Editorial

Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis for Marketing (2011) **19**, 67–68. doi:10.1057/jt.2011.13

The road to the successful enhancement of brand equity through endorsement or promotion by celebrities is littered with the bodies of both brand owners and the celebrities themselves. ‘Borrowed equity’ is the how marketing describes the value of a famous name. But the dangers of using celebrities as spokespersons for brands have long been documented. Not least, when the celebrity runs into difficulty, so can the brand. Golfer Tiger Woods earned over US\$100 million from his endorsement deals in 2009, including agreements with Nike, Accenture, Gillette and Electronic Arts. It is hard to quantify the benefits for the endorsees. But then came the car accident, the mysterious wielding of a golf club by the sportsman’s wife, the revelations, and the rest, as they say, is history.

But what if the celebrity were under the total control of the marketer? Animated spokes-beings and animated advertising more generally would seem to provide a less risky route to endorsement. They rarely take drugs, beat up friends and family, or engage in other unsavoury practices. From meerkats to monkeys, animated or artificial celebrities have much less downside. But where is the evidence that animation works – and how does it work? In the first of two articles in this quarter’s *Journal*, Chang-Hyun Jin explores the role of animation on the formation of consumer attitudes. He discovers that animated commercials stimulate viewers or affect their emotional responses and behavioural expectation. Using a tripartite attitudinal model (incorporating cognitive, affective and conative factors) and an experimental design exploring both low and high involvement contexts, he discovers that well-designed and especially creative animation in advertising can make up to some extent for a low involvement buying context, augmenting the subject’s attention level and perhaps leading to an increased propensity to act in relation to the brand.

The exploration of consumer attitudes forms the basis of a second article in this issue. Hongwei Yang examines changing consumer attitudes to mobile viral marketing. The ubiquity of mobile devices, especially among young people, means that they play an increasingly important role in the consumption practices of consumers and consequently in the marketing and communications strategies of firms. However, the transmission of mobile marketing messages is heavily influenced by anti-spam legislation in many jurisdictions and the propensity to forward mobile messages to family and friends on mobile devices is relatively under-researched. Yang uses the technology acceptance model as a framework to measure influences on young consumers’ mobile viral marketing attitudes. Income and usage (themselves closely correlated), rather than ease of use, appear to be important determinants of forwarding propensity but, more importantly, the research suggests that mobile viral campaigns will be more effective if the mobile marketer can reassure recipients that friends and family will welcome and benefit from the information that they are being asked to forward: and this, in turn, presupposes a good knowledge of those to whom the message is likely to be forwarded.

Quite what we should know about consumers to help in predicting adoptive behaviour, especially in new or evolving consumption contexts, is also a theme developed by Naseri and Elliott’s paper. Their focus is the rehabilitation of demographics as providing predictive utility for direct marketing (rather than just as moderators or control factors) in the case of online shopping. A multi-product category analysis demonstrated that nearly a quarter of the online shopper’s behaviour could be explained by demographics (ranging from occupation, marital status and language skills to country of birth) alone. A shortlist of five demographic variables is suggested, although the category variance (say, between wine and books)

may be considerable. Nevertheless, they question the cost–benefit argument for increasingly sophisticated theory-based predictive models as a result.

Some CEOs are increasingly celebrities too and Chang-Hyun Jin's second contribution to the issue with co-author Hyun-Chul Yeo, is an interesting exploration of the effects of negative and positive news about their CEOs on customer relationships with companies, and the importance of prior attitudes to those companies. The public perceptions of a CEO can and do have an effect on a firm's capacity for relationship building with its publics as well as affecting the reputation for leadership of the CEO and overall corporate credibility. However, existing levels of customer satisfaction can be an important mediating factor and this has important implications for public relations professionals.

In their article, Lee, Kim and Joshi consider the nuanced and complex notion of fairness among consumers and its implications for practitioners. They apply the so-called four-factor structure of fairness (distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational) to retailing and find an effective fit. Recognising perceived fairness as an holistic concept, in its entirety (rather than, say, just procedural fairness), is found to be important in enhancing retail customer attitudes and therefore has useful consequences for those practitioners thinking about fuller and more effective mechanisms for service failure and recovery.

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