

“Yes, (s)he is pretty, but...”

An investigation of the simultaneous impact of endorser characteristics relevant to purchasing behaviour

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Abstract

Objectives. Research on advertising efficiency states, that both the attractiveness of a model endorsing a product (Halliwel & Dittmar, 2004) as well as the extent of identification with this endorser (Felsler, 2001) are relevant parameters of advertising effectiveness. Surprisingly, no research has simultaneously investigated the significance of attractiveness and identification with the endorser in the field of non-celebrity endorsement (e.g., typical product users), so far.

Method and Results. Using an experimental between-subjects design ($N = 480$) endorser's attractiveness and gender were manipulated in print advertisements for four different products. Including pivotal determinants of purchasing behaviour (e.g., impression on product quality) multiple regression analysis showed that identification but not attractiveness had a small but significant incremental predictive value on purchasing behaviour.

Conclusion. A (potentially less attractive) non-celebrity endorser with whom consumers can identify themselves might be preferred in favour of an attractive one with whom consumers cannot identify themselves.

Introduction

Advertisements often systematically use endorsers (testimonials), in order to attract the target subject's attention and thereby increase advertising impact (e.g., Happel, 1991) for example through a match between endorser and brand (e.g., Bekk, Spörrle, & Felsler, 2009). Studies investigating testimonials' attractiveness found a positive effect of testimonials' external appearance on advertising appeal (e.g., Sigall & Aronson, 1969). Moreover this positive effect of an attractive testimonial is enforced by ascribed attributes of attractive testimonials, such as „perceived expertise“ and „trustworthiness“ (e. g., Patzer, 1983). In addition to attractiveness, other variables can be assumed to affect a testimonials' advertising appeal. One example may be, that people tend to identify themselves stronger with testimonials, matching ones perception of the self (e.g., Basil, 1996). Identification constitutes an essential aspect of effective lay-testimonial-advertising: If consumers can identify themselves with the testimonial in connection with the offered product, they might perceive the product as appropriate for them. Advertising psychology should be interested in finding out whether the degree of identification between consumer and testimonial or the testimonial's attractiveness is more important to predict purchasing intention.

Method

Study 1:

Several photographs of stimulus persons, male and female respectively, with different levels of attractiveness, were used in Study 1 ($N = 87$) in order to select them regarding significant attractiveness differences. Two sets of pictures were established for both sexes containing stimulus persons of low, medium, and high attractiveness.

Study 2:

480 participants with an average age of 22.39 years ($SD = 3.17$, Range: 16 to 41) rated four different advertisements (drink, ice cream, banking service, and flight) within a $2 \times 2 \times 3$ design:

- Participant's sex
- Stimulus person's sex
- Stimulus person's attractiveness

The participants were asked to complete a paper-pencil-questionnaire regarding (a) their purchase intention towards the particular product provided as dependent variable, (b) their affective, and their (c) cognitive evaluation towards the product. Furthermore, participants were asked to indicate, (d) how strong they can identify with the stimulus person and (e) their general evaluation regarding the particular product category. Participants were asked to rate the mentioned constructs on 11-point Likert scales. Each construct was assessed by means of three items. All scales showed satisfying internal consistencies of $\alpha = .76$ at least.

Furthermore, in order to assess participants' rating of their own attractiveness and the attractiveness of the stimulus persons by the participants, we used a single-item measure to be rated on an 11-point scale. Moreover, the participants were asked to specify their age and sex. The attractiveness of the participants was additionally evaluated by the investigator. In order to keep this judgement comparable across the whole study, only one investigator rated the participants' attractiveness.

Results

In order to analyse the (a) perceived attractiveness and (b) participant's identification with the testimonial concerning purchase intention, a multiple regression analysis was conducted.

First, socio-demographic variables were included. In this step, considering participant's age, sex and attractiveness and the testimonial's sex, there was no significant effect on purchase intention.

In the second step, the affective and cognitive evaluation towards the product and the general basically evaluation regarding the particular product category are included into the multiple regression analysis. The included variables could explain 48% of the variance of purchase intention ($\Delta R^2 = .48$, $p < .001$). Specifically, each variable had an own significant beta-value in predicting purchase intention (affective evaluation towards the product, $\beta = .44$, $p < .001$, general evaluation regarding the particular product category, $\beta = .22$, $p < .001$ and cognitive evaluation towards the product, $\beta = .20$, $p < .001$).

In the last step, the two variables identification with the stimulus person and attractiveness evaluation of the stimulus person by the participant were entered in the analysis. Identification with the stimulus person could explain about an additional 1% of the variance in buying intention ($\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p < .05$), but not the stimulus person's attractiveness. Results indicated, that only the degree of identification with the stimulus person ($\beta = .08$, $p < .05$), but not attractiveness evaluation of the stimulus persons by the participants ($\beta = .01$, *n.s.*) provided a relevant contribution in predicting purchase intention. This analysis, thus, indicated that the degree of identification with the stimulus person (but not attractiveness) served as one incremental determinant of purchase intention.

Discussion

- ➔ Compared to attractiveness, identification has shown to be one relevant determinant of purchase intention.
- ➔ Identification with the testimonial emerged as a significant predictor of purchase intention, even when statistically controlling for central causal variables of buying behaviour.
- ➔ A potentially less attractive testimonial should be preferred over an attractive one, if it allows the consumer to identify with the testimonial.

References

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