

# Tiger economy in jeopardy

The fallout from the golf star's philandering has led his sponsors to reconsider his strategic value

First, and let me be very clear on this point, I have never had sex with Tiger Woods. I appreciate that this may come as a shock, given that, by now, it may appear that almost everyone has had a secret relationship with the world's most famous golfer.

Alas, Tiger's apparent popularity with some ladies is not rubbing off on his brands. Most of his sponsors look set to make the most of the morality clauses in their contracts with him and drop him from their marketing plans.

We have had misbehaving celebrities for decades, yet most have held on to their sponsors. Why is Tiger different?

First off, his alleged indiscretions are hard for the public to forgive. He has two lovely children and a beautiful and apparently dedicated wife. Most of the women he has been associated with are, to put it mildly, in a different segment.

The majority of people simply can't understand why Woods would repeatedly let down such a loving family. When US swimmer Michael Phelps was busted smoking pot this year, the general reaction was 'Yup, I did that at college too', and the transgression was swiftly forgotten. The Tiger scandal is different because people cannot forgive what that they do not understand.

Second, his actions are a direct contradiction of his positioning. His Gatorade drink, for example, was marketed with the words 'True force' and 'Focus' – now hilariously off-kilter with Tiger's recent misdeeds. Three weeks ago, it was a perfect fit with how

the world saw Woods: cool, dedicated, professional, infallible. These attributes attracted sponsors and this was how they then portrayed him. His recent behaviour is not just inconsistent with that image, it undermines it forever.

When Kate Moss was photographed apparently snorting cocaine in 2005, she famously went on to double her income the following year. Her actions might have been illegal, but they were entirely consistent with the girl from Croydon who became the world's most dangerous and mysterious supermodel.

Tiger's crime is very different. He not only cheated on his wife, he also cheated on his image. That's one crime the sponsors never forgive.

We live in a new, more responsible century. Forty years ago it was possible for George Best to bed far more women than Tiger and remain one of sport's

**'Tiger Woods' huge price tag may be contributing to the speed with which he is being jettisoned by sponsors'**



most marketable stars. But sponsors are looking for honourable, holistic people to represent them in these parsimonious and transparent times. They have traded stars with drug problems and serial infidelities for ones with personal foundations and a social conscience. That was why they flocked to Woods – and why they are now deserting him.

Strategically, this might be a good time to take advantage of a clause in Woods' contract for unrelated financial reasons. Major sponsors like Accenture are downsizing their workforce as revenues drop. No bad time, perhaps, to also walk away from a multimillion-dollar deal with a man who missed most of 2008's season through injury and now looks set to miss most of 2010. When you are paying for a celebrity like Woods you cannot simply opt not to use him for a while. His huge price tag may actually be contributing to the speed with which he is being jettisoned.

It's not over yet. When David Beckham was accused of having an affair, there was only ever one story to play out in the press and his sponsors waited it out. With at least a dozen women now claiming involvement with Tiger and each on the verge of mega-deals for their story, there could be many salacious twists yet to be revealed. If there is still more to come, expect even Nike to call foul and head for the clubhouse.

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## 30 seconds on... suddenly inappropriate Tiger campaigns

- **Gatorade - 'It's in Tiger, is it in you?'** Last week, PepsiCo said it was discontinuing the Gatorade Tiger Focus variant. It claimed the decision was made several months earlier.
- **Gillette - 'The best a man can get.'** On Saturday Gillette said it is phasing out activity using Woods to promote the Fusion razor to 'support his desire for privacy'.



**Nike Golf** stated support for Woods, but has gone quiet on the ad front

- **Accenture - Go on, be a Tiger!** After a six-year tie, the consulting firm dropped Woods on Sunday. Research had 'determined that he is no longer the right representative for our advertising'.
- **AT&T - 'Talent, leadership, and philanthropy.'** The US phone network supports the Tiger Woods Foundation and sponsors the player's golf

bag. It is 'presently evaluating our ongoing relationship'.

- **Nike - 'I am Tiger Woods.'** On 4 December, the sportswear and equipment brand stated its 'full support' for the golfer and is 'looking forward' to his return to golf from a self-imposed, indefinite 'time out'. Since then, however, its ads featuring Woods have disappeared from the market.