HOW SELFIES CHANGE THE EFFECT OF PRODUCT ENDORSERS IN SOCIAL MEDIA: THE ROLE OF SELF-DISCLOSURE AND SOCIAL INTERACTIVITY

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Abstract

This paper studies the role of selfie and social interactivity in the effect of product endorsers in social media. Given taking selfie is a self-presentation photograph about people's private information, we interpret selfie as a high form of self-disclosure. We think this form of self-disclosure can moderate the effect of product endorsers' attractiveness and credibility on consumers' attitudes. Meanwhile, as selfie is usually posted in social media like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, the environment of social media also should influence the effect of product endorsers. Towards social media environment, we select social interactivity as one of social media characteristics and propose that social interactivity also can moderate the effect of product endorsers' attractiveness and credibility on consumers' attitudes. Then we discuss the methodology and potential contribution of this study.

Keywords: Selfie, Self-disclosure, Social interactivity, Product endorsers

1 INTRODUCTION

Taking Selfie is an increasing popular phenomenon in the age of social media and selfie is added into oxford dictionary as "Word of the Year" in 2013 (Sifferlin 2013). In social media like Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, nearly 30% photos are selfies taken by adolescents and more than 1 million selfies are taken every day (Locateadoc.com 2014). Many companies also begin to leverage it to do commerce in social media. One famous event about selfie in social commerce is the talk show host, Ellen DeGeneres take a selfie with many movie stars in Oscar-night and this selfie is the most retweeted message in the history of Twitter which is one of the dominant social media in US. Since the mobile phone used to snap the selfie is Samsung's Galaxy Note 3, the selfie also brings a Oscar prize to Samsung (Bulik 2014). Another famous event is about the Nokia Lumia 730 which is used to capture the world largest selfie with 1151 people in it. Microsoft is applying the newest Guinness record for this selfie and also for themselves (Gsmarena 2014). Therefore, taking selfie is becoming a trend in social media for social media users and companies also can make use of selfie for business purposes like holding marketing activities about selfie in social media.

However, although selfie has been used in social media for business, few literature studies the role of selfie in electronic commerce. To be specific, as selfie can be taken and shared by product endorsers, we do not know how it can change the effectiveness of endorsers in ads in social media. Traditionally, the videos and pictures of product endorsers are designed to aim at specific consumers in mass media and endorsers need to perform in the videos and pictures according to the requirements of companies. But in social media, endorsers can take the selfie with products in any occasions with any situations, this type of "ads" must have different impact from the traditional ones. Meanwhile, the nature of social media may also influence the effectiveness of endorsers because the interactivity of social media may enlarge or impede the effect of endorsers. Therefore, we propose the research question as:

How selfie and social interactivity impacts the effectiveness of endorsers in ads in social media?

To understand the question above, we organize the following part of this proposal as follows. At first we introduce the theoretical background and develop hypotheses about the relationships among effectiveness of endorsers, selfie and social interactivity. Then we depict our preliminary methodology to study the question. At last, we discuss the potential implications of this study.

2 THEORETICAL   BACKGROUND   AND   HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Effectiveness of endorsers

Previous literatures mainly study the effectiveness of endorsers from the two views of source effects: source credibility and source attractiveness (Erdogan 1999). Source credibility and source attractiveness are both the communicators' positive characteristics which can help to make receivers accept the message from communicator. Source credibility is determined by communicators'

trustworthiness and expertise (Ohanian 1990), while source attractiveness depends on communicators' similarity, familiarity, and likeability (McGuire 1985). Based on these two source effects, many scholars studied the effectiveness of different endorsers under different conditions. Friedman and Friedman (1979) found different types of endorser (celebrities, experts and typical consumers) worked differently among different types of products which were categorized based on different risk (high in social/psychological risk, financial risk and low in risk). Stafford et al. (2002) found spokes-character was most useful for hedonic service because spokes-character introduced fun and was most congruent with hedonic service, while celebrity created more credibility for hedonic service and more positive attitude for utilitarian service than service employee and consumer. Biswas et al. (2006) found expert endorsers were better for high technology-oriented product than celebrity endorsers in reducing consumers' risk perception and this effect would be stronger when the consumers were knowledgeable with the product. Wang (2005) compared the different endorsement effect of experts and consumers in rating movies. They found audience perceived more credible for institutions' rating than consumers' and the positive consensus between the two endorsers would influence audiences' attitude and behaviour better than low consensus or negative consensus. To conclude, the effectiveness of different endorsers depends on their characteristics like credibility and attractiveness.

Besides, based on theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1991), attitude is a fundamental predictor to influence consumers' intention and actual behavior and has been used widely to explain online consumers' behavior (e.g., Pavlou and Fygenson 2006; Wu and Chen 2005). Thus, to test the effectiveness of product endorsers, we focus on their impacts on consumers' attitude. As the attractiveness and credibility of endorsers is the positive characteristics of advertisement source, we can hypothesize as:

H1: The attractiveness of product endorsers impacts consumers' attitude towards products positively.

H2: The credibility of product endorsers impacts consumers' attitude towards products positively.

2.2   Effect of selfie

Since selfie is a self-portrait photograph, typically taken with a hand-held digital camera or camera phone and it is usually about the private life of photographer (Wikipedia 2014), we interpret selfie as a form of high self-disclosure in social media because self-disclosure is the process of communicating with others about the information of one's own and selfie do convey private information of photograph takers.

According to previous literatures, self-disclosure plays an important role to develop social relationship and its consequences have been discussed. Collins and Miller (1994) conducted a meta-analysis of the relationship between self-disclosure and liking and revealed their positive relationship. Reis and Shaver (1988) uncovered that self-disclosure contributed to the intimacy and closeness among people through a interpersonal process model. Lee et al. (2008) investigated the antecedents and consequences of voluntary self-disclosure on blogs and found it improved the disclosers' relationship management, well-being and leaded to habitual self-disclosure. To conclude, self-disclosure can benefit the building and development of social relationship.

Towards the effect of selfie on the effectiveness of product endorsers, we propose it can moderate the effect of endorsers' attractiveness and credibility on consumers' attitudes towards products in selfie. For endorsers who do not take selfie in formal pictures or videos, consumers evaluate their attractiveness and credibility based on endorsers' attributes or their past experience about the endorsers. But with regard to endorsers who take selfie about their private life, the disclosure about their private life will reduce the psychological distance between endorsers and consumers and develop shorter psychological distance than endorsers who do not take selfie. Such shorter psychological distance will make the evaluation of endorsers' attributes or impression of consumers' past experience be better (Jourard and Friedman 1970). Therefore, attractiveness and credibility of endorsers who take selfie will have a strong effect on consumers' attitude than the endorsers who do not take. Therefore, we can hypothesize as:

H3a: Attractiveness of endorsers impacts consumers' attitude towards products stronger when endorsers take selfie than the endorsers who do not take.

H3b: Credibility of endorsers impacts consumers' attitude towards products stronger when endorsers take selfie than the endorsers who do not take.

2.3 Effect of social interactivity

As we mention in introduction part, selfies are usually posted in social media like Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, the attributes of social media also should influence endorsers' effect. Given social media is the application for the exchange of user generated content, it can facilitate the interaction between users (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Hence, we focus the effect of social interactivity on the effectiveness of endorsers.

In previous literature, interactivity has been shown to influence participators or system users' attitude and behavior. Huang (2003) identified the dimensions of interactivity and found it influenced users' flow experience in using websites. Jiang and Benbasat (2007) found increased interactivity in product presentation could increase consumers' attitude towards online shop and the product. Phang et al., (2009) found social interactivity could influence online community users' sociability. Meanwhile, previous literature also shows interactivity could facilitate interpersonal communication to build relationship in marketing context (Liu et al. 2008). To conclude, interactivity not only benefits the building and development of social relationship, but also changes information systems users' attitude.

Social interactivity in this study mainly refers the interactivity between endorsers and their subscribers in social media (Hoffman and Novak 1996). The interactive activities can be the discussion about the selfie between endorsers and their subscribers or the information exchange among their subscribers about endorsers' selfie with product in social media, etc. Through traditional mass media, companies only can influence consumers' attitude just relying on the advertisement, but they can employ many different methods to cultivate consumers' attitude by interacting with consumers in social media. Endorsers themselves also can communicate with consumers about products directly through social media. Such communication and interaction make consumers understand the advertisement deeper and be more familiar with the endorsers (Zajonc 1968). Meanwhile, the interaction and communication

also can decrease the psychological distance between endorsers and consumers (Nooteboom 2000). As consumers evaluate the attractiveness and credibility of endorsers mainly based on their attributes, the familiarity and short distance from social interactivity will enhance the effect of attractiveness and credibility of endorsers. Therefore, we can hypothesize as:

H4a: Attractiveness of endorsers impacts consumers' attitude towards products stronger when social interactivity is higher than it is lower.

H4b: Credibility of endorsers impacts consumers' attitude towards products stronger when social interactivity is higher than it is lower.

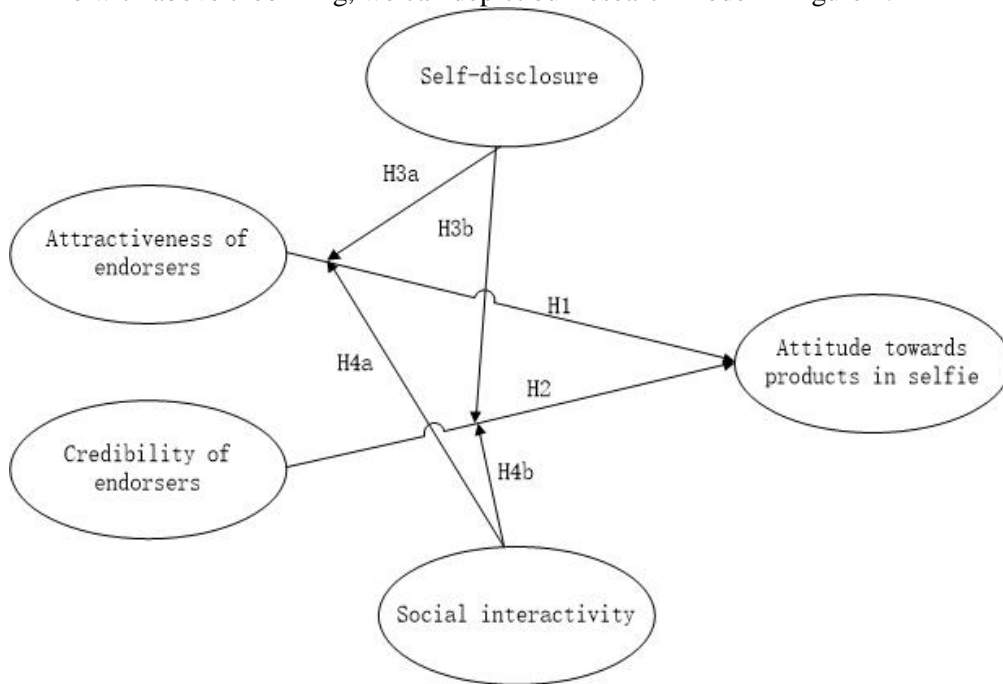In line with above theorizing, we can depict our research model in figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Model

3 METHODOLOGY

The relationships in this study will be tested by using a survey method which can gather information from the targets we will study. We will make questionnaires for all variables and issue the questionnaires to our sample randomly.

3.1 Sample and data collection

Respondents in this study will be undergraduate students in universities in Mainland China. According to the statistic report of CNNIC (2014) and CNNIC (2012), the age of the largest segment of Internet users in China is from 20 to 29 (more than 30%) and the age of largest segment of online shoppers in China is from 18 to 30 (more than 60%). Thus, these respondents can be representatives of Chinese e-commerce and our study is mainly about the internet users' opinions and attitudes, the respondents should be an appropriate for this study. Meanwhile, given our study is about the phenomenon in social media, users of Sina Weibo in the sample will be selected out finally.

There are several reasons to choose the users of weibo.com. First, Sina Weibo is a popular microblogging network in China which contains millions of users and our sample has a high possibility to use Sina Weibo. Second, it has well-developed poster authentication system which can ensure the content quality in some degree. Third, it has a large member base, active postings and review activities.

To conduct the survey, the questionnaire instruction will ask participants to recall the most recent selfie they have viewed in Sina Weibo and the selfie should contain endorsers and endorsed products. Then, they complete the survey based on their perceptions.

3.2 Measurement instruments

Every construct will be operationalized based on previous measurement to ensure its face validity. Furthermore, to confirm the measurement instrument, the questionnaire has been discussed with expertise in social media and advertising research and has been conducted a pre-test with almost 20 Chinese undergraduates students which will be not in the final sample. Based on the results of pre-test and discussion, the questionnaire which is shown in table 1 will be used in following research. The questionnaire will be designed as seven-point Likert-type scale. In table 1, constructs, items and their sources are listed.

Constructs	Items	Sources
Attractiveness of endorsers	Generally speaking, the endorser in selfie I viewed is attractive	Ohanian (1990)
	Generally speaking, the endorser in selfie I viewed is Classy	
	Generally speaking, the endorser in selfie I viewed is Elegant	
Credibility of endorsers	Generally speaking, the endorser in selfie I viewed is reputable	Ohanian (1990)
	Generally speaking, the endorser in selfie I viewed is reliable	
	Generally speaking, the endorser in selfie I viewed is trustworthy	
Self-disclosure	Generally speaking, the selfie I viewed is honesty	Wheeless (1978)
	Generally speaking, the valence of selfie I viewed is positive	
	Generally speaking, the information amount of selfie I viewed is large	
Social interactivity	It is conducive to interact with selfie posters through Sina Weibo	Preece (2000)
	It is easy to interact with selfie posters through Sina Weibo	
Attitudes towards products	I like my viewed product in the selfie	Day and Stafford (1997)
	I am favourable of my viewed product in the selfie	
	I think the product in the selfie I viewed is good	
	My attitude towards my viewed products in the selfie is positive	

Table 1. Measurement instrument for each construct

3.3 Data analysis

To test the research model, we will utilize structural equation modelling (SEM) technique with using partial least squares (PLS) estimation analysis. The analysis will be conducted by using SmartPLS (Ringle et al. 2014) .

Structural equation modelling technique need estimate two models: measurement model and structural model (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). To evaluate measurement model, we will use confirmatory factors analysis (CFA) to assess the reliability of each construct by using Cronbach's alpha, composite

reliability (CR), and the significance of item loading. We also will assess the convergent validity by using average variance extracted (AVE) and evaluate the discriminant validity by using comparing the square root of AVEs and construct correlations. To test structural model, we will estimate the path coefficients of each relationship and judge model's fit by using indices like the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) and the Bentler–Bonett normed fit index (NFI), etc.

4   POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY

We think this study can contribute to literature in several ways. First of all, we interpret the role of selfie from self-disclosure perspective which provide theoretical basis to understand this phenomenon. This perspective can help us to explain and predict selfie's effect in social media. Second, we consider the effect of social media. Given users in social media can exchange real-time information, social interactivity should be one of the main characteristics of social media and should influence the effect of product endorsers. To be specific, the interaction may amplify the effect of endorsers. At last, we test the effect of product endorsers in social media context which validates their effects in new context. This study also can bring implication to practice in many aspects. First of all, the environment of social media is very different from mass media and the leverage of endorsers in social media should be different from it in mass media. Selfies provide a novel way to play product endorsers' role. Secondly, we study the effect of selfies on different endorsers' effect which provides details to judge different endorsers' different effect when selfie is used. At last, as we discuss the role of social media and this study can give guidance to implement marketing and commerce activities in social media.

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