

# Two sides of sponsor's coin

Unlike Tiger Woods, reports about John Terry's private life will not damage his endorsement deals

Last December there were two big marketing scandals. First, there was Tiger Woods' fall from ice-cool sporting demigod to damaged love-cheat. Then there was the scandalous inability of an array of experts to predict correctly the impact of Woods' misdeeds on his sponsorship deals.

In case you had forgotten how wrong they were, I have helpfully provided a sample at the foot of this column. As *PR Week* observed in December, marketers were 'unanimous in their verdicts that Woods' image will not be damaged in the long term'.

If ever we needed proof that most pundits in the world of sports sponsorship and celebrity endorsement are buffoons, here it was, in spades. This is one thing they are supposed to know about, and they managed to be 100% incorrect in their assessments. Not just wrong, but dead wrong.

Two months on and we have fresh grist for the sports celebrity scandal mill. John Terry has allegedly been engaging in Woodsian quantities of shagging with the partner of former Chelsea team-mate, Wayne Bridge.

This time around, however, you might have noted a stark absence of expert commentary on the subject. Look as hard as you like – despite acres of media coverage, no marketer wants to go on record and say whether Terry will lose lucrative deals with the likes of Samsung, Umbro and Carlsberg.

So allow me to step in. Terry might have lost the England captaincy but he

will not lose his sponsors. Brands select celebrities for different reasons. In the case of Woods, they loved his control, invulnerability and precision. That is why he was able to pick up millions from brands including Tag Heuer and Accenture that had nothing directly to do with golf. His cheating was not just morally reprehensible, it was in total contradiction to these associations, Woods lost everything as a result.

Terry is a very different kind of celebrity. For starters he looks like the kind of bloke that would have a crack at your missus given half a chance. He comes across as tough, aggressive and ever-so-slightly dodgy. That is why he attracted such an abysmally low level of endorsement income while holding the England captaincy.

Terry's biggest sponsorship deal, with Umbro, is tied to his strength and

aggression on the field and nothing to do with his character off it. Cheating on his wife does not run counter to Terry's existing reputation as a bad boy, nor will it disrupt his playing ability. He underlined this fact with another sterling performance on Sunday. His limited sponsorship appeal will endure.

Woods cheats on his wife – his sponsors desert him. Terry does the same – and he keeps them. This apparent inconsistency makes sense if you stop applying generic rules to the business of celebrity endorsement and see each star for what they are – completely different bundles of meaning.

Take two extreme cases. Nothing Keith Richards does will ever damage his reputation or reduce his attraction to sponsors such as Louis Vuitton, because his celebrity is built on adventure, rule-breaking and endurance. To paraphrase Nietzsche – what does not kill him, will make his sponsorship appeal stronger. Meanwhile, poor old Daniel Radcliffe, who plays Harry Potter, went through media hell last year because he was snapped smoking something that looked like a joint.

The difference is not hypocrisy, it is a matter of celebrity association. This is welcome news for Terry, who may have lost the England captaincy but appears to have kept his wife and his tie-up deals – and that is two up on Tiger.

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## 30 seconds on... 'expert' predictions from December on Tiger Woods

■ **Braben director of sport Rachel Froggatt:** 'Over the long term, this won't damage Woods much. In fact, it shows a previously unseen human side to his character, which makes him more relatable. I don't think he will lose any sponsors of note, as he is far too valuable, but you will see them reshape the way they communicate around him.'



Woods' idea that scandal would not damage his image was wide of the mark

■ **Sports PR company director Caroline McAteer:** 'He is still the number-one golfer in the world. Brands associated with him on a sports level such as Nike will probably find the stories make no difference to his appeal.'

■ **Antony Marcou, managing director, Sports Revolution:** 'If Tiger Woods starts missing cuts then that might make a

difference... if someone does leave him, then some other smart brand will pick him up.'

■ **Mark Ritson, your humble columnist:** 'Most of Tiger's sponsors look set to make the most of their morality clauses in their contracts and drop him... He not only cheated on his wife, he cheated on his image. That's one crime the sponsors never forgive.'