

Celebrity Attractiveness in Advertising for University Students' Preference of Cosmetic Products in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract

Celebrities used to endorse products in advertising are expected to be attractive. Their familiarity, likability and similarity help them convince consumers to prefer the products they endorse. This is achieved when meaning is transferred from the celebrity to the product and finally to the consumer. Therefore, organizations prefer celebrities who are attractive for product endorsement to enable positive image transference to their products, consumed especially by the youth who like cosmetics that are edgy (make-up). This study, therefore, sought to determine the effect of celebrity attractiveness in advertising on preference of cosmetic products by university students in Nairobi County, Kenya. Data was collected through questionnaires self-administered to 385 respondents aged 18-30, purposively sampled from five private and public universities in Nairobi county. Advertising personnel from four advertising agencies were also interviewed. The research findings revealed that celebrity attractiveness is key in determining cosmetic preferences among young consumers. Furthermore, different characteristics of attractiveness appeal to diverse consumers.

Index Terms

Celebrity attractiveness, advertising, cosmetic products, preference

1.0 Introduction

Use of celebrity endorsers has been a popular strategy for decades, with as many as 25 % of US companies employing celebrities in advertising campaigns (Shimp, 2000). Erdogan

(1999) notes that the use of celebrities as spokespeople for brands dates back to the nineteenth century when Queen Victoria was associated with Cadbury's Cocoa. In 2003, Nike used \$1.44 billion on endorsement contracts (CNN Money, 2003). In the 12 months prior to June 2008, Oprah Winfrey amassed \$275 million from endorsement contracts (Miller, 2008). Michael Jordan has pocketed an estimated \$10 billion from endorsements over the course of his 14 year NBA career (Erdogan, Baker, & Tagg, 2001). This means that organizations have grown confident in using celebrities to endorse their products.

Some of the benefits of using celebrity endorsers lie in making the advertisement more effective in certain instances (Kamins, Brand, Hoeks, & Moe, 1989), and enhancing message recall (Friedman & Friedman, 1979). Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann say that celebrities also aid in the recognition of brand names (Biswas, Biswas, & Das, 2006). Celebrity advertising in the cosmetic industry is very common. The global cosmetics industry is broken down into six main categories; skin care being the largest one of them all, accounting for 36.4 percent of the global market in 2016. In recent years, consumers have been spending higher levels of disposable income on cosmetics than they had in the past (L'Oréal, 2017). In Kenya, the cosmetic industry has been steadily growing, with a surge in the recent years. Kenya's colour cosmetics market is estimated to be worth Sh5.4 billion and was expected to grow to Sh6.6 billion by 2018 (Wainainah, 2016).

Make-up products, in particular, help one to feel beautiful and confident, as well as clean and attractive (Lopes & Agante,

2016; Hardon, Idrus, & Hymans, 2013). According to a report by Cosmetics Europe (2017), young people often struggle with self-esteem and social interaction as they transition from teenage hood into adulthood. Cosmetics and personal care products play an important role in building self-esteem and enhancing their everyday social interactions. . Influence of celebrities on young consumers can be quite strong, as documented by Wen (2017), who found that young people may adopt the behavior of undergoing cosmetic surgery in an attempt to achieve an attractive look similar to the celebrities portrayed in media. Chan & Prendergast (2008) highlight that motivation of young people for viewing advertisements has a strong positive relationship to imitation of celebrity models.

Celebrities are effective endorsers because of their attractiveness. Attractiveness refers to the familiarity, likability and similarity of the celebrity with the consumer. This perspective enumerates the reason why a young pop star would be more suitable endorsing products for the youth; because they are familiar with him owing to the perceived similarities they both have (McCRACKEN, 1989; Ohanian, 1990). Attractiveness of the celebrity endorser has much to do with physical attributes like classy, handsome and beautiful, and elegance of the endorser (Ohanian, 1990) However, according to Erdogan (1999), attractiveness does not exclusively refer to physical attraction, but rather it is made up of a number of attributes of the celebrity endorser that the consumer may perceive. These attributes range from intellectual skills, to personality properties, lifestyles or athletic prowess. In the cosmetic industry, however, it is most likely that physical attractiveness has a higher stake due to the value that the industry places on outer beauty.

Nevertheless, the concept of certain characteristics being the standard of beauty is being challenged in this century, as more and more people embrace different characteristics and body types as being attractive. For most of the 20th and 21st centuries, the ideal beauty standards were advertised by mainstream media as a symmetrical, toned, light and thin body. With increased exposure of diverse body types in recent years, it is evident that there is more than one kind of beautiful body features (Thorpe, 2017).

1.1 Research Objective

This study sought to determine the effect of celebrity attractiveness in advertising on preference of cosmetic products by university students in Nairobi County, Kenya.

1.2 Research Methodology

This study was conducted using a descriptive design. The study population was undergraduate students within the 18-30 age bracket, from private universities and public universities, and advertising personnel from advertising agencies in Nairobi County. Using purposive sampling one public university and four private universities were selected for the study. These universities have the highest number of students according to latest statistics by Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2017), providing for better representativeness of the population. Students in computer laboratory environments, libraries, accommodation and catering venues, and who wear make-up preparations, were purposively selected to fill in the questionnaires. 385 students participated in the study. Using purposive sampling, seven advertising personnel were selected for interviewing depending on their availability and approval of the four agencies that participated in the study.

2.0 Research Findings

The study sought to determine the effect of celebrity attractiveness in advertising on preference of cosmetic products by university students in Nairobi County, Kenya.

Table 2.0: Attractiveness of celebrities used to endorse make up products

| | Strongly Agree | | Neutral | Strongly Disagree | |
|--------------|----------------|----------|---------|-------------------|--------|
| | Agree | Disagree | | Disagree | Agree |
| Classy and | | | | | |
| Elegant | 29.90% | 29.90% | 25.20% | 10.40% | 4.70% |
| Sexy | 15.10% | 17.90% | 26.50% | 24.90% | 15.60% |
| Beautiful | 13.00% | 14.00% | 22.10% | 27.30% | 23.60% |
| Likable | | | | | |
| Personality | 30.60% | 36.40% | 17.10% | 10.40% | 5.50% |
| Relatable | 30.9% | 35.10% | 20.50% | 9.40% | 4.20% |
| Unknown | | | | | |
| Celebrity | 18.7% | 16.90% | 25.70% | 22.10% | 16.60% |
| Shared | | | | | |
| Similarities | 41.00% | 22.9% | 17.40% | 10.10% | 8.60% |
| Alluring | 37.90% | 32.20% | 20.00% | 6.5% | 3.40% |

The main attributes that a majority of the university students felt were key for celebrities to positively influence their cosmetic products preferences were; alluring, likable personality, relatable, shared similarities and classy with 70.1%, 67%, 66%, 63.9% and 59.8% of the respondents respectively indicating that those attributes were crucial for them. On the attribute of likable personality, some of the interviewees had interesting overviews as captured in the excerpts below;

“...On the matter if the celebrity has to be likable to the consumers in order to convince them...I would say that’s up in the air and I’ll tell you why. It’s easier to convince me as a consumer since I like you but it doesn’t mean that despite the fact that I don’t like you, if you are making a genuine point I will not care what you say”.

“...Likability of celebrities by the consumers is key... You must have that love. People who love you. For no reason, it doesn’t have to, you’ve never met them, you’ve never done anything, but maybe they just like the way you dress, they like the way maybe you do your make up.”

Different interviewees had varied views on if shared similarities of the celebrity endorsers and the consumers’ played a role in influencing cosmetic product preferences;

“...Normally brands want to do a mirror image of the consumer they are seeking and most brands will be seeking younger people because they believe that the younger consumer is the future. So you’ll see a lot of the cosmetics going after younger consumers because they believe that is where the future lies in terms of market...brands that are coming in want to build their own identity from scratch, they would want younger people....so that the brand grows with the celebrity.”

“...I don’t think that it’s true that there should be shared similarities between the celebrities and the consumers.....there are people who worship celebrities. So no matter what they say, you know, they just want to be seen wearing similar products as those of their favorite celebrities... I feel like most people who follow what celebrities are doing, don’t really look at their similarities. I think they just have this notion that “whatever this guy is wearing is fantastic, they can never wear something bad...but it depends on people. I’ll say, for myself, I’m not moved by celebrities. No matter what a celebrity does or wears, I’m not gonna be moved. If I like it, I like it. If I don’t, I don’t... but there are people who are greatly influenced by celebrities. That I know I’ve seen it for myself.”

The research findings revealed also that a majority of the respondents did not perceive beauty, sexiness and not knowing the celebrity as attributes that would influence their preference of cosmetic products. Erdogan (1999) states that attractiveness does not exclusively refer to physical attraction but rather it is made up of a number of attributes of the celebrity endorser that the consumer may perceive which range from intellectual skills, to personality properties, lifestyles or athletic prowess. As such, only 27% of the respondents from selected universities indicated that if they didn’t consider the celebrity beautiful, they would not buy the cosmetic product, only 33% indicated that if the celebrity looked sexy they thought they would also appear sexy by using the cosmetic product thus would accept it. Interviews with selected advertising agencies

also did reveal different views on the matter of if physical appeal was key or not when choosing celebrity endorsers for cosmetic products as the excerpts below illustrate;

“I wouldn’t say the celebrity has to be physically attractive. You see what, especially in the modeling and beauty industry, what are the parameters of attractiveness? There’s a time in the industry, especially in the modeling world, people were saying you have to be tall, you have to be skinny, you have to have long legs, you have to have a certain chiseled cheek bone-that used to be the definition of beauty. But as time has gone by, we see other unique beauty qualifications. You might have nice eyebrows, thus everyone has a beautiful quality, and you may have a good personality which even makes it better. The biggest challenge is identifying the lasting quality that celebrity has. The physical attribute, in my opinion, is not number one priority in selecting that individual.”

“...Part of the characteristics we look out for when choosing endorsers is their looks depending on if they are male or female. Because... well for men, it’s not really about the looks. You know... But women, for you to push, you know, let’s say if it was a beauty product, you already have to naturally look good before you know, you already have to appease to the crowd before you start selling to them something. But for men, well, I think women are very diverse in what they like so, yea you’ll find some women who want to see the abs and you have to be fit but sometimes also, there are guys we’ve used that really don’t look the part but they have a following.”

The familiarity of the celebrity endorser to the consumer did not seem paramount in matters altering negatively their cosmetic products preference as only 35.6% of the respondents from the universities indicated that they if they didn’t know the celebrity they would not be convinced by the endorsement to acquire the cosmetic product. On the question of importance of familiarity of the celebrity endorser to the consumer, interviews from selected advertising agencies revealed varied views as illustrated below;

Question: What about familiarity between the celebrity and the consumer? Should the celebrity be familiar to the consumer, know who they are?

Answer: “Yes and No. Yes in that it gives you that advantage that you do not have to work very hard to gain momentum because already this person is known to the consumer, so the brand equity is there. And no in that, a fresh face also has something to offer. One of the challenges that we are having with celebrities and endorsements in general is that people are saying brands are paying celebrities...”

Question: Should the consumers be familiar with the celebrity?

“...If you really want your brand to move, let’s say most brands are just looking at increasing their market share, you need to have someone that has that influence on society before you, you can’t just pick a random person off the streets and say, “Hey, can you endorse my product?” People need to relate to them. They need to at least, even if they are not very famous, be known somewhat. So you don’t have to be famous-famous, but at least you know, you are known, you are seen in the social media space, you’re seen on TV probably, you know, you’re doing stuff. So you are not just quiet and then someone picks you out of nowhere.”

2.1 Pearson Correlation Coefficient

To determine if there was a relationship between the independent variable (celebrity attractiveness) and the dependent variable (cosmetic product preference); a Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) was used. The correlations findings did establish an interrelationship between the independent variable and dependent variable.

Table 2.1: Pearson Correlation Matrix

| | | Attractiveness | Preference |
|----------------|---------------------|----------------|------------|
| Attractiveness | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .704** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 385 | 385 |
| Preference | Pearson Correlation | .704** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 385 | 385 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation coefficient for celebrity attractiveness and cosmetic product preference was ($r=0.704$, $P=0.000$) which also is indicative that celebrity attractiveness has a strong and statistically significant positive relationship with preference for cosmetic products since $p<0.05$.

3.0 Conclusions

The study concluded that successful endorsement of cosmetic products by celebrities was highly dependent on their attractiveness. Attractiveness didn't solely refer to physical charm but a combination of attributes such as likable personality, shared similarities, classy and elegant. Beauty, sexiness and not knowing the celebrity did not largely influence the respondents' preference of cosmetic products. One of the reasons is that parameters of beauty in the world have changed over the years, thus different beauty standards appeal to a diverse number of people.

4.0 Recommendations

The study was able to establish that use of celebrities for advertising positively impacted on the cosmetic products preference. The study therefore recommends that cosmetic products companies should utilize celebrities to endorse their products while taking consideration the celebrity attractiveness.

Companies using celebrities to endorse their products need to determine the beauty standards that would appeal to their target consumers and seek to find celebrity endorsers that embody the preferred standards since the concept of one standard of beauty that cuts across is no longer viable.

5.0 Suggestions for Further Research

The study recommends further research on factors (apart from celebrity attractiveness), that affect the preference of cosmetic products, which were not captured in the findings.

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