

# **The Power of Stars: Celebrity Athlete Product Endorsement in Social Media**

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Nowadays, star athletes are global brand personalities. The increased popularity of the professional sport has contributed to elevating exceptional athletes to international star status. At the same time, social commerce represents a new stream in e-commerce, in which social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, and Weibo are utilized in advertising and marketing initiatives. With almost mythical status, professional athletes have become rising symbols of athletic excellence in sport game and competition and play socially interactive roles through their likeable and trustworthy persona, then positively endorse products or brands and further influence consumers' product involvement. In contrast with the traditional promotion practice in TV, magazine, and broadcast channels, social media endorsement has grown exponentially across various industries. The happening of the recent Olympic Games Tokyo 2021 has raised substantial attention of sports aficionados and fans, which could further boost product immersion in both sports and non-sport-related products or services. Currently, most studies of celebrity endorsement emphasize film, music, or TV show stars' influence via traditional media channels but overlook athletes from both team and individual endorsement through social media platforms. Even particular research has investigated the global well-known or highest-paid athletes product endorsement in Western social media applications (e.g., Twitter, FB, Instagram). There is limited explicit research on Chinese celebrity athlete endorsement in China's local social media (e.g., Weibo). Hence, this empirical study aims to assess the impacts of athlete performance and brand social value on product involvement, with celebrity athlete endorsement mediating effect. A quantitative survey was conducted with 399 Chinese participants and analyzed via structural equation modeling through a two-step analysis approach. The results demonstrate that there are significant impacts of athlete performance and brand social value on product involvement. Celebrity endorsement partially mediates the effects of athlete performance and brand social value towards product involvement. This study extends the understanding of celebrity athlete product endorsement and insights the strategic implication for social media-based marketing initiatives and endeavors.

**Keywords:** *Brand Social Value, Celebrity Athlete Product Endorsement, Product Involvement, Social Media, Weibo*