



The impact of sports celebrity endorsement on profit generation from endorsed brands: A study of Cristiano Ronaldo

Prof. N. E. Shezi

University of South Africa, College of Economic and Management Sciences, Department of Marketing and Retail Management, South Africa, Pretoria, 0002.

Email: shezine@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

Celebrity endorsement is a widely utilized strategic marketing tool employed by numerous companies globally. This study specifically examines sport celebrity endorsement, focusing on Cristiano Ronaldo's impact on profit generation for the endorsed brands. Two prominent brands, Nike and Louis Vuitton, featured among the top ten most valuable fashion brands in 2024, were selected for analysis. The research utilized secondary data to meet its objectives. The findings demonstrate that Cristiano Ronaldo has a positive influence on profit generation for the brands he endorses. These results support the integration of high-profile sport celebrities into companies' marketing communication strategies to drive profitability. Brand managers who have not yet adopted a sport celebrity endorsements strategy are encouraged to explore this approach, as it has proven to be a viable strategy for significantly boosting company profits. However, like any research, this study has certain limitations. Future research is recommended to explore the impact of local sport celebrities on profit generation for locally endorsed brands.

Keywords: Celebrity endorsement, sport celebrity endorsement, Nike, Louis Vuitton, Cristiano Ronaldo

INTRODUCTION

In today's global village that is highly competitive, brands are constantly seeking innovative ways to differentiate themselves and increase their brand value. One powerful strategy that has gained significant attention is celebrity endorsement, specifically within the sports industry (Wang, 2024:46). The use of sport celebrities as brand endorsers is a potent tool in marketing, as these figures often possess strong personal brands that can be transferred to the products they endorse (Chen, 2021:164). Sport celebrity endorsements provide brands with credibility, global exposure, and the ability to tap into the emotional connections that consumers have with these athletes. Among the most prominent and influential sports endorsers is Cristiano Ronaldo, known as CR7, whose global appeal and iconic status have significantly impacted the brands he represents as an endorser. This article examines the role of sport celebrity endorsement in influencing the brand value of endorsed brands, with specific reference to Cristiano Ronaldo.

The endorsement of brands by sport celebrities leverages their fame, credibility, and consumer base to create a strong association between the individual and the product (Erdogan, 1999). Brand managers must understand that celebrity endorsements are not just about selling a product, but also about enhancing the brand equity and brand value of the endorsed brands. The source credibility theory (Hovland et al., 1953) confirms this by suggesting that consumers

are more likely to trust a brand that is associated with a credible and trustworthy person. In the case of Cristiano Ronaldo, his achievements on the football field, joint with his disciplined lifestyle and dedication to fitness, enhance the perceived credibility of the products he endorses. This can substantially boost brand value, as consumers are more inclined to purchase products they believe are used and trusted by Cristiano Ronaldo as their role model.

Celebrity endorsements have a direct impact on brand awareness and brand visibility, which are crucial components of brand value. Cristiano Ronaldo, as one of the most recognizable role models in the world, significantly increases a brand's reach, particularly on social media. With over 500 million followers on Instagram, his endorsements reach a global audience almost instantaneously (Statista, 2023). This global visibility contributes to increased brand recognition, which is a key driver of brand equity (Keller, 2003). The association with Cristiano Ronaldo's global brand allows companies to position themselves in the international market, reaching not only sports fans but also a broader demographic. His endorsements for brands such as Nike, Herbalife, and CR7-branded clothing have all benefited from this massive global platform, which strengthens the brand's presence and enhances brand value.

Another crucial factor in the success of sport celebrity endorsements is the concept of brand personality transfer, where the qualities and characteristics of the celebrity are similar and transferred to the brand they endorse (McCracken, 1989). Cristiano Ronaldo is often associated with quality characteristics such as excellence, competitiveness, and perseverance. When he endorses a brand, these attributes are transferred to the product, enhancing the brand's identity and perceived value more than that of other brands. For example, his long-standing partnership with the Nike brand has resulted in the sports brand being viewed as a symbol of athletic excellence and innovation. This personality traits transfer contributes to the emotional connection between the sport consumer and the brand, further elevating brand value (Till & Busler, 2000). In addition to boosting consumer perceptions and visibility, celebrity endorsements also have tangible financial effects on the brands they endorse. Several studies suggest that the use of celebrity endorsers in marketing can lead to increased sales and stock market performance (Spry et al., 2011). Cristiano Ronaldo's endorsement deals, valued at millions of dollars, reflect the financial stakes involved in such partnerships. For example, Nike's collaboration with Cristiano Ronaldo has been estimated to generate billions in revenue, largely driven by the athlete's immense popularity and influence (Statista, 2023). This validates the direct link between celebrity endorsement and the financial value of the endorsed brand.

PROFILING CRISTIANO RONALDO

Cristiano Ronaldo dos Santos Aveiro AKA CR7 was born on 5 February 1985 in Funchal, Madeira, Portugal, into a modest family (Torres, 2017). His early life on the island was shaped by his passion for the game of football, which he displayed from a young age. His natural talent was evident, and by the time he was 12, he moved to Lisbon to join the prestigious Academia Sporting Clube de Portugal, known as CP academy (Maich, 2024). This move marked the beginning of his journey in becoming one of the greatest footballers in the history of football. His performances in Sporting's youth teams quickly drew attention, and at just 17 years old, Ronaldo made his debut for Sporting's senior team, showcasing his blistering speed, technical ability, and exceptional dribbling skills (Wilson, 2020). It wasn't long before his talent was recognized at international level, and Manchester United FC manager Sir Alex Ferguson took notice of the young star.

In 2003, Ronaldo moved to Manchester United FC at the age of 18 for a transfer fee of £12.24 million, a record fee for a teenager at the time (Borden, 2022). At Manchester United FC, under Sir Alex Ferguson's guidance, Cristiano Ronaldo's development as a footballer accelerated quickly. Known for his flair and technical brilliance, Cristiano Ronaldo's matured into a complete player during his early years at the club. He was a key part in Manchester United FC success during that time, helping the club win three consecutive Premier League titles between 2006 and 2009, and the UEFA Champions League in 2008 (Javed, 2024). His individual performances earned him the first of many prestigious awards when he won the Ballon d'Or in 2008, solidifying his place among the elite footballers of his generation (Conn, 2021). Cristiano Ronaldo's time spent at Manchester United FC not only showcased his skillset but also revealed his hard work and work ethic, which became a symbol of his career.

Ronaldo's transfer to Real Madrid FC in 2009 for €94 million marked the beginning of an era in which he would elevate his game to unprecedented levels (De Scitivaux, 2009). This transfer made him the world's most expensive player at the time, and he certainly lived up to the expectations (Kapel, 2015). At Real Madrid FC, Cristiano Ronaldo developed a reputation as one of the most prolific goal-scorers in football history by scoring 451 goals (Goal.com, 2024). Over the period of nine years at the club, he became Real Madrid's all-time leading scorer, netting 451 goals in 438 appearances (Wilson, 2020; Goal.com, 2024). His big rivalry with Lionel Messi during this period fuelled debates about who was the greatest soccer player of all time. Cristiano Ronaldo's athleticism, strength, and goal-scoring instincts made him virtually non-stoppable. He helped Real Madrid FC to win four UEFA many Champions League titles, including three consecutive triumphs from 2016 to 2018, while individually, he added four more Ballon d'Or titles to his name, reaching a total of five (Borden, 2022).

During his time at Real Madrid FC, Cristiano Ronaldo consistently broke many records, including becoming the first soccer player to score 100 goals in UEFA Champions League history (Roberts, 2021). His transformation from a skilful winger to a lethal goal-scoring forward demonstrated his ability to adapt his game as he matured. One of the key aspects of Cristiano Ronaldo's success has been his on and off the field behaviour, contributing to good physical condition. Even as he entered his 30s, he continued to display remarkable athleticism, often surpassing younger soccer players in terms of speed, strength, and endurance (Conn, 2021). His dedication to maintaining peak physical form through rigorous training and a disciplined lifestyle allowed him to remain at the top of the game in the world of football well beyond the age when most soccer players begin to decline and retire.

In 2018, Ronaldo made another high-profile move, this time to Italian giants Juventus, for a transfer fee of €100 million (News24, 2018). His arrival in Serie A league was met with much anticipation, and Ronaldo did not disappoint, scoring 101 goals in 134 appearances during his time at the club (Juventus FC, 2024). He assisted Juventus FC to secure two Serie A titles, demonstrating that even in his mid-30s, he remained one of the most effective forwards soccer players in the world (Roberts, 2021). His ability to adjust to the tactical demands of the Italian football league was further proof of his versatility and football intelligence. At Juventus FC, Cristiano Ronaldo continued to break many records, including becoming the fastest soccer player in the club's history to reach 100 goals (Wilson, 2020).

Cristiano Ronaldo's impact extends beyond club football level. He has been a pivotal figure for Portugal his national team, becoming the country's all-time leading goal-scorer (Goal.com, 2024). His leadership, experience and contributions were crucial in Portugal's historic victory at the 2016 UEFA European Championship as Portugal won their first major

international trophy. Cristiano Ronaldo also played a significant role in Portugal's triumph in the 2019 UEFA Nations League, further cementing his place as one of the greatest international soccer players of all the time (Conn, 2021). As of 2023, Ronaldo holds the record for the most international goals scored by any player, surpassing the 120-goal mark, an achievement that highlights his longevity and consistency at the highest level of the football game (Borden, 2022).

Beyond football, Cristiano Ronaldo has become a global cultural icon. He is one of the most marketable sport athletes in the world. His CR7 brand spans across fashion, fragrances, and hospitality. His social media account presence is incomparable, with over 500 million followers on Instagram alone, making him one of the most followed individuals in the world (Roberts, 2021). Cristiano Ronaldo's influence rises above sports, as he is a symbol of determination, discipline, and success. His philanthropy, including significant donations to hospitals and various humanitarian causes, reflects his commitment to giving back to the community. As Cristiano Ronaldo's career continues into its twilight years, his legacy as one of football's greatest ever soccer player is secure, not only for his incredible statistics and accomplishments but also for his enduring influence on the football game and popular culture (Conn, 2021).

CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT

Celebrity endorsement has become a widely used and highly effective marketing strategy for brands across various industries around the world (Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010:452). It includes leveraging the popularity, image, and influence of well-known individuals to promote products or services, with the aim of enhancing brand awareness, credibility, and consumer appeal (Awah et al., 2024:2). The core idea behind celebrity endorsement is the transfer of the celebrity's positive attributes such as their success, attractiveness, or trustworthiness to the brand they endorse – in that way influencing consumer perceptions and purchase intentions (McCracken, 1989). This method of endorsement has been particularly successful in a highly saturated market where brands compete heavily for consumer attention and differentiation is key.

The success of the celebrity endorsement concept is often attached to several psychological and sociological theories. The most popular one is the Source Credibility Model (Hovland et al., 1953). According to this model, the effectiveness of an endorsement deal depends on the three perceptions, namely the expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness of the celebrity. When a celebrity is observed as credible in these three areas, consumers are more likely to believe in the endorsement and associate the positive attributes of the celebrity with the product or service being promoted or endorsed. For example, Cristiano Ronaldo, widely regarded as one of the supreme footballers of all time, is seen as an expert in soccer, which gives him the credibility to endorse athletic brands like Nike. His trustworthiness as an athlete who consistently performs at the highest level enhances the believability of his endorsements, which in turn positively impacts consumer attitudes toward the brands he promotes or endorses.

Another important theory in understanding the effect of celebrity endorsements is the Match-Up Hypothesis (Kamins, 1990). This theory suggests that endorsements are most effective when there is a natural fit or connection between the celebrity and the product. A well-matched endorsement ensures that the celebrity's image associates with the product's attributes, making the endorsement seem more authentic and believable to the targeted consumers. For example, when Cristiano Ronaldo endorses sportswear or athletic products, the

endorsement resonates with consumers because there is a clear connection between his personal expertise and the brand's identity. This alignment increases the influence of the endorsement, as consumers perceive a greater relevance between the celebrity and the product being promoted (Till & Busler, 2000).

The Meaning Transfer Model, developed by McCracken (1989), presents additional understanding into how celebrity endorsements work by suggesting that celebrities serve as cultural intermediaries who transfer their meanings to the products they endorse. Celebrities are pictured as carriers of specific cultural meanings, which may include qualities such as luxury, athleticism or sophistication. When a celebrity endorses a product or service, these meanings are transferred from the celebrity straight to the brand being endorsed, influencing how consumers perceive the product. In the case of Cristiano Ronaldo, his athletic excellence, discipline, and global fame are qualities that get transferred to the brands he endorses, such as Nike or luxury brands like Louis Vuitton. This transfer of meaning helps to shape consumer perceptions about the brand, making it more desirable and prestigious in their eyes.

In modern society, the role of celebrity endorsement has grown due to the rise of social media platforms. Celebrities like Cristiano Ronaldo, with hundreds of millions of followers on platforms like Instagram, can reach a vast audience in real time, making social media a powerful tool for expanding endorsements. The Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) theory advocates that consumers are more likely to trust and engage with brand messages when they come from celebrities they like and follow on social media (Trivedi & Sama, 2020). Social media also allow for more personal and direct engagement between celebrities and their followers, increasing the authenticity of the endorsement. For brand managers, this means that their message is not only amplified but also perceived as more relatable and trustworthy, leading to higher consumer engagement and purchase intentions. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement is not without its challenges. Celebrity scandals or negative publicity can have a harmful effect on the brands they endorse, leading to what is known as the vampire effect, where the celebrity overshadows the product or damages the brand's image and reputation (Erdogan, 1999). For example, if a celebrity becomes involved in controversy, the negative media attention may reflect poorly on the brand they endorse, causing consumers to distance themselves from the brand. Brands must, therefore, carefully manage their relationships with celebrity endorsers, confirming that the celebrity's image remains consistent with the brand's values and identity.

SPORT CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT

Sport celebrity endorsement is a prominent marketing strategy, whereby athletes are used to promote products, brands, or services (Gordillo-Rodriguez, 2024:886). This form of endorsement capitalizes on the unique characteristics that sports figures embody, such as physical prowess, dedication, and excellence. Athletes often have large, loyal fan bases, which brands leverage to increase their reach, credibility, and consumer trust. Among the most influential sport celebrities in the world, Cristiano Ronaldo stands out as a major example of how a sport celebrity's endorsement can elevate a brand's visibility, reputation, and value (Salim, 2024:4). Cristiano Ronaldo's endorsements start from athletic brands such as Nike to luxury brands like Louis Vuitton, demonstrating his strong broad appeal and marketability.

Sport celebrities like Cristiano Ronaldo are particularly effective in endorsement deals because they represent a mix of physical achievement, discipline, and glamour. According to

the Source Credibility Model (Hovland et al., 1953), a celebrity's endorsement is effective when the endorser is perceived as credible, which includes being trustworthy, knowledgeable, and attractive. Cristiano Ronaldo represents all three of these qualities: his consistency as a top performer in football makes him an expert in sports-related products, his success and lifestyle make him applicable and trustworthy, and his physical attractiveness increases his appeal across diverse consumer segments (Salim, 2024:4). His endorsement deals are credible because he is directly associated with the product category he promotes or endorses, particularly in the sports and fitness industry. For example, Cristiano Ronaldo's long-lasting partnership with Nike associates with his expertise as an influential athlete, which strengthens the brand's positioning as a leader in sportswear and athletic gear.

One theory that highlights the impact of sport celebrity endorsements is the Match-Up Hypothesis (Kamins, 1990), which suggests that endorsements are most successful when there is a good fit and connection between the celebrity and the product. Cristiano Ronaldo's endorsement deals with brands like Nike and Herbalife are successful because they align with his identity as a professional athlete. His lifestyle, dedication to fitness, and global influence resonate with the target audience of these brands, creating a strong association between the brand and the values representing him. For example, Nike, a brand known for its high-performance sports gear, benefits from Cristiano Ronaldo's global fame and athletic expertise, making their partnership an excellent match. The collaboration between Cristiano Ronaldo and the Nike brand increases the brand's credibility and appeal, especially among younger consumers who admire Cristiano Ronaldo's athletic accomplishments and aspire to emulate his fitness method.

The Meaning Transfer Model (McCracken, 1989) gives another justification for why sport celebrity endorsements are so effective. According to this model, celebrities convey specific cultural meanings that are transferred to the brands they endorse. In Cristiano Ronaldo's case, his association with hard work, success, and a glamorous lifestyle is passed on to the brands he promotes. For example, his endorsement of CR7, his personal brand of clothing and fragrance, allows his fans to connect the qualities of success and style with the products, making them more desirable. Furthermore, his involvement in global campaigns for brands like Louis Vuitton and Tag Heuer increases his influence beyond sports and positions him as an icon of fashion and luxury, transferring his status as a high achiever to these premium brands.

Celebrity worship (Maltby et al., 2002) plays a fundamental role in the effectiveness of sport celebrity endorsements. Fans of athletes like Cristiano Ronaldo often form parasocial relationships, where they feel a personal connection with the celebrity, despite never having met him. This emotional attachment leads to greater trust in the products that the athlete endorses. For example, Cristiano Ronaldo's millions of social media followers are more likely to purchase the products he promotes because they feel a personal connection with him. His influence on consumer behaviour is further amplified by the accessibility of his endorsements through social media platforms like Instagram, where he regularly shares content related to his endorsement deals, providing a direct channel for engaging with consumers across the globe.

NIKE

Nike, one of the world's most valuable and recognizable sports brands, has long utilized celebrity endorsements as a central component of its marketing strategy. The company was founded in 1964 as Blue Ribbon Sports and rebranded to Nike in 1971 (Hamza, 2023). The

brand has built its global reputation by aligning its brand with elite athletes across various sports, such as Cristiano Ronaldo in soccer. Nike's incorporation of celebrity endorsements is rooted in the idea that successful athletes embody traits such as excellence, dedication, and achievement, which are then transferred to the brand through endorsement (McCracken, 1989). A prominent example of this strategy is Nike's long-term partnership with Cristiano Ronaldo, one of the most famous athletes in the world of soccer. Cristiano Ronaldo's association with Nike has not only raised the brand's visibility but also significantly contributed to its global brand value.

Nike's endorsement strategy with Cristiano Ronaldo benefit from the Match-Up Hypothesis, which suggests that the effectiveness of a celebrity endorsement depends on the fit between the celebrity and the product (Kamins, 1990). Cristiano Ronaldo, as a football icon known for his athletic excellence, associates perfectly with Nike's brand, which is centred around sports performance and innovation. This strategic match elaborates Nike's brand message of pushing boundaries and achieving greatness in the sports world. Cristiano Ronaldo's personal brand, constructed on his dedication to fitness, winning mentality, and global appeal, reinforces Nike's position as a leader in the athletic footwear and apparel industry. By associating itself with a celebrity like Cristiano Ronaldo, Nike increases its brand image, making it more appealing to consumers who identify with the values Cristiano Ronaldo represents (Till & Busler, 2000).

Cristiano Ronaldo's endorsement deal with Nike is not merely transactional but a deeply integrated partnership that has led to the creation of exclusive brand extension and increasing product lines, including the highly successful CR7 line of football boots. These product lines highlight the synergy between Cristiano Ronaldo's personal brand and Nike's innovative designs. The CR7 products reflect Cristiano Ronaldo's style, performance, and personal story, which adds emotional and symbolic value to the brand. According to the Meaning Transfer Model (McCracken, 1989), Ronaldo's qualities of his speed, agility, and relentless work ethic are transferred to the Nike brand through these products. This association increases the desirability of Nike's offerings, as consumers aspire to express the traits that Cristiano Ronaldo personifies when they purchase CR7-branded products.

One of the most significant aspects of Cristiano Ronaldo's endorsement of Nike is his influence on social media. With more than 500 million followers on Instagram alone, Cristiano Ronaldo is the most followed athlete on the platform, which gives the Nike brand matchless access to the global village (Statista, 2023). This makes Cristiano Ronaldo not only an athlete but a powerful marketing tool, capable of reaching millions of consumers across the globe in real time. Nike brand has effectively leveraged this reach by integrating Cristiano Ronaldo into its digital marketing campaigns, ensuring that the brand is constantly visible to an infinite audience. Cristiano Ronaldo's social media posts featuring Nike products generate massive engagement, driving strong brand awareness and increasing consumer affinity for the brand. According to the literature, social media celebrity endorsements have a direct and positive impact on brand visibility and customer purchasing decisions (Spry et al., 2011). This digital endorsement strategy plays a key role in keeping the Nike brand relevant in the ever-evolving digital landscape.

Nike's relationship with Cristiano Ronaldo also reflects the financial implications of celebrity endorsements. Cristiano Ronaldo signed a lifetime deal with Nike in 2016, reportedly worth over \$1 billion, making it one of the most lucrative endorsements deals ever in sports history (Forbes, 2021). This long-term commitment indicates Nike's confidence in Cristiano

Ronaldo's ability to continue improving the brand's value. The financial return on this investment is evident in the increased sales of CR7 products as well as Nike's sustained dominance in the sportswear market globally. Studies have proven that celebrity endorsements can generate significant financial gains for companies, not only through direct sales but also by increasing stock market performance (Spry et al., 2011). Nike's stock price has often seen positive movements following major campaigns or product launches featuring Cristiano Ronaldo, underscoring the financial benefits of his endorsement. Therefore, this study proposes the first hypothesis as:

H1: Cristiano Ronaldo's endorsement positively influences Nike's profit generation.

LOUIS VUITTON

Louis Vuitton, one of the most iconic luxury fashion houses in the world, has strategically utilized celebrity endorsements to maintain its position as a leading global brand. Founded in 1854, the brand has consistently highlighted craftsmanship, exclusivity, and timeless elegance (Wang, 2023:1568). As consumer behaviour has shifted in the modern era, Louis Vuitton has increasingly leveraged high-profile celebrities to enhance its global reach and appeal, while preserving its image of luxury and exclusivity (Wang, 2023:1571). The use of celebrity endorsements, especially partnerships with sports icons like Cristiano Ronaldo, allows Louis Vuitton to connect with diverse and influential audiences, ensuring its constant relevance in a highly competitive market of luxury fashion.

Louis Vuitton's collaboration with Cristiano Ronaldo is an example of how the brand effectively taps into the athlete's global recognition, personal brand, and massive fan base to extend its influence beyond traditional fashion circles. Cristiano Ronaldo's appeal transcends sports, making him an ideal figure for a luxury brand like Louis Vuitton, which seeks to expand its reach across various demographics (Diderich, 2022). According to the Meaning Transfer Model (McCracken, 1989), celebrity endorsements permit brands to assume the cultural meaning associated with a celebrity. In the same way, Cristiano Ronaldo's image as a successful, hardworking, and stylish figure is seamlessly transferred to the Louis Vuitton brand, reinforcing its association with excellence and sophistication. His connection to luxury and high fashion advances the brand's positioning in the minds of consumers, particularly among those who admire Cristiano Ronaldo's style and success.

In 2022, Cristiano Ronaldo was featured in an iconic Louis Vuitton campaign alongside fellow football star Lionel Messi. The campaign, which featured the two soccer stars playing chess on a Louis Vuitton briefcase, was widely celebrated and became one of the most talked-about luxury endorsements globally (Louis Vuitton, 2022). The pairing of Cristiano Ronaldo with the Louis Vuitton brand serves to underscore the brand's alignment with exclusive status and excellence, while also capitalising on the massive social media presence that Cristiano Ronaldo commands. With over 500 million followers on Instagram (Statista, 2023), Cristiano Ronaldo's endorsement provided Louis Vuitton with unique exposure, particularly among younger, sports-oriented demographics who might not have previously engaged with the brand. This digital endorsement strategy allows Louis Vuitton to remain visible and relevant, particularly among millennials, Generation Y and Generation Z consumers.

The Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953) proposes that the influence of a celebrity endorsement depends on the perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the endorser. Cristiano Ronaldo, being a highly respected and admired athlete, brings

credibility and aspirational value to the brands he endorses, including Louis Vuitton. His endorsement offers the brand not only visibility but also a feeling of trust and authenticity. Cristiano Ronaldo's carefully curated image as a stylish, successful, and disciplined individual aligns with the values Louis Vuitton seeks to promote: elegance, luxury, and achievement. This perceived credibility is crucial in maintaining Louis Vuitton's brand prestige, as consumers are more likely to associate the brand with these characteristics when they see them reflected in a role model like Cristiano Ronaldo.

The collaboration with Cristiano Ronaldo also reflects the growing trend within the industry about endorsements, where popular athletes are increasingly becoming brand ambassadors for luxury fashion houses, not just sports brands. This trend highlights the blurring of lines between different consumer segments, where athletes like Cristiano Ronaldo are seen not only as sports stars but also as style celebrities. Louis Vuitton's strategic partnership with Cristiano Ronaldo capitalizes on this cross-industry appeal, allowing the brand to engage with sports fans who also have an interest in high luxury fashion. This has contributed to the growing narrative that luxury fashion is no longer exclusive to fashion aficionados but is also accessible to those who value success, performance, and personal branding. By aligning itself with Cristiano Ronaldo, the Louis Vuitton brand enhances its modern, global image, making the brand more accessible and more relevant to the audience globally.

The financial impact of celebrity endorsements is also noteworthy for luxury brands like Louis Vuitton. Previous studies have shown that high-profile celebrity endorsements can lead to increased brand equity, sales, and even stock market performance (Spry et al., 2011). In the case of Cristiano Ronaldo's collaboration with the Louis Vuitton brand, the luxury brand saw a rise in social media engagement and visibility following the chess-themed campaign. The campaign generated millions of likes and shares across social platforms, reflecting the powerful financial implications of such high-profile celebrity partnerships. While Louis Vuitton is already a well-established brand, the endorsement deal with Cristiano Ronaldo assisted to solidify its status among younger consumers and expanded its reach in regions where Cristiano Ronaldo's influence is particularly strong, such as Europe and Latin America. Therefore, this study proposes a second hypothesis as:

H2: *Cristiano Ronaldo's endorsement positively influences Louis Vuitton profit generation.*

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Celebrity Worship Theory

The Celebrity Worship Theory abbreviated (CWT) explores the psychological phenomenon in terms of which fans develop an intense emotional connection with celebrities, often leading to behaviours that look like idolization or obsession. This theory, which has been extensively investigated by Maltby et al. (2004), identifies different levels of celebrity worship, ranging from a simple admiration for the individual to extreme forms of obsession. In the context of modern football, few athletes embody the concept of celebrity worship as comprehensively as Cristiano Ronaldo. The Portuguese footballer's enormous global popularity, fuelled by his athletic prowess, lifestyle, and social media presence, provides a prime example of how fans can develop deep emotional attachments to a celebrity.

At the core of the CWT lies the idea that individuals may be drawn to celebrities because they see them as representations of success, power, or beauty – qualities they admire

and aspire to possess. For many football fans, Cristiano Ronaldo represents not only athletic excellence but also the idealised version of self-improvement, dedication, and success. Cristiano Ronaldo's rise from humble beginnings in Madeira to becoming one of the most celebrated soccer stars in history resonates with fans worldwide, who may see parallels between his journey and their own desires for personal achievement (Maltby et al., 2004). This admiration can foster what psychologists call "entertainment-social" worship, a form of celebrity worship where fans follow Cristiano Ronaldo's career, watch his soccer games, and engage with his content on social media simply because they admire his public personality (Maltby, 2002).

As this admiration intensifies, fans may enter the "intense-personal" phase of celebrity worship, where their attachment to their favourite celebrity becomes more emotional and personal. In the case of Cristiano Ronaldo, many fans do not merely admire his soccer skills but also feel a personal connection to his off-the-field personality. Cristiano Ronaldo has carefully created a public image through his social media posts, interviews, or business ventures, making fans feel like they "know" him on a deeper level. This connection is further enhanced by Cristiano Ronaldo's massive social media presence, where he frequently shares snippets of his personal life, including family moments, fitness routines, and motivational messages (McCutcheon et al., 2002). For some fans, Cristiano Ronaldo's success becomes a personal motivation, driving them to follow his discipline and commitment in their own lives. This is a central aspect of celebrity worship, where fans derive self-esteem and validation from their association with the celebrity (Maltby et al., 2004). However, CWT also acknowledges the potential for extreme forms of celebrity idolization, known as "borderline-pathological" worship. In this phase, fans may exhibit obsessive behaviours or irrational beliefs about their relationship with the celebrity. For example, some fans of Cristiano Ronaldo may engage in behaviours that go beyond normal admiration, such as obsessively following his every move, collecting memorabilia, or defending him passionately in online spaces against any criticism. Such behaviours can indicate an unhealthy level of emotional dependence, where the fan's sense of self-worth becomes intrinsically linked to Ronaldo's success and image (Maltby et al., 2006). Previous studies suggest that individuals who engage in pathological celebrity worship may suffer from underlying psychological issues, such as anxiety or low self-esteem, and use their attachment to the celebrity as a coping mechanism (McCutcheon et al., 2002).

Cristiano Ronaldo's status as one of the most followed persons on social media, with over 500 million followers on Instagram only, further elucidates how the lines between celebrity and fans can become blurred. Social media space has amplified the reach and influence of celebrities, allowing fans to feel an almost constant presence in the lives of their idols. This accessibility plays a crucial role in fostering celebrity worship, as fans feel more closely connected to Cristiano Ronaldo's daily life, from his soccer training sessions to his family vacations (Maltby et al., 2006). This constant exposure highlights the emotional bond between fan and celebrity, making Cristiano Ronaldo not just a soccer star but a lifestyle icon, influencing fashion, fitness, and even personal values for many fans globally (McCutcheon et al., 2002).

CWT also highlights the commercial implications of this phenomenon. Cristiano Ronaldo's global brand, CR7, capitalises on his status as a worshipped celebrity. His influence goes beyond the soccer pitch, affecting endorsed products, fashion trends, and even the marketability of the sport clubs he plays for. Fans who exhibit intense levels of celebrity worship are more likely to buy products associated with Cristiano Ronaldo from CR7-branded clothing to his endorsed brands like Nike (Maltby et al., 2006). This kind of consumer

behaviour is influenced by the desire to feel connected to the celebrity, with fans believing that using the same products as Cristiano Ronaldo somehow brings them closer to his level of success and prestige (McCutcheon et al., 2002).

METHODOLOGY

Secondary data were collected from reputable companies, namely brand finance, Yahoo finance and Statista, that provide reliable financial records of different companies operating worldwide. This study selected brands that are endorsed by Cristiano Ronaldo, appearing on the most valuable fashion brand list in 2024, including Nike and Louis Vuitton (FashionUnited International, 2024; International Brand Equity, 2024; Bosze, 2024).

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

TABLE 1:

Financial records of brands endorsed by Cristiano Ronaldo

Brand name	Year 2021	Year 2022	Year 2023	Year 2024	Decision
Nike	\$44,538M	\$46,710M	\$51,217M	\$51,362M	H1: Accepted
Louis Vuitton	\$14,858M	\$23,426M	\$26,290M	\$32,235M	H2: Accepted

Sources: Louis Vuitton Brand Finance:

<https://brandirectory.com/rankings/global/2022/table;>

Nike-Statista:<https://0-www-statista-com.oasis.unisa.ac.za/statistics/241683/nikes-sales-worldwide-since-2004/>

Table 1 presents financial performance of both brands endorsed by Cristiano Ronaldo from the list containing most valuable brands globally in 2024. For Nike, there was an increase of profit generation each year from 2021 to the current year, 2024. Nike's profit generation increased by \$2.172M in year 2022 from year 2021. The following year, Nike's profit generation increased by \$4.507M in 2023 from year 2022. Furthermore, Nike's profit generation increased by \$0.145 in the current year (Year 2024) from year 2023. Cristiano Ronaldo's endorsement positively influence Nike profit generation. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is accepted.

The second brand is Louis Vuitton. The financial figured presented in Table 1 above highlights that there was an increase in profit generation each year, from Year 2021 to the current year (Year 2024). Louis Vuitton's profit generation increased by \$10,568M in Year 2022 from Year 2021. The following year, Year 2023, Louis Vuitton's profit generation increased by \$26,29M from Year 2022. The current year, Year 2024, Louis Vuitton's profit generation increased by \$5.945M from Year 2023. Indeed, Cristiano Ronaldo endorsement positively influence Louis Vuitton's profit generation. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

DISCUSSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Cristiano Ronaldo's endorsements of brands such as Nike and Louis Vuitton highlight the immense influence that celebrity endorsement has on brand perception, consumer loyalty, and overall brand value. Cristiano Ronaldo, being a global sports icon with a massive following, lends credibility and aspirational value to both athletic and luxury brands. Nike benefits from Cristiano Ronaldo's association through his athletic performance, which aligns perfectly with Nike's focus on excellence and high performance in sports. On the other hand, Louis Vuitton, a luxury brand, leverages Cristiano Ronaldo's star power to appeal to a broader audience,

making the brand more relatable and desirable, even beyond the typical luxury consumer. The duality of Cristiano Ronaldo's brand appeal allows him to fit seamlessly into both athletic and luxury segments, reinforcing the versatility and adaptability of these brands in different market spaces.

Leveraging Cristiano Ronaldo's athletic achievements and global appeal means that the brand can continuously strengthen its image as a leader in sports innovation and performance. Brand managers should focus on developing campaigns that highlight Cristiano Ronaldo's journey and achievements, linking them with Nike's technological innovations in footwear and apparel. Moreover, brand managers can use his endorsement to tap into emerging markets, particularly in regions where soccer is prominent, to increase brand penetration. Nike can also capitalize on Cristiano Ronaldo's social media presence to generate user engagement, utilizing his posts and appearances to create interactive campaigns that resonate with younger audiences.

Cristiano Ronaldo's endorsement presents a unique opportunity to blend luxury with lifestyle. Brand managers should focus on creating marketing campaigns that balance the exclusivity of the Louis Vuitton brand with Cristiano Ronaldo's more accessible, relatable personality. By associating with Cristiano Ronaldo, Louis Vuitton can appeal to sports enthusiasts who may also aspire to luxury consumption. Brand managers can also expand Cristiano Ronaldo's endorsement into experiential marketing strategies, such as limited-edition product lines or exclusive events, where consumers can experience the brand through the lens of Cristiano Ronaldo's luxurious lifestyle. This approach can help Louis Vuitton maintain its prestige while lengthening its customer base to include a more diverse, global audience.

CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Brands that have not yet utilized celebrity endorsements, particularly sports celebrities, are encouraged to explore this highly effective marketing strategy. Sports celebrity endorsements have consistently demonstrated strong returns on investment for companies that have adopted this approach. As evidenced by the success of brands like Nike and Louis Vuitton, Cristiano Ronaldo's endorsement has positively influenced their profit generation. This study examined the role of global athlete Cristiano Ronaldo as a celebrity endorser and its impact on the profitability of the brands he endorses. Future research should focus on examining the influence of local sports celebrities on the profitability of endorsed brands.

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