# HOW SPORTING GOODS BRANDS SHOW THEIR SPORT BRAND AUTHENTICITY?

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Brand strategy is one of the key factors for successful corporate management. The first step of strong brand building is setting up the brand core image, brand identity. Nowadays brand authenticity is studied as a core branding source by some marketing field researchers. This research focuses on the brand authenticity can make sporting goods brand succeed consistently. Sport authentic brands are loved by customers as their loyal sporting goods brand. Customers consume a sporting brand as an image of authentic high performing athletes. This research defined sport brand authenticity based on the former studies of social science. And this research showed the differences in brand communication between sport authentic brand and non-sport authentic brand through content analysis of sporting goods brand website. There were meaningful differences in their way of brand communication. Sport authentic brands tried to show images of sports activities and their high performing equipment in their website, and their communication sources are more concentrated on male, elite athlete with impassive and serious face.

Authenticity, Brand Communication, Sport Brand Authenticity, Content Analysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

Although there are many sporting goods brands in the world, some brands are globalized and their business domains are spreading out, but some other brands' business performance grows worse and shut down their businesses. What is the key factors for consistent success in sporting goods industry?

In the process of expansion of the sporting goods company business, some brands cover only sport oriented categories and items, but some other brands try to get fashion market out of boundary of sports performance to increase their market share. It means that sporting goods brands are pursuing different image and character in order to associate with different consumers and they are making an effort to build their own brand equity. When companies do marketing activity and advertisement, they develop brand positions based on their brand authenticity. Many scholars claim that representing authenticity is not only identifying brand character but also crucial factor of brand positioning. In addition, finding effective way to express and create authentic image is a very sophisticated work, and sometime consumers recognize that marketing for creating authenticity is not authentic but commercial image.
This research define the concept of sport brand authenticity based on the former social science research and try to show how the sport authentic brand represents their authenticity. The concept of sport brand authenticity is extracted from the most pure and essential concept of sport that is physical achievement and performance that Kang describe as the most important aspect of sport. Sport brand authenticity is defined as the brand of pursuing sports spirit [1].

Strong sporting goods brands like Nike and Adidas are trying to reinforce their professional sport brand image through their brand communication activities. They have been employing many big sport stars in their advertisement consistently and they held many sport oriented events. Nike and Adidas are associated as the best sporting goods brand in every consumers' mind. Sport brand authenticity is truly important to make sporting goods brand successful.
So this study tried to investigate global sport brand to find the differences between sport authentic brands and non-authentic brands in terms of brand communication methods.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### A. Sport Brand Authenticity

Keller explains that brand equity includes strength and value of it as well [2]. The strength of brand is consumers and retailers who make that brand acquire advantageous position continuously. Considering brand equity, brand identity is the most important aspect in marketplace, as it is essential factor to understand present brand position and consumer perception of the brand and it can provide important navigator that direct the way to be extended to new markets and new product in the future.

Building authenticity is the most fundamental stage in contemporary marketing activities. The concept of authenticity in consumer science is very elusive and dynamic. Authenticity of brand is crucial factor of brand identity [3]. And brand essence is considered as core value of brand and it is associated with authenticity that pertains the brand aspects that consumers consider as distinctive.

In this research sport authenticity is defined through the concept of sport spirit. Sport authenticity is extracted from the most pure and essential concept in sport that is physical achievement and performance that described as the most important aspect of sport [2]. And the other aspect of Sport Authenticity is defined as sportsmanship in this study.

WADA(world anti-doping agency) announced about the core concept of WADA. That covers core sport spirit that generally falls into legitimacy and virtue which is one of the most vital notion of authenticity in management and sociology. Especially most sporting goods brands want to communicate with consumers by the concept of sports authenticity. Even though the core product of brand is apparel and shoes for every day, they would like to express inspiration from sports authenticity in their communication tools, if they are originated from sports.

### B. Website Contents and Branding

Branding is a complex process that is performed across all types of media, from product packaging, TV commercials and magazine ads to interior store decoration and logotype design. Of course branding also applies to web design [4]. The factors presented in website are designed to represent brand identity and strategy. So contents analysis on website of brand may give critical information about strategy of brands which includes core identity they try to develop and communicate with consumer. The website which is managed by brands is the most considerable tool that can represent their identity. Brand managers compose their contents with high intention in website in order to make brand association with consumers. Thus the contents of websites are different according to their brand identities and management strategy. The main contents of websites are objects of analysis.

Jhally emphasizes the reason why current advertisement is influenced by sociological meaning of gender. Gender is not natural but rather a sociocultural construction which refers to the relationship between men and women or femininity and masculinity [5]. In this image-conscious society, it seems impossible to escape the message that the female body beautiful is slim and toned. It should be recognized that there are many competing and ambiguous body image that maintain the dominance of hetero sexually attractive female bodies [6]. So when advertisers employ models on official website for publication or promotion of brands, they need to consider which gender is the most appropriate one to achieve their purpose of advertisement.

Brand personality is an important factor of brand equity and it is mainly created by user image, thus the image of models who are employed in brand advertisement is highly associated with brand personality [7]. Furthermore the profession of model who use the product of brand in their communication activities is considerably influential to express brand identity. As a result, brands should select their model with high intention for advertisement and consider the image of model which is supposed to be influential on creating brand image. Most global sports brands make sponsorship agreement with elite athletes for promoting brand awareness and identity. Now we are consistently facing messages from advertisement of companies and they are talking their product is right. But people tend to primarily decide their opinion emotionally. Thus Hill claims that 21st century marketing can realize success by being on-emotion, first and foremost. Being on-message remains a vital but secondary strategy [8]. Most consumers can get emotional effect from the looks of models in advertisement. Thus looking of models is one of critical roles to express brand image.

### C. Sport Brand Categories

Sporting goods brands can be divided into three categories by the criteria of sales volume and sport categories that they are focusing on. That are ‘Conglomerate sports brand’, ‘Athletic sports brand’ and ‘Sports life style brand’. Conglomerate sports brands cover every sports category and every item, even though the products are not for sports activity but originated from sport. Nike and Adidas are positioned in Conglomerate Sports Brand. Athletic sports brands are focusing on the development of technology for better performance of players, so they don’t carry many categories of sports. And also they don’t make many effort to build an emotional image for sports authenticity but keep trying to make better goods in terms of function and technique for offering better performance to players. Sports life style Brand came from sports origin. And they still have DNA from sport but their brand identity from sports authenticity is diluted. They just want to enjoy some mood of sports but don’t want to generate sales in sports performance categories. This research tried to show the difference of sports authenticity in their communication from the perspectives of three sports categories. The former two types of brand were assorted as authentic sport brand, and the latter type of brand considered as non-authentic sport brand in this study.

## III. EMPIRICAL STUDY

This research try to show the way to represent their sport authenticity through analyzing the websites visual component by contents analysis.

Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or images. Researchers quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of such words and images, then make inferences about the meanings.

**<Table 1. - Theme of contents>**

| Authenticity | Class. | Brand | Sports Activity | Equipment | Apparel & Shoe | Fashion(pictorial, model cut) | Etc. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Authentic Sport Brand | Conglomerate Sports Brand | Adidas | 50% | 33% | | 17% | |
| | | Nike | | 17% | 50% | | 33% |
| | | Ave. | 25% | 25% | 25% | 8% | 17% |
| | Athletic Sports Brand | Atomic | 13% | 88% | | | |
| | | Babolat | 60% | 40% | | | |
| | | Burton | 14% | 29% | 29% | 29% | |
| | | Head | 43% | 57% | | | |
| | | Salomon | | 100% | | | |
| | | Taylormade | 50% | 50% | | | |
| | | Titleist | 60% | 40% | | | |
| | | Wilson | | 100% | | | |
| | | Asics | 25% | 50% | 25% | | |
| | | Mizuno | 33% | 33% | | | 33% |
| | | Underamour | 20% | 60% | | | 20% |
| | | Ave. | 29% | 59% | 5% | 3% | 5% |
| Non-Authentic Sport Brand | Sports Life Style Brand | Converse | | | 33% | 67% | |
| | | Descetnte | 40% | 20% | 20% | 20% | |
| | | Fila | 17% | | 67% | 17% | |
| | | Fred ferry | | | 75% | 25% | |
| | | Lacoste | 17% | | | 83% | |
| | | Lecoqsportif | 33% | | 22% | 44% | |
| | | Puma | | | 50% | 50% | |
| | | Ave. | 15% | 3% | 38% | 44% | 0% |

**<Table 2. – Human elements of contents>**

| Authenticity | Category | Brand | Model Gender | | | Model Profession | | | | Looks on Face | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Male | Female | Child | Elite Athlete | Amateur | Entertainer | Fashion Model | Serious/ Impassive | Smile |
| Authentic Sport Brand | Conglomerate Sports Brand | Adidas | 75% | 25% | 0% | 50% | 11% | 0% | 39% | 61% | 39% |
| | | Nike | 75% | 25% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% |
| | | **Ave.** | **75%** | **25%** | **0%** | **75%** | **6%** | **0%** | **19%** | **81%** | **19%** |
| | Athletic Sports Brand | Atomic | 100% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% |
| | | Babolat | 67% | 33% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 83% | 17% |
| | | Burton | 65% | 35% | 0% | 65% | 35% | 0% | 0% | 69% | 31% |
| | | Head | 88% | 13% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% |
| | | Salomon | 100% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% |
| | | Taylormade | 100% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% |
| | | Titleist | 94% | 6% | 0% | 94% | 6% | 0% | 0% | 94% | 6% |
| | | Wilson | 100% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% |
| | | Asics | 100% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 67% | 33% |
| | | Mizuno | 100% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 88% | 13% |
| | | Underamour | 100% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 67% | 33% |
| | | **Ave.** | **92%** | **8%** | **0%** | **96%** | **4%** | **0%** | **0%** | **79%** | **21%** |
| Non-Authentic Sport Brand | Sports Life Style Brand | Converse | 32% | 68% | 0% | 0% | 21% | 58% | 21% | 42% | 58% |
| | | Descetnte | 81% | 19% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 35% | 65% | 35% | 65% |
| | | Fila | 55% | 27% | 18% | 18% | 0% | 9% | 73% | 36% | 64% |
| | | Fred ferry | 50% | 17% | 33% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 67% | 33% |
| | | Lacoste | 63% | 37% | 0% | 32% | 0% | 5% | 63% | 47% | 53% |
| | | Lecoqsportif | 17% | 83% | 0% | 17% | 0% | 83% | 0% | 50% | 50% |
| | | Puma | 33% | 67% | 0% | 33% | 0% | 67% | 0% | 33% | 67% |
| | | **Ave.** | **47%** | **45%** | **7%** | **14%** | **3%** | **37%** | **46%** | **44%** | **56%** |

We focused on the illustration and visual components in their website. First of all, the main theme of websites is significant. There are several kinds of themes like sports activities theme, professional equipment theme, apparel and shoes theme and fashion oriented theme in the websites. Sports activity theme is defined as the scene of movement by athletes or amateur players and professional equipment theme is just focusing on the equipment feature or technology of it without human beings. Apparel & shoes theme is defined as the product focused page composed by apparel and shoes. Fashion oriented theme emphasizes factors which are related with fashion oriented scene. And human elements mainly consist of gender, profession and looks on face. In this study, I segment the main job of the models into 4 categories, elite athlete, amateur player, entertainer and fashion model that are appearing in website for the purpose of promotion.

In this study, Looks on face of models were classified into 2 types, serious/impassive and smile.

Research Samples are confined to 20 official websites of each sporting goods brand which are targeting the Korean consumers. And this research suggests the relationship between brand authenticity and the websites visual components like theme of main page, human elements (gender, occupation of

model, looks on face), product (equipment, apparel, shoes and so on).

The results of contents analysis about theme of websites' contents are shown in <Table 1>. Authentic sport brand websites' contents theme focused on the sports activity and equipment. The proportion was over 70%. And non-authentic sport brand websites' contents theme focused on the apparels, shoes, and other fashion items. The proportion was over 80%. The results of human elements are like <Table 2>. The models of authentic sport brand websites were mainly male, elite athlete. And the model's face expression was serious and impassive. The overall proportion of these characteristics is over 80%.

On the other hand, non-authentic sport brands' model are different. The proportion of male model is under 50%, over 80% of models' profession is entertainer and fashion model. And the looks on face of model is smile. The proportion is 56%. That is compared to the proportion of authentic sport brands' figure 21%.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion of this contents analysis, sport authentic brands don't hesitate to express confidence which is come from advanced technology and craftsmanship of the brands. They are continuously trying to make an effort to build high performing function and pursuit professional players' image. They tried to show that the apparel and footwear of their brand is designed and used for authentic sports activities. They are more focusing on representing behavioral aspect (physical aspect) of sports authenticity in every section. They frequently use black and white color to express their strong and pure image of brand in website visual presentation. In human element section, they employ male and professional athlete for model over 90% and the portion of serious look on the face is much higher than other categories.

This result implies that they are trying to keep and develop authenticity of sports consistently, because business spirit and strategy is relatively strict to sports itself. Even they don't want to share some effort to consider other part of sport, emotional aspect of sport authenticity.

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