

An Overview on the Effectiveness of Brand Mascot and Celebrity Endorsement

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Abstract—Celebrity and brand mascot endorsement have been explored for more than three decades. Both endorsers can effectively transfer their reputation to corporate image and can influence the customers to purchase the product. However, there was little known about the mediators between the level of endorsement and its effect on buying behavior. The objective of the current study is to identify the gap of the previous studies and to seek possible mediators. It was found that consumer's memory and identification are the mediators, of source credibility and endorsement effect. A future study should confirm the model of endorsement, which was established in the current study.

Keywords—Product endorsement, memory, identification theory, source credibility, unintentional effect.

I. INTRODUCTION

FOLLOWING a long history of research studies on the effect of media, product endorsement was first introduced in the 1970s [1], [2]. It is a decade after violence in the media was explored [3]-[5]. Previously, product endorsement study was classified as a neutral media effect. The neutral media effect is neither harmful nor beneficial for media audiences [6]. However, researchers of later studies tend to consider the negative effects of advertising on young adolescents [7], and also to enhance media literacy skills in them [8]. The present study was conducted to understand the overall dimensions of product endorsement and its effects on consumers. The main objectives are (1) to identify the themes, dimensions, and all variables founded in this area, (2) to identify the missing variables, and (3) to point the direction for future studies.

II. PRODUCT ENDORSEMENT

Marketers believe celebrity product endorsement in advertising is a way to attract audiences' attention and draw it to the message [9]-[11]. This marketing strategy can also improve brand image [12], and increase audiences' positive attitude toward the brand [10], [13], [14]. Bunnag found an effect, image transfer, that celebrity image can transfer to brand image [15]. A reconceived preference for a particular celebrity can increase the positive attitude of individuals towards a brand and products [11]-[13]. In fact, product endorsers can be anyone, not only celebrities or famous people. There are four types of product endorsers, which are

(1) celebrity from entertainment media, (2) CEO or top manager of the company, (3) expert who does not work in the entertainment industry, and (4) typical people [16]. Similarly, another researcher identified two types of product endorsers used in television advertising, which are (1) celebrity who uses the product in his/her real life, and (2) celebrity who only pretends to use the product in the advertising [17]. However, none of these studies consider brand mascots as product endorsers. The current study intentionally included brand mascot in the analysis to compare the various dimensions of benefits and disadvantages to human endorsers.

The reason that the researchers need to include brand mascot in the analysis is that many recent studies have found a negative effect of using celebrity as a product endorser. When audiences view the advertising presented by a famous celebrity who appears everywhere, eventually the effectiveness of the advertising will diminish parallel to the disinterest of the audience due to perceived overkill [9]. As a result, audiences will not be interested in the product [9]. Another related marketing strategy is product placement in a celebrity's social network account. For example, Scott Disick posted his photo with a Bootea Shake on Instagram [18]. A qualitative interview study found that fans of celebrities feel bored and annoyed when they see product placement on celebrities' social network profiles [19]. Lately, educators and teachers also try to enhance media-literacy skills in young children [20]-[23]. Marketing strategies, such as product placement, can obviously be viewed as advertising, although in fact, marketers need it appear to be unintentional. Since people are aware of the hundreds of advertisements around them, they may not need to be see an additional advertising in their spare time. As the email contained advertising is called, 'junk mail,' it shows that these people have a negative attitude regarding advertising.

Other detrimental effects of using celebrity as product endorser is that there might be negative news about celebrities who may have already signed for an endorsement campaign [24]. Many celebrities are also poor role models for young children [25]. Kim, Lee and Prideaux [26] also found that attributes of celebrity do not always transfer to brand credibility. Some brands need to use many celebrities to cover the overall target market [26]. This could imply that a company might have to spend a lot of money to hire various celebrities to achieve the goal of the campaign. Currently, some companies use brand mascots, instead of celebrities as product endorsers. However, the brand mascots may not have the initial credibility as the celebrities [27]. Thamsongsana [28] has suggested the way to heighten the reputation of brand

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mascots. If brand mascots are famous enough, the brand may not need to use celebrity endorsement anymore. Television, website, digital billboard, brand mobile application, and print media can support the rendering of brand mascots. Brand mascots can be vividly animated with new computer graphic software [29], and added in a game and mobile application that human cannot fit in properly in their real lives [27].

Wei and Lu [30] have compared the effect of using celebrity as product endorsers to online customer review. It was found that celebrity can cause audiences' attentions and desire in shoes advertising, but customer reviews cause a more positive effect in toner, which is more sensitive product for human skin. The present study seeks to compare various dimensions of enforcement effect of celebrity and brand mascot. Both endorsers might be more comparable than celebrity and customer review in the study of Wei and Lu [30], since nowadays brand mascots become tangible and animated as living creatures. Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart and Lalive [31] suggested that all quantitative researchers should ensure that independent variable really causes an effect on dependent variable, and if not, researchers should seek other related variables, such as the mediators.

III. METHOD

The current study extends the previous study of the same researcher, [27] and [24]. Documentary analysis was used to analyze the findings of the overall studies in the product endorsement area. The researchers used thematic analysis to categorize the main variables of the cause and effect of product endorsement. Moreover, researcher Isari Pairoa has worked as a marketer in a private company, and currently, Proud Arunrangsiwed works as a brand ambassador for an art supply import company. It is a good opportunity to include the researchers' experience in the analysis. All selected papers were cited in the reference section. These selected papers need to include the keywords, such as product endorsement, brand mascot, advertising, marketing campaign, and other related keywords in the same field.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Source Credibility Scale

The Source Credibility Scale (SCS) was developed by Ohanian [32]. Source credibility refers to a positive image of the endorser or trustee that trustors or audiences can perceive from the message [32]. In the same study, SCS has three dimensions, which are attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. All these three dimensions were examined by many researchers from various areas of advertising. Credibility can be created based on positive experience in interactive activities between customers and company. This positive experience can transpire through many different methods, such as campaigns, purchasing, and communicating with customer service. A positive experience in interactive activity will provide customers a good memory or experience of a company [33]. Credibility has to be contained in three levels of Communication, which are the sender, media and message

[34]. Rattanachat and Chaiprasit [35] used a similar credibility scale, but taking out 'expertise', and adding 'perceived similarity.' They found that all these dimensions have a relationship with cosmetic purchasing behavior. The dimension, perceived similarity, will be discussed later.

1) Attractiveness

The researchers found that previous studies in the area of product endorsement contained less data and results about attractiveness, compared to the other two dimensions, trustworthiness and expertise. This might be because the earlier study found that there is no relationship between attractiveness and purchasing behavior. For example, attractive endorsers can only benefit some kind of products, and they could negatively relate to purchasing behavior [36]. Generally, attractiveness was found in the media study research. Media study scholars tend to point out that media should not reinforce the myth about goodness and attractiveness [37]. Klein and Shiffman [38] also found a relationship between body thinness and expertise in many cartoon characters. The researchers of the current study suggest that celebrity is generally more attractive than a brand mascot and should also be perceived as having more expertise. Using a brand mascot might be a double-edged sword. If there is no marketing strategy to heighten the reputation of brand mascot, using a brand mascot as a product endorser might be worse than using a celebrity. However, most brand mascots are not thin, but rather they tend to look fat or having round body. This means that the brand mascots will not reinforce the myth about thinness and other positive traits.

2) Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the level of trust that media audiences or customers give to the endorser and message [39], [10]. Songprayoon [17] found that a celebrity endorser who uses the product in their real life can have a more positive effect on purchasing decision than a celebrity who does not use the product. This is because audiences perceive less trustworthiness in the celebrity who does not use the product [15]. Trustworthiness effect can be created by a brand mascot endorsement, too. The brand mascot endorsement used at a university library can provide emotionally engage and trustful students who use the library [40]. Brand mascot can also reduce the feeling of a barrier for the students who use library service. However, people from different ages trust different types of endorsers [33]. Younger people trust low-decency superheroes, but older people trust high-decency superheroes [24]. A celebrity with a strong reputation will often endorse various products of different companies. This kind of advertising will create a sense of less trustworthiness [9]. The researchers of the current study suggest that product quality is another reason that causes lower levels of trustworthiness in the advertising with a famous celebrity. It is well-known that companies are often required to pay large sums for celebrity endorsements. This can give the implication that for the same product price, the product with famous endorser is of inferior quality than that with a regular man-on-the-street

endorsement, since the product price includes the cost of hiring the celebrity. The finding of Aneaktumkul 's study [9] and the finding of Wei and Lu's study [30] also supports our conclusion. The target audience may not trust the celebrity endorsers, since they believe that famous people would do everything for money, as well that most of these celebrities do not relate to the product [9], [30].

3) Expertise

Expertise is one of the most frequent variables found in research studies in the area of product endorsement. A celebrity with direct experience in using a particular product is more likely to enhance overall perceived credibility [41]. Source expertise can boost the interest of audiences and encourages them to try to understand the message and finally purchase the product [42]. Petty, Cacioppo and Goldman [43] discovered that source expertise and the quality of the argument in the message can influence audiences' involvement in the message. Another important influence of an expert endorser is that they can increase consumers' positive attitude toward the brand and its products [44]. Endorsers who have a real-life relationship with a product can create a more positive attitude in audiences than endorsers who do not relate to a product [10]. Moreover, there is a long-term effect, that the audiences are more likely to forget messages from endorsers who have no relationship with the product [45]. Another negative effect of this type of endorsement is perceived insincerity. The target audience is likely to view endorsers without a relationship to a product as being insincere [10]. For the brand mascot, there is no question of whether they can be experts, since they are not real people. However, to increase perception of a brand mascot as an expert, companies need to find the strategies to make them popular. Thamsongsana [28] suggested that brand mascot should be involved in various activities, and thus, it could be seen as an expert in different areas. These activities can include being seen as a brand Line Stickers or brand Facebook Sticker. Line is a social networking application that is famous in Thailand and East Asia. Most large companies in Thailand pay to put their brand mascots in Line Sticker sets for social network users to download them and use them. In the sticker set, brand mascots can be involved in different activities such as eating, talking, running, etc. They work when social network users use these stickers to represent their own emotions. This process is part of how users identify with brand mascots.

B. Identification

Because consumers are the ones who use a product or service, they may also consider themselves as expert. Consumers are more likely to feel an affinity with expertise endorsements from those representatives who use the product [46]. This perceived affinity is one of the most important outcomes resulting from an endorsement, and it also one of the most important dimensions in the identification process.

Identification theory was first written by Burke [47]. It provides previous studies to explore its function in various areas in communication. Hearold [6] stated that an audience

would identify with a film or movie character, when the audience perceives that the character is attractive, similar, and heroic. Homophily is how the individual perceives similarity between one another [48]. Arunrangsiewed [24] extended the dimension of perceived similarity by conducting a study to test the relationship between homophily (perceived similarity) and how audiences believe in the message. Not only was the relationship between both variables found, it also showed that the link is stronger in men than in women [24]. Similarly, on social networking platforms, users are more likely accept the friendship of strangers if they are perceived to be similar to themselves [49]. In a study on fan psychology, groups of fans are more likely to join with others who they perceive as having similar interests [50]. People are also more likely to react positively to those they perceive are similar to themselves [51].

In the area of product endorsement, perceived similarity can encourage a target audience to identify with the endorsers [44]. Perceived similarity has a stronger effect on audiences' purchasing intention than trustworthiness and attractiveness of the endorsers [35]. Both brand mascot and celebrity endorsements are used to enhance product identity [15]. Product identity is what makes a product different from similar product of other brand. A famous celebrity who is endorser of many brands or products could limit the perceived integrity of a product. A brand mascot might be a solution to this problem, since it represents a particular product or company. Thus, the brand mascot could be a better endorser compared to a famous celebrity who represents multiple products. On the other hand, human endorsers may have a stronger effect on perceived similarity than brand mascots. This is because brand mascots are not human. However, brand mascots in social network sticker sets can strengthen user identity through emotional affinity, rather than through a physical similarity. Well-designed cartoon representations [52] displaying realistic human emotions can communicate that emotion. This supports our suggestion that audiences or social network users could perceive emotion from brand mascot better than human endorsers.

Another factor that mentioned in a previous study by Arunrangsiewed [24] is that most celebrities are wealthier than the target audience and therefore it can be difficult to perceive similarity between people in different social classes. Thus product placement in a movie might work better than in TV advertising, because a character in a film is more likely to be representative of the average person. The researchers of the present study would suggest that another missing dimension of the identification process is the point of view of audiences while watching a movie. The audiences would paste themselves in the movie as the point-of view character. For example, in the movie *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), the point-of-view character is Alice, and audiences identify with her rather than other characters. Product placement in the movie should be used with the point-of-view character, and would likely result more effective endorsement than placement with other characters.

C. Reputation

Friedman and Friedman [53] classified celebrity endorsers into three types, (1) endorsers who do not relate to the product, (2) endorsers who genuinely use the product, and (3) endorsers who have an affinity with the audience. As mentioned in the discussion on identification theory, the third type of endorsers can have the strongest influence on consumers' attitude and behaviors. A cartoon character or a brand mascot could be used in the campaign, as well as the real-life celebrity, because of their reputation. Arunrangsiwed [24] provided an example in a previous study regarding the cartoon character, Hatsune Miku. Hatsune Miku is as famous as any human celebrity, since she had her own live concert and appeared in various commercials. This reveals that famous endorsers, both human or cartoon, would have an initial positive image and that this positive image can be transferred to the product and corporate image [11], [54]. On the other hand, an endorsement campaign with a famous celebrity might not result in a positive perception of the product, but rather increase the positive perception of the celebrity [15]. In other words, a celebrity can boost their own celebrity status by appearing in the advertisement. The opposite can also be true, for example, the status of sports celebrity Tiger Woods diminished after signing his endorsement of certain products [15]. Chiou, Huang, and Chuang [41] also found that celebrity endorsement can only increase purchasing intention in their fans, both not in other potential consumers. Their study showed that consumers can stop purchasing products with endorsements from celebrities they do not like. Where celebrities are endorsing multiple products, target audiences may become fatigued and lose interest in both the celebrity and the advertising, and thereby decrease purchase intention [9].

A new marketing strategy is to use typical everyday people on social networks to promote a brand or product. This is also another way of using brand ambassadors, who have a positive influence on buying behavior [55]. Brand ambassadors are actual customers who use the product; they are basically online influencers. The second researcher of the current study is also a brand ambassador of an art supply company. Using products from a particular company, she creates a painting every week and posts it on her Facebook or Instagram accounts. The images are tagged with the company name and the products used in the painting, such as the brand of the acrylic paint and canvas. Although by only posting her paintings through her social network, the researcher does not feel that she can influence many people to purchase the same products. The researcher also introduced products, such as brushes and watercolor sets into the classroom for students to use first hand. After continual use of the watercolor sets throughout the semester, the students enquired about purchasing their own set. Therefore, direct contact with a product by potential consumers could be seen as more effective than just posting pictures on Facebook.

D. Memory

Since products from many brands are similar, not only in

appearance, but also in functionality, using celebrity endorsements is one way to create a positive memory in consumers and advertising audiences [10], [43]. The brand mascot can act as an endorsement to enhance the identity of a product and benefit product recall [56]. Celebrity endorsements can heighten the recall link between the products and the endorsers themselves [15]. Marketers believe that both celebrity and brand mascot endorsements can increase attention, concerns and recall-memory in audiences and consumers [57]. A famous celebrity who endorses many brands is less likely to be able to leave a lasting impression in advertising audiences, since the multiple endorsements can be confused [9]. Thus plays memory an important role as a bridged from the endorsement process to the final goal.

Hall [58] developed the AIDMA model to test the endorsement effect. Memory is also a part of this model. Later in 2013, Wei and Lu [30] added two more dimensions to the original model to test the effect from online resources. Memory recall is the important process that happens before consumers take action to purchase a product. In other words, after audiences perceive product credibility from the endorsement, they need to be able to recall the memory to engage purchasing intention and purchasing behaviors.

Memory has also been explored as a part of study tourists, and identified what is called memorable experience [59]. This memorable experience cannot be created just by watching advertising on TV or from online resources. For a brand mascot promoted in the format of branded social network stickers, a memorable experience can be established through the use of the stickers by social network users when communicating with friends.

Muda, Musa, Mohamed and Borhan [60] tested a model where source credibility is the independent variable, attitude is the mediator, and purchasing intention is the dependent variable. However, no study was found that tested a model with memory as the mediator. The researchers of the current study suggest that a future study should include memory in the model.

E. Unintentional Effect

One of the goals of using product placement is to create an unintentional effect. That is when audiences do perceive the advertising as part of the movie or content on a celebrity social network account. This unintentional effect is mostly explored in studies focusing in areas such as media violence [61], feminism [62], [63], and myth [64]. They discussed how young adolescents are influenced by stereotypes [65], [66], myths [64], and violence in the media [67]. This intentional effect causes aggressiveness [68], [69], anti-social behaviors [70], and prejudice in media users/audiences. Moreover, the people who are influenced by the media might also misclassify the identity of others [71]. In the area of product endorsement, if audiences perceive a product placement in a movie or on a celebrity's social networking account as too obvious, it can have the effect of being irksome and disappointing [41].

Additional marketing strategies can be implemented when using a brand mascot in an advertising campaign. Companies

need to promote the brand mascot to build its reputation as the brand representative. To build reputation brand mascots can appear in mainstream media such as television and newspaper [28], as well as through the branding of social network Stickers. Marketers can also build scenarios around the brand mascot to draw the attention of media audiences [28]. Such a scenario could create a sense of curiosity or intrigue and help build an interest in the activities of the brand mascot. The researchers of the current study refer to this strategy as the use of anti-stereotypes in marketing communication.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Future studies should include the variables of source credibility and un/intentional effect as the independent variable, and identity salience and memory as the mediator. The dependent variable could be purchasing intention and purchasing behaviors. The researchers should not only explore product endorsement, they should understand that there are other factors that influence purchasing behaviors, such as variety of products, prices, and promotions [35], [72], the characteristic of the company [73], and the involvement of the company to the target market [74]. Most studies cited in the findings of this paper used quantitative research design. Future studies may consider using mixed method design [75].

Another suggestion for future research in any area in the field of marketing is for researchers and companies to consider the benefit of the product or company to society and consumers over potential profit [76], [77]. Advertising should not only express a message to audiences; it should also reinforce the thinking process [78] to allow media audiences to compare similar products. As an example, a media producer might consider adding prosocial content into a media design or advertisement to promote prosocial thoughts and behaviors in young adolescents [79], [80].

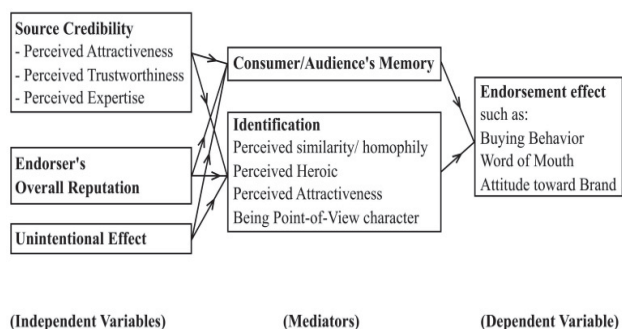


Fig. 1 Suggested Conceptual Model for Future Study, named, "Proud and Isari's Model of Endorsement"

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