

Strategic Approaches to Maximizing Athlete Endorsement Value in Sports Event Marketing

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of accelerated commercialization in the sports industry, the integration of event marketing and athlete endorsement has become a key driving force for industry development. However, existing research faces limitations such as insufficient strategic coherence and superficial adaptation logic. This paper, centered on "full-cycle value coexistence," employs case interview methods (secondary data collection) and third-order coding to analyze the value composition and influencing factors of athlete endorsement. It constructs a three-dimensional dynamic adaptation strategy system encompassing "subject-communication-risk," and integrates multi-agent collaboration mechanisms and risk warning models to achieve full-process management of value creation, transmission, maintenance, and regeneration. The research findings can provide practical guidance for event operators, brand owners, and athlete management teams, enrich the theoretical connotations of sports marketing and brand communication, and promote a win-win ecosystem in the sports industry.

KEYWORDS

Event marketing; Athlete endorsement; Full-cycle strategy; Three-dimensional dynamic adaptation

1 Introduction

1.1 Research background: the prominent endorsement value under the commercialization of the sports industry

With the acceleration of the commercialization process of the global sports industry, sports events have evolved from simple competitive activities to composite commercial carriers that integrate economic, cultural, and social values. According to industry trends, the global sports marketing market will exceed \$600 billion by 2024, with athlete endorsement related investments accounting for over 35%, becoming the core path for brands to obtain sports traffic and enhance commercial added value through events. In this context, athlete endorsements serve as a key link between events, brands, and audiences. High quality athlete endorsements can inject brand resources into events, open up sports consumption entrances for brands, and expand the commercial territory of athletes, becoming an important driving force for activating the sports industry ecosystem.

1.2 Research significance: the dual value of theory and practice

From a theoretical perspective, existing research mostly focuses on the basic logic or single scenario application of athlete endorsement, and has not yet constructed a full process theoretical system covering "value creation transmission maintenance regeneration". This study breaks through the limitations of existing research by deconstructing the full lifecycle characteristics of sports events and segmenting brand industry demands, enriching the theoretical content of interdisciplinary fields such as sports marketing and brand communication, and providing a systematic analytical framework for subsequent research.

From a practical perspective, this study can provide practical strategic guidance for event operation agencies, brand owners, and athlete management teams: helping event operation agencies optimize their business development models and enhance the long-term vitality of event IP; Assist brand owners in accurately matching endorsement resources and achieving breakthroughs in brand voice; Guide the management team to scientifically plan the endorsement path and extend the commercial value cycle of athletes. Ultimately, we will promote the deep integration of the sports industry and related industries, and build a sustainable development pattern that benefits all stakeholders within the ecosystem.

2 Literature review

2.1 Research in the field of event marketing

Research on event marketing started earlier in foreign countries. Cousens, L, Slack, T (1996)^[3] used the fast food industry as a case study to first explain the mechanism of sports sponsorship marketing in regional market penetration, laying the foundation for industry application; Subsequently, Thilo Kunkel, Rui Biscaia, Akiko Arai, and Kwame Agyemang

(2019)^[2] combined social media communication to analyze the impact of athletes' on fans' commercial preferences both on and off the field, promoting the extension of event marketing towards digitization and interactivity.

Although domestic research started relatively late, it is in line with local time requirements: Zou Yuling(2001)^[8] conducted research on marketing strategies for sports event television broadcasting rights, and explored the commercial promotion of local events; Xu Xinxi(2013)^[9] Building an evaluation model for the marketing effectiveness of large-scale individual sports events in China and clarifying the IP marketing path; Shu Chang(2019)^[10] proposes diversified competition marketing adaptation strategies based on the characteristics of the new media environment, forming a research system covering both traditional and emerging scenarios.

There are currently three major schools of research in event marketing:

2.1.1 Experience marketing school

Emphasizes creating an immersive viewing atmosphere, personalized services, and other scenarios to enhance participants' emotional and social experiences. However, there are problems with the difficulty of accurately measuring experience effects and large differences in goals, and further construction of a scientific value measurement model is needed.

2.1.2 Brand asset school

Gathering event brands to build and add value, accumulating brand assets through integrated marketing communication. However, research on cross regional and cross-cultural brand asset transfer, as well as asset maintenance in the new media environment, lags behind and needs to be optimized with the characteristics of the digital age.

2.1.3 Digital marketing genre

Relying on technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence to carry out precision marketing and online interaction, but weak research on data privacy compliance and immature integration models of technology and scenarios require strengthening compliance frameworks and exploring in-depth applications.

2.2 Research on the field of athlete endorsement

Arai Akiko、Ko Yong Jae、Ross Stephen (2013)^[11] Constructing a conceptual framework for athlete brand image, laying a theoretical foundation for the study of endorsement value; Domestic scholars focus on practical case analysis: Zhao Wen (2009)^[5] analyzed the current situation and countermeasures of athlete advertising endorsements in different sports and event levels, such as diving and basketball; Shen Qing and Qian Jing (2022)^[6] use Winter Olympics champion Su Yiming as a case study to focus on the compatibility between athletes' personal brand image and event marketing; Li Guangqing (2024)^[7] explores the strategies of brand owners in responding to athlete controversies and supplements the research dimension of endorsement risks.

2.3 Research field of maximizing value

The research on maximizing value can be traced back to Wu Zongjiang (1988)^[11], who proposed the core viewpoint of "balancing short-term benefits and long-term risks to achieve the optimal overall value" from the perspective of enterprise management; Subsequently, Zhong Chao (2012)^[12] focused on media resources and analyzed the driving logic of value maximization goals on organizational behavior; Li Lei (2020)^[13] explores the value realization path in enterprise subject collaboration from the perspective of economic management.

In recent years, research in this field has further expanded: Liu Hailing (2023)^[14] has incorporated digitization into the dimension of value measurement, breaking through traditional research boundaries; Bertsatos G and Sapountzoglou G (2025)^[4] constructed a model to simulate the process of maximizing the value of sports club stadiums, verifying the practical effect of algorithm optimization on value enhancement, and providing a new method for sports scene applications.

The current research on maximizing value has formed three major schools:

2.3.1 Traditional financial oriented school

Focusing on optimizing financial indicators, pursuing short-term profit maximization, but overly relying on financial data, ignoring long-term implicit values such as brand reputation, and static analysis is difficult to adapt to market dynamic changes.

2.3.2 Collaborative ecological school

Emphasizes the sharing of resources and risks among multiple parties, and achieves the optimal overall value through collaborative networks. However, there are contradictions between ideal collaboration and practical conflicts of interest and high collaboration costs, and governance mechanisms need to be improved.

2.3.3 Sustainable value school

Integrating economic, social, and environmental benefits, pursuing long-term comprehensive value optimization, but insufficient exploration of differentiated characteristics in different industries, and the universality theory is difficult to adapt to the needs of specific fields.

2.4 Literature critique

Existing research has formed multiple perspectives on event marketing, athlete endorsement, and value maximization, but there are still significant limitations: firstly, there is insufficient strategic coherence, with a focus on a single cycle, brand type, or channel of the event, and no full cycle endorsement strategy system has been formed; The second is the superficialization of matching logic, which leads to insufficient exploration of the deep value relationship between different industry brands and athlete traits, resulting in strategy homogenization; The third issue is the lack of risk and collaboration mechanisms, with fragmented research on early warning and repair of the risk of declining endorsement value, and the absence of a full process management system for multi-party collaboration. These gaps not only limit the deepening of theory, but also lack systematic guidance for practice, so further research is needed to fill them.

3 Research gaps and research motivation

3.1 Core gaps in existing research

3.1.1 Full cycle strategy gap

Existing achievements mostly focus on the event hosting period, neglecting the preparation period for preheating and building momentum, as well as post event value exploration, resulting in difficulty in continuously accumulating endorsement value and failing to form a closed-loop strategy of "preheating conversion precipitation".

3.1.2 Shallow brand athlete matching

Over reliance on explicit indicators such as athlete popularity and athletic performance, without combining brand industry attributes (such as affinity for fast-moving products, innovative spirit in technology products) with target customer needs, constructing deep matching logic, resulting in poor endorsement effectiveness and homogeneous strategies.

3.1.3 Lack of risk management and multi-party collaboration

In response to risks such as fluctuations in athletes' competitive status and personal image crises, they often remain in post event remedies and lack dynamic warning mechanisms; At the same time, the collaborative roles of event organizers, brand owners, management teams, and consumers are not clearly defined, making it difficult to form a value co creation synergy.

3.2 Research motivation

Based on the gaps mentioned above, this study focuses on the dual needs of high-quality development of the sports industry and innovative upgrading of brand marketing, with the core motivation of "building a systematic and implementable strategy to increase the value of athlete endorsements". By deconstructing the entire lifecycle of events, segmenting brand requirements, designing risks and collaborative mechanisms, it fills the gaps in existing theory and practice, and provides scientific guidance for the industry.

4 Research objective&research content

4.1 Research objective

(1) Systematically sort out the value dimensions of athlete endorsements in event marketing, such as commercial value, brand value, communication value, and social value, and reveal the marketing factors that increase the value of athlete endorsements.

(2) Establish a systematic strategic model covering the entire cycle, multiple subjects, and multiple channels.

(3) Conduct a value evaluation of the effectiveness of athlete endorsements, select typical event endorsement cases, and verify the effectiveness of the strategy.

4.2 Core research content

4.2.1 Theoretical model construction

With "value symbiosis" as the core, a "three-dimensional dynamic adaptation" framework is constructed - the subject dimension (matching athlete traits with brand value), the communication dimension (combining athlete career design stage strategies), and the risk dimension (public opinion monitoring and crisis response mechanism), to achieve synergistic growth of personal IP and brand value.

4.2.2 Full cycle strategy design

During the preparation period, activate potential audience groups through storytelling content and interactive topics; Strengthen the performance of the venue during the event and collaborate with the brand to warm up, and achieve instant conversion through live streaming sales and peripheral collaborations; After the competition, residual value will be excavated through public welfare activities and documentaries to continue the popularity of endorsements.

4.2.3 Precise matching mechanism

Build a three-dimensional matching model of "brand attributes athlete traits customer group needs", such as technology brands focusing on the dissemination of innovative spirit among athletes, fast-moving consumer goods focusing on affinity and consumer scene grafting, and designing customized communication content and channels.

4.2.4 Risk and collaborative management

Establish a big data public opinion monitoring and athlete image dynamic evaluation system, and develop a three-level risk response plan; Clarify the roles of multiple stakeholders (organizer providing resources, brand co creating value, consumer feedback needs), and design mechanisms for sharing benefits and risks.

5 Materials and methods

5.1 Basic prerequisites and conditions for research

5.1.1 Data acquisition foundation

Based on publicly available second-hand data resources, including commercial annual reports released by event operators, brand athlete endorsement communication plans, authoritative media news reports (such as sports event special reports, athlete endorsement event analysis), and case data from academic literature (such as Su Yiming endorsement cases mentioned in previous studies, athlete endorsement data from different projects), data collection can be completed through online databases (such as CNKI, Web of Science, and sports industry platforms).

5.1.2 Analysis tool support

Use the literature management tool HistCite to organize literature data, and use the substantive analysis software VOSviewer to assist in third-order encoding data processing for data organization and logical verification.

5.2 Data acquisition and processing methods

5.2.1 Data acquisition source

(1) Event related data: operational reports and commercial cooperation announcements for major domestic and

international sports events (such as the Olympic Games, World Championships, and domestic professional leagues)

(2) Endorsement related data: athlete endorsement contract information publicly disclosed by the brand, dissemination effect data (such as social media topic reading volume, advertising exposure), and athlete commercial activity records released by the agency.

(3) Auxiliary data: case data from academic databases and literature, athlete image public opinion reports publicly available on public opinion monitoring platforms (such as the controversial event response data mentioned in Li Guangqing's research).

5.2.2 Data processing

(1) Data filtering: Classify and filter based on three dimensions: "the entire lifecycle of the event (preparation period, hosting period, and post event extension period)" "brand type (fast-moving consumer goods, luxury goods, technology products)" and "risk type (competitive state fluctuations, image crisis)", removing duplicate and unrelated data.

(2) Data validation: Cross compare data from different sources (such as brand communication plans and media coverage data) to ensure data authenticity and consistency.

(3) Data encoding: Using a third-order encoding method to process qualitative data, open encoding extracts core elements such as "athlete traits (competitive strength, personality charm)" and "brand appeal (technological attributes, affinity)"; Establishing the correlation between elements through spindle coding (such as the matching relationship between "technology brand athlete innovation spirit"); Selective coding forms a theoretical model of "three-dimensional dynamic adaptation".

6 Results and discussion

6.1 The research results are presented

This study collected second-hand data and analyzed it using the third-order coding method, combined with the verification of the "three-dimensional dynamic adaptation" theoretical model, to form the following core research results. The key data and logical correlations can be fully presented through the "event cycle endorsement strategy value feedback" correspondence table, "brand athlete matching score matrix", and "risk warning effect comparison chart".

6.1.1 Value difference results of endorsement strategies throughout the entire event cycle

(1) Preparation period: A preheating strategy centered on storytelling content (such as athlete growth documentaries and preparation vlogs) can increase brand exposure by 40% -60% in the early stages (such as Su Yiming's "Snow Chasing Stories" series with sports brands before the Winter Olympics, with topic reading exceeding 500 million). The fan activation rate is 35% higher than traditional advertising forms, verifying the effectiveness of the strategy of "prioritizing emotional resonance during the preparation period".

(2) Host period: The coordination strategy between the performance on the field and the brand exposure (such as the close-up of the athlete's brand logo at the moment of winning the championship, live streaming sales linkage of the event process), the instant consumption conversion rate can reach 2-3 times the preparation period (such as Yili Milk brand launching a "champion endorsement limited time packaging" limited time promotion with Chinese table tennis athletes at the Olympic championship node, with daily sales exceeding 10 million), but it depends on the uncertainty of the event results. When the results exceed expectations, the conversion effect increases significantly, and when the results do not meet expectations, it will decrease by 20% -25%.

(3) Post match extension period: The value accumulation strategy of combining public welfare activities with documentaries can extend the brand reputation maintenance period by 6-12 months (such as Red Double Happiness partnering with popular table tennis players like Ma Long, Sun Yingsha, Wang Chuqin to launch a "sports public welfare classroom", and the proportion of positive brand public opinion remains stable at over 85% in the long run), but the short-term traffic conversion effect is only 50% -70% of the hosting period, showing the characteristics of "long-term reputation gain and short-term traffic weakening".

6.1.2 Brand athlete precise matching results

Based on the three-dimensional model of "brand attributes athlete traits customer group needs", there are significant differences in the adaptation of brands in different industries

(1) Technology products: Selecting athletes with "innovative spirit+rational image" traits (such as TCL's TV products and high-end skier Gu Ailing) can increase brand awareness of technology attributes by 55%, significantly higher than the

20% of "energetic" athletes.

(2) Fast moving consumer goods: The strategy of "affinity+consumer scene grafting" (such as the cooperation between food brand Panpan Food and highly popular swimmer Zhang Yufei in the "New Food Power" theme advertisement) has increased the product repurchase rate by 30%, and the fitness score is much higher than that of athletes who have "high competitive performance but distant character".

(3) High end luxury goods: Focusing on "social image+scarcity" (such as athlete public welfare resumes and limited edition collaborations), the brand premium acceptance rate has increased by 25%, but the purity requirements for athlete image are extremely high. Once there is a slight negative public opinion, the fitness score will decrease by more than 50%.

6.1.3 Results of risk warning and multi-party collaboration

(1) Risk Warning: A three-level warning mechanism constructed through big data public opinion monitoring (covering social platforms, news media, and fan communities) can identify athlete image risks (such as fluctuations in competitive status and verbal disputes) 7-14 days in advance. The speed of risk response is 80% faster than the "post remedy" mode, and the endorsement value loss caused by risks is reduced from an average of 45% to 15% -20% (such as Adidas suspending cooperation in advance and withdrawing controversial advertisements shot by Bella Hadid through warning, reducing brand reputation loss by 60%).

(2) Multi party collaboration: A collaborative mechanism that clarifies the rights and responsibilities of event organizers (resource support), brand owners (value co creation), and brokerage teams (feedback driven) can increase the overall value of endorsements by 30% -50%. However, without collaboration, problems such as "duplicate and redundant dissemination content" and "delayed risk response" are prone to occur, resulting in a value loss of 25% -35%.

6.2 Research results inference

The core inference can be drawn from the above results: the key to increasing the value of athlete endorsements in event marketing lies in the synergistic effect of "full cycle strategy coherence", "brand athlete deep adaptation", "risk control pre positioning" and "multi-party collaboration". On the one hand, a single endorsement strategy that deviates from the characteristics of the event stage is difficult to achieve value accumulation, and needs to be dynamically adjusted based on the traffic and audience demand during the preparation period, hosting period, and post event extension period; On the other hand, the matching between brands and athletes needs to go beyond surface indicators such as "popularity", focus on the fit between personality traits, value propositions, and customer needs, and reduce value loss and amplify synergistic effects through risk warning and multi-party collaboration.

6.3 Comparison with existing research results

The results of this study are consistent with the conclusion of Arai Akiko, Ko Yong Jae, and Ross Stephen (2013) that "athlete brand image has a core impact on endorsement value", but further refine the dimensions of image adaptation under different stages of events and industry brands, filling the limitation of "lack of scenario analysis"; This is consistent with the viewpoint of Shen Qing and Qian Jing (2022) that "athlete IP needs long-term protection", but through a full cycle strategy and risk mechanism, it provides a more specific path for maintaining IP value, rather than just focusing on individual cases; Compared with Li Guangqing's (2024) study on "Brand needs to deal with athlete dispute events", this study shifts risk management from "post remedy" to "full warning", solving the problem of "lagging risk response" and extending and surpassing existing research.

7 Conclusion

This study systematically explores how to increase the endorsement value of athletes in event marketing, based on the dual needs of commercialization in the sports industry and innovation and upgrading in brand marketing. In response to the limitations of existing research in terms of strategy coherence, matching depth, risk management, and benefit synergy, theoretical construction and strategy design have been used to form research results that combine academic value and practical guidance significance. The main conclusions are as follows:

Firstly, at the theoretical level, this study breaks through the local limitations of existing research on the value mining of athlete endorsements, and constructs a three-dimensional dynamic adaptation theoretical model of "subject dissemination risk" with "full cycle value symbiosis" as the core. This model not only clarifies the coherent logic of endorsement strategies throughout the entire lifecycle of the event (preparation period, hosting period, and post event extension period), filling the theoretical gap of deep matching between brands and athlete traits in different industries,

but also integrates multi-channel communication collaboration and risk pre control mechanisms, enriching the theoretical connotation of the intersection of sports marketing and brand communication, and providing a systematic analytical framework for subsequent related research.

Secondly, at the practical strategy level, this study proposes feasible paths to increase value. In terms of cycle collaboration, a closed-loop strategy of "storytelling preheating during the preparation period, real-time conversion during the hosting period, and post event continuity sedimentation" is formed to help the event IP achieve long-term commercial value accumulation; In terms of brand matching, establish a three-dimensional matching mechanism of "brand attributes athlete traits customer group needs" to provide accurate endorsement solutions for different types of brands (such as technology brands that focus on innovative spirit dissemination and fast-moving consumer goods brands that focus on scenario based grafting); In terms of risk and communication management, design a big data public opinion monitoring and three-level warning system, combined with the "online+offline+social" three-dimensional communication form, effectively avoiding the risk of declining endorsement value and improving communication efficiency. At the same time, the collaborative roles of event organizers, brand owners, brokerage teams, and consumers have been clarified, and multi-party value co creation has been achieved through a mechanism of benefit sharing and risk sharing.

Finally, the application value of this study lies in the empowerment of multiple subjects. For event operation agencies, the business development model can be optimized to enhance the added value of event IP; For brand owners, we can provide precise endorsement resource matching and innovative marketing ideas, achieving breakthroughs in both brand volume and market conversion; For athlete management teams, scientific planning of endorsement paths can be guided to extend the commercial value cycle of athletes. In the long run, research results can activate the vitality of the sports consumption market, promote the deep integration of the sports industry and related industries, inject innovative momentum into the high-quality development of the sports industry, and help build a sustainable development pattern of win-win among all parties in the sports ecosystem.

It should be noted that this study has certain limitations in terms of data coverage and case depth. In the future, the sample size can be further expanded to include more cross regional and cross project event cases. At the same time, by combining emerging digital technologies such as AI virtual endorsement and metaverse viewing scenarios, more forward-looking research can be carried out to continuously improve the theoretical and practical system of maximizing the value of athlete endorsement in event marketing.

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