

Review of “Connecting with Celebrities: How Consumers Appropriate Celebrity Meanings for a Sense of Belonging”

Summary of Article

Celebrities have never had a more dominant presence within society. They help shape our self-concept, influence what we buy, and tell us what we should be interested in. This article focused on the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements of brands and measured how individuals respond to content based on their self-esteem or need to belong (NTB). Three studies were completed to provide empirical support of their belief that consumers with a high NTB are more likely to use celebrities to help provide meanings for brands they should identify or affiliate with.

The first two studies, 1A and 1B, focused on how high-NTB consumers form self-brand connections to products like shampoo or moisturizer that are endorsed by their favorite celebrities. The third study replicated the findings of the first two studies and measured the degree to which celebrity’s image correlated with the brand they were advertising.

Participants in Study 1A included 190 U.S. females from an online panel, and Study 1B included 141 male and female workers at Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Each study asked individuals to fill out an individual difference scale and then asked to fill out a list of five celebrities that they like of their own gender and rank them in order of favorite to least favorite. Once completed, participants were told that research was being conducted for the launch of a new moisturizer (Study 1A) or shampoo (Study 1B) and asked how likely they would feel if this product was endorsed by their second-favorite celebrity. Based on the answers given by participants, researchers measured responses for both Study 1A and 1B based on the following scales:

- Leary et al. (2013) Need to Belong Scale (**NTB**)
- Escalas (2004) Self-Brand Connection Scale (**SBC**)
- Modified Rubin, Perse and Powell (1985) Parasocial Relationship Scale

In Study 2, 295 individuals were asked to complete items like a Need to Belong Scale, and then asked to read a biography of either Will Smith (male participants) or Angelina Jolie (female participants) that emphasized either their dramatic or athletic abilities. After reading these biographies, participants were shown an ad of a fake watch brand and asked if they had a connection to the brand based on their relationship with the celebrity.

Results from Study 1A and Study 1B both found a significant positive effect of NTB on SBC. Study 1A also found that when parasocial relationships and NTB are included in the model of SBC, NTB becomes insignificant. Study 1B also shows that parasocial relationships have a significant positive effect on SBC. Study 2 had similar results and found a significant positive effect on NTB and SBC, as well as a significant positive effect of NTB on parasocial relationships.

Key Conclusions

Results show that consumers appropriate brand meanings based on celebrity endorsement, and use these images to construct their self-concepts. Studies 1A and 1B show that consumers who have higher affiliation needs create parasocial, one-sided relationships with celebrities, thus influencing their interest in specific products. Study 2 successfully highlights the positive effect that celebrity endorsement has on consumers as well as how important celebrity-brand image match is.

Even if consumers truly do not know celebrities, they feel as if they do and create an intense emotional and psychological connection to them. A symbolic match between the celebrity and the brand is found to be more important to consumers with lower affiliation needs. Celebrity endorsements have been proven to increase interest of both high NTB and low NTB consumers, but have a more of a lasting effect on high NTB consumers.

My Opinion

Celebrities are the bread and butter of western civilization. In order to keep up with the 'culture' or remain socially relevant, it almost comes second nature to look at public figures and try to model our lives after theirs in some way. This need to belong (NTB) is something that we are taught at a young age, and gains more importance when we begin developing who we are, or want to be. Whether we recognize it or not, we each hold a level of NTB, and those with a high NTB use celebrities to help construct their own self-concepts.

I can't remember a time in my life when I wasn't bombarded with images or ads of celebrities trying to sell me something. From commercials of Britney Spears sharing the 'Joy of Pepsi', or Beyoncé telling me why I should be a Covergirl, I was constantly being sold on what I should be spending my money on. Because my favorite celebrities were on the screen, my ears went deaf to the marketing tactics being thrown in my face, and more enthralled in the items they were highlighting. The simple fact of knowing that they may potentially own the same product as me was extremely fulfilling. Based on the findings, I learned that I would be considered a person with a high NTB. I am a brand's best target, because I have a connectedness to certain celebrities and the willingness to buy anything they sell. Once this study pointed out the fact that the relationships I create with my favorite celebrities are completely one-sided, I was immediately ready to detach from them all.

If I could alter a few things about these studies I would include real name brands to test if that made consumers had a particular response. We commonly associate some brands with certain celebrities so it would be interesting to see if the name of the could affect responses. In addition, I'd be interested in focusing on how endorsements affect parasocial relationships, especially on social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube. We are scrolling through and liking these images and videos, but I wonder if that affects how we take in the advertisement. Overall, these results are very helpful for companies and highlight that in most cases, if there is access to a celebrity, there is access to consumers. This strategy has been utilized for years, but it's just interesting to see how public figures truly influence our population.

References

- Edson Escalas, J., & Bettman, J. R. (2017, January 31). Connecting With Celebrities: How Consumers Appropriate Celebrity Meanings for a Sense of Belonging. *Journal of Advertising*. Retrieved April 2017, from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00913367.2016.1274925?scroll=top&needAccess=true>