

Celebrity Endorsements and Brand Effectiveness: Is Success Inevitable or Accidental?

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Abstract: Celebrity endorsements are a widely utilized marketing strategy to enhance brand visibility and influence consumer behavior. However, the effectiveness of these endorsements in improving brand performance remains inconsistent. This study explores the relationship between celebrity endorsements and brand effectiveness, examining whether success is inevitable or accidental. By analyzing two cases—Gucci's collaboration with Xiao Zhan and Jeanswest's endorsements by Zhang Ruoyun and Wang Yibo—the research identifies key factors contributing to successful endorsements. The study integrates Bourdieu's cultural capital theory and Dawar's brand extension theory to highlight the role of cultural alignment and ambassador compatibility in driving brand effectiveness. Findings reveal that while a strong alignment between a brand's image and a celebrity's cultural capital can significantly enhance brand effectiveness, mismatches may lead to limited or even negative impacts. This research provides actionable insights for businesses on selecting ambassadors strategically to optimize brand outcomes.

Keywords: celebrity endorsements, cultural alignment, brand effectiveness, brand extension

1. Introduction

Celebrity endorsements are a common way for brands to promote themselves and can motivate consumers to purchase the endorsed products or services. It is a fairly common practice to use celebrities as a marketing communication strategy to support their brand image[1]. In recent years, with the development of social media, the influence of celebrity-endorsed brands has also been gradually expanding. However, not all brands will have a positive impact after inviting celebrities to endorse them, whether in terms of brand reputation or brand effectiveness. Brand effectiveness refers to how well a brand performs in achieving its business goals and marketing objectives. Brand effectiveness is a measure of the actual effect and influence of a brand in its target market through various communication strategies. From a marketing or branding perspective, perception-oriented measures such as brand associations, brand benefits, or customer satisfaction are analyzed[2]. The widespread of celebrity endorsement poses a question: Do all celebrity endorsements have a positive impact on brand effectiveness?

This study aims to fill the gap in the research of celebrity endorsements from the perspective of brand effectiveness. By combining brand extension theory and cultural capital theory, this study provides new perspectives and case support for the research in the field of brand endorsements. It

would provide practical suggestions for companies to formulate endorsement strategies and determine ambassadors.

2. Literature review

There are many documents about celebrity endorsements through reading the literature. Ruchi Gupta and other scholars conclude the "impact of celebrity endorsements on consumers' purchase intention" that celebrity endorsements have a significant impact on consumers' purchase intentions[3].

Not only the commodity markets of the past but also the emerging markets have reached the same conclusions as previous studies. Kofi Osei-Frimpong and other authors write in *The Impact of Celebrity Endorsement on Consumer Purchase Intention: An Emerging Market Perspective* that his research shows that Celebrity endorsements influence consumers' perceptions of brand quality[4].

Most studies focus on the impact of celebrity endorsements on fan behavior, but few studies view it from a brand perspective. So, the study is about the impact of celebrity endorsements on brand effectiveness. Even if it is brand-related content, it is research related to brand reputation, just like *Celebrity Endorsement Influence on Brand Credibility: A Critical Review of Previous Studies*. These articles on brand effectiveness indicate that the image of the spokesperson is also closely related to the brand's reputation. When a spokesperson's image is damaged by allegations of illegal or unethical behavior, the negative impact associated with the celebrity may be transferred to the brand being endorsed[5]. Not only does this lead to consumers having a bad opinion of the celebrity, but it also reduces trust in the brands they endorse[6]. The above article only shows that the reputation of celebrities will affect the reputation of brands. However, the factor that affects the long-term development of a brand still lies in brand effectiveness. The reason is that brand reputation is also one of the factors that affect brand effectiveness. Therefore, only when the brand's sales are large enough and the market share occupies a dominant position can the brand continue to develop. It is easy to find that there is a gap in the research on the effect of celebrity endorsements on brand effectiveness, so this study will fill the gap in this field. So, the research topic is *Celebrity endorsements on brand effectiveness: Is success inevitable or accidental?* This is a question worth studying. The general perception in the market is that brands can increase brand effectiveness by choosing celebrity endorsements. However, this research can help brands make more careful decisions when choosing endorsements. In addition, most studies focus on brand reputation, but what is more important to a brand is performance. Only turnover, market value, and market share increase can the brand develop in the long run.

To address this question, the two theories will be used as references. One is Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. He believes that if individuals gain competence in the high culture of society, then they have cultural capital. This cultural capital exists in three forms: one is the state of embodiment, one is the state of objectification, that is, the transformation of cultural capital into cultural products, such as "pictures, books, dictionaries, etc." one is institutionalization[7], Gucci relies not only on the quality of the product itself in the market but also on the unique lifestyle, status symbol and identity symbolized by the brand. Therefore, these brands need ambassadors with higher cultural capital to give the brand a deeper cultural and social meaning. Another one is Dawar, Niraj's Brand extension theory. He pointed out that the reason for the failure of brand extension may be that consumers are unwilling to extend the name that already has meaning to them to new products[8]. That is to say, even if the cultural capital of the celebrity is high, if the brand fails to find resonance between the ambassadors and the brand image, the risk of brand extension is still great.

3. Methodology

This article explores the relationship between celebrity endorsements and brand effectiveness through Gucci and Jeanswest. These two brands represent high-end luxury brands and mass-market brands, respectively, with significant differences in their endorsement strategies and brand positioning. By comparing the endorsement effects of these two brands, we can reveal the role of celebrity endorsement at different market levels: Gucci's spokesperson demonstrates the brand value-added role of celebrities in the luxury brand market, while Jeanswest's spokesperson reflects how celebrity endorsement can help troubled Brands recover.

The case study is the basic research method of the entire article. Text analysis and data analysis are used as auxiliary methods in the research process to facilitate readers to understand more clearly. Case studies can deeply analyze the endorsement strategy of typical brands through real cases[9]. It combines theory and practice to more clearly show the market performance of the brand and the factors that lead to the success or failure of celebrity endorsements. Combining text analysis and data analysis in a case study can avoid the one-sidedness of research results caused by a single research method. Text analysis is used to analyze the speeches and interviews of brand CEOs to enhance authenticity. Then, use data analysis to study Gucci and Jeanswest's sales, data growth, etc. These data can intuitively show the impact of celebrity endorsements on brands. The combination of the two research methods can provide a more comprehensive analysis and make the article more convincing.

4. Results

4.1. Gucci

Gucci is one of the most popular luxury brands in the world. It is ranked 4th in the world by Interbrand, behind Louis Vuitton, Chanel, and Hermès[10]. Gucci is a brand with great influence, but it still chooses to invite some ambassadors to promote its products. Gucci's ambassadors are divided into many levels, and Global ambassador is the highest title given by the brand. Chinese singer and actor Xiao Zhan received this honor because his multicultural identity complements Gucci's global image and fits the brand's high-end image. Xiao Zhan has 32.6 million fans on Weibo, a Chinese social media platform. His popularity is not limited to China, and he can also be seen on foreign social media. The topic of Xiao Zhan's birthday topped the Twitter trend on October 5th. Terms such as Milan Fashion Week and Bay Area Rising Moon Gala were also high on the trending list. The higher the fit between the celebrity and the brand, the more positive the impact on brand evaluation[11]. As written on Gucci's official website: With his style and personality, Global Brand Ambassador Xiao Zhan offers a personal interpretation of the fine jewelry designs. Xiao Zhan gives Gucci products new concepts in his way, injecting youth and vitality into this old-money brand.

Xiao Zhan joining saved Gucci from declining sales in 2019-2020, and since then, sales have increased year by year, as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Gucci revenue 2019-2022[10]

Year	Gucci Revenue(EUR)	Gucci Revenue(USD)
2022	€10.49 billion	€11.46 billion
2021	€9.73 billion	€10.63 billion
2020	€7.44 billion	€8.13 billion
2019	€9.63 billion	€10.52 billion

Not only that, according to Lefty x KARLA OTTO published data, Xiao Zhan created \$5.4 million in EMV (28.4%) for Gucci on Weibo alone during the SS24 Fashion Week without even attending, making him one of the most influential Chinese actors at this fashion week. Xiao Zhan was among the best celebrities at Milan Fashion Week and also made indirect publicity for Gucci products. Xiaozhan's Weibo post inviting his fans to watch "Gucci Ancora" received 10 million responses including likes, comments and reposts, providing a media value of \$3.77 million.

Because Xiao Zhan brought huge brand effectiveness to Gucci, Gucci treated Xiao Zhan better than other ambassadors. Gucci gave Xiao Zhan two hand-painted graffiti walls. The brand also has five hand-painted murals around the world. Xiao Zhan is the first Asian star to be added to the murals. This is his second time to appear in it. The purpose of setting up Local Advertising is not only to increase brand awareness, but also to use Xiao Zhan's popularity to attract more fans to buy. Specifically, although global sales have increased after Xiao Zhan's endorsement, sales in China have increased significantly. Especially after the local advertising push, many fans entered the store to take photos with the ambassador, thereby promoting consumption. In addition, Gucci not only stated that Xiao Zhan was the spokesperson in the profile of its social software account in China, but also clearly wrote Xiao Zhan's name in its overseas accounts. Godey and others mentioned that brands should view social media marketing as an important and cost-effective image-building tool[12]. Through the ambassador setting in the social media profile, Gucci can not only attract Xiao Zhan's fans but also enhance consumers' loyalty to the brand and increase purchase intention through continuous brand content push and fan interaction.

Gucci's brand effectiveness has improved significantly after collaborating with Xiao Zhan. This sales growth is not only due to Xiao Zhan's popularity, but also because Xiao Zhan has deeper cultural capital. Gucci CEO Marco Bizzarri pointed out that Xiao Zhan has suffered from online violence for a long time, which has had a negative impact on Xiao Zhan's career and reputation. However, Xiao Zhan has not changed his original intention and continues to spread positive energy. He is a great artist. Xiao Zhan's unyielding spirit, tenacity in adversity, and positive attitude towards life have increased the cultural connotation of Gucci's brand through cooperation. Bourdieu said that most properties of cultural capital can be inferred from the fact that, in its basic state, it is tied to the body[7]. Xiao Zhan's cultural capital is not just his words or image promotion, but is embodied through his behavior, body language, and the way he responds to setbacks. Bourdieu also mentioned that in a materialized state, cultural capital will be transformed into substantial cultural commodities[7]. Xiao Zhan was a designer before he became a star. His unique aesthetics, temperament and dress form his unique personal style. Xiao Zhan wore Gucci's ready-to-wear clothes in his own style long before he became a star. The elegance and fashion are very consistent with the brand tone of Gucci. After seeing Xiao Zhan and Gucci join forces, consumers will first feel comfortable with their fit. The spokesperson's perfect interpretation of Gucci's desired style is also a key factor in attracting consumers. After a deeper understanding, consumers can feel Gucci's brand concept through Xiao Zhan's personal charm and experience, which increases their desire to buy. Gucci uses the brand extension to impress consumers from the surface to the deep, so the brand effectiveness will naturally be improved. Dawar, Niraj's brand extension provides certain marketing advantages, and the brand's reputation will be carried over to new products[8]. The same is true for celebrity endorsements, as consumers will judge the brand's philosophy, spirit, and fashion perspective from the image displayed by the celebrity. Choosing the right ambassador will increase brand effectiveness.

4.2. Jeanswest

However, not all brands have seen an increase in brand effectiveness after inviting ambassadors. Dawar, Niraj's Brand extension theory indicates the reason for the failure of brand extensions may be the unwillingness of consumers to extend a name that has come to acquire meaning for them to

new products[8]. Jeanswest is an Australian clothing chain founded in 1972. In 1994, it was acquired by Chinese retailer Rising Sun Group, which subsequently sold the company to a Hong Kong family in 2017. In 1993, Jeanswest officially entered the Chinese mainland market and opened its first store in Shanghai. Ten years later, Jeanswest already had more than 2,500 stores in China, with sales of nearly HK\$5 billion, making it the leader in casual wear on the mainland. However, in the following years, Jeanswest suffered huge losses. From 5 billion to 1.6 billion, its sales performance has been declining, accompanied by closures and layoffs. It finally withdrew from the Chinese market[13].

To return to the Chinese market, Jeanswest invited Zhang Ruoyun as its brand ambassador in 2022. According to the annual report of Sunrise Group, although Jeanswest's brand effectiveness has recovered briefly, some branches are still in a loss-making state. There are two reasons for this: 1. Ambassador Zhang Ruoyun does not have enough commercial value and fan effect. 2. Zhang Ruoyun is not compatible with the brand and cannot bring deeper cultural capital to the brand.

Table 2: Jeanswest revenue between 2021 and 2022[14]

	2022	The year 2021	alteration
(Unit: HKD thousand)			
Consolidated total sales	1060681	997841	16.30%
Among them:			
A. Financial investment	42570	55059	↓22.68%
B. Interior design and decoration works	701643	698844	↑0.40%
C. Export business	268191	193693	↑38.46%
D. Hong Kong retail and overseas franchise	48259	50223	↓3.91%
Profit attributable to equity holders of the Company	39229	36996	16.04%
(Unit: Hong Kong Cents)			
Earnings per share (basic)	2.57	2.40	↑7.08%
Dividend per share			
- Final stage	4.00	4.00	—
- All year	6.00	6.00	—
	in 2022	in the year 2021	
	Dec.	Dec.	
	Thirty-one day	Thirty-one day	alteration
(Unit: HKD thousand)			
Net cash and quasi-cash*	2491700	2562846	12.78%

In 2024, Jeanswest chose Wang Yibo as its spokesperson, and this decision brought a huge turning point for the brand. Since Wang Yibo was announced as the brand spokesperson, Jeanswest's women's clothing line has ushered in an unprecedented sales peak. Think Tank Star Path shows that on April 29, 2024, when Jeanswest announced Wang Yibo as its spokesperson. The brand voice reached 4,517,369, nearly twice that of the second place. In addition, The CEO of Jeanswest indicates that from January to August 2024 alone, Jeanswest's online sales increased by more than 60% compared with the same period last year. Not only that, Jeanswest officially released good news on November 13. In the first year of signing Wang Yibo, the brand created the highest sales in the history of entering the Chinese mainland market, exceeding 5 billion yuan.

Jeanswest chose Wang Yibo as its brand ambassador, saving this declining clothing brand. The fact that Zhang Ruoyun did not generate as much brand effectiveness as Wang Yibo during his endorsement period indirectly shows that the ambassador himself will also have an impact on the brand. Hovland et al.'s credibility model explains that the effectiveness of information depends on the

"expertise" and "credibility" of the source[15]. Jeanswest's target consumer group is mainly young people, such as college students and high school students. As a married actor, Zhang Ruoyun, the former ambassador, finds it difficult to attract young fans, and his followers are around 30-40 years old. In addition, he is already 36 years old, which is slightly different from Jeanswest's "youth" brand concept. In other words, neither his positioning nor the age range of his fans are in line with Jeanswest's target group. This is one of the reasons why some of Jeanswest's brand effectiveness still declined during Zhang Ruoyun's endorsement. Therefore, the high degree of compatibility between Wang Yibo and the brand also further confirmed the impact of the compatibility between spokespersons and brands on brand effectiveness. In Dawar Niraj's article, it is mentioned that understanding an unfamiliar domain requires mapping the relationships between objects in a well-understood domain to the unfamiliar domain[8]. Jeanswest realized that the traditional brand label of "cheap and affordable" is no longer applicable to the new era of e-commerce, so it changed its brand positioning to "trendy leisure." Jeanswest invited Wang Yibo as its spokesperson precisely because of Wang Yibo's dressing style, temperament and fashion sense. Wang Yibo's dressing style has always been casual and comfortable while still handsome and fashionable. His airport outfit has been widely discussed many times, and many celebrities have followed suit. Wang Yibo's cultural capital is also very consistent with Jeanswest's new brand label "trend." He has achieved very impressive results in many fields, such as dance, skateboarding, and racing. Especially in street dance, he set off a street dance craze in China through the program "This is Street Dance." It can be said that Wang Yibo is a trend leader. Whether it is other stars or ordinary people, they will be influenced by him. Jeanswest needs such fans with huge star effects to drive brand effectiveness. Consumers can directly project the ambassador's fashion traits onto Jeanswest, thereby enhancing their overall perception of the brand. Change the impression of Jeanswest from "low price clothes" to "trendy brand worn by Wang Yibo." In addition, most of Wang Yibo's fans are young people, which perfectly matches the target group of Jeanswest. Wang Yibo demonstrated not only the brand's fashion sense and market insight that keeps pace with the times but also its highly competitive product strength.

5. Discussion

It is no coincidence that both Wang Yibo and Xiao Zhan have achieved great brand effectiveness for the brands they endorse. They have some common characteristics that can not only give brand value, but also effectively touch target consumers. First, they both have strong cultural capital. Their professional abilities have been substantiated through long-term accumulation of skills, spirit, work, etc. Secondly, their cultural capital is highly consistent with the brand's concept and label. Through his experience as a designer, unique personal style, and strong positive image, Xiao Zhan aligns with Gucci's elegant and socially responsible brand concept. Wang Yibo's energetic, trendy, and versatile image just fits the brand positioning of Jeanswest's youthful transformation and sports and leisure. Next, they have strong market appeal. They can transform their huge fan base into the main purchasing force of the brand. Fans extend their understanding of the star themselves to their love and acceptance of the brand. This finding is consistent with previous research on celebrity endorsements, which emphasizes that meaning is transferred from the celebrity to the product and from the product to the consumer[16]. However, this article goes a step further and shows how the fan community can infuse the brand with additional emotional and social meaning, making it a symbol of the connection between fans and idols.

Although this study focuses on two specific brands, future research can explore a wider range of product categories and cultural contexts to assess the generalizability of these findings. For example, studying virtual character endorsements may reveal different dynamics of emotional and social meaning transfer. In addition, this study deeply explored the impact of Chinese ambassadors on brand effectiveness, and related research on Western celebrities can be added in the future. The results also

provide practical applications for companies when selecting potential endorsers. Companies can develop a checklist to evaluate not only the commercial value of celebrities, but also their ability to attract and mobilize fan communities. Criteria may include social media influence, emotional resonance with fans, and consistency with brand values.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the core question of this article is whether all celebrity endorsements can enhance brand effectiveness? The answer obtained by studying the two cases of Gucci and Jeanswest is negative. Only celebrities who are in line with the brand, have strong personal abilities, and have great market conversion capabilities can have a huge impact on brand effectiveness. Moreover, celebrity endorsements can not only enhance brand effectiveness but may also create risks due to image mismatch or negative behavior. Research by White et al. shows that the decline of celebrity image will affect brand image, and brand effectiveness will also decrease[6]. It has been proven that matching the characteristics of celebrities with brand positioning is the key to enhancing brand effectiveness. When choosing a spokesperson, brands need to comprehensively consider the celebrity's image, temperament, style, audience base and long-term influence. This study provides valuable insights for businesses to optimize their marketing strategies. By leveraging these factors, businesses can improve brand effectiveness and enhance consumer loyalty. Future research could explore the role of emerging digital influencers in enhancing brand effectiveness. It could also explore whether the benefits of successful endorsements fade over time.

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