CONSUMER JUDGMENT OF SCANDALIZED ATHLETES: AN ASSIMILATION-CONTRAST APPROACH

By

SHINTARO SATO

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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To my dad
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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<td>ANOVA</td>
<td>Analysis of Variance</td>
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<td>CNN</td>
<td>The Cable News Network</td>
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<td>IRB</td>
<td>Institutional Review Board</td>
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<td>IRS</td>
<td>The International Revenue Service</td>
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<td>NBA</td>
<td>National Basketball Association</td>
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<td>PED</td>
<td>Performance Enhancing Drug</td>
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<td>UADA</td>
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<td>USTA</td>
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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

CONSUMER JUDGMENT OF SCANDALIZED ATHLETES: AN ASSIMILATION-CONTRAST APPROACH

By
Shintaro Sato

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Chair: Yong Jae Ko
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The current study examines the effect of the contextual information on consumer judgment in athlete scandal settings. The author argues that consumer judgment and behavior are influenced by the contextual information, and they are assimilated to (or contrasted away from) the contextual information. Drawing on theoretical background regarding assimilation and contrast effects, this study hypothesized that consumers’ default judgment can be adjusted in the opposite direction (e.g., assimilation to contrast and vice versa) when the domain of previous and current information is matched. In contrast, consumers stick with their initial default judgment when the domain of the two pieces of information is mismatched.

Study 1 proposes that sport consumers utilize athletes’ positive associations (i.e., performance and philanthropy associations) as the contextual information when they make judgment of and behave towards athletes committing scandals (i.e., performance or non-performance related scandals). The results indicated that consumers adjusted their judgment in the opposite direction when athletes, whose performance association is salient, committed performance related scandal (i.e., PED scandal). In other words,
performance association can buffer against non-performance related scandals (i.e., tax evasion scandal). However, consumers blame scandalized athlete even more critically when scandals are relevant to performance association (i.e., PED scandal). In contrast, when athletes’ salient association was philanthropy, consumer judgment of scandalized athletes did not show any differences.

Study 2 examines that athlete scandal information (i.e., performance or non-performance related scandals) can serve as the contextual information and influence consumer judgment of response strategies (i.e., performance and non-performance related response strategies) and behavior toward athletes implementing response strategies. The results of Study 2 indicate that non-performance related response strategies (i.e., healthy partnership campaign) can be effective as a response to performance related scandals (i.e., PED scandal) while the same response strategy can be less effective to non-performance scandals (i.e., extramarital affair scandal). It indicated that consumers perceive the domain mismatch strategies more favorably while domain match strategies are perceived less favorably. When scandals happen, marketing managers in charge of athlete branding should consider the domain of the scandals and implement the appropriate response strategies to protect and revitalize the scandalized athletes’ status.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The Impacts of Athlete Scandals

It is reported that the sport industry is estimated over $480 billion in the US and $1.5 trillion worldwide (Plunkett Research, 2012). Although it is challenging to capture exact revenue streams incorporating with ticket sales, merchandizing consumption, and sponsorship, the sport industry has a great ability to generate considerable profits. Sponsorships are among the greatest means of economic assets drifting into the sport industry. In fact, sponsorship spending has reached $53 billion (IEG, 2013). These include companies’ tremendous financial investment for athletes to advertise their products and services (Stotlar, Veltri, & Viswanathan, 1998).

Athlete endorsement has been commonly utilized as a promotional tool to persuade consumers (Erdogan, 1999; Stotlar, Veltri, & Viswanathan, 1998). Although its positive aspects have been traditionally studied with keen interests, the scientific knowledge with respect to its dark side has not been accumulated enough. As we can see in the cases of the Tiger Woods’s sex scandal, Alex Rodriguez’s performance-enhancing drug (PED) issue, Lance Armstrong’s PED issue, and the scandal regarding domestic abuse involving NFL players (Bacon & Busbee, 2010; Lawton & Moore, 2013), misbehaviors of athletes are surprisingly prevalent.

These scandals have had wide-casting impacts. For example, the case of Jerry Sandusky the Penn State University child abuse scandal impacted society’s perception of the university as well as the team. Moreover, it led to a $60 million fine that was imposed by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (CNN, 2012). The shareholders of Woods’ sponsors also lost nearly $12 billion due to his sex scandal (Goldiner, 2009).
Such scandals can break endorsement and sponsorship contracts due to potential significant financial and societal impacts associated with the crisis (Miller & Laczniak, 2011). Eventually, scandals hurt the integrity of sport, which leads to a detrimental impact on the sport industry (Hughes & Shank, 2005; Till & Shimp, 1998).

**Need for Understanding Consumer Judgment of Scandalized Athletes**

Crisis management scholars have strived to search effective strategies to deal with a wide variety of crisis circumstances (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Kim & Cameron, 2011). However, many firms and organizations are still unprepared for unexpected crises. For example, a research report revealed that approximately 60% of sampled firms have experienced a crisis, yet only about 50% had a crisis plan (Burson-Marsteller, 2011).

This discrepancy is also applicable to individuals such as CEOs and celebrities. Embarrassing incidents are broadly reported as pictures and videos are often unexpectedly taken while the victim is unaware that they are being monitored. Many individual celebrities, including athletes, are surprisingly unprepared for exposure to the mass media (Holmes & Redmond, 2006). Athletes should be aware of, and prepared for, the possibility of unexpected crises and have crisis management strategies for a variety of situations that typically impact the sports industry and their careers negatively, including athlete scandals (Doyle, Pentecost, & Funk, 2014; Miller & Laczniak, 2011).

The primary goal of this line of research is to protect scandalized parties (i.e., organizations and individuals) and to revitalize businesses (Agyemang, 2011; Coombs, 2007; Hughes & Shank, 2005; Roehm & Tybout, 2006). The scandalous events are intensely broadcasted as negative publicity, which hurts consumers’ perceived reputation of scandalized objects (Coombs, 1996; Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Possible
remedies to minimize the scandal impact are (1) to build prior positive associations between the target objects and their stakeholders (Coombs, 2007; Godfrey, Merrill, & Hansen, 2009; Kim, 2013) and (2) to effectively implement post-scandal response strategies (Coombs, 1996; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Kim, Avery, & Lariscy, 2009; Roehm & Tybout, 2006).

First, previous literature, especially in organization settings, has proposed that organizations should build an association with stakeholders based on two perspectives: corporate ability (CA) and corporate social responsibility (CSR; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Kim, 2013). People make psychological associations with firms that have the ability to provide excellent services and products to customers (i.e., CA association) and that are considered socially responsible (i.e., CSR association). Godfrey et al. (2009) advocated that “doing good” plays a role in protecting organizations from the damages elicited by detrimental events. The contention has been supported in various data (e.g., French panel data; Ducassy, 2013) and in different settings including controversial industries (e.g., tobacco, alcohol, and gambling; Jo & Na, 2012) and automobile industries (Li, Chen, Chiu, & Lee, 2011). It indicates that building prior positive associations through CA and CSR may create a shield for scandal damage, and implies that individual athletes should also develop positive associations with consumers.

In addition to developing positive associations with consumers, effectively responding to the occurrence of crises is also an important task for minimizing the damage (Coombs, 1996; Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Scholars have strived to extend this line of research in the fields of marketing and public relations, and potential crisis response strategies have been suggested to reduce the crisis impact. Benoit (1997)
provided several subcategories of image repair crisis response strategies including denial, excuse, apology, and justification. Coombs (1996; 2007) also contributed to this line of research to further articulate crisis response strategies by considering different crisis types. Many other scholars have contributed to accumulating the effective crisis response strategies to protect scandalized objects (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Kim et al., 2009; Roehm & Tybout, 2006). In athlete settings, how would marketing managers respond to consumers at a time of scandal to minimize its impact?

Problem Statement

Athlete scandals have started to receive much more scholarly attention in the sport management realm (Agyemang, 2011; Arai, 2014; Feinberg, 2009; Fink, Parker, Brett, & Higgins, 2009; Hughes & Shank, 2005; Lee & Kwak, 2015; Lee, Bang, & Lee, 2013). As discussed in the section above, developing prior associations before scandals and communicating with stakeholders after scandals have been regarded as a means to minimize the possibility of any negative impact. This study argues that positive CA and CSR associations (Babiak, 2010; Walker, Heere, Parent, & Drane, 2010; Walker & Kent, 2009) and post-scandal response strategies (Bruce & Tini, 2008; Fink et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2013; Roehm & Tybout, 2006) can provide useful insights to sport marketers for minimizing the damage of unexpected negative events. Nevertheless, several questions still remain to be answered. Although prior positive association and effective response strategies may be able to minimize the scandal damage, can any forms of established positive associations help minimize the negative impacts of crises? What are the differences in consumer judgment toward the scandalized athletes in the face of different types of post-crisis response strategies?
Alex Rodriguez, for example, had a strong positive association with sport fans due to his notable performance (i.e., CA association). Would he have received the same level of blame if he committed PED or became involved in a sex scandal? Michael Vick, a professional American football player, was defamed due to a dog fighting scandal. Later, Vick engaged in animal protection campaigns. Was this response strategy more effective than if he were to be involved in an anti-doping campaign? Previous literature has not taken unique characteristics of different scandals into such consideration, meaning that the types of scandals (i.e., performance or non-performance related) should be considered for future research.

Consumer judgment toward scandalized objects has not been systematically examined in the sport management realm. Particularly, the bias in consumer judgment of scandalized athletes has not received scholarly attention to date. Based on the judgment literature, people cannot be free from the influence of contextual information, and it can lead to the biased judgment of target objects (Bei, Chu, & Shen, 2011; Janssen, Sen, & Bhattacharya, 2015; Martin, Seta, & Crelia, 1990; Mussweiler, 2003; Schwarz & Bless, 1992). Influenced by contextual information, consumers show two different types of biased judgment called assimilation and contrast effects (Bless & Wanke, 2001; Forehand & Perkins, 2005; Herr, Sherman, & Fazio, 1983; Hovland, Harvey, & Sherif, 1957; Mussweiler, 2003). According to Martin and his colleagues (1990), an assimilation effect refers to “a positive relation between value people place on a target stimulus and the value placed on the contextual stimuli that accompany the target” (p. 27), whereas a contrast effect refers to “a negative relation between these two values” (p. 27).
Previous literature has provided insightful findings regarding crisis/scandal management in order to understand the impact of scandals on organizations as well as on individuals (Agyemang, 2011; Benoit, 1997; Berger, Sorensen, & Rasmussen, 2010; Choi & Lin, 2009; Dawar & Lei, 2009; Jin, 2010; Zhou & Whitla, 2012). However, prior crisis/scandal management literature has highly focused only on scandalized objects themselves. Specifically, it has not sufficiently employed contextual information in its investigations. For example, Ray Rice, a National Football League player, was accused of domestic violence and received harsh criticism from football fans and media. However, fan and media evaluation might be different if they had information of Rice being previously engaged in charitable activities. In this case, “good Ray Rice”, who engaged in charitable activities, can serve as contextual information to create a biased judgment of subsequent “bad Ray Rice”. As a result, consumers may evaluate him more favorably than he actually is (i.e., assimilation effect), or they could have a severe evaluation of him (i.e., contrast effect). Previous literature, particularly in social psychology, has provided several compelling theoretical models to explain assimilation and contrast effects (Schwarz & Bless, 1992; Mussweiler, 2001; 2003). Application of these theories for understanding consumer biased judgment toward scandalized athletes can contribute to the existing body of sport crisis management literature.

**Purposes of the Study**

The two purposes of this dissertation research are to examine the effects of (a) positive athletic performance and philanthropy associations and (b) athlete scandals on the subsequent consumer judgment and behavior. As mentioned above, previous literature has not examined the effect of contextual information on consumer judgment and behavior regarding scandalized objects. When an assimilation effect manifests, the
scandalized athlete evaluation is placed closer to the previously established image (i.e., standard of comparison), whereas when a contrast effect manifests, the evaluation is located away from it. It is predicted that either assimilation or contrast effects manifest when the standard (i.e., previously established image) is similar to a judgment target (i.e., currently scandalized athlete).

Specifically, the first half of this study argues that the match between the target objects’ pre-scandal status (i.e., performance or philanthropy associations) and the scandal types (i.e., performance or non-performance related scandals) may provide different outcomes with respect to the assimilative and contrasting consumer judgments as well as overt behaviors. To design experiments answering this question, traditionally utilized CA and CSR associations in organization research settings are operationalized as associations based on athletic performance and philanthropic activities (Babiak, Mills, Tainsky, & Juravich, 2012), respectively.

The current study argues that pre-existing athlete information (i.e., contextual information) serves as contextual information for judgment of subsequently received information about them. Study 1 examines whether initially possessed salient positive associations (i.e., athletic performance or philanthropy association) between consumers and athletes serve as contextual information for subsequently received information of the same objects that commit to scandals (i.e., performance or non-performance related scandal). Further, if they receive performance related (or non-performance related) scandal information, the diagnostic link between initial athletic performance (or philanthropy) information and subsequent performance (non-performance) scandal information can encourage consumers to further compare past and current athletes’
status, resulting in a contrast effect. However, when the link between initial and subsequent pieces of information is weak, consumers may stick with their default assimilative judgment.

For Study 2, the current research uses the same theoretical background to replicate the findings of Study 1 in post-scandal response strategy settings. Specifically, information of scandalized objects (i.e., performance or non-performance related scandal) is used as contextual information for subsequently received post-crisis response strategy information (i.e., performance or non-performance related response strategy). One notable difference between Study 1 and 2 is that consumers’ default judgment mode can differ because of the characteristics of contextual information. Although consumers’ default judgment mode has been traditionally believed to be assimilative (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1997; Mussweiler, 2003), the literature has asserted that the default contrast is also possible when the context is extreme (Herr, Sherman, & Fazio, 1983; Petty & Wegener, 1993). Unlike Study 1, the contextual information in Study 2 is negative information (i.e., athlete scandal). Negative information is considered to be diagnostic and extreme (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr, Kardas, & Kim, 1991). This contention implies that consumers’ initial judgment of the target in Study 2 may be placed further away from rather than closer to the standard of comparison (i.e., default contrast). This study argues that domain match between the initially received information and the subsequently received positive response can create a situation wherein consumers can easily engage in comparative judgment. This cognitive elaboration can lead to judgment adjustment. Thus, default contrast in Study 2 can possibly be adjusted in an assimilation effect (Petty & Wegener, 1993). Inversely,
when the two pieces of information are inconsistent in their domain, consumer judgment towards the subsequently received information can remain the default (i.e., contrast in Study 2). Understanding the effects of contextual information will contribute to appropriate decision making regarding crisis/scandal management. This dissertation research strives to explore the micro-oriented consumer judgment of and behavior towards scandalized athletes from the lens of the assimilation and contrast effects.

**Terms and Definitions**

Before starting the literature review, this section provides terminologies and definitions that are important for this dissertation. The current research focused on the associations between consumers and sport entities, namely corporate ability association and corporate social responsibility association.

**Athletic Performance Association**

Traditionally, researchers have believed that consumers develop two different associations with companies. One of the important factors that contribute to the establishment of association is corporate ability association (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Based on their definition, corporate ability association is a psychological association with organizations that have the ability to provide excellent services and products to customers. This definition was refined to correspond with the individual athlete contexts, and the authors defined athletic performance association as “consumers’ psychological scheme regarding athletes’ ability to deliver excellent athletic performance”.

**Philanthropy Association**

In addition to corporate ability association, corporate social responsibility association is also an important factor to establish splendid relationship with consumers. Carroll (1979) proposed a CSR framework with four distinct responsibilities that can be
broken down into four subsets: economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary. Mohr, Webb, and Harris (2001) defined CSR as “a company's commitment to minimizing or eliminating any harmful effects and maximizing its long-run beneficial impact on society (p. 47)”. Although CSR has a long history in academia, scholars have not had a consistent definition of CSR due to its scattered focuses. To be consistent with previous literature in the sport management realm (Babiak et al., 2012; Babiak & Wolfe, 2006), the current dissertation emphasizes athletes’ voluntary activities that minimize or eliminate any harmful effects and maximize its long-run beneficial impact on society. Based on this assertion, philanthropy association is defined as “consumers’ psychological scheme regarding athletes’ social responsibility status”.

**Assimilation and Contrast Effects**

From the perspective of judgment literature, people cannot be free from the influence of contextual information. Influenced by the contextual information, individuals exhibit two different types of overt judgments, namely the assimilative and the contrasting judgments (Schwarz & Bless, 1992; Martin et al., 1990). The assimilation effect is defined as a positive relation between value people place on a target stimulus and the value placed on the contextual stimuli that accompany the target whereas the contrast effect refers to a negative relation between these two values. (Martin et al., 1990; p. 27). Assimilation and contrast effects are also observable in behavioral domains (Appel, 2011; Dijksterhuis, Spears, & Lepinasse, 2001; LeBoeuf & Estes, 2004; Mussweiler, 2007).

**Correction**

Correction refers to consumers’ adjustment of biased judgment (Petty & Wegener, 1993). Traditionally, individuals’ default judgment mode has been considered
assimilative (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1997; Mussweiler, 2003), and contrast effects manifest only when they feel the need to adjust their biased judgment (Simon, 1955; Chien, Wegener, Petty, & Hsiao, 2014). Therefore, only correction contrast effect that is over-adjusted from assimilation can be considered realistic.

However, recent studies also suggest that consumers’ default judgment mode is not always assimilative (Raghunathan & Irwin, 2001). Depending on situations, consumers engage in either assimilative or contrasting judgment as their initial reactions. One of the factors that encourage consumers to engage in default contrast mode is the extremity of context (Herr, Sherman, & Fazio, 1983). Since negative information is usually considered more diagnostic and extreme than positive and neutral information (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr, Kardas, & Kim, 1991), initial contrasting judgment can be the default in Study 2. The flexible correction model (Petty & Wegener, 1993) denotes that correction can emerge not only biased assimilative judgment, but also contrasting judgment. In other words, flexible correction predicts that consumers initial default judgment is adjusted to the opposite direction (Chien et al., 2014).

**Significance of the Study**

This study not only contributes to the existing body of crisis/scandal management literature, but also the athlete scandal literature in the field of sport management. The specific focus of the current study is to examine whether positive associations (i.e., performance and philanthropy) and athlete scandals (i.e., performance related and non-performance related scandals) can minimize the negative impact on the scandalized athlete if they are implemented appropriately.
Specifically, this study contributes in several ways. Although this line of research has received a tremendous amount of attention across a wide variety of disciplines including business (Dawar & Lei, 2009; Kim, 2013) and public relations (Benoit, 1997; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Kim et al., 2009), previous research has not sufficiently assessed the effect of contextual information on consumer judgment during consumer judgement of scandalized athletes. Accordingly, much of the research conducted in the past has yielded mixed findings about whether the involvement of positive actions can protect scandalized objects or not (Eisingerich, Rubera, Seifert, & Bhardwaj, 2010; Godfrey, 2005; Godfrey, Merril, & Hansen, 2009). The current study attempts to provide alternative explanations for these inconsistent findings by exploring the assimilation and contrast effect.

This research has an important practical implication. Marketing managers in charge of athlete branding will be able to integrate the knowledge generated by this research in two important ways. When scandals occur, they need to contemplate the diagnostic match between (1) initial image of athletes and scandal characteristics (Study 1) and (2) scandal characteristics and the types of post-scandal response strategies (Study 2). By doing so, managers can further obtain a clearer understanding of consumer reactions during athlete scandals, which can contribute to scandal damage minimization and the strategic repositioning of the scandalized athletes.
CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

CA and CSR Association

Consumers develop two different corporate associations: Corporate ability (CA) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) associations (Brown & Dacin, 1997). CA refers to psychological associations with organizations that have the ability to provide excellent services and products to customers, whereas CSR denotes that consumers’ association with organizations that is considered as socially responsible (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Previous literature has shown much interests to the effects of CA and CSR associations in the contexts of marketing (Biehal & Shenin, 2007; Brown & Dacin, 1997), business ethics (Berens, Van Riel & Van Rekom, 2007), public relations (Kim, 2013; Kim & Cameron, 2009), and sport management (Inoue, Mahan, & Kent, 2013).

For example, Brown and Dacin (1997) found that CA association has a greater impact, relative to CSR association, on consumer evaluations of the firms’ products. Later, Berens et al. (2007) found that firms’ good CSR status compensated their poor CA in certain situations (e.g., when consumers prefer a company’s stocks and jobs because stock value is fluctuated by product quality as well as reputation).

Brown and Dacin (1997) defined CA as “company’s expertise in producing and delivering its outputs” (p. 68). Grunwald and Hemplemann (2011) advocated that positive CA associations play a shielding role to block the negative impacts of crises. Specifically, consumers’ perceived crisis responsibility of companies can be lowered. Previous literature has usually examined this shield effect in the context of product-harm crises (Klein & Dawar, 2004).
Although the operationalization of CA and CSR associations has not necessarily been consistent, scholars have operationalized CA as service quality (e.g., Brown & Dacin, 1997; Walsh & Bartikowski, 2013). Service quality has been actively utilized in the sport management literature (Ko & Pastore, 2004; 2005; Tsuji, Bennett, & Zhang, 2007; Yoshida & James, 2010). Both CA and service quality commonly focus on the ability to provide tremendous products and services to consumers. Although it has not been operationalized in individual athlete contexts yet, the current study focuses on athletes’ abilities to provide excellent core services (i.e., athletic performance) to be consistent with previous literature in CA and service quality.

CSR has been operationalized in several different ways (e.g., compliance and philanthropic activities). Carroll (1979) proposed four different stages of CSR by looking at its economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary aspects. The hierarchical model suggests that economic responsibility is considered the most important. Following economic responsibility, Carroll mentioned that it is also crucial to obey the law to become a responsible company. After these two responsibilities, ethical and discretionary responsibilities were identified. Ethical responsibility denotes an organizations’ behavior and activities that people expect, but that are not regulated by law. Lastly, discretionary responsibility refers to behavior and actions that exceed society’s expectation.

Sport management scholars have accumulated much knowledge to extend the existing body of literature in CSR (Sheth & Babiak, 2009; Walker et al., 2010; Walker & Kent, 2009). Sheth and Babiak (2009), for example, found that executives in the sport industry perceive CSR as a strategic imperative for sport franchises. The study also
identified eight CSR categories that sport executives practically prioritize: Philanthropic, community, strategic, partnership, leadership, ethical, legal, and stakeholders. However, Brown and Dacin’s (1997) CSR association is considered to be a much broader concept as it refers to socially desirable gestures, which include environmental stewardship, diversity understanding, supporting cultural activities, community involvement, and philanthropic activities. The current study again focuses on individual athletes’ positive association with sport consumers. Based on the previous literature (Babiak et al., 2012), CSR association in this study can be operationalized as philanthropy association to be pertinent to the setting of individual athletes.

Doing and Being Good as a Shield against Negative Events

Prior studies in the field of risk and crisis management focused on the assessment of how pre-existing associations influence consumer evaluation the face of negative events (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Coombs & Holladay, 2006; Fomburn & Shanley, 1990; Godfrey, 2005). Thus, positive association is believed to create a buffer against the negative impact of scandals. Godfrey et al. (2009) suggested that establishing positive associations with consumers is a type of insurance that can act as a shield when firms are involved in a crisis. Using 160 firms from panel data, their study found that firms’ engagement in CSR activities positively influenced corporate financial performance even when crises happen. Grunwald and Hempelmann (2011) also found that firms having positive CA associations with consumers can enjoy the protection when they are in a tough period of time.

On the other hand, expectancy-violation theory (Burgoon & LePoire, 1993; Jussim, Coleman, & Lerch, 1987) suggests that evaluations of targets are extremely discounted when they violate consumer expectations. For example, in product-harm
crisis situations, Kim (2013) provided evidence that the target objects having positive CA associations are more negatively evaluated relative to those who have positive CSR associations. This finding implies that consumer expectation toward target objects that have provided excellent products and services may be exceptionally high, creating a situation where a violation of consumer expectation can be salient under times of product failure. In fact, scholars have contended that corporate crises in a specific domain are more likely to be considered as betrayals of consumer expectation (Bansal & Clelland, 2004; Simonson & Tversky, 1992). Thus, previous literature has shown the mixed findings with regard to the effect of positive association on damage minimization (Sato, 2015). This dissertation seeks to provide alternative explanations of the inconsistent findings of the effects of athlete scandals by exploring an assimilation and contrast judgment approach.

**Crisis Response Strategy to Buffer against Negative Events**

Along with the prior CA and CSR associations, post-crisis response strategies should also create a buffer against the impact of scandals. Previous literature has provided insights for understanding this phenomenon (Benoit, 1997; Claeys, Cauberghe, Vyncke, 2010; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Schwarz, 2012). Coombs (2007) asserted that effectively responding to stakeholders after a scandal occurrence can minimize its damage. Specifically, the situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2007) introduced a wide variety of response strategies such as deny, diminish, rebuild, and bolster. It is suggested that response strategies should be carefully selected and implemented for different types of scandals. For example, a deny strategy must not be used when the scandalized object commits a serious transgression, whereas a diminish
strategy can be effective in accidental scandal situations (Coombs, 1996; Coombs, 1998).

A wide variety of response strategies mentioned above have been actively utilized by many scholars (Kim et al., 2009, Claeys, Cauberghe, & Vyncke, 2010; Schultz, Utz, & Goritz, 2011). However, its focuses on each strategy appears too narrow which can lead to difficulty in their application to practice. Most importantly, response strategies have been tested for effectiveness based on generally defined crisis types, usually centered on the intentionality and controllability of crises. These studies have not contemplated the semantic relationship between crisis and response strategies. Additionally, since studies examining the effect of post-crisis response strategies have been mainly conducted in the scandalized organization contexts, it is necessary to examine whether such knowledge is applicable to individual athletes’ scandal contexts.

Assimilation and Contrast Effect

The assimilation and contrast effect has received much scholarly attention in the field of psychology, particularly in the domain of social comparison (Festinger, 1954; Mussweiler, 2003; Steinmetz & Mussweiler, 2011; Turner, 1975). This line of research has been extended to consumer price judgment (Cunha & Shulman, 2010; Janiszewski & Lichtenstein, 1999), consumer product evaluation (Chien, Wegener, Hsiao, & Petty, 2010), and advertising persuasiveness (Kim, Yoon, & Lee, 2010; Pillai, & Goldsmith, 2008; Poncin & Derbaix, 2009).

Numerous studies suggest that consumers are never free from contextual information when they make judgments (Bless & Schwarz, 1999; Bless & Schwarz, 2010; Dato-on & Dahlstrom, 2003; Nam & Sternthal, 2008). Contextual information refers to the information that does not necessarily have a direct relation to the focal
stimuli (i.e., evaluation target such as a scandalized company; Kulkarni, 2011). For example, Caron Butler is a NBA player who was awarded the role model of the year by the Middlesex county Chamber of Commerce. Consumers probably agree that he has positively impacted this community. Consumers’ evaluation can be further boosted when they learn that he used to be a member of a poor family and had to be a drug dealer to survive. Consumers may use the “previous Butler” as contextual information to evaluate the “current Butler” more favorably than he actually is. Thus, contextual information can change judgment toward focal stimuli through either assimilation or contrast effects (Bless & Schwarz, 2010; Mussweiler, 2003; Wanke, Bless, & Igou, 2001). Several key theoretical models have been proposed in order to explain the assimilation and contrast effects. This section will summarize the key theories contributing to the explanation of the assimilation and contrast effects.

**Range-Frequency Model**

Range-frequency model (Parducci, 1965) is one of the most classic theoretical models and explains the effect of contextual information on judgment. The basic tenet of the range principle is that judgment of targets is determined by the relationship among targets and perceivers’ subjective minimum and maximum values of contexts. When contextual information greatly overreaches the minimum or maximum value, consumers’ judgment of the target is placed further from the value. For example, a consumer is contemplating purchasing a pair of basketball shoes. Assume his or her subjective price range of a pair of basketball shoes is $100 (i.e., minimum) to $150 (i.e., maximum). When he arrives at a store, the pair of shoes is $140. He notices that the prices of other models at the store vary from $100 to $200. In this situation, the pair of shoes, which costs $200, serve as contextual information to create a biased price judgment of $140
shoes, ultimately resulting in the perception that $140 is cheaper than it actually is (i.e., contrast effect). As such, the range-frequency model has been utilized to explain consumers’ biased price judgment in previous studies (Niedrich, Sharma, & Wedell, 2001; Niedrich, Weathers, Hill, & Bell, 2009). Although it is useful to explain the contrast effect, the model does not sufficiently provide a convincing explanation as to why the assimilation occurs (Damisch, Mussweiler, & Plessner, 2006).

**The Inclusion/Exclusion Model**

Schwarz and Bless (1992) proposed the inclusion/exclusion model (IEM) to explain the processes regarding the assimilation and contrast effects. The principle of IEM is that consumers need to create mental categories to compare target objects. The assimilation effect manifests when a target object is included in the mental category of the comparison standard (Bless & Shuwarz, 2010, Bless & Wanke, 2000). Specifically, imagine a situation where a person is looking at Kevin Durant, the regular season MVP of the NBA in 2014, and subsequently observes an African American basketball player. In this situation, the person may activate the mental category of “African American” to compare Kevin Durant and the subsequently observed basketball player. Because of the shared mental category (i.e., African American), the person tends to include the subsequently observed basketball player in the same category wherein Kevin Durant belongs to. This inclusion mechanism biases consumer judgments, and evaluation of the athlete (i.e., target) usually moves closer to that of Kevin Durant (i.e., contextual information). This biased judgment is termed as the assimilation effect.

By the same token, the contrast effect manifests when the target object is excluded from the mental category of the standard comparison. For instance, Schwarz and Bless (1992) found that politicians in general are more positively evaluated when a
scandalized politician is excluded from the politician mental category. Bless and Schwarz (1999) also found that the consumer evaluation of wine is more favorable if wine is in the cuisine mental category that lobsters belong to. However, evaluation of wine decreases when it is excluded from this cuisine category. Thus, inclusion elicits the assimilation effect, and exclusion leads to the contrast effect. These findings have received further empirical support in previous literature (Wanke et al., 2001).

**The Selective Accessibility Model**

Mussweiler (2001; 2003; 2007) proposed the selective accessibility model (SAM) of social comparison to explain the processes regarding individuals’ comparative judgment. SAM predicts that when people have information of standard, subsequent information of the evaluation targets are tested whether the information is similar or dissimilar to this standard. If people engage in a similarity testing, the evaluation of the target will move closer to that of the standard (i.e., assimilation effect). On the other hand, when a dissimilarity test is engaged, the evaluation of the targets will be pushed away from that of the standard (i.e., contrast effect). For example, assuming that the representative basketball player is LeBron James, sport consumers may evaluate another African American basketball player as having more expertise than he actually does simply because of his racial similarities to LeBron James. On the other hand, sport consumers may evaluate a White basketball player as less of an expert than he actually is because of the perceived racial dissimilarity between LeBron James and the subsequently exposed athlete.

Numerous studies in a wide variety of disciplines have provided fairly concrete evidence that the similarity/dissimilarity testing predicts whether the assimilation or contrast effect manifests (Damisch, et al., 2006; Mussweiler & Bodenhausen, 2002). For
example, Damisch et al. (2006) conducted research in the context of sport performance judgment, and found that even highly experienced performance judges were influenced by the perceived similarity of athletes. Specifically, if judges focus on the similarity between one athlete and a subsequently performed athlete (i.e., same nationality), assimilative judgment manifests while contrasting judgment occurs when they focus on dissimilarity between two athletes (i.e., different nationality).

Unlike the assimilation effect, consumers evaluate target objects as more (or less) favorable than they actually are when the contrast effect manifests. Based on SAM, when consumers’ perceived dissimilarity between a target and a comparative object increases, the contrast effect manifests (Damisc et al., 2006; Mussweiler, 2001; 2003; 2007). Kim et al. (2010) found that receiving incomparable pieces of information leads to the contrast effect. Specifically, when consumers initially obtain negative information about products and then subsequently receive positive information about them, the incompatibility creates the expectation-experience discrepancy, resulting in the contrast effect. Based on the tenets of SAM, the target objects (i.e., athletes) that have positive associations with consumers can be evaluated more negatively than they actually are when they commit scandals. This model may be able to sufficiently explain the contrast effect for this study because consumers will compare “previous positive (or negative) athlete” and “current negative (or positive) athlete”. This comparison can highlight dissimilarities, resulting in contrast effect. However, whether the assimilation effect manifests in this study setting still remains questionable because a previously established image of an athlete and a subsequently introduced athlete can allow for
dissimilarity testing. The following flexible correction model supplementary explains the processes of assimilation in athlete scandal contexts.

**Flexible Correction Model**

The flexible correction model (Petty & Wegener, 1993; Wegener & Petty, 1995) insists that individuals adjust their judgment when they are aware of the contextual information influencing them. In this case, they try to adjust their judgment in the opposite direction when they are motivated to do so, resulting in an opposite directional overcorrection effect (i.e., the assimilation effect becomes the contrast effect and vice versa). The conditions that elicit overcorrections vary depending on individual factors including consumer thoughtfulness (Priester, Dholakia, & Fleming, 2004), consumers’ cognitive resources (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1997), and expertise (Nam & Sternthal, 2008). Specifically, expert consumers can be more motivated to engage in adjusting their judgment when they are aware of the contextual influence. Situational factors such as information relevancy (Forehand & Perkins, 2005; Priester et al., 2004) also influence consumers’ overcorrect judgment. For example, Priester et al. (2004) found that biased judgment (i.e., contrast effect) is overcorrected to elicit the opposite effect (i.e., assimilation effect) when there are no concrete rationales for the judgment.

However, how consumers make initial judgments is still unclear. Assimilative judgment has been considered the default judgment mode (Martin, 1986; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1997; Mussweiler, 2003). Based on this contention, the information about scandalized athletes is always assimilated to the previously established positive association information. Hence, consumers’ initial judgment of the target athlete in Study 1 is inclined to be favorable. Consumers may adjust their initial positive judgment toward the scandalized athlete in the opposite direction if they feel the need. However,
consumers’ default judgment may be different in Study 2. Consumers also engage in default contrast mode when the contextual information is extreme (Chien et al., 2014; Herr, Sherman, & Fazio, 1983). Previous research has proposed that negative information is perceived to be more diagnostic relative to positive and neutral information because of its extreme nature (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr, Kardas, & Kim, 1991; Ito, Larsen, Smith, & Cacioppo, 1998). Due to the fact that the contextual information in Study 2 is related to athlete scandals, consumers may make contrasting judgment of targets as an initial default judgment. Assimilation effect can manifest when consumers adjust their initial contrasting judgment in the opposite direction. This is termed as the correction assimilation effect.

**Accessibility-Diagnosticity Model**

To further understand how assimilation and contrast effects manifest, the accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988) can provide useful insight. This model asserts that how particular information is prioritized is a product of its accessibility and diagnosticity. Accessibility refers to the ease of retrieval from memory or the vividness of the information at the time of judgment (Herr et al., 1991), while diagnosticity means how relevant the information is to the judgment (Ahluwalia & Gürhan-Canli, 2000). The more accessible the information, the more likely it will be used for judgment. However, consumers are more likely to prioritize diagnostic information more when it is available even if other accessible information exists. That is, when individuals make a judgment of whether the target person is academically smart or not, they are more likely to use diagnostic information (e.g., affiliated university) than less diagnostic information (e.g., her favorite musician) as a resource.
Congruent with the current study, when individuals make judgment of athletes who are involved in performance (or non-performance) related scandals, the contextual influence of athletic performance (or philanthropy) association is relevant (or less relevant) for their judgment because of their domain match (i.e., athletic performance association and performance related scandal). For example, if consumers previously established a positive performance association with Lance Armstrong and subsequently received information pertaining to his PED use (i.e., the scandal), the link is perceived as diagnostic because they share the same domain (i.e., performance). This domain diagnosticity can highlight the comparability of two pieces of information. In this situation, consumers can explicitly compare the standard of comparison (i.e., Armstrong as a good athlete) to the judgment target (i.e., Armstrong as a bad athlete) with ease. On the other hand, it can be difficult for consumers to fully compare the standard or comparison and the target when their domain is not relevant. For example, if consumers receive non-performance related scandal (e.g., tax fraud, sexual infidelity) about an athlete after establishing a positive athletic performance association, the link is not strongly diagnostic relative to the previous case. In this situation, they may discard the importance of the information coming from the non-diagnostic source.

As mentioned earlier, consumers adjust their initial assimilative judgment in the opposite direction when they feel their judgment is biased (Petty & Wegener, 1993; Wegener & Petty, 1995). However, this judgment adjustment can only occur when consumers are motivated (Bless & Schwarz, 2010; Wegener & Petty, 1997) or possess enough cognitive resources (Nam & Sternthal, 2008; Martin et al., 1990). This study argues that judgment correction can occur only when the domain of the standard of the
comparison and the target is consistent. Specifically, consumers’ initial judgment
towards a scandalized athlete who was involved in a PED scandal may be adjusted if
the athlete previously established athlete performance association (i.e., athletic
performance domain match). Nevertheless, in the domain mismatch conditions,
consumers are more likely to stick with their initial default judgment because judgment
adjustment requires notable cognitive elaboration, which can be difficult upon
comparing two irrelevant pieces of information.

**Consumer Judgment of Scandalized Athletes**

**Consumer Blame**

According to attribution theory, people are driven to make sense of the causes of
observed events (Heider, 1958). Individuals strive to make sense of certain actions by
attributing their causes to either personal dispositions (e.g., personality of actors) or
situations (e.g., inevitable circumstances that actors have to engage in certain actions).
Whether people attribute causes to personal dispositions or the environment can be
determined by the perceived intentionality of actors (Coombs, 2007; Coombs &
Holladay, 2008; Heider, 1958). People tend to blame those who engage in undesirable
behavior harsher when they perceive the negative action is deliberately performed
because it encourages people to fully attribute its causes to the actor (Shaw & Sulzer,
1964).

Previous literature in product-harm crisis management showed that blame is a
fundamental attribution when consumers receive negative information about products
that are dangerous and broken (Folkes, 1984; Folkes & Kotsos, 1986). Dawar and
Pillutla (2000) contended that when consumers receive and interpret negative
information pertaining to target objects (i.e., companies), their judgment of these objects
is greatly influenced by their prior expectations towards them, serving as contextual information. This recommendation is consistent with the notion from previous literature which noted that consumer judgment cannot be free from contextual information (Bless & Wanke, 2010; Mussweiler, 2003). Therefore, consumers may blame athletes who engage in detrimental behavior, and their judgment of scandalized athletes fluctuates, based on their previously established associations with these athletes (e.g., performance and philanthropy associations). Previous literature in crisis management often focuses on psychological variables such as attitude, reputation, product evaluation, and company evaluation (Doyle et al., 2014; Zhou & Whitla, 2013). In the field of sport management, especially in athlete scandal settings, consumer blame is an additional pertinent psychological variable, favored by several sport management scholars (Fink et al., 2009; Hughes & Shank, 2005).

**Negative Word-of-Mouth/Advocacy Behavior**

Traditionally, studies in crisis management have proposed that crises can make consumers engage in detrimental behavior such as negative word-of-mouth and advocacy (Aaker, 1996; Coombs, 2004; 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Dunn & Dahl, 2012; Fong & Wyer, 2012; Janssen et al., 2014; Tsarenko & Tojib, 2012). Among these behaviors, consumers’ negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) behavior was selected as the focal behavior in Study 1 because the judgment target is a scandalized athlete. On the other hand, advocacy behavior was selected for Study 2 because the judgment target in Study 2 is an athlete who engaged in a positive charitable campaign.

From the perspective of assimilation and contrast effects, behavior can also be assimilated when the standard of comparison is similar while a contrast effect can manifest when they are (Appel, 2011; Mussweiler, 2003). Of particular relevance, Aarts
and Dijkstehuis (2002) found that behavior is assimilated to (contrasted from) irrelevant (relevant) comparison targets. LeBoeuf and Georgia (2004) also provided the same pattern of behavioral assimilation in interpersonal comparison settings. These studies imply that behavior toward scandalized athletes can be assimilated toward previously presented athletes when a salient association domain is irrelevant (e.g., a performance association salient athlete and non-performance scandalized athlete).

Drawing on theories and models from social psychology (Forehand & Perkins, 2005; Mussweiler, 2003; Petty & Wegener, 1993), the current study focuses on the domain match between: (1) associations and crisis types and (2) crisis types and response strategy types to assess how consumer judgment and behavior changes because of the contextual influence. This objective may help expand the knowledge base on the processes regarding assimilation and contrast effects pertaining to athlete scandals. More specifically, this study proposes that consumers: (1) keep their initial default judgment and behavior in situations where the domain of prior and subsequent information does not match and (2) adjust their default judgment and behavior in the opposite direction when the domain match is present.

Based on the assertion that an assimilative judgment mode is the default (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1997; Mussweiler, 2003), a contrast effect is a creation of consumers’ judgment adjustment (Petty & Wegener, 1993). This adjustment process requires cognitive resources (Bless & Schwarz, 2010). The pieces of information in the same domain can be processed by consumers with ease. Therefore, consumers can further compare the target to the standard more elaborately. This explicit comparison leads to the contrast effect (Forehand & Perkins, 2005). However, it may not be the
case when the information domain does not match between the standard and the target due to its irrelevancy. Irrelevant information is not utilized for judgment (Feldman & Lynch, 1988). Again, consumers assimilate their judgment of, and behavior toward, the target to the standard. If information is not diagnostic, consumers may discard the information and stick with their initial judgment unless they are highly motivated to further search additional diagnostic information. Study 1 examines whether previously established performances associations can serve as contextual information when consumers receive performance related and non-performance related scandal information. Incorporating the aforementioned theoretical background, the following hypotheses are developed:

- **H1**: Athletes who establish positive PERFORMANCE ASSOCIATIONS and engage in a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDALS (i.e., PED scandal) will be BLAMED MORE, compared to a no prior salient association (contrast effect).

- **H2**: Athletes who establish positive PERFORMANCE ASSOCIATION and engage in a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (i.e., Tax evasion scandal) will be BLAMED LESS, compared to a no prior salient association (assimilation effect).

- **H3**: Athletes who establish positive PHILANTHROPY ASSOCIATION and engage in a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (i.e., PED scandal) will be BLAMED LESS, compared to no prior salient association (assimilation effect).

- **H4**: Athletes who establish positive PHILANTHROPY ASSOCIATION and engage in a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (i.e., Tax evasion scandal) will be BLAMED MORE, compared to no prior salient association (contrast effect).

- **H5**: When consumers observe PERFORMANCE ASSOCIATION salient athletes engage in a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL, they will engage in NWOM MORE, compared to a no salient association condition (contrast effect).

- **H6**: When consumers observe PERFORMANCE ASSOCIATION salient athletes engage in a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL, they will engage in NWOM LESS, compared to a no prior salient association condition (assimilation effect).

- **H7**: When consumers observe PHILANTHROPIC ASSOCIATION salient athletes engage in a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL, they will engage in NWOM LESS, compared to a no salient association condition (assimilation effect).
• H8: When consumers observe PHILANTHROPIC ASSOCIATION salient athletes engage in a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL, they will engage in NWOM MORE compared to a no prior salient association condition (contrast effect).

In Study 2, the author strived to replicate the findings in a slightly different context. Study 1 explored the strategies to minimize unexpected scandal damage by focusing on the preparation stage (i.e., pre-scandal phase). It is also particularly important to understand the effective post-scandal response strategies. Derived from the same theoretical background, Study 2 was designed to make scandal information the standard of comparison and assess how it influences consumer judgment of, and behavior toward, the athlete who has responded to the public with positive charitable activities. Specifically, when consumers know that an athlete committed a performance related scandal, such as the use of PEDs, a performance related (non-performance) response strategy creates a contrast (assimilation) effect because of information elaboration in the domain match (or mismatch) situation. Based on the aforementioned argument, Study 1 developed the following hypotheses:

• H9: Consumer judgment of athletes’ PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES is LESS FAVORABLE when they observe the athletes committing a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (contrast effect).

• H10: Consumer judgment of athletes’ PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES is MORE FAVORABLE when they observe the athletes committing a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (assimilation effect).

• H11: Consumer judgment of athletes’ NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES is MORE FAVORABLE when they observe the athletes committing a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (assimilation effect).

• H12: Consumer judgment of athletes’ NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES is LESS FAVORABLE when they observe the athletes committing a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (assimilation effect).
• H13: Consumers are LESS likely to ADVOCATE for athletes involved in PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES as a response to a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (contrast effect).

• H14: Consumers are MORE likely to ADVOCATE for athletes involved in a PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES as a response to a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (assimilation effect).

• H15: Consumers are MORE likely to ADVOCATE for athletes involved in NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES as a response to a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (assimilation effect).

• H116: Consumers are LESS likely to ADVOCATE for athletes involved in NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES as a response to a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (contrast effect).
Overview of Study 1

The purpose of the first experiment was to examine whether athletes’ existing associations regarding athletic performance and philanthropy can contribute to minimizing or amplifying scandal impact (i.e., consumer blame and online NWOM behavior). A three (prior association type: athletic performance vs. philanthropy vs. control) by two (scandal type: performance related vs. non-performance) between-subjects scenario-based experiment was conducted. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions.

Prior positive information of an athlete can be a reference point for consumers to make a judgment of the athlete when he or she is involved in a scandal. When a contrast effect manifests, consumer judgment and behavior are placed further from the reference point. By contrast, consumers move closer to the reference point when an assimilation effect emerges. Specifically, a contrast effect regarding consumer blame and NWOM behavior is expected to manifest when prior positive associations and scandal types are diagnostic (i.e., domain match) whereas the assimilation effect should manifest when they are less relevant (i.e., domain mismatch). In sum, the first experiment was designed to assess the following eight hypotheses:

- **H1**: Athletes who established a positive PERFORMANCE ASSOCIATION and engaged in a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (i.e., PED scandal) will be BLAMED MORE compared to a no prior salient association condition (contrast effect).
- **H2**: Athletes who established a positive PERFORMANCE ASSOCIATION and engaged in a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (i.e., Tax evasion scandal) will be BLAMED LESS, compared to a no prior salient association condition (assimilation effect).
H3: Athletes who established a positive PHILANTHROPY ASSOCIATION and engaged in a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (i.e., PED scandal) will be BLAMED LESS compared to a no prior salient association condition (assimilation effect).

H4: Athletes who established a positive PHILANTHROPY ASSOCIATION and engaged in a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (i.e., Tax evasion scandal) will be BLAMED MORE compared to a no prior salient association condition (contrast effect).

H5: When consumers observe PERFORMANCE ASSOCIATION salient athletes engage in a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL, they will engage in NWOM MORE, compared to a no salient association condition (contrast effect).

H6: When consumers observe PERFORMANCE ASSOCIATION salient athletes engage in a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL, they will engage in NWOM LESS, compared to a no prior salient association condition (assimilation effect).

H7: When consumers observe PHILANTHROPIC ASSOCIATION salient athletes engage in a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL, they will engage in NWOM LESS, compared to a no salient association condition (assimilation effect).

H8: When consumers observe PHILANTHROPIC ASSOCIATION salient athletes engage in a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL, they will engage in NWOM MORE compared to a no prior salient association condition (contrast effect).

Method

Apparatus Development: Association and Scandal Types

Controlling confounding variables is crucial for experimental studies to properly assess the effects of focal variables (Campbell, Stanley, & Gage, 1963). Given that delimitations were set by using a fictitious athlete in the experiment. The use of fictitious target stimuli has benefits over actual stimuli for controlling exogenous factors (e.g., likeability and familiarity for a particular athlete; Money, Shimp, & Sakano, 2006; Wanke et al., 2001). A fictitious athlete named Phil Franklin, adopted from previous literature (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989), was used. Before conducting the main experiment, a series
of pre-tests was conducted to identify (1) an appropriate stimulus of athletic performance and philanthropy history that the athlete engages and (2) performance and non-performance related scandals. This process is important to increase the legitimacy of the stimuli. Consumers may not believe the information about associations as well as the scandals if the current study employed unrealistic manipulations.

Firstly, a focus-group interview was conducted to discuss the determinants of performance association and philanthropy association. Nineteen undergraduate students at the University of Florida participated in the interview. Participants were asked to imagine specific athletes with whom they had positive performance associations. Next, they were asked to freely discuss the excellent performance-based qualities of their chosen athlete. The same procedure was employed to identify the specific philanthropy activities that make their chosen athlete socially desired. As a result, specific examples of both performance and philanthropy associations could be generated. For example, athletes who established performance associations with consumers would be considered to have strong athletic skills and appear in recognized competitions. Interestingly, having endorsement contracts was also mentioned a factor ensuring performance association. On the other hand, involvement in charitable activities and social advocacy were identified as common elements that philanthropic athletes possess. Examples mentioned by focus group interview participants are shown in Table 3-1. Athlete profile information (i.e., experimental stimuli) incorporated the target athlete’s performance or philanthropy characteristics. A stimulus for the control condition only provided general information about the athlete (see Figure 3-1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance association</th>
<th>Philanthropy association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athletic skills and abilities</td>
<td>Involvement of charitable activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending recognized competitions</td>
<td>Donations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving awards</td>
<td>School visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having endorsement contracts</td>
<td>Advocating social problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Performance association

Phil Franklin is a 26-year-old American tennis player. He has had a highly successful career as an athlete, and has competed in highly recognized tennis tournaments such as the Wimbledon and the US Open. Fans love to watch his games because of his outstanding performance as a tennis player.

Philanthropy association

Phil Franklin is a 26-year-old American tennis player. He has been a dedicated philanthropist, and has been actively involved in organizations that promote financial stability and independence among low-income Americans. People regard him as a public figure contributing to the society’s welfare.

Control

Phil Franklin is a 26-year-old tennis player.

Figure 3-1. Experimental Stimuli for Associations
Secondly, a focus group interview was also conducted to identify performance related and non-performance related scandals. The procedure was identical to the first focus-group interview. The participants of the second focus-group interview were seven undergraduate students from the University of Florida. They were asked to discuss specific scandals that athletes had engaged prior to the time of the interview session. Participants provided a number of athlete scandals (e.g., the use of PED, extramarital infidelity, match-fixing, dog fighting, and tax-evasion). They were then asked to assign each scandal into either performance-related or non-performance related scandal category. Examples for performance/non-performance related scandals are depicted in Table 3-2. The current study developed scandal stimuli based on the results of the second pre-test (see Figure 3-2). Specifically, PED use was selected as a performance related scandal while tax evasion issue was chosen as a non-performance related scandal. These decisions were based on careful examination of the interview results as well as previous literature (Lee & Kwak, 2015; Sato, Ko, Park, & Tao, 2015).

Table 3-2. Performance/Non-performance Related Athlete Scandals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance related scandals</th>
<th>Non-performance related scandals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PED</td>
<td>Dog fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match-fixing</td>
<td>Tax evasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment tampering</td>
<td>Extramarital infidelity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Driving under influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discriminatory remarks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of 216 participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk). A three (prior association: athletic performance vs. philanthropy vs. control) by two (scandal type: performance vs. non-performance) between-subjects experiment was conducted. They were randomly assigned to one of six conditions.
First, participants were asked to read a scenario explaining a tennis player named Phil Franklin’s (1) excellent athletic performance, (2) philanthropy activity engagements, or (3) general information (i.e., control condition). Athletic performance association scenario explained Phil Franklin’s excellent performance while the philanthropy association scenario described his charitable activities for low-income Americans. Participants in the control condition were given general information (i.e., he is a 26 year-old tennis player). In the next page, participants were asked to answer questions with checked items to validate that they had carefully read the scenario.

They then read another short news story with respect to Phil Franklin’s performance related scandal (i.e., use of performance enhancing drug) or non-performance related scandal (i.e., tax evasion). In the performance related scandal condition, participants received information describing that Phil Franklin used performance-enhancing drugs to improve his athletic performance. In the non-performance related scandal condition, participants were given information that described Phil Franklin’s tax evasion. Again, participants were asked to answer questions regarding the contents of the scenarios to validate their attention to the scenario (e.g., what did franklin do?). After reading a set of two scenarios about association and scandal, participants provided blame and online NWOM behavioral responses. Lastly, participants answered manipulation check items with respect to associations, scandals, and demographic information. They were also informed that all the information provided was fictitious.

**Measures**

The first experiment focused on whether contextual information can induce assimilative and contrasting judgment behavior of consumers. To examine this purpose
of the experiment, the nature of dependent measures must focus on the subsequently presented scandalized athlete (e.g., if a dependent variable is attitude, consumers may look back and form an overall impression). Otherwise, the initially presented athlete with a positive association would not be used as a reference point. Rather, consumers may form overall impressions by combining initially and subsequently received information of the athlete. Therefore, since the target was a scandalized athlete, dependent variables that focused on the negative aspects of the focal target were selected.

Consumer blame has been measured with a variety of scales (Carvalho, Muralidharan, & Bapuji, 2014; Klein & Dawar, 2004; Lei, Dawar, & Gurhan-Canli, 2012). However, due to the aforementioned reasoning, items intended to measure consumer blame were carefully adopted from previous research on the basis of content and face validity (Dunning, Pecotich, & O’Cass, 2004; Klein & Dawar, 2004; Whelan & Dawar, 2014). Actual items included “In your opinion, what is the level of blame Phil Franklin deserves specifically for the scandal?”, “To what extent do you consider Phil Franklin should be blamed for the scandal?” These two items were measured with a 10-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = Not at all to 10 = All the blame. The current study confirmed that the two item scale of consumer blame attained adequate reliability (α = .88).

As a second dependent variable (i.e., online NWOM behavior), participants were given an open-ended question asking to provide comments to an online forum (i.e., a fictitious ESPN forum) that discussed Phil Franklin’s scandal. Participants were told that the open-ended question was completely voluntary. By following an approached utilized by Dunn and Dahl (2012), participants who provided negative statements were coded
as 1, and those who did not provide negative statements were coded as 0. Inter-coder reliability was 91.3%, which was deemed adequate (Kassarjian, 1977).

**Data Cleaning**

Before testing the hypotheses, the data was cleaned using the following procedure. The first step focused on the association scenario attention check question item that participants answered immediately after reading the scenarios. Participants were asked to select one of four choices that were relevant to the association scenario (i.e., performance, philanthropy, dancing, and none of the above). Sixteen participants who clearly did not read the association scenario were excluded. Secondly, the same procedure was then employed for the scandal scenario attention check question, which included five choices (i.e., performance-enhancing drug, tax evasion, committed suicide, tampered racket, and extramarital affair). This step excluded four inattentive participants. Third, the median absolute deviation (MAD) technique was employed to detect outliers in each condition. MAD has benefit over the traditional outlier detection techniques because of its focus on medians. Scholars have utilized a variety of outlier detection techniques. For example, detecting outliers by considering the distance from the value to the mean scores has been commonly utilized. If the values are further than 2 times the standard deviation from mean scores, they are considered outliers. However, this technique has a critical drawback due to its focus on means and standard deviations. Specifically, means and standard deviations are highly perverted if outliers exist in the data set (Ley et al., 2013). It can be easy to imagine that an extreme outlier can drastically change mean and standard deviation especially in the experimental data set due to the relatively small sample size. Instead of mean and standard deviations, focusing on medians can resolve this problem. As Leys and his colleagues (2013)
recommended, the author used the distance from the median plus minus 2.5 times the MAD as the selection criteria. Applying this technique to each condition, a total of 23 outliers were detected. As a result, 173 useful responses were further analyzed. Table 3-3 depicts the sample size for each condition.

Table 3-3. Sample Size in Each Experimental Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PED scandal</th>
<th>Tax evasion scandal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance Association</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philanthropy Association</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

Sample Demographics

Mturk samples are usually from India and the United States (Ipeirotis, 2010). The current study programmed the data collection criteria based on participants’ geographic locations (i.e., only the United States). The participants of this study consisted of 173 Americans. The majority of participants were male (67.6%), young (Mage = 36.4, SD = 12.0), and relatively low income status (less than $60,000 = 74.0%). With respect to racial characteristics, almost 75% of the sample population was White/Caucasian followed by Asian (9.3%), African American (7.5%), and Hispanic (6.9%). Although Mturk samples are considered more heterogeneous relative to student samples as well as other online data platforms (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011), interpretation of the data should be exercised with caution since the sample demographics of this study are slightly different from the general population of the United States (e.g., they are more educated, but generate less income; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). Table 3-4 shows the summary of the sample demographics.
Table 3-4. Sample Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 24,999</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,000 – 59,999</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>58.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60,000 – 99,999</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 100,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather not to say</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>74.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average 36.4 (SD = 12.0)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Manipulation Check**

To validate the current study’s manipulations with regard to associations and scandals, two questions for associations and one for scandals were included. Specifically, the performance association manipulation was assessed by asking participants whether they agreed that Phil Franklin had showed tremendous athletic performance (i.e., Phil Franklin provided tremendous athletic performance to sport fans). They were asked to answer based on the content of the first scenario, measured with a 7 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*. The results of independent sample t-tests revealed that participants in the performance association condition showed higher ratings ($M = 6.07, SD = .66$) than those in the
control condition ($t(114) = 10.82$, $p < .01$, $M = 4.51$, $SD = .87$) and in the philanthropy condition ($t(114) = 11.29$, $p < .01$, $M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.16$).

Similar to the performance association manipulation check, the philanthropy association manipulation was assessed by asking participants if they thought Phil Franklin had engaged in philanthropic activities (i.e., Phil Franklin engaged in philanthropic activities to contribute to the society), measured with a 7 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree. The independent sample t-tests provided evidence that participants in the philanthropy condition thought Phil Franklin had engaged in philanthropic activities ($M = 6.42$, $SD = .53$) more than those in the control condition ($t(116) = 18.52$, $p < .01$, $M = 3.89$, $SD = .90$) and in the performance condition ($t(110) = 17.64$, $p < .01$, $M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.27$). These results showed that completely distinguishing performance and philanthropy associations is difficult as they usually established multiple associations with targets (Kim, 2013). However, the current study successfully manipulated the salience of such associations.

Next, the scandal manipulation was also assessed with one item that asked participants whether the scandal that Phil Franklin was involved in was related to his athletic performance. This item was also measured with a 7 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree. An independent t-test showed participants in the performance related scandal condition rated significantly higher on this scale ($t(171) = 43.01$, $p < .01$, $M = 6.44$, $SD = .61$) than the non-performance scandal condition ($M = 1.74$, $SD = .81$), indicating that the scandal manipulation was successful.
Hypotheses Testing

The first experiment assessed the effect of the previously established association salience (i.e., performance vs. control vs. philanthropy) and scandal type (i.e., performance vs. non-performance related) on consumer blame judgment of the scandalized athlete as well as online NWOM behavior. As mentioned in the sections above, this study hypothesized that a contrast effect manifests when the athlete’s salient association and scandal type matches, whereas an assimilation effect emerges when these two pieces of information do not match.

A two-way ANOVA was first conducted to test the effects on consumer blame. The results revealed a main effect of scandal type \( (F(1, 167) = 25.91, p < .01, \eta^2 = .13) \) but the main effect of association salience \( (F(2, 167) = .04, p = .96, \eta^2 = .01) \) was not significant. More importantly, these main effects were qualified by the two-way interaction of association salience and scandal type \( (F(2, 167) = 5.21, p < .01, \eta^2 = .03) \).

To further examine the significant interaction, simple effect tests were conducted to compare focal conditions. Consistent with the current study’s hypotheses, a significant difference between the performance association condition \( (M = 9.58, SD = .54) \) and control condition \( (M = 9.09, SD = .81; t(57) = 2.70, p < .01, r = .34) \) was confirmed when a performance related scandal occurred, providing evidence that H1 was upheld (i.e., contrast effect). Furthermore, consumers in the performance association condition \( (M = 8.25, SD = 1.03) \) blamed the scandalized athlete significantly less than those in the control condition \( (M = 8.83, SD = 1.05; t(57) = -2.09, p = .04, r = -.27) \) when a non-performance scandal occurred. This result supported H2 (i.e., assimilation effect). However, when philanthropy association was salient, consumers did not show significant differences in terms of blame in the performance related
scandal situation ($M_{\text{philanthropy}} = 9.19$, $SD_{\text{philanthropy}} = .77$ vs. $M_{\text{control}} = 9.09$, $SD_{\text{control}} = .81$; $t(55) = .47$, $p = .64$, $r = .06$) and in the non-performance scandal situation ($M_{\text{philanthropy}} = 8.64$, $SD_{\text{philanthropy}} = 1.12$ vs. $M_{\text{control}} = 8.83$, $SD_{\text{control}} = 1.05$; $t(59) = .65$, $p = .53$, $r = .07$).

Hence, $H3$ and $H4$ were not supported. The results of the simple effect tests for consumer blame are shown in Figure 3-3.

Figure 3-3. The Results of Simple Effect Tests for Consumer Blame

To examine consumers’ online NWOM behavior toward a scandalized athlete, participants were asked to provide comments to a fictitious ESPN forum where people could discuss the scandal. The experiment emphasized this question as completely voluntary so that participants did not feel obliged to provide their thoughts. These voluntary statements were coded as $1 = \text{negative comments}$ or, $0 = \text{otherwise}$ by the author and a trained coder.
The proportion of consumers who engaged in online NWOM behavior was assessed by a Z-test of proportion by following Dunn and Dahl (2012). The results indicated that consumers in the performance association condition with a performance related scandal were more likely to provide negative comments about the scandalized athlete \( (n = 24, 85.7\%) \) than those in the control condition \( (n = 20, 64.5\%, Z = 1.87, p = .06) \), supporting H5. Consumers in the performance association salient condition, however, did not tend to engage in more online NWOM behavior \( (n = 10, 37.0\%) \) relative to the control condition when the scandal type was non-performance related \( (n = 12, 40.0\%, Z = .23, p = .82) \), which rejected H6. However, in the non-performance scandal situations, consumers were less likely to engage in NWOM behavior when the performance association was salient \( (n = 10, 38.5\%) \) than the control condition \( (n = 20, 64.5\%, Z = 1.96, p = .05) \). This indicated that H7 was upheld (i.e., assimilation effect). Finally, the proportional differences of consumer online NWOM behavior between the philanthropy association salient condition \( (n = 12, 38.7\%) \) and the control condition \( (n = 12, 40\%, Z = .10, p = .92) \) were not significantly different, indicating that H8 was rejected. Figure 3-4 shows the results of online NWOM behavior.
Discussion

The first experiment examined the effects of association and scandal type on consumer blame and online NWOM behavior. Specifically, the current study posits that association can serve as an anchor for consumers’ comparative judgment with regard to scandalized athletes. As consumers’ default judgement is assimilation, the level of blame in all conditions is supposed to assimilate towards the prior positive association information. However, a domain match between performance (or philanthropy) association and performance (or non-performance) related scandal can increase the cognitive elaboration of consumer comparative judgment. In domain matching situations, consumers can detect the enormous dissimilarity between what they thought the athletes were and what they actually are. According to the selective accessibility model (Mussweiler, 2003), dissimilarities between the standard and the target lead to a contrast effect. In the domain mismatch conditions, a less diagnostic relationship
between association and scandal may not encourage consumers to further elaborate the information, which leads to a situation wherein consumers rely on a biased assimilative judgment that they initially made. The results provided support for several hypotheses and valuable insights from the perspective of assimilation and contrast effects.

Consistent with the contrast effect, when athletic performance association is salient, consumers blame scandalized athletes more than those in the control group when they are involved in performance related scandals (H1). Furthermore, the same pattern of results was obtained for online NWOM behavior, supporting H5. Specifically, consumers blame more and engage in online NWOM behavior more towards performance related scandalized athletes relative to athletes whose associations are not salient. As predicted, these results can be interpreted as evidence for judgment adjustment (Petty & Wegener, 1993). The domain match between performance association and performance related scandal made consumers further compare past and current athletes. Previous research also found that individuals tend to find more dissimilarities when they compare elaborately (Raghunathan & Irwin, 2001). Recalling the basic tenet of SAM (Mussweiler, 2003), the dissimilarity between the standard and the target can induce the contrast effect. Therefore, it should be reasonable to interpret that the domain match (i.e., salience of performance association and performance related scandal) could increase the comparability of past and current athlete statuses, which led to a contrast effect. These results are consistent with previous empirical findings examining the contrast effect (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2002; Damisch et al., 2006; Hanko et al., 2010). From the perspective of athlete endorsement evaluation and
branding, this result could shed lights on biased consumer judgment and behavior in severe athlete scandal (particularly performance related) situations.

The contrast effects supported in H1 and H5 reverted to an assimilation effect when scandalized athletes with salient performance association engaged in a non-performance related scandal, supporting H2. This assimilation effect can also be interpreted consistently with SAM (Mussweiler, 2003). Consumers may firstly engage in assimilative judgment due to their default judgment mode. The domain mismatch could make the situation where consumers can not perceive the diagnosticity of contextual information for the target judgment. In this case, consumers may not explicitly use the contextual information available to them and rely on an initial biased assimilative judgment. However, this pattern of result was not supported in the behavioral domain (H6 rejected), which proposes that consumers are less likely to engage in NWOM about the non-performance related scandalized athletes when their performance association is salient. It is appropriate to state that behavioral assimilation is more difficult to manifest relative to judgment assimilation, as supported in H2. Nevertheless, online NWOM behavior was insignificant when compared to the control condition.

When athletes’ philanthropy association is salient, the level of consumer blame was not different when compared to the salient performance association case regardless of scandal types, rejecting H3 and H4. The results revealed that there were no statistically significant assimilation and contrast effects, which can be influenced by the comparable characteristic range of the standard and the evaluation target. Chien, et al. (2010) asserted that an assimilation (or contrast) effect manifests when the range of overlap between the standard and the target is large (or small). Unlike in an athletic
performance association, a philanthropy association can provide a wide variety of connotations about the focal athletes (e.g., socially appropriate, morally desirable). Therefore, the results might be indicated that consumers may not necessarily be able to detect similarities and dissimilarities when their philanthropy association is salient, which could result in the weakening of the effects. Another potential explanation is the occurrence of a floor effect. That is, although this study measured consumer blame with a 10-point scale, the specific context related to athlete scandal might not have let consumers rate less blame than a certain minimum point.

With respect to NWOM behavior, the current study provided mixed findings when athletes’ philanthropy association is salient. When athletes are involved in a performance related scandal, consumers are less likely to provide negative comments about an athlete whose philanthropy association is salient, which supported H7. Additionally, the probability of engaging in NWOM behavior was not found to be significant when a non-performance related scandal occurred, rejecting H8. One potential explanation is that the effect of manipulation is much stronger on judgment than behavior, which means behavioral assimilation is much more difficult to manifest (Davies, Chun, & Kamins, 2005). Lastly, the main effect of scandal type was notably strong although the current study did not hypothesize it. Specifically, performance scandals are perceived more critically than non-performance scandals, which is consistent with previous sport management research (Hughes & Shank, 2005).

In sum, domain matching showed an over-corrected contrast effect while an assimilation effect manifested in the domain mismatch condition. However, these findings were only supported when athletes’ prior athletic performance association was
salient. In other words, consumer judgment of scandalized athletes who committed tax-
evasion scandals is more lenient when the athletes’ positive performance association is salient. In contrast, when philanthropy association was salient, neither assimilation nor contrast effect manifested. The insignificant results can be interpreted based on the contention that philanthropic activities span a wide variety of domains such as socially desirable gestures, which include environmental stewardship, diversity understanding, supporting cultural activities, community involvement, and philanthropic activities (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Even if the characteristics of a scandal fall into a non-performance domain, consumers might not be able to perceive the broad nature of the philanthropy association as a relevant source for their judgment.

Study 2 was then conducted to replicate the findings in a different research context, as Study 1 only focused on the preparation phase for unexpected athlete scandals. To minimize scandal damage, identifying and understanding effective post-scandal response strategies is also crucial. Hence, Study 2 examined the assimilation and contrast effect in post-scandal settings. Incorporating the results obtained in Study 1, Study 2 aimed to explore several alternative explanations: (1) the degree of domain match and, (2) potential floor effects. Specifically, the author strengthened the degree of domain match between scandals and response strategies particularly in non-performance scandal conditions. The author assumed that detecting domain match in non-performance scandal conditions was challenging task for consumers because non-performance scandals implied many different meanings (e.g., socially undesirable, environmentally unfriendly, and ethically uncommendable). Also, the mean score of consumer judgment of blame in Study 1 was rated exceptionally high in the range of 1
to 10. It implied that the measurement used in Study 1 might not have captured consumer judgment in detail. Specifically, it could only detect the difference around the upper score (e.g., 7-10 in the Likert type scale). Therefore, dependent variable was changed in Study 2 to aim more accurate measurement of consumer judgment.
CHAPTER 4
STUDY 2: EXPERIMENTS AND TESTING HYPOTHESES

Overview of Study 2

The purpose of the second experiment was to replicate the findings of the first experiment in a different research setting: post-scandal response strategy. Understanding consumers’ judgment mechanism for post-scandal response strategies is as important as the preparation phase for minimizing the damage of a scandal (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Hence, Study 2 examined how athletes’ scandal information, serving as contextual information, can influence consumer judgment of their post-scandal response strategies, as well as advocacy behavior. To do so, a three (scandal type: performance related vs. control vs. non-performance related) by two (response strategy type: performance related vs. non-performance related) between-subjects scenario-based experiment was conducted.

Based on the theoretical background applied in Study 1, the author hypothesized that prior information of a scandalized athlete can serve as a reference point for consumers’ subsequent judgment of response strategies that the scandalized athlete implements. The current study also examined the effect of contextual information on consumer online advocacy behavior towards the athlete. Before addressing the experimental design, it is important to note that consumers’ default judgment mode in Study 2 may differ from that in Study 1. Previous literature has stated that consumers can engage in default contrast judgment mode when the context is extreme (Herr et al., 1983). Since negative information is usually considered more diagnostic and extreme than positive and neutral information (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991), it is expected that consumers may initially engage in contrasting judgment in Study 2.
Specifically, contrast effect is expected to manifest as it is considered to be the default reaction in Study 2. However, when domain match exists between scandal types (i.e., performance related or non-performance related) and post-scandal response strategies (i.e., performance related or non-performance relates response), consumers can further compare two pieces of information (i.e., context and target) with ease. This elaborative comparison can adjust their initially biased judgment in the opposite direction, resulting in a correction assimilation effect (Petty & Wegener, 1993). However, since these two pieces of information do not match in terms of their domain, consumers may simply discard the information because it can be perceived as irrelevant (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991). In this case, they may stick with their initial biased judgment. Taken together, Study 2 examined the following hypotheses:

- **H9**: Consumer judgment of athletes' PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES are LESS FAVORABLE when they observe the athletes committing a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (assimilation effect).

- **H10**: Consumer judgment of athletes' PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES are MORE FAVORABLE when they observe the athletes committing a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (contrast effect).

- **H11**: Consumer judgment of athletes' NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES are MORE FAVORABLE when they observe the athletes committing a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (contrast effect).

- **H12**: Consumer judgment of athletes' NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES are LESS FAVORABLE when they observe the athletes committing a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (assimilation effect).

- **H13**: Consumers are LESS likely to ADVOCATE for athletes involved in PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES as a response to a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (assimilation effect).

- **H14**: Consumers are MORE likely to ADVOCATE for athletes involved in a PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES as a response to a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (contrast effect).
- H15: Consumers are MORE likely to ADVOCATE for athletes involved in NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES as a response to a PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (contrast effect).

- H116: Consumers are LESS likely to ADVOCATE for athletes involved in NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES as a response to a NON-PERFORMANCE RELATED SCANDAL (assimilation effect).

**Method**

**Apparatus Development: Scandal Types and Response Strategies**

To select specific athlete scandals for Study 2, the author aimed to choose equally severe performance and non-performance scandals. To achieve this purpose, the first pre-test was conducted to identify the level of scandal severity consumers’ perceived. Twelve participants were recruited from Mturk (\(M_{age} = 38.5\)). They were provided with a list of scandals that were identified in the focus group interview in Study 1. They were then asked to answer how severe the presented scandals were on a 7 point semantic differential scale (i.e., 1 = not severe; 7 = severe). As a result, child abuse scandal was rated as the most severe scandal (\(M = 6.92, SD = .29\)) while driving under the influence was rated the least severe scandal (\(M = 4.75, SD = 1.05\)). The use of PED (\(M = 6.25, SD = .75\)) as performance related scandal and extramarital affair (\(M = 6.17, SD = .72\)) as non-performance related scandal were selected because of their small standard deviations and that they were perceived to be equally high in terms of severity (\(p = .78\)).

Before selecting specific response strategies, alternative explanations for why Study 1 provided mixed findings regarding assimilation and contrast effect were contemplated so that Study 2 could be designed to cast out the potential factors preventing these effects. The author believed that there were two reasons limiting the accurate assessment of the effects: the degree of domain match and overall impression.
formation. With regards to the degree of domain match, the author might not have operationalized the strength of domain match sufficiently in Study 1. Although both assimilation and contrast effect manifested in the performance scandal conditions, none of the effects were supported in the philanthropy conditions. As mentioned in previous sections, salient philanthropy association could possibly activate a number of positive characteristics (e.g., socially appropriate, morally desirable). Unlike the performance association-scandal link, philanthropy-non-performance scandal link might not have been strong enough to test the hypotheses. Therefore, pre-tests were conducted in Study 2 to carefully design the strength of domain match.

To address the concern about the domain match, the author conducted a focus-group interview to identify response strategies that are domain congruent with selected scandals. Three scholars participated in this focus-group interview (i.e., 1 Ph.D. and 2 Ph.D. candidates). As a result, an anti-doping campaign was selected as a performance related response and a healthy relationship campaign was selected as a non-performance related response. Based on the aforementioned pre-tests, hypothetical news stories were created (see Figure 4-1 and 4-2).

With regards to the second concern about overall impression formation, the author believed that the potential problem was related to measurement. As mentioned in the above section, Study 1 selected consumer blame as a dependent variable to let participants focus on making judgment of the target (i.e., scandalized athlete). Although it was a viable option, the issue regarding overall impression formation might not have been resolved. Therefore, the author carefully contemplated how to measure the
dependent variables in Study 2. This was further addressed in the measurement section.

Performance related scandal

![Figure 4-1. Experimental Stimuli for Scandals](image)

CNN reported that Phil Franklin, a 26-year-old American tennis player, was involved in the use of performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs). The report reveals that Franklin admitted taking PEDs to improve his endurance and response speed.

Non-performance related scandal

![Figure 4-1. Experimental Stimuli for Scandals](image)

CNN reported that Phil Franklin, a 26-year-old American tennis player, was involved in an extramarital affair case. The report reveals Franklin admitted that he made approaches to several women at social occasions and had affairs while married to his wife.

Control

![Figure 4-1. Experimental Stimuli for Scandals](image)

Phil Franklin is a 26-year-old American tennis player.
Participants and Procedure

A total of 212 participants were recruited from Mturk. They were randomly assigned to one of six conditions. A three (scandal type: performance related vs. non-performance related vs. control) by two (response type: performance related vs. philanthropy related) between-subjects experiment was conducted. Specifically, a PED
scandal was selected as a performance related scandal and an extramarital affair scandal was chosen for a non-performance related scandal. Regarding response strategies, an anti-doping campaign was selected for a performance related response and a healthy relationship campaign was chosen for a non-performance related response.

The procedure for Study 2 was similar to that of Study 1. Participants were first asked to read instructions about fictitious athletes who committed either a performance (i.e., PED) or non-performance (i.e., extramarital affair) related scandal. Participants in the control group were given only general information about the athlete. After reading the scenario, they were asked to answer attention check questions to validate that they were paying attention to the information received. Participants then made an initial judgment of the fictitious athlete.

Next, participants were asked to read another scenario about the same athlete’s involvement in a positive activity as a post-scandal response. Participants were assigned to either performance related (i.e., anti-doping campaign) or non-performance related (i.e., healthy relationship campaign) post-scandal response conditions. After reading the second scenario, they answered another attention check question, followed by the dependent variables (i.e., judgment of the response and online advocacy behavior). At the end of the experiment, they also answered manipulation check questions and provided general demographic information. Finally, they were thanked and debriefed.

**Measures**

As the author mentioned in the sections above, Study 2 employed a different measurement technique to avoid overall impression formation. To do so, the author
measured consumer judgment once after the scandal manipulation and then again after the response strategy manipulation. The discrepancy of these judgment ratings was used as a dependent variable. Specifically, participants were asked to rate their judgment of the athlete immediately after the scandal manipulation. The first judgment was measured by a single item scale adopted from previous literature (Bickart & Schwarz, 2001; Henderson & Wakslak, 2010). The actual item was “how do you feel about Phil Franklin?”. This item was measured on a 10 point-Likert type scale ranging from 1 = Very negative to 10 = Very positive. After being exposed to the second manipulation about the response strategy, they were asked to make another judgment. Unlike the first judgment, participants were asked to make a judgment of the response strategy itself rather than Phil Franklin. The actual item was “how do you feel about what he did (i.e., specific charitable campaign)?”. This item was also measured with a 10 point-Likert type scale ranging from 1 = Very negative to 10 = Very positive. The discrepancy between these item ratings was calculated to determine the effectiveness of the post-scandal response strategy.

Some may critique this measurement technique for the following reasons: (1) multi-dimensional measurement can be desirable; (2) it may not be appropriate to combine two distinct judgment tasks. Numerous studies have used multi-dimensional scales and they have advantages with regards to scale reliability. However, single item measurement is particularly useful when participants answer questionnaire items online (Jordan & Turner, 2008) and other constraints (e.g., time and the number of items that researchers can include) are present (Robins et al., 2001). In fact, researchers have reported that single item measurement is as useful as multi-item measurement (Doyle
et al., 2003; Kunkel, Funk, & King, 2014; Kwon & Trail, 2005). Hence, the scale for the current study was deemed appropriate.

The second potential critique was related to the discrepancy score. Specifically, some may argue that the first and second judgment should be consistent (i.e., measuring judgment of Phil Franklin twice). This assertion may have been appropriate if the research focus was on consumers’ overall impression of the scandalized athlete. However, the current research examined whether the target judgment ratings were closer or farther away from the standard rather than overall impression. If studies measure the judgment of the same target twice, the subsequent judgment of the target would never be free from the influence of the first judgment. To minimize the overall impression formation, the current study needed to measure two related, but distinct judgments.

Participants were also provided with instructions which explained that ESPN just opened an online forum about Phil Franklin after the response strategy manipulation. They were then asked to provide any comments, as they wished. The author emphasized that answering this question was voluntary. Provided comments were coded by a researcher and a trained coder. Participants who provided positive comments were coded 1 as advocators, while those who did not provide any positive comments were coded 0 as non-advocators. Inter-coder reliability was 87%, which is deemed satisfactory (i.e., above 85% is desirable; Kassarjian, 1977).

After answering all the questions, participants were asked to answer manipulation questions regarding scandal types (i.e., What Phil Franklin did [i.e., assigned scandal was programmed to show up here] was related to athletic
performance), response strategy types What Phil Franklin did [i.e., assigned response was programed to show up here] was related to athletic performance), and domain match (i.e., the domains of scandal and the campaign are). Finally, they were thanked and debriefed.

**Data Cleaning**

Data cleaning was employed prior to testing the hypotheses. The first step was identical to Study 1, as it focused on attention check questions. Specifically, after participants read one of three news stories (i.e., PED scandal, extramarital affair scandal, or control), they were asked to indicate what the news story was about. Five different choices were provided to participants (i.e., PED, extramarital affairs, suicide, tax evasion, racket tampering, and none of the above). Participants were then asked to select only one of the five options. Nineteen participants did not select the option that was consistent with the news story. Thus, these participants were excluded from the data analysis, as their responses indicated a lack of active participation in this experiment.

The second step focused on an attention check question related to the response strategy manipulation. The same procedure was employed. Participants were given four different choices (i.e., anti-doping campaign, youth athlete development campaign, healthy relationship campaign, and financial responsibility campaign). This step resulted in the exclusion of 17 inattentive participants. Lastly, MAD technique was employed to detect outliers in each experimental condition. Consistent to Study 1, the distance from the median plus or minus 2.5 times the MAD was set as the cut-off criterion for outlier detection (Leys et al., 2013). Nine outliers were detected in this step. As a result, a total
of 167 valid responses were included in data analysis. The sample size for each experimental condition is provided in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1. Sample Size for Each Experimental Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Anti-PED campaign</th>
<th>Relationship campaign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance related scandal (PED)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-performance related scandal (extramarital affairs)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control (only general information)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

Sample Demographics

Identical to Study 1, the data collection method in Study 2 was also programmed with participants’ geographic locations because of the characteristics of Mturk’s sample population (i.e., a majority are Americans and Indians; Iperiotis, 2010). After the data cleaning process, a total of 167 responses were further analyzed. Similar to the sample characteristics of Study 1, a majority of the participants were Whites/Caucasians (79.8%), followed by Asians (6.6%), African Americans (6.6%), and Hispanics (5.5%). The income status was also similar to that of Study 1, as more than 70% of participants’ income levels were less than US$60,000. The samples were also relatively young (\(M_{age} = 36.4, SD = 12.3\)) and the gender ratio between males (50.9%) and females (49.1%) was deemed to be equal.
Table 4-2. Sample Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 24,999</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,000 – 59,999</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60,000 – 99,999</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 100,000</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather not to say</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>79.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>36.4 ($SD = 12.3$)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Manipulation Check**

Prior to testing the hypotheses, the author first performed manipulation checks in terms of scandals, response strategies, and domain match. Three manipulation check questions were included in the experiment. With regards to scandal manipulation, participants in the performance related scandal conditions perceived that the scandal was related to athletic performance significantly higher ($M = 6.40$, $SD = .75$) than the non-performance-related scandal conditions ($M = 1.68$, $SD = .94$, $p < .01$). Moreover, participants in the performance related response strategy conditions perceived that the response strategy was related to athletic performance significantly more ($M = 5.84$, $SD = .1.43$) than those in the non-performance related response strategy conditions ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.35$, $p < .01$). More importantly, the current study also included another question that further verified the domain match between scandals and response strategies. Specifically, participants were asked to provide their perceived domain
match. The actual item was “the domain of the scandal and the response strategy are similar.” This item was measured on a 10 point-Likert type scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 10 = *Strongly agree*. Independent sample t-tests showed that participants in the performance match condition provided higher domain match ratings 

\(M = 7.13, \ SD = 1.88\) than those in the mismatch condition \(t(56) = 9.78, \ p < .01, \ M = 2.27, \ SD = 1.64\). By the same token, participants in the non-performance domain match condition perceived domain match to be higher \(M = 8.34, \ SD = 1.70\) than those in the mismatch condition \(t(54) = 17.65, \ p < .01, \ M = 1.74, \ SD = .98\). These results indicated that the manipulations used in Study 2 were successful.

**Hypotheses Testing**

Study 2 examined the effect of scandals (i.e., performance related [PED] vs. non-performance related [extramarital affair] vs. control [general information]) and response strategies (i.e., performance related [anti-doping campaign] vs. non-performance related [healthy relationship campaign]) on the evaluation of response strategies and online advocacy behavior. This study predicted that an assimilation effect would manifest when a domain match between scandals and response strategies exists. On the other hand, a contrast effect would manifest when the match is incongruent. Descriptive statistics regarding consumer judgment of response strategy (i.e., discrepancy score) is depicted in Table 4-3.
Table 4-3. Descriptive Statistics: Consume Judgment of Charitable Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scandal Type</th>
<th>Response strategy type</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.97 (1.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-performance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.30 (1.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.32 (1.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-performance</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.18 (1.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-performance</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.37 (2.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-performance</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.31 (2.54)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to test the effects of each independent variable and the interaction on consumer judgment of post-scandal actions. The results indicated that the main effect of response strategy type on the discrepancy score of charitable activity judgment of was statistically significant \(F(1, 161) = 9.46, p < .01, \eta^2 = .05\), while the main effect of scandal type was not significant \(F(2, 161) = 8.09, p = .14, \eta^2 = .02\). These main effects were qualified by the two-way interaction of scandal and response strategy \(F(2, 161) = 11.73, p < .01, \eta^2 = .12\).

A series of simple effect tests were conducted to further assess differences between focal conditions. The results showed the difference regarding consumer judgment of response strategy between the performance related scandal condition \((M = 1.97, SD = 1.74)\) and the control condition \((M = 2.32, SD = 1.28; t(54) = -.84, p = .20, one-tailed, r = .11)\) were not statistically significant when performance related response strategy (i.e., anti-doping campaign) was implemented, leading to the rejection of H9 (assimilation effect). Nevertheless, there was a significant difference between the non-performance related scandal condition \((M = 4.37, SD = 2.57)\) and the control condition \((M = 2.32, SD = 1.28; t(50) = 3.59, p < .01, one-tailed, r = .45)\) when the athlete executed a performance related response strategy, providing support for H10 (contrast effect).
Focusing on the situation wherein the athlete employed a non-performance related response strategy (i.e., healthy relationship campaign), the results did not support a contrast effect, as the difference in terms of consumer judgment between the performance related scandal condition ($M = 2.30, SD = 1.82$) and the control condition ($M = 2.18, SD = 1.72$; $t(53) = .25, p = .40$, one-tailed, $r = .11$) was not significant. Thus, H11 was rejected. In contrast, participants in the non-performance scandal condition perceived the response strategy to be significantly less favorable ($M = 1.31, SD = 2.54$) than the control condition ($M = 2.18, SD = 1.72$; $t(55) = 1.51, p = .07$, one-tailed, $r = .20$), providing support for H12. The results of the simple effect tests for consumer judgment of post-scandal response strategies are provided in Figure 4-3.

![Figure 4-3. The Results of Simple Effect Tests: Post-Scandal Response](image)

The current study also hypothesized behavioral assimilation and contrast in post-scandal settings. By following Dunn and Dahl's (2012) procedure, participants were
asked to provide any comments to a fictitious ESPN forum wherein consumers can freely discuss Phil Franklin. Again, to reduce demanding effect, it was clearly stated that providing comments on the forum was completely voluntary. Participants who provided positive comments were coded 1 as advocator, whereas those who did not provide any positive comments were coded 0 as non-advocators.

Identical to Study 1, a Z-test of proportion was employed to examine the proposed hypotheses. Firstly, focusing on the performance related response strategy (i.e., anti-drug campaign), participants in the performance related scandal condition (i.e., PED; \( n = 6, \ 19.4\% , \ Z = 2.56, \ p < .01, \text{ one-sided} \)) were significantly less likely to advocate for the athlete than those in the control condition (\( n = 13, \ 52.0\% \)). Therefore, \( H13 \) (assimilation effect) was supported. However, all other behavioral assimilation and contrast hypotheses were rejected. The result of online advocacy behavior is depicted in Figure 4-4.

![Figure 4-4. The Results of Z-tests of Proportions: Online Advocacy Behavior](image)
The author conducted an additional data analysis to assess whether all the response strategies were perceived favorable. Paired sample t-tests were conducted to examine the differences between consumer evaluations of Phil Franklin. Although consumers in the domain mismatch conditions tend to make more favorable judgment of response strategies, the findings suggest that doing something good creates consumers' positive response after unexpected negative incidents regardless the domain match. The results of paired sample t-tests were shown in Table 4-4.

Table 4-4. The Results of Paired Sample t-tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scandal Type</th>
<th>Response strategy type</th>
<th>Difference between pre vs. post</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Paired sample t-test</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>1.97 (1.74)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6.29</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Non-performance</td>
<td>2.30 (1.82)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6.58</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>2.32 (1.28)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9.05</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Non-performance</td>
<td>2.18 (1.72)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.69</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-performance</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>4.37 (2.57)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8.26</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-performance</td>
<td>Non-performance</td>
<td>1.31 (2.54)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Study 2 examined the effects of domain match between athlete scandal types and response strategy types on consumer judgment and online advocacy behavior. The author expected that consumers would use the initially received scandal information as a reference point for subsequent judgment of response strategies. As mentioned in the section above, the author predicted that consumers' default judgment mode is contrasting due to the extremity of contextual information (i.e., scandal). When domains of athlete scandals and response strategies are congruent (e.g., PED scandal and anti-
doping campaign), consumers may be able to adjust their judgment in the opposite
direction. This would lead to less favorable judgment (i.e., assimilation effect). However,
if domain match is not secured, they may stick with their initial contrasting judgment
since further processing of incongruent information (e.g., PED scandal and healthy
relationship campaign) requires greater effort.

The results provided strong support for a contrast effect when the athlete who
committed a non-performance related scandal (i.e., extramarital affair) implemented a
performance related response (i.e., anti-doping campaign), supporting H9. Considering
the fact that default judgement is contrasting due to the extremity of contextual
information (Herr et al., 1983), it seems that consumers might have stuck with their
initial judgment. As Petty and Wegener (1993) asserted, adjusting judgment requires
cognitive resources to further process information. In particular, comparing two pieces
of less diagnostic information is a challenging task for consumers. Thus, relying on their
initial judgment can be the viable interpretation of this finding. Notwithstanding, this
pattern of result can also be interpreted based on SAM (Mussweiler, 2003), which
suggests that perceived dissimilarity (or similarity) between the context and targets
leads to a contrast (or assimilation) effect. Unlike the first interpretation asserted that
consumers simply stick with initial default judgment, consumers might have cognitively
detected dissimilarities between the two different domains. This interpretation has also
been documented in previous studies (Mussweiler, 2001; Chien et al., 2010).

When the athlete engaged in a performance related scandal (i.e., PED),
however, executing a performance related response strategy (i.e., anti-doping
campaign) was not judged significantly worse than the control condition. Although this
result led to the rejection of H1 (assimilation effect), the direction was consistent with correction assimilation effect (Petty & Wegener, 1993). In fact, a simple effect test between domain match ($M = 1.97$, $SD = 1.74$) and mismatch conditions ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 2.57$) indicated a statistically significant difference ($t(56) = -4.21$, $p = .01$, one-tailed, $r = .49$). Since the control group was also placed in the middle of domain match and mismatch conditions, the result at least implied the hypothesized assimilation effect.

Focusing on the non-performance related response strategy, consumer judgment in the domain match condition assimilated to the standard of comparison, supporting H12. This result can also be interpreted based on SAM. Flexible correction model (Petty & Wegener, 1993) also mentioned that adjusting default judgment in the opposite direction requires cognitive effort. Domain match might have helped in reducing the cognitive effort that consumers had to exert.

In contrast, participants in the domain mismatch condition (i.e., PED and healthy relationship campaign) did not rate the response strategy more favorably than the control group, leading to the rejection of H11. Although this pattern of results is inconsistent with the current study’s assumption, an alternative explanation can be provided by the reflection and evaluation model (REM; Markman & McMullen, 2003). REM predicts that consumers might be implicitly influenced by contextual information and this implicit influence can lead to an assimilation effect.

The results regarding online advocacy behavior revealed a significant assimilation effect only in the situation wherein the performance domain match was present. Specifically, consumers were less likely to engage in online advocacy behavior for an athlete who was involved in a PED scandal and announced his involvement in an
anti-doping campaign as a post-scandal response strategy. This pattern of assimilation effect was also in accordance with the literature (Chien et al., 2014; Forehand & Perkins, 2005; Petty & Wegener, 1993). As addressed in Study 1, assimilation and contrast effect in behavioral domains are more difficult to manifest (Davies et al., 2005) since consumer behavior is stimulated by a wide variety of variables (e.g., attitude, emotion, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control; Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Havlena & Holbrook, 1986). Lastly, as the results of paired sample t-tests revealed, all the response strategies were perceived at least favorable. Although the effectiveness of response strategies differ depending on the domain match, athletes and marketing managers in charge of athlete branding should engage in positive activities regardless the domain match.
CHAPTER 5
GENERAL DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

Unexpected detrimental events that athletes commit are broadcast on a daily basis. Although prior studies attempted to explain consumer reactions towards scandalized athletes (Arai, 2015; Doyle et al., 2014; Fink et al., 2009; Lee & Kwak, 2015), no prior research has shed light on the effect of contextual information on consumer judgment and behavior in athlete scandal settings to date. Consumer judgment is never free from contextual information (Bless & Schwarz, 2010). Hence, consumer judgment is always biased by the effects of contextual information. The purpose of the current research was to further understand consumer reactions when they observed athlete scandals by considering the effect of contextual information. Specifically, the author hypothesized that consumer judgment of and behavior towards the judgment target can change due to their previously established image and status. Influenced by contextual information, consumer judgment and behavior can move closer to (or farther away from) the contextual information, which is termed as assimilation (or contrast) effect. Understanding the direction of biased judgment, rather than avoiding it, can help develop effective strategies for the athlete scandal damage minimization.

Two experiments examined how consumer judgment and behavior were influenced by contextual information. Study 1 was conducted to examine how athletes' previously established positive associations (i.e., athletic performance association and philanthropy association) can serve as contextual information to influence consumer judgment (i.e., consumer blame) of and behavior (i.e., online NWOM behavior) towards the athletes committing scandals. The findings of Study 1 provided support for
assimilation and contrast effect when athletes’ athletic performance association is salient, which was in accordance with the previous literature in social psychology (Bless & Wanke, 2010; Mussweiler, 2003; Petty & Wegener, 1993; Chien et al., 2014). However, the results did not show notable findings when athletes’ philanthropy association was salient. The author assumed that these results were produced due to the degree of domain match. Specifically, unlike athletic performance associations, philanthropy associations are a broader concept in nature and can activate a wide variety of positive aspects in diverse domains. Consumers might have simply discarded philanthropy association information, as they perceived it to be irrelevant.

Study 2 focused on a different research setting (i.e., scandals and post-scandal response strategies) to further examine assimilation and contrast effect by considering the effect of domain match. The findings provided support for both assimilation and contrast effects in a situation in which athletes committed a non-performance related scandal (i.e., extramarital affair). Specifically, when athletes are involved in such non-performance related scandals, domain mismatch response strategies (i.e., performance related response strategies) should be implemented. With a strict interpretation, Study 2 did not support assimilation and contrast effects in the performance related scandal situations. However, the results showed that the data patterns are at least consistent in terms of the directions of the relationships, as the author predicted. Therefore, it is reasonable to note that domain mismatch (or match) response strategies can receive more (or less) favorable judgment by consumers.

**Theoretical and Managerial Implications**

This research provided important theoretical contributions as well as practical implications to the sport management realm. First, this study will contribute to the
literature of sport scandal/crisis management. Although scholarly interests in sport scandals have recently grown (Doyle et al., 2013; Fink et al., 2009; Lee & Kwak, 2015), no prior research has incorporated the effect of contextual information into empirical studies. Consumers’ reactions at the times of sport scandals may be more dynamically different than the knowledge that sport management scholars have accumulated. In fact, applying the sound theoretical base from social psychology, this study could provide alternative explanations of consumer judgment of the scandalized target. Specifically, the domain match between what the athlete used to be seen and what he/she is currently seen can predict the direction of consumer reactions. In this sense, the current research provided new insights to the existing body of sport management research.

The current study also provided useful insights to industry practitioners. By understanding the fact that the direction of consumer judgment and behavior change based on the domain match, sport marketing managers in charge of athlete branding should be able to develop athlete scandal preparation plans by encouraging athletes to put effort on image establishment for unexpected scandals that may potentially occur in the future. By the same token, they will also be able to select appropriate response strategies by using the relationship between scandal types and the causes of positive campaigns. In sum, practitioners can incorporate the knowledge for developing strategies of scandal damage minimization as well as strategic repositioning of the scandalized athletes.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The current research contains several limitations. Firstly, participants in the series of experiments in this study are slightly different from the general US population
such as the levels of income and education (Paolacci et al., 2010). Randomization can cast out the effect of these socio-demographic variables, but the potentially existing differences between the general population and sample population may provide alternative results in terms of consumer judgment.

Numerous studies regarding social comparison research have usually included the standard of comparison and the judgment target independent of each other (Bless & Schwarz, 1999; Damisch et al., 2006; Forehand & Perkins, 2005; Wanke, Bless, & Igou, 2001). The series of experiments in this research, however, focused on consumer judgment of the same object (i.e., athlete). In this situation, it is quite challenging to completely rule out the possibility that consumers compare the target judgment to other external sources. Although the experiments in this research were rigorously designed to encourage consumers to use the judgment targets’ previous information for their overt judgment, they might have automatically activated Tiger Woods, for example, when they received information about extramarital affair scandals.

Another limitation was also associated with the contextual information. The current study was designed to set the athletes possessed salient association (i.e., performance or philanthropy) as the contextual information. However, clearly distinguishing the athletic performance and philanthropy associations might not have been realistic. Recently, athletes’ involvement in charitable activities is quite common and can be observed on a daily basis. Therefore, consumers might have formed unmentioned impressions. For example, when they received information about an athlete whose performance association was salient, they might have imagined the
athlete could be involved in charitable activities even if it was not mentioned. This fuzzy distinction could have provided the mixed findings in Study 1.

Numerous studies have provided mixed findings in terms of the effect of athlete scandals on consumer reactions (Lee et al., 2013; Doyle et al., 2014; Fink et al., 2009). Similar to the current dissertation research, designing studies with a consideration of athlete scandal types (e.g., on/off-field, performance/non-performance related) has been a common research approach (Arai, 2014; Lee et al., 2013; Lee & Kwak, 2015). Along with examining the athlete scandal type, future research should also explore a threshold to further delineate the impact of athlete scandals. For example, although previous research has proposed that a performance related scandal is perceived to be more severe (Hughes & Shank, 2005), is there a certain line that this assertion loses the meaning? To be more specific, is a child abuse scandal less severe than a sport equipment tampering scandal? This question awaits future investigation.

The current study only focused on individual athlete scandals. Many other questions in various contexts are still waiting for future investigation. Firstly, to further extend athlete scandal literature, future studies should also focus on consumption domains such as purchase intention of endorsed products. Second, scholars should give more attention to not only individual athletes or sport organizations, but also sport fan-induced scandals. This line of research has received surprisingly little attention to date despite the fact that sport consumption experiences induce strong arousal and excitation. To sustain or even improve the quality of sport products, more research about the dark sides of sport (e.g., fan riots and hooliganism) should be conducted. Although sport scandal studies have recently started to receive keen scholarly interests
in the field of sport management, no prior research has examined the positive sides of scandals to date. In the marketing discipline, scholars started to find positive effects of negative information (Berger et al., 2010; Ein-Gar, Shiv, & Tormala, 2012). For example, prior research found that valence of information can be forgotten and negative information actually boosts consumer recall and recognition more than positive information as time goes by (Berger et al., 2010). Along with accumulating knowledge regarding dark sides of sport, researchers in the sport management realm should also explore how to utilize the negative information for marketing and management strategies.

**Concluding Statements**

The current research made significant contributions to the existing body of sport management literature by providing new insights to better understand consumers’ comparative judgment in scandal settings. The author hopes that this study can serve as a catalyst for future research activities regarding bias in sport consumer judgment. This study also provided useful knowledge that practitioners in the sport industry can utilize. The author believes that understanding and utilizing the bias elicited by contextual information can help sport industry professionals to develop effective communication strategies.
APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL FORM

Institutional Review Board
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

March 13, 2015

TO: Shintaro Sato
PO Box 118208
Campus

FROM: Ira S. Fischler, PhD; Chair
University of Florida
Institutional Review Board 02

SUBJECT: Exemption of Protocol #2015-U-0269
Consumer Evaluation of Scandalized Athletes: An Assimilation-Contrast Approach

SPONSOR: None

Your protocol submission was reviewed by the IRB. The Board determined that your protocol is exempt based on the following category:

45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

Should the nature of your study change or if you need to revise this protocol in any manner, please contact this office before implementing the changes.

IF: dl
APPENDIX B
QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS FOR STUDY 1

1. Attention check items for association (after the first scenario)
   - What was the news story about?
     1. Phil Franklin’s athletic performance
     2. Phil Franklin’s philanthropic activities
     3. Phil Franklin’s dancing skills
     4. None of the above

2. Attention check item for scandal (after the second scenario)
   - What did Phil Franklin do?
     1. Racket tampering
     2. The use of performance-enhancing drugs
     3. Extramarital affair
     4. Tax evasion
     5. Suicide

3. Consumer blame
   - In your opinion, what is the level of blame Phil Franklin deserves for the incident?
   - To what extent do you consider Phil Franklin should be blamed for the incident?
     (1 = Not at all blame 10 = All the blame)

4. Consumer NWOM behavior
   - ESPN just opened an online forum about Phil Franklin to figure out our public opinion. Please post any comments if you wish. (Open-ended voluntary question)

5. Manipulation questions for association
   - Please answer the question based on the first news story you read.
Phil Franklin provided tremendous athletic performance to sport fans.
(1 = Strongly disagree    7 = Strongly agree)

- Please answer the question based on the second news you read.

Phil Franklin engaged in philanthropic activities to contribute to the society.
(1 = Strongly disagree    7 = Strongly agree)

6. Manipulation question for scandal

- The scandal was related to athletic performance.

(1 = Strongly disagree    7 = Strongly agree)

7. Demographic information

- My age is ___________________.

- My ethnic background is:

1. African American
2. Asian
3. White/Caucasian
4. Hispanic
5. Other

- Please indicate your approximate annual income (US$).

1. Less than 24,999
2. 25,000 – 59,999
3. 60,000 – 99,999
4. 100,000 – 149,999
5. Over 150,000
6. Rather not to say

- My gender is:

1. Male
2. Female
APPENDIX C
QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS FOR STUDY 2

1. Attention check item for response scandal (after the first scenario)
   - What did Phil Franklin do?
     1. Racket tampering
     2. The use of performance-enhancing drugs
     3. Extramarital affair
     4. Tax evasion
     5. None of the above

2. Initial judgment about Phil Franklin
   - How do you feel about Phil Franklin?
     (1 = Very negative 10 = Very positive)

3. Attention check items for response strategy (after the second scenario)
   - What was the news story about?
     1. Phil Franklin’s athletic performance
     2. Phil Franklin’s philanthropic activities
     3. Phil Franklin’s dancing skills
     4. None of the above

4. Judgment of response strategy
   - How do you feel about what Phil Franklin did (i.e., assigned response was programed to show up here)?
     (1 = Not at all blame 10 = All the blame)

5. Consumer online advocacy behavior
   - ESPN just opened an online forum about Phil Franklin to figure our public opinion. Please post any comments if you wish. (Open-ended voluntary question)

6. Manipulation questions for scandal
Please answer the question based on the first news story you read.

What Phil Franklin did (i.e., assigned scandal was programmed to show up here) was related to athletic performance.
(1 = Strongly disagree    7 = Strongly agree)

7. Manipulation question for response strategy

- Please answer the question based on the second news you read.

What Phil Franklin did (i.e., assigned response was programmed to show up here) was related to athletic performance.
(1 = Strongly disagree    7 = Strongly agree)

8. Manipulation check question for domain match

- The domains of scandal and the campaign are:

  (Semantic differential scale: Similar – Dissimilar)

9. Demographic information

- My age is ___________________.

- My ethnic background is:
  1. African American         4. Hispanic
  2. Asian                   5. Other
  3. White/Caucasian

- Annual income (US$)
  1. Less than 24,999         4. 100,000 – 149,999
  2. 25,000 – 59,999         5. Over 150,000
  3. 60,000 – 99,999         6. Rather not to say

- My gender is:
  1. Male
  2. Female
LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Shintaro Sato was born in Sapporo, Hokkaido, Japan. He majored in physical education (concentration in outdoor recreation) at Hokkaido University of Education. After receiving his bachelor’s degree in 2006, he further pursued his academic career in the Department of Sport Sciences at Waseda University. In 2011, he started the Ph.D. studies in the Department of Tourism, Recreation and Sport Management at the University of Florida under Dr. Yong Jae Ko’s supervision.

During his Ph.D. studies, he had dedicated to consumer judgment research. He had also conducted many research projects in a variety of contexts such as outdoor sport participation, athlete endorsement, and athlete scandals from the lens of consumer judgment. He presented his research at recognized academic conferences held by the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), the Sport Marketing Association (SMA), and Sport Management Association of Australia & New Zealand (SMAANZ), and published his work in European Sport Management Quarterly. Due to his dedication and accomplishments, he was given several awards such as the outstanding international student award in 2013, University of Florida HHP best research award in 2014, and a finalist award for the 2015 NASSM student research competition.

In August 2015, he officially graduated from the University of Florida with a Doctor of Philosophy degree in health and human performance with Sport Management specialization. He is further pursuing his academic career and strives to contribute to the Sport Management academia.