The Effects of Informational and Transformational Motivations on Responses Toward Celebrity Endorsements

Kenneth Lord, The University of Scranton, USA
Sanjay Putrevu, University at Albany, SUNY, USA

This research examines the relationship between dimensions of celebrity endorser credibility (attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness) and consumer motivation (informational and transformational). The first study reveals that attitude and purchase intention of adult consumers are driven by celebrity endorsers’ trustworthiness upon exposure to ads for products with informational motivations and by their attractiveness when the ads are for products with transformational motivations. The second study shows that celebrity expertise is the primary determinant of informational processing, while attractiveness is the principal variable driving transformational processing.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/14880/volumes/ap08/AP-08

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
The Effects of Informational and Transformational Motivations on Responses toward Celebrity Endorsements

Kenneth Lord, The University of Scranton, USA
Sanjay Putrevu, University at Albany, SUNY, USA

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Celebrity-endorsement contracts have grown substantially in quantity and cost in recent years. Armbruster (2006) described an array of benefits that may account for the popularity of this strategy: instant recognition, immediate “cut-through” (in a cluttered ad environment), implied preference (assumption that the celebrity likes the product), “cool” factor, and competitive advantage (through instant credibility). Ohanian (1990) presented evidence that source credibility consists of three major dimensions: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. This research examines which of the three dimensions dominate celebrity-endorser credibility perceptions under informational and transformational motivational conditions and how those dimensions affect consumer judgment and choice.

The Elaboration-likelihood Model (ELM) postulates two routes to persuasion or attitude change (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). It suggests that individuals who are high in processing motivation, opportunity, and ability will, upon exposure to a persuasive message, engage in purposeful processing of the message arguments (central route to persuasion). On the other hand, at lower levels of motivation, opportunity, and/or ability, any persuasive effect that emerges is presumably associated with the individual’s liking or disliking of the various executional elements of the message (peripheral route to persuasion). In addition, the spokesperson might be construed as either a central or peripheral cue, depending on the type of relationship between the endorser and the product. Thus, an involved consumer may look to an endorser’s trustworthiness or expertise as an “argument” in favor of message acceptance via the central route, whereas acceptance for a less involved recipient may derive from the endorser’s attractiveness or familiarity via the peripheral route.

The R-P Grid (Rossiter and Percy 1987) incorporates several aspects of the involvement theory and ELM constructs along two dimensions: involvement (high versus low) and type of motivation (informational versus transformational). Informationally motivated consumers are likely to be sensitive to the personal relevance and potential functional risk associated with purchase decisions. Here, the most effective endorsers will be those in whom the buyer can place his or her confidence or whose credibility offers the greatest potential for minimizing risk. In the first instance (confidence), the advantage would appear to fall to the “trustworthy” endorser. In the second (risk reduction), an “expert” presumably offers greatest credibility advantage because of his or her superior knowledge. Transformational motivations stem from a consumer’s desire to enhance his or her sensory, mental, or social state. The attractive, engaging properties the consumer may like to attain are potentially more likely to reside in the “attractiveness” than in the trustworthiness or expertise dimensions of endorser credibility.

Study 1 examined the influence of the attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness dimensions of endorser credibility by observing their effects on the attitudes and purchase intentions of subjects toward informational and transformational products.

H1: For products appealing to informational motivations, brand attitude and purchase intention are influenced by the expertise and trustworthiness of the endorser.

H2: For products appealing to transformational motivations, brand attitude and purchase intention are influenced by the attractiveness of the endorser.

Print advertisements were created to measure consumer reaction to messages for products typified by informational (microwave ovens and aspirin) and transformational (designer jeans and chocolate bars) motivations. In a between-subjects design, subjects (120 students from a major Australian university – 63 females and 57 males) received one of the test ads (the Michael Jordan endorsement for the product in the relevant condition) and three filler ads (for the other three products). The three dimensions of credibility were measured using 15 six-point semantic differential items and attitude and purchase intent were measured using multiple items. To test hypotheses 1 and 2, attitude and purchase-intention scores were regressed as a function of the mean attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness scores. In the informational-motivation category (microwave oven, aspirin), trustworthiness was the only dimension of credibility that emerged as a significant predictor of attitude and intention. This provides partial support for H1, which predicted significant effects of trustworthiness and expertise, but not for attractiveness. In the transformational-motivation condition (designer jeans, chocolate bars), as predicted by H2, attractiveness was a positive and significant predictor.

The intent of Study 2 was to provide direct evidence of a link between the three credibility dimensions and the two motivation types in an externally valid context.

H3: Informational processing is influenced by the expertise and trustworthiness dimensions of endorser credibility.

H4: Transformational processing is influenced by the attractiveness dimension of endorser credibility.

To enhance external validity, actual ads from several publications depicting celebrity endorsers were selected as the stimuli for the second study. A judgment sample of 241 non-student consumers in the United States was exposed to these ads. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, respondents were shown a magazine article and two ads (a test ad and a filler) and invited to read them as they would in their typical magazine reading. Upon completing that task, they were provided with the instrument, containing the same measures of the three dimensions of endorser credibility used in Study 1 and the Puto and Wells (1984) Informational and Transformational Ad Content scale. To test hypotheses 3 and 4, the informational- and transformational-processing scores were regressed as a function of the mean attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness scores. As in Study 1, results were partially consistent with the informational-motivation hypothesis (H3) whereby expertise was found to be the only significant predictor of informational processing ($\beta = .51$, \(t = 3.58\), \(p < .005\)). H4 obtained support in the results, with attractiveness emerging as the only significant positive predictor of motivational processing ($\beta = .28$, \(t = 2.12\), \(p < .05\)).

This research set out to explore how celebrity endorsements are processed by consumers and how such processing influences
brand attitude and purchase intention. There were two dimensions of credibility to which consumers were expected to respond cognitively in response to informational motivations – expertise and trustworthiness; each emerged as a significant predictor of relevant dependent variables. Similarly, attractiveness, which was expected to dominate when consumers were experiencing transformational motivation on the basis of its affective relevance, emerged consistently as significant in the predicted conditions across Studies 1 and 2. It appears that informationally motivated consumers draw upon their perceptions of an endorser’s trustworthiness or expertise to enhance their confidence or minimize risk, whereas transformationally motivated consumers are affected primarily by the attractiveness dimension of credibility. Hence, informational motivation leads to the cognitive processing of endorser expertise and trustworthiness, while transformational motivation leads to the affective processing of endorser attractiveness; these in turn shape attitudinal and behavioral outcomes.

REFERENCES


Mills, Judson and John Harvey (1972), “Opinion Change as a Function of When Information About the Communicator is Received and Whether He is Attractive or Expert,” Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 21 (1), 52-55.


