

## Consumer Behavior

Famous people are always subject to increased attention of the public. This concerns not only their achievements and professional life, but also their private life. The latter can influence a celebrity's image and change public opinion about him/her. This tendency is well illustrated by the case of Tiger Woods. In the following case report, I am going to identify the key issues of the case, which concern social influence and provide solutions to them.

Tiger Woods is a famous golf player, who has won a lot of prizes. His sparkling sports career drew attention of different marketers, who wished to promote their brands with the help of Woods' name. The companies, on the one hand, and the golfer, on the other hand, benefited from such cooperation. As an endorser of various brands, he contributed to an increase in companies' profits and earned a lot of money himself. He has done a lot for golf as well. He has created a golf community and participates in promoting golf globally. Through Tiger Woods Foundation, he supports educational opportunities of the youth and also helps orphan girls in Thailand.

Tiger Woods' active social life and reputation of a winner and a leader have made him a rather popular commercial figure. As a successful golfer, he has brought success to the companies he associates himself with. This is a common practice in the modern world, when companies cooperate with celebrities to promote their brands. When people see celebrities present certain products, they tend to believe that these products are better than their analogs. Moreover, they prefer to buy products of these brands, since that will make them feel associated with the famous person.

However, celebrity endorsement works as long as he or she appeals to the public. Reputation plays a very important role. While a celebrity is associated with leadership, success, style, excellence, and things like that, the endorsement will be successful. As soon as he gets involved in a scandal or some other unpleasant incident, his reputation might no

longer be beneficial for the company and its brand. This is the opposite side of a medal of celebrity endorsement. The influence of public opinion is great. In this case, society makes producers make decisions concerning promotion and images of their brands.

The case of Tiger Woods exemplifies this statement. When he was accused of infidelity and withdrew himself from sports and social life, his reputation suffered a lot. Because of that, some of the companies limited his role in promoting their brands or even ceased to cooperate with him at all. The reason why they did so was that they were afraid that Tiger Woods's decrease in popularity will cause a decrease in sales of their products. This is not just an unnecessary precaution of marketers. This is a tendency, which is supported by the polls conducted at that time among senior marketers. This survey illustrated how important the reputation of the brand endorser is for producers. Even if marketers had wanted to continue working with Tiger Woods, they could not have done so because they have to regard the opinions of their influence groups. The empirical study conducted by Knittel and Stango (2010) provides data, which prove that Woods' sponsors lost stock market value shortly after the scandal. Moreover, the firms' losses were the gains of the competitors that do not practice celebrity endorsement. All of that proves that using celebrities to promote brands is a risky activity.

Social influence can be defined as a change in somebody's views, beliefs, and behavior through interaction with other members of society or a group (Rashotte, n.d.). Social influence is a very powerful thing, which changes people's behavior. We are used to thinking that consumers are the ones who are always subjected to the influence of advertisements, public relation techniques and other promotion tools that are used by marketers. However, when it comes to marketers and society, it works both ways. On the one hand, marketers influence their target audiences by means of creating appealing images of their brands. On the other hand, target audiences and other stakeholders influence companies' decisions

indirectly because the later have to take into account changes in people's opinions on their brands. The case of Tiger Woods clearly exemplifies this feature of social influence.

The effect of social influence is an inalienable part of consumer behavior. However, not only consumers are subjected to it. As it has already been shown above, marketers also have to adjust their activity under the influence of their target audiences. Moreover, the celebrities, who are often perceived as role models and act as brand endorsers, also experience the influence of public opinion. Famous people cannot separate their private lives from their public lives, no matter how hard they try. Sooner or later they will appear under the spotlights of mass media and their private affairs will be revealed. Although some of the celebrities benefit from scandals, most of them care for their good reputation, especially when they are associated with the brands of their sponsors. They are responsible for keeping their favorable ratings high in order to perform their function of brand endorsers as well as possible.

If we look at Tiger Woods's case, we will see how social influence works. When he was at the peak of his golf career, his favorable ratings were 88 percent. A lot of companies signed up endorsement contracts with him. He was popular, successful and had a perfect reputation. Because of that, his cooperation with his sponsors was beneficial. However, the unpleasant incident connected with his private affairs and subsequent withdrawal from golf damaged his reputation. Being a public figure, he could not separate himself from society, first of all his fans, fellow golfers, sponsors, and business partners. Under the pressure of social influence, he had to apologize for his behavior in order to regain his reputation. That did not help him much, since his favorable rating dropped to 39 percent; however, it could have been even lower if he had not taken actions to rehabilitate himself.

The case of Tiger Woods uncovers another aspect of social influence. It is the influence of a person, who is considered a role model. People tend to mimic those who they

consider great and successful. They want to wear the same clothes, use the same gear, drive the same cars, and have the same lifestyle as their idols. This psychological feature is often exploited by marketers, which can be seen in the case of Tiger Woods. However, he promotes not only brands, but also golf. It is not just about building golf communities. Woods's popularity and participation increased the popularity of the game among common people and boosted the development of the golf industry as a whole. All of that was possible because of the positive influence on society, which Tiger Woods had.

Now that we have identified the key issues of social influence in the case of Tiger Woods, we can provide some recommendations for future actions. It is evident that the reputation of Tiger Woods was damaged by his unethical behavior and withdrawal from the professional sport. In the following paragraphs, I am going to propose and evaluate two alternative solutions for Tiger Woods and produce a final recommendation.

One of the ways of regaining reputation and even boosting popularity is to return to the professional sport. This could be a very effective move, especially if he shows great results and becomes a champion again. On the other hand, it is going to be very hard, since he will have to train a lot in order to regain good shape. Moreover, he will have to exceed even himself and become an even greater golfer than he was before. That will create additional pressure on him and might cause new problems with his family. However, it is clear that if he stays away from golf for too long, he will never be able to become popular again. People will find a new idol to worship.

Another solution for Tiger Woods is to get more involved in the social life. For example, he should develop and expand his golf community, initiate junior and amateur championships, or even create his own foundation, which will help bring up young sportsmen from different parts of the world. He might also involve himself in some charity projects. All of that can help Woods restore his reputation as a public figure. However, that will not affect

his reputation as a sportsman. His fans will be disappointed in him, and that will cause a serious loss of popularity. Sports companies, such as Nike and Titleist, might limit Woods' role in promoting their brands because he would no longer be an important figure in golf.

Having evaluated possible solutions, I would recommend the following actions. Tiger Woods should return to the professional sport as soon as possible. Even though it will be hard for him and his family, it is the best solution, which will help him restore his reputation of a great golfer. His comeback should be promoted widely. The public should be aware of the fact that Woods is going to return and be prepared for his triumph. By means of a powerful public relation campaign, people will be made to anticipate Woods's return. The public should be reminded about his former achievements. All those actions, of course, have to be confirmed by his great performance. After that Tiger Woods will have to compete and win in order to prove that he is as great as everyone expects him to be.

These actions will also bring him new sponsors. If he performs brilliantly on a golf course, his popularity will rise exponentially. Then, more marketers will want to make him the face of their brands, first of all those who produce sportswear and equipment. Maybe there will be little time for participation in public life, but at first it will not be as important for Woods as his sports career.

In this case study, we analyzed social influences of different groups. It turned out that in society there are many kinds of influences, and all the groups and individuals are subjected to it to some extent. Marketers influence people in order to make them buy their products. Stakeholders influence producers' decisions concerning their brands' images. Celebrities influence people's lifestyles and habits, but on the other hand, their behavior is influenced by public opinion.

## References

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