



The power of celebrity endorsement on persuasive communication

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ABSTRACT

The growing trend of using entertainment celebrities for advertising is evident in the business world today, particularly Korean celebrities. Due to the highly competitive market, planning effective persuasive communication strategies is certainly the main challenge businesses face when attracting customers. In this context, the objective of this paper is to identify the persuasive factors of celebrity which influence audience purchase intention. This paper also seeks to explore the characteristics of celebrity that are most appealing to the audience. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 informants who are Hyun Bin's fans from Malaysia, Indonesia and South Korea. The findings demonstrate that the persuasive factors of celebrity endorser which influence customer intention to purchase consist of source credibility, source attractiveness and popularity appeal. Additionally, characteristics such as likeability, expertise and trustworthiness in a celebrity are found to be most appealing to the audience. This study has enhanced our understanding of the source credibility theory, which contends that a source's perceived characteristics affect how the audience of a communication perceives that source's credibility. The study also contributes to the literature on persuasive communication and celebrity endorsement from the audience perspective. These findings will also be useful to advertisers executing celebrity endorsements to grab the attention of their target audience effectively.

Keywords: *Celebrity endorsement, persuasive communication, persuasive factors, celebrity characteristics, source credibility theory*

INTRODUCTION

Celebrities have long been used in persuasive communication. Persuasion is important as the message being sent across should be able to influence people's perception of the product and brand, which in turn improves the business image. The use of celebrities as company ambassadors has also become a key strategy for advertisers to introduce new products and promote existing ones. Much research has proved the effectiveness and the positive influence of celebrity endorsement towards the audience, particularly with regard to the celebrity's credibility, attractiveness (Akram et al., 2017) audience approval and purchase intention (Halim & Kiatkawsin, 2021).

Celebrities are well-known personalities who are publicly recognised either due to their charisma, attractiveness, expertise, or a combination of these. Companies have spent millions of dollars on endorsements by famous singers, movie stars and athletes to promote their products or services (Byun, 2014). Well-known public figures and famous celebrity spokespersons have been used in endorsements to attract audiences for decades. In recent years, Korean celebrities have become increasingly visible to global audiences. For example, when the fast-food giant McDonald's unveiled a BTS combo meal, they received 2.3 million responses on their social media accounts, including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. This illustrates the huge impact that endorsing K-pop stars have on netizens, regardless of the product (Byun, 2014; Halim & Kiatkawsin, 2021).

Over the years, it is apparent that Malaysians have assimilated Korean culture into numerous social aspects of their everyday life. The trend has driven Malaysians to take a greater interest in Korean brands and therefore, increased intention to purchase Korean products. K-dramas and K-pop has played a significant role in raising awareness of Korean cosmetics and brands. This in turn, has increased the demand among Malaysian youth and women, leading to the opening of numerous specialised Korean e-commerce platforms (Chan, 2018). In 2020, Korean consumer labels were in high demand in Malaysia; be it food, cosmetics, toys, or even household electronic products. In this case, it is important to not just understand how consumers perceive celebrity endorsement, but also to determine if there are intercultural similarities and differences in the perceptions among consumers from different cultures.

In addition, companies and advertising agencies are paying more attention to the selection of the best celebrity endorsers. Social judgement through social media messages is particularly useful when reaching out to younger generations. Celebrities benefit businesses by providing a perception of dependability and honesty to their target audience, which will increase sales (Ahmed Tanha, 2021). The celebrity effect of seeing a star using a product can make the brand famous overnight (Chung & Cho, 2017), which is why many brands insist on promoting their products through celebrity endorsements.

Hyun Bin has been chosen as the focus in this research due to his starring role in the 2020 South Korean drama hit "Crash Landing on You", leading to numerous commercial offers non-stop. Hyun Bin has also become one of the top choices and most in-demand actor for endorsements (Sihombing & Dellavia, 2021). He made headlines with his endorsement earnings from "Secret Garden" in January 2011 to 2012, accumulating US\$2.9 million from eight deals. He has appeared in numerous luxury commercial films and is alleged to be paid a median of US\$900,000 per endorsement deal. Being the current top-rated TV actor for brand value in South Korea, he has certainly done plenty of endorsements throughout his career.

In this context, the present study attempts to examine the power of celebrity endorsement on persuasive communication and its effect on purchase intention by applying

the Source Credibility Theory. The first objective is to identify the persuasive factors of celebrities which influence audience purchase intention. Then, the second objective seeks to explore the characteristics of a celebrity that are most appealing to the audience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Celebrity endorsement

Yang (2017) described that celebrity endorsement is part of the marketing strategy to communicate a brand through a famous spokesperson. A celebrity has traditionally been understood as a person known by the public and seen as a role model due to his/her charisma (Freire et al., 2017). It is believed that celebrities can spark the audience's desires and intention to purchase (Chung & Cho, 2017). Moreover, celebrities can also play a role as brand ambassadors and create or establish a connection with the audience (Singh & Banerjee, 2018).

Celebrities can be influential and powerful assets for companies as they can build brand awareness and attract new audience for a period of time (Zipporah & Mberia, 2014). Advertisers often select celebrities who have a sense of charisma, attractiveness, and confidence which align with the desired brand image (Hakimi et al., 2011). By recruiting celebrity endorsers, it may enhance the brand image and change the perception of the product (Hakimi et al., 2011). Celebrities create impact using their knowledge, attitude, and behaviours because they are perceived to be unbiased and are able to influence consumers to believe any claim about a brand (Ohanian, 1990). In addition, celebrity endorsers make an advertisement or product more noticeable, stand out and retain consumer attention (Ohanian, 1990).

In addition, consumers are highly attracted to the popularity of a celebrity (ul Hassan & Jami, 2014). Companies need to remain vigilant in the selection of celebrities for the purpose of brand approval in advertising. If there is an inconsistency with the consumer preferences, the outcome can be very stressful for advertisers. The image of a celebrity also has an impact on the attitude towards the endorsed branded product. Therefore, celebrities must especially be aware in choosing the brand they are going to endorse as there may be a decrease in the quality of the perceived brand and image.

Trustworthiness is also another underlying factor of source credibility (Hakimi et al., 2011; Ohanian, 1990). Researchers perceive that the reliability of a celebrity, such as the attributes of dignity, credibility and honesty possessed, are observed by consumers. Research has demonstrated that the public expect the image of a celebrity to be compatible with the brand they promote (Freire et al., 2017). Bartfeld (2020) demonstrated that the audience is capable remembering or recalling products that have been endorsed by particular celebrities, especially if the celebrities have certain special characteristics. The author also said that the human brain recognises celebrities in the same manner that we recognise close individuals whom we are familiar with (Bartfeld, 2020). Interestingly, if consumers happen to be fans of the endorser, they will place a greater value and trust in the products being promoted, as if they are getting an advice from a valuable friend.

In addition, Chan et al. (2021) stated that celebrity endorsement is used by advertisers as a promotional strategy to reach out to customers. Currently, it becomes necessary for the advertisers to use different well-known personalities to create a unique brand identity and raise the profile of the company's brand or product, which ultimately results in higher business costs. In turn, this will certainly create a buzz and give popularity to both the company and the brand as this can increase customer expectations by keeping

to the company's promise (Taher et al., 2022). Therefore, marketers and advertisers share the belief that the characteristics of the celebrity has a significant impact on the message persuasion.

Persuasive communication

According to Fang and Jiang (2015), persuasion is a communication process that tries to convince people to change their beliefs, attitudes, intentions, or behaviour regarding an issue. Kamaruddin (2017) highlighted that persuasion is one of the most important parts and also the most basic form of communication. In other words, it is the process of changing one's mind and they may not be even aware of it.

The use of celebrities in advertisement originates in the 19th century and these general advertising practices have highlighted many intellectual and realistic considerations. Initially, the credibility of the spokesperson and charismatic representations are considered in the analysis of celebrity endorsement, which suggests that celebrities influence consumers through apparent traits (Ohanian, 1990). Studies have found that the use of a charming celebrity in advertisements serves as a basis for enhancing the audience's feelings. According to Akram et al. (2017), this mindset is defined as a set of psychological conditions that people use to systematise how they perceive their surroundings and how they respond to them.

Nielson reported that 64% of American netizens who follow celebrities also follow brands, claiming that followers are prospective buyers of the brand (Business & Leadership, 2011). Therefore, it is essential to understand what kind of endorsements can convert followers into buyers. The findings imply that the success of celebrity endorsement depends not only on the celebrities' persuasive qualities, but also on the calibre of the celebrities' personal traits. Therefore, techniques for choosing endorsers should take into account a celebrity's ability to gain confidence and uphold a good reputation among fans.

Many social psychologists and advertisers have studied the effectiveness of different persuasive communication strategies (Bartfeld, 2020). The Source Credibility Model by Hovland and Weiss (1951) posits that the public perception of the celebrity's expertise and reliability influences the effectiveness of the advertising message. Meanwhile, the Source Attractiveness Model by McGuire (1985) suggests that the physical appeal of a celebrity influences the effectiveness of advertising messages as well as influences the intention of customers to buy. When customers feel that they share similar interests, values or attributes with the celebrities, they are more likely to follow their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours (Amos et al., 2008).

Besides, previous studies have demonstrated that celebrity persuasion effects are based on the source effects and the attention becomes amplified when celebrities are generally attractive (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Some celebrities possess an acquirable trait where other people can learn the same trait, such as an athlete endorsing sport apparel or a beautiful model endorsing cosmetics product (Halim & Kiatkawsin, 2021). Celebrities are also loved by fans which leads to recognition and fans will seek some kind of relationship with the celebrity (Chung & Cho, 2017).

Celebrity likeability refers to effective or strong emotions that consumers have towards the qualities of a celebrity (Singh & Banerjee, 2018). There are various characteristics of personable qualities that a celebrity is perceived to possess, such as friendly, respectful, kind, and well-behaved, and these are argued to be the main factors. Physical attraction has always been an important factor in persuasion research, especially in the area of celebrity recognition (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Most of the celebrities selected by the advertisers come with appealing features such as slim, tall, or beautiful. Advertisers also choose celebrity

endorsers based on their attractiveness to take advantage of the dual effects of celebrity status and physical appeal (Singh & Banerjee, 2018). Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) have proven the tendency of people to think that more attractive individuals embody positive traits, such as happy, extrovert, successful, and friendly. Celebrity trustworthiness also has a significant influence in enhancing consumer purchasing, brand image, brand credibility, and impact on loyalty (Singh & Banerjee, 2018).

Furthermore, popularity appeal also appears in all forms of advertisements. A commercial might feature a current famous person who promotes a product. The public perceives celebrities to be important, prestigious, and unique, which encourages them to emulate what these celebrities do and identify themselves with celebrities to develop a similar image as them (Taher et al., 2022; Veloo & Mustafa, 2023).

Therefore, persuasion in celebrity is important because the use of celebrity in endorsing a brand will affect the audience attitude and perception towards the product and purchase intention. Celebrities who attach their personality and charisma to a brand have found to produce more positive responses to the advertisement and purchase intentions than a non-celebrity.

Purchase intention

Purchase intention is a form of decision-making that looks at the reason for a customer to buy a particular brand (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; ul Hassan & Jami, 2014). Halim and Kiatkawsin (2021) defined the intent to purchase as a situation where the consumer has a tendency to buy a certain product under certain conditions.

The purchasing process starts with the information-sourcing stage of customers, just after they receive some brand awareness. According to Singh and Banerjee (2018), when consumers pay attention to an endorsed product, their communication with this could help them assess customers' willingness to buy. Purchase intention could now be perceived as a desire to support and spend on a specific brand or product (ul Hassan & Jami, 2014).

Moon et al. (2008) highlighted that purchase intention differs across cultures. For instance, consumer preference and the value placed on certain products are heavily affected by social differentiation and consumer self-esteem. These attributes may vary based on cultural orientation. The cultural dimensions of uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, power distance and individualism are helpful in explaining intercultural differences for product acceptance.

Therefore, celebrity endorsement is a long-time effective factor of consumers purchase intention. The public image and reputation of celebrities build consumer confidence and increase their willingness to purchase the endorsed products (Halim & Kiatkawsin, 2021; Agil et al., 2022).

Source Credibility Theory (SCT)

Source Credibility Theory (SCT) postulates that when a source presents itself as credible, people are more likely to be persuaded. Developed by Hovland and Weiss in 1951, SCT is one of the communication strategy models used in marketing studies. This theory assumes that people's opinions about endorsed products may be influenced by the endorsers' credibility in terms of their beliefs, attitudes, and actions.

According to Singh and Banerjee (2018), research has demonstrated that the success of a message depends on how knowledgeable and reliable its endorsers are perceived to be. Information from a reputable source (such as a celebrity) can affect beliefs, opinions, attitudes, or behaviours through a process called internalisation, which happens when consumers embrace an influential source, in terms of their own attitude and value systems.

Applying the Source Credibility Theory to celebrity endorsements, celebrity endorsers are seen as communicators, with the audience acting as the recipients. Through their unique personalities, celebrities can establish a high level of trust in the eyes of their audience. The Social Credibility Theory has been employed in this study to better understand how audience purchase intention is influenced by the communicator's persuasive abilities and credibility.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach and used semi-structured interviews to identify the persuasive factors of celebrity which influence the audience and to discuss the characteristics of celebrity that are most appealing to the audience.

In this study, the sampling method used was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling includes identifying and selecting individuals or groups that have a special understanding or experience of the phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Another sampling technique which was adopted in this study was snowball sampling. This method is used when it is difficult to reach informants with the target characteristics. At the initial stage, several informants were chosen among the researchers' social network. After that, informants were asked to identify more potential informants to be interviewed. All of the informants were members of Hyun Bin's international fan clubs from Malaysia, Indonesia and South Korea. A total of 12 female informants aged between 22 and 41 years old were involved in the interviews.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interview sessions were conducted virtually through Webex Meeting or Zoom Meeting. The informants were invited to share their most memorable celebrity endorsers and attributes of the celebrity who had created such a profound impression on them. Each interview session took about 30 – 45 minutes. The interviews took place in a language that they were most comfortable with, therefore, interviews were conducted in English or Mandarin. The video recordings from the Mandarin sessions were transcribed and the selected quotations were translated into English by the researchers. The English translations had been verified and accepted by all the informants.

The NVivo10 software was utilised to conduct a thematic analysis on the interview transcripts (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The coding procedure was guided by the research objectives. In the initial step of the procedure, potential themes in line with the Source Credibility Theory were manually identified for input into NVivo10. The final themes were then produced through the grouping of the codes in accordance with the collected transcripts.

Korean celebrity - Hyun Bin

The Korean Wave refers to a phenomenon of the Korean popular culture that reached every corner of the world, including Malaysia. Malaysians first began embracing the Korean Wave through the TV drama "Winter Sonata" in 2002, and the wave has ever since then, expanded its cultural scope through film, fashion, food, language, tourism, and lifestyle. Local business advertisers have taken advantage of this phenomenon by choosing Korean celebrities to promote their products in advertising campaigns.

Hyun Bin (현빈) is an actor from South Korea who was born on September 25, 1982. Hyun Bin first became famous for his role in the television drama "My Lovely Sam-soon" in 2005. Since then, he has undertaken many leading roles in other successful television dramas including "Secret Garden" in 2010 and "Crash Landing on You" in 2019. He gained more popularity by starring in a series of box office films such as "Confidential

Assignment” and “The Swindlers” in 2017, as well as “The Negotiation” and “Rampant” in 2018.

Throughout his career, he received many international fame and acting recognition, such as the Baeksang Arts Awards. He was also involved in several campaigns such as the awareness against animal cruelty campaign. He has continually supported several charity projects including Save the Children, Community Chest of Korea, and several international relief NGOs. In March 2020, Hyun Bin made a secret donation to the Community Chest of Korea, a non-profit organisation to help fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Advertisers are fond of engaging Hyun Bin because he is very easy to work with, shows professionalism and passion for his work, on top of being knowledgeable and a fast learner. These are the characteristics advertisers look for in a celebrity endorser.

In 2011, a few companies were still seeking Hyun Bin to renew his contract or sign new endorsements, even though they knew that he was still in the army. When Hyun Bin joined the navy voluntarily, advertisers perceived this as a positive image and lined up to hire him. While most male celebrities in South Korea require some time for them to regain back their popularity after being discharged from the army, Hyun Bin’s popularity never waned. After his discharge from the army, Hyun Bin was again proclaimed “CF King” (Commercial Film) in 2013 and continued to top brand value rankings for years. Hyun Bin’s popularity and image are the reasons why advertisers like to hire him for endorsements (Sihombing & Dellavia, 2021). Additionally, his voice, at 172 Hertz, sounds calm and gentle, so when he speaks the lines for an advertisement, it is easy for audiences to form a favourable impression (Sihombing & Dellavia, 2021). For instance, Hyun Bin has appeared in advertisements for Kia Motors, Samsung, Lexus as well as Korean hair products, coffee brands and outdoor gear to name a few.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Persuasive factors of a celebrity

Past studies have shown that there are many celebrity persuasive factors associated with influencing the audience. The current findings have identified three main persuasive factors that would influence the perception of the audience, which are source credibility, source attractiveness and popularity.

Source credibility is defined as the attributes or characteristics of a celebrity that lead the audience to accept and believe the truthfulness or honesty of his/her messages (Ohanian, 1990). Source credibility studies have indicated that information from credible sources is seen to be more valid and persuasive, whereby it will positively influence the beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and behaviours of audiences. The findings suggest that consumers do consider a celebrity’s credibility as the most important factor when selecting a product to buy. The reason why they choose products that have been endorsed by celebrities is because celebrities help to generate awareness of the brand. The informants said that they prefer celebrities because they are widely known, so they are seen as more credible and have more influence in brand evaluation. The following statements from Informants 3 and 6 reflect their perception of Hyun Bin:

I think Hyun Bin’s personal image is very good and positive. If I see an advertisement featuring Hyun Bin, I will stop and pay attention to the product. Because of Hyun Bin, I will feel that the company will have a certain reputation and I am confident that the product is not a bad product.

(Informant 3)

The product will be more reliable if Hyun Bin is representing the company in the ad. If Hyun Bin appeared in the ad, I have a positive feeling towards the product, because in my opinion, Hyun Bin has built a good image of celebrities internationally. (Informant 6)

As such, the findings suggest that consumers are inclined to purchase a product when they see a familiar face featured in the advertisement, and assume that it would be a high-quality product because of these references.

Next, source attractiveness works to establish affective connection with the public (Freire, et al., 2017). It means that individuals are most likely to be influenced by the source when they seek to identify themselves. At the same time, they are more likely to identify with those they find to be friendly and attractive. This study found that attractive individuals are better able to change their beliefs because they find the endorser to be attractive and when they believe there is something in common between them and the endorser. Celebrity attractiveness is an influencing power in the attempt to redirect the customer's conduct. Therefore, this study recommends the recruitment of physically attractive endorsers. It is also recommended that the process remains objective.

When I see the advertisement, the first thing that cross my mind is how handsome and cool Hyun Bin is. The way he promoted the product is very smooth and he has his own unique style and tone to deliver the message. I think Hyun Bin helps to make the advertisement more attractive and memorable to the audience. (Informant 5)

It makes me feel very excited as I could see him in the printed ad and videos that the brand released. He looks so classy and elegant in the advertisement. As people always quote that personality has greater recommendation than any kind of introduction. (Informant 7)

Besides that, popularity appeal is the third factor raised by the informants. They believed that celebrities are a potential source of persuasion, which can affect the attitude, perception, and intention of customers. The more popular the endorser is, the more influence he/she can influence the consumer's brand appraisal and their buying intentions.

Oh yes. I will pay attention to the Hyun Bin's advertisement because he is so popular. I think the company has made a smart choice to select Hyun Bin as their ambassador. It has greatly affected my impression towards the products. I believe that the products endorsed by him are guaranteed to be of good quality. So, I ended up having it as well. (Informant 10)

He has high recognition and good impression from most of the audience. Besides that, his exposure rate on social media is comparatively higher. If companies choose him as an endorser, their product or brand will have higher discussion rate and exposure rate as compared to others because he is popular. (Informant 6)

Thus, the findings have shown that a credible, popular, and likeable celebrity endorser will influence audience perception and increase purchase intention. The findings also demonstrated that social judgments with the appropriate persuasive factors can positively influence consumer response towards the celebrity endorsers and brand.

Characteristics of a celebrity endorser

The study found that most of the informants remembered better celebrities who they considered to have certain characteristics such as charming, likeable and professional. They also admitted that a positive and good image is an important factor for advertisers to consider during the selection of celebrity endorsers. Most informants felt that using a celebrity would increase brand awareness, appeal to the celebrity's fans, and improve purchase confidence. The common characteristics highlighted by the informants consist of likeability, expertise and trustworthiness.

The first characteristic that appealed to the informants was likeability. Likeability refers to an affection towards the source because of their physical appearance, behaviour, or other personal characteristics (Yang, 2017). Likeability is associated with physical attraction, i.e. desirable features and qualities in terms of facial and body appearance, dress codes and poses. Meanwhile, attitude towards a celebrity is defined as the positive or negative appraisal of the particular celebrity (Yang, 2017). Findings reveal that there is a relationship present between celebrity and likeability.

I think it is because he is well liked by the audiences. Some people who never watched his work before will be fascinated by him right away. He is also very kind and no wonder so many fans love him, of course I am one of them.
(Informant 1)

I would definitely buy and try the product (for example coffee) if Hyun Bin thinks the product is favourable! For me, the brands can speak for itself if they are big names who promote it.
(Informant 2)

Next, expertise, in the current study context, is defined as the degree to which a communicator is perceived as a valuable source of assertions (Singh & Banerjee, 2018). Most of the informants responded that besides likeability, they have a strong belief towards a person who looks confident, is knowledgeable, and an expert in their field. Celebrities with high level of expertise and communication skills display a stronger advocacy power as compared to celebrities with little knowledge (Ohanian, 1990). Celebrity expertise is one of the reasons discovered to have an influence on receiving information, for instance giving testimonials on the benefits of a product (Zipporah & Mberia, 2014). This can be seen from the feedback from Informants 1 and 8 on Hyun Bin.

He is smart and also talented, he learned foreign languages very fast. Other than Korean language, he can also speak English. He can understand a bit of Mandarin as well as Japanese. He is trying to learn more languages. For example, he was able to speak Filipino commercial taglines in the advertisement he shot in Philippines. I think his hard work is one of the reasons the companies choose him among so many male celebrities.
(Informant 1)

Hyun Bin is extremely successful, not only because he is a beloved artist and public figure, but also because he is very professional in handling the endorsed brand.
(Informant 8)

Meanwhile, celebrity trustworthiness also has an important influence on the public's perception of the company, product, brand and purchase intention (Singh & Banerjee,

2018). Trustworthiness is perceived as a characteristic of a celebrity that is a sure-fire way to make a customer feel more confident and believe in the product that they want to buy (Hakimi et al., 2011; Ohanian, 1990).

Hyun Bin always show a positive image to the public such as polite and gentle. He takes good care of his image whenever and wherever he is. He is reliable and trustworthy to collaborate. Some male celebrities may only have good appearance, but not so trustworthy, maybe due to their negative behaviours and rumours.
(Informant 4)

Thus, celebrities have to be recognisable to garner attention. Generally, it is assumed that celebrities who are perceived as likeable, is an expert and trustworthy will increase brand awareness and persuasion for product purchase. In addition, there must also be a connection present between the celebrity and the audience.

CONCLUSION

The theoretical contribution of this study includes a deeper understanding of which persuasive factors and characteristics of a celebrity endorser can increase purchase intention. The application of the Source Credibility Theory to celebrity endorsement also offers valuable insights into how consumers process and react to these celebrity endorsers. From the collected fan perceptions about celebrity endorsements, it can be concluded that advertisements with celebrities are more influential than those without celebrities. The benefits of celebrity endorsement strategies may, under the right conditions, justify the high costs for such advertising. On the other hand, companies need to be aware that the use of celebrities is mainly to attract consumer attention and may not automatically translate into purchasing behaviour. Thus, it is vital for advertisers to grasp how consumers perceive celebrity endorsement in this regard.

Practically, this study highlights some important characteristics that companies and advertisers can capitalise in order to design a successful celebrity endorsement campaign and positively influence consumers' purchase intention. For example, companies can use a reputable and successful celebrity who is an expert in their field and not just rely on their physical attractiveness. Besides, they can pick a well-known celebrity with a positive image, since their image is likely to be conveyed in the brand image. Lastly, choose a celebrity that a target group can identify with and one that is known nationally in the country where the companies are expanding. By understanding the celebrity endorsers' persuasive factors and characteristics, marketers can tailor their endorsement strategies to align with consumers' existing attitudes and beliefs, thus enhancing the overall effectiveness of celebrity endorsements.

Another implication that may be helpful to advertisers is the consumers' perception that a celebrity has the power to change their perceptions of the product. This research also suggests that advertisers should choose a celebrity endorser which is the most popular to target the wider population. It is very interesting to note that most of the informants considered celebrity popularity to be the most important factor.

Limitations and future research

There are some limitations to this research that need to be considered. First, the study focused on just one celebrity, which is Hyun Bin. Besides, the sample used was too small

to represent the entire fan base of Hyun Bin. As a result, the study could not provide a specific evaluation. A majority of the informants were students and young adults, so it is not possible for the result to be generalised to the whole population. Furthermore, as this study only involved female informants, there was no gender equality among informants that could have had an impact on the responses. A majority of the informants were Chinese fans, thus not allowing a generalisation to be made to different societies such as Malay and Indian fans in Malaysia. Although Hyun Bin's fans can actually be found all around the world, this study was restricted to only three countries. As this research had only focused on celebrity fans, future research may concentrate on a different range of age and individual profiles.

In conclusion, the power of celebrity endorsements has a positive effect on the audience, given that the persuasion is greater when celebrity credibility and attractiveness are included, and that characteristics can influence the audience. These findings will also be useful to advertisers executing celebrity endorsement campaigns to grab the attention of the audience. Last but not least, undoubtedly, the world of celebrities has become a powerful source of persuasive communication for the public and target audience.

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