

IMPACT OF K-POP CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT ON THAI BRAND IMAGE

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ABSTRACT

As a result of Korean government's efforts to sell its cultural assets overseas, a phenomenon of Korean culture acquiring global popularity and consumption called the Korean Wave was created. Since the success of the Korean Wave, it has generated a number of Korean celebrity endorsed brands/products in global regions including Thailand. This research seeks to examine the impact of Korean (K-pop) celebrity endorsement on Thai brand image through achieving two of the research objectives.

The research objectives were 1) to identify the perceived qualities (likeability, credibility, similarity and congruence with the brand) of K-Pop celebrities in the eyes of Thai consumers to determine their influence on consumer attitudes and behaviors and 2) to gather the insights of marketers from Thai brands that have employed K-pop endorsers for a comparative analysis with the consumer perceptions.

In order to achieve the objectives, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used. Data collection consisted of a questionnaire survey which was administered to 200 participants aged from 13 to 15 in Bangkok metropolitan area and an in-depth interview with brand executives of brand B-ing and Masita.

The findings from the survey revealed that the 4 attributes of the endorsers had a significant influence on the endorsed brand image. Also, the comparative analysis between the respondent perceptions and marketer insight indicated a few flaws in the endorsement strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Using people that are well-known and loved by many to promote products or brands is a widespread phenomenon in marketing communication history. Companies spend vast amounts of money in order to match their brands with endorsers. Such endorsers are believed to embody both attractive and likeable qualities (Atkin and Block, 1983) and companies build strategies to translate these qualities into products through marketing communication activities (McCracken, 1989). Although celebrity endorsement strategy in marketing communication context is not verified to bring only positive effects, it is known to create effects such as increased attention, image polishing, brand introduction, brand awareness, brand repositioning and underpinning global campaigns (Erdogan, 1999).

Ever since the early days of celebrity endorser utilization in the late nineteenth century, field of celebrity endorsement studies has been gathering a wide range of relevant intellectual sources from various approaches. Such knowledge vary from historical development and pros and cons of the endorsement strategy, endorser selection standards, endorsement process, positive/negative endorsement effect, financial results, impact on endorsed brand image, etc. Moreover, basic findings from the studies have developed into more specific research topics such as impact of big sports star endorsement like Michael Jordan. More and more studies are being conducted through journals, articles, academic conferences which relates to celebrity endorsement studies to produce deeper understanding of the field and have the knowledge accessible to learners and practitioners out there.

While there are a number of prior studies which the contents deal with celebrity endorsement, Erfegen (2011) has systematically analyzed success factors for brand image effects on the communication process perspective, adopting who says what in which channel to whom, to derive implications regarding celebrity, message, advertising channel and recipient. While the review contains success factors according to each element of communication process, this study will focus on characteristics of celebrity endorsers which were identified to have an impact on endorsed brand image. The characteristics vary from perceived personal attributes (e.g., likeability, physical attractiveness, credibility, expertise, trustworthiness and similarity), congruence with the brand, external information (e.g., negative information, information about remuneration) and multiple endorsements. These components of communicator success factor will be reflected on developing research methods to evaluate Korean star endorsed advertisement effects and impact on brand image.

Korean Wave which refers to a phenomenon of Korean popular culture spreading out and achieving public favor overseas, first started in Northeast Asia regions and later expanded its boundary worldwide, including Thailand. The Korean Wave has been growing since its strong appeal to Thai audience through the TV drama “A Jewel in the Palace” in 2005, broadening its cultural range from films, TV drama, pop music, and games to fashion, food, language, tourism and lifestyle. What seemed to be a short-term sensation still exists and has settled down in to a certain point in Thai society. Marketers of local companies have been exploring such phenomenon to have selected Korean celebrities to promote their products in advertisement campaigns. This study will seek to provide knowledge on Korean celebrity endorsement trends and objectives according to each brands studied, consumer perceptions on the endorser and brand image as well as the impact on the endorsed brand image.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research is based on a several concepts and theories as follows: explanation of (1) the importance of the communicator in a communication, (2) identification of celebrity characteristics as the success factors of celebrity endorsement, and (3) concept of the Korean Wave.

The effectiveness of a communication is commonly believed to depend upon who elivers it. Statements made by scholar with great prestige, an expert with prolonged experience or a figure with authority have more tendency to be trusted than the ones made by ordinary individuals (Hovland, Janis and Kelley, 1953). Ability to notice the importance of the communicator and recognize what attributes the source has to persuade the audiences underlie the effectiveness of a communication. Therefore many studies in celebrity endorsement domain have put effort into providing such type of communication success factors. Through a systematic

analysis of 36 empirical studies, Erfegen (2011) was able to identify 24 brand image drivers in impact of celebrity endorsement on brand image. By adopting communication process perspective, Lasswell's (1948) well-known classical formula, "who says what in which channel to whom", these drivers were found to have relations to each communication process element.

While Erfegen(2011) notes the importance of brand image drivers in each element of the communication process, the purpose of this study is to measure the effectiveness of utilizing K-pop celebrity in promoting Thai brands. This review will be focusing on success factors affiliated to the 'who' part; discussing what may determine the success and create positive/negative brand image outcome. Four of the endorser attributes found to affect the brand image are covered in this research which consist of likeability, credibility, similarity, and congruence with the brand.

Likeability is defined as a fondness for a source developed from the source's outer and inner qualities. Out of various characteristics that a celebrity is perceived to embody likeability qualities such as intellectual skills, personality and fashion style, while physical attractiveness is assumed to be one of the major factors. Think of the advertisements exposed in our everyday life. Most of them deliver their message with attractive people such as thin and tall models or good looking stars. Physical attractiveness has always been an important topic of research in social science (Bersheid and Walster, 1974) particularly for celebrity endorsement field. Advertising practitioners have selected celebrity endorsers based on their attractiveness in order to benefit from dual effects of celebrity status and physical attractiveness (Singer 1983). And studies such as Miller (1970) have proved people's tendency to think that more attractive people embodies positive traits such as happy, outgoing, successful, kind, etc.

In order to achieve an effective communication, recipients must accept the advocated message from a communicator. In any give case, recipients' decision whether to believe the communicator's assertions or not will be based on the communicator's credibility which is composed of two factors, trustworthiness and expertness. Hovland et al. (1953) define trustworthiness as "*the recipient's degree of confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid*". Advertisers capitalize on the value of trustworthiness by selecting endorsers who are widely regarded as honest, believable, and dependable (Shrimp, 1997). Regardless of other qualities, untrustworthy speakers would be viewed as a questionable message source (Smith, 1973). Hovland et al. (1953) define expertise as "*the recipient's perception of a communicator as a source of valid assertions*". An expert usually refers to an individual with long-term education, practice and experience to translate them into well-established skills in a particular field. There is a variety of what relates a recipient's perception with communicator's expertness. For example, it could be the age or position of leadership in a group of the communicator or the level of similarity they share in status, values, interest and needs (Hovland et al., 1953). Therefore, in celebrity endorsement context, what matters is how the endorser is perceived by the target audience but not whether he/she is an actual expert (Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian 1990).

Similarity is defined as a resemblance that the message recipient perceives to have with the message source (Erdogan, 1999). By adapting social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), how the concept of similarity between celebrity and recipient drives brand image effects can be explained. "*That is, consumers may infer from their perceived similarity with the celebrity whether they can expect gratification from adopting attitudes or following the celebrity's recommendation.*" Therefore the advertiser's strategies of using average looking endorsers resulted from this reasoning (Erfegen, 2011). However, Patzer (1985) contends that people generally exaggerate their own charms so that attractive endorsers will exert more positive effects than average looking endorsers.

Congruence is a perception of being the right fit, match, for each other between a brand and an endorser (Misara and Beatty, 1990). A brand or a product endorsed by a celebrity who has relatively higher congruence may expect to achieve better advertisement effect such as celebrity and advertiser credibility than being promoted by a celebrity with less congruence with the brand (Karmins and Gupta, 1994). A combination of well-matched crossover between the endorsed product/brand and the celebrity endorser's qualities such as persona, reputation or the activities the celebrity has done, it will provide the advertisers with both the fame and the tie-in working for them (Bertrand, 1992: cited in Erdogan, 1999).

The term Korean Wave originally comes from Chinese letters, 韩流, which meaning Korean wave. There are various ways of calling it in English; 'Korean Wave', 'Korean Fever', 'Hanliu', 'Hallyu'. In Korea it is written as 'Hallyu' whereas in China and Japan, as 'Hanliu'. The term 'wave' in Korean Wave defines 'style' which is applicable for any other cultures of different nationality. For example, Japan called the phenomenon of Taiwanese films gaining popularity in the 1980s as the Taiwanese Wave. When Korean popular culture emerged onto the overseas markets and got people's favor, it was called the Korean Wave. It was second half of 1999 when the term Korean Wave was used officially by the Korean government by which distributing music albums and posters with the title <韩流(the Korean Wave), Song from Korea>, produced by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Korea (Entertainment Asia Network, 2007). The term was then spread through media and widely used among society.

There are multiple reasons to be named that contributed to formation of the Korean Wave. After the World War II, Asian countries experienced economic development starting from Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan, and China to South East Asia. Such development was then linked to economic exchanges followed by cultural exchanges among the nations which led to emergence of the Taiwanese Wave and Japanese Wave. Korea, after going through IMF (International Monetary Fund) in the late 1990s, was looking a new industry to alternate IT (Information Technology) industry and support nation's economy crisis. Growth of Korea's popular culture came at the moment of referring to successful case studies of cultural industry overseas along with the rise of entertainment industry since the 1980s. Open-door policy since 1987 after 1986 Seoul Asian Games and 1998 Seoul Olympics also helped enhance Korea's cultural competence to great extent. Growth of entertainment industry as well as music industry in the 1980s, films, games and Internet industry in the 1990s considered as what led Korean pop culture to develop. Despite sensational popularity of Japanese culture over Asia regions, Korean Culture which was rather new and at a lower price started drawing attention in Hong Kong, Taiwan and China and later on was spread out to all parts of Asia such as Japan, Vietnam, Philippines, etc. And the anti-Japanese sentiment over Asia in general cannot be overlooked as well. However, exact period of time and reason on formation of the Korean Wave cannot be defined on one clear cut for its occurrences goes back to many different individuals from many different places. Considering centered around China, it is assumed to be after 1992 Korea-China amity establishment when Korea's TV series and music was introduced and gained popularity among people.

Same difficulties of defining exact time when the Korean Wave occurred in Thailand are there for it did not happen at once but gradually grew big inch by inch. 0000 states that according to many news and articles done by noted journalists and scholars, Korean drama series "A Jewel in the Palace" broadcasted in 2005 was a big turning point to boost up the popularity of Korean products and services in Thailand. Thus, year of 2005 is regarded as the year when the Korean Wave had Thai public recognize its presence (Jongkrieng, 2008). Since 2005, Korean TV drama series showed its consistent popularity among Thai people. According to the data of foreign drama viewing in Thailand in June 2008 offered by AGB Nielsen, 3 out

of top 5 foreign TV dramas in Thailand were from Korea, each placing 1st, 2nd and 4th in place. According to Kim (2011), the most preferred genre of Korean popular culture among Thai respondents were television dramas(64.6%), indicating that the genre is a major linkage between Korean culture and Thai people. Such TV dramas and films which first drew Thai public attention were more than a story telling content, but a culture introducing content. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and Korea Tourism Organization portrayed Korean product re-marketing strategies to inspire people in Asia and Middle East market. They extended the range of promoting Korean cultures from films and TV dramas to performance shows, food, spring flowers, autumn leaves, and winter sports inside dramas. And since 2010, a variety of business related to Korean Wave has been conducted by the organizations in order to induce positive perceptions on Korean culture. For example, production of one of mega hit Thai films in 2010, Hello Stranger, was supported by Korean government, appealing the local sights attractiveness to Thai audience (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2013). Food, fashion, people, places and 4 seasons related contents inspired people to visit and experience Korea themselves, contributing to increase of Thai tourists every year. While countries such as Malaysia, China and Japan had minus growth rate of Thai visitors, Korea had consistently growing rate of Thai visitors every year since 2010.

Music from Korea, known as K-pop, is another big part of Korean Wave in Thailand. According to Channel V Thailand, out of 20 artists selected as number one Asian pop artists of the month since March 2012, 15 were K-pop artists demonstrating persistent popularity of K-pop in Thailand. Popularity of K-pop also had an influence on Thai pop music industry. That is, entertainment companies such as R.S. Promotion and GMM Grammy promoted boy bands, K-OTIC, C-Quint and Prince, with a Korean as one of the members out in the market.

CEO of a cosmetic brand, The Face Shop, Thailand, once mentioned in 2011 that believe it or not, just by putting a photo board of Korean star Kim Hyun Joong in front of the store, sales grew by whopping 100% in two month. Along with popularity of Korean pop music, commonly known as k-pop, k-pop stars have often appeared in Thai advertisements as presenters targeting young local generations. Now it's not so hard to find TV commercials or street billboard advertisements starring Korean celebrities anymore. The first Korean celebrity to break through Thai advertisement market was Rain, appearing in TV commercial for multinational dairy brand Dutchmill. In fact, the first person to be offered the job was not Rain but Won Bin who was the lead actor in drama Autumn in My Heart, one of the most popular Korean drama series aired in Thailand. The drama was rerun three times since its first broadcast and Won Bin was truly the best Korean star in Thailand from 2004 to 2005. However, due to several problems Rain was the one to seize the opportunity of shooting the commercial. Since then, many Korean celebrities have appeared in Thai advertisements which includes; TVXQ and 2NE1 for Yamaha Motorcycle, Donghae of Super Junior for contact lens, SiWon of Super Junior for a laptop, 4Minute for Scott Puree, Jang Keun-suk for Ole candy, 2pm and Beast for Tao Kao Noi seaweed snack, Kyuhyun of Super Junior for Masita seaweed snack, Taeyeon of Girl's Generation for B-ing collagen drink, Girl's Generation for True Move H, Lee Min-ho for Dunkin Donuts, and many other commercials not listed.

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted through data from both quantitative (questionnaire survey) method and qualitative (in-depth interview). Questions used in the questionnaire survey were developed based on related studies conducted in Korea. Also, questions used in in-depth

interview were developed based on the completed questionnaire survey in order to conduct a comparative analysis afterwards.

According to the Taro Yamane formula, the quantitative research could be conducted when the number in the population at infinity (∞) for precision (e) of $\pm 7\%$. Regarding that the sample size of 204 was required for this research, 244 questionnaires were distributed to random respondents involving both male and female aged from 13 to 35 year-old in Bangkok metropolitan area and was later sorted down to 200.

The quantitative study was intended to firstly measure the perceived celebrity characteristics, likeability, credibility, similarity and congruence with the brand, among respondents which have been defined to affect endorsed brand image. The research subjects for the survey were Girl’s Generation and the endorsed brand True Move H, Taeyeon and the endorsed brand B-ing and KyuHyun and the endorsed brand Masita. Once the perceived celebrity characteristics were measured, the brand image (attitudes) among respondents was examined in order to explore the related implications between the two dynamics. The research tools to examine such factors were adapted from related studies (Kim, 2000; Han and Yoo, 2005; Lee, 2006). Image congruence between the celebrity endorser and the brand image in particular, was measured by having 18 brand personality scales evaluated for both the endorser and the brand and calculated the score difference between the two dynamics.¹

The Qualitative study was originally planned to conduct an in-depth interview with four Thai brands, True Move H, B-ing, Masita and Tao Kae Noi. Selection of these four brands was made based on whether the ad campaign is still on-the-go status as of September 2013. During the process, brand Tao Kae Noi was dropped from the research based on research advisor’s suggestions. Additionally, due to contact and time issues, the interview was established with only two of the brands which were B-ing and Masita.

Collected data was analyzed through SPSS program with several statistical models such as frequency, percentage, average score and standard deviation while correlation analysis was used for hypothesis testing at statistical significance level of 0.05..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the consumer perception on K-pop celebrity endorser/endorsement and how it affects the endorsed brand image. Also, it was to define the marketing communication intentions of K-pop celebrity endorsement on marketers’ perspective for brand True Move H, B-ing and Masita. While only two brands accepted to share their viewpoints, the results from the interview should help the readers have better understanding of

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BMC = $(\sum BP - MP)/N$	
*note	Brand Personality-Model-Congruity
	BP : Brand Personality
	MP : Model Personality
	N : Number of Personality Scales

(source: Han and Yoo, 2005)

the brand and their endorsement strategies. Furthermore, both research results were brought into a comparative analysis to check different views of the two sides.

For the brand B-ing, Mr. Natthapong Chanapichaikit, the marketing executive of the brand, participated to share the ideas on the brand's Korean celebrity endorsement.

B-ing is a 5 year old beverage brand owned by Boon Rawd Brewery Co., Ltd. as of year 2013 which positions itself as a functional drink with five flavors, B-ing Bodyline, B-ing Fine, B-ing Ey Care, B-ing Bebe and B-ing Collagen. Mr. Chanapichaikit mentions that each flavor is supposed to provide its own consumption benefits such as helping to gain slender body figure, consume healthy ingredients for eyes and brighter skin. B-ing Collagen is a newly launched flavor in 2013 which is the first and only Korean celebrity endorsed product out of B-ing's product lines. The newly added product attempts to build perceptions among consumers that it is a beauty drink, not a medical drink that functions to bring actual physical changes but better to drink than water, and once drank is believed to gradually bring appearance changes such as pure, bright and white skin.

What the brand sought for in the new product presenter was someone that embodies the physical appearance qualities suitable for the brand image, bright and white skin tone. In fact, the brand had been using a famous Thai female actress Nune Woranuch as the presenter which according to the executive's view helped raise brand awareness but made the brand be perceived as just one of the beverages in the market. Therefore, what the brand was aiming this time was to make use of an endorser that enables brand image refreshment and seize the younger targets of teenagers. Their main targets are teens to first jobbers, age ranging from 15 to 30, mostly female while in the past it hasn't been quite clear that the brand was reaching out to consumers at teenage level. This led to hiring a Korean idol celebrity with well-matched characteristics with the brand.

According to a research conducted by the brand, a Korean girl band, Girl's Generation, was one of the most popular Korean singers in Thailand. Moreover, Taeyeon was perceived to be the top of mind member out of nine members of the team when it came to healthy and white bright skin. Her position as a leader of the team also had the marketing executives decide that she was the qualified endorser for the brand.

The new advertisement campaign endorsed by Taeyeon, adapted the Kwi-yomi Song from Korea which in recent past had created a phenomenon among young generations globally including Thailand to sing along the song and post online. The executive finds that Taeyeon has enabled a balanced linkage between her physical attractiveness, Korean-ness and the brand image as well as a reach-out to rather younger generations. B-ing attempts to employ Taeyeon's celebrity image on the brand itself and appeal that image to the consumers.

On the other hand, for the brand Masita, Mr. Vanis Arunthaiphaphat, product group manager of Masita, Sanvo, Fiji water, and Mr. Nathakorn Chuapitakpong, marketing executive of Masita, gave their participation in the interview.

Masita is a seaweed snack brand of Boon Rawd Brewery Co., Ltd. which has been distributing its products in Thailand for two years. Since its launch in 2011 the brand has been positioning itself as a Korean style seaweed snack from head to toe. The brand name Masita means delicious in Korean language which gives a foreign appeal or Korean-ness to Thai consumers. The products are manufactured in Korea with the ingredients from Korean considering the general perception among Thai consumers that high quality seaweed comes from Korean or Japan.

The main target of the brand is an age group of 18 to 25, mostly females, who are fans of Korean culture. Because the brand has been pursuing a Korean image, they have chosen the target group that is likely to be more susceptible to such brand image appeal. However, the marketers find there exists a limitation of drawing minds of more general public for the brand is currently targeting a certain group of people by using a particular Korean celebrity endorser. Therefore, it is their new challenge to build a new communication strategy to blend both Korean fans and general public.

Due to the brand's specifically defined target, selection of the brand endorser was based on a research they conducted to find the most popular Korean male celebrity in Thailand. It came down to choosing one presenter out of top three, SiWon of Super Junior, KyuHyun of Super Junior and another member from TVXQ. They concluded that KyuHyun's funny, friendly, trendy, charming yet mature image matched well with the brand image Masita was going for which are fun, friendly, family-like and trendy. Although the marketers find KyuHyun of having high physical attractiveness, it was his overall characteristics that suited the brand image. They showed their impression of KyuHyun's capability to answer every question with a sense of humor during the interviews at brand events.

KyuHyun has been the first and ever presenter of Masita for two years ever since its launch. Interviewees mentioned that such endorsement is expected to evoke benefits of delivering Korean-ness as well as KyuHyun's own characteristics to be reflected on the brand personality and create a certain brand identity.

According to Mr. Nathakorn Chuapitakpong, there may be a new presenter for the brand, either Korean or Thai, in the future. However, for the moment, they believe that the current endorsement campaign by KyuHyun has been performing well in bringing the brand image they had expected.

For the quantitative research, 154 female respondents (77%) and 46 male respondents (23%) were involved. The majority of the respondents were 17-20 year olds represented by 50%, while followed by 21-15 year olds represented by 33.50%. Most of the respondents had an education level of undergraduate level by 72%. Regarding the fact that the two brands' main targets were group of people age from 15-30 and 18-25 each, mostly female, the respondents who participated in the survey seem to fit in the brands' main target boundary.

In order to look into consumer perceived endorser qualities, 4 brand image success factors, likeability, credibility, similarity and image congruity, of the endorser was evaluated through a questionnaire survey. And the endorsed brand image was evaluated in the survey as well to see the impact of such factors on it.

The respondents showed an overall favorability towards the Korean culture with the highest average score of 3.735 on 'I like Korean celebrities' followed by 3.725 on 'Korean has positive image', 3.670 on 'In general, I have favorable impression on Koreans' and 3.500 on 'I like Korean popular culture'. The most favored type of Korean popular culture was 'TV drama' represented by 95 respondents (47.50%), followed by 'Movie' represented by 31 respondents (15.50%) with similar results of 30 respondents (15.00%) who preferred 'Music' and 'TV Game Shows' represented by 24 respondents (12.00%). When the respondents were asked how many hours they engage in Korean popular culture per week, 'none' was the most answered by 36.50% followed by '1-4 hours per week' 35.00%, '5-9 hours per week' 14.50%, '10-20 hours per week' 9.00% and 'More than 21 hours per week' 5.00%. The most popular type of Korean celebrity was 'Singer' represented by 49.00%, followed by 'Actor/Actress' 38.00%. It is interesting for the fact that singers who engage in music which is second preferred type of Korean popular culture,

gained higher percentage than actor/actress who engage in TV drama or movie, with higher or even preference with the music. The numbers leave it to the marketers to consider which type of Korean celebrity they should hire as an endorser. For the time being, most of the endorsers appear to be K-pop singers.

Likeability, credibility and similarity in prior studies, have received empirical supports of having significant influence or equivocal results on the endorsed brand image under certain conditions. For example, physical attractiveness had significant relationship with the brand image when the endorsement was for the product domain in which attractive is relevant (Karmins, 1990: cited in Erfegen, 2011). And credibility of an endorser was found to create positive attitudes towards the advertisement and corporate credibility (Lafferty and Goldsmith, 1999; Lafferty et al., 2002). Although there were few aspects with positive responses, all three endorsers' perceived characteristics in general were evaluated at a moderate level. The respondents' attitudes had no hostility, distrust or sense of incompatibility, yet this did not directly link to having a strong favorability, trust or sense of resemblance between themselves and the endorsers. Likeability in particular, was one of which the brands' marketers gave a major consideration on in terms of the endorser selection. Apparently, the research on the most popular K-pop celebrity in Thailand they conducted was not able to represent general public opinion. However in a positive point of view, the fact that the responses did not reach an extremely negative level still gives the brands a chance. Based on the study result that likeability, credibility and similarity of the endorsers are correlated to positive brand image (attitudes), the brand marketers should take care of their communication strategies to enable an achievement in high likeability, credibility and similarity qualities of the endorser.

Also, during the process of measuring the image congruence between the celebrity endorser and the brand, it was discovered that the k-pop celebrity endorsers were perceived to embody certain images in common to an agree level which are up to date, successful, ambitious, polite and service-mindedness. Although each endorser did have different images to match oneself, the responses in general showed that the endorsers had overlapping images whereby their top 3 matching images were similar. In comparison, Korean celebrity endorsers in Japan studied by Han and Yoo (2005) were identified with each distinctive features of their own. For instance, actor Bae Yong Joon, Lee Byung-Hun to be service-mindedness, Kwone Sang woo were each perceived to be polite, service-mindedness while actress Choi Ji Woo was perceived to be intelligent.

Additionally, prior literatures (Karmins and Gupta, 1994; Misara and Beatty, 1990) have defined that image congruence between the celebrity endorser and the brand generates positive impact on the brand image whereas in Han and Yoo (2005)'s results, it partially worked for only certain images. The results from this research showed similarity to Han and Yoo (2005)'s findings where the images of two brands out of three were found to be affected by such factor. After identifying which of the image scales (of the brand and the endorser) in congruence had significant relationship with the brand image, the respondents were divided into groups of two who had evaluated the image scales in high and low level. For brand True Move H and B-ing, the respondents with high image congruence evaluation had better brand image attitudes than those with low image congruence evaluation. However, the relationship was not applied for brand Masita showing that the image congruence did not significantly influence on creating positive brand image. Referring back to B-ing's brand executive's words, the brand was well aware that their product benefits were related to physical attractiveness. Therefore, such endorsement strategy to align the brand image with the endorser whose image had high ratings in 'charming' aspect may be considered to have generated positive brand image effects. On the other hand, although one of the reasons for Masita's endorser selection was based on high image congruence

with the brand, the brand itself lacked its own image to benefit from a well-matching image strategy. Furthermore, brand's expected benefits from the endorsement was to approach with Korean image appeal and create awareness among consumers that their product, the seaweed snack, made of ingredients from Korea, manufactured in Korea, has good qualities. With no doubt, hiring a Korean presenter did have created a linkage between the brand and the Korean-ness. However, connecting the brand image with just a popular K-pop celebrity image not only limits the range of audience the brand could reach, as the marketers were already aware that the brand engagement would only occur among Korean popular culture fans, but it also limits the actual message delivery the brand needs to spread out to the public. In order to enhance the brand's competence and position in the market, the practitioners should be reminded of the main message they are trying to delivery to the audience before they attempt to utilize the Korean celebrity's images onto the brand image.

In conclusion, this research provided information on perceived likeability, credibility and similarity qualities of the three endorsers, Girl's Generation, Taeyeon and KyuHyun, which in general were evaluated at a moderate level. Also, it identified the certain images that were perceived to match each brand and the endorser. These factors were found to have a significant impact on the brand image while one of the factors, image congruence between KyuHyun and Masita, did not. When compared with the marketing practitioners' insights, the endorsements were regarded to be exerting positive effects on one hand and insignificant achievements on the other hand. Korean cultural appeal might promote trendy, up to date, successful, ambitious, polite and service-mindedness sort of like images to the brand. Yet, misallocation of such endorsement strategies may blur the success or even generate negative effects. Therefore, the marketers should be aware of what image they desire to borrow from the celebrity image and what message they wish to deliver through the endorser. With the right consideration and judgment, the marketers will be enabled to customize their endorsements to target their audiences.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study was conducted in order to learn the impact of Korean celebrity endorsement on Thai brands by choosing three current Korean celebrity endorsed Thai brands, True Move H, B-ing, and Masita. Using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methods, data of the brands' marketer insights and general public's perceptions were collected and analyzed. However, several issues which led to being a limitation to this study may be pointed out.

Firstly, it should be noticed that only a few of K-pop celebrity endorsements were studied in this research. There have been a lot of k-pop celebrity endorsers recently such as 2pm, BEAST, 4minute and SiWon of Super Junior in Thailand. Aside from those whose names were mentioned above, more and more k-pop celebrities as well as actors and actresses are portraying their activities in Thailand. Therefore, if there were to be any further studies on Korean celebrity endorsement, more various endorsers should be taken into account to measure its impact.

Secondly, it is the data collecting problems. For the place limitation, the questionnaire was distributed to random samples in few of the districts in Bangkok metropolitan area which is composed of 50 districts. Also the sample size was only 200 hundred which the responses may not represent the generalized opinions of people in Bangkok. Moreover, being unable to interview True Move H led to an absence of comparative analysis between the marketing practitioner's point of view and that of the respondents. Therefore, with bigger size of samples and interview with the brand True Move H would have brought better research results.

Thirdly, it is the measurement method used in the questionnaire. The literature foundation for this study was based on Efergen (2011) which in the review covers the influential factors of celebrity endorser on the endorsed brand image. The factors vary from perceived characteristics (likeability, credibility and similarity), image congruence between the celebrity and the brand, external information and multiple endorsements. In comparison, most of the studies on celebrity endorsement focuses on the impact from a single factor, for instance, how did a sports star endorser's drug abuse during a game affect the endorsed brand image? Attempt to measure the impact from multiple factors on three brands resulted in a long set of questions for the survey which may have gotten the respondents lose concentration while answering. Therefore measurements concentrated upon one subject, either a single brand or factor, would have brought more fluency during the research process.

Fourthly, the exclusion of impact on brand image by influential factors such as external information or multiple endorsements is another limitation to this study. There was a challenge to controlling the two factors into the research, for example, employing sensationally negative news about such endorser to measure its impact. Additionally, as more and more Korean celebrities are broadening their career range overseas including Thailand, multiple endorsements, either one brand endorsed by multiple Korean endorsers or one Korean endorser presenting multiple brands, are suggested to be explored.

Fifthly, more various sets of indicators measuring the impact of K-pop celebrity endorsement could have been used in the research. In this study covers the impact on the endorsed image which is measured with brand attitude and brand image variables. However, measuring how it generates changes in advertisement attitude, intention of purchase, would have resulted more precise details on its impact.

Lastly, more information could have been analyzed and discussed deeply in terms of correlation between the demographics and other factors such as personal attributes and general behavior towards the Korean Wave. Despite this research defines the significant relationship between the factors, it lacked of analysis on which type of age group or gender has the strongest favorability towards the endorser attributes such as likeability, credibility, similarity and the image congruence with the brand. Furthermore, the research was not able to identify which type of Korean popular culture usage (engagement frequency, favored type of celebrity and popular culture type) generated positive effects on such factors. Therefore, If there were to be any follow research to this study, these knowledge is recommended to be provided for better understanding of K-pop celebrity endorsement in Thailand advertisement domain.

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