PERSONALLY YOURS: THE IMPACT OF CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS IN NATIVE ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT

Native advertising is paid content that matches the look and feel of the digital site where it is placed. This paper sought to determine the influence of celebrity endorsements in native advertising. To attain this objective, qualitative research was employed where selected Twitter followers of Anne Curtis and other celebrity endorsers were interviewed. The opinions, experiences and motivations of individual participants on native advertising in general, and Twitter celebrity endorsements in particular, were probed. The findings revealed that the informants were not receptive to Twitter posts that seemed like obvious advertisements but preferred tweets that sounded natural and personal. They also showed a more positive attitude towards the endorsed brands when the characteristics of the celebrities were in congruence with the products they promoted. They likewise said that the gratifying personal experience of the celebrity endorser with the product imbued the Twitter message with credibility and trustworthiness, and was therefore persuasive.

Keywords: *Native advertising, Celebrity endorsement, Twitter, Personally Yours, Impact*

INTRODUCTION

Native Advertising

The advertising industry, which specializes in creating catchphrases, has a new buzzword: native advertising. Fairly obscure until August 2012, the term is fast becoming a byword and is now touted as a significant advertising innovation in social media platforms (Wasserman, 2012). The Interactive Advertising Bureau – composed of more than 500 leading media and technology companies in the U.S. – defines native advertising as "paid ads that are so cohesive with the page content, assimilated into the design, and consistent with the platform behavior that the viewer simply feels that they belong" (IAB, 2013, p. 3).

Fahad Khan (2013), Chairman and CEO of One Public and Adjunct Professor at Rutgers Business School, offers this definition: "Ads in a format that is native to the platform on which they are run, bought or sold." He cites as examples Facebook sponsored stories and all types of

advertisements in the Newsfeed as native. Moreover, Ian Schafer, CEO of Deep Focus, a digitally native global marketing network, describes native advertising as "Advertising that takes advantage of a platform in the ways consumers are actually using it (Wasserman, 2012)."

Native advertising, with its central elements of "strong visual integration, choice-based interaction and content-driven experiences," can entertain, engage and connect with its audiences. (Forbes Insights, 2012, p. 3). It is revolutionary as it promotes products or services. Viewers, however, still consider it interesting enough to participate in and even to share. Its adoption in major online platforms – Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr and WordPress – is a testament to native advertising's marketing value.

Twitter is a popular social media platform that can accommodate native advertising. This microblogging service allows its users to transmit and view 140-character messages called tweets. According to Semiocast, a Paris-based analyst group, Twitter passed the half billion account mark in July 2012, making it the next biggest social networking site after Facebook. The Philippines ranked Number 10 among countries with the most number of Twitter accounts (Lunden, 2012).

The Wall Street Journal has reported that, MoPub – a Twitter-owned mobile-advertising exchange – created native advertisements within the Twitter stream that had been very successful in inducing click-throughs to advertisers' websites. This agrees with a forecast from market research company BIA/Kelsey that native advertising spending in social sites will grow to $4.57 billion by 2017, an increase of 93% (Koh, 2013).

With advertising expenditures increasing in social media, advertisers are expected to demand the use of the most effective tactics. It can thus be presumed that celebrity endorsements in Twitter would be maximized for its drawing power.

This is bolstered by the fact that in social networks including Twitter, celebrities have more influence than brands. Justin Bieber has 34.5 million Twitter followers, Kim Kardashian has 17.3 million and Oprah Winfrey, 16.6 million (knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu). But brands' Twitter followers are far fewer: Coca Cola has 2.6 million, Adidas 2 million and Dell Computers, 1.4 million (fanpagelist.com).

Filipino celebrities also command huge Twitter following. The top 10 personalities with the greatest number of followers in Twitter as of April 2016 are: Anne Curtis, 8.34 million; Angel Locsin, 7.55 million; Vice Ganda, 7.02 million; Kathryn Bernardo, 6.02 million; Yeng Constantino, 5.59 million; Daniel Padilla, 5.13 million; Bianca Gonzales, 5.10 million; Angelica Panganiban, 4.88 million; Luis Manzano, 4.80 million; and KC Concepcion 4.77 million. (www.socialbakers.com).

Yahoo Vice President Patrick Albano believes native advertising, contained in social media like Twitter, plays a crucial role in enabling brands and consumers to "communicate with each other in more personal and natural ways" (IAB, 2013, p. 3). Audiences listen because it talks to them in a tone and language that they are receptive to (Salmon, 2013).

Sharethrough (2014), a software firm that powers in-feed native advertising for brands, affirms that native advertising formats must match both the form and function of the user experience where they are placed. Because they look and feel like natural content and thus less intrusive, users are more likely to click on these. An original study conducted by Sharethrough and IPG Media Lab, which utilized eye tracking technology and surveys, compared native advertisements to the usual internet banner placements. Results showed that consumers looked at native advertisements 53% more frequently than banner ads. Native advertising also registered 25% more consumer views, 18% higher lift in purchase intent and 9% boost in brand affinity. There was also increased likelihood of sharing for native advertisements (Hallett, 2014). An experimental study done by Tutaj and van Reijmersdal (2012) showed that participants find native advertisements to be more informative, more amusing and less irritating than the typical online banner commercial. The outcome likewise revealed that consumer skepticism was higher for banner ads.

Native advertising's more positive results could be attributed to its non-interruptive nature. It sustains one's interest in online experience when compared to a distracting conventional commercial (McCaffrey, 2013). Paul Keers (2014), London Bureau Chief of White Light Media, opines that while the usual online advertisement is often viewed as "intrusive and clunky," native advertising could engage its audience more and induce them to share it. This behavior, he says, is rarely achieved by traditional advertising.

The above mentioned literature review led the researchers to assume that:

A1: Native advertising should be less interruptive and not be perceived as an advertisement to be engaging.

Celebrity Endorsements in Native Advertising

Native advertising's rise could be attributed to advertisers' attempt to counteract clutter, the confusion caused in target audiences by the inundation of commercials. When consumers are bombarded with advertisements, they are thought to become immune to marketing messages. (Muda, Musa & Petit, 2011). Native advertising is presumed to break through the competitive clutter by being more noticeable and appealing to the online user.

Native advertising is a relatively new phenomenon, but celebrity endorsement – the use of popular individuals to promote the product or service – is not. Brands have leveraged celebrity influence for a long time, and have continuously banked on their mass appeal (Sharma and Kumar, 2013). Both native advertising and celebrity endorsement, however, share the same reason for being: to make a positive impact on consumers. "It's hard to get people's attention through all this clutter and noise," says Barbara Kahn, director of the Jay H. Baker Retailing Center at Wharton. "It was hard before, and it is even harder now. Celebrities – for better or for worse – do get our attention" (The Hazards of Celebrity Endorsements in the Age of Twitter, para. 9).

Because of their high profile, celebrities could help commercials break through the surrounding clutter. The power of celebrity endorsements emanates from three facets. The first, Attention, makes the target market notice the endorsed brand. The second, Credibility, results in consumers' trust of the brand. The third, Persuasion, convinces them to patronize the endorsed brand (Alsmadi, 2006).

Research studies show that compared to non-celebrity endorsements, commercials that utilize celebrities have fared better in terms of attention generation, message recall, and favorable attitude towards the brand and purchase intent (Starcevic, 1997). A paper written by Anderson and Zahaf (2008) also concludes that celebrity endorsements could influence the willingness to buy in various ways. Moreover, the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements is often attributed to "brand fit," wherein the values associated with the celebrity are transmitted to the advertised brand (Sharma

& Kumar, 2013). Forkan (1980) also suggests that the message conveyed by the celebrity's image and the message given by the brand should converge to make the advertisement effective. Misra (1990) likewise opines that the advertiser must match the personality of the celebrity with that of the product.

McCracken (1989), however, has scrutinized the phenomenon of celebrity-product fit using the cultural Meaning Transfer model. He argues that the celebrity endorsement is a process where the endorsers bring the symbolic meanings associated with them to the product they are endorsing. These meanings are then transferred to the consumer. The celebrities who convey meanings that match with the endorsed brand tend to be more effective compared to celebrities who do not match the product endorsed.

This perspective dovetails with the Match Up Hypothesis, discussed in-depth by Kahle and Horner in 1985. The core principle of said hypothesis is that congruence between the celebrity endorser and the brand is key to advertising effectiveness. Consistent empirical support has upheld this fundamental premise (Choi & Riffon, 2012). Earlier research on Match Up Hypothesis indicates that physically attractive celebrities are more persuasive when they are endorsing products that promise enhanced physical beauty (Kamins, 1990). More recent studies affirm that a perceived fit between the celebrity and the product in terms of expertise and image are more promising match up aspects (Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Till & Busler 1998). This seamless congruence between the celebrity and the brand boosts the endorser's believability through the identification process (Langmeyer and Walker, 1991a), thus positively influencing consumers' attitudes toward products and their predisposition to buy (Kirmani and Shiv, 1998). Past research attesting to the positive influence of celebrity endorsers, coupled with the effectiveness of native advertising, led the researchers to this assumption:

A2: Consumers perceive that brand fit between the celebrity endorser and the endorsed brand in native advertising enhances its persuasive potential.

The credibility of the endorser plays a vital role in consumers' attitude towards a brand. When the endorsement comes from a credible source, prospective buyers perceive the product to be of high quality (Gaulkar & Kulkarni, 2005).

In a typical endorsement, celebrities who are endorsing the products avow that they have proven and tested the product or the service. A credible celebrity endorser moves people so that the testimonial is believed, and the endorsed product also becomes perceived as trustworthy (Celebrity Endorsement in Advertising, para. 4).

Theoretically, this is supported by the Source Credibility Model proposed by Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1953). The theory contends that expertise and trustworthiness are vital factors for the credibility of the advertising message. Expertise relates to the consumers' perception that the celebrity has sufficient knowledge or experience of the product. Trustworthiness, on the other hand, is the degree of consumers' confidence in the celebrity's endorsement of the product and its claims. This means that when celebrity endorsers are seen by the target audience as a credible authority on the product, presumably arising from satisfied usage, the purchase intent becomes greater (Misra and Beatty, 1990).

Such arguments led the researchers to suppose that:

A3: Consumers believe that the celebrity endorser's personal experience with the brand adds to the convincing power of native advertising.

Central Question and Objectives

To recapitulate, this paper sought to answer this question: What is the perceived impact of celebrity endorsements in native advertising to female Twitter users?

It aimed to fulfill the following research objectives:

- To identify the characteristics that make target audiences positively predisposed towards native advertising.
- To determine if perceptions of brand fit between the celebrity endorser and the endorsed brand is crucial to native advertising's persuasive potential.
- To examine if the perceived celebrity endorser's personal experience with the brand adds to the convincing power of native advertising.

SCOPE AND DELIMITATION

While there are various social media platforms that can accommodate native advertising, the researchers opted to limit their study to selected promoted tweets in Twitter.

This paper focused on the perception of selected Twitter followers of Anne Curtis since said celebrity is the most popular in Twitter.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

According to research service Business Insider Intelligence (2015), native advertising expenditures are growing considerably, and could be expected to eclipse $21 billion in 2018. It will continue to evolve and expand since advertisers consider it a vehicle for reaching consumers (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016). Native advertisements in social media, including Facebook news feeds and promoted Twitter tweets, are predicted to draw a sizeable chunk of advertising spending in the next few years. With huge investments at stake, advertisers and advertising-dependent media must be better informed on what kind of native advertisements will draw prospects' slippery attention and create favorable impressions on their brands.

Corollarily, celebrities' magnetic pull has compelled advertisers to tap them as brand ambassadors in the traditional media of print, radio and television. It remains to be seen, however, if their persuasive appeal can be maximized in an unconventional social medium like Twitter.

By analyzing the significance of celebrity utilization in native advertising placed in Twitter, this study could be helpful to advertisers, advertising-dependent media, advertising practitioners and communication students who would like to gain better understanding of this phenomenon in the local context.

METHOD

This study employed qualitative descriptive research to reveal key informants' perception on native advertising on Twitter and the role of celebrity endorsements in enhancing this kind of advertisement's persuasive appeal. The purpose of using qualitative research was to gain deeper insights on the study's topic. It used in-depth interviews to support the assumptions advanced by

insights on the study's topic. It used in-depth interviews to support the assumptions advanced by the researchers.

The paper primarily focused on the product endorsements contained in the tweets of Anne Curtis, a very popular actress who, aside from having the most number of Twitter followers, is also a much sought after commercial endorser. The researchers followed Anne Curtis' Twitter account for several weeks to examine interactions with her followers. From there, followers with the most number of interactions were selected.

The informants were asked to undergo semi-structured interviews, since these presented an opportunity to probe beyond initial responses. The semi-structured interviews consisted of key questions that helped to describe the topic being explored. These also enabled the interviewer or informant to deviate so that an idea or response can be pursued in more detail (Gill & Stewart, 2008).

Detailed data were collected from open-ended queries that became the source of direct quotations. Narrative descriptions of a small number of informants were involved. The paper used thematic analysis to interpret the data. This research arranged data into patterns that emerged during analysis.

RESULTS

Profile of the Informants

Majority of the interviewees were females, 18-34 years old, who were followers of Anne Curtis. They were selected since they actively clicked, liked, retweeted and replied to the actress' tweets. The choice of this type of respondents were based on a Pew Research Center study (2013) affirming that this user profile was the most involved in Twitter.

Additional information was also elicited from active female Twitter users, in the same age bracket, who were followers of other celebrities.

Native Advertising in Twitter

Generally, the interviewees tended to ignore banner ads and would often get annoyed with pop up ads within social media sites. Native advertisements, however, were not overlooked because they have a similar look and feel to the content around them. This seems to be the case because they blend in and appear like part of the overall content. The respondents regarded them as less interruptive than banner or pop-up ads.

The informants also reacted negatively to Twitter posts that seemed like obvious advertise-ments. They claimed that they wanted to read personal tweets, and not paid posts. The informants asserted that the latter spoiled the Twitter experience for them. *"Minsan kasi, meron pong mga shouting sa Twitter that they want the product, use this product, etc. Hindi ko na binabasa, or I might unfollow kung annoy-ing na masyado,"* one informant claimed. ("Sometimes, there are shoutouts in Twitter that they want the product, use this product, etc. I don't read them, or I might unfollow if it becomes too annoy-ing.")

Too many promoted tweets likewise irritated the interviewees. One of them said, *"In-unfollow ko si Bianca Gonzalez kasi nafa-flood ako ng tweets niya minsan."* ("I unfollowed Bianca Gonzalez because her tweets flooded my account.") The informants seemed to think that Anne Curtis' tweets blurred the line between advertising and content; these were not seen as disruptive to the users' experience. One of them mentioned, *"Pag si Anne kasi, hindi mo malaman kung personal or endorsement; possible naman na gusto lang niyang mai-share 'yung mga gusto niya."* ("You can't tell with Anne if her tweet is personal or an endorsement. It's possible that she just wants to share what she likes.")

Product-Celebrity Congruence

Anne Curtis was perceived as a suitable endorser for the brands she endorsed in Twitter. The interviewees agreed that she was the ideal fit for fashionable clothing and personal care prod-ucts. Being known as a "celebrity fashionista," respondents said they looked up to her as "an icon or model" for what they would wear.

The celebrity-product match up between Anne and her endorsed brands, i.e. Primadona, Avon and L'Oreal, held up because Anne was perceived as "sophisticated and classy," just like the

DISCUSSION

Recommendations on Native Advertising

Research studies conducted by Forbes Insights (2012) and Sharethrough (2013) have shown that with the plunging performance of traditional interruptive media methods, native advertising is increasingly being recognized by top marketers as a potent instrument for brand content. Furthermore, majority of the advertisers have confirmed the importance of a native look and feel for their advertisements instead of the usual paid placements. Because of its viability and effectiveness, native advertising should be further explored and maximized as an advertising vehicle.

Towards this end, care must be taken so that the product pitch flows naturally within the content, and not to be perceived as disruptive, hard-sell advertising. Native advertising's approach should be seamless so that it blends into the user experience. It must incorporate more narrative, personally relevant content that could deepen relationships with its intended targets. Tools, platforms and technologies have to be leveraged so that native advertising could engage the audience better.

To achieve this, the advertising industry must invest in developing and hiring creative talent who can craft native experiences that are informative, entertaining and absorbing. Failure to do so could lead to a proliferation of unremarkable native advertisements that consumers would inevitably learn to avoid.

Ethically, native advertising's objective of promoting brand content "into the endemic experience of a site in an integrated, non-interruptive way" (Forbes Insights, 2012) could pose concerns about the blurring of the line between advertising and content. Transparency demands that "regardless of context, a reasonable consumer should be able to distinguish between what is paid advertising versus what is publisher editorial content" (IAB, 2013). Like the Interactive Advertising Bureau in the United States, our local regulators – specifically the Advertising Standards Council – must formulate disclosure standards and guidelines for native advertising.

Recommendations on Twitter Celebrity Endorsements

Celebrity tweets are increasingly being used by advertisers to catch audience's attention. This could be attributed to the predisposition of audiences to skip the usual, traditional commercials. More companies are thus paying celebrities large sums to extol their products to thousands, even millions, of Twitter followers (Associated Press, 2011).

However, advertisers should not hire a celebrity merely for the sake of having a celebrity endorser. When considering an endorser for their product, they should ensure that the values of the brand are in consonance with the image portrayed by the endorser. Celebrities help in generating attention, awareness and favorable attitudes towards the brand provided there is a clear fit between them and the brand. Marketers must, therefore, make certain that the personality, lifestyle and other associations of their endorser fit their brand.

If the celebrity endorser represents values that clash with the brand's values, the advertising is likely to create conflict in the minds of target consumers. The strategy of celebrity endorsement will then be rendered futile.

In Twitter, as in other advertising channels, audiences like to think that celebrity endorsers actually like and use the product as their personal choice. This increases the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of the endorser, which then translates to their willingness to buy the product. Thus, it is of utmost importance that the chosen celebrity endorser must be believed as having experienced the brand, and has drawn satisfaction from it. Otherwise, the target market will assume that the endorser is not interested in the brand, and is only doing the advertisement for the money.

While celebrity endorsements may help to get the brand noticed in Twitter, it might be erroneous to say that it is the only solution to command attention and interest. Advertisers should not be compelled to shell out huge amounts of money for a celebrity. Instead, they should demand that their advertising agencies deliver creative messages that are high on relevance and effective in eliciting desire, with or without a celebrity endorser.

In native advertising, including promoted tweets, celebrity endorsement should just be a means to an end, which is a more engaging viewing experience. The ultimate objective is to have

brands she was promoting in Twitter. The respondents believed that Anne brought said brands to "a higher level."

Anne Curtis was also perceived as a good example for young, hardworking professionals. As responsible earners, they were a viable target market for the condominiums being sold by SM Development Corporation (SMDC*).* They saw Anne Curtis as fitting the SMDC residences was endorsing. One of them said, *"Malaking investment siya para sa 'kin. Anne Curtis owns a condo there, so parang hindi siya basta-bastang condo. Anne owns one, so you're sure na maganda siya."* ("It's a big investment for me. Anne Curtis owns a condo there, so it won't be an ordinary condo; you're sure it's a nice one.") This enhanced purchase intent for one informant who clarified, "*Nag-iipon ako for a house and lot, but then, ever since Anne started to endorse SMDC, parang may impact sa 'yo because you're a big fan of hers."* ("I was saving up for a house and lot. But Anne's endorsement of SMDC had impact because when you're a big fan of hers, you'd consider getting it."

Other celebrity endorsers were also perceived as having a good brand fit.

Megan Young was seen as fit and sexy so she complemented the healthy drink, Jamba Juice. Male celebrities Ramon Bautista and Lourd de Veyra were the respondents' favorite male Twitter endorsers for being funny and *"maka-masa"* (popular with the masses). Ramon Bautista was considered a credible endorser for Axe because he personified the man who was endowed with the Axe Effect: not goodlooking but desired by girls: "*Kahit hindi guwapo, maraming chicks!"* He and Axe were both described as "cool."

In general, the respondents exhibited a more positive attitude towards the endorsed brands when the characteristics of the celebrities were in congruence with the products they promoted. Message recall and predisposition to buy were also enhanced.

Experience and Credibility

According to the interviewees, Anne Curtis' tweets made them believe that she actually used the products she endorsed. Her perceived satisfying experience with these brands elicited the desire to buy the endorsed brands.

"I'm a PH Care user," said an informant. *"But nag-post siya na Lactacyd ang ginagamit niya. Why not ikaw, hindi mo gamitin? Eh 'yung makinis at malinis na tao nga, 'yun ang ginagamit, 'di ba? So I tried it; hanggang ngayon, Lactacyd pa ako."* (But she posted that she uses Lactacyd. Why don't you try it? She's so smooth and clean, and she uses Lactacyd, right? So I tried it, and I'm still using it.")

Another related: "*Alam ko favorite niya 'yung Ihop sa The Fort. So sabi ko sa friend ko, kasi magbi-birthday siya, na we can go to Ihop kasi Anne Curtis eats there. At sobrang sarap ng pancake dun kesa sa Mcdo."* ("I know Ihop at The Fort was her favorite. So I told my friend who's having a birthday that we can go to Ihop because Anne Curtis eats there. The pancakes were very delicious, much better than Mcdo!")

When Anne Curtis tweeted that she used Avon lipstick to look good in her photo shoots, her followers were persuaded to also get the product. *"Bumili ako ng Avon lipstick kasi ginagamit 'yun ni Anne, ang sosi!"* ("I bought Avon lipstick because that's what Anne used; it's so classy!")

Sam YG, noted comedian and radio host, enjoined his followers to enjoy Greenwich in his tweets. A respondent said it was very persuasive: "I think Greenwich is Sam's favorite snack. Whenever I see him tweet about eating Greenwich in his radio show, I crave for pizza. *Nakakagu-tom!"* ("It makes me hungry!")

Not all celebrity endorsers are effective in Twitter, however. Some respondents said that young star Julia Barretto could not convince them to use Pond's. They did not believe her tweets about the brand's merits because they did not think that she actually used the product: *"Paid adver-tisement lang 'yun"* ("That's just a paid advertisement.").

By and large, this study showed that the perceived gratifying personal experience of the celebrity endorser with the product imbued the Twitter message with credibility and trustworthi-ness, thus convincing the prospects.

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