

Brand Endorsement and COO: An Exploration of the Value of Multicultural Celebrity Brand Endorsers

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The art and science of pairing celebrity and product have yielded tangible results. Approximately 14% to 19% of advertisements in the United States feature celebrity endorsers and is two times greater in foreign markets (Elberse & Verleun, 2012). Most consumers spend limited time when selecting products and rely on a few cues, country-of-origin (COO) being one of them (Ozretic-Dosen, Skare, & Krupka, 2007). In this exploratory study the relationship of the celebrity COO and that of the product/service brands they represent is examined in order to determine if the celebrity creates more added economic value if they are from same country of origin as the brand they are trying to promote.

INTRODUCTION

The iconic value of a global celebrity, coupled with a product brand is the holy grail of strategic brand alliance and reach, in today's self service world of social media and non-traditional television consumption. The hope is to be the next YouTube viral sensation, with so many million/billion views. Approximately 14% to 19% of the advertisements in the United States featured celebrity endorsers and that number is twice as high in certain foreign markets (Elberse & Verleun, 2012). The non-traditional of years ago has become the norm of today and may not be the norm of tomorrow. So in this ever-changing media consumption world how can one evaluate the global reach of a celebrity and the most adequate tie-in with a product brand? Will the 'normal' practice of the celebrity and product being from the same country-of-origin continue successfully into the foreseeable future? Can celebrity from emerging markets have equal or greater reach than those from the Western world? Does celebrity appeal transcend across borders equally? Would Western celebrities continue to have appeal in emerging markets? Is there an effective formula for brand equity coupling between the celebrity and the product?

The art and science of pairing celebrity and product have yielded very tangible results for example Tiger Woods is said to have contributed \$600 million USD in profit to Nike (Wu, 2013). Strategic brand alliances with celebrity comes at a cost, for example Phil Mickelson earned \$52 million USD from his endorsement deals from July 2009 to July 2010 while only earning a mere 18% of that from the actual sport and LeBron James earned \$30 million USD during the 2009-2010 compared to his actual player salary which is approximately half that amount (Parker & Fink, 2012). Nike is estimated to have spent

\$475 million USD annually on athlete endorsement as part of their \$1.7 billion advertising budget in 2006 (Elberse & Verleun, 2012). Kelting and Rice (2013) cautions that as the size and scope of the celebrity endorsement portfolio increases, the effectiveness of the advertisements featuring the celebrity tends to decrease. This provides the rationale for brands to have multiple celebrity endorsers in the various markets, however given the fact that celebrity brands are more complicated than product brands, pair-bonding the product and the celebrity can prove to be a challenge in the globalized marketplace of self-service on-demand media.

Some celebrities have taken advantage of their cultural heritage to launch their careers and advance. While others have hidden their heritage; yet there are those who use it by convenience by highlighting their heritage in certain circles when it is beneficial and highlighting their country of birth instead when it's not. Heritage and cultural background seems to be a continuum - on one side there are those celebrities that highlight their country of birth to the maximum expression (such as Carlos Vives - Colombian Artist, that has used his music to showcase Colombia and Latin America); on the other side, there are those celebrities that have opted to highlight their heritage rather than country of birth such as Romeo Santos (American singer, born to a Dominican Parent and a Puerto Rican Mother; he has opted to highlight his "Dominican" heritage and become an ambassador of Dominican Music "Bachata"). Within this scale there are interesting cases such as Rihanna and Nicki Minaj, both considered to be American artists, both were born in the Caribbean (Rihanna in Barbados and Nicki Minaj in Trinidad) - and both highlight their Caribbean heritage in certain circles (example, Rihanna's Caribbean Carnival exploits in Trinidad and Barbados, Nicki Minaj's American Idol comparison of war-torn Liberia with Trinidad which meant she needed to escape to the US in order to survive) when it is appropriate for them. But for the most part, they present themselves as being "American". Within these two extremes we have multiple combinations, including celebrities that have been able to manage both country of birth and heritage, and exploit both equally and be recognized as such. That is the case of "Jenny from the Block", Jennifer Lopez- an American artists that highlights her latin roots but at the same time her country of birth.

It is this multiplicity of identity within the sphere of celebrity, that begs the review of COO, culture of origin and country of success for the celebrity endorser, as it will affect the perceived effectiveness of the strategic brand alliance from the perspective of the consumer, who may or may not be inherently aware of the celebrity's multiple cultural alliances. Dependent on which identity the consumer is aware of, this may result in the endorsement being successful or not in the various target markets; as the particular celebrity may carry a connotation of particular COO. This perception attached to the celebrity's COO, may add one more variable to product's COO matrix as it may affect the purchase intention of the consumer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Country of Origin in General

As consumers we perceive products as having several attributes (Erdem, Zhao, & Valenzuela, 2004); Fishbein, 1967; Lancaster, 1966). Most consumers spend a limited amount of time when selecting products and rely on just a few cues, country-of-origin (COO) being one of them (Ozretic-Dosen, Skare, & Krupka, 2007). Wang and Yang (2008) have pointed out that "the interaction of COO and brand personality is an important conceptual and managerial issue" that needs to be considered (p. 459). The selection of a celebrity to endorse a product, has to work in harmony with the COO and the brand's image, in order to reap the desired results. The effectiveness of a celebrity endorser to persuade a consumer to use the product they endorse would be a factor in that "limited amount" at product selection. The question raised is how much of the interaction of a celebrity's COO and their endorsement of a product affect purchase? Is there a better combination that proves more successful such as both celebrity and product sharing the same COO? Or is the heritage, rather than their COO, of the celebrity more influential?

There's no consensus in the international marketing literature on a definition for COO; although various authors have proposed one (D'Astous and Ahmed, 1999; Al-Sulaiti and Baker, 1998), among

researchers there's an understanding that "an inextricable link exists between the country image and the brand image, although the exact nature of this link, including the direction of the relationship, is equivocal" (Ozretic-Dosen, Skare, & Krupka, 2007, p. 130). Likewise, many studies have shown that the COO image has an impact on the consumer's perception and that this affects purchase intention (Wang & Yang, 2008; Saeed, 1994, Roth & Romeo, 1992, Hong & Wyer, 1989, among others). However, there's no consensus on how much the COO cue influences product evaluation and selection (Ozretic-Dosen, Skare, & Krupka, 2007). Some authors consider that this is a limited influence (Thakor & Katsanis, 1997); while others that it is not the COO of the product, but rather the origin of the brand and its association that is more influential (Thakor & Lavack, 2003).

It is an established practice in industry to highlight the German origin of the car, the Swiss origin of the watch as companies seek to exploit the positive COO effects and hide the negative. While Pecotich and Rosenthal (2001), and later Usunier (2006) claims that because of globalization the COO effects have become muted and less relevant; it should be noted that a typical product carries a label that denotes, the COO, country of design and country of assembly; which may indicate that the relevancy is in fact increasing. Zdravkovic's (2013) study indicates that country image does in fact matter and depends on a person's country-of-origin, and if the product in question is a high involvement product Kelting and Rice (2013).

Pharr (2005) rightly stated that COO is one of the most widely studied concepts in marketing, which after the many decades of research leads to one conclusion: that COO has influence on the evaluative judgments of the product. The fact that globalization has accelerated with the successful formation of many trading blocs, the World Trade Organization, new rules of origin for customs and the prevalence of the internet and social media; has only created new complexities in understanding COO; given that there is now country of design, country of parts, country of assembly, country of manufacture (Pharr, 2005) and country of brand as well as country of brand spokesperson. Pham (2006) denotes this phenomenon as hybrid products with multiple country affiliations which is found in multiple product categories. Pharr (2005) shows that brand image and brand equity have been found to moderate the effect of COO on product evaluations and purchase intentions. Chen (2004) in examining the multiplicity of the hybrid product's COO, found that early adopters were most interested in the country of manufacture, while the majority and laggards were using the country of brand origin as their main cue to make a judgment on the product.

Bilkey and Nes (1982) highlight the issues that remain salient even in today's COO studies, that is the majority of the studies involved only a single cue – the COO and not even a tangible real product under evaluation. Additionally, other issues raised include that of brand, product warrantee, prestigious retailer or even celebrity spokesperson being able to compensate for a negative COO cue (Bilkey & Nes, 1982). The COO biases that may emerge from source country considerations like degree of economic development, political climate and the consuming country considerations like that of nationalism and cultural affinity with the source country will inherently have an impact on the superficiality or depth of the COO positivity or negativity (Bilkey & Nes, 1982). A good case in point highlighted by Bilkey and Nes (1982) was that Indian students rated British products higher than did Taiwanese students and this was attributed to the former colonial ties.

Agrawal and Kamakura (1999) shows that consumers infer brand quality from COO as a cue in certain situations, and as a summary construct in others; however, the hedonic products like wines and fragrances where quality cannot be judged until after consumption then the cues of price, brand and COO is used to make a judgment call. This seems to suggest that the use of celebrity coupled with the cues of price, brand and COO may have a positive effect on the judgment call made at the point of purchase. Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) show that COO also has symbolic and emotional meaning to the consumer who may derive status from the authenticity and exoticness of the product.

Koubaa (2008) found that Japanese consumers perceive the Sony product made in China, Indonesia and the USA as inferior to any Japanese made Sony and Sanyo. Previously D'Astous and Ahmad (1999) found that BMW brand perception was eroded when some production was shifted to the USA from Germany. These findings highlight the call to have multi-cue studies in the area.

COO Of Individuals (Celebrity Endorsement)

Branding theory for the most part have always focused on the product brand, however given the changing media consumption patterns that exist today, increasingly there is the notion that the celebrity themselves carry a person/human brand. Celebrity and the human brand is defined within the confines of this paper as any well known persona who is the subject of marketing communications (Thomson, 2006). The celebrity's image and core values are carefully cultivated in much the same way product brands are. These persons may be found within the world of sports, music and the performing arts.

Schroeder (2005), notes that neither the managers nor consumers completely control the branding process, but there are cultural codes that interplay, constrain and contribute to how the brand produce their meaning. So while the human/celebrity brand is carefully cultivated; the brand itself have similar constraints that affect their meaning. This interplay may be similar to those of products where there may be a distinction between COO, country of design and country of assembly. Carlson and Donovan (2013), incorporate the notion of brand personality of both the celebrity and the product needing to have a strong association in order to positively influence consumer consumption behaviors. Aaker (1997) defined brand personality as the human characteristics associated with a brand. Therefore the choice of the celebrity for a strategic brand alliance with a product should ensure that the celebrity exhibits a high level of attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness in relation to the product in question. Pikas, Schied and Pikas (2012) define expertise as the ability to provide the consumer with accurate and beneficial information; trustworthiness as the ability to provide the information in an objective and honest manner; and attractiveness as the physical appearance and facial attractiveness.

As consumers, we are familiar with the idea of individuals (politicians, performing arts celebrities, athletes, etc) being a "brand" that can be marketed. Schroeder's (2005) work about the "The artist and the brand" further showcases this idea. Thus, if we see the artist as a brand, then we can consider how COO will affect that brand. Along those lines, more so than for actual physical consumable products, the heritage they opt to highlight and showcase would have an effect on their brand. When they sponsor a product, or thus engage in co-branding or strategic brand alliance, the managerial and conceptual issues that need to be considered according to Wang and Yang (2008) come into play.

Walker, Langmeyer and Langmeyer (1993) highlighted some notable failures in strategic brand alliances, namely Bill Cosby as endorser of E.F. Hutton, John Houseman for McDonald's, Ringo Starr for Sun Country Classics, John Wayne for Datriil and Hair Trigger and George C. Scott for Renault; but there are some notable successes for Bill Cosby for Kodak, Jello and Coca-Cola and John Houseman for Smith Barney. Are the different results somehow tied to the notion of attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness or the brand equity of the human/celebrity brand? The evidence shows that the endorsement, that is the strategic brand alliance, is most successful when there is a natural fit between the product and celebrity/human brand and the fit is essential for the celebrity to be successful in convincing the consumer (Boyd & Shank, 2004; Till & Busler, 2000). Lee, Lee and Lee (2011) demonstrate that when two-product categories fit well functionally, consumers easily understand the combination. While, on the other hand, when the fit is low, consumers are left confused and will find other information to resolve their confusion. Kelting and Rice (2013) show that the associative strength between the celebrity and the product is crucial. If the celebrity has a weak link to the product or product category, then there is greater possibility of endorsement failure; as the customer will have greater difficulty recalling the product and the celebrity. Walker, Langmeyer and Langmeyer (1993) observe that a product that does not have a strong brand image may inextricably have one created for it by using the brand equity of the celebrity as a proxy. Lee, Lee and Lee (2011) highlight this observation by showing that the familiar brand allows the less familiar brand to share its primary associations of attributes, benefits, attitudes and personality. Wu (2013) demonstrates that the celebrity can increase the product reputation, enhance brand image while being seared into the consumer memory for future recall. Kelting and Rice (2013) further states that the inclusion of a famous face in advertising creates additional pathways to the long-term memory for consumers; however this pathway can be negatively affected when the famous face is associated with multiple brands.

Latin American & Caribbean COO Perceptions

Brand names are valuable assets to companies especially in the global marketplace. Lim and O'Cas (2001) states that brand names are truly the last source of differentiation for products and services; as the actual product and service can be easily emulated. The human brand, that of celebrities proves to be more valuable in this landscape of easily emulated products and services; as the celebrity stands as the last bastion of uniqueness. The celebrities lend their uniqueness to the various products as services as highlighted earlier. However, with the exception of a few celebrities such as Tiger Woods, the actual return on celebrity value on a particular product or service is not certain.

While the Caribbean claims the celebrity that acknowledges their origins in the Caribbean, for example Barbados in 2008 named Rihanna their cultural ambassador with the trappings of the diplomatic passport, a gift of prime real estate in the most exclusive neighborhood on the island; the return may be controversial media coverage. In the case of Rihanna, when the Prime Minister who bestowed the ambassadorship on her died in 2010, it was first reported that she is too busy to attend his funeral. That short statement sullied the Rihanna brand amongst the English speaking Caribbean. Social media lit up with many negative responses; which resulted in her attendance. Still, today, there are calls for the current prime minister to revoke her diplomatic passport. So while Rihanna may have global appeal, two question remain. Can her brand be a good match in a brand strategic alliance with a brand targeting Caribbean consumers? Can her brand be a good match in a brand strategic alliance with a brand targeting American consumers?

Nicki Minaj bills herself as a Trinidadian born rapper. In 2013 when she appeared on American Idol and stated that Trinidad is similar to Liberia and that she was lucky to make it out alive; this angered even the Minister of Tourism who stated that she would have to explain what she meant, in light of the fact that in November 2012 Minaj stated the HIV/AIDS cases in Trinidad is 250,000 when in fact it is a tenth of that (Baboolal, 2013). So therefore while representation on the world's stage is good, when the information is inaccurate, it may damage the associated reputation - in this case, the country of Trinidad. However, after both incidents, Minaj filmed her 'Pound the Alarm' video in Trinidad and featured Trinidad's Carnival, which may possibly prove to be a positive strategic brand alliance for the country with the brand of Nicki Minaj.

On a different sphere, that of the world of sports, we find cases such as that of Felix Sanchez, American born track-field athlete that competes representing the Dominican Republic. Since his 1999 debut, he has won two Olympic gold medals in 2004 and 2012; has won gold and been world champion in 2001 and 2003. Felix Sanchez, was not the only athlete that decided to play for/ represent another country by taking advantage of dual citizenship through heritage (he has dual citizenship - American and Dominican through his parents heritage) or by becoming citizens for a new country, such as the case of Viktor Ahn, a short track speed skating athlete of South Korean descent, who competes for Russia after becoming a Russian Citizen.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Proposal of Value of Celebrity Endorsement for the Country

The goal of this paper is to contribute to the COO literature by expanding the research field as we examine celebrity endorsement, COO and the celebrity brand and the value of the celebrity and the effects that COO have on their effectiveness. In order to achieve this contribution, we are considering the following research questions to guide us in the process:

- Can these C/LA celebrities be suitable endorsers for C/LA products and services?
 - How does the COO of the artist affect the artist's image and brand?
- How do the diaspora and the C/LA region perceive these celebrities?
 - What are the impacts of cultural ambassadors to COO/ Country (or adopted country)?
- What's the relationship of the celebrity COO and that of the product/service brands they represent and does the celebrity create more added economic value if he or she is from same COO as the brand he or she is trying to promote?

- In terms of celebrities, what constitutes COO - birth or heritage or country of success?
- Does COO perception vary by field? (Newscasters vs. musicians/ actors vs. athletes)
- How are athletes/artists that easily shift COO/Culture affiliation perceived? For example when they embrace another culture to appeal to their audience.

CONCLUSION

Pike (2012) shows that the strategic brand alliance with celebrities can be further broken down to those alliances with global celebrity and local celebrity. The global celebrity is most useful when they can espouse universal values like that of glamour, style, performance, strength, masculinity and femininity; the caveat being that they must be a desirable role model in their private lives as well (Pike, 2012). The local celebrity (TV presenters, local athletes etc.) achieve that sense of identification with the consumer that is difficult for the global celebrity to achieve, but depending on the product or service (both local or global), having the global celebrity can prove to be a winning strategic brand alliance if there is a sense of aspirational values.

Lim and O'Cas (2001) allude to this in their assessment of the marketplace. Today, where there are considerable similarities in consumer needs, greater population mobility – physically and digitally, where consumers have increased exposure to multiple media messages – via the internet, film and television. However, the perception of the brand and any strategic brand alliance with the celebrity may be perceived differently in the many regions of the world, of course due to differences in culture and history. A good case in point is the presumption that the foreign celebrity is almost required to sell a product in the Asian markets and that reality does not seem to hold true in the Latin American and Caribbean markets, where there is a mix of global and local celebrity endorsers with mixed results. In some cases, the Latin American and Caribbean markets react in much the same way as suggested by the Bilkey and Nes (1982) study of the Indian and Taiwanese students, where the former colonial ties have some sway or influence on the notion of good quality.

A study of the relationship between celebrity's COO and the brand could strengthen the literature by serving as a stepping stone to explore other areas such as the use of "A-List" celebrities to market everyday products outside of their home market, while in their own home market they would not endorse these mundane products. A study of this nature may lead to companies discovering the right mix of global A-listers and local celebrities to successfully promote the product brand around the globe. In today's globalized world, companies need to leverage their resources in order to be successful. Having the right combination of brand image/ product/ celebrity endorser could and would have an impact on achieving that success.

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