

An Analysis of Brand Spokesperson Models

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Abstract. In today's market, the examples of brands using celebrity spokespersons are increasing in a huge trend. Both international luxury brands and affordable niche brands cannot escape this trend. This has much influence on brands, celebrities, and consumers, both good and bad. For example, the cases of Louis Vuitton using young idol spokespersons in China create huge effects and benefits, and it will be further analyzed in this article. As the use of spokespersons in advertising and brands are spreading out effectively, there is still very limited research on why those celebrity endorsement work. So, the aim of this article is to address the potential benefits and how to strategically solve the negative information of celebrity sources in brands and companies. The main research method is to collect case studies to make marketing comparisons between companies using young idol celebrities and those who do not. Then, analysis of the precious cases to see the extent to which consumers, brands, and celebrities benefit from the Celebrity-Brand Congruence policy. In findings, negative public voice of information on celebrities can harm brands' reputations even if the consumers have already recognized them before. However, in many perspectives, those celebrity endorsements enhanced the effectiveness of the brands' image and likability of celebrities, and indeed they all attract supporters.

Keywords: Celebrity Endorsement, Brand Image, Celebrity-Band Congruence.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, people are all customers of certain brands and companies in the consumerist society. Hence, there is marketing communication between brands and customers. Thus, much attention has been put on idol spokespersons' model of operation. Indeed, there are great impacts on celebrity endorsement. Using celebrities, especially young idols, in an advertisement will directly increase brand awareness and attract supporters because they have enough publicity and popularity. Though there are risks in achieving mutual benefits, the success of Celebrity-Brand Congruence would benefit and enhance the brand's image and likability.

As the global pandemic spreads fiercely, many brands and companies are under great economic crisis. Consumers' demand for cosmetics has plummeted due to home-based work and the daily wearing of face masks. So, the global beauty industries have been severely affected by the pandemic. According to a recent report on the impact of the pandemic on the global beauty industry, global sales of beauty products from April to June 2020 fell by about 50% compared with the same period last year, and full-year sales are expected to fall by 20% to 30% [1]. In addition, according to the data of the 2020 semi-annual report, L'Occitane, Shiseido, and other beauty enterprises showed significant degrees of decline. The year-on-year growth rates reached -11.6% and -26% respectively [2]. Indeed, this makes brands more dependent on spokespersons now. So, it is urgent for them to maximize the value transmission. In the communication between a brand and consumers, celebrity endorsement is one of the most direct methods in marketing. The better use of celebrity's images can effectively communicate with the public. In 2022, some brands tried to rewrite the traditional form of endorsement and explore innovative ways of endorser marketing, such as the use of the virtual idol spokesperson. They have no uncontrollable gossip, which is safer for the brand. McDonald's had launched a singing and dancing virtual idol called "Happy Sister". Wearing a cute dress with a Dressed ponytail, she quickly gained some children's attention [3]. However, since that is a very creative, new, and bold try, the greatest issue in recent years for many companies is still how to choose a celebrity spokesperson, whether to follow the popular flow, select young idols as the spokesperson, or use national-level star endorsement that matches the brand tone has become a question that many

brands consider deeply. About which is more likely to increase brand value and make sales faster set off a lot of topics and public attention.

According to previous research, when a celebrity is associated with a brand, their image contributes to the consumer's perception of that brand. Although study findings are ambiguous about celebrities' capacity to inspire real purchasing behavior, the beneficial influence on the economic returns of sponsoring corporations is extensively documented [4]. Several articles like this suggest that celebrities involved in brand images are spreading out. Previous research has recognized the influence of celebrity credibility on endorsement brands and how the personality congruence between spokespersons and brands will affect customers' buying interest. However, there have been limited cases or group studies on this topic to address why celebrity endorsement works effectively.

Facing increasingly complex and changeable market competition, in order not to be abandoned by consumers and to maintain the vitality of the brand, it has become a consensus of many brands to act and propagandize younger to attract the new generation of young consumers. At the same time, brands also need to consider whether the spokesperson is in line with the brand's tone. While previous studies focus more on behavioral patterns, and the utilization of cases may be overlooked by the empirical surveys, this study seeks to fill the gap by doing case studies recently. In this research, the aim is to specify how celebrities, brands, and consumers can benefit as a whole in order to develop a more detailed strategic model when selecting spokespeople. There will be no limit on elaborate factors like the attractiveness and credibility of the brands and celebrities to measure the match between them. For example, how do customers react to brands differently to a brand when they got a young celebrity to be a spokesperson and when they do not? In what way can brands make sure they are using a celebrity effectively?

2. Basic background of Celebrity-Brand Congruence

Celebrity-Brand-Congruence is a key aspect for brands to consider when selecting a spokesperson in order to gain differential advantages for the brand. According to recent studies, congruence can be categorized into three types: "attractiveness-based" congruence (for example, correlating a pretty celebrity with a brand associated with a beauty product), "expertise-based" congruence, for instance, correlating a sportsperson with a brand related to sports item, and "image-based" congruence, for instance, correlating reachable celebrity connotations with reachable brand associations [4]. However, is this a prerequisite for making an endorsement effective? The answer cannot be very absolute because there is a different conceptualization of the construct of congruence.

3. Congruence between celebrity-brand personalities

The choosing of congruent brand-celebrity personality pair is definitely important and pervasive. There are still many conventional brands that contribute to the match-up theory using personality as an important dimension of fit. Both of the situations work as long as the brands are taking the right celebrity. Because "consumers will have favorable attitudes toward those brands which they perceive to have higher self-image congruence," and given the compatibility of celebrity and brand personas, enhancing the brand personality will improve consumer attitudes [4].

For common small brands, finding the right spokesperson is the most important thing. Unlike big luxury companies, their purpose is not to go international but how to quickly enter the mass market. For example, a clothing brand named Hailan home announced Jay Chou as their new spokesperson in June 2021. If only the commercial value is evaluated, the score that Jay Chou can get may not be as good as the singing and dancing young idols. However, the most important factors for brands to choose cooperative artists are public praise, their personal labels, and previous endorsement effects. The efficacy of the spokesperson may be significantly increased by a congruent fit between the brand and the spokesperson in terms of how each is regarded [5]. Jay Chou is "the symbol of the Chinese music world", and the image has always been positive. He has accumulated a good reputation in the

fields of music, actors, and directors. On the other hand, Hailan Home has been recognized as a "national classic brand", which has been providing the most suitable clothing for hundreds of millions of men in China. They both have created extraordinary achievements in each other's professional paths, so their strengths are quite matched [6]. From the statistic, in the first half of 2020, Hailan Home's revenue fell by 24%, and its net profit was cut in half, down 55.42%. Issues include inventory pressure and declining product design appeal. So, their goal was to find a spokesperson who could address these issues. Apparently, it reached the goal. After 2 days of Jay Chou's endorsement, the brand's popularity is 97.96 after index calculation [7]. Hailan House successfully found the current celebrity who fit the outlook of the brand and rebuilt the brand's cultural confidence.

4. The successful case of celebrity incongruence with the brand

However, there are many positive and successful examples of endorsement regardless of whether the celebrities actually fit the brand's image as long as they can both benefit from the cooperation. Many international luxury brands already have attention from the higher-class people; their need is to strengthen the public perception. So, the congruence between the celebrity and the brand itself may not be the first criteria. In other words, it is not as important as the well-known degree of the appointed celebrities. For example, this summer, Louis Vuitton announced the youth idol group "Teens in Times" as its brand ambassador in China. They are a young boy group in China that have 7 members. As a group, they have more than 10 million fans; the highest number of individual followers is more than 20 million. Within 3 hours of the official announcement, the number of likes on the related social media posts exceeded 1.1 million. The Spring/summer 2023 men's fashion show is regarded as the turning point for Louis Vuitton [8]. The hot tags and topics on social media that this young idol band can bring is the key reason for this cooperation. Capturing young consumers is the main strategy of Louis Vuitton in the Chinese market. In this successful case, it is easy to raise the question of why can an idol group with an average age of less than 19 endorse an international luxury brand like Louis Vuitton?

Previous research used to believe that a higher degree of similarity between celebrity brand personas and consumer behavior may aid customers in rationalizing their decisions and have a favorable and substantial impact on brand associations [4], according to the attribution theory. Teens in Times, however, do not seem to be the best representers of the brand since they are too young to hold luxury brands, and they debut two years till now, which gives not enough time for LV to examine them. Indeed, Louis Vuitton opened a new market idea in the Chinese market and accelerated the "hunt" for celebrities.

5. The win-win mode

5.1. Benefits model for brands

Louis Vuitton reversed the trend, reflecting the brand's unique market position and the current strategic position of the young market in LV's global context. There are some brands against this approach and suggest that the best spokesperson for a brand is always the product itself. However, according to the previous sales data, in the 2021 summer, within a few days after the endorsement of Gongjun, a famous young actor in China, LV gained more than 6 million in online sales from his fans, which reflects the powerful purchasing power of Chinese fan culture. According to the statistical analysis from LVMH, Asia accounted for 37% of LVMH's sales in the first quarter of 2022, making the largest contribution among all sales regions [8]. The fierce competition does not allow brands to lose out in the Chinese market, and no other global market is so dependent on celebrities. Louis Vuitton's action reflects its unique market position and the current strategic position of the young market in LV's global context. Indeed, on the other hand, LV also considers a lot of risk control and revenue perspectives when selecting a spokesperson to protect the brand's reputation best.

From a risk control perspective, because Teens in Times is a group, the losses caused by personal risks can be better dispersed. Their entertainment company also has strict behavioral controls on teens and is less prone to scandals. In addition, the career of this young boy group is long, and the future development potential is also greater, which is a longer-term investment for luxury brands. Next, from the perspective of revenue, Teens in Times can bring a group of young consumers to Louis Vuitton. As for now,

Men's clothing business accounts only for a small proportion of the brand, so their volume of business is more on accessories, bags, and womenswear. In this way, the purchase of a large number of female fans will increase the sales of women's clothing, the growth of the accessories business, and the overall social media popularity of the brand.

5.2. Marketing methods for a celebrity endorser

While celebrity endorsement is a beneficial way for brands to enhance their value, how should the brand deploy its strategy after determining the spokesperson? Many previous studies talked about the management slant for influencer marketing, which is to make celebrities increase parasocial contact and deepen parasocial connections and publish a post that is very personal [9]. For example, to provide an adequate indication of the persuasive nature of their messages (e.g., using "#sponsored" or "#ad") on Instagram. Marketing used to be all about creating topics and attention on social media, which are effective. Now there are more influential ways for brand marketing. If an enterprise wants to develop, in the long run, it has to establish a brand image. Celebrity endorsement is the fastest and most effective way to help the brand establish its image and occupy the market. First, media placement: placing advertisements in films and television shows. Second, fans marketing: celebrities making live sales online [10]. The online data tends to be more. In addition, both online and store sales methods mean that the brand has a wider range of channels. If identifying spokespersons is a difficult task for the brand, then it is more important for companies to use celebrities to enhance the brand value. In accordance with the professional strategic deployment above will create perfect cooperation and achieve a win-win situation for the brand and artists.

6. The risks and solutions

Previous research still has a concern about the effects of attitude incongruity. A state of "congruity" is stated to occur if a person has a favorable attitude toward both a source and a brand or a bad attitude toward both [11]. For example, a positive attitude toward the brand and a negative one towards the celebrity. While the guidelines are not very clear, how should the brand stop the loss in time and reduce the negative impact when they accidentally choose the wrong spokesperson?

Celebrity endorsement of brands can be a high-risk decision. In fact, the extent of success and failure is based on the celebrities' behavior. When there is a strong enough association between a celebrity and a brand, any subsequent unfavorable publicity about the celebrity lowers the brand's ratings [12]. In many cases, the brand is innocent because they did nothing wrong, but they have to take responsibility for selecting the wrong spokesperson. For example, in July 2021, Kris Wu, a famous Chinese celebrity, was caught in a huge scandal. He quickly got criminally detained, arrested, and banned from the Internet in mainland China on suspicion of rape and sexual assault on minors. In only 2 days, Kris Wu was quickly abandoned by the Chinese market; twenty brands ended their relationship with him. However, this still hurts the reputation of every brand. The public will not accept any of these products in a short time because they will remind the customers about sexual assault when looking at these brands' image. After this incident, nowadays, many brands are being very cautious and avoid using Chinese idol spokespeople [13].

Taking action in a timely manner, whether to terminate the contract or clarification on official social media, can ease the public's attitude towards the brand. As long as to not only wait and sit still, the brand can reduce the negative impact and the evaluation to a certain extent. In addition, some record measures should be done in advance to make sure there is always a second plan in a crisis. For

example, Zheng Shuang, a young Chinese actress, was banned from the entertainment industry because of surrogacy. She used to be the spokesperson for Prada, and her influence on Prada on the Internet is direct and obvious. Right after the incident, Prada's stock fell seriously. Two days after the scandal, Prada issued a letter the next day to terminate the cooperation. Because Prada's cooperation time with Zheng Shuang is not too long, in fact, it only lasts for seven days; in addition, the public relations team's processing is strong. The incident did not cause too much damage to the brand's reputation. According to Yeon's data, the negative sentiment only increased by 4% [14].

The damage is temporary, and Zheng Shuang is not the only focus that Prada has put on the growth of its spreading in the Chinese market. In fact, Xukun (August) Cai is also a Prada spokesperson, a young idol among the new generation of artists. The day after the official announcement of August as the spokesperson, Prada received 730 million exposures on the hot topics. According to an interview with the salesperson, the purchasing power of his fans behind is also very considerable. Prada's cooperating letter keychains with him have been sold out in mainland China, Hongkong, and Japan within one day, only because the keychain has the three letters "Kun" which represent him. His fans have also started an event of posting more than 50,000 orders on Prada's official blog [15]. Professionals in the industry have also stated that Prada has successful performance nowadays is inseparable from Cai Xukun's three-year spokesperson status. In rational business events, the stability and professionalism of spokespersons are extremely critical to the reputation of the brand. The negative impacts of Zheng Shuang's incident on the endorsed brand are accidental but also inevitable. When the damage has already occurred, what the brand can do is deal with it in time, reduce the impact, and prepare a plan beforehand.

7. Conclusion

In this study, the article analyzed the potential benefits of celebrity endorsement and provided strategic solutions for brands when facing negative spokesperson sources. After the analysis of different cases, there is a conclusion that brands, celebrities, and consumers all can benefit from a celebrity-brand congruence policy. In addition, consumers can also be attracted to a spokesperson who does not have a perfect fit with the brand. As long as celebrities can enhance the effectiveness of the brand's image, people, especially adolescents, will make big support the company. It is a trend that the utilization of spokespersons in brands is getting more and more effective. This study focused on talking about why and how these common celebrity endorsements work, which fills the gap of the previous studies. The most contribution of this article is all of the case studies; the details of how those brands choose the specific celebrities within the huge Chinese entertainment market is extremely beneficial to small business and companies which just starting to enter the market. At present, there is not much research on what the spokesperson should do to make the brand achieve better benefits after the spokesperson is determined. Future research can explore what substantive promotion the spokesperson can do to help the brand enhance more value and attract more customers in addition to the fans base in addition to only waiting for fans to buy the product.

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