

Country-of-origin Effects in Celebrity Endorsements in the China's Sportswear Market

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Introduction and Research Background

Country of origin (COO) is given a lot of consideration by marketers to promote global brands with celebrity endorsers. There is evidence in literature to indicate that proper utilization of celebrity endorsers could be effective in promoting a product and getting the right response from consumers (Roy & Bagdare, 2015). However, few empirical studies have investigated the COO effect of celebrity endorsers. This study aims to investigate the impact of brand's COO and spokesperson's nationality on consumers' attitudes and purchase intention in the Chinese sportswear market (see Figure 1). It would be interesting to explore whether the COO of the celebrity and the COO of the endorsed brand would interact each other and create differences in consumer attitudes. Congruence theory (Kamins & Gupta, 1994) and social identity theory (Hogg & Abrams, 1988) provide theoretical background for investigating the celebrity-brand congruence and its effect on consumer attitudes. We chose the Chinese sportswear industry as our research setting because China is the world's fastest-growing market for sportswear products and endorsement by star athletes is commonly used by both Chinese and foreign sportswear brands in the Chinese market (Tong & Hawley, 2009). Since the athletic footwear is the biggest product category within the sportswear industry, the sports shoes were targeted in this study to represent the sportswear market.

Research Design and Methodology

This study used a 2 x 3 factorial design. Brand's COO has two levels (*Chinese vs. international*) and spokesperson's nationality has three levels (*Chinese sports star, international sports star of China, and international sports star*) (see Table 1). As compared to previous studies, our study introduced a new hybrid type of sports celebrity, *international sports star of China*. It refers to Chinese sports stars who have gained international success and fame, such as Yao Ming. Six versions of advertisements were created to represent the six conditions of this study. The brand's COO and spokesperson's nationality information (such as "a brand from USA" or "NBA basketball star from China") was embedded in each ad along with a picture of the spokesperson and a picture of the product (sports shoes). The scales measuring the dependent variables were derived from the literature review (Kamins and Gupta, 1994).

College students enrolled in a large university located in Shanghai, China were invited to participate in this study. We targeted college students mainly because college-aged consumers comprise the major consumers of branded sportswear products (Tong & Hawley, 2009). A written questionnaire was distributed to students in classes. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of six versions of ads. Participants were first given five minutes to review the test advertisement. After ad exposure, participants were told to complete an attached questionnaire that collected information on the dependent measures, manipulation check, as well as standard demographics.

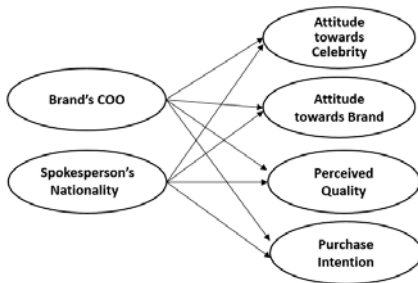


Figure 1: the Conceptual Model

Table 1. Fractional Factorial Design

Attributes	Levels
1. Brand's COO	1. Chinese 2. International
2. Spokesperson's nationality	1. Chinese sports star (<i>Liu Xiang</i>) 2. International sports star of China (<i>Yao Ming</i>) 3. International sports star (<i>Kobe Bryant</i>)

Data Analysis and Results

Of the 260 collected questionnaires, 247 responses were considered valid and were used in the study. Most participants were between the ages of 18 and 27 (95%), and 190 respondents were women (77%). Over 90% of participants own at least one pair of sports shoes.

We conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with brand's COO and spokesperson's nationality as independent variables and attitude towards the celebrity, attitude towards the brand, perceived product quality and purchase intention as dependent variables. The results of MANOVA suggest that **the main effect of spokesperson's nationality is significant on attitudes towards the brand** (see Table 2). The subsequent post hoc comparisons in ANOVA indicate that the mean score of brand attitude for the international sports star of China situation ($M = 4.36$) is significantly higher than the Chinese sports star situation ($M = 3.93$). This implies that using a China athlete who has gained international fame (*such as Yao Ming*) as spokesperson can generate more favorable brand attitude (for both domestic and international brands) than using a domestic sports star (*such as Liu Xiang*). The results of MANOVA also suggest that **there is a significant interaction between the two independent variables for perceived product quality**. The subsequent two-way ANOVA and simple effects tests indicate that Chinese consumers infer higher quality for an international sportswear brand when the brand uses an international star (*such as Kobe Bryant*) as spokesperson ($M = 3.45$) than a Chinese star ($M = 3.13$).

Table 2. MANOVA and Univariate Results

Independent Variables	Attitude towards Celebrity		Attitude towards Brand		Perceived Quality		Purchase Intention	
	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
Brand's COO (A)	0.03	0.85	0.76	0.39	0.40	0.53	0.44	0.51
Spokesperson's nationality (B)	1.73	0.18	3.46	0.03*	1.59	0.21	0.49	0.61
A X B	1.35	0.26	1.30	0.27	3.10	0.04*	1.48	0.23

NOTE: * $P < 0.05$

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