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DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

The Effect of Athlete Brand Personality, Brand Image Attributes and Brand Loyalty on Athlete  
Brand Advocacy: the mediating effect of deservedness

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Master in Marketing,

Supervisor:

PhD João Guerreiro, Assistant Professor,  
ISCTE-IUL Business School

November, 2021



BUSINESS  
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Athlete motivation, behaviors, and achievements bring their social surroundings to engage in a relationship. The rewards he receives from it are the ultimate reflection of the athlete's control over his contagious brand success.

Sara F. Leal

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ABSTRACT

In a context where sports are socially driven by the athletic ideal, athletes' deservedness has proven to encourage advocates to fight for their belonged outcomes and rewards. This research is needed for the specific field of sports because it extends deservedness studies into what creates the consumer support system, which may be essential to, afterward, catch other sports entities to also contribute to the athlete brands' success. Assuming advocates as the main support system, they are seen as a key element able to effect change to the athlete's worthy rewards. This thesis targets athletes that want to leverage their brand and their brand managers, who should understand the best way to articulate the athletes' promoted efforts (for social evaluation of deservedness), then develop the support system and encourage brand advocacy. This mindful investigation cares to address a new perspective of deservedness in the relationship athlete - consumer and conclude on what is the relational level most associated to deservedness and worth of social fair distribution of support - brand advocacy. An online questionnaire was conducted towards individuals who had a favorite athlete (N=300) and PLS-SEM was used to test and validate 6 hypotheses. Findings indicate that *athlete brand personality* does not significantly influence *athlete brand advocacy* and the mediating role of deservedness in this relationship is also non-significant; *athlete brand image attributes* and *brand loyalty* significantly strengthen *athlete brand advocacy* and the mediator role of *athlete deservedness* in these relationships is positively significant.

Keywords: athlete personality, *self*-congruency theories, athlete brand image attributes, brand loyalty, deservedness, brand advocacy.

JEL classification system: M31 – Marketing; L83 – Sports, Gambling, Restaurants, Recreation, Tourism

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RESUMO

Num contexto em que o desporto é socialmente guiado pelo atleta ideal, o merecimento deste estimula os advogados da marca a lutarem pelos seus resultados e recompensas. Esta pesquisa é necessária para o desporto, visto que expande os estudos de merecimento sobre o sistema de suporte dos consumidores, o que pode ser essencial para, eventualmente, contagiar outras entidades a contribuir para o sucesso da marca do atleta. Tendo os advogados como o principal sistema de suporte, estes são um elemento-chave capazes de efetuar mudança sobre as recompensas que o atleta recebe. Os alvos desta dissertação são os atletas que pretendem potenciar a sua marca e os respetivos gestores, que deverão perceber a melhor maneira de articular a divulgação dos esforços dos atletas (alvo de avaliação social do merecimento), desenvolver o sistema de suporte e estimular a defesa da marca. Esta investigação cuidadosa preocupa-se em tratar de uma nova perspetiva de merecimento na relação atleta-consumidor e concluir sobre o nível de relação mais associado com merecimento e digno da defesa da marca. Um questionário online foi direcionado a indivíduos que tinham um atleta preferido (N=300) e o método PLS-SEM foi usado para testar 6 hipóteses. As conclusões indicam que a *personalidade da marca do atleta* não influencia significativamente a defesa dessa marca e o efeito mediador de *merecimento* nesta relação também é não-significativo; os *atributos da imagem de marca do atleta* e respetiva lealdade significativamente fortalecem a sua defesa e o efeito mediador de merecimento nestas relações é significativamente positivo.

Palavras-Chave: personalidade do atleta, teorias congruentes do *eu*, atributos da imagem de marca do atleta, merecimento, lealdade à marca, defesa da marca

Sistema de classificação JEL: M31 – Marketing; L83 – Desporto, jogos de azar, restaurantes, recreação, turismo

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List of abbreviations

ABI-Athlete Brand Image

ABP-Athlete Brand Personality

BA-Brand Advocacy

BI-Brand Image

BL-Brand loyalty

BP-Brand Personality

CI – Confidence Intervals

CSR-Corporate Social Responsibility

HEXACO - honesty- humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience

JEL – Journal of Economic Literature

PLS-SEM: Partial Least Squares – Structural Equation Modelling

SPORTEAPE – Sports Team Personality

SRM-Sports Relationship Marketing

VIF-Variance Inflation Factor

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sports Relationship Marketing is a field of study in marketing with the concrete application (Shani, 1997), as the relationships between athletes and other entities have gained relevance (Abeza et al., 2019). The athlete brand depends on what the public evaluates of him (Carlson and Donovan, 2013). Famous athletes have been considered social signs and valuable assets to sport organizations (Väättäinen & Dickenson, 2018). As social signs, they gain a deservedness level according to their functions in society, which attribute them social roles responsible for societal equilibrium (Schweiger, 2014). Not all sports agents can set this reference level in societies that are ruled by sports (Heil, 2016).

The dimension of these human brands is clear: Cristiano Ronaldo, for example: not only does he have a fan base of 122.28M *Facebook* followers-June 2021-, but also does he have 3332M followers in *Instagram*-September 2021: an Instagram post was valued at 985.441\$ on average in 2020 (Statista, 2021). The consumer advocacy system is important-it serves to ensure the athlete harmonizes his performance through a bundle of followers and gains the support system that follows along with his success.

Advocates use their unique voices to powerfully and impactfully convince and enable access to resources, rights, and opportunities (Cox et al., 2015). They are the ones capable of effecting change (Heil, 2016), and vital on selling a narrative to reach higher targeted scales (Harris, 2021), assure the athletes' performance, and contribute to their brand success, by convincing others to support, like the government or partnership brands. In a worldwide public opinion survey about government funding for Olympic athletes, 67% of all respondents stated that they believed government funding should be used to support Olympic athletes (Lange, Statista, 2021). For sponsorship, the example of Simone Biles in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics also sheds light on (her mental health) advocacy. "Her choice (to bow out from the competition and focus on her mental health) drew widespread support from fans, athletes and commentators" (Pearl, Forbes, 2021) and made her the most mentioned Tokyo 2020 athlete (Statista, 2021). Months after, she signed a new partnership with *Cerebral*, a mental health, and telemedicine app. It is estimated her endorsements (United Airlines & Visa) reach 5 million dollars a year (Statista, 2021).

For all this support to happen, consumers should perceive these athletes to deserve their efforts of support. Moving or influencing other sports-involved entities takes on a "whole village" and efforts. Here, deservedness appears as a social concept related to advocacy.

Consumers will interpret deservedness. They will interpret athlete deservedness when trying to evaluate the worth of their efforts for the athlete brand. When studied in a sports context, deservedness falls into definitions of success factors of an athlete and his deservedness appears to be accepted if the athlete socially acknowledges his position for the social organization (Shweiger, 2012;2014). For general studies, deservedness has been studied in a social sphere of allocating rewards to socially worth individuals (Ye & Nylander, 2020).

Yet, the extant literature of relational exchanges between athlete-sport entities does not take into consideration the entity evaluation of athletes' worthiness of their rewards. This study fills in the gap by providing a specific approach for the exchanges established between athletes and consumers. Neither has deservedness been developed as a social concept paired with brand advocacy nor has the concept been studied for a specific entity relationship in sports: athlete-consumer. This dissertation takes on three lines of thoughts of 3 different variables that may be compared to 3 different levels of relationship (athlete brand personality, athlete brand image attributes, and athlete brand loyalty) and are posed to be antecedents of brand advocacy. Then, it studies what level is perceived as deserved of advocacy efforts.

The literature revealed conclusive findings that go hand in hand about the association of brand personality (Kang et al., 2013; Karjaluo et al., 2016; Samala & Singh, 2019; Wilk et al., 2021) and athlete brand image (Gutman, 1982; Bauer et al., 2008; Koo & Hardin, 2008; Mahmoudian et al., 2021) on its positive outcomes – also identified as positive antecedents to loyalty and/or advocacy -, and the greater attention the effect of brand loyalty on brand advocacy has received (e.g. Stokburger-Sauer, 2010; Fullerton, 2011; Wilk et al., 2018). Aggregating these literature efforts, the dissertation cares to express the effect of athlete BP, BI attributes, and brand loyalty on the action of advocate fans and mediated by deservedness.

The practical goal is to create a social support system that may incorporate the athlete into consumers' wider imaginary communities of benefits, changing or creating perceptions of the general consumer advocacy on what the athlete deserves: a potential sponsorship/partnership, a career upgrade, a great coach or training improved conditions, etc. For the three antecedents, suggested by this investigation, athletes and consumers act as co-exchanged social individuals. Athletes play the game of social relevance in the consumers' minds and consumers evaluate athletes' deserved items. This happens because individuals create mental images of others and project them into certain imaginary social communities that allow them to classify their surroundings in a mental spectrum of deservedness to reposition social structure (Burnasheva



& Villa-Lobos Moron, 2019; Campenhout & Houtum, 2021). As deservedness can prompt strong emotions (Hafer, 2012), individuals tend to advocate a behavior socially encouraged (Szóke, 2015) and accept more easily the rewards they receive (Ye & Nylander, 2020).

#### Main goals and research questions

The mentioned antecedents have been proven to trigger consumer positive outcomes and ultimately lead to brand advocacy. When conducting a focus group, a variable of deservedness appeared as a concept that might explain advocacy. *Athlete deservedness* is the mediator variable that possibly explains the athlete BP symbolism, ABI attributes and loyal behavior and the consumers trigger to advocate. For that reason, the main research questions associated with the main goals are as follows:

- How is *athlete brand advocacy* predicted by the athlete brand personality symbolism, the athlete brand image attributes, and brand loyalty?
- What is the mediating role of *athlete deservedness* on predicting *athlete brand advocacy*?
- Is *athlete deservedness* evaluation about a social perspective or a relationship construction?

The main goal was to test deservedness in the consumers' relationship with the athlete and address whether it is about the social organization of hierarchies in seeing the athletes receive what they deserve (brand advocacy) or an internal bond verification (brand loyalty) – where consumers' perspective of the athlete brand personality and performance triggers a genuine will to strengthen the relationship.

The remainder of this paper is as follows: first, a literature review on the main concepts is introduced – the role of athletes as human brands and theories on brand personality regarding the *Self* are introduced, as well as the athletes' BI attributes and previous research conducted on loyal and advocate consumers. Throughout this initial conceptualization, the items used for the questionnaire are theoretically explained, the variables are formalized in the sports context and the hypotheses from the non-mediator analysis are justified. Next, deservedness is explained through social and sports perspectives, leading to the justification of the mediation hypotheses of deservedness. Following, the study presents the methodology used before assuring great results from all the data collected in *smart-PLS*. The paper concludes by discussing the results and presenting limitations to the study that might serve as future directions for research.

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## 2. LITTERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 ATHLETES AS HUMAN BRANDS

The general concept of a brand includes the human brand research (Thomson, 2006), where brands are seen as humans (Kucharska et al., 2020) and proven to be an extension of interpersonal relationships (Thomson, 2006), under the premise that the development of these relationships requires the human brand to be seen, by establishing their “own symbolic meaning and value using their name, face or other brand elements in the market” (Arai, et al., 2014, p.98). Research has common ground on the concept of human brands about the person in question that is somehow related to its marketing communication (Thomson, 2006; Close et al., 2011; Fournier & Eckhardt, 2018).

Thomson (2006) defined the human brand as a well-known person that is influenced by marketing communication efforts, whereas Close et al. (2011) extended these interpersonal and inter-organizational communication activities to any type of persona – emerging and well-known. Fournier & Eckhardt (2018) emerged these two parts of the concept, stating it is based on the person that is the target of commercialized brand offering. Literature shows that persons, in general - and the case of athletes (O’Reilly & Braedley 2008; Parmentier et al., 2013) – are marketable, as well as products (Kotler & Levi, 1969; Hirschman, 1987; Gilchrist, 2005). Consumers view athletes as human brands with unique personalities (Carlson & Donovan, 2013) and are more likely to connect with a brand with a differentiated personality (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Establishing an athlete brand means the goal is to strengthen the unique bond between that athlete and his/her fans (Parmentier & Fischer 2012).

Human brands like athletes are responsible for the emotional, value-expression connection (Fournier, 1998; Osorio et al., 2020) and their professional brands are ready to be branded when they achieve celebrity status (Carlson & Donovan, 2013) or get to the public eye (Thomson, 2006), which is a status only given to entertainers or sports stars (Chae & Lee, 2013) and human brands that are already considered celebrities (Centeno & Wang, 2016). This person-brand side that seeks the development of the emotional dynamic relationship with consumers (Fournier, 1998) combines with the athletes’ commercialized brand offering side and promoted marketing efforts, and distinguishes them from going beyond the functional beneficial experience (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2019).

The concept of celebrity brands is a particular case of human brands (Osorio et al., 2020). Many studies associate athletes with the concept of celebrities and human brands (Rindova et

al., 2006; Thomson 2006; Arai et al., 2013). This means the efforts of building, leveraging, and sustaining a brand is directed to a human being – a person – (Keller, 2008), which includes sports celebrities (Carlson & Donavan, 2013) that can trigger devoted commitment and affection on consumers (Oliver, 1999), based on their talent and still ordinary life (Dyer, 1998).

These celebrities can set a reference level of achievements and aspirations (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Based on their brand promotion and “narrative” of the person (Gabler, 2001; Escalas, 2004), celebrities have a more appealing personality than others (Lunardo et al., 2015). Their likable personality and athletic expertise (Braunstein & Zhang, 2005) make them considered “star-worthy” (French & Rave, 1959). Giving them a spokesperson or a figurehead, the brand is obtaining a personality and a character that is the object of communication efforts (Kapferer, 1997) and translated into the many facets of the human brand (Carlson & Donavan, 2013). Athletes are conceptualized into brands (Arai et al., 2014) and associated with a certain personality (Hasaan et al., 2019).

## 2.2. BRAND PERSONALITY

Personality is a durable, dynamic concept that does not change very much over time (Freud, 1963) and describes the reaction mechanisms representatives of a person (Sullivan, 1953). The personality concept in psychology is a valid method to be transported to the field of brands (Caprara et al., 2001) and there has been research on brand personality based on the psychology roots (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). Koebel & Ladwein (1999) argue that brand personality is seen through observable behaviors and brand elements expression, which contributes to the consumer attributing a personality to it (Kang et al., 2016; Braxton & Lau-Gesk, 2020). Consumers can recognize these traits on the brand and describe it as if it was a person (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003) when they emotionally give the response of personifying a brand (Patterson, 1999; Braxton & Lau-Gesk, 2020).

There is a customer learning process of socialization in becoming aware of the brand and getting to know it (Mitsis & Leckie, 2016) to the point they, as human beings in their nature, look forward to securing their *Self* with the brand (Wee, 2004; Septyani & Alversia, 2020) that often offers them the symbolism of human personality (Austin et al., 2003; Shafiee et al., 2021). “Choosing a brand with the right personality characteristics enables the consumer to develop a visible and a unique representation of himself” (Fournier, 1991; Ligas, 2000; *in Austin et al., 2003, p.77*). As inanimate subjects, brands, like any individual, can be described with

adjectives that represent their behavior (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003) and can receive human personality traits that are achieved due to marketing efforts (Kang et al., 2016). Authors like Gordon (1996) argue this personification is a straight reflection of the relationship between consumer and brand, and authors like Plummer (2000) propose that the personality of the brand derives only from the communication created for the specific brand. Either way, there is a tendency of consumers to attribute human personality traits to brands (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Arora & Stoner, 2009;) that are one non-human entity able to create meaningful symbolic connections through different encounters (Austin et al., 2003; Shafiee et al., 2021).

Based on the extent to which individuals attribute personality characteristics to others in their daily interactions (Punyatoya, 2011), the same way the brand receives its meaning in the consumers' eyes (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, Shafiee et al., 2021). Brand personality and human personality conceptualize differently: the consumers' direct or indirect encounters with the brand will determine the personality they associate with it (Kang et al., 2016), yet what they learn about the individual's attitudes, behaviors and beliefs form the human personality (Plummer, 1985; Park, 1986; Lee & Cho, 2009). According to Restak (1991), sport consumers are not capable of differentiating real encounters from promoted media experiences. That explains why only brand personality traits get to the public eye, while human personality traits may or may not get there (Kakitek, 2018).

At some point, human and brand personality may overlap to some extent, which calls for differentiation (Aaker, 1997). States are temporary manifestations caused by external circumstances (Chaplin et al., 1988) and associated with brand personality, whereas traits relate to human personality (Carlson & Donovan, 2013) and remain through the person's lifetime (Allport, 1961; McCrae et al., 1980), due to internal causes (Chaplin et al., 1988). According to Allport (1937), a trait is a neuropsychic demonstration of people behaving consistently in response to various equal stimuli and a concept associated with the same way it is associated with an individual (Aaker, 1997). "Because brand personality is formed by associating a brand with human emotions and traits, it will sometimes capture aspects of human personality" (Kim et al., 2018, p.95). Indeed, human personality can be transported to brands (Kassarjian, 1971; Chen & Rogers, 2006; Milas & Mlacic, 2007; Kaplan et al., 2010; Kang et al., 2016; Kakitek, 2018), as it is constructed based on the attribution of human personality traits to product or services (Plummer, 1985; Aaker, 1996). "Athletes like Roger Federer, Maria Sharapova, and Kelly Slater have both human and brand personality facets" (Kakitek, 2018, p. 13). It has also

been cleared the difficulty to determine “attributes for a professional athlete as they are diverse and individualistic” (Kakitek, 2018, p. 23), as there is more and more research in the sports brands field that have invested in generating an appropriate list of brand personality items applicable to the sport context (Ross, 2010; Braunstein & Ross, 2010; Tsiotsou, 2012).

Aaker (1997) defined brand personality as “the set of relevant human characteristics associated with the brand” (p.349). The author research extended through different personality items of products, employees, corporate brands, and others (e.g. Slaughter et al., 2004; Sung and Tinkham, 2005; Muniz & Murchetti, 2012; Davies et al., 2017) and, at the same time, has been the target of some criticism, because of its generalization flaws (Austin et al., 2003; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Clardy, 2012) and because it did not measure the personality traits, but included brand identity facets (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Bosnjak et al., 2007), leading to constructing validity problems (Geuens et al., 2009). It became clear the vagueness and undistinguished aspects of brand personality when compared to brand identity or brand image concepts (e.g., Freling and Forbes, 2005). It should exclude “functional attributes, demographic characteristics, user imagery, user appearance, and brand attitudes” (Geuens et al., 2009. p.99). Aaker (1997) framework had its generality improved and focused onto the SPORTEAPE framework; onto the HEXACO model (Ashton et al., 2004), and onto Geuens et al. (2009) framework—and others—to fight the use of non-human personality traits in the literature, avoid the structure distortion (Lee & Ashton, 2005) and increase validity in cross-cultural settings (Garanti & Kissi, 2019).

According to Costa & McCrae (2006), personality traits are basic tendencies known for a consistent pattern of actions, feelings, and thoughts. The *Big five* model is based on an innate traits’ attribution (McCrae & John, 1992) that has been proven to be reliable (Schmitt et al., 2007; Nevid & Pastva, 2014; Sleep et al., 2020) and to apply to brands (Huang et al., 2012). The *Big Five* came with the theory of McDougall (1932) that assessed the 5 main traits as differentiated and inseparable (OCEAN): openness to new experiences (intensity, span, and complexity of an individual’s experiences), conscientiousness (traits of scrupulousness, orderliness, and trustworthiness), extraversion (openness to others, sociability, impulsivity and likeability to feel positive emotions), agreeableness (kindness, modesty, trust, and altruism) and neuroticism to measure the level of emotional stability (anxiety, instability, and nervousness). Goldberg (1990; 1992) and McCrae & John (1992) continued the framework and came up with The *Big Five* personality dimensions: extroversion, agreeableness,

conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience (McCrae & Costa, 1997; John et al., 2008). There is some similarity between dimensions of the main literature (*Aaker's* and the *Big five*): sincerity and – agreeableness and conscientiousness, excitement and extraversion; competence and – conscientiousness and extraversion (Zivanovic et al., 2017).

In the sports field, Olson & Hergenbahn (2011) argue that brand personality varies from individual to individual according to the situation and all personality traits predict a certain athlete behavior in the future (Habib et al., 2019). Piedmont et al. (1999) argue the *Big 5* is a strong predictor of an athlete's performance since it reflects personality traits used to improve sports performance (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2011). Authors like Chen & Rogers (2006), Milas & Mlacic (2007), and Kaplan et al. (2010) have also supported the use of the *Big five* in their research – according to Davis et al. (2018) the *Big five* provided researchers with a common language in the trait's description and five replicable domains of personality that facilitate comparison between studies.

Extraversion relates to the quantity and intensity of interpersonal relationship type and the level of activity, need for stimulation, and joy (Widiger & Costa, 2002). More extroverted individuals or brands are known to be more sociable, active, talkative (John et al., 2008), optimistic and look for fun (Widiger & Costa, 2002). Lower scores on this dimension indicate more reservedness, shyness (John et al., 2008), autonomy, less talkative or exuberant (Widiger & Costa, 2002).

As another interpersonal dimension, agreeableness scores higher to individuals or brands that are perceived to avoid conflict, to be friendly, affectionate, honest, altruistic, and simple, whereas lower values reflect individuals or brands more hostile, obliged, offensive, questionable, uncooperative, irritable, and to some extent manipulative and vindictive (Widiger & Costa, 2002).

Conscientiousness analyses the willingness level, persistence control, and behavior motivation directed to the goals. Conscientious humans tend to be more organized, self-disciplined, competent, effective, and perseverant (Widiger & Costa, 2002).

Emotional stability involves the level of emotional adjustment: individuals or brands emotionality stable are perceived to rarely experience negative emotions, often lead with calmness and are much less disturbed by embarrassing social situations and have a greater

tolerance for frustration, while individuals or brands emotionality unstable is characterized by anxiety, guilt, inferiority, sadness, shame, weak impulse control, and difficulty to get along with stress (Widiger & Costa, 2002).

The last dimension from the *Big Five* measures the active demand and appreciation for new experiences, as individuals or brands that score high show creativity, originality, and interest, and individuals with low scores are individuals more conventional in beliefs and attitudes and simple, with a tendency to maintain a set of circumscribed behaviors (Widiger & Costa, 2002).

In sports research, Tsiotsou (2012) identified five traits related to sports brands, from which two of them – competitiveness and morality - were human personality traits found to characterize the sports teams' personality and later confirmed to be applied to individual athletes (Mitsis & Leckie, 2016). Competitiveness relates to the perception consumers have on the winning capacity of the sports team over its competitors and to achieve its goals, as competitive sports brands are ambitious, dynamic, successful, proud, and triumphant and the ones that score lower on these dimensions are less competitive (Tsiotsou, 2012). Morality is a trait that characterizes the principles, culture, and ethics a sports brand carries. Brands scoring higher in these items are perceived by consumers to have a great code of conduct, whereas brands scoring lower as perceived to be more immoral (Tsiotsou, 2012).

Personality traits of the brand are absorbed by consumers in different ways by its learning and experience (Aaker, 1997; Coelho et al., 2019), which can vary across different situational cues and influence brand preference and people's emotions (Aaker, 2001; Shafiee et al., 2021). Consumers learn about the brand through encounters they experience with it (Ward, 1974) that allow them to create knowledge and attitudes towards the brand (Dix et al., 2010; Shafiee et al., 2021). The exchanges happen in the consumer's psychological process of judging the brand by comparing its characteristics to their own or desired *Self* (Aaker, 1997) and test the brand as a relationship partner with human-like characteristics (Fournier, 1998) that will ultimately establish its perceived value in the consumers' eyes (Coelho et al., 2019).



2.2.1. The *Self* Theories – Similarity and Complementarity alignments

“The *Self* is what one is aware of, one’s attitudes, feelings, perceptions, and evaluations of one’s *self* as an object” (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967, p. 24). These multiple and relevant attributes are part of the *self*-concept and guide experience, behavior (Markus & Wurf, 1987; McConnell, 2011; Lisjak et al., 2012), and advocacy (Septyani & Alversia, 2020). According to Aggarwal & McGill (2007), consumers tend to ascribe human characteristics to brands and use personality traits to define the brand as if it was a relationship partner (Tsotsou, 2012), which is described in a differentiated and irreplaceable attachment (Thomson, 2006). With this partner, consumers expect the brand to be active in their behaviors and actions to be able to soak all their interesting traits (Punyatoya, 2011). “To become an actual partner in the relationship, the brand must be perceived as a complete, literal hum” (Puzakova et al., 2009, p.413), which has been proven by Levy (1985) and Plummer (1985) that consumers view brands with unique personality traits. These bonds’ creation lies in the human interpersonal psychology theory regarding similarity and complementarity (Dryer & Horowitz, 1997). Consumer’s expression of their own and ideal *Self* is encouraged by the personality of the brand (Belk, 1988), which should be consistent with their own *Self* (Malhotra, 1988).

Similarity theories are based on the individuals’ projection of their *self*-knowledge into brands (Puzakova et al., 2009) in a comparative approach between their *self*-concept and the brand image (Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy et al., 1991). Consumers look forward to identifying the match between their personality and the brand (Malar et al., 2011) and seek *self*-validation through the identification of similar brand traits to their own actual *Self* (Aron et al., 1996). “The consumer intentionally has targeted the social environment because it is consistent with and supports his or her *self*-concept” (Oliver, 1999, p.38). There is a strive for harmony in the consumer’s thoughts, as they look for congruence between elements they perceive to belong together (Chadwick, 2015). Consumers extend their selves into the brand (Belk, 1988), wanting to portrait themselves in their brand choices (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). According to Klohnen & Luo (2003, in Karampela, 2018, p. 575) “similarity helps partners to feel safe and familiar with each other”. Congruence appears as a concept associated with the extent to which a brand goes with an entity (Chadwick et al., 2016). If consumers find a connection with the brand that satisfies their *self*-definitional needs, they will be more willing to demonstrate its positive outcomes (Govers & Schoormans, 2005).

In a complementarity alignment, it is believed consumers tend to expand their selves for personal growth (Aron & Aron, 1986); complementarity is seen as a way of “individuals being drawn to partners to access characteristics they desire, but do not possess themselves for *self*-enhancement purposes” (Dryer & Horowitz, 1997, in Karampela, 2018, p.575). Consumers evaluate their *Self* and compare it to the brand in hopes to find *self*-esteem projected into the brand (Kressman et al., 2006). According to Beerli et al. (2007), this happens because there is a gap between their *Self* and their desired *Self* that consumers want to fulfill. It serves to step up their *Self* in a complementarity alignment, where consumers desire to enhance their *Self* (Jamal & Mohammed, 2007). Consumer’s attraction to the brand personality reflects Homans’ (1958) theory that consumers attract others they perceive to add more value to the rewards that come from these relationships (Karampela et al., 2018). The attachment with the brand enables consumers to step up their status by interacting as an active relationship partner (Fournier, 1998).

“In the context of interpersonal relationships, people extend their personalities to incorporate some desirable traits attributed to their partners” (Kressman et al., 2006, p.958). Consumers see their partners as an attractive element because they have the potential to extend their selves on what is missing (Aron & Aron, 1996). When meeting the ideal *Self* into the brand, consumers meet their need for *self*-esteem, which leads them to evaluate the brand favorably (Kressman et al., 2006) and to brand loyalty (Nam et al., 2011). There is increased support to the brand when consumers *self*-identify with it in a similar alignment (Fullerton, 2003). On the other hand, complementarity or positive dissimilarity, according to Kressman (2006) and Puzakova et al. (2009), enhances the quality of the brand-consumer interpersonal relationship, since it relies on the premise that brands meet the consumer’s needs for *self*-confirmation or *self*-extension. Brand personality establishes itself as a trigger of engagement (Rodriguez et al., 2019), responsible for recommendations to others (Wilk et al., 2018), positive word of mouth (Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008), advocating for the brand after consumption (Stephenson & Yerger, 2014), volunteer promotion of the brand and its defense (Stephenson & Yerger, 2014).

### 2.3. ATHLETE BRAND IMAGE ATTRIBUTES

The concept of brand image has been extant in the literature regarding definitions: it gathers the general perception of the brand attributes (Herzog, 1963; Newman, 1985; Dichter, 1985);

it is also related to the symbolic meaning gained in the consumers' mind (Sommers, 1964; North, 1988; Levy, 1999); and others authors even argue that brand image consists of what the consumers' attitudes, feelings, and impressions of the brand attributes are (Gardner & Levy, 1955; Bullmore, 1984; Kapferer, 1994). All definitions fall into the concept of Dobni & Zinkhan (1990) that see the brand image as the total perceptions of brand associations held in the consumers' memory. Brand image is a concept that is highly paired with brand associations (Arai et al., 2014) since it is argued to develop and include brand image attributes that characterize the experience; benefits that consumers attach to the consumption of the brand (Keller, 1993) and brand attitudes that are related to the consumers' overall brand evaluation (Wilkie, 1986, Keller, 1993).

The main criticism for the brand image concept is that it is conflicted with brand personality since it incorporates adjectives that are on the public eye dimension and should be differentiated from brand personality, whose concept should enter the perspective of human personality traits (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). The authors argue that the brand image concept is constructed on perceptions and impressions of brand association and does not receive differentiation from brand personification.

Brand image is a great way to strategically develop consumers' perception of the brand and their consequent positive feelings and to help them assemble and distinguish brands, keeping this information in their memory (Na et al., 2021). The same way consumers develop perceptions about different types of brands, so do they develop these on athlete brand image attributes (Na et al., 2021). The athlete brand image is constructed between pre-existing information and what the actual encounters brand-consumer bring to the consumers' memory associations of the athlete's attributes (Keller, 1993; Arai et al., 2014).

In the sports context, brand image has been studied in leagues (e.g. Kunkel et al., 2014), teams (e.g. Bauer et al., 2008; Kunkel et al., 2016) and developed into an individual athlete perspective (Arai et al., 2013; Arai et al., 2014). Also, the brand image attributes have received categorization, since the field of sports can provide both product-related attributes associated with their performance and non-product-related attributes (Bauer et al., 2008). In team performance research, Gladden & Funk (2001, 2002) associated product-related attributes, like success, star player, head coach, and management with the contributors to the core product - performance. On the other side, there are also non-product-related attributes that go beyond the core product, do not affect performance, and still add benefits relevance to the sports team

consumption (Bauer et al., 2008). The benefits that come attached with the brand's attributes are, in the consumers' mind, an added value and meaning to their relationship (Keller, 1993) and can be categorized into functional, symbolic, or experiential (Park et al., 1986). Arai et al. (2013) explained the three attributes related to the athlete brand image: athletic performance, physical attractiveness, and marketable lifestyle, however, only the first two were incorporated into this research, since marketable lifestyle can be arguably associated with brand personality perceptions and a brand personality scale constructed on human personality traits was studied separately.

Arai et al. (2014) considered on-field attributes such as athletic performance and attractive appearance: it is about the athlete's expertise and his/her skills and knowledge that fans value in the sports competition environment (Trail et al., 2003). How well a product performs well is also transported into brands (Séguela, 1982). Indeed, "one may argue that the appeal of a famous athlete may depend on his/her performance" (Lunardo et al., 2015, p.692). Arai et al. (2014) mentioned athletic performance as a variable related to athlete's facets of performance, which includes athletic expertise, competition style, sportsmanship, and rivalry. Athletic expertise refers to the wins and achievements throughout his/her career, while competition style indicates how his/her performance is in the competition environment. Expertise is related to the provider's competence and knowledge of a specific field (McGinnies & Ward, 1980) and, in blog research, has been found responsible for a human brand's influence on consumers (Lewis, 2010). Consumers want to see themselves in sports brands that have an influencing power and can win (Tsiotsou, 2012). "Sportsmanship is measured by the athlete's ethical behavior, including items like fairness, integrity, ethical behavior, and respect for the opponents (e.g., Shields & Bredemeier, 1995; Sessions, 2004), and rivalry refers to an athlete's competitive relationship specifically with other athletes" (Arai et al., 2014, p.14). The athlete establishes the brand based on his/her rivals because it also makes it possible for the brand to be defined in the consumers' minds when competition is extremely high (Richelieu & Pons, 2006).

The construct of attractive appearance is valued and recognized by consumers as a "trademark" of athletes and distinguishes their features from others (Arai et al., 2013). Appearance perceptions relate to an athlete's physical characteristics and include perceptions attached to his or her physical attractiveness, symbol, and body fitness (Arai et al., 2014). Because athletes are labeled as such role models, their body fitness – how physically fit the athlete is - is what establishes their brand, giving them the supposed credibility (Ohanian, 1991)

and their physical attractiveness will differentiate them in their sport, as there are social stereotypes about attractive people consumers associated with success (Arai et al., 2014). The fitness body of an athlete is seen as a symbol for the consumer's *self*-concept (e.g., Lau et al., 2008). Besides the physical attractiveness, individuals also seek symbolic attractiveness in the relationship, as the brand symbol is a way of consumers using an outward feature of them to express their personality – symbol refers to an athlete's attractive personal style, fashion, or any outward unique features of the athletes (Arai et al., 2013).

The benefits from brand image attributes act on the relationship, by fulfilling consumers' values and providing them with desirable outcomes, often associated with positive brand attitudes (Gutman, 1982; Bauer et al., 2008), commitment, and attachment (Koo & Hardin, 2008; Mahmoudian et al., 2021). Within the context of athlete brand image, the consumers' perception over these attributes (Arai et al., 2014) are proven to drive positive attitudes – p.e. in athlete brand extensions - (Walsh & Williams, 2017), like psychological commitment (Arai et al., 2013; Sassenberg, 2015), responsible for brand loyalty (Kressman et al., 2006; Iglesias et al., 2011; Chinomona, 2013; Hasaan et al., 2018). Mostly, the literature is ruled by the significant positive effect of brand image attributes on brand loyalty (Vázquez-Carrasco & Foxall, 2006; Upamannyu et al., 2014, Arai & Chang, 2015). Not only is brand loyalty a component to brand advocacy (Cant et al., 2014), but there are also previous studies that found a direct significant positive relationship between the brand image in WOM (Liao et al., 2009) and higher recommendations to others (Richardson et al., 1994).

### 2.3. BRAND LOYALTY

Loyalty has been proven to reflect customers' willingness to commit to the brand's success, which derives from the bond between the brand and consumers (Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2010). If consumers do not show interest in a product category, then loyalty is not achieved (Oliver, 1999) – it is not only about keeping satisfied customers freely to choose (Jones and Sasser, 1995). There has to be a brand preference (Guest, 1955; Jacoby & Kyner, 1973; Cuong, 2020) -and brand preference from alternatives (Dick and Basu, 1994)- to exist true brand loyalty (Oliver, 1999), which some authors define it as a tendency to consume the product over time without switching brands (Bilro et al., 2018; Cuong, 2020). According to Oliver (1999), loyalty to a product asks for minimum requirements, such as some superiority/desirability, to be the subject to some adoration and embedded in a social network – the author also explains

that a loyalty program should be associated with non-commodities from which there is an “enduring preference to the point of defense” (p. 42).

Loyalty research is based on attitudinal and behavioral perspectives (Day, 1969; Jacoby & Kyner, 1973; Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Yun et al. 2020). According to Kraus (1995), attitudinal and behavioral loyalty reconnected since consumers’ attitudes will match their behaviors (Kraus, 1995) and, in sports, is mostly viewed as fan loyalty (Yun et al., 2020). The brand loyalty literature history indicates the behavioral concept was the first dominant one and was associated with actions expressed over time (Jacob & Kyner, 1973). According to Odin et al. (2001), the literature was once divergent between the stochastic approach – where there is no possible explanation for loyalty and it is based on straight purchase behavior - and deterministic approach- where the consumer psychological commitment behind the purchase can and should be investigated (Jacoby, 1969; Olson & Jacoby, 1971; Jarvis & Wilcox, 1976). Later, Jacoby & Kyner (1973) argued that brand loyalty is a behavioral response expressed over time based on a psychology evaluation process and for one or more alternative brands out of a set of those respective brands.

According to Stevens & Rosenberger (2012, *in Karjaluoto et al., 2016*), “the most common means of improving behavioral loyalty relates to investing more in customer relationships and maintaining a distinguishable and appealing brand personality” (p.54). “Brand loyalty was seen in terms of results, not reasons” (TaghiPourain & Bakhsh, 2016, p.48). This definition could include one or more brands since loyalty was associated with straight repeated purchases, its probability, and frequency (Cuong, 2020), or the number of years consumers have as a fan (Mahony et al., 2000). There is a preferable behavior and little desire to switch a product or service (Oliver, 1997; Shuv-Ami et al., 2017). The ultimate loyalty consists of consumers pursuing this quest “against all odds and at all costs” (Oliver, 1997, p.392).

Day (1969) supported the concept of attitudinal loyalty that compelled the emotional attachment to the brand from consumers’ “long-term and ongoing relationship with the brand” (Khan, 2009, *in TaghiPourian & Bakhsh, 2016, p.49*), where there is a disposition to commit to the preferred brands (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001) and resist others’ marketing activities (Walsh et al., 2010). This concept goes beyond reason loyalty (Shuv-Ami et al., 2017) and triggers consumers’ willingness to brand-related behaviors (Rauyruen et al., 2007; Saini & Singh, 2020) and expands positive affective consequences in relationship marketing (Dick & Basu, 1994; Yuan et al., 2020). There is a positive attitude towards the brand (Baldinger &

Rubinson, 1996) and a favorable availability and commitment that advances a positive attitude from a loyal customer and results in avoiding brand switching (Gommans et al., 2001).

Throughout all the measurements of brand loyalty, Odin et al. (2001) advanced with some criticism due to the lack of reliability and validity when trying to understand the nature of brand loyalty, mentioning it is a concept based on consumers' declarations and not behaviors with the help of its antecedents or consequences and not measuring it isolated. Also, "the goal is not to know whether an individual is loyal or not, but to know the intensity of his loyalty to a brand" without confusing loyalty towards a singular entity with loyalty towards associated surrounding entities (Odin et al., 2001, p.2). "For a consumer to become and remain loyal, he or she must believe that an object firm's products continue to offer the best choice alternative" (Oliver, 1999, p.35). Besides this, research started to appear and brand loyalty was studied on a 3-item sphere: cognitive, conative, and affective loyalty (e.g. Worthington et al., 2009) and specifically in the sports field (e.g. Li et al. 2020).

Cognitive loyalty is the first theoretical phase of brand loyalty that is based on the knowledge and information retained from recent experience (Yuan et al., 2020), where the main transaction is the attribute performance levels regarding functional and aesthetic components (Oliver, 1999) that create opinions and beliefs of individuals toward the brand (Louis & Lombart, 2010). This stage is created based on brand image, perceived qualities, and features (TaghiPourian & Bakhsh, 2016). It associates with the evaluation of the benefit over the cost of the brand (Kang et al., 2013) that ends up in lower likeliness to choose alternatives (Nikhashemi & Valaei, 2017). In this concept, the relationship is superficial and it becomes deeper, the more the consumer processes satisfaction, triggering more affective experiences (Oliver, 1999).

"The more the brand seems a part of *self*-definition, the closer the affective or emotional attachment would be" (Nikhashemi & Valaei, 2017, p.88). Affective loyalty is the one that easily stays with the consumer and marks their feelings towards the brand (Hyun, 2012; Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014). This phase appears in a more deeply, committed, and attachment-attitude level (TaghiPourian & Bakhsh, 2016) based on cumulative pleasurable experience that enters the consumer's mind within the fulfillment and liking sphere (Yuan et al., 2020). There is an exclusive liking of the information and quality of the brand that allows consumers to tune out these obstacles present in the way to the ultimate loyalty (Oliver, 1999). It is not only about customers having the desire to rebuy or revisit based on the product superiority but also

avoiding all alternatives on a true loyalty basis (Oliver, 1999; Yuan et al., 2020) and linking the emotional elements of the experience to a memorable interaction that attracts “him to engage more with a brand” (Kumar & Kaushik, 2020, p. 335).

What also motivates the consumer into behavioral loyalty are the lifestyles and interactions with the brand (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010) that encourage co-creative hedonic experiences (Kumar & Kaushik, 2020). Conative loyalty is all about future behavioral intention that expresses the positive feeling towards the brand to continually purchase (TaghiPourian & Bakhsh, 2016) and is the one closest to predicting behavior (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014; Choi et al., 2015). In this phase, there is a more advanced commitment already to repurchase, meaning there is a motivation and desire to revisit the brand, even if the action does not take place (Oliver, 1999; Li et al., 2020). It is about “rebuying or patronizing a preferred product/service” despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviors (Oliver, 1997, p. 392). Consumers are likely to “promote the brand to others with some fervor” (Oliver, 1999, p.38).

To encourage long-term strong brand relationships, the desire to keep it through good and bad times (Fournier, 1998) with a switching resistance behavior and attitude (Grover & Srinivasan, 1992; Shuv-Ami et al., 2017), the consumer should commit to the attached brand in a desire of preference (Oliver, 1999; Li et al., 2020). According to Kim et al. (2010), the commitment the members of a brand community show towards their brand leads to extreme loyalty. Individuals who are part of a brand community tend to buy that brand consistently over the years (Algesheimer et al., 2005). There are also studies showing that members of a brand community experience dissonance when they acquire other brands (Scarpi, 2010). Thus, active participation in a brand community, along with interaction with other members, helps strengthen brand experience and enhance its value for consumers, which increases the commitment and loyalty of individuals to the brand (Jang et al., 2008). Brand communities tend to increase brand engagement (Zhou et al., 2012) and consequently loyalty (Madupu & Cooley, 2010). Communities manage to increase consumers’ loyalty to a brand and cause engaged opposition to competing brands (Luedicke and Giesler, 2007; Thompson and Sinha, 2008).

The literature says sports fan loyalty is studied, not only through commitment (Yun et al., 2020) but also through involvement attributed to the utilitarian and hedonic features (Morris et al., 2018; Gardan et al., 2020), perceived risk (Ga-Bin & Hyung, 2018), sense of well-being



(Kim & James, 2019), satisfaction (Carneiro et al., 2019), evaluation of factors like atmosphere, stadium facilities, level of entertainment (Alexandris & Tsiotsou, 2012) and others. On the sports field, loyalty to an athlete is about the emotional attachment to him (Hassan et al., 2019) and becoming a fan (Arai et al., 2013) with positive attitudes and behaviors towards their brand (Karjaluo et al., 2016). In football research, Kucharska et al. (2020) argued that the industry requests the attitudinal experience through different factors that enable behavioral consumption.

Several studies on fan loyalty explain the attitudinal and behavioral measures of the concept (e.g. Mahony et al., 2000; Gladden & Funk, 2001). All the agents, like sponsors, coaches, spectators, and others participate in the consumers' experience with the sports brand (Uhrich, 2014; Kolyperas et al., 2018) as co-creators responsible for the consumer's attitudinal and behavioral loyalty (Alexandris & Tsiotsou, 2012; Horbel et al., 2016). The bond that characterizes brand loyalty appears to encourage customers to serve as points of reference (Fullerton, 2005), nominating them as advocates for the brand (Du et al., 2007). Indeed, advocates are customers that strengthen their sense of loyalty and especially engagement (Kotler et al., 2016).

### 2.4. BRAND ADVOCACY

Brand advocacy is highly associated with the willingness to put in effort and investment into the brand (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012), as a result of the customer service evaluation (Anderson, 1998; Oliver & Swan, 1989; Zeithaml et al., 1996; Hassaan et al., 2016). Advocating for a brand is a concept described by positive word of mouth (Kemp et al., 2012; Fuggetta, 2012; Wallace et al., 2012; Bhati & Verma, 2020), favorable recommendations (Park & MacInnis, 2006; Luo et al., 2019), defense of the brand when it is attacked (Keller, 2007; Khamwon & Pongsuraton, 2020) and forgiveness after a failure service encounter (Joireman et al., 2015; Christodoulides et al., 2020). These behaviors or attitudes are based on the brand-experienced customer who actively "stands up for" and "speaks on behalf of" the brand (Wilk et al., 2018). It evolves all the consumers' behavioral efforts to support the brand (Kim et al., 2010). And they only put the effort in (Bolton & Saxena-Iyer, 2009), because there is a genuine customer choice to engage (van Doorn et al., 2010) in a relational behavior towards the brand (Melancon et al., 2011).

Brand advocacy is a concept that marks an achieved goal in the relationship between brand and consumer (Urban, 2004). According to Bhati & Verma (2020), the strength of the brand values is what makes consumers speak about the brand and their quality relational encounters with it positively affect brand advocacy (Wallace et al., 2012), online (Chu & Sung, 2015) and offline WOM (Lowenstein, 2011). Customers engage in these value co-creation exchanges (Leclercq et al., 2017), becoming potential advocates who are resilient to negative communication about the brand, intent to try new products (Pai et al., 2013; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012), and spread favorable WOM about the brand's values and offerings (Schepers & Nijssen, 2018).

Advocacy-related behaviors have proven to help give a human representation to brands (O'Leary, 2010), however, the concept has received discussion on what and when is appropriate to use this measure to study antecedents (Schepers & Nijssen, 2018). It goes hand in hand with measures related to the customers' willingness to promote and defend the brand (Cross & Smith, 1995; Jillapalli & Wilcox, 2010) and to share positive experiences (Westbrook, 1987) in platforms/communities that provide support and impactful information for others (Singh & Trinchetta, 2019). Besides the community engagement, the concept benefits from brand awareness, value, image, and the creation of a memorable two-way rewarded experience (Singh & Trinchetta, 2019). Throughout the literature, the antecedent concepts related to brand advocacy have remained more or less the same, when regarding commitment (e.g. Harrison-Walker, 2001; Fullerton, 2005, 2011; Kwong, 2015; Chuang et al., 2016), identification (e.g. Ahearne et al., 2005; Wallace et al., 2012, Shimul et al., 2019), engagement (e.g. van Doorn et al., 2010; Bilro et al., 2018), satisfaction (e.g. Fullerton, 2005; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010; Shimul et al., 2019), trust (e.g. Jillapalli & Wilcox, 2010; Badrinarayanan & Laverie, 2011; Roy, 2014) and others. Also, the general concept has been explored from active consumers engaging in positive recommendations about the brand (Keller, 2009; Jillapalli & Wilcox, 2010), to defending the brand and acting as active evangelists (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Fuggetta, 2012; Khamwon & Pongsuraton, 2020), to online support regarding User Generated Content, social media, influencers and opinion leaders, online reviews or recommendations and eWOM (e.g. Wilk et al., 2018).

As online communication channels gain relevance and provide opportunities to exchange knowledge (Berger & Iyengar, 2013; Hewett et al., 2016), the literature review has also measured brand advocacy in an online sphere (Storbacka et al., 2016; Cooper et al., 2018; Wilk et al., 2018), as e-communities of advocates engaging with the brand has become a reality

(Wilk et al., 2018). Online Brand Advocacy is a good match to offline variables (Graham and Havlena, 2007) and has been studied continuously through its multidimensions – cognitive, affective, and virtual cues - (Wilk et al., 2021). It is a concept associated with providing valuable information through online channels like social media, review or e-commerce platforms, and others – internet platforms – (Rosario et al., 2016). As noted by Wilk et al. (2019), online brand advocacy differs from general or offline brand advocacy. Online brand advocacy is a complex, multidimensional translation of offline brand advocacy, where the communication is at a specific, “one-off, time” (p.417). According to Wilk et al. (2018), it is a concept directly related to the customers’ affection towards the brand and its reflection into the online platforms that is characterized by organic behaviors and voluntary attitudes (Wilk et al., 2019). It goes beyond simple transactions (Van Doorn et al., 2010, p.254) and is a way of exchanging knowledge and information about the brand to other consumers in a social exchange interaction (Pasternak et al., 2017). Wilk et al. (2018) suggested five different types of brand advocacy interactions: brand positivity, brand defense, virtual positive expression, brand knowledge, and brand appraisal. These online measures “answer a call by Graham & Havlena (2007) for a stable and accurate measurement of online brand advocacy” (in Wilk et al., 2018, p.416) and were later improved and used again (Wilk et al., 2019; 2021).

These brand interactions are mirror the customer individual motivation and willingness to create or produce “cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity” (Hollebeek, 2011, p.790; Hill et al., 2006; Harrison-Walker, 2001), due to pleasant, enthusiastic experienced encounters (Schneider & White, 2004). Recommendation, promotion, or support to the brand (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012; Luo et al., 2019) is an extra effort behavior from consumers (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Melancon et al., 2011). Keller (2001) affirms that “consumers themselves become brand evangelists and help communicate about the brand and strengthen the brand ties of others” (p. 19). This Brand positivity concept relates to consumers’ positive communication to others (Wilk et al., 2021) about their evaluation of their experiences (Engel et al., 1969; Westbrook, 1987; Singh, 1988) and is explained by the act of consumers informing or persuading others (Anderson, 1998; Harrison-Walker, 2001).

Persuading others can also involve shielding behavior from the consumer towards the brand, for example defending the brand when others talk it down, standing up for the brand when necessary, and protecting the brand by saying positive things for the brand’s best interest (Wilk et al., 2021). Defense is also about saying positive statements about the brand or saying negative things about rival brands when others attack it (Ihan et al., 2018).

This is possible because consumers have gained knowledge from their own experiences with the brand (Wilk et al., 2021) and the share of this content genuinely makes the consumer an advocate that communicates intimate and insightful brand information (Wilk et al., 2018a, 2019). *The brand knowledge* creates a place for the concept of brand familiarity, and the share of background knowledge acquired during these encounters (Sirianni et al., 2013) is highly valued because consumers like to learn from others who have had a brand experience and can somehow give their testimonials in a relatable way and accurately inform others (Urban, 2005).

Advocates represent personal sources of information to others (Murray, 1991), their spread of the word is easily handled inside a network compared to a big organization (Wong & Boh, 2010) and they act as reference enthusiastic customers for the sports field (Palmatier et al., 2006). In CSR research, Magnusen et al. (2011, p. 64), discussed that “the development of advocates is an opportunity for sports organizations to maximize the effectiveness of their activities through the strategic union of internal and external resources”. The authors argue that sport consumer advocates are especially important because they enter the social sphere of sports and can actively support a specific social cause that will easily influence others for the benefit of individuals or groups. Sport consumer advocates can affect change (Magnusen et al., 2011; Heil, 2012).

There is an altruistic nature on consumers to advocate for positive experiences (Chelminski & Coulter, 2011; Shimul & Phau, 2018). Being an advocate is almost being an apostle for the brand (Smith & Wheeler, 2002), in a consumer information exchange process (Chelminski, & Coulter, 2011). They are creating a passionate free support system that will promote the organization in communities (Murray, 1991). Brand communities open an opportunity for consumers to defend and preserve the brand and act as advocates on behalf of the organization’s efforts (Coelho et al., 2019). The purpose of brand communities is to create a structured organization of brand admirers that share brand-related experiences with other persons in favor of that same brand (Carlson et al., 2008; Burnasheva & Villa-Lobos Moron, 2019).

#### The effect of *athlete brand personality* on *athlete brand advocacy*

Consumers choose communities to defend the brand and obtain the benefits so much desired of the *self*-concept. When using brands to help construct their *self*-concept symbolism (Dwivedi, 2014; Harmon-Kizer et al., 2013; Shafiee et al., 2021), consumers see the “brand as a *Self*” (Cheng et al., 2011). Brands reflect something about the consumer (Escalas & Bettman, 2005), as their need to consume brands that provide *self*-congruency benefits (Malar et al.,

2011). Consumers are motivated to experience a brand with a matching personality to their actual or desired *Self* as if the brand was a relationship partner (Kressman et al., 2006). A threat to the brand is a threat to the *self*-concept of consumers who seek their *self*-integrity projected into the brand, which is why they defend a brand as if they were to lose themselves (Lisjak et al., 2012). The whole process of categorizing the *Self* triggers the sense of community which increases an individual's commitment to the brand (Carlson et al., 2008).

Literature reveals that individuals acknowledge belongingness to communities in a commitment to the community and the brand itself (Ellemers et al., 1999; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). Committed members would elicit brand evangelism (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013), an extension of WOM (Doss, 2013), as they join structures to express mutual sentiments or commitments to the brand that provide the *self*-definitional role benefits (Shaari & Ahmand, 2016). The strength of such relationships has been named brand relationship quality (Fournier, 1998; Aaker, 1996; Thorbjörnsen et al., 2002; Aaker et al., 2004) and it pertains to the emotional attachment and willingness/responsibility to preserve the relationship (Fournier, 1998).

Brand community commitment is defined as members' psychological attachment to a community and their belief in the value of the relationship in the community (Kim et al., 2010). As a way to minimize psychological discomfort (Westhuizen, 2018) and maintain their integrity, consumers grow and reinforce their attachment to the brand (Park et al., 2010, Laophon & Khamwon, 2019). Laophon & Khamwon (2019) argued that the actual and desired *self*-congruency theories have a positive influence on brand attachment, which leads to different forms of communication (Kim et al., 2001; Brakus et al., 2009), positive word of mouth, and continue consumption it (Fullerton, 2005). The attachment gained in the relationship (Thomson et al., 2005; Park et al., 2010) encourages consumers to invest time, energy, and money (Batra, et al., 2012), leading to brand advocacy (Wilk et al., 2018), as a way of translating genuine and proactive attitudes and behaviors (Wilk et al., 2019). It triggers consumers to actively participate in brand evangelism and positive referral (Shaari and Ahmad, 2016). In a sports corporate social sphere of advocacy, Li et al. (2021) found that *self*-brand connection positively influences attitudes towards advocacy and consequently WOM.

As a result, the first hypothesis is proposed:

**H1. Athlete brand personality has a positive effect on athlete brand advocacy**

This means a consumer that highly perceives similarity or complementarity between their *Self* and the brand *Self* will have more willingness to engage in advocate behavior.

The effect of *athlete brand image* attributes on *athlete brand advocacy*

Brand attitudes are formed on the consumer judgment of the brand that enables him to form beliefs about the attributes and benefits (Bauer et al., 2008, p.213). Research has indicated a positive influence of unique attributes of the athlete brand image on fans' loyalty and attitudes towards the athlete (Summers & Morgan, 2008; Parmentier & Fischer, 2012; Arai et al., 2013; Kunkel et al., 2019). Their specific brand image attributes enable a "fan to strengthen the link with him (the athlete) and thus increasing the athlete's loyalty levels" (Hasaan et al., 2018).

In the sports field, loyalty has been proven to be associated with the degree of fans' mental commitment over time, which depends on a deep attachment and strong attitudes towards the athlete, and resistance to negative criticism (Mahmoudian et al., 2021). Athletic performance was found to trigger feelings of commitment, responsible for fan loyalty (Kunkel et al., 2019; Mahmoudian et al., 2021) and attractive appearance was associated with the fans' attachment, commitment, and loyalty to an athlete (Koo & Hardin, 2008; Hasaan et al., 2018; Mahmoudian et al., 2021).

Studies on the athlete brand image show congruency regarding its effect on psychological commitment in sports (Arai et al., 2013; Vaatainen & Dickenson, 2018; Mahmoudian et al., 2021). According to Beatty et al. (1988), commitment pertains to the emotional or psychological attachment to a brand, which is associated with loyalty. Besides these positive outcomes leading to brand advocacy, the specific main research goes on the effect of brand image on brand loyalty (Andreani et al., 2012; Mabkhot et al., 2017; Julian & Ferdinan, 2021), a proven antecedent of brand advocacy (e.g. Kang et al., 2013; Karjaluoto et al., 2016; Samala & Singh, 2019; Bhati & Verma, 2020).

As a result, the second hypothesis is proposed:

**H2. Athlete brand image has a positive effect on athlete brand advocacy.**

This means a consumer that highly values the athlete's functional attributes will have more willingness to remain an advocate or engage in increasing brand advocacy behavior.

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Will the engagement and bond gained from brand loyalty encourage consumers to also advocate for the athlete?

### *Effect of athlete brand loyalty on athlete brand advocacy*

A way of consumers exhibiting their loyalty towards the brand is to be more forgiving to service failures, accept better the price and positively communicate the brand (Collier et al., 2018). Authors like Anderson (1998) have even reported the concept of advocacy as a soft form of loyalty since it is a more abstract subject. "Some have argued that advocacy is a much stronger indicator of real consumer loyalty than repeated purchase behavior because consumers will only enthusiastically endorse products, services, brands, and firms when they have strong feelings about the entity in question" (Mazzarol et al., 2007; Reichheld, 2003; *in Fullerton, 2011, p.93*). What distinguishes brands is the affective relationship they have with consumers (Chernatony et al., 2003).

Sports brands specifically are characterized by the emotional bond (Sutton et al., 1997) that encourages a greater willingness to invest time and effort to obtain the brand (Martin et al., 2020). Brand advocates are loyal customers (Cant et al., 2014) that only changed their attitude towards the brand to the point of advocating for it (Dick and Basu, 1994). They go beyond spreading favorable messages or purchasing its services to voluntarily serve the brand's success (Kumar & Kaushik, 2020). It has been found that advocacy is a stepped-up game of brand loyalty (Reichheld and Sasser, 1989; Dick and Basu, 1994; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010; Cant et al., 2014). Loyal customers develop commitment (Harrison-Walker, 2001) and their bond connection (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Wilder, 2015) and are, as a result, prompt to advocate for the brand (Shukla et al., 2016; Shimul & Phau, 2018) and positively recommend it (de Matos & Rossi, 2008).

As a result, the third hypothesis is proposed:

### **H3. Athlete brand loyalty has a positive effect on athlete brand advocacy**

This means a consumer who highly engages in loyal attitudes and behaviors will be more willing to advocate for the brand.

This investigation leads to believe that consumers insert themselves into communities of value where they can justify the athlete deservedness, sharing their experience with it and acting as advocates for the 3 antecedents (athlete brand personality, athlete brand image, or athlete brand loyalty). The upcoming hypotheses justify the effect of deservedness mediating

the relationship between the three antecedents and brand advocacy, explaining what is worth advocating for the symbolism of brand personality, efforts of athletes managing their brand image, or the positive feelings the brand displayed in the consumer, respectively.

## 2.5. DESERVEDNESS

According to the Oxford Learners dictionaries (10<sup>th</sup> edition), something that is deserved, “it has been earned by what somebody has done or how they have behaved” and someone is deserving (of something) when it deserves help, praise, a reward, etc.

Deservedness has been studied in the psychology field, as incorporated in paranoia and perceived persecution measures (e.g. Melo et al., 2009) and in a justice point of view and redistribution of power (e.g. Szóke, 2015), making it clear the role that rights and obligations play. Deservingness and undeservingness are seen as a competition between rights and obligations in a social complex that produces opportunities for individuals (Ye & Nylander, 2020). The deserving differs from the undeserving based on principles of “work” and the usufruct of an enabled infrastructural support system or external “charity” opportunities as a reward (Katz, 2001).

Deservedness shows a certain similarity with the concept of entitlement: both represent the “expectation of a reward or other positive outcomes owed to the *Self*”, but differ on the source of the outcome (Feather, 1999b). Entitlement research is based on the distribution of societal resources (Campbell et al., 2004) and has been studied in the workplace, as employee entitlement (Deol & Schermer, 2021), in the adhesion of certain treatments, and when evaluating poor living conditions of certain individuals (Bloche, 2001; Schram et al., 2009). In the literature, the concept of entitlement has been associated with deservingness (Campbell et al., 2004; Pryor et al., 2008; Rose & Anastasio, 2014; Deol, 2021). Psychological entitlement is the “stable and pervasive sense that one deserves more and is entitled to more than others” (Campbell et al., 2004, p. 31), however, it has entered clinic psychology as a “feature of narcissism that is often viewed as the most toxic aspect of narcissism” (Rose & Anastasio, 2014; Deol & Schermer, 2021, p.2).

These two concepts have received some concern since the entitlement subscale, “along with the exploitativeness subscale measure the most problematic aspects of trait narcissism” (Raskin & Terry, 1988, in Pryor et al., 2008, p.2) and do not measure the single entitlement factor only (Emmons, 1984). Both presented different patterns to the *Big Five* framework



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(Goldberg, 1992) and measured the sense of the *Self* regarding behavioral problems and personality disorders (Pryor et al., 2008), forgetting to study the role of “others” (Rose & Anastasio, 2014). Entitlement may be related to “certain malevolent personality traits” (Lee et al., 2019; Deol & Schermer, 2021) and is associated with psychopathy and Machiavellians and narcissism: *The Dark Triad* (Deol & Schermer, 2021).

Nonetheless, Campbell et al. (2004) developed the *Psychological Entitlement Scale*, where items related to deservingness are incorporated in the scale, as well as expressions related to “worthiness” and “great/more things”. Worthy individuals receive more benefits than troublesome ones, making it about cooperation in social interactions (Kallio and Kouvo, 2015; Zamboni, 2019). “Every individual holds multiple socially constructed identities which produce varying degrees of privilege” (Trochmann, 2021, p.103). Deservedness is a social concept constructed on a mentally structured hierarchy of privilege (Castañeda, 2011; Willen, 2011), where individuals create imaginary communities of similar shared values they feel they belong (Szóke, 2015).

Campbell et al. (2004) argue that individuals evaluate others and whether or not their outcomes are deserved their rewards or punishments. It relates to the psychological equity theory (Adams, 1963) that enters “activities involving an individual and several other people” and states that “outcomes are equitable only when people receive benefits that are proportional to their inputs” (APA). This premises that the opposite of a deserving person is perceived to be undeserving of something (Ye & Nylander, 2020) and defends differentiated deservedness, a concept that differentiates people based on their specific attributed deservedness (Hafer, 2012). The concept of the desert itself is an important principle of social justice that originated in social relations and was evaluated by surroundings (Miller, 1999).

Another theory that enters the social evaluation of deservedness (Heil, 2012) is the social exchange theory (Homans, 1958). According to Homans (1958), during interactions, rewardable outcomes of a person appear to the same extent they emit valuable behavior to the other and each party tries to “maximize their benefits within the limits of what is regarded as fair or just” (APA). The author goes further explaining that a member of the relationship keeps with his behavior of value and with his part of the exchange because they want to receive in the same way and do not want his reward to decline – it is argued that social structure is organized according to the frequency exchanging rewarding or costly behaviors during social

interactions. Both theories maintain that people seek fairness in social relationships as long as their outcomes match the inputs (APA)

In the sports field, the concept of deservedness is based on two approaches: what athletes get and what they should get (Schweiger, 2014). The first one depends on the market, person, or institution and its willingness to provide benefits to the professional athlete: it goes by the standards used to measure benefits and is, most of the time, not questioned since they are arbitrary and the market is free, not open for debate (Schweiger, 2014). The origin of desert discrepancies relies on the market criteria regarding the specific sport culture: an athlete from a specific sport gains more money, social status, or media attention because the sport is more profitable and entertains more people, which is determined pre-handled for the two approaches by the support system and how hard consumers follow it (Schweiger, 2014).

The second approach serves as a philosophical perspective to correct the first approach flaws and objectively measure the just and fair distribution of rewards, based on social justice (Schweiger, 2014). These rewards are reserved for the ones that deserve (Feather, 1999a, 1999b) and are weighted based on one's hard work, efforts, or character (Campbell et al., 2004). Schweiger (2012) argues that a threat to social justice is posed by high salaries that may or may not be deserved for the athlete, but are not justified, which questions what they, other elite athletes or opponents/rivals who gain less, should deserve and the reason behind this inequality.

It is “what people claim for their peculiar contributions to a shared goal” (p.9) and it can be claimed from other individuals, an organization/institution, or society, based on one's efforts and achievements (Schweiger, 2014). According to Schweiger (2014), these efforts – the value of putting time and hard work into one's training – and achievements – actual tangible results that may express luck, hard work, or natural talent - are translated into material social esteem (money, house, food, etc), social forms like “inclusion, access, membership or participation in a certain social relation” or symbolic goods such as appraisal communication or other favorable expressions (Schweiger, 2014, p. 12). Even the external opportunities that come through the path of a person's life (luck, p.e.) identify a random event or chance that explains the person's humbleness, justifies their deservedness, (Ye & Nylander, 2020), and mirrors the discipline worth the reward (Brown et al., 2016).

The mediator effect of *athlete deservedness*

This study suggests there is a social evaluation of the athlete for his or her deservedness that will possibly justify and comply with the consumer advocate efforts. It is suggested that when the fan feels prompted to advocate, he/she has weighted the athlete's inputs into the relationship and accepts it: as consumers are social beings, they also evaluate the athletes' effort in a social sphere of their relationship, which means the athlete is assigned responsibilities that are socially evaluated by consumers accordingly to what the later will receive in exchange.

Having assured the conceptualization and respective variables for the main literature, the mediator effect of deservedness was established through 3 hypotheses.

The mediator effect of *athlete deservedness* on BP→BA

The symbolism of brand personality (Austin et al., 2003) is associated with a genuine bond and deep motivation that trigger behavioral engagement (Xie, et al., 2019; Farhat et al., 2021). Brand personality also triggers a feeling of belongingness to communities, which is a specific derived feeling that enables strong brand advocacy (Burnasheva & Villa-Lobos Moron, 2019). Individuals evaluate their *Self* based on their unique attributes onto membership to certain groups (Harding et al., 2021), as a way to justify the concept of believing in a world where people receive rewards and punishments they deserve (Lerner, 1980).

The concept of belongingness explains deservedness/undervedness (Zervnik & Ruseel, 2021), as being perceived to share the same normative values determines whether the person is deserving of being part of the community in question (Campenhout & Houtum, 2021). In these imagined communities of value, other individuals associated with the group evaluate, accordingly, deserving individuals based on their value to the membership (Anderson, 1983; Schinkel, 2017). Cox et al. (2018) explain that consumers decide on their advocacy practices based on their will to appraise the brand and the values' orientation that is followed in the imagined communities. A behavior socially encouraged will be rewarded or supported/advocated for and behavior socially repelled will be ignored and/or even punished (Szóke, 2015).

As a result, the first hypothesis is proposed:

H1a: Deservedness mediates the relationship between athlete brand personality and athlete brand advocacy.

This means for the athlete who is high in deservedness, his/her brand personality will have a positive association in their brand advocacy.

Another hypothesis is posed related to the mediator effect of *athlete deservedness* on  $ABI \rightarrow BA$ .

According to Heisley & Cours (2007), the ability of athletes to compete has to be learned, the competition style should be to win and performance relates to the highest possible levels of athletes' functioning, which requires extreme physical and cognitive efforts (Baker & Young, 2014). The cognitive beliefs, behavioral ties, and attachment that come from consumer-brand interactions (Li et al., 2021) have been proven to trigger a favorable emotional response over the brand attributes (Biel, 1993). Consumers favor the efforts, attributes, and benefits of strong brands (Keller, 1993), as there is a positive evaluation of the encounters with them (Kapoor & Heslop, 2009). Feather (1999) argued that the behavior and personal attributes of persons are seen as a responsibility of that person. According to Hafer (2012), people should deserve the respective outcomes when they match their responsibility in producing the outcome. In a social sphere of a deserved outcome, individuals are expected to match the subjective value of the reward with their contribution to the relationship (Hafer, 2012).

For athletes, this responsibility for their attributes depends on their efforts to "create, maintain, or change his/her image, which is vital in enhancing fans' perceptions of them" (Hassaan et al., 2016, p. 145) and trigger appraisal communication (Schweiger, 2014). Schweiger (2014) argues that an athletes' efforts and achievements determine their deservedness to social status in a community of athletes - "an athlete deserves for his or her contribution for which he or she is responsible" (p. 12). The social efforts' success of an individual enables his or her earned status, which favors his/her prestige and honors the major sphere he is inserted on (McGowan et al., 2017).

The field of sports, beforehand, carries extreme social value that posits athletes into a certain status or position, which is determined by the value others perceive of the individual in question (McGowan et al., 2017). The value of people's deserved outcomes is evaluated on the same note of their actions' value (Lerner, 2009; Feather, 1999). The marketing value of athletes is based on their brand management (Arai et al., 2013), as their brand image is a trigger for consumers' social evaluation (McGowan et al., 2017) and consequently consumers' positive

outcomes - It triggers feelings of loyalty (Bauer, Sauer, & Exler, 2005; Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Schmitt, 2005), strong emotions and a “desire to see that people get what they deserve plays a role concerning punishment, resources, and the treatment that people receive” (Hafer, 2012, p. 414). Customers’ engaging feelings towards the brand have been proven to elicit voluntary brand support (Keller, 2001; Kumar & Kaushik, 2020) that results in brand advocacy (Lowenstein, 2011; Cant et al., 2014).

As a result, the second mediator hypothesis is proposed:

H2a: Deservedness mediates the relationship between *athlete brand image* and *athlete brand advocacy*.

This means for the athlete who is high in deservedness, *athlete brand image attributes* will have a positive association with *athlete brand advocacy*.

The third mediation hypothesis regarding the effect of *athlete deservedness* on BL→BA is posed.

Campenhout & Houtum (2021) argue that the players’ acceptance and recognition is a matter of moral deservedness. The specific case of athletes is great at creating positive psychological benefits for consumers (Shilbury, 2009) because they possess the variable of performance and can create experiences, which distinguish them from other brands and is something consumers will continuously value in their bond to the athlete (Hafer, 2012). The bond consumer-brand provides consumers the emotional benefit (Moliner et al., 2018) that will trigger people to want to help brands in its success (Fullerton, 2005), acting as a helpful relationship partner (Harrison-Walker, 2001) in patronizing for the brand (Fullerton, 2003; Harrison-Walker, 2001). In these evaluations, individuals predict the equity of the relationship, based on the values subscribed into inputs/outputs of the social interaction (Pereira et al., 2012). As people evaluate these benefits, according to the psychological equity theory (Adams, 1963), it is expected in this study that consumers evaluate the athletes’ deservedness for advocacy.

Szóke (2015) explains the behavior towards a person and the notions they have of “worthy” and “unworthy” about them rely on their “social” valuable work. The consideration of social psychology evaluation of deservedness will determine the increase in the commitment, responsible for preference on allocating rewards on social status, skill basis (Hafer, 2012). Similar to the concept of brand loyalty, it includes a desire to commit to a preferred approach, despite other situational factors and alternatives (Oliver, 1999). Commitment is defined as a desire to pursue a long-lasting relationship with the brand and, indeed, is proven to be

associated with levels of loyalty (Vieira & Sousa, 2020) and advocacy (Bhati & Verma, 2020). As the willingness to bond and commit to the brand's success increases, there is a more predisposition to communicate the brand to others (Brown et al., 2005; Hagenbach et al., 2008; Harrison-Walker, 2001). There is a willingness to be enthusiastic advocates and genuinely want to be loyal and advocate for the brand (Fullerton, 2003; Harrison-Walker, 2001).

As a result, the third mediator hypothesis is proposed:

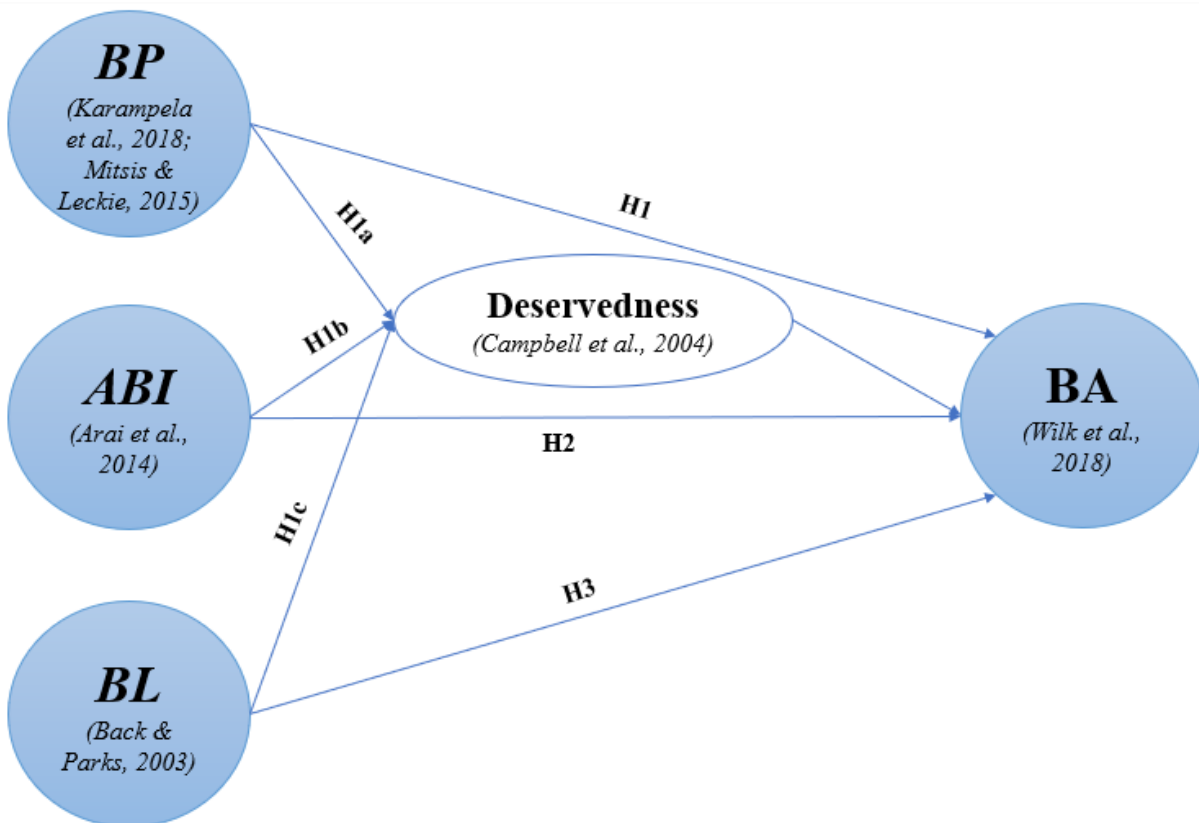
H3a: Deservedness mediates the relationship between athlete brand loyalty and advocacy.

This means for the athlete who is high in deservedness, athlete brand loyalty will have a positive association with athlete brand advocacy.

#### Proposed Conceptual Framework

All the reviewed literature from the variables allowed this investigation to produce 6 hypotheses presented and the following conceptual model:

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework – variables and paths



### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This investigation studied the deservedness mediator effect in brand advocacy (both concepts englobed in the social sphere), having as proposed antecedents the brand personality, the brand image attributes, and brand loyalty - an athlete relationship marketing triad that measures different levels of relationship with the athlete brand. It adds relevance to the literature by introducing a new behavior variable into the conceptualization of an athlete and how to measure it in terms of managing the brand efforts.

Deservedness appeared while conducting a focus group with 15 high-performance athletes. This focus group had questions to ascertain the relevance of the items chosen for brand personality, brand loyalty, and brand advocacy (each concept was explained according to the literature) and continued with 3 main questions: What does athlete brand personality symbolize for you? What makes you think is the reason behind your loyalty towards your favorite athlete? What would be a reason for you to engage in advocacy behavior and a reason you would stop doing that? Some of the answers were: “No one can take what he/she has done”; “He is the way he is, but maybe that what makes him so special (football), no one wants some athlete not to brag and claim what he has done”, “He deserves to be heard”.

To test the proposed conceptual model, the nature of this research was quantitative, as all variables were measured on a scale from 1 to 7, accordingly, in an online questionnaire (see table 1 - appendix).

#### 3.1. Questionnaire Design and Measures

The questionnaire (see annex A - appendix) – run in *Quatrics Survey Software* - was directed to a population that consumed an athlete brand and targeted individuals who had a favorite athlete to improve the quality of the results, as it has been done in previous research. For that reason, responses were conveniently sampled, by promoting the questionnaire in places like CAR Jamor (Centro de Alto Rendimento), gym, sports club, college facilities (Fitness Hut, CRP Campolide, FMH-Faculdade de Motricidade Humana), and others, and the responses were filtered by asking those who had not a favorite athlete to not respond.

To identify low validity values, a pre-test (see table 2 - appendix) was conducted with 15 responses and, similarly to the final questionnaire, targeted people who had a favorite athlete. Both the pre-test and final questionnaire were written in Portuguese to make the comprehension easier and avoid fatigue. The initial part was a short introduction written to introduce

respondents to the main themes and to recall them to think about their favorite athlete when responding.

The first page was reserved for individuals to classify the extent to which the traits would better describe their favorite athlete (Brakus et al., 2009; Tsiotsou, 2012). For athlete Deservedness, the items were based on the *Psychological Entitlement Scale* from Campbell et al. (2004) and items were adapted from “I...” to “he/she” and “If I were on Titanic, I would deserve to be on the first lifeboat” to “If he/she were on the Olympics, he/she would deserve to be considered best athlete of the games”. For brand loyalty items were adapted from “The \_\_\_ hotel...” to “Athlete x”; from “superior service quality” to “superior experience quality”; from “staying at the hotel” to “being in contact with the athlete”; from “Even if another hotel brand is offering lower room rate, I still stay at the x hotel” to “Even if another athlete is performing better, I will still support athlete x” and from “I intend to continue staying at the x hotel” to “I intend to continue supporting athlete x” (Back & Parks, 2003). Athlete brand image remained the same (Kressman et al., 2006) and for Brand advocacy measures (Wilk et al., 2018) items were mostly adapted from “the brand...” to “the athlete...”; from “Provide details about upcoming promotions and available discounts for the brand” to “Provide details about future competitions and others”; from “Share information about available or upcoming promotions for the brand” to “Share information about future competitions or a link to their social media platforms”.

The final section served to collect demographics regarding age and gender (see table 3/4 appendix) - respondents were mainly male (54%) in the age gap of 18-24 years old (46,7%), - and presented an additional question to ensure respondents were considering their favorite athlete while responding. In this final question, the main athletes' names were: Cristiano Ronaldo, Michael Phelps, Michael Jordan, Simone Biles, Serena Williams, Ronda Rousey, Rafael Nadal, Kobe Bryant, and Usain Bolt.

Once the data were collected through *Qualtrics*, *Smart-PLS* was used to analyze it: there were 300 valid responses and 69 invalid responses that had to be deleted due to its inadequate nature, which makes it a 77% effective response rate. In a PLS-SEM approach, the minimum sample size is achieved according to the “ten times rule” (Barclay et al., 1995), established with a minimum of 130 responses.

This research uses a PLS-SEM approach since its application has grown in the marketing field (Hair et al., 2012) and easily takes on latent variables as exact duplicates of its respective



factors (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982), which becomes useful for this study that asks for a latent model. PLS brings the advantage of a partial least squares SEM, develops appropriate causal-predictive testing in a complex model (Henseler et al., 2009; Hair, et al., 2012), and easily manage measurement scales, residual distributions, and sample size (Urbach & Ahlemann, 2010; Hair et al., 2011). Both the inner and outer models were analyzed, and the hypothesis results were extracted from the latent construct.

### 3.2. Data Analysis and Results

The results gathered from *smart-PLS* served to analyze the inner and outer models. Two models were analyzed: the outer layer model aimed to study the relationships on the lower-order constructed loadings and the inner layer to extend the analysis of these measured and confirm the hypotheses.

The study applied to resample procedures of 300 responses for the *PLS Algorithm* (Ringle et al., 2005), 5000 responses for *bootstrapping* (Hair et al., 2011), and 7 proposed cases for *blindfolding* (Hair et al., 2012) with the use of cross-validated redundancy (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974; Chin, 1998), on which 95% confidence intervals were generated.

#### 3.2.1. Outer Model Results – Measurement Model

This study considered convergent validity and reliability and discriminant validity to assess the construct validity (Campbell & Fiske, 1959), as part of the measurement model analysis.

To firstly assure the outer model collinearity validation, VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values entered the analysis to assess multicollinearity in the outer constructs (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982) and all of them were validated (see table 5 - appendix) through the conservative perspective of  $VIF < 5$  (Kock & Lynn, 2012), except some values that surpassed this criterion, which may have been considered a multicollinearity problem, however it was under the value criteria of  $VIF < 10$  (Hair et al., 2016);

#### Measurement Model - Internal Consistency Reliability Analysis

To assess the measurement model, indicator loadings and reliability were examined. Outer loadings analysis (see table 6) served to eliminate items from the analysis due to values  $< 0,4$  (Bagozzi et al., 1991; Hair et al., 2011) or the ones that scored between 0,4 and 0,7 and had no contribution to composite reliability. The indicators that scored between 0,4 and 0,7 that were

significant to measure the latent variable and to the consistency of the model remained in the final model to strengthen it.

Reliability is defined as “the extent to which a measuring instrument is stable and consistent” (Mark, 1996, p.285). To measure internal consistency reliability, *PLS Algorithm* was run, *Cronbach’s alpha* values along with composite reliability values were extracted and the priority was assuring strong values superior to 0.7 on Composite Reliability (Jöreskog, 1971), as recommended (Wasko & Fargi, 2005). *Brand Positivity* showed the best CR score (0.919) and *Openness* the lowest (0.853).

*Cronbach’s alpha* values varied between 0.669 and 0.882. It is not a measure as precise as composite reliability (Hair et al., 2018), however, all of the items that did not register values greater than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2011), like *Competitiveness* and *Morality* had great CR loadings (>0.7) and explained more than half of the respective construct variable ( $AVE > 0.5$ ); not to mention that the Cronbach alpha values were very close to the acceptable. For that reason, and because any effort to optimize these values might damage reliability (Raykov, 2007), these items remained in the final model and were kept as is. It is possible to conclude that the constructs in question are reliable.

Table 6. Loadings and Internal reliability

|                    | Item                 | Outer Loadings | Cronbach's Alpha | CR    | AVE   |
|--------------------|----------------------|----------------|------------------|-------|-------|
| Agreeableness      | sympathetic_BP       | 0.839          | 0.774            | 0.869 | 0.688 |
|                    | Warm_BP              | 0.850          |                  |       |       |
|                    | unsympathetic_BP_inv | 0.799          |                  |       |       |
| Competitiveness    | Ambitious_BP         | 0.872          | 0.669            | 0.858 | 0.751 |
|                    | Dynamic_BP           | 0.862          |                  |       |       |
| Conscientiousness  | Efficient_BP         | 0.850          | 0.824            | 0.881 | 0.650 |
|                    | Practical_BP         | 0.784          |                  |       |       |
|                    | Sloppy_BP_inv        | 0.762          |                  |       |       |
|                    | Systematic_BP        | 0.825          |                  |       |       |
| EmotionalStability | Envious_BP_inv       | 0.919          | 0.807            | 0.912 | 0.838 |
|                    | Jealous_BP_inv       | 0.912          |                  |       |       |
| Extraversion       | Bashful_BP_inv       | 0.875          | 0.861            | 0.915 | 0.782 |
|                    | Shy_BP_inv           | 0.907          |                  |       |       |
|                    | Withdrawn_BP_inv     | 0.870          |                  |       |       |
| Morality           | Ethical_BP           | 0.875          | 0.669            | 0.858 | 0.751 |
|                    | Principled_BP        | 0.858          |                  |       |       |
| Openness           | Creative_BP          | 0.651          | 0.782            | 0.853 | 0.595 |

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|                                      |   |       |       |       |       |
|--------------------------------------|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                                      | Imaginative_BP  | 0.801 |       |       |       |
|                                      | Intellectual_BP   | 0.837 |       |       |       |
| ABI (Athlete Brand Image Attributes) | Athletic_exp. An athlete's achievement and athletic capability (winning, skills, proficiency in their sport)                          | 0.780 | 0.782 | 0.821 | 0.546 |
|                                      | Compet_style. An athlete's specific characteristics of his/her performance in a competition   | 0.868 |       |       |       |
|                                      | Phys_attrac. An athlete's physical qualities and characteristics that spectators find esthetically pleasing                           | 0.874 |       |       |       |
|                                      | Sportsmanship. An athlete's virtuous behavior that people have determined is appropriate (fair play, respect for the game, integrity) | 0.454 |       |       |       |
|                                      |   |       |       |       |       |
| Brand Loyalty                        | AffecBL1. I like athlete x more so than other athletes  | 0.515 | 0.838 | 0.878 | 0.513 |
|                                      | AffecBL3. I love being in contact with athlete x  | 0.601 |       |       |       |
|                                      | CogBL1. Athlete x provides me superior quality experience as compared to any other athlete  | 0.723 |       |       |       |
|                                      | CogBL3. I Believe athlete x provides more benefits than other athletes in its category  | 0.786 |       |       |       |
|                                      | ConBL1. Even if another athlete is performing better, I will still support athlete x  | 0.679 |       |       |       |
|                                      | ConBL2. I consider athlete x to be my first lodging choice  | 0.807 |       |       |       |
|                                      | ConBL3. I intend to continue supporting athlete x   | 0.843 |       |       |       |
| Brand Appraisal                      | Bappral. Provide lengthy explanations as to why this athlete is better than other athletes  | 0.897 | 0.860 | 0.915 | 0.782 |
|                                      | Bappr2. Discuss his/her good and not so good points   | 0.825 |       |       |       |
|                                      | Bappr3. Provide a lot of information about the athlete  | 0.928 |       |       |       |
| Brand Defense                        | Bdef2. Stand up for the athlete when others talk negatively about it  | 0.897 | 0.865 | 0.917 | 0.786 |

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|                  |  |       |       |       |       |
|------------------|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                  | Bdef3. Talk up the athlete when others talk negatively about it  | 0.853 |       |       |       |
|                  | Bdef4. Defend the athlete if I hear someone speaking poorly about it   | 0.909 |       |       |       |
| Brand Knowledge  | Bknow1. Provide details about upcoming performances and available discounts for the brand  | 0.804 | 0.847 | 0.906 | 0.763 |
|                  | Bknow2. Provide extra details about the athlete (e.g. price, store locations, availability of discounts, or a link to a website) | 0.914 |       |       |       |
|                  | Bknow3. Share information about available or upcoming performances (games, fights) for the athlete                               | 0.899 |       |       |       |
| Brand Positivity | BPOS1. Say positive things about the athlete   | 0.910 | 0.882 | 0.919 | 0.739 |
|                  | BPOS2. Say positive things about the athlete   | 0.790 |       |       |       |
|                  | BPOS4. Say the athlete is great  | 0.863 |       |       |       |
|                  | BPOS5. Talk about the good points of this athlete  | 0.873 |       |       |       |
| Deservedness     | Deserv1. I honestly feel he/she is just more deserving than others   | 0.742 | 0.826 | 0.869 | 0.529 |
|                  | Deserv4. I demand the best for him because he/she is worth it  | 0.845 |       |       |       |
|                  | Deserv6. He/she deserves more things in his/her life   | 0.817 |       |       |       |
|                  | Deserv7. People like him/her deserve an extra break now and then   | 0.604 |       |       |       |
|                  | Deserv8. Things should go his/her way  | 0.678 |       |       |       |
|                  | Deserv9. I feel that he/she is entitled to more of everything  | 0.647 |       |       |       |

Construct Validity

Construct validity of the reflective measurement model served the purpose of proving there was convergent validity and no discriminant validity issue.

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### Convergent Validity

Convergent Validity is the extent to which multiple attempts are cohesively explaining the same factor (Bagozzi et al., 1991), it explains how well a certain item is representative of a certain variable. To analyze the construct convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted of the items was analyzed (see table 7) and all of them presented a value, as recommended, superior to 0.5 (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2011; Urbach & Ahlemann, 2010). *Brand loyalty* (0.513) was the lowest and *Emotional Stability* was the highest (0.838). All items were converging to measure the underlying construct and convergent validity was established.

Table 7. Convergent Validity: AVE

| Item                | AVE   |
|---------------------|-------|
| Agreeableness       | 0.688 |
| Competitiveness     | 0.751 |
| Conscientiousness   | 0.650 |
| Emotional Stability | 0.838 |
| Extraversion        | 0.782 |
| Morality            | 0.751 |
| Openness            | 0.595 |
| Athlete Brand Image | 0.546 |
| Brand Loyalty       | 0.513 |
| Brand Appraisal     | 0.782 |
| Brand Defense       | 0.786 |
| Brand Knowledge     | 0.763 |
| Brand Positivity    | 0.739 |
| Deservedness        | 0.529 |

### Discriminant Validity

The discrimination and unique explanatory power a variable provides is considered in this research by analyzing the *Fornell-Larcker* Criterion, Cross Loadings, and HTMT. The purpose was to discriminate, distinct, and “personify” every individual measure from different constructs (Bagozzi et al., 1991).

For discriminant validity, the *Fornell-larcker* criterion was used to study the correlation between two variables and assemble a stronger correlation of the square root for a construct than its correlation with the rest of the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Because this criterion was fulfilled, there was support to assure discriminant validity (see table 8 - appendix).

Cross loadings analysis help understand the strength of each item in its parent construct. Table 9 (appendix) shows that every item scored higher in their parent construct when compared to other constructs (Chin, 1998; Wasko & Faraj, 2005; Grégoire & Fisher, 2006), proving discriminant validity.

The ratio of HTMT (see table 10 - appendix) was also analyzed to conclude about the estimation of correlations between factors and they assured the threshold of 0.85 or less (Kline, 2011) and some of them scored higher than this, but still entered the value criteria of 0,9 or less (Teo et al., 2008; Henseler et al., 2015).

Based on this analysis, it was possible to conclude that there was convergent validity and there was no issue of discriminant validity.

### 3.2.2. Inner Model Results – Structural Model

Having met the outer model results, and previous to analyze the hypotheses on a latent constructed path, the structural model was assessed (Hair et al., 2017a): its coefficient of determination (R Square), cross-validated redundancy measure (Q Square), SRMR criteria was assessed in the latent construct and path coefficients were taken into consideration to test the hypotheses.

To examine the inner model quality of this research, the R Square value for the dependent variable was observed (Peñalver et al., 2017) and showed a significant predictive capacity of the variables. R Square should be equal or greater than 0,1 (Falk & Miller, 1992; Hair et al., 2011): as table 11 shows, this value stood in the interval 0.35- 0.45, which meant the model has established its predictive capability and, according to this specific coefficient of determination, this capability was moderate (Hair et al., 2011; Sarstedt et al., 2014).

For the value of Q Square, the recommended (Chin, 1998; Henseler et al., 2019) is to score higher than 0 to confirm the model has predictive relevance. Through a blindfolding run analysis, the values scored between 0.15 and 0.45 (see table 11).

Table 11. R Square and Q Square

|              | R Square ( <i>PLS Algorithm</i> ) | Q <sup>2</sup> ( <i>Blindfolding</i> ) |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| BA           | 0.368                             | 0.161                                  |
| Deservedness | 0.413                             | 0.404                                  |

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Also, to measure the effect size and strength of the relationship between factors, F Square was used to study large ( $>0.35$ ), medium ( $0.15-0.35$ ), small ( $0.02-0.15$ ), or no effect size ( $<0.02$ ) (Cohen, 1988). As table 12 (appendix) shows, seven relationships were established: one large, five small, and one with no effect.

Table 12. F Square

|              | BA    | Deservedness |
|--------------|-------|--------------|
| BA           |       |              |
| BL           | 0.064 | 0.550        |
| BP           | 0.036 | 0.006        |
| Deservedness | 0.053 |              |
| ABI          | 0.036 | 0.050        |

Another measure studied in the latent model was SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual), which value should be less than 0.10 to exist an acceptable model fit (Hair et al., 2016). In the same bootstrapping run analysis of the latent model, this value was 0.082, NFI=0.771 and Chi-Square is 166.024 in the Estimated Model, which confirmed the fitness of the model (see table 13).

Table 13. SRMR – Latent Model

|            | Saturated Model | Estimated Model |
|------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| SRMR       | 0.082           | 0.082           |
| Chi-Square | 166.024         | 166.024         |
| NFI        | 0.771           | 0.771           |

### Hypotheses – Path Coefficients

The last criteria analyzed were the path coefficients. The inner layer had 6 hypothesized relationships assigned (see table 14 below). By calculating bootstrapping, it was possible to check if relationships were significant: since all of these presented a  $t\text{-value} > 1.96$  (t value in green) and a  $p\text{-value} < 0.05$  they were all significant and accepted, except the effect of BP on BA and the mediating effect of deservedness in the relationship (see table 15 below). The conclusions are:

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- The relationship between athlete brand personality and athlete brand advocacy is not significant and there is a not significant mediation effect of deservedness in this relationship.
- The relationship between athlete brand image attributes and athlete brand advocacy is significant and there is a significant positive mediation effect of deservedness in this relationship.
- The relationship between athlete brand loyalty and athlete brand advocacy is significant and there is an expressive positive mediation impact of deservedness in this relationship.

Hypotheses were tested to ascertain the significance of the relationship.

Table 14. Summary of hypotheses tested

| Path                   | Original Sample<br>(O) | T Statistics | P Values | Decision                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|--------------|----------|---------------------------------|
| BP -> BA               | 0.172                  | 1.802        | 0.072    | Non-significant<br>and rejected |
| BP -><br>Deservedness  | -0.070                 | 0.594        | 0.553    | Non-significant<br>and rejected |
| ABI -> BA              | 0.176                  | 2.891        | 0.004    | Significant and<br>accepted     |
| ABI -><br>Deservedness | 0.197                  | 3.033        | 0.002    | Significant and<br>accepted     |
| BL -> BA               | 0.259                  | 3.894        | 0.000    | Significant and<br>accepted     |
| BL -><br>Deservedness  | 0.589                  | 11.895       | 0.000    | Significant and<br>accepted     |
| Deservedness -<br>> BA | 0.238                  | 3.391        | 0.001    | Significant and<br>accepted     |

Note: SRMR=0.082, Chi-Square= 166.024 | CI=95%



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Table 15. Specific Indirect Effects

| Path                      | Original Sample (O) | T Statistics ( O/STDEV ) | P Values |
|---------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| BP -> Deservedness -> BA  | -0.017              | 0.497                    | 0.619    |
| ABI -> Deservedness -> BA | 0.047               | 1.993                    | 0.046    |
| BL -> Deservedness -> BA  | 0.140               | 3.261                    | 0.001    |

Table 16. Total Effects

| Path               | Original Sample (O) | T Statistics | P Values |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|----------|
| BP -> BA           | 0.155               | 1.665        | 0.096    |
| BP -> Deservedness | -0.070              | 0.594        | 0.553    |
| ABI -> BA          | 0.223               | 4.256        | 0.000    |
| ABI ->             |                     |              |          |
| Deservedness       | 0.197               | 3.033        | 0.002    |
| BL -> BA           | 0.399               | 7.911        | 0.000    |
| BL -> Deservedness | 0.589               | 11.895       | 0.000    |
| Deservedness -> BA | 0.238               | 3.391        | 0.001    |

H1 evaluates whether *athlete brand personality* has a significant positive impact on *athlete brand advocacy*. Because  $\beta = 0.172$ ,  $t = 1.802$ ,  $p = 0.072$ , H1 was not supported. The relationship between *athlete brand personality* and *athlete brand advocacy* was found to be not significant. H1 is rejected. Through a conservative perspective ( $p < 0.10$ ), H1 is supported, meaning there is some strength between both variables.

H1a: The hypothesis sought to ascertain the mediating role of *athlete deservedness* between *athlete brand personality* and *athlete brand advocacy*. The results revealed that deservedness fails to mediate the impact of *athlete brand personality* on *athlete brand advocacy* ( $\beta = 0.02$ ,  $t = 0.059$ ,  $p = 0.953$ ). H1a is rejected for  $p < 0.05$  and  $p < 0.10$  (conservative perspective), meaning there is no relationship between BP and deservedness. Because the indirect effect was not significant, there is no mediation. Rejecting H1 for  $p < 0.05$ , one can say there is no effect of deservedness in the relationship. Accepting H1 for  $p < 0.10$ , one can say there is a direct effect only since H1 is significant.

H2 evaluates whether *athlete brand image* has a significant positive effect on *athlete brand advocacy*. Because  $\beta = 0.176$ ,  $t = 2.891$ ,  $p = 0.004$  H1 was supported. Results revealed higher

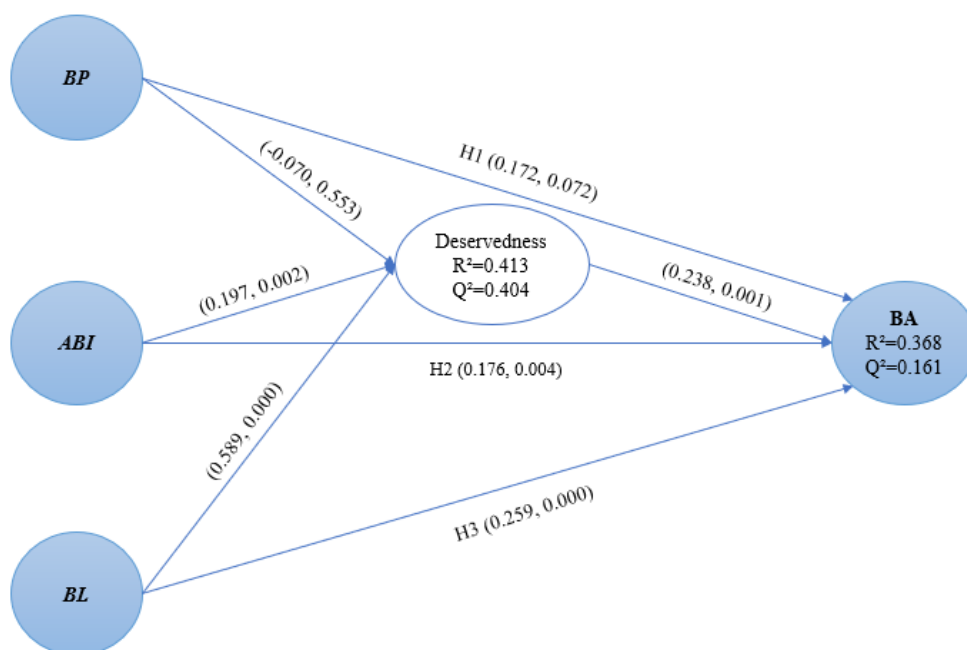
scores of *athlete brand advocacy* at higher scores of *athlete brand image* attributes. H2 is accepted.

H2a: evaluates the mediation effect of *athlete deservedness* on the positive relationship between *athlete brand image* and *athlete brand advocacy*. Because  $\beta = 0.121$ ,  $t = 3.600$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , H2a was supported. *Athlete deservedness* is a significant mediator in the relationship between brand personality and brand advocacy. H2a is accepted. Because the indirect effect was significant, as well as the direct effect, *athlete deservedness* partially mediates the relationship  $ABI \rightarrow BA$ .

H3 evaluates whether *athlete brand loyalty* has a significant positive influence on *athlete brand advocacy*. Because  $\beta = 0.259$ ,  $t = 3.894$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , H1 was supported. Results show that *athlete brand loyalty* positively influences *athlete brand advocacy* and this relationship was revealed to be the strongest one out of all six total. H3 is accepted

H3a: evaluates the mediation effect of *athlete deservedness* on the positive relationship between *athlete brand loyalty* and *athlete brand advocacy*. Because  $\beta = 0.116$ ,  $t = 3.215$ ,  $p = 0.001$ , H3a was accepted. Results show that *athlete deservedness* significantly and partially (both the indirect and direct effect were significant) mediates the relationship between athlete brand loyalty and advocacy and this relationship was the strongest out of the three mediator paths established.

Figure 2. Conceptual framework – Hypotheses significance; ( $\beta$ , p-value) +  $R^2$  and  $Q^2$



#### 4. DISCUSSION

Various studies explore the effect of brand personality on brand loyalty (Diamantopoulos et al., 2005; Punyatoya, 2011; Kakitek, 2018), even in the sports field (Trail et al., 2003; Alexandris & Tsiotsou, 2012; Horbel et al., 2016), and on-brand advocacy (Thomson et al., 2005 Park et al., 2010; Batra, et al., 2012; Wilk et al., 2018). Similarly, some authors argue engagement is a trigger for loyal customers to have encouragement into brand advocacy behavior (Cant et al., 2014; Bhati & Verma, 2020; Martin et al., 2020). This study uses a scale based on human personality traits and understands its effect on brand-related behaviors or attitudes already proven to have some kind of relation to brand personality in other fields (Belk, 1988; Malhotra, 1988; Kressman et al., 2006). Then, it explores the efforts of athlete brand image on positive attitudes/advocacy; and the consumer loyalty to the brand as a variable stepping up to brand advocacy (Batra et al., 2012). This research takes on brand advocacy as the established outcome for 3 extended relational variables in the literature (brand personality, athlete brand image, and brand loyalty), introduces a fully connected model of this triad on an individual athlete level, and introduces a new perspective on examining what is the role that deservedness plays on it.

##### *The effect of athlete brand personality on athlete brand advocacy*

The predictive stance of athlete brand personality on BA was not established: results showed a non-significant path ( $\beta=0.172$ ,  $t=1.802$ ,  $p=0.072$ ), meaning consumers who *Self* verify themselves through the athlete brand are not encouraged to advocate for it. This result went against the literature used regarding attributing or evaluating symbolic traits of the athlete (Kressman et al., 2006; Shafiee et al., 2021), encouraging consumers to also engage in brand success by investing their time, energy, and money (Batra et al., 2012) and regarding the *Self* theories (Cheng et al., 2011; Dwivedi, 2014). The investigation leads to believe that the evaluation of athlete personality traits does not mean the consumer is ready to engage in advocacy behavior, meaning that BP might pass through an awareness phase where consumers might or might not see their *Self* assured by and with the brand, therefore not seeing the *self*-confirmation or enhancement fulfilled.

This may happen, because indeed, brand personality traits used do not encourage brand advocacy or may not be perceived as symbolic to the consumers, since the format of the questions incorporated straight qualification of simple adjectives and not the symbolism, so for example “competitiveness”, instead of “I identify my *Self* with the athlete’s competitiveness”.

Also, the chosen set of traits may suggest that is not the “ideal” package to induce advocacy. However, previous studies have used this format, and analyzing the decision on this hypothesis under a more conservative perspective ( $p < 0.10$ ), it is possible to accept it. For this case, all the literature used is supported and the athlete’s personality traits are proven to carry a *self*-symbolism that enables consumers to strengthen their relationship and desire to advocate for the brand and support the athlete (p.e. Septyani & Alversia, 2020).

The mediator effect of *athlete deservedness* on BP→BA

The results from hypothesis H1a show that besides the non-significant path BP→BA, the mediator of deservedness does not either strengthen or weaken this relationship (non-relevant mediation role). It suggests there is not great acceptability to advocate for the athlete based on their personality when analyzing deservedness. This research first argued that individuals project their social identity into mentally organized communities where a set of shared values, characters, and similar rewardable individuals are grouped to encourage a behavior socially advocated for. The investigation led to believe the greater symbolism of personality to be perceived as a value worthy, the greater will be the consumer’s engagement in brand advocacy behavior, however, results showed a non-significant mediation effect of deservedness on BP→BA ( $\beta = -0.017$ ,  $t = 0.497$ ,  $p = 0.619$ ).

The investigation suggests 3 reasons for this non-significant relationship: the first one is that because brand personality consists of the attributes that will get to the public eye, it may indicate there are no efforts socially valued for deservedness, and because of that consumers do not engage in a relationship where they sense a possible inequity of inputs-outputs; Another reason suggested is that the concept of consumers’ personality might conflict with the judgment of athletes’ brand personality values since the cultural value changes according to national boundaries (Cheng et al., 2011). Because every individual is aware of his position in a social organization, there might be social approval for the athletes’ brand personality traits, due to his social value and status, however, a regular consumer might not perform for the same social norms, which makes it difficult for consumers to identify with athlete brand personality and review his/her personality into the brand (via theories of the *Self*) when there is a criterion to be fulfilled. The third reason relates to the social exchanged relationship, on which, according to Adams (1963), one or both parties can perceive the exchange as inequitable, since it may carry no value meaning or psychological utility. Interpretation of results may suggest that the set of traits used in this investigation are not socially valued or worth the reward - brand

personality fails to impact the perception of deservedness, even under a more conservative perspective ( $p < 0.10$ ). This means athlete brand personality has a certain strength and symbolism to predict brand advocacy, however, it is not socially valued for deservedness (comparing H1 to H1a).

#### The effect of ABI→BA

The literature revealed the consumer positive outcomes triggered with a brand image (e.g. Mabkhot et al., 2017; Manyiwa et al., 2018), especially in athlete brands can encourage not only commitment (Vââtâinen & Dickenson, 2018), proven to be an antecedent of brand loyalty and brand advocacy, but also brand loyalty (e.g. Bauer et al., 2008; Mahmoudian et al., 2021) and other positive attitudes (Summers & Morgan, 2008; Parmentier & Fischer, 2012; Arai et al., 2013; Kunkel et al., 2019). Having brand loyalty as a subcomponent of brand advocacy and the main outcome result in the literature of ABI, this study agrees that the effect of ABI on BA can happen through positive attitudes, suggested by (Mahmoudian et al., 2021). Also proven by Ansary et al. (2018), brand image has a positive effect on brand attitudes and attachment and this relationship is strengthened by the moderator variable of WOM.

ABI registered a significant positive relationship on BA ( $\beta = 0.176$ ,  $t = 2.891$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ), as literature had proven that both athletic performance and attractive appearance trigger commitment and loyalty to an athlete (Hasaan et al., 2018; Kunkel et al., 2019; Mahmoudian et al., 2021). This relationship was weaker than BL→BA, suggesting there is more likely to engage in BA if the consumer has his bond strengthened with the athlete, however it still proves the positive effect of brand associations in advocacy. This path was also stronger than BP→BA (accepting H1 for  $p < 0.10$ ), suggesting that these brand associations are slightly more relevant for advocacy than the personification of a symbolic brand.

#### The mediator effect of *athlete deservedness* on ABI→BA

When connecting to a brand, consumers expect the added value and the responsibility principle associated with the second individual to match (Feather, 1999). This is so much treasure that there is a time when a brand, that has been inviting consumers into certain values and stops giving them, is held accountable for not assuring the added value to their lives (Forbes, Llopis, 2014). This investigation led to believe that as consumers judge ABI, they rely on athletes' actions and efforts towards ability and brand image management to be under the social evaluation of deservedness for a worth or not the outcome.

This goes by the psychological equity theory (Adams, 1963) that states the importance of individuals deserving rewards on the same note they show a contribution to others in the respective relationship (Hafer, 2012). This investigation suggested that the athletes' effort in managing their brand image are their responsibility in the relationship with the consumer: it gains them the social value that will eventually be perceived as the worth of positive rewards (McGowan et al., 2017) and trigger positive outcomes, more specifically brand loyalty, which will eventually lead to advocacy. Results indicate this premise is significantly justified ( $\beta = 0.047$ ,  $t = 1.993$ ,  $p = 0.046$ ).

#### The effect of *athlete brand loyalty* on *athlete brand advocacy*

Examining the relationship  $BL \rightarrow BA$ , results evidenced the strongest effect out of all six hypotheses. It was proven the effect of loyal behavior/attitudes on predicting commitment and engagement is necessary to lead customers on becoming advocates for the brand (Bhati & Verma, 2020). In the sports field, this means that loyal fans who see their affection, beliefs, and intent to continue consuming the brand increase are also more likely to engage in brand advocacy behavior: a higher score in athlete brand loyalty will positively influence advocacy behavior from consumers ( $\beta = 0.259$ ,  $t = 3.894$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). More so than it would happen if they were not loyal fans and the athlete brand image meant something to them (comparing to significant H2) or even the brand *Self* brought any symbolism to them (accepting H1 for  $p < 0.10$ ). This positive relationship has been found justified in the general literature as two variables that are interrelated, meaning that advocacy is a parallel form of brand loyalty. It complies with general studies that found brand loyalty to positively influence BA and with sports studies that found fan loyalty as a way to reach brand advocacy.

#### The mediator effect of *athlete deservedness* on $BL \rightarrow BA$

The significance of the hypothesis has been proven, as the pathway indicated  $\beta = 0.140$ ,  $t = 3.261$ ,  $p = 0.001$ , reporting the relationship as significant and the best mediator path. This study argues that athlete deservedness encourages loyal customers to engage in advocacy behavior where there should be a clear translation of the two-way beneficial relationship: athletes provide psychological benefits related to the experience and performance that so much distinguish athletes and adds value to the bond consumer-athlete; This consumer bond with the athlete will also benefit the athlete, as it strengthens the relationship and will have consumers reciprocate with the advocacy behavior of, not only, their merit (Heisley & Cours, 2007), but also their social valuable work to the field of sports (Reid, 2017). As suggested by Singh &

Trinchetta (2019), WOM communication is an important tool in marketing to translate and posit the co-exchanged relationship of rewards. One can say that the discussion of the results shows that there is more perceived co-exchanged value for consumers when they analyze their loyalty – towards the brand - to athlete deservedness (H3a) compared to when they analyze ABI attributes into athlete deservedness (H2a).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Having established the objective of studying a new variable in the sports field, where athletes are the ones to bring the added value to society, this investigation examined how the social concept of deservedness brings the athlete symbolic personality, brand image attributes, and loyal consumers into brand advocacy. This investigation supports theoretical proof that athlete brand image attributes and brand loyalty positively influence brand advocacy and deservedness also plays an important role when associated with ABI attributes and brand loyalty. The findings from the mediator paths provide strong evidence that deservedness significantly mediates two relationships (ABI→BA; BL→BA), which is also true in light of the offering existing literature. The direct and indirect effects of BP→BA (H1 and H1a) were found non-significant, which goes against the initially suggested justification, even though it is possible to accept H1 under a conservative perspective ( $p < 0.10$ ).

This study implies that relationships around deservedness are only established between athlete's brand personality, brand image attributes, loyalty, and advocacy, however, it is possible to extract benefits to individuals (athletes), and for management/organizational levels in terms of orienting only these on what type of efforts to make to easily reach advocacy and possibly enrich what triggers this.

All the significant relationship justification of this study implies that there is a starting point before achieving advocacy, which is a two-way relationship between consumer and athlete, where exchanges of flows happen, and there is always a middle enhancement of advocacy, which is the positive attitudes, commitment or attachment derived from the antecedents proposed that also work as relationship enhancement of brand advocacy. When *athlete deservedness* enters this sphere, the starting point is an established relationship, this time in a social evaluation of value, and the middle enhancer is the derived positive outcomes related to the evaluation of social deservedness and the willingness to provide the athlete with advocacy in the same proportion. The evaluation of social deservedness relates to the psychological equity theory (Adams, 1963) that states individuals receive rewards in the same

proportion to their contribution to the relationship with others. As individuals are social beings who establish personal and macro relationships, they act as responsible and rewarding individuals that claim others' deservedness. Not forgetting the crucial role of advocacy, Li et al. (2021) argued, in sports corporate social advocacy research, that advocacy initiatives normally pressure the responsible entity to take action.

How is brand advocacy predicted by the athlete brand personality symbolism, athlete brand image attributes, and brand loyalty?

According to the results, BA is significantly predicted by ABI and BL, under the assumption that positive attitudes result from the consumer being able to value the ABI attributes and gain a loyal connection, which will trigger engagement and commitment afterward, responsible for brand advocacy. BL showed to be the best predictor when compared to ABI, suggesting that advocates are more strongly measured by an existing bond with the brand than evaluation and association of the athlete brand attributes. On the other side, BP's non-significant effect on BA suggests that the entire set of traits used are not a product of consumer *self*-expression through the brand and do not comply to encourage advocacy behavior. The main justifications are that the nature of the question does not translate the traits symbolism and that the consumer weights the possibility of unbalanced incomes-outcomes, meaning their perception is: to provide support to the athlete brand that is just "being itself"; or the set of traits used are not the ideal package to be perceived as worthy the advocacy.

It is an easier and significant way to find the main attributes of the athlete brand, like athletic performance or physical attractiveness, or even the bond established (consumer-athlete) than to check for *self*-connection with mere traits of the athlete. Interestingly enough, accepting H1 under a more conservative perspective ( $p < 0.10$ ), it is still possible to conclude about a positive effect on ABP on BA, however, this effect was the smallest one out of the three non-mediator paths. It is about how the athlete can fulfill the consumer emotionally (Freling & Forbes, 2005), to the point of having a loyal customer (Aaker, 1997; Diamantopoulos et al., 2005), that sees the bond strengthens (Trail et al., 2003), positive feelings (Kumar & Kaushik, 2020), opinions and beliefs about the brand image attributes triggered (Kang et al., 2013) and a commitment towards the athlete to continuing consuming the brand (TaghiPourain & Bakhsh, 2015). This loyal customer is one to engage as exclusive fans (Aaker, 1997; Oliver, 1999) that support their success (Kumar & Kaushik, 2020).



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Indeed, engaged customers are already triggered to advocate for the brand as a form of increased attachment and bond strengthening. Athletes become the facilitators of social bonds (Heisley & Cours, 2007). What this study argues, based on the results, is that consumers who have already increased their attachment to the athlete, then see themselves as fans that should engage in an advocate role, as a stepped-up game of their bond engagement expression (Collier et al., 2018) that now nominates them as points of reference for the athlete (Fullerton, 2005). In a sports analysis campaign, Waymer & Logan (2021) found that engagement can be used to empower certain stances on social issues.

What is the mediating role of *athlete deservedness* in predicting brand advocacy?

The non-significant mediating path  $BP \rightarrow \text{Deservedness} \rightarrow BA$  is defended based on the premise that individuals evaluate the rewards they and athletes get from the relationship (Kang et al., 2013) and are not willing to engage in advocate behavior. They still want to *self-verify* themselves and do not want the relationship to be about how the brand personality is perceived to be worthy or not. Also, BP may not require extreme efforts, achievements, or others, it may be perceived as something that is born with the athlete and will simply/eventually get to the public eye, unlike their BI attributes or their loyal fans – these require investment and are better supported. ABI attributes require the efforts from the athlete to maintain them and loyal brand fans require a voluntary deep level of engagement from the consumer.

*Athlete deservedness* seems to significantly mediate the relationships  $ABI \rightarrow BA$  and  $BL \rightarrow BA$ . This interpretation is also seen as a two-way relationship, but in the way, athletes contribute to society and to a field that carries extremely social value – Sports (Reid, 2017) plus the way consumers perceive them to deserve socially valuable rewards. Based on the relationship  $ABI \rightarrow BA$ , it is argued athletes make efforts to assure their performance, their main product, and main image for the sports field, which contribution and responsibility are valued and socially perceived as deserved of consumers' efforts.

The positive mediation effect of *athlete deservedness* on  $BL \rightarrow BA$  (H3a) suggests that increasingly bonded individuals are expected to enthusiastically act as advocates (Harrison-Walker, 2001) for the brand and help the brand in its success (Fullerton, 2005). This means the bond created around the athlete's inputs in the social relationship will lead to a favorable symbolism of their hard work, merit, and achievements and consequently go through a diagnosis phase where consumers accept their belongingness to enter the social sphere or not. Consumers, then, go through a process of considering the social psychology of deservedness

and decide on preferably allocate rewards, based on the athlete social status and skills, which will lead to a higher consumer commitment to advocate for the brand.

Is athlete deservedness evaluation about a social perspective or a relationship construction?

Overall, this investigation leads to believe that athlete brand advocacy is highly valued for sports in a social sphere analysis of deservedness for the brand image attributes and the loyal relationship consumer-> athlete. The effect of BP→BA and its respective mediator path suggest there is a limitation with the athlete's added social value of personality in being perceived as worthy of advocacy. In this investigation, it is suggested that BP is not easily associated with holistic relations: when comparing to ABI effect on BA, this one appears to get closer to the concept of athletes' inputs being more valued and positively triggering consumer outcomes. The same goes for BL, a concept that involves a certain degree of emotional connection received by consumers that will then enable positive outcomes-advocacy. Both ABI and BL are socially valued for the sports interactions and perceived as deserved of brand advocacy, yet the strength of each path show that consumers support more the athlete that can make them feel some type of way, translated into positive feelings, proximity, and bonds than the athlete that gets his athletic and physical performance assured. One can say that consumers prefer to advocate for the athlete that makes them feel engaged with the brand, then for the athlete that just assures his main product continues to perform. The promotion of the athlete brand is more than just functioning.

This study does not include insights into which athlete needs the social support, but which ones deserve it; not who wants to be a successful athlete and needs the resources to get there. It is under the assumption that there are entities that take care of the abstract concept of deservedness, regarding the fair distribution of societal resources in a countries' economic sphere to provide with minimum conditions (salaries, wealth redistribution, etc), not considering the evaluation of rewards or benefits to the people who need it. For the general paths established, it is also under the assumption that there are only 3 established antecedents to brand advocacy hypothesized to be mediated by deservedness.

Despite this, this dissertation filled in the literature gap by posing the 3 suggested antecedents as predictors of athlete brand advocacy and putting *athlete deservedness* as a trigger to actual consumers' efforts. Besides analyzing it in the sports field, it also measured the effect of deservedness mediating the relationships and concluded about what is most associated with deservedness. Posing deservedness as a social organization could be theoretical

or practically right with further investigation adding to this thesis, however, the efforts on developing this dissertation show that deservedness is about prompting strong emotions and creating engagement in the relationship between athlete-consumer. Right after this, it puts athlete deservedness right as a relational concept towards the consumer that can justify and measure actual consumer efforts-brand advocacy.

### Limitation and Further Research

Because this research was directed to general sports, it is not without limitations. Sports are perceived differently (Kucharska et al., 2020) from culture to culture and it might influence differently the criteria to trigger deservedness and advocacy, which may encourage practitioners, the athlete's manager(s), or similar to investigate which strategy to promote the athlete's deserved consistency that is worth the social support and a good life for him (Schweiger, 2014).

As the social relevance of athletes has been proven, one should investigate the different perceptions of athlete deservedness in one country with sports that carry different values to society. On the same note, advocacy was chosen along with deservedness due to its social relevance, however, there should be research investigating to what extent are consumers willing to advocate for athlete deservedness and how does the pattern of athlete deservedness changes throughout the phases of consumers' consumption to go deep into trying to understand if each phase is about a social, awareness construction or an engagement connection. Also, and because the athletes' performance or image attributes were argued to benefit the consumers in social interactions, one should change the conceptual scope, by studying if the level of perceived deservedness changes throughout the athlete brand lifecycle where the athletes' brand image also changes. Another derived research from this is studying deservedness or other chosen variables on retired athletes: they may lose their social status and identity (Taylor and Lavalley, 2010), which can affect consumers' *self*-identification or congruency theories and trigger athlete shifting (Hasaan et al., 2018). So, the effect of change on the athletes' brand image and brand personality during a phase of extension on their level of deservedness should be studied. This extends to other subjects: Due to athlete fragility, would a crisis, for example, change the perception of athlete deservedness?

Because BP→Deservedness registered a non-significant path, the scale of brand personality might be simplified into positive traits and exclude negative traits to improve respondents' answers. The challenge still goes into finding a set of athlete brand personality

traits that are valued by consumers. Also, and because this research was directed to general consumers, future analysis should be conducted to find what each entity of the SRM (sports industry, sponsors, clubs) looks for when analyzing athlete deservedness and if it differs from a general consumer framework. A consolidated and consistent scale would come as a great measure to set the expectations of all agents involved in the respective brand.

Because the study revealed a higher correlation with brand loyalty in the paths than with athlete brand image, one should try to understand what part of the loyalty response is due to the deservedness component and which loyalty strategies work better for each athlete personality alignment and if there is a *self*-identification with the level of perception on the athlete deservedness. Besides this connection perspective, athlete deservedness can be studied in a straight justice evaluation, weighting both these affective and utilitarian features. It asks to differentiate highly similar concepts, such as deservedness, entitlement, and worthiness and asks for scales on specific contexts. The scale of deservedness can suggest a more personalized choice of items since Schweiger (2014) argued about many athlete factors that are seen to be deserved of specific rewards. It would also be interesting to study the nature and habits of the athlete that might translate into a specific type of brand advocacy, for example, if the athlete satisfies the *self*-concept of the consumer, he will likely engage in social media brand advocacy (Samala & Singh, 2019). With this, brand managers will easily identify the best channels for consumers to communicate and interact with the athlete.

Also, the framework should open doors to understanding the salary deservedness of athletes in a specific sport and the general sports field. Interviews or focus groups are a great method to enter this analysis when possibly introducing two cases on the salary inequities of specific athletes and eventually discussing the weight for each deservedness item suggested in table 17 (see appendix) and creating a general equation. With that being said, a deservedness scale should be developed specifically on what distinguishes an athlete from another (Carlson & Donovan, 2013). Does an athlete deserve more if he/she works harder to accomplish the same as another direct competitor? (Schweiger, 2014)

Regarding the scales and questionnaire run, it is important to separate concepts on how did respondents answer the questions: based on what they thought they would be willing to do or what they have done? Also, it would be interesting to use the concepts to check if changing items like “I love athlete...” to “I am affectively loyal to ...” would register an increase/decrease in scores and why. As most of the respondents would be Portuguese and

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research is not specified to a particular sport, the outcomes might have been too weak to be examined - besides football, there is little action sports culture from consumers in Portugal, however, future research can consider different cultures and specific sports.

The deservedness scale application has the potential to be improved and to help support federations, endorsers, or other entities that somehow are in charge of rewarding the athlete. Table 17 (see appendix) proposes an improved suggested scale to measure *athlete deservedness*. It does not analyze what the athlete gets and should deserve but what is most socially valued in athletes, based on a deservedness perspective. This measure should be on a liberty scale to measure the importance attributed by the consumers to each item. The first claim from each “dimension” should work as an acknowledgment that the athlete has the “minimum requirements” to be evaluated for the upcoming deservedness-related items. The social institutions were chosen based on Abeza et al. (2019) who presented different sports relationship marketing perspectives: organizational perspective (sport driver industry, clubs, and partnerships), consumer’s perspective (fans), and other channels (not included in this case). Words like “efforts” and “hard work” were chosen based on Ye & Nylander (2020); “worth” and “reward” based on Téo (2015) and Campbell et al. (2004); “athletic capacity” and “virtuous performance” based on Schweiger (2012); “money”, “social status” and “appreciation” based on Schweiger (2014); and “rights and obligations” based on (Szóke, 2015).

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## 7. APPENDIX

### Annex A. The questionnaire

Q1 O atleta é visto pelos consumidores como uma marca humana de personalidade única. Não só estão os atletas associados ao laço emocional com os consumidores, mas também à sua própria vertente comercial. As suas características humanas incentivam a preferência e escolha - lealdade e defesa. Este questionário serve o propósito de recolher respostas sobre a perceção que os consumidores têm acerca dos atletas e tem uma duração aproximada de 7 minutos. Pense no seu atleta preferido e responda com sinceridade.

#### **Início do bloqueio: Bloco 2**

BP Classifique em que medida os seguintes traços de personalidade caracterizam melhor o seu ATLETA PREFERIDO numa escala entre (1) extremamente impreciso e (7) extremamente preciso.

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|                   | 1<br>(1)              | 2<br>(2)              | 3<br>(3)              | 4<br>(4)              | 5<br>(5)              | 6<br>(6)              | 7<br>(7)              |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Organizado (1)    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Eficiente (2)     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Sistemático (3)   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Práctico (4)      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Desorganizado (5) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ineficiente (6)   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Desleixado (7)    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Descuidado (8)    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Simpático (9)     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Caloroso (10)     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Bondoso (11)      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Antipático (12)   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Duro (13)             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Frio (14)             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Rude (15)             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Relaxado (16)         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Não Invejoso<br>(17)  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Invejoso (18)         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ciumento (19)         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Temperamental<br>(20) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Irritável (21)        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Mal-humorado<br>(22)  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Sensível (23)         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Falador (24)          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Extrovertido<br>(25)  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|                      |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Corajoso (26)        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Sossegado (27)       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Tímido (28)          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Reservado (29)       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Envergonhado<br>(30) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Filosófico (31)      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Profundo (32)        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Criativo (33)        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Imaginativo<br>(34)  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Intelectual (35)     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Complexo (36)        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Não Criativo<br>(37) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Ambicioso -<br>Ele/a está<br>determinado a<br>atingir os seus<br>objetivos (38)    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Dinâmico -<br>Ele/a é auto-<br>motivado (39)                                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Triunfante -<br>Ele/a destaca-se<br>em eventos<br>importantes da sua<br>vida (40)  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Principiado -<br>Ele/a está imbuído<br>em regras de<br>conduta aceitáveis<br>(41)  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Culto - Ele/a<br>desenvolve e<br>promove o<br>crescimento da<br>cultura (42)       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ético - Ele/a<br>comporta-se de<br>acordo com os<br>padrões da boa<br>prática (43) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**Fim do bloco: Bloco 2**

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**Início do bloqueio: Bloco 3**

**ABI Em que medida considera que o seu atleta preferido é mais forte ou menos forte nas seguintes características (numa escala entre 1-muito fraco e 7-muito forte).**

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|   | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     | 6                     | 7                     |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|   | (1)                   | (2)                   | (3)                   | (4)                   | (5)                   | (6)                   | (7)                   |
| Na conquista individual e capacidade atlética (vitórias, habilidades, competência no seu desporto) (1)                            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Nas Caraterísticas específicas da sua performance numa competição (2)   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| No comportamento virtuoso do atleta que as pessoas determinaram como apropriado (jogo limpo, respeito pelo jogo, integridade) (3) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

Na relação  
Competitiva do  
atleta com  
outros atletas  
(4)

Nas  
caraterísticas e  
qualidades  
físicas do atleta  
que os  
espectadores  
consideram  
esteticamente  
agradáveis (5)

Na marca  
registada e o  
estilo pessoal  
atrativo do  
atleta (6)

No corpo  
do atleta em  
forma no seu  
desporto (7)

AD Em que medida concorda que o seu atleta preferido merece mais do que os outros (numa escala entre 1-forte desacordo e 7-forte acordo)?



DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|   | 1<br>(1)              | 2<br>(2)              | 3<br>(3)              | 4<br>(4)              | 5<br>(5)              | 6<br>(6)              | 7<br>(7)              |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Eu honestamente sinto que ele/a apenas é mais merecedor do que outros (1)                                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ele/ela deve vivenciar as melhores coisas que lhe possam acontecer (2)  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Eu acho que se ele/a estivesse nos Jogos Olímpicos, mereceria ser considerado/a o/a melhor atleta dos jogos (3) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Eu exigo o melhor para ele/a porque ele/a vale a pena (4)   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Ele/a não<br>merece<br>necessariamente<br>tratamento<br>especial (5)                             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ele/a<br>merece mais<br>coisas na sua<br>vida (6)  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Pessoas<br>como ele/a<br>merecem uma<br>pausa extra nas<br>suas vidas de<br>vez em quando<br>(7) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| As coisas<br>devem<br>acontecer à<br>maneira dele/a<br>(8)                                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Eu sinto<br>que ele/ela tem<br>direito a mais<br>de tudo (9)                                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**Fim do bloco: Bloco 3**

**Início do bloqueio: Bloco 4**

BL Em que medida considera que as seguintes afirmações descrevem a sua lealdade perante o atleta preferido (numa escala entre 1-extremamente impreciso e 7-extremamente preciso)?

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|  | 1<br>(1)              | 2<br>(2)              | 3<br>(3)              | 4<br>(4)              | 5<br>(5)              | 6<br>(6)              | 7<br>(7)              |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| O meu atleta preferido proporciona-me uma experiência de qualidade superior à de qualquer outro atleta (1) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Nenhum outro atleta consegue cumprir com melhores experiências do que o meu atleta preferido (2)           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

Eu acredito que o meu atleta preferido fornece mais benefícios do que outros atletas da mesma categoria ou escalão (3)

Eu gosto mais do meu atleta preferido do que outros (4)

Eu sinto-me melhor quando estou em contacto com o meu atleta preferido (5)

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

Eu amo  
estar em  
contacto  
com o meu  
atleta  
preferido (6)

Mesmo  
que outro  
atleta esteja  
a jogar  
melhor, eu  
vou  
continuar a  
apoiar o  
meu atleta  
preferido (7)

Eu  
considero o  
meu atleta  
preferido  
como a  
minha  
primeira  
escolha de  
"aposento"  
(8)

Eu  
tenciono  
continuar a  
apoiar o  
meu atleta  
preferido (9)

**Fim do bloco: Bloco 4****Início do bloqueio: Bloco 5**

BA\_posit Em que medida considera que as seguintes afirmações descrevem a sua defesa perante o atleta preferido (numa escala entre 1-extremamente impreciso e 7-extremamente preciso)?

|  | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     | 6                     | 7                     |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|  | (1)                   | (2)                   | (3)                   | (4)                   | (5)                   | (6)                   | (7)                   |
| Dizer coisas positivas sobre o atleta (1)                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Mencionar que eu estou feliz com o desempenho dele/a (2) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Falar favoravelmente sobre o atleta (3)                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Dizer que o atleta é bom (4)                             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Falar sobre os pontos bons do atleta (5)                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

BA\_defense Em que medida considera que as seguintes afirmações descrevem a sua defesa perante o atleta preferido (numa escala entre 1-extremamente impreciso e 7-extremamente preciso)?

|   | 1<br>(1)              | 2<br>(2)              | 3<br>(3)              | 4<br>(4)              | 5<br>(5)              | 6<br>(6)              | 7<br>(7)              |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Eu defendo o atleta quando outros o derrubam (1)                      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Eu luto pelo atleta quando outros falam negativamente sobre ele/a (2) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Eu promovo o atleta quando falam negativamente sobre ele/a (3)        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Eu defendo o atleta se ouvir alguém a falar mal sobre ele/a (4)       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

BA\_know1 Em que medida considera que as seguintes afirmações descrevem a sua defesa perante o atleta preferido (numa escala entre 1-extremamente impreciso e 7-extremamente preciso)?

|  | 1<br>(1)              | 2<br>(2)              | 3<br>(3)              | 4<br>(4)              | 5<br>(5)              | 6<br>(6)              | 7<br>(7)              |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Fornecer detalhes sobre futuras provas e outros do atleta (1)                                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Fornecer detalhes extra sobre o atleta (local do treino, disponibilidade diária, etc) (2)        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Partilhar informação sobre competições futuras ou um "link" para o seu website/redes sociais (3) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |



DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

BA\_appra Em que medida considera que as seguintes afirmações descrevem a sua defesa perante o atleta preferido (numa escala entre 1-extremamente impreciso e 7-extremamente preciso)?

|   | 1<br>(1)              | 2<br>(2)              | 3<br>(3)              | 4<br>(4)              | 5<br>(5)              | 6<br>(6)              | 7<br>(7)              |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Fornecer explicações longas sobre o porque deste/a atleta ser melhor do que os outros (1) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Discutir os seus pontos bons e não tão bons (2)   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Fornecer imensa informação sobre o atleta (3)   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

Género

Feminino (1)

Masculino (2)

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Idade

18-25 (1)

26-35 (2)

36-55 (3)

56-65 (4)

66+ (5)

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Q15 Como se chama o seu Atleta Preferido?

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Table 1. Variables' Scales, authors, and number of items

| Variable            | Factors                 | Author               | Liberty Scale               | #Items |
|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------|
| Athlete Personality | Human personality       | Brakus et al. (2009) | 1 = "extremely inaccurate", | 43     |
|                     | Sports Team Personality | Tsiotsou (2012)      | 7 = "extremely accurate"    | 6      |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|                |                       |  |  |   |
|----------------|-----------------------|--|--|---|
| Athlete        | Athletic Performance  | Kressman et al.                              | 1=very poor;   | 4 |
| Brand Image    | Attractive Appearance | (2006); Arai et al.<br>(2014)                | 7=very strong  | 3 |
| Brand Loyalty  | Affective Loyalty     | Beatty et al (1988);<br>Loken & John (1993), | 1 = "extremely   | 3 |
|                | Cognitive Loyalty     |  | inaccurate",   | 3 |
|                | Conative Loyalty      | Back & Parks (2003)                          | 7 = "extremely<br>accurate                             | 3 |
| Brand Advocacy | Brand Appraisal       | Wilk et al.<br>(2018;2021)                   | 1 = "extremely   | 3 |
|                | Brand Defense         |  | inaccurate",   | 4 |
|                | Brand Knowledge       |  | 7 = "extremely   | 3 |
|                | Brand Positivity      |  | accurate   | 5 |
| Deservedness   | Deservedness (1-9)    | Campbell et al. (2004)                       | 1="strong<br>disagreement";<br>7="strong<br>agreement" | 9 |

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, N=15, N=300, Scale: 1-7.

| Construct            | Items            | Pre-test |           | Final questionnaire |           |
|----------------------|------------------|----------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|
|                      |                  | Mean     | Std. Dev. | Mean                | Std. Dev. |
| Conscientiousness    | efficient_BP     | 5.93     | .884      | 5.85                | 1.325     |
|                      | systematic_BP    | 5.87     | 1.125     | 5.57                | 1.150     |
|                      | sloppy_BP        | 2.13     | 1.457     | 2.11                | 1.505     |
|                      | practical_BP     | 6.20     | .941      | 5.66                | 1.242     |
| Agreeableness        | unsympathetic_BP | 2.47     | 2.134     | 2.47                | 1.511     |
|                      | sympathetic_BP   | 5.00     | 1.648     | 4.88                | 1.711     |
|                      | warm_BP          | 4.47     | 1.552     | 4.79                | 1.461     |
| Extraversion         | shy_BP           | 3.47     | 1.767     | 3.01                | 1.688     |
|                      | withdrawn_BP     | 4.40     | 1.805     | 3.24                | 1.782     |
|                      | bashful_BP       | 3.47     | 1.685     | 2.82                | 1.696     |
| EmotionalInstability | envious_BP       | 2.53     | 2.031     | 2.25                | 1.643     |
|                      | jealous_BP       | 3.73     | 1.981     | 2.59                | 1.825     |
| Openness             | creative_BP      | 5.27     | 1.163     | 5.19                | 1.358     |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|                  |                 |       |       |       |       |
|------------------|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                  | imaginative_BP  | 5.13  | 1.302 | 5.01  | 1.121 |
|                  | intellectual_BP | 4.53  | 1.506 | 5.14  | 1.377 |
| Competitiveness  | ambitious_BP    | 6.47  | .834  | 6.41  | 1.026 |
|                  | dynamic_BP      | 5.93  | 2.052 | 6.16  | 1.268 |
| Morality         | principled_BP   | 6.47  | .743  | 6.15  | 1.140 |
|                  | ethical_BP      | 6.00  | .926  | 6.33  | .847  |
| ABI              | Athletic_exp    | 6.50  | .650  | 6.07  | 1.034 |
|                  | compet_style    | 6.43  | .646  | 5.82  | 1.041 |
|                  | Sportsmanship   | 5.71  | 1.326 | 5.72  | 1.221 |
|                  | phys_attrac     | 5.29  | 1.541 | 5.32  | 1.143 |
| Deservedness     | DESERV1         | 5.73  | 1.100 | 4.91  | 1.742 |
|                  | DESERV4         | 5.93  | 1.163 | 5.07  | 1.536 |
|                  | DESERV6         | 5.53  | 1.356 | 4.06  | 1.567 |
|                  | DESERV7         | 5.13  | 1.767 | 4.74  | 1.193 |
|                  | DESERV8         | 4.47  | 2.200 | 3.98  | 1.701 |
|                  | DESERV9         | 3.73  | 1.944 | 3.85  | 1.798 |
| Brand Loyalty    | COGBL2          | 5.53  | 1.187 | 4.69  | 1.801 |
|                  | COGBL3          | 5.93  | 1.033 | 4.66  | 1.416 |
|                  | AFFECBL1        | 5.33  | 1.291 | 5.61  | 1.351 |
|                  | AFFECBL3        | 4.07  | 2.052 | 4.06  | 1.616 |
|                  | CONBL1          | 5.47  | 1.959 | 4.43  | 1.623 |
|                  | CONBL2          | 5.53  | 1.727 | 4.42  | 1.675 |
|                  | CONBL3          | 6.40  | .986  | 5.32  | 1.540 |
| Brand Positivity | BPOS1           | 6.00  | .845  | 5.34  | 1.185 |
|                  | BPOS2           | 5.80  | .862  | 5.34  | 1.411 |
|                  | BPOS4           | 6.00  | .926  | 5.55  | 1.142 |
|                  | BPOS5           | 6.13  | .834  | 5.65  | 1.197 |
|                  | Brand Defense   | BDEF2 | 5.33  | 1.291 | 4.79  |
| BDEF3            |                 | 5.40  | 1.242 | 4.84  | 1.282 |
| BDEF4            |                 | 5.40  | 1.242 | 4.89  | 1.425 |
| Brand Knowledge  | BKNOW1          | 4.53  | 1.727 | 4.29  | 1.545 |
|                  | BKNOW2          | 3.73  | 1.710 | 4.62  | 1.529 |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|                 |         |      |       |      |       |
|-----------------|---------|------|-------|------|-------|
|                 | BKNOW3  | 3.87 | 1.922 | 4.54 | 1.644 |
| Brand Appraisal | BAPPRA1 | 4.60 | 1.844 | 4.61 | 1.707 |
|                 | BAPPRA2 | 5.00 | 1.309 | 5.39 | 1.325 |
|                 | BAPPRA3 | 4.40 | 1.595 | 4.46 | 1.741 |

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics – Age of respondents

| Age             | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|-----------------|-----------|-------------|
| 18-24 years old | 140       | 46.7        |
| 25-34 years old | 81        | 27.0        |
| 35-56years old  | 65        | 21.7        |
| 56+ years old   | 14        | 4.7         |
| Total           | 300       | 100         |

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics – Gender of respondents

| Gender | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|--------|-----------|-------------|
| Female | 138       | 46          |
| Male   | 162       | 54          |
| Total  | 300       | 100         |

Table 5. Collinearity - VIF Values

| Indicator | VIF   |
|-----------|-------|
| AFFECBL1  | 1.336 |
| AFFECBL3  | 1.557 |
| BAPPRA1   | 3.715 |
| BAPPRA1   | 2.943 |
| BAPPRA2   | 2.322 |
| BAPPRA2   | 1.692 |
| BAPPRA3   | 5.049 |
| BAPPRA3   | 3.137 |
| BDEF2     | 3.223 |
| BDEF2     | 2.202 |

## DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|                |       |
|----------------|-------|
| BDEF3          | 3.163 |
| BDEF3          | 2.114 |
| BDEF4          | 3.402 |
| BDEF4          | 2.464 |
| BKNOW1         | 3.154 |
| BKNOW1         | 1.769 |
| BKNOW2         | 5.149 |
| BKNOW2         | 2.320 |
| BKNOW3         | 2.817 |
| BKNOW3         | 2.303 |
| BPOS1          | 4.049 |
| BPOS1          | 3.309 |
| BPOS2          | 3.430 |
| BPOS2          | 1.954 |
| BPOS4          | 3.229 |
| BPOS4          | 3.106 |
| BPOS5          | 3.681 |
| BPOS5          | 3.445 |
| COGBL2         | 2.177 |
| COGBL3         | 2.437 |
| CONBL1         | 1.675 |
| CONBL2         | 2.088 |
| CONBL3         | 2.458 |
| DESERV1        | 2.011 |
| DESERV4        | 2.424 |
| DESERV6        | 2.122 |
| DESERV7        | 1.631 |
| DESERV8        | 1.992 |
| DESERV9        | 1.789 |
| ambitious_BP   | 1.339 |
| athletic_exp   | 2.041 |
| bashful_BP_inv | 2.030 |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|                      |       |
|----------------------|-------|
| compet_style         | 2.412 |
| creative_BP          | 1.863 |
| dynamic_BP           | 1.339 |
| efficient_BP         | 4.290 |
| envious_BP_inv       | 1.841 |
| ethical_BP           | 1.339 |
| imaginative_BP       | 2.243 |
| intellectual_BP      | 2.448 |
| jealous_BP_inv       | 1.841 |
| phys_attrac          | 1.279 |
| practical_BP         | 1.843 |
| principled_BP        | 2.770 |
| shy_BP_inv           | 5.801 |
| sloppy_BP_inv        | 2.969 |
| sportsmanship        | 1.439 |
| sympathetic_BP       | 1.766 |
| systematic_BP        | 2.140 |
| triumphant_BP        | 2.492 |
| uncreative_BP_inv    | 1.444 |
| unsympathetic_BP_inv | 3.282 |
| warm_BP              | 1.911 |
| withdrawn_BP_inv     | 2.172 |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

Table 8. Discriminant Validity: *Fornell-Larcker* Criteria

|                   | Agreeableness | Brand Appraisal | Brand Defense | Brand Knowledge | Brand Loyalty | Brand Positivity | Competitiveness | Conscientiousness | Deservedness | Emotional Stability | Extraversion | ABI | Morality | Openness |
|-------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|-----|----------|----------|
| Agreeableness     | 0.830         |                 |               |                 |               |                  |                 |                   |              |                     |              |     |          |          |
| Brand Appraisal   | -0.112        | 0.884           |               |                 |               |                  |                 |                   |              |                     |              |     |          |          |
| Brand Defense     | -0.054        | 0.491           | 0.887         |                 |               |                  |                 |                   |              |                     |              |     |          |          |
| Brand Knowledge   | -0.078        | 0.503           | 0.417         | 0.874           |               |                  |                 |                   |              |                     |              |     |          |          |
| Brand Loyalty     | -0.065        | 0.358           | 0.464         | 0.073           | 0.716         |                  |                 |                   |              |                     |              |     |          |          |
| Brand Positivity  | 0.076         | 0.404           | 0.524         | 0.339           | 0.410         | 0.860            |                 |                   |              |                     |              |     |          |          |
| Competitiveness   | 0.574         | 0.067           | 0.002         | -0.098          | 0.047         | 0.430            | 0.867           |                   |              |                     |              |     |          |          |
| Conscientiousness | 0.219         | 0.206           | 0.128         | -0.191          | 0.222         | 0.173            | 0.350           | 0.806             |              |                     |              |     |          |          |
| Deservedness      | -0.138        | 0.348           | 0.376         | 0.144           | 0.652         | 0.437            | -0.043          | 0.099             | 0.727        |                     |              |     |          |          |



DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|                    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |        |       |       |       |       |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| EmotionalStability | 0.664 | 0.042 | -     | -     | -     | 0.316 | 0.585 | 0.337 | -     | 0.915  |       |       |       |       |
| Extraversion       | 0.385 | 0.094 | -     | -     | -     | 0.132 | 0.401 | 0.526 | -     | 0.591  | 0.884 |       |       |       |
| ABI                | 0.119 | 0.281 | -     | -     | -     | 0.336 | 0.336 | 0.458 | -     | -0.022 | 0.025 | 0.739 |       |       |
| Morality           | 0.232 | 0.183 | -     | -     | -     | 0.288 | 0.526 | 0.309 | -     | 0.403  | 0.266 | 0.312 | 0.867 |       |
| Openness           | 0.330 | 0.162 | 0.160 | 0.098 | 0.072 | 0.267 | 0.259 | 0.179 | 0.182 | 0.323  | 0.176 | 0.191 | 0.140 | 0.771 |

Table 9. Cross Loadings

|                      | Agreeableness | Competitiveness | Conscientiousness | EmotionalStability | Extraversion | Morality | Openness | Brand Loyalty | ABI   | Brand Appraisal | Brand Defense | Brand Knowledge | Brand Positivity | Deservedness |
|----------------------|---------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|----------|----------|---------------|-------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|
| sympathetic_BP       | <b>0.839</b>  | 0.530           | 0.287             | 0.447              | 0.259        | 0.273    | 0.248    | 0.014         | 0.214 | -0.050          | -0.055        | -0.217          | 0.036            | 0.001        |
| unsympathetic_BP_inv | <b>0.799</b>  | 0.510           | 0.089             | 0.669              | 0.447        | 0.238    | 0.236    | 0.226         | 0.002 | -0.127          | -0.133        | 0.031           | 0.073            | -0.313       |
| warm_BP              | <b>0.850</b>  | 0.373           | 0.170             | 0.524              | 0.236        | 0.046    | 0.346    | 0.073         | 0.082 | -0.100          | 0.071         | -0.006          | 0.082            | -0.010       |
| ambitious_BP         | 0.471         | <b>0.872</b>    | 0.292             | 0.482              | 0.320        | 0.477    | 0.225    | 0.084         | 0.299 | 0.135           | 0.020         | -0.066          | 0.400            | -0.019       |
| dynamic_BP           | 0.525         | <b>0.862</b>    | 0.316             | 0.533              | 0.376        | 0.433    | 0.225    | 0.004         | 0.282 | -0.022          | -0.017        | -0.104          | 0.345            | -0.055       |
| efficient_BP         | 0.381         | 0.370           | <b>0.850</b>      | 0.371              | 0.542        | 0.311    | 0.120    | 0.080         | 0.463 | 0.262           | 0.094         | -0.146          | 0.100            | 0.006        |
| practical_BP         | 0.145         | 0.118           | <b>0.784</b>      | 0.090              | 0.311        | 0.064    | 0.160    | 0.353         | 0.343 | 0.154           | 0.259         | -0.093          | 0.109            | 0.171        |
| sloppy_BP_inv        | 0.084         | 0.389           | <b>0.762</b>      | 0.431              | 0.462        | 0.371    | 0.176    | 0.169         | 0.218 | 0.074           | -0.068        | -0.277          | 0.194            | -0.002       |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|                  |        |       |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |       |        |        |        |        |
|------------------|--------|-------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| systematic_BP    | 0.002  | 0.152 | <b>0.825</b> | 0.059        | 0.293        | 0.162        | 0.123        | 0.173        | 0.468        | 0.155 | 0.206  | -0.047 | 0.158  | 0.231  |
| envious_BP_inv   | 0.711  | 0.538 | 0.263        | <b>0.919</b> | 0.528        | 0.362        | 0.308        | 0.169        | 0.001        | 0.058 | -0.100 | 0.050  | 0.254  | -0.189 |
| jealous_BP_inv   | 0.500  | 0.533 | 0.356        | <b>0.912</b> | 0.554        | 0.377        | 0.284        | 0.039        | 0.043        | 0.019 | -0.141 | -0.083 | 0.325  | -0.097 |
| bashful_BP_inv   | 0.229  | 0.420 | 0.514        | 0.565        | <b>0.875</b> | 0.365        | 0.115        | 0.088        | 0.032        | 0.097 | -0.067 | -0.016 | 0.260  | -0.154 |
| shy_BP_inv       | 0.470  | 0.428 | 0.444        | 0.562        | <b>0.907</b> | 0.235        | 0.064        | 0.294        | 0.080        | 0.103 | -0.077 | 0.019  | 0.083  | -0.352 |
| withdrawn_BP_inv | 0.320  | 0.201 | 0.437        | 0.431        | <b>0.870</b> | 0.091        | 0.303        | 0.237        | 0.054        | 0.047 | -0.071 | -0.075 | -0.005 | -0.216 |
| ethical_BP       | 0.183  | 0.463 | 0.233        | 0.466        | 0.264        | <b>0.875</b> | 0.125        | 0.043        | 0.151        | 0.083 | -0.123 | 0.027  | 0.213  | -0.065 |
| principled_BP    | 0.220  | 0.448 | 0.306        | 0.227        | 0.195        | <b>0.858</b> | 0.118        | 0.084        | 0.397        | 0.239 | 0.128  | -0.016 | 0.289  | 0.009  |
| creative_BP      | 0.158  | 0.147 | 0.083        | 0.073        | 0.017        | 0.023        | <b>0.651</b> | 0.179        | 0.043        | 0.037 | 0.079  | -0.172 | 0.023  | 0.186  |
| imaginative_BP   | 0.248  | 0.102 | 0.206        | 0.091        | 0.034        | 0.047        | <b>0.801</b> | 0.108        | 0.188        | 0.137 | 0.167  | 0.081  | 0.014  | 0.149  |
| intellectual_BP  | 0.218  | 0.134 | 0.106        | 0.323        | 0.120        | 0.199        | <b>0.837</b> | 0.142        | 0.015        | 0.313 | 0.152  | 0.205  | 0.335  | 0.264  |
| AFFECBL1         | 0.186  | 0.162 | 0.170        | 0.263        | 0.043        | 0.291        | 0.179        | <b>0.515</b> | 0.019        | 0.331 | 0.148  | 0.170  | 0.241  | 0.070  |
| AFFECBL3         | -0.217 | 0.104 | 0.249        | 0.054        | 0.033        | 0.246        | 0.090        | <b>0.601</b> | 0.231        | 0.198 | 0.265  | 0.119  | 0.289  | 0.358  |
| COGBL2           | -0.066 | 0.074 | 0.163        | 0.151        | 0.274        | 0.067        | 0.011        | <b>0.723</b> | 0.063        | 0.010 | 0.188  | -0.152 | 0.120  | 0.508  |
| COGBL3           | -0.127 | 0.002 | 0.148        | 0.202        | 0.292        | 0.001        | 0.059        | <b>0.786</b> | 0.208        | 0.298 | 0.429  | -0.048 | 0.308  | 0.577  |
| CONBL1           | 0.066  | 0.084 | 0.194        | 0.124        | 0.208        | 0.239        | 0.027        | <b>0.679</b> | 0.423        | 0.333 | 0.386  | 0.068  | 0.276  | 0.364  |
| CONBL2           | -0.097 | 0.164 | 0.045        | 0.153        | 0.226        | 0.178        | 0.042        | <b>0.807</b> | 0.058        | 0.292 | 0.396  | 0.221  | 0.287  | 0.596  |
| CONBL3           | 0.044  | 0.120 | 0.221        | 0.034        | 0.069        | 0.084        | 0.082        | <b>0.843</b> | 0.220        | 0.347 | 0.392  | 0.027  | 0.482  | 0.557  |
| athletic_exp     | 0.138  | 0.365 | 0.424        | 0.124        | 0.221        | 0.468        | 0.172        | 0.022        | <b>0.780</b> | 0.353 | 0.268  | 0.007  | 0.340  | -0.006 |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|               |        |       |       |   |       |       |       |       |       |              |              |              |              |              |              |
|---------------|--------|-------|-------|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| compet_style  | 0.127  | 0.202 | 0.317 | - | 0.003 | 0.031 | 0.294 | 0.175 | 0.080 | <b>0.868</b> | 0.284        | 0.321        | 0.160        | 0.238        | 0.181        |
| phys_attrac   | 0.031  | 0.256 | 0.395 | - | 0.153 | 0.142 | 0.116 | 0.071 | 0.423 | <b>0.784</b> | 0.045        | 0.251        | -0.238       | 0.205        | 0.433        |
| sportsmanship | 0.016  | 0.031 | 0.210 | - | 0.133 | 0.085 | 0.318 | 0.157 | 0.067 | <b>0.454</b> | -0.092       | 0.094        | -0.167       | -0.119       | -0.026       |
| BAPPRA1       | -0.212 | 0.107 | 0.132 | - | 0.146 | 0.041 | 0.053 | 0.085 | 0.331 | 0.240        | <b>0.897</b> | 0.424        | 0.389        | 0.193        | 0.355        |
| BAPPRA2       | -0.052 | 0.244 | 0.263 | - | 0.289 | 0.249 | 0.332 | 0.173 | 0.226 | 0.193        | <b>0.825</b> | 0.300        | 0.411        | 0.425        | 0.141        |
| BAPPRA3       | -0.050 | 0.037 | 0.156 | - | 0.027 | 0.044 | 0.108 | 0.164 | 0.381 | 0.302        | <b>0.928</b> | 0.553        | 0.519        | 0.431        | 0.410        |
| BAPPRA3       | -0.050 | 0.037 | 0.156 | - | 0.027 | 0.044 | 0.108 | 0.164 | 0.381 | 0.302        | <b>0.928</b> | 0.553        | 0.519        | 0.431        | 0.410        |
| BDEF2         | -0.118 | 0.030 | 0.054 | - | 0.117 | 0.146 | 0.055 | 0.058 | 0.417 | 0.325        | 0.457        | <b>0.897</b> | 0.438        | 0.548        | 0.406        |
| BDEF3         | 0.009  | 0.078 | 0.101 | - | 0.155 | 0.093 | 0.104 | 0.235 | 0.411 | 0.199        | 0.323        | <b>0.853</b> | 0.282        | 0.297        | 0.249        |
| BDEF4         | -0.019 | 0.094 | 0.184 | - | 0.087 | 0.019 | 0.019 | 0.157 | 0.409 | 0.388        | 0.501        | <b>0.909</b> | 0.368        | 0.510        | 0.325        |
| BKNOW1        | -0.119 | 0.277 | 0.243 | - | 0.224 | 0.211 | 0.198 | 0.021 | 0.161 | 0.059        | 0.194        | 0.370        | <b>0.804</b> | 0.118        | 0.082        |
| BKNOW2        | -0.094 | 0.002 | 0.069 | - | 0.044 | 0.073 | 0.115 | 0.134 | 0.036 | 0.053        | 0.618        | 0.379        | <b>0.914</b> | 0.367        | 0.162        |
| BKNOW3        | -0.005 | 0.046 | 0.226 | - | 0.069 | 0.005 | 0.029 | 0.080 | 0.028 | 0.067        | 0.424        | 0.352        | <b>0.899</b> | 0.350        | 0.120        |
| BPOS1         | 0.126  | 0.487 | 0.171 | - | 0.321 | 0.093 | 0.300 | 0.278 | 0.422 | 0.336        | 0.342        | 0.405        | 0.259        | <b>0.910</b> | 0.439        |
| BPOS2         | -0.001 | 0.302 | 0.130 | - | 0.198 | 0.115 | 0.294 | 0.324 | 0.098 | 0.452        | 0.433        | 0.485        | 0.434        | <b>0.790</b> | 0.296        |
| BPOS4         | 0.080  | 0.373 | 0.200 | - | 0.310 | 0.156 | 0.236 | 0.164 | 0.476 | 0.208        | 0.308        | 0.452        | 0.205        | <b>0.863</b> | 0.380        |
| BPOS5         | 0.063  | 0.318 | 0.094 | - | 0.260 | 0.089 | 0.152 | 0.137 | 0.436 | 0.135        | 0.294        | 0.453        | 0.249        | <b>0.873</b> | 0.393        |
| DESERV1       | -0.152 | 0.032 | 0.110 | - | 0.051 | 0.082 | 0.014 | 0.308 | 0.466 | 0.271        | 0.426        | 0.353        | 0.323        | 0.456        | <b>0.742</b> |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

|         |        |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |        |        |              |              |              |              |
|---------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| DESERV4 | -0.088 | 0.063 | 0.189 | -     | -     | 0.076 | 0.072 | 0.022 | 0.247 | 0.570 | 0.427 | 0.464  | 0.448  | 0.114        | 0.480        | <b>0.845</b> |              |
| DESERV6 | -0.137 | -     | 0.139 | -     | -     | 0.038 | 0.255 | 0.376 | 0.136 | 0.061 | 0.598 | 0.098  | 0.082  | 0.281        | 0.107        | 0.328        | <b>0.817</b> |
| DESERV7 | 0.116  | 0.144 | 0.118 | 0.057 | 0.168 | 0.200 | 0.016 | 0.450 | 0.225 | 0.187 | 0.119 | -0.083 | 0.222  | <b>0.604</b> |              |              |              |
| DESERV8 | -0.142 | -     | 0.164 | 0.004 | 0.207 | 0.383 | 0.122 | 0.051 | 0.304 | 0.189 | 0.116 | 0.174  | -0.030 | 0.086        | <b>0.678</b> |              |              |
| DESERV9 | -0.224 | -     | 0.131 | 0.021 | 0.214 | 0.268 | 0.138 | 0.087 | 0.364 | 0.052 | 0.053 | 0.081  | 0.073  | 0.114        | <b>0.647</b> |              |              |

DO ATHLETES DESERVE TO HAVE CONSUMERS ADVOCATING FOR THEM?

Table 10. Discriminant Validity: HTMT

|                     | Agreeableness | BA    | BP    | Brand Appraisal | Brand Defense | Brand Knowledge | Brand Loyalty | Brand Positivity | Competitiveness | Conscientiousness | Deservedness | Emotional Stability | Extraversion | ABI   | Morality |
|---------------------|---------------|-------|-------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|-------|----------|
| Agreeableness       |               |       |       |                 |               |                 |               |                  |                 |                   |              |                     |              |       |          |
| BA                  | 0.178         |       |       |                 |               |                 |               |                  |                 |                   |              |                     |              |       |          |
| BP                  | 0.828         | 0.402 |       |                 |               |                 |               |                  |                 |                   |              |                     |              |       |          |
| Brand Appraisal     | 0.145         | 0.860 | 0.313 |                 |               |                 |               |                  |                 |                   |              |                     |              |       |          |
| Brand Defense       | 0.135         | 0.893 | 0.256 | 0.548           |               |                 |               |                  |                 |                   |              |                     |              |       |          |
| Brand Knowledge     | 0.174         | 0.808 | 0.264 | 0.545           | 0.483         |                 |               |                  |                 |                   |              |                     |              |       |          |
| Brand Loyalty       | 0.272         | 0.551 | 0.405 | 0.429           | 0.521         | 0.206           |               |                  |                 |                   |              |                     |              |       |          |
| Brand Positivity    | 0.103         | 0.872 | 0.378 | 0.450           | 0.581         | 0.363           | 0.506         |                  |                 |                   |              |                     |              |       |          |
| Competitiveness     | 0.790         | 0.378 | 0.887 | 0.225           | 0.099         | 0.190           | 0.198         | 0.560            |                 |                   |              |                     |              |       |          |
| Conscientiousness   | 0.321         | 0.296 | 0.796 | 0.257           | 0.232         | 0.223           | 0.327         | 0.204            | 0.429           |                   |              |                     |              |       |          |
| Deservedness        | 0.282         | 0.476 | 0.388 | 0.376           | 0.385         | 0.209           | 0.725         | 0.458            | 0.216           | 0.230             |              |                     |              |       |          |
| Emotional Stability | 0.831         | 0.314 | 0.895 | 0.220           | 0.162         | 0.161           | 0.256         | 0.377            | 0.797           | 0.362             | 0.239        |                     |              |       |          |
| Extraversion        | 0.462         | 0.185 | 0.820 | 0.146           | 0.123         | 0.143           | 0.311         | 0.154            | 0.522           | 0.590             | 0.364        | 0.706               |              |       |          |
| ABI                 | 0.222         | 0.418 | 0.493 | 0.302           | 0.361         | 0.267           | 0.380         | 0.343            | 0.383           | 0.549             | 0.427        | 0.189               | 0.194        |       |          |
| Morality            | 0.312         | 0.344 | 0.732 | 0.277           | 0.196         | 0.174           | 0.320         | 0.373            | 0.784           | 0.390             | 0.218        | 0.544               | 0.342        | 0.537 |          |
| Openness            | 0.405         | 0.309 | 0.674 | 0.216           | 0.208         | 0.204           | 0.231         | 0.300            | 0.327           | 0.235             | 0.286        | 0.353               | 0.240        | 0.239 | 0.193    |

Table 17. Proposed improvement on athlete deservedness scale

**1. (HARD WORK) Athlete x puts in the effort and hard work into everything he does**

---

Athlete x deserves sports industry support because of his efforts and hard work

---

Athlete x deserves club support because of his efforts and hard work

---

Athlete x deserves brand sponsorships/partnerships because of his efforts and hard work

---

Athlete x deserves the money because of his efforts and hard work

---

Athlete x deserves a social status because of his efforts and hard work

---

Athlete x deserves appreciation because of his efforts and hard work

---

**2. (ATHLETIC CAPACITY) Athlete x demonstrates the athletic capacity to reach a specific goal outside the competition**

---

Athlete x deserves sports industry support because of his athletic capacity

---

Athlete x deserves club support because of his athletic capacity

---

Athlete x deserves brand sponsorships/partnerships because of his athletic capacity

---

Athlete x deserves the money because of his athletic capacity

---

Athlete x deserves a social status because of his athletic capacity

---

Athlete x deserves appreciation because of his athletic capacity

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**3. (PERFORMANCE) Athlete x demonstrates virtuous performance in a competitive environment**

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Athlete x deserves sports industry support because of his virtuous performance

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Athlete x deserves club support because of his virtuous performance

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Athlete x deserves brand sponsorships/partnerships because of his virtuous performance

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Athlete x deserves the money because of his virtuous performance

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Athlete x deserves a social status because of his virtuous performance

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Athlete x deserves appreciation because of his virtuous performance

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**4. (RESPECT) Athlete x respects his rights and obligations in a society**

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Athlete x deserves sports industry support because he respects his rights and obligations

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Athlete x deserves the club support because he respects his rights and obligations

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Athlete x deserves a brand sponsorship because he respects his rights and obligations

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Athlete x deserves the money because he respects his rights and obligations

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Athlete x deserves a social status because he respects his rights and obligations

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Athlete x deserves appreciation because he respects his rights and obligations

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**5. (CLAIMS) Athlete x claims rewards from others**

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Athlete x deserves to claim rewards from the sports industry

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Athlete x deserves to claim rewards from their club

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Athlete x deserves to claim rewards from their sponsorships/partnerships

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Athlete x deserves to claim rewards from their fans