

Chapter 4

Social Media Influencers and Consumer Online Engagement Management

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ABSTRACT

With the popularity of social media, social media influencers have been playing an increasing role in modern marketing. However, there is little research on the impact of social media influencers on consumer brand engagement. To fill this gap, this chapter develops a conceptual framework to examine the impact of the endorsement by social media influencers on online brand engagement. The authors use social distance theories to construct several propositions to provide a deep understanding. They suggest that traditional celebrities and social media influencers have different social distance, therefore generate different types and degrees of consumer online engagement. And the product characteristics moderate the effectiveness of the different types of celebrity endorsement.

INTRODUCTION

Late 1983, Pepsi's popularity skyrocketed, overtaking their main competitor - Coca-cola, when Michael Jackson was hired as the endorser (University of Michigan, 1987). The effect of this campaign has become a good example in celebrity advertising.

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It is believed that celebrity endorsers are able to create a profound impact on brands, particularly in the social media domain (Kramer, 2011). It is certainly “a ubiquitous feature of modern marketing” (McCracken, 1989). Marketers use celebrity endorsements as an effective promotional tool and there are approximately one-sixth of ads worldwide featuring celebrities (Shimp & Andrews, 2013). Given the importance of celebrities on the effectiveness of advertising, consumer engagement, company’s investment in promotional dollars, the selection of celebrity endorsers is crucially important (Choi & Rifon, 2012).

Despite the importance of social media influencers in modern marketing, there are not many prior studies explored on the impact of social media influencers. To fill the gap in the literature, this study investigates the effects of different types of celebrity endorsers in social media on the emergence of different amount as well as types of consumer brand engagements. The two types of celebrity endorsers are the traditional celebrities, who are movie stars, sport stars and singers, and the ‘new’ celebrities, who are the social media influencers (Saul, 2016). In this study, we use the terms ‘new’ celebrities” and “social media influencers” interchangeably. The brand engagement is investigated in quantity and the form of abstract engagement versus concrete engagement. The study further explains the underlying mechanism: the perceived social distance. As such, the study presumes that traditional and new types of celebrities generate different perceptions of social distance among consumers which then makes them engage in brands differently (i.e., in an abstract vs concrete manner) and in different amount in the social media. The study also investigates the impact of different celebrities on brand engagement when they endorse different goods (hedonic versus utilitarian). Lastly, this research contributes to literature of celebrity endorsement, social media and construal level theory.

BACKGROUND

Celebrity Endorsement

The use of celebrities as endorsers has been a common but expensive practice in the advertising industry since the nineteenth centuries (Choi, Lee, & Kim, 2005). It is suggested that attributes acquired by celebrities, such as trustworthiness, likeability, expertness, dynamism, and objectivity are essential for drawing attention, enhance source credibility, and increase the likelihood of message recall (Ohanian, 1990). Source credibility model (Sternthal, Dholakia, & Leavitt, 1978) and source attractiveness model (McGuire, 1969) are widely used by researchers in celebrity endorsement literature to assess the effectiveness of messages conveyed through celebrity endorsement (McCracken, 1989). Additionally, “match-up hypothesis”

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