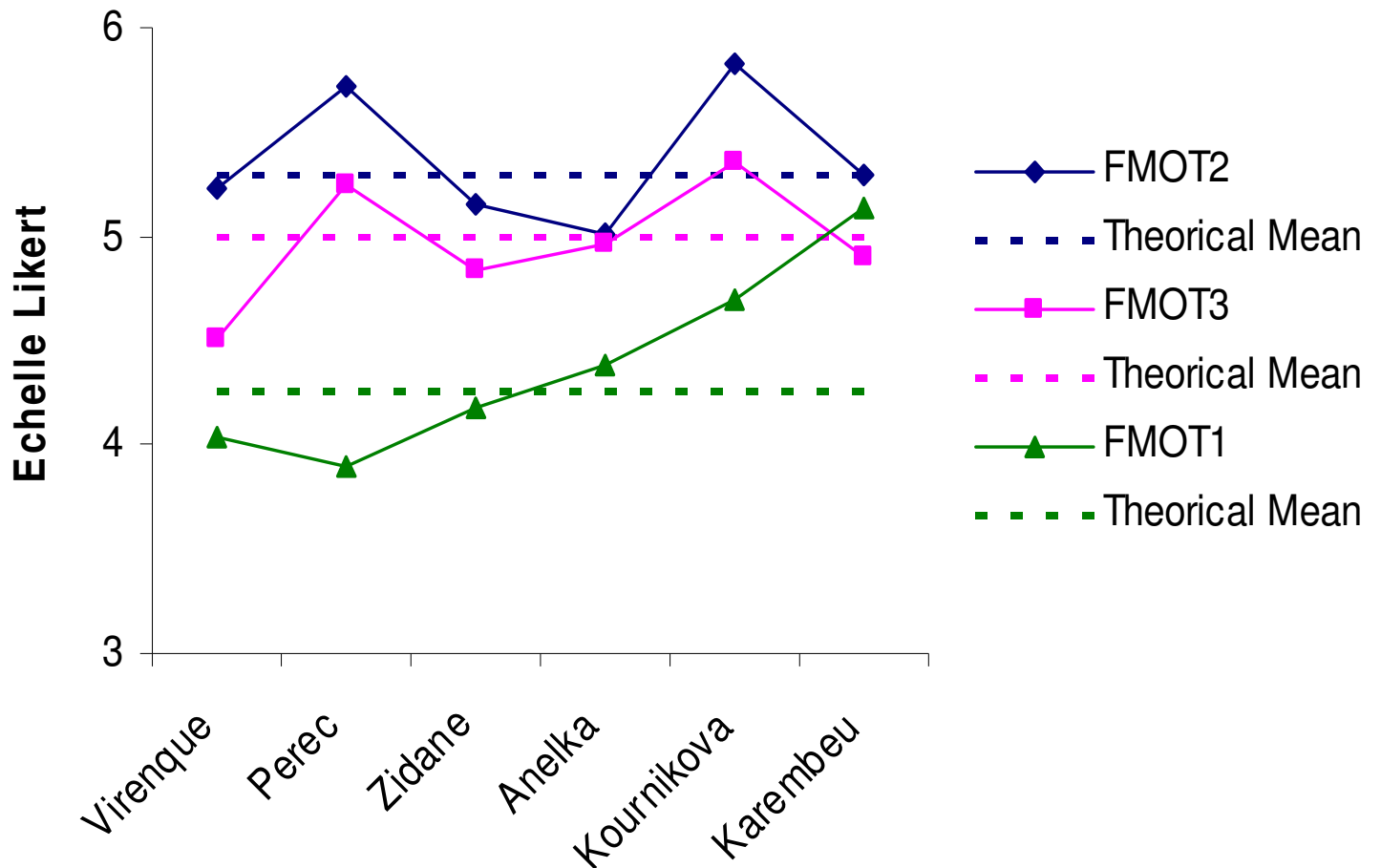


Figure 2. Mean score on the Likert scale for the different motives of players, by depreciated athlete. $F(15.823)=2.31$; $p < 0.01$. FMOT1: Distinctiveness. FMOT2: Sociability. FMOT3: Playing to limits.

Playing-to-the-limits

The hypothesis was that sports celebrities evaluated as “not very brave” will be depreciated by consumers who attach a great importance to the “playing to the limit” motivation in their own sports experience. The results (Figure 3) showed that individuals who depreciated cyclist Virenque attached less importance than others to the playing-to-the-limits motive in their own playing: they scored below the theoretical mean on this motive. Individuals who depreciated athlete Perek and tennis player Kournikova, on the other hand, scored above the theoretical mean here. A post-hoc Hartley test on this motive revealed that individuals who depreciated Kournikova were significantly more attached to playing to the limits than those who depreciated Virenque ($p < .05$).

DISCUSSION

Based on these results and on qualitative data found in press and on Internet, we will now present a brief portrait of each of these sports celebrities, in order to

contextualize our results and highlight issues that may contribute to their depreciation by the public.

Karembeu (French National soccer team)

Presentation

Christian Karembeu

This player, a native of the island of Lifou (New Caledonia), has certainly won more championships and trophies than most other players on the French team. He has earned the titles of world champion, European champion, champion of France, and winner of the Confederation Cup and the League of Champions Cup. On March 27, in 2001, Christian Karembeu, mid-field player for the French team, was booed by a majority of spectators at the Stadium of France when he entered the field in the 58th minute of play to replace Vincent Candela. At each of his interceptions and moves on an opponent, in fact every time the New Caledonian player touched the ball, his efforts earned him a derisive hoot

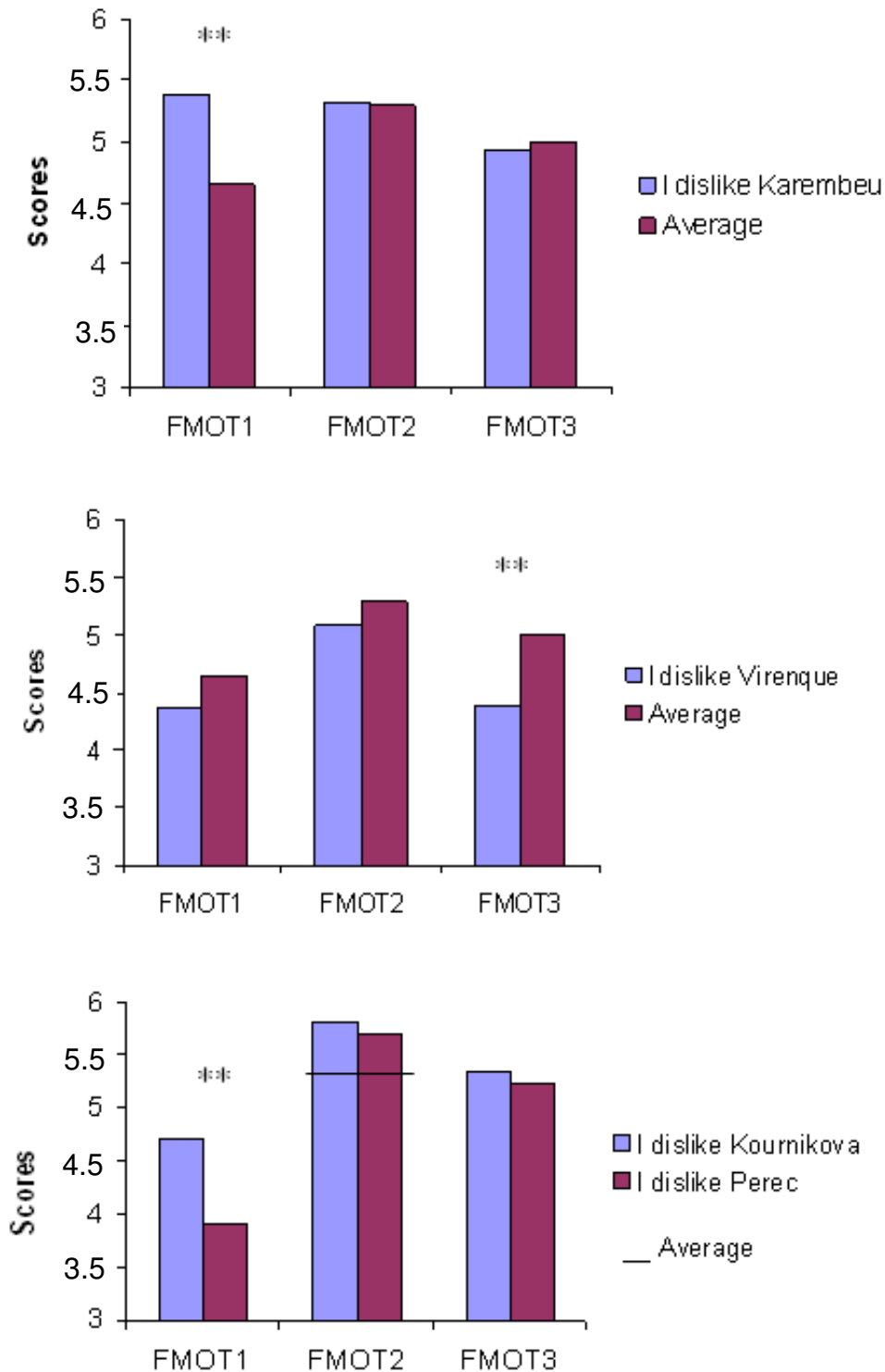


Figure 3. Mean score on the Likert scale for the different motives of players, for the depreciated athletes: FMOT1: Distinctiveness. FMOT2: Sociability; FMOT3: Playing to limits.

from the public. “Christian Karembou is known to be an untiring fighter as much on the field as off it. His proclamation of his Kanaka descent, his marriage to super-model Adriana, and his opposition to French

nuclear testing in the Pacific in 1995 might be the real causes of the frequent hissing and booing by some spectators in the stadium of France” (source: comorama.info¹).

Interpretation

Our results showed that Christian Karembeu's detractors attached significantly more importance to the 'distinctiveness' motive than others ($t(775) = -2.69$, $p < 0.01$). Why is Christian Karembeu depreciated? Is it really because he is Kanaka and refuses to sing the national anthem? This tool helped us answer these questions and to validate testimonies like this one from a supporter of the national soccer team, who wrote on the internet (2002): "I do not know if the journalists, or even the press in general, are hypocritical on the subject, but it seems evident to me that the booing and hissing (certainly a little exaggerated) stem solely from the fact that soccer amateurs do not understand why Christian Karembeu is still on France's team, given his level. All it takes to realize this is to see his 'lame' performance of Wednesday evening. Unfortunately it seems that Roger Lemerre attaches more importance to a player's past, to his reputation, than to his real, present qualities." The results showed indeed that Karembeu is reproached mainly for his lack of competitiveness (represented by the 'distinctiveness' dimension). The fact that he is Kanakan seems to be an incorrect, 'invented' justification. Individuals who depreciated Christian Karembeu do so because they do not see in him the level of competitiveness they seek in a sports hero.

The Virenque case (a French drug-use scandal)

Presentation

Richard Virenque used to be the top cyclist representing France. A veritable 'Virenque-mania' took over France in July 1997, when Virenque finished second in the Tour de France (behind the American, Lance Armstrong). But during the following year's Tour de France, the Festina scandal erupted. The affair was described by the press as "the first big drug-use trial". Richard Virenque, 33 years old, five-time best climber in the Tour de France, was surely the competitor affected the most by this scandal. Here are the causes of this media explosion: it all began on Wednesday, July 8, three days before the Tour began. Willy Voet, Richard Virenque's personal trainer and masseur who was traveling with the Festina team, was arrested near the French-Belgian border. In his car, the customs officers discovered 500 doses of drugs and masking agents. After first denying his involvement in drug traffic or use, Richard Virenque admitted it, but claimed that he was a victim of practices that were institutionalized within the team. After that, Virenque's image was one of a cheater, of someone who goes back on his word and who is capable of denouncing his team members to avoid being held responsible. This

scandal would seem to make Virenque the exact opposite of a hero in the eyes of the public.

Interpretation

The individuals who detest Virenque accorded less importance than the others to the playing-to-the-limits motive ($t(773) = 2.98$, $p < 0.01$). Inverting these results, this means that those who did not depreciate Virenque assigned more importance than others to pushing oneself to the limits. This finding allowed us to look at the processes by which sports fans justify the use of drugs by athletes. The subjects who valued playing to the limits were very familiar with the problem of the tempted man, the "dangling man" described by the philosopher Jankélévitch (1963): "The situation of the tempted man is a tense one." Jankélévitch characterizes temptation as the situation of a "dangling man" at the moment when he is about to choose between Good and Evil, Truth and Lies. It is an "instantaneous point of tangency", an "either-or" situation where everything is going to shift to one side or the other. This is an opportunistic philosophy (*Kairos*). "Temptation presumes a Manichean simplification of the situation. All is summarized in one monosyllable: saying "yes" or "no". If a man is tempted, neutrality is prohibited." Yet people criticize Richard Virenque for his drug use. For athletes, drug use probably represents a borderline behaviour, where one teeters between saying "yes" or "no" to the use of forbidden substances. This evokes the Biblical image of Adam and Eve with the apple. Like drug use in sports, playing to the limits is also a matter of being tempted.

This fact may explain why those individuals who seek the feelings experienced when playing to the limits do not detest Richard Virenque. Perhaps they understand this behaviour not only because they have already lived some symbolically similar experiences in their own sports playing, but also because this particular cyclist is a climber and mountains are precisely the type of terrain reserved for those who play to the limits. It is the mountainous territory on which the rankings often hinge and which increases the gaps between players. Virenque feeds the suspense and therefore enhances the emotion-generating tension in the sporting spectacle.

Perec vs. Kournikova (depreciated sportswomen)

Presentation

Marie-José Perec was born in Guadeloupe in 1968. She has been decorated by the Legion of Honor and has a host of titles which have won her the admiration of many journalists and fans. She was twice world champion and three times an Olympic medalist in the 200- and 400- meter

racers. Not only an athlete but also a model (about 5 ft. 11 inches tall), she has been nicknamed the “diva” and the “black gazelle”. But the gazelle is rebellious. According to her agent, just before the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney, she managed to avoid training with the rest of the French team in order to stay focused on the 400-meter event. Upon her arrival in Sydney, the Frenchwoman refused all contact with others, remaining closeted in her hotel room -- which caused a storm in the local press. “In order to compete at the highest level, she needs this feeling of hatred, which she transforms once on the track”, is how her former coach, François Pépin, explained her behaviour. Finally, just before the race, despite the fact that she was one of the favourites among the French athletes for winning a medal, Marie-José Percec dropped out and decided not to compete. The Australian press used the term “running away” to characterize Percec's surreptitious departure from Sydney a few hours before lining up for the 400-meter race, where she would have to challenge the national champion, Australian aborigine Cathy Freeman (Source: AFP).

Anna Kournikova, who conveys a “Lolita image with an absolutely perfect figure” earns “colossal” sums which are not directly proportional to her level of athletic prowess (Tauziat, 2000). She is one of the highest-performing players in the worldwide arena (regularly classified as one of the Top Ten), but although she is one of the best-paid tennis players on the circuit, she has never won a major tournament. Rumors on this subject are legion. She gets a lot of publicity for reasons which seem more aesthetic than sports-related, a fact for which she has been criticized: she is reproached for not devoting enough time to tennis.

Interpretation

Our results showed that Anna Kournikova's detractors attached significantly more importance to the ‘distinctiveness’ motive than the persons who disliked Marie-José Percec ($t(94) = 2.31, p < 0.05$). Anna Kournikova, “veritable cash-drawer of the WTA” (Tauziat, 2000), pulls in a salary which is not entirely in keeping with her tennis skills. It is possible that her mannequin-like figure contributes to her colossal fortune, that is, “colossal with respect to her performance” (Tauziat, op. cit.). According to Tauziat, three factors are involved in the popularity of women's tennis besides the quality of their sports performance: the beauty of some players, the money that very young players earn, and the scandals that surround them. The fact that Anna Kournikova earns so much money without having won a tournament probably irritates some people. Individuals who detest Marie-José Percec granted little importance to the

‘distinctiveness’ motive in their own playing. Those who attached a great deal of importance to competition did not choose her. Indeed, one cannot reproach this athlete for her lack of competitiveness: Percec was the best runner in the world on the 400-meter race.

Enjoyment of sport – as player or fan – is almost always a function of interaction with other people. The detractors of both Percec and Kournikova indicated that they attached much more importance to the ‘sociability’ in their own sports playing than the other individuals interviewed (as represented by the theoretical mean). It turned out that Percec was characterized by her antisocial behaviour during the Sydney Olympics, which is probably what caused her to be depreciated. When Kournikova was depreciated, it was also connected to the ‘sociability’ dimension: she was depreciated for her personality. Those people who said they depreciated her attached much more importance than the others (represented by the theoretical mean) to the motive of sociability in their own sports playing. Although she is regarded by some of her opponents as “cute, funny, and rather nice”, the media (particularly television channel M6, just before our questionnaire was administered) presented her as a ‘pest’, ‘conceited’, ‘scornful of the rest of the world’, in short, antisocial. This broadcast probably influenced a large number of TV watchers and affected their representations of this player. It isn't surprising, then, that Kournikova is depreciated both by those who champion ‘distinctiveness’ and by those who are more concerned with ‘sociability’.

Implications: Disliked athletes and the ideal self-image

Morin (1962) described the mechanisms through which individuals project themselves onto a star who represents them. These mechanisms are highly applicable to sports. It is trivial to state that when a local or national team wins, it is the entire city or country that wins and takes credit for the accomplishment (Bromberger, 1995). But when the home team loses, the only thing the fans can do is find avoidance strategies for denying that failure, which are in effect self-protection strategies (such as naming scapegoats like the referee, the person who selected the players or particular players). These scapegoats are then generally labelled as anomalies, intruders, or impostors. They are typically blamed for their incompetence, whether justifiably or not. Fan identification with players and teams has spawned its own nomenclature. For example, there is “Birging”, or “basking in reflected glory”, which can be seen in fan's use of the words “we”, “us”, and “our” when their favourites win, or Corfing (casting off reflected failure”) as seen when the words “them” or “they” are used to discuss a loss (Mullin, Hardy, and

Sutton, 2007). However, the belief that winning absolves all other sins is a symptom of what Mullin et al. (2007) called sport marketing myopia. Of course, winning is important but does not guarantee a rise in the appreciation of sporting celebrities. Then, judging sports stars as depreciated athletes is not done solely on the basis of actual performance in competitions (Karembeu): it can also involve personality factors (Perec) and bring to bear questions of ethics or morality (Virenque). The fans feel as if the athlete is bringing shame upon them. The depreciated athlete is also someone who is not as one would like him to be, not what he ought to be. These judgments are backed by the judge's own ideal self-image. The shame is reinforced by the fear of being contaminated by the impostor's image, a representative of narcissistic failure.

Thus, the true opponent seems to be an internal one. Clearly, depreciated individuals are not athletes from competing or foreign teams: they are local or national, just like positive sports figures. Why are they depreciated? Sometimes it is because they have reached an undeserved rank, and sometimes it is because their image -- perceived as negative -- threatens to reflect upon the entire community and stigmatize it in the eyes of others. People do not want to be represented by narcissistic individuals. This is reminiscent of female rugby players' refusal to allow homosexual players on their team, not because they are homophobic, but from the fear of being seen as homosexuals themselves (Espinete, 2002).

Limitations

The expectations of fans are obviously not only based on the simple notion of motivation, and numerous exploratory studies have suggested that fans are capable of very complex reactions to the behaviours and marketing person as of sporting celebrities. For example some can state that even they do not play American football, there are sports figures they love and hate in the game. They can idealize athletes for their hard work and ability to excel, they can bond with them because they attended their alma mater (their school, their university, their city, their country), and they can depreciate them because they appear to be immoral and greedy.

These are aspects of self that have nothing to do with sports participation, and yet these positive possible selves they seek to obtain, or negative possible selves they wish to avoid underpin their love or hate of sports figures. However, the aim of the present paper is merely to analyze relationships between motives and depreciated sports figures. The argument is that part of what motivates the evaluative reaction toward these icons is how fans imbue or project their own desired

self-conceptions onto these athletes.

Carr et al. (2001) compared the influence of parents, peers, and sporting heroes on the goal orientations of 75 children and 75 adolescents in the midlands of England. They found that sporting heroes were the most influential social agent in the adoption of goal orientations for both children and adolescents. Therefore, it appears that identification with heroes may be a greater influence on developing motivation than parents or peers. In the other hand some researchers defend the idea that sporting products/heroes need to be congruent with the receptors' personality. It would be interesting to determine whether personality influences sports images or if sports images influences personality. After all, ANOVAs only measure relationships and not some type of cause/effect connection between the two. In the sporting heroes' case, we can probably suggest a "circular" relationship between personality and sports images. More research is needed on this topic.

CONCLUSION

Building upon marketing and media psychology, a number of studies examined the evaluations of products by consumers. Most of these studies focused on preferences about positive or neutral attributes. For example, Chitturi, et al., 2007; Raghunathan, and Mahajan, 2007) examined the emotional and behavioural consequences of making functional versus hedonic trade-offs. Results showed that consumers attached greater importance to the hedonic attribute. Despite these studies' importance, important questions remain. Why are some products depreciated by consumers?

The aim of this research was not to identify loved or hated athletes, but to propose a tool for understanding what makes spectators depreciate sports celebrities, and for grasping the projection and identification mechanisms underlying the public's perceptions of athletes. This paper could inform marketers as they make decisions about product endorsement by sports superstars.

The proposed tool (motivational scale) is an effective method of capturing subjects' choices of disliked athletes. The primary advantage of this tool is that its dimensions were determined by means of a factor analysis. By way of their responses, the respondents were the ones who indicated which items were representative of a given dimension. In addition, this motivational scale allowed us to grasp factors of respect or disrespect that could not be ascertained from a simple analysis of the fans' comments.

The results demonstrated the limitations of a simple discourse analysis of the spectators' remarks. In choosing a hero or an impostor, some reasons are rational and easily verbalized, while others are affective

and emotional. This study is the first to provide evidence that the evaluative reaction toward these disliked sports figures is influenced by how fans imbue or project their own desired self-conceptions onto sports images.

As with symbols (Durand, 1969), the sports fan's construction of hero and impostor images seems indeed to be the result of an anthropological trajectory, of a continuous exchange between subjective impulses and objective internalizations of the environment. As spectators, we project ourselves onto the image that we build of sports celebrities. We see ourselves in the celebrity, whether he/she is positive/heroic or negative/evil.

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APPENDIX

Distinctiveness motive (*FMOT1*). The three items were:

What I like in the sport I play most is"

- a. Achieving the best possible rank or position.
- b. Winning over one or more opponents.
- c. Victory.

Sociability motive (*FMOT2*). The three items were:

What I like in the sport I play most is...

- d. Experiencing moments of complicity.
- e. Sharing the same moments, the same experiences with people I like.
- f. Sharing a certain closeness with other players.

Playing to the limits (*FMOT3*). The four items were:

What I like in the sport I play most is...

- g. Having opposing or contradictory feelings; simultaneously experiencing a desire and a fear to try something.
- h. Confronting obstacles which seem almost within my reach without being totally sure of my power to attain or overcome them.
- i. Trying an activity that is very difficult for me, but that I think I can do successfully.
- j. Doing activities that could "make or break" me, activities that are close to my "breaking point".