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LESSONS FROM THE RICH AND FAMOUS

A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Celebrity Endorsement in Advertising

Sejung Marina Choi, Wei-Na Lee, and Hee-Jung Kim

ABSTRACT: Using celebrities to promote products is a popular advertising technique around the world. However, little is known about how the implementation of celebrity endorsement varies according to dominant cultural values. This study content-analyzed television commercials featuring celebrities from two diametrically different countries—the United States and Korea—in terms of two fundamental cultural dimensions: (1) low versus high context, and (2) individualism versus collectivism. Findings of this study suggest that the strategic use and creative executions of celebrity endorsement mirror the respective prevalent cultural orientations in the two countries, although some similarities do exist. Extensive discussion and suggestions for future research are provided.

Today's American society is said to be fascinated with celebrities (Schickel 1985). Many successful individuals from a variety of fields, ranging from entertainment to sports, cuisine, business, and politics, are often elevated to celebrity status. Mass media are saturated with images of and information about celebrities, and as a result, celebrity figures enjoy high profiles, idiosyncratic qualities, and glamorous images in the eyes of the public (Giles 2000; McCracken 1989). Capitalizing on the public recognition bestowed on them, celebrities frequently appear in advertising in association with consumer products or services. With its ability to penetrate the busy clutter of advertising spots, draw consumer attention, generate high recall rates, create and differentiate product images, and generate sales and profits, celebrity endorsement has proven to be a valuable strategy (Agrawal and Kamakura 1995; Erdogan 1999; Gabor, Jeannye, and Wiener 1987; Kaikati 1987; Mathur, Mathur, and Rangan 1997). No wonder marketers invest large sums of money in employing celebrities to promote their products. Nike, for instance, signed a \$100 million, five-year contract with Tiger Woods for his endorsement (Isidore 2003).

The celebrity phenomenon is not limited to the United States and appears to be universal. Past research also observes

the prevalence of the celebrity endorsement strategy in many other countries (Cutler, Javalgi, and Lee 1995; Erdogan, Baker, and Tagg 2001; Lin 1993; Praet 2002; Shapiro 2001). As mass media enable celebrities such as Madonna and Michael Jordan to move beyond national markets and establish awareness and reputation around the world, celebrities with worldwide recognition and popularity are believed to transcend national borders and overcome cultural barriers in global marketing communications (Erdogan 1999; Kaikati 1987). Yet no research to date has empirically examined the assumption that the celebrity endorsement strategy is used in a similar fashion from country to country, or that consumers around the world respond to it in a similar way.

Since celebrities echo the symbolic meanings and values that are closely tied to the culture in which they have attained their eminence (McCracken 1989), the selection of celebrity endorsers and the creative execution of this advertising strategy may also mirror the fundamental cultural orientations and values of that society. Indeed, a considerable amount of cross-cultural research has evidenced that cultural values are often apparent in the practice of advertising. Advertising messages that are congruent with the dominant cultural norms are said to be more persuasive than those that do not reflect the cultural values of the society in which the advertising is disseminated (Cho et al. 1999; Han and Shavitt 1994; Taylor, Miracle, and Wilson 1997). To date, a few cross-cultural content analyses of advertising have observed the differing incidence of celebrity endorsement across countries (Cutler, Javalgi, and Lee 1995; Lin 1993; Praet 2002). However, these examinations are generally limited to merely examining the frequency of celebrity appearances; little is known about similarities and differences in *how* this particular technique is implemented cross-culturally.

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The purpose of this study is to establish a baseline understanding of cross-cultural similarities and differences in the practice of celebrity endorsement in advertising from two diametrically different countries, the United States and Korea, in terms of two fundamental cultural dimensions: (1) low versus high context, and (2) individualism versus collectivism. In addition to assessing the frequency of usage and the characteristics of celebrity endorsers, this study also closely examines the creative execution of the technique in the two countries. The common styles and features in the execution of celebrity-endorsed advertising should provide insights into what is considered effective by advertising practitioners in a given culture (Zandpour, Chang, and Catalano 1992). Theoretically, as one of the first efforts to delve into the implementation of celebrity endorsement cross-culturally, this study should serve as a starting point for future research on the varied celebrity endorsement usage and effectiveness across cultures. In practical terms, findings of this study should aid international advertisers in their initial understanding of the proper use of celebrities in different cultural settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Celebrity Endorsement

Using celebrities in advertising dates back to the late nineteenth century, and this common advertising practice has drawn a considerable amount of academic and practical attention (see Erdogan 1999 for an extensive review). Most academic investigations of celebrity endorsement have been contextualized in the realm of source credibility and attractiveness models, and suggest that celebrities exert their influence on consumers through perceived attributes such as expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, familiarity, and likeability (Ohanian 1990, 1991).

Another stream of research on celebrity endorsement, which is labeled the "match-up hypothesis," has examined the fit or "match" between a celebrity and the product being endorsed, and maintains that celebrity endorsement is more effective when the images or characteristics of the celebrity are well matched with the endorsed product (Kahle and Homer 1985; Kamins 1990; Kamins and Gupta 1994; Till and Busler 2000). In a similar vein, McCracken suggests that a "celebrity who best represents the appropriate symbolic properties" of the product should be selected, thus highlighting the importance of the cultural meanings of celebrities in the endorsement process. Celebrities embody a collection of culturally relevant images, symbols, and values. As images of the celebrities become associated with products through endorsement, the meanings they attach to the products are transferred to consumers through purchase and consumption (McCracken 1989, p. 316). Therefore, the practice of celebrity endorsement

should be closely related to the cultural context in which the images of celebrities are formed and individual celebrities are selected to be linked with particular products.

For advertising practitioners, employing an appropriate celebrity endorser to promote a product is an important and difficult task. For instance, as suggested in the theoretical literature, professionals at advertising agencies and their client companies in the United States and the United Kingdom cited celebrity attributes such as image, trustworthiness, and familiarity, as well as the fit between the celebrity and the product, as important factors for choosing the appropriate endorsers (Erdogan, Baker, and Tagg 2001; Miciak and Shanklin 1994). Other highly ranked decision factors include celebrity/target-audience congruence, costs of securing the celebrity, the celebrity's risk of controversy, and the celebrity's prior endorsement. As suggested by Erdogan, Baker, and Tagg (2001), the perceived importance and the actual use of endorser selection criteria may vary from culture to culture. Differences in the entertainment industry and agency business, and more broadly, in the cultural environments are likely to influence the execution of the celebrity endorsement strategy across countries.

Arguing for standardized advertising across countries, some contend that consumer demands and tastes have become similar on a global scale (Levitt 1983; Taylor and Johnson 2002) and that using celebrities with worldwide recognition in advertising is an effective means of overcoming cultural difficulties (Erdogan 1999; Kaikati 1987; La Ferla 2001). Others claim that despite some observed convergence among consumers around the world, fundamental values still remain divergent across cultures. Therefore, international advertisers cannot assume that the same advertising technique should be uniformly applied or that it will be equally effective in different countries (De Mooij 1998, 2003; Onkvisit and Shaw 1999). Yet research on similarities and differences between cultures in the use of celebrity endorsement in advertising is scarce, despite the potential cultural influence on this technique as speculated in the literature.

Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Differences

The contextuality of a culture is one of the most frequently used cultural orientations for distinguishing Asian cultures from Western ones, and has proven to be useful as a means of understanding cross-cultural differences (Cho et al. 1999; Kim, Pan, and Park 1998). Hall (1984) classified cultures according to the degree of context in their communication styles, noting that "a high context communication or message is one in which most of the information is already either in the physical context or internalized in the person while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message," whereas "a low context communication is just the opposite; i.e., the

mass of the information is vested in the explicit code" (p. 91). In high-context cultures, messages are conveyed in an abstract, implicit, and indirect manner. In contrast, communication in low-context cultures is more straightforward, explicit, and direct. Western countries such as the United States are characterized as low-context cultures, whereas Asian cultures such as Japan and Korea exhibit a high-context communication style (Cho et al. 1999; Hall 1976).

Some previous cross-cultural studies have applied the concept of high- versus low-context communications to advertising. In general, advertising in low-context cultures is often information-oriented and typically employs direct rhetorical styles, confrontational appeals, and hard-sell approaches (Cutler and Javalgi 1992; Lin 1993; Miracle, Chang, and Taylor 1992; Mueller 1987). Conversely, advertising in high-context cultures tends to be more emotional and symbolic, with more frequent use of soft-sell approaches and indirect verbal expressions (Biswas, Olsen, and Carlet 1992; Cutler and Javalgi 1992; Johansson 1994; Lin 1993; Miracle, Chang, and Taylor 1992; Mueller 1987). Consumers in a high-context culture are familiar with and are thought to prefer indirect or implicit ways of communication via symbols. As cultural icons, celebrity endorsers can therefore be used effectively as an implicit means of conveying messages to consumers without overtly stating them.

Another dimension frequently used for comparing cultures is individualism versus collectivism (Aaker and Maheswaran 1997; Han and Shavitt 1994; Moon and Franke 2000). Originating from Hofstede's work (1984), the concept of individualism versus collectivism illustrates different values that are appreciated across cultures. Individualistic cultures are characterized by valuing independence, self-realization, freedom, and a high level of competition, whereas interdependence, harmony, family security, group-oriented goals, social hierarchies, cooperation, and a low level of competition typify collectivistic cultures. In short, individuals from an individualistic culture tend to be independent and self-oriented, whereas members of a collectivistic society are more interdependent and group-oriented. Individualism is often valued more in Western cultures, while collectivistic patterns are more common in Asian cultures (Cho et al. 1999; Hofstede 1984).

Reflections of individualism–collectivism have also been observed in advertising themes and executions (Cho et al. 1999). Prior research shows that advertisements in individualistic cultures often emphasize independence, uniqueness, and success of individuals, whereas advertising in collectivistic cultures is more likely to display interdependence, family integrity, group well-being, and concern for others (Belk and Bryce 1986; Han and Shavitt 1994; Miracle, Chang, and Taylor 1992; Mueller 1987). Employing celebrities to bring credibility to product endorsements and to transfer their symbolic

properties to consumers seems to be more congruent with the common mode of communication observed in collectivistic cultures than that of individualistic cultures. Celebrities who are widely recognized and represent the shared values of the society might be perceived as more credible and influential in a collectivistic culture, where belongingness, harmony, and respect for social hierarchy are key values (Han and Shavitt 1994; Hofstede 1984; Kim 1996), as opposed to individualistic cultures, where consumers may consider celebrities simply as unique individuals who are accomplished in their respective fields.

Cross-Cultural Comparisons

As cultural orientations differentially influence the content and style of advertising across countries, the practice of similar advertising techniques such as celebrity endorsement may vary accordingly. Given the significant financial investment involved in this strategy, it is important to understand the varied use of celebrity endorsement techniques across cultures. Comparative analysis will add depth to such an understanding. Meaningful cross-cultural comparisons involve studying cultures that vary on the major constructs with sufficient functional similarities (Berry 1980).

In this study, two countries are selected for comparison of the practice of celebrity endorsement in advertising: the United States and Korea. The United States represents a typical individualistic culture with a low-context communication style, whereas Korea is characterized as a collectivistic culture with a high-context communication pattern (Cho et al. 1999; Hofstede 1984; Taylor, Miracle, and Wilson 1997). Hofstede (1991) reported that the United States was the most individualistic country among the 53 countries analyzed, with a score of 91 on a 100-point scale, whereas Korea was evidently collectivistic, with a score of 18. The contextual differences in the two countries have also been explicitly described by Hall (1976, 1984), who classified the United States and Korea as low- and high-context cultures, respectively.

As a newly developed country and one of the major trading partners of the United States, Korea has rapidly increased its dependence on international trade, thus presenting attractive business opportunities for foreign firms (Economist Intelligence Unit 2004). With its high level of economic development, Korea now has one of the fastest-growing advertising markets in the region (*International Journal of Advertising* 2001). Not surprisingly, the advertising industry in Korea has recently evolved into one of the globally aligned markets as many large agencies become affiliated with worldwide agencies, with the share of the foreign companies in the agency business exceeding 40% (KOBACO 2003; Moon and Franke 2000). Today, Korea offers great availability of media, with over 75% of the population using the Internet and 60%

of households equipped with high-speed Internet access (Economist Intelligence Unit 2004; KOBACO 2003). The recent introduction of satellite and cable television further adds to these vibrant communications services and growth in advertising.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Consistent with the foregoing argument, prior research has indicated that there is more extensive use of celebrities in Asian advertising than in Western countries (Cutler, Javalgi, and Lee 1995; Lin 1993; Praet 2002). For example, Cutler, Javalgi, and Lee (1995) found that Korean magazine advertisements employed status appeals and celebrities more often than their U.S. counterparts. Since magazines are generally target-audience specific, for a comprehensive comparison of the use of celebrities in advertising, it is necessary to extend earlier work to a medium that reaches the masses, such as television. In 2003, television accounted for 35% and 40% of the total advertising expenditures in Korea and the United States, respectively (KOBACO 2004; TNS Media Intelligence/CMR 2004). Thus, television is deemed a comparable medium for comparisons between the United States and Korea.

Moving beyond the past research on comparing frequencies of celebrity appearances, the current investigation also seeks to identify common types and characteristics of celebrity endorsers in the two countries. Popular types of celebrities hired to promote products might hinge on cultural settings, and this descriptive information should provide additional insights into the cross-cultural similarities and differences in the practice of celebrity endorsement. Therefore, focusing on television, the first set of research questions is posed to update and expand the previously observed cross-cultural differences pertaining to celebrity appearances in advertising.

RQ1: Does Korean television advertising use more celebrities than its U.S. counterpart? Also, what are the types and characteristics of celebrities appearing in U.S. and Korean television advertising?

Celebrities have been associated with diverse products. Conventional wisdom and research findings both suggest that the effective use of celebrity endorsers should depend greatly on product types (Forkan 1980; Friedman and Friedman 1979). By means of the identification process, celebrities work best when endorsing products that are high in social or psychological risks, such as fashion apparel and jewelry, rather than functional products involving high performance or physical risk, such as appliances (Friedman and Friedman 1979). Meanwhile, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion suggests that celebrity endorsers in advertising should be more effective in low-involvement purchase situations

where consumers do not actively think about the qualities of the products. In this way, celebrity endorsers generally function as peripheral cues that allow consumers to form or change their attitudes toward the products by simply associating the products with positive feelings toward the celebrities or using simple heuristics pertaining to the celebrities, such as "celebrities are credible" (Chaiken and Maheswaran 1994; Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983).

Despite the potential variation of the use of celebrity endorsement among product types, previous research offers little information on similarities and differences across cultures in this regard. On the one hand, according to the current theory on celebrity endorsement, both American and Korean advertising should use celebrities more often for low-involvement products that have a symbolic, psychological, or social component than for other types of products, which would result in a similar list of product categories for which celebrities are commonly employed. On the other hand, culture may exert a strong influence on the execution of this strategy. Consequently, Korean consumers' preference for high-context communication, along with their strong desire to conform to social norms and trends, may lead to the frequent use of celebrity endorsement even for rational, high-involvement products. In line with the discussion, the following set of research questions is put forth to determine whether the use of celebrity endorsement varies with product types and whether this relationship differs in the two countries.

RQ2a: What are the product types for which celebrities are commonly employed as endorsers in U.S. and Korean television advertising?

RQ2b: Does the frequency of celebrity appearances vary with product types in U.S. and Korean television advertising?

RQ2c: Does the relation between the use of celebrities and product types differ between the two countries?

The current investigation further seeks to identify celebrity endorsers' functions in the ads. In other words, what roles do celebrities play in Korean and American advertising? Celebrities can overtly promote products as spokespersons or simply appear in advertising without providing personal approval of the products. An examination of the function of the celebrities in the creative content or how they are represented in the commercials should enhance understanding of the cross-cultural difference in the practice. If the credibility of the celebrities is the key to their endorsement, then celebrities should appear as themselves and endorse products by directly speaking to the audience. This type of explicit communication is likely to be common in an individualistic culture. In contrast, serving as visual cues that stand out in the advertising clutter, celebrities may play characters other than themselves in the creative plot. In this way, the celebrities are

employed for the cultural meanings they embody in an implicit manner. Therefore, the next set of research questions is raised.

RQ3: What role do celebrity endorsers play in U.S. and Korean television advertising? Does their function differ between the two countries?

Prior literature on low- versus high-context cultures suggests that Korean advertising may convey messages in a more abstract and indirect manner than American advertising, thereby containing less information. Indeed, a cross-cultural study of information content in advertising found that Korean advertisements presented less information than their American counterparts (Keown et al. 1992). Results from an experimental study also showed that Korean consumers responded more positively to less information-oriented ads than did Americans (Taylor, Miracle, and Wilson 1997). Applying celebrity endorsement to television advertising, Korean commercials may rely more on the appearance of celebrities as a key visual component or the focal point of the story line, thus presenting less information. This is also in line with Korean consumers' preference for high-context communication and ads with less information. In contrast, U.S. advertising may still convey a considerable amount of information even when featuring celebrities, due to its predisposition to a low-context communication style. The following question is formed to examine differences between the two countries in the amount of information present in celebrity advertising.

RQ4: Does Korean celebrity advertising convey less information than U.S. celebrity advertising?

Celebrities embody common characteristics of success, fame, and popularity, but these attributes can be represented differently depending on cultural orientation. From a theoretical standpoint, advertising in an individualistic culture such as the United States should depict celebrities as unique individuals with strong self-identity and portray their success as an outcome of self-actualization, whereas celebrities in a collectivistic culture such as Korea may echo fundamental values of the culture and their act of endorsement can signal a sense of public approval of the endorsed products. Hofstede (1994, 2001) suggested that while individualism and collectivism are two distinctive dimensions at the individual level, they are to be treated as opposite poles on a continuum at the society level. Following this conceptualization, this study examines collectivistic values to assess the influence of the dimension of individualism–collectivism. The following research question is therefore put forth to gauge the influence of individualism–collectivism on the content of celebrity advertising.

RQ5: Does Korean celebrity advertising emphasize more collectivistic values than U.S. celebrity advertising?

METHOD

Sample

Television commercials aired on major networks in each country were collected for the week of July 29 to August 2, 2002, a period with no major national holidays or events. All of the commercials that were shown on three major U.S. national networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) and three main Korean national channels (MBC, SBS, and KBS2)¹ were recorded during the prime-time hours of 8 to 11 P.M. (Eastern Standard Time in the United States). These networks and time slots were chosen for the large viewing audiences on a national scale and their wide range of programming. This technique of consecutive-day sampling has also been considered to be conducive to inferring the findings to a larger population (Riffe, Aust, and Lacy 1993; Riffe, Lacy, and Fico 1998).

Local ads, political campaign ads, self-promotional ads for the networks, and ads for entertainment products such as movies and music concerts were excluded. This led to a total of 841 and 975 national commercials, including duplicates, from Korea and the United States, respectively. Among them, commercials in which celebrities appear were counted and selected for the samples. Based on the literature, celebrities were broadly defined as "any native or foreign individuals who are famous or widely known to the public" (McCracken 1989; Praet 2002). With this definition, a wide variety of celebrities, such as actors/actresses, music artists, entertainers, sports figures, fashion models, broadcasters, and CEOs, were included. The percentage of agreements between coders for celebrity identification was over 98% and discrepancies were resolved by a third judge. With duplications, this procedure yielded a total of 479 Korean and 87 American celebrity commercials. This sample with duplications was used to answer the first research question pertaining to the frequency of celebrity appearances and their characteristics since the audience's exposure to this type of advertising in comparison with other types is important in assessing the prevalence of the celebrity endorsement advertising strategy.

Although the discovery of fewer celebrity ads in the United States was consistent with the research expectation, a discrepancy in size between the U.S. and Korean samples suggested that to make meaningful content comparisons between the two countries, additional commercials featuring celebrities were needed to augment the U.S. sample. For this reason, to gather additional data, television commercials on major U.S. networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX) were recorded for one extra week from March 3 to March 7, 2003, between 7 and 10 P.M. (Central Standard Time). A total of 1,379 national commercials were initially collected and further reduced to 132 duplicated ads featuring celebrities. Preliminary analyses compared the samples collected from the two periods of

time and found them to be comparable in terms of program types and product categories. Accordingly, these two sets of commercials were merged into one U.S. sample for subsequent analysis.

An examination of unique ads was deemed appropriate for the rest of the research questions concerning the content or executional aspects of celebrity endorsement advertising. After duplicated ads were removed, the final samples consisted of 188 and 46 unduplicated celebrity commercials from Korea and the United States, respectively. Among the 46 unduplicated U.S. celebrity ads, 20 came from the first period and 26 from the second period of sampling.

Coding Scheme

Coding categories were adapted from past research or developed for this study to encompass all the necessary measures to answer the research questions. A set of categories were designed to record characteristics of individual celebrity endorsers, including their gender, age, and professional field, along with the product categories the celebrities were associated with. The roles of celebrities in advertising were categorized as "appearing as themselves," "acting as a character other than themselves," or "other."

For product types, the Foote, Cone & Belding (FCB) matrix, a well-known framework for advertising planning was used. The FCB grid classifies products along two dimensions: level (high/low) and type (thinking/feeling) of involvement that consumers associate with products (Vaughn 1980, 1986). According to this matrix, in which the vertical and horizontal axes represent high and low involvement and thinking and feeling, respectively, Quadrant I is characterized as thinking and high involvement, and includes products such as cars, appliances, and insurance. Quadrant II reflects feeling and high involvement, and cosmetics, jewelry, and fashion clothing are among the products that belong to this category. Associated with thinking and low involvement, Quadrant III involves products such as gasoline, paper products, and household cleaners. Feeling and low-involvement dimensions comprise Quadrant IV, which is associated with products such as alcohol, cigarettes, and candy (Weinberger and Spotts 1989).

The 14-item information classification (price/value, quality, performance, components/contents, availability, special offers, taste, nutrition, packaging/shape, guarantee/warranties, safety, independent research, company research, and new idea) and coding procedure developed by Resnik and Stern (1977) were employed to count and categorize the information present in each of the ads analyzed (see Table 1 for definitions of informational cues). While some limitations are recognized, this typology has been widely applied in many countries, including the United States and Korea, as an objective measure for quantifying advertising information con-

tent and comparing it across countries (Abernethy and Franke 1996).

Cultural values were measured by four collectivism-relevant elements from a comprehensive classification identified in the previous literature (Hetsroni 2000). These four elements were collectivism, family, popularity, and tradition. "Collectivism" was defined as follows: "The people in the ad, who are typical users of the product, are depicted as a group whose members spend time together and help each other." "Family" was characterized as: "It is the product that brings these people together. Showing family life in a positive manner, and stressing that the product can be used by all the family members or is intended for family use." "Popularity" described ads with an emphasis on "the large number of people who use the product, mentioning that some brands are very heavily consumed by consumers (perhaps more heavily than other brands)." Finally, "tradition" stressed that the "product enjoys a long impressive history, or suggested that using the product helps to transmit values and beliefs from generation to generation" (Hetsroni 2000, pp. 60–61).

Coding Procedure

Nine coders (three natives in each country and three bilingual individuals), who were blind to the purpose of the study, were hired for coding in this study. All coders used a standard coding sheet written in English (the Korean coders were proficient in English as well) with concern that the translation process could hamper the equivalency of the coding procedure between the two countries. Prior to the main coding task, coders were given written rules and procedures and trained with a small set of ads, which were not included in the study sample. In the process, inconsistencies in coding were identified and discussed to clarify any unclear instructions.

To establish intercoder reliability, all of the ads in the sample were analyzed by two coders (one bilingual coder and one native coder) independently. Specifically, three Korean and three American judges coded all of the ads from their respective country, while the three bilinguals coded both the U.S. and Korean commercials. Intercoder reliability was initially determined by the ratio of agreements to the total number of coding decisions (Kassarjian 1977), and it ranged from 81% to 100%, exceeding the acceptable level suggested in the literature (Riffe, Lacy, and Fico 1998). For a more rigorous test, additional interjudge reliability coefficients were obtained using the Perreault and Leigh (1989) formula. Estimates based on that index ranged from .98 to 1.00 for celebrity characteristics. The reliability index for information categories was .91 on average, with a range from .78 to 1.00. Coding for collectivism values obtained a reliability coefficient of .93 on average, ranging from .86 to .98. Disagreements in judgment between the two coders were resolved by a third judge.

TABLE I
Definition of Informational Cues in Advertising

Information category	Definition
Price/value	What does the product cost? What is its value-retention capability? What is the need-satisfaction capability/dollars?
Quality	What are the product's characteristics that distinguish it from competing products based on an objective evaluation of workmanship, engineering, durability, excellence of materials, structural superiority, superiority of personnel, attention to detail, or special services?
Performance	What does the product do and how well does it do it? What is it designed to do in comparison with alternative purchases?
Components/content	What is the product comprised of? What ingredients does it contain? What ancillary items are included with the product?
Availability	Where can the product be purchased? When will the product be available for purchase?
Special offers	What limited-time nonprice deals are available with a particular purchase?
Taste	Is evidence presented that the taste of a particular product is perceived as superior by a sample of potential customers?
Nutrition	Are specific data given concerning the nutritional content of a particular product, or is a direct specific comparison made with other products?
Packaging/shape	What package is the product available in that makes it more desirable than alternatives? What special shapes is the product available in?
Guarantees/warranties	What post-purchase assurances accompany the product?
Safety	What safety features are available on a particular product as compared with alternatives?
Independent research	Are results of research gathered by an "independent" research firm presented?
Company research	Are data gathered by a company to compare its product with that of a competitor available?
New idea	Is a totally new concept introduced during the commercial? Are its advantages presented?

Source: Alan Resnik and Bruce L. Stern (1977), "An Analysis of Information Content in Television Advertising," *Journal of Marketing*, 41 (1), 50-53.

RESULTS

Frequency of Celebrity Appearances

The first research question was to examine the frequency of celebrity appearances in television advertising in the United States and Korea. Using the samples with duplicate ads, the number of commercials featuring celebrities was compared with the total number of advertisements sampled in each country. Consistent with our expectation, Korean commercials were found to employ celebrity endorsers far more frequently than their counterparts in the United States. Indeed, more than half (57%, or 479 out of 841) of the total Korean advertisements were found to feature celebrities, whereas celebrities appeared in 8.9% of the U.S. commercials in the sample from the first period (87 out of 975) and 9.6% (132 out of 1,379) during the second period of sampling, respectively.

Celebrity Endorser Characteristics

The first research question also sought to obtain more detailed information on celebrity characteristics to enhance our understanding of the use of this technique in the two coun-

tries. Since some celebrities were featured in multiple advertisements for different products and some commercials employed more than one celebrity, the number of unique celebrities was different from that of the commercials in which they appeared. Thus, the unit of analysis here became the celebrity. Fifty-three American celebrities and 126 Korean celebrities were identified from the samples. Among the Korean celebrities, 32 appeared to promote multiple products, whereas only 1 American celebrity endorsed more than one product.

As for the gender of celebrities, male and female celebrities appeared evenly in the U.S. commercials, whereas the Korean commercials employed more male celebrities (56%) than females (44%). Ages of the celebrities ranged from teenagers to people older than their fifties, but celebrities in their thirties comprised the majority of both the Korean and U.S. samples (41% and 34%, respectively). The U.S. ads appeared to use people in their forties or older (43%) more than their Korean counterparts (25%). Seventy-five percent of the Korean commercials featured celebrities in their thirties or younger, in contrast to 58% of the U.S. commercials.

The majority of the celebrities in both the Korean and U.S. commercials fell into the category of actors/actresses (62%

TABLE 2
Characteristics of Celebrities

	Korea (<i>n</i> = 126)		United States (<i>n</i> = 53)	
	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	55.6	70	50.9	27
Female	44.4	56	49.1	26
<i>Age</i>				
Teens	3.2	4	1.9	1
Twenties	31.0	39	20.8	11
Thirties	40.5	51	34.0	18
Forties	15.9	20	30.2	16
Fifty and older	9.5	12	13.2	7
<i>Professional field</i>				
Actors/actresses	61.9	78	39.6	21
Athletes	6.3	8	22.6	12
Music artists	9.5	12	7.5	4
Comedians	8.7	11	9.4	5
Other	13.5	17	20.8	11
<i>Ethnicity*</i>				
Caucasian			77.4	41
African American			18.9	10
Asian	.8	1	1.9	1
Korean	98.4	124		
Other	.8	1	1.9	1

*Korea is an ethnically homogeneous country. With the exception of two foreign celebrities, all of the Korean celebrities were domestic stars.

and 40%, respectively). Sports figures (23%) were the second most common type of celebrities in the U.S. sample, followed by comedians (9%). In the Korean commercials, music artists (10%) appeared more often than comedians (9%) and athletes (6%). All of the celebrities featured in the Korean commercials were domestic stars, with only two exceptions being foreign celebrities: Jackie Chan (a movie star from Hong Kong) and Guus Hiddink (a soccer coach from the Netherlands). Among the American celebrities, over 77% were Caucasian, followed by African Americans (19%). Table 2 shows the characteristics of the celebrity endorsers in both countries.

The remaining research questions focused on the strategic and creative execution of this advertising technique in the two countries; therefore, after eliminating all duplicate ads, samples consisting of only unique commercials in which celebrities appeared were used for analysis. The resulting Korean sample contained 188 unduplicated celebrity commercials, while the U.S. sample consisted of 46 unique advertisements obtained from both the first and second periods of recording.

Celebrity Endorsement and Product Types

The second research question pertained to the relationship between celebrity endorsement and product types. In terms of

general product categories, the three main categories endorsed by the celebrities were food/beverages, personal care products, and services for both the U.S. and Korean samples, although they were ranked in a different order. Korean celebrities promoted services most frequently (27%), followed by food and beverages (21%) and personal care products (11%). In the U.S. commercials, however, celebrities endorsed personal care products (26%) most often, with food and beverages (20%) and services (20%) as the next most common product categories.

Using the FCB scheme, products were further classified into one of the four quadrants. Similar to the procedure used by Weinberger and Spotts (1989), ads featuring products that were not mentioned by the developers of the FCB, such as retail, corporate, and institutional ads, were excluded from analysis. This resulted in 174 ads in the Korean sample and 44 in the U.S. sample. For the Korean sample, celebrities were employed most frequently for products in Quadrant III, low/thinking (43%); followed by Quadrant IV, low/feeling (29%); Quadrant I, high/thinking (20%); and Quadrant II, high/feeling (8%). In the U.S. commercials, on the other hand, celebrities were more often associated with products in Quadrants II and III (both at 31%) than those falling into Quadrant IV (26%) and Quadrant I (12%).

Chi-square analyses of country and involvement level/type

TABLE 3
Frequencies of Celebrity Appearances Across the Foote, Cone, & Belding (FCB) Matrix Classification

	Think		Feel		Total	
	Korea	United States	Korea	United States	Korea	United States
High involvement	35	5	14	13	49	18
Low involvement	75	13	50	11	125	24
Total	110	18	64	24	174	44

Source: Marc G. Weinberger and Harlan E. Spotts (1989), "A Situational View of Information Content in TV Advertising in the U.S. and U.K.," *Journal of Marketing*, 53 (1), 89–94.

Note: Product categories:

Quadrant I (high/think): Appliances, camera, car, electric ranges, home furnishings, house, insurance, securities, tires and batteries, and traveler's checks.

Quadrant II (high/feel): Cosmetics, fashion apparel, hair coloring, jewelry, motorcycles, perfume, sports vehicles, and sunglasses.

Quadrant III (low/think): Banks, breakfast drinks, coffee/tea, credit cards, feminine hygiene products, food, household products, laundry products, motor oil, over-the-counter drugs, personal care products, and yogurt.

Quadrant IV (low/feel): Beer/liquor, candy, cigarettes, desserts, fast food, long-distance phone calling, and soft drinks.

Following Weinberger and Spotts's procedure (1989), retail, corporate, and institutional advertisements, which did not belong in any of the original product classifications, were eliminated from this analysis.

revealed more similarities and differences between the two countries. Both the U.S. and Korean television ads employed celebrities to promote products associated with low involvement more frequently than high-involvement products, and this pattern appeared to be similar in the two countries ($\chi^2 = 3.42$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$). Meanwhile, the use of celebrities for thinking versus feeling products exhibited significantly different patterns in the two countries ($\chi^2 = 5.81$, $df = 1$, $p = .016$). The U.S. commercials featured celebrities more often for feeling products than for thinking products, whereas celebrities were associated with thinking products more frequently than feeling products in the Korean ads. Frequencies of celebrity appearances in the quadrants of the FCB matrix in the U.S. and Korean samples are reported in Table 3.

Role of Celebrity Endorsers

The purpose of the third research question was to determine whether U.S. and Korean commercials assign different roles to celebrity endorsers. A significantly different pattern between the two countries emerged regarding the function of the celebrities in the creative execution ($\chi^2 = 5.36$, $df = 1$, $p = .021$). In the American commercials, over half of the celebrities (54%) portrayed themselves and spoke directly to the audience, with fewer celebrities acting not as themselves but as a different character (46%). The opposite was true in the Korean ads. More celebrities in the Korean commercials appeared to play a role other than themselves (62%), while the rest appeared as themselves (38%). Additional examination revealed that most Ko-

rean celebrities were not identified in the spots (90%), whereas 59% of the U.S. commercials featuring celebrities provided their names and/or professions ($\chi^2 = 57.41$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$).

Information Content of Celebrity Ads

The fourth research question queried about the amount of information present in celebrity advertising in the two countries. The mean number of informational cues present in the commercials (i.e., how many informational cues among the 14 categories were present in each advertisement) was obtained for each country. Consistent with our expectation, t test results ($t = 7.14$, $df = 232$, $p < .001$) showed that the Korean commercials featuring celebrities ($M = .98$, $SD = .86$) carried significantly less information than their U.S. counterparts ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.36$). The three most frequently observed information categories were performance, quality, and price/value for the U.S. celebrity ads, and components/content, performance, and taste for the Korean celebrity commercials (see Table 4 for the results).

Cultural Values Reflected in Celebrity Ads

The last research question dealt with cultural values reflected in celebrity advertising in the two countries. As expected, the results indicated that Korean advertising with celebrities emphasized collectivism-related values more than the U.S. celebrity advertising. Thirty-seven percent of the Korean celebrity commercials appeared to employ collectivism-relevant appeals,

TABLE 4
Information Content in Celebrity Advertising

	Korea (n = 88)		United States (n = 46)	
	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency
Price/value	2.1	4	28.3	13
Quality	10.6	20	37.0	17
Performance	18.1	34	52.2	24
Components/content	19.7	37	17.3	8
Availability	5.3	10	21.7	10
Special offers	8.0	15	15.2	7
Taste	13.8	26	8.7	4
Nutrition	8.0	15	2.2	1
Packaging/shape	3.2	6	6.5	3
Warranties/guarantees	0	0	0	0
Safety	1.6	3	2.2	1
Independent research	3.2	6	0	0
Company research	.5	1	0	0
New idea	3.7	7	21.7	10
Mean number of cues	.98		2.13	

Note: Multiple cues can be found in a single ad.

including group belongingness, family, popularity, and tradition, whereas 15% of their U.S. counterparts utilized these values ($\chi^2 = 7.78$, $df = 1$, $p = .005$). Table 5 reports the frequency of the specific collectivism values in the two countries.

DISCUSSION

As more and more companies engage in international business these days, the notion of global consumer groups, such as "global teenagers," sharing similar values, tastes, and styles has gained mounting popularity among advertisers (De Mooij 2003, p. 183). With increased global competition and financial pressure, international advertisers often seek to standardize advertising efforts by using similar strategies in different countries. Yet a successful advertising technique in one country does not necessarily guarantee its success in other countries. In an effort to disentangle the cultural complexity of global advertising, this study focused on investigating the practice of the celebrity endorsement strategy in two dissimilar cultures.

As anticipated, a higher frequency of celebrity appearances was observed in Korean television advertising in comparison with its U.S. counterpart. Korean society is said to be one that emphasizes harmony and is group-oriented and respectful of social hierarchies. With this collectivistic cultural nature, Korean consumers are more likely to conform to group norms and follow "mainstream" trends than Americans. As celebrities embody popular meanings of the time, consumers in Korean society may want to connect with these meanings by consuming the products endorsed by these famous figures.

Similar to the case of Japan, Korean advertising could also be seeking to capitalize on consumer predisposition to celebrity endorsements (Kilburn 1998). In fact, celebrity appearances in ads are considered as entertainment by a great number of consumers in these Asian cultures (Praet 2002).

Findings from this study also illustrate differences between the two cultures in the implementation of celebrity advertising. Celebrities in U.S. advertising often portrayed themselves (i.e., they served as spokespersons), whereas the majority of Korean celebrities acted in roles. As spokespersons, celebrities are no doubt being used for their unique attributes that are compatible with the products. Celebrities' professional accomplishments and expertise may serve as a logical connection with the products, and consequently make the endorsements more believable to consumers (Till and Busler 2000). As characters, on the other hand, celebrities could be used in a similar way to other attention-getting techniques or visual components that facilitate an indirect representation of the intended images. In this way, rather than placing emphasis on the celebrities' ability to endorse the products convincingly, the focus is on their ability to attract attention or render cultural meanings to the product in an implicit manner. The appearance of celebrities as characters other than themselves might also enhance the entertainment or publicity value of the commercials. Another possible explanation may be that the role of celebrity endorsers coincides with the common mode of communication in the culture. For example, celebrities acting as spokespersons can deliver more factual information on products in an explicit manner, which would resonate

TABLE 5
Collectivism Values Reflected in Celebrity Advertisements

	Korea	United States
Sense of belonging	23	1
Family	42	3
Popularity	5	2
Tradition	5	3
Number of unique celebrity ads containing collectivist values	69	7
Number of unique celebrity ads	<i>n</i> = 188	<i>n</i> = 46

Note: Multiple values can be found in a single ad.

with the low-context communication style characteristic of the United States. In Korean advertising, on the other hand, celebrities acted mostly as characters created for the commercials; their credentials were not presented. This is consistent with the high-context communication style of Korean culture, where the celebrities were already well known to the target audience.

Some similarities did appear to exist for the strategic decisions pertaining to the use of celebrity endorsement. Both Korean and U.S. commercials used celebrities mainly for food/beverages, personal care products, and services. Since it is not easy to differentiate products in terms of technologies or physical features in these categories, celebrities might be used as a means of creating and maintaining distinctive images for brands. Consistent with the ELM arguments that celebrities might be more effective for facilitating simple image transference in the category of products with relatively low risks, celebrities in both countries were found to be associated more frequently with low- rather than high-involvement products.

Actors and actresses were the most frequently used group of celebrities in both U.S. and Korean commercials. Other popular types of celebrity endorsers included athletes, comedians, and music artists. While all these common categories of celebrities receive substantial media exposure and wide recognition, actors/actresses might be employed most often due to their versatile images and ability to act. With only a few exceptions, all celebrities employed in the Korean commercials were domestic personalities. Korea is often identified by multinational corporations as one of the potentially lucrative markets in the Asia-Pacific region; however, its advertising seems quite localized in terms of the use of celebrity endorsers. Perhaps domestic celebrities are more effective in delivering messages consistent with the prevalent cultural values in the country, meaning that consumers are more likely to identify with them. Or, they might simply be readily available and cost-efficient compared with celebrities with international recognition, such as Hollywood stars.

Another interesting finding of the study was that many Korean celebrities appeared to promote more than one product. In theory, if a celebrity becomes associated with multiple products, overexposure might make the relation between the

celebrity endorser and each of the products less distinctive. This would reduce the positive influences of the endorsements, thereby causing the messages to be less effective (Tripp, Jensen, and Carlson 1994). In addition, consumers might become skeptical about the messages the celebrity carries and resent that the celebrity seems to be appearing in the commercials for the compensation he or she receives in return, not for his or her genuine beliefs in the merits of the products (Mowen and Brown 1981; Sparkman 1982). Multiple endorsements by celebrities in Korean advertising therefore raise concerns about their effectiveness, and consequently, the purpose of using them. From a practical standpoint, multiple endorsements might simply be a function of the limited pool of available celebrities or advertisers' desire to make the most of the A-list stars of the time, notwithstanding their association with other products. From a theoretical perspective, however, this leads one to wonder whether the use of celebrities in Korean commercials is mainly for product differentiation, prestige, or entertainment.

Closely tied to prevalent cultural orientations, advertising appeals and themes also appeared to differ between the American and Korean commercials featuring celebrities. Results showed that Korean celebrity advertising contained less information and exhibited more collectivism-oriented values than its U.S. counterpart. Past research has observed these differences in advertising on the whole, but not in the context of celebrity endorsement (Keown et al. 1992). In light of the findings, although often suggested as an effective technique to lessen cultural complexities in global marketing communications, the strategy of using celebrity endorsement did not appear to deviate much from culture-specific advertising patterns. Therefore, caution should be exercised when designing advertising campaigns in different countries, even when using a similar advertising approach.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this study yield insights into the use of celebrity endorsement across different cultures. Unlike other advertising strategies, celebrity endorsement provides a culturally

meaningful connection between the product and the consumer. Differences observed in the execution and content of celebrity advertising highlight the cultural influences on the current practice of this technique. In this view, celebrity endorsement is an especially fitting and fruitful area for cross-cultural research, and continued efforts are needed to better explain similarities and differences between the implementation and effectiveness of this technique across cultures.

As with any other content analysis study, findings of this study do not provide answers regarding the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement or reasons for the differing use of the advertising strategy between cultures. Therefore, future research should investigate which factors drive such differences. One potential explanation is that consumers in different cultures might have different attitudes toward celebrity endorsement. For example, a survey of Irish consumers revealed that celebrity-endorsed advertising was considered as "attention-getting . . . entertaining, likeable, and impactful" (O'Mahony and Meenaghan 1997/1998, p. 18); Japanese consumers are also often said to enjoy celebrity-endorsed advertising (Praet 2002). On the contrary, coupled with their relative negative reactions to advertising in general (La Ferle and Lee 2002), American consumers have been found to be skeptical about the true motives of celebrities endorsing products (Mowen and Brown 1981; Sparkman 1982). Differences in consumer predisposition toward celebrity endorsement are likely to lead to the observed cross-cultural differences in the use of this technique.

At a more fundamental level, consumer perception of celebrities in general might vary across cultures. For instance, a recent survey reports that Korean children think of entertainers as belonging to the most appealing future career field, with teachers and medical doctors holding the next most attractive professions (*Weekly Chosun* 2004). The social status of entertainers as celebrities has escalated significantly in Korean society, and consumers tend to adore them due to their desire for high status and strong motivation to follow social values. A line of research has recently suggested that celebrity worshipers exhibit personality characteristics that differ from those of nonworshippers (McCutcheon et al. 2003). Similarly, consumers in differing social and cultural milieus might respond differently to celebrities and their endorsements.

Although the present study attempted to obtain information on the executional styles of celebrity endorsement advertising, it does not fully capture all of the discrepancies between cultures, due in part to the limited number of unduplicated celebrity ads found in the United States. Future studies should start from a larger sample that includes diverse media to generate sufficient unique ads targeting different audiences for comparisons. Since this study compared only two countries, more should be included in future studies to cross-validate the findings.

For advertisers, the important question is not only whether or not to use a celebrity for their product, but also how to successfully execute the strategy. The use of celebrities often influences creative directions since the famous figures, usually hired at a high cost, tend to be the focal point of the advertisements. Some celebrities might also want to have some control over creative decisions for their own image-making or personal enhancement purposes, thereby shaping the advertising content in the process (Miciak and Shanklin 1994). Given the unique situation associated with celebrity endorsement, it might be useful to examine the creative-decision process for this technique in different countries.

For international advertisers, the idea of employing international stars as endorsers across countries appears to be a promising standardized advertising strategy to effectively reach consumers around the world. Along this line, advertisers might prefer to implement one uniform advertising message via the use of celebrities as a means of creating a consistent brand image on an international scale at a relatively low cost. Results from this study, however, suggest that this may not be an effective strategy because of the cultural differences observed in how the same technique is utilized. Future research should also delve into the issues of employing international celebrity endorsers across different cultures.

NOTE

1. There are four national networks in Korea. Among them, KBS1, a government-owned station that does not air commercials, was not included in the sample.

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