

# Research on the Influence of Negative Information of Brand Spokesmen on Brand Attitude

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## Abstract

Celebrity endorsement is a marketing strategy commonly adopted by enterprises at present. Brand spokesmen can bring rich profit returns to enterprises, but risk is often associated with interests. In recent years, the negative events of brand spokesmen frequently exposed to the media. These negative events not only make effect on the celebrities themselves, but also bring unpredictable risk to the products or brands endorsed by the celebrities. This paper studies the relationship between the brand attitude and negative information of brand ambassador from the perspectives of perceived risk and brand trust, and puts forward some suggestions for enterprises to deal with celebrity endorsement crisis.

**Keywords:** Brand Ambassador Negative Information, Perceived Risk, Brand Attitude, Brand Trust

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## 1. Introduction

Celebrity endorsement is a marketing strategy commonly adopted by enterprises at present. The brand spokesmen can make the brand image deeply rooted in people's hearts with their characteristics of visualization, emotion and individualization. In the era of attention economic boom, using brand spokesmen to advertise for brand can make the advertisement stand out from the miscellaneous environment. That can help the brand establish a new image and inspire consumers to imitate the celebrity's choice of brand. Brand spokesmen can bring lucrative returns to the enterprises, but the benefits are often accompanied by risks. The popularity of celebrities is a double-edged sword, especially in the era of social media. Once the negative news of celebrities is exposed, they will quickly spread to all kinds of social media. The negative information of spokespersons not only affects their own images, but also the brands their endorse will be questioned by the public, and even the brand products endorsed by them will be resisted by customers. When celebrities establish endorsements with brands, the negative effects of celebrity's negative information will be passed on to the brand. Once the spokesperson has negative news, he will lose his appeal and reputation instantly, which will not only threaten his own image, but even cause negative brand image to consumers. Studies have shown that the negative information of brand spokespersons changes consumers' attitudes towards celebrities, and then affects consumers' attitudes towards products endorsed by the celebrities which will lead to a corresponding impact on consumers' purchase intention. Based on the review of literature and the current social situation, we assume that the negative information of brand spokesmen will make consumers no longer trust the spokespersons, or even doubt whether all aspects of the brand information conveyed by the spokespersons are true. Consumers will perceive the existence of risks which will changes their attitudes towards the brand.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Brand Spokesmen Negative Information

A spokesman is a broad conception that refers to a special person who provides information dissemination services for the profit-making or public welfare goals of an enterprise or organization. Brand spokespersons will carry out various media publicity for a brand, spread brand information, expand brand awareness and recognition, participate in public promotion, communicate with audiences closely, and strive to establish brand reputation and loyalty. The negative information of brand spokesperson refers to the bad and negative news that brand spokesperson brings to the brand, which will have a negative impact on the corporate image and brand. Scholars mainly study the negative information of brand spokesmen from the degree of responsibility of brand spokesmen, the degree of connection between ambassadors and brands and the types of negative information to study the influence of the negative information of brand spokesmen on the brands they represent.

Table 1 The summary of the studies on the negative information of brand spokesmen

Research Perspectives	Prior Research
The degree of responsibility	Consumers' reaction to negative information of brand spokesmen is affected by the responsibility of brand spokesmen in the event.
The degree of connection between ambassadors and brands	The degree of connection between spokesmen and brands affects the final endorsement effect. From the perspective of positive influence, if the degree of contact is higher, the endorsement effect is better. In terms of the influence of negative information, the higher the degree of connection, the greater the negative influence will be.
The types of negative information	Shang (2012) divides spokesman scandal into two dimensions: violation scandal and illegal scandal; Wu (2012) believes that negative information of brand spokespersons can be divided into two types: capable negative information and moral negative information; Zhou (2012) divides negative information of brand spokesmen into three categories: consensus information, unique information and consistent information.

### 2.2 Perceived Risk

Some scholars define perceived risk as the nature and degree of risk perceived by consumers in a purchase decision. Meng (2010) believes that the main research object of perceived risk is the behavior of individuals and groups, that is, the process of subjective judgment when individuals and groups are faced with many uncertain factors before making decisions. Previous scholars have studied the constituent dimension of perceived risk, and they believe that perceived risk is a multi-dimensional concept. The following paper will sort out the multi-dimensional research.

Table 2 The summary of the dimensions of perceived risk

The dimensions of perceived risk	Prior research
Financial risk, functional risk, physical risk, social risk, psychological risk,	Jacoby & Kaplan (1972)
Inherent risk, operational risk	Bettman (1973)
Effect risk, time risk, financial risk, transportation risk, social risk, privacy risk, payment risk and website source risk	Anne-sophie Cases (2002)
Product risk, financial risk, psychological risk, time risk	Bo Shi (2003)

### 2.3 Brand Attitude

At present, studies on brand attitude have been quite adequate. Most scholars define brand attitude as a tendency of consumers to like or dislike a product brand by means of advertising. The expression of attitude is a kind of opinion for or against, which is called a kind of satisfaction or dissatisfaction emotion from the perspective of consumers. Brand attitude is an overall evaluation of a brand based on consumers' cognition of brand characteristics and brand benefits. The academic circle divides the dimensions of brand attitude into two categories: one thinks that brand attitude only includes brand cognition and brand emotion; the other considers purchase intention as part of brand attitude.

Table 3 The summary of the dimensions of brand attitude

The dimensions of brand attitude	Prior research
Cognition, emotion, behavior	Rosenberg & Hovland (1960)
Belief, value, behavioral intention	Fishbein & Ajen (1975)
Cognition, emotion, purchase intention	Song (2004)
brand trust, brand emotion, purchase intention	Paul & Chen (2011)

### 2.4 Brand Trust

The definitions of brand trust by domestic and foreign scholars include the following meanings: The existence of brand trust is premised on the existence of risk; Consumers believe that the quality of the brand is consistently good; Consumers believe that brands will actively fulfill their commitments; Consumers believe the capabilities of the brand. The classification of brand trust dimensions by domestic and foreign scholars is not uniform. Each study has different methods of dividing dimensions, but different studies have all shown that brand trust includes trust in quality, trust in brand ability to meet consumers' demand and trust in brand willingness to meet consumers' demand.

## 3. The relationship between negative information of brand spokesmen and brand attitude

### 3.1 Negative information of brand spokesmen and brand attitude

Negative information of spokespersons has an important influence on consumers' attitudes. The degree of celebrity

responsibility in negative events will affect consumers' evaluation of the brand. Langmeyer (1993) finds that consumers would transfer their negative or positive perception of brand spokesperson to the brand endorsed by them. Till (1998) believes that when consumers have a low evaluation of spokespersons, they will have a low evaluation of the brands endorsed by the spokesmen. Louie (2001) points out that the negative information of the company's spokespersons would lead to a decline in the market value of corporate stocks. All these existing studies point to a problem: consumers will generate relevant views on the brands represented by brand spokesmen through their perception of negative information of brand spokesmen. In other words, negative information of brand spokespersons has a negative impact on brand attitude

### *3.2 The effect of perceived risk*

Previous studies have shown that, faced with the stimulation of negative information, the strongest psychological reaction of consumers is the perception of risk. When negative effects occur, the perceived risk of consumers will increase. Fang (2007) finds that when negative information appears, customers will generate perceived risks. Liang (2012) proves that the perceived risk has a significant negative correlation with the consumers' purchase intentions when the product has negative information. Zhang (2007) believes that the more information sources reveal the same point of view, the easier it is for consumers to change their brand attitudes. The persuasion theory of information communication believes that the higher the credibility of information, the more persuasive it will be to the audience. The more negative news spreads, the more consumers tend to make a poor moral evaluation of the celebrity. Therefore, we expect that when the negative information of celebrity is widely spread, the consumers can contact the negative information actively or passively through various channels for a long time and at a high frequency. The repeated occurrence of information can deepen consumers' memory and credibility of the information, reducing consumers' evaluation of the spokesmen which has a negative impact on the endorsed brands.

According to the S-O-R model, the stimulus acts on the organism, and the organism takes an internal or behavioral response to the stimulus through a series of psychological reaction processes. The internal reaction is usually the attitude of consumers towards the brand, while the behavioral response is the behavior of approaching, buying or avoiding the brand. In this study, the response is consumers' attitude towards the brand. When consumers perceive the risk, they will instinctively think that the quality of the brand will not be as good as advertised because of the empathy effect, that is, the degree of trust in the brand quality will be reduced.

### *3.3 The immune effect of brand trust*

While the negative information of spokesmen causes their image to be damaged, it will spill over the negative influence to the brand they represent. However, some studies show that brand trust regulates the influence of negative information of brand spokesmen on the brand. Brand trust means that consumers believe that the products of the brand can bring more benefits to themselves than others, and reflects the trust of consumers on brand quality, brand ability to fulfill promises and enterprise's willingness to improve brand quality.

Consumers' original brand trust plays an immune role in negative events of brand spokespersons. When enterprises encounter negative events of brand spokespersons, consumers tend to produce uncertain responses due to information asymmetry. Consumers generally find it is difficult to tell the truth from false, so they need to balance their psychological cognition by means of corresponding information sources. However, if consumers already have a sense of trust in the brand before the negative news of the brand spokesperson happens, then, when the negative news occurs, the trust of the brand quality and the ability of the enterprise formed in the past experience can reduce the perceived risk of consumers to a large extent. Once consumers establish a strong self-connection with the brand, they will have a strong sense of identity with the brand. Therefore, consumers are willing to believe this brand and still trust it even in the context of risk. The original brand trust can greatly reduce the erosion of negative information on consumers' brand attitudes. At this time, even if the brand encounters occasional negative news, consumers will not easily change their brand attitudes.

## **4. Discussion**

### *4.1 Choose a reputable brand spokesperson*

A brand spokesperson with good reputation can promote the relationship between consumers and brands, improve consumers' brand trust, enhance consumers' dependence on the brand, and establish a good brand image. However, the brand endorsed by the infamous brand spokesperson will make the original consumers doubt the brand, enhance the perceived risk of consumers, reduce the degree of brand trust, and affect purchase behavior. The exposure of negative news about celebrities can destroy their good image, also affect the reputation of enterprises and brands. Therefore, when selecting brand spokespersons, enterprises should not only focus on their professional influence, but also focus on their moral qualities. In the process of selecting a brand spokesperson, detailed evaluation indicators and specific selection schemes need to be developed. A comprehensive evaluation of the past public image and personal life status of the candidate spokespersons can predict the legitimacy and compliance of their future behaviors through their personality traits and behavior patterns, so as to avoid selecting brand spokespersons

with potential negative behavior tendency to the greatest extent.

#### 4.2 Establish a sound emergency mechanism

As a celebrity, the behavior of brand spokesmen will attract extensive attention of the public. Therefore, the negative news of brand spokesmen is uncontrollable and unpredictable. There are many channels of information communication in China, and the negative information of brand spokespersons can be easily spread quickly. Therefore, enterprises must seize the initiative in brand activities. Enterprises should not only conduct dynamic management of various information of spokespersons, but also formulate corresponding contingency plans for negative events of brand spokespersons. When the negative events of brand spokespersons occur, enterprises should take the initiative to release public explanations and processing results, and use the image and credibility of authoritative organizations and mainstream media to control the trend of public opinion. For the negative events caused by the brand spokesperson, the enterprise should release the announcement to express the position and apology of the company to the society and consumers. For unfair competition actions manipulated by external forces, enterprises should clarify in time and protect their rights through legal means. Enterprises need to contact with consumers from multiple channels, establish information feedback channels, timely grasp the thoughts and suggestions of consumers, and take active and effective remedial measures to stabilize consumers' emotions.

#### 4.3 Build brand trust with consumers

The products and services of the enterprise are the cores of brand value. The high-quality products and services provided by enterprises will generate trust and dependence of consumers, and in the process of the growth of enterprises, such trust will be accumulated, which can largely resist the negative effects brought by negative information. Therefore, enterprises should give full play to the immunity of consumers' original brand trust in negative events of brand spokespersons. In order to establish a solid brand trust relationship with consumers, enterprises must meet consumers' individualized requirements, attach importance to two-way communication with consumers, and constantly improve brand reputation and enhance corporate image. The ultimate purpose of establishing relationship between enterprises and brand spokespersons is to enhance the brand influence of companies by virtue of the influence of spokespersons. In order to prevent the negative impact of negative information on the brand, the company needs to continuously improve product quality, establish brand reputation, and gain core competitiveness.

#### 4.4 Establish efficient information dissemination channels

The negative information of brand spokesperson affects brand attitude through perceived risk. Perceived risk of customers is caused by the existence of information asymmetry. Enterprises should establish efficient information transmission channels to solve the problem of information asymmetry. Enterprises should adhere to the principle of seeking truth from facts to publicize products and truly convey brand confidence. In this way, even brand spokespersons have negative news, consumers will maintain their original trust according to previous experience. When the negative information of brand spokesperson appears, the enterprise should pay close attention to the media trend, clarify the facts in time, and show a responsible attitude. At the same time, enterprises should communicate and coordinate with all parties of the society to avoid the spread of misinformation. If necessary, the enterprise can terminate the cooperative relationship with the brand spokesperson to minimize the impact of negative information of brand spokesperson.

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