Celebrity endorsement effectiveness for print destination advertising

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Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

In modern marketing campaigns, celebrity endorsers are employed to differentiate and position products, services or even political candidates from competitors. In a similar vein, a destination marketing organization (DMO) could appoint a celebrity endorser to differentiate the destination from the competitors and direct awareness towards their own unique selling propositions. This assumption is explored in this study and it examines if a celebrity endorser is able to generate a positive impact on tourist attitude and whether this would lead to positive visitation intentions. As such a conceptual framework to explain and predict celebrity endorsement effectiveness on tourists' attitude and their visitation intentions is proposed.

Objectives

- Investigate how and if the celebrity endorsement factors influence tourists' attitudes towards the advertisement and

destination and whether this leads to visitation intentions.

- Examine whether tourists' attitude towards both the advertisement and destination mediates the impact of celebrity endorsement factors on visitation intentions.
- Assess if the Matchup construct moderates the impact of celebrity endorsement credibility factors on tourists' attitude towards the advertisement and destination.
- Compare the influence of native versus non-native celebrity endorsers on tourists' attitude and visitation intentions.
- Provide selection criteria for the most appropriate celebrity endorser for a destination print advertisement.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative approach using a questionnaire to address the objectives. An experimental research design using a print destination advertisement was selected to determine the effects that four celebrity endorsers (native/male, non-

native/male, native/female, non-native/female), have on tourists' attitude and visitation intentions compared to a control group showing no endorsement claim. Nearly all major constructs and their indicators are based on previous studies. This study employs a modified model to examine the nexus between celebrity endorsement factors and tourist's attitude towards the destination and advertisement. Structural equation modelling was the main statistical analysis to assess the relationships between celebrity endorsement factors and tourists' attitude, and to show how these being combined influence visitation intentions.

Results

The revised measurement model and structural model were found to fit the data satisfactorily. The path coefficients and their statistical significance in the revised structural model indicated that all hypotheses were supported, apart from one. Although the path from Attractiveness to Attitude towards the Advertisement is in the specified positive direction, it is not statistically significant. This study found that tourist's attitude towards the advertisement and the destination were predictors of visitation intentions, and at the same time played a mediating role between the celebrity endorsement dimensions and visitation intentions. 'Matchup' reported significant moderation effects on the relationship between perceived expertise and attitude towards a destination. Squared multiple correlations indicate that the revised structural model has a strong statistical ability to predict Mainland Chinese respondents' Attitude towards the Advertisement (47%) and Attitude towards Hong Kong (26%) and to a lesser extent their Visitation Intentions (9%).

The experimental research design was able to determine the effects of the four treatment groups versus the control group. By comparing the latent mean differences, it was found that the experimental groups significantly score better on both attitude dimensions. However, no significant differences were detected for visitation intentions. The study also compared the celebrity endorser groups on all the criterion

dimensions for selecting the most appropriate spokesperson.

Theoretical conclusions

Ohanian's (1990, 1991) source credibility model was successfully applied and extended to assess celebrity endorsement effectiveness for print destination advertisements in the context of Mainland Chinese tourists visiting Hong Kong. In such a context, this study widens the applicability of the conceptual model beyond a single discipline and cultural setting. The modified framework not only contributes to the field of tourism, but also contributes to the knowledge of consumer behaviour in general. As such, the study sheds light on the appropriateness of Trustworthiness as a dimension to examine source credibility for a celebrity endorser and proposes to reconstruct the Expertise dimension. Furthermore, this study examined how the accepted relationship that exist between celebrity endorsement and behavioural intentions change, when mediating constructs and a moderating latent variable are introduced. It is important to continually improve conceptual frameworks as this might alter our understanding of the phenomena and existing relationships. The proposed inclusion addresses multiple elements of the conceptual model and takes responsibility for designing an improved concept. The proposed change to the established relationship is exemplified by introducing two Attitude dimensions as mediators and Matchup as a moderator within an existing framework. By validating and including the two mediating constructs and a moderating variable in explaining celebrity endorser effectiveness on tourists' responses, the current study puts forward a more comprehensive conceptual framework in reflecting the complicated phenomenon of celebrity endorsement.

Practical application of the dissertation

The results of this study may be of interest to DMOs as it provides practical assistance in selecting an appropriate celebrity endorser for a destination. By assessing the celebrity endorsement effectiveness using the proposed model, marketing practitioners can

gain a more complete understanding of the impact that certain celebrity endorsers may have on tourist's attitude and their visitation intentions. The proposed model is able to assess several celebrity endorsers at the same time and the DMO is able to select the most appropriate celebrity endorser for a specific target market. The image that a certain celebrity endorser holds among the target market can be assessed beforehand, thereby avoiding certain risks.

As this study is placed within a certain context, it may be of particular interest to the Hong Kong Tourism Board and other tourism stakeholders in Hong Kong. With regard to China's increasing volume of outbound tourism, this study may also be of importance to other DMOs that wish to positively influence destination choice to be made among potential Mainland Chinese travellers by appointing a celebrity endorser. Reference to the complete study is suggested for further details of how the model could be employed as distinctive marketing tools. As such the proposed framework and methodology may help destination marketers assess, explain and justify the value of collecting celebrity endorser assets and their effectiveness in positively influencing tourist's attitude and visitation intentions.

Content of the dissertation

Abstract of chapter one

This chapter provides an introduction to the background and purpose of this study. It discusses the various constructs of the proposed theoretical framework, the definitions, the methodology and overall research question, which is followed by the objectives. Furthermore, several sections relevant to the phenomenon of celebrity destination endorsement are discussed to provide justification for this study.

Abstract of chapter two

This chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to the phenomenon of celebrity destination endorsement. These underlying concepts and assumptions are discussed on a theoretical and practical level to address the conceptual boundaries for the

objectives of the study. Furthermore, the merits, shortcomings and the related complexity accompanying celebrity endorsement are illustrated. A separate section is devoted to several prominent models to discuss their potential in achieving the objectives of the study. Literature addressing the mediating dimensions of Attitude is reviewed and the congruency concept for the moderator dimension is discussed in order to propose amendments to Ohanian's model.

Abstract of chapter three

This chapter presents the conceptual framework of the study combined with justification and illustration of the hypotheses. The modified framework assesses the nexus between celebrity endorsement, attitude towards Hong Kong and attitude towards the advertisement, all of which are believed to impact positively on intentions to visit Hong Kong. The relationships were developed into six hypotheses between all major constructs. This is followed by two additional hypotheses. The first proposes a mediation effect of attitude between the celebrity endorsement effectiveness factors and visitation intentions. The second hypothesis proposes moderation effects on the relationship between credibility factors and attitude dimensions.

Abstract of chapter four

This chapter addresses the research methodology and the methods used to examine celebrity endorsement effectiveness for destinations. The sample criteria were discussed in order to reflect potential leisure tourists as closely as possible combined with a quota sampling procedure. Full colour print advertisements were designed showing a picture of the Hong Kong harbour front combined with one of the four celebrity endorsers for the treatment groups and the official slogan. The questionnaire administered employed a 7-point semantic differential scale format. A total of 1365 valid face-to-face street interviews were conducted, 267 for the pilot and 1098 for the main survey. The pilot study confirmed the majority of the proposed components, except for the construct Trustworthiness.

Abstract of chapter five

This chapter presents the results and starts describing the procedure to find an appropriate measurement model. This was achieved by applying a cross validation procedure. Subsequently, the data was applied to the proposed structural model for hypotheses testing, which is preceded by a section discussing the mediating and moderating effects. All the hypotheses were developed based on a thorough literature review and all but one were fully supported in this study. In general, these findings appear to be in line with previous studies, which further validate the structural model. Mediating effects were examined and it appeared that partial mediation was supported for the attitude constructs. In addition, the results indicate that Matchup had a significant moderating effect for the relationship between a celebrity's perceived Expertise and the Attitude towards Hong Kong, which partially supported moderation effects. After testing for measurement invariance, the treatment groups were compared to the control group to examine whether there were any celebrity endorsement effects based on mean structure invariance. The last section of this chapter tries to specify the most appropriate celebrity endorser for promoting Hong Kong by analyzing the mean structure invariance for all criterion dimensions. It is believed that evaluating the celebrity endorser on more variables was more appropriate and objective. This way, one can obtain a comprehensive picture of which celebrity endorser performs better and in which areas.

Abstract of chapter six

This chapter serves to interpret the study findings and how they relate to previous studies by discussing all major research constructs independently and their relationship to other dimensions. Results partially supported the proposed model as the study only identified two celebrity

endorsement constructs. The Trustworthiness dimension is not identified and the reasons for this are discussed. While Attractiveness and Trustworthiness are important factors in persuasive communication research, they appear to have a minimal impact in the present study. In addition, theoretical and practical contributions of the study were addressed, and the practical implications were presented as specific marketing tools.

Abstract of chapter seven

This chapter provides a general overview of the study, followed by a review of the research question and objectives. The objectives are discussed separately in order to identify to what extent they were achieved. The last section illustrates the limitations, with recommendations for future research proposed. Furthermore, this chapter provides an overview of the study and discusses the achievement of the research objectives separately. This is followed by addressing the limitations of the study from which future research directions were suggested. From these limitations a number of opportunities have arisen that could be addressed by future research. Future research should validate the model in other settings, and cross-sectional and/or longitudinal studies would be valuable and meaningful to this line of inquiry.

In summary, this study provides a conceptual framework for understanding tourist's responses to celebrity endorsement for a print destination advertisement and explores the impact of the celebrity endorser on these responses. The model contributes to knowledge, as it is a first thoroughly researched step towards understanding of tourists' responses to celebrity endorsement in a destination selection context. The model presented has been built from both conceptual and empirical research, and provides a basis for further research. The complete dissertation can be freely accessed at the Hong Kong PolyU Institutional Repository (<http://repository.lib.polyu.edu.hk/jspui/>).