

CELEBRITY BRANDED PRODUCTS: AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION INTO CONSUMER PURCHASE MOTIVATION AND GENERAL ATTITUDES TOWARD THE BRAND

Stephanie T. Gillison, University of Alabama, USA
Kristy E. Reynolds, University of Alabama, USA

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates why individuals purchase celebrity branded products (CBPs). Qualitative depth interviews reveal that CBPs may aid individuals in developing their self-identities and may provide a way for the celebrity's human brand to extend from the celebrity into tangible products which can be consumed by the celebrity's fans.

A celebrity branded product (CBP) is a product sold by a celebrity, under his/her own name or brand, with no other known brand associated with the product. CBPs represent a large and growing portion of retail sales. For instance, celebrity wines and spirits sales grew 19% over 2007 (Progressive Grocer March 2008) and celebrity scents made \$170 million in 2008 (Muther 2009). Interestingly, CBPs have succeeded and thrived even when other non-celebrity products in the same product categories have failed. Perfumes have declined 10% this year, however, Britney Spears's perfume sales were up 13% this June (Connelly 2009). O, Oprah Winfrey's magazine, has been successful even as many long-standing magazines such as House and Garden are shutting down. Overall, CBPs have proliferated in the past three decades, yet little is known about the influence these products have on consumers, the celebrities who sell them, or the marketplace overall. Also interesting is the increase in the use of celebrity products for several retailers' competitive strategies. For example, Macy's department stores have used CBPs as the focus of their merchandise strategy and their promotional campaign for the past several years. The company features celebrity products prominently in their stores and features the celebrities whose products they carry in their television commercials. K-Mart recent announced that they have ended their contract with Martha Stewart, who sold her Everyday line of home products exclusively at the retailer, leaving many to wonder what the effect on K-Mart's profitability will be (The New York Times 2009).

Qualitative depth interviews were conducted with fourteen individuals in order to investigate the purchase and usage drivers of CBPs along with individuals' general attitudes toward these products. Following research on para-social interaction (Giles and Maltby 2004; Giles 2002; Boon and Lomore 2001), human brands (Thomson 2006), brand extensions (Park, Millberg, and Lawson 1991; Aaker and Keller 1990), self-identity formation (Escalas and Bettman 2005; Batra, Myers, Aaker 1996; Belk 1988), and the theory of meaning transfer (McCracken 1989, 1986), we propose that individuals may use CBPs as a way to form their self-identities and to express this identity to others and that CBPs may act as a form of human brand extension for celebrities.

The depth interviews showed several interesting things. First, most individuals interviewed could remember purchasing or using CBPs in the past, providing evidence that they are important in the marketplace. Second, several individuals who had purchased or used CBPs also held negative general feelings of CBPs and the celebrities who make them. Therefore, if the individual likes the celebrity, s/he may purchase the celebrity's products, but if an individual does not like the celebrity, s/he are unlikely to purchase their products. Third, many individuals admitted that they do use the celebrity as a guide when making the purchase decision, such as choosing gifts because they knew the recipient liked the celebrity, being drawn to the product because it was associated with a celebrity they liked, and purchasing a product because they thought the celebrity would be an expert in the product category. This indicates that individuals may use celebrities as a reference group when making their purchase decision, use celebrities to form their own identity, and use CBPs to express their identity to others. The depth interviews also indicate that if the product is consistent with the celebrity's image or transfers the celebrity's image from their primary occupation to the CBP, individuals may be more likely to purchase the product, providing support for the notion that CBPs may act as a form of brand extension for the celebrity.

References Available on Request.