

How to Choose Celebrity Spokesperson to Improve Customer Satisfaction in the Fast Fashion Industry

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Abstract. Nowadays, as competition in the medium- and low-end market is becoming increasingly fierce, fast fashion brands face more challenges and need to make some changes to highlight their uniqueness and increase sales. It is necessary to shift emphasis from choosing the location and scale of the store and window display to celebrity product endorsement, and analyze how celebrity spokespersons exert a great impact on customer satisfaction. On the basis of Heider's balance theory, this paper uses the method of theory analysis and induction to put forward the celebrity endorsement strategies from the aspects of consumers, spokespersons and products. The main research conclusion is that fast fashion brands need to select spokespersons not only suitable for the product but also popular among consumers.

1. Introduction

The concept of fast fashion derived from America in the 1980s and developed from the product-oriented idea. In the 1990s, fast fashion became a mature marketing mode and a fashion style widely recognized by contemporary clothing retailers and consumers. Consumers choose fast fashion because of the product itself, not the brand value.

Advertising has been one of the most efficient marketing tools that brands employ to convince consumers of the advantages of their products and services over those of their competitors[1]. In the past, fast fashion brands had a strong market, so they just focused on the location and scale of the store as well as window display instead of celebrity endorsement with a view to reducing the cost. However, because of slowing revenue growth in 2018, fast fashion brands began to invite more superstars to endorse their products, especially the world's biggest fast fashion brand – Zara.

Studies on advertising in the fast fashion industry have been limited to the location and scale of the store or window display. However, the influence of celebrity spokespersons on fast fashion brands has not been studied. To fill this void, this study takes the advertising-flooded consumer society as the background, chooses Heider's balance theory since it emphasizes that one's attitudes towards a certain cognitive object is often influenced by others' attitude towards the same object. Therefore, by doing this research, we intend to explore how to choose celebrity spokespersons for fast fashion brands in order to increase customer satisfaction.

2. Literature Review

There have been many studies on advertising, but not many on advertising in the fast fashion industry. We searched advertising" on CNKI and found more than 70,000 articles, but there were only around 50 articles for "fast fashion advertising", most of which are studies on advertising strategies. And there are few articles about "celebrity spokespersons for fast fashion brands".

Advertising spokespersons are people who use their physical attractiveness, credibility, expertise, perceived image and celebrity-product fit to sell products directly or indirectly to consumers on behalf of a brand. In 1979, Friedman divided advertising spokespersons into three main categories: celebrity spokespersons, expert spokespersons and typical consumer spokespersons. Marketers select celebrity spokespersons to endorse their products or services to stimulate consumers' positive responses, and ultimately increase message recall and brand recognition[2]. This endorsement has

been applied by extended advertising channels, from traditional channels such as TV, radio and magazines to Internet-based new channels like social media.

In 2012, the first fast fashion brand Uniqlo entered Chinese market and led fast fashion to popularity throughout the country. Because of the lower price, fashionable style and beautiful window display, fast fashion brands put less emphasis on advertising. There were many studies on advertising pricing strategies, advertising product strategies and brand marketing strategies, but few on advertising spokespersons in the fast fashion industry. In the context of new media, the celebrity effect is more vital and image management of celebrities is more complicated. Therefore, researching on how to choose celebrity spokespersons for fast fashion brands is of strong practical significance.

3. Method and Analysis

3.1 Heider's Balance Theory

Balance theory is a theory of attitude change and it conceptualizes the cognitive consistency motive which is urge to maintain one' s values and beliefs over time as a drive toward psychological balance[3]. Heider thinks that everything consists of entities constituting a relation P-O-X model, in which P represents a person, O represents another person, X represents activity or product, as shown in figure 1 and 2 (Heider, 1958).

These relations may be for complex cases, but all relations are from the perceiver' s subjective point of view. Heider distinguishes two types of relations between separate entities: unit relations and sentiment relations. A unit relation refers to the judgement whether there are practical or implicit relations between two entities. U denotes the cognitive unit between two entities, and non-U represents the fact that the two entities are segregated. A sentiment relation refers to the positive (L) or negative (-L) feelings or valuation that one gives to an entity, such as a person, an activity, or an object[4].

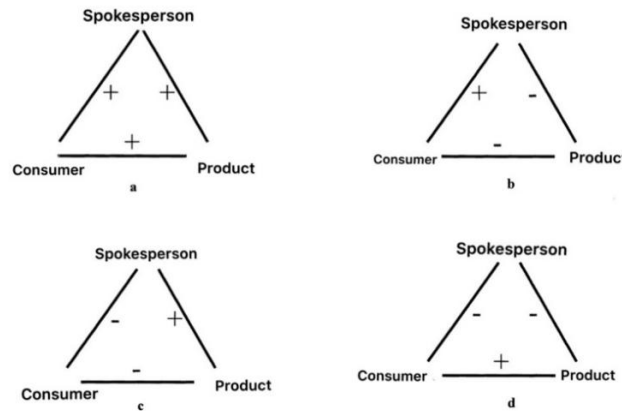


Figure 1. Balanced states among consumer, spokesperson and product.

In the consumer-spokesperson-product context, Figure 1 (Heider, 1958) summarizes four sets of relationships in triads resulting in balanced states: in Figure 1 (a), all three relations are positive; in Figure 1 (b), (c), and (d), two relations are negative and one is positive. In Figure 1(a), the consumer-spokesperson relation is positive, that is, the consumer likes the spokesperson because, for example, the latter is the former' s role model. The unit relation is positive between the spokesperson and the product when, for example, the product is suitable for the spokesperson. The consumer likes the product. Consequently, the three relations are harmonious in Figure 1(a). In Figure 1(b), the unit relation between the spokesperson and the product is negative and the consumer dislikes the product because, for example, the consumer does not like the product' s style or color; the spokesperson is not suitable for the product. However, the relation between the consumer and the spokesperson is positive because, for example, the spokesperson the consumer admires share the same attitude towards a product. Although three relations are not that harmonious, the situation is still balanced. In Figure 1(c), the relation between the consumer and the spokesperson, and that between the consumer and the product are negative, that is, the consumer dislikes the product and the spokesperson for some reasons.

However, the unit relation is positive between the spokesperson and the product because, for example, the fashion brand is suitable for the celebrity spokesperson, which means the consumer does not care about the product (clothes) worn by the spokesperson and his psychological state is still balanced. In Figure 1(d), although the relation between the consumer and the spokesperson, and that between the spokesperson and the product are both negative, the consumer likes the product. This could happen when the consumer dislikes the spokesperson and the spokesperson is not suitable for the brand, but because the person whom the consumer dislikes looks bad when wearing the product (clothes), the consumer loves the clothes, which means his psychological state can also be balanced. These four modes show a balanced state among the consumer, spokesperson and product that has a positive effect on sales.

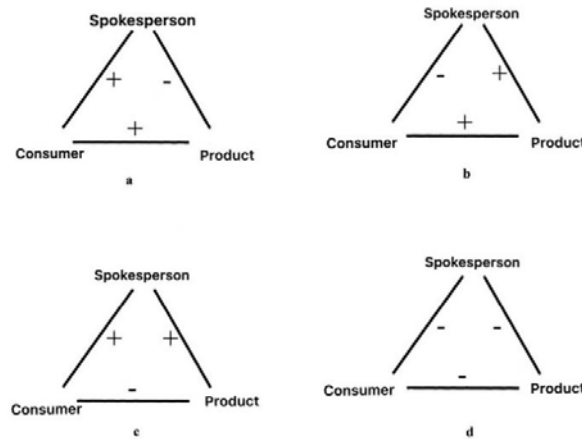


Figure 2. Unbalance states among consumer, spokesperson and product

Imbalance occurs when two of the relations are positive and one is negative. Figure 2(a), (b) and (c) depict the parallel unbalanced states for the consumer with respect to the spokesperson and the product. The case of three negative relations [Figure 2(d)] is somewhat ambiguous and reflects associations that are unlikely to influence balanced or unbalanced states[4]. In Figure 2(a), the relations between the consumer and the spokesperson, between consumer and product are positive, that is, the consumer wants to buy the clothes and is satisfied with the spokesperson. However, the spokesperson-product unit relation is negative because, for instance, the spokesperson looks awful in the endorsed clothes. The consumer may hesitate whether to buy the product or not and it results in an unbalanced state. In Figure 2(b), the consumer likes the product and the spokesperson looks good in the product, but the consumer dislikes the spokesperson and the customer will have less satisfaction when buying the product. In Figure 2(c), the consumer likes the spokesperson and the spokesperson is suitable for endorsing the product, but the consumer dislikes the product because of its style or price, for instance. Three relations are inharmonious. In Figure 2(d), the consumer dislikes not only the spokesperson but also the product, and the product does not fit the spokesperson. Consequently, the consumer and the spokesperson feel irritated while brands will suffer a big loss.

Based on this model, Heider proposes “we want people we like to like us, and we tend to like people who like us—and the parallel is true for negative sentiments”. (Heider, 1958) Consequently, it is easier for fast fashion brands to transform an unbalanced state to a balanced state by selecting correct spokespersons.

3.2 Customer Satisfaction

The concept of customer satisfaction was first put forward by Cardozo, but there are divergent views with regard to the definition of consumer satisfaction in terms of perception, evaluation, emotion and wholeness. Despite different viewpoints, most researchers still believe that customer satisfaction is the comparison of the pre-purchase expectation and post-purchase perceived value performance of customers, as well as the overall evaluation and attitude of the products or services purchased[5]. Besides, the customer satisfaction degree refers to the feeling of customers about the degree to which their requirements have been satisfied. Celebrities have a huge attraction to ordinary people and their

fans, which means selecting suitable stars to cater to customers' tastes and improve customer satisfaction is very important for the fast fashion industry.

4. Discussion

4.1 Results

For brand firms in the fast fashion industry, advertising is a way to sell more products and make profits, which means a vital element is to lead consumer to a positive and a pleasant psychological state after they buy their products. Changing the consumer's unbalanced psychological state into a balanced psychological state is the work for fast fashion brand firms. In other words, they need to keep a high level of customer satisfaction. In Figure 1(b) and (c), although it is a balanced state, the consumer dislikes product on sale. In Figure 1(d), the consumer likes the product because of the product itself, which means the money used to invite the spokesperson is wasted. It can be seen that Figure 1(a) is the best model for fast fashion brands to use for advertising. In Figure 2 (Heider, 1958), researchers can summarize that the spokesperson needs to be suitable for the product and needs to be liked by the consumer for the sake of changing unbalanced states and improving customer satisfaction.

4.2 Suggestions

4.2.1 Suggestion 1

Our results suggest that when a brand chooses spokespersons, the spokesperson's style and image need to be consistent with the performance and the style of the brand's product. The target customers of fast fashion brands are mainly young people aged from 18 to 35. Such customers are highly sensitive to fashion trends, pursue fashionable clothing styles and unique design in order to meet their inner needs, and they have certain purchasing power. Thus, selecting young and famous celebrities, such as Zhang Yixing and Wang Yuan in China, as spokespersons is a good choice. They are adorable among young customers and they have good figures that look pretty when wearing those inexpensive but fashionable clothes. Consumers would like to imitate their role models and are willing to buy the products the spokespersons endorse. Moreover, the performance of the product also limits the spokesperson's image. Without doubt, men's clothes and shoes should be endorsed by male spokesmen, and the parallel is true for female. Beautiful and handsome celebrities are more suitable for endorsing fast fashion clothes or shoes than homely spokespersons. By carrying out this strategy, customers may think that they wear the same clothes or shoes as their idols and may feel that they are as charming as the spokesperson, which keeps customer satisfaction on a high level.

We suggest that even though the customer's psychological state can also be balanced when the unit relation between the spokesperson and the product, between spokesperson and the product is negative, the cost of inviting celebrities is useless since customers like the product originally, which is an ideal situation. By selecting suitable spokespersons, the firms are likely to satisfy customers' purchasing will.

4.2.2 Suggestion 2

Further, this study also helps us to understand that the spokesperson should be accorded with public preference. The aim for firms to select celebrities as their spokespersons is to increase the popularity of their product and sell it. In the context of new media, the fan effect shows strong vitality and attraction. The concept of fan effect is that firms make profits by inviting celebrities who have a host of fans that have a strong purchasing power to endorse their products^[6]. Instead of nitpicking the style, quality or the color of the product (clothes), fans tend to follow their ideals' endorsement blindly. This strategy is also able to satisfy their shopping needs like possessiveness, fashion seeking and blind worship, thus making the whole shopping process exciting and enjoyable. Not only can the brand firms expand their sales but they also can set the brand image in order to increase their brand's popularity. Besides, selecting spokespersons with high reputation needs to be considered. A celebrity who has a good image and character can win the heart of the public and attract more attention, but an immoral and bad image celebrity will have a negative effect on the product. If a brand firm selects an

incorrect spokesperson, customers will feel disappointed and reject the product they endorse, then customer satisfaction will decrease.

5. Conclusion

Advertising is a major way for firms to promote their products and a celebrity is perceived as a cultural meaning by consumers, and the meaning moves into products or brands through media. Thus, celebrities in ads can play a role as a connecting symbol between products and consumers[7].

The author reviewed some literature, analyzed the balance theory and used induction to give some theoretical advertising strategies to firms in the fast fashion industry. This study suggests that celebrity spokespersons are vital to improving customer satisfaction, so firms need to choose those who are not only suitable for the product but also popular among consumers. Although the fast fashion industry now suffers slowing revenue growth and has a loophole in advertising strategies, it quickly finds defects and is trying to make remedies. It is hoped that these analyses will provide some theoretical reference for firms in the fast fashion industry in order to reduce the loss when choosing the celebrity spokespersons and increase customer satisfaction for the sake of promoting sales, leading the fast fashion industry to a brighter future.

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