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The investigation of a professional athlete's endorsement deal, and other drivers of brand loyalty in the sports apparel sector.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Royal Docks School of Business and Law, University of East London for the degree of **Masters of International Business Management**

2020-06

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Abstract

With an incurrence of growth of globalisation, marketers are increasingly aware of attaining brand loyal consumers in today's vastly competitive markets. The sports apparel sector is one of these competitive markets, where there is a need for achieving brand loyal customers, as well as a differentiation with competitive brands in order to thrive. Sports apparel brands increasingly use celebrity endorsements in order to achieve a non-replicable advantage over competitive brands. This study attempts to find a link between celebrity endorsements and brand loyalty, as well as examine what brand loyalty drivers are of importance in this industry.

The data was processed through the positivism approach, whilst using a quantitative research methodology for the data collection. The data was collected through an online questionnaire and was analysed through the IBM SPSS software, as well as through Excel. A Pearson's test, as well as a crosstabulation of data was utilised to analyse the data. The research findings found no significant correlation between celebrity endorsements and brand loyalty, however it identified certain brand loyalty drivers, such as: quality and price, wide selection of choices, and satisfactory previous purchase experience as significant factors for customer loyalty in the sports apparel industry. Furthermore, the results of the study found a relationship between previous purchase experience and post-purchase behaviour. Based on these findings, the research was able to bring forth a recommendation for a market strategy in the sports apparel industry to achieve a customer-loyal base.

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I would like to use this opportunity to thank some people who have been there for me every step of the way. Firstly, I'd like to thank my parents for their unconditional love and support, and for providing me with the opportunity to pursuit a Master's degree in London. Furthermore, a special thank you to my sister Anuschka, for always being there for me. I'd also like to thank Demi Schuurs, for all the practices we have had in order to clear my mind. Furthermore, I'd like to use this opportunity to thank those who took part in this study, or even shared it in order to help this study come to a good end. Lastly, I would like to thank my supervisor Jaya S. Kypuram and lecturer Michael Harrison, for all your guidance and help.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

This chapter delivers an introduction to the research, which includes the research background (chapter 1.2) and a concise introduction to brand equity, brand loyalty and celebrity endorsements. Chapter 1.3 outlines the research question as well as the research objectives of this study, and chapter 1.4 provides an outline how this study has been structured further.

1.2 Research background

According to Statista (2020), the sports apparel industry estimated a revenue of $180.9 billion in 2019, and is expected to rise to almost $209 billion by 2025. One of the most significant factors of this growth in the sports industry worldwide is globalization (Howard and Sandeep, 2010). Furthermore, according to Euromonitor (2020), the sports apparel sector has grown faster than non-sports apparel wear in 2019 due to a growth in health awareness, an increase in participation in sports and fitness, and popularity of athletic wear. Additionally, it states that sports apparel has grown from apparel one wears for sports activities to fashionable wear for multiple occasions, such as running errands. Thus, sports apparel has shifted from use for athletics only, to every day wear. Moreover, according to Kumar and Deshmukh (2019), an increase in women participation in sports has further given growth to the sports apparel sector, for instance yoga has picked up incredible speed in recent years. This trend displays a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 5.1% from 2019 to 2026 (Kumar and Deshmukh, 2019).

As the sports apparel sector has a highly competitive market, with competitors such as Nike, Adidas, and Underarmour, brands must be able to differentiate themselves from their competitors, as well as gain a competitive advantage,

which can be achieved through celebrity endorsements (Amis et al., 1999; Hendriks, 1996). The use of celebrity endorsements has numerous other benefits; such as an increase in brand recognition, brand recall, impact brand equity, and influence buyer behaviour (Cornwell, 2001; Dugalic, 2015; Varghese, 2019). Furthermore, the use of celebrity athletes for a brand is tough for other brands to replicate, unlike other factors used to differentiate from competitors, such as pricing of products, and promotions. Moreover, due to the rise of social media, these celebrity athletes offer a vast platform to sports apparel brands to advertise their brand to the athlete's fan base, with some athletes having over millions of followers. Consequently, celebrity athletes are endorsed more than any other category of celebrities (musicians, actors, et cetera), and companies are willing to spend millions of dollars on endorsing these athletes (Carlson and Donavan, 2008). These endorsement deals have been going up steadily as well, for instance Roger Federer receives $30million a year from Uniqlo alone to endorse its brand (Badenhausen, 2019), which means athletes can make more money from endorsement deals than from prizemoney.

For brands, there is an increasing importance in brand equity and its drivers (Howard and Sandeep, 2010) and thus this research will look into the impact of endorsement deals with athletes on one driver of brand equity, brand loyalty. Firstly, two principal conceptual frameworks of brand equity exist, the first framework of brand equity by Aaker (1996), and the second framework by Keller (2003). Brand equity consists according to Aaker (1996) of four key drivers, namely; brand awareness, brand associations, brand loyalty and perceived quality. Whereas, Keller (2003) provides a six layer consumer-based pyramid of brand equity, and when all layers are achieved, intense active loyalty occurs . Both of these conceptual frameworks thus showcase brand loyalty as a component of brand equity. Moreover, brand loyalty is explained as to be the heart of brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Oliver, 1999). According to Aaker (2014), in order to enhance brand loyalty, the basis of the relationship with the customer must be

meaningful, rich, deep, and consistent over time. Brand loyalty is defined as 'a deeply held commitment to re-buy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same-brand set purchasing despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour' (Oliver, 1997). In a competitive market, the retention of customers is of great significance, because retention of a brand's customer base is a cheaper marketing strategy than gaining new customers. Thus, in a competitive environment such as the sports apparel industry, it is imperative to achieve a loyal customer base. Additionally, brand loyalty in the sports apparel brand can lead to consumers being less susceptible to a competitor's products and marketing promotions. Furthermore, brands are able to charge a 'premium price' to consumers, thus increasing profits.

Furthermore, previous research has indicated that for brand awareness and brand associations positively impact brand equity through endorsement deals, but not much has been researched on the brand loyalty driver on its own. Therefore, the focus of this study is specifically on brand loyalty and how it is impacted through the use of celebrity athletes in the sports apparel industry.

1.3 Research question and research objectives

As mentioned previously , not much research has been conducted on the impact of celebrity endorsement deals on brand loyalty. Therefore, it was decided to investigate a celebrity endorsement's impact on brand loyalty, especially as it is seen to be the heart of brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Oliver, 1999). Furthermore, the sports apparel sector was chosen as the sector has steadily grown and is expected to keep growing, and due to many athletes receiving numerous endorsement deals, such as: luxurious items (e.g. watches), drinks, sports equipment, car companies, et cetera. But, one could assume sports apparel to be the most common and lucrative endorsement deal, with some athletes making more money from clothing apparel endorsement deals than from prizemoney

(Badenhausen, 2019). Additionally, other brand loyalty drivers such as: price, quality, customer satisfaction, and post-purchase behaviours will also be investigated. To properly investigate these factors, a research question with research objectives was established, which were tested through a quantitative data research encompassing a questionnaire:

Research Question: What is the effect from a professional athlete's endorsement deal on brand loyalty (through Aaker's 1996 model) for the sports apparel industry?

Research objectives:
RO1: to identify if the endorsement of a celebrity athlete aids brand loyalty in the sports apparel sector
RO2: to determine what brand loyalty antecedents occur most in the sports apparel sector.
RO3: to detect what brand loyalty antecedents are best for marketing strategies for the sports clothing sector

By meeting the research objectives, and providing an answer to the research question, the outcomes of this study should offer a deeper understanding of how endorsement deals impact brand loyalty, as well as other significant elements to brand loyalty, which subsequently can lay a basis for a further investigation of marketing strategies in the sports apparel sector through the use of celebrity athlete endorsements. This study is especially useful to smaller sports apparel brands, as bigger sports apparel brands, such as Nike, already have a well-founded reputation through which they acquire the customer's trust and their loyalty.

1.4 Research structure

This research has been divided into six chapters; introduction (chapter 1), literature review (chapter 2), methodology (chapter 3), data analysis (chapter 4), conclusion (chapter 5), and future recommendations (chapter 6).

The first chapter will introduce the research, why it was chosen, and will briefly tap into the research question and objectives. The second chapter will entail the critical literature review, which will further dig into the two most used conceptual frameworks to brand equity by Aaker and Keller, brand loyalty conceptual frameworks, and endorsements of athletes. Furthermore, this chapter also provides limitations of the literature review, and a conclusion to the literature review. The third chapter entails the methodology utilised for the study, the research question and an in-depth explanation of the research objectives, as well as an elaboration of the hypotheses. Furthermore, this chapter also entails the challenges that occurred in the research. The fourth chapter will provide a detailed explanation of the data analysis, and the results obtained from the study, whilst also linking the results of the data to previous studies. The fifth chapter will provide us with an explanation of the findings of the study, and what is concluded from the study. The sixth and final chapter then will provide a brief summary of limitations in this study, and recommendations for future studies and managerial implications.

2. Literature review

2.1 Overview

This chapter encompasses existing literature review on brand equity (chapter 2.2), furthermore, when it comes to scholarly review on brand equity, generally one of two frameworks are most often sought out. These two frameworks are either Aaker's framework to brand equity, or Keller's framework, which are both explained in chapter 2.3. Most particularly this study will tap into brand loyalty and its impact to brand equity. Due to this, chapter 2.4 has been dedicated to brand loyalty and its importance to a brand. Chapter 2.5 then consists of endorsements of professional athletes. Chapter 2.6 will tap into the existing literature's shortcomings in order to grasp the importance of endorsing an athlete for a clothing apparel brand, whilst chapter 2.7 covers the conclusion, and lastly offers a review of key terms discussed (found in appendix 8.1).

2.2 Brand equity

Firstly, this study will look into what brand equity is and more significantly, why brand equity is such an important concept to managers nowadays. As aforementioned, most scholars prefer Aaker (1996), and Keller (1993) to conceptualize brand equity. According to Aaker (1996), 'brand equity is a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers'. Keller (1993) defines brand equity as 'the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand', thus looking at a consumer perspective to determine brand equity. Furthermore, Keller (1993) states that strong brands are made in the mind of the consumer, which can therefore essentially make or break a brand. Both Keller and Aaker look at brand equity through a consumer perspective, whilst for instance Simon and Sullivan (1993) defined brand equity through a financial perspective, as

'incremental cash flows which accrue to branded products over and above the cash flows which would result from the sale of unbranded products'.

2.2.1 Brand equity importance

Crass et al. (2019) explain that strong brand equity leads to a long-term impact on the brand's performance. Furthermore, Aaker (2006) explains that brand equity creates financial value to the firm, as well as a competitive advantage, which with the growth of globalization has a vast impact on the firm's performance (Bank et al., 2019). Essentially, when looking at the sports apparel sector, firms with high brand equity thus can increase profitability, can improve their brand's performance, and gain a competitive advantage over its competitors. Keller (1993) further added that one could look at price premium in order to establish if the firm has positive brand equity. This means that if the consumers are satisfied with paying a higher price for the product, the brand would have a positive brand equity. Thus, positive brand equity can also add value to the firm in terms of being able to charge a premium price for its product. With this in mind, what drives brand equity?

2.3 Conceptual framework of brand equity: Aaker (1996)

As mentioned previously, brand equity is often explained by scholars through one of two brand equity research frameworks, based on the works of Aaker (1996) and Keller (2003). Aaker (1996) suggests four key drivers to brand equity stemming from brand assets, which are depicted in figure 1 below.
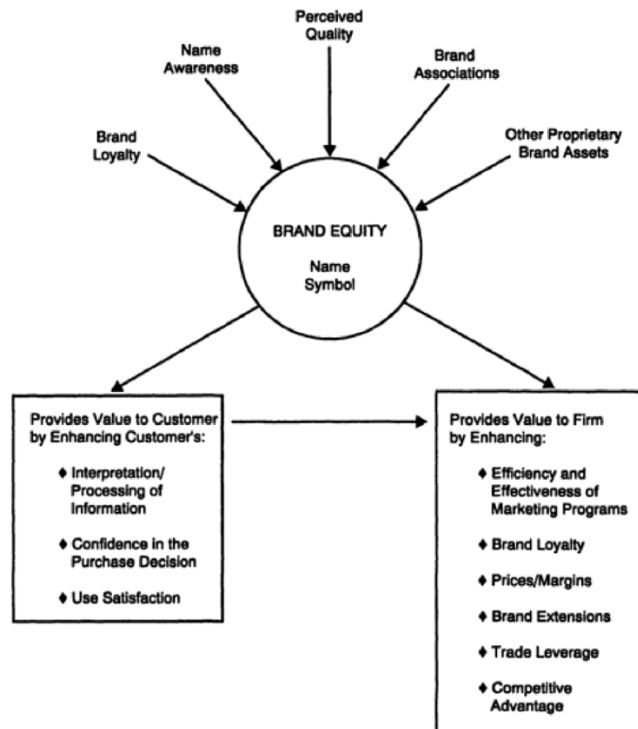
Figure 1 Brand equity from Aaker (1996)

By looking at this figure, one finds brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, as well as other brand assets such as patents, to be the key drivers to brand equity. Additionally, the image also gives us a clear representation of the importance to customers for brand equity, namely; brand equity provides better information, confidence in the consumer's purchase, and satisfaction to the brand, which in turn can lead to brand loyalty. Lastly, the figure also provides us detail on the effect of brand equity to financial value of the firm, as it can cause consumer loyalty to the brand, competitive advantage, and so on.

2.3.1 Conceptual framework of brand equity: Keller (2003)

Whilst Aaker's brand equity model is based on four drivers linked to the brand's assets (brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality), only touching briefly upon the consumer's perspective, Keller (2003) on the other hand, looks at brand equity rigorously through a consumer's perspective. According to Keller (2003), the more favorable the product is seen

in the consumer's mind, the more positive the brand's equity is. Figure 2 below depicts Keller's consumer-based brand equity pyramid. His pyramid includes six concepts in four layers in order to create a strong brand.
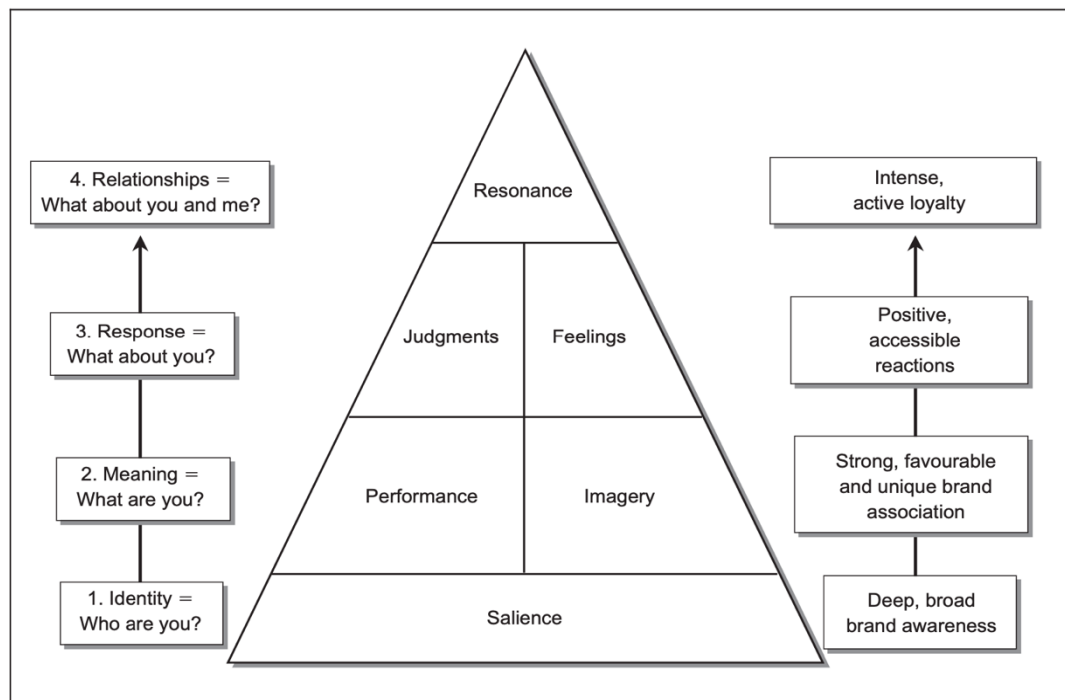
Figure 2 Customer based brand equity pyramid from Keller (2003)

As previously stated, the pyramid focuses on four layers (or steps) with six concepts. On the left hand side of the pyramid, one can find the four questions the consumer asks of a brand, and how the corresponding steps (identity, meaning, response, and relationships) are reached through 4 different blocks (pyramid itself) in order to create a strong brand (Keller, 2003).

Step 1: brand identity
Step 2: brand meaning
Step 3: brand response
Step 4: brand relationships

The pyramid works from bottom to top, thus one starts at brand salience and works to brand resonance, yet in order to reach the next step of the pyramid, one must have successfully accomplished the previous layer (Gordon, 2010). To put this more clearly, brand salience (step 1) must be reached before touching upon brand image and brand performance (step 2), followed by consumer judgements and feelings (step 3), and finally brand resonance (step 4).

According to Keller (2003), one wants to create brand salience through brand identity (step 1). Brand salience is the extent to which a brand virtually stands out from its competitors (Van der Lars et al, 2018). Thus, the firm needs to offer a product with a deep and broad brand awareness in order to meet the customer's needs. Secondly, after achieving brand salience, one moves further to brand meaning (step 2). The firm has to create brand meaning, which can be achieved through brand performance and brand imagery. According to Keller (2001) brand performance relates to the 'ways in which a particular product or service attempts to meet the customer's more functional needs, whilst Kotler and Armstrong (2004) refer to brand image as 'a set of beliefs held about a particular brand'. Thus, whilst brand performance attempts to meet more functional needs, brand image plays a role in attempting to meet the more social needs of the customer. If brand image and brand performance are seen to be strong and favourable, a positive brand association develops in the customer's mind (Keller, 2003). When a positive brand association is developed, we move on to brand response (step 3). This follows brand judgements and brand feelings. If these judgements (from the mind), and feelings (from the heart) are positive, we can continue to the final step, which is the creation of brand relationships (step 4). This creation of brand relationships occurs through brand resonance, which is defined by Keller (2001) as 'the nature of the relationship that customers have with the brand and the extent to which they feel 'in sync' with the brand'. If brand resonance is positive, intense and/or active loyalty occurs. If all these steps are reached, Keller (2001) says we have a positive brand equity and thus firms can

charge a premium price to consumers, whilst also being able to effectively and efficiently produce marketing programs for the brand.

Clearly, by looking over Aaker's and Keller's framework, brand loyalty is seen to be a contributing component to brand equity. However, what exactly is brand loyalty, and why is it important?

2.4 Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty, according to Oliver (1997), is defined as 'a deeply held commitment to re-buy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same-brand set purchasing despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour'. It is becoming a more and more important concept to marketers in recent years, and two loyalty frameworks are found most in literature, a two dimensional loyalty framework (Day, 1969), and a four dimension framework (Oliver, 1997). Following Day's (1969) framework, there are two types of brand loyalty, namely attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty. Behavioural loyalty refers to the consumer's loyalty resulting in an actual purchase of a product from a firm, whilst attitudinal loyalty refers to the consumer's loyalty not directly through buying, but by way of, for instance, through word-of-mouth bringing a positive image of the product to other consumers (Shih-I, C. 2011). Attitudinal loyalty also leads to a willingness to pay a premium price and to overcome obstacles to purchase the brand (Bandyopadhyay and Martell, 2007). By this, attitudinal loyalty can thus be seen as a psychological construct, whilst behavioral loyalty can be seen as a substantial construct (figure 3). However, due to the complexity of brand loyalty, most researchers now look at brand loyalty through at least a three-dimensional concept, or even a four-dimensional concept (e.g. Oliver, 1999).
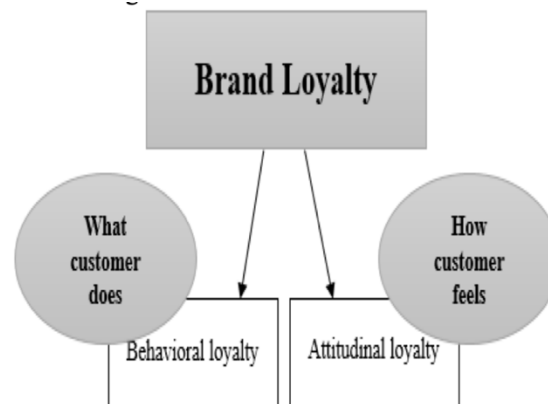
Figure 3 Two dimensional loyalty framework (Kahn, 2009), adapted from Taghipourian et al. (2015)

Henceforth, Oliver (1999)'s framework of brand loyalty includes four dimensions; cognitive loyalty, affective loyalty, conative loyalty, and action loyalty (figure 4). This framework starts at cognitive loyalty, and works down consecutively to affective loyalty, then conative loyalty, and lastly action loyalty. However, cognitive and affective loyalty are a form of behavioural loyalty, whilst conative and action loyalty are a form of attitudinal loyalty.
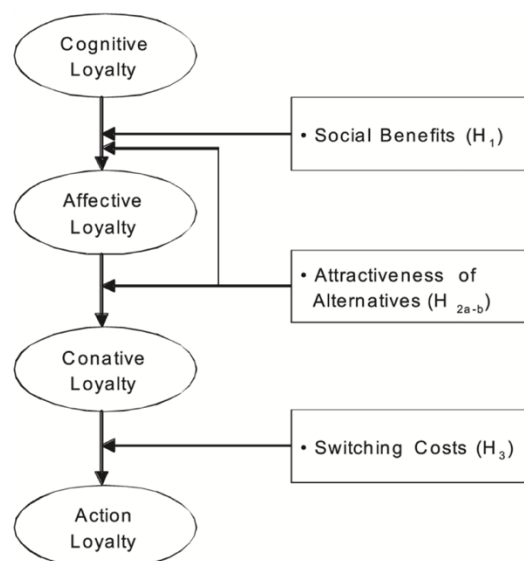
Figure 4 Oliver's four-dimensional framework (from: Blut et al., 2007)

Cognitive loyalty is seen as the weakest type of loyalty, and is determined by virtue of price and quality of the product offered (Blut et al., 2007). This type of loyalty is solely based on information (Taghipourian et al., 2015). Thus, consumers may still switch easily if they find an alternative product, which has better value for money. Secondly, affective loyalty is based on a consumer's favorable feeling towards a certain brand. In this stage of loyalty, the consumer's loyalty is not strong enough yet and consumers may still switch to a brand's competitors due to the attractiveness of alternative products. Thirdly, one moves on to conative loyalty. This is achieved when a consumer has numerous positive feelings about the brand. According to Blut et al. (2007), conative loyalty implies that attitudinal loyalty is accompanied 'by a desire to intend an action', thus meaning the consumer will want to repurchase the brand. However, intending to buy the product is not buying the product. Looking at figure 4 above, however, consumers still have a tendency to find alternative products from competitors. Lastly, there is action loyalty. According to Oliver (1999), this is achieved when consumers are willing to take 'action' or a 'readiness to act', thus are willing to buy the product from the brand.

By virtue of aforementioned reasons, one can establish some drivers of brand loyalty; price and quality, favorable feeling towards a brand, repurchasing decisions, as well as satisfied customers due good customer service (Blut et al., 2007; Marketing Charts, 2016). Other studies show more drivers, such as brand name (Keller, 2003), style, and promotion (Jayarathne, 2019). Furthermore, according to Marketing Charts (2016), a survey was conducted with decisive results, 45% of participants thought poor product quality is the most important factor for switching behaviour between brands, followed by bad customer service at 22%, and lastly 20% of the participants established price is of significance to brand loyalty. Moreover, approximately 66% of the participants believed value for money was of utmost significance for brand loyalty. Furthermore, according to Urun (2011), as brands nowadays develop products incrementally more similar,

consumers base their purchasing decisions more on price and quality. Thus, sports apparel brands with a good price and quality ratio can attract more consumers and potentially build a loyal consumer base.

2.4.1 Brand loyalty importance

According to Alhaddad (2014), brand loyalty has numerous significant influences on brand equity, such as: gaining a higher market share, the firm's ability to reduce marketing costs, and as aforementioned, the ability to strengthen the brand against competitors. Marketing costs can be reduced because retaining consumers is less expensive than gaining new consumers. Strengthening a brand against competitors in the sports apparel sector is extremely significant as there is an incurrence of numerous amounts of competitors in this industry, with Nike and Adidas at the forefront of the sports clothing apparel industry. Moreover, Atilgal et al. (2005) also state that strong brand loyalty can lead to barriers of entry for other firms, as well as firms being able to charge a premium price to consumers. Furthermore, Oliver (1997) and Aaker (1996) even state that brand loyalty is the heart of brand equity. Adding to this, if customers solely buy on price differences or convenience whilst not being loyal to a brand, it is also highly likely there is little brand equity (Ahmed, 2006). According to Giddens and Koffman (2002), brand loyalty increases sales, firms can charge premium prices to customers, and thirdly consumers will check for the brand's products first. If a consumer looks for a particular brand, they will be less likely to 'recognize' other brands, which means consumers will be less susceptible to another brand's products and promotions.

2.5 Endorsements of athletes

Athletic endorsement is the usage of an athlete by a brand, where the athlete is provided with financial (or tangible) benefits, and in return the athlete uses, promotes, or supports the brand's products (Beech and Chadweek, 2010). Moreover, Varghese (2019) refers to celebrity endorsements as 'a form of

advertising campaign or marketing strategy used by brands, companies, or non-profit organizations which involves celebrities or a well-known person by using their social status or fame to help promote a product or service'.

Globalisation is one of the most significant determinants of growth in the sports industry, especially with the increasing importance in brand equity (Howard and Sandeep, 2010). With the expansion of the sports industry, sports apparel brands are increasingly interested on putting their brand on a 'celebrity athlete'. Badenhausen (2019) updates a list each year with endorsement earnings as well as total pay per year (salaries/winnings, endorsements). This list shows how much money brands are willing to give athletes to endorse their products, with Roger Federer raking in $86 million in 2019 exclusively through endorsement deals. Uniqlo alone, pays Federer $30 million a year to wear its brand (for a 10 year deal), vastly overtaking his wining earnings of 'only' roughly $7.5 million. This is due to Federer's large fan base and his 'grace' displayed on a tennis court. Moreover, this list shows 5 out of 10 athletes in the top ten biggest endorsements are individual sport athletes (tennis and golf), whilst only two individual athletes are in the top 10 for complete earnings (Badenhausen, 2019). This means that individual athletes may receive a lower pay for their individual sport, but then can vastly make up for this with endorsement deals. However, why do marketers spend so much money on athletes?

2.5.1 Importance of celebrity athletes

Van Heerden et al. (2008) explains that companies are willing to devote this sort of money on athletes because professional athletes can convey the endorsing's brand message to their fans, and therefore bring in more customers. Furthermore, previous research has indicated numerous benefits on athletic endorsements. For instance, Dugalic and Lazarevic (2016) conducted an experiment regarding endorsements, where 63% of their respondents stated that athletic endorsement helped them with the identification of a brand. Additionally,

Cornwell et al. (2001) clarified that sponsorship of athletes can help a brand with differentiating itself from its competitors, further adding long term sponsorships seem to have the most impact on brand equity. As aforementioned, considering brands' products are starting to become more and more similar, a way of differentiation (by price, endorsements of athlete) with another brand can attract more customers. According to Carlson and Donavan (2008), celebrity endorsements show a positive relationship with favorable attitudes towards the brand, purchase behaviours, and stock price evaluations. Lesaule and Bouvier (2017) appear to agree, however they emphasize an increase in brand image and brand awareness through celebrity endorsements more. Further, they add that an athlete brings in credibility of the brand and assures a certain quality and performance of the brand's products. By looking at aforementioned reasons, themes start to appear in regards to why celebrity athletes are so important. A celebrity athlete can aid in brand image and brand associations, thus essentially bringing forth a feeling of favorability and familiarity if the athlete is liked (Arai et al., 2014; Mukherjee, 2009; Renton, 2009). Furthermore, the more likeable the athlete is, the more likely the consumer will be favorable towards the advertised brand (Kim and Na, 2007; Renton, 2009). These aforementioned reasons are a way of securing a non-replicable advantage over other brands, unlike, for instance price wars and promotions which are easily copied by competitors in the sports apparel market.

2.6 Shortcomings of literature review

As aforementioned, brand loyalty is seen as the heart of brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Oliver 1999). However, most literature review in regards to the impact of brand equity by endorsements show an impact on brand equity, yet not much has been exhibited specifically on the effect on brand loyalty through endorsement deals. Most significantly, most research has displayed positive relationships between athletic endorsements and brand image, brand

associations, and brand awareness (Mukherjee, 2009; Renton, 2009; Arai et a., 2014; Lesaule and Bouvier, 2017).

2.7 Conclusion

To conclude, brand equity as well as brand loyalty are complex, multidimensional terms. Keller (2003) and Aaker (1996) are seen as the two groundbreaking authors in regards to brand equity, both developing frameworks which are still used in today's brand equity research. Aaker has developed a brand equity concept with four drivers, whilst Keller developed the customer based brand equity pyramid with six concepts, in which one works up from the bottom to the top layer. Aaker's framework only briefly touches upon the consumer perspective in regards to brand equity, whilst Keller (2003) focuses rigorously on the consumer perspective. For the purpose of this paper, brand equity as explained by Aaker (1996) was used, with its four drivers of brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand associations, and perceived quality. Most literature review in this study regarding celebrity endorsements and brand equity henceforth also referred to the brand equity drivers from Aaker's viewpoint, such as: brand image, brand awareness, and brand associations, rather than Keller's consumer-based pyramid. More specifically, brand loyalty has been selected to investigate the impact on brand equity through endorsement deals with professional athletes, as brand loyalty is seen to be at the heart of brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Oliver, 1997). Furthermore, with the growth of the sports industry, as well as the competitiveness in the sports clothing apparel sector, brands need to be able to differentiate themselves from competitors, and one way to achieve this is through endorsement deals (Cornwell et al., 2001). The endorsement of an athlete provides numerous benefits to a brand, such as: a competitive advantage difficult to replicate by competitors, favorable attitudes to the brand, credibility of the brand, and an increase in brand image, brand awareness, and brand associations (Cornwell et al., 2001; Carlson and Donavan, 2008; Mukherjee, 2009; Lesaule

and Bouvier, 2017). Furthermore, appendix 8.1 provides a recap of the key terms used in chapter 2.

3. Methodology

3.1 Overview

This chapter moves on to the research development and thus will include the elaboration of the research question, as well as what type of research methods were used. Furthermore, this chapter is divided into 12 sections, in which the selected methodology for this research will be examined. Chapter 3.2 consists of the research question and hypotheses development, chapter 3.3 entails the research design by Saunder's 'research onion', which is used to explain the research selection process. Chapter 3.4 explains the research philosophies, whilst chapter 3.5 explains what research approach is used. Chapter 3.6 consists of the research strategy, whilst chapter 3.7 explains the set-up of the survey. Chapters 3.8 to 3.12 conclude with data collection and analysis, which is the last layer of the 'research onion'. In these chapters you will find reliability, research ethics, time horizons, research techniques, and lastly the limitations and challenges encountered.

3.2 Research question and hypotheses

The research question for this paper is:

The investigation of a professional athlete's endorsement deal, and other drivers of brand loyalty in the sports apparel sector.

Even though brand equity is determined by four drivers (Aaker, 1996), this paper will specifically look into brand loyalty, as brand loyalty is the heart of brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Oliver, 1999). This question was developed due to the researcher's interest in gaining a perspective in how much an endorsement deal helps a firm's brand loyalty. In order to gain perspective on this question, a set of research objectives was formulated:

RO1: to identify if the endorsement of a celebrity athlete aids brand loyalty in the sports apparel sector

RO2: to determine what brand loyalty antecedents occur most in the sports apparel sector

RO3: to detect what brand loyalty antecedents are best for marketing strategies for the sports clothing sector

To gain perspective on the research question, and to meet the research objectives, a set of hypotheses was developed. A hypothesis is effectively the beginning of the research process as well as the ending of the research. Through previous research on the impact of brand equity and brand loyalty through endorsements, three different hypotheses have been formulated in order to test, which are depicted in the table below.

Table 1 Research objectives and hypotheses

RO1	H1: celebrity endorsements influence brand loyalty in the sports apparel sector
RO2	H2: quality and price components are more significant brand loyalty components H3: customer satisfaction positively impacts post-purchase behaviour in the sports apparel sector

RO1 was developed as previous research indicated that companies are willing to spend more money on employing celebrity athletes, as they help the brand in audience attention, recall, evaluations and purchase intentions (Van Heerden et al. 2008). Furthermore, Cornwell et al. (2001) found that brand equity is positively impacted by endorsing athletes, but does not look at brand loyalty individually. Therefore, H1 was developed to determine if brand loyalty is impacted through celebrity athlete endorsements.

RO2 further digs into brand loyalty components, and examines the importance of price and quality. According to Dugalic (2015), most respondents (61.81%) to

the survey said that they are attracted to promotions involving celebrity athletes, yet only 2.66% said they would change their purchasing behaviours. Therefore, H2 was developed to investigate what other factors are necessary to change purchasing behaviours. According to Marketing Charts (2016); price, quality, and customer satisfaction through good customer service are the most significant of the price and quality components. Consequently, H3 was developed as post-purchase behaviour such as word-of-mouth recommendations is mostly associated with customer satisfaction.

As sports apparel brands invest incredible amounts of money into the endorsement of athletes (Lawrence, 2003; Stock 2014) and previous research (Cornwell et al., 2001; Agrawal and Kamakura, 1995) show a positive impact on brand equity through endorsements, RO3 was developed in order to recommend a marketing strategy in the sports apparel industry. However, R03 will be discussed further after the data analysis, as in order to meet RO3, the other research objectives must first be met so as to recommend marketing strategies.

3.3 Research design

After developing the set of hypotheses, the next step in research is to determine the research methods. According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2012), research design is the overall configuration of a research, in which one answers to what kind of evidence is gathered and from where, as well as how this evidence is interpreted in order to find a solution to the research question. Thus, this is fundamentally the architectural framework of the research. Saunders et al. (2012) developed a 'research onion', which one can easily follow from outer layers to inner layers in order to provide an answer to the research question. This framework consists from research philosophies, research approaches, research strategies, research choices, time horizons, and lastly techniques and procedures (figure 5).

Illustration 1: The Research 'Onion'
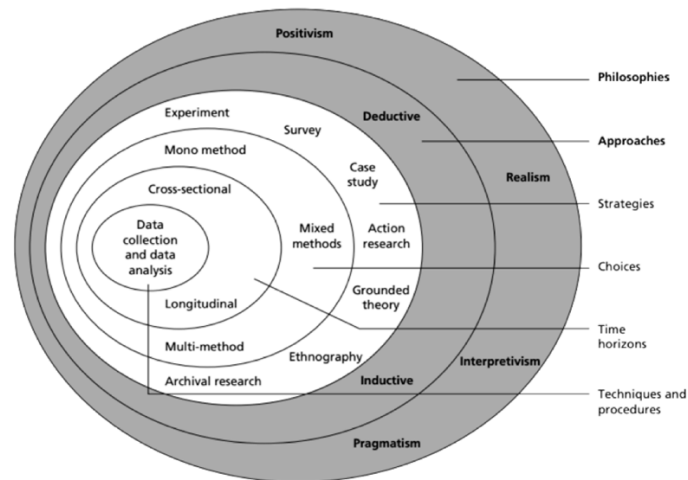
Figure 5 The research onion from Saunders et al. (2012)

3.4 Research philosophies

According to Saunders et al. (2009), research philosophy 'refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge'. Furthermore, in the outer layer of the onion, one will find four major philosophies: positivism, realism, interpretivism, pragmatism. However, according to Bryman and Bell (2015), the two most widely used research philosophies for business research are positivism and interpretivism. Therefore, it was opted to look further into either positivism and interpretivism for the purpose of this study.

Whereas interpretivists focus on subjective meanings and social phenomena, positivists focus on observable phenomena and facts. As this study aimed to further investigate previous research regarding the significance of brand equity, and other studies regarding brand loyalty drivers, the positivist philosophy was thus most appropriate. Positivist argue that knowledge is based on either observing or manipulating natural phenomena, through either empirical or experimental means (Neuman, 2003; Lincoln and Guba, 2005). Hammersley (2013) concurs and states that in order to understand a certain phenomenon, the phenomenon must be measured and supported by evidence. Furthermore, a

positivist research is undertaken in a value-free way where the researcher maintains an objective stance (Saunders et al. 2012). As not much has been discussed in terms of the impact of athletic endorsements on brand loyalty, an assumption cannot be made in regards to hypothesis 1. As this study attempts to either confirm or refute aforementioned hypotheses, the study will be supported by evidence to attempt to establish law-like generalisations (Saunders et al., 2012).

3.5 Research approach

A research approach can either be through a deductive or inductive approach. Saunders et al. (2012) explain that the deductive approach involves looking back at existing theory and building on that theory to investigate phenomena. On the other hand, the inductive approach starts by collecting data to understand a phenomenon, with that data then being utilised to build a theory. As this study involves the testing of hypotheses to investigate, and build on, previous theories regarding brand equity and brand loyalty, the deductive approach is chosen as the most appropriate a research approach.

3.6 Research methods

The first layer to peel in the inner layer is what research method to use. Saunders et al. (2012) state that this is usually a choice between either quantitative, qualitative, or a mixture of both research methods, with quantitative research being opted most for a positivist research philosophy and a deductive research approach. According to Antwi and Hamza (2015), quantitative research generally reduces measurements to numbers through the use of surveys. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is usually done through observations or in-depth interviews, with the measurements usually being in the form of words. As explained previously, this study uses the positivism philosophy and deductive approach, thus quantitative research is most appropriate. More specifically, it

was opted to use a survey in order to statistically prove or refute the abovementioned hypotheses regarding brand loyalty drivers.

3.7 Research strategy

Peeling the research onion off further, this study now looks at the options for the research strategy. There are numerous options, such as experiments, surveys, case studies, grounded theory and so on. Quantitative research often uses questionnaires, surveys and experiments to gather data, which researchers then explain in data (Hittleman and Simon, 1997). Furthermore, according to Saunders et al. (2019), using positivism as the research philosophy, whilst using the deductive approach often leads to quantitative research, which then is conducted through a survey or experiment. Therefore, a survey was chosen to be the primary data collection method, which then asks the question if it would be an on-the-field survey or an online survey. An online survey was chosen, primarily due to time constraints as well as convenience for the participants. According to Evans and Mathur (2005), a few vast advantages of utilising online surveys are: convenience, ease of data entry as well as analysis, and speed and timeliness.

3.7.1 Survey development

As the use of a survey was established as research strategy, this section will discuss how the survey was developed, as well as what variables were used, what the data collection purpose entails, and what sampling techniques were used.

Firstly, the survey was based on twenty-two questions, with the last question possessing of a subset of questions, which will enable the researcher to answer the research question. The survey consisted of a mixture of open and close-ended questions, whilst starting off with a filter question, asking if the participants played tennis recreationally or competitively. The filtering question was chosen as at first in the data analysis it would serve as a comparison of tennis players and other sports. However, after observing the data, it was opted to filter non-

tennis players out as 88% of the participants played tennis. The online questionnaire is attached in Appendix 8.3.

Furthermore, the questionnaire was also pilot tested through the use of family, and friends to test if the questions were easily understood. Due to the pilot study, questions were changed in order to be more comprehendible to those participants who speak Dutch, as the participants were mostly from Belgium and the Netherlands. Furthermore, questions were further explained as the pilot study showed several did not fully understand the question due to a language barrier (an example of an athlete receiving athletic endorsement was therefore given, as participants of the pilot study did not fully understand what was meant by 'athletic endorsements').

3.7.2 Descriptive versus exploratory studies

According to Saunders et al. (2012), data collection from a questionnaire can either be used for descriptive or/and exploratory, or explanatory research. Descriptive research is used to obtain an accurate profile of events, persons or situations (Saunders et al., 2012). However, this is usually a precursor to an explanation of the description; which is explanatory research. Explanatory research studies a situation or a problem in order to explain the relationships between the variables (Saunders et al., 2012). For the purpose of this paper, a mixture was chosen, or descripto-explanatory research. The descriptive research will enable this study to describe the impact of the drivers of brand loyalty in the sports apparel industry due to endorsement deals, whilst explanatory research will further explain the discovered phenomena.

3.7.3 Variables tested

Furthermore, there are three types of variables which can be collected through the use of a questionnaire, namely; opinion variables, behaviour variables, and attributes variables. Opinion variables record how respondents feel about certain aspects, whilst behaviour variables include what people do in the past, in the

present, or in the future, and attributional variables contain data about the respondent's characteristics (Saunders et al., 2012). The questionnaire has been aimed to consist of all three variables in order to fully grasp the collected data in regards to the research question and thus provide representative data that can be used for the general population.

3.7.4 Sampling technique

Lastly, the use of which sampling technique will be explained. According to Taherdoost (2016), a sampling technique is needed because a researcher does not have the time nor the resources to analyze data from an entire set of cases, commonly referred to as a population. Furthermore, Taherdoost (2016) explains that generally, sampling techniques can be divided into two types, probability sampling or non-probability sampling, which further have various specific types as sampling techniques, shown in figure 6.
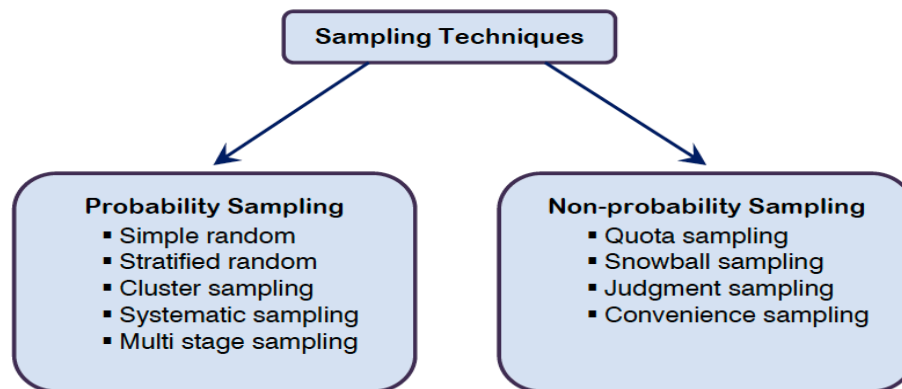
Figure 6 Sampling techniques from Taderhoost, 2016

For the purpose of this paper, it was opted to use judgment or purposive sampling. Maxwell (2012) explains that purposive sampling is used to choose particular groups, people, or events in order to gain important information which one could not have gotten as well from other participants. As the research wanted to compare those habits of an individual sport (tennis) to those of other sports, this research targeted sports enthusiasts, as well as a particular group of people;

specifically competitive/recreational tennis players. In order to reach this specific purposive sampling criteria, a filter question was utilized in the beginning of the survey, where the participant was asked: does the participant play tennis, either recreationally or competitively? Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire even if they did not meet the filtering question, however as aforementioned, after analysing the data it was opted to sample those out who did not meet the criteria for this study.

3.8 Research reliability and validity

Reliability is tested to see if the results of the study are repeatable (Bryman and Bell, 2015). According to Mitchell (1996) there are three approaches to assess reliability: the test re-test approach, internal reliability, and the alternative approach. According to Bryman and Bell (2015), internal reliability is applied when working with multiple-indicator measures such as this paper, and the Cronbach's Alpha test is used most often to ensure reliability in quantitative research. Cronbach's Alpha ranges in number between 0 and 1, with 0 showing no internal validity, and 1 displaying perfect internal reliability. The results of the Cronbach's alpha test can be found in chapter 4.2.

Furthermore, a pilot test can also be utilised to assess validity and the likely reliability of the collected data (Saunders et al., 2012). As previously mentioned, a pilot test was conducted in this study, and small amendments to the questionnaire were made. A pilot test was especially of importance for this study as most participants were from Dutch-speaking countries, and language barriers could occur, which could cause erroneous data. As previously mentioned in chapter 3.7.1, more explanation was given to a question regarding athletic endorsements, so participants could answer the questionnaire with ease and to establish content validity.

3.9 Research ethics

When working with human or animal participants, ethical approval must be given by the governing body for the study. Before starting the questionnaire, ethical approval was requested from the University of East London School Research Committee, see Appendix 8.2 for the approval letter. Further, Saunders et al. (2012) included ten ethical principles, which all were upheld in this study. These portrayed ethical principles, such as: avoidance of harm to participants, informed consent, privacy, voluntary nature of participation an right to withdraw, and so on. Firstly, participants were not exposed to any harm or distress due to this study. Further, participants were given a consent form prior to the study, thus there was no infraction of a lack of informed consent (as seen in Appendix 8.3). Thirdly, there was no invasion to privacy as this study was anonymous, data was in a protected file solely available to the researcher, and will be directly destroyed upon completion of the study. Lastly, participants were not forced to participate in this study, nor were the participants offered money. Even though the web-based questionnaire required answers in order to submit, participants were free to exit the webpage and thus not have their answers viewed. Furthermore, individuals under the age of 18 were not asked to participate in the questionnaire.

3.10 Time horizons

There are two types of time horizons, a cross-sectional study or a longitudinal study. Longitudinal studies are a 'diary' perspective, meaning one can study change and development, as the research covers a longer amount of time (Saunders et al., 2012). Cross-sectional studies, on the other hand, are those studies of particular phenomena at a particular time, or a snapshot in time (Saunders et al., 2012). As this research has a short time period, this research will consequently be a cross-sectional study.

3.11 Techniques and procedures

In the final layer of the research onion, one can find the data collection and analysis. As this paper used a quantitative research method (chapter 3.6), different quantitative analysis techniques were chosen, through the use of IBM SPSS Statistics, as well as Excel. These two programs were used to transcribe the respondents' socio-demographics, to test hypotheses through multiple tests, such as Pearson's test and crosstabulations, in order to conclusively meet the research objectives. This will be further explained in Chapter 4: Data findings.

3.12 Research limitations and challenges

Limitations that occurred in this study were time and cost-related. A bigger sample size could have provided a deeper understanding of brand loyalty in the clothing apparel industry. Furthermore, the data received from the questionnaire could also have been complemented with qualitative data, such as interviews, in order to further grasp the research question and objectives. Moreover, due to the researcher's nature, the comparison between an individual sport (such as tennis), and other sports failed as the percentage of tennis players was too distinct compared with the amount of other sports fanatics. However, without a tight time-frame, this could have been negated which could provide more insight in differentiations of brand loyalty between certain sports.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Overview

After having covered the existing literature on brand equity through Aaker's brand loyalty model, as well as covering the research methodology used to conduct this study, the focus now moves on to data analysis. Thus, this chapter will focus on the analysis of the acquired data. Chapter 4.2 covers Cronbach's alpha, the sample characteristics are covered in chapter 4.3 as well as the socio-demographics of the participants. Chapter 4.4 will then cover the individual data as well as data analysis and findings, and lastly chapter 4.5 will cover the discussion of the findings.

4.2 Cronbach's alpha

As mentioned previously, the Cronbach's alpha test is used to test internal reliability, with values between 0.7 and 1 indicating the questions of the questionnaire measure the same thing (Saunders et al, 2012). The IBM SPSS software was utilised to test Cronbach's alpha for this study. At first, the Cronbach's alpha was very low for this study, so in order to bring it to an acceptable level, a few questions that had no correlation with the other questions were deleted. However, the questions that were rejected in order to reach an acceptable alpha coefficient, are found in the summarizing table at the end of the questionnaire. The most prominent questions that were rejected concerned emotional commitment to the brand/athlete, as well as how participants found out about the latest products in the market. Lastly, a question concerning how well the brand meets the participants' needs was also deleted. Even though the questions concerning emotional commitment could have provided additional information regarding brand loyalty, as it is a part of emotional branding, the other questions did not. However, as emotional branding has not been covered in this study, these questions were not consistent with the remaining questions. Furthermore, as the importance of brand and celebrity endorsement was covered

in the summarizing table, this study did not entirely neglect these questions. After rejecting aforementioned questions, this study obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .686, which is an acceptable level of internal reliability, thus the questions in the questionnaire were interrelated and consistent. In table 2 below, one can find the Cronbach's alpha test results. Furthermore, in Appendix 8.3.1, one can find the questionnaire after adjusting for Cronbach's alpha.

Table 2 Cronbach's alpha

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.686	.673	17

4.3 Sample characteristics

Data used in this research was collected from April 10 until May 13, 2020. This was an approximately four and a half week period, with 56 participants filling out the questionnaire in April, and 4 in May. 75% of those participants filled out the online survey in the first week, with the remaining 25% spread out from April 21 until May 13. An online survey was chosen for its convenience, as well as due time constraints. A filtering question was asked if the participants play tennis, either recreationally or competitively. Out of the original 60 participants, 13 participants did not play tennis, thus the sample size for the study was 47. However, one participant was further filtered out as the participant was under the age of 18, resulting in a final sample size of 46.

4.3.1 Socio-demographics of questionnaire respondents

The socio-demographics of the participants include gender, age, and occupation. Furthermore, the overview with all tables regarding socio-demographics of the participants can be found in the tables 3 and 4 below.

4.3.2 Age demographic and gender demographic

Concerning age, two main age categories were persistent in this study, with approximately 30% of the participants in the 18 to 24 years old age bracket, and 52% of the participants in the age category of 25 to 34 years old. In regards to gender, there was an even balance of 50% of the participants female, and 50% of the participants male, meaning there was no gender disparity in the survey (table 3 below).

Table 3 Age and gender characteristics

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	≥ 54	Total
Female	17.39%	28.26%	2.17%	0.00%	2.17%	50.00%
Male	13.04%	23.91%	2.17%	10.87%	0.00%	50.00%
Total	**30.43%**	**52.17%**	**4.35%**	**10.87%**	**2.17%**	**100.00%**

4.3.4 Occupation

In terms of occupation, approximately 63% of the participants were employed, 28% of the participants were students, and the remaining 9% either preferred not to say, or were unemployed. Henceforth, as aforementioned most of the data was received from either students or young working professionals, as table 4 depicts.

Table 4 Age and occupation characteristics

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	≥ 54	Total
Employed	8.70%	36.96%	4.35%	10.87%	2.17%	63.04%
Not employed	4.35%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4.35%
Prefer not to say	0.00%	4.35%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4.35%
Student	17.39%	10.87%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	28.26%
Grand Total	**30.43%**	**52.17%**	**4.35%**	**10.87%**	**2.17%**	**100.00%**

4.3.5 Most bought sports apparel brand

Furthermore, participants were asked which sports apparel brand they bought most within the past six months. The subsequent questions in the questionnaire

referred back to what brand they picked in this question. Unsurprisingly, Nike was purchased most, followed by Adidas. This follows the market share of the respective brands in the sports apparel sector, as Nike as well as Adidas are the two leading brands in the global market for sports apparel (O'Connell, 2020). However, the discrepancy between Nike and Adidas is noteworthy, as this means Nike surpasses Adidas at its 'home' in Europe. Table 5 below depicts the percentages of all brands mentioned.

Table 5 Most bought clothing brand over past 6 months

Over the past six months, what sports apparel brand did you buy most? (The other questions in the questionnaire will refer back to your answer to this question).		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Adidas	8	13.6	13.6	13.6
	Asics	2	3.4	3.4	16.9
	Australian	1	1.7	1.7	18.6
	Babolat	3	5.1	5.1	23.7
	Head	1	1.7	1.7	25.4
	Lotto	1	1.7	1.7	27.1
	New Balance	1	1.7	1.7	28.8
	Nike	35	59.3	59.3	88.1
	On Cloud Running	1	1.7	1.7	89.8
	Underarmour	5	8.5	8.5	98.3
	Wilson	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	59	100.0	100.0	

4.4 Primary data analysis and findings of individual questions

After covering the sample characteristics and socio-demographics of the participants, this study moves on to the other questions pertaining the study. These include customer loyalty, celebrity endorsement factors, post-purchase behaviour, and questions concerning factors one may be tempted to switch to another brand.

4.4.1 Celebrity endorsement findings

In order to find characteristics involving celebrity athletes, four questions were asked pertaining athletic endorsements. Firstly, participants were asked if the sports apparel brand they wear is the same brand as their favourite athlete/team wears (figure 7A). This question was asked to see if customers keep in mind athletic endorsements when contemplating to purchase a certain sports apparel

brand. However, it was clear from the responses this was not the case. Out of the 46 participants, 52.2% responded they did not wear the same brand, 34.8% of the participants do wear the same brand as their favourite athlete/team, and 13% did not know if it was the same brand.

A second question was asked whether the participants' choice of brand was affected by marketing strategies of brands, such as celebrity endorsements or team endorsements (figure 7B). This question dug deeper in reasons why people buy a brand. However, 73.9% of the participants refuted an effect of celebrity usage in a marketing strategy. Furthermore, 15.2% of the participants agreed on being affected through celebrity usage as a marketing strategy, and the remaining 10.9% were not quite sure.

The third question pertaining celebrity endorsements was asked to determine if participants would consider switching to a different brand if said athlete changed endorsements (figure 7C). This question was asked in order to see if participants are loyal to an athlete, rather than to a brand. However, the answers were unwavering, with only 4.4% of the participants stating they would switch brands to follow an athlete. A resounding 80.4% of the participants specified they would stay with the brand they wear. The remaining 15.2% of the participants replied they would maybe consider changing brands if their favourite athlete/team switches brands.

Finally, a fourth question was asked whether participants thought celebrity endorsements whilst buying a brand was a factor they considered when purchasing athletic apparel (figure 7D). The options to answer ranged from very unimportant to very important. Following the trend in aforementioned responses, only 13% of the participants thought this was an important factor in purchasing sports apparel, whilst 32.6% had a neutral opinion on the matter. Furthermore, 15.2% of the participants found celebrity endorsements a very unimportant factor

for purchasing a brand, and 32.6% found it unimportant. The remaining percentage of the participants stated not applicable.
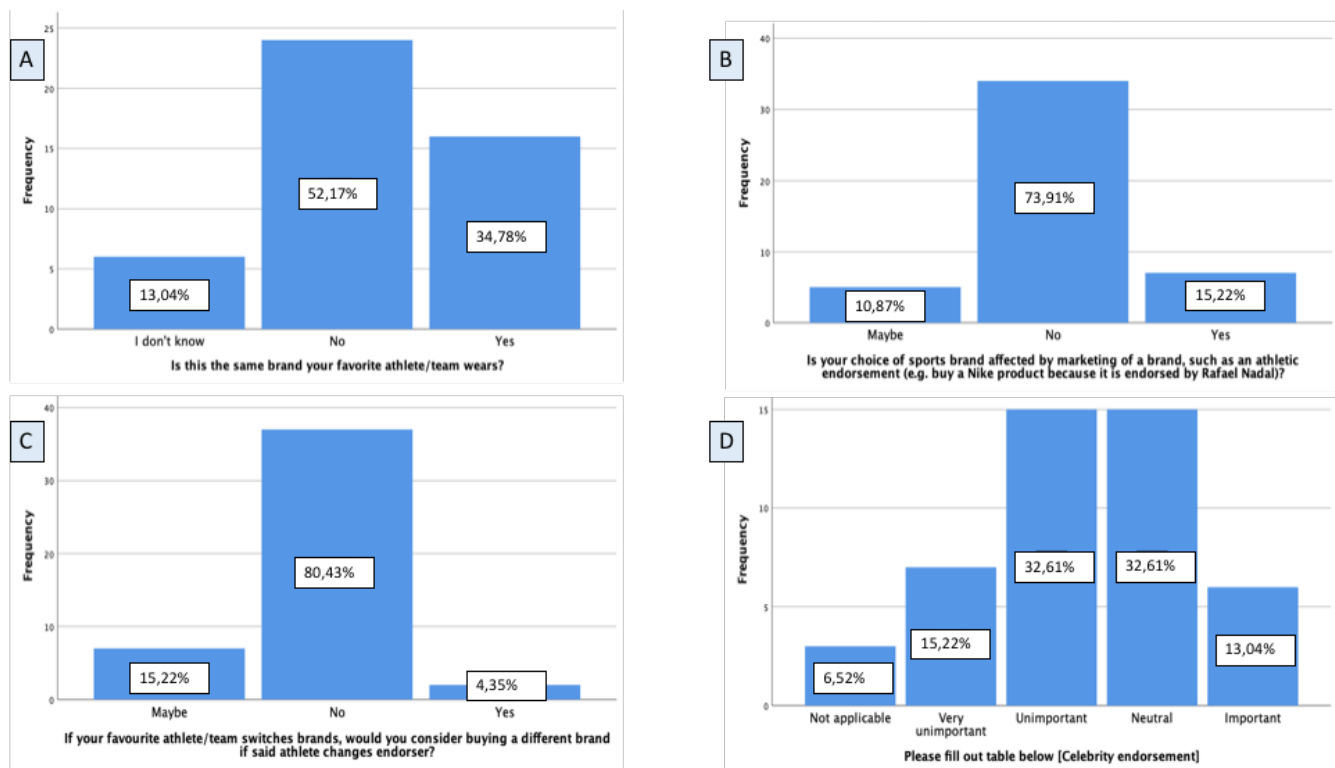
Figure 7 Celebrity endorsements

To conclude, celebrity endorsements do not seem to be of significant importance to consumers, as figure 7 above depicts. However, chapter 4.5.1 digs deeper into the celebrity endorsement phenomenon. Moreover, figure 7C portrays most consumers would remain brand loyal even if their favourite celebrity athlete switches, however, what does make a consumer in the sports apparel industry loyal to a brand?

4.4.2 Customer loyalty

After covering celebrity endorsements, a second set of questions involved questions on customer loyalty. Firstly, participants were asked how long they had been a customer to the sports brand they picked previously (figure 8A). This

question was asked to acknowledge the length of the participants' brand loyalty. Four options were given, ranging from under six months to more than two years. Unsurprisingly, many participants exhibited strong customer loyalty, as 84.8% of the participants acknowledging they had been with a certain brand for over two years. Furthermore, 4.3% of the participants stated they had been a customer for between one and two years. Most participants thus have been a long-time customer to a certain sports apparel brand. Moreover, 2.2% of the participants have been a customer for six months to a year, and the remaining 8.7% had only been purchasing products from a brand under six months.

Secondly, a five-point Likert scale was introduced to understand the importance of a brand to customers when contemplating to purchase sports apparel (figure 8B). These options ranged from very unimportant to very important. Following the duration of the customer duration to a brand, 15.2% of the participants found brand a very important factor when purchasing sports apparel, and 43.5% of the participants saw brand as an important factor. However, 13% of the participants thought brand was unimportant when looking at apparel, and 8.7% of the participants even described brand as a very unimportant factor when looking to purchase sports apparel. The remaining 19.6% of the participants were neither fussed, nor enthusiastic regarding a brand name when purchasing sports apparel.

A third question was introduced to see how likely participants were to repurchase the sports apparel brand they had previously chosen, which was asked through a ten-point Likert scale, ranging from not likely at all (1), to extremely likely (10) (figure 8C). As we have previously seen most participants had been long-time customers to a brand, 45.6% of the participants were also extremely likely to make a repurchase. Furthermore, 17.4% of the participants were very likely to make a repurchase, and a further 19.6% were moderately likely for repurchasing a certain sports apparel brand. The remaining percentages either picked not

likely at all (4.4%), neutral (4.4%), reasonably likely (6.5%), or somewhat likely (2.1%).

Finally, previous purchase experience was also examined (figure 8D). Previous purchase experience is important to customer loyalty because it can cause a loyalty loop when the previous purchase experience is satisfactory. By examining the data, one can see the importance of previous purchase experience, as 37% of the participants find previous purchasing experience when contemplating to make a purchase very important. Furthermore, 43.5% of the participants find previous purchase experience important. Only 15.2% of the participants found previous purchase experience unimportant. The remaining participants found it either not applicable, or were neutral about the subject.
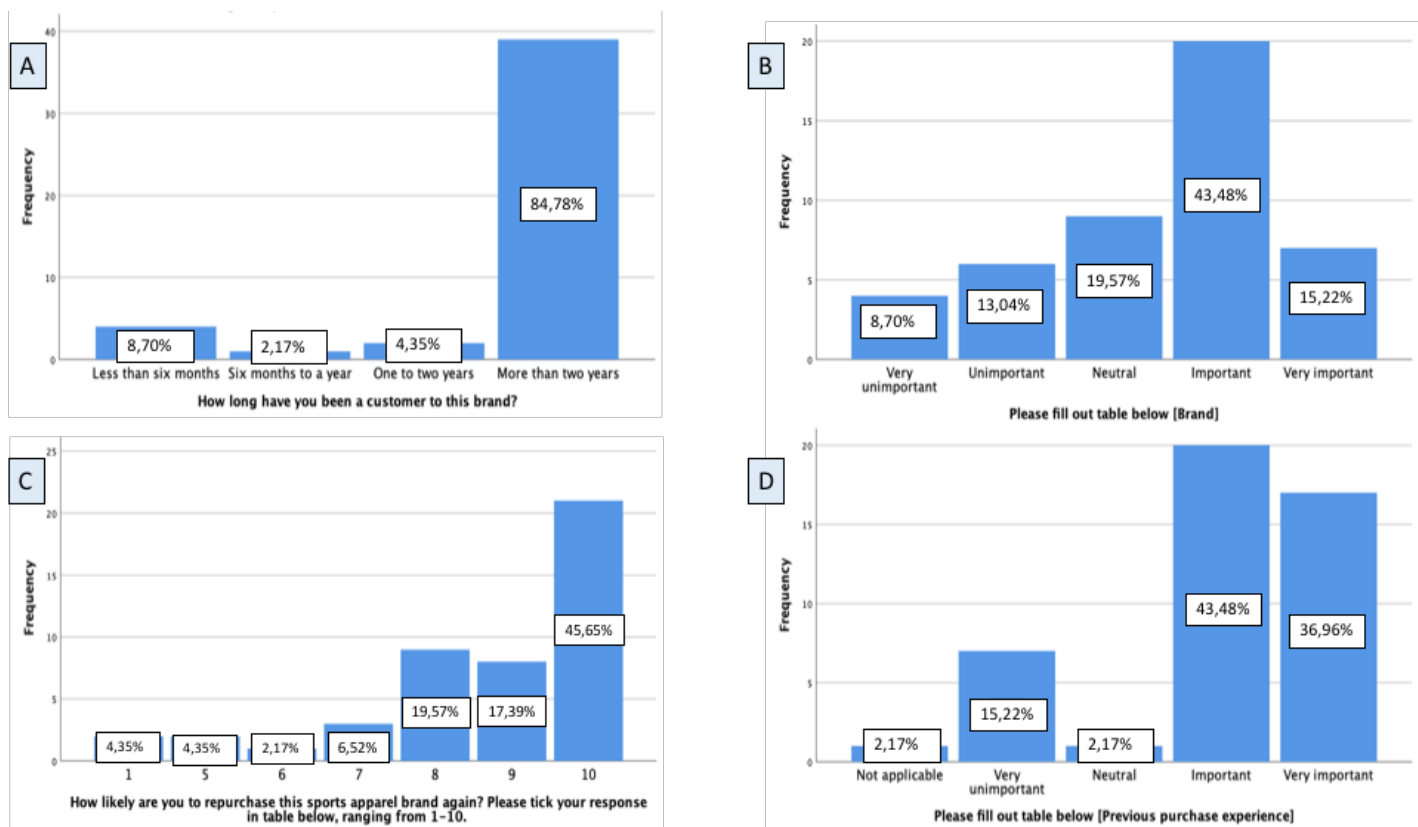

Figure 8 Customer loyalty

4.4.3 Post-purchase behaviour

A third set of questions involved questions on post-purchase behaviour. This involves the satisfaction of the brand, which in turn can lead to recommending the brand to other people, which then can bring in new customers. Firstly, participants were asked if they were willing to recommend the sports apparel brand they most bought within the last six months to friends/family. This question was based on a ten-point Likert scale, with value 1 being not at all likely, and value 10 extremely likely. The results showed that 32.6% of the participants are extremely likely to recommend a certain brand, 15.2% were very likely to recommend the brand, and 37% of the participants showed a moderately likelihood of recommendation. Furthermore, only 2.2% of the participants would be opposed to recommending the brand they bought most within the past six months, and 2.2% was neutral. The remaining percentage of participants chose somewhat likely to recommend (6.5%), and the remaining 4.3% were reasonably likely to recommend the brand. As most participants were willing to recommend the sports apparel brand to other people, it is deemed they are amply satisfied with the brand.

On the other hand, participants were also asked if they take recommendations from friends/family when they look to purchase sports apparel. Purchasing decisions based on the recommendations of friends/family, showed that only 21.7% of the participants thought it was a an important factor when contemplating on buying sports apparel. However, 52.2% of the participants were neutral to recommendations from friends/family, 15.2% found it an unimportant factor, and 10.8% found it a very unimportant factor.

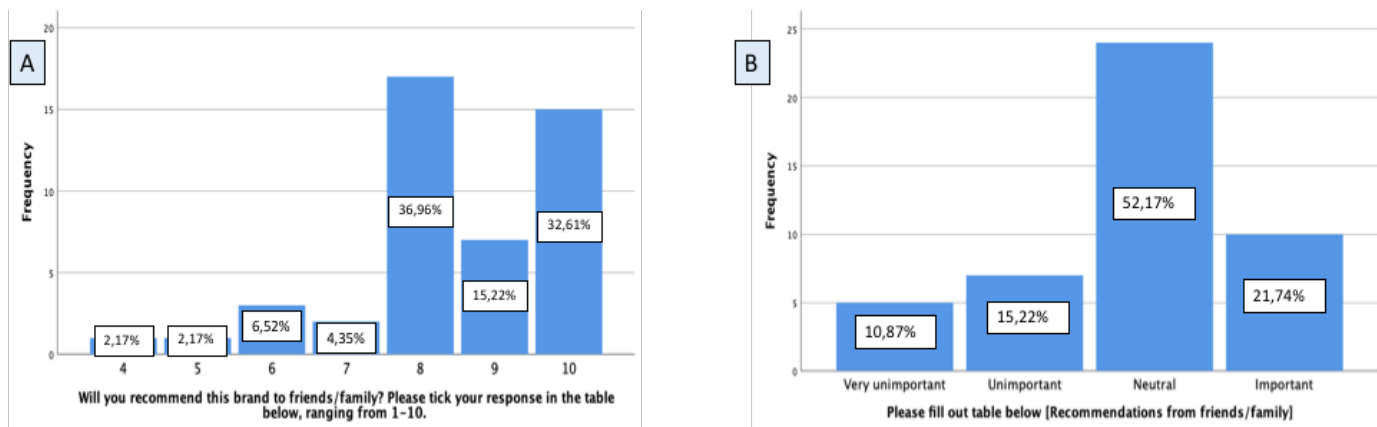The graphs for post-purchase behaviour can be found in figure 9 below.

Figure 9 Post-purchase behaviour

4.4.4 Price and quality

Lastly, participants were asked to fill out questions regarding other factors that can cause a shift from one brand to another. These were asked as quality and price of clothing apparel are considered to be two extremely significant aspects of why customers change between brands (Marketing Charts, 2016). Firstly, participants were asked if the brand they purchased most was of a higher price, equal price, or lower price than a competitor's brand (figure 10A). Unsurprisingly, 34.8% of the participants thought the price of the brand they purchased seemed somewhat higher, whilst 56.5% of the participants valued the price at about the same as a competitor's price. As established previously, Nike was the most purchased brand (table 5), and the results seem sensible as Nike's prices do appear to be slightly higher than those of its competitors.

Secondly, participants were asked whether price was a significant factor in purchasing a brand (figure 10B). As stated previously, price is seen to be a significant factor for brand loyalty (Urun, 2011; Marketing Charts, 2016). The participants noted whether price was very unimportant to very important in purchasing a brand. Expectedly, 13% of the participants thought price was a very important factor, and 56.2% thought it was an important factor in contemplating

to purchase a sports apparel product. Remarkably, 10.8% thought price was a very unimportant factor.

Furthermore, participants were asked whether they would continue buying products from the brand if the prices increased (figure 10C). The results showed more hesitation, expectedly, however 21.7% of the participants were still moderately likely to buy from the brand, 13% reasonably likely and 23.9% somewhat likely to purchase products even if the prices increased. Nonetheless, approximately 37% of the participants were either neutral or less likely to make a purchase when a price increase occurs.

However, when looking at price, one also ought to look at quality as these seem to go hand in hand (figure 10D). According to Chi et al (2011), sports apparel manufacturers ought to be critical to develop quality sportswear that is reasonably priced. Previous studies showed quality to be of utmost importance, which resembles the participants' results. A resounding 52.2% of the participants found quality a very important factor when looking to buy sports apparel, with 26.1% of the participants find quality an important factor. The remaining percentage of participants found quality either not important at all (19.6%), or it was not applicable to them (2.1%).

Furthermore, participants were asked whether a wide selection of choices is of importance to consumers when considering to buy from a sports apparel brand (figure 10E). Having a wide selection of choices gives customers more options to find a product suited particularly to their needs. In this study, 21.7% of the participants deemed a wide selection of choices very important when wanting to make a purchase of a sports apparel brand, and 58.7% deemed it to be an important factor. Moreover, 8.7% of the participants were neutral to a wide selection of options. The remaining percentage of participants either thought it

to not be an important factor at all (8.7%), or unimportant (2.2%) when contemplating to purchase a sports apparel brand.

Lastly, participants were asked about their thoughts in regards to value to money ratio of the brand (Figure 10F). According to Marketing Charts (2016), consumers are increasingly conscious of the value to money ratio, and can develop brand loyalty if the ratio is satisfactory. Predictably, 43.5% of the participants found the brand's value to money ratio above average, whilst the same percentage of participants saw the value to money ratio as average. The other 10.9% thought the money to value ratio was even excellent, and the remaining 2.1% found the ratio below average.

Figure 10 below depict the percentages of participants in regards to price and quality factors.
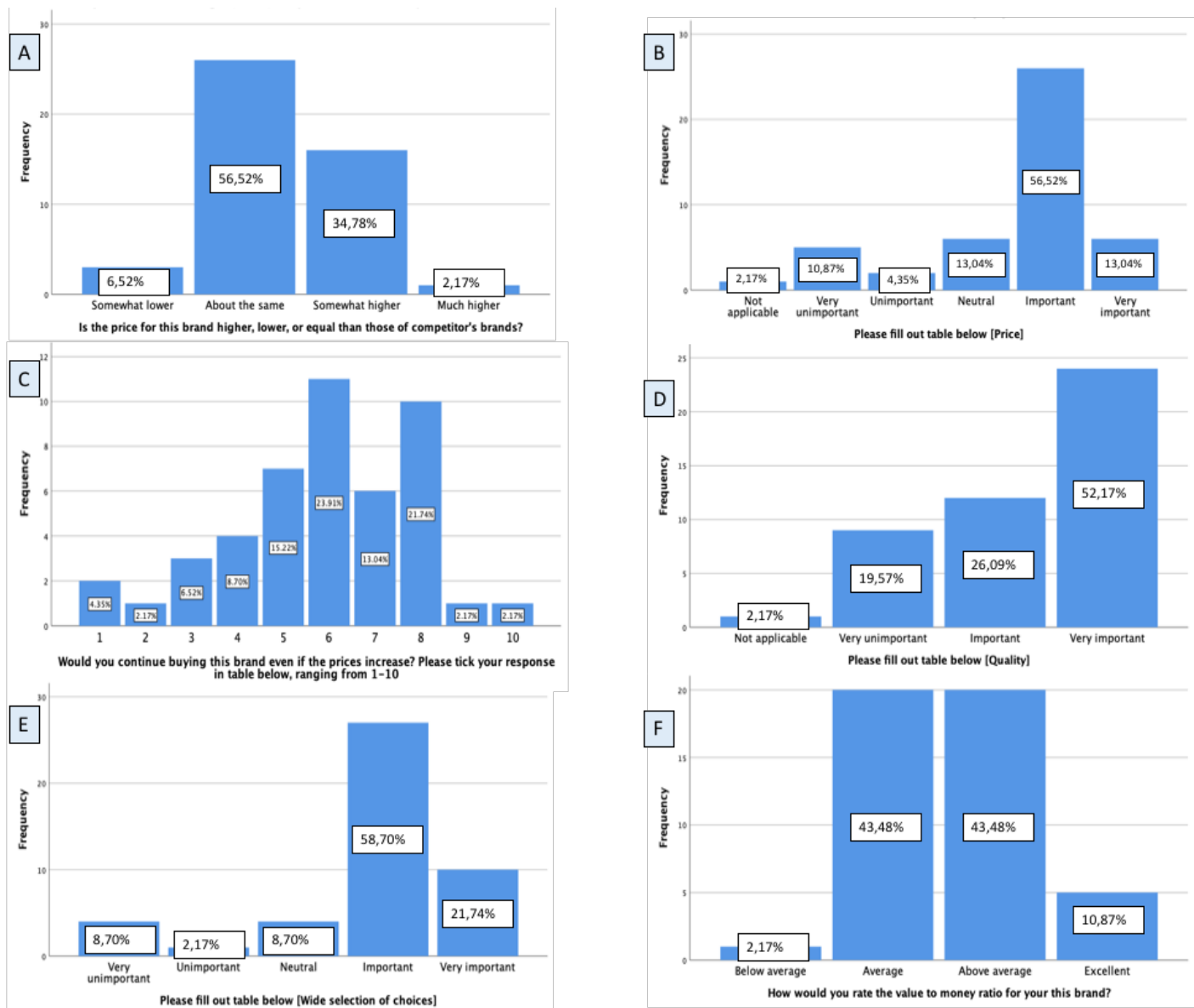
Figure 10 Price/Quality factors

4.5 Themes and data findings

After going through the individual responses to the questions in the questionnaire, this study will move on to testing the hypotheses, and finding themes between the data given through the questionnaire.

4.5.1 RO1 and H1

The first research objective for this study was to investigate if there is an impact of athletic endorsements on drivers of brand loyalty. For investigating this, the following hypothesis was developed:

H1: celebrity endorsements influence brand loyalty in the sports apparel sector.

In order to test the first hypothesis, participants were first asked what they look for when buying sports apparel. Figure 11 below indicates that price and quality was seen to be the most contributing factor, with 52.2% of the votes. Two more prominent areas were shown, with 19.6% of the participants solely looking for a certain brand, and the other 19.6% combining aforementioned responses and stating they look for quality, price, as well as a certain brand. Other participants looked at brands with celebrity endorsements (4.3%), and the remaining percentage dug deeper and looked at online reviews, longevity of material, or simply price and a certain brand.

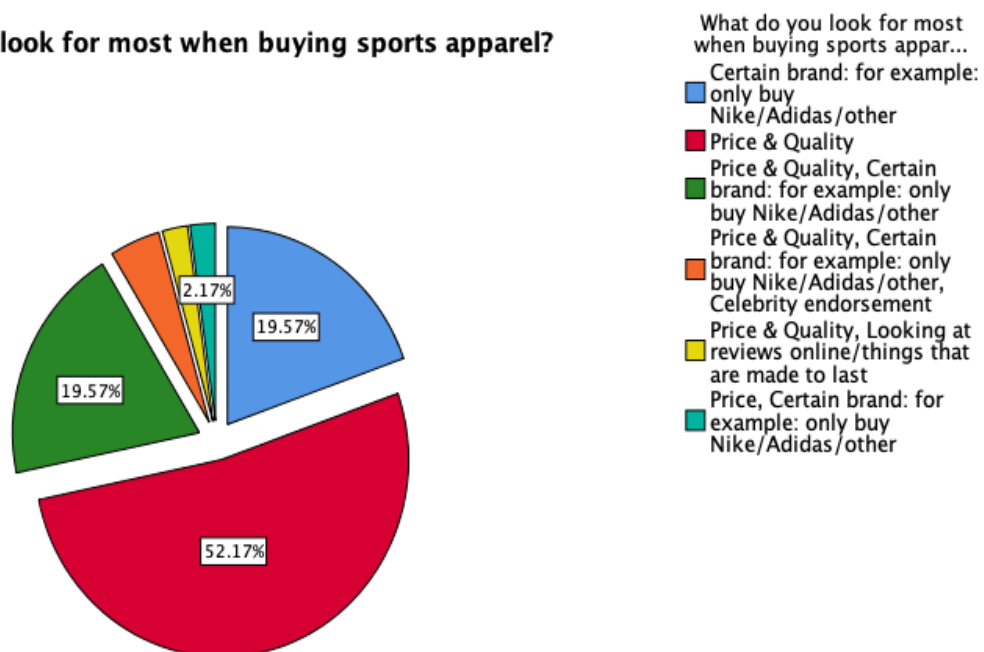**What do you look for most when buying sports apparel?**

Figure 11 Results contemplation sports apparel

However, by looking at aforementioned data, it is clear most participants look at price and quality as the most significant factor when contemplating a sports apparel brand. Celebrity endorsements only was mentioned by a few participants, which follows previous athlete endorsement questions covered in chapter 4.1.1. Nevertheless, a bivariate correlation analysis utilizing Pearson's was conducted in order to explore the correlation between two variables. The test will display a value between -1 and 1, which indicates the strength of the relationship between variables. A value closer to 0 depicts a weaker relationship, and a value closer to 1 depicts a stronger relationship, whilst a negative value shows a reverse relationship between the variables (Bryman and Bell, 2015). A first test was conducted in order to discover if celebrity endorsement factors had any relationship with the likelihood of a repurchase. Then, in order to test H1, a second test was conducted in order to depict a relationship between celebrity endorsements and post-purchase behaviour, such as recommending a brand to friends/family. The variable for the first analysis reflected customer loyalty; which is the likelihood of a repurchase, whilst the celebrity endorsement variable was the importance of athletic endorsement. For the second test, the study looked at a post-purchase behaviour variable; more specifically the recommendation to friends/family, and a celebrity endorsement variable; particularly the importance of endorsement when contemplating to buy a brand.

Table 6 Pearson Correlation Test 1

Pearson Correlation	1	−.032
Sig. (2−tailed)		.834
N	46	46

Table 7 Pearson Correlation Test 2

Pearson Correlation	1	.215
Sig. (2−tailed)		.151
N	46	46

As seen in table 6 above, test 1 concerning celebrity endorsement and likelihood of a repurchase resulted in a -.032 Pearson correlation, this means that there is a slight reverse relationship between celebrity endorsements and likelihood of repurchase, meaning the importance of celebrity endorsement decreases when the likelihood of repurchasing a brand increases. Furthermore, test 2 resulted in

a .215 Pearson correlation (table 7), which means there is a very weak relationship between celebrity endorsements and post-purchase behaviour.

Furthermore, participants were asked if celebrity endorsements is a factor they consider when contemplating to buy sports apparel. As previously mentioned, 32% of the participants found this an unimportant factor, whilst 15% even thought of it as a very unimportant factor. Only 13% illustrated celebrity endorsements as an importance.

Consequently, H1 is rejected as celebrity endorsements show no or a very weak relationship to brand loyalty components.

There were no earlier studies on the importance of celebrity endorsements and its impact on brand loyalty, however, other studies regarding celebrity endorsements showed a positive impact on brand equity through athletic endorsements (Cornwell et al., 2001; Carlson and Donavan, 2008; Lesaule and Bouvier, 2017).

4.5.2 RO2 and H2:H3

As mentioned previously, approximately 85% of the participants acknowledged they had stuck with a certain brand for more than two years. The question that arises then is 'what is of importance subsequently to participants when they contemplate to purchase sports apparel?'.

In order to establish what drives sports apparel consumers to brand loyalty, RO2 was established. The second research objective was put forth to determine what brand loyalty antecedents occur most in the sports apparel sector. H2 was developed as price and quality seem of utmost importance to consumers (Marketing Charts, 2016). Furthermore, poor customer satisfaction leads to a willingness to switch brands, thus it was opted to test whether customer

satisfaction leads to increased post-purchase behaviour. As word-of-mouth recommendations of customers are mostly associated with customer satisfaction, this study attempted to find a link between these two themes.

H2: quality and price components are more significant brand loyalty components in the sports apparel sector
H3: customer satisfaction positively impacts post-purchase behaviour in the sports apparel sector

In order to test these hypotheses, the table at the conclusion of the questionnaire asked participants numerous questions in regards to importance of factors when contemplating to buy a sports apparel brand, such as the importance of brand, wide selection of choices, celebrity endorsements, price, quality, recommendations of friends/family, and previous purchase experience. Looking at figures 7D, 8B, 8D, 9B, 9D, and 9E, one can clearly see quality is depicted as the main concern of participants when contemplating to buy sports apparel, followed by previous purchase experience, wide selection of choices, and price. Celebrity endorsements is seen to be mostly unimportant or very unimportant to participants. Earlier research by Marketing Charts (2016) matches to the findings of this study, as poor quality was perceived to be the most significant factor to consumers for switching brands, followed by customer satisfaction and price. Furthermore, Urun (2011) further explains due to brands becoming more and more similar, consumers base their purchasing decisions more frequently on price of a product, which is proven in this study (figure 10B) as approximately 56% of the participants acknowledge price as an important factor, and 13% finding price a very important factor when contemplating to purchase a sports apparel item. Henceforth, Urun (2011) states that a lower price for a similar product motivates consumers to purchase that particular brand over another brand, and to stimulate those consumers to build a long-term relationship with the company.

Furthermore, Marketing Charts (2016) also stated consumers look for a good money for value ratio. As most participants had stuck with a certain sports apparel brand for over two years, it was also shown they found the value for money ratio predominantly average (approximately 43%), above average (approximately 43%), or even excellent (approximately 10%), as seen in figure 10F above. However, a wide selection of choices and celebrity endorsements was not covered in the research from Marketing Charts.

Thus, even though celebrity endorsement does not seem to be a significant factor to brand loyalty, price and quality, and customer satisfactions are both seen as significant factors. This follows other studies (Blut et al., 2007; Marketing Charts, 2020) which state price, quality, post-purchase experiences, and money for value are significant factors to brand loyalty. Blut et al. (2007), however, state that price and quality are significant factors of the first layer of Oliver's four-dimensional framework: cognitive loyalty. However, cognitive loyalty is a very weak loyalty, and therefore, consumers may still switch easily if they find an alternative product which has a better value for money. This does not match the current study, as mentioned previously most participants in the study have been brand loyal (approximately 85%) for more than 2 years.

Nevertheless, H2 is proven as price and quality are found to still be significant factors to consumers when contemplating to buy a certain brand.

This study will consequently also try and find a link between previous purchase experience (H3), and post-purchase behaviour. Previous purchase experience was calculated on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1.0 (not applicable) to 6.0 very important. The second construct, recommendations to family, was conducted on a ten-point Likert scale, ranging from 1.0 (not at all likely to recommend), to 10 (Extremely likely to recommend). It was opted to use a

crosstabulation between these two constructs in order to reach a conclusion on H3.

The table revealed a positive relationship between previous purchase experience and recommendation to family, as seen below in table 8.

Table 8 Crosstabulation post-purchase behaviour and previous purchase experience

		Previous purchase experience					
		Important	Neutral	Not applicable	Very important	Very unimportant	Total
Recommend to family	4	0	0	0	1	0	1
	5	1	0	0	0	0	1
	6	2	1	0	0	0	3
	7	2	0	0	0	0	2
	8	5	0	1	8	3	17
	9	6	0	0	1	0	7
	10	4	0	0	7	4	15
Total		20	1	1	17	7	46

As aforementioned, most participants were extremely likely, very likely, or moderately likely to recommend the brand they purchased most in the past six months to friends/family. Furthermore, the participants mostly found previous purchase experience very important, or important when contemplating to purchase sports apparel. Moreover, this table exemplifies that those who were satisfied with their previous purchase experience are also more likely to recommend this brand to their friends/family. As those participants who found previous purchase experience very important to important were also predominantly seen to be moderately likely to extremely likely (8/9/10 on 10-point Likert scale) to recommend the sports apparel brand to their friends/family. Thus, H3 can be confirmed as customer satisfaction also leads to more word-of-mouth recommendations. This finding is on par with other findings regarding customer satisfaction and post-purchase behaviour, such as the study of Khadka and Maharjan (2017). They stated that an increase in customer loyalty provides a company benefits, such as: increased customer loyalty, and increases in word-

of-mouth communication. Thus, customer satisfaction could lead to an increased customer base, which can resume the loyalty loop for these new customers.

4.5.3 RO3

The final research objective attempts to detect what brand loyalty antecedents are best for marketing strategies for the sports clothing sector. After conducting the data analysis, this study can provide sufficient information for marketing strategies for the sports apparel industry in regards to tennis players.

As previously mentioned, celebrity endorsements did not provide a significance to brand loyalty drivers. However, this study exemplified that quality, price, a wide selection of products, and previous purchasing experience are a significant factor when contemplating to purchase a product of a sports apparel brand. Previous research on celebrity endorsements regarding brand equity showed an importance to numerous other factors of brand equity though. Thus, even though sports apparel brands may not influence brand loyalty through endorsement deals with celebrity athletes, they are able to bring forth a positive feeling to the brand, identification of a brand, differentiation from competitors, more brand image and brand awareness, and credibility of the quality of the brand (Cornwell et al., 2001; Carlson and Donavan, 2008; Dugalic and Lazarevic, 2016; Lesaule and Bouvier, 2017). Therefore, in order to bring forth a good marketing strategy in the sports apparel sector regarding tennis players, a combination of all abovementioned factors is required. Brand loyalty is seen to be the heart of brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Oliver, 1997), thus in order to achieve a loyal customer base in the highly competitive sports apparel industry, brands must be able to offer good quality for price, a wide selection of choices to consumers, and a satisfactory purchase experience. Additionally, the sports apparel brands have consequently achieved brand loyalty and thus can charge a premium price to their consumers (Keller, 2003), considering most participants in the study would place a repurchase for a product even when the price is slightly higher than those of competitors, or even when the brand would increase its prices slightly.

Furthermore, even though price is deemed of importance in the study, quality is deemed more important to consumers. Lastly, tying celebrity athletes to a sports apparel brand can aid in other brand equity drivers, such as brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Overview

This chapter provides the conclusion of the study, as well as the individual research objectives and what significance this has to marketing strategies in the sports apparel industry.

5.2 Aim of study

This study aimed to establish the impact of celebrity endorsements on brand loyalty, as well as what drives customers' purchasing habits in the sports apparel industry. Furthermore, interrelations between brand loyalty drivers were examined, in order to discover suitable marketing strategies in the sports apparel industry.

As mentioned previously, the sports apparel market has grown steadily over recent years, and is expected to continue rising until at least 2026. However, the sports apparel industry is highly competitive, thus brands in this industry must be able to differentiate themselves from competitors in order to thrive in the market. One way of differentiating themselves from competitors is through adopting ways to increase brand equity. However, according to Cornwell et al. (2001), brands can also differentiate themselves from competitors through celebrity endorsement deals. Nonetheless, brand loyalty is seen to be the heart of brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Oliver, 1997), yet there is a lack of research in this area and its impact of celebrity endorsements. Therefore, this study attempted to provide better insights in the effect of celebrity endorsements on brand loyalty.

5.3 Conclusion of research objectives and research question

Based on the existing literature review, two conceptual frameworks of brand equity were established: Aaker (1996) with four drivers of brand equity, and

Keller (2003) with a six layer consumer-based brand equity pyramid. Both of these conceptual frameworks included brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is a complex, multidimensional concept, but most frameworks include two key areas of brand loyalty: behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty (Day, 1969; Oliver, 1997). Brand loyalty has numerous antecedents, such as: price and quality, brand name, favorable feeling towards a brand, repurchasing decisions, as well as post-purchase behaviour, style, and promotion (Blut et al., 2007; Marketing Charts, 2020; Keller, 2003; Jayarathne, 2019). Even though celebrity endorsements have shown an impact on brand equity individually, as well as other brand equity factors, brand loyalty has been largely ignored. Findings regarding celebrity endorsements have previously established: an increase in credibility of the brand, assurance of product quality, positive impact on brand image, increased brand awareness and recognition, and a favorable feeling towards the brand (Dugalic and Lazarevic, 2016; Carlson and Donavan, 2008; Cornwell et al., 2001; Lesaule and Bouvier, 2017; Kim and Na, 2007; Renton, 2009).

However, the findings of this study firstly determined no significant link between celebrity endorsements and brand loyalty in the sports apparel sector. A negative adverse relationship between celebrity endorsements and likelihood of a repurchase occurred, whilst there was a weak relationship between celebrity endorsements and post-purchase behaviour. Furthermore, approximately 80% of the participants showed no feeling for transitioning to another brand if their favourite athlete switched endorsers. Additionally, 74% of the participants disproved their choice of sports brand apparel was affected through a celebrity endorsement marketing strategy. Thus, if celebrity endorsements do not impact brand loyalty, what factors do drive customers' purchasing habits when contemplating to purchase a sports apparel brand over another? This study identified four distinctive drivers consumers look for when buying sports apparel: quality, price, a wide selection of choices, and previous purchase experience. Even though a vast amount of consumers look for a certain brand when

contemplating to buy sports apparel, quality and price were discovered to be the most significant drivers to determine what brand to buy. However, warranted by other studies, consumers are likely to pay a higher price for sports apparel if the quality of the brand is better, which was further proven in this study as quality was seen to be of utmost importance. Furthermore, a wide selection of choices was determined to be significant to sports apparel customers, with a variety of choices, consumers can meet their personal needs, which if they do not have this option consumers are likely to search for other brands that provide alternative products from other brands. Furthermore, previous purchase experience, such as good customer service, was also discovered as a significant factor to sports apparel consumers. This study also exemplified that when consumers are satisfied with their previous purchase experience, they are also more likely to exhibit post-purchase behaviour, such as willingness to recommend the brand to others.

To conclude, as the sports apparel industry is increasingly growing and highly competitive, the findings of this study can thus assist sports apparel brands in the process of building a relationship with the customers, in order to obtain a competitive advantage over the other brands. By virtue of finding the right mix of price and quality, as well as offering a wide selection of choices, the sports apparel brands can retain more customers. Furthermore, by offering a good previous purchase experience, such as quality customer service, consumer satisfaction can increase. If the consumer satisfaction improves, consumers are more willing to recommend the brand to others, which in turn can bring in new customers and the loyalty loop can resurface for these new customers. Furthermore, even though this study was conducted for sports apparel brands, it could be adopted by the non-sportswear industry as well. However, a longer study should be conducted, as the sample size for this study was very small. Furthermore, alongside quantitative research, qualitative research should be conducted in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the multidimensionally complex brand loyalty concept.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Overview

This last chapter will ultimately give insights on future recommendations after carrying out the research. These recommendations will be based on a managerial point of view, as well as will provide recommendations for future research.

Nonetheless, after conducting the study, numerous limitations occurred which should be addressed to provide accurate recommendations for future research. As aforementioned, this study was a cross-sectional study, though conducting a longer study would have given more insight on the impact of different drivers on brand loyalty and celebrity endorsements. However, this was not feasible due time constraints and financial constraints. Furthermore, conducting a study over a longer period of time could have provided a bigger sample size, which could have facilitated fully grasping the brand loyalty phenomena more profoundly. Additionally, the questionnaire for this study was short, and it was noticeable in order to fully understand brand loyalty drivers a qualitative research (e.g. interviews) could have provided additional information, in order to entirely obtain a more in-depth analysis of the different drivers of brand loyalty, and the importance of athletic endorsements. Lastly, this study attempted to compare results from tennis players and other sports, however this was not feasible as over 80% of the participants were tennis players. Thus, non-tennis players were sampled out, meaning these results could differ for other sports. Nonetheless, despite these limitations certain links and trends could still be observed by conducting this study.

6.2 Managerial implications

After covering the initial limitations of the study, one can move on to theoretical implications one can discover through this study. As aforementioned, endorsements are an extremely luxurious source of income for athletes, however

by analysing the data, there was no link found between celebrity endorsements and one driver of brand equity, namely brand loyalty. This however, should not discourage sports apparel brands. Other studies have shown a positive impact on brand equity, however none of these studies were conducted for the brand loyalty driver. Through the analysis of the data, it was concluded that consumers base their purchasing decisions in terms of sports apparel brand on price, quality, previous purchase experience, and a wide selection of choices. Thus, sports apparel brands can benefit by offering a good price to quality ratio, good customer service, whilst also having a variety of products on offer. By meeting these factors, as these are seen to improve brand loyalty, sports apparel brands can differentiate themselves from competitors, but of equal importance, build a relationship with the customer. If a sports apparel brand can build a relationship with a customer, and offer them a good experience when buying their apparel, customers are also more likely to recommend the brand to others, which effectively can cause an increased customer base. Furthermore, tying celebrity athletes to their brand can aid in other brand equity drivers, such as brand awareness, perceived quality and brand associations. Thus, celebrity endorsements are still of importance in order to reach an improved brand equity, which in turn can lead to an increase in the firm's profitability. Considering the competitiveness in the sports apparel industry, it is imperative for sports apparel brands to find a mixture of abovementioned factors in order to obtain a vast competitive advantage over other brands.

6.3 Future research

As aforementioned, this study was a cross-sectional study, but conducting a longitudinal study could have provided more insight in brand loyalty drivers, as well as the impact of celebrity endorsements and its impact on brand loyalty. A longitudinal study could also provide more information on the impact of celebrity endorsements on other drivers of brand equity, which could explain the importance of the use of celebrity athletes in the sports apparel industry. Even

though earlier studies have shown a positive impact on brand equity drivers through celebrity endorsements, not much has been researched on the impact of celebrity endorsements on brand loyalty. Especially given celebrity endorsement deals have gone up steadily in recent years, and the growth of the sports apparel industry, this could be a starting point for future research. Moreover, this study was conducted in Belgium and the Netherlands. Both of these countries are small, with not too many sports teams and 'hero' athletes. Even though the findings are representative of these countries, a further study conducted in an immense sports country, such as The United States, where for instance Nike had 15,902 million dollars in revenue (MDS, 2019), compared to 9,812 million dollars revenue in Europe and Africa combined, could further provide insight in the importance of celebrity endorsements and brand loyalty. This study was conducted exclusively for tennis players as well, however a study of other sports, either separately or generally, should also be conducted as there can be variances between an individual sport and other sports in terms of loyalty to athletes. Furthermore, bigger brands, such as Nike and Adidas, can profit from their brand reputation, however smaller brands usually do not have this aspect yet, therefore a study could be conducted for smaller brands, as bigger brands can use their reputation and customer trust to attract customers.

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8. Appendices

8.1 Key terms used in study

Brand	A name, a sign, term, design, symbol, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (Kotler, 2014)
Brand equity	A set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers (Aaker, 1996)
Brand loyalty	A deeply held commitment to re-buy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same-brand set purchasing despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour (Oliver, 1997)
Brand awareness	The ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category (Aaker, 1991)
Brand associations	Anything that is linked to the memory of the brand (Aaker, 1991)
Perceived quality	The customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of the product or service with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives (Aaker, 1996)
Brand salience	The extent to which a brand virtually stands out from its competitors (Van der Lars et al., 2008)
Brand image	A set of beliefs held about a particular brand (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004)
Brand performance	relates to the ways in which a particular product or service attempts to meet customers' more functional needs (Keller, 2001)
Brand resonance	refers to the nature of the relationship that customers have with the brand and the extent to which they feel 'in sync' with the brand. (Keller, 2001)
Celebrity endorsement	a form of advertising campaign or marketing strategy used by brands, companies, or non-profit organizations which involves celebrities or a well-known person by using their social status or fame to help promote a product or service (Varghese, 2019)
Attitudinal loyalty	leads to a willingness to pay a premium price and to overcome obstacles to purchase the brand (Bandyopadhyay and Martell, 2007)
Behavioural loyalty	Refers to the consumer's loyalty resulting in an actual purchase of a product from a firm (Shih-I, 2001)

8.2 Approval Ethics

School Research Ethics Committee Application Front Sheet

Field Name	Details to complete
Student Number(s)	U1715776
Programme	Msc International Business Management
Module Code	MK7227
Project Title	'Investigating of the Impact of a Professional Athlete's Endorsement to Brand Equity'
Project Supervisor/Tutor	Jaya S. Kypuram
Please confirm that you completed the form based on your supervisor or tutor instructions and recommendations.	Yes
What form of primary data collection will your project involve?	Survey
Supervisor/Tutor Review Decision (**Not completed by the student**)	This form has been re-written based on discussions between myself and Brecht. I am happy to approve this in its current form.
Supervisor/Tutor Review Comments and Amendments Required for Resubmission (If "Minor" or "Major", **Not completed by the student**)	None.

8.3 Online questionnaire

Investigation into a professional athlete's endorsement deal on brand equity for clothing apparel

Hi everyone! My name is Brecht Vangrinsven and I am a Master's student in International Business Management at the University of East London. I am conducting research on the impact of a professional athlete's endorsement deal on one of the key drivers of brand equity (brand loyalty more specifically) in the clothing apparel sector, and would like to ask you for help by filling out a short questionnaire for my dissertation. This questionnaire is anonymous, your data will not be used for any other purposes, and the data will be destroyed upon completion of this research. If you have any further questions, please email me on u1715776@uel.ac.uk, or my supervisor Dr. Jaya S. Kypuram on j.s.kypuram@uel.ac.uk. The results are also available on request.

Thank you so much for taking time to participate in this study!

Participant Information Letter

Programme of Study: Msc International Business Management

Dissertation or Project Title: Investigation into the Impact of a Professional Athlete's Endorsement to Brand Equity

Module Code: MK7227

Dear Participant,

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?
The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of a professional athlete's endorsement to one of the four drivers of brand equity, which is brand loyalty. This study is conducted for academic purposes only to pursue my master's degree in International Business Management.

What will I have to do if I take part?
To take part, please participate in a survey, which is conducted online, and consists of 15 questions, and a set of demographic questions. Participation to the survey should take no longer than 5 minutes.

What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?
There are no disadvantages or risks of participation to this survey.

Do I have to take part?
You are under no obligation to participate in this study. If you do decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If you do not take part or withdraw from the study at a later date, it will not disadvantage you. Except in the case of partially completed, anonymous on-line questionnaires, all data related to your responses will also be safely destroyed unless you state otherwise. Submission of a partially completed or fully completed questionnaire implies consent to participate in the study and you will be unable to withdraw your data.

What will happen to the information?
Your participation in this study and all information collected will be kept strictly confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). Unless otherwise indicated, all personal information and data collected will be coded and anonymised so that you cannot be recognised from it. The collected data will be securely stored on a password protected computer and safely disposed of once the project/dissertation has been completed.

The results of this study will be reported as part of my degree programme and may be further disseminated for scientific benefit. The results will be available to you on request.

Who should I contact for further information or if I have any problems/concerns?

Researcher: BRECHT VANGRINSVEN, u1715776@uel.ac.uk
Supervisor: Dr. JAYA S. KYPURAM, j.s.kypuram@uel.ac.uk

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:
Catherine Hitchens, Ethics Integrity Manager, Graduate School, EB 1.43
University of East London, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD
(Telephone: 020 8223 6683, Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk)

Consent form (please tick all to agree) *

☐ i. I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be treated in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 2018'. (Please tick in the case of questionnaires/interviews involving the collection of data falling under the Data Protection Act 2018 definition of 'sensitive personal data')

☐ ii. (Please tick where anonymous questionnaires are used) By taking part in this study I fully understand that 'Submission of a partially completed or fully completed questionnaire implies consent to participate in the study and that I will be unable to withdraw my data'.

☐ iii. I confirm that I have read the participant information sheet for the above study and I have been given a copy to keep.

☐ iv. I understand what the study is about and I have had the opportunity to discuss with the researcher and ask questions about the study.

☐ v. The procedures involved have been explained to me. I know what my part will be in the study and how the study may affect me.

☐ vi. I understand that my involvement in this study and particular data from this research will remain strictly confidential. Only researchers involved in the study will have access to the data.

☐ vii. It has been explained to me what will happen to the data once the study has been completed.

☐ viii. I understand that I have the right to stop taking part in the study at any time without reason or prejudice to myself.

☐ ix. I know who to contact if I have any questions/concerns about my participation and I have their contact details.

☐ x. I fully and freely consent to participate in the study

Questionnaire completion date *

DD   MM   YYYY

_____ / _____ / 2020

Participant's name *

Your answer

Age *

◯ 17 or younger

◯ 18-24

◯ 25-34

◯ 35-44

◯ 45-54

◯ 54 or older

◯ Prefer not to say

Do you play tennis, either recreationally or competitively? *

◯ Yes

◯ No

Gender *

◯ Male

◯ Female

◯ Prefer not to say

Occupation *

◯ Employed

◯ Not employed

◯ Student

◯ Prefer not to say

What do you look for most when buying sports apparel? Please tick all that apply *

☐ Price

☐ Quality

☐ Price & Quality

☐ Certain brand: for example: only buy Nike/Adidas/other

☐ Celebrity endorsement

☐ Other:

Over the past six months, what sports apparel brand did you buy most? (The other questions in the questionnaire will refer back to your answer to this question). *

○ Nike

○ Adidas

○ Puma

○ Head

○ Yonex

○ Lotto

○ New Balance

○ Reebok

○ Underarmour

○ Other: _____

Is this the same brand your favorite athlete/team wears? *

○ Yes

○ No

○ I don't know

Is your choice of sports brand affected by marketing of a brand, such as an athletic endorsement (e.g. buy a Nike product because it is endorsed by Rafael Nadal)? *

○ Yes

○ No

○ Maybe

If your favourite athlete/team switches brands, would you consider buying a different brand if said athlete changes endorser? *

○ Yes

○ No

○ Maybe

How long have you been a customer to this brand? *

○ Less than six months

○ Six months to a year

○ One to two years

○ More than two years

How well does this brand meet your needs? *

○ Extremely well

○ Very well

○ Somewhat well

○ Not so well

○ Not well at all

How likely are you to repurchase this sports apparel brand again? Please tick your response in table below, ranging from 1-10. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all likely	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Extremely likely

Will you recommend this brand to friends/family? Please tick your response in the table below, ranging from 1-10. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all likely	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Extremely likely

How would you rate the value to money ratio for your this brand? *

○ Excellent

○ Above average

○ Average

○ Below average

○ Poor

Is the price for this brand higher, lower, or equal than those of competitor's brands? *

○ Much higher

○ Somewhat higher

○ About the same

○ Somewhat lower

○ Much lower

Would you continue buying this brand even if the prices increase? Please tick your response in table below, ranging from 1-10 *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all likely	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Extremely Likely

Compared to competitors' brands, do you think the quality of this brand is better, nearly the same, or worse? *

◯ Much better

◯ Somewhat better

◯ Nearly the same

◯ Somewhat worse

◯ Much worse

How do you find out about the latest products in the market of your preferred brand? Please, select all that apply *

☐ Word of mouth

☐ In-store promotions

☐ Television

☐ Internet

☐ Celebrity endorsements

☐ Social media

☐ Other: _____

Do you feel emotionally committed to your favourite athlete/team, and have positive feelings/and beliefs about him/her/them? *

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ I don't know

Do you feel emotionally committed to a clothing brand and have positive feelings/beliefs about the brand? *

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ I don't know

Please fill out table below *

	Very unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very important	Not applicable
Brand	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Wide selection of choices	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Celebrity endorsement	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Price	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Quality	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Recommendations from friends/family	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Previous purchase experience	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

8.3.1 Questionnaire after considering Cronbach's alpha

Do you play tennis, recreationally or competitively?   YES/NO

Gender

Female
Male
Prefer not to say

Age

18 or younger
18-24
25-34
34-45
45-54
54 or older
Prefer not to say

Occupation

Employed
Not Employed
Student
Prefer not to say

What do you look for most when buying sports apparel? Please tick all that apply.

Price
Quality
price & quality
certain brand: for example: only buy Nike/Adidas/etc
celebrity endorsement
other, please specify

Question 1:
What sports apparel brand do you prefer?

Nike
Adidas
Puma
Head

Yonex
Lotto
New Balance
Reebok
Underarmour
Other: please specify: …………………

Question 2:
Is this brand the same brand your favorite athlete/team wears?
Yes
No
I don't know

Question 3:
Is your choice of sports brand affected by marketing of a brand, such as celebrity endorsement or team sponsorship?
Yes
Maybe
No

Question 4:
If your favourite athlete/team switches brands, would you consider buying a different brand if said athlete changes endorser?
Yes
No

Question 5:
How long have you been a customer to this brand?
Less than six months
Six months to a year
One to two years
More than two years

Question 6:
How likely are you to repurchase this brand again? Please, circle your response in the table below, ranging from 1-10.

Not at all likely				Neutral					Extremely likely
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Question 7:
Will you recommend this brand to friends/family. Please, circle your response in table below, ranging from 1-10.

Not at all likely   Neutral   Extremely likely

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Question 8:
How would you rate the value to money ratio for this brand?

Excellent
Above average
Average
Below average
Poor

Question 9:
Is the price for this brand higher, lower, or equal than those of competitors' brands?

Much higher
Somewhat higher
About the same
Somewhat lower
Much lower

Question 10:
Would you continue buying this brand even if the prices increase? Please, circle your response in table below, ranging from 1-10.

Not at all likely   Neutral   Extremely likely

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Question 11-17:

Please fill out table below

	Very unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very important	Not applicable
Brand						
Wide selection of clothes						

Celebrity endorsement						
Price						
Quality						
Friend/family recommendations						
Previous purchase experience						