Consumers’ Attitudinal and Behavioral Responses to Controversial Endorser: A Case of Nike Ad Campaign

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Marketing - Consumer Behavior (Other)  virtual asynchronous
Poster Abstract 2020-154  Session: Poster Session II

Since opting not to stand for the national anthem before the 2016 National Football League (NFL) game, Colin Kaepernick has been perceived as one of the most controversial figure in recent years. Interestingly in commemorating its 30th “Just do it” anniversary, Nike launched a commercial using Kaepernick as the spokesperson. Without a single footage of Kaepernick’s protest of police brutality and racism in the advertisement, it was enough to cause immediate public stir. On one side was criticism of Nike for exploiting a sociopolitical issue in promoting their brand, leading many to boycott Nike, while others were found more receptive of Nike, taking a stand on social cause (Marzilli, 2018). Despite a plethora of research existing on the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers, a current void in the literature limits understanding of the phenomenon found in the Nike case to its entirety.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to examine the Nike commercial case featuring Colin Kaepernick and how consumers respond to the marketer’s persuasion attempt (advertising). Given that consumers process information differently depending on the level of their involvement (Nkwocha, Bao, Johnson, & Brotspies, 2005), the current study suggests and explores on an overarching effect of social cause involvement on subsequent relationships in the celebrity endorsement literature. Specifically the current study simultaneously tested a conceptual model delineating the relationships among social cause involvement, attitudes toward spokesperson, attitudes toward advertising and attitudes toward brand, and social cause behavioral intention. To further understand how consumers response to the marketer’s persuasion attempt, the moderating effects of advertisement perception on the proposed relationship was investigated within the framework of the persuasion knowledge model (PKM).

For the purpose of this study, a total of 305 participants were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The majority of the participants were White (72.0%) and male (56.8%). Approximately 63.3% reported having a bachelor’s degree or higher. Individuals between the ages of 21 and 40 represented 73.9% of participants. A two-step approach was adopted to test the hypothesized relationships in the proposed research model and measurement scale. Following guidelines from Preacher and Hayes (2008) on multiple mediation models, we used bootstrapping procedures to examine the total effects containing both the direct and indirect effects of variables in the model. To verify the appropriateness of measurement models for the current study, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed. Based on the overall results of the CFAs, it is deemed that the measurement model was acceptable with good model fitness.

The results indicate that social cause involvement has an extensive impact in the domain of celebrity endorsement, while overall attitudes toward celebrity supporting a social cause did not have a direct impact on attitudinal and behavioral responses to advertisement. In terms of the role of advertisement, this study demonstrates and confirms the presence of the moderating effects of advertisement perception on the proposed relationship.

The findings of this study has potential to provide a new and extended perspective on existing advertising effectiveness and develop effective marketing and communication strategies.